Contemporary Challenges for Vatican II’s Theology of the Laity: 
The Nigerian Church Experience

by

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Abstract

Vatican II stipulates that the laity by virtue of their baptism are constitutive members of the Church and should play their role in the mission of the whole Christian faithful in the Church and the world. More than fifty years since the beginning of the Council, the Church in Nigeria is still struggling to understand itself as well as to discern the identity, the role and participation of the lay Christian faithful in the mission of the Church. This thesis explores and analyzes the strengths and limitations of the current dominant ecclesiology of the Roman Catholic Church in Nigeria, and constructively suggests various means of overcoming some of these deficiencies. It will proffer and argue that the contemporary challenges which Vatican II’s theology of the laity faces today in the Nigerian Roman Catholic Church call for a Church that is not only participatory, but also prophetic as well as a Church that engages and is constantly in solidarity with the people of God.

As a foundation to this reflection, communion ecclesiology is the central and fundamental concept of all the documents of the Second Vatican Council. It provides the basis on which the revolutionary shift in the articulation of the theology of the laity was inaugurated. This shift expresses itself in its call for co-responsibility and participation of all in the life and work of the Church and underscores the priority of the vocation of the whole community of the people of God over all diversities of functions and of charisms.
Placed in the context of the Nigerian Church, Christianity seems to be flourishing. However, there is evidence to show that the extent to which the presence of the laity is being felt in other aspects of the ministries of the Church as well as in the Nigerian social order is still very debatable. While acknowledging the outstanding contribution of all the people of God in regard to the proper understanding of the ecclesiology that encourages the active involvement of the laity in the mission of the Nigerian Church and society, the Nigerian Church is still rooted in a juridical ecclesiology, which does not foster the spirit of ecclesial communion and solidarity as forms of Christian witness and ministry. This thesis therefore proposes an inculturated response to the challenges posed by the non-reception of Vatican II’s theology of the laity in Nigeria, based on some key principles from Vatican II’s ecclesiology and African culture.
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List of Abbreviations

AA  Apostolicam Actuositatem (Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People)
AG  Ad Gentes (Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity)
AM  Africae Munus (Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Benedict XVI on the Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace)
CC  Canons
Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria
CCCB Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops
CD  Christus Dominus (Decree on the Pastoral Office of the Bishops in the Church)
CIC  Codex Iuris Canonici auctoritate Ioannis Pauli PP. II promulgatus
CL  Christifideles Laici (1988 Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of John Paul II on the Vocation and Mission of the Lay Christian in the Church and in the World)
EFCC Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (A Nigerian commission constituted to fight corruption especially in the public service)
EG  Evangelii Gaudium (2013 Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today’s World)
EN  Evangelii Nuntiandi (1975 Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Paul VI on the Evangelization in the Modern World)
EIA Ecclesia in Africa (1994 Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of John Paul II on the Church in Africa and her Evangelizing Mission Towards the Year 2000)
GDP Gross Domestic Product
GS  Gaudium et Spes (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World)
JM  Justitia in Mundo (Justice in the World: Document on the Social Justice by the 1971 Synod of Bishops)
LG  Lumen Gentium (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church)
MM  Mater et Magistra (1961 Encyclical Letter of John XXIII on Christianity and Social Progress)
MOSOP  Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People
NDVF  Niger Delta Volunteer Force
NEEDS  National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy
OT  Optatam Totius (Decree on the Training of Priests)
RN  Rerum Novarum (1891 Encyclical Letter of Leo XIII on the Condition of the Working Classes)
SAPs  Structural Adjustment Programs (Economic Reconstruction Policies)
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General Introduction

All of you have been commissioned by Christ himself to have a share in the saving mission of the Church [cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 33]. I appreciate the way in which you the laity of Nigeria work together with your bishops and priests in order to bear witness to Christ, in order to communicate Christ to others. This unity with the pastors of the Church is indeed an essential condition for the supernatural success of your efforts… Having been called by Christ himself, you are his chosen partners in evangelization… You are truly aware of the *mystery of the Church* that all of us who are baptized in Christ make up of his Body, the Church. In this Church, there is *diversity of apostolate* or ministry but *oneness of mission*: the spreading of the Kingdom of Christ. Bishops, priests, religious and laity—each group has its specific contribution to make.¹

The above statement is an excerpt from John Paul II’s message to the laity of the Nigerian Roman Catholic Church during his first Pastoral visit to Nigeria in February 1982. It captures the description of the research field of this thesis which centres on the contemporary challenges of Vatican II’s theology of the laity within the African context and particularly Nigerian.

The Roman Catholic Church marks more than fifty years since the opening of Vatican II (1962-1965) this year. The convocation of this great Council was initiated by John XXIII. Its significance lies in its call for Church renewal: returning to sources (ressourcement) and bringing the Church in all aspects of its life up to date (aggiornamento). One aspect of this renewal is in the area of relationship among various

members of the Church upon which is built the restoration of the dignity and mission of
the laity.\(^2\)

The Fathers of the Council gave special attention to the dignity and mission of the lay faithful and dedicated an extremely rich chapter in *Lumen Gentium* (articles 30-38) to the role of the laity in the Church’s saving mission and later developed this theme in the Decree on the Apostolate of the Lay People, *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (articles 1-33).

With specific reference to contemporary circumstances, the mission of the laity was specified concretely in the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes* (articles 43 and 62). In these documents, the Council sought to develop the great flourishing of the lay apostolate, which had characterized the previous decades.\(^3\)

After the Second Vatican Council, lay people have been called repeatedly to assume their rightful place among the people of God, and to perform the apostolate that is their responsibility through different magisterial pronouncements and publications.\(^4\) This in itself constitutes a remarkable change and advancement in the traditional understanding of the role of the laity and ministry of the Church.\(^5\) In spite of these


significant advances, the Council’s treatment of the laity is not completely consistent.\textsuperscript{6} The consequences of these ambiguities or inconsistencies in the conciliar teaching on the lay participation in the mission of the Church are still being felt in various aspects of the Church’s life and ministry. This situation has been a common experience of the Church in different parts of the world since the close of the Second Vatican Council.

In the context of the Nigerian Church, Christianity seems to be flourishing and growing. However, there is evidence to convince us that the lay Christian faithful have not fully assumed their role as constituent members of the Church in line with the teachings of Vatican II and post-conciliar reflections. The minimal active role they are allowed in a new era of evangelization in a country shackled by a multitude of problems including poverty, endemic diseases, religious acrimony, social/ethnic conflicts and incessant wars is very worrisome.\textsuperscript{7}

Such a situation necessitates some questions regarding the theology of the laity in general and particularly within the Nigerian context. In what way have the lay people received their mission in the Church? How can the role of the lay people as agents of world transformation and renewal of their social environment be properly interpreted and implemented? How can the lay Christian faithful exercise and experience their call to the priesthood of all the faithful? How can the lay people be assisted to realize their

\textsuperscript{6} According to Giovanni Magnani, there are two different views of the laity evident in the Council documents—contrastive and intensive. The contrastive view seeks to contrast the identity of the laity with that of the clergy, treating each as complementary categories of membership in the Church and at the same time, limiting the scope of the laity’s apostolate exclusively to secular affairs (LG, 31). However, a more intensive view of the laity can also be found in some conciliar documents, which does not limit the apostolate of the laity exclusively to secular affairs. Rather, it sees all the members of the Church as participants or sharers in the secular activity of the Church in different ways. John Paul II emphasized this intensive view of the laity in his 1987 Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, \textit{Christifideles Laici}: “Certainly all the members of the Church are sharers in this secular dimension, but in different ways” (CL, 99). See, Richard R. Gaillardetz, \textit{The Church in Making: Lumen Gentium, Christus Dominus, Orientalium Ecclesiarum}, 53

respective and unique vocations in the mission of the Church to the world within the Nigerian context?

Given the reality of the present context of the Nigerian Church, this thesis will demonstrate and critically explore the strengths and limitations of the current dominant ecclesiology of the Roman Catholic Church in Nigeria, and constructively suggest various possible means of overcoming some of these deficiencies. I will proffer and argue that the contemporary challenges which Vatican II’s theology of the laity faces today in the Nigerian Roman Catholic Church call for a Church that is not only participatory, but also prophetic, as well as a Church that engages and is constantly in solidarity with the people of God.

Background to the Present Study

Although the predominant ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council is that which understands the mystery of the Church in terms of the People of God, it is the ecclesiology of communion which is the central and fundamental concept of all the documents of the Council.8 Communion is the fundamental concept because it expresses more adequately the inner reality of the Church and her origin in the mystery of Trinitarian communion.9

This communion ecclesiology has inaugurated a revolutionary shift in the articulation of the theology of the laity in its call for co-responsibility and participation of

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8 The articulation and understanding that the ecclesiology of communion is the central and fundamental concept in Vatican II documents is clearly stated within the final report of the Second Extraordinary Synod of Bishops, called by John Paul II and held in Rome in 1985 to reflect on the teaching of the Second Vatican Council. See, 1985 Extraordinary Synod of Bishops, “Final Report,” Origins 15:27 (December 19, 1985) 444-450.
all in the life and work of the Church. This ecclesiological insight underscores the priority of the vocation of the whole community of the people of God over all diversities of functions and charisms. John Paul II likened this ecclesiology to an organic communion, analogous to that of a living and functioning body, characterized by a diversity and complementarity of vocations and states in life, of ministries, charisms and responsibilities.

The reception and non-reception of the Second Vatican Council’s teachings within the African context in general, and particularly within the Nigerian Church and society, as far as the theology of the laity is concerned has its challenges. Adrian Hastings’ description in his seminal article, “The Council Came to Africa,” indicates the marginal involvement of the African bishops during the Council. Such marginal involvement, Hastings argues, affected the participation and implementation of the Council’s agenda within the African context and invariably poses great obstacles to the ongoing post-conciliar reception of the Council in Africa. One such significant area is the understanding of the mission and the participation of the laity.

In response to the demands of Vatican II for the participation of the laity in all levels of Church ministry, the creation of the Catholic Laity Council of Nigeria on March

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13 Ibid., 315-316. This is because of the fact that many of the African Churches were still missionary Churches represented by their expatriate bishops at the Council.
14 Ibid., 316-317.
16, 1973 signalled the first significant and positive event in this direction.\textsuperscript{15} Assessing the dynamic development and growth of the Catholic Laity Council of Nigeria amidst its challenges, Gabriel A. Ojo offers some areas of reception and non-reception of the Council’s teachings on the mission of the laity in the Church.\textsuperscript{16}

Nevertheless, the extent to which the presence of the laity is being felt in the other aspects of the ministries of the Church as well as in the Nigerian social order is still very debatable. The exercise of ministerial authority of the Nigerian Church is still deeply rooted in an institutional and juridical ecclesiology, as Elochukwu Uzukwu argues, with its distinguishing characteristics of clericalism, paternalism and authoritarianism. Such an understanding of the Church allows no opportunity for the effective co-responsibility and collaboration of the laity within the various ministries in the Church.\textsuperscript{17} The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria in its various Pastoral Letters and Synodal decisions calls the problems of clericalism, as well as the exclusion of certain groups of lay Christian faithful from active involvement in the mission of Church, a great disservice to the Gospel as well as counterproductive in the pastoral leadership of the Church internally and within the socio-political and economic sphere of the Nigerian society.\textsuperscript{18}

\begin{footnotesize}
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The Nigerian Church can effectively and concretely respond to the contemporary challenges of Vatican II’s theology of the laity by living according to what it proclaims to the world. This implies that it must live by the standards of the gospel of Christ, striving vigorously to make Christian values enshrined within the various documents of the Second Vatican Council as it concerns the theology of the laity, applicable to the concrete situations and circumstances of the Nigerian Church and society.\(^{19}\)

Methodology

I shall undertake an evaluative, analytical and synthetic approach in the study of Vatican II’s theology of the laity and its contemporary challenges within the Nigerian Roman Catholic Church. I will critically articulate the historical and theological framework as well as the hermeneutical basis for the theology of the laity based on the analysis of pre-conciliar, conciliar and post-conciliar documents. The aim of such analysis is to establish a contextual background that enables us to understand and appreciate the contemporary challenges of Vatican II’s theology of the laity within the African context and particularly within the Nigerian Church.

In view of this, this work will explore the major areas of Catholic theology, especially the ecclesiological teachings of the Church as seen in the various magisterial documents and works of different theologians in response to the theology of the laity. Attention will be given to other aspects of theology, especially the social teachings of the Catholic Church and the African theology of inculturation in delineating the dynamics of

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\(^{19}\) Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, nos. 9-17.
Vatican II’s theology of the laity in its relation to the different challenges its reception and non-reception has posed within the Nigerian Church and society.

This work will utilize some personal interviews with individuals from the Nigerian laity, who have played and are still playing key roles in the major areas of our concern in this project. For the theological analysis of this project, I will draw on the insights of some theologians whose theological reflections have immensely shaped the foundation and development of the theology of the laity: Yves Congar, Karl Rahner, Edward Schillebeeckx, Paul Lakeland, Richard Gaillardetz, Gabriel A. Ojo, Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, Oliver A. Onwubiko, Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, and Bénézet Bujo.

Yves Congar was one of those to make the first systematic attempts to articulating a theology of the laity. His intervention during the Vatican II Council led to the reformulation of the theology of the laity that set the fundamental impulse for the subsequent articulation of this theology within the history of the post-conciliar reception. Karl Rahner’s active involvement during the Council assisted him in giving a fundamental orientation to the theological principles behind Christian participation in civil and political projects developed in Catholic social documents. Edward Schillebeeckx took a positive approach in the description of the laity in terms of their specific relationship with secularity of the world. Paul Lakeland was influenced in his theology of the laity by Yves Congar, and his contributions are still being felt within the contemporary issues concerning the lay Christian faithful and their mission both in the Church and the world. Richard Gaillardetz’s ecclesiology of Catholic social teaching, on the other hand, captures the fundamental shift in the ecclesiology of Church relationship
with the world in terms of the socio-political responsibility of the Church, which equally relates to the theology of the laity within the present dispensation.

For understanding of the Church as well as the theology of the laity in the contemporary Nigerian Church and society, I will draw on some insights from the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria’s statements, writings and Synodal decisions as well as from African theologians and active lay faithful who have made significant contributions and are still contributing to the interpretation of Vatican II’s theology of the laity and its reception and non-reception within the various context of the Nigerian Church. Gabriel A. Ojo, Elochukwu E. Uzukwu and Oliver A. Onwubiko are pioneers in the study of theology of the laity in Nigeria. Bénézet Bujo’s contribution helps for the development of an African theology using African categories to situate the theology of the laity. Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator’s contribution most significantly enables us to respond to the socio-political, economic and cultural dimension of the responsibility of the Church hierarchy towards the laity.

Significance and Scope of the Study

The significance of this work lies in the singular opportunity to respond to the “signs of the times” in the reconstruction of the Vatican II’s theology of the laity within the African context and particularly Nigeria. This study provides a healthy link between academic theology and contextual theology by analyzing and evaluating how the conceptual resources and normative principles in some magisterial documents, and by the different ecclesioologists, might assist one to rediscover an authentic application of Vatican II’s theology of the laity within a given context.
Although it could be said that the reception and non-reception of Vatican II in general has been an ongoing process within the different continents, as noted by many authors, few works done in this area have not paid an in-depth and particular attention to the theology of the laity from the hermeneutical perspective of the reception and non-reception of Vatican II. It is this dimension that this work, focusing on Nigerian experience, brings to the conversation.

I consider this approach original and significant because it creates unique and interactive scenarios where interdisciplinary dialogue—sacred and secular—will be put into constructive conversation in order to respond creatively in search of an authentic and effective presence of the Church in today’s Nigerian society as far as Vatican II’s theology of the laity is concerned.

Procedure to the Present Study

The work tentatively will be divided into four chapters preceded by a general introduction that lays out the scope and limitations of the work. It ends with a general conclusion, summarizing and restating the main claim of the work.

Chapter One will deal with the understanding of Vatican II and the theology of the laity. It focuses on the historical evolution of the theology of the laity in relation to the ecclesiological self-understanding of the Church through which the theology of the

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21 See, Innocent O. Dim, Reception of Vatican II in Nigeria/Igbo Church with Reference to Awka Diocese. He discusses the issue of Vatican II reception of the theology of the laity within the Nigerian Church based on the actual establishment of the statutory body of the Laity Council (Catholic Laity Council of Nigeria) by the Nigerian Conference of Catholic Bishops as required by the decree on the apostolate of the lay people (AA) without exploring critically how this institution or statutory body of the lay organisations has helped to deepen the effectiveness of the lay apostolate in Nigeria.
laity emanates. Thus establishes that Vatican II’s theology of the laity represents a natural
development of the conciliar theology of the Church as communion. I will explore the
theological influence of some theologians—Yves Congar, Karl Rahner and Edward
Schillebeeckx—who initiated the foundation for the pre-Vatican II’s theology of the laity.
The post-conciliar interpretation as well as the reception and non-reception of the
theology of the laity will be studied by examining various magisterial documents.

Chapter Two will situate this study within the Nigerian context with a brief review of the history of the Nigerian Roman Catholic Church in relation to the
development of the Catholic Laity Council of Nigeria (CLCN). The theological insights of some African theologians and active lay faithful, especially Gabriel Ojo, will be used to explore the various dimensions of the laity’s apostolate before and after the Council. Current ecclesiological contexts of the Nigerian Church as well as the socio-political, economic and cultural situation of the Nigerian society in relation to the theology of the laity will be examined in order to establish the template for the critical assessment of Vatican II’s theology of the laity and its reception and non-reception within the Nigerian Church and society.

Chapter Three examines the contemporary challenges and implications of the Church’s response to the reception and non-reception of Vatican II’s theology of the laity. Here, I will initiate dialogue between African theologians, Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, Gabriel Ojo and Oliver A. Onwubiko with the various theological statements and Synodal decisions of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria in relation to the problems of clericalism and the exclusion of the laity in the mission of the Church. Paul Lakeland’s insights on clericalism and other related issues on theology of the laity will be
explored in relation to other African theologians. This chapter evaluates certain socio-cultural factors that render ineffective the implementation of the principles of co-responsibility and ecclesial communion within the Nigerian Church and society in relation to the theology of the laity. Insights from Agbokhianmeghe E. Orobator, Richard Gaillardetz on Christian social responsibility will be useful here.

The final chapter considers what I designate as an authentic or inculturated response to the reception and non-reception of Vatican II’s theology of the laity within the Nigerian context: “Towards an Integral Ecclesiology of Vatican II’s Theology of the Laity.” The understanding of this ecclesiology would encourage active involvement of the laity in the mission of the Nigerian Church and society and, at the same time, foster the spirit of ecclesial communion and solidarity, as forms of Christian witness and ministry. The relational model of ecclesial leadership proposed by Elochukwu E. Uzukwu as well as Oliver A. Onwubiko in the area of inculturation will be used to address some of the African cultural elements and paradigms that would respond to the issues relating to Vatican II’s reception and non-reception within the Nigerian context.
Chapter One

Background Description and Analysis: Understanding Vatican II and the Theology of the Laity

1. Introduction

This chapter deals generally with Vatican II’s theology of the laity. It begins with a brief description of the historical evolution of the theology of the laity in Roman Catholicism, leading to the Second Vatican Council. I will then show how Vatican II’s theology of the laity represents a natural development of the conciliar theology of the Church as a communion by exploring the theological influences and contributions of some theologians who laid the foundation for Vatican II’s theology of the laity. The post-conciliar interpretations as well as the reception and non-reception of the theology of the laity are then studied through a review of various magisterial documents.

1. 1 The Pathway to Vatican II’s Theology of the Laity

The theology of the laity, which finds its ultimate modern expression in the documents of the Second Vatican Council, cannot be examined without considering the historical development of the understanding of Church. Thus, I begin this brief historical survey, highlighting some characteristics of the ecclesial distinction between the laity and clergy in the various stages of Church history in early Christianity, the medieval period, the Reformation and Council of Trent, and the modern period.
1. 1. 1 *Early Christianity*

*Origin of Lay/Clergy Distinction*

The Greek word *klero*, from which we get the word “cleric,” appears at several points in the New Testament, but nowhere does it refer to ministry. Its basic meaning is concerned with the “casting of lots.” The Greek word *laikos*, from which we derive the word “lay person,” is not found in the New Testament at all. Nonetheless, it appears once in the non-canonical text, I Clement, authored around 96 CE, but does not come into common usage until the very end of the second century.\(^\text{22}\)

By the close of the second century, a distinction between the entire Christian community and Church leadership began to appear. Early Christian reflection during the first two centuries of the Church was less preoccupied with distinctions within the community than as it was the distinction between the Christian community as a whole, and the world in which Christians lived. The difference in the understanding of the ministry between the lay people and cleric was eclipsed by a concern for the common demands of discipleship.\(^\text{23}\) Christians were more preoccupied with the task of defining their relationship with Christ, than defining the relationships that existed among themselves.\(^\text{24}\)

On the other hand, references are made to a great diversity of ministries exercised in the life of the early Christian communities. What the Christian community did have right from the beginning is the conception that different people have different charisms,


\(^{24}\) Ibid., 127.
and that there were different functions to be fulfilled in the Christian community.\textsuperscript{25}

Indeed, early Christianity was a community highly differentiated by reason of charisms and ministries (1 Corinthians 12:4-11). There were sacred orders of ministers and pastors who were responsible to their heavenly chief shepherd (1 Peter 5:2-4).\textsuperscript{26} Saint Paul offers several lists of such ministries in Romans 12:6-8 and in 1 Corinthians 12:28. As evident in some Pauline writings, there is no radical opposition between the charismatic and administrative ministries. All the gifts and charisms have their common source—the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:11). Some of the gifts are clearly charismatic, but others are just as clearly administrative or institutional (Rom. 12:7-8; Eph. 4:11-12). Thus, charismatic ministries existed alongside some administrative ministries. The charismatic church at Corinth did not fully submit to all of Paul’s decisions, but not all of Paul’s administrative decisions were rejected (1 Cor. 5:3-5; 7:17; 11:17, 33; 16:1) The Corinthians implicitly recognized Paul’s apostolic authority in referring some administrative decisions to Paul (1 Cor. 7-10).\textsuperscript{27} There have always been leaders who reserved certain powers to themselves as we can glean from Saint Paul who considered himself to have the authority to settle disputes and lay down rules in Christian communities of the early Church.\textsuperscript{28}

The pastoral epistles, written probably one to two generations after Paul, offer the first traces of a consciousness of intraecclesial distinctions, as these texts discuss the

\textsuperscript{25} See, Alexandre Faivre, \textit{The Emergence of the Laity in the Early Church}, 8-10. The author speaks of the complementarity of charisms as well as the variety of functions.


\textsuperscript{28} See, 1 Cor. 1:10-13; Cf. 1 Cor. 3:5, 21-23; 1 Cor. 5:3-5; 1 Cor.7:17; 1 Cor.11:17, 33; 1 Cor.16:1.
criteria for choosing leaders within the community. But there is no sense that there are
two strictly distinct groups of believers, public ministers and the rest of the faithful.\textsuperscript{29}

The emergence of a distinction between two different kinds of Christians in the
second century, some ordained and others not, occurred gradually as a result of a
confluence of diverse factors. The gradual association of celibacy with the ordained
certainly strengthened the distinction.\textsuperscript{30} One reason that brought about the shift toward
clerical celibacy that informed the distinction between the clergy and laity was the
changing conceptions of Eucharist and the priesthood. Tertullian identifies the laity with
ordinary people, who are distinguished from the “priestly” or “ecclesiastical order” of
bishops, presbyters and deacons.\textsuperscript{31} Other fathers of the Church, such as Cyprian of
Carthage (ca. 200-258A.D.), saw the changing conceptions of the Eucharist and
priesthood as a dividing line between the laity and clergy. Hence, he saw the bishop as
the leader of the Christian community and symbol of unity of the Church.\textsuperscript{32} Indeed, by
the middle of the third century, the state of being a lay person and being a clerical
member was increasingly based on what actions each group performed, and how the
Church officially sanctioned those actions—with ordination or without ordination.\textsuperscript{33}

The fourth century is regarded as the turning point in the distinction between the
clergy and the laity. This is due largely to Christianity becoming the established religion
of the empire through the instrumentality of the then Roman Emperor, Constantine. With
such recognition and with the special privileges accorded to the clerical members of the

\textsuperscript{29} See, Richard R. Gaillardetz, Ecclesiology for a Global Church: A People Called and Sent, 175. See also,
Alexandre Faivre, The Emergence of the Laity in the Early Church, 10. Cf. Raymond E. Brown, The
\textsuperscript{30} Alexandre Faivre, The Emergence of the Laity in the Early Church, 72-73. Cf. Kenan B. Osborne,
Ministry, Lay Ministry in the Roman Catholic Church, 120-162.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 45-47. Cf. Kenan B. Osborne, Ministry, Lay Ministry in the Roman Catholic Church, 140-143.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 105-128. Cf. Kenan B. Osborne, Ministry, Lay Ministry in the Roman Catholic Church, 143-145.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.
Church as public servants of the civil administration, the laity became people who were the subjects of the bureaucratic administration of the Church. It was the above socio-political relationship between the Church and the State that clearly established the distinction between the clergy and laity.

Monastic spirituality, which began initially as a lay movement within early Christianity as a reaction against the institutionalization of the Church, further accentuated the sense of a class structure in the Church. Monks were therefore regarded as “super Christians”, simply devoted to Christ by their poverty and celibacy. Other Christians, ordained or not, whose lives were solely pre-occupied with the terrestrial and transitory realities of the family and civic life, stood on lower rungs. The role of the ordinary Christians was to support those who served them by contemplation and prayer, that is, the monks, and those who presided over them, the ordained. Since monastic spirituality was perceived in such way, many bishops promoted monks to an ordained priesthood while many priests embraced monasticism for reasons of personal holiness. Thus, such mentality created further significant distinctions between the ordained and the laity.

1. 1. 2 Medieval Period

In the medieval life of the Church (5th to 15th century), there was a clear division between the clergy and the lay people. This division came as a result of a juridical

34 Ibid., 148, 157-161.
37 Alexandre Faivre, The Emergence of the Laity in the Early Church, 191-197.
ecclesiology which started with the conversion of Constantine\textsuperscript{38} as earlier mentioned. This ecclesiology is often considered as the greatest turning point in the history of the Church.\textsuperscript{39} This ecclesiology prevailed until the period of the Counter-Reformation and the later Roman centralization tendencies of Vatican I. The characteristic features of the Church within the medieval period, as seen in its theological manuals, consisted of such themes as sacraments, incarnation, faith and canonical collections, all of which projected the temporal power of the Church over and against that of the civil authorities.\textsuperscript{40} The Reformation challenged the social and juridical posture of the Church, and compelled it to come to the maturity of theological self-consciousness. Instead of being one people, there was strong emphasis on authority, especially from the era of Pope Leo IX (1049-1054) and Gregory VII (1073-1085). A sense of hierarchy and institutionalization reigned supreme, and the Church failed as it were, in the face of law, to exist as a mystery of communion of love among all the believers.\textsuperscript{41} As a result of this situation and orientation, an American theologian, John Linnan, asserted:

Because polemic always distorts one’s vision, many other elements in the Church’s self-understanding were neglected or

\textsuperscript{38} Historians described this era in these words: “Throughout the Roman world, the spiritual and temporal were reconciled, so that the Roman Empire, which was considered to be the incarnation of anti-Christ, became the ‘new kingdom of God on earth’ (Eusebius of Caesarea).” Quoted by Jacques Lacarriere, Men [sic] Possessed by God (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc, 1964) 88. This ecclesiology of post-Constantinian conversion was concretely based on the attempt by the Church to recapture the regime of Caesar (that is the political establishment of the Roman Empire) in place of her pastoral government. Seen in this context, the Church was primarily understood as a social and juridical institution, rather than as a mystery and communion. The Church was conceived after the fashion of a political entity. It was the period of Christendom, that is the era of amalgamation of Church and state based on the unity of faith and alliance between the ‘throne and the altar’ which made Pope Gelasius I to write to Emperor Anastasius I in the fifth century: “Two are things by which this world is chiefly ruled: the sacred authority of the Pope and the royal power” Cf. H. Arendt. Between Past and Future (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985) 98.


\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 39.

\textsuperscript{41} Ferdinand Nwaigbo, Church as a Communion: An African Christian Perspective, Theology of the Local Church in the Light of the Second Vatican Council (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1996) 118-119. See also, Richard R. Gaillardetz, Ecclesiology for a Global Church: A People Called and Sent, 96-99.
even overlooked. This Roman Catholic theology of the Church emphasized the structure, authority, the sacred power of the Pope, bishops and clergy, and adherence to propositions defining Catholic faith as criteria for Church membership. It constructed a monolithic Church. 

The understanding of the Church from this ecclesiological perspective had far reaching effects such that the vision of the Church no longer concentrated on the Christian community as in the early period. The role of the Christian community and the articulation of the Church as the creation of the Holy Spirit were completely eroded in preference of a Christocentric ecclesiology that explicitly identified itself with the visible institution and its authority.

Although medieval Christianity was structured politically in a similar fashion to that of the Constantinian Church, where as indicated earlier, the power of the ecclesiastical hierarchy was sublime, it should be noted that not all the lay people were passive. Rather, great nobles such as kings and emperors were seriously involved in the affairs of the Church. They were regarded as quasi-ecclesiastical functionaries who exercised some priestly functions such as lay investiture, a practice which eventually led to a great stumbling block in the relationship between the Church and the State. Indeed, lay investiture was a striking example of the extent to which the Church had once fallen under lay political control. A description of this elitist lay involvement was given by André Vauchez thus:

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The lay lords actually considered themselves to be proprietors of the Churches and abbeys which they themselves or their ancestors had built in their lands. Not satisfied with appropriating their revenues, the lords laid claim to the ecclesiastical dignities and did not hesitate to name parish priests, and even bishops and abbots, who would suit with their patrimonial interests and their political strategies. By means of investiture—a feudal ceremony of purely lay character—men without the slightest attitude for religious life were assigned high offices in the Church. The papacy itself did not escape this evolution…. Thus, the entire Church, from bottom to top, ran the risk of dissolving into feudal society which surrounded it.44

The opponents of this lay control challenged the ancient and long-accepted practices and such challenge was provided initially by monastic movements which sprang up almost everywhere in the West especially in Cluny within the second half of the eleventh century. The monks in their writings tended to emphasize the superiority of the spiritual power over the temporal power in order to justify their demand for freedom from the secular authorities.45 Since early feudal conditions had made the claims of the papal supremacy difficult and sometimes almost impossible to effect, the restoration of this supremacy was an important objective of the eleventh century reformers.46 The reformers were thus led to accentuate the distinction between clergy and laity, and to relegate the latter to a subordinate position, while extolling the eminent dignity of the priesthood.47

This ultimately resulted in the famous Dictatus Papae of Gregory VII, dated March 1075. In it, Gregory declared that everyone, including secular rulers, were subordinate to the primacy of the pope. One of the fruits of this reform was the final emergence of the clergy as a clearly identifiable class over and against the lay people. In

46 André Vauchez, The Laity in the Middle Ages: Religious Beliefs and Devotional Practices, 41.
47 Ibid.
this view, the Church was no longer a community of equals. On the contrary, the institutional Church came fully to reflect the values and assumptions of the feudal society of medieval Europe. The pope considered himself to be at the top of such a hierarchy, above even the emperor.\(^{48}\)

Boniface VIII went one step further in this direction in his bull *Unam Sanctam*, when he declared that submission to the pope in Rome is necessary for all human beings to achieve salvation.\(^{49}\) In another of his papal bulls, *Clericis Laicos*, issued February 24, 1296, he stated that now laity and clergy, as in the times of the old Church, have become adversaries. With such papal pronouncement, lay people were completely pushed to the periphery of the Church. Lay participation in the institutional Church was reduced to the barest minimum. Indeed, the hierarchy and the whole institutional Church, in a sense, became the ecclesial version of the Roman Empire’s political structures.\(^{50}\)

Despite the negative consequences of the Gregorian reform for the situation of the laity in the medieval Church mentioned earlier, it would be incorrect and unfair to conclude that there was no further influence of lay people in the European Church especially between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries. The lay people emerged from their passivity and aspired to play an active role in the religious domain. Lay participation and influence were seen in such faith-based organizations such as guilds and confraternities within the twelfth and fourteenth centuries in most European countries and in England. Other areas where the sustained and involved efforts of the lay people were felt in Western Europe during the medieval period included the establishment and

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\(^{50}\) Kenan B. Osborne, *Ministry, Lay Ministry in the Roman Catholic Church: Its History and Theology*, 381.
promotion of the various monastic institutions for men and women, participation at various pilgrimages and crusades, as well as devotions to the cult of saints and relics.\textsuperscript{51}

These instances highlight the definite modifications in the status and influence of the lay people within the Christianity of the medieval era.

In conclusion, it should be recognized that as difficult as it was with a Church that had become increasingly clericalized, the medieval period witnessed the involvement of the lay people in the affairs of the Church, especially in the area of religious practices, which gave some relevance to their identity and vocation within such historical context.

1. 1. 3 \textit{The Reformation and the Council of Trent}

With the period of Reformation, the Church experienced a different atmosphere than in the previous centuries, concerning the unique distinction between the laity and the hierarchy in the mission of the Church. The Reformation was in part a protest against the clericalization of the Church and the relegation of the laity to being passive objects of the clergy’s ministrations and governance. Some authors describe the period of Reformation as an epoch of emancipation where the world was seen as an independent entity, freed from the tutelage of the Church as well as being conscious of its own value and autonomy.\textsuperscript{52} These stormy times in Church history witnessed, among other things, different forms of condemnation which included: Templars at the Council of Vienne


(1312 A.D.) in France as well as similar condemnation of John Wycliff and John Hus at the Council of Constance in 1415 A.D.\textsuperscript{53}

However, the ecclesiology of the Reformation period saw the Church mainly as a congregation of the “faithful.” Various Reformers espoused the fundamental belief in the “priesthood of all believers.” Martin Luther’s teaching saw all Christians as sharers in the same spiritual estate, which included baptism and sharers in one faith which makes us spiritual and Christian people. Thus, we are all consecrated priests through baptism, as St. Peter says: “You are a royal priesthood and a priestly kingdom” (1 Peter 2:9).\textsuperscript{54} Martin Luther and other reformers sought to counteract the hierarchical authority of the Church in recognition of the call to discipleship shared by all Christians.\textsuperscript{55} The first reaction of the institutional Church was a defensive one, with its pastoral work organized virtually to maintain little islands of the older Christendom within this new world of Reformation period or age. With such a fortress mentality, and in order to dominate the challenges posed by the ecclesiological situation of the Reformation period, the institutional Church sought out the laity as sharers in the hierarchical mission of the clergy.\textsuperscript{56}

Within the period of the Council of Trent (1543-1563), there were certain kinds of lay influences, especially among the princes on the political scene,\textsuperscript{57} and with few instances where lay people were assigned some responsibilities within the Council.\textsuperscript{58}

\textsuperscript{53} See, Peter Chidi Okuma, \textit{The Vatican II: The Laity and Today’s Challenges} (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2011) 31-32.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 402-406, 414-422.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid. See also, Isidore Gorski, “Commentary on the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity: Apostolicam Actuositatem,” George P. Schner, ed., \textit{The Church Renewed: The Documents of Vatican II Reconsidered}, 75.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 437.
However, the main goal of the Council was to free the Church from the political power of the state by limiting active participation in the Church government to the bishops, which ultimately strengthened clericalism. Such attitude could be gleaned from Saint Robert Bellarmine’s description of the Church as “a society of men (sic) united by the profession of the same Christian faith and participation in the same sacraments, governed by their legitimate pastors and especially by the only Vicar of Christ on earth, the Pope of Rome.”  

Thus, the aftermath of the Council of Trent was, according to some authors, the maintenance of clerical power and the exclusion of the laity from the mission of the Church. The purpose of this exclusion of the laity was intended to reinforce a view that held that lay people occupied an inferior position in religious affairs of the Church.  

1. 1. 4 Modern Period

The arrival of modernity and secularization further initiated many problems and challenges for a juridical conception of the Church. The Enlightenment in the 17th and 18th centuries, for instance, forced “the issue of faith and religion from the centre of the arena of public concern to the periphery of the private judgement of the individuals.” The Church subsequently found herself vulnerable and increasingly incapable of coming to terms with a world that was undergoing more and more mutation, owing to scientific discoveries as well as to developments in the area of individual autonomy, freedom and responsibility. The official reaction of the Church was characterized by fear and

59 See, Robert Bellarmine as quoted in Ferdinand Nwaigbo, Church as a Communion: An African Christian Perspective: Theology of the Local Church in the Light of the Second Vatican Council, 120.
61 Ibid. See also, Robert McClory, As it was in the Beginning: The Coming Democratization of the Catholic Church, 62-67.
suspicion as well as “outright rejection of a worldview, which, however, had already been assimilated by most of the faithful.”

Moreover, the apex in the understanding of the Church from this ecclesiological perspective was reached with the definition of papal primacy, and infallibility by the First Vatican Council (1869-1870). It was indeed a Council that dedicated itself to the rejection of errors and, most importantly, the strengthening of the authority and power of the Pope in the Church in opposition to “individualism, rationalism, materialism, liberation, scientism and statism of the modern world.”

This understanding of the Roman Church, which concentrated on its juridical nature, was explicitly justified in order to safeguard and protect the person of the Pope with all the visible and juridical structures. Thus, the Church saw herself as one, holy, catholic and apostolic founded by Christ and, according to his promise, visible in the world as the Roman Catholic Church. Consequently, the Catholic Church appeared as an all-encompassing institution or one diocese directed from Rome.

Such was the vision of the Church that dominated Roman ecclesiology until the eve of the Second Vatican Council, which inaugurated a new vision of a theology of the laity. It becomes necessary within this context to consider the Second Vatican Council’s ecclesiology as the context from which the theology of the laity emanated.

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62 Ibid., 41.
65 Ibid., 72.
1.2 Synopsis of Ecclesiology and the Theology of the Laity Prior to Vatican II

When in the mid-nineteenth century, Monsignor George Talbot, an English curial official and secretary to Pope Pius IX, was asked about the role and mission of the laity, he responded, “To hunt, to shoot, to entertain. These matters they understand, but to meddle with ecclesiastical matters, they have no right at all.” This statement serves as a pivotal signal of how the laity were perceived in the Church in the years leading up to Vatican II. There was a marked distinction between the clergy and the laity, between the sacred and the secular, between the eternal and the temporal. Indeed, a clear dichotomy between the ecclesia docens—the teaching Church—to which belonged the exclusive monopoly of thinking and speaking in all ecclesiastical matters, and an ecclesia discens—the listening Church—whose only right and duty was to listen, to submit and to act accordingly. This model of Church effected the separation between the clergy and the laity.

The paradigmatic shifts in theology and the modernist crisis of the early twentieth century were subtle factors in Vatican II’s theological revolution. Liturgical scholarship not only revivified sacramental theology, but also restored the laity’s role in worship. But even more important, the shift to historical-critical scholarship was the immediate cause of the overthrow of the reigning Neo-scholastic ideology that Leo XIII had made as the official philosophical and theological system in the Church. Nowhere was the shift more evident than in France and other parts of Europe at mid-century, and in no writings more

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66 Maureen Sullivan, OP. The Road to Vatican II: Key Changes in Theology, 61.
67 Ibid. “Anyone trained in Catholicism before Vatican II would be familiar with this model, frequently referred to as the ‘pyramid’ model of Church. This pyramid reflected one’s place in the Church. At the top was the pope, followed by cardinals, bishops, priests, nuns, and –last—the laity. It was a ‘rank-and-file’ approach.” See also, Jan Walgrave, “Newman’s ‘On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine’” Johannes-Baptist and Edward Schillebeeckx, eds., The Teaching Authority of the Believers. Concilium, 180 (4/1985) 24.
than in the writings of Yves Congar who, while not alone, was undoubtedly the overwhelming influence upon Vatican II’s nascent theology of the laity.68

1. 2. 1 Theological Debate on the Laity

In the words of Maureen Sullivan, OP, “something very significant was happening in the field of theology in the century before Vatican II.” In those years, we find some theologians, mainly Europeans, who were approaching theology in a very different manner. Their methodological emphasis, described as the “new theology,” was viewed by many as a threat to the Neo-scholasticism that was prevalent in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.69 This section of this study therefore is an attempt to recapitulate the insights of these major theologians—Yves Congar, Karl Rahner and Edward Schillebeeckx—who were instrumental in establishing the fundamental and foundational principles on which the theology of the laity during the Second Vatican Council was based.

Yves Congar, OP (1904-1995), and the Theology of the Laity

Congar’s work became one of the first systematic attempts to articulate a theology of the laity. In his work, Lay People in the Church,70 Congar set out not only to highlight the historical development of the lay people in the Church, but also to give considerable foundation to the theology of the laity, which he claimed to be a total ecclesiology. Thus, he writes: “At bottom there can only be one sound and sufficient theology of the laity,

69 Maureen Sullivan, OP, The Road to Vatican II: Key Changes in Theology, 17.
and that is a ‘total ecclesiology.’”\(^{71}\) In other words, a comprehensive understanding of the Church cannot be reached without acknowledging the place and the role of the laity.

While not claiming to produce a total ecclesiology, Congar made consistent attempts to present the role of the lay people in the Church in positive and dynamic terms. He rejected the medieval notion of the clergy as a class over and against the laity, as well as the monastic view, which held that the lay people existed by virtue of concession to weakness. Rather, “as members of the people of God, lay persons are, like clerics and monks, by their state and directly, ordered to heavenly things.”\(^{72}\)

Congar contended that in as much as the lay persons are ordered to heavenly things, they should not, however, neglect their involvement in the activities of the world. Thus, lay peoples’ secular identity is qualified.\(^{73}\) In his 1964 additions, he admittedly recognized the shift in his articulation of the laity’s role based on the Council’s preferred language of the “People of God.” Hence, he wrote: “There are particular forms of exercise of the Church’s mission, but there is no particular mission differentiating the faithful and the ministerial priesthood.” He references the fact that the hierarchical ministry is equally directed towards the world just as “the lay faithful in their own way carry on the Church’s evangelizing mission” by virtue of their sacramental identity.\(^{74}\)

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\(^{71}\) Ibid., xv-xvi.


\(^{73}\) Ibid., 24. Most often, the word “secular” is contrasted with “sacred” in such a way that the former is understood as profane, devoid of God, while the latter is imbued with God’s presence. This often leads to a dichotomy between the Church and the world as well as between the clergy and the laity. However, for Congar, his entire effort in his book on the theology of the laity as it concerns the secular identity of the laity is geared towards a protest against reducing the lay person’s proper quality to being a reference to the world or temporal things devoid of the presence of God. Thus, he wrote: “For to him or her, Christianly speaking, that which is to be referred to the absolute is the very reality of the elements of this world….”

\(^{74}\) Ibid., 24-27; Cf. Paul Lakeland, *The Liberation of the Laity*, 52-54.
Congar tries to situate the two aspects of the Church—as community of the faithful (the Christian faithful) and as order of the means to salvation (the hierarchy)—within the different historical circumstances under which they have been articulated and understood, as evident in the history of the Church. While some of these historical developments seem to offer an exceptional emphasis on the nature of the Church as societas fidelium (society of the faithful), other interpretations seem to recognize the hierarchically structured institution as a normative principle. However, the rediscovery of the positive image as well as of a balanced theology of the laity in the later part of the nineteenth century, as Congar argues, came as a result of the triumph of modernism, the birth of liturgical movements, as well as the renewal of Christian initiative in the form of Catholic Action. These contributed immensely to creating a clear consciousness among the laity not only of belonging to the Church, “but of being the Church,” using the exact words of Pius XII.

Congar’s other major contribution on the theology of the laity prior to Vatican II was in the area of the hierarchy and faithful relationship. Speaking on how Christ’s kingly, priestly and prophetic mediation is related in two ways to the understanding of the relationship between the hierarchy and the laity on the one hand, and the relationship between the world and the Church on the other hand, he clarified: “The hierarchy exercises the mediation of the means of grace between Christ and the faithful; the latter exercises a mediation of life between the Body of Christ and the world, and this also is a

75 Ibid., 28-37.
76 Ibid., 38-53.
77 Ibid., 54-55.
78 Ibid., 59-118.
means of grace in its order.” In other words, the hierarchy pertains to the juridical powers of the Church, in which it has a ruling voice, but the laity pertains to the life of the Church and in that sense, they are central to the mission of the Church. The laity, he argues, keeps the world oriented toward God’s ultimate purpose, which is symbolized as the kingdom of God. Therefore, the world and the kingdom are related. The laity’s unique contribution is to affirm the world and keep it related to the kingdom. He considers the laity in terms of their participation in the life of the Church through its priestly, kingly and prophetic offices. Such participation in the threefold functions of the Church, he argues, is grounded in their baptismal identity.

