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Mission And The Economic Factor: The Paradox Of A Noble Ideal

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Abstract

The Son of God did not incarnate as any ordinary man. He incarnated as a particular man, a Jew, a Galilean, at a precise moment in the history of the world. As a man, he was influenced by the geo-political conditions of his country. He lived under the socio-economic laws of his time, took active part in political conflicts and shared the hopes and aspirations of his people. These socio-economic and political conditions helped in fashioning the Jesus we know today. The Church, which is the fruit of the Incarnation of the Son of God, does not escape the realities and the vicissitudes of the world. The Church, as an entity, is also an earthly reality. Even though Christ prayed to his Father to keep the Church from being *of* the world, history however has taught us that it is within this world made up of socio-political and economic upheavals that the Church is called upon to fulfil her mission. This demonstrates that the Church is part and parcel of the world and does not escape from its influence in every sphere of its life. Being part and parcel of the world and all that it contains, the Church can only accomplish her mission by making use of the resources that the world puts at her disposal. Even though the primary mission of the Church is to preach the Good News of Jesus Christ, it cannot ignore the necessity to work for its economic and financial survival which is indispensable for accomplishing its mission in the world. This article seeks to delve into the thorny issue of economic factors that impact on the Church's mission today. The

Church in Africa, having been known as an “aided Church”, is today called upon to assume full responsibility of its economic survival for a fruitful mission. What are the new strategies that should be put in place to ensure that the Church in Africa becomes self-sufficient economically? Answers to such questions constitute the objective of this article.

Introduction

The 19th century economic theorist Karl Marx held the idea that almost everything in this world is determined by the economy.¹ For him, “your very ideas are but the outgrowth of conditions of your bourgeois production and bourgeois property, just as your jurisprudence is but the will of your class, made into law for all, a will whose essential character are determined by the economic conditions of the existence of your class.”² In fact, Marx and his friend Engels saw this “economic determinism” as the creative force in every human progress. Thus, “the final causes of all social changes and political revolution are to be sought, not in man’s brains, not in man’s insight into internal truth and justice... but in the economies of each epoch.”³ By this, Marx and his followers place economic issues at the heart of human existence and nothing can exist if it is not determined by economic realities.

¹This theory is known as “historical materialism”. It is a theory of history according to which the material conditions of a society’s way of producing and its productive capacity determine its organisation and development.

²MARX Karl and ENGELS Friedrich, *Communist Manifesto*, London, International Publishers, p. 35.

³ENGELS Friedrich, *Socialism : Utopian and Scientific*, p. 54.

In spite of the limitations of Marx's approach to history and human existence,⁴ our day-to-day human and economic realities seem to confirm the Marxian approach to history.⁵ In fact, most socio-political revolutions throughout history could be attributed to economic factors. Generally, when people are dissatisfied with their economic conditions, they are likely to undertake a political revolution to ask for a change and better living conditions.⁶ For instance, the increase in fuel prices automatically leads to an increase in transportation fares, which in turn leads to the increase in the prices of products of basic necessity, thus creating hardships which could lead to political upheavals and agitations. This goes a long way to show how economic issues do affect our everyday lives as individuals and as a society. In a nutshell, economic factors often determine the way societies and individuals behave at a given time in their history.

This article seeks to delve into the question of mission and the economic factor. As already posited, questions bordering on economic issues cannot and must not be neglected even when it concerns the Church and her mission in the world today. This is because economic factors could go a long way in determining the orientation to be given, not only to our lives as priests and missionaries, but as also the mission which the Church has

⁴CROCE Benedetto, "Concerning the Limitation of the Materialistic Theory of History" in BOTTOMORE Tom (ed.), *Karl Marx*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1979, pp. 69-78. The author considers Marx's theory of historical materialism as a mere canon or instrument which may be useful or useless as the case may be.

⁵BERLIN Isaiah, "Historical Materialism" in BOTTOMORE Tom (ed.), *Karl Marx*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1979, p. 56.

