Roots and Spectacles: The Impressions of an African Missionary in the Western Church

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The Catholic Church in the West is faced with a dearth of priestly and religious vocations amidst a growing cultural diversity. This situation poses many pastoral challenges, one of which is the need to meet the demands of ordained clergy in many of the parishes and dioceses across Western Europe, the United States, and Canada. What used to be a vibrant and dynamic local church has in recent years seen its numbers of clergy dwindle. This has necessitated the creation of a new dimension of assistance and sustenance for parish life: the use of international priests from countries where vocations are still growing. These international priests are otherwise called the *Fidei donum* (gift of faith) priests by the Diocese of Belleville and many other dioceses in the United States. These priests are mainly immigrants from Asia, Africa, and South America, with a greater number from countries like India, Poland, and Nigeria in West Africa. In fact, according to the *Directory of African Conference of Catholic Clergy and Religious in the United States* (ACCRUS), Nigeria contributes the highest number of priests and religious working in the United States in relation to other African countries.

The dearth of vocations has made it an imperative for the local church of the United States, like in most western countries, to reach out to priests, with the consent of their individual bishops and Ordinaries, from far away dioceses and Congregations to invite them to come over and support the U.S. Church in its pastoral need. This is in tune with the mark and mission of the Universal Church that is in communion with local churches and so shares the gift of faith (*fidei donum*) in her unity and catholicity.

This paper is my reflection as an African international priest on pastoral assignment in the United States. It is a reflection on my observations of the conflict of culture that has become a major concern for the local churches in the on-going engagement of international priests in the dioceses of the United States, with particular interest in the Catholic Church of Southern Illinois. The conflict of culture and the process of engagement of the international priests are areas of greatest concern. This reflection has been inspired by a talk originally given to the priests of the Diocese of Belleville for the Clergy Day of October 28th of 2010, when I was invited to share my impressions with the priests of the diocese as an international priest from Nigeria working in their midst. Thus, one may see dominating these perspectives and impressions experiences from both my homeland in the Eastern

2 I was introduced to the Presbyterium and the laity of the diocese in these words. It is how those of us who are international priests are referred to.
3 In the 2009 publication, Nigeria constitutes more than 60 percent of the priests and religious of African descent. The Igbo of south eastern Nigeria are recorded to constitute more than 70 percent of these Nigerians. So, what may be considered a Nigerian Church is often times a true image of the Igbo Church. See USCCB, “Directory of African Catholic Clergy and Religious in the United States” (bulletin, ACCRUS Convention in Atlanta, Georgia, 2009).
heartland of Nigeria with its typical Igbo church and the Church in Southern Illinois. However, these perspectives will be broadened to accommodate, where necessary, impressions from outside these precincts.

I have chosen to call this reflection “Roots and Spectacles: The Impressions of an African Missionary in the Western Church.” It serves as a kernel for appreciating the common heritage, the “common meaning,” and the experiences which all priests share with the “one, holy, catholic and Apostolic Church” that is missionary. It is of great importance to appreciate this fundamental character and formation of the true Church that informs us of a great and unique tradition of faith and apostolate. Though we may travel far and wide, the consciousness of this unity in faith affords me the leisure of a realistic reflection. So, in order to proceed with this reflection, I will briefly explain my use of terms as it applies to this paper and then delve into where and how these terms apply in the universal mission of the Church. I will present a brief survey of the Nigerian Church, and then, the Church in the western world with particular reference to the United States. I will also examine the cultural and pastoral challenges facing this mission with some proposals for moving forward into the future.

**Explication of Terms**

It is important that I am on the same page as my reader regarding the peculiar terminology in this paper. I prefer the word “missionary” to be applied to the ministry of foreign priests as opposed to the term “international priest,” which is commonly used here in the United States. I prefer the word “missionary” for two reasons. First, it encourages us, with the entire Church, to look at this international pastoral engagement as part of the apostolic mandate of Christ to his Church to go and proclaim the good news to all creation (cf. Mk. 16:15). Second, it will benefit the understanding of the “signs of the times” that calls the Church to a new mission *ad Gentes*; not as it was in the mission lands of Asia and Africa in the past centuries, but within the new reality of the new-evangelization and re-conversion in the face of a new secular world order. However, for the purpose of this paper, I will use interchangeably the term, “international priests”, *Fidei donum*, and “missionary” to identify the priest-immigrants in question.