The priestly function of the lay people has both the mediating role in the secular world as well as the liturgical life where both clergy and laity are united with the sacrifice of Christ in the mass. Such priesthood of the lay people is a true priesthood, for which Congar’s preferred term is “spiritual-real,” which expresses its place both in “the order of the holiness” and in “the order of sacramental worship.” Thus, the clergy and laity participate equally in Christ’s messianic mission, yet in different ways: the clergy, by celebrating the sacraments, constitutes the faithful people, whereas the laity, by their graced activities, consecrates the world, making of all things a sacrifice of praise to God.

Congar sees the laity’s involvement in the kingly function of Christ under two aspects, namely a form of life and a form of power. The kingly function as a form of life involves two aspects of self-mastery of one’s power and deeds, as well as the aspect of

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79 Ibid., 118.
80 Ibid.
81 Ibid.
82 Ibid., 176-233.
83 Ibid., 192-193.
spiritual freedom—a dialectic of “refusal and engagement” through which one serves, challenges and even at times withdraws from the world. Congar sees the laity’s involvement in the governing authority within the Church as part of the kingly function of Christ. Although the laity have not been instrumental to the structural formation of the Church’s administrative procedures, their involvement in consent and decision-making, as evidenced in history, has immensely contributed to the life of the Church.\textsuperscript{84}

It is the primary responsibility of the episcopal hierarchy to ensure and safeguard the doctrine of the faith—charism of Apostolicity (the teaching function of the Church’s hierarchy). The laity’s involvement in the Church’s prophetic office, he argues, implies a sharing of the laity in the conservation, as well as in the development of the deposit of faith. Congar expresses equally the dependency of the episcopal hierarchy and the body of the Christian faithful on the gift of the Holy Spirit as far as the quality of infallibility of the Church’s teaching office is concerned. While Congar recognizes the competency of the clergy over the lay people on theological proficiency,\textsuperscript{85} Paul Lakeland raises serious objection against Congar for such recognition, because for him, it is obviously a historically conditioned judgement. The growth in lay expertise in theology from fifty years ago has certainly shifted the balance between lay and clerical theologians. Thus, such claim that the clergy are “properly” pre-eminent in theology may not stand the test of the present situation because the theological skills of some laypersons cannot be denied.\textsuperscript{86}

Another aspect of Congar’s theology of the laity ensues from his discussion on the apostolic function of the lay people with a particular focus on the phenomenon of

\textsuperscript{84} Ibid., 234-265.
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid., 271-311.
\textsuperscript{86} Paul Lakeland, \textit{The Liberation of the Laity}, 64-67.
“Catholic Action.” He sees the mission of the Church as a direct appropriation of the mission of Christ with its objective being salvation in Christ Jesus. It is a mission that is facilitated inwardly through the Holy Spirit, and outwardly through the apostolic ministry. For Congar, therefore, the Church’s apostolic mission has a link with the apostles which represent the hierarchical mission of the clergy. Thus, the mission of the faithful stands in essence and in principle as a sharing with, and a complement to, that of the apostles. The apostolic activities, which he designates with the term “Catholic Action,” have their origin within the early period of the nineteenth century, with a distinctive characteristic of being a lay-led apostolate under the direction of the hierarchical Church with its ecclesiastical sanction and “mandate.” However, in his explanation of what he considers to be the correct understanding and interpretation of the hierarchical mandate of “Catholic Action”, Congar asserts that the basis for the lay apostolate is not this mandate, but their faith and fervour of their Christian life.87

Congar speaks of the spirituality of the lay people on the basis of the universal call to holiness, but simultaneously acknowledges the specific form of holiness of the lay people from the perspective of their engagement in secular work through which they sanctify the world. Hence, for Congar, there is no real or authentic spirituality of the lay apostolate until the secular character of the world in which they are called to exercise their apostolate in particular is recognized.88 He therefore argues that the sanctification of the Christian lies effectively through engagement in the business of the world as willed by God, not as a closed world, but as “a temporary world, which man [sic] can look after

87 Yves Congar, Lay People in the Church: A Study for a Theology of Laity, 349-367, 398-399.
88 Ibid., 400-401.
lovingly but wherein he is awaiting a call whose delay does not hide its real imminence.”

Congar’s formulation of the theology of the laity is a requisite part of his overall effort to restore a “total ecclesiology.” Such articulation affirms that the authentic ecclesiology in Congar’s perception cannot neglect the role and place of the lay people in the Church mission, and still claim its rightful position as a genuine appreciation of what the Church stands for. To infer that such an expression signifies something substantial in the theology of Congar can only be clarified by reference to his attempt to do theology in a comprehensive manner.

In conclusion, one element that stands out clearly throughout his theology was his ability to maintain a clear distinction between the hierarchically structured institution of the Church and the dimension of the lay people’s involvement in the mission of the Church. Congar transcended some of his contemporaries in this ecclesiological trajectory by insisting that various ministries in the Church serve as communion and service to the entire structure of the Church. This was something unique in his entire theology.

One equally discovers at times some elements of painful dialectic in Congar’s thoughts and theological trajectories. This explains the reason behind some critics who seem to affirm the lack of systematization in Congar’s theology. However, his insistence in the later part of his theological career on the active and intelligent participation of the lay people in salvation history, as evidenced within the various documents of the Second

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89 Ibid., 401-413, 420-423.
90 Ibid., 389-391.
92 Yves Congar, Lay People in the Church: A Study for a Theology of Laity, 392.
Vatican Council, which he greatly influenced, is a signal of the subsequent development and assimilation of his ideas in the theological discourse of the present century.

*Karl Rahner, SJ (1904-1984), and the Theology of the Laity*

The foundational work on the theology of the laity which was laid by Yves Congar prior to the Second Vatican Council was complemented by Karl Rahner, who provided a unique description of the laity in terms of their mission in the world. Similar to Congar, Rahner rejected purely clerical or canonical notions in defining the laity. Rahner held that the laity were not to be defined in opposition to the sacred. Hence, “the notion of layman [sic], therefore does not mark the boundary between the sphere of the profane and the sphere of the sacred and sacral; it refers rather, to someone who has a definite position within the one consecrated realm of the Church.”

Rahner contends that the laity have a specific apostolate in the world and towards the world which determines their “status in the Church.” Thus, in describing positively the nature of a layperson who has a distinctive role to play in the Church, Rahner says: “Being a layman [sic] in the Church (and also to have the qualification of a Church member in this sense) means having one’s place in the Church as her member and exercising her functions wherever there is the world (all this referring, of course, to the lay-Christian only in so far as he is distinguished from the clergy and from the religious).”

Rahner warns against defining the laity exclusively from their situation in the world and says that the positive determination of the concept of a lay person must also

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94 Ibid., 323.
say what a lay person is in the Church as a member of the Church.⁹⁵ He argues that the laity share necessarily in the Church’s mission and responsibility by virtue of their sacramental identity. Based on this sacramental identity, Rahner contends that the lay person is a member of the Church both in the dimension of inward grace as well as in her outward visibleness. By the very nature of being a member of the Mystical Body of Christ, Rahner argues that the lay person is an active cooperator in the fulfillment of the Church’s mission and mandate.⁹⁶

Rahner reflected on the question whether lay people who are working inside the Church can be considered truly lay people.⁹⁷ In his opinion, the lay state in the proper sense ceases whenever there is real and habitual participation of the lay person in the powers of the hierarchy in such a way that the exercise of these powers characterizes the life of such a person, that is, determines his station (in life).⁹⁸ Rahner’s examples of such a person are instructive: “An officially-commissioned ‘lay catechist,’ a woman officially employed as ‘parochial helper,’ an official sacristan, etc. are not indeed ordained; yet if these are principal functions, they are no longer, properly speaking, lay persons.”⁹⁹ Rahner seems to see them as equivalent to the ranks of a kind of diaconal ministry. Thus, he writes: “There are many tasks in the realm of the Church’s apostolate as a whole which cannot be fulfilled on the plane of the lay apostolate; it would be necessary rather to create a new theological, psychological and legal sphere for them, on the level of the hierarchical apostolate.”¹⁰⁰

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⁹⁵ Ibid., 324.
⁹⁶ Ibid., 326.
⁹⁷ Ibid., 319-352.
⁹⁸ Ibid., 330.
⁹⁹ Ibid., 337.
¹⁰⁰ Ibid.
Rahner goes further to assert that every Christian has been given the right and responsibility through baptism and confirmation, without further commission, to bear witness to the faith and to be concerned with the salvation of the world. The lay person’s apostolate for Rahner, is therefore, founded on his or her own Christian being, and is not determined in its extent and manner by an ecclesiastical commission from above, but from below, i.e. by his or her situation in the world.\textsuperscript{101}

In concluding his analysis on the apostolate of the laity, Rahner argued that the proper place for the lay apostolate is in the world. Hence, he says: “Let us not impose an apostolate on the layman [sic] to which he is not suited existentially and to which in general he is not called.”\textsuperscript{102} However, he suggests that lay people should be formed in such a way that they may be Christians in the place where they are or should be—in the world. It is there, he argues, they are called to bear witness to Christ by their life.\textsuperscript{103}

\textit{Edward Schillebeeckx, OP (1914-2009), and the Theology of the Laity}

In his article on “lay spirituality”, which was published in 1949, Edward Schillebeeckx opined that the common “religious wealth” which is shared by the laity, religious and clergy must be examined before the vocation and mission of the laity can be discussed.\textsuperscript{104} By religious wealth, Schillebeeckx recognizes the “primary mission of the Church” which is shared by every member of the Church including the laity.

In his explanation of the vocation of the laity, Schillebeeckx rejects the negative description of the laity as a “non-office bearer.” He rather takes a positive approach in

\begin{footnotes}
\item[101] Ibid., 339.
\item[102] Ibid., 351.
\item[103] Ibid., 352.
\end{footnotes}
describing the laity in terms of their specific relationship with the secularity of the world. This relationship is seen as the distinctive aspect of the laity and it characterizes their membership in the Church and their participation in the “primary religious mission of the Church.” While Schillebeeckx sees the primary task of the laity as being in the world, he did not restrict their apostolate to the world. The laity could also carry out an apostolate in the Church, without altering their identity as laity. Thus, he says: “One, who is baptized, therefore, must integrate his involvement in the affairs of this world into his existence as a believer and member of the Church.” He believes that the secular apostolate of the lay people should be carried out entirely within the context of their communion with God in order for that apostolate to assume “an authentic component of the entirely God-centred attitude to life.”

Unlike Karl Rahner, Schillebeeckx believes that the immediate co-operation of the layperson in the hierarchical apostolate, even when it takes the form of full-time occupation and consequently requires that the layperson give up their secular place in the world, remains in the category of the apostolate of the layperson in the Church. And just like Congar and unlike Rahner, he calls Catholic Action the collaboration of the laity in the hierarchical apostolate. “It is a question not of lay participation, but of lay assistance, in the exercise of the apostolic function of the ecclesiastical hierarchy.” Differently expressed, Catholic Action for Schillebeeckx includes: “the rendering of lay assistance, whether to the teaching authority of the Church, or to the governmental

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105 Edward Schillebeeckx, *The Layman in the Church and Other Essays* (New York: Alba House, 1963) 34-42. As indicated earlier in this chapter, the understanding of the secularity of the world is not meant to suggest a world devoid of God’s presence. Rather, it speaks of the positive affirmation of the laity’s involvement in the activities of the world where they are being called to exercise their mission as part of the entire mission of the Church.
106 Ibid., 41.
107 Ibid., 43-44.
functions of the Church, or to the sanctifying and pastoral duties of the priesthood.” Lay assistance “signifies consequently co-operation with the apostolate of the hierarchy in so far as the latter necessarily includes secular involvement.”\textsuperscript{109} Thus, for Schillebeeckx, the Christian layperson bears responsibility both towards the Church as well as towards the world, and the layperson’s apostolic secular involvement “is at the service of both Church and the world.”\textsuperscript{110}

The brief history of the Christian self-awareness of the layperson in the Church, according to Schillebeeckx, reveals that the laity do not yet know exactly the limits of their active involvement in the Church because such knowledge or awareness has not been theologically developed. He therefore suggests that the laity should be given opportunity, through adequate formation, for the proper appreciation and understanding of their function in the Church. He equally pointed out the danger of “clericalization” by which the clergy in their attempts to define their precise clerical task moved out of their own boundary of authority in relation to the laity.\textsuperscript{111}

He further warned that the laity in the recognition of their secular involvement should not excessively be absorbed in it so as to forget dialogue with God and lose the awareness of the Spirit who sometimes expresses itself over all institutions. They should be mindful of the second danger which creeps in as a result of their collaboration with the hierarchy so that they do not consider themselves as self-emancipated from the hierarchy. This does not however mean for Schillebeeckx “that the layman [sic] is simply an executive of the official Church decisions.” Rather, it means that the layperson has


\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., 56-57.

\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., 57-58.
his/her own responsibility towards the Church as “a consequence of the mandate of a baptized, confirmed and married Christian.” To that effect, Schillebeeckx advocated for the canonical protection of the special activity of the layperson just as the special activity of a parish priest is protected in the Code against possible abuse of episcopal authority. Until “the notion of the Christian laity is given canonical structure,” Schillebeeckx argued, the layperson remains powerless. This authoritative, canonical recognition of the lay form of membership of the Church which belongs to the Christian layperson does not involve any partial withdrawal of the laity from ecclesiastical authority. Nevertheless, Schillebeeckx suggested that this proposal for canonical legislation for the laity should be considered for the Second Vatican Council.\textsuperscript{112}

The significant contributions of Congar, Rahner and Schillebeeckx without doubt signalled a better appreciation and positive understanding of the theology of the laity within the Church prior to the Council. What I will show next is how these influences impacted the later articulation and development of this theology within the Council and its subsequent interpretations in the post-conciliar period.

1. 3 Second Vatican Council’s Ecclesiology and the Theology of the Laity

In this section, I will explore the theology of the laity as espoused in the various documents of the Second Vatican Council. This theology finds ultimate expression especially in the following Councils’ documents: \textit{Lumen Gentium, Apostolicam Actuositatem} and \textit{Gaudium et Spes}.\textsuperscript{113} Since these Council’s documents do not exhaust the entire theology of the laity, references are made to other Council’s documents as they

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., 58-60.
\textsuperscript{113} Cf. \textit{Lumen Gentium, Gaudium et Spes, Apostolicam Actuositatem}. 
relate to the theology of the laity. The theology of the laity which is found in the Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People \(^{114}\) is primarily based on the theology of the Church set forth in the Constitution on the Church, particularly in its chapters on the People of God and the Laity.

In the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Lumen Gentium, the Council fathers placed the chapter on “the Hierarchical Constitution of the Church” after the chapters on the “Mystery of the Church” and the “People of God.” Since the fundamental reality of the Church is primarily that of a communion with God and with one another, every member of the Church shares a basic equality, dignity and a call which are grounded in Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist. Thus, chapter four of Lumen Gentium on the laity begins as follows: “Everything that has been said of the People of God is addressed equally to the laity, religious, and clergy.”\(^{115}\) By structuring Vatican II’s text of Lumen Gentium in this way, the Council fathers significantly established a shift from the juridical and hierarchical approach which characterized pre-conciliar ecclesiology and presented a renewed vision of the Church, informed by contemporary biblical studies, historical research and ecumenical openness.

The Council wrestled with the question of how to define the lay faithful. From the canonical perspective, they were baptized Christians who had not received the sacrament of Orders. Seeking a more positive understanding of the laity, the Council fathers taught that the lay Christians were incorporated into the Body of Christ by virtue of their baptism and therefore shared in their own way in Christ’s threefold office as priest, prophet and king. Hence, Vatican II declares:

\(^{114}\) Cf. Apostolicam Actuositatem.

\(^{115}\) Lumen Gentium, no. 30.
The term laity is here understood to mean all the faithful except those in holy orders and those in a religious state sanctioned by the Church. These faithful are by baptism made one body with Christ and are established among the People of God. They are in their own way made sharers in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly functions of Christ. They carry out their own part in the mission of the whole Christian people with respect to the Church and the world.\textsuperscript{116}

This description of the laity, though still with some limitations, is informed by the Council fathers’ realization that the laity, like every other person who belongs to the Church, have status in the Church.\textsuperscript{117} The Council fathers, recognizing the fundamental dignity of all the baptized, affirmed the status of the laity. This recognition of the status of the laity, therefore, necessitates the characterization of the laity as priests, prophets and kings.

Thus, they have a share in the mission of the Church (\textit{LG}, 34-36, \textit{AA}, 2). There is a complementarity of roles between the laity and the ordained. As Vatican II notes: “In the Church, there is diversity of ministry but unity of mission” (\textit{AA}, 2). While the ordained and laity differ, each is necessary to the mission of the Church (\textit{LG}, 32; \textit{AA}, 25). The mission of the Church does not rest on the shoulders of the ordained alone (\textit{LG}, 30). However, the Council affirms that the mission of the Church is done mainly through the ministry of the word and of the sacraments, which are entrusted in a special way to the clergy (\textit{AA}, 6). The bishops and their assistants, the priests, are to order and coordinate the various ministries and apostolates of the laity (\textit{AA}, 23-24; \textit{LG}, 32). The bishops and priests have the responsibility to discern, judge and order the charisms given by the Spirit (\textit{LG}, 12, 23-24; \textit{AA}, 3).

\begin{footnotes}
\item[116] Ibid., no. 31.
\item[117] Ibid., no. 30.
\end{footnotes}
The laity can still exercise some responsibilities in the Church in other ways. For instance, the laity can make their opinions about the good of the Church known to their pastors by reason of their competence, as the Council urges and obliges them to do (LG, 37). They can utilize the Spirit’s gifts for the unity of the Church and the vitality of its mission (AA, 3). The laity are united with Christ in his perfect offering to the Father (SC, 7) and their “full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations,” (SC, 14; LG, 34) enhances the effectiveness of the Church’s worship.

The Council regarded the lay Christian faithful as particularly competent in “secular” matters (LG, 30, 31, 33; GS, 43; AA, 2-5, 11-14), and as well provided for their advanced participation in the inner affairs of the Church (LG, 32; AA, 10, 20, 26). What was specific to the laity as such for the Council was their secular apostolate—to engage in temporal affairs, seeking to order them according to the plan of God. “They live in the world,” said the Council, “that is, in each and in all of the secular professions and occupations. They live in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life, from which the very web of their existence is woven” (LG, 31).118

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118 Recognition of the secularity of the laity should not make us to lose sight of the secular character of the whole Church. In this regard, some theologians, in affirming the secular character of the laity, also establish the secularity of the Church in such a way that the secular character as well constitutes a link between the Church and all her members. This is a move in the right direction, especially when the Church and her members are in the secular world though not of the world. Such an approach presents a balanced and positive understanding of the secular. Thus, Paul Lakeland, from a religious point of view, understands secular to mean “considering the world, dependent on God for its existence and suffused with divine presence through Christ and the Spirit, but not in such a way that the presence of God changes or suspends the natural laws of the universe.” Lakeland regards secular reality as the only one reality we can experience, and within which the Church exists. Hence, he argues: “The Church is not another reality, but a particular reality within the secular. The Church may exist to proclaim the affirmation of the goodness of the world in the life of Jesus, to protect the story that Christians tell about history, but it does so as a community within history.” See, Paul Lakeland, The Liberation of the Laity: In Search of an Accountable Church, 149, 158. In the post-conciliar theology, the secular is already sacred just as we can speak of a graced nature. Karl Rahner has made a wonderful contribution in this regard. See, Karl Rahner, “Ecclesiology, Questions in the Church, the Church in the World,” Theological Investigation, vol. xiv, trans. David Bourke (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1976). See also, Paul Lakeland, The Politics of Salvation: The Hegelian Idea of the State (New York-Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984) 117-118.
Actuositatem, a continued emphasis is placed on the role of the laity in the world. The document declares:

The mission of the Church, consequently, is not only to bring people the message and grace of Christ but also to permeate and improve the whole range of temporal things. The laity, carrying out this mission of the Church, exercises their apostolate therefore in the world as well as in the Church, in temporal order as well as in the spiritual.\footnote{See, Apostolicam Actuositatem, nos. 5 and 7.}

There is no dichotomy between the laity’s mission in the Church and the laity’s mission in the world, as if the former were primarily “spiritual” and the second restricted to the “worldly” realm. Since the Church’s mission is both spiritual and temporal, the laity are called to the building of ecclesial communion (\textit{ad intra}) as well as to the transformation of the world with gospel values (\textit{ad extra}). Thus, the secular character of the laity is not posed in opposition to their participation in the inner life of the Church. The laity have the right and responsibility to engage in intra-ecclesial ministries and promote the life of the Church. The promotion of social justice in national affairs is part of the lay apostolate, and a constitutive dimension of proclaiming the gospel.\footnote{Justice in the World, nos. 6, 36, Joseph Gremillion, The Gospel of Peace and Justice: Catholic Social Teaching Since Pope John (Maryknoll-New York: Orbis Books, 1976). Cf. Apostolicam Actuositatem, nos. 9, 14.} Thus, the laity are called to promote actions for justice and the common good animated by the spirit of the gospel.\footnote{See, Apostolicam Actuositatem, nos. 5, 14. See also, Gaudium et Spes, nos. 26, 41, 43.} The concept of the secular character, which remains the distinctive character of the laity, is related to the baptismal mission of the faithful. It is part of their priestly, prophetic and kingly identity.

The description of what the laity are called to do as a participation in the mission of the Church is designated with the term “apostolate.” Vatican II’s document on the
Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People defines the apostolate as the sum total of the activity whereby the Mystical Body spreads the kingdom of Christ and thereby brings the world to share in Christ’s saving redemption (AA, 2). However, the Council made an important advance in the spirit of Pius XII. It stated that while the laity can be called to participate in the apostolate of the hierarchy, as is the case in Catholic Action, this is not their only way of exercising the apostolate. Indeed, before receiving any mandate from the hierarchy, they already participate in the saving mission of Church through their baptism and confirmation. By virtue of these sacraments, the Lord himself commissions them to the apostolate. Instead of being perceived as mere passive recipients of the ministrations of the hierarchy, all the lay Christian faithful have a positive contribution to make within the entire mission of the Church. They are called to play their own role in order to promote the growth and sanctification of the Church (LG, 33; AA, 2-3).

Moreover, at various points in its documents, Vatican II sought to clarify the respective competences of the hierarchy and the laity, making several important distinctions. All Christians, it taught, are called by virtue of their baptism to be active in extending and sanctifying the Church, though always under the supervision of the hierarchy. The laity in particular are called to make the Church present and operative in secular environments where it is difficult for clergy and vowed religious to penetrate. In addition to this general call, some members of the laity receive a special mandate from the hierarchy to cooperate in a more immediate way in the apostolate of the hierarchy, as did the co-workers in the gospel to whom Paul refers in his letters (Roman 16:3ff; Phil 4:3). Some laity may be commissioned for certain sacred functions ordinarily reserved to

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the clergy because of a shortage of priests, or some persecution that prevents priests from performing their tasks. Laypersons cannot, of course, perform functions reserved to the ordained by divine law, but they can receive the deputation, for instance, to baptize, to witness marriages, to preach and to distribute Holy Communion (AA, 24).

The above description of the laity, though still with some limitations, is informed by the Council fathers’ realization that the laity belong to the Church and that they have the fundamental dignity of all the baptized. Nonetheless, as Dom Christopher Butler observes, Vatican II is not a final accomplishment, but a stepping-stone to further theological reflections. Therefore, it is against this background that we can explore some theological principles or images of the Church that informed the theology of the laity as seen in Vatican II’s ecclesiology.

1.3.1 The Nature of the Church: Vatican II’s Images of the Church and the Theology of the Laity

The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council gave us a laudable idea of Church in the world, namely, a Church in constant dialogue with the world in all its exigencies and contexts, and indeed a Church that is both accommodating and outreaching. According to the Council’s ecclesiological teachings, the Church is theandric (divine and human),

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126 Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, nos. 1-2, 8, 21. Emmanuel Achunike understands the Church as “a mystery, as people of God, as mystical body of Christ, as Sacrament...as one complex reality with visible and invisible elements, the hierarchical and charismatic, the institutional and spiritual, the earthly and heavenly.” See, *The New Code, A Challenge to the Apostolate of the Laity: With Particular Application to the Nigerian Catholic Laity in the New Era of Evangelization in Nigeria* (Rome: 1988) 43. See also, Thomas Green, “The Diocesan Bishop in Revised Code, Some Introductory Reflections,” *The Jurist* 42 (1983) 324. John E. Linnan, added that “The Church is a human institution, but it is also divine mystery. Its power comes from God through Christ in the Spirit, but it is divine necessarily mediated by human beings, human systems,
“a society with hierarchical organs and the mystical body of Christ—the visible society and spiritual community; the earthly Church and the Church endowed with heavenly riches.”

The Council was very much concerned with correcting an image of the Church that was generally considered as being too rigid, and in many instances, out of touch with contemporary reality. Thus, their first concern was to go beyond any purely apologetical approach to self-understanding of the Church so common in the time after the Reformation, and in the wake of the Enlightenment.

We find in the documents on the Church a refreshing return to the biblical understanding of the Church, as well as the use of symbols from patristic literature to portray the mystery and mission of the Church. These images and analogies have Christological background and foundation. Specifically, the Church is described as “sheepfold,” “vineyard,” “building,” “family,” “temple,” “mother,” “bride,” “sacrament,” “people of God,” “mystical body,” and finally as “communion.”

All these images reflect the nature of the Church used in the theology of the Second Vatican Council. In the words of Pope John Paul II:

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129 Ibid., 36-37.

130 See, Lumen Gentium, nos.1, 6, 7, 9, 13, 48. Cf. Maximilian Heinrich Heim, Joseph Ratzinger Life in the Church and Living Theology: Fundamentals of Ecclesiology with Reference to Lumen Gentium (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007) 49. See also, Anthony Chiegboka, Administrative Co-operation in the Diocesan Curia (Nigeria: Rex Charles and Patrick Ltd. 2007) 6-7. Ferdinand Nwaigbo affirmed that “The Council fathers employed also some biblical images, pictures and symbols in order to describe the reality that the Church is said to be, such as sheepfold, cultivated field, spotless spouse, People of God, Body of Christ and the Temple of the Holy Spirit. With these biblical metaphors, the Council explains that mystery which the Church bears after the divine Godhead.” See, Ferdinand Nwaigbo, Church as a Communion: An African Christian Perspective Theology of the Local Church in the Light of the Second Vatican Council, 139. See, Robert Kress, The Church: Communion, Sacrament, Communication (New York: Paulist Press, 1985) 34.
Foremost among the elements which express the true and authentic image of the Church are: the teaching whereby the Church is presented as the People of God (cf. const. *Lumen Gentium*, n.2) and its hierarchical authority as service (ibid n.3); the further teaching which portrays the Church as a communion and then spells out the mutual relationships which must intervene between the particular and the universal Church, and between collegiality and primacy; likewise, the teaching by which all members of the People of God share, each in their own measure, in the threefold priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ, with which teaching is associated also that which looks to the duties and rights of Christ’s faithful and specifically the laity; and lastly the assiduity which the Church must devote to ecumenism.\(^{131}\)

While it is true that these images reflect the nature of the Church, it is essential to keep in mind that no single image, conceptualization or definition is ever sufficient or exhaustive to describe the Church adequately. Each model or image plays a complementary role with other models to give a deeper meaning or full understanding of the Church, in relation to the theology of the laity. It is equally essential to note that the Vatican II as a whole, and not merely in the sections which dealt expressly with the laity, provides some important elements in understanding the notion of the Church which gives the laity its due place.\(^{132}\)

Thus, by describing the Church as the “People of God,” the “Mystical Body of Christ” or as the “Communion of the faithful,” amidst other images, Vatican II affirmed the fundamental dignity and equality of every vocation, grounded in the reality of

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baptism, and established some fundamental principles upon which a theology of the laity
could be formulated. I will discuss each of these images in the following sections.

1. 3. 1. 2 Church as People of God

The rediscovery of the image of the Church as the community of the “People of
God,” called to be sign and instrument of human unity and salvation, recaptures the
essential aspect of the ecclesiology of Vatican II. From this perspective, it implies that the
Church has a unique character, which signifies brotherhood and sisterhood, solidarity,
and the equality of all people as children of God, called to the same supernatural destiny
by Christ as the only mediator between God and humanity. Drawing upon the Old
Testament concept of the people of God (Ex 19:5ff; Lev 26:9-12; Jer 32:38) as a better
description of the Church, the Council fathers in unequivocal terms affirmed and
reiterated: “He has…willed to make men and women, not as individuals without any
bond or link between them, but rather to make them into a people who might
acknowledge Him and serve Him in holiness.” Thus, these people, prefigured by Israel
according to the ancient alliance, are through faith in Christ finally established as “a
chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation…who in times past were not a people, but
now are the people of God (1 Pet. 2:9-10).”

Based on this understanding of the Church as a People of God, Vatican II made an
advanced gesture in the fundamental importance of community in the self-understanding
of the Church. It is this bond and link established by God between people through faith in

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133 See, Lumen Gentium, no. 32.
134 Ibid., nos. 9-17; Cf. Frederick Chiromba, “The Life of the Church,” Maura Browne, ed., The African
Synod: Documents, Reflection, Perspective, 9.
135 Lumen Gentium, no. 9.
136 Ibid.
Christ that makes the Church a community. In this sense, the Church is first a community of people with a common faith, a common hope and a common charity in God, through Christ. While discussing further the image of the Church as the People of God, Vatican II strikes at the heart of the matter when it speaks of people in terms of “communion of life, love and truth.”\textsuperscript{137} Communion refers to all People of God, and not only to individual parts. This way of speaking of the Church as communion has a fundamental implication for the way of life, the way of making decisions and the way of acting together of the whole community, which is the People of God, the Church. It is a unique family with the orientation of love, solidarity and mutual support and participation. Thus, the Church becomes a community with fundamental rights and responsibilities.

This new ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council made another essential rediscovery when it explicitly affirmed the reality of the “common priesthood of all believers,” based on the fundamental principle of baptismal profession. According to Juan I. Arrieta, the unique image of People of God “possesses a considerable juridical dimension and the accent is on the common condition that all members of the Church share in virtue of baptism, regardless of their respective roles in realizing the mission entrusted to them by Christ.”\textsuperscript{138} Through this sacrament, one shares in the priestly, kingly as well as prophetic mission of Christ. From this common priesthood of all the faithful, which includes all the charisms given by the Spirit, there springs the common responsibility of all the faithful for the mutual upbringing of the Church. Thus, all have a share in the apostolic ministry and services of the Church. This has serious implications for the theology of the laity. Consequently, the image of the Church as People of God

\textsuperscript{137} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{138} Juan Ignacio Arrieta, \textit{Governance Structures within the Catholic Church} (Canada: Wilson & Lafleur Ltd. 2000) 1.
stresses the fundamental unity of all the baptized in Christ, which is prior to all diversity in ministry and function in the Christian community. As the Council asserts:

> There is common dignity of members deriving from their rebirth in Christ, a common grace as sons, a common vocation to perfection, one salvation, one hope and undivided charity. In Christ and in the Church there is, then, no inequality arising from race or nationality, social condition or sex, for “there is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor freeman; there is neither male or female. For you are all ‘one’ in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28; cf. Col. 3:11).¹³⁹

In identifying the Church as the whole People of God, Vatican II affirms the common identity and equal dignity of all its members. God has made all people holy and wants to save them, not merely as individuals, but as a single people that acknowledge him in truth and serve him in holiness. Christ extended this covenant by calling together a people made up of Jews and Gentiles, making them one in the Spirit. Their state is that of the dignity and freedom of sons and daughters of God (LG, 9).

Subsequently, this image of the People of God extends and includes those who are validly baptized or received into the Church, and are in full communion with the Church (LG, 12) and in solicitude, those who are outside the faith and partially incorporated into the Church.¹⁴⁰ Thus, from this sacramental foundation of the People of God, all those who are baptized can lay unique claim to a common fatherhood in Christ, and all are recognized as brothers and sisters. This also implies a kind of common heritage emerging from the cross and side of Christ and the waters of baptism. This image of the Church as

¹³⁹ *Lumen Gentium*, no. 32.
¹⁴⁰ Ibid, nos. 13-17. In *Lumen Gentium*, no. 13, the Fathers of the Council said: “All men [sic] are called to belong to the new People of God. This people therefore, whilst remaining one and only one, are to be spread throughout the whole world and to all ages in order that the design of God’s will may be fulfilled.” John E. Linnan also affirmed that “the Church is above all the people of God and the distinctions between clergy and laity are secondary (LG 9-12).” See, John E. Linnan, “Subsidiarity, Collegiality, Catholic Diversity, and their Relevance to Apostolic Visitations,” *The Jurist* 49 (1989) 411.
People of God makes us into one fold, which is an image that developed quite vividly in the first Special African Synod, namely: “Church as Family of God,” that emphasizes “care for others, solidarity, warmth in human relationship, acceptance, dialogue and trust.”\(^\text{141}\) In the Church as Family of God, therefore, the dignity and rights of individuals of whatever status, race or religion should be accepted and properly acknowledged.

This fraternity, based on a common fatherhood in God, is the basis of the equality that ought to reign in Christian community. Furthermore, the common vocation of all to holiness, which has its foundation on their equal dignity as children of God, does not rule out the reality that there are different ministries among the members of the one People of God. Thus, *Lumen Gentium* emphasizes that “[t]he distinction which the Lord made between sacred ministers and the rest of the People of God,”\(^\text{142}\) involves a genuine *communio*. “Thus in their diversity, all bear witness to the wonderful unity in the Body of Christ.”\(^\text{143}\) The Church hierarchy, following the example of the Lord, are called to the ministry of service. Since this ecclesiology has a foundation rooted within the framework of a ministry of service, authority or hierarchy exists in order to render faithful assistance to the community of the People of God.\(^\text{144}\)

This description of the hierarchy as exercising the office of service inside the Christian community is a revolution of its kind, when compared with the previous understanding of the Church with its pyramidal structures and vision. The Council’s decision to speak of the hierarchy as ministry or service inside the Church can therefore


\(^{142}\) *Lumen Gentium*, no. 32.


\(^{144}\) Ibid.
be regarded as the “Copernican ecclesiological Revolution” of the Second Vatican Council.\footnote{See, Peter Okafor, “The Ecclesiology of Vatican II: Towards a Theology of Communion for the Nigerian Church” Felix Nwatu, ed., Bigard Theological Studies, Vol. 27, no. 1 (January-June 2007) 14.} It represents a single and most important or effective achievement of Vatican II. It marks a definitive correction of the social, juridical and institutional ecclesiology of past centuries, and establishes and emphasizes the conciliar theology of communion through which a theology of laity can emanate.

1. 3. 1. 3 Church as Mystical Body of Christ

Another image which illustrates the mystery of the Church, and which the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church \textit{Lumen Gentium} proposes, is that of the \textit{Mystical Body}, with Christ as head. Speaking of this mystical union of Christ with his body, the Church, the Council fathers said: “In the human nature united to himself, the son of God, by overcoming death through his own death and resurrection, redeemed man \textit{sic} and changed him into a new creation (cf. Gal. 6:15; 2 Cor. 5:17). For by communicating his Spirit, Christ mystically constitutes as his body those brothers \textit{sic} of his who are called together from every nation.”\footnote{Cf. \textit{Lumen Gentium}, no. 7. See also, Congregation for Bishops, Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops, \textit{Apostolorum Successores}, (Ottawa: Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops Publications, 2004) no. 3. See also, Miguel M. Garijo-Guembe, \textit{Communion of the Saints: Foundation, Nature and Structure of the Church} (Collegeville-Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1994) 82-86.} The notion of “Body of Christ” expresses the intimate union of the Church with the risen and glorified Lord as his continuing presence in the world. It reveals the innermost heart of the Church, of dependence on, and in union with Christ. Some hold this understanding of the Church as the most mature result of the Council’s reflections on the scriptures in thinking about the Church.\footnote{John Fuellenbach, \textit{Church: Community for the Kingdom}, 47.}
St. Paul was the first to give a new meaning and profound application to this idea of the Church as “Body of Christ” as well as the first to comprehend the great “principle of unity in diversity.” This expression, “Body of Christ”, which comes from St. Paul, and has been used variously to describe what is distinctive about the Church, has gone through some historical evolution with its attendant nuances and applications. In its terminological meaning and implications, this metaphor “Body of Christ” can refer to the crucified body of Christ (Rom. 7:4) or to the Eucharistic body of Christ (1 Cor 10:16).

In the Post-Pauline works of Colossians and Ephesians, this picture of the Body was still focused on the Church. While speaking about the relationship between Christ and the Church in Colossians, the author says that “the Church is his body, [and] he is its head” (Col 1:18). In Ephesians, the members of the Church are identified as a structure and not structures: “As every structure is aligned on him, all grow into one holy temple in the Lord; and you too, in him, are being built into a house where God lives, in the Spirit” (Eph. 1:22).

However, in 1 Cor 12: 27, Paul explicitly relates this image to the Corinthian Church. The description of the Church as “Body of Christ” indicates the solidarity of...
community, calling into question the individualism of the Corinthian Christians. Thus, the Church as the “Body of Christ” emphasizes that the community has both features of solidarity and plurality, which can be expressed in multi-dimensional ministries and theologies. In this sense, it is to be understood that St. Paul had two pictures in his mind when he addressed the Church in Corinth with the phrase, “you are many in the one Body of Christ.” Hence, the fundamental vision and concrete affirmations of the Second Vatican Council based on the Church as the “Mystical Body of Christ” are of pivotal importance for any subsequent theology of ministry in the local churches especially as it concerns the theology of the laity.

As sharers in the role of Christ the Priest, the Prophet and the King, the laity have an active part to play in the life and activity of the Church…without it the apostolate of the pastors is generally unable to achieve its full effectiveness. In the style of men and women who helped Paul to spread the gospel, the laity with the right apostolic attitude supply what is lacking to their brethren, and refresh the spirit of pastors and of the rest of the faithful…they are eager to do their share in the apostolic work.\(^{151}\)

The threefold office of Christ as Prophet, Priest and King is taken up by *Lumen Gentium* to describe the threefold dimension of His Body, the Church (LG. 10). All the members of the “Mystical Body of Christ” have participation and share in the threefold dimension of Christ’s mission, in varying degrees, according to their various gifts and guidance of the Spirit (1 Cor 12:1ff). They all share in the one priesthood of Jesus, and equally in the ministry of the Church according to the manner in which the Epistle to the Hebrew expressed it: “Let us come forward with sincere hearts in full assurance of faith”

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\(^{151}\) See, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 10.
(Heb 10:22). Communion in ministry starts with our willingness, and endeavour to foster the interests of the Church and the People of God before personal and institutional interests, and in this way, we can really contribute to a new understanding and appreciation in ministry, and thereby glorify the Lord in manifold forms of services and diversities of cultures.

The theology of the Church as “Mystical Body” received greater attention in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. It provided a counter balance to the heavily one-sided ecclesiology of Vatican I, which so emphasized the institutional element of the Church, that the inner, divine dimension was hardly recognizable. Pope Pius XII rejuvenated the ecclesiology of the “Mystical Body of Christ” in 1943 through the publication of his famous encyclical letter, *Mystici Corporis Christi*. In this document, he defined the Church of Jesus Christ as the “Mystical Body” though still identifiable solely with the Roman Catholic Church. Nevertheless, this image of the Church, in as much as it was intended to balance the hierarchical aspect in the Church, gave little room in ecumenical dialogue due to its exclusive identification of the Mystical Body of Christ with the Roman Catholic Church.

The Second Vatican Council in *Lumen Gentium* reaffirms the idea that the Church is the Body of Christ, but slightly differs from the positions adopted by *Mystici Corporis* of Pope Pius XII. The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, rather distinguishes between the Church as a hierarchical society and as the Body of Christ, and asserts that the two are related to each other in a way comparable to the human and divine natures of Christ. The structure of the Church is described as an instrument serving

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152 See, Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 44.
153 Ibid.
Christ’s Spirit, who vivifies it in building up his Body.\textsuperscript{154} Thus, the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ from this perspective expresses yet another image of the Church as the sign and sacrament of communion. Such image of the Church as a communion is composed of all the faithful who share intrinsically in the Body of Christ as prophets, priests and kings.\textsuperscript{155} As a result of this communion, the laity are seen, not as substitutes to priests, but as full ministers of the Word and Sacrament.\textsuperscript{156}

1. 3. 1. 4 Church as a Communion

The image of the Church as a communion\textsuperscript{157} develops further and completes the images of the Church as “People of God” and as the “Body of Christ.” Although the image of the Church as People of God is considered the predominant ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council, it is the ecclesiology of communion which is the central and fundamental concept of all documents of the Council.\textsuperscript{158} Communion is the fundamental concept in Vatican II’s documents is clearly stated within the final report of the Second Ordinary Synod of Bishops, called by Pope John Paul II and held in Rome in 1985 to reflect on the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, twenty years after its conclusion. Thus, it states: “The ecclesiology of communion is the central and fundamental idea of the council’s documents. Koinonia/communion, founded on Sacred Scripture, has been held in great honour in the early Church and in the Eastern Churches to this day. Thus, much was done by the Second Vatican Council so that the Church as communion might be understood and concretely incorporated into life. What does the complex word communio mean? Fundamentally it is a matter of communion with God through Jesus Christ in the sacraments. Baptism is the door and foundation of communion in the Church. Eucharist is the source and culmination of the whole of Christian life (cf. \textit{LG} 11). The communion of the Eucharistic Body of Christ signifies and produces, that is, builds up, the intimate communion of all the faithful in the Body of Christ which is the Church (1 Cor 10:16).” See, 1985

\textsuperscript{154} Cf. \textit{Lumen Gentium}, no. 8.
\textsuperscript{155} Ibid., no. 10.
\textsuperscript{156} Ibid., nos. 33, 35.
\textsuperscript{158} This articulation that the ecclesiology of communion is the central and fundamental concept in Vatican II’s documents is clearly stated within the final report of the Second Ordinary Synod of Bishops, called by Pope John Paul II and held in Rome in 1985 to reflect on the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, twenty years after its conclusion. Thus, it states: “The ecclesiology of communion is the central and fundamental idea of the council’s documents. Koinonia/communion, founded on Sacred Scripture, has been held in great honour in the early Church and in the Eastern Churches to this day. Thus, much was done by the Second Vatican Council so that the Church as communion might be understood and concretely incorporated into life. What does the complex word communio mean? Fundamentally it is a matter of communion with God through Jesus Christ in the sacraments. Baptism is the door and foundation of communion in the Church. Eucharist is the source and culmination of the whole of Christian life (cf. \textit{LG} 11). The communion of the Eucharistic Body of Christ signifies and produces, that is, builds up, the intimate communion of all the faithful in the Body of Christ which is the Church (1 Cor 10:16).” See, 1985
concept because it expresses more conveniently the inner reality of the Church or its origin in the mystery of the Trinity.\textsuperscript{159}

The Church as a mystery of communion underscores the fact that the members of the Church are called “to a participation of the divine life,”\textsuperscript{160} in which their most profound dignity consists.\textsuperscript{161} The Church is “a people brought into unity from the unity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”\textsuperscript{162} This Trinitarian communion is the foundation and goal of ecclesial communion.\textsuperscript{163} The participation of human beings in the divine life as well as in the relationship existing among the entire people of God are the essential constitutive elements of ecclesial communion. In other words, the Church as a communion refers to the mystery of the divine life of the Trinitarian God, as well as to the openness of the divine communion in creation and redemption. This ecclesial communion in the Church is both vertical with God and horizontal among human beings,\textsuperscript{164} and it is expressed through various activities by which Christians engender

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\begin{itemize}
  \item\textsuperscript{159} Cf. \textit{Lumen Gentium}, nos. 1-4.
  \item\textsuperscript{160} Ibid.
  \item\textsuperscript{161} Cf. \textit{Gaudium et Spes}, no. 19.
  \item\textsuperscript{162} See, \textit{Lumen Gentium}, no. 4. Cf. Robert Kress, \textit{The Church: Communion, Sacrament, Communication}, 31; Saint Cyprian, on whom the Second Vatican Council built its theology of the Church, described the Church as the “\textit{De unitate Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti plebs adunata}” (A people brought into unity by the unity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit).
  \item\textsuperscript{163} Maximilian Heinrich Hein, \textit{Joseph Ratzinger: Life in the Church and Living Theology: Fundamentals of Ecclesiology with Reference to Lumen Gentium}, 65-77.
  \item\textsuperscript{164} Cf. \textit{Lumen Gentium}, stated: “the Church, in Christ, is in the nature of a Sacrament—a sign and instrument, that is of communion with God and of unity among all people” no.1. See also, Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith (\textit{CDF}), “Church as Communion,” no. 1. See also, John Paul II, “Los Angeles Meeting of the Pope and U.S. Bishops,” \textit{Origins} 17:16 (October 1, 1987) 253, 257-258 where the Pope affirms that vertical relationship with God is a precondition for our communion and horizontal unity with other Christians and fellow believers.
\end{itemize}
spiritual solidarity among themselves within the Church, in all of their personal, structural and administrative relationships.  

The idea of the Church as a communion therefore yields a truly rich ecclesiology because it explains, among other things, the place of the Holy Spirit as the source of life in the Church, and promotes a renewed appreciation for the role of charisms given to all members by the Spirit for the building up of the Church. Hence, the theological implications of the Church as a communion are many.

