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YOUTH APOSTOLATE IN NIGERIAN CATHOLIC CHURCH: EXAMINING THE CHALLENGES IN THE LIGHT OF *CHRISTUS VIVIT* OF POPE FRANCIS

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Abstract

Every society is composed of different groups of people in different age brackets – children, young people, and old people. Each group help are of great importance in the overall progress of the society. None can supplant the position of the other; rather each makes its own contribution in moving the wheel of the society. Children growth into young people and young people eventually become old people. That goes to say that there cannot be children without procreation through the union of man and woman; neither can there be young people without children, nor will there eventually be old people without the young people. Each group gives meaning to the other; and none can comfortably exist independent of the other. The human affair in any society in general and the Church in particular is carried out by these three categories of human beings; but the young people remain a formidable work force. Sequel to that, they need to be properly guided. It is on that note that the researcher aimed at considering how the challenges bedeviling the youth can be gainfully addressed and suitable remedy proffered.

Keywords: apostolate, youth, contexts, youth apostolate

Introduction

The future of any society depends on its youth. Nigeria is blessed with a teeming population of young people that all things being equal will guarantee its growth if properly trained, guided and empowered. It is the young people that form the veritable work force that will continue to promote the well-being of any nation. The Church forms part of the society; and through the sacrament of marriage and baptism the Church is populated. In that vein, John Paul II (1981 n.15), teaches that, Christian marriage and the Christian family build up the Church: for in the family the human person is not only brought into being and progressively introduced by means of education into the human community, but by means of the rebirth of baptism and education in the faith the child is also introduced into God's family, which is the Church.

The important place Christian marriage occupies in the life of the Church demands that it be given a matchless dedication and consideration; and more properly and jealously guarded against ill-winds that could militate against it. When marriage is battered or tossed about its rippling effects is reflected in the whole society. On the contrary, when its values are safeguarded and those that are married bear eloquent testimony with their virtuousness and steadfastness, the positive effects will be noticeable in the society. To prevent these ill-winds, it becomes of utmost necessity to properly catechize the young people especially with regard to the challenges that besiege them on daily basis. The researcher will do that in the light of *Christ is alive (Christus Vivit)* which is Post-Synodal Exhortation of Pope Francis to young people.

Understanding Apostolate from its root

Apostle is derived from the combination of the Greek preposition *Απο* – meaning off, away from and the Greek verb *Στελλειν* (Stellein) meaning to send. Therefore, when put together, *Αποστελλειν* means to send off, away from. The noun form is *αποστολος* –sent to convey a message. Its Latin equivalent is *Apostolus*. Further still, according to Barnhart (2000:60) in apostol-ate, the suffix “-ate” is used in forming nouns naming an occupation, position or the like, or persons serving or being in it, such as consulate: referring to the office of a consul, apostolate, the office of an apostle, professorate: the office of a professor, theologate: the school of theology, and a host of others.

Tracing the Importance of Youth Apostolate

The Catholic Church has always given a pride of place to the apostolate of young people. The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council in the Declaration on Christian Education (*Gravissimum Educationis*, n.2) called young people “the hope of the Church.” In the same token, as the bishops were being instructed on the necessity of showing greater attention to catechetical instruction but more especially in making sure that the method is “suited to the matter that is being treated and to the character, ability, age, and circumstances of the life of the students” (*Decree on the pastoral office of Bishops in the Church*, n.14). In the same vein, during the closing ceremony of the Second Ecumenical Council, the Council addresses its final message to the young men and women of the world thus:

it is you who are to receive the torch from the hands of your elders and to live in the world at the period of the most gigantic transformations ever realized in its history. It is you who, receiving the best of the example of the teaching of your parents and your teachers, are to form the society of tomorrow. You will either save yourselves or you will perish with it.

Paul VI (1965) enjoined them more passionately in these words:

It is in the name of this God and of His Son, Jesus, that we exhort you to open your hearts to the dimensions of the world, to heed the appeal of your brothers, to place your youthful energies at their service. Fight against all egoism. Refuse to give free course to the instincts of violence and hatred which beget wars and all their train of miseries. Be generous, pure, respectful and sincere, and build in enthusiasm a better world than your elders had.

