FORMATION AND FUNDING OF SEMINARIES: A MAJOR CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGE TO THE CHURCH IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The issue of formation and funding of seminaries has today become a very topical and serious challenge to the Church in Nigeria. The challenge stems from the growing difficult financial terrain which our seminaries have to navigate in order to sustain their life, owing to the rapid decline, if not gradual withdrawal, of financial subsidies by their oversea funding agencies, particularly the Society of SS Peter and Paul. The above society based in Rome has, right from the foundation of most of our seminaries, provided the major financial support for seminary formation. With what strongly appears in the horizon today as annual gradual withdrawal of financial support by this Roman ecclesiastical funding agency, our seminaries have now entered into a turbulent and difficult phase of their history, financially speaking, which only a creative alternative local strategy of funding by Nigerian particular Churches can help to salvage. This article on formation and funding of seminaries is an honest attempt to contribute intellectually, constructively and meaningfully to this process.

Introduction

The theme of our reflection is a very topical and timely issue given the enormous and peculiar challenges confronting priestly formation in our Nigerian context. In the light of the changing circumstances of our time, this reflection calls for new approaches, inventiveness, creativity and new insights if we are still to be able to effectively nurture and sustain integral formation of future priests in the light of the Gospel teaching, and according to the norms and principles for reform of seminary formation as

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articulated by the Magisterium of the Church. We shall proceed methodically in addressing our theme of reflection. We shall begin by discerning the place of seminary formation in the life of the local Church in order to highlight its significance and importance to the future of evangelization of humanity, which is also in reality, the future of the Church. Next, through a short historical survey, which focuses only on key historical moments while taking cognizance of differing historical circumstances, we shall attempt to grasp solidly the meaning and nature of priestly formation. Then, we shall advance a solid doctrinal foundation for seminary formation by highlighting the four pillars of seminary formation in their mutual interrelatedness as discussed in the Second Vatican Council Decree on Priestly Training, *Optatam Totius* and in Pope Saint John Paul II’s Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis*. We shall then consider the issue of funding as it arises in the context of Priestly formation in Nigeria. Attention shall be given to the effects of poor or inadequate funding on seminary formation within the Nigerian context. After noting some positives on the part of certain quarters in the Nigerian Church, we shall finally conclude by proposing a vision for re-strategization on the part of our local Churches in the effort to address systematically and with a long term plan the challenges of funding increasingly confronting the Nigerian seminaries.

The Place of Seminary Formation in the Life of the Local Church

The significance and importance of seminary formation in the life of the local Church is tied to the significance and importance of the ministry of its priests. In his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, Pope Saint John Paul II expressed the indispensable importance of the priestly ministry in the Church when he wrote:

Without priests the Church would not be able to live that fundamental obedience in response to the command of Christ: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations” (Mt. 28:19) and “Do this in remembrance of me” (Lk. 22:19; cf: 1 Cor. 11.24), i.e., an obedience to the command to announce the
Gospel and to renew daily the sacrifice of the giving of his body and the shedding of his blood for the life of the world.¹

It therefore follows that the desired renewal of the whole Church depends largely on the ministry of its priests whose efficacy and fruitfulness depend largely on the quality of formation given as well as received in the seminary. It is in this light that Optatam Totius urges that “all priests should look on the seminary as the very heart of the diocese and should gladly help and support it.”² This decree on priestly training promulgated by Vatican II as guideline for post-conciliar reform of seminary formation, in the light of contemporary situation and challenges, also demands that “the bishop, by his keen and affectionate care, should encourage the seminary staff and show himself a true father in Christ to the students.”³ This “keen and affectionate care” with which the bishop is expected to encourage seminary formation, we assume, would also logically include solid financial provision and systematic plan to address the issue and challenges of funding.