The notion of the Church as a communion explains the theological basis of unity of the Church, and collegiality between the pope and the college of bishops. The Second Vatican Council affirmed that by the decree of the Lord, St. Peter and the rest of the apostles are united into one college, and so are the pope and the bishops. This dignity is a consequence of valid episcopal ordination and hierarchical communion. In this context, both the collegiality and the bishops’ communion with the head (pope) give the bishops the juridical authority to be seen not as delegates of the pope, but as vicars of Christ. This unity and communion among the world episcopate, such as, between the pope as the head and the bishops (and never without the head), guarantees the unity of the Church. Thus, the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith affirmed that fostering a unity which does not destroy diversity is a fundamental function of the Roman Pontiff for the universal Church, and of each of the bishops within the particular church in such a way

166 See, Lumen Gentium, no. 4
167 Ibid., nos. 20-25.
168 Ibid., no. 22.
that each builds up and safeguards unity “on which diversification confers the character of communion.”

Another implication of the Church as a communion is in the relationship between the local church and the universal Church. The relationship between the universal Church and each particular church is founded on the basis of the Church being understood as a communion. The relationship within the human dimension is seen as a vertical *communio* relationship, and is rooted not only in the same faith and in the common baptism, but above all in the Eucharist and in the episcopate. In each of the particular churches exists the one and only Catholic Church. However, the universal Church cannot be seen as the sum of particular churches, or as a federation of particular churches.

On the parish level or the Church community, which is part of the diocese, the sense of ecclesial communion is identified or reflected on the Council’s call for co-responsibility and participation of all in the life and work of the Church. On this, John Paul II affirms, among other things, that “the parish must be a place where, through worship in communion of doctrine and life with the bishop and universal Church, the members of Christ’s body are formed for evangelization and works of Christian love.” Similarly, on the diocesan level, the Council reiterated the importance of the establishment of other councils, in order to encourage effective collaboration and participation among the priests, all religious, as well as the laity in the pastoral work of the Church as a sign of communion and solidarity within the Church.

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169 See, Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, CDF, “Church as a Communion,” no. 18.
170 Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, nos. 23, 26. See also, *Christus Dominus*, no. 11.
172 *Lumen Gentium*, no. 37.
these councils however, the role and participation of the laity are still restricted to advisory and consultative roles. The lay people are yet to experience an active involvement or participation in these councils from its deliberative nature (CIC, 514, 536 § 2).\textsuperscript{175}

This ecclesiological insight of the Church as a communion underscores the priority of the vocation of the whole community of the People of God over all diversities of function and charisms. Ecclesial communion is therefore not identical to a hierarchical and institutional Church, where a few people monopolize or control power and responsibilities at the detriment of others. Rather, it applies to the entire community of the Christian faithful in as much as they are members of the living Body of Christ.\textsuperscript{176}

In other words, ecclesial communion seen in this way reflects an ordering in its ministerial relationships. The diversity and variety of ministries that complement one another are all united through the Holy Spirit. The various gifts, roles, and ministries in the Church are not adversarial; on the contrary, they are mutually dependent upon one another and indeed enrich one another. Thus, within this theology of communion, distinctions in ministry are necessary and beneficial. These distinctions actually manifest the organic and ordered relationships created through baptism and the presence of charisms within the communion of believers. This communion approach to the life of the ecclesial community is essential in articulating and understanding any theology of lay ministry, since it avoids a view of the Church as an unequal and overly hierarchical society. The fathers of the Council dramatically changed this view by recognizing instead

\textsuperscript{175} Cf. Ladislas Orsy, Receiving the Council: Theological and Canonical Insights and Debates, 38-39.

\textsuperscript{176} See, Lumen Gentium, nos. 32-33.
that the Church is a communion of believers, equal in dignity and sharing a common mission.\textsuperscript{177}

Another important component of the Church as a communion is the notion known as the \textit{sensus fidelium}, or the “sense of the faithful.” The term indicates that the Church’s teaching emerges out of the faith of the entire Church, and is evidence of mutuality between the hierarchical authority and the whole people of God in the formulation of doctrine through the gift of the Holy Spirit. Speaking of a supernatural sense of the faith possessed by the whole people of God, the Council fathers affirmed:

\begin{quote}
The whole body of the faithful who have an anointing that comes from the holy one (cf. 1 Jn. 2:20 and 27) cannot err in matters of belief. This characteristic is shown in the supernatural appreciation of the faith of the whole people, when, ‘from the bishops to the last of the faithful’ they manifest a universal consent in matters of faith and moral. That discernment…is aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth.\textsuperscript{178}
\end{quote}

This understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit in the appreciation of faith is a basic theological principle that expresses the nature of the Church as a communion in relation to the role of the laity in the Church. In other words, the Church as a communion expresses the idea of reception which refers to “the process by which official teachings and decisions are accepted, assimilated, and interpreted by the whole Church.”\textsuperscript{179} The Council fathers realized that the Church is a community in which the gifts of the Holy Spirit are available to all the members in the ongoing search for truth, as it is clearly stated in \textit{Lumen Gentium}:

\begin{quote}
The laity have the right to receive in abundance the help of the spiritual goods of the Church...from the pastors. To the latter the
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{177} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{178} Ibid., no. 12.
laity should disclose their needs and desires with that liberty and confidence which befits children of God... Many benefits for the Church are to be expected from this familiar relationship between the laity and the pastors. The sense of their own responsibility is strengthened in the laity.... The latter, helped by the experience of the laity, are in position to judge more clearly and more appropriately in spiritual as well as in temporal matters. Strengthened by all her members, the Church can thus more effectively fulfill her mission for the life of the world.180

Thus, the ecclesiology of communion is fundamental to the Second Vatican Council’s ecclesiology, and it demands the effective co-responsibility of all the community in all aspects of life and mission of the Church. One has to understand the idea of unity in diversity as a hallmark of communion ecclesiology, where individual gifts and values are recognized and integrated for the common good of all. 181 In the next section, I will consider the theology of the laity and its post-Vatican II’s developments.

1. 4 The Theology of the Laity and Its Post-Vatican II’s Developments

The renewed ecclesiology of lay participation in the mission of the Church, which has the ultimate foundation in the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council, was further articulated and developed within the various post-conciliar magisterial documents. In this section, I will briefly consider the different insights which these magisterial texts have highlighted, with particular reference to the theology of the laity. This section also explores the reception and the non-reception of the theology of the laity in various post-Vatican II’s magisterial documents, and establishes the challenges and implications of such a theology as seen in these magisterial documents.

180 Lumen Gentium, no. 37.
181 Ibid., nos. 32-33.
One of the ways by which the magisterium implemented and developed the teaching of the Second Vatican Council on the theology of the laity in the Church a few years after the Council was through the promulgation of the Apostolic Letter, *Ministeria Quaedam* by Paul VI in 1972.\(^{182}\)

In this document, Paul VI sought to extend the involvement of the laity in the Church’s mission as a fruitful sign of the work of the Spirit. He abolished the subdiaconate in the Latin Church, and reduced the four “minor orders” to two, namely acolyte and lector, giving them the name “ministries.” Hence, one enters the ordained clerical state in the diaconate. Since the functions of the acolyte and lector were no longer reserved exclusively to the clergy, these ministries were committed to lay Christians. They are lay ministries in every sense, and even a seminarian now receives these ministries as a layperson. This created some opportunities for lay people to participate more directly in the liturgical celebration, which is part of their responsibility in the sacred mission of the Church.\(^{183}\) Thus, the document, *Ministeria Quaedam*, reflected some elements of recognition and reception of Vatican II teachings on the theology of the laity.

On the other hand, the document had certain limitations to full lay participation. It states: “The offices of lector and acolyte are reserved to men in keeping with the venerable tradition of the Church.”\(^{184}\) The question arises: if these ministries are truly lay

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\(^{184}\) Paul VI, Apostolic Letter on First Tonsure, Minor Orders and the Subdiaconate, *Ministeria Quaedam*, no. 7.
ministries as the document speaks, why are they restricted to men? Indeed, *Ministeria Quaedam* is of great significance for the participation of the laity in the liturgical life of the Church, but it is not necessarily the last solution to certain restrictions already placed to full lay involvement in the ministries of the Church.

1. 4. 2 *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975)

Another remarkable development on the theology of the laity in the Church since the Council is Paul VI’s Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, which was issued to mark the tenth anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Council. This exhortation does not explicitly focus on the laity, but rather on evangelization, and the role every Christian has to play in this mission. In that respect, therefore, the document expresses the essential question of the role and participation of the laity in the context of the mission of the whole Church.\(^{185}\) With particular reference to lay ministry, Paul VI wrote:

\[\text{\ldots the laity can also feel themselves called, or be called, to work with their pastors in the service of the ecclesial community, for its growth and life, by exercising a great variety of ministries according to the grace and charisms which the Lord is pleased to give them\ldots.\ldots We encourage the openness, which the Church is showing today in this direction and with this solicitude. It is openness\ldots to ecclesial ministries capable of renewing and strengthening the evangelizing vigour of the Church. It is certain that side by side with the ordained ministries\ldots the Church recognizes the place of non-ordained ministries, which are able to offer a particular service to the Church\ldots These ministries, apparently new but closely tied up with the Church’s living experience down the centuries\ldots are valuable for the establishment, life, and growth of the Church, and for her capacity to influence her surroundings and to reach those who are remote from her.}\(^{186}\)


\(^{186}\) Ibid., no. 73.
It is interesting to note from the above citation that the laity’s secular apostolate as well as their activities within the Church, are recognized, appreciated and emphasized. This document may not have established evangelization within the ecclesial community as the primary task for the laity, but it does not however favour hermetic separation of the sacred and secular apostolate of the laity. Indeed, this document does not present new ideas concerning the mission of the laity. Rather, it primarily addresses the entire mission of the Church in which the laity have a share by virtue of their baptismal vocation.

1. 4. 3 The New Code of Canon Law (1983)

The new Code of Canon Law, which is the legislative interpretation and application of the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, has insightfully deepened the reflection on the participation of the laity in the mission of the Church. The 1983 Code of Canon Law was promulgated by John Paul II through the Apostolic Constitution: Sacrae Disciplinae Leges on 25 January 1983 in order to replace the 1917 Code of Canon Law which until then was the operative legal document of the Latin tradition. Unlike the 1917 Code of Canon Law, the present Code has quite significant legislative principles concerning the lay people’s participation in the mission of the Church, and reflects the conciliar teaching on the equality of all members of the People of God with special reference to the dignity, activity and common sharing in the mission of the Church (Canons 207, 208, 209 and 211). Having accentuated the rights and obligations of all Christians (Canons 204-223), the new Code turns to specific rights and duties of lay people (Canons 224-231). It is worth drawing attention to these legislative principles in
order to show their relevance with regard to the theology of the laity within the mission of the Church.

According to canon 225§1: “Since the laity, like all the Christian faithful are deputed by God to the apostolate by baptism and confirmation, they are bound by the general obligation and they have the right, whether as individuals or in associations, to strive so that the divine message of salvation may be known and accepted by all people throughout the world. This obligation is all the more insistent in circumstances in which only through them are people able to hear the Gospel and to know Christ.” Secondly, canon 225§2, states: “They have also, according to the condition of each, the special obligation to permeate and perfect the temporal order of things with the spirit of the Gospel. In this way, particularly in conducting secular business and exercising secular functions, they are to give witness to Christ.”

Canon 226 speaks of the duty of married Christians to work for the up building of the Church through their marriages and family life. It equally underscores the duty and right of parents to educate their children, and especially to provide for their religious education. Subsequently, canon 227 affirms that the laity as citizens are free in regard to temporal affairs, though intrinsically obliged to act in the spirit of the gospel and in light of the Church teaching. Therefore, on questions legitimately open to different views, they should not present their opinions as the position of the Church.

Canon 228 affirms that qualified lay people can hold offices and perform functions in the Church open to them in Church law, and can also serve as experts or advisers to the pastors of the Church, “even in councils.” Canon 229 asserts that the laity should learn Catholic doctrine; and study in ecclesiastical universities and institutes, earn
degrees in theology and related fields, receive official certification (Mandates) to teach sacred sciences.

In continuation with the provision made by *Ministeria Quaedam* of Paul VI concerning lay ministries in the Church, canon 230§1 states: “Lay men whose age and talents meet the requirements prescribed by decree of the Episcopal Conference, can be given the stable ministry of lector and of acolyte, through the prescribed liturgical rite. This conferral of ministry does not, however, give them a right to sustenance or remuneration from the Church.” Canon 230§2 states: “Lay people can receive a temporary assignment to the role of lector in liturgical actions. Likewise, all lay people can exercise the roles of commentator, cantor or other such, in accordance with the law.” In addition, canon 230§3 states: “Where the needs of the Church require and ministers are not available, lay people, even though they are not lectors or acolytes, can supply certain of their functions, that is, exercise the ministry of the word, preside over liturgical prayers, confer baptism and distribute Holy Communion, in accordance with the provisions of the law.” Again, these references are demonstrative of the effort in the present Code of Canon Law to make adequate provisions for lay participation and involvement in the mission of the Church, particularly making provisions for cases where no ordained ministers are available.

1. 4. 4 The 1987 Synod and *Christifideles Laici*

The 1987 Assembly of the World Synod of Bishops was held at the Vatican from October 1-30, with its central theme: “Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church, Twenty Years after the Second Vatican Council.” In this document, *Christifideles laici,*
John Paul II synthesized the assembly’s deliberations and reaffirmed the teaching of the Second Vatican Council on the theology and mission of the laity within the Church. It may not be a surprise to recognize that the upsurge in the “lay ministry” twenty years after the Second Vatican Council had resulted in the publication of this document as a response to the theology of the laity.

The aim of the Synod, according to John Paul II, was that the lay faithful should listen “to the call of Christ the Lord to work in his vineyard, to take an active, conscientious and responsible part in the mission of the Church in this great moment of history.” They have “an essential and irreplaceable role” in evangelization, for “through them the Church of Christ is made present in the various sectors of the world, as a sign and source of hope and love.” The Pope insisted that the vocation of the laity does not come by delegation from the hierarchy, but as a result of their special union with Christ through baptism and confirmation. Apart from the fact that the lay apostolate has theological as well as ecclesiological dimensions, the secular character of their apostolate distinguishes them from the clergy and the religious.

Conscious of the sacred mission or apostolate of the laity in the Church, John Paul II exhorted the laity not to neglect their responsibilities in the secular world by being aware of the various temptations that may preclude their mission in the world. He concluded:

The Synod has pointed out that the post-conciliar path of the lay faithful has not been without its difficulties and dangers. In particular, two temptations can be cited which they have not

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187 John Paul II, *Christifideles laici*, no. 2.
188 Ibid., no. 3.
189 Ibid, no. 7.
191 Ibid, no. 15.
always known how to avoid: the temptation of being so strongly interested in Church services and tasks that some fail to become actively engaged in their responsibilities in the professional, social, cultural and political world; and the temptation of legitimizing the unwarranted separation of faith from life, that is, a separation of the Gospel’s acceptance from the actual living of the Gospel in various situations in the world. 192

While considering the valuable service of the lay people in Church institutions and structures, a similar caution was extended to the laity with particular reference to their apostolate. John Paul II advised that they should avoid: “…a too-discriminate use of the word “ministry,” the confusion and equating of the common priesthood and the ministerial priesthood, the lack of observance of ecclesiastical laws and norms, the arbitrary interpretation of the concept of “supply,” the tendency towards a “clericalization” of the lay faithful and the risk of creating, in reality, an ecclesial structure of parallel service to that founded on the Sacrament of Orders.” 193

The John Paul II also declared that the formation of the laity for the apostolate should be a priority and be promoted in every diocese. The fundamental and primary aim of this formation should be to show the laity how to integrate their religious and secular lives. Hence, the Pope said: “Every activity, every situation, every precise responsibility…are the occasions ordained by providence for a “continuous exercise of faith, hope and charity.” 194 Indeed, Christifideles laici is far from being “a conclusive document on the topic of the lay faithful” (CL 2), but the fact that laity were present and

192 Ibid, no. 23.
193 Ibid, no. 23.
194 Ibid, no. 59; See also, Canon 229§1: “The lay people have the duty and right to acquire the knowledge of Christian teaching which is appropriate to each one’s capacity and condition, so that they may be able to live according to this teaching, to proclaim it and if necessary to defend it, and may be capable of playing their part in the exercise of the apostolate.”
able to speak at the synod at all is undoubtedly a positive move towards a modern or renewed theology of the laity.

1.4.5 The First Special Synod of the African Bishops (1994) *Ecclesia in Africa*

In 1994, the first Special African Synod of Bishops\(^{195}\) which adopted the family model as the best way to understand what it means to be a Church, especially in Africa, sees the theology and mission of the laity from the context of the African Church as a unique expression of the entire mission of the Church. Seeking a Church that is both African and Catholic, the bishops focused on the cultural *symbol of family* as a way to approach the unique sense of the Church in Africa.\(^{196}\) They equally reiterated, among other issues, the indispensable role and participation of the laity in the evangelization of Africa. They called for a sufficiently formed laity with the ability to competently assume their civic responsibilities, as well as the ability to discern socio-political problems in the light of the Gospel and faith in God.\(^{197}\)

This new metaphor, adopted by the Synod of Bishops for Africans, wished to introduce into the life of the Church the caring and warm characteristics of the multiple channels or links of kinship, grouped under the term “family” in Africa. In our Church-Family therefore we are brothers and sisters because we (members of the Christian community) share the same Mother and the same Father.\(^{198}\) However, the idea of Church as Family according to Elochukwu E. Uzukwu should not be construed to mean that the African cultural experience would uncritically set the terms for the construction of this


\(^{196}\) Ibid., no. 84.

\(^{197}\) Ibid., nos. 85, 95.

“new family of God.” This tendency was noticed in the Synod’s “Message to the People” as it linked the notion of family with the spiritual “paternity” of its priests. This metaphor therefore, must be stripped of all the characteristics of patriarchal dominance. Based on the Gospel experiences—the way Jesus lived family life—the Church as Family of God should reflect the new Family of God or new People of God based on a new kind of relationship. This relationship may not exclude division (Lk 12:52ff); and it will certainly include an openness that knows no limits (Mk 3:31-35).

The Church as Family of God in which we live should not be an association of clans or ethnic groups, but a brotherhood and sisterhood beyond the frontiers of blood relationship, clan, ethnic group or race. In fact, a sincere renewal is needed in order for one to be admitted to membership in this new family. Stripped of possible negative tendencies, this new metaphor has the potential for healing the wounds of division within the Christian communities, and between Christian communities and those of other faiths, or of no faith at all.

In conclusion, this document is not primarily and exclusively directed towards the laity, but its concern on the role of the laity in the evangelizing mission of the Church as the Family of God in Africa, is a positive development towards developing a theology of the laity, and shows elements of the reception of Vatican II in a specifically African context.

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199 Ibid.
200 Ibid.
201 Ibid.
1. 4. 6 *Instruction on the Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of Non-Ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of Priests* (1997)

The *Instruction on the Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of Non-Ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of Priests*, was issued on August 15, 1997, and signed by the Congregation for the Clergy in conjunction with seven other Congregations and Pontifical Councils, and then approved by John Paul II *in forma specifica* in order to have the binding force of law. In normal circumstances, Instructions are not meant to be laws; rather they are acts of executive authority.\(^{203}\)

The authority of this *Instruction* may not be comparable to documents of Vatican II or *Christifideles laici*. The Instruction, nevertheless indicates a somewhat changed attitude towards the laity. Although not addressed to the laity, its main purpose is to show the concern and solidarity of the Church towards the apostolate of the laity, and at the same time, to clear the confusion that usually arises between the clergy and the laity, when exercising their various responsibilities as far as collaborative ministry is concerned.\(^{204}\) John Paul II said: “the particular gift of each of the Church’s members must be wisely and carefully acknowledged, safe-guarded, promoted, discerned and co-ordinated, without confusing roles, functions or theological and canonical status.”\(^{205}\) All are therefore called to a greater involvement in the mission of the Church in all its aspects.

Despite the fact that this *Instruction* indicates the various areas involvement of the laity in the mission of the Church, it emphatically goes on to repeat that “the priority

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of the task of the New Evangelisation…requires that, today in particular…there be also a
full recovery of the awareness of the secular nature of the mission of the laity.” The
meaning of the phrase “a full recovery,” seems to suggest a restrictive interpretation of
the laity’s mission, which often sees the mission of the laity exclusively from its secular
perspective rather than from its inclusive dimension, which involves the mission of the
laity within the Church as well. The document essentially expresses that the various
forms of lay participation are only permissible in case of an extreme shortage of sacred
ministers:

It must be noted…that in many Particular Churches the
collaboration of the non-ordained faithful in the pastoral ministry
of the clergy has developed in a very positive fashion….In
situations of emergency and chronic necessity…some of the
faithful, despite lacking the character of the sacrament of Orders,
have acted appropriately and within their proper limits, in dealing
with these realities.  

As Thomas Hoebel argues, the laity should assist and be of help where there is a shortage
of ordained ministers; nonetheless, lay participation within the mission of the Church
cannot be limited only to these circumstances. Lay participation, he continues, must not
be reduced to filling the gaps of ordained ministers. The Instruction, instead of
suggesting proper forms of lay participation, takes a negative approach by emphasizing
the need for limitation because of supposed abuses. 

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206 Ibid., Premise to the Instruction on Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of the Non-ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of Priests.
207 Thomas Hoebel, Laity and Participation: A Theology of Being the Church (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2006) 125.
1. 4. 7 The Second Special Synod of the African Bishops (2009) *Africae Munus*

The Second African Synod on the theme “The Church in service to Reconciliation, Justice, and Peace: ‘You are the salt of the earth….You are the light of the world,’” draws on the previous official documents of the Roman Church, and sees the mission of the Church as well as the laity as agents of God’s reconciliation, justice, and peace.208

Positioning the mission of the laity within the African context, and on the foundation of unity in diversity inspired by the gift of the Holy Spirit in the Church, the second part of *Africae Munus*, presents the essential role of the lay people in the Church and in society (*AM*, 128). It emphasizes the priority of the secular apostolate of the laity, and calls for an appropriate formation of the laity in all its aspects (*AM*, 128-131). Calling on the different categories of Christ’s faithful (*AM*, 99-128) to their responsibilities, the Synod fathers highlight the social mission of the laity. As “ambassadors of Christ,” the synod fathers invited the laity to equip themselves with a solid knowledge of the Church’s social doctrine in order to become credible witnesses of the Gospel, “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world” (*AM*, 128-131).209

Teresa Okure suggests that there appears to be great progress in integrating the laity in their mission within the Church. She observes, however, that the major area of the laity’s apostolate in the world, as the Synod fathers maintain (*AM*, 132-146), still attracts

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the designation of “secular.”

Thus, the restrictive or contrastive interpretation of the laity’s mission is still very operative within the current magisterial document. The document in general has no explicit reference to the theology of the laity. However, some positive affirmations regarding the role of the laity as expressed within the document indicate some encouraging insights towards the development of a theology of the laity within the African context. For instance, the document recognizes the invaluable role played by catechists during the first evangelization in Africa in such area as in the preparation of catechumens for various sacraments. Such role, the document maintains, remains essential for the present and future evangelization within the African communities and should be encouraged through adequate formation of catechists as well as through greater attention to the living conditions of catechists (AM, 125-126).

Generally, it may be observed that the manner in which these magisterial documents were issued still favours the class distinction between the clergy and the laity. They are exclusively magisterial pronouncements emerging mainly out of clerical gatherings or entities. Even when the lay people were invited, they were only invited as mere observers, with little opportunity for an active involvement or participation. Thus, the genesis of these texts still favours the reality of the distinction between the *ecclesia docens*—the teaching Church—with the exclusive monopoly of thinking and speaking in all ecclesiastical matters and the *ecclesia discens*—the listening Church—whose only right and duty was to listen, to submit and to act accordingly.

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1.5 Conclusion

This chapter has broadly sketched out the historical evolution of the theology of the laity in relation to the ecclesiology of the Roman Catholic Church. The Second Vatican Council’s theology of the laity is a natural development from the Council’s communion ecclesiology. Subsequent developments with respect to the reception and non-reception of Vatican II within the various subsequent magisterial documents highlight some progressive reinforcement and unfinished business on the theology and mission of the laity.

This latter is evident in the many concerns around the theology and mission of the laity within the African context, and particularly within the Nigerian Roman Catholic Church. The greatest challenge facing the theology of the laity is currently rooted in the ecclesiological, socio-political, economic, and cultural problems of the Nigerian Church and society. With significant opportunities and encouragement, the laity could potentially play a more active role within the Nigerian Church and society. In the next chapter, I will examine the contexts of the Nigerian Church and society in relationship to the theology of the laity. I will also demonstrate how these contexts have influenced the reception and non-reception of Vatican II’s theology of the laity.
Chapter Two

The Context of the Nigerian Roman Catholic Church and the Reception and Non-Reception of Vatican II’s Theology of the Laity

2. Introduction

This chapter situates the study of the theology of the laity within the Nigerian context, with a brief review of the history of the Nigerian Roman Catholic Church in relation to the development of the Catholic Laity Council of Nigeria (CLCN). It also explores the various dimensions of the laity’s apostolate before and after the Council, based on insights of some African theologians. The current ecclesiological contexts of the Nigerian Roman Catholic Church, as well as the socio-political, economic and cultural situation of Nigerian society as it pertains to the theology of the laity, will be examined in order to establish a template for the critical assessment of Vatican II’s theology of the laity, and its reception and non-reception within the Nigerian Church and society.

2.1 Historical Excursus of the Nigerian Roman Catholic Church

The Second Vatican Council is the only Council the Nigerian Roman Catholic Church has witnessed as a distinct ecclesial body. Its decisions have had much influence on the Nigerian Church, which has completed its first one hundred and fifty-three years of existence since the introduction of Christianity by missionaries from Europe and North America.\textsuperscript{212} The reception of the Council’s teachings with regard to the theology of the laity has opened a window of meaning and understanding of ecclesiology for the development of the Nigerian Church.

The meaning of “reception” of the Second Vatican Council within the Nigerian context implies what effects did the Council make in the Nigerian Church, and what in the teachings of the Council, the Nigerian Church tested and found good and to be retained or what the Nigerian Church found wanting and to be discarded.\footnote{213} In other words, the reception of the Council as an ecclesiological reality has to deal with how the receiver(s), from the perspective of their particular context, understands, interprets and applies the Council and its teachings.\footnote{214} According to hermeneutics of reception, a given text is dead until it is read. Therefore, Vatican II is not achieved until it is received. The documents of this Council are dead until they are read in the sense of understood, interpreted and applied within a particular context.\footnote{215}

The importance of the reception of Vatican II’s theology of the laity for the development of the Nigerian Roman Catholic Church exposes not only the extent the ecclesiology of the Nigerian Church has been articulated by all, but it x-rays also how the effects of the Council will lead the People of God in Nigeria to greater awareness of the role and responsibility of the laity within the entire mission of the Church.\footnote{216} Based on the above description, one can distinguish between the level of reception of magisterial texts, works of theologians and reception by the laity. Hence, in dealing with reception in this thesis, I will be focusing on these three levels of distinction.

The first unsuccessful attempt to implant the Christian religion in Nigeria happened between the 15\textsuperscript{th} and 18\textsuperscript{th} centuries, under the direction of Portuguese missionaries. Capuchin missionaries and Augustinians from Portugal, Spain and Italy

\footnote{215}{Ibid.}
\footnote{216}{Ibid.}
were mainly involved in this encounter.\textsuperscript{217} The second and successful attempt began in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century. This second attempt of missionary venture was pioneered by freed slaves and Protestants. Names like Henry Townsend and Michael Ajayi Crowther are forever indelible on the Christian history of Nigeria. However, from the perspective of the Catholic Church, the SMA (Society of African Missions—Société des Missions Africaines) fathers championed the new course of evangelization. By 1860, Padre Antonio already had missions going on in Lagos, and by 1868, the SMA, led by Francesco Xavier Borghero, laid a more solid foundation for the modern day Nigerian Catholic Church.\textsuperscript{218}

In order to capture the dynamics of these early missionaries’ activities and their impact on the present Nigerian Catholic ecclesiology, as far as the theology of the laity and its reception and non-reception are concerned, this section undertakes a schematic review of missionary strategies in the evangelization of the three major regions of Nigeria (the South-West, the South-East and the North).

The Early Missionaries’ Evangelization Strategies in Nigeria

Missionary Activities in South-Western Nigeria

Former slaves from Brazil, Sierra Leone and other colonies, who by 1860 had already formed a Catholic community in Lagos under a layperson, a pious catechist


called “Padre Antonio,” championed Catholicism in South-Western Nigeria. In 1862, a priest of the Society of African Missions (SMA), Fr. Francisco Borghero, arrived in Lagos from Sao Tome. The pioneering work of Fr. Borghero was fruitful. With the assistance of the community, he secured lands and embarked on school and farm projects. Other priests and professed men and women religious (mainly expatriates) later came and joined him, leading to the creation of the vicariate of Western Nigeria, with Msgr. Carlo Zappa as Prefect Apostolic in 1894. Under Msgr. Zappa, maps for the districts were produced and schools for training of native clergy and catechists were built. Unfortunately though, in spite of the directives on mission stating the importance of indigenization, a system which allows the Church in Nigeria to express herself in an authentic way through some cultural elements or symbols, the SMA did not pursue any indigenization policy beyond the translation of the Bible into native languages. Thus, evangelization mission of the early missionaries was to some extent facilitated through the translation of the Bible into native languages.

Missionary Activities in South-Eastern Nigeria

Missionary activities in nineteenth century Igboland were championed by the Church Missionary Society (C.M.S), one of the societies formed by the members of the Anglican Church. In July, 1857, the CMS arrived at Onitsha. The mission stations they

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established were located in Ossomala (1873), Asaba (1875) and Obosi (1882). However, the advancement of the C.M.S at this time was very slow.\textsuperscript{222}

The advent of Catholic missions in Eastern Nigeria began on December 5, 1885, with a handful of priests, brothers and artisans led by Fr. Lutz\textsuperscript{223} of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{224} They became the first Catholic missionary team to settle in Igboland on the eastern side of the Niger,\textsuperscript{225} and they obtained a piece of land on which the present Basilica of the Most Holy Trinity, Onitsha was built.\textsuperscript{226}

In introducing Christianity, the pioneer missionaries to Igboland adopted certain strategies and techniques in the varying circumstances in which they found themselves. Such methods of evangelization included: open-air preaching, regular pastoral visitations to homes and villages, intense catechetical instruction within the “Christian village”

\textsuperscript{226} However, there are variety of opinions as to how Fr. Lutz obtained the piece of land on which he built the first Church which stands presently as the Basilica of the Most Holy Trinity, Onitsha. Some say he obtained it from the traditional ruler, Obi Anazonwu; others say Samuel Ajayi Crowther donated it. Cf. Ikem Oliobi, et al. eds., \textit{Awka Diocese at 25: A Historical Overview} (Nimo-Nigeria: Rex Charles & Patrick Ltd, 2002) 11. See also, Innocent O. Dim, \textit{Reception of Vatican II in Nigeria/Igbo Church with Reference to Awka Diocese}, 44.

\textit{Missionary Activities in Northern Nigeria}

Evangelization of Northern Nigeria was extremely difficult as a result of several factors, namely: the presence of Islam and its system of government, the initial mistakes of the Church Mission Society (C.M.S), and its link with the colonists as their political spies.\footnote{See, Fred Nnabuihe, “The Church in Nigeria Today,” R. C. Onwuanibe, ed., \textit{The Relevance Church in the 21st Century Nigerian Society}, 16. Cf. Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria, \textit{The Church in Nigeria: Family of God on Mission}, no. 28.} It is understood that C.M.S had other aims with their colonial counterpart besides the propagation of faith. They were seen as political arms of the colonists. The missionary activities in Northern Nigeria in the later part of the nineteenth century can be divided into three phases.\footnote{See, E. A. Ayandele, “The Missionary Factor in Northern Nigeria 1870-1919,” O. U. Kalu, ed., \textit{The History of Christianity in West Africa}, 135. The different phases are noted as follows: The dialogic smooth phase (1870-1888), the dark phase of suspicion and hostility (1888-1900) and finally, the phase of resistance and rejection (1900-1918). Cf. Celestine A. Obi, “Background to the Planting of Catholic Christianity in the Lower Niger,” Celestine A. Obi, et al. eds., \textit{A Hundred Years of the Catholic Church in Eastern Nigeria 1885-1985}, 13.}

In the first phase, owing to the dialogic tactic of Samuel Ajayi Crowther, missions were set up at Kipo Hill in 1875 and Bida in 1876, and subsequent stations were set up in Ilorin, Egga, Loko and Yimaha, Kontangora, Nassarawa, Sokoto, Zaria and the Adamawa.
provinces. The second phase was characterized by suspicions of the missionaries as political spies owing to the misguided enthusiasm of the Sudan party. The third phase was an expected aftermath of the second phase. The British Colonial administration’s policy of non-interference with the local customs and religion (Islam) blocked the further advance of missionary activities in the northern part of Nigeria.230

A Catholic presence was recorded much later within the northern part of Nigeria. The Kingdom of Kororofa was said to have had more Christians, and a sixty-bed hospital built by a priest. The Holy Ghost Fathers in their struggle to contain the spread of Islam and slavery followed the practice of making the Christian village the basis of a method of evangelization. They established one in Dekina, but they were forced to withdraw in 1904.231

Thus, from the foothold established in Shendam in 1907, the Prefecture of the immense area north of the River Benue was established in 1911, then the relocation of the centre of mission to Jos. Moreover, SMA forays into missions in the north made possible the creation of the Prefectures of Jos and Kaduna in 1934. With Shanahan and his successor, Heerey, as well as with the German Holy Ghost Fathers, who worked along the Benue region as far as Yola, the creation of the Prefecture of Benue in 1934, with headquarters in Makurdi, was made possible.232

Indeed, Catholic schools in the north, as in the south, were instruments of steady progress in the evangelization goals of the early missionaries. The Emirs eventually welcomed such missionary avenues for the evangelization of the north, despite the

230 Ibid.
232 Ibid., no. 29.
serious resistance to Catholic initiatives in education as a result of the close contacts between the CMS mission and colonial powers. The SMA missionaries built schools for Christian religious instruction in Shendam in 1919, as well as primary schools where children were baptized, and this formed the bedrock of the Christian communities. From these initiatives, other schools and training colleges were built, which attracted the presence of many religious congregations of males and females within the northern part of Nigeria.233

The establishment of schools, the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria affirms, is one of the greatest contributions of the Catholic Church to nation building in Nigeria. However, the Nigerian government’s take-over of the schools in 1970, showed the weakness of making education the only means of evangelization. The SMA and French Spiritan’s priority of building Christian communities thus came into greater importance in the country.234 Nonetheless, it is a fact that the early missionaries were assisted by some lay people. The next section of this study will explore the role of lay people in the evangelizing mission of the early missionaries as an avenue of deepening our understanding of the theology of the laity prior to the Second Vatican Council.

2. 2 Pre-Conciliar Theology of the Laity in the Nigerian Church

The task which concerns us here is to find out how the laity of the Nigerian Catholic Church perceived themselves and their apostolate prior to Vatican II, which eventually led to the gradual emergence of the different lay organizations. In other words,

233 Ibid., no. 30.
234 Ibid., 31.
how can we understand the laity and their involvement in the Church’s apostolate or mission during the early stages of missionary activities in Nigeria?

In the first phase of the evolution of a lay organization, Gabriel A. Ojo characterizes the perception and nature of laity participation in the early life of the Church in Nigeria as essentially “individual lay participation.” Explaining further the meaning of “individual lay participation”, he said: “…each layperson on his or her own got involved in or committed to the mission as far as his or her resources and talents were recognized and utilized or as far as the call to duty was extended to him or her.” This is particularly true of any missionary child as well as of any lay leader. Each person responded to the priest as necessary or as warranted by the circumstances of his life and of the situation in which he operated.

David D. Dodo captures a similar description of “individual lay participation” as the era when the lay people acted as catechists, interpreters and Church wardens. This era, he argues, witnessed a very passive era of lay participation in the mission of the Church because the lay people took cues from the clergy who, for all intents and purposes, dictated the script. Thus, “Lay people in the Catholic Church were not regarded

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235 Gabriel A. Ojo was the pioneer general secretary of the Catholic Laity Council of Nigeria (CLCN) from 1973 to 1980, and later became the chairperson of the same Council from 1984 to 1990. He was a member of the Pontifical Council for the Laity in the Vatican from 1973-1983. Presently, he is the National Patron of the Catholic Laity Council of Nigeria. His written works on the theology of the laity and his active involvement within the Nigerian Church on the subject matter of this thesis are exceptionally significant. His practical experiences with regard to lay participation in the mission of the Nigerian Church are valuable signs of his great contributions towards the ongoing appreciation of Vatican II’s reception within the Church in Nigeria. Cf. Gabriel A. Ojo, A Life of Surprises: Autobiography of Gabriel Jimoh Afolabi Ojo (Nigeria: Ibadan, Daily Graphics Nigeria Ltd, 2010).


237 Ibid.

as full members of the Church but as mere objects of pastoral care who were there to be seen and not heard and who constituted the passive arm of the Church.”

There were other aspects to the laity’s involvement in the early missionaries’ endeavours within the Nigerian Church. The first lay people that the early missionaries maintained contact with were the rulers and leaders of the society. This form of strategy in the evangelization of the Nigerian Church as employed by the early missionaries, as Gabriel A. Ojo maintained, became an effective instrument for the missionaries. It was believed that the conversion of the rulers and leaders of the people invariably guaranteed the subsequent conversion of the rest of the community as well as enhanced the support and protection of the missionaries by the rulers and leaders. A graphic account of how Chief Onyeama of Eke in Eastern Nigeria gave the Catholic Church in his district a flying start, as reported by Gabriel A. Ojo, attests to the reality of the individual lay participation in the mission of the Church.

In 1917, Chief Onyeama, a great lover of knowledge, went to Onitsha with his cousin, late Chief Joseph Nwankwo, to negotiate directly from Father Superior Rev. Father Joseph Shanahan for a resident priest and later that year, Rev. Father Joachim Correia arrived at Eke and settled to work. A thatch house was quickly built for him by the people of Eke at Ani-Atta...from which they travelled far into the hinterland and across streams and rivers as far as to Nsukka, Abakaliki, Ogoja and Makurdi until 1928….So like the Biblical mustard seed, the Catholic Church spread from Eke to the outer confines of Makurdi and Ogoja to the North, to the inner reaches of Ebenebe, Awgu and Ezere to the South, and to the meandering meadows of Idah and Agenebode to the NorthWest and to the most westerly limit through Awlaw and Olo.240

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Catechists and teachers were among other lay men and women who were involved in the early missionaries’ work and growth in the Nigerian Church. Other “individual lay participation” in the mission of the early missionaries included those who served in various capacities as cooks, stewards, drivers and general errand-boys. Nonetheless, Gabriel A. Ojo has argued that catechists and teachers were the most consistent and organized body of laypersons, who distinguished themselves in the field of the “individual lay participation” in the mission of the Church during the early missionaries’ period.²⁴¹ Vincent A. Nwosu, a Nigerian Church historian, gave a similar appraisal of the works of catechists and teachers during the early missionary efforts in the evangelization of some parts of the Nigerian Church.²⁴² The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria in 1960 recalled the significant contributions of the catechists and teachers in the early missionary work:

In Nigeria we need only think of the role played in times past—and still in greater and lesser degree—by our catechists. The remarkable and vital service they have rendered is emblazoned in the annals of our Catholic missions from the remotest time. And if we mention a specific group, we must give a place of honour to our teachers. The Church owes them a great debt for their deep loyalty and steadfast devotion. For many years they have been the principal cooperators with priests and religious in the organised work of the Church. A large section of our people owes them a good part of the knowledge of faith and has learned from them much of the example of the Christian life. It isn’t out of place to mention here also that we are proud of the contribution that many

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of our teachers have made to the national movement and to the political life of the country.  

Apart from the “individual lay participation” which was in existence during the early missionary period, another form of lay involvement in the development of lay organizations in Nigeria is seen in the phenomenon of the “group lay apostolate.” The transition to this second phase of evolution of the lay involvement was necessitated as a result of the adoption by the local church in Nigeria of a sense of collective participation, which was a dominant feature of African traditional religions. Thus, members of the local church tended to group themselves into societies/associations comparable to the groups based on age or gender in the Nigerian traditional settings, and they were named after the saints assigned to them.

According to Gabriel A. Ojo, it was through involvement in these associations/societies that the lay people were drawn into “group lay involvement” in the mission of the Church in those early days. The distinguishing activities of such cultural-based societies and associations included the preparation of catechumens for baptism and other sacraments. Members of the various Church societies and associations, for instance, gathered at the end of each Sunday’s celebration in order to ensure that detailed arrangements were made for the involvement of each “group lay apostolate” in the

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evangelical mission of the Church. Hence, no one, according to Gabriel A. Ojo, was left to operate as an individual participant in the mission of the Church.245

Considerable lay apostolates established through such “group lay involvement” in the mission of the Church could be seen in the works of the Legion of Mary, Saint Jude’s Society, Saint Anthony’s Society, The Block Rosary, Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Catholic Youth Society, Knights of Saint Mulumba, Knights of Saint John, Catholic Women’s Organization, Catholic Men’s Organization, Nigeria Federation of Catholic Students and the Association of Catholic Graduates and Professionals. Indeed, impressive achievements have been recorded through the instrumentality of lay group involvement in the evangelization work of the Church.246

Nevertheless, a careful study of the lay apostolate during the second phase of the development of lay organizations by Gabriel A. Ojo revealed some limitations of “group lay involvement.” Some groups operated as separate entities with little or no interaction with each other. The Church at that period in history had not given its unequivocal recognition to the apostolate of the laity as being mutually complementary to ordained pastoral ministry. It was not until the third phase of the evolution of laity organizations in Nigeria that such complementarity of the lay apostolate with the pastoral ministry of the priests was given appropriate recognition and encouragement.247 Thus, the post-conciliar theology of the laity, which laid the foundation for the inauguration of the third phase of the evolutionary trend in the development of the laity organizations, is the subject-matter of the next section of this study.

245 Ibid., 73-74.
247 Ibid.
2.3 Post-Conciliar Theology of the Laity in the Nigerian Church

As a follow-up to the emergence of the lay organizations, this section reviews the understanding of the theology of the laity with special reference to the lay apostolate during and after the Second Vatican Council, which also marks the beginning of the third phase in the development of the lay organizations in the Nigerian Roman Catholic Church. It also examines the Laity Council’s current relationship with the hierarchy of the Nigerian Church, as well as with the other statutory bodies of the lay associations or movements. In other words, details about reception and non-reception of Vatican II’s teachings on the theology of the laity as it concerns the Nigerian Roman Catholic Church are the focus of this section of study.

2.3.1 Emergence of Laity Organizations in the Nigerian Church

The Catholic Laity Council of Nigeria (C. L. C. N)

*Origin*

The third phase of the evolution of laity organizations of Nigeria, which Gabriel A. Ojo calls “co-ordinated group laity organizations” with specific commitment to their own special form of evangelization, was greatly influenced by the various world congresses of the laity which were held in 1951, 1957 and 1967. The African continental response to these world assemblies, Gabriel A. Ojo argues, necessitated the birth of the Pan Africano-Malagasy seminar, which took place in Accra, Ghana from August 11-18, 1971, on the theme, “The commitment of the laity in the growth of the Church and the integral development of Africa.” As a follow-up to the Accra seminar, the meeting of the
Pan-African-Malagasy Provisional Committee of the laity took place in Rome from March 22-26, 1972.  

These three world congresses, and particularly the Accra seminar and the Provisional Committee meeting in Rome, according to Gabriel A. Ojo, paved the way for the emergence of a renewed form of lay organization as seen in the formal establishment of the Catholic Laity Council of Nigeria.

The Catholic Laity Council of Nigeria (CLCN), formerly known as the National Laity Council of Nigeria (NLCN), started its early preparatory stages in view of its inauguration in response to Vatican II’s directives in 1972, through the instrumentality of various representatives from all the dioceses in Nigeria. Here, we see the first instance of Vatican II’s reception within the Nigerian Roman Catholic Church following the directives of the Council which stipulates that “Laity Council” should be set up “at parochial, inter-parochial, inter-diocesan level and national as well as inter-national plane.” These meetings were held on June 30, and on November 17-18, 1972. On February 9 and March 8, 1973, a subcommittee of the preparatory committee was appointed to finalize the arrangements for the formal inauguration of the Catholic Laity Council of Nigeria.

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249 Ibid., 76.


