

VIRGINITY AND SEXUAL PURITY: THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY AS A MODEL OF DECENCY FOR NIGERIAN YOUTHS

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Abstract

The high rate of sexual immorality among young Nigerian is a thing of concern. This is evident on the wanton and reckless display of all manners of indecency in public, especially on social media platforms. What, in the past, constituted immorality appears no longer to be an issue. Sadly, a lot of these actions are learnt from celebrities and those referred to as social media influencers. Many young people look up to these as role models. This work is a study of the doctrine of the Perpetual Virginity of the Blessed Virgin Mary as a panacea for indecency among Nigerian youths. It begins with an introduction that sets the pace of our discourse. Some key concepts used in the work are clarified. Next some forms of immorality common among Nigerian youths today were highlighted. The importance of virginity and sexual purity is established and some insights are drawn from scriptures and magisterial teachings. The dogma of the Perpetual Virginity of Mary is presented next and this enables us to present her as a role model for sexual purity. Finally, recommendations are made and the work is concluded.

Keywords: Indecency, Mary, Nigerian Youths, purity, virginity.

Introduction

On a regular basis, the social media is awash with visual content portraying all manner of sexual indecency. This is evident in the amount of pictures and videos that inundate the cyberspace exposing very sexually profane behaviors of people. Most of these immoral and indecent behaviors are exhibited by our young people. From nude pictures to sexually explicit videos to indecent skits in the name of comedy, the internet is rife with lots of these depraved materials, many of which are done in the name of “creating content”. The most unfortunate thing is that this indecency is shamelessly displayed in the public space and young people now find justification in being shameless about it. These acts of indecency have become a trend among young people many of whom no longer view sexual decency as a virtue worth coveting. Thus, sexual immorality seems to be

celebrated and anyone who attempts to call people who exhibit immodesty to order is blackmailed with the lines “do not judge”. It would appear that sexual morality is now a relative term and what one deems moral or immoral is only a matter of understanding. With this attitude, virtues such as chastity and virginity now appear obsolete, and saintly models who were once celebrated for such virtues have now been relegated to the darkest quarters of human history. This work is not primarily concerned about the causes of immorality nor is it about the statistical presentation of the rate of immorality among the youths. It only seeks to highlight the virtues of the Blessed Virgin as a model for young people.

The Catholic Church (Eastern and Western rites) as well as some non-Catholic Churches agree on the perpetual virginity of the Blessed Mother of Christ, Mary. From early on the Doctrine of the Virgin Birth has been given an important place in Christian Theology, and Mary is given a key role in God’s plan of salvation. Hence, the Church upholds the teaching that the Blessed Virgin Mary conceived Jesus while remaining a virgin in her marriage with St. Joseph. The virginal conception is affirmed in the Sacred Scripture—*virginatas ante partum*; the second was discerned by the Church’s intuition—*virginitas in partu*; and the third, *virginitas in partum*, the perpetual virginity, is strongly implied in the sacred text and has been held by numerous theologians (with the exception of Tertullian) from the advent of Christianity.¹ However, prominent theologians such as Gregory Nazianzen (d. 390) have exalted Mary’s virginity from a doctrinal level to an exemplary and ascetic value. Gregory Nazianzen went further to assert that “the Christian practice of virginity was inaugurated by Mary herself.”² In this work, we shall examine the values of virginity and sexual purity as upheld by the Church was tracing the Blessed Virgin Mary as a paragon for the antecedent.

Clarification of Concepts

It is important at this point to clarify some important concepts that are central to our discourse. The concepts virginity, sexual purity, indecency and Nigerian youths will therefore be discussed to create a foundational knowledge for our discourse ahead.

a. *Virginity*

The word “Virgin” originated from the Greek and Latin word “*virgo*,” which means maiden. It was used often in Greek mythology to classify several goddesses, such as Artemis (also known as Diana) and Hestia. In medieval times, virginity became a sexual

¹ Michael O’Carroll, “Virginity of Mary”, in *The Theotokos: A Theological Encyclopedia of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2000, 357.