A Short Historical Survey of Seminary Formation

Jesus the Formator: A Study of the First Seminary

Jesus of Nazareth was the person to set up the first ‘seminary’⁴ when as Mark the evangelist reports: “He appointed twelve to be with him, and to be sent out to preach and have authority to cast out demons” (Mark 3: 14-15). This being with the Master, Teacher and Formator, Jesus Christ, which lasted for three years, would set the eternal pattern and standard for priestly formation in the Catholic Church all through the ages. The great Apostle of the Gentiles, Paul, also imitated Jesus in this style of personal accompaniment when he chose St. Timothy whom he “wished to go forth with him” (Acts 16:3), as he conveyed to his Churches the pastoral decision reached by the Council of Jerusalem (ca. ⁵)

³Ibid.
⁴From the Latin, Seminarium, meaning ‘seed bed’.
⁵Ibid.
AD 49). The model set by Jesus and imitated by Paul is in continuity with the great prophetic tradition of Moses, who desired Joshua to undergo a sustained apprenticeship in his company. The result was that when Joshua became the leader of the people of Israel, God promised him: “No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with you.” (Joshua 1:5).

What is the importance and significance of this gospel model of formation; this being with Jesus? Being with Jesus through intimate association with him in every phase of his mission, enabled the apostles to become his (Jesus) credible witnesses of the life that appeared in him as the crucified, risen and ascended Son of God (cf. Acts 1:8). The life which he handed on to his disciples is the same form of life as lived out in the Trinitarian communion. Thus, Jesus could say of himself: “He who comes from heaven is above all...He bears witness to what he has seen and heard...For it is not by measure that he gives the Spirit.” (John 3:31, 32, 34).

Given the above standard of the Gospel, every historical development of seminary formation, must be measured against this original model of the Gospel: to be with him, to imitate what he has seen and heard from the Father and the Spirit, as well as lived out existentially by his life, passion, death and resurrection.

Patristic Era: Augustine of Hippo

It is an historical fact that fifty years before the episcopacy of St Augustine of Hippo, St Eusebius of Vercelli “combined the monastic discipline with a common life for the parochial clergy with whom he lived personally.”5 This combination of monastic discipline and the common life already suggests a substantial formation of the clergy, since monastic life included study, asceticism and community life. On the assumption of his Episcopal ministry, Augustine converted his Episcopal residence into a formation centre for the superiors of many monastic houses and for a considerable number of diocesan bishops. In this way, clerical training in community with others, especially with the bishop, became a model for imitation.6

6Ibid., 5.
The weaknesses of seminary formation in our age and in our Nigerian context may be compounded by a distancing between formation and community, between seminary and bishop. On the other hand, the combination of monastic discipline and community life in the Episcopal residence at Hippo would have ensured that clerical formation was not without its necessary human, spiritual and intellectual dimensions – normal to any monastic community. Moreover, it was an Augustinian rule that no one would be ordained a priest unless he had lived in community for some time. Through such measures, Augustine left behind him an educated clergy; and the essential features of this Augustinian formation would be repeated through the ages.

**Clerical Formation and Influence of Western Monasticism under the Rule of St Benedict**

As Western monasticism began to develop under the influence of St. Benedict, clerical formation took on a more monastic expression. The Benedictine monastic tradition was known for welcoming boys into monasteries for the purpose of forming them to become monks. The daily program of formation consisted of regular hours of manual labour and several hours of sacred reading, namely, reading and copying of the Scriptures, reading of monastic writings and the Fathers of the Church. However, secular authors were also not forgotten, as they had a place in monastic culture.

It was St. Bede who, two centuries later, gave us a clear insight into what the intellectual aspects of monastic formation looked like in his day: “I have spent all the remainder of my life in this monastery and devoted myself entirely to the study of the Scriptures. And while I have observed the regular discipline and sung the choir offices daily in Church, my chief delight has always been in study, teaching, and writing.”

Later in the early medieval period, another level of education would be included, namely, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music. The above two levels of education became the prerequisite then for studying philosophy and theology. The dawn of the scholastic age would lead to the elaboration of a fuller philosophical and theological curriculum.