251 See, Gabriel A. Ojo, “Emergence of Laity Organizations in Nigeria,” A. O. Makazi and Gabriel A. Ojo, eds., *The History of Catholic Church in Nigeria*, 76. The members of the sub-Committee were Professor Gabriel Ojo (convener), the late Mr. Raymond A. Njoku, Mr. J.A. Adebambo, Mr. J.O. Olofinlola and Mrs. V.C. Kufo. Rt. Rev. A.S. Sanusi, who was the Secretary of the National Episcopal Conference of Nigeria piloted the preparatory Committee. See also, Gabriel A. Ojo, *Catholic Laity in Nigeria: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow* (Ibadan-Nigeria: Daily Graphics Nigeria Limited, 2004) 58.
With the approval of the Nigerian Catholic Bishops, the formal inauguration of the Catholic Laity Council of Nigeria took place on March 16, 1973, at the Holy Cross Cathedral in Lagos. The then Archbishop of Onitsha, as well as the acting president of the National Episcopal Conference of Nigeria, Francis Cardinal A. Arinze, presided over a concelebrated solemn Mass with about twenty-eight other Bishops of Nigeria. Others who were present at the inaugural ceremony included the Papal delegate to Nigeria at that time, Archbishop A. Poggi, and Cardinal Villot, who read the Papal message of Paul VI, as well as many influential lay members of Christ’s faithful.

At the end of the inauguration of the Laity Council of Nigeria, a preparatory committee was sent to attend an international conference of the laity in Rome. With a careful discernment regarding the life of the Catholic Church within the Nigerian context, the committee defined the significance of the theology and mission of the laity as imperative for the growth of the local Church. This position was maintained by the Fathers of the Council when they stated: “The Church is not truly established and does not fully live, nor is it a perfect sign of Christ unless there is a genuine laity existing and working alongside the hierarchy. For the Gospel cannot become deeply rooted in the mentality, life and work of a people without the active presence of the lay people.”

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252 Here is the formal recognition of the Laity Council of Nigeria by the entire Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria. In other words, it signifies the first reception of Vatican II’s teachings on the theology of the laity by the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria.

253 Gabriel A. Ojo, “Emergence of Laity Organizations in Nigeria,” A. O. Makazi and Gabriel A. Ojo, eds., *The History of Catholic Church in Nigeria*, 38. Cf. Sylvanus Ifeanyichukwu Nnoruka, “Introduction,” *Church Administration/The Role of the Laity*, 10-11. According to Nnoruka, “Many countries of the world responded positively to the above direction and embarked on establishing their National Laity Council. The Nigerian Church woke up with the rest of the world in the early seventies to respond to the directives of the Vatican II Council Fathers. There was a concerted effort on the African continent to join the global enterprise of making the former passive laity active and it has yielded tremendous results. It was on the 16th of March 1973 at Holy Cross Cathedral, Lagos that the National Laity Council was formally inaugurated in Nigeria. The response was spontaneous and encouraging.”


255 Cf. *Ad gentes divinitus*, no. 21. See also, *Gaudium et Spes*, nos. 74-76.
The Catholic Laity Council of Nigeria exists to coordinate and promote the lay apostolate undertaken by various lay groups at the parish, diocesan, provincial, national and international levels. This Council, the Nigerian Bishops argue, was established after the Second Vatican Council to assist in the Church’s work of evangelization and sanctification, and in the fields of charity and social relations among others. Thus, the Laity Council of Nigeria should be aware of its serious obligation towards the Church, and take the responsibility in identifying the problems of the lay apostolate, and assist the hierarchy in its pastoral work of oversight.256

As for the administrative composition of this Council, the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria confirmed that it consisted of the presidents and secretaries of the Catholic Men’s Organization (CMO), Catholic Women’s Organization (CWO), Catholic Youth Organization of Nigeria (CYON), and those of pious and lay apostolate organizations and associations existing whether on the parish, diocesan, provincial, national and international levels.257

The aims and objectives of the Catholic Laity Council of Nigeria as enshrined in its constitution states:

To promote the Apostolate of the Laity in accordance with the Decree of the Apostolate of the Laity of the Second Vatican Council and the constitution on the Church, Lumen Gentium. To serve as animator in lay apostolate activities. To participate in Regional and World Congresses of the Lay Apostolate and other

256 Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria, “Salt of the Earth and Light of the World,” (cf. Matthew 5:13-16) Manual of the Laity (Abuja: A Publication of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, 2009) no. 199. Cf. David Dodo, The Laity and the Laity Council, 3-4, 19. Here, David Dodo reiterates the obvious reality that the laity Council of Nigeria was established primarily to ensure effective evangelization, coordinate and offer good administrative strategy in the interest of the Church. Accordingly, the main duty of this Church’s structure is “to witness to Christ” especially in various settings such as within the family, social grouping as well as within one’s profession. In other words, this organization is called to take an active part in the mission of the Church, in family life, education, social, economic, political and cultural issues. Cf. Innocent O. Dim, Reception of Vatican II in Nigeria/Igbo Church with Reference to Awka Diocese, 377.

257 Ibid., no. 200.
relevant meetings. To co-operate with the Council of the Laity in Rome and with the Pan African and Malagasy Council of the Laity and other Committees of a similar nature. To assist the Hierarchy of Nigeria with advice and practical help. To maintain liaison with other national Catholic and non-Catholic religious organizations and authorities whose objectives and activities are related to those of the Council. To do any thing whatever which Council may consider necessary, wise or expedient to do for the promotion of its aims and objectives.258

Examineing these aims and objectives, one can see that the Laity Council clearly represents a deeper awareness and response to Vatican II’s teachings on the theology and mission of the laity within the Nigerian Church. This mission statement of the Laity Council of Nigeria effectively highlights the relationship between this statutory body, not only with the Nigerian Catholic hierarchy, but also with the other external bodies that have similar aims and objectives. Its ecumenical dimensions and application are quite recognizable in terms of the Laity Council’s relationship with the other non-Catholic groups and associations.

Catholic Laity Council of Nigeria and Its National, Diocesan and Parish Activities

As stated in the previous section, the Catholic Laity Council of Nigeria is a body that works at both national and international levels, from which it reaches out to the dioceses and parishes. Under the “direction and guidance” from the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria, the Council has adequate representation of women, men and young people. According to David Dodo, some of the functions of the Council include:

It sends representatives to the Christian Association of Nigeria [CAN], to work with the bishops and other Christian leaders in the formulation of policies, programmes for the good of all

Christians in Nigeria and for the nation. It makes suggestions to the bishops and gives them practical help where and when necessary. It sponsors some seminarians and encourages individual laypersons and lay associations to do the same. The Council organizes conferences, seminars and workshops every year at the national, provincial and diocesan levels to enlighten the laity and train them for the role they are expected to play in the Church and in Nigeria. It co-ordinates the various lay associations in the Church by sending some officials of the Council to participate in some of the activities of the associations. It gives some financial help to the national lay associations when they are hosting International conferences/seminars or going out of Nigeria to attend one. The Council sponsors some of its officers to international conferences/seminars and gives donations to some national and diocesan Church projects.259

Other functions of the Catholic Laity Council of Nigeria include the training of its elected officers as well as full-time diocesan Laity Council administrative secretaries. The Council equally ensures greater co-ordination, efficiency and more fruitful participation and involvement of all the lay people in the work of evangelization. The Council creates political awareness among the lay people and encourages them to participate actively in politics and to evangelize the political domain as an avenue of creating awareness that shows that politics is not a dirty game, but rather a way to fulfill ones’ social responsibility within the temporal order.260

Another aspect of the work of the Catholic Laity Council of Nigeria includes one week of special spiritual activities, held in the middle of March every year. It is called the “National Laity Week.” During this period, the activities of the organization start on Monday, and end on the Sunday closest to March 16 of every year, in order to mark the anniversary of the inauguration of the organization. During this week, all Catholics in all dioceses and parishes nationwide are expected to participate and co-operate with each

260 Ibid.
“Parish Laity Council” in order to ensure the success of the week. Also, all priests and lay persons in various Catholic Churches who, for one reason or another, are not taking part in the activities of the laity are encouraged by the Nigerian Church hierarchy to do so for the growth and development of the Church. This is one of the methods used by the Catholic Church for the spiritual development of its members.

Apart from this, the national chairperson of the Laity Council of Nigeria goes on a nationwide tour of all the Catholic dioceses, enlightening the members about what the Laity Council is, and about what kind of work it performs in the Church. During such visits, seven days are spent in each diocese to conduct a three-hour seminar every day for the members of the diocese, in order to enlighten them about this organization. A programme called “mobilizing the laity” for effective evangelization is also run by the organization in all Catholic dioceses in the country.

2. 3. 2 Nature and Forms of the Nigerian Laity Organizations

According to the Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People, lay organizations “afford to support their members, train them for the apostolate, and carefully assign and direct their apostolic activities; and as a result a much richer harvest can be hoped for from them than if each one were to act on his own.” For these reasons, therefore, the Council spoke of the “group apostolate” which results as “a sign of the communion and unity of the Church in Christ.” Group apostolates offer, as such, a sense of belonging, and a forum for a fuller and more active participation of the lay faithful, fundamental for

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261 Ibid.
262 Ibid., 44.
263 Apostolicam Actuositatem, no. 18.
264 Ibid.
their identity and mission. With special reference to the lay apostolate, these lay groups are indispensable organs which assist the hierarchy in pastoral governance.\textsuperscript{265}

However, the nature and forms of the Nigerian Laity Organizations are often misunderstood by the different lay organizations and associations. This misunderstanding often persists and becomes more obvious when one tries to establish the relationship or the distinction between the different organizations and associations of the Christian faithful. The Catholic Laity Council of Nigeria, in the words of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria, “exists to coordinate and promote the lay apostolates undertaken by various lay groups at parish, diocesan, provincial, national and international levels.”\textsuperscript{266} This Council, the Catholic Bishops of Nigeria argued, was established after the Second Vatican Council in order “to assist in the Church’s work of evangelization and sanctification, or in the fields of charity, social relations and the rest.”\textsuperscript{267}

These lay groups, organizations and associations include: the Catholic Women’s Organization (CWO), the Catholic Men’s Organization (CMO), the Catholic Youth’s Organization of Nigeria (CYON), the Legion of Mary, Saint Jude’s Society, Saint Anthony’s Society, Saint Vincent de Paul’s Society, the Apostolate of Prayer, Block Rosary, the Blue Army of Our Lady of Fatima, the Charismatic Movement, the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD), the Knights of Saint John’s International, the Knights of Saint Mulumba, Papal Knights, the Knights of Saint Sylvester, the Christian Father’s Association and the Christian Mother’s Association. It is certain that, as of


\textsuperscript{266} Ibid., nos 199, 205. “In Nigeria, varieties of lay groups exist as associations, movements, or sodalities, some of which have evangelization, or other pious purposes for their apostolate. Some of them exist to provide leadership and solidarity. Each of them comes under the Catholic Laity Council and does not constitute separate bodies.”

\textsuperscript{267} Ibid.
today, many lay people have been drawn into participation in the mission or activities of the Church in Nigeria because of their membership in one or more of the associations.  

Moreover, the main objective of any organization or association is discernible from its name. For instance, the Prayer Meetings and the Charismatic Renewal Movement enjoin members to experience a new sense of commitment in prayer, a self-communication with God where one is fully, consciously and physically involved, and with a true awareness of the active presence and influence of the Holy Spirit—a kind of “new” Pentecost. Although each of the associations differs in its immediate aims and methods, they all have the same purpose. Francis Cardinal Arinze states that “these organizations differ in immediate aims and methods. But they all agree in striving to extend the Kingdom of Christ in one way or the other.”

Other distinguishing characteristics of lay organizations or associations as noted by the Catholic Bishops of Nigeria include: the missionary nature of some associations, centering on corporal and spiritual works of mercy; or conversion and discipleship which offer some sort of formation that enables candidates to mature in Christian faith and witnessing. Some lay associations have the ability to bring together lay faithful with similar experiences and professions with the objective of using their expert knowledge and skills for evangelization. Other lay groups are social in character, aiming at the formation of candidates in Christian leadership. Other associations or organizations have

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268 Ibid., nos. 198-199. From the perspective of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria, some of these statutory bodies such as Catholic Laity Council of Nigeria (CLCN), the Catholic Men’s Organization (CMO), the Catholic Women’s Organization (CWO), and the Catholic Youth Organization of Nigeria (CYON) offer a sense of belonging and a forum for fuller and active participation of the lay faithful in the mission of the Church. With reference to lay apostolate, the Bishops are convinced these fundamental groups are indispensable organs which assist the hierarchy in pastoral governance. Each of the statutory groups has its constitution approved by the Bishops.


as their objective the strengthening of their members in their responsibility to infuse a Christian spirit into the temporal order.\textsuperscript{271}

While there are more than fifty associations, movements, organizations and societies in all the dioceses in Nigeria, only those accredited by the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria\textsuperscript{272} will be highlighted to show some of their similarities and dissimilarities within the entire framework of the lay apostolate in the Nigerian Church.

\textit{The Catholic Women’s Organization (C.W.O)}

The origin of the Catholic Women’s Organization and its activities in Nigeria preceded its organizational identity. Its inception as an organized force within the Church can be traced back to 1957, when the Catholic Council, a lay apostolate organization of men and women known as the Eastern Nigeria Catholic Council (E.N.C.C) was formed in Eastern Nigeria. In 1961, a women’s wing of this organization, which eventually assumed the Catholic Women’s Organization, was established in order to effectively involve the diocesan Catholic women in the Church.\textsuperscript{273} Thus, the organization started in the Eastern region of Nigeria and it was first in Onitsha Ecclesiastical Province that it

\textsuperscript{271}See, Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria, \textit{Manual of the Laity}, nos. 207-211.
\textsuperscript{273}Cf. V. A. Nwosu, “The Laity and Church Growth,” Celestine A. Obi, et al. eds., \textit{A Hundred Years of the Catholic Church in Eastern Nigeria 1885-1985}, 350. The first step was taken in 1962 when, on the recommendation of the E.N.C.C, a woman, Mrs. V.V.I Okoye, was sent for a special leadership course in the United States of America. On coming back in 1963, she, with the help of other women leaders, toured various Church stations and parishes in the Onitsha Archdiocese, visiting the Catholic women’s societies and instructing women on leadership techniques, fundraising projects and good Christian living. Cf. Regina C. Okafor, “Women in the Contemporary Church: Roles and Expectations,” Sylvanus Ifeanyichukwu Nnoruka, ed., \textit{Church Administration/The Role of the Laity}, 29. Here, Regina C. Okafor recalled her initial involvement with other women in the Church at the inception of the women’s wing of the organization. In her analysis, the women in the Church within the historical period in question did not work as individuals but in solidarity with each other in order to effect meaningful administration of the women group in the Church and society.
received the title “Catholic Women’s Organization,” and then spread to other dioceses in Nigeria from 1974 to 1975.\textsuperscript{274} As a lay group within the Church, the Catholic Women’s Organization has as its main objective the formation of women in their Christian vocation and mission in the family, Church and society. Given the phenomenon of globalization and rapid changes within human society, this organization monitors developments and signs of the times, and seeks ways to interpret them in the light of the Gospel.\textsuperscript{275} Nevertheless, whether this objective has been realized or is being realized within the Nigerian Church today is still a question that requires an answer in terms of its relation to the theology of the laity.

Based on the above objective, the organization primarily has both pastoral and evangelical roles in the proclamation of the Gospel, and in bearing convincing testimony to the Word made flesh by the quality of their lives. Under the pastoral guidance of the parish priest (pastor), religious adviser or chaplain, the organization engages on various forms and levels of apostolate. These apostolates include the regular cleaning of the parish Church in preparation for Sunday liturgy and during other extraordinary celebrations such fundraising activities. They work among the community, visiting the underprivileged and doing other charitable works of mercy.\textsuperscript{276}

All other activities of the C.W.O extend to the care of young adults, both male and female, widows, orphans and the destitute. They extend aid in cash and in kind for the maintenance of seminaries and seminarians, for orphanages as well as significant support and solidarity for pastoral initiatives. The latter include the needs of the priests, 

\textsuperscript{274} Ibid., 350-353. 
 bishops, religious men and women, and towards the building and equipping of Churches, rectories and colleges.\textsuperscript{277}

Despite their numerous accomplishments, some Nigerian women, both in the Church and society, are regrettably experiencing some challenges in relation to some cultural barriers (customs and practices), and numerous cases of horrendous abuse of their fundamental human rights and dignity. There are instances where the subjugation of women which pervades all of Africa culture raises serious concerns. In African societies, women occupy an inferior position and in some societies, women are considered as owned by their husbands and they are not entitled to any inheritance. One of the practices that enforces this subordination of women is the widowhood rite. Among the Igbo who practise this custom in Nigeria, the wife is always a suspect in the case of the death of her husband and she is therefore subjected to all sorts of ill-treatment and torture according to the traditional widowhood rites.\textsuperscript{278} Thus, in the face of these situations, the theology of the laity, with its reception and non-reception, invariably calls on the Nigerian Church hierarchy to put forth a number of concrete actions/steps in response to these circumstances.\textsuperscript{279}

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\item Ibid. Cf. Innocent O. Dim, \textit{Reception of Vatican II in Nigeria/Igbo Church with Reference to Awka Diocese}, 398.
\item Cf. Justin S. Ukpong, \textit{Essays in Contextual Theology}, 133.
\item Cf. Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria, “Restoring the Dignity of the Nigerian Women: A Pastoral Letter of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria, February, 2002,” Peter Schineller, S.J. ed., \textit{Pastoral Letters and Communiqués of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria 1960-2002: The Voice of the Voiceless}, 443-445. At the dawn of the present century, the Nigerian Bishops recall with regrettable disposition, the numerous shadows of the denial of the fundamental human rights threatening to obscure the rays of light be brought about through the declaration of human freedom as enunciated through some transnational organs for dialogue and cooperation among nations such as United Nations Organization, the Organization of African Unity, the European Union, the Economic Community of West African States, among many others. The Nigerian Bishops felt that much effort is still needed to address especially human rights as it concerns the deprivation of such rights on women and with particular reference to the Nigerian women.
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The Catholic Men’s Organization (C.M.O)

The Catholic Men’s Organization is an umbrella body which brings together all the married Catholic lay men in Nigeria, or those who have attained thirty-five years of age and above. The primary objective of this statutory body is to foster Christian vocation in the family as husbands and fathers as well as to strengthen their mission both in the Church and in the world.\textsuperscript{280}

Unlike its counterpart—the Catholic Women’s Organization—the Catholic Men’s Organization as a lay group within the Nigerian Church is yet to be recognized by the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria. The origin of the Catholic Men’s Organization is still debatable. While some groups of lay people have the strong conviction that its origin can be traced to the Eastern (Igbo) part of Nigeria, others claim that its origin can be located within the Southwest (Yoruba) part of Nigeria. However, the popular view seems to reaffirm that the origin of the Catholic Men’s Organization of Nigeria seems to have come from the Eastern ecclesiastical region of the country.\textsuperscript{281}

At present, the request for recognition and accreditation of this organization by the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria at its national level is yet to be approved. Regardless, the organization exists at different levels of the Church’s administrative structures—parish and diocesan levels—with sets of similar but different responsibilities with its counterpart, the Catholic Women’s Organization. The Catholic Men’s Organization serves as an organ to awaken faith, and coordinate collective and individual

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\textsuperscript{280} Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria, \textit{Manual of the Laity}, no. 201
\textsuperscript{281} Interview with Mr Joseph O. Falase, the Executive Secretary to the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria Committee for the Laity, Abuja, June 20, 2013.
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initiatives, especially in the areas of dialogue, inculturation, justice and peace, as well as in the deepening of Christian life and the development of society.\textsuperscript{282}

\textit{The Catholic Youth Organization of Nigeria} (C.Y.O.N)

The Catholic Youth Organization of Nigeria is a group that brings together all Catholic young people (male and female) in the age bracket of 15-35 years. The primary objective of the Nigerian Catholic Youth Organization is to affirm the place of youth in the Church’s life, as well as in the promotion of youth involvement in the work of evangelization. The organization embraces such groups as the Mary League Girls, the Catholic Boys and Catholic Girls, the Young Christian Students (YCS), the Nigerian Federation of Catholic Students (NFCS), the Young Christian Workers, Catholic Cadets and others,\textsuperscript{283} while respecting the autonomy of all other youth organizations.

The Catholic Youth Organization of Nigeria has long existed in parish and diocesan levels without national coordination and cohesion. However, as the request for recognition and accreditation was being considered by the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria, the United Nations Organization declared 1985 as the International Youth Year (IYY). Following this declaration, several consultations were made in the various ecclesiastical provinces in response to the need to establish a national executive structure for the Youth Movement. The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria in 1985 responded and inaugurated the National Catholic Youth Organization of Nigeria at the Catholic diocese of Ogojo, Cross River State.\textsuperscript{284}

\textsuperscript{282} Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria, \textit{Manual of the Laity}, no. 201.
\textsuperscript{283} Ibid., no. 203.
\textsuperscript{284} See, B.A. C. Obiefuna, “The Catholic Youth in the Collaborative Ministry of the Church in Nigeria,” Ignatius M.C. Obinwa, ed., \textit{Collaborative Ministry in the Context of Inculturation} (Onitsha-Nigeria:
With the parish as its primary base, and under its national organizational structure, the Catholic Youth of Nigeria (C.Y.O.N) integrate all ranks of young people and provide a forum that would avail the Church the opportunity to reach out to the young people of a wider spectrum in order to sensitize their faith and motivate them for the future. Through this avenue, the Catholic Youth Organization embarked on several projects which included the construction of youth centers and the development of infrastructures that were geared towards gainful self-employment opportunities in such areas as farming, catering, trading, sports, carpentry, and motor repairing. Its members equally distinguished themselves in other areas of lay apostolate, and in the promotion and involvement of the youth in the work of evangelization.\textsuperscript{285}

Despite all these accomplishments, the Nigerian Youth Organization is yet to receive adequate assistance from the Nigerian Church hierarchy in order to promote, direct and evolve a network of support for youth initiatives as groups or as individuals for the development of the Church and the society. According to the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria, more attention should be given to human development, youth empowerment and catechesis.\textsuperscript{286}

\textit{The Legion of Mary}

Besides the above organizations, lay people have the right to form associations that sustain their faith and further their appropriate mission in the Church and in the world. One of the oldest and largest of such associations in Nigeria is the Legion of

\textsuperscript{285} Cf. Innocent O. Dim, \textit{Reception of Vatican II in Nigeria/Igbo Church with Reference to Awka Diocese}, 411.

Mary. The present Code of Canon Law states that “the Christian faithful are at liberty to found and govern associations for charitable and religious purposes or for the promotion of the Christian vocation in the world; they are free to hold meetings to pursue these purposes in common” (Canon 215).  

The Legion of Mary was one of the lay associations that spread very quickly in many towns and villages within the Catholic dioceses in Nigeria, and especially in Igboland. However, this association was first introduced jointly at Ifuho (Ikot Ekpene Diocese) in 1933 by Father James Moynagh, who later became known as Bishop Moynagh of Calabar, and Father Peadar. Unlike other lay associations, which were closely related to the school apostolate and which were purely devotional in nature, members of this association “undertook not only the pursuit of personal sanctification but also active proselytization.”

This association has as its primary nature and aim the missionary dimension of the Church, with particular reference to corporal and spiritual works of mercy. It offers to the Church, the society and its members such services as door to door evangelization, home visitations in solidarity with the aged, the handicapped, the lonely, and the bereaved as well as visits to prisons. In some parishes in Nigeria, legionaries give marriage instructions, settle dispute of various kinds, and engage in some counselling services. They work in some small health service clinics such as maternity homes, as well as visit hospitals in order to comfort sick people.

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287 Ibid., no. 204.
289 Ibid.
291 Ibid.
Despite the progress made in the history of the Nigerian Church as it concerns her evangelization mission with respect to the teachings of the Second Vatican Council on the theology of the laity, the challenges facing the Nigerian Church with respect to the theology of the laity are still enormous. In what follows, I will discuss the current ecclesiological as well as the socio-political, economic and cultural situations of the Nigerian Church and society in relation to the theology of the laity. This will help to establish the template for the critical assessment of Vatican II’s theology of the laity and its reception and non-reception within the Nigerian Church and society. Hence, Nigerian Church must address these situations, and bring its prophetic, critical as well as constructive dynamism to reflect on these problems if she is going to be a credible instrument and source of hope for the future of the Church in Nigeria,\textsuperscript{292} as it concerns the theology of the laity.

2.4 Current Ecclesiological Context of the Nigerian Church and Theology of the Laity

Nigeria, with its beauty in ethnic diversity, has presently fifty-two (52) Catholic dioceses and nine (9) ecclesiastical provinces.\textsuperscript{293} Despite initial setbacks, the survival of the Nigerian Church is a testimony to its maturity. It has become a local church with its own clergy, religious men and women, as well as dedicated lay Christian faithful. This wonderful development has been attributed to the heroism and dedication of the missionaries who announced this faith to Nigerians.\textsuperscript{294}

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The emergence of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria as an organ of unity of the local churches makes concrete the remarkable cooperation that existed between the Bishops of Nigeria before 1950 when a local hierarchy was established.

Other aspects of the Nigerian Church which depict its growth and maturity are, among other things, the fact that the late Dominic Cardinal Ekandem was ordained as the first Bishop in Anglophone West Africa in 1954 and made Cardinal in 1976. In 1985, Francis Cardinal Arinze, Prefect Emeritus of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, became the second Nigerian Cardinal. Also in 2003, the retired Archbishop of Lagos, Anthony Cardinal Okogie became the third Nigerian Cardinal.295 Archbishop John Olorunfemi Onaiyekan of Abuja was recently elevated to become the fourth Nigerian Cardinal in 2012.296 The beatification of Cyprian Iwene Tansi in 1998 by John Paul II crowns the heroic witness of the Nigerian Church and the efforts of those who brought the Christian faith to our lands.297 Other institutions such as the Catholic Secretariat, the Regional Major Seminaries, the National Missionary Seminary of Saint Paul, the Catholic Institute of West Africa (CIWA), the growth and expansion of the Catholic Laity Council of Nigeria since its inception in all the dioceses, and the recently established Veritas University of Nigeria, Abuja (VUNA), are all aspects strengthening the catholicity and maturity of the Nigerian Church.298

Another aspect of the current ecclesiological context of the Nigerian Church, however, suggests that the local churches are “individualistic.” Precisely, apart from the

295 Ibid., no. 40.
298 Ibid., no. 39. With special reference to Veritas university, which is a Catholic university with its permanent site located at the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, the university began officially on its temporal but off-campus site, Obhi (Aba Diocese) in September 15, 2008.
Nigerian Catholic Bishops’ meetings at its national and the provincial levels, one may question the impact or the influence that the Nigerian Church hierarchy has been able to achieve in its various dioceses, and what it has been able to display with reference to the issue of missionary solidarity among its various ecclesiastical jurisdictions.

Based on this context, the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria has already argued for the possibility of the exchange of personnel between various dioceses within their ecclesiastical jurisdictions when they stated: “No particular church, not even the poorest can ever be dispensed from the obligation of sharing its personnel as well as its spiritual and temporal resources with other particular churches and with the universal Church.”

The current ecclesiological situation in Nigeria suggests something different in relation to the implementation of this pastoral solidarity in terms of the Nigerian bishops’ openness to missionary solidarity. Missionary interests are continually being discouraged as people find it very difficult to accept missionaries outside the natural environment of their ecclesiastical jurisdiction. In some instances where pastoral agents are being received, commensurate incentive or motivation is not fully extended. Hence, excessive particularity which prevents the spirit of mutual sharing and solidarity becomes the distinguishing mark of some dioceses in Nigeria. In addition to the issue of pastoral solidarity is the current understanding of the meaning and nature of ministry, where the clergy is recognized as the only form of ministry in the Church in relation to Vatican II’s teaching on the notion of collaborative ministry within the Church. Emmanuel Orobator, an eminent African theologian, confirmed this mentality when he asserted:

\[\text{See, Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria, The Church in Nigeria: Family of God on Mission, no. 80.}\]
\[\text{Cf. John Paul II, Ecclesia in Africa, no. 63.}\]
The falsity of an ecclesiology that confines itself to the role and functions of the ordained ministers under the rubric of ‘ministry’ is too obvious to warrant any extensive commentary. Such ecclesiology represents the remnant of an atavistic clericalism whose effects, unfortunately, continue to impact on many aspects of the Church’s self-understanding and mission in Africa.\(^{301}\)

The question that presently comes to mind is: How has the Nigerian Church hierarchy deepened the understanding and appreciation of the shared and participatory ministry of the laity in the mission of the Church in relation to the ministry of clergy? An additional query deals with: How has the current ecclesiology of the Nigerian Church from the perspective of her hierarchy handled the problem of pastoral solidarity in terms of its sharing of its personnel in the various areas of apostolate within the Church?

There is enough evidence to prove that some bishops, priests, religious men and women have suffered greatly because of the rejection they have experienced from the various dioceses where they have been sent to exercise their pastoral responsibility. There is also enough evidence to prove that the various structures of participatory ministry in terms of its decision-making within the Nigerian Church have not been properly and effectively utilized in order to encourage an active involvement and participation of the laity in the mission of the Church. These situations invariably have implications on the reception of Vatican II’s teachings on the theology of the laity as it concerns the collaborative ministry between the clergy and the laity.

A case at hand is the recent rejection of Msgr. Peter Okpaleke of the Catholic Diocese of Awka, Anambra State, when appointed as the new Bishop-elect of the Catholic Diocese of Ahiara, Imo State on December 7, 2012 by Benedict XVI. The ordination of the new bishop as well as his canonical possession of the diocese were

delayed as a result of the refusal to accept him by some members of the presbyterium, in collaboration with some lay Christian faithful of the Catholic Diocese of Ahiara. Msgr. Peter Okpaleke was later ordained at the Seat of Wisdom Major Seminary, Owerri, on May 21, 2013, for Ahiara diocese amidst various protests. This new bishop is yet to take possession of the diocese.

The faithful in this diocese have argued that someone should not be imposed on them from outside as their bishop. Their demand is that one of their priests should be made a bishop. The lay people who protested against the decision of the hierarchy as it concerns the appointment of Msgr. Peter Okpaleke as the new diocesan Bishop of Ahiara were supported and encouraged by some of their priests. There was a perceived understanding by some members of the presbyterium and the entire lay faithful of Ahiara diocese that proper consultative mechanisms were not followed in the appointment of the bishop in question. They therefore denounced this appointment as unfair and unjustified. Such a situation has already generated mistrust and a lack of confidence on the part of some clergy and the laity of Ahiara diocese towards the ecclesiastical hierarchy of the Nigerian Church.

In addition, this situation raises serious concerns about the credibility of the Nigerian Church hierarchy, as well as its implications for the theology of the laity within the Nigerian Church. The situation equally calls for a re-examination of the entire

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302 Cf. Vincent Ujumadu, “Rebellion in the House of God,” January 27, 2013: http://www.vanguardngr.com, 2. (Accessed: March 4, 2014). Vincent Ujumadu in this article gave a vivid description of how some priests of the Ahiara diocese orchestrated the demonstration that led to outright rejection of the bishop-elect, Monsignor Peter Okpaleke. Hence, he said: “It was shortly after the appointment that some Mbaise priests began to meet to deliberate on the development which later culminated in the demonstration, led by eight priests from the diocese, expressing their opposition to the appointment. While they argued that they had nothing against the person of Okpaleke to be made a bishop, they insisted that they have credible priests from Mbaise to be elevated to that position, especially in these days of indigenization of the Church.” See also, Dominic Oguguo, “The Ahiara Bishopric Selection,” February 19, 2013: http://www.sunnewsonline.com, 2-3 (Accessed: March 4, 2014).
ecclesiological understanding of the Nigerian Church in light of recent developments.

Has the Church in Nigeria been able to overcome excessive ethnocentrism and particularism? How has the Church favoured organic pastoral solidarity and the sharing of personnel and resources among particular churches without undue considerations? To what extent is each particular church open to offer hands of solidarity to other particular churches? Has ethnicism within the Church in Nigeria been mitigated, and if it remains, what are the incubating factors? Could it be said that the Nigerian Church hierarchy was insufficiently informed as to the possible ways of handling this situation, or could it be said that they deliberately decided to impose their authority by not listening to the voice of the people? This situation leaves us in a dilemma regarding the actual perception of the Nigerian ecclesiology in relation to the theology and mission of the laity. Indeed, excessive particularity and ethnocentricism, which prevents the spirit of mutual sharing and solidarity, have become the distinguishing marks of some dioceses in Nigeria. 303

Another aspect to the ecclesiological situation of the Nigerian Church in relation to the theology of the laity is concerned with the issue of co-responsibility. Vatican II spoke of co-responsibility in the Church when it emphasised the complementary nature of the role of the laity in the evangelizing mission of the Church. The notion of co-responsibility equally highlights the cooperation that should exist between the clergy and the lay Christian faithful as they strive to fulfill such responsibilities both in the Church and in the world. Thus, Apostolicam Actuositatem says: “...the laity are made to share in the priestly, prophetical and kingly office of Christ; they have therefore, in the Church

and in the world, their own assignment in the mission of the whole People of God.”

It should be noted that since Vatican II, institutions which actualize the co-responsibility of the lay people, such as the parish and the diocesan pastoral councils in some dioceses in Nigeria, have not been employed sufficiently and effectively in some decision-making procedures. Often, proper consultation which these councils supposed to enhance or serve is not being effectively used as we have seen in the case of the Ahiara diocese discussed above.

Moreover, the exclusion or non-involvement of some members of the lay Christian faithful, and especially women in the mission of the Nigerian Church on account of some cultural constraints, speaks significantly to the same issue of co-responsibility as implied in the teaching of Vatican II. Most of the religious-cultural institutions or settings in Africa, and particularly in Nigeria, are very patriarchal. Some traditional African laws and customs are applied differently according to gender or class. In some instances, Christianity accommodates and facilitates the subordination of women by being indifferent to the practices in Nigerian culture of the subordination of women. This has resulted in the exclusion of women in certain ministries in the Church. Unfortunately, some Nigerian Church hierarchy and lay people are not open to any kind of inclusive and shared ministry within the Church. For example, in some Catholic communities within some dioceses in Nigeria, religious sisters (Nuns) and lay

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306 See, Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria (CBCN), The Church in Nigeria: Family of God on Mission, 97. The Nigerian Bishops’ Conference acknowledges the injustices which the traditional society has brought to women such as: denial of inheritance rights, early child marriage, widowhood rituals, and all forms of discrimination, exploitation and violence against women.
women are not allowed to serve as extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist. Rather, an invitation is extended to senior seminarians to exercise the extraordinary ministry of distributing the Holy Communion.\footnote{308}

This situation expresses a serious challenge to the spirit of positive empowerment of all members of the Church, particularly the laity. If some groups are restricted from active participation, how can they become involved in the mission of the Church which Vatican II encourages through the principle of co-responsibility in ministry of the Church? It can be said therefore, that the Nigerian Church has not sufficiently put into practice in every community that which is so well defined namely, the sense of co-responsibility of the laity in the mission of the Church.

In another instance, but a similar dimension, there are a great number of Christian lay faithful, especially Catholic parents, who are being excluded from the reception of the sacraments—the source and strength of Christian life—by reason of their tacit support and solidarity to their children who are in inter-faith marriages. Others are barred from active participation in the activities of the Church by reason of an already existing marital relationship.\footnote{309} For example, some local churches praxis in Nigeria sanctions parents for

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\item See, Instrumentum Laboris for the Awka Diocesan Catholic Synod, art. 68. Cf. 1983 Code of Canon Law, Canon 1366. It provided prescription of sanctions to parents or guardians who hand over their children to be brought up in non-Catholic religions. The Nigerian local Churches witness constantly (since the presence of Christianity) situations of inter-faith (mixed) marriages. In some occasions, such is celebrated without observations of the norms of law on mixed marriages and normal dispensations from the local ordinary. While the legal dispositions (canons 1124-1129) target the parties in marriage (Catholic and non-Catholic), the local disposition has involved the parents in signing an undertaking to ensure that the Catholic party and the children are brought up in Catholic Church. The problem then is that in most cases the parties to marriage who are adults and majors according to canonical prescription (canons 97-98) refuse the Church’s proposal and conditions. In this situation, the parents are submerged in a dilemma of cultural and ecclesial requirements. In this predicament, the parents either suffer from strained relationships in their cultural milieu for refusal to support the daughter to marry a person of her choice or risk the invocation of the sanction of canon 1366 (which in our local context is the denial of communion and a Christian funeral) for supporting their daughters. My conviction is that it is very difficult to see the possible extension of the
\end{itemize}
the reason of the inter-faith marriages of their daughters. The *Synod Acta* of the Catholic Diocese of Awka, Nigeria clearly declared: “Where Catholic parents give out their daughter in marriage to a non-Catholic, they incur the penalty of suspension from the sacraments unless they show non-cooperation by not taking dowry and accepting wine.”310 Parents, however, should not deny their erring child.311

These particular legislations presumed that a sinful and wilful act of cooperation and seduction by parents and guardian has occurred, and invariably requires sanctions mentioned in canon 1366 (which in the Nigerian context is specified to be a denial of sacraments). The number of such sanctions and the proposal for a review of the above norm is seen in the message of the retired Catholic bishop of Awka, Simon A. Okafor to his priests:

As part of the activities marking the Year of the Eucharist, 409 couples were reconciled with the Church. Most of those involved became interdicted because their wards were married to non-Catholics. On one hand, one may say that the number is not too much since it implies that on the average, one has about four such cases in each parish. But when we recall that such exercise was carried out in 2000 and 2003 at the celebration of the New Millennium and the Silver Jubilee of the creation of Awka Diocese respectively, then one will have reason to call for a review of the discipline in order to see how to make it more effective.312

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310 These are the elements or materials in the Igbo cultural setting which are being used when parents give their daughter in marriage as a symbolic gesture of real marriage relationship. Once dowry and the wine are accepted, marriage covenant among the Igbos is said to be effected.


As it stands presently, these legislations continue to provoke tensions, derail fruitful ecumenical relationships, generate loss of membership and devalue the importance of sacraments (as some parents dismiss the consequences). It also continues to bring burden to the faithful Christian parents who are always punished in these inter-faith marriages. These predicaments and the reference to canon 1366 have provoked unimaginable strife among the lay Christian faithful, and have generated dissent, distrust and disunity among the people of God, the Church.

In another direction, the theology of the laity as enunciated within the documents of the Second Vatican Council encourages a sense of solidarity among the different groups and among each member within a particular group in relation to their different apostolate. However, it has been observed that within some dioceses in Nigeria, some members of the lay Christian faithful have developed the “super laity mentality,”\(^{313}\) in which they fundamentally see themselves not mainly as members of the lay group, but something higher than the lay status within the Church. This “super laity mentality” which they have of themselves in relation to other members of the laity seems to suggest that they are a class above all others, and superior to any other person. Thus, it brings with it a discernible lack of mutual collaboration among the members, and between the leaders and some of its members.\(^{314}\)

Similar to the above elitist mentality, there often exists a bitter rivalry between the executive members of the Catholic Laity Council of Nigeria, and leaders of some


statutory bodies such as the Catholic Women’s Organization, the Knights of Saint Mulumba, and the Knights of Saint John.\textsuperscript{315} The fact that some of these statutory bodies preceded the Catholic Laity Council of Nigeria makes their leaders think that the Catholic Laity Council of Nigeria should operate under their administrative machineries. Thus, they seem not to comprehend the juridical status of the Laity Council of Nigeria in relation to other lay organizations as a Council, which actually was intended to coordinate the activities of other lay associations, while at the same time respecting and maintaining the relative autonomy of each lay association.\textsuperscript{316} I will discuss in what follows the socio-political, economic and cultural contexts of the Nigerian Church and the theology of the laity.

2. 5 Socio-Political, Economic and Cultural Contexts of the Nigerian Church and the Theology of the Laity

The secular apostolate of the laity as espoused within the various documents of the Second Vatican Council, establishes the fundamental principle under which the examination of the socio-political, economic and cultural contexts of Nigerian society can be studied. This principle teaches that the laity are called to engage in temporal affairs, seeking to order them according to the plan of God, and to promote actions for justice and the common good, animated by the spirit of the gospel.\textsuperscript{317} \textit{Apostolicam Actuositatem} continues to emphasize the role of the laity in the world. “The mission of the Church, consequently, is not only to bring people the message and grace of Christ, but also to

\textsuperscript{316} Cf. \textit{Apostolicam Actuositatem}, no. 26.
\textsuperscript{317} Cf. \textit{Lumen Gentium}, no. 31. See also, \textit{Apostolicam Actuositatem}, nos. 5, 9 and 14. See also, \textit{Gaudium et Spes}, nos. 26, 41 and 43.
permeate and improve the whole range of temporal things. The laity, carrying out this 
mission of the Church, exercises their apostolate in the world as well as in the Church, in 
the temporal order as well as in the spiritual.\textsuperscript{318} There is no doubt that the lay people are 
bound to be influenced by the society in which they are being called to exercise their 
apostolate. Thus, the implication of such evaluation will assist in understanding the 
impact the Nigerian context in its various dimensions has played and continues to play in 
shaping the current ecclesiology of the Nigerian Church, with particular reference to the 
reception and non-reception of Vatican II’s theology of the laity.

The social context of the Nigerian Church and society on the eve of Nigerian 
Independence until the present moment has been described by the Catholic Bishops of 
Nigeria as distressful.\textsuperscript{319} In addition to the country’s predicament as described by the 
Bishops, Chief Gani Fawehinmi (SAN), a prominent Nigerian legal practitioner and 
social activist, attributed the decadent socio-political and economic situation of Nigeria to 
the failure in leadership when he said:

\begin{quote}
The directionlessness of the Federal Government has been characterized by the following among others: collapsed infrastructure, total paralysis on the health sector at all levels, constant nationwide power failure and the attendant negative effects on all sectors of the economy.\textsuperscript{320}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{318} See, \textit{Apostolicam Actuositatem}, nos. 5, 9 and 14.
\textsuperscript{320} See, Philip Nwosu, “Gani Rejects National Honour,” \textit{Nigerian Daily Sun Newspaper} (Tuesday, December 16, 2008) 4. Gani until his death September 5, 2009 turned down the national award which the Federal Government was about to give him based on the reality that the Federal Government of Nigeria has failed the citizens by their neglect to address human right abuse, corruption and the poor socio-political and economic situation of the Nigerian society.
The implication of the above assessments suggests not only that the Nigerian bishops and Chief Gani share the same conviction, but also that the understanding of the situation from these evaluations have not significantly changed or improved. With such appreciable awareness of the context of Nigerian society as noted by the Nigerian Catholic Bishops and Chief Gani Fawehinmi, one wonders about the effect of such a situation on the present ecclesiological reality of the Nigerian Church as it concerns the mission and theology of the laity. These contexts will be considered in the next section of study.

(i) Socio-Political Context of Nigeria

Modern Nigeria, a nation of over 250 tribes and languages,\(^{321}\) came into existence in 1900 when the British joined together great and distinct empires and kingdoms around the borders of West Africa to form one nation otherwise known as Nigeria. Nigeria, which gained its independence from Britain on October 1\(^{st}\), 1960, and as the most populous nation in Africa with an estimated 170 million people, is still facing intermittent political turmoil and economic crisis.\(^{322}\)

The country was ruled by the military for much of the four decades after independence, before making the transition to civilian rule in 1999. Moreover, the struggle for power between the north and south that has broadly defined much of

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Nigeria’s modern political history can be traced, in part, to administrative divisions instituted during Britain’s colonial administration.\footnote{Ibid. According to Lauren Ploch, Britain administered the north and south separately from the late 19th century until 1947, when it introduced a federal system that divided the country into three regions: Northern, Eastern, and Western. Presently, Nigeria is comprised of six geopolitical zones: north-west, north-east, north-central, south-west, south-east, and south-south (the Niger Delta). Cf. Iheanyi M. Enwerem, O.P. A Dangerous Awakening: The Politicization of Religion in Nigeria, 9.} The political climate of Nigerian society since her independence has been scarred by unimaginable conflict along both ethnic and geographic lines. Maladministration has undermined the authority and legitimacy of the state apparatus. Northern military leaders dominated Nigerian politics until 1999, when the country made the transition to democracy with Olusegun Obasanjo, former military general, as the president. With the completion of his eight years in office, he was replaced by Umaru Yar’Adua, another Northerner, on May 29, 2007, in an election which a lot of domestic as well as international monitoring groups and observers described as “deeply flawed.”\footnote{See, Lauren Ploch, “Nigeria: Current Issues and U. S. Policy,” Congressional Research Service, \url{www.crs.gov} (Accessed: January 30, 2008) 2.}

Upon Yar’Adua’s death while in office in 2010, his vice-president, Goodluck Jonathan, a former governor from the southern Niger Delta, took office to complete the remainder of Yar’Adua’s first term. Goodluck Jonathan, who is currently the elected president of Nigeria, ultimately secured the nomination for the 2011 election and later won victory, which was viewed by many election observers as a significant improvement on the electoral democratic progress, though still lacking credibility.\footnote{See, Lauren Ploch, “Nigeria: Current Issues and U. S. Policy,” Congressional Research Service, \url{www.crs.gov} (Accessed: May 21, 2013) 2-4.}

perceived differences have been politically, socially and economically misinterpreted and misappropriated through the instrumentality of the political elites. An example of such sectarian violence is the problem of Boko Haram—a violent Salafist movement in the north—which has grown increasingly active and deadly in its attacks against states and civilian targets in Nigeria.\footnote{Lauren Ploch, “Nigeria: Current Issues and U. S. Policy,” Congressional Research Service, www.crs.gov (Accessed: May 21, 2013) 9-12.} With these circumstances, nothing seems to work, the citizens cannot enjoy adequate security of life and property, afford adequate food, find jobs for millions of unemployed youths, have access to good and dependable healthcare, drink clean water, enjoy a good supply of electricity, accessible roads, functional educational facilities such as universities and colleges, and other social services.\footnote{Cf. Hilary Odilichukwu BenEzenwa, The Clay-Footed Giant: Crises of Life and Challenges for Change in Nigeria (Nimo-Nigeria: Rex Charles & Patrick Publications, 2008) 4-5.}

The political climate in Nigeria is distinguishingly marked by uncontrolled passion and a quest for power and authority. Considerations are not given to the how or means by which one acquires and possesses them and Nigerian politicians can engage in unimaginable actions\footnote{See, John O. Odey, Living in the Shadow of Death: Why Nigerian Fear 2007 (Enugu-Nigeria: Snaap Press Ltd, 2006) 8-12, 47. According to John Odey, in order to subvert the people’s right to choose their leaders and to be ruled by those they have chosen, mischievous politicians use the Nigerian police as agents of intimidation and death against their rivals and against the electorates.} in order to gain and retain power, since leadership is the fastest means of personal enrichment. They often manipulate political structures and processes in order to promote their selfish interests as well. The truth of this reality can be seen in the words of a prominent Nigerian political and economic analyst, Claude Ake, in this succinct declaration: “Political power was everything; it was not only the access to wealth but also the means to security and the only guarantor of general well-being.”\footnote{See, Claude Ake, Democracy and Development in Africa (Washington DC: The Brookings Institute, 1996) 7.} In his confirmation of this ethos of the Nigerian leadership mentality, John O. Odey
submits: “Leadership in Nigeria has become a huge investment and a life insurance scheme where one has to engage in many abnormal things to be secured in perpetuity.”