Fernando Cardinal Filoni, Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, in a paper he presented as part of the centenary celebrations of the Owerri (Nigeria) ecclesiastical province in 2012, affirms that the Church’s *Missio ad Gentes* is not born of human initiative. It is the result of divine inspiration. It urges the believer to go beyond geographical and anthropological confines, to dwell in the frontiers, to exercise itinerancy, to be in solidarity with those who suffer and are marginalized, to share a common space, to accept others even if they are different because of race, language or ethnicity, and to share his mission as a disciple of the Lord with others as an act of authentic response to the Gospel that is a gift of God to his Church.

This implies that mutual sharing and giving are at the heart of the mission *ad Gentes*, and that it is a dynamic of cooperation, collaboration, encounter, and reciprocity with the western Church. Thus, in this paper the use of the term “roots” will be derived from this “common meaning” of our faith practice and missionary mandate.

On the other hand, the term “spectacles” stems from what I see and observe, not *a priori*, but *a posteriori* within the given circumstance. It also applies the perspectives from which the ‘other’—i.e. the culture, the people, the parishioner, the indigenous priest, and the bishop, who are all critical participants to this project—perceives and

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4 Braxton, *We Are His Witnesses*, 6.
5 Fernando Cardinal Filoni, “Missio Ad Gentes and the New Evangelization” (paper, Centenary Celebration of the Catholic Church, Owerri, Nigeria, November 8, 2012).
judges things that are of “common meaning” to the ministry. In fact, it is from my immediate and particular experience that this reflection is supported to appraise meaning and relevance of the *Fidei donum* project within the universal mission of the Church.

**The Universal Mission of the Church**

The Church, from our simple catechism to the studies in ecclesiology, has taught us to believe in her divine nature as *Mater et Magistra* (Mother and Teacher), as Body of Christ, as People of God, with human instruments as shepherds to oversee the spiritual welfare of her peoples in every age and culture. The words, “We and the Holy Spirit...,” (Acts 15:28) affirm a strong pedagogy of the mystery of the Body of Christ. This has not changed over time. In the *Decree on the Mission of the Church (Ad Gentes Divinitus)*, the Council Fathers said:

> Divinely sent to the nations of the world to be unto them “a universal sacrament of salvation”, the Church driven by the inner necessity of her own catholicity, and obeying the mandate of her Founder (c.f. Mark 16, 16), strives ever to proclaim the gospel to all men (sic). The Apostles themselves, on whom the Church was founded, following in the footsteps of Christ, “preached the word of truth and begot churches”. It is the duty of the successors to make this task endure “so that the word of God may run and be glorified” (2 Thess. 3, 1) and the kingdom of God be proclaimed and established throughout the world.6

This evidently explains why, in the dioceses of the United States and other parts of the western world, we have international priests from whom the Church has continued to proclaim “the word of truth.” This mission stands on the foundation of the Apostles, and we international priests respond to the authority of the successors of the apostles. Hence, whether it is the Nigerian Church or the Polish Church or the Indian Church or the American Church, we are missionaries who spread the truth of the gospel. These ethnic and cultural differences, rather than divide us, enrich the cultural diversity of the one Church of Christ.

In his encyclical, *Fidei donum*, Pope Pius XII called on his venerable brother bishops and ordinaries to “support with zealous interest the most holy cause of bringing the Church of God to the entire world.”7 This is what it means to give the “gift of faith” to the missions. This encyclical serves as an exhortation to the entire Church. Though there was particular interest for the missions in Africa at the time, the field of the missions, in the words of the Holy Father, was not limited to Africa. It informs all Catholics of an imperative to action toward the mission:

> Let them direct this zeal toward those regions of Europe in which the Christian religion has been cast off, or to the boundless spaces of South America; in both of these continents there are great difficulties to be overcome... Let them give financial assistance to the Catholics of Oceania and to the missions in Asia... Let them likewise perform the duties of fraternal charity in behalf of those countless Christians who are very dear to Us (sic) and are the glory of the Church... Let them grieve for the lamentable state of innumerable souls, especially of those young people who because of the atheistic propaganda of our times are growing up in the wretched condition of complete ignorance of religion and, in some cases, of active hatred of God.8

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7 Pius XII, *Fidei Donum* (1957), no. 4, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xii/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_21041957_fidei-donum_en.html
8 Pius XII, *Fidei Donum*, no. 5.
Thus, the universality of the “gift of faith” comes in its various dimensions to all peoples, yet, as a mission of the Church beyond geography and personnel. It is through such response that the Church in Africa was planted and has grown exceedingly in less than a century of active evangelization. Nigeria, for instance, is a typical case in point.