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Middle Ages: The Rise of Cathedral Schools and the Birth of Universities

In the early medieval period, monastic schools or system of education held sway in Christendom. For instance, many daughter monastic communities and schools owe their origin to the famous monastery of Fulda founded by St Boniface. However, it was to the Emperor Charlemagne that credit goes for enacting an act that played a role in the development of cathedral schools towards the end of the eight century, thus, breaking the monopoly of monastic education. He made laws which required all clerics to read and write, as well as possess sufficient knowledge that would permit the fulfilment of their professional duties. In this way, the establishment of cathedral schools for the formation of clerics under the vigilance and tutelage of their bishops gained momentum. Earlier in 633, the Fourth Council of Toledo had made it mandatory for priestly candidates to live in a single building near the cathedral. Thus, a certain level of uniformity in curriculum and method of supervision began to develop. The proximity to the cathedral provided a certain pastoral colouration to the formation of candidates for ordination.

Furthermore, even though a great variety of circumstances gave rise to the birth of universities, nearly all of them had links to the monastic and cathedral schools of their time. For instance, the birth of the University of Paris was as a result of a concentration of professors and students of monastic and cathedral schools. In spite of the existence of different reasons for their origins, medieval European universities had ecclesiastical links which guaranteed their academic program.8

On the other hand, as a place for priestly formation, university settings were not always conducive. It could not take responsibility for spiritual or pastoral formation, although the existence of clerical residences on campus could enhance these possibilities. Thus, towards the close of the medieval period, laxity in clerical life grew. This ugly situation was reflected in the lamentation of Bishop Francesco Chierigati of Teramo (1552), in the wake of the posting of Luther’s 95 theses: “We all, prelates and clergy, have gone astray from the right way, and for long

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8Ellis, Essays in Seminary Education, 13.
there is none that has done good; no, not one. To God, therefore, we must
give all the glory and humble ourselves before Him.”

The ability of the Church to carry out reforms in clerical formation
was hampered by, among other things, the lack of institutions of priestly
formation which maintained high standards of conduct. It was only the
strong reform spirit of the Council of Trent that would address
comprehensively the formation and education of the clergy resulting in a
revival of the pastoral ministry.

Council of Trent and the Reform of Clerical Formation

In 1536 Pope Paul III had set up a commission to see to the clerical
reform in the Church. The commission submitted its report to the Pope in
1537. It examined the reasons behind the principal clerical abuses. Although, it made an honest evaluation of the issue, the report did not
suggest the prior need for institutions devoted to the spiritual and
intellectual formation of future priests and bishops. The matter of clerical
reform came up clearly during the Council only in 1547 during a plenary.

In its decree on seminaries, the Council of Trent has the following
provisions:

1. Every cathedral and metropolitan Church is obliged to have a
   seminary of its own.
2. Smaller and poorer jurisdictions might band together to form what
today would be called a regional seminary.
3. While every diocese is obliged to have a seminary, not every
candidate whom a bishop ordains has to be educated in a seminary.
4. Candidates for the seminary should be at least twelve years of age
   with skills in reading and writing and be of suitable moral
   character.
5. Preference is to be given to the sons of the poor.
6. Intellectual formation is to be suited to a candidate’s age and
   abilities.
7. However, a curriculum of sorts is specified: they are to study
   letters, the humanities, chant, and the science of “ecclesiastical

9Ibid., 21.
computation,” scripture, dogmatic, moral and pastoral theology, and rubrics.

8. Spiritual formation includes wearing the clerical dress, receiving the tonsure, assisting at daily Mass, going to Confession once a month, and to Holy Communion as often as the advice of one’s spiritual director permits.

9. Professors in the seminary are to be qualified academically with Masters or Licentiate, or doctoral degrees in particular field of their expertise and are to be competent in discharging their offices.

After outlining the above specifics of intellectual and spiritual formation, the other aspects of the decree dealt largely with financial and administrative details such as the designation of the bishop as the supreme administrator of the institution. All of these stipulations were aimed at putting in place a high standard of priestly formation which would be uniform as well as discourage the ordination of unworthy and unsuitable candidates.\(^{11}\)

**Second Vatican Council**

The Second Vatican Council also took up the subject of reform of seminary formation in its decree on priestly training – *Optatam Totius* (1965). Prior to the Council, the need arose to find a balance between the spiritual and intellectual aspects of formation. There was also the need to improve on the link between seminary formation and pastoral life, and to emphasize sufficiently, especially given the challenges to clerical celibacy in the 1950’s, the integration of the emotional life with the spiritual life.\(^{12}\) Thus, the document highlights what should be the four pillars of integral seminary formation; a teaching which was taken up and beautifully expounded by Pope Saint John Paul II in his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Pastores Dabo Vobis.*

**The Four Pillars of Integral Seminary Formation**

The primary goal of seminary formation is to produce men who will be intellectually, socially and spiritually equipped to be effective instruments of evangelization in the circumstances of the world of their

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\(^{11}\) Cf. Ellis, *Essays in Seminary Education,* 36.