⁶MACCULLOCH Robert, "What Makes a Revolution" in *DEDPS* 30 (September 2001), p. 2.

entrusted to us. Again, the need to pay attention to the influence of economic factors on the life and mission of priests and missionaries stem from the fact that over the years the question seems to create some kind of a paradox between what we are called to be and the need for economic survival. These are the issues that constitute the core of our reflection on mission and the economic factor.

The Incarnation, Socio-Economic Realities and the Mission of the Church

It was into this world, with its economic realities, that the incarnate Son of God came and accomplished his mission as the Saviour of the world. In fact, the Son of God did not incarnate as any ordinary man. He incarnated as a particular man, a Jew, a Galilean, at a precise moment in the history of the world. As a man, he was highly influenced by the geo-political, social and economic conditions of his land. He lived under the socio-economic laws of his time, took active part in political conflicts and shared the hopes and aspirations of his people. These socio-economic and political conditions played a major role in fashioning the Jesus we know today. Jesus of Nazareth walked the hills and valleys, and most of the time he shared in the economic hardships that faced his people. Jesus and his disciples were most of the time homeless and stayed in the homes of those who were ready to accomodate them (Matt 8:19-20). The place where the Son of God incarnated was not only the manger of Bethlehem. It was first and foremost the Jewish civilisation that Jesus adopted as his own.⁷ It was within the context of such socio-economic conditions that Jesus launched the

⁷SAULNIER Christian, ROLLAND Bernard, BILLON Gérard, "La Judée au Temps de Jésus" in *Cahiers Evangile* n° 174 (December 2015), p. 5.

mission entrusted to his disciples when he said to them: "Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations. Baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you" (Matt 28:19-20). In sending out his disciples on mission, Jesus himself was aware of these realities.

The Church, which is the fruit of the Incarnation of the Son of God and the one to whom Christ's mission is entrusted, does not escape the socio-economic realities and the vicissitudes of the world just like her master. The Church, born out of the pierced side of Christ on the cross, is also an earthly reality. Even though we are not *of* this world, however, we are *in* the world. Jesus himself was aware of this reality and did not want it to be otherwise: "I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one" (Jn 17:15). Even though Christ prayed to his Father to keep the Church from being *of* the world, history however has taught us that it is within this world made up of socio-political and economic upheavals that the Church is called upon to fulfil her mission. This demonstrates that the Church is part and parcel of the world and does not escape from its influence in every sphere of its life.

Being part and parcel of the world and all that it contains, the Church can only accomplish her mission by making use of the resources that the world puts at her disposal. Even though the primary mission of the Church is to preach the Good News of Jesus Christ, it cannot ignore the necessity to work for its economic and financial survival which is indispensable for accomplishing its mission in the world. However, the relationship between mission and economic issues is not as simple as one may

think. In fact, there could be serious tensions between these two realities. If economic survival is indispensable for the success of our mission, there are several instances where economic issues become an impediment to a noble ideal.

The “Chaotic” Economic Environment and its Impact on Formation and Mission in Africa

Before sending his disciples on mission, Jesus makes the following remark: “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field” (Lk 10:2). The call for workers into the Lord’s harvest field translates itself into the recruitment and the formation of candidates to the priesthood and religious life. To this call, many have responded, especially in Africa. In fact, Africa is the continent of the future in terms of vocation to the priestly and religious life. Speaking about the increase in vocations, Pope Benedict XVI describes Africa as the spiritual lungs of the world.⁸ Every year, thousands of young men and women express the desire to enter into seminaries and formation houses of various dioceses and religious congregations. If this affluence is a source of joy and good news for the Church, the question however remains as to how to get the needed financial resources to turn these candidates into useful missionaries for the Church.

The “chaotic” economic environment in Africa makes it practically impossible to give a positive response to the vocation boom in Africa. Even though African countries are politically independent, they still strongly depend on their former colonial

⁸ “On Africa Trip, Pope Will Find Place Where Church is Surging Amid Travail”, *The New York Times*, March 15, 2009, p. 11.

masters for economic and financial support. Today, African countries live practically on aid from the Western world.⁹ According to economic experts, the budgets of most African countries are financed through foreign aid.¹⁰ In fact, most African economies will simply collapse without foreign aid. In the same manner, the Church in Africa is also highly dependent on the Church in the West for its economic and financial survival. Most seminaries and formation houses in Africa would simply close down without the financial help received from Church and donor institutions from the West.