² Lugi Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church: The Blessed Virgin Mary in Patristic Thoughts*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999, 165.

term for a heterosexual woman who had not been penetrated by a man's sexual organ (penis). Virginity was classified as a gift from the Christian God only to be released by a husband. It was expected for a woman to remain chaste (a virgin) until marriage; a woman broke her family's honor and was often punished if she was not chaste. Tests of chastity, both medical and mystical, were used on women to verify their status.³

b. Sexual Purity/Chastity

A central virtue in the Greek, Roman, and Christian traditions, chastity (Gk. *sōphrosunē*, Lat. *castitas*) reflects the values of purity, blamelessness, and order.⁴ The Catechism of the Catholic Church paragraph 2337 sees Chastity (sexual purity) as the, "means the successful integration of sexuality within the person and thus the inner unity of man in his bodily and spiritual being." Furthermore, the paragraph reads that "sexuality, in which man's belonging to the bodily and biological world is expressed, becomes personal and truly human when it is integrated into the relationship of one person to another, in the complete and lifelong mutual gift of a man and a woman." The virtue of chastity therefore involves the integrity of the person and the integrality of the gift.⁵

Hence, Chastity and purity, modesty and decency are comparable in that they have the basic meaning of freedom from whatever is uncouth or sensational. Yet they also differ. Chastity implies an opposition to the immoral in the sense of lustful or licentious. It suggests refraining from all acts or thoughts that are not in accordance with the Church's teaching about the use of one's reproductive powers. It particularly stresses restraint and an avoidance of anything that might defile or make unclean the soul because the body has not been controlled in the exercise of its most imperious passion.⁶

c. Immorality/Indecency

Immorality is defined by the Oxford Dictionary as "behaviour that does not follow accepted standards of sexual behaviour"⁷. It defines indecency as "behaviour that is thought to be morally or sexually offensive"⁸. From the two definitions above, we can say that immorality and indecency are bordering on the same issue which is sexually misbehavior. Thus, they shall be used interchangeably in this work. Any form of sexual

³ Defining Virginity, *Sutter Health*, accessed June 30, 2022,

<https://www.sutterhealth.org/health/teens/sexual/defining-virginity>

⁴ "Chastity," *Encyclopedia.com* published May 14, 2018. accessed June 30, 2022,

<https://www.encyclopedia.com/medicine/anatomy-and-physiology/anatomy-and-physiology/chastity>

⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed., Abuja: Pauline Publications, 1995, 494.

⁶ Fr. John Hardon "Chastity," *Catholic Culture*, accessed June 30, 2022,

<https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/dictionary/index.cfm?id=32459>

⁷ Oxford Dictionary online, accessed January, 2023

⁸ Ibid.

behaviour that is considered to be inappropriate can, therefore, constitute immorality or indecency. Such behaviour can manifest in forms of words, actions or dressing.

d. Nigerian Youths

There is no universally agreed definition of the youth age group. However, the United Nations, without prejudice to other definitions, defines the youth as persons who are between the ages of 15 and 24 years.⁹ It is important to note that Nigeria has the largest youth population in the world, with a median age of 18.1 years. About 70% of the country's population is under 30 years and 42% are under the age of 15.¹⁰ While this large number of young people is supposed to be an asset to the nation, and the media is often agog with the stellar performance of young Nigerians in foreign countries in different fields of life: academics, medicine, science and technology and even sports, unfortunately, many of these young people, especially within the country, have taken to a life of immorality and crime: prostitution, internet fraud, drug abuse, cultism and banditry. While some of these can be seen to be the result of bad governance and hardship, many of these are actually the result of wrong choices.

Indecency among Nigerian Youths

Indecency among youths has reached a new high with the advent of social media. This is not in any way an attempt at ignoring the benefits of social media. On the contrary, it buttresses the fact that social media makes it easy to achieve one's aims, positive or negative with little effort and time. Some forms of indecency among Nigerian youths today are:

a. Indecent Dressing

There is high rate of indecent dressing among young people in Nigeria today. Examples include wearing revealing outfits that display sensitive body parts such as cleavages, bellies, backs, thighs and buttocks. It has become a common trend to wear either extremely tight clothes or deeply cut ones that leave little to the imagination. With the reemergence of waist-beads, it has been common for young girls to wear skirts and pants that enable people to catch a glimpse of their beautiful beads. Another very unfortunate development is the advent of the camel toe. This is a fashion sense that requires young ladies to wear extremely tight sport pants that reveal the shapes of their vaginas thereby giving the look and shape of a camel's toe. There are even artificial pads that are inserted