**The Nigerian Church**

The Nigerian Church is still a relatively young and growing Church. Some provinces have celebrated one hundred years of Catholic Christian presence, while others are younger. However, the Church has steadily grown from being a mission in the 19th century to becoming a church of 54 dioceses and 9 ecclesiastical provinces in 2013. Taking the Archdiocese of Owerri as an example, it just celebrated its centenary in 2012. This province is blessed with 8 dioceses of which about 70% are Catholics. The Owerri mission, as it was then called, was established in 1912 and had its first indigenous priest by 1937. She is like the biblical mustard seed. Within this short span of time, the Church in just the archdiocese has grown and is blessed with more than 292 diocesan priests and 55 religious priests, 195 women religious, 5 men religious brothers, and 172 major seminarians. As of today, 26 priests of this Archdiocese are engaged in mission in different parts of the world, with 23 being engaged in different dioceses and apostolates in the United States.\(^9\) Currently, this Archdiocese, like many other dioceses in Nigeria, is growing with an abundance of vocations and new parishes. During his visit to Owerri for the 1980 dedication of Maria Assumpta Cathedral, Bishop Joseph Whelan, the pioneer bishop of Owerri diocese, reacted to this tremendous growth:

> “Full of sorrow in the heart, yet full of contentment, that we (missionaries) have achieved our purpose; creating an Igbo Clergy and Hierarchy already at the beginning of our work...That the white men (sic) will leave today and the Igbos take over tomorrow without the smallest hitch is a miracle that could have happened nowhere else in the whole missionary world.”\(^10\)

The bishop—still nursing the regrets of how they, the missionaries, were unceremoniously expelled by the then Federal Military Government at the end of the civil war in 1970—was elated by the growth and expansion of the Church among the Igbo of Nigeria in such a short period of time.

The cultural heritage of the Igbo people has contributed to a better appreciation of the Church. Primarily, it is not an exaggeration to say that the indigenous people are intrinsically religious in nature and aptitude. Every aspect of their life is deeply religious and there are some traditional elements among the Igbo that have given meaning to the traditions of the Church. For instance, the spirituality of the ancestor worship relates to the veneration of the saints; the observation of sacred days relates to the holy days of obligation; the shrines dedicated to the various deities and sacred spaces relates to the church building; the taboos (aru) relate to sacrileges in the Church; the practice of a deep sense of awe for the sacred relates to how the Church shows deep reverence for holy things, sacred objects, and vessels. The priesthood of the traditional religions are understood as a sacred office by divine appointment and inheritance. These priests of traditional Igbo religions are highly respected and regarded in their communities, and are related to the ministerial priesthood of the Church; the presence of the diviners relate to the prophets in the Christian scriptures; there is the udu-akiri (a ritual clay-pot filled with local palm wine) which is similar to Holy Communion; and the concept of life after death and the observance of the hierarchical structure that recognizes elders and titles and offices are not foreign to the Igbo people, either.

These cultural elements are typically religious. They form the foundation of the people’s traditional spirituality that has become translated to their Christian religiosity. It is a life-world of religiosity and sacred symbols that

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they live in. In fact, the appreciation of Catholic elements appears significant in the lives of the Igbo people because they are naturally a religious people.

The young are numerous and are actively involved in their Christian churches. Participation in the Church and attending church activities is an appealing thing for the Igbo people of all age brackets. Even with the influence of western culture through travel and media exposure, religiosity remains a dominant factor as an image of the local church, and of all Africans.