Politics for some Nigerians is therefore a matter of a “do or die affair.”

Democracy—a principle of governance with its inherent qualities of freedom, and power of the people to elect people of their choice in terms of leadership—has been redefined within the Nigerian context as the power of the incumbent. Those already in power find it absolutely impossible to relinquish their unbridled quest for power and authority. When elections are rigged or are so organized to serve merely as a smokescreen for political godfathers to enthrone their preferred godsons and goddaughters, the people’s will, which is the moral basis of the authority of the government, is subverted and the government gravely lacks credibility and legitimacy. Therefore, this circumstance is not far from political alienation or marginalization, with the aggregate effect being that political corruption and other forms of corruption are inevitable consequences.

Thus, corruption in Nigeria has created unimaginable miseries, unparalleled oceans of poverty dotted with islands of scandalous wealth. Corruption has destroyed basic virtues of trust in the social arena and has equally soiled the country’s image internationally, leading to massive capital flight, the transfer of stolen public funds abroad, and a disincentive for foreign investment. Recent survey has estimated that

332 Cf. Hilary Odilichukwu BenEzenwa, The Clay-Footed Giant, 54-58. The author, using Nigeria as a case study highlighted the various means by which those already with political positions try to manipulate the election in their desperate inclination to remain in power even when it goes against the wish of the electorate.
333 Ibid., 59.
Nigeria may lose more than 10% of its annual GDP through fraud. Several local as well as international firms have been implicated in Nigerian bribery scandals.\(^{335}\)

Moreover, a Nigerian law enforcement agency entitled the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) was formed in 2003 to combat corruption and fraud. It has consistently experienced executive interference, bringing with it the undermining of the entity’s investigations as well as derailing prosecutions. Indeed, successive presidents have taken a public stance against corruption, but some observers suggest that they have also used corruption charges to sideline critics and political opponents. Various advocacy groups have called on Goodluck Jonathan to increase the EFCC’s independence in order to serve disinterestedly in the promotion of social order and justice within Nigerian society.\(^{336}\)

Other aspects of the socio-political context of Nigerian society that need to be highlighted include issues dealing with social welfare, which have degenerated due to the corrupt practices of Nigerian leaders. Nigeria is one of the countries in West Africa that has the poorest record when it comes to the provision of medical facilities. The medical situation, according to available statistics, claims one doctor for every 5,882 patients and one nurse for every 1,639 patients.\(^{337}\) The country has been suffering from a shortage of doctors and nurses as a result of disincentives from the Federal Government. Most of the Nigerian doctors and nurses seek employment overseas where they are guaranteed proper


remuneration and work-related incentives and security.\(^{338}\) While the president of Nigeria and other political elites always seek medical attention overseas because they can afford it, the poor and less-privileged people are left to experience bitter pain, anxiety and eventual death from various diseases due to their inability to pay the high cost of medical treatment. Hence, the life expectancy of Nigerians is relatively low due to the scarcity of medical resources and management.\(^{339}\)

With reference to education, it has been noted that despite Nigeria’s effort to improve the quality of the education system, 8 to 10 million children of school age are neither in primary or secondary school. According to this report, there are about 60 million adults in Nigeria; and 85 percent of this number under the age of 35 years can neither read nor write. Education has collapsed at all levels in Nigeria and most Nigerians with financial resources now send their children to Ghana and Togo to have a quality primary, secondary and university education.\(^{340}\) Yet, Nigeria claims to be offering Universal Basic Education, a free and compulsory education aimed at providing and improving quality education for its children.\(^{341}\) Knowing this context, one cannot but


\(^{341}\) Cf. Hilary Odilichukwu BenEzenwa, *The Clay-Footed Giant*, 93-117. Within this section of his book, “The Plight of Education and Youth Development,” the author expresses the deplorable condition of the Nigerian system of education, highlighting corruption practices of our leaders in the educational sector as causes that generate failure to the delivery of effective and qualitative education in Nigeria. He suggests
arrive at the conclusion that the socio-political and economic situation of Nigerian society, where the lay people are called to exercise their apostolate, is simply in a deplorable condition.

(ii) Economic Context of Nigeria

Nigeria’s economy is the second largest in Sub-Saharan Africa, and among the world’s fastest growing sources of high quality crude oil and natural gas. Despite its oil wealth, Nigeria remains highly underdeveloped. Poor governance has greatly limited infrastructural development and the provision of social services, hindering economic development, and leaving more of her citizens mired in poverty. Given the depressed state of the Nigerian economy, a largely pauperized populace, and absence of gainful employment for the vast majority of the Nigerian youth, it is therefore not surprising to see the reason why the late Nigerian great novelist, Professor Chinua Achebe, attributed the cause of this situation to failure in leadership when he wrote:

The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing wrong with the Nigerian character. There is nothing wrong with the Nigerian land or climate or water or air or anything else. The problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example which are the hallmarks of true leadership…. I am saying that Nigeria can change today if she discovers leaders who have the will, the ability and the vision.

The economic prosperity of a nation is not viewed so much by its total assets in terms of wealth and property, or as the equitable division and distribution of wealth.

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Rather, it is measured according to the extent in which it guarantees the personal
development of the members of society, which is the true goal of a nation’s economy.\textsuperscript{344}

Pius XII previously articulated a similar thought:

\ldots the national economy, as it is the product of men [sic] who work together in the community of the state, has no other end than to secure without interruption the material conditions in which the individual life of the citizen may fully develop. Where this is secured in a permanent way, people will be, in a true sense, economically rich because the general well-being, and consequently the personal right of all to the use of worldly goods, is thus realized in conformity with the purpose laid down by the creator.\textsuperscript{345}

Unfortunately, based on its present economic predicament, Nigeria appears to have different standards for values, marked by the ineptitude of its leaders, which has made it seemingly impossible to have achieved its goals. Mokwugo Okoye, an astute nationalist put the matter most eloquently:

In general, the type of leadership in any society is the most important element in the matrix of historical causation. It is the leadership which defines the situation and conditions of the people and the nature of their response to them and, ultimately it is this leadership which put its stamp on the future development of the society.\textsuperscript{346}

In fact, many Nigerian leaders have shown great insensitivity and mismanagement with the resources ever since excavations started in various parts of the country.\textsuperscript{347}

Since independence, Nigeria has had more than one chance to put the economy right, and it has failed in every case due to the gross financial recklessness of the military

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\textsuperscript{345} See, Pius XII, Radio Message of Pentecost on the Fiftieth Anniversary of the \textit{Rerum Novarum} (June 1, 1941) no. 16.
\textsuperscript{347} See, Hilary Odilichukwu BenEzenwa, \textit{The Clay-Footed Giant}, 80.
\end{footnotes}
leaders and elite, as well as the greed of its political class who looted the national treasury. In the mid 1970’s, Nigeria experienced an oil boom. Money flowed in but was squandered. The Gulf war in the early 1990’s attracted billions in revenue, only to be siphoned by former and successive military leaders, namely Ibrahim Babangida and Mohammed Sani Abacha, through seemingly unpopular economic policies. The acceptance of the economic policy such as the *Structural Adjustment Programme* (SAP) by the Federal Government of Nigeria was detrimental to development as it encouraged the government’s withdrawal from the provision of social amenities and services.

With the restoration of democracy on May 29, 1999, through the administration of the former President Olusegun Obasanjo, the inauguration of another economic policy—the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS)—which began in 2004, has made significant commitments to economic reform, including efforts to deregulate fuel prices and to improve the monitoring of official revenue, reduce poverty, create wealth and generate employment. The first phase of this economic plan was implemented between 2004-2007, and it has been discovered that this policy has had no advantages. 80% of Nigerians live below the poverty level, surviving on a salary of $1.00 dollar per day. This has not done much to alleviate the poverty for the increasing number of Nigerians who live daily through unimaginable hardship and impoverishment. Hence, the candid observations of A. O. Makozi concerning the national economic predicament remain conspicuously valid:

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348 Ibid., 81. *The Structural Adjustment Programme* (SAP) which the government accepted was rather an imposition by the International Monetary Fund on the nation as measure for economic recovery. But, it was misappropriated by the government with the resulted effect that it ended up withdrawing from the provision of social amenities and services meant to serve the needs of the people.

349 Ibid., 89.
…side by side with this state of near destitution of the majority, is the affluence and conspicuous consumption of a few super-rich Nigerians, whose wealth and privilege have multiplied in the last few years to about the same degree as the misery of the masses. This class of Nigerians squander millions of Naira daily in a life of vanity and debauchery, while the poor starve to death.350

Laura Ploch, an analyst in African affairs for the United States Congress, states in her 2012 Congressional Report that Nigeria’s economy is based on the monolithic product of petroleum, which accounts for, according to the World Bank’s statistics, 80% of government revenues, 95% of the export earnings, and 52% of the country’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The country’s extractive industries have grown, but many of its other industries have stagnated or declined due to the displacement of agriculture and other local market and subsistence economies by the oil industry, under the management and control of foreign multinational corporations, and a few privileged Nigerians. Nigeria currently imports food and an estimated $10 billion Naira in refined petroleum products annually for domestic consumption, but still suffers periodically from severe fuel and electricity shortages.351

Successive Nigerian administrations, beginning with the late President Yar’Adua (2007-2010) and the current President Goodluck Jonathan, have made commitments to economic reform, but their track record is mixed. The current economic situation since 2010 is still very much the same with Olusegun Obasanjo’s economic policy and reform. Apart from the unreliable economic policies and strategies of the Federal Government of

351 Lauren Ploch, “Nigeria: Current Issues and U. S. Policy,” Congressional Research Service, www.crs.gov (Accessed: May 21, 2013) 5-6, 7. See also, Junaid Mohammed, “No Cause to Celebrate,” The News (October 4, 2010) 26. According to Junaid, the second development which has negatively impacted on the Nigerian economy is the criminal neglect of agriculture which should be the mainstay of the national economy, the main provider of jobs for our teeming youths and the general populations. “Our export commodities which are mostly agricultural have been destroyed. Nigeria no longer competes well globally in agricultural exports like groundnut, cocoa and hides and skin, and in solid minerals like tin, zinc, iron ore, columbite and coal.”
Nigeria, the inability of the government to create a conducive and enabling environment for the growth and development of its economic plans has become a serious concern for many Nigerians. Inadequate provision of the basic infrastructural facilities such as electricity, and the inability of the Nigerian government to critically address the issue of social unrest in various parts of the country, especially within the Niger Delta region, has become a critical issue as far as foreign investment opportunities are concerned.\footnote{Ibid., 8, 13.}

Efeturi Ojiakaminor clearly analyses the situation when he said: “The truth is that no foreign investor in his right mind would invest in Nigeria. Not even Nigerians themselves would like to invest in the country…. Why would anyone want to go and invest in a country where there is no security of life and property?”\footnote{See, Efeturi Ojakaminor, *Nigeria’s Ghana-Must-Go Republic: Happenings*, 111.}

Ojakaminor’s assessment of the above situation could be read alongside with the current militant insurgency in the Niger Delta\footnote{Lauren Ploch, “Nigeria: Current Issues and U. S. Policy,” *Congressional Research Service*, [www.crs.gov](http://www.crs.gov) (Accessed: May 21, 2013) 13. Cf. Hilary Odilichukwu BenEzenwa, *The Clay-Footed Giant*, 80. In his assessment, Hilary Odilichukwu opines that it is no longer news that major oil prospecting companies in the world are now feverishly looking elsewhere for crude oil other than the Niger Delta of Nigeria. They are retrenching and finding it extremely and increasingly difficult to recruit the highly skilled foreigners required to protect the rigs. Losses from blown up pipelines are also rising, fear of kidnapping and consequent ransom are making the Niger Delta hell on earth for oil workers. For the fact that the economic fate of Nigeria is so inextricably tied to the Niger Delta, it might not be an exaggeration to declare that as the Niger Delta goes, Nigerian economic power could equally disappear. These problems are as a result of people and tribes, trying to struggle for recognition, integration and control of the main source of Nigeria’s revenue. They include: Movement for Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), Movement for Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), Niger-Delta Freedom Fighters (NDFF), Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Front (NDPVF), and Odua Peoples Congress (OPC).} as well as within the Northern parts of Nigeria with its *Boko Haram Militants*.\footnote{Ibid., 10-12. According to Laura Ploch in her 2012 Congressional Report, *Boko Haram* emerged in the early 2000s as a small, radical Sunni Islamic sect that advocated a strict interpretation and implementation of Islamic law for Nigeria. As a violent Salafist movement in the north, this has grown increasingly active and deadly in its attacks against state and civilian targets in Nigeria. While its attacks have not exclusively, or even primarily, targeted Christians, attacks attributed to the group on Churches in several north and central states are fuelling existing religious tensions.} This insurgency has taken a heavy toll on the Nigerian economy. Not only is oil production on the decline, but workers and expatriates
have also had to abandon oil rigs while others, including Nigerians who remain on the
job, are there at great peril to their lives. The country is losing considerably in terms of
revenue and image. The current Nigerian economic situation is in deplorable shape and
the present government has been too slow to put in place the infrastructural development
needed for the economic growth of the nation and the Nigerian people.\textsuperscript{356}

The continuous flaring of gas in the Niger Delta for example, is a thorny issue,\textsuperscript{357}
and the absences of a clear programme to keep the youth gainfully engaged, as well as
the rising nature of unemployment, remain major concerns.\textsuperscript{358} Nigerian issues and
problems in relation to the mission and the theology of the laity are not exclusively of an
economic dimension. There are also cultural factors which are affecting the lives of its
people, and which the Nigerian Church has to respond to in order to be credible and
relevant within the Nigerian context.

(iii) The Nigerian Cultural Context

Nigeria is a country characterized by a cultural context that is traditionally
patriarchal in nature. It is a culture that is male-dominated, and considers women inferior


\textsuperscript{357} Ibid. Indeed, millions of barrels of oil are believed to have been spilled in the region since oil production began, causing major damage to the fragile riverine ecosystem, and ultimately to the livelihoods of many the Delta’s 30 million inhabitants. See also, Ferdinand Nwaigbo, “The Church and the Current Issues of Economy of Oil and Gas in the Niger Delta of Nigeria,” Ferdinand Nwaigbo, et al. eds., \textit{The Church and the Politics of Resource Control} (Port Harcourt-Nigeria: CIWA Publications, 2006) 99-120. In Nwaigbo’s view, the Niger Delta is causing panic for Nigeria as well as for foreigners. The environmental degradation that is being precipitated by the exploration of oil and gas industries in the Niger Delta region confronts Nigeria on the altar of justice and peace. The exploration and exploitation of oil and gas economy in the present dispensation are issues bordering on justices against ecosystem. The situation in the Niger Delta has great implication for the Church and it also has many implications for the country as a whole. Thus, the Church has a mission to guard the entire creation of God. Ecological sensitivity to the entire creation of God is a part of the Church’s mission. Consequently, the abundant natural resources in the Niger Delta region are gifts by God which are to be used for the development of the entire community of Nigeria.

\textsuperscript{358} Ibid.
and weak. African cultures generally, and particularly Nigerian cultures, inherently acknowledge a certain degree of recognition and acceptance under which each gender, male or female, is treated differently in various political, social, economic and religious institutions or settings. In other words, some traditional laws are applied differently according to gender or class. People are willing to spend a greater part of their income for the educational training of a male-child than a female-child. This is based on the cultural belief that a female-child is simply the property of some other person when it comes to the issue of marriage. Such an experience of the traditional laws that favour males against females in terms of educational opportunities is no longer applicable in all parts of the country. However, some remnants of such laws have had lasting effects within the south-eastern part of the Nigerian society.


The marginalization of Nigerian women is rooted in a cultural and traditional religious worldview, where women are considered unclean during their menstrual cycle. Such belief helps to discriminate against women, barring them from participating in many activities and functions of society, with presumed fear that they may contaminate others. This inferior status or marginalization of women, protected by tradition, culture and religion, has deprived women of their rights as human beings. Some examples of the violation of women’s rights and other forms of degradation of women in Nigeria include domestic violence in the home, sexual harassment at school and work, rape, harsh and punitive widowhood practices or rites, genital mutilation, sexual violence in conflict situations, enforcement of gender biased laws, and disinheriting of wives and daughters.\textsuperscript{361}

Another area where cultural discrimination is clearly expressed and carries great importance is the tribal issue of the Osu Caste System. The origin of Osu is not certain, but it is definitely not an enviable status that should be pursued according to some cultural settings in Nigeria.\textsuperscript{362} This is an ethnic purity system which tends to regard some tribes or groups of people as untouchable based on the cultural reality of their origin or affiliation to a certain tribal deity or god. This association or link with a tribal deity

\textsuperscript{361} See, U.E. Umoren, “Enculturation and Inculturation: The Gospel of Liberation and the Culture of African Womanhood,” \textit{African Christian Studies}, Vol. 11 (September, 1995) 47-48. Another area of dehumanization for the Nigerian woman according to the author involves the institution of marriage. The Nigerian social structure is traditionally arranged in such a manner that women are always blamed for the breakdown of a marriage. While it is lawful and permissible for a man to divorce his wife, it is very difficult for a woman to leave her marriage based on any condition. On the issue of fidelity, a husband can commit adultery many times and get away with it without being divorced or subjected to public ridicule. A woman who commits a similar offence is made to suffer the consequences of her action, which by implication gives the man the opportunity to divorce her. See also, Daisy N. Nwachuku, “The Christian Widow in Africa Culture” Mercy Amba Oduoye and Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro, eds., \textit{The Will to Arise: Women, Tradition, and the Church in Africa} (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1992). See also, Pat U. Okoye, \textit{Widowhood: A Natural or Cultural Tragedy} (Enugu-Nigeria: NUCIK Publishers, 1995.

establishes levels of stratification within society, which sees some people as freeborn (Diala: sons and daughters of the land) and others as slaves (Osu: a person dedicated to a deity). Hence, the Osu then becomes an outcast, an object and property of the god or shrine. Nigerian historian Hilary Achunike depicts the nature of the Osu Caste System among the Igbo tribe as “something dreadful…. No normal person or freeborn would want to become an Osu or associate with an Osu who is supposedly the “property” of Alusi (Deity). It is erroneously believed that an Osu cannot regain his [sic] freedom.”

Despite the growth of Christianity with its spirituality, the idea of Osu is still very much alive and active in some cultures in Nigeria, and some Nigerian Christians still find it very difficult to associate with the people whom culture refers to as Osu. However, the powerful influence of Osu is gradually being deemphasised by the collective efforts of some Christian Churches. Thus, if the reception of the theology of the laity within the Nigerian Church is to have a serious impact, or show significant relevance to the entire ecclesiological framework of the Church as communion, the culture of liberation and integral development should be preached in order to promote the eradication of the culture of discrimination based on gender or class.

While it can be said that there has been some significant improvement for women, especially in the areas of economic and socio-political emancipation, there has been little if any change in the cultural subordination of women. There are constantly varied tensions within certain cultural contexts of Nigerian society with respect to women’s subordination and liberation in general. While some women who are highly placed in the educational standard seem to be protected from such subordination, illiterate women

363 Ibid., 107-108.
of Nigerian society, who are underprivileged by the same standard, seem to suffer from such defacing human conditions and hardship.

Another aspect of African culture, and particularly the Nigerian cultural heritage that exerts and establishes consistent influence on the ecclesiology of the Nigerian Church in relation to the theology of the laity, is the sacredness of nature and the environment. For Africans and Nigerians in particular, the whole of creation tells of the glory of God and manifests God’s presence. In effect, the created order, visible and invisible, bears the mark of goodness and godliness.\(^365\)

In a letter dated March 25, 1988 mandating the Episcopal Conferences in Africa and Madagascar to include the study of African Traditional Religion in the seminary curriculum, the former President of the Secretariat for Non-Christian Religions, Francis Cardinal Arinze cited the “sense of the sacred” with other African cultural values as an essential element of African cultural heritage. Other African values that have great influence on the cultural life of the people include: “respect for life, sense of community, family, spiritual vision of life, authority as sacred and symbolism in religious worship.”\(^366\) All space is sacred as well as all of the elements for offerings and sacrifices to god. Moreover, the cultic personnel within the traditional religion are treated with profound reverence and dignity because of the traditional shared belief of their closeness to divinity.\(^367\)


If we then consider for instance the African sense of sacred as it concerns the cultic functions, we come to understand that such an African sense of sacred does not end with the advent of the Christian religion, as the people naturally transferred the same awe and reverence from their traditional religious priests and elders to the Christian clergy. Such a traditional sense of the sacred now given to the Christian clergy, to some extent, promotes the sacralization of the Church authority. Based on such background, the activities and decisions of the Church hierarchy in Nigeria tend to go unquestioned and unchallenged by the laity, whose disposition towards them is that of awe and respect, akin to the same awe and respect associated with the traditional religious intermediaries of the African traditional priests and elders.\textsuperscript{368} This clericalization has hampered the effective involvement of the lay people in the mission of the Church, and has become a great challenge within the present ecclesiological structure of the Nigerian Church.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter broadly examined the context of the Nigerian Church and society through the review of the history of the Nigerian Roman Catholic Church, in relation to the development of the Catholic Laity Council of Nigeria (CLCN). In studying the reality of the reception or non-reception of Vatican II’s theology of the laity within the Nigerian Church and society, I have explored the various dimensions of the laity’s apostolate before and after the Council. This chapter has also examined the current ecclesiological context as well as the socio-political, economic, and cultural situation of the Nigerian Church and society in relation to the theology of the laity.

Based on the analysis and evaluation of these contexts in relation to the theology of the laity, one can see some elements of positive reinforcement (reception) as well as some obstructions (non-reception) to Vatican II’s theology of the laity within Nigerian Church and society. The current situation of the Nigerian Church and society, with such creative tension, demonstrates serious challenges and implications for the theology of the laity. The next chapter discusses the contemporary challenges and implications for the reception and non-reception of Vatican II’s theology of the laity in the Nigerian Roman Catholic Church.
Chapter Three

Contemporary Challenges and Implications of the Reception and Non-Reception of Vatican II’s Theology of the Laity in the Nigerian Roman Catholic Church

3. Introduction

This chapter examines the contemporary challenges and implications of the reception and non-reception of Vatican II’s theology of the laity in the Nigerian Roman Catholic Church. These challenges will be considered through the evaluation of ministerial authority and its influence within the Nigerian Church. I will critically explore the reactions of some African theologians to the various theological positions and decisions of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference, with respect to the problems of clericalism and the Church’s hierarchical culture, paternalism, and the sacred power of the priests, and how these problems relate to the exclusion of the laity from the mission of the Church.

Other aspects of this include: priestly life styles in Nigeria, the Church’s hierarchy and its relationship with her lay employees, and the responses of the Nigerian Church hierarchy to the socio-political, economic and cultural responsibilities of the Nigerian laity. I shall also evaluate socio-cultural factors that render ineffective the implementation of the principles of co-responsibility and ecclesial communion within the Nigerian Church and society as they pertain to the theology of the laity.

3. 1 Exercise of Ministerial Authority within the Nigerian Roman Catholic Church

The Nigerian Church has made some progress in various areas of her evangelizing mission and life over the last fifty-one years, since the opening of Vatican II (1962-1965). The significance of this Council lies not only in its call to bring the Church up to date in
all aspects of its life, but also in the renewal of the Church’s relationship with its various members, upon which the restoration of the dignity and mission of the laity is built.\footnote{369}{Cf. Maureen Sullivan, OP., \textit{The Road to Vatican II: Key Changes in Theology}, 39-40.}

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Nigerian Roman Catholic Church is exceptionally blessed with many hard-working bishops, committed priests, religious men and women, as well as dedicated laity. This Church is already sending missionaries, priests and other religious to different countries of the world, while maintaining a strong impact on the missionary endeavours within its own various ecclesiastical jurisdictions, through the instrumentality of various lay organizations, associations and movements. All are positive developments of which the Church should genuinely be proud, and point to the Nigerian Church’s readiness to collaborate in the mission of the universal Church.\footnote{370}{Camillus Umoh, “I Planted, Apollos Watered…” (1Cor. 3:6): Rivalry in the Corinthian Mission, A Lesson for the Nigerian Church,” Ignatius M.C.Obinwa, ed., \textit{Collaborative Ministry in the Context of Inculturation}, 84-85. Cf. John Onaiyekan, “The Priesthood and the African Synod,” Luke N. Mbefo and Ernest M. Ezeogu, eds., \textit{The Clergy in Nigeria Today} (Enugu-Nigeria: Snaap Press, 1994) 101-102.}

The Church in Nigeria is still a growing and developing Church with its own share of problems and setbacks.\footnote{371}{Cf. Obinna Ifeanyi, C.S.Sp. \textit{Ministry in the Nigerian Church: Challenges and Prospects} (Enugu-Nigeria: Snaap Press Ltd, 2004) 59.} Its exercise of ministerial authority has been challenged by the new way of being a Church, based on the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council, which specifically expressed its profound teaching on the dignity and mission of the lay faithful. Such teaching constitutes a remarkable change and advancement in the traditional understanding of the role of the laity and ministry of the Church.\footnote{372}{Cf. Richard R. Gaillardetz and Catherine E. Clifford, \textit{Keys to the Council: Unlocking the Teaching of Vatican II}, 101.}

However, a review of the existing situation within the Church in Nigeria shows that its hierarchy and ministry are still deeply rooted in an overly institutional and
juridical ecclesiology. The distinguishing characteristics of such an ecclesiology underscore the idea of clericalism, or an over-emphasis on the power of hierarchy. This ecclesiology equally reveals paternalistic traits in the Church where the exercise of ministerial authority gives no opportunity for effective co-responsibility and collaboration of the lay people in the various ministries of the Church. This type of ecclesiology was partly inherited from the missionaries who conceived their mission in the post-Tridentine image of the Church.\textsuperscript{373} There are still other cultural and sociological factors indigenous to the Nigerian situations that have greatly influenced the proper reception of Vatican II’s theology of the laity within the Nigerian Church. Thus, we now consider these challenges and their implications as ways in which the Nigerian Church hierarchy, broadly considered, has been responding to the Vatican II’s theology of the laity.

3. 1. 1 Clerical Imperialism and Hierarchical Culture of the Roman Catholic Church

The term clericalism, generally considered, refers to the attitudes and behaviours of the clergy and is designed to underline the overly privileged status of priests and bishops. The nineteenth century usage of the term in Western Europe, especially in both France and Italy, provided a convenient designation by which those who mistrusted religion in general and the Catholic Church in particular could advance an antireligious

\textsuperscript{373} See, Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, \textit{A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches}, 10-11. According to the author, “The Church in Africa inherited this pattern of clericalism from the missionaries, who, naturally, communicated the post-Tridentine image of the Church. The training of the clergy did not permit any questioning of such structures. In fact, our bishops and priests have no evident interest in changing the status quo in this Church, which is essentially an unequal society made up of those who ‘occupy a rank in the different degrees of the hierarchy and the multitude of the faithful’….The privileged clergy are the principle beneficiaries. However, they are inserted within the highly centralized and autocratic world Church (Western rite).” See also, A. E. Orobator, S. J. \textit{The Church as Family: African Ecclesiology in its Social Context}, 43-45. Cf. Bénézet Bujo, \textit{African Theology in its Social Context} (Kenya: Paulines Publications Africa, 1992) 97-98.
agenda. The apparent preoccupation or aim of the clericalist system was the subjugation of civil governments to the control of the pope through the influence of the local bishops and priests. The term later expanded in meaning to include any perceived incursion of religion into public affairs, particularly those involving attempts to gain power over the state.\(^{374}\)

In response to the clericalist system of the Church prior to the Council, Vatican II (1962-1965) gave a different meaning and understanding of the role of the clergy based on restored theology of ministry. The restoration of the theology of ministry and charisms, as espoused by the Second Vatican Council, shifted away from the dominant theology of a ministry, with legal presuppositions and centralization of power in the clergy, that was prevalent prior to the Council. The Council questioned the monolithic structure of the clergy and recognized a diversity of ministries that were more consistent with the apostolic tradition. Vatican II emphasized the need for a pluralism of ministries thus:

> Various types of ministry are necessary for the implanting and growth of the Christian community, and once these forms of service have been called forth from the body of the faithful, by the divine call, they are to be carefully fostered and nurtured by all. Among these functions are those of priests, deacons and catechists, and also that of Catholic Action. Brothers and nuns, likewise, play an indispensable role in planting and strengthening the kingdom of Christ in souls, and in the work of further extending it, both by their prayers and active work.\(^{375}\)

The implication of the above text is clear. Vatican II responded to clericalism by its expanded vision of ministry. It presupposed a restored outlook on ministry based on a restored understanding of the relationship between the Spirit and the Church. The


recognition of different ministries acknowledges the basic truth that ministry is, above all, a common responsibility of the whole Church. The ministry of lay people actualizes the ministry of Christ in the Spirit. The affirmation of the diversity of ministries is a sign that the Spirit continues working in many ways to inspire the faithful who want to serve the Church in different areas. The Spirit is seen at work as the source of this diversity of ministries. It is the Spirit who, “shares his gifts as he wills for the common good.”

Thus, to recognize that the Church needs a variety of ministries is to admit that there is a need to end what has come to be seen as a ‘tyranny of the clergy.’ The text cited above has a sampling of various ministries and places priests, deacons, catechists and Catholic action groups existing side by side. All these different ministries of service of the Church, along with those of men and women religious, are to be considered authentic ministries.

Similarly, the majority of theologians believe that the laity’s participation in the Church’s mission constitutes a form or type of ministry. The obligation of all Christians to participate in the common mission of the Church is a necessary foundation for any reflection on Church ministry. Ministry originates from one’s belonging to the Church.

Through the sacraments of Christian initiation, one is called to ministry. Based on this understanding, Donald Goergen maintains that vocation, mission and ministry constitute the full meaning of Christian discipleship. According to him, sacraments of Christian initiation are sacraments of the laity. His conviction that every Christian begins his or her Christian ministry as a lay person, as well as his belief that lay ministry is the norm in

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376 Ibid., no. 23.
terms of which ordained ministry is to be understood, led him to see ministry in the Church as fundamentally lay.\textsuperscript{378}

However, the fact that all clerics were first members of the laity before they accepted the vocation to ministerial priesthood does not necessitate an understanding of the ministry of the Church to be fundamentally a lay ministry. Such understanding will dislodge ministry from its fundamental source—Christ—and present a one-sided understanding of the entire ministry within the Church. Christ indeed is the foundation of the Church’s ministry. Clerical and lay ministry are distinct, but related ministries in the Church. Elochukwu Uzukwu clearly states this when he reflects that bearing united witness to Christ is the Church’s fundamental ministry in the community and the world.\textsuperscript{379} As a consequence, the Church’s ministry is the ministry of Christ to which the clergy and the laity share in their various ways.\textsuperscript{380}

The rediscovery of the theology of the laity as seen in the Council’s \textit{Decree on the Apostolate of the Lay People}, the \textit{Dogmatic Constitution on the Church} and on the \textit{Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World} reminds us that there is more to Christian ministry than its institutional or ordained form. Laity have their own share of responsibility in the apostolic functions of the Church. In the words of the Council, “Thus, every lay person, through the gifts given to him, is at once the witness and the living instrument of the mission of the Church itself ‘according to the measure of Christ’s

\textsuperscript{378} See, Donald Goegen, “Current Trends: The Call to the Laity,” \textit{Spirituality Today} 35(1983) 264-265. See also, \textit{Lumen Gentium}, no. 10. Here we see Vatican II’s understanding of the “priesthood of the faithful.”

\textsuperscript{379} Elochukwu Uzukwu, \textit{A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in the African Churches}, 136.

\textsuperscript{380} See, Thomas O’Meara, \textit{Theology of Ministry} (New York: Paulist Press, 1983) 142. O’Meara understands ministry “as a public activity of a baptized follower of Jesus Christ, flowing from the Spirit’s charism and an individual personality on behalf of a Christian community to witness to, serve and realize the kingdom of God.”
bestowal’ (Eph. 4:7))." Specifically, Christ “fulfills this prophetic office, not only by the hierarchy who teach in his name and by his power, but also by the laity.” And finally, “The apostolate of the laity is a sharing in the salvific mission of the Church. Through Baptism and Confirmation, all are appointed to this apostolate by the Lord himself.”

Currently, the term “clericalism” is most often employed by Catholics to designate a vision or worldview of the Church that emphasizes its institutional, patriarchal structures, and the privileged position of clergy over the laity. This type of ecclesiology underscores the leadership model in the Church, which emphasizes the hierarchical and visible institution. In principle, it readily accepts that the Church is a spiritual community as well as a mystery. However, in reality, it is mainly concerned with order, conformism, submission, and the visible structures of the Church in opposition to a relational type of ecclesiology. The image of the African family as suggested by Ecclesia in Africa is such a model of relational or communion ecclesiology.

Reflecting on the reality of this clerical culture, from which the idea of clericalism emanates in relation to the theology of the laity in the mission of the Church, the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria calls the problems of clericalism, as well as the exclusion of certain groups of lay Christian faithful from active involvement in the mission of Church, a great disservice to the Gospel. They also argue that such a clericalist mentality or hierarchical culture of the Church is counterproductive to the internal pastoral

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381 See, Lumen Gentium, no. 33.
382 Ibid., no. 35. Cf. Apostolicam Actuositatem, no. 2.
383 Ibid., no. 33. Cf. Apostolicam Actuositatem, nos. 2-3. See also, Gaudium et Spes, no. 43.
385 John Paul II, Ecclesia in Africa, no. 63.
leadership of the Church, as well as to its witness in the socio-political and economic sphere of Nigerian society.\textsuperscript{386} Describing the nature of this clerical culture and its implications, the Nigerian bishops declared:

It is a self-serving attitude which pretends to be all sufficient. With smack of pride, triumphalism and high-handedness, it denies the dignity of other members of God’s people. As an abuse of power, clericalism is itself counterproductive as it breeds rebellion and anarchy, instead of loyalty, cooperation and collaboration. Clericalism manifests itself in lack of transparency, dialogue, respect, availability, delegation, responsibility…in pastoral leadership.\textsuperscript{387}

To some Nigerian clerics, such a challenge, as the bishops argue, brings with it some sense of anti-clericalism. For the Nigerian bishops however, what some clerics term “anti-clericalism” often turns out to be a rejection of the abuse of power and downright injustice on the part of the clergy towards the laity.\textsuperscript{388}

The emphasis on the clerical culture, as some theologians have noted, places the concept of authority not so much in the way the authority is exercised, but on the clerical status of the one who exercises it. It is not so much what is said as to the one who says it; and not so much on the facts, as on the authority figure behind the decision. This model of leadership or ministerial authority, as evident in the Church in Nigeria, is simply


\textsuperscript{387} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{388} Ibid.
clericalism, and as such does not encourage the full participation in the life of the Church by all the members.

Clericalism as the dominant model of ecclesiology is not only a remote or exclusive experience of the Nigerian Church; clericalism is also present equally in many other African Churches, as well as in Eastern and Western Churches. Discussing the curse of clericalism from the perspective of the Western Churches, Michael W. Higgins and Douglas R. Letson see clericalism as an abuse of power of the priesthood, as expressed in myriad forms. The exploitation of this clerical power, they argue, is seen in the different instances of sexual abuse cases by the clergy as recorded in Canada, and in similar cases in the United States, Ireland, England, or Australia. Alexander Carter, the late Bishop of Sault Ste. Marie, ON, Canada, in his intervention during the 1971 Synod of the Catholic Bishops in Rome, characterized clericalism as the most troublesome challenge facing the Catholic Church in the twenty-first century. For Russell Shaw, the clericalist mentality distorts the idea of power in the Church by interpreting it in

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391 Ibid., 255.
political terms—domination and submission—rather than in terms of service. Clericalism in all its forms and manifestations continues to do great harm to all the members of the Church and priests as well as laity. Indeed, clericalism is systemic and pervasive. Russell Shaw even suggests that until clericalism is recognized and eradicated, it will continue to poison Catholic life in countless ways.\(^393\)

The situation as described above has been clearly articulated in Pope Francis’s first Apostolic Exhortation, \textit{Evangelii Gaudium}, the Joy of the Gospel, where he urges for a greater role for the laity, warns of “excessive clericalism” and calls for “a more inclusive female presence in the Church,” especially “where important decisions are made.” Thus, he says:

\begin{quote}
There has been a growing awareness of the identity and mission of the laity in the Church…. At the same time, a clear awareness of this responsibility of the laity, grounded in their baptism and confirmation, does not appear in the same way in all places. In some cases, it is because lay persons have not been given the formation needed to take on important responsibilities. In others, it is because in their particular Churches room has not been made for them to speak and to act, due to an excessive clericalism which keeps them away from decision-making. Even if many are now involved in the lay ministries, this involvement is not reflected in a greater penetration of Christian values in the social, political and economic sectors. It often remains tied to tasks within the Church, without a real commitment to applying the Gospel to the transformation of society.\(^394\)
\end{quote}

Pope Francis calls the formation of the laity and the evangelization of professional and intellectual life, a significant pastoral challenge. He equally acknowledges the indispensable role of women in our society, as well as in our pastoral responsibilities,

\(^393\) Russell B. Shaw, \textit{To Hunt, to Shoot, to Entertain: Clericalism and the Catholic Laity}, 29-31.

while advocating for a greater and a more inclusive presence of women in the Church and social structures where important decisions are made.\(^{395}\)

Bishop Christopher Mwoleka of the diocese of Rulenge in Western Tanzania articulated the perennial nature of this clericalist mentality while addressing the 1975 plenary assembly of Episcopal Conference of African Bishops and Madagascar (SECAM). Calling the African experience of clericalism an incurable disease, he maintained:

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\text{The root of the trouble is that we have a fixed idea of the Church. At meetings like this everybody seems to agree that the Church, of course, means all the faithful. But at the back of our minds and in our imagination, almost instinctively, the Church is always the Church of the clergy. The disease is incurable.}^{396}\]

This clerical culture, according to Elochukwu Uzukwu is equally seen in the training of the clergy. He argues that such clerical structure does not permit any questioning. Neither bishops nor priests have any evident interest in dismantling or changing the status quo, which exists essentially as an unequal society made of those who “occupy a rank in the different degrees of the hierarchy and the multitude of the faithful.”\(^{397}\) In that way, the indigenous clergy contribute to the life of clericalism in the African soil. This is no surprise since the principal beneficiaries of this clericalist mentality, as Uzukwu argues, are the privileged clergy. In a way though, they could be called victims of circumstance because they are already “inserted within the highly centralized and autocratic world Church (of the Western rite).”\(^{398}\)

\(^{395}\) Ibid., nos. 103-104.


\(^{397}\) Ibid.

\(^{398}\) Ibid.
Despite the revolutionary changes instituted by Vatican II’s ecclesiology of the People of God, Elochukwu E. Uzukwu argues that little has been done to implement such an ecclesiology. Elochukwu Uzukwu further argues that a poor theology of baptism and a clericalized ministry has long denied the laity of their position and responsibility in the Church. He reasons that this patriarchal and highly clericalized model of ministry is what the Synod of Bishops for Africa set out to address. The African Church, and particularly the Nigerian Church, still operate with structures that merit its ecclesiology being called a “hierarchology,” which sees the bishop as an extension of the pope, the priests as extensions of the bishops, and the lay people as the commanded serfs, comparable to the feudalistic structure of the middle ages.

In the same manner, Congolese theologian Bénézet Bujo sees clericalism as prevalent and excessively pervasive in the African Churches, and unequivocally condemns it. Describing various ways by which the clericalistic mentality has manifested itself within the African Churches, Bujo says:

We cannot honestly speak of ‘a living Christian community’ when the laity are systematically excluded from any part in decision-making in their own Church; when decisions are taken by some clerical ‘fiat’; when bishops meet and make decisions affecting priests and people without consulting them, and sometimes without even informing them of the decisions. Bishops especially are in danger of regarding themselves as experts in all fields, and as above all advice, especially perhaps advice from priests, who are supposed to be their collaborators.

Bujo shows that many African bishops behave like tyrants at the diocesan level, a situation which is equally the case in the parishes when it comes to the attitude of many

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399 Ibid., 121.
400 Ibid., 105.
401 Ibid., 104.
402 Ibid.
403 See, Bénézet Bujo, African Theology in its Social Context, 90.
priests. A true vision of ministry, based on the renewed ecclesiology of Vatican II as it concerns the laity, can be realized if the Church in Africa will abandon all aspects of clericalism, episcopalism and the dominant pyramidal model of the Church in which the lay faithful are treated as mere consumers. He sees clericalism as dangerous for African Christianity, recognizing that: “A priest or a bishop can turn into a lifelong oppressor of the ecclesial community, effectively dechristianizing it.” He therefore pleads for “the destruction of all clericalism and all episcopalism,” and traces of it in the Church.

Based on his own assessment of the current patterns of leadership and authority within the African Church, A. E. Orobator sees clericalism as a style of leadership which makes possible the general lack of the laity’s participation in the mission of the Church, with its resultant effect being the stifling of creativity and the fostering of alienation of different groups and people from the Church. He defines clericalism “as the obsessive and excessive monopoly of power, initiative and control of the ecclesial community based on one’s membership in the class of ordained ministers.”

Adrian Hastings suggests that the way out of this current situation of authority, and its application within the leadership principle in the African Church, is to declericalize the Church. Hence, he opines: “To save the Church in Africa today we have, more than anything else, to declericalize her. We have to declericalize the liturgy…. We have to declericalize Scripture…. We have to declericalize parish organization…. We

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404 Ibid., 89-90.
405 Ibid., 97-98.
407 Ibid.
have to declericalize the apostolate…. We have to declericalize marriage…. Finally, and most difficult of all, we have to declericalize the ministry.\textsuperscript{408}

Despite the growing awareness of the revolutionary teachings of Vatican II’s ecclesiology on the full and active participation of all the faithful in the pastoral life and mission of the Church, the legitimate diversity of ministries as a sign of the Spirit who “shares his gifts as he wills for the common good,”\textsuperscript{409} the Nigerian Church leadership structures are still predominately clergy-dominated. These structures are still branded by a form of clerical imperialism that has inhibited the laity’s ability to innovate, and has stunted the growth of the laity’s involvement in the mission of the Church. The exercise of clericalism in the Nigerian Church hierarchy was recently exhibited by a retired Nigerian Catholic bishop, while addressing a group of candidates for the Catholic priesthood. He said: “We are the Church, you are not the Church; the Church speaks, you listen; we talk, you do the listening; we give directives, you obey; you are there, we are here; we send you, you go.”\textsuperscript{410} This type of language as expressed in this style of leadership mentality represents an authoritative figure who cannot instil or encourage mutual solidarity and participation—lay and ordained—in the evangelizing mission of the Nigerian Church.

In some dioceses and parishes in Nigeria, it is surprising that there are no such structures of discernment and decision-making such as diocesan and parish pastoral councils. Granted that in many dioceses and parishes too, such structures exist. But, it is also observable that these councils are manipulated or used for the interests of their pastors. It is equally true that in some parishes in Nigeria, the laity’s reduced role is only

\textsuperscript{409} See, \textit{Ad Gentes Divinitus}, no. 23.
\textsuperscript{410} See, Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, \textit{A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in Africa Churches}, 121.
to support and defend their pastors’ administrative plans or agenda, whether these are adequate and viable or not. Any resistance or indifference in opinion makes the lay faithful unacceptable to their pastors.\(^{411}\) In fact, the local churches are predominately run by the clergy. Thus, in the Igboland of Nigeria for instance, the pejorative name for the Catholic Church is “\textit{Uka Fada},” meaning, “the priest’s Church.”\(^{412}\) The full recognition of lay participation in the mission and life of the Church as far as some local churches in Nigeria are concerned, is still yet to be appreciated.