⁹ United Nations. A/36/215 in Resolution 36/28 of 1981, accessed March 09, 2022 www.un.org

¹⁰ Akinyemi, A. I. and Mobolaji, J. W. (2022, July 21). Nigeria's Large, Youthful Population could be an Asset or a Burden. Premium Times. Assessed December 18, 2022.

into the pants to give this appealing outline in the event that the shape is not as pronounced as desired.

b. Nudity

Nudity is becoming a common trend among young people who see no shame in the exhibition of their private body parts to the public. It is no longer uncommon to see wanton displays of nudism in the public space by young people who have discovered it as the quickest way to achieve fame in the cyberspace. Young ladies now see it as part of the fashion of the times to go nude without any sense of shame. Sometimes this is done in the form of a challenge. A good example was the silhouette challenge that trended on TikTok in the early months of 2021, which involved going completely nude and displaying all manners of provocative eroticism while being only partially concealed by a red light filter. This challenge themed '#silhouettechallenge' came to an abrupt end when some people devised a way to remove the filter and thus exposed a lot of nude videos.

c. Sexual Immorality

In as much as sexual immorality is not a new thing among people, in the last few years, since the advent of social media, there appears to have been a geometric rise in the rate of immorality among the youths. Fornication has become very rampant and masturbation has become very common no thanks to the abundance of pornography on the internet and social media. Young people now find it entertaining to discuss their sexual exploits and experiences within the public space and it is disheartening to see that such threads gather much more views and comments than more reasonable posts.

d. Love Charms (kayan mata)

Another dangerous trend among youths today is the sudden rise of love charms often referred to as 'kayan mata'. These charms are said to empower young people with the ability to ensnare, capture and hold anybody they want for different reasons, sometimes for marriage, but most times for pecuniary reasons. While love charms have always been said to exist, the indiscriminate manner with which people who claim to possess powers to concoct such charms advertise themselves on social media and have large followership is very alarming. Some of such practitioners claim to have gotten their powers from certain marine spirits.

e. Body Enhancement

There has also been a sudden craving among young to undergo body enhancement surgeries. While it is not a crime to want to augment one's looks, there is so much emphasis on those body parts that give one a seductive appearance, mainly the breasts and the buttocks. Many young people today, no longer contented with their natural endowments, are quick to go under the knife in order to obtain their desired appearance.

This often involves the draining of fat from their mid-sections called liposuction or the insertion of silicon into their bodies to give the required shape. Some undergo all manners of skin treatments in order to give off a glowing appearance without the thought of the future consequences of these treatments on their bodies.

f. Prostitution

There is high rate of modern prostitution among young people in Nigeria. This is evident in the kind of life they lead on social media. Many young men and women now use the social media as a means of setting up meetings for sexual escapades which is for many of them, the source of their income. Some of them do these under the cover of selling different wares but a little probe reveals the true nature of their business. They even have euphemized names for this business such as street work, runs, hookup, escort service and sleepover.

In the midst of all these, what is the way forward for Nigerian youths? How can these young people, full of life and energy, find the proper models to emulate? How can sexual morality become a desired virtue for the sexually curious youths who live in a sexually charged environment? That is the next direction of this work.

Importance of Virginity and Sexual Purity in the Sacred Scriptures

Drawing from St. Paul teachings, sexual relations should be only for a man and a woman in a marriage and should stay between those married people for a lifetime (cf. Ephesians 5:31). God designed sex to be pleasurable, but also instructed that it was reserved for marriage. Despite what many cultures today advocate, sexual purity is crucial and beneficial to us. Within the boundaries of marriage, sex is a pleasurable and beautiful gift. Sexual activity outside of marriage is a perversion of something God made good.¹¹

However, there are many Scripture passages about sexual purity, but in St. Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, he encapsulates much of God's directive on the subject: "For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from fornication; that each one of you know how to control your own body [13] in holiness and honor, not with lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God;... For God did not call us to impurity but in holiness." (cf. 4:3–5, 7)