This financial aid has flowed for some years and has contributed immensely in the formation of candidates to the priestly and religious life. However, for some time now, this financial aid is seriously dwindling and the Church in Africa is constantly being called upon to find ways and means of surviving financially. The formation of priests and missionaries is becoming more and more the responsibility of dioceses and religious congregations. Even though money still comes from the West, it is becoming more and more evident that these monies received are not sufficient enough to cover even a third of the high cost of formation. It is true that the various dioceses and religious congregations are working around the clock to come to terms with the inevitable: the eventual end to all forms of financial aid from the West. The question is: what will become of the Church in Africa and her mission in such a situation? How will seminaries and formation houses survive such an eventuality? How will the Church's mission look like in

⁹AYITTEY George B.N., *Applied Economics for Africa*, Atlas Network, 2018, pp. 7-8.

¹⁰MOYO Dambisa, *Dead Aid: Why Aid Is Not Working And How There Is A Better Way For Africa*, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009.

the absence of foreign aid? These are questions that cannot be ignored and to which concrete answers must be provided.

There is no doubt that the Church in Africa lives and undertakes its mission in a materially and financially poor environment. This “chaotic” economic environment has a negative impact, not only on the life of the priest as an individual, but also on his missionary and pastoral work. In his own ecclesial milieu, the financial and material situation of a priest or a religious missionary is nothing to write home about. How many dioceses and religious congregations in Africa are capable of providing a decent financial and economic life for its members?¹¹

Coupled with the precarious financial and economic situation is the image that people have of the priest. Some people still consider the priest as someone rich who lacks nothing: good food, nice car, decent house, etc. In fact, he is considered as the elite of his family to the point that all eyes of family members look up to him. Because of such perceptions, the priest, instead of relying on others for survival, often finds himself being relied upon, not only by family members, but also by his parishioners, for survival. In Africa, it is the hand-goes-hand-comes affair. In other words, certain family members who might have contributed towards the formation of a priest, might think that priestly ordination is a harvest time when he or she can “reap what he or she had sowed”. Such an attitude is surely influenced by the way and manner in which the first missionaries from the West went about their missionary activities. We still have the image of the white missionary-philanthropist who went to the extent of taking care of the physical needs of his parishioners. Not only does he build a

¹¹NDONGMO Marcus, *Idéal ou relativisme moral?*, p. 71.

church for them but also schools and health centres are sponsored by him. In fact, some parishioners think that the priest is there to provide not only their spiritual needs but also their physical needs. This reminds me of what a parishioner told me one day: "You wicked priest. When the Pope sends money to you to be given to us, you sit on it." For this parishioner, I as a priest had become the channel (sort of Western Union or MoneyGram) through which the Pope sends money to Christians in Africa. As funny as this remark may seem, it portrays the desperate situation in which a priest or a missionary may find himself in the exercise of his mission in the face of economic and financial inadequacy.

In the midst of such a chaotic economic environment and its negative impact on the formation and the life of a priest or a religious, not only does the Church find it difficult to assure the formation of the numerous candidates that knock at her door, but the very concept of priestly and religious vocation becomes ambiguous. Such a situation could easily be a source of frustration especially when one considers the number of years spent in preparing oneself to become a priest. One could go to the extent of considering such a situation as a form of injustice. The question is often asked: "Don't I deserve the same treatment as others?" The impact of such a chaotic economic environment has led to the question as to whether the priesthood or the religious life is a vocation or a job.

The Priesthood/Religious Life: a Vocation or a Job? The Paradox of a Noble Ideal

One of the major points of confusion that often exists in the mind of a candidate to the priesthood or the religious life hovers around

the distinction between a job and a vocation. It is not rare to observe that most of the candidates who enter seminaries and formation houses to be trained as future priests and religious missionaries have a confused notion as to whether the life they have chosen is a job or a vocation.