\(^{12}\) Cf. ibid., 173-184.
day. The seminary is thus, expected to be the “seed bed” for the nurturing of capable and mature priests, who, in response to God’s grace, can collaborate with their bishops and superiors in serving God’s people throughout the world. This task of forming priests, who will be gentlemen, saints, scholars and pastors, was considered by His Holiness, Pope St John Paul II in his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Pastores Dabo Vobis* as “one of the most demanding and important tasks for the future of the evangelization of humanity.”\(^{13}\) In this light, the Pope identified four necessary components of priestly formation, namely, human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral components of priestly formation. These areas of formation do not stand in isolation from each other, rather, the goal of formation is a holistic integration of these components in each and every candidate for the priesthood.

**Human Formation**

It is reassuring that the Pope did note in the same document that human formation is the basis of all priestly formation, given that it is the human person that becomes the priest.\(^{14}\) The goal of human formation is to form priests who are “balanced people, strong, and free, capable of bearing the weight of pastoral responsibilities.” The priest is expected to “mould his human personality in such a way that it becomes a bridge and not an obstacle for others in their meeting with Jesus Christ the Redeemer of man.” According to John Paul II, the priests “need to be educated to love the truth, to be loyal, to respect every person, to have a sense of justice, to be true to their word, to be genuinely compassionate, to be men of integrity and, especially, to be balanced in judgment and behaviour.” Furthermore, as the Holy Father exhorts, “the priest should be able to know the depths of the human heart, to perceive difficulties and problems, to make meeting and dialogue easy, to create trust and cooperation, to express serene and objective judgments.”\(^{15}\)

In order to give the formation of the human person the pride of place it deserves, *Pastores Dabo Vobis* recommends, “a simple and demanding” programme of human formation modelled after St. Paul’s exaltation to the Philippians to strive for and after “whatever is true,

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\(^{14}\) Ibid., 43.

\(^{15}\) Ibid.
whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things” (Phil. 4:9). This implies that the priest should be formed to develop the capacity to relate well with and to others; to be a “man of communion.” Therefore, he must be formed to avoid being arrogant and quarrelsome, but to be affable, hospitable, sincere in words and heart, prudent and discreet, generous and ready to serve, capable of opening himself to clear and brotherly relationships, quick to understand, to forgive and to console.  

**Spiritual Formation**

The document, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, considers spiritual formation as the soul of priestly formation, as this aspect is seen as the centre which holds together and gives life to the being of a priest and his function as a priest. The essential content of spiritual formation is well expressed in the Second Vatican Council’s Decree, *Optatam Totius*. According to this decree, spiritual formation of seminarians should help them to cultivate intimate and constant union with the triune God, develop personal relationship with Jesus in every detail of their lives, cultivate a liturgical personality that also redounds to the benefit of their future flock, and seek Christ in many places; and this includes in the faithful meditation of God’s word, Eucharist, the bishop who sends them and the people to whom they are sent, especially the disadvantaged among these people. The spiritual formation of the priest helps him to become a man of prayer and communion with God.  

**Intellectual Formation**

Although intellectual formation has its own characteristics, it is also profoundly linked with both human and spiritual formation. It is a necessary expression of these, and its object is the formation of the future priest so that he is able to acquire not only improved knowledge of the God that he serves, but also that this wisdom of God shapes his mind and transforms his entire being for the love of God and the following of Christ. *Pastores Dabo Vobis* shows that the intellectual formation of candidates for the priesthood finds its specific justification in the very nature of the ordained ministry, and the challenge of proclaiming Christ in...