On the other hand, virginity is a very important concept in the Sacred Scriptures. The Bible defines sex outside of marriage as a sin because it is a form of sexual immorality (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:2). Thus, Christians are not to engage in sexual relations outside of

¹¹ "What does the Bible say about Sexual Purity," *Compelling Truth*, accessed June 30, 2022, <https://www.compellingtruth.org/sexual-purity.html>

the boundaries of marriage. A person who chooses to remain abstinent is called a virgin. Mary, the mother of Jesus, is often referred to as the Virgin Mary because she became pregnant with Jesus as a miracle from God without having had sex. In today's modern culture, virginity is a negative thing. For others, "virginity" has become a technical delineation describing not "going all the way," yet still engaging in all sorts of other sexual acts. The Scriptures makes it clear, however, that any sexual act outside of how God created it to be within marriage is sinful. God desires sexual purity in body, mind, and heart.

The Scriptures emphasizes the importance of virginity because it is an act of obedience to God. In Saint Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, he says, "Shun fornication! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body; but the fornicator sins against the body itself. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body." (cf. 6:18–20). Hence, practicing abstinence requires discipline, which can be very difficult when we face physical temptations. Sex was created by God; therefore, our sexual desire is part of how He made us. However, outside of marriage sex is defiled and can have negative consequences. When we choose to trust God, even if we do not fully understand His plan, we are obedient to Him. Our obedience is an act of submission to Him acknowledging that we need Him as our Saviour.

Finally, virginity is a symbol of commitment to God. The apostle Paul describes marriage as "a relationship that symbolizes Christ's relationship to the Church" (cf. Ephesians 5:31–32). In this relationship both Christ and the Church are committed to one another in a monogamous relationship.¹²

Concepts of Virginity and Sexual Purity in Christianity

The theme of virginity lies at the very centre of the Catholic Church. Christianity attaches the utmost importance to virginity. The theological significance of Mary's virginity ensures that the believers recognize virginity as a virtue by Christianity. Christians believe Mary, mother of Christ, had miraculously given birth to Jesus without having had sex, while her virginity stayed intact. It is considered by the Church to be the ultimate miracle that supports the whole of Christianity. Therefore, the scriptures regard Virginity in Christianity as a holy trait.¹³

¹² "Why is Virginity so Important in the Bible," *Compelling Truth*, accessed June 30, 2022, <https://www.compellingtruth.org/Bible-virginity.html>

¹³ "Virginity in Christianity: All you need to know as a Christian," *Be Virgin*, accessed June 30, 2022, <https://www.virginitynow.com/blog/virginity-in-christianity-all-you-need-to-know-as-a-christian/>

The Idea of Celibacy in Christianity

Another concept closely related to that of virginity is celibacy. Celibacy is the state of being unmarried and abstaining entirely from sexual relations, willingly, or under some compulsion, for an indefinite time. Abstinence from sex is the core of the Catholic Church. The Virgin Mary remained celibate. Medieval English hymns to the Virgin Mary refer to her being without spot or spotless. The Catholic Church expects Christian clerics and nuns to remain celibate their entire lives. The church maintains this to preserve the simplicity of life that frees the human to love and serve God with a radical singularity. Therefore, Virginity in Christianity is not only a physical state but a virtue. Catholics see it as a means to attain a state conducive to communicating with the Holy Spirit. Christians nuns are termed as ‘brides of Christ’, indicating that they are committed to serving Christ for the entirety of their lives, which rules out any possibility of them losing their virginity.¹⁴

Consecrated Virgins

A consecrated virgin is a never-married woman who dedicates her perpetual virginity to God and is set aside as a sacred person who belongs to Christ in the Catholic Church.¹⁵ Consecrated virginity can be traced in sections of the New Testament, such as Matthew 19:12 and 1 Corinthians 7:25-40. Early church fathers, such as St. Ignatius of Antioch, have also mentioned consecrated virgins as a distinct group within the Catholic Church, dating back to 110 A.D. Before women were able to enter a religious order, many dedicated themselves as consecrated virgins. St. Agnes, St. Agatha, St. Cecilia and St. Lucy are among the early saints recognized by the Catholic Church as consecrated virgins. During the sixth century, the practice of consecrated virginity fell by the wayside as the popularity of monastic religious life grew, and became extremely rare the Middle Ages. However, consecrated virginity made a comeback as religious orders began to preserve the “Rite of Consecration to a Life of Virginity.” Pope Pius XII on the 25th March, 1954 promulgated an encyclical called *Sacra Virginitas* (On Consecrated Virgins) to foster the desire of consecrated virginity. Vatican II also ensured consecrated virginity’s restoration in the modern world when it revised the “Rite of Consecration.”¹⁶