The Catholic Church in Nigeria is not left out in this concern for the evangelization of the youth. Speaking to the young people of Nigeria during his visit in 1982, Pope John Paul II (1982:n.2) admonished them thus:

My beloved young people of Nigeria, you must be outstanding for discipline, strength of character and reliability. This will show itself in several ways. You will be chaste. You will resist all temptations which attack the sanctity of your body. You will bring your chastity to the priesthood, religious life or marriage. You will have many opportunities to express discipline through Christian temperance. The attractions and pressures of the world often lure young people into self-indulgence or escapism. Temptations to the excesses of drink and to drug abuse are all around you.

As true youth you will see, judge and then act according to the criteria of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.” (n.5). More so, the United Nations Organization proclaimed 1985 as the

International Youth Year. Addressing the young people in order to mark that occasion, John Paul II (1985 n.1) charged them to be aware of the youthfulness they are endowed with:

You young people are the ones who embody this youth: you are the youth of the nations and societies, the youth of every family and of all humanity; you are also the youth of the Church. We are all looking to you, for all of us, thanks to you, in a certain sense continually become young again. So your youth is not just your own property, your personal property or the property of a generation: it belongs to the whole of that space that every man traverses in his life's journey, and at the same time it is a special possession belonging to everyone. It is a possession of humanity itself.

John Paul II (1995:n.93) acknowledged the fact that “the Church in Africa knows well that youth are not only the present but above all the future of humanity. It is thus necessary to help young people to overcome the obstacles thwarting their development: illiteracy, idleness, hunger, drugs. In order to meet these challenges, young people themselves should be called upon to become the evangelizers of their peers. No one can do this better than they. The pastoral care of youth must clearly be a part of the overall pastoral plan of Dioceses and parishes, so that young people will be enabled to discover very early on the value of the gift of self, an essential means for the person to reach maturity. In this regard, the celebration of World Youth Day is a privileged instrument for the pastoral care of youth, which favours their formation through prayer, study and reflection. Benedict XVI (2011 n.62) on his own part advised that “we should make every effort to involve young people directly in the life of society and of the Church, so that they do not fall prey to feelings of frustration and rejection in the face of their inability to shape their own future, especially in those situations where young people are vulnerable due to lack of education, unemployment, political exploitation and various kinds of addiction.”

Various contexts influencing the Youth

Young people in any society at all do not fall from the blues. They are rather children of the society where they are brought up. Consequently, they are influenced by the different milieu of the society they come in contact with in the process of their growth.

Socio-cultural Context

Ordinarily, Nigerian society values family and human relation. In contemporary Nigeria, the nuclear family exists side by side with the extended family. The family includes not only the immediate siblings but also grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, nephew nieces etc. The family according to Mbiti (1975:141) also includes the departed relatives, whom may have designated as the living/dead”. In family there is openness to life in which children are valued as a blessing from God. Therefore, Getui (1998) affirms that,

...Children can contribute an enduring source of emotional satisfaction and joy to their parents. Parents look upon the development and growth of their children as their work. The successes and failures of their children are their successes and failures. If the parents have not achieved all their youthful goals in life, they rejoice in the thought that they will see these goals fulfilled in their children. (p. 72).

Generally, Nigerian traditional system is marked with the responsibility of the upbringing of children with regards to values, skills and techniques of traditional cultural heritage. The family structure also serves as a place for formal and informal instruction

during initiation rites that prepared the child to assume adult responsibilities. The extended family also had a system of social control, which guided the youth in their daily choices. These inbuilt mechanisms therefore helped to a great extent in ensuring the stability of the family. The parental care and nurturing of children depend to a large extent on the economic, social, intellectual and the emotional situation of parents, which all contribute to making the home the first school for youth formation.

Nigerians especially Igbos express their culture in customs, values, social norms, religion and beliefs and their day to day living and interactions. The richness of this culture is being reinforced and manifested also in their mode of greeting, clothing, arts, music, dance, drama, proverbs, traditional marriage and other ceremonial activities.

However, fundamental to culture is knowledge. All these play prominent role in the life and behavior of the Igbo people. For example, storytelling is used in teaching moral to children and the young ones thereby stimulating them toward good conducts. It also serves as a documentation of some actual events and people's life in a given period of time. Proverbs serve to communicate the wisdom of the past generation. Unfortunately, because of social changes, we are gradually experiencing the disappearance of some of these cultural values. Nowadays, no pain no gain does not very much hold again. *Aka aja aja n'ebute onu mmanu mmanu* is becoming obsolete. People today are less interested in hard work but want quick money and wealth. Today people want promotion without merit, employment without certificate, certificate without studying, marks without sitting for an examination; to pass through celebrated malpractice etc. oddities are boldly being celebrated. Solidarity is gradually becoming a thing of the past; everybody thinks of his/her own without looking out to see how to help the other.