To make things clear, let us try to differentiate between the two terms. According to the *Maryknoll Catholic Dictionary*, vocation, in a specific sense, can be defined as a particular calling to a priestly or religious life. It is a way by which God, who knows the needs of his Church, inspires a sufficient number of young people to fill those needs”.¹² From the above definition, one can deduce that God is the source of any given vocation. He does the calling and determines the nature of the work to be accomplished. Also, emphasis is placed on the people of God who constitute the reason for which an individual is called by God. Here God calls the individual for the purpose of responding to the needs of the people of God. As rightly stated by Vatican II, priests are “taken from among men and appointed for men in the things that pertain to God that they may offer gifts and sacrifices for sins”.¹³ Designated by God, he is to exercise his ministry among men on things that pertain to God. The life and work of a priest, according to Robert Martineau, stands out among the variety of service to which God calls. For this author, “it represents to the Church itself and to the world outside one special aspect of the life and work of the Church as a whole”.¹⁴

¹²NEVINS Albert J. (ed.), *The Maryknoll Catholic Dictionary*, Dimension Books, New York, 1965, pp. 597-598.

¹³VATICAN II, *The Priesthood in the Church's Mission* no. 3.

¹⁴MARTINEAU Robert, *The Office and Work of a Priest*, Mowbrays, London, 1972, pp. 9-10.

From the biblical point of view, a vocation, apart from being a call to service, is also a call to abandonment. Almost all the biblical vocation stories are set in the context of a call to abandonment. The one called often leaves or better still abandons an earlier life situation to accept a new one where he receives no financial remuneration for his work. Abraham has to leave his country, his kindred and his father's house to a land that the Lord will show him (Gn 12:3); Moses must leave his work as the shepherd of the flock of his father-in-law (Ex 3:1ff); Peter and the others abandon their fishing nets to follow Jesus (Mk 1 :16-18); Paul has to abandon his work as persecutor of Christians (Acts 9:1-20). A close reading of these vocation stories shows that God does not promise any financial compensation for the service to be rendered. All that Abraham gets in return is the promise of a great nation and a blessing to the whole of humanity. Peter and his colleagues will become fishers of men and eventually inherit the kingdom of God. The abandonment even becomes an obligation in the Gospels when Jesus admonishes his disciples in these terms: "Anyone who does not leave his father, mother, brothers, sisters, land, etc. for my sake will not enter the kingdom of God." (Lk 14:26; cf. Mt 10:37; Here, not only that the would-be disciple gets nothing for his response to Jesus' call, but also, he even loses what he possessed before becoming a disciple.

On the contrary, a job is any type of work for which a financial compensation is given at the end of the day. For instance, in the parable of the last-minute labourers (Mt 20:1-16), we see that the master gives each of the labourers a decent financial reward for the work done, even to the extent that those who came earlier felt cheated when they realised that they had received the same amount as those who came last.

This helps us to establish a clear-cut difference between a job and a vocation. Even though in the two cases, there is a “call”, at the end of the day, one receives a financial remuneration while the other does not. In fact, in the case of vocation, the candidate cannot lay any legal claim to any financial reward whatsoever. Situating the life of the priest or the missionary in the light of this differentiation between a vocation and a job, it is of no doubt that the life chosen by the priest or the religious is one of a vocation and not a job where he or she could expect a “salary” at the end of the day.

Establishing this clear difference between a job and a vocation should lead us to differentiate between “what is a priest” and “who is a priest”. In fact, these two questions seem equivocal because asking “what is a priest”, is not synonymous with “who is a priest”. In the first case, we are dealing with a job or a function, in the second we are dealing with the ‘being’ of the priest, what philosophers call ontology. Differentiating between the two questions brings us to understand that the priesthood is not a job or a function.¹⁵ It is a state of being marked with an indelible character.¹⁶ The question should therefore be: “who is a priest?”