The Influence of the Local Church in Nigeria on the Missionary

Typical of their Irish missionary heritage, the Church in Nigeria is structurally modeled to the Roman rite of the Catholic Church. It is conservative and yet open to the cultural appreciation of the people; it is charismatic and yet sentimental to the Latin liturgy; it is dynamic and vibrant. It is a singing church. It is a church of rituals and symbols. It is above all a “listening” and following church. It is significant to say that in the local church among the Igbo, there is much lay faithful participation, but it is met with deep and conscious respect to priestly prerequisites in liturgy and administration. The celebration of the Eucharist is really a communal celebration and remains a sacred time both for the family and the community. The people are ordinarily a religiously conscious people. Therefore, religiosity is greatly appreciated. They love their priests. They love the Church. They are very generous and respectul to the Church. The Church has a reason to grow and flourish under this kind of friendly sociosphere. It reflects the dynamism, spirituality, and deep religiosity of the African people.

This peculiar image of the local Church among the Africans, with special attention to the Igbo people, sustains the nostalgia one experiences when one leaves home and country to engage in a foreign mission like the one in the United States. In Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa, the priest looks forward to the Sunday liturgy with its vibrancy. It becomes a kind of spirituality to see the young and the old, male and female, actively involved in the church as lectors, altar servers, ushers, or choir members, or actively involved as members of any of the councils or committees in the local parish. Most times, these stewardships are rendered as pure voluntary service. Some Westerners might find it peculiar that among the Igbo people, despite strong active participation of the lay faithful in different cadres of church activity, the pastor is still regarded as the center of all these pastoral activities. I must observe, however, that such an attitude could lead to a hierarchical attitude in pastoral matters that may be too incongruous for pastoral practice and the frustrations that come with clericalism. This situation may somewhat differ from the experience one gets in the western world, especially in the United States. However, it is within this peculiar cultural heritage of the indigenous people that the international priest from Africa is called to serve in a typical western church with all its uniqueness.

The Face of the Church in the United States

The cultural landscape of the Church in the western world is one of great interest. In recent times, there is a growing concern about meeting demands for ordained clergy in her parishes. Taking cue from what one observes in the Church in southern Illinois, the engagement of international priests from India, South America, Poland and countries in Africa was initiated within the past seven years. One begins to place the missionary in the cultural context of the time.

The missionary arrives with the picture of the western world set in the motion pictures of Hollywood as he had perceived them from his home country. This initial picture distorts the true image of the challenges of mission. The culture, the language, the social context and the influence the secular ideology has on the western Church begin to unravel before the eyes of the international priest, and culture shock sets in. The cultural difference be-

tween Nigeria and the United States becomes an issue of primary concern. Like a missionary, one must observe, listen, and understand those cultural elements to be able to communicate to the heart of the people. For the gospel to be proclaimed effectively, the Church must know the culture of the people.\textsuperscript{12} This is an imperative for the missionary in the modern world. Faith, reason, and the heart must be connected harmoniously in order to effect a pastoral commitment towards the work of evangelization.

Some of the common phrases I have experienced that mirror the spectacles of life for the people of the United States ought to be known. These include a culture of a level-playing ground for all; of affirmative action; of saying it as it is; of phrases like, “This is not the way we do it”; “it is ok”; directly relates the people’s perception of things. Incidentally, these are in contrast to the hierarchical and authoritative style of the African Church and its sense of awe and reverence intrinsic to religious matters. The United States is founded on the principles of freedom and equality, a nation of laws, “a land of the free and home of the brave” with a peculiarity to God consciousness, but with a different appeal to Catholic history and model of hierarchy, authority, and service in the Church. From the rights of the First Amendment to the privileges of opulence and cultural diversity, one can perceive the uniqueness of the Church and its understanding in the American context.

Charles R. Morris in his work, \textit{American Catholic} has carefully traced the story of the Church in the United States as a story of “rise”, “triumph,” and “crisis”\textsuperscript{13} within the socio-cultural milieu it has found herself. The days of “rise” and “triumph” are gone with the decades of the last century leaving among some of the Catholics nostalgia of the past and anxiety for the future. Personally, I am among those who hold the strong view that the present “crises” of vocation and other allied matters are there to strengthen the Church and prepare her for a future of greater evangelization in the face of the ambivalence towards the mission of the Church and the antagonism she receives presently from the secular world. The implications of a neo-persecution resulting from the prevalent ideological war on ethical issues like abortion, euthanasia, same-sex union, the use of contraceptives, and so forth will eventually identify the faithful. Since the Church is a pilgrim being, there is hope in the horizon.