This situation is the after effect of the civil war. "Knowledge is power (Francis Bacon)"; "the pen is mightier than the sword" (Edward Bulwer-Lytton) which we quote regularly are being mercilessly eroded. "The greatest culprit appears to be what Achebe (2000:1) identifies as "the failure of leadership".

The consequences are affecting everybody. These values used to be part of every Igbo person, because according to Getui (1998:76) it is incorporated into the daily activities of people, as such, being a way people are being formed spiritually. Unfortunately, today's socio-cultural state is marked by insecurity *in excelsis*. The atmosphere is charged with anger and aggressive tendencies. The odour of corruption is oozing out from every corner to the utter consternation of the rest of us. It is inexhaustible.

Political context

Man", said Aristotle (1995) "is by nature a political animal." Being so constituted by nature, he/she lives in a community and associates with others thanks to the gift of speech with which he/she is endowed. Consequent upon this living together, comes the need to have leaders who will direct, make laws and guide the citizens towards a common good and who will fight for the welfare of the people. This will help to avoid a lawless situation where each person makes his/her own law as it suits him/her. An authority is therefore needed to guide the people towards a common good. Thus, the leaders should always bear in mind that,

there is no better way to establish political life on a truly human basis than by encouraging an inward sense of justice, and of service to the common good, and by consolidating the basic convictions of all as to the true nature of the political

community and the aim, proper exercise, and the limits of political authority. (Vatican II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, n.73)

The political authorities on their own part are urged to act within the limits of the law and not place themselves above the law. In the Nigerian context, what does the political situation look like? The *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria* in its preamble states that its purpose for “promoting good government and welfare of all persons in our country on the principles of freedom, equality, justice, and for the purpose of consolidating the unity of our people.” To what extent these values are realised remains another question. In fact, Nigeria has experienced and is still experiencing unhealthy political arrangement that has engendered and almost institutionalised corruption in every imaginable dimension. Democracy is gradually metamorphosing into “selectocracy”, which will eventually relapse into kakistocracy and then degenerate into ochlocracy. There is unguided sycophancy and public fund is embezzled with impunity. Unfortunately, this is the political environment within which the youth grow.

In a similar vein, the young people in some cases have been used as instruments of violence during political campaigns and great have been the damaging effects. It is now the duty of the young people to be firm and act with right reason in every circumstance. In the *Lineamenta for the First National Pastoral Congress* (1999 n.73) the Bishops of Nigeria acknowledged that the “youth today are caught in the web of harsh realities of illiteracy, unemployment, slave labour, illness, hunger, drugs, cults, armed robbery and general violence.” In order to be ready to confront these challenges strongly John Paul II (1982 n.5) enjoined that “as true youth you will see, judge and then act according to the criteria of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.” This admonition stretches to all sectors of community life in which the young people find themselves because their duty is an integral and not a lopsided one.

Religious Context

Section 38(1) of the *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria* states that “Every person shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom (either alone or in community with others, and in public or in private) to manifest and propagate his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance.” Corroborating this stipulation, the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council, which declared that, “Every person has a right to religious freedom. Freedom of this kind means that all men should be immune from coercion on the part of individuals, social groups and every human power so that, within due limits, nobody is forced to act against his convictions nor is anyone to be restrained from acting in accordance with his convictions in religious matters in private or in public, alone or in association with others.” (Vatican II, *Declaration on Religious Liberty*, n.2)

This liberty has made religion a free zone. A warehouse can comfortably serve as a place of worship. Each person is an expert in religious matters. A loafer today can be a man of God tomorrow. What is needed is a good microphone and a little dose of patience and perseverance, gradually an empty hall is filled up. It is however not easy. It is important to acknowledge their resilient spirit. One who is handed over an empty hall and a microphone and he struggles to fill it to the brim needs to be congratulated. Such a person will more likely handle his followers with care and caution. However be it, Pentecostalism often times thrives on the people’s ignorance, surviving on a mixture of evangelism which incorporates African traditional beliefs. They depart radically from the preaching of the crucified Christ;

offer wishy-washy holiness and continue to inundate their followers with the doctrines of prosperity, albeit, prosperity at all costs. They build a temple of materialism and their followers are repeatedly told that the Holy Spirit changes lives so that sickness and calamity only befalls non-believers. The ignorant masses are made to witness organized miracles and made to hope on promises of prosperity.