From the above, we can clearly understand that the priest or religious who is called to work in the Lord’s vineyard cannot lay claim to any form of financial compensation for his work. This, in a way, is in line with what Jesus tells his disciples as he sends them on mission: “Freely you have received, freely give” (Matt 10:8).

¹⁵“Qu’est-ce qu’un prêtre?” in *THEO, Recherches de Dieu, Patrimoine judéo-chrétien, Vie et Foi de l’Eglise*, Droguet-Ardant/Fayard, Paris, 1989, p. 557, quoted by NDONGMO Marcus, *Idéal ou relativisme moral*, p. 38.

¹⁶This constitutes the subject-matter of the book of DREWERMANN Eugene, *Fonctionnaires de Dieu*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1993.

The missionary therefore is that person who is expected to freely dedicate his or her life for the good of others. He or she is expected to work and serve the people of God without expecting any form of financial compensation in return for the services rendered.

However, the clear-cut distinction between a job and a vocation seems paradoxical in the sense that it could lead to a misunderstanding between the call to abandonment and the necessity of economic survival of the priest. The fact that the priesthood is not a job or a function in itself does not remove the necessity for economic survival of the one called by God. If the priest or religious is expected to live a life of gratuity, abandonment and self-giving, this does not mean that his basic physical needs should not be taken care of. Jesus, upon sending his disciples on mission, makes provision for their physical upkeep: "Whatever house you enter, let your first words be, 'Peace to this house'. And if a man of peace lives there, your peace will go and rest on him, if not, it will come back to you. Stay in the same house, taking what food and drink they have to offer, for the labourer deserves his wages" (Lk 10:5-7). By this, Jesus takes cognizance of the right of the priest or missionary to a decent economic life which is assured by those to whom the priest or missionary is sent.

Living on People's Generosity

The call to depend on one's host for economic survival is the general tendency that characterises the life of the majority of priests and missionaries in Africa today. It is no secret today that most priests in Africa depend largely on people for their economic and financial survival. Even right from his days in the seminary or

house of formation, the candidate to the priesthood is “attributed” a benefactor or a benefactress who contributes immensely to the cost of his formation. Such relationships often continue even after ordination. Most priests today still heavily depend on their benefactors and benefactresses, not only for their physical needs but also to finance most of the projects undertaken in their places of mission. The priest depends on stipends provided by the people to whom he is sent to serve. These come mostly in the form of allowances and donations. As rightly observed by James J. Kutav, “their basic needs are at least moderately provided by those whom they serve, even in poor areas... Indeed the God fearing people... ensure that he has enough food, water, his environment is conducive to live in, his basic personal and ministerial needs are provided.”¹⁷ While such arrangements are necessary, it goes without saying that such measures, when they become excessive, could jeopardize or threaten not only one’s priestly ministry but also the mission at large.

The Dangers of Over-dependence on People for Economic Survival

The proverb goes that “he who pays the piper calls for the tune”. How can one pretend to bite the hand that feeds him or her? The quest for economic survival by over-depending on others often leads priests and missionaries to compromise their ministry and what they stand for¹⁸, especially when it comes to dealing with those who support them financially. James J. Kutav identifies this

¹⁷KUTAV James J., *Lovers of Priests*, Spiritan Publications, 2010, p. 54.

¹⁸ALEKE Cletus Eze, “Foolishness in Response to a Mysterious Call” in EKWUNIFE A.N.O. (ed.), *Fools for Christ at Forty: The Hazards and Joys of Ministerial Priesthood*, Enugu, SNAAP Press Ltd, 2010, p. 46-47

over-dependence as one of the dangers that the priest is likely to face in the exercise of his ministry: he becomes the "possession" of a few individuals who take him as "family priest" or "our priest".¹⁹ Such situations limit him in his pastoral or ministerial freedom. There are many stories that recount how priests, for financial reasons, have practically become slaves to their benefactors and benefactresses. How many times have they not been forced to "forfeit a sick call to attend a dinner organized by the family; or say the Holy Mass hurriedly or forfeit confession to follow them to the beach"?²⁰

Which Way Out?