The American Church offers us so much to reflect on. There is so much to learn from the people; from their sense of precision to their brevity; from their gender sensitivity to their concern for the law; and from their separation of church and state to the great spirit of patriotism and sense of accommodation. The rich cultural diversity represents beautifully a true image of a Church alive and strengthened. This socio-cultural landscape situates the Church at the center of the American people’s lives, just as the religious heritage of the African people shape the African’s embrace of the Church.

I must commend the degree of lay faithful participation in the United States, whose resourcefulness and expertise have been of enormous support to the clergy. However, the idea of the married clergy and the permanent Diaconate is not common in the African Church, especially in Nigeria. It would be very strange to open up discussions on such subjects in the Nigerian context, at least for now. Nonetheless, their inclusion into the mainstream of the ministerial life may be seen as part of the rich cultural diversity seen in the United States. I have observed the spirit of ecumenical sharing and openness which complement the works of charity in our communities, with special attention to food pantries which are operational in most parishes I have visited. The Ministerial Alliance is a worthy association that enables the ministers of different confessions to reach out to those in need to meet periodically to pray together. In the diocese of Belleville, the Bishop, Edward K. Braxton, holds what is called the “Wisdom Community Session” which brings some of the priests together from time to time to share experiences.


of developments in the Universal Church and peculiar pastoral experiences. I have found this to be informative and enriching, and something that sustains that sense of belonging for the *Fidei donum* priests in his diocese.

In any case, the pastoral experience of the *Fidei donum* priest is not complete without the practical experience at the parish level or the immediate place of the apostolate. One can notice the anxiety of some parishioners over the accent of some of the international priests. The *Fidei donum* priest could hail from India or Poland or some country in Africa where the English language is at best only a second language. The effort an international priest makes to be heard is often not always appreciated by some of the parishioners, and in some cases, it becomes an excuse for the parishioner to withdraw from participation in the parish. This kind of approach in some of the parishes falls short of the mutual cooperation that could characterize this kind of peculiar situation.

In some parishes, instead of being patient with the priest, some of the parishioners have chosen to be absentee members of the parish. Some have argued with passion for the need for women ordination as a solution to the continued dwindled number of ordained clergy in the church. This radical option, I suppose, may not bring the immediate solutions to something that could be solved with a little more attention to and the employment of Christian virtue of tolerance and patience.

I have also noticed a great degree of ignorance about the social, academic, and religious lives of the African people. Africa is often referred to as a country, or hamlet, where everyone knows one another and lives in proximity with the other. It sounds strange for one to ask an African priest who comes from Nigeria about her brother or cousin who is living in Nairobi, Kenya! Most times, the only things known about Africa are the jungle forests, the ethnic wars, or the scourge of hunger and HIV Aids. Sometimes, depending on how the missionary priest is asked, some of these questions are frustrating and embarrassing.

The continued onslaught from the public media and misrepresentation of facts concerning the African continent and her peoples has left a poor image of Africa among some of the parishioners of America. It leads to an assumption that the international priest, who is working in their midst, is being gifted with an extraordinarily privileged life in America, leading to prejudice.

In general, the *Fidei donum* priest makes efforts to adapt to language and culture. Often, there is no mutual reciprocation from the parishioners. The presumption that the alien must adapt to the host’s way of doing things is not by itself unreasonable. What makes it unreasonable is the assumption that the international priest “ought to know better.” This leads us to the question that could be considered: to what extent are these parishioners prepared for or educated about the new reality of the presence of *Fidei donum* priests in their local parishes?

There are few instances of concern that are not typically doctrinal; however, they pose pastoral issues depending on individual dispositions. There are parishioners who are quick to adapt and adjust to the international priests. I have observed that this is often dependent on one’s exposure or interaction with a wider range of “foreigners” in one’s life experience. Where this is the case, it could be that such parishioners have come in contact with one “foreign” priest who had paved the way in the past or it could be that the parish is set within the urban area where there is an influx of people of different backgrounds. I consider this to be a sociological factor.