Unfortunately, this state of religion throws the youth who are not grounded in their faith into a confused state.

The context of *Christus Vivit*

It is significant that the publication of this document took place on the anniversary of the death of Saint John Paul II, the Pope who wrote the first *Letter to the Youth of the World (Dilecti Amici)* in 1985 on the occasion of International Youth Year. Francis signed the document on 25 March 2019, while visiting the Basilica of the Holy House of Mary in Loreto, Italy, and it was published on 2 April, 2019 the anniversary of the death of Pope John Paul II, the Pope who began the World Youth Days. One could glean from the document different theological perspectives of the youth that equally reflect different models of the youth; among them are:

Biblical model of the youth – reflects the two testaments and presents young figures that played significant roles in the Bible ranging from Joseph, Gideon, Samuel, King Saul, King David, King Solomon, Jeremiah, down to Ruth and the rich young man in the gospel.

Christological model – the idea of youth relates to the person, nature and role of Christ. It is important to realize that Jesus was a young person. He gave his life when he was, in today's terms, a young adult.

Mariological model – refers to the influence of Mary and her commitment to God. He talks of how she was “a young woman whose heart overflowed with joy” (*Christus Vivit* n.46). The document speaks of her role as a mother and protector. “Thus Mary illumines anew our youth” (CV 48).

The Mariological character is also evident on the fact that it was signed Santuario di Loreto, Italy and on the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord. “She is the supreme model for a youthful Church that seeks to follow Christ with enthusiasm and docility. While still very young, she accepted the message of the angel, yet she was not afraid to ask questions (cf. Lk 1:34). With open heart and soul, she replied, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord” (Lk 1:38)” (*Christus Vivit* n.43).

Ecclesiological model – reinforces the fact that the young people are the Church of today and that of tomorrow. Thus, “enriched by a long and living history, and advancing towards human perfection in time and the ultimate destinies of history and of life, the Church is the real youth of the world”. (Paul VI, *Address to young men and women of the world*, Closing of the Second Ecumenical Council 8 December 1965)

Challenges of Youth Apostolate

Youth apostolate like every other apostolate is beset by series challenges which need to be confronted in order tap the fruitful dividend of the apostolate. Among them are:

‘False cult of youth’

It refers to those who build a future without deep roots. It is impossible for us to grow unless we have strong roots to support us be it academic, spiritual, proper use of reason, etc. False cult of youth dismisses all that is not young as outmoded (*Christus Vivit* n.182). It is a cult that dismisses hard work and seeks unstoppably for easy life. It is a massive deception if one rejects attention to academic work but wants to gain white-collar job after schooling. It is a generation of young people without roots that ground them and are easily manipulated (CV 180). However, there is need for them to interact with the wise and trustworthy elders because their wisdom and influence is key to developing those roots. “If we journey together, young and old, we can be firmly rooted in the present, and from here, revisit the past and look to the future.” (CV 199)

Intellectual/Material Poverty

Intellectual poverty is when one is bereft of proper reasoning ability. Intellectual richness does not come automatically by the mere fact that one passed through an academic institution. One could pass through such institution but still remain excellently ignorant, a celebrated ignoramus. John Paul II (1985) strongly warns “...the family educates and that the school teaches and educates, at the same time both the action of the family and that of the school will remain incomplete (and could even be made useless) unless each one of you young people undertakes the work of your own education. Education in the family and at school can only provide you with a certain number of elements for the work of self-education.” (John Paul II, *Dilecti Amici* n.13) This lack affects the young people in their decision-making.

The material poverty could also be a stumbling block. When there is a desire on the part of a young person to pursue his area of academic interest but there is no financial back up from his parents or relations, such interest could be totally aborted to the utmost regret of the person in question. On the contrary, parents or even some well-disposed benefactors/benefactresses may have a burning zeal to train a young person in a particular academic field only to have such wish nosedived because of the dearth of young people that have proper intellectual disposition to learn. This is currently being fueled by the distraction from social media or even by the crazy desire to get married or get-rich-quick syndrome. Quite unfortunate!

Negligent Parenthood

This is another obstacle that could negatively redirect the mind of the young people away from their rightful decisions in life. It is worthy of note that parents are the primary educators of their children at every level of their growth. This education entails taking care of their material and spiritual needs in order to help them grow into responsible adults that could be of desirable help to themselves, to their parents, to the society and eventually gain eternal life hereafter. When parents neglect this duty it is tantamount to inattentive parenthood. Such irresponsibility surely has the resultant effect of affecting the young people in their choice-making in life. Benedict XVI (2010 n.104) seriously advised that “young people need witnesses and teachers who can walk with them, teaching them to love the Gospel and to share it, especially with their peers, and thus to become authentic and credible messengers.” When there is lack of proper guidance on the part of the parents, surely the young people remain in the words of Erasmus of Rotterdam like a “rolling stone that gathers no moss.”