Thus, according to the 1983 Code of Canon Law, women who are seeking out this particular vocation must be consecrated to God through the diocesan bishop, according to

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Maggie Maslak, “Consecrated Virginity,” *Catholic.net*, accessed June 29, 2022, <https://catholic.net/op/articles/4192/cat/1233/consecrated-virginity.html>

¹⁶ Ibid.

the rite approved by the Church. Below are some Canons that relates to the life of consecrated virginity;

- i. Can. 588 §1: In itself, the state of consecrated life is neither clerical nor lay.
- ii. Can. 599: The evangelical counsel of chastity embraced for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven, is a sign of the world to come, and a source of greater fruitfulness in an undivided heart. It involves the obligation of perfect continence observed in celibacy.
- iii. Can. 604 §1: The order of virgins is also to be added to these forms of consecrated life. Through their pledge to follow Christ more closely, virgins are consecrated to God, mystically espoused to Christ and dedicated to the service of the Church, when the diocesan Bishop consecrates them according to the approved liturgical rite.
- iv. §2: Virgins can be associated together to fulfill their pledge more faithfully, and to assist each other to serve the Church in a way that befits their state.

The Church's Magisterium on Virginity and Sexual Purity

The Church's teachings on sexual purity are mostly found in the pages of the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Summarily, it is seen as a virtue that involves the integrity of the human person and the integrality of the gift of one's self to God. "It includes an apprenticeship in self-mastery which is training in human freedom. The alternative is clear: either man governs his passions and finds peace, or he lets himself be dominated by them and becomes unhappy."¹⁷ It is further classified by the Church under the virtue of temperance and as a moral virtue, "It is also a gift from God, a grace, a fruit of spiritual effort. The Holy Spirit enables one whom the water of Baptism has regenerated to imitate the purity of Christ."¹⁸ Therefore, all the baptized are called to chastity. The Christian has "put on Christ, the model for all chastity. All Christ's faithful are called to lead a chaste life in keeping with their particular states of life."¹⁹

The Church classifies Chastity into three forms:

1. The first is that of spouses,
2. The second that of widows, and
3. The third that of virgins and does not praise any one of them to the exclusion of the others.²⁰

¹⁷ CCC, 2339

¹⁸ CCC, 2345

¹⁹ CCC, 2348

²⁰ CCC, 2349

Lust, masturbation, fornication, pornography, prostitution and rape are all classified as deviations and offences against chastity.

The Dogma of the Perpetual Virginity of the Blessed Virgin Mary

The teaching of Mary's perpetual virginity is one of the longest defined dogmas of the Church. It was taught by the earliest Church Fathers, including: Tertullian, St. Athanasius, St. Ambrose, and St. Augustine. And it was officially declared a dogma at the Fifth Ecumenical Council in Constantinople in 553 A.D. That declaration called Mary "ever-virgin." A century later, a statement by Pope Martin I clarified that "ever-virgin" meant Mary was a virgin before (*virginitas ante partum*), during (*virginitas in partu*), and after (*virginitas post partum*) Christ's birth. Of these three aspects of Mary's perpetual virginity, the easiest part to see in Scripture is her virginal conception of Christ. Both Matthew and Luke leave no room for doubt on that (cf. Mt 1:18; Lk 1:34–35, 3:23). That virginal motherhood is the guarantor of both Jesus' divinity and Jesus' humanity. It safeguards the truth that he was both fully God and fully man.²¹