3. 1. 2 Paternalism and the “Sacred Power” of the Roman Catholic Church

The term “Paternalism” derives from the Latin “\textit{Pater},” meaning “Father.” The father-child relationship on which the term is based is one in which the father acted, provided, and dictated to the child within a moral framework that credited him as knowing what is good for the child. Thus, one might argue that paternalism is a policy or practice of treating or governing people in a fatherly manner, especially by providing for their needs without giving them their rights or responsibilities. In other words, it is to act for the good of another person without that person’s consent, as parents do for their children.\(^{413}\)

Paternalism, which is the exercise of authority, intended to express concerns and love to someone’s subordinate, but which indirectly strips one of responsibility and


\(^{412}\) ‘\textit{UKA FADA}’ is literally an interpretation or translation in Igbo language, which indicates a lack of genuine collaboration in the ministry of the Church between the clergy and the laity. Every pastoral initiative is taken over by the priest who acts in such a way that the laity has little or nothing to contribute as far as the ministry and governance of the Church are concerned. Cf. Hilary Odili Okeke, “Ecclesiastical Ministries for the Layperson in Nigeria: Problems and Prospects,” \textit{Studia Canonica} 30 (1996) 520-521.

freedom of choice under the cover of protection, has been viewed variously as one of the challenges of Vatican II’s theology of the laity. The misunderstanding of the relationship between the meaning, the nature and the exercise of the sacred order of the clergy, poses a similar challenge to Vatican II’s theology of the laity. Paternalism comes from a flawed understanding of service within the Christian community.

Paternalism, as one element among other constitutive elements of African traditional family values, makes the father of a family responsible for everything. Such an African cultural element places upon the father of a family a huge responsibility of making adequate provisions for all that is needed in the family. The constitutive ideas in understanding paternalism as applied here are that of domination and control which are exercised in two ways: by making provision of what is needed to the people and by a denial of the exercise of people’s responsibilities under the guise of protection. Paternalism is an exercise of power over those who are subordinate.

Paternalism is another phenomenon that describes the attitude of many Nigerian clergy in relation to the lay people. In as much as one acknowledges the fact that many of the Nigerian clergy are hard-working and conscientious about their responsibility towards the lay Christian faithful, there is still the hierarchical control and domination within the Nigerian Church that gives little or no opportunity for effective and responsible lay participation and involvement in the ministry of the Church. Despite the call by the Second Vatican Council, as well as the teachings of the first Special Assembly of African

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Synod of Bishops *Ecclesia in Africa*, on the need for the effective involvement of the laity in the mission of the Church by virtue of their baptismal rights and responsibilities, the lay Christian faithful are yet to be effectively integrated into the exercise of ministry. David D. Dodo, former chairperson of the Nigerian Laity Council identified this problem when he said:

> Here is the problem. For the layman [sic], the new dispensation brought about by Vatican II and the 1983 Code of Canon Law in terms of his definition and role in the Church is a welcome development and he is eager to be given the opportunity to perform; but for the priest, it is an intrusion, an invasion of traditional power, and he is not ready and willing to allow the layman [sic] to play his new role. This results in conflict of interest, confusion and suspicion.

Such paternalistic tendency does not give the laity the opportunity to exercise their own share in the ministry of the Church. As an example, the priest in Nigeria presumes that he knows everything. To him, he is so knowledgeable in the administrative/secretarial concerns of the parish life that the presence of the parish administrative secretary may not be required. He is a building designer and construction expert. His ingenuity in matters dealing with all financial matters and protection of the parish’s temporal goods, are significantly laudable. His paternal concern is so much that he feels that he is completely and absolutely indispensable in the various aspects of parish life and experience.

The clergy do not consider their actions as monopolizing and domineering, but rather as an exercise of their legitimate and exclusive rights and responsibilities. The lay people are therefore to be led as children who need only to be fed and protected, as a docile flock not asking questions, but having only to follow their shepherd, the clergy,

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cannot lead them astray. However, ministry is the ultimate responsibility of all the members of the Church. The laity are called to be effective collaborators, and co-responsible with the clergy in the exercise of ministry. This is because the renewal ecclesiology of Vatican II has shifted from a hierarchical model to a collaborative model with its integral and all-inclusive characteristics. Gabriel Odigbo, as quoted by George Ehusani, would say, “…no segment of the people of God has got a monopoly of the gifts of the Spirit and wisdom that have been assured to the whole people and family of God. Each member has a gift and right to contribute to the growth and well-being of the Church.”

Another aspect of the contemporary challenge of Vatican II’s theology of the laity is insufficient knowledge of the relationship between the nature and meaning and the exercise of the sacred power of the clergy, and the understanding of charisms as service within the Christian community. Sacred power as understood is the power which the priest received by virtue of his consecration or ordination to priesthood. This sacred power, which comes through ordination, confers on a priest, together with the office of sanctifying, the duty equally of teaching and ruling of the Christ’s faithful. However, the problem is on the “abuse and dangers” that come as a result of misunderstanding of this power in relation to the experience of sacred power in traditional African systems. Such misunderstanding of the sacred power has aided the paternalistic tendencies of much of the Nigerian clergy.

421See, Lumen Gentium, nos. 18-20.
422Ibid., no. 21.
423 Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches, 122.
The root cause of this exploitation of the “sacred power,” as Elochukwu E. Uzukwu sees it, “is intimately connected with the abuse of ‘sacred power’ and the misunderstanding of order and charism in Church-community.” This power according to Uzukwu, works in two ways; namely, it is based on the naked denial of the rights of the lay people simply on the foundation that the lay people neither belong to the clergy nor to the religious. Thus, all decisions are made by the clergy at their different levels of operation—parish, diocese as well as within the episcopal conference. “The deep respect for the sacred, awe and fear” associated “with the sacred and those in sacred ministry as inherited from African traditional religious culture,” as noted in Chapter Two of this study, help to restrain the lay people from resisting such exercise of the abuse of the sacred power. Secondly, the abuse of this sacred power according to Uzukwu is seen in another dimension as it concerns “the gift or charism of healing.”

This problem is clearly seen in the recent developments of the phenomenon of the healing ministry. The surge in healing ministry among some Nigerian clergy has indeed left some doubts in the minds of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria, with regard to the authenticity of such ministry. The rate at which the “gifted priests and charismatic” display their healing power in imitation of the new African Independent Churches leaves much to be desired. The exercise of this particular charism, and the exploitation of the sacred power associated with it, have had and still have significant implications for the theology of the laity within the Nigerian Church. Since some lay people are highly vulnerable as a result of sickness and unemployment, they are often led

424 Ibid.
425 Ibid., 122-123.
426 Ibid.
427 Ibid., 123.
428 Ibid.
to understand by the self-acclaimed “gifted priests” that the solution to their life’s situations could be reached by submission to various superstititious or manipulative techniques of their “priest healers.”  

As a consequence, this situation leaves the lay people in a state of passivity when seeking solutions to their problems in life. The healing charism, which intends to bring wholeness to the body and mind of the human person and freedom in mind and heart, instead results in a misplaced emphasis that brings with it syncretism, and confuses the lay Christian faithful. This also introduces disharmony among the agents of evangelization. It also engenders fear and distressful conditions on the lay faithful who, awed by the sacred gifts of ordained “priest-healers,” often compare them with the other priests who are supposedly lacking in such gifts. “The orderly exercise of charisms for the benefit of the community,” according to Uzukwu, “appears not to be uppermost in the minds of some healers.” This situation equally has resulted to a serious division among priests within the Nigerian Church, as some lay people have greater trust and confidence towards the “priest-healers” than the ordinary priests who are not gifted with such healing power.

The paternalistic attitude of the Nigerian Church hierarchy, as well as the exploitation of their sacred power, have sustained and encouraged the priestly life-styles of some Nigerian clergy. Such life-styles often do not encourage the laity to respond appropriately to their social responsibility.

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430 Ibid., 346.
3. 2 Priestly Life-Styles in the Nigerian Roman Catholic Church

By reason of their special vocation, it belongs to the laity to seek God’s kingdom by engaging and directing ordinary circumstances of family and social life according to the will of God (LG, 31). The practical goal of the Council’s social teaching in the complex and ever changing social, economic and political order, cannot be achieved without the active collaboration of the laity. In reality, Christians are to live out gospel values in their daily lives, and in union with their neighbours. Thus, the Council clearly declared that, “It is to the laity, though not exclusively to them, that secular duties and activity properly belong” (GS, 43). The role of the clergy in this realm is to provide enlightenment and spiritual nourishment. The Council further warned that the clergy should “be mindful to build up their daily behaviour and concern, an image of the Church capable of impressing men [sic] with the power and truth of the Christian message. By their words and example and in union with religious and with the faithful, let them show that the Church with all its gifts is, by its presence alone, an inexhaustible font of all those resources of which the modern world stands in such dire need” (GS, 43).

One of the greatest challenges facing the Nigerian Church in her social responsibility is its inability to translate her commitment to the issues of social justice into concrete and positive actions. As the 1971 Synod of Catholic Bishops indicates: “If the Church is to give witness to justice, she recognizes that whoever dares to speak to others about justice should also strive to be just in their eyes. It is necessary therefore, to examine with care the procedures, the possessions and the life-style of the Church.”

432 See, 1971 Synod of Catholic Bishops, De Justitia in Mundo, Justice in the World, no. 3. The document emphasizes that responsibility to God requires in this case as in all others, an awareness of the immediate moment and its needs, a willingness to reconstruct one’s own habits in order that the neighbour’s needs may be met, a readiness to depart from tradition in order that the great tradition of service may be followed.
One is therefore left to think that the flamboyant and ostentatious life-styles of some clergy make it impossible for them to address and challenge unjust social structures that are inflicting unimaginable suffering and pain on many Nigerian people.

Indeed, Nigerian society has become materialistic, and an inordinate desire for the acquisition of material things is affecting many Nigerian clergy and religious. In fact, there have been cases of priests extorting money from their parishioners. A good number of priests today tend to live lives of luxury that stand out clearly against the voluntary poverty that they have vowed. The need for expensive and luxurious cars and houses, and the involvement in many money-yielding projects, are sources and signs of materialism which directly or indirectly affect the clergy’s genuine commitment to pastoral assignments. Moreover, the rate at which priests’ birthdays and anniversaries of ordinations are orchestrated and celebrated in Nigeria is symptomatic of their incredibly luxurious and extravagant life-styles. Elochukwu E. Uzukwu was right when he said: “In Nigeria, the way money and wealth are employed as principal indicators of success among priests have reached a level of scandal.” Anthony Ekwunife confirmed this situation when he said:

Thus, in their life styles, one often fails to distinguish between the wealthy secular Nigerian or a business man and a priest. Hence, some of the indices of a successful priest in Nigerian society today are… lucrative secular job or a commanding job in

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It reminds the Church that “While the Church is bound to give witness to justice, she recognizes that anyone who ventures to speak to people about justice must first be just in their eyes” (JM 3). The document concludes by insisting that social responsibility in the form of redressing injustice must begin with and within the Church. “Hence, we must undertake an examination of the modes of acting and of the possessions and life style found within the Church itself” (JM 3). Cf. John Paul II, Ecclesia in Africa, no. 106. See also, George Omaku Ehusani, A Prophetic Church, 87-88.

ecclesiastical or secular sphere; an executive car…, a gigantic well furnished house….\textsuperscript{434}

It may not be an exaggeration to say that the life-style of some of the Nigerian priests has resulted in a serious wave of anti-clericalism, and armed robbery attacks being unleashed against them. These circumstances have generated among the lay Christian faithful a lack of trust and confidence in the life and ministry of some of the Nigerian priests. For example, some lay faithful tend to regard them as failures in their respective apostolates, and these priests have failed to bear credible witness to the kingdom of God in the prevailing socio-cultural conditions of their ministries.\textsuperscript{435}

This situation often makes some priests’ prophetic utterances meaningless because their credibility is challenged. Such priests find it extremely difficult to speak out in defence of the poor and the less-privileged of society for fear of losing support of the rich political class on which they have modelled their lives. This type of priestly life-style does not encourage the lay faithful to stand and defend the cause of justice because the clergy who are supposed to provide enlightenment and spiritual nourishment, as the Council rightly directed, are not committed to the quest for justice. As such, lay people are not being motivated to pursue actions that will bring about a society where justice and fairness will reign (\textit{GS}, 43). Thus, the important place of the laity in the social mission of the Church, calls for a thorough re-examination of the Nigerian clergy and their priestly life-styles in order to encourage the lay faithful to assume civic responsibilities, and to consider socio-political problems in light of the gospel.

3. 3 The Relationship between the Church Hierarchy and Lay Employees within the Nigerian Roman Catholic Church

Apart from the contradictions of the priestly life-style of some priests, the attitude of the Nigerian Church hierarchy towards the lay employees brings to mind another aspect that has not really encouraged the proper reception of Vatican II’s theology of the laity in the Nigerian Church. Effective action for the promotion of justice and peace must be a constant concern of the Church’s evangelizing mission. However, the non-involvement of laity in promoting justice stems from the fact that some priests through their actions have not really been able to enlighten the laity towards a change that can redress injustice, alleviate suffering and promote peace.

In as much as it is true that the Nigerian Church is struggling to be self-sustaining, there is clear evidence to show that among the local churches there is neglect of the vital and essential responsibility towards being fair and just to lay employees. In response to the inherent injustices in Nigeria, the Nigerian Church understands its mission of salvation as integral, and involving human development, justice and peace. While the courageous denunciation by the bishops of injustice in Nigeria is commendable, the Nigerian Church hierarchy needs to do more to engage Nigerian society. However, the hierarchical nature of the Nigerian Church itself raises more constraints and challenges in its efforts to engage society, and in the manner in which the clergy relates with its employees.

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Some Church workers do not receive commensurate remuneration, welfare, medical insurance or provision for retirement and pension. It is regrettable to note that catechists (who facilitate most of the priestly responsibilities like teaching and preparing candidates for various sacraments), stewards, cooks and parish secretaries are not given adequate salaries, which continually makes their assignment less-encouraging and less-motivating. Cognizant of the fact that the Nigerian Church has not been effective in responding to the issue of just wage for her workers, the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria declared:

The Church should take the lead not only in developing and spreading the concept of the just wage, but also take the lead in practising it based upon the tradition of the Church’s social teachings. In this way, they will give hope and increase support to many dedicated and long serving Church workers and their families.  

While the local churches in Nigeria cannot pay the minimum wages to their workers, often citing their usual claim of the unavailability of capital resources to meet the Church’s social responsibilities, one finds it very difficult to reconcile this poor support of the workers with the manifestation of affluence among the Nigerian Church hierarchy. This brings us to the idea that words are not enough to denounce injustices being perpetuated, but action must express this denunciation in more concrete ways. A. E. Orobator puts it well when he says: “the most serious drawback to the self-understanding of the Church in Nigeria shows in the obvious chasm between its declared prophetic mission and the means it adopts for translating it into effective actions at the service of the society.”

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439 Orobator, The Church as Family, 86.
If the Nigerian Church claims to stand for justice and solidarity with the marginalized of society, why is the Church not able to fulfil its social responsibility with its own members? How then can the Nigerian Church be assessed when concrete steps are not taken to address the issues concerning social injustices as they relate to unfair wage structures within the Church? The words of John Paul II to the African Synod of Bishops at their Special Assembly carry the impulse and reality of the issue in question: “The Churches in Africa are also aware that, insofar as their own internal affairs are concerned, justice is not always respected with regard to those men and women who are at their service. If the Church is to give witness to justice, she recognizes that whoever dares to speak to others about justice should also strive to be just in their eyes.”

Indeed, the apathy or passivity some Nigerian laity have shown in fulfilling this aspect of the evangelizing mission of the Church comes from the reality that the Nigerian Church hierarchy have not shown enough motivation or action towards a just wage with respect to their lay workers. Nonetheless, the only means to effect change in such an unjust situation is to encourage the laity to assume political and civic responsibilities. The question then remains as to where the Nigerian Church hierarchy fits into this picture.

3. 4 The Response of the Nigerian Church Hierarchy to the Laity’s Socio-Political, Economic and Cultural Responsibilities

The Church’s intervention in the social and political life of the human person is not meant to develop specific programmes of social action, but to encourage and guide

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the faithful in their social apostolate.\textsuperscript{441} “Every Christian has a vocation, a call to participate in re-building the earth through concrete deeds of justice, and to see politics not as a “dirty game”, but as a powerful instrument for the transformation of social structures and service to God and society.”\textsuperscript{442} Some theologians believe that the Church exists in and for the world and for the sake of the Kingdom of God,\textsuperscript{443} and can only be understood in terms of this mission. She is a community gathered in response to the invitation to be the Body of Christ, with the specific mission of proclaiming the Good News, and building the Kingdom of God.

Based on this understanding, Paul Lakeland argues that the Church’s mission involves proclaiming human solidarity, and stimulating the human community to work for the proper well-being of the world.\textsuperscript{444} It also demands speaking against all societal ills that undermine human solidarity, as well as confronting the current problems of the world. It is in this sense that Gerald Foley maintains that the mission of the Church is one of service to the community; and scripturally, it remains antecedent to community since it

\textsuperscript{441} Cf. \textit{Lumen Gentium}, no. 36: With regard to this form of apostolate, the Council Fathers gave this invitation: “Let the lay faithful by their combined efforts remedy the institutions and conditions of the world when the latter are an inducement to sin, that all such things may be conformed to the norms of justice, and may favour the practice of virtue rather than hindering it. By so doing, they will infuse culture and human works with a moral value.” See also, John Paul II, \textit{Christifideles Laici}, no. 51. See, Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria, \textit{Manual of the Laity}, nos. 231-232. Cf. Alexius O. Makozi, “Opening Address at the National Seminar on Church and Politics for Justice and Peace Co-Coordinators at St. Peter and Paul Major Seminary, Bodija, Ibadan, 8\textsuperscript{th}-12\textsuperscript{th} July, 1991,” Livinus Ukah, ed., \textit{National Seminar on Church \& Politics in Nigeria} (Lagos: Derio Ventures, 1991) 9-10.


\textsuperscript{443} “The Kingdom, which is the realization of the will of God, comes into being wherever men live the Gospel, whether explicitly or implicitly. When the reality of the Gospel takes hold, a genuinely human community begins to appear. There is peace, freedom, charity, justice, and the untrammelled pursuit of truth. The Church exists to promote these values, to be a herald of the future of [hu] mankind, to be kind of ‘preview of coming attractions.’” See, Richard P. McBrien, “A Theology of the Laity,” \textit{American Ecclesiastical Review} 160 (1969) 73, 85.

\textsuperscript{444} Paul Lakeland, \textit{The Liberation of the Laity: In Search for an Accountable Church}, 229.
is intrinsic to the sense of vocation.\textsuperscript{445} The communities to which the Church’s mission is directed are the Christian community and the entire social community.

Thus, the Church’s mandate over faith and morals obliges her to keep the teaching of Christ intact, and to preserve all that is good in the tradition handed down from the Apostles through the ages. Since it is the people, and not stones and bricks that make up the Church, the Church has to be concerned with both spiritual and temporal life. The Church stays near to guide and protect the human person in all aspects of his/her life, be it religious, social, economic, cultural and political. This is why the Church has to be involved in the integral development of the human person, and in the secular society in which he/she lives.\textsuperscript{446} “It is exactly for this purpose that papal social encyclicals, beginning with the Encyclical \textit{Rerum Novarum} of Pope Leo XIII, stated that the Church has shown her genuine concern about the situational and temporal problems which Christians face as contemporaneous members of the ‘secular society.’”\textsuperscript{447} Some sort of response of the Nigerian Church hierarchy to the laity’s socio-political, economic and cultural responsibility\textsuperscript{448} becomes imperative.

However, our concern in this section of study is to evaluate how the Nigerian Church hierarchy have assisted and allowed the laity to be partners in the Church’s collective voice in challenging some socio-political, economic and cultural problems that

\textsuperscript{445} Gerald Foley, \textit{Empowering the Laity} (Kansas: Sheed & Ward, 1986) 52.
\textsuperscript{448} See, \textit{Gaudium et Spes},” no. 43. “It is to the laity that secular duties and activities properly belong.” Cf. \textit{Apostolicam Actuositatem}, no. 13. The laity have the duty and responsibility to infuse a Christian spirit into the mentality, customs, laws and structures of the community in they live. See also, Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria, \textit{Manual of the Laity}, no. 231.
are preventing the laity from fulfilling their secular mission. In other words, how has the Nigerian Church hierarchy involved the lay people in seeking common solutions to social concerns of the laity? Are the laity given equal voice with the Nigerian Catholic bishops in finding appropriate response to socio-political issues affecting the laity?

Hence, “the joys and the hope, the grief and anguish of” the lay people in Nigeria, especially the poor and the marginalized, “are the joys and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well.” 449 This universal Church concern, as stated above, also became a recent concern of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria as they maintained, “We are yet to build a nation where people dwell in security, but we have a country where life and property are constantly exposed in danger.” 450 The bishops recall that corruption and the theft of public funds have remained unabated, despite their call for prayers for the end of such things. 451

Nevertheless, it is undoubtedly clear that the Nigerian Catholic hierarchy has always played a significant role in the process of nation building since the beginning of Nigeria’s political independence on October 1, 1960. They have continually shown a more visible form of ecclesial political involvement, in exercising their responsibility as authentic teachers of faith and morals, by speaking in defense of truth, justice and morality in the social order. Nigerian bishops, individually and collectively, have sought to contribute their opinions where appropriate and necessary, on issues pertaining to the common good of all Nigerians, and to the building up of the country. They have rightly observed that Nigeria as a nation is sick and “profoundly distressed, and even

451 Ibid.
From the early 1960s to the 1990s, the Nigerian Catholic bishops produced several social documents dealing with the issues of social justice affecting the lives of so many Nigerians. According to the bishops, Nigerians are finding it increasingly difficult to be proud of their nation. Nigerians are consistently subjected to shady or dubious politics, programs or systems. Bribery, corruption and fraud are on the increase. The leadership classes, the military, and civilians have not given proper attention to the problems of the society. Women are placed in an “excessively inferior situation” within the Nigerian society, and their dignity is not respected. There is perceived, widespread dilapidation of essential infrastructures such as roads, schools, hospitals and public utilities, and continued tensions, conflicts and conflagration, based on ethnic or religious affiliations.

The enumeration of the above social problems of the society by the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria represents the unflinching commitments of the Nigerian Catholic hierarchy towards the support and enthronement of justice within the Nigerian society where the laity are being called to exercise their social responsibility. In moments of great national crisis, especially a year prior to the Special Assembly of the African Bishops and the annulment of the June 12, 1993 election, the Nigerian bishops passionately appealed to Nigerians to exercise patience in the face of apparent tension.

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453 Ibid., 55-74.
454 Ibid., 11.
455 Ibid., 21-22.
and anxiety.\textsuperscript{457} With the political impasse of the late military President of Nigeria, General Sani Abacha (1994-1995), the Nigerian bishops sought the assistance of God through the composition of the “Prayer for Nigeria in Distress,”\textsuperscript{458} a prayer which really helped to sustain the hope of the people. Another prayer was composed by the Nigerian Catholic Bishops’ Conference titled: “Prayer against Bribery and Corruption in Nigeria.” This prayer captures the collective intention of the Nigerian Catholic bishops regarding the corrupt nature of the political elites. It reads as follows:

Father in heaven, you always provide for all your creatures. So that all may live as you have willed. You have blessed our country Nigeria with rich human and natural resources to be used to your honour and glory and for the well-being of every Nigerian. We are deeply sorry for the wrong use of these your gifts and blessings through acts of injustice, bribery and corruption, as a result of which many of our people are hungry, sick, ignorant and defenceless. Father, you alone can heal us and our nation of this sickness. We beg you, touch our lives and the lives of our leaders and people so that we may all realize the evil of bribery and corruption and work hard to eliminate it. Raise up for us God-fearing people and leaders who care for us and who will lead us in the path of peace, prosperity and progress. We ask this through Christ our Lord, Amen.\textsuperscript{459}

From the tone of this prayer, one can understand and appreciate the distressful nature of Nigeria. At the beginning of this millennium up until the present moment, the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria has not ceased to show serious commitment to issues relating to the social conditions of the Nigerian people. It should be said that the above cursory examination of the bishops’ utterances indicates that the Church possesses an appreciable awareness of the social context of the laity’s mission. One equally discovers

\textsuperscript{458} Ibid., 313.
the unmistakable and consistent efforts of the Nigerian Catholic hierarchy when responding to the socio-political, economic and cultural situations of Nigerian society.

Despite the courageous efforts and appeals of the Nigerian Catholic hierarchy acting “as conscience of the nation, a Church that highlights the evils of society,” it appears that their words are yet to find adequate and appropriate expressions within the Nigerian situation. A. E. Orobator sees the bishops’ enumeration of the ‘social ills’ in their pronouncements, as words without concrete action. Thus, he suggests a certain weakening of perspective as well as an inability of the Nigerian bishops to understand the situation in creative ways, which might have helped to generate more effective responses to the issues at hand.460 In his study of the Nigerian Church, George Ehusani, former secretary to the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria, passionately argued that Nigeria needs a prophetic Church whose pronouncements should not appear to be only empty words that could never be followed up by action. Rather, it should be a Church whose words should be translated into concrete action. Thus, he regrets that in spite of pronouncements that sporadically come from the Nigerian bishops, no serious effort to act has been demonstrated:

What is clear to many however is that the Church’s participation in social transformation has remained in a large measure on the level of social analysis that is unaccompanied by social action, except of course that type of action that is equivalent to providing succour to the oppressed while letting the oppressor go free to continue his exploits…. When it comes to prophetic confrontation with unjust social structures; when it comes to challenging the evil status-quo, the social teaching of the Church does not seem to have “taken flesh” in the Nigerian context. The public statements of the hierarchy have remained largely on the level of pious exhortations, passionate appeals and benign denunciations, but lacking any practical gestures of solidarity with the oppressed and distraught with the oppressor. The Nigerian Church cannot be

said to have really done much that will amount to confrontation with the unjust and inhuman regimes that have plagued this land for the greater part of her life as a nation.\textsuperscript{461}

From this therefore, one sees the communiqués of the Nigerian Catholic bishops as being repetitive, endless recitations of social ills, a constant repetition of unchanging woes and distress. Their prophetic responsibilities or missions seem to be exhortations that have little or no impact on reality.

As a true prophetic Church, whose responsibility calls her to speak out and dismantle the unjust social structures that prevent the exercise of human rights and privileges among the people of God,\textsuperscript{462} the question arises: how far have the Nigerian bishops involved the lay people in this struggle to respond to these social ills of the society?

A case at hand where the Church has failed to translate her prophetic utterance into concrete action by involving the laity is in the recent removal of the oil subsidy in one of the most populous countries of Africa by the Federal Government of Nigeria. The industrial action, which the Labour Union embarked upon on January 9, 2012, was a protest against this subsidy removal which raised the prices of all essential commodities, resulting in the impoverishment of many people, especially the poor masses of the most vulnerable in Nigerian society. However, while other non-religious organizations were raising their voices to reject these injustices, the Nigerian Catholic Bishops’ Conference did not make any public statements or involved the lay people through the Catholic Laity Council of Nigeria to denounce such awful distortions of human rights and privileges. This unfortunate situation begs the question of how the Nigerian Church can be true to its

\textsuperscript{461} See, George Omaku Ehusani, \textit{A Prophetic Church}, 108-109.

\textsuperscript{462} Ibid.
social mission or responsibility towards the laity, if the Church leadership keeps silent amidst the turbulent nature of the Nigerian society, where the laity are called to exercise their responsibility. The Church in Nigeria should not be seen as being neutral or indifferent in the face of awful deprivation of human rights and freedom.

Thus, if the Church in Nigeria in this present situation is true to her prophetic call and responsibility towards the laity, as far as her social ministry is concerned, the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria should not wait for any directive from any quarter in order to authentically respond to the demands of the moment. In the context of the social and political oppression of Nigerians, can one really affirm that the Nigerian Church hierarchy have played her prophetic role? What prevents the Nigerian Church leadership from organizing and actively directing civil resistance and mass protests via the laity as occasion or circumstance demands, in order that the oppressors may experience certain challenges from the masses of this great nation? What prevents the Nigerian Church hierarchy from associating with any available social justice, humanitarian and human rights groups in pulling their resources together in order to challenge institutions or individuals that perpetuate these unjust social structures?

Granted that over the last fifty years, the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) acting through their national organization, like their counterparts elsewhere, have spoken out forcefully and frequently on political, social, and economic matters through their collective declarations. The Nigerian bishops have not fully involved the laity through the platform of the Catholic Laity Council of Nigeria in this direction. The proliferation of such socio-political judgements without the involvement of the laity is still an expression of clericalism.
Even though Nigerian hierarchy have had opportunities to address socio-political problems of Nigerian society, the way Nigerian Catholic hierarchy have addressed these problems within the Nigerian Church and society exhibits a modern clericalist mentality at work. There is no doubt that Nigerian Catholic bishops are part of the Nigerian Church. The Nigerian hierarchy have equally continued to play a leading role in the Church’s affairs. To speak against the social ills within the Nigerian society is not an exclusive priority of the Nigerian hierarchy. However, lay people should be given an equal opportunity and voice in matters concerning social issues. To suppose otherwise reflects the ecclesiology of clericalism.\footnote{Cf. Russell Shaw, \textit{To Hunt, To Shoot, To Entertain: Clericalism and the Catholic Laity}, 23.} It therefore implies that the Nigerian Church through her leaders should not be the only voice in pursuit of social emancipation of the Nigerian people and society. Thus, the Nigerian hierarchy should give equal opportunity to the lay people while addressing issues and problems relating to the laity’s social responsibility. The voice of the laity should be heard at the same time. There should be no hierarchal control on issues or problems where the laity’s involvement could be employed in order to find appropriate solutions to the laity’s social responsibility within the Nigerian Church and society.

As it stands presently on the socio-political issues of the Nigerian laity, the Catholic bishops judge and prescribe, and the Catholic laity remain silent. On socio-political issues, the Catholic laity lack any corporate mechanism to formulate and express their views except insofar as the laity’s concerns or problems are interpreted, mediated, and articulated by their clerical leaders (like the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria). The immediate need is not for the clerical hierarchy to simply walk away from socio-political commitments, but for the Church hierarchy to make room or opportunity
for lay people to share in the process by which the Church political agenda is hammered out, communicated, and implemented, on an equal footing. The implication of this situation is clear. Clerical interventions in political and economic affairs without the collaboration of the laity discourage the lay people from carrying out their responsibility to shape secular culture in the light of the Gospel. As a result, liberal secularism, not Christianity, is the dominant culture-forming force in the Nigerian context.\(^{464}\)

However, to achieve the objective of assisting the lay people to realize their socio-political responsibilities and to respond appropriately to the ecclesiological and the social challenges and implications for Vatican II’s theology of the laity within the context of the Nigerian Church, some cultural, sociological and socio-political factors responsible for this situation must first be overcome.

3. 5 Socio-Political and Cultural Constraints to the Implementation of Vatican II’s Theology of the Laity within the Nigerian Roman Catholic Church

The main socio-cultural and political factors responsible for the ineffective reception and implementation of Vatican II’s theology of the laity within the Nigerian Church can be analyzed under four categories: Nigerian culture and ministerial authority; early Christian missionary models of priestly ministry; Nigerian politics and civil society; and the historical context of the Nigerian Church at the time of Vatican II. In this section, I will deal with each of these in what follows.

3. 5. 1 The Nigerian Culture and Ministerial Authority

An important factor that has assisted in reinforcing the authority of the clerics in the Nigerian Church in relation to the non-reception of the theology of the laity is the

\(^{464}\) Ibid., 24.
people’s sense of the sacred. As noted in Chapter Two, Nigerian people, like all African people, are traditionally and deeply religious. Pope (Emeritus) Benedict XVI testified to this African sense of the sacred shortly after his 2009 pastoral visit to Africa. Their perception of reality around them is always influenced by their traditional African religious world-views, even after they become Christian. Despite the conversion of a large number of people to Christianity, many of them still retain in some form elements of African traditional religion.

In the traditional religion, priests and priestesses of the deities are revered because of the vital role which they play for the community through their mediating function between the divine and the human world. Thus, as persons who mingle with the “gods”, and can “hear” and “understand” their voices and discern their will for humans, the priests and priestesses have a dominant place in African traditional religion. In performing their cultic functions their word is like the word of God. This African sense of sacred did not end with the advent of the Christian religion, instead the people naturally

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466 Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI spoke of his experiences concerning the Church in Africa after his 2009 pastoral visit. Herein he says: “I plan to speak at greater length about this significant pastoral experience at the general audience on Wednesday, but I cannot pass up welcoming the present occasion to manifest the deep emotion that I experienced meeting the Catholic communities and the people of Cameroon and Angola. There were two aspects—both very important—that above all made an impression on me. The first is the visible joy in the faces of the people, the joy of feeling part of the family of God, and I thank the Lord for having been able to share moments of simple choral and faith-filled celebration with great numbers of brothers and sisters. The second aspect is precisely the strong sense of sacred that one breathes in the liturgical celebrations, a characteristic common to all the people of Africa, which I could say emerged in every moment of my stay among those dear people.” See, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, “On the Challenges Facing Africa: It is No Longer Time for Words and Speeches,” http://www.zenit.org/article-25309?1=english; Wednesday Papal Audience Report (March 25, 2009) Accessed on March 26, 2013.
transferred the same awe and reverence accorded to their traditional religious intermediaries to the Christian clergy.\textsuperscript{467} Thus, A. Ekwunife was right when he said: “Nigerians with rich religious traditions, which gave profound respect to their traditional religious specialists, especially priests/priestesses of divinities, projected the same respect for the Christian missionary clergy and their immediate successors.”\textsuperscript{468}

The traditional sense of the sacred, now accorded to the Christian clergy, promoted the sacralization of Church authority. This means that the activities, decisions and positions of those in authority in the Church tend to go unquestioned and unchallenged by the laity, whose disposition towards the Nigerian clergy is that of awe and respect, modelled on their experience of cultic leaders in African traditional religion.\textsuperscript{469}

However, it is essential to understand that the range of spiritual authority of the priest in African traditional religion cannot be compared with the range of his authority in the Catholic Church. This is because in traditional religion the spiritual authority of the priest is limited to matters of religious worship. The priest is the recognized custodian of a sacred grove or place of worship of the people. He exercises his cultic function either at a regular date for the community or on daily basis for his clients.\textsuperscript{470} The cultic works of the African traditional priest or priestess is mainly regarded as service to the community.

\textsuperscript{467} See, Peter Okafor, “Ecclesiology of Vatican II: Towards a Theology of Communion for the Nigerian Church,” 20.


\textsuperscript{469} Ibid. Further details concerning the sacralization of the Church authority, reference can be made to the comparative study highlighted by G. Ikeobi’s article on “The Healing Ministry and Igbo Christianity,” Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, ed., Religion and African Culture: Inculturation—A Nigerian Perspective, 191-208.

These works include: prayer and purification when an evil act is committed and sacrifice in cases of sickness or danger that threatens the human person. He makes his/her living from such service.\(^{471}\) He is not responsible for the making of moral laws in the community, which owe their existence to the traditions received from the ancestors. Rather, the elders through ancestral traditions, determine when there is a breach of the moral code of the people, and together with the community they apply the necessary punishment. The role of the priest or priestess in the African traditional context is simply to reinstitute the harmony of the group that is troubled by transgression of its moral laws through sacrifices, purification and propitiatory rites with the aim of placating the spirits.\(^{472}\)

In contrast to this, the spiritual authority of the hierarchy in the Catholic Church is wide-ranging, as a bishop in his diocese has all the three powers of governance, namely juridical, legislative and executive though all are in the confines of Canon Law.\(^{473}\) A similar situation is applicable to the bishop of Rome and the college of bishops when making decisions on doctrinal and moral questions, which affect the Christian community as the People of God,\(^{474}\) an authority that the priests in traditional religion do not have. The magisterium or teaching authority of the Catholic Church claims the authority to interpret historical revelation and to determine moral norms. Hence, the hierarchical authority of the Church exerts a great deal more influence or power on the life and conduct of the believer than does the priest or priestess in African traditional religions.

\(^{471}\) Ibid., 109.
\(^{474}\) See, Lumen Gentium, nos. 22-24.
The traditional sense of sacred accorded to the African traditional religious specialists, especially the priests/priestesses of divinities, subsequently becomes transferred to the Christian clergy and promotes the sacralization of the Church authority. Thus, the decisions or activities of those in authority in the Church remain unquestioned by the laity. As a result, the opinions of the lay people are not respected and collaboration and co-responsibility in the mission of the Church become more difficult since the authority of the Christian clergy is feared and respected.

3. 5. 2 Early Christian Missionary Models of the Priestly Ministry

The advent of the early Christian missionaries in Nigeria between the 15th and 18th centuries and finally in the 19th century,\(^ {475}\) greatly influenced the nature and exercise of ecclesiastical authority within the Nigerian Church. Missionaries, who came to Nigeria, as in other places in Africa, were burdened with inherited prejudices that manifested a strict intolerance towards the indigenous culture. The depictions of the Nigerian culture by the missionaries as primitive and the religion as fetishism and heathenism underscore that intolerance among these European missionaries.\(^ {476}\) These missionaries brought with them an ecclesiology that was centred on the clergy and only indirectly on the lay people. The ecclesiological mind-set of the period was viewed as hierarchically structured. The understanding of the Catholic priesthood and ordination were seen as a divine arrangement for the rule of the Church.\(^ {477}\)


With this hierarchical mentality of the Church, and combined with the colonial experience of the Nigerian people, the Nigerian people placed these missionaries in high esteem. Furthermore, the people of Nigeria even accorded the missionaries more superior categories than the missionaries gave themselves. Thus, with this kind of relationship, a separation was introduced between the missionaries and the people, who subsequently developed a sense of apathy as a result of such a mentality of inferiority. Without losing sight of the numerous achievements of the early Christian missionaries, as already seen in Chapter Two of this study in terms of faith implantation and growth, it is obvious that the missionaries bequeathed to the Nigerian Church a form of ecclesiological or ministerial leadership that was juridical, authoritarian and institutional. 478

Indeed, David D. Dodo vividly captured this ecclesiological mentality of the foreign Christian missionaries at the early stages of Christianity in Africa: “The priest enjoyed absolute power and the layman [sic] obeyed him as if the priest is God. The layman [sic] was to be seen and not heard. He was not regarded as a full member of the Church but an object of pastoral care who had no business in the administration of the Church.” 479 This inherited ecclesiological form of leadership or ministry, devoid of love, solidarity, care and warmth in relationship, is still present and influencing the Nigerian Church in her various apostolates.

3. 5. 3 Nigerian Politics and Civil Society

As stated in Chapter Two of this study, the socio-political, economic and cultural environment in which the Church is being called to exercise her evangelizing mission

also influences the Nigerian Church’s reception of Vatican II’s theology of the laity. The Church as we know it exists in the world,\textsuperscript{480} and evangelizes in various political and civil contexts.

As a developing nation with great potential, Nigeria still has a weak record of human rights and democracy. Despite gaining political independence in 1960, the nation has been dominated by a military dictatorship for about twenty-nine of its fifty-three years of independence. During this period of military administration human rights were seriously undermined. In many of the states of Nigeria there was little or no place for the rule of law. The nation suffered unimaginable instability in every aspect of her existence—politically, socially, economically and psychologically. Some considerable progress has been made in terms of democracy with the present civilian government, which began in 1999, however circumstances have not changed radically.

Indeed, there is still evidence of bad governance and the abuse of human rights, which includes the persecution of political opponents, kidnappings and the manipulation of the electoral system. Such a political climate of limited freedom makes the absolute power of the national political elites and their authorities remain unquestionable. In this situation, the entire populace is drawn to apathy and passivity. On occasion, organized industrial action is carried out through the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) in order to protest official policies that undermine the fundamental rights and freedoms of the people. The government often turns deaf ears to the yearnings of the people and often times and seeks to proscribe such organized labour action. As a consequence, it stifles the growth of democracy and enthronement of the rule of law and justice.

\textsuperscript{480} Cf. \textit{Gaudium et Spes}, nos. 1 and 40.
However, one can observe recent and positive developments within the present Nigerian society that concern the power of the press. The active involvement of the Nigerian press in championing the cause of democracy, to such a level that the political authorities cannot ignore them, cannot be underestimated. Nigeria is blessed with many renowned and highly talented social critics and human rights crusaders who are capable of challenging structures that perpetuate and inflict injustices, and drawing international attention to the Nigerian situation. The present anti-corruption activities of the Federal Government of Nigeria are commendable and should be intensified as corruption in any nation is always detrimental to the cause of democracy.

This is the socio-political context in which the Church in Nigeria exists. In addition, the Nigerian Church is influenced by its socio-political environment with regard to the nation’s poor record of democracy. A careful assessment of the present leadership mentality within the Nigerian Church manifests some semblances with the attitude of the political elites or those in power. The Church hierarchy does not usually admit or allow any questioning. Hence, with such a leadership mentality, which the Church hierarchy inherited from the Nigerian political society, the people remain generally passive and ignorant. Highlighting such a sad and dark situation of the people in ignorance, Jude Uwalaka laments:

Ignorance, they say, is a disease that has afflicted most of our people even the so called literate ones, and which is responsible to a big extent for the sorrowful plight of the masses. It is ignorance of who their enemies are; ignorance of the source of their underdevelopment; ignorance of the subtle mechanism of exploitation and manipulations which have kept them where they are; ignorance of how they have been shamelessly used for the selfish interest of the privileged elite and politicians…, by surrendering their ballot power when they must have used it to
effect changes, or selling them so cheaply as if it is something so marginal in social and political calculation.\textsuperscript{481}

This quote explains the unfortunate situation in which the Church in Nigeria finds herself. Democracy as we know encourages the participation of all in a society. The aim of democracy is to enable the government to become the government of the people. The purpose of democracy is for the building up the people. Democracy is worth defending when it lives up to its ideals and features, as government of the people, by the people and for the people.\textsuperscript{482}

Participatory democracy creates a framework for improved protection of the people as well as mobilizes the people at the grassroots levels to be involved in choosing good democratic leaders. In effect, there is no genuine democracy when social justice is lacking in a human society. Democracy is not a means of manipulation of individual rights and freedom. Rather, democracy allows individuals and groups to express their own views on the duties and obligations imposed on them. In any participatory democracy, people are not compelled to obey without being heard or listened to. These are two fundamental human rights of the citizens whose expression is intrinsically connected with the term democracy. Democracy at the first level is an important opportunity to awaken people to play their civic roles and to become the social instruments of justice, peace and truth in human society. On a second level, democracy is not a passage to blind obedience, and it is not uncritical submission to authoritarianism and totalitarianism on the ground of religious faith, and democracy is neither slavery, for


we are no longer children of slavery, “for freedom Christ has set us free” (Gal. 5:1).\textsuperscript{483} Democracy as it is been practiced in Nigeria today and as an essential foundation of a human society is still experiencing many challenges.

Nonetheless, a radical revolution in this environment can also influence the way authority is exercised in the Nigerian Church. A turn to democracy will make the Catholic hierarchy responsible in the exercise of their ministerial authority, with sincere and conscious recognition of the place and role of the lay Christian faithful in the mission of the Church. This can also make the faithful equally more conscious of their rights and responsibilities. It must be said that the socio-political environment in which the Church today exists does not in any way justify clericalism, as the Church has the treasure of the gospel as the source and wellspring of its life. Similarly, the Church should not simply reproduce the social contracts and structures, since it has her origin in God. Democracy in the Church should not be manipulated and subordinated to any goal of a social-political organization. The Church is called, rather, to be a model to the society, and not vice versa.\textsuperscript{484}

3. 5. 4 The Historical Context of the Nigerian Church at the Time of Vatican II

In my consideration of the factors that have greatly affected the reception of Vatican II’s theology of the laity within the Nigerian Church and society, attention should be drawn to the ecclesiastical and historical circumstances of the Nigerian Church and society at the time of the Council. Adrian Hastings’ description of Vatican II’s reception

\textsuperscript{483} Ibid., 198-200.
in his seminal article, “The Council Came to Africa,”\textsuperscript{485} indicates the marginal involvement of the African bishops during the Council.\textsuperscript{486} Such marginal involvement, Hastings argued, affected the subsequent participation and implementation of the Council’s agenda within the African context, and still poses great obstacles to the ongoing post-conciliar reception of the Council’s teaching in Africa and particularly in Nigeria. One such significant area is the understanding of the mission and participation of the laity.\textsuperscript{487}

In the Council itself, the large majority of bishops representing Africa were still European missionaries. These episcopal representatives of the African Church had almost no theological advisers of their own, and were dependant on theologians of European descent, largely from Holland, Belgium, France and Germany. All other bishops at the end of the Council (1965) returned home, but those from Africa could not but notice that in some ways, while the Council was so opportune for their continent, it had hitherto hardly made any impact. It is clear, according to Adrian Hastings, that the Council Fathers—both in its leading bishops and their theologians—had the needs of Europe and North America far more in mind than those of Africa or Asia during the actual celebration of Vatican II. Thus, the African bishops returned home with various documents of the Council, only to begin to oversee clergy who were far less informed about the recent ecclesiological and theological developments in the Church than their counterparts in Europe, who were actively involved in the entire Council. The laity,


\textsuperscript{486} Ibid., 315-316. This is because of the fact that many of the African Churches were still missionary Churches represented by their expatriate bishops at the Council.