More so, some of the parents have some selfish inclination with regard to the choice of career of their children and wards. In such cases, the young people are not guided towards the realization of the career of their own interest; rather they are redirected to pursue the career choice of their parents. That a parent is a medical doctor does not mean that his/her son or daughter must be a medical doctor even if he/she has no minimal interest in science subjects. Such is an evidence of what could be called parental dictatorship.

Peer group pressure

Although parents are supposed to be the primary teachers of their children and wards, it is often evident that at times peer groups have greater influence. At times the parents make effort to inculcate Christian values on their children, but the peer group pressure often deletes these values from their head and reteaches their fellow peer the wrong attitudes that appeal to them. Incidentally, young people spend more time with their peers than with their parents. Therefore, young people must be vigilant and evaluate properly before adopting another's way of life.

Instability of academic learning

The main undoing of the young people is the near speedy collapse of academic learning. More so, there is the tendency of seeing education solely as a means instead of an end. When education is seen solely as means of gaining white-collar job, then we got it all wrong. Education is to be seen primarily as an end through which one becomes a cultured human being and a well-balanced person. One who knows his onions has got to prove himself in his own field of learning. Education as a means also counts but it is purely secondary. In consequence of that, when education begins to collapse from its foundation as it is happening in Nigeria, then institutions of learning will be churning out a bunch of mediocre and half-baked graduates that parade about with certificates which they cannot creditably justify in the field of work. Terribly shameful! Nonetheless, given the fact that education should be seen also as a means but not primarily as such, it becomes pitiable when government has no plan in place for the absorption of young people in the field of work.

Worse still, when education is made to be purely theoretical without a bent towards the practical aspect that could promote self-reliance, it makes some young people to change their mind against the pursuit of learning that does not engage them at the end. Though such change is not right but not everyone has such intellectual capacity to reason in that direction. Many want to have something doing after their academic pursuit in order to help themselves, their parents, their younger ones and others. More so, the invention of social media which was aimed at easing off difficulties in life through easy communication has become a terrible distraction to young people. Many are glued to their cellphone with utter neglect of giving attention to their studies. It is really a disaster.

Unemployment

John Paul II (1981n.18) laments: "it is particularly painful when unemployment especially affects young people, who after appropriate cultural, technical and professional preparation fail to find work, and see their sincere wish to work and their readiness to take on their own responsibility for the economic and social development of the community sadly frustrated." The case of Nigeria is pathetic because one doesn't see any light at the end of the tunnel because there is no evident plan in place regarding nipping the problem from bud. Such

situation can generate any imaginable crime: violence, drug abuse, being used as political desperadoes etc.

It is however an education that aims at self-reliance that can help in remedying this situation. When that is done, the young people can engage themselves in some concrete job without depending so much on white-collar jobs. But to realize that objective, there is need to devote adequate time in technical studies. However, our structure of education does not have such inclination.

Neopaganism

According to Stefoni (2010) neo-paganism is applied to “any of several spiritual movements that attempt to revive the ancient polytheistic religions”. It involves a situation of abandonment of one’s faith in order to search for other gods. The Awka Diocesan *Synod Acta* (2018 n.118) states that, “some of our Christians do return to idol worship, while some others pay double allegiance, one to Christianity and another to the traditional religion.” One can easily observe that most of the young people are born into the faith, but the faith is not deeply rooted in them. Consequently, when they are buffeted by the ill wind of difficult life experiences, they are torn asunder. In such situations, the Christian faith seem very slow in responding to their problems. They need magical attention. Based on that, the spiritual counseling that comes from the priest is thrown overboard and sharply replaced with regular frequenting of the traditional diviners for solutions. In fact, in their religious vagrancy, Ndiokwere (1995:25) states the young people “rarely discriminate...one may not know the exact number of places they regularly visit in search of solutions to their problems.” Most often they end up compounding their problems and creating imaginary enemies where they do not exist.

The way forward

After examining the different challenges confronting our youth, it is of great importance to look into how best to tackle them.