It is an accepted natural fact that societies mutate and adapt their lifestyle to new situations and events. So must it be for the Church and her mission as they relate to economic factors. For a long time, the mission in Africa had been sustained thanks to the generosity from within and without. Today, the reality seems to be different. This calls on us to re-strategize so that the mission of Christ entrusted to the Church will continue its journey to the ends of the earth.

Encouraging Solidarity Among Priests

One of the elements that helped in sustaining the early Christians was their desire to build a solid community life where solidarity was the order of the day. In the Acts of the Apostles, we are told that the early Christians were united in one heart and one soul, and

¹⁹KUTAV James J., *Lovers of Priests*, p. 51.

²⁰KUTAV James J., *Lovers of Priests*, p. 50. See also ALEKE Cletus Eze, "Foolishness in Response to a Mysterious Call", pp. 45-49.

that no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, as everything they owned was held in common. This way of life is the logical conclusion of what Jesus himself had wished when he called his first disciples. The Gospel of Mark gives reasons for which Jesus chose the Twelve: they were to be his companions and to be sent out to proclaim the message (Mk 3:13-19). Even though the ultimate objective of the choice of the twelve was the proclamation of the Good News, Jesus thought it wise to build, first of all, a solid community around his person. Elsewhere, when the disciples of John asked Jesus where he lived, he asked them to come and see, and upon seeing, they decided to stay with him (Jn 1:39-41). It is from the community that the individual is sent on mission and it is always back to the community that he reports after his mission. These examples portray the importance of community life and solidarity as a source of a successful mission²¹. In fact, without a solid community life, mission becomes practically impossible and bound to fail.

Majority of candidates to the priesthood and the religious life come from moderate and not-so-well-to-do families.²² Certainly, this does not, in any way, constitute an impediment in one's vocation and call by God. However, this could be a source of frustration especially when it comes to the accomplishment of one's mission as a priest or religious. That is why there is the need for mutual support from "well-to-do priests" towards their fellow confreres who may find themselves living a precarious life for lack of financial and economic resources. This is what James J. Kutav

²¹DUMAIS Marcel, *Communauté et mission: une lecture des Actes des Apôtres*, Paris, Fides, 1999.

²²*Guide for Spiritan formation* n° 43.

terms as “priests loving priests”.²³ According to the *Guide for Spiritan Formation*, “this fraternal solidarity is a missionary witness of charity and reconciliation in Christ”.²⁴ In fact, this act of solidarity has important implications for initial formation. Formators are encouraged “to progressively introduce each future candidate to community life so that he can discover, for himself, its riches and demands”. This will indeed help in curbing any sense of individualism which could paralyse the life of the group. The community therefore becomes “a place of mutual support and encouragement”.²⁵

A Balanced Formation: Towards Economic and Financial Self-sufficiency of Priests and Religious²⁶

The specificity of a credible priest or religious is the quality of the formation he or she receives. For it to be complete, formation must be integral, that is, it must take cognizance of several factors: intellectual, moral, spiritual. The priest, by nature of his work, must be intellectually sound. His intellectual capabilities serve as a recourse for the people in times of crises. The intellectual formation of the priest must be pluridisciplinary and must be in tune with current issues concerning our world today. As for the moral formation, it must not only be theoretical but also practical and concrete. This moral formation equips him with the necessary tools to be able to resist all forms of temptation. A morally corrupt priest is nothing but a danger to his people. Last but not the least,

²³KUTAV James J., *Lovers of Priests*, p. 84.

²⁴*Spiritan Rule of Life* 37; 141.

²⁵CONGREGATION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, *Guide for Spiritan Formation* nos 37, 39.

²⁶GUINDON Jeannine (dir.), *The Integral Human Formation of Candidates for the Priesthood*, Editions Paulines, Montreal, 1993, pp. 33-34.

the priest must possess a solid spiritual foundation. This must not be limited to spiritual exercises. A spiritual life is first of all a state of being that calls on us to see God in everything we do.²⁷ These three elements, under normal circumstances, constitute the core of an authentic formation of a priest. However, in the light of the problematic that concerns us here, that is the impact of economic issues on the pastoral and ministerial mission of the priest, it seems necessary to concentrate on another issue that is pertinent in the search for solutions.