Less apparent is Mary's virginity during and after Christ's birth. Understanding the reason for that first requires recognition that Mary's virginity was not just one attribute of hers among many. It is central to her identity. It is who she is. Not just biologically, but spiritually and interiorly. All her life, Mary possessed an integrity that every other human person since Adam and Eve has lacked. Because of that integrity, her body perfectly expressed her spirit. There was no tension between the two. Accordingly, since Mary's soul was entirely consecrated to God, so too was her body. Her physical virginity was a perpetual sign of that consecration. While the Church doctrine refers primarily to Her bodily integrity, Mary's virginity includes *virginitas mentis*, that is, a constant virginal disposition; *virginitas sensus*, that is, freedom from inordinate motions of sexual desire, and *virginitas corporis*, that is, physical integrity. Mary's virginity keeps the physical sign of an interior reality intact. Doing that took a miracle, but no more of a miracle than it took for Jesus, after his resurrection, to enter the room where His disciples awaited Him even though the door was locked (cf. Jn 20:19). That's also one of the reasons why Mary and Joseph refrained from normal marital relations. Her virginity was too central to her identity to do otherwise.²²

²¹ "Understanding Mary's Perpetual Virginity," *St. Paul Center*, published November 21, 2018, accessed June 30, 2022, <https://stpaulcenter.com/understanding-marys-perpetual-virginity/>

²² Ibid

Mary as a Role Model for Virginity and Sexual Purity

Mary, the Mother of Jesus The virgin wife of Joseph of Nazareth and the mother of the Davidic Messiah, Jesus Christ. Having accepted this exalted vocation, she became the ideal model of Christian faith and discipleship (Luke 1:38, 45; 8:21; 11:28). Mary's example of pointing always to Jesus is a model for chastity. Her pure Heart was centered entirely on God; therefore, it was keenly attuned to the needs of others. All, whether married or single, are called to chastity, according to their state in life.²³ The role of the Virgin Mary in the Church covers many virtuous facets of the Church's economy of salvation. The concrete aspect of the Virgin as a model of the Church is specified by the Second Vatican Council. It implicitly teaches that the Virgin Mary is a model of the Church as a Mother, Virgin and in order of faith, charity and perfect union with Christ.²⁴ The Dogmatic Constitution of the Church *Lumen Gentium* draws special attention to the sanctity of the Virgin Mary and of the Church. Her role consists in radiating and increasing holiness in the Church. On the other hand, the Church joyfully contemplates the sanctity of the Mother of grace, and imitates her charity. She contemplates it in the light of the Word of God made flesh, because the Virgin Mother is her example and model.²⁵

Consequently, as a paragon of various virtues, the virtues of virginity and chastity have been greatly linked by various theologians and Church Fathers alike. St. Cyril of Jerusalem regards the Virgin birth of Jesus as well as the perpetual Virginity of Mary as greatly exalting the Virginal state with the Church and made chaste life highly attractive to all the faithful, whatever their state in life.²⁶ Subsequently, the Cappadocian, St. Basil of Caesarea (d. 379) who was a strong defender of the Virgin Mary's perpetual virginity, even though did not make explicit his statements on the Virgin Mother's holiness, limited himself to calling her holy and recalled her purity and perseverance in holy virginity.²⁷ Furthermore, another Cappadocian, Gregory Nazianzen (d. 390) who was a contemporary of St. Basil also agrees that the Virgin Mary is a model of Virginal life. He does not limit himself to teaching Mary's virginity on a doctrinal level but also presents its exemplary and ascetical value. Also, he asserts that the Christian practice of virginity was inaugurated by Mary herself. In his moral poem, he writes that, "after Christ was born, a

²³ Mary Angela, "Mary, Perfect Model of Religious Life," *Missio Magazine*, published January 16, 2017, accessed June 29, 2022, <https://missiomagazine.com/mary-perfect-model-religious-life>

²⁴ Mark I. Miravalle, *Mariology: A Guide for Priest, Deacons, Seminarians*, Goleta: Seat of Wisdom Books, 2007, 599.

²⁵ Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, *Lumen Gentium* (21 November 1964) 65, in *Vatican Council II, Vol 1: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery, Mumbai: St. Pauls, 2013, 380-81

²⁶ Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church: The Blessed Virgin Mary in Patristic Thoughts*, 138.