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16Ibid.
a renewed way bearing in mind, the conditions and circumstances of today. Thus, new problems, questions and challenges of our time or the present situation demand deeper intellectual formation in the mysteries of God so that the future priest would be better equipped to provide the response of faith and account for the hope that is in us (cf. 1 Pt. 3:15).  

For priests and future priests who may tend to relegate intellectual formation to a secondary importance in relation to other aspects of formation like the spiritual dimension, *Pastores Dabo Vobis* does not fail to correct this erroneous tendency by stressing the indispensability of this aspect of the formation and its complementarity with other aspects:

> The commitment to study, which takes up no small part of the time of those preparing for the priesthood, is not in fact an external and secondary dimension of their human, Christian, spiritual and vocational growth. In reality, through study, especially the study of theology, the future priest assents to the word of God, grows in his spiritual life and prepares himself to fulfil his pastoral ministry.  

> “True theology proceeds from the faith and aims at leading to the faith.” A theologian is therefore, first and foremost, a believer, a person of faith. He is one who asks himself questions about his own faith, with the aim of reaching a deeper understanding of the faith itself. Thus, faith, as it were, becomes the point of departure and the point of arrival of theology. 

> The document condemns a purely abstract approach to knowledge, and privileges an approach that integrates intellectual formation with spiritual formation marked by a personal experience of God, which makes the priest pastorally effective. This implies, in my own understanding, that conversion is the heart of all formation, as it is the quality that transforms the person-in-ministry to become more and more a better and effective instrument of God for bringing reconciliation to mankind. The necessity of integrating intellectual formation with spiritual formation is not only true for theology but also for philosophy since as a discipline it “greatly helps the priest to be to enrich his intellectual formation in the “cult of truth,” namely, in a kind of loving veneration of the truth, which leads one

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19Ibid.
to recognize that the truth is not created or measured by man but is given to man as a gift by the supreme truth, God.” The Christian philosopher is therefore a believer who is conscious of his faith and does not work at counter purposes with its demands.\(^{20}\)

**Pastoral Formation**

The whole formation imparted to candidates for the priesthood aims at preparing them to enter into communion with the charity of Christ the Good Shepherd. Hence their formation in its different aspects must have a fundamentally pastoral character. The three components of priestly formation already seen are directed to making the priest a pastor of God’s people which is what pastoral formation is about.\(^{21}\) According to *Optatam Totius*, priests should be

True shepherds of souls after the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, teacher, priest and shepherd. Hence, they should be trained for the ministry of the word of God, so that they may gain an ever increasing understanding of the revealed word of God, making it their own by meditation, and giving it expression in their speech and in their lives. They should be trained for the ministry of worship and sanctification, so that by prayer and the celebration of the liturgical functions they may carry on the works of salvation through the Eucharistic sacrifices and sacraments. They should be trained to undertake the ministry of shepherd, that they may know how to represent Christ to humanity, Christ who did not come to have service done to him but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for the many; (Matt10:45; Jn. 13:12-17) and that they may win over many by becoming the servants of all (Cor. 9:19).\(^{22}\)

A programme for pastoral formation in the light of the recommendations of *Optatam Totius* would cover the threefold functions of Jesus Christ as Prophet/Teacher, Priest/Sanctifier, and King/Servant. That is, the pastoral formation of the priest should consist of his training as the minister of the word (his prophetic function), as the minister of

\(^{20}\)Ibid., 52-55.
\(^{21}\)Ibid.,57.
worship and sanctification (his priestly function), and as shepherd (his kingly function).

This pastoral formation of the future priest has two aspects, theoretical and practical. The theoretical aspect is pursued in a special sense by the theological discipline referred to as Pastoral or Practical Theology. Here, what is studied are the principles and criteria for the pastoral action of the Church in history, along with the techniques for pastoral activities. “Among these principles and criteria, one that is especially important is that of the evangelical discernment of the socio-cultural and ecclesial situation in which the particular pastoral action has to be carried out.”23 On the other hand, the practical aspect is left to be learnt and acquired on the field, during pastoral work in the local Churches during their long holidays and pastoral year programme, and other occasions that provide themselves.