\textsuperscript{487} Ibid., 316-317.
according to Hastings, were even more uninformed. Yet, it is clear that the conditions in Africa and its Church still cry out for something to be done.\footnote{Ibid., 316-317.}

Historically, on no other continent did the call and celebration of the Council coincide quite neatly and sympathetically with a major process of secular change than in Africa. While political emancipation and independence from the colonial masters was going on, the celebration of the Council was taking place at the same time. 1960 was “the year of Africa”; more than a dozen countries of Africa became politically independent. While Nigeria achieved her independence in 1960, other countries followed: Tanzania in 1961, Uganda in 1962, Kenya in 1963, Malawi and Zambia in 1964. In other words, the excitement of the Council was closely paralleled by a secular excitement at this time. The announcement of the Council made by Pope John XXIII in 1959 coincided with the time when European statesmen were declaring to colonial Africa that its independence was in sight.\footnote{Ibid., 315-316. Cf. Gabriel A. Ojo, \textit{Catholic Laity in Nigeria: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow}, 116-117.}

All of these historical and ecclesiological factors and struggles still have serious repercussions within some of the African Churches, and particularly within the Nigerian Church as far as the Councils’ reception is concerned. Some countries in Africa are still affected by the remnants of these ecclesiological and colonial histories which impede their growth and maturation. The missionaries in Nigeria were regarded as emissaries of the colonialists who had no regard for some Nigerian culture. As a result of such collaboration with the colonialists, L. Mbefo asserts that “evangelical work has been seen as a means used by the colonists to subjugate the Africans and thus render them porous to
European exploitations. Many of the Nigerian people were marginalized with the advent of colonialism and Christianity. All these circumstances of the Nigerian Church and society at the time of the actual celebration of the Council question the appropriate understanding and appreciation of some doctrinal issues discussed within the Council. This is because the Nigerian Church was not properly represented at the Council, but also the Church is still suffering from the aftermath of the combined efforts of colonialists and their Christian missionaries in the exploitations of the Nigerian society and culture.

These ecclesiological and historical experiences of the Nigerian Church question the on-going reception of Vatican II’s theology of the laity within the Nigerian Church context. In effect, African/Nigerian concerns and problems were not part and parcel of the discussions held within the Council because African/Nigerian representatives were mainly Europeans bishops who were not familiar with African cultural realities and problems. On the other hand, African Churches have been viewed, and continued to be viewed by the Western world, as dependent and passive in relation to their contributing voice in discourses affecting ecclesiological issues and concerns within the “World Church”, using the exact words of Karl Rahner. In other words, Africans have continually allowed themselves to be defined by some elements of neo-colonialism to such an extent that they are still being described as a dependent Church—lacking the ability to be a self-sustaining and self-reliant Church. This perception has served to make Christianity a foreign religion within the African context, and has greatly affected the “reaffirmation of

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African culture and identity” which was “denied by Western colonialism and the Christian missionary evangelism.”

Granted that the subsequent growth and development within the Nigerian Church and society may have lessened the impact of these setbacks, with regard to the on-going reception of Vatican II’s theology of the laity, there is still the need to remember that the remnants of these ecclesiastical and historical experiences of the Nigerian Church and society may not have been completely overcome by time and history.

3.6 Conclusion

It is important to recall in this concluding section of my study that the Nigerian Church, situated within its ecclesiological, socio-political, economic and cultural context, is already undergoing various challenges, yet positive shifts in perspective on the theology and mission of the lay people have also been recorded.

In light of what has been considered so far, one can now identify elements of a contemporary renewed or re-invigorated ecclesiology and theology of the laity. One can better formulate an ecclesiology with a framework and concrete applications that are capable of highlighting and exploring the dynamic relationships that exists between a community and its members. The aim of such an ecclesiology would be to provide an appreciable understanding of the Church which focuses on the ways in which the activity of its members is intrinsic to the community’s self-realization as the People of God and

Body of Christ. Similarly, this ecclesiology would need to envisage a community where the participation or involvement of all the members is guaranteed. This is the focus of the next chapter.
Chapter Four

Towards an Integral Ecclesiology of Vatican II’s Theology of the Laity in the Nigerian Catholic Church

4. Introduction

This final chapter considers what I designate as an authentic or inculturated response to the reception and non-reception of Vatican II’s theology of the laity within the Nigerian context. In the previous chapters, I have dealt with the problems and tensions associated with the identity and participation of the laity in the mission of the Church. These problems are seen as unresolved questions regarding the exact nature and capacity of lay participation in the life and mission of the Church, and the relationship of such lay participation in relation to the clergy.

I argue that the challenges of Vatican II’s theology of the laity in the Nigerian Church and society are symptomatic of deeper ecclesial problems. Despite the emphasis of Vatican II on the equality and dignity of all the baptized, the Nigerian Church’s post-conciliar reception of Vatican II’s teachings on the theology of the laity has failed to fully develop and actuate the laity into its life and mission. Precisely, these situations have evolved as a result of biases embedded in the Nigerian Church structures and ecclesial cultures, as well as in the theologies, customs, disciplines, and laws that support them.

The contemporary challenges faced by Vatican II’s theology of the laity in the Nigerian Roman Catholic Church today call for a Church that is not only participatory, but also prophetic, as well as a Church that engages and is in constant solidarity with the people of God.492 Such an ecclesiology should encourage active involvement of the laity

in the mission of the Nigerian Church and society and, at the same time, foster the spirit
of ecclesial communion and solidarity as forms of Christian witness and ministry.

“Challenges,” as Pope Francis stated recently in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii
Gaudium*, “exist to be overcome!” Such challenges concerning the theology of the laity
within the Nigerian Church invite us to greater creativity in our search for suitable ways
of responding to the message of the gospel in our reception of Vatican II within the
Nigerian context.

4.1 An Urgent Call for a Sincere Reception of the Integral Ecclesiology of Vatican II

Aware of the fundamental principles of the teachings of Vatican II and the
subsequent theological trends after Vatican II, one is faced with no other alternative than
to opt for a total ecclesiology, a term whose origin is traceable to Yves Congar.

Considering the issue of the theology of the laity from the post-conciliar perspective,
Yves Congar asked in the third edition of his work, *Jalons pour une théologie du laïcat*:

“Cannot all present-day efforts be characterized by a search for plenitude and
integration?” Seeking such integration calls us to reconsider the dominant ecclesiology
of Vatican II in a new dimension, which highlights the images of the Church as those of
the People of God and as a communion. These aspects of the Church’s identity have been
clearly noted in Chapter One of this study. The People of God image of the Church, as
chosen by Vatican II, corresponds to the new commitment of the Church to renew and
update its message based on the Council’s documents. The idea of the Church as People

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494 Cf. Yves Congar, *Lay People in the Church: A Study for a Theology of Laity*, xv-xvii. See also, Yves
of God permitted the Church to correct its one-sided pre-Vatican II hierarchical understanding of the Church. It enabled the Church to rediscover the sense of community through the Eucharist and the need of situating the place of authority of sacred ministers within the communion of the whole Church.

This sense of communion is first rooted in the Eucharist because the Eucharistic sacrifice, while always performed in a particular community, is never a celebration of that community alone. In fact, the community, in receiving the Eucharistic presence of the Lord, receives the entire gift of salvation and shows, even in its lasting visible particular form, that it is the image and true presence of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church:

This Church of Christ is really present in all legitimately organized local groups of the faithful, which, in so far as they are united to their pastors, are also quite appropriately called Churches in the New Testament. For these are in fact, in their own localities, the new people called by God, in the power of the Holy Spirit and as the result of full conviction (cf. 1 Thess. 1:5). In them the faithful are gathered together through the preaching of the Gospel of Christ, and the mystery of the Lord’s Supper is celebrated ‘so that, by means of the flesh and blood of the Lord the whole brotherhood [sic] of the Body may be welded together.’ In each altar community, under the sacred ministry of the bishop, a manifest symbol is to be seen of that charity and ‘unity of the mystical body, without which there can be no salvation.’ In these communities, though they may often be small and poor, or existing in the diaspora, Christ is present through whose power and influence the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church is constituted.496

Ecclesial communion, into which each individual is introduced by faith and by Baptism, has its root and centre in the Blessed Eucharist. Baptism is an incorporation into a body that the risen Lord builds up and keeps alive through the Eucharist, so that this body can truly be called the “Body of Christ”. The Eucharist is the creative force and source of

496 See, Lumen Gentium, no. 26.
communion among the members of the Church, because it unites each one of them with Christ himself: “Really sharing in the body of the Lord in the breaking of the eucharistic bread, we are taken up into communion with him and with one another. ‘Because the bread is one, we, though many, are one body, all of us who partake of the one bread’ (1 Cor. 10, 17).”

The rediscovery of a Eucharistic ecclesiology, though being of undoubted value, has sometimes placed unilateral emphasis on the principle of the local church. In such an approach, where the Eucharist is celebrated, the totality of the mystery of Church would be made present in such a way as to render any other principle of unity or universality non-essential. However, the unicity and indivisibility of the Eucharistic Body of the Lord implies the unicity of his mystical Body, which is the one and indivisible Church. The Church is both the local and the one (universal). From the Eucharistic centre arises the necessary openness of every celebrating community, of every particular church; by allowing itself to be drawn into the open arms of the Lord, it achieves insertion into his one and undivided Body. And through the Eucharistic sacrifice, the source and summit of the Christian life, the Christian faithful offer the divine victim to God through the part they play in the liturgical action. Strengthened by the body of Christ in the Eucharistic communion, the Christian faithful “manifest in a concrete way that unity of the People of God which this holy sacrament aptly signifies and admirably realizes.” In the Eucharistic celebration, the Christian community proclaims in word and celebrates in

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497 See, Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), Church Understood as Communion, no. 5. “Hence, the Pauline expression, the Church is the Body of Christ means that the Eucharist, in which the Lord gives us his Body and transforms us into one Body, is where the Church expresses herself permanently in most essential form. While present everywhere, she [sic] is yet only one, just as Christ is one” (Church Understood as Communion, no. 5).
498 Ibid., no. 11.
ritual and symbol its most profound reality, its truest identity as a people whose lives are being conformed to that of Christ by the celebration of the paschal mystery.

In order to realize this communion in another aspect, Vatican II asked for the creation of synodal organs of participation for the integration of both the entire clergy and the laity in the life and mission of the Church. Thus, the new image of the bishop projected here is that of a true servant who is in communion with his people. Based on this perspective, Vatican II sees the bishop as the visible source of unity and foundation of the particular church. The diocesan bishop is able to personify this unity and communion through the service of solidarity and synodality in his community. Hence, a bishop who bypasses the legitimate organs of consultation and synodality in order to run his own individual administrative procedure, in which all pastoral decisions are made by him, cannot be a true minister of unity and communion in his particular church.

The Nigerian Church needs to abandon her juridical and institutional ecclesiology with its authoritarian accent, and embrace the People of God ecclesiology of Vatican II, with all its emphasis on community, communion, solidarity, service and synodality in the particular church. This can be facilitated if the Nigerian clergy give priority to the pastoral character of their various ministries both in the parishes, as well as in the dioceses. By implication, the Nigerian Church’s present pastoral situation calls for the creation and reinforcement of the parish and diocesan pastoral councils where these councils are not in existence. Such development will help to empower and encourage more participation of the various lay associations in the various levels of decision making in the local churches.

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500 See, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 23.
Another dimension to the integral ecclesiology of Vatican II within the Nigerian Church can be linked to Edward Schillebeeckx’s observation that instead of seeking to identify the role of the laity in the Church theologically, the question should be: “What is the place of ministry in the ecclesial People of God?”

The correctness of this question, according to Leonard Doohan, is based on the fact that “lay persons do not belong to the Church, nor do they have a role in the Church. Rather, through baptism they are Church, and in union with Christ, their mission is the mission of the Church itself.” Vatican II stressed the rooting of all vocations in baptism, and spoke of the equality of all members of the Church because of their baptism. Indeed, the special call of God to human beings is the call to baptismal commitment. In other words, there is the need to renew our attention to the sacrament of baptism as a foundation for the understanding and appreciation of all ministries in the Church.

Through the sacraments of initiation, the faithful in union with others constitute Church and remain theologically challenged to live out their ecclesial identity in full. This implies that the Christian personality is, in essence, ecclesial. Being Church presupposes a continual struggle which constitutes the asceticism of the baptized. It equally entails living as a community in the world for the service of the world. Thus, as a baptized person, one is called to be and to live as a community of faith based on the Word, and on the freedom and love that Christ has gained for us. Whether one is a priest or a layperson, we all share the same life, the Christian life. Therefore, what truly matters

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503 See, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 32.
is not to one-sidedly focus on the lay mission, but to be consciously educated by who we are in baptism.⁵⁰⁵

As Christians, we must have mutual and sincere appreciation of the different ministries. Ministries in the Church are unique, each having its own contribution to the building up of the Church as the body of Christ. By virtue of one’s baptismal commitment, one is called to be a minister. Thus, respecting different ministries that build up the Church, one can be a minister to the world or a minister in the Church. Second Vatican Council speaks of this idea in terms of the “common priesthood of the faithful.”⁵⁰⁶ Whether one is a minister in the Church or to the world, the word “minister” expresses the ecclesial character of the person and manifests the one mission of all the people of God.

Because of the common identity of all the baptized as people of God, “the dividing line between various stations among Christians is not between clerical and lay, religious and secular, but between Christians and non-Christians.”⁵⁰⁷ One of the achievements of Vatican II was the reaffirmation that all Christians share a common bond.⁵⁰⁸ The Council stresses that every Christian is an active, responsible member of the Church. All are spiritual. All constitute the “Body of Christ.” Right from the early period, the Church has been an organized structure whose existence hinges on the basis of a rich variety of charisms, offices and ministries (cf. 1Cor 12, 4-31). Seen from this perspective, the Church is neither clerical nor laical. It is fundamentally an organized and diverse whole, a living communio. There should be practical understanding among clergy and

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⁵⁰⁶ Cf. Lumen Gentium, no. 10.
⁵⁰⁸ Cf. Lumen Gentium, Chapters II and V.
laity that all Christians are responsible for building up the Church. This can only be realized when the Church returns to an authentic relationship of communion rather than one of power and submission among the two groups of Christian faithful.

The emphasis should not be on the distinction between the constituent members of the Church, but on the edification of the Christian community and the fulfilment of the mission of the Church. It is a clear fact that the laity receive the grace of God and are also under the influence of the Holy Spirit. As there is a variety of people, so also is there a variety of charisms that are geared towards the building up of the “body of Christ.” The Holy Spirit “lavishes diverse hierarchical and charismatic gifts on all the baptized, calling them to be, each in an individual way, active and co-responsible.” However, lay ministry arises not only out of personal charism, but more fundamentally out of the relationship to Christ that is sacramentally mediated by Baptism and Confirmation (CL, no. 20).

The essential question that the Church should always address is: “What significance does the community of Jesus Christ as salvation sacrament have in this place, in this specific situation?” Such a question can only be answered if the Church as a living community of Christ is experienced “as a living, witnessing, community of members with differing charisms and a vital faith conviction.” This experience can be made to bear on all activities of the Church community such as worshipping, meditating the faith, social services, and in other human endeavours as they profoundly reflect the image of the Church as the sacrament of Christ. The essential responsibility of the Church is to make human beings better, and allow the love of God to be expressed daily in their interactions with one another. Every action of the Church must be geared towards

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510 Ibid., 44.
achieving these objectives because these were the qualities that Christ manifested, that
drew people to Christ, and which at the same time, constitute the basis of Christian
discipleship.

Indeed, a good theology and praxis of the ecclesiology of Vatican II that hinges
on a holistic appropriation of the people of God ecclesiology would render a theology of
the laity unnecessary. As Peter Neuner would say, “If the reality of the people of God is
to be realized in our ecclesial forms or organizations, we must not rack our brains over
the activation of the laity.”\footnote{Peter Neuner, “Aspects of a Theology of the Laity,” Theology Digest 36 (1989) 121, 125.}
In other words, the conciliar notion of the Church as People
of God has not found an adequate expression or place in the Church’s organizational
structures, and especially within the Nigerian Church. As in the past, the important
decisions in the Church today are not made by the People of God, but by a restricted
group of office bearers. To illustrate, some Nigerian clergy see themselves as sole
administrators in parishes especially in areas where decisions are supposed to be made
after consultations with the laity. Experiences have shown that there have been instances
in some parishes and dioceses in Nigeria where clergy have made administrative

Thus, the fundamental task facing all, especially within the current situation, is to
recapture the vision of the whole Church as “People of God,” from among whom some
are called to the ordained ministry while still remaining within the community of Christ’s
body. Any meaningful and fruitful discussion on the theology of the laity, as well as on

Based on what has been discussed so far, it is important to remember that all ministries are participation in the ministry of Jesus Christ. The exercise of those ministries must reflect the relationships established within Christ’s Church. The ministry of the lay faithful ought to be in conformity to their specific vocation, which is different from that of the ordained ministry (\textit{CL}, no. 23). What has been explored so far does not contradict the need for a variety of ministries and offices within the Church. In the Church, there is a need for order, and without these offices, the constituent members of the People of God would not be complete. However, these offices exist within the People of God and not over them. “The Church as a whole preserves and promotes the faith, as a whole it dispenses the sacraments, and as a whole it fulfils its ministry in the world.”\footnote{514}{Peter Neuner, “Aspects of a Theology of the Laity,” 125.} It is in communion of all the members that the Church fulfils what it is called to do as People of God.

4. 2 Promoting the Ecclesiological Paradigm of the “Church as Family of God” within the Nigerian Church

The Second Vatican Council remains an epochal ecclesial event for modern Catholicism. As mentioned earlier, a significant theological development of conciliar teaching was communion ecclesiology. The 1985 Extraordinary Synod of Bishops recognized and furthered Vatican II’s ecclesiology of communion by affirming that the
structures and relations within the Church must express this communion.\textsuperscript{515} Fifty-one years after the opening of Vatican II, there have been further developments in communion ecclesiology in relation to diverse contexts. The “Church as Family of God” is one such example of a contextualization of conciliar communion ecclesiology. In proposing a response to the ecclesiological question, “Church of Africa, what must you now become so that your message may be relevant and credible?”\textsuperscript{516} the first Synod of the African Bishops opted for an ecclesiology of the “Church as Family of God.”

This Synodal assembly espoused that the Church in Africa, as Family of God, is modeled on the Trinity at the depths of which is the bond of communion. The significance of this ecclesiology speaks of the depth of the concept of family in African culture. Among others, the “Church as a Family of God” appropriates the ecclesiological and socio-cultural values of interdependence, fraternity, solidarity, collaboration, participation, hospitality and communion. The image of the family reveals the reciprocal responsibility that must exist in human society and the Church. Moreover, there could be no better term to express the beauty and richness of the Church in Africa as the concept of “family”:

The African family is a living cell from which models of the Church and experiences lived in Africa is found. The family is a place of reproduction, of transmission and of protection of life, a place of learning and of interiorising cultural values, a place of sharing, of support and of fraternal welcome, a place where people live together. The family is the fundamental base of humanity and of society. It is the place where human problems are realistically solved—problems of orphans, of the aged and of the lonely.\textsuperscript{517}

\textsuperscript{516} John Paul II, Ecclesia in Africa, no. 21.
\textsuperscript{517} Relatio Post Disceptationem, no. 5.
In proposing this ecclesiology, the Synod of the African Bishops projected the positive elements in the African concept of the family as a setting whereby everyone can live concretely and authentically in the experience of fraternity, knowing one another sufficiently to have the feeling of spiritual togetherness, sharing their joys, sorrows, successes and failures, united in solidarity, and in mutual support and collaboration in the construction of a civilization of love, justice and peace.

Similarly, the “Church as Family of God” ecclesiology has also an important social implication. It embodies the elements and values of the African family that unify. The social dimension of the “Church as Family” becomes a functional model in confronting the problems and tensions created by some contexts peculiar to African culture. In effect, understanding the “Church as Family” means that in the Church, everyone is welcomed, everyone finds a home and everyone shares a sense of belonging. To appreciate the “Church as Family” is to understand Christ’s commandment of loving one another. In the “Church Family”, Africans will understand themselves as members of the same family, and seek to eschew all forms of hatred, division, discrimination and domination that are not a natural part of family living in Africa. In this community, conflicts are resolved, and people learn that to love and serve God has implications for the love and service of fellow human beings.  

The “Church as Family” therefore is “not an association of clans and ethnic groupings, but a brotherhood and sisterhood beyond the frontiers of blood relationship, clan, ethnic group or race.” The absolute and ultimate reference point is God, the Father of all, over all, through all and within all (Eph. 4:5). In the “Church as Family”

519 Synod of Bishops (1994), Special Assembly for Africa, Bulletin, no. 15.
ecclesiology, the experience of the mystery of Christ, its joy and hope, is made alive in an environment of fraternal love and personal faith. John Paul II described this as ‘Good News.’ “We are the family of God. This is the Good News! The same blood flows in our veins, and it is the blood of Jesus Christ.” The same Spirit gives us life, and it is the Holy Spirit, the infinite fruitfulness of divine love.\footnote{Synodus Episcoporum, \textit{Coetus Specialis Pro Africa. Nuntius}, Vatican City, 1994, no. 25.}

According to Elochukwu Uzukwu, the African Synod of Bishops sees this metaphor as the interpretation of the mystery and ministry of the Christian Church on earth. The choice of this image, as the “Message” of the Synod indicates, is linked to the Church’s intent to transform the unjust and violent conditions of life in our world through a new type of witness. “Envy, jealousy, racism, war, division of the human race into first, second, third and fourth worlds, cults of wealth, disparity between nations, and exploitation and humiliation of the African continent through debt burden and unfair trade arrangements or by media, are all going to be changed when we live the Church as family in the image of the trinitarian family.”\footnote{Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, \textit{A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches}, 47.}

However, this does not hide the reality that the model of the “Church as Family” has some very fundamental problems that need clarification, if it is to serve the purpose for which it is recommended. In the first instance, we need to be clear about the type of family being envisaged. Is it the African traditional family, or the contemporary one? In any case, the African family, whether traditional or contemporary, is still very hierarchical. The father figure is still much feared by the other members of the family. The wife has not yet been given full rights of equality, and for this reason, the women’s movement in Africa is very powerful. The rights of children are only beginning to be
realized and respected. Therefore, when the “Church as Family” model is recommended, it is important to agree that this does not refer to any of the families that are not yet fully egalitarian.

We must create a vision of an African family where equality is guaranteed, clear sharing of responsibility is accepted, the clear option for the disadvantaged members is made, and conflicts are eliminated. John Mary Waliggo warns however, that the theology of “Church as Family” is a double-edged sword. It can be profitably used, but it may also lead to benign paternalism. He also asserts that we must be careful not to end up with the pyramid structure of the Church again, instead of the circular one of communion. African theologians, he contends, must take on the challenge of this theme, and show how it can be used positively to create a new understanding of the African Church and society.\(^{522}\)

The use of the family metaphor, according to John Paul II, presupposes a more general image of the family as an abode of love and fellowship, “care for others, solidarity, warmth in human relationships, acceptance, dialogue and trust.”\(^{523}\) According to Uzochukwu Njoku, however, this idea of family overlooks the reality that family could also be a scene of rivalry and competition, autocracy and patriarchy, violence and betrayal.\(^{524}\) Does Ecclesia in Africa’s vision of family take into consideration the injustice which women faced through the centuries in traditional families—where they were often denied value and the rights of inheritance? How does this paradigmatic shift to Church as Family of God’s ecclesiology see the oppressive hierarchies in traditional families—with the father at the top of the ladder, followed by the mother and then the

\(^{523}\) John Paul II, \textit{Ecclesia in Africa}, no. 63.
children, where the first male child is usually placed at an advantage over other children of the family and the first daughter is often set against other daughters of the family? How far does this ecclesiology consider the situation in polygamous families, and the rivalry between children of the various wives? To state that family creates an ambivalent picture of love and tension is simply to emphasize the obvious.\textsuperscript{525}

This model of the “Church as Family”, in as much as it expresses the African sense of mutuality, solidarity and care among the African people, is obviously a challenging one in its concrete application in terms of its pastoral, socio-political implications. There is, for instance, the persistence of dictatorial tendencies experienced in the exercise of both political and ecclesiastical authorities in Africa. What is really the intention of the African Synod of Bishops in its use of the image of family? Does the African Synod of Bishops intend that Africans of today (which it claims to care for) remain in an enclosure where a strong authority figure would in perpetuity tell them what is right and wrong, where their particularities and individualities are denied any relevance or worth? Could it be possible that the African Synod of Bishops intends to confine Africans to a system where they cannot question their rulers or call them to order, and where the “father figure” is sacrosanct and above their communities?

In our present circumstance, many people are still being subjected to untold hardship, and deprivation of their human respect and dignity. Nigerians live in a society that is characterized and marred by an obvious denial of fundamental human rights, oppression and arbitrary denial of justice. It is a society where inequality and injustices of every kind abound. The economic situation of some African countries like Nigeria creates unbalanced stratification and undesirable competition among individuals and

\textsuperscript{525} Ibid., 7-8.
groups. The lack of political maturity and vision on the part of African political leaders contribute immensely to a vicious circle of poverty and political instability in most African countries, especially in Nigeria. These questions confront the use of the family image as an orientation for the theology of ministry in an African/Nigerian Church.

These social circumstances call for consistent effort and action of the Church to respond creatively and find realistic and credible solutions to these problems. By showing solidarity to the individuals and groups who are being denied their human dignity and respect, the Church, through each of her members as Family of God, will rediscover herself as the agent of social transformation and peace, and be a credible voice of the voiceless. It cannot be overemphasized that the Church which understands itself as a family, as A.E. Orobator argues, will find it extremely difficult to preserve its authentic identity if it manifests indifference towards the prevailing conditions of life in its social location.

How can the image of the Church as Family of God provide a theological praxis, as well as serve as a liberative ecclesiology for the transformation of the ecclesiological and social contexts of the Nigerian Church and society, with specific reference to the theology of the laity? Indeed, the image of the Church as Family of God is capable of providing a transformative theological praxis suitable for the promotion and implementation of the mutual ecclesiastical structures that enhance collaborative ministry between the clergy and the laity. We cannot effectively and honestly speak of a “living Christian community” or “Church as Family of God” when the laity are systematically excluded from any part of decision-making within the Church, or when decisions

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affecting the lay Christian faithful are made without consulting them, and above all, without even informing them of these decisions.528

In Nigeria for instance, some bishops and priests often regard themselves as experts in all fields of knowledge. They behave in such an authoritative manner at the levels of the diocese and parish. The impression given is that ecclesial life is generally the private property of the clerics,529 which stands in opposition to family as the symbol of unity, service in solidarity and communion. Thus, any bishop or priest who shows reluctance to engage in fraternal dialogue within the Church, understood as Family of God, cannot be a true minister of unity and communion.

The Nigerian Church through her ecclesiastical hierarchy needs to abandon dimensions of its overly institutional ecclesiology with its authoritarian accent, and sincerely embrace the proper image of the Church as Family of God ecclesiology with its love and solidarity, care and warmth in relationship between her various members. As Family of God, the Nigerian Church can effectively and concretely respond to its challenges by living according to what it proclaims to the world. This implies that it must live by the standards of the Gospel of Christ, striving to witness daily in words and deeds the Christian values of love, honesty, forgiveness, justice, self-sacrifice, solidarity and compassion.

Moreover, it must be a Church that upholds the dignity and rights of the human person, and denounces what is essentially inhuman—a Church that courageously fights against the forces of evil and iniquity that are mercilessly plaguing the nation: bribery and corruption, ethnocentrism, political deceit, greed for money and craze for power and

prestige. It must be a Church that is the moral conscience of the nation: spelling out what is good or bad, right or wrong in the public life of the nation;\textsuperscript{530} becoming the voice of the voiceless; and promoting initiatives which contribute to the development and ennoblement of individuals in their spiritual and material needs.\textsuperscript{531}

In order to achieve the above objectives, the Nigerian Catholic hierarchy should be able to give priority in their exercise of ministry to integral and effective involvement of the lay Christian faithful in the mission of the Church. Thus, the present circumstance challenges us to redefine and reform the structures of ministry within the Church, so that the new forms of ministry can emerge and be developed with a view to promoting collective and common responsibility for the evangelizing mission of the Church. Such integrating diversity of the community or Family of God requires dialogue and mutual listening. Hence, the Nigerian theologian, Elochukwu Uzukwu speaks of this family as a “listening Church” with its dialogical characteristic.\textsuperscript{532}

However, the depth of the mystery of the Church is not in any way exhausted in the concept of the “Church as Family.” In spite of the limitations of this notion, this ecclesiology constitutes one of the most important contributions of the African Synod of Bishops to ecclesiology, which is key to enriching the ecclesiological, socio-pastoral activities of the Church in relation to the theology of the laity. In other words, this paradigmatic shift to Church as Family of God ecclesiology can enable the African/Nigerian Church as well as African theology of ministry to confront many

\textsuperscript{530} See, John Paul II, \textit{Ecclesia in Africa}, no. 49.
\textsuperscript{531} Ibid., no. 70.
challenges of the time, and to be more relevant to her people on the basis of an authentic theology of inculturation.

This reflection on the shift to the Church as Family of God ecclesiology has argued in favour of developing this model of Church in the Nigerian-African context, and the examples show that this ideal is neither unattainable nor utopian. It lies within the realm of possibility for the Church to reinvent its identity as the Family of God in Nigeria, based on the principles and practice of solidarity, service and promotion of life which are unique characteristics of the African family. Through this way, the Church which is God’s Family can promote diversity among all its constituent parts. When there is diversity, complementarity of roles and charisms of all members, within the Church understood as the “Family of God”, the community will be transformed into communion in diversity—a community that values and promotes the gifts and talents of all.

4.3 Synodality and an African Cultural Model of Leadership

In this study, particularly in Chapter Three, I noted clericalism as the prevalent system of leadership within the Nigerian Church, and indicated its negative consequences in relation to the theology of the laity. What model of ecclesiastical leadership do Nigerian theologians advocate as a corrective to this way of being a Church? Generally, Nigerian theologians propose the “African Palaver” model of leadership and authority.533

As one of the African cultural elements that can respond to the problems relating to Vatican II’s reception of the theology of the laity in the Nigerian Church, “the Palaver

Model of the African Leadership” is a natural characteristic of the traditional African society and its political organizations. “Palaver”, an African process of dialogue, with its origin in the Black African context, exists in various genres. From the perspective of the African conceptual world, the deepest meaning of palaver underscores the function and power of the “word.” Without this “word”, a person cannot understand completely the African palaver praxis. The word is understood in the Bible as genuinely accomplishing what it was sent to do (Genesis 1:3; Psalm 33:6-9; Isaiah 55:10-11; Matthew 8:8; Hebrew 4:12). This implies that the “word” by which dialogue is effected within a community, can either create or destroy community. This means that the “word” signifies life or death—it is medicine or poison. The word is seen as healthy and healing. Thus, “Palaver” in the African context, involves a communicative process between individuals within a community by means of the word through which dialogue is accomplished. A person who listens to the word of an older person and takes it to heart is enabled to give the community a new vitality. “Palaver”, as a model of leadership in Africa, does not aim exclusively at the resolution of conflicts. “Palaver” rather, takes in all the concerns that can contribute to invigorating the welfare of any particular community. The aim of African palaver according to Bénézet Bujo is not to dazzle or lead the participants astray by rhetoric. Rather, the community seeks a good and correct word, testing its capacity to heal and to build up the community.

It involves the consultation of the people on a wide scale, with deliberation at many levels, for the purpose of arriving at a consensus. These decisions usually reflect

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534 See, Bénézet Bujo, Foundations of an African Ethic: Beyond the Universal Claims of Western Morality, 45-54, 150.
535 Ibid., 151-152.
536 Ibid., 45-54.
the opinion of the people being governed in such a way that it can be correctly affirmed that power lies with the people. Among the Africans, and particularly the Nigerians (Igbos), palaver is seen as the most effective means of resolving conflict and effecting reconciliation. Elochukwu Uzukwu reinforces this point by saying that:

One may correctly say that power lies with the people. The society or community is an active subject of right. It participates in decisions affecting its well-being. The deliberations have the general aim of arriving at a consensus. This is the African “palaver”—not to be understood as interminable useless discussions; rather it is a system of mass consultation with the people.\(^{537}\)

Palaver is a system by which Nigerians, and especially Igbos, communicate with one another as nobody is on his or her own, but everybody is with the others. The mere fact that everybody participates in the issues that affect them shows how openly the system works in the interest of everyone in the community and the wider world. This is why when it concerns the enactment of rules and regulations, the Igbos say: *Obodo* or *Umunna tiri iwu*—“the village or kindred community made a law.”\(^{538}\) This alternative model of relating “palaver” is consistent with the relationality of the African people, which is the basis of the family institution. Thus, the family or community foundation of this system of relationship gives it the credibility required among the Africans. And this relationality is at the basis of a “communion” ecclesiology.

M. Masango testified to the truth of this model of relationship when he said: “in Africa, leadership was traditionally a function to be shared by all villagers or community

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\(^{537}\) Elochukwu Uzukwu, *A Listening Church*, 18.

members, rather than invested in one person.”

Elochukwu E. Uzukwu illustrates this system of mass consultation of the people implied in the African palaver model of leadership with the symbol or totem of the Manja Chief in the Central African Republic: “The chief’s symbol is the rabbit, because it has large ears. He has the last word. But his ears are open to the opinion of all—human as well as spirits. That is the source of his power; and that also is the limit of his power.”

The quality of patient listening is thus one of the distinguishing characteristics of the African palaver. Hence, Uzukwu continues: “For the chief to be fair, he must be a patient listener. And this listening takes plenty of time. This is what is generally referred to as African “palaver”: the liberation of speech at all levels of community to come close to that Word which is too large for an individual mouth, the Word which saves and heals.”

Congolese theologian Bénézet Bujo applies this model to the Church, which involves the consultation of the people with open dialogue, patient listening and the exercise of authority, in concert with the community. Thus, he suggests:

According to the Black African palaver model, the word cannot be interpreted by some central authority but only by a community, that is, in the process of listening with and to each other, it is possible to repulse a fatal word and confirm a life-promoting one, and to receive it into the service of ecclesial community. Concretely this would mean that it is not a solitary authority but this authority (is exercised) in concert with the community of all believers (…..) This African palaver model even completes and corrects to some extent the individualistic view of Roman and Western ecclesiology that tends to ascribe the competence for

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540 See, Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, *A Listening Church*, 18.

decision-making and interpretation in many areas solely to the teaching magisterium of the Church.  

This palaver model of leadership is simply well suited to the Church in Africa because it is truly African and reflects the reality of the Church as a community of disciples. Inculturation demands that this model of leadership be adapted into the new African communion ecclesiology with the abandonment of the stifling clericalism, which is a dominant dimension of the present African ecclesiology. All members of the Christian community (bishops, priests, laymen and laywomen, rich, poor, illiterates, and so on) according to Bujo must have something to contribute in a Christian palaver or dialogue. This concretely means that no document of the magisterium may be written without the involvement of those affected by it. The publication of such a document demands patience, speaking and listening to one another as brothers and sisters.

The principles of this model of leadership can find appropriate expression within the Nigerian Church if its leaders (bishops and priests) make positive use of the synodal structures—diocesan synod, pastoral, presbyteral and laity councils—in their administrative system as stipulated in the documents of the Second Vatican Council. Through her ecclesiastical leadership, the Catholic Church in Nigeria should develop a consistent listening ability towards the lay Christian faithful via these ecclesiastical structures of discernment—parish pastoral and the laity councils—in order to properly understand what the Spirit is saying in the present circumstances.

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543 Ibid.

544 Cf. *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 26. The Council Fathers demanded that formal participative structures should be erected at different levels in the parishes, inter-parishes, inter-diocesan level, and also in the national and international sphere.
Recent developments with the rejection of Msgr. Peter Okpaleke as the bishop of Ahiara diocese, as noted in Chapter Two of this study, is a concrete example of how proper consultation could have resulted in a better resolution of the problem between the Nigerian hierarchy and the People of God in the Catholic diocese of Ahiara, Nigeria. There was a perceived understanding by some members of the presbyterium and lay faithful of Ahiara diocese that proper consultative mechanisms were not followed in the appointment of the new bishop in question. The people’s disposition towards such an appointment seems to suggest that the Nigerian hierarchy could have done more by way of adequate and extensive inquiry from the people of Ahiara concerning their choice with regard to their own diocesan bishop. As a result of such perceived and apparent neglect in regard to the consultation of the lay faithful in collaboration with some members of the presbyterium, the people of Ahiara diocese denounced such an appointment as unfair and unjustified. Could it be said that the Nigerian Catholic Church magisterium perhaps speaks too much and listens too little? On the other hand, it may not be denied that the Nigerian Catholic hierarchy fulfilled its responsibility by adhering to the stipulated canonical regulations governing the selection of bishop. The current situation has generated mistrust and a lack of confidence on the part of some clergy and the laity of Ahiara diocese towards the ecclesiastical hierarchy of the Nigerian Church. Hence, the need to develop an effective sense of collaborative ministry becomes an urgent priority.

4.4 Promoting a Spirit of Collaborative Ministry within the Nigerian Church

As we have seen already, the sacraments of Christian initiation establish the foundation on which each Christian is called to the ministry of Christ in the ecclesial
community. Thus, all members of the Christian community are jointly called to a common task or mission of the Church in Christ according to each one’s condition and function. With this common vocation to the ministry in the Church comes the sense of collaboration and cooperation, which the Second Vatican Council sees as a collective responsibility of all who share in the one body of Christ.545

The Council documents unambiguously speak of the dignity and freedom of all the baptized and place emphasis on their primary mission to transform the world according to the vision of the kingdom (LG, 32, 33; AA, 3). However, the documents of the Council also present a renewed understanding and appreciation of the laity’s participation and collaboration in the life of the Church (LG, 30-35; GS, 43). The Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People affirms that the lay people have “an active part of their own in the life and action of the Church. This action is so necessary that without it the apostolate of the pastors will frequently be unable to obtain its full effect” (AA, 10).

Similarly, post-conciliar teachings on the collaborative ministry of the laity have been developed in many Church documents. Paul VI’s Apostolic Exhortation, Evangelii Nuntiandi has maintained that “the laity can also feel themselves called, or be called to work with their pastors in the service of the ecclesial community for its growth and life by exercising great ministries according to the grace and charisms which the Lord is pleased to give them” (EN, 73). The 1983 Code of Canon Law clearly shows improvements in delineating the significant rights of the laity to participate and collaborate in the total life of the Church, rather than the passive and minimalist approach of its 1917 edition (CIC, Canons 208-223). The 1985 Extraordinary Synod of Bishops

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545 See, Lumen Gentium, nos. 32-33. See also, Apostolicam Actuositatem, nos. 2, 3, 10. Cf. Gaudium et Spes, no. 43.
held in Rome spoke explicitly about the collaboration of the laity in the mission of the Church:

Because the Church is a communion, there must be sharing and co-responsibility at all levels…. Since Vatican II, a new type of collaboration between lay people and clergy has happily come about in the Church. The spirit of readiness in which a great number of the lay people have offered themselves for the service of the Church must be counted among the best benefits of the Council. In this, there is a new experience of the fact that we are all the Church.¹⁴⁶

The Synod document referenced above, acknowledges the progress already made in the area of collaborative ministry between the laity and the clergy. Such development has been seen as a positive reception of Vatican II’s teaching on the theology of the laity.

In his 1988 Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, Christifideles Laici, John Paul II clearly reiterated Vatican II’s call for participation, co-operation and consultation, and spoke explicitly on the collaboration of the lay people through the different Church’s structures of discernment and decision-making. “The recent Synod has favoured the creation of Diocesan Pastoral Councils, as a recourse at opportune times…. The participation of the lay faithful in these Councils can broaden resources in consultation and the principle of collaboration—and in certain instances also in decision-making—if applied in a broad and determined manner” (CL, 25). Thus, there is no doubt from all these instances that Vatican II Council and its post-conciliar teachings have left a deepened understanding and appreciation of the shared and participatory ministry of the laity in the mission of the Church.

However, it cannot be denied that the issue of collaborative ministry has been a recurrent problem, as well as a challenge to the Nigerian Catholic Church, as the Church

struggles to live and identify with the new way of being a Church, within the context of the post-conciliar reception of Vatican II’s teaching on the theology of the laity.

Collaborative ministry as an ecclesiological model of the Church’s ministry expresses the true image of the Church that is compatible with the African sense of communion and solidarity. Beyond the many characteristics and values which this model of ministry inspires, the most outstanding is the sense of interdependence.\(^{547}\)

Collaborative ministry within the Nigerian Church, which is built on the basis of this principle of interdependence, echoes the fundamental theology of the Second Vatican Council which stipulates with conviction that all Christ’s faithful are gifted and called to the ministry as a result of their rebirth in baptism through Christ.\(^{548}\) Hence, there is the tendency to understand collaboration as harmoniously working together within the mission of Christ in the world, where each member of the Church is either given the voice or the opportunity to speak, and each is allowed to contribute to the common good according to his or her gifts.\(^{549}\) Each member of the Church is called therefore, to build up the “Body of Christ.”

Collaborative ministry in the case of the Nigerian Church however, does not consist of stripping the Church hierarchy of its power. Nor does it mean that the Church hierarchy is no longer meaningful. Rather, the main issue is how to overcome or bridge the gap between the Church’s theory and praxis so as to enable the lay people to have a share in the common mission of the Church. In other words, it is a question of how to

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\(^{548}\) Through baptism in Christ, there exists among all the Christian faithful, a true equality regarding dignity and action by which all the members of Christ faithful are called to cooperate in the building up the body of Christ according to each one’s own condition and function. Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, nos. 32-33.

arouse more participation, and engender more co-responsibility among the members of the Church as people of God. Contemporary experience in Nigeria shows that the Church as an institution cannot ignore the structures of modern society as well as the signs of the time, and still be relevant and credible.  

It is a frightening experience to see some Nigerian clergy acting as sole administrators in their various domains, and particularly in their relationship with the lay people with regard to the different ministries in the Church. One of the major obstacles to the proper reception of Vatican II’s theology of the laity within the Nigerian Church context, as far as collaborative ministry is concerned, is too much emphasis being placed on authority and the exercise of the same authority by the Church’s hierarchy. Theophilus Okere, an eminent Nigerian theologian has correctly maintained:

That the problem in the clergy/laity relations is only a partial symptom of a more generalized malaise that runs right from the top of the Church’s edifice to the bottom. And it has dogged the Church, assuredly not from its beginning, but from early infancy. A solution to this problem might have been possible if the Church did not continue to deepen the hole it had dug for itself by habitually endowing merely historical facts with divine constitutional status, turning ecclesial, historical and contingent facts into doctrinaire ecclesiology of de iure divino rank. In the process, it often precludes a priori any considerations of change even when this would be clearly (ad aedificationem ecclesiae Dei) for the ‘up building of the Church of God’ and better suited for the (salus animarum) salvation of souls.

On the other hand, the current practice and continuous association of the word “ministry”, when referring exclusively to the ministry of the clergy, has added equally to

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the confusion in understanding the meaning and nature of ministry, and has thus greatly influenced the mentality and ways in which the theology of the laity has been received within the Nigerian Church. The falsity of such an ecclesiology, as Emmanuel Orobator has argued, tends to make the ministry of the clergy the only form of ministry, and has resulted in deemphasizing the involvement or participation of the laity in the ministries of the Church. The promotion and encouragement of collaborative ministry in the Nigerian Church has become very difficult as a result of such understanding of the ministry as an exclusive prerogative of the clerical culture.552

Ministry in the Church is primarily that of the whole Christian community before being the responsibilities of particular individuals or Church officials. This perspective presupposes that the Church’s ministry is characterized by a deep sense of mutuality.553 This mutuality is the understanding that every Christian faithful has something to offer. The basic truth that all Christ’s faithful constitute a brotherhood and sisterhood should shine through the relationships, planning and action of the Christian community. This implies that the ideal of brotherhood or sisterhood and communion need to be given tangible and concrete expression through the adoption of certain fundamental gospel values of freedom, dignity of persons and their legitimate rights and solidarity.