Reawakening of Learning through Catholic Schools

Cicero (2001) in his *De Divinatione* (II,2,5) extolling the prime place of learning questions: “...what greater or better service can I render to the commonwealth than to instruct and train the youth — especially in view of the fact that our young men have gone so far astray because of the present moral laxity that the utmost effort will be needed to hold them in check and direct them in the right way?” Therefore, school apostolate must ultimately aim at evangelization and subsequently champion the promotion of good character and learning.

Trained Animators

We must bear in mind that “the quality of any form of pastoral activity is placed at risk if it does not rely on truly competent and trained personnel.” (New *General directory for catechesis*, n.234.) Human engineering is a complex activity that demands an in-depth knowledge of developmental psychology. Such knowledge will help the animator to respond responsively to the demands of youth apostolate. Without such knowledge one could end up running very well but outside the track, or spending very much in irrelevancies thinking that he/she is doing a good job. However, the animator must be an epitome of moral

correctness in order to be a role-model for the young people. He/she has to be very dynamic and flexible with regard to suitable methods.

Flexibility in Method/Social Media: The Fathers of the Second Vatican II state in the *Inter Mirifica* (n.1) that the “Church sees the media as gifts of God.” Consequently, she makes adequate use of that gift in the propagation of the faith to every class of believer. She maintains the truth and content of her teaching but presents it according to John Paul II (1990 n.37) with new methods, “new languages, new techniques and a new psychology.”

In as much as the social media is replete with distractions for the young people, fruitful use must be made of it in youth apostolate. It is the world of the young people either she/he is on Facebook, or WhatsApp, Instagram, or Twitter, etc. It is necessary to tap the vast knowledge of the young people in the area of social media for a speedy and profound touch of the lives of the youth. The ecology of communication must be maintained. To that effect, Francis (2023 n.105) admonished that, “young people must know how “to use the new communications technology to transmit the Gospel, to communicate values and beauty”.

Involving the youth in their Catechesis

Young people need to be co-opted in planning and execution of the programme for youth apostolate. They understand themselves better and know their language. Paul VI (1975 n.72) advised that, “young people who are well trained in faith and prayer must become more and more the apostles of youth.”

Ongoing Catechesis

The youth apostolate should not be a hit-and-run exercise. It should not end with the reception of the sacraments of initiation but rather has to be an all year round activity. Bearing in mind that the young people in their vivacity abhor vacuum, if such is created, they can easily drift to another ready-at-hand activity wherever and by whomever.

Drawing from the Fountain of *Christus vivit*

Pope Francis urges that Youth ministry look to the needs of young people and be guided by youth. Rather than giving a blueprint to youth ministry, he outlines two main courses of action, “outreach” and “growth”. Outreach relies on the young people engaging with other young people to draw them in as well as highlighting that a dialogue with the youth needs to be full of love and integrity. In growth, Francis talks about focusing on trying to “awaken and consolidate the great experiences that sustain Christian life” (CV 212). He describes “Youth Ministry in educational institutions”, affirming that schools are in “*urgent need of self-criticism*”. He recalls that “some Catholic schools seem to be structured only for the sake of self-preservation... A school that becomes a ‘bunker’, protecting its students from errors ‘from without’ is a caricature of this tendency”. When young people leave, they feel “an insurmountable disconnect between what they were taught and the world in which they live”, while “one of the greatest joys that any educator can have is to see a student turn into a strong, well-integrated person” (CV 221). By focusing on a “pure and perfect youth ministry, marked by abstract ideas, protected from the world and free of every flaw, we can turn the Gospel into a dull, meaningless and unattractive proposition. Such a youth ministry ends up completely removed from the world of young people and suited only to

an elite Christian youth that sees itself as different, while living in an empty and unproductive isolation” (CV 232).

Conclusion

There is no better way to conclude than using the words of Virgil (1,205), “through varied fortunes, through countless hazards, we journey towards Latium, where fate promises a home of peace” (*per varios casus, per tot discrimina rerum, tendimus in Latium sedes ubi fata quietas ostendunt*). Pursuant to that assurance, we make haste to say that not minding the gains we enjoy and are still enjoy with the presence of the youth in the Church, not minding the misfortunes of manipulation some of them must have suffered, not minding the corrosive air of corruption that has buffeted some of them, we still journey together guided strongly by use of reason and attention to the voice of conscience towards a hopefully better tomorrow for the Catholic Church in Nigeria. All in all, every human activity has the potentiality of yielding a positive or negative result depending on the goal it is meant to achieve. But for the realization of any positive goal some obstructing obstacles must have to be surmounted.

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