The Issue of Funding in the Context of Priestly Formation in Nigeria
Situating the Question of Funding in Its Social and Ecclesial Context

The issue of Formation and Funding of Seminaries, as the theme of this article did not surface as a bolt from the blue. It was not by chance or by accident that the theme is selected for reflection and consequent action. The issue is topical and contextual, arising from the present social and ecclesial situation of our country. As men of faith called to live out their vocation in the circumstances of the present day, what happens within the social and ecclesial context of our seminaries invariably influences and conditions the progress and outcome of priestly formation positively or negatively. In this light, the issue of funding is fast becoming a major challenge to priestly formation in our seminaries. Some major developments and changes in the socio-ecclesial context of seminary formation in Nigeria is responsible for this challenge, and these must now be tackled headlong, methodically and systematically in order to restore hope to the future of seminary formation, knowing quite well that on this depends, to a large extent, the future of the Church, her development and her universal mission of salvation.

The first major challenge in this area of funding of our seminaries has an ecclesial origin. It is based on the rapid decrease, if not gradual

23Ibid., 57.
withdrawal, of financial subsidies by our overseas funding agencies particularly the Society of SS Peter and Paul (Rome) which has, right from the foundation of most of our seminaries, provided the major financial support for seminary formation. Just as in 2008, when the slump of world economy under the pressure of financial crisis which originated in the United States of America caught many in the world unawares, so also the gradual meltdown of ecclesial financial subsidy from Rome is catching the local Churches in Nigeria napping, resulting in a great challenge to the future of priestly formation in our seminaries.

Another important challenge in this area of funding is the spiral rise in vocations to the priesthood; the so-called “vocation boom” – a situation which may be due to a number of factors. There is no doubt as to the high religious sense of the African man (thanks to the African religion and culture). However, to present this point as the singular factor behind this phenomenon of vocation-boom will be very presumptuous. The long-standing economic crises in the country, the dwindling economic fortunes of many Nigerians increasingly characteristic of our country, the lack of jobs for young graduates and school leavers, all of which make life more and more difficult to cope with, may also significantly account for this phenomenon of spiral rise in vocation, as these experiences may cause some young Catholics to perceive the priesthood as a possible source of well-being and enviable social status. The point we want to make is that the astronomical growth or rise in priestly vocation in Nigeria also has implication for funding in all our seminaries.

Another major challenge for the funding of our seminaries, which is socio-economic in nature, results from the present high cost of living engendered by high inflation unparalleled in the history of Nigeria. This has greatly affected the purchasing power of the administrative organ of our seminaries, thereby undermining their capacity to effectively run the seminaries in terms of the needed funds to feed the seminarians, maintain existing infrastructures, build new ones where necessary, provide a living wage for their lay employees, pay a modest but generous allowance to seminary professors, cater for the car maintenance of their permanent priest formators, as well as other running and overhead costs. In all, both the capacity for capital and recurrent expenditures have been effectively undermined.
The other major challenge which should not be forgotten as it is part of the reality within which we live is the absence, till date, of any systematic, methodical and long term plan by our local Churches to tackle this gradually but rapidly developing contextual issue or challenge of funding of seminaries. Although, the encouragement and support of our diocesan bishops to priestly formation as demanded by the Universal Church has never been in doubt, the present changes and difficulties experienced within our social and ecclesial context call for urgent and more concerted effort as well as long term systematic approach to grapple with the problem. It demands, on the part of the leaders of the Nigerian Church, serious attempt to re-strategize methodically in view of responding to the situation; an attempt whose necessity can only be properly appreciated after an analysis and stock-taking of the effects of poor funding to the quality of priestly formation offered and received in our seminaries.