The clergy, religious and lay Christian faithful in Nigeria need to be given adequate formation in collaborative ministry in order to ensure that they understand and appreciate that all have the right and responsibility to participate actively in the ministry and mission of the Church. Moreover, openness and transparency are required as vital instruments among the bishops, priests, and religious men and women as well as the laity.

for an effective pastoral collaborative ministry.\textsuperscript{554} Thus, the Vatican II ecclesiology of communion should imply an effective co-responsibility and collaboration of the whole people of God. This can be facilitated if the Nigerian clergy give priority in their exercise of ministry to integral and effective involvement of the laity in the mission of the Church. The lack of authentic collaboration on the part of the laity comes down to the fact that the laity of the Nigerian Church have not been instructed or enlightened enough by the Nigerian hierarchy in active pastoral collaboration. One thing is certain; the laity need to know the significance and the meaning of their true place in the Church. It is the responsibility of the Nigerian hierarchy to create opportunities for such enlightenment and formation of the laity. Thus, the liberation and empowerment of the laity through integral formation cannot be overemphasized.

4. 5 Liberation and Empowerment of the Laity through Integral Formation

Given the important place of the laity in the entire mission of the Church, a new approach in the integral formation of the laity should be viewed as a necessary and urgent task in the Nigerian Church. The urgency of this responsibility is made even more obvious in today’s society, which is marked by spiritual disorientation and uncertainties concerning the Catholic identity. Thus, integral formation of the laity geared towards the liberation and empowerment of the lay people is accomplished through faith formation, which elicits profound commitment to Christian life and to the world, and a readiness to promote greater justice among peoples and nations.\textsuperscript{555}

\textsuperscript{554} See, Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria (CBCN), \textit{The Church in Nigeria: Family of God on Mission}, nos. 118-120.
The vocation and mission of the laity from the Second Vatican Council make lay people’s formation imperative and urgent. Based on the diversity of persons and circumstances where lay people are called to exercise their apostolate, the Council spoke explicitly of indispensability of lay people’s formation in order that their apostolate may attain its full efficacy.\textsuperscript{556} The need for the formation of the laity stems naturally from being primarily constitutive members of the mystical body of Christ, which makes them sharers in the three-fold mission of sanctifying, teaching and governing within the Church as the people of God. Based on this foundation, the laity are called not only to be actively committed, but to champion the actual course of bringing the influence of the Church through their faith into ordinary events of community life and other responsibilities. Lay people’s involvement in this direction has been noted clearly in the document, \textit{Gaudium et Spes} when it maintained:

\begin{quote}
It is their (lay people’s) task to cultivate a properly informed conscience and to impress the divine law on the affairs of the earthly city. For guidance and spiritual strength let them turn to the clergy; but let them realize that their pastors will not always be so expert as to have a ready answer to every problem (even every grave problem) that arises; this is not the role of the clergy: it is rather up to the laymen [sic] to shoulder their responsibilities under the guidance of Christian wisdom and with eager attention to the teaching authority of the Church.\textsuperscript{557}
\end{quote}

Various post-conciliar teachings reiterated the importance and need for the formation of the laity in terms of right and duty. The 1983 Code of Canon Law stipulates: “Lay people have the duty and the right to acquire the knowledge of Christian teaching which is appropriate to each one’s capacity and condition, so that they may be able to live according to this teaching,… and may be capable of playing their part in the exercise of

\textsuperscript{556} See, \textit{Apostolicam Actuositatem}, nos. 28-29.
\textsuperscript{557} See, \textit{Gaudium et Spes}, no. 43.
the apostolate” (*CIC*, Canon 229). Canon 231 further prescribed the formation of those “who are pledged to the special service of the Church, whether permanently or to a time.”

These could be catechists, members of the different councils including statutory lay organizations and, in particular, the *Catholic Laity Council of Nigeria*. In his Post-Synodal Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa*, John Paul II repeated the same need for the formation of the lay people through suitable centers and schools of formation in order that the lay people may be faithful witnesses to the Gospel:

> The laity are to be helped to become increasingly aware of their role in the Church, thereby fulfilling their particular mission as baptized and confirmed persons…. Lay people are to be trained for their mission through suitable centers and schools of biblical and pastoral formation. Similarly, Christians who occupy positions of responsibility are to be carefully prepared for political, economic and social tasks by means of a solid formation in the Church’s social doctrine, so that in their places of work they will be faithful witnesses to the Gospel.  

Given the increasingly complex and ever changing nature of the Nigerian society in the fields of economy and politics, the need for the formation of the laity cannot be overemphasized. This call for formation demands a well developed programme for the laity which should include other dimensions necessary for concrete Christian action in today’s society, such as the themes of justice, peace and solidarity, the dynamics of social transformation, social analysis, public enlightenment and fundamental human rights.  

Another area where the lay people need to become better educated, as Paul Lakeland suggests, is in the history of Catholic tradition. Knowledge of history and theology will be indispensables if the Nigerian Church is to seek a greater participation of

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the lay people in the ministry of the Church as Vatican II indicates. The experiences of early Church’s practices within the first five centuries of the Church’s life, where lay people had greater involvement or major roles in the selection of their bishops, are examples of the crucial role of history and theology with regard to the integral formation of the laity. Patterns of Church leadership today offer a good example of the value of history. Regardless of how one feels about patterns of ministry and structures of leadership in the Church today, it is impossible to make the case that they have always been this way.\textsuperscript{561} History helps us to attain such knowledge.

For example, history teaches us that the Church is a dynamic reality, always on the move, always engaged in that common historical process of remembering and forgetting. As a body in history, the Church is as susceptible as any human institution to the accidents of history. The Church has its saints and sinners, its heroes and heroines. All of them together make up the history of the Church, and the knowledge of how they have played their roles helps us to understand and appreciate where the Church is today. Above all, history helps us to distinguish between what is of the essence of our tradition, and what as a product of historical accident, is not.\textsuperscript{562}

On the other hand, the urgency of this integral formation of the laity in a manner that they are able to respond in the Spirit of Christ to their mission in the Church and in the world has been emphasized by John Paul II in \textit{Ecclesia in Africa}. He posed a very challenging question to the Church in Africa: “Has the Church in Africa sufficiently formed the lay faithful, enabling them to assume civic responsibilities and to consider socio-political problems in the light of the Gospel and of faith in God? This is certainly a


\textsuperscript{562} Ibid.
task belonging to Christians; to bring to bear upon the social fabric an influence aimed at changing not only ways of thinking but also the very structures of society.⁵⁶³ This could also be applied to the Nigerian Church since social justice issues and true liberation cannot be accomplished within the Nigerian context apart from the active involvement and commitment of the lay Christian faithful. Based on this, Matthew Kukah, former secretary to the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria and currently the Catholic bishop of Sokoto diocese, Nigeria, maintained:

For all the talk about option for the poor, liberation theology, structures of sin, etc, not much will happen unless the lay people fully assume their role in the Church and society. Whether in politics, economy or social life, there is very little that the clerical class can do in terms of bringing about direct political change unless the laity (civil society) is fully educated and equipped to take the ball and run as the saying goes.⁵⁶⁴

This formation, which is geared towards the political engagement of Christians⁵⁶⁵ cannot be overemphasized or underestimated. The Church in Nigeria has a responsibility in this matter, which she cannot abdicate without failing in her mission. The Church in Nigeria cannot fail in her prophetic role of denouncing and condemning in clear terms the social vices of the nation, especially of her leaders.⁵⁶⁶ In such a situation, the need to involve trained laity comes to mind. However, how can they be trained, formed, motivated and spiritually equipped to promote Christ’s kingdom of justice and peace in the community if there are no resources? The organizational organs of the Laity Council of Nigeria in the

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⁵⁶⁵ John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 54. Here, John Paul II calls for the thorough formation of the lay people which will help to assume competently their civic responsibilities and consider socio-political problems in the light of the Gospel and faith in God.
local churches are viable platforms for effective planning and implementation of integral formation programmes for the laity. It is then the responsibility of each bishop within the particular churches to ensure that adequate provisions are made for the effective training of the lay people.

Apart from the socio-political dimensions of the formation of the laity mentioned above, the laity should equally make themselves available for a sound theological formation geared towards addressing certain ecclesiastical issues and problems within the Nigerian Church. The highest places of theological formation in the Nigerian Church at present are the major seminaries and the Catholic Institute of West Africa (CIWA). At the moment, this training or formation is dominated by seminarians and priests. Thus, there may be a need for the establishment of more theological institutes. There is also the need to have a theologically qualified and competent laity working side by side with the clergy. The essence of such formation or training is geared towards the growth and emergence of a mature, critical and responsible laity. Such formation will go a long way in preparing the laity for the active participation and involvement in the evangelizing mission of the Nigerian Church.

4. 6 Ongoing Theological Formation for the Nigerian Bishops, Priests and Religious

The Nigerian bishops, priests and religious have vital roles to play as far as the involvement and participation of the laity are concerned in the mission of the Church. As members of the Episcopal college, the bishops are responsible for the universal as well as

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the particular churches.\textsuperscript{568} Since the bishops’ ministry constitutes in a special way an integral part of the Christian community, as it concerns the welfare of the lay Christian faithful in both their pastoral administrative and social dimensions, the bishops’ need for ongoing theological formation cannot be overemphasized. Vatican II’s teaching in this direction as seen in the \textit{Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church}, has maintained:

\begin{quote}
In order to be able to provide for the welfare of the faithful as their individual circumstances demand, he [the bishop] should try to keep himself informed of their needs in the social circumstances in which they live. To this end he should employ suitable methods, especially social research…. In exercising his ministry he should ensure that the faithful are duly involved in Church affairs; he should recognize their rights and duty to play their part in building up the Mystical Body of Christ.\textsuperscript{569}
\end{quote}

On the other hand, it is clear that among those called to collaborate with the diocesan bishops, as far as their pastoral responsibilities are concerned, are the lay Christian faithful.\textsuperscript{570} Such involvement or collaboration of the lay people in the ministry of the diocesan bishops calls for a serious pastoral supervision by the bishops. Thus, from the above analysis and perspective, the bishops’ responsibilities are extremely demanding and challenging, and therefore require serious attention with regard to the ongoing formation for the bishops. In view of this, the need to understand the latest insights and developments in the fields of theology and human sciences becomes essential.

\begin{quote}
Enlightened by Word of God, diocesan bishops should be able to discern and evaluate current thought, as well as the anthropological and scientific trends, in order to respond with fidelity to the doctrine and discipline of the Church and to the new
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{568} See, \textit{Christus Dominus}, no. 3.
\textsuperscript{569} Ibid., no. 16.
\textsuperscript{570} Ibid., no. 27.
questions arising in society with regard to the theology of the lay Christian faithful.\textsuperscript{571}

With such theological renewal, the bishops can give solid foundation to their magisterial tasks for the enlightenment of the people of God. Knowledge of current developments, especially as it concerns the reception of the theology of the laity in the non-western world in particular, will enable the bishops to monitor or critically verify the conformity of the new theological ideas with the contents of Tradition, countering objections to sound doctrine, and correcting any distortions.\textsuperscript{572}

The possible solution to an appreciable need for the ongoing formation of the bishops is to engage the bishops, through periodic consultation and exchange of ideas, with active and professional theologians in their dioceses. And when there is no such theological knowledge and understanding, a bishop can be led to excessive and dangerous conservatism and traditionalism, with an authoritarian or clerical style of leadership, which often time negates an effective reception of the theology of the lay people in the mission of the Church. John Paul II in his Post-Synodal Exhortation, \textit{Ecclesia in Africa}, reiterated the need for this ongoing theological formation for the bishops as recommended by the Second Vatican Council when he said:

\begin{quote}
According to the recommendation of the Second Vatican Council, Bishops dedicated to carrying out “their Apostolic office as witnesses of Christ before all people” are to exercise personally, in a spirit of trusting cooperation with the presbyterate and other pastoral workers, an irreplaceable service of unity in charity, carefully fulfilling their responsibilities of teaching, sanctifying and governing. Moreover they are regularly to update themselves theologically and to foster their spiritual life, taking part as much as possible in the sessions of renewal and formation organized by the Episcopal Conferences or the Apostolic See. In particular, they should never forget the admonition of Pope Saint Gregory
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{572} Ibid., no. 52.
the Great, according to whom the Pastor is the light of his faithful above all through an exemplary moral conduct marked by holiness.\textsuperscript{573}

Such formation for bishops as stipulated is so essential because each bishop in his particular church has unique responsibility of promoting the faith of the entire members of Christ faithful. Since each bishop within his particular church, is a visible sign of unity, a member of the Episcopal college and has responsibility toward the universal Church, the need for theological renewal or formation becomes indispensible. Without this formation, bishop’s pastoral initiatives may possibly experience some setbacks.

This provision concerning the ongoing theological formation is equally applicable to diocesan priests, as well as to religious men and women. Diocesan priests, as effective collaborators with the bishops in assisting the lay people in their Church’s mission, are equally called to embrace ongoing formation. This responsibility is spelled out in the \textit{Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests}: “Priests are to be sincere in their appreciation and promotion of lay people’s dignity and of the special role the laity have to play in the Church’s mission.”\textsuperscript{574} If priests are to fulfil or discharge such roles, it therefore implies that the priests should be ready to engage themselves in serious preparation or integral formation that will give them the opportunity to share their experiences with the lay people, who are already called by virtue of their baptismal vocation to share in the mission of the Church. This priestly responsibility towards the lay people is further highlighted in the 1987 Synod of Bishops’ document, \textit{Christifideles Laici}, which stipulates the parish as the essential context for the formation of the lay faithful:

\textsuperscript{573} See, John Paul II, \textit{Ecclesia in Africa}, no. 98.
\textsuperscript{574} See, \textit{Presbyterorum Ordinis}, no. 9.
Situated and at work within the Particular Church or diocese is the Parish which has the essential task of a more personal and immediate formation of the lay faithful. In fact, because it is in the position to reach more easily individual persons and singular group, the parish is called to instruct its members in hearing God’s Word, in liturgical and personal dialogue with God, in the life of fraternal charity, and in allowing a more direct and concrete perception of the sense of ecclesial communion and responsibility in the Church’s mission.\footnote{575}{John Paul II, Christifideles Laici, no. 61.}

In other word, the personal and immediate formation of lay faithful falls on the pastors of souls in collaboration with other members of the ecclesial community. This formation includes instruction in the word of God as well as in liturgical and personal dialogue with God in prayer. The lay faithful are to be equipped with a greater appreciation of the sense of ecclesial communion and their responsibilities in the mission of the Church.

One of the reasons behind the ongoing formation of priests stems from the fact that the priestly ministry is a service directed to others. John Paul II confirmed this reason in his 1992 Apostolic Exhortation “On the Formation of Priests,” Pastores Dabo Vobis, when he maintained:

Certainly there are also \textit{purely human reasons} which call for the priest to engage in ongoing formation. This formation is demanded by his own continuing personal growth. Every life is a constant path towards maturity, a maturity which cannot be attained except by constant formation. It is also demanded by the priestly ministry seen in a general way and taken in common with other professions, that is, as a service directed to others.\footnote{576}{John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, Pastores Dabo Vobis, On the Formation of Priests in the Circumstances of the Present Day (London: Catholic Truth Society: Publishers to the Holy See, 1992) no. 70.}

Since the priestly ministry is directed to others, which include the lay people as the above text clearly stated, there is the need for the ongoing formation of priests in order that they may be effective instruments in their pastoral ministry. Through the priest’s daily contact
with people and his sharing in their daily lives, the priest needs to develop and sharpen his human sensitivity in order to understand more clearly and respond to lay people’s demands as well as share their hopes and expectations, the joy and burdens which are part of life. The priests require constant updating through ongoing formation if they are going to remain effective in their ministry. The same is true of the religious men and women.

As those who have accepted the vocation to be part of the Church’s mission of evangelization, the religious, and especially the religious priests, are called to assist the lay people in the realization of their own mission in the Church and within the world. Since the lay people share in the ministry of the religious within the parish setting, the need for the ongoing formation of the religious cannot be overemphasized. With this ongoing formation, the religious can be in a better position to assist the lay people in fulfilling their mission both in the Church and in the world.

Nevertheless, it is regrettable to note that apart from the initial formation session being organized by the Apostolic See for the newly appointed bishops and the yearly retreat of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria, there is no other formal formation session for most of the Nigerian bishops. In some dioceses where it has become part of their diocesan regulation to hold theological conferences, some bishops usually avail themselves of such opportunity to acquire further training or formation in respect to their pastoral responsibilities. Other bishops do not seem to enjoy such opportunity. Thus, one sees such limited opportunity for the further formation of some Nigerian bishops as a

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577 Ibid., no. 72.
578 Ibid., nos. 70-71.
concern that demands serious consideration and improvement. The same situation is applicable to the formation of priests and religious.

While some priests and religious have had the opportunity to acquire further formation or training abroad, the majority of the Nigerian priests and religious acquire their formation locally. The Catholic Institute of West Africa (CIWA) is the only viable option for some priests and religious in acquisition of such education and formation. However, the conditions of studies in CIWA are not the best and some priests and religious who are already studying there seem to understand that being sent to CIWA is a punishment from their local ordinary or Superior General. With such a mentality, the majority of the Nigerian priests and religious find it extremely difficult to appreciate the formation or training being received from such an institution. Catholic Institute of West Africa, therefore, should be better equipped in order to meet the standards of academic excellence and productivity being expected of such an ecclesiastical institution. Nigerian Catholic bishops should, therefore, set up some developmental projects that will adequately respond to the much needed improvement of the whole institution in all its ramifications. With such improvement, a better learning environment will be created to encourage an appreciable theological formation of the Nigerian bishops, priests and religious men and women.

4. 7 Theological Updating for the Seminarians/Religious

Another way the Nigerian Church can help promote the reception of Vatican II’s theology of the laity is to seriously reconsider the type of formation being given in the major seminaries and religious houses of formation for candidates to the Catholic
priesthood and to religious life. That such change in the formation programme could have serious positive repercussions and consequences with respect to the theology of the laity within the Nigerian Church cannot be overemphasized.

Indeed, seminary and religious formation must be geared toward a meaningful encounter with the real world. Paul Lakeland rightly observes that the “seminary and ministerial training should be for ministry in the real world.”\textsuperscript{579} He further argues that the present seminary system of formation needs to be dismantled in favour of genuine and authentic academic formation in Catholic institutions of higher education, without ignoring the need for the spiritual formation of the candidates to Catholic priesthood.\textsuperscript{580} There is good reason for students of ministry to live together and receive spiritual formation from diocesan personnel. However, since the academic preparation is supposed to be of a higher standard, it ought to be conducted, according to Paul Lakeland, in an atmosphere that is open and free and possibly in contact with ordinary lay Catholics in the real world.\textsuperscript{581}

What, then, is the real world in the context of this study? It is the world where the presence and experiences of the lay people and the candidates for the ministry to Catholic priesthood and religious life are being felt in a profound manner. It is the world as noted in Chapter Two of this study, with its socio-political, economic and cultural context as well as with its challenges as a result of the interplay of different forces therein. It is a society marred with an unbranded quest for political power, with no interest at all for the entire populace whose rights and dignity as God’s children are being daily deprived by force and intimidation.

\textsuperscript{579} See, Paul Lakeland, \textit{Catholicism at the Crossroads: How the Laity can Save the Church}, 111.  
\textsuperscript{580} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{581} Ibid., 112.
Nigerian society has been saddled with an inept and corrupt political leadership, which has culminated in the massive impoverishment of the great majority of the populace, under the continued dominance of both military and civil governments that have been generally fascist or, at best, dictatorial in nature. Indeed, the Nigerian society and its political leadership have been espousing a willingness for democracy, though in practice they have been perpetuating a political culture that relies on authoritarian measures to maintain social control in the society.\(^{582}\)

The real world as described above indicates an outlook or a type of world-view which is common to all the lay people and which, unfortunately, is uncommon and unfamiliar with so many candidates to priesthood and religious life. Often times candidates for ministry are simply protected from these realities and experiences; cocooning them in the clerical milieu, which isolates them from these facts and experiences of the real life situation. Awareness through the instrumentality of these real world experiences, as well as through genuine interactions with the lay people who are part of these real world experiences, will assist the students of ministerial training (seminarians and novices) in acquiring better skills, adaptable to their ministries and apostolate within the real world.

Theological update or training oriented towards an appropriate response to the exigencies of the real world can encourage a stable and dynamic relationship between the future ministers of the Gospel—seminarians and novices and the lay people for whom they are called to serve, amidst the challenges of their society and of the world at large. Such a context will help to diffuse various tensions which often arise in areas where the

priests and lay people are being called to share in the common mission of the Church. Moreover, such interactions within public spaces, such as the Catholic universities or colleges shared by both the laity and seminarians, can encourage a greater understanding and appreciation of the lay people’s positions towards some of the Church’s teachings.

Similarly, such opportunities will further assist the seminarians to better appreciate the people’s ideas of the Church. Since seminarians are being trained to offer advice and counsel to the lay people as soon as they become priests, they will be in a better position to offer such counselling, having been part of the worldly experiences of the lay people within the real world. Thus, seminary and ministerial training should be for ministry in real life and in the real world. On the other hand, the seminaries as institutions for learning can still remain open for the spiritual formation of the seminarians based on the different needs of the dioceses, as well as on the needs of the various religious houses of formation, for each religious congregation.

4. 8 Promoting and Encouraging the Basic Christian Community as a Family

The basic Christian communities are parish-based communities that play an important role in parish life. These basic or small Christian communities benefit from their role in the larger Catholic Church by living the life of the Spirit. Basic communities have enabled believers to develop a more profound union with God, and a relationship with one another. These Christian communities are truly evangelizing communities whose preoccupation is to present the Gospel message in a new way, through which Christians can acquire the confidence, clarity, and mutual support necessary to witness to the Gospel in public places. The recent increase or growth of basic Christian communities
is one of the more significant developments in the post-conciliar reception of Vatican II’s ecclesiological teaching on the renewal of the Church, and in the transformation of the world.\footnote{583}{Cf. Lucius Iwejuru Ugorji, \textit{Witness in Charity and Truth} (Enugu: Snaap Press Ltd, 2002) 118-119.}

Historical evidence has shown that the development of basic Christian communities, beginning with the early Church Tradition through the different stages of Church history, indicates varied characteristics of these faith-based communities. One of the fundamental and unique historical marks of these basic Christian communities is their communitarian nature. These communities were established over centuries under Church authority for the promotion of some work of devotion, charity, public worship, or outreach.\footnote{584}{See, Thomas A. Kleissler, et al. eds., \textit{Small Christian Communities: A Vision of Hope for the 21st Century} (New York: Paulist Press, 1997) 9-13.}

During, and after the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), and under the broad heading of Catholic Action, several Christian communities developed a strong sense of a community base. In the past, Catholic Action was sometimes seen as an expression of the apostolate in which the laity extended the work of the hierarchy. Basic Christian communities as they are emerging today, however, are expressions of the Church’s mission in which the laity are called to assume their rightful responsibility based on their baptismal vocation.\footnote{585}{Ibid., 13. Cf. John L. Allen, JR. \textit{The Future Church: How Ten Trends are Revolutionizing the Catholic Church}, 185.} Christians are to live their mission within these basic Christian communities through communion with other Christians, based on the principles highlighted during the Second Vatican Council. These principles include: the
communitarian nature of the Church, the renewed focus on the word of God and on a
greater understanding of the social mission of the Church.\textsuperscript{586}

Over the last several decades, the growth of these basic Christian communities
has been perceived as a response to the reception of Vatican II’s teaching on the
participation and involvement of the lay people in the mission of the Church, in different
cultural settings. In Latin America, the basic Christian community exists among the poor
and oppressed members of the Catholic population, revolving around the strong sense of
or concern for social justice. These communities, which are supported and encouraged by
the Latin American bishops, received great confirmation at the Medellin (1968) and
Puebla (1979) Conferences held in Colombia and Mexico. Africa’s small Christian
communities, initiated by the Church hierarchy, are designed to convey the growing need
of the African Christians to express the values of community, such as harmony and
solidarity in the context of their Christian faith.\textsuperscript{587}

These basic Christian communities have their own characteristics and expressions
based upon the various histories, cultures, and Church traditions of their countries or
areas of origin. Similarly, these groups are designated with a variety of names. In Africa
for instance, some of the terms used are “small Christian communities” (SCCs), “living
ecclesial communities,” and “neighbourhood Gospel groups.” In Latin America, these
communities are called “base ecclesial communities” (BECs) or “communidades
ecclesiales de base.”\textsuperscript{588}

\textsuperscript{586} Ibid., 20-33.
\textsuperscript{588} See, John Paul II, \textit{Ecclesia in Africa}, no. 89. Cf. Oliver A. Onwubiko, \textit{The Church as the Family of God
(Ujamaa)}, 192-196.
The nature of these basic Christian communities, as expressed by Philip J. Murnion, maintains that:

This community of faith is a community that is personal without being merely private, moving beyond the “circle of intimacy” of family and friends and entering into the “company of strangers” whom the Lord has made our brothers and sisters. It is a community where commitment is not reduced to mere compliance, where the fact of communion created by the Lord becomes an obligation for mutual respect and interdependence, a task of freeing the expression of each one’s gifts for the good of all and mission of all. It is a communion that enables each member to move beyond “self-development” and “growth,” for its own sake, as if this could be a purely individual matter, to the use of one’s abilities for the good of others.\textsuperscript{589}

The existence of these basic Christian communities has made it possible for people to be conscientiously involved in the work of evangelization. The integration of the Gospel into all the areas of peoples’ lives, as well as the bringing of Christian values to impact upon the world have been the essential qualities of these basic Christian communities. These communities are instances where solidarity and communal expression of one’s gifts are experienced as an ultimate value for the benefit of all. It is a community where a sense of belonging is recognized, achieved and sustained.\textsuperscript{590}

In addition, these basic communities are places where people who know one another can appreciate and care for one another. It is through these basic communities that those who are searching for a fuller faith life and greater sense of the transcendent God will find support, insight, and encouragement. In a sense, therefore, small Christian communities offer an opportunity for greater participation of all the people of God in the

\textsuperscript{589} Thomas A. Kleissler, et al. eds., \textit{Small Christian Communities: A Vision of Hope for the 21\textsuperscript{st} Century}, xii.
\textsuperscript{590} Ibid., 2.
mission of the Church, which is the central theme of Vatican II’s ecclesiology of communion.

During the first African Synod of bishops, basic Christian communities were projected as a viable model of renewing the Church-family from the grassroots, as well as a better option in fostering authentic human relationship among different people:

Right from the beginning, the Synod Fathers recognized that the Church as Family cannot reach her full potential as Church unless she is divided into communities small enough to foster close human relationships. The Assembly described the characteristics of such communities as follows: primarily they should be places engaged in evangelizing themselves, so that subsequently they can bring the Good News to others; they should moreover be communities which pray and listen to God’s Word, encourage the members themselves to take on responsibility, learn to live an ecclesial life, and reflect on different human problems in the light of the Gospel. Above all, these communities are to be committed to living Christ’s love for everyone, a love which transcends the limits of the natural solidarity of clans, tribes or other interest groups.\(^591\)

It is the Church (basic Christian community) in the neighbourhood which helps to promote communion and co-responsibility, and gives every member a sense of belonging.\(^592\) Many people in Nigeria are beginning to see the need to break the present parish set-up into small, manageable “cells” or “zones”, consisting of Christians who are able to know one another properly, visit one another regularly, and share in one another’s joys and sorrows, anxieties and worries. The basic Christian communities meet regularly to study the Bible, pray, celebrate the Eucharist, take care of the underprivileged, and respond to the problems of society in the light of the message of Christ.\(^593\)

\(^{591}\) See, John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 89.
Above all, these communities are noted for the love they radiate, a love that transcends the limits of the natural solidarity of clan, tribes or other interest groups.\textsuperscript{594}

With these characteristics, the basic Christian communities offer the best pattern for the renewal of ecclesiology within the Nigerian Church, especially as it concerns the participation and involvement of the laity in the mission of the Church. This is a very welcome development in a Church that increasingly promotes the idea of the basic Christian community as a “family”.\textsuperscript{595}

Despite the unique and positive values of restructuring the present parish structures to represent and reflect these basic Christian communities, it is evident that some Nigerian pastors have not fully come to grips with reorganizing the structures of the Church at the grassroots level because of the clerical orientation which they have inherited. The Nigerian Church hierarchy should therefore develop additional measures that would lead to a sincere reception and appreciation of an ecclesiology that encourages a relational attitude typical of basic Christian communities. The recognition of the traditional kindred or “Umunna” structure within Igbo culture can serve this purpose. The understanding of the Church through the appropriation of the Igbo cultural element of Umunna, sees the Church as primarily the communion of persons who belong together because of their shared ancestral origins and united by their common ties of nature, objectives, socio-cultural and salvific vocation in the triune God.\textsuperscript{596}

For instance, in many dioceses within the south-eastern Nigeria, many parishes have been divided into zones based on the number of kindred or families that are found


\textsuperscript{595} George Omaku Ehusani, \textit{A Prophetic Church}, 128.

within each parish. Existing structures, such as this, have proved to be vital Christian community that constitutes the most basic cell of the Church. In such communities, which are cells of the Church as family, one is formed to live concretely and authentically the African communitarian values or experiences of fraternity, solidarity, openness and inclusiveness. The Church, seen as the basic cell, challenges the segregative syndrome in our local church and wider society as well as the cultural subordination of women in Africa. Seeing the Church also as the basic cell, challenges the exclusivity characteristic of the African family, which is the root cause of ethnocentrism that is responsible for continued tension and conflicts in many African societies and institutions.\textsuperscript{597} Through such a relational ecclesiology unique to the basic Christian communities, the lay people will integrally be part of the Church’s mission of evangelization. This represents another dimension of communion ecclesiology, the sharing of a common mission.

4. 9 An Urgent Need for a Theology of Inculturation within the Nigerian Church

The Church’s evangelizing mission does not take place unless it addresses culture, and succeeds in bringing about a re-expression of the Gospel and Christian life in terms of the culture addressed. This is what has come to be known as inculturation.\textsuperscript{598} There is an urgent need for a renewed theology of inculturation in the face of the present nature of the ecclesial ministry, and the contemporary challenges for Vatican II’s theology of the laity within the Nigerian Church context as highlighted within the previous section.

\textsuperscript{597} Cf. Lucius Iwejuru Ugorji, \textit{Witness in Charity and Truth}, 119.
The traditional Roman theology of the pre-conciliar era has the mark of thinking in terms of a uniformed culture for all people. The result was an attempt to formulate a uniform system of theology. It is not surprising that some of the post-conciliar theological trends have been severely criticized as a move to abandon the attempt to formulate a theology valid for the universal Church. In spite of the criticisms and counter criticisms, some post-conciliar theological trends, like the theology of liberation and contextual theology, have continued to dominate theological reflection not only in Latin America and Africa, but also in Europe.

The post-conciliar theological trends represent a theological evolution which underlines the effort to understand theology as “fides quaerens intellectum” – faith seeking understanding. Recent literature and developments among African theologians confirm that African theology is no longer a mere possibility or what Cardinal Ratzinger in 1985 described “as a project rather than a reality.” At present, African theology has not only become a reality, but it has also been able to develop specific characters as a result of coming to terms with African culture and experiences in a creative manner. Therefore, the “universal theology of the Christian faith will and must always remain one, but interpreted in terms of the African soil,” in African idioms and an African world-view. And a theology of the laity for Africa must be contextual.

Since the Second Vatican Council, inculturation theology has gained much attention in the mission of the Church and theology. The term “Inculturation” itself has evolved from its sociological usage to assume a significant theological meaning. Besides

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the term inculturation, African theology is also expressed in such concepts as “localization”, “contextualization”, and “indigenization.” In whichever term it is expressed, African theology of inculturation represents an active encounter between the Gospel message and culture. Inculturation theology is indeed not exclusively an African affair. It is a call by the Second Vatican Council to all people and local churches to make the Gospel incarnate in the lives and cultures of the people.⁶⁰¹

In the documents of the Second Vatican Council, “incarnation” theology is presented as the starting-point for the development of the theology of inculturation. Using the terms “accommodation” and “adaptation” rather than inculturation, the Council formulates what is to be the content, form and method of inculturation theology. These outlines are discernable in the Council’s document *Gaudium et Spes*:

> The good news of Christ continually renews the life and culture of fallen man [sic]; it combats and removes the error and evil which flow from the ever-present attraction of sin. It never ceases to purify and elevate the morality of peoples. It takes the spiritual qualities and endowments of every age and nation, and with supernatural riches it causes them to blossom, as it were, from within; it fortifies, completes and restores them in Christ. In this way the Church carries out its mission and in that very act it stimulates and advances human and civil culture, as well as contributing by its activity, including liturgical activity, to man’s [sic] interior freedom.⁶⁰²

In the period after the Second Vatican Council, the African Church has been steeped in inculturation theology. In 1967, barely two years after the Council, Paul VI issued a message to the Church and people of Africa, *Africæ Terrarum*. This text speaks of the essentials of African moral and religious values as a foundation for a well-ordered

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⁶⁰² See, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 58.
society. Addressing the Symposium of Episcopal Conference of Africa and Madagascar at the close of its first plenary session on July 31, 1969, in Kampala, Paul VI optimistically called for dialogue between faith and culture. This call was re-echoed in the Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Nuntiandi of December 8, 1975 that stressed in a theological pattern the place of culture in evangelization. This document presented an analysis of how a particular culture can appropriate the Gospel values, and leaves no one in doubt as to the place and importance of culture in evangelization and the mission of the Church.

However, it is noteworthy that the Second Vatican Council and Paul VI spoke glowingly of inculturation without using the very term “inculturation.” There is evidence that suggests that the term “inculturation” did not gain access into a magisterial document until 1979 when it was used by John Paul II in Catechesi Tradendae. According to John Paul II, “the term acculturation or inculturation may be a neologism, but it expresses very well one factor of the great mystery of Incarnation” (CT, 53).

With the entrance of the term “inculturation” into magisterial documents, it became popularized with theological significance. In the African Church it has become a dominant theological trend. The first African Synod of Bishops—Ecclesia in Africa—strongly stressed that if the Gospel message is to be firmly rooted in Africa, inculturation must be given urgent priority in the life of the African Church. This document describes inculturation theology as “a requirement for evangelization and one of the greatest

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603 Paul VI, Africa Terrarum, no. 13 as quoted by Aylward Shorter, Toward a Theology of Inculturation, 206-207.
604 See, Aylward Shorter, Toward a Theology of Inculturation, 208.
605 Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation on Evangelization in the Modern World, Evangelii Nuntiandi, no. 20.
challenges for the Church in the continent on the eve of the Third Millennium.” To speak of evangelization and mission of the Church in Africa without being cognisant of inculturation is almost impossible.

Therefore, to define African theology as an “inculturation theology” is to underpin the trend upon which genuine evangelization is to be carried out in Africa. *Ecclesia in Africa* articulates inculturation in the context of the Church’s evangelizing mission, and maintains that “inculturation is precisely the insertion of the Gospel message into cultures.” In inculturation theology, the authenticity of the Gospel values, the purity of the apostolic traditions, and the catholicity of the Church must be kept constantly in mind as fundamental principles.

While asserting that the actual practice of inculturation is a delicate task, *Ecclesia in Africa* extends inculturation to the “whole life of the Church,” including “theology, liturgy, and the Church’s life and structures.” The first Special Assembly of the African Synod of Bishops did not only speak of inculturation, but clearly applied such an approach in its expression of the Church in Africa as Family of God—an appropriate paradigm shift within the twenty first-century.

However, a critical review of the process of practical inculturation in many African countries like Nigeria shows that volumes of academic and theological discussions on inculturation exist, but very little have been translated into the actual practices and pastorals of the Church. For many people, inculturation seems to have

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607 Ibid., no. 60.
608 Ibid., no. 62.
609 Ibid., 63.
been more or less delineated to the renewal of some simple elements of liturgy, identifiable with the use of vernacular, the use of local instruments and liturgical music, ceremonials, the clapping of hands, and the use of locally made materials in liturgical worship.

Inculcation is much more than the above elements, though these elements do indicate some mark of progress in inculturation theology. If the principle of inculturation, however, could find appropriate expression in how priestly ministry is exercised, as well as in how the involvement of the laity should be applied and appreciated within the Nigerian context, then the problems of clericalism, paternalism and other issues relating to the social mission of the Church could be properly addressed and resolved. In other words, inculturation of Christianity in terms of its concrete expression as it concerns the Church’s structures, and in respect of the contemporary political, socio-moral and economic context of the Nigerian society, are yet to find an appropriate application.

However, there are some instances where the practice of inculturation could challenge certain indigenous beliefs and practices with the Gospel message in order to eradicate them.

For instance, there are practices of the indigenous society that constitute injustice towards, and oppression and marginalization of some categories of people within the society. They include the caste system and subjugation of women, which I treated in Chapter Two of this study. The Osu caste system, which is practised by some ethnic groups in Nigeria, denies in many respects those who belong to it, the free association with other members of society. For example, they cannot marry outside the caste and they

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are discriminated against in many activities of the society. Christian conscience must therefore denounce such practice as unjust and against the message of Christ. Christianity must be seen as a force to break down barriers of caste, ethnicity, race and social discrimination (cf. Gal 3:25-29). The task of inculturation here is to conscientize the people about the heinousness of such practices, when considered in the light of the Gospel of Christ, and involve the people to actions that will seek to eradicate such practice.611

Another instance where the issue of inculturation of the Gospel is needed is in critique of the marginalization and subjugation of women that pervades all of the Nigerian culture. In African societies and in particular Nigerian society, women occupy an inferior position and they are subordinated to men. In some societies therefore, they are considered as the property of their husband and are not entitled to any inheritance. Widowhood rites, as noted within Chapter Two of this study, are one of the practices that enforce this subordination of women in some ethnic groups in Nigeria. In some societies within the Igbo culture of the Nigerian society, women are primary suspects in the cases of the death of their husbands and they are therefore subjected to all sorts of ill-treatment and torture according to the traditional widowhood rites. It is not uncommon to see Christians condone and even enforce unjust practices simply because that is the way things have been in the society. This is where the practice of the inculturation of the Gospel should provide a Christian challenge to culture. Thus, the starting point for inculturation in this respect is the mobilization of Christian consciousness against such

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unjust and inhuman situations. Christians should be made aware that their commitment to Christ obliges them to challenge such practices because of their cruel nature.\textsuperscript{612}

4. 10 Conclusion

In this last chapter, I have given an inculturated reception to the ecclesiology of Vatican II’s theology of the laity within the Nigerian Church by highlighting some African cultural elements, as well as some of the principles of Vatican II’s ecclesiology, that would encourage active involvement and participation of the laity in the mission of the Church. Each of these responses is primarily intended to foster the spirit of ecclesial communion and solidarity as forms of Christian witness and ministry between the clergy and the laity, within the context of the Nigerian Church and society. These measures will also assist in fostering a deeper and more extensive knowledge of the Council as well as its assimilation, reaffirmation and its implementation within the Nigerian Church and society with special reference to the theology of the laity. Such practical and appreciable application of the Council’s teachings on the theology and mission of the laity will lead both the Nigerian hierarchy as well as lay people to a greater understanding of the Council’s affirmations on the mission of the Church which is shared by the clergy and laity.

\textsuperscript{612} Ibid., 134-135.
General Conclusion

The legacy of Vatican II is a story of accomplishment. It was a Council which signalled the most tremendous shift in the theology of the laity. This theology emphasizes the baptismal dignity of the laity through which the laity have received their full membership in the Church and the responsibilities for the Church. These aspects of the new theology of the laity were recognized through some of the images of the Church as the People of God, Mystical Body of Christ and the Church as a communion.

The teaching of Vatican II on the theology and mission of the laity, despite the different nuances, as seen in Chapter One, constitutes a considerable advance in Catholic ecclesiology. Vatican II’s teaching on the theology of the laity is far removed from the pre-conciliar tendencies, which saw the laity as mere passive recipients of the clergy’s pastoral initiative. Rather, in modern times lay people are seen as being responsible ministers of the Gospel, as Paul Lakeland argues. Their call to mission is seen as rooted in faith, baptism and confirmation rather than primarily as a mandate given to them from the hierarchy. In all these instances, one discovers a major challenge with which the study of Vatican II’s theology of the laity confronts us as noted by Paul Lakeland: “a theological understanding of the laity is entire ecclesiology, and one that cannot be healthily constructed without honestly facing the problems that a cult

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613 Cf. Richard R. Gaillardetz and Catherine E. Clifford, Keys to the Council: Unlocking the Teaching of Vatican II, 101. “Although the Council was unable to offer a fully developed and completely consistent theology of the laity, its contributions nevertheless lay the foundation for a new age of the Church. No more were the laity to be relegated to servile obedience to clerical mandates. Now the laity were to engage the world with initiative, courage, and conviction. In the post-conciliar era we have witnessed a renewed emphasis on the priority of Christian baptism and the demands of Christian mission, calling every baptized follower of Jesus to be a servant of God’s reign.”

understanding of the priesthood has bequeathed to the Church.” 615 Secondly, “silence on the theology of the laity,” he argues, “is to be explained at least in part by the radical ecclesiological implications of this kind of religious reflection.” Thus, “when the lay state is treated as the norm in ecclesiology, rather than the clerical,” Paul Lakeland maintains, “the Church suddenly seems very different.”616

Placed within the context of the Nigerian Roman Catholic Church, we can infer from the available evidence and literature that the theology and mission of the laity have undergone different interpretations. The basic presuppositions surrounding the theology and mission of the laity have been blurred through the various hermeneutical principles which seem to establish and overemphasize the dichotomy between the ministerial priesthood and the priesthood of the faithful. Such interpretations have led to seeing the Church as something in terms of a juridical ecclesiology, and as a Church that emphasizes the power and authority of the hierarchical priesthood over and above the priesthood of the faithful. We saw this in some of the discussions within the African context and, particularly, the Nigerian context.

The Roman Catholic Church in Nigeria has not entirely succeeded in giving its laity an adequate sense of participation in, and co-responsibility for, the mission of the Church as we have discussed in Chapters Two and Three. The urgent need today is to further develop collegial and synodal structures so that the Church in Nigeria may become a free and progressive community, a sign of unity in diversity in every aspect of its context. The Nigerian Church should also become more involved in the promotion of

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615 Ibid.
peace, justice, and reconciliation, advocating greater collaboration of laypersons in the apostolate and a more adequate use of the distinctive gifts of women.

The advent of Christianity in Nigeria has contributed immensely to a greater appreciation of the Christian faith. The Church in Nigeria can discover new ways of being a Church through a sincere appropriation and application of the principles of the Second Vatican Council’s communion ecclesiology as we have seen in Chapter Four. The Nigerian Church needs to abandon its juridical and institutional ecclesiology, with its authoritarian accent, and embrace the proper image of the people of God ecclesiology with its love, solidarity, service, communion and warmth in relationship among her various members.

True and authentic communion can easily be facilitated among all the people of God if the African Church hierarchy, especially the Nigerian clergy, gives priority in its exercise of ministry to integral and effective involvement of the laity in the mission of the Church. Therefore, communion ecclesiology in the present structure of the Nigerian Church should imply an effective co-responsibility and collaboration of the whole people of God in the life, organization and mission of the Church, in all the ramifications of the Church’s existence. Based on these principles, the suggestion of the twentieth-century theologian and ecclesiologist Yves Congar will come true as he rightly wrote on the need to cultivate the sense of an organic co-operation between the clergy and laity:

It is this mutual give-and-take that I should like to see going on between priesthood and laity. The actual forms that it could take do not matter much, provided that due respect is invariably given both to fatherhood—that is, to authority—and fellowship in community; a respect that sees in others, not simply an object, but a subject, a person, a grown-up person. What we need is dialogue, something that takes place between adult and responsible persons, face to face. And dialogue has two enemies: one is monologue,
when only one voice speaks; the other is disorder, when everyone talks at once. “God”, wrote St Paul, “is the author of peace, not of disorder” (1 Cor. 14:33). I am convinced that along these lines, there can be found more far-reaching ways of putting the Christian abilities of the laity to work and thus the possibility of a new springtime for the Church.⁶¹⁷

However, dialogue cannot be effective until each dialoguing partner listens to one another. Listening as an art of the human person is a commitment that demands great attention. The ministry “with large ear,” as Elochukwu Uzukwu proposes, disposes the leader of any Christian community to facilitate a nonthreatening, but progressive upbuilding of the Christian community.⁶¹⁸ Such listening helps in rendering justice and fairness to all and makes the community to achieve its purpose of bearing witness to the Kingdom of Christ and for the transformation of the world. When we give one another (priests and lay people) the opportunity of sincere collaboration and authentic solidarity as people of God, God can and will work through such co-operation in order to achieve the healing needed in the Church and the world. Such support, as I have argued, can serve as a possibility for the full realization of the contributions of the laity and of the clergy in the mission of the Nigerian Church and society.

The Nigerian Church can effectively and concretely respond to the contemporary challenges of Vatican II’s theology of the laity by living according to what it proclaims to the world. This implies that the Church in Nigeria must live by the standards of the gospel of Christ, striving vigorously to make Christian values enshrined within the various documents of the Second Vatican Council as it concerns the theology of the laity, applicable to concrete situations and circumstances of the Nigerian Church and society.

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