What About the Economic Issue?

Throughout this article, we have been able to understand the importance of economic issues vis-à-vis the Church's mission today. Today in Africa, one cannot talk of an authentic mission without taking into account the economic issue. After all, the priest needs enough financial and economic resources to be able to fulfil his mission. However, the major sources of income, that is dependence on people, is beginning to pose a serious threat to the integrity of this noble ideal which is the priesthood and the religious life.

As we have already stated, the credibility of a priest depends on the type of formation that he receives. In the same vein, the ability of a priest to solve the economic problems involved in his pastoral ministry depends on the formation on economic issues that he receives in the course of his years of formation. Such a formation will surely lead to self-sufficiency and autonomy in one's pastoral ministry. St. Paul gives us a foretaste and the joy of financial and economic self-sufficiency and its impact on the mission. In Acts

²⁷NDONGMO Marcus, *Idéal ou relativisme moral*, p. 135-138.

20:33-34, Paul affirms: "I have never wanted anyone's silver or gold or clothing. You know well that these very hands of mine have served my needs and my companions. In every way I have shown you that by hard work of that sort we must help the weak, and keep in mind the words of the Lord Jesus who himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" Paul is here making reference to his work as a tent-maker from which he earned enough to take care of himself and his companions, that is those who were with him on his missionary journeys.

This text is situated within the general context of Paul's journey to Miletus where he addresses the elders of the church of Ephesus. In his speech, Paul presents his lifestyle as an example to be followed. From the time he set foot in Asia, Paul did his very best to demonstrate a behaviour worthy of emulation. He served the Lord in all humility in spite of the difficulties he suffered at the hands of the Jews. Paul, in fact, never sought to run away from his responsibilities and his mission of evangelisation. In spite of all the spiritual and pastoral guidance, Paul had never wanted to be a burden on the people, and that is why he constantly worked with his hands to provide his needs and those of his companions. Such a situation gives more credibility to Paul as a missionary and as a pastor. By affirming that he never desired anyone's money or clothing, Paul reminds us of the terrible punishment that was visited upon a certain personality in Israel, at the time when Joshua entered the Holy Land. Achan, the son of Zerah, perished with all his family for having stolen a mantle, money and gold that was reserved for the Lord (cf. Jos 7:16-26). It is within this context that the example of Paul is worthy of emulation. Anyone who wants to serve the Lord in all honesty must imitate Paul who, not only saw to it that he was not a liability to those among whom he lived, but

worked with his hands to provide his needs and those of his companions (cf. 1 Thess 2:9 ; 4:11 ; 1Cor 4:12 ; 9:15).²⁸ As Martineau rightly posits, “the use of the word calling, or vocation, does not exclude the description trade or profession, every honourable trade or profession can be the way in which a man fulfils his vocation”.²⁹

In reaction to the constant abuse that Ghanaians suffer at the hands of the so-called “men of God” who take advantage of their faithful and dupe them, Jerry John Rawlings, the former president of Ghana said: “Jesus was a carpenter, Paul was a tent-maker, Peter was a fisherman. If your pastor has no day-time job then he is a thief.”³⁰ As hilarious as such comments may seem, they demonstrate the danger that an economically handicapped priest could pose to the people to whom he is sent.

To this effect, could there be the possibility of blending intellectual, moral, spiritual and economic issues in the course of the formation of a priest? Is it possible for a priest to acquire a profession³¹ that permits him to provide for his needs while at the same time taking care of the spiritual needs of the people just like the apostle Paul?

²⁸ BOSSUYT Philippe and RADERMAKERS Jean, *Témoins de la Parole de la Grâce. Lectures des Actes des Apôtres 2. Lecture continue*, Éditions de l'Institut d'Études Théologiques, Bruxelles, 1995, p. 607-608.