Effects of Poor Funding on Seminary Formation

A. Difficulty or Lack of the Capacity to Provide Adequate Infrastructure

The availability of adequate facilities and critical infrastructure surely have their role to play in the formation of candidates for the priesthood. Inadequate facilities and sham structures tend to deplete the psychological disposition of seminarians towards their formation. The response which they are capable of giving to formation suffers inhibition and setback. For instance, overcrowded class-room or lecture hall would necessarily undermine the rate of concentration and full application of the student to his studies or the lectures given by their formators. This would ultimately impact negatively on the integral formation of the seminarians. On the other hand, liturgical ceremonies celebrated in a poorly constructed or unconducive structure also affects, negatively, the quality of response given to formation in prayer and worship.

Furthermore, the absence of adequate sports facilities and other recreational infrastructure in the seminaries would also hamper the human formation of the candidates to the priesthood, as a healthy mind is said to reside in a healthy body. Our seminaries would also need other facilities like auditorium, libraries and decent staff quarters as well as good hostel accommodation for seminarians in addition to other critical infrastructures.
where these do not exist or are inadequate. Failure to provide them as may be the case in some Nigerian seminaries due to the challenge of funding, affects the quality of response of the candidates to formation. Anselm Jimoh was, therefore, right when he stated: “A psychologically and physically enabling environment will promote the quality of response of the candidates to formation. Thus, the seminary should be made conducive enough to ensure that the seminarians are disposed to receiving as much as the formation given.”

B. Strain on Recurrent Expenditure

The inability of many of our seminaries to muster enough funding to support effectively its operations and meet adequately its financial obligations has serious consequences for its recurrent expenditure. Many seminaries are finding it more and more difficult to pay a living wage to their lay staff, and provide a realistic allowance to the formators in the light of the current social and economic realities in Nigeria or cater adequately for many of their legitimate needs. This situation may sometimes be demoralizing to those who accept the call to serve in the seminaries as formators. It can also discourage others who may be needed in the future to take up the work of formation in our seminaries. Although the work of priestly formation in the seminary is essentially a call to service and sacrifice, the quality of formation given by the seminary professors may also be boosted by building into the system a sustained strategy of incentives.

Many seminaries are also not finding it easy to maintain their existing infrastructure or provide essential services like electricity, water supply and balanced diet. All this may contribute to creating an unsuitable and unhealthy environment which does not allow formation to thrive well as it may lead to discontent or foster in many seminarians animosity for the seminary administrators who have the immediate responsibility to provide the necessary facilities and to create an enabling environment for serious formation to take place.

C. Tendency towards Destabilization of the Formation Programme

This paucity of funding often creates anxiety for the seminary administrators. One of the results of this development becomes the recognition of the need to source for additional means of funding to supplement what remains as oversea subsidy and the contribution from the diocesan bishops and religious superiors. In this way, sourcing for additional fund becomes a major preoccupation of seminary administrators during the academic and formative year. The unpleasant effect of this development is that it reduces the level of concentration and self-application of seminary authorities to the full realization of integral formation of future priests, as some valuable time and precious energy are lost in the ensuing anxiety and drive for complementary sources of funding, to enable the seminaries fulfil its financial requirements. This may also give rise to some destabilization in the formation programme as some seminaries may sometimes be forced to close earlier than normal or resume later than usual during the time for short break during the academic/formative year. This is an experience that is not alien to us; examples are here with us.

Some Positives

It will also be necessary to observe here that the challenge of funding in our seminaries occasioned by the factors already analysed above has attracted the concern and attention of some of our local Ordinaries who from time to time offer spontaneous and significant financial support apart from their yearly mandatory financial subventions. This has helped to ameliorate some difficulties experienced in some of our seminaries. For instance, Blessed Iwene Tansi Major Seminary, Onitsha is a beneficiary of regular significant financial support of the Arch-bishop of Onitsha. The bishops of Awka, Enugu and Nnewi also do offer some significant financial support. These financial supplements are heartily received and well-deserved since Blessed Iwene Tansi Major Seminary, like some other new generation major seminaries in our country, still lacks some critical infrastructures like a library, befitting Chapel/Church, auditorium and academic/administrative block.
However, the need for a more systematic and long term approach to grapple with the growing challenge of funding in all Nigerian seminaries call for re-strategizing on the part of our local Churches.