**Bishops and Fidei Donum Priests**

Now let us look at the relationship between bishops and *Fidei Donum* priests. I have observed that some of the local clergy resist welcoming and working with *Fidei donum* priests. As a matter of diocesan policy, some have refused to engage the international priests, especially those from Africa, for reasons unbeknownst to me. In the Diocese of Little Rock, Arkansas, for instance, it is presently the preference to consider only international priests...
from Latin America and Poland, and no more from Africa. In a diocese like the Houston Archdiocese, where the Missionary of Saint Paul (MSP) has celebrated 25 years of their presence, there are surprisingly few Africans to show for it. This is in spite of the huge Nigerian presence in that single Archdiocese actively participating and building up the faith life of the Archdiocese.

This, however, is in contrast to what the bishop of San Bernardino, California has done. Bishop Gerald Barnes recognizes a parish in his diocese as a mission parish to assist the diocese of Ahiara in Nigeria. It is not as if I am suggesting that this should be an expectation, or that it ought to be the universal pattern of collaboration, but there are certain kinds of pastoral collaborations that express the appreciation of presence that is lacking in some of the dioceses where these international priests are engaged. Collaboration is a ministry of charity. It falls on any individual bishop to make that decision about whether to consider inviting international priests in his diocese or not, and the kind of collaboration he prefers that could work for them.

The experience differs from place to place. The Church in the United States may need some pastoral help as it relates to numbers of the ordained clergy. They, however, require priests in good standing with the Church and with integrity of character. During some of my discussions with other international priests, it has been indicated that some of the anxieties the bishops are having stem from previous ugly experiences by some of the Fidei donum priests who have betrayed their trust in the past. Some of these unwelcome acts include, but are not limited to, failure to fulfill their contracts with the diocese in question, allegations on moral issues, and sometimes there may arise the problem of accent in speech. For these reasons, some of the bishops have become very slow to further engage African priests. As pathetic and embarrassing as this may be, the need for Fidei donum priests in the United States and the Western Church cannot be over emphasized. The solution calls for honest and mutual re-assessment of the strategy of engagement. What else could be done to improve on the project?

Space may not permit me to go into further specifics of these negative impressions, but my experience could be likened to what other international priests are experiencing. The reality of the cultural differences shapes the understanding the international priests have and the respective expectations of the host community. However, we are committed to live out the same sacred tradition from the apostles. The truth is that every one of us is coming from a particular culture; and most times, we are proud of our culture. Studies in the humanities lead us to the conclusion that there is no perfect or superior culture. Each culture serves its people; and because culture is dynamic, it can learn from the other.

In the ministry here in the United States, one is bound to be pulled through the cultural conflicts of the host community, the priests’ own culture, and the culture of the Roman Catholic Church, which unites the two parties. One is forced to ask: which culture should dominate as far as ministry is concerned? Perhaps where we observe conflict may become our mutual challenges for a better collaboration.

Challenges for the Future

What I consider challenges for the future are those significant areas that could sustain and bring about greater collaboration in the Church for evangelization, a process that is necessary to encourage vocations in the Church of the United States.

As one who has been privileged with the simple experience of these cultures, and with an appeal to the sensu ecclesiae, there may be a need in the future for all people to devote more time to catechesis and study that is in tune with the Church’s magisterium on the topic of the ecclesiology of the Church, with special attention to the role and place of the Magisterium, the local ordinary, and excellence of doctrinal positions in every local church and seminary. Michael Rose observes how liberals took seize of most of the seminaries at some point in the his-
tory of the United States Church and flooded them with all sorts of strange teachings and literature that opposed orthodoxy, Christian sexual ethics, scholastic philosophy etc.\(^\text{14}\) The effect on the students was underestimated. There will be need for a rediscovery of liturgical spirituality; an appreciation of the Sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist; the significance of a Eucharistic-centered parish; a renewed interest in the Scholastic definitions of freedom and truth; and the implications of absolute relativism. It behooves the mission of the Church to continue to bear witness to the truth to all peoples and cultures in every generation. The Catholic parishioners have a right to the truth and to be taught the truth of their faith. Will these increase vocations to the priesthood and the religious life? There is yet no study which I am presently aware of that it will be the case. However, from my personal experience as an international priest and from the experiences of other international priests working in different dioceses in the United States whom I have had the opportunity to discuss with, the parishioners thirst for these elements of orthodoxy to be exemplified in the life of their priests. It is interesting how these often neglected aspects of the Church could make a difference. By my estimation, this may actually be a unique contribution the international priests are making in the life of the parishioners.