²⁹ MARTINEAU Robert, *The Office and Work of a Priest*, p. 10.

³⁰ GhanaWeb Online, General News of Mon, 11 Dec 2017: <https://ghanaweb.com>. Accessed on 01 October 2018 at 11:28am.

³¹ See the Pre-Capitular questionnaire for the Enlarged Provincial Council Meeting of the Province of Ghana n° 18 which calls for a reflection on the possibility of training confreres who can take up income-earning jobs to augment the Province's finances.

Such a situation will not be something new because history gives us several examples of priests who were able to combine pastoral ministry and work. The most famous example is that of the "worker priests" (*prêtres ouvriers* or *prêtres au travail*).³² These were priests of the Catholic Church who took up jobs as salaried workers. This phenomenon began in the years 1940-1950 in France and was described by the Dominican priest Marie-Dominique Chenu as "the biggest religious event since the French Revolution".³³ Condemned by Pius XII in 1954, this movement will be rehabilitated by Paul VI after the Second Vatican Council.

Certainly, what motivated these priest-workers was not economic and financial reasons. They simply wanted to respond to the problem of dechristianisation of the French society. It was about being present and being attentive to the signs of the time and sharing the joys and the pains of their fellow brothers and sisters. What should be underlined here was the desire to bring concrete solutions to a given problem.

Today, the Church in Africa is faced with the acute problem of financial and economic resources which seriously affect its mission. The traditional ways of sourcing for funds seem not only to be getting more and more scanty but also pose a threat to the integrity of the missionary. Encouraging priests to take up "income-generating activities" will not be out of line. In fact, some religious congregations have taken this option and the results are spectacular. We see more of this in female religious

³²ARNAL Oscar L., *Priests in Working-Class Blue. The History of the Worker-Priests (1943-1954)*, New York, Paulist Press, 1986.

³³CHENU Marie-Dominique, "Qui a peur des curés rouges" in *L'Histoire* n° 285 (March 2004).

congregations where members are trained in specific areas such as teachers, doctors, nurses, social workers, etc. and who work either in their own institutions or public institutions. This brings in a considerable amount of resources for the day to day administration of the Congregation. We can cite the example of the Congregation of the Sisters of St Joseph of Cluny who have inculcated in the formation process the training of their members in various fields of study. After the novitiate and pastoral experience programme, each member undertakes a training in any field of her choice. It is after this training that the candidate is finally professed as a full member of the Congregation.

Conclusion

Aristotle defines virtue as the mean between two extreme states.³⁴ According to this theory, 'every virtue of character lies between two correlative faults or vices..., which consist respectively of the excess and the deficiency of something of which the virtue represents the right amount. In the midst of the paradox of mission and the economic factor, there is the need to take the mean which, we believe, will be the most effective way of safeguarding the nobility of our calling.

In the face of the temptation and the danger, Jesus, who does not necessarily condemn riches but the way it is used, calls on his disciples to exercise total interior detachment: "Blessed are the poor in spirit" (Mt 5:3). Only such a heart can prevent us from falling into the trap of money and riches which often manifests itself in areas where we least expect especially in the area of

³⁴ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*

pastoral initiatives which could easily be transformed into the quest for personal and selfish interests. In this context, one can easily cite the example of simony. We should bear in mind that priestly ordination is not necessarily a step further on the social ladder, but a service to be rendered to the people of God. The priesthood does not give right to all the comforts in life. On the contrary, it is built on the spirit of inner detachment, the spirit of sacrifice, and the ability to accept to carry one's cross. As the apostle Paul, the true priest must model his life on that of Christ who often times had no where to lay his head, who knew hunger and thirst, and calls on his disciples not to carry anything as they go on mission. St Paul gives us a practical example when he writes: "I know how to live modestly, and I know how to live luxuriously too. In every way now I have mastered the secret of all conditions: full stomach and empty stomach, plenty and poverty. There is nothing I cannot do in the One who strengthens me." (Phil 4:12-14).³⁵

³⁵NDONGMO Marcus, *Idéal ou relativisme moral*, p. 141-142.