**Re-strategizing and Building of Capacity: A Primary Diocesan Responsibility**

In view of the gradual withdrawal of subsidy or financial support by Rome and other external funding agencies, it would be necessary on the part of our local Churches, to begin to think of post subsidy regime or period of seminary life and existence in Nigeria when the major burden of funding would necessarily revert to us. Although, this may bring some pain in the financial nerve centre of the Nigerian Church, a pain which our seminaries have begun to experience, it may, however, be a trail blazer to new opportunities that the Church in Nigeria can seize upon in order to achieve a fuller self-consciousness, freedom and responsibility for her existence and destiny; after all, even maturity involves pain: the pain of growth and responsibility.

It is therefore important and necessary to begin to fashion out systematic strategies and map out comprehensive plan and agenda for the future survival of our teeming seminaries. These strategies should be able to address the present challenge of funding as currently experienced by the seminaries. In this direction, the primary responsibility for the sourcing of funds to sustain our seminaries falls squarely on the local Ordinaries who are the proprietors of these seminaries. As we have already observed, *Optatam Totius* considers the seminary as “the very heart of the diocese.”

Consequently, greater concern and due attention to the issue of seminary funding would be of top priority for our local Churches, since this would be one of the primary means of expressing concretely, in the scheme of things, this consciousness of the seminary being the very heart of the diocese.

On the other hand, we have equally pointed out the dangers of letting the seminaries themselves take a major part in the responsibility of sourcing for funds, as this affects their level of concentration and energy exerted in the formation of candidates for the priesthood, and destabilizes their formation programme. Since, as we have seen, the primary

\[\text{25Vatican II, Optatam Totius, 5.}\]
responsibility for funding of the seminaries belongs to the bishops, the ecclesiastically recognized proprietors, the few suggestions that would be proposed henceforth in the direction of funding, would be towards helping local Churches strategize and build their capacities for tackling headlong this developing challenge of seminary funding in the Nigerian context.

Setting Up Special Fund Raising Board and Trust Fund in Each Diocese for Seminary Education Support

On the basis of the understanding that the seminary is the very heart of the diocese, each diocese in Nigeria should create a special fund raising board or agency in the mould of JDPC, whose responsibility, under the support of the diocesan bishop, would be to raise funds for seminary support as well as manage it as a trust fund, from which our local Ordinaries can gradually pull from to increase significantly their annual mandatory financial subventions to the seminaries on each of their candidates. This board managed by a responsible, trusted and capable priest together with his board members, which may include lay committee members would be saddled with the special task of reaching out to the parishes and generous Catholics who may want to contribute to the fund. Other ways fund can be raised for the board would be through annual bishop’s appeal and annual collections from the parishes in support of the seminaries. This should be preceded by general enlightenment and conscientization of the faithful, of the need for the building of financial capacity for the support of priestly formation given the present situation of our seminaries.

Taking Over Full Responsibility for the Building of Critical Infrastructures and Funding of Capital Projects in Our Seminaries

In order to afford our seminaries the enabling environment and the breathing space to concentrate on their precious work of formation with full attention, it would not be out of place to suggest that our local Churches, under the wise directives and guidance of the diocesan Bishops, take up directly the responsibility of building or funding of all necessary capital intensive projects, infrastructures or facilities so much needed in the life of our seminaries. This would be done with full commitment and due attention such as that given to diocesan projects in our various dioceses.
Conclusion

The Church has as its mission no other task than the building of the Kingdom of God on earth. But this task is essentially the result of God’s action and human response. In other words, the building of God’s kingdom is not the action of human beings on their own behalf, but God’s action on behalf of humankind. It is a matter of divine initiative and human co-operation. This is the great Catholic tradition.

Consequently, as formation in the seminaries continues to suffer the problem of funding, due to the developing challenges of their socio-ecclesial context, Church leaders in Nigeria as well as the seminary formators and administrators should continue to open up themselves to the constant action of God’s Spirit so as to seize upon the opportunities offered by current the situation and discern in which direction the Spirit is leading the Church in dealing with the funding challenge. The lasting solution to the problems of funding in Nigerian seminaries would not be achieved simply by what A or B wants, but by discerning what God wills as well as responding to the direction that he may want to lead his Church today.