On the part of the continued collaboration with the *Fidei donum* priests, some proposals could be considered. This includes as a matter of urgency an immediate formation program for the international priest as part of the preparation and orientation immediately after he arrives and just before being launched into the parish life. This kind of formation may not be limited to just the pastoral and the Child Protection module, but the social and cultural life of the people and their expectations, colloquial and different nuances in words and phrases, accent reduction, and so forth. An institution like the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago can take up this project as a program to support the various dioceses.

There is also the need for an educational session for the parishioners, with whom these international priests have to work. This will cushion the initial indispositions some parishioners have in dealing with ‘foreigners’ or colored people, both of which they may not have been used to.

The need for mutual acceptance is also important. Often times, it is what the diocese will benefit from the international priest that is offered and, besides the basics, not much is inquired, if need be, of the concerns of the priest being engaged. Some of these priests may be coming from dioceses with vocations to spare and share, but these dioceses may be really needy in some respect which the host diocese can offer in that same spirit of collaboration.

Furthermore, patience and tolerance are of mutual concern. The host community needs be patient with the new priest to understand him and the international priest needs be tolerant to the “strange” way of doing things which may be completely different from the style he had been used to. Finally, adjustment and adaptation become necessary tools for the ministry in every new territory. It is also a significant disposition for both the host community and the international priest to practice in this kind of engagement. All of this goes to buttress the proposition of Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone on the *Fidei donum* missionaries:

> In particular, it is appropriate to rethink the Church’s communion and co-responsibility for mission, as well as the methodological implications such as the need for common planning, the integration of “*Fidei donum*” missionaries with specific tasks and roles, their reinsertion into their Churches of origin, the mutual exchange of people, means and apostolic methodologies, formation courses for missionaries, the need to set up national missionary formation centers for those who are to be sent, and coordination centers to respond adequately to the requests for personnel and means.

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A further objective is to enable the young Churches, which for the time being have to rely on the aid of the missionary institutes, to send out their own “Fidei donum” missionaries.\textsuperscript{15}

\textbf{Conclusion}

We strongly affirm that this Church is a mystery. We are all called, not to do our own thing, but to do the will of the one who called us. The human face of the Church is an insight to lead us to see the divine aid in our midst. So also the divine aid urges us to trust in the human hands of fragile and mortal men who are called priests. They, with all the faithful, are mere instruments of God. We are witnesses of truth and hope. This reflection does not claim to have adequately exhausted the impressions and the challenges facing the international priest in a world of multi-cultural diversity as we experience today, especially in the western world. In line with the common anxiety and mutual cooperation being experienced and anticipated, I do not claim to have exhausted in these few pages all there is to articulate. There is still more to share and to learn as this serves as a \textit{terminus ad quo} to this important pastoral discussion.

Before I conclude, I wish to share with you this admonition from a friend when I was about to begin in the apostolate in the parish to where I have been sent. He cautioned me that the secret of my success is not in what I am able to accomplish, but in the “much” I am able to avoid. And this is one significant difference that summarizes the differences of approach to pastoral work in most of the African Church and in the United States, i.e. in my home church and culture and the Church in America. Could this be the human wisdom of engagement?

The Church in Nigeria and the Church in the United States are both rooted in the same Catholic Church, but we see them from these cultural spectacles. The roots may be the same, but the spectacles differ. The difference is not in form or structure, but in understanding and appreciation.

As a last word, we cannot afford to be simplistic about this phenomenon of international priests in our times. Insofar as the Church continues to face the need for ordained clergy to sustain a Eucharistic-centered parish, the relevance of the missionary, otherwise called the international priests, will endure in our multicultural world. This reflection, as it were, is borne of my own experience and the discussions I have had with fellow international priests working in the different parts of the country. The limitations I have had here is the limited scientific sources and the scarcity of materials in this subject which now calls for further study. It will serve to renew the discussions on this imperative of the Church in our time. How best we can make of this needed pastoral strategy for the salvation of souls is this paper’s question.