²⁷ *Ibid* 148

chaste and Virgin Mother, not bound by carnal chains and unto God... Virginity began to sanctify women and drive away the bitter Eve.” In addition, Gregory Nazianzen uses an allegory of a beautiful Virgin of noble ancestry called Justina who was seduced by Cyprian. He was able establish how Justina’s call for assistance of the Virgin Mary remedied her plight since the Virgin Mary too, was a Virgin and had also been in danger.²⁸

St. Ambrose (d. 397) who was the Bishop of Milan in his writings gives a clear impression that his extraordinary interest in the Mother of the Lord stemmed from his unbounded admiration for the Virginal life consecrated to God. Indeed, when he speaks of the Virgin Mary, this often leads to a discussion of virginity which is a topic that the Saint is always inclined to emphasize. In his letter addressed to his sister who had consecrated herself to the Lord as a Virgin, he expresses the Virgin Mary as the Mother of God, a noble and chaste woman but a Virgin both in body and also in mind. He qualifies the Virgin Mother in this words; “This woman is a model of virginity. For such was Mary, that the life of this one woman may be an example for all.”²⁹ The Saint further adds that, being the truest and most sublime model of the Virginal life, the Virgin Mary establishes an emotional bond with Virgin soul; this enables her to present them before the Lord and to speak to him in their name and on their behalf. The imitation of the Virgin Mary’s is presented as a fitting task for all those who have embraced the ideal of virginity. However, St. Ambrose does not limit himself to this; he adds that the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary offers a paradigm of Christian conduct for all believers.³⁰

St. Jerome (d. 419) while commenting on the Virgin Mary’s holiness, listed amongst her personal virtues, appearances of ornament of her virginity. Citing Isaiah 11:1 that says, “A shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse, and from his roots a bud shall blossom.” The exegete Jerome comments on the shoot as the Mother of the Lord, simple, pure and sincere, who was not joined to any seed coming from within. Hence, Jerome proposes the Virgin Mary as model whom all Christians ought to imitate, especially those who lead a Virginal life.³¹

Consequently, the dogma of the perpetual virginity of Mary hinges on the fact that the Virgin Mary’s virginity was declared to be before, during and after the birth of Christ. Hence, she led a chaste and virginal life. Our hyper-sexualized cultural hostility to virginity today, makes it extremely difficult to contemplate the possibility of a life of virginity or sexual purity. The perpetual virginity of the Blessed Virgin Mary serves as a

²⁸ Ibid 166-167

²⁹ Ibid 190-191

³⁰ Ibid 191

³¹ bid 213

truth revealed by God as shown in the Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition which the Church presents to us as a dogma of faith. However, we must understand that the life of virginity and the life of chastity in true sense are distinct. Barga citing Freithoff gives three basic elements that is involved in virginity.

- i. Firstly, there is the essence of virginity which consists in the will to abstain from every satisfaction connected with sexual intercourse, whether such as is permissible in itself or not.
- ii. Secondly, that such satisfaction was never allowed as this is presumed in the first and,
- iii. Lastly, following from the first two, the unbroken seal of virginity.

As such, those who, before resolving to refrain from satisfaction of this kind, but had already actually enjoyed it, and those who have actually abstained from it in the past but are by no means resolves to continue to abstain, cannot be called Virgins in the strict sense of the word but as a matter of fact, be practicing the virtue of chastity or purity.³² Therefore, all these should all be geared and modeled towards the imitation of the Virgin Mother, who is our role model of true discipleship.

Recommendations and Conclusion

This work identified various forms of indecency prevalent among Nigerian youths. It also presented the Church's teachings on the Blessed Virgin Mary. The goal of this discourse is to present the Blessed Virgin as an inspiration to young people. We recommend that young people should study the life and times of the Blessed Virgin as a model for purity and decency. Rather, that adopt celebrities and influencers as models, they should adopt the lifestyle of Mary in order to inspire them noble endeavors. They should see sexual purity as a virtue worth adopting and celebrating and not be misled by those who see these as outdated. They should strive to avoid any manner of indecency especially within the public space. Thus, they should not be carried away by the trends of the times and feel obliged to participate in all forms of wanton behaviour exhibited by their peers.

The Catholic Church expects young people to follow in the footsteps of the 'Virgin Mary' and to maintain their chastity at least until marriage. Followers should also believe that chastity ensures purity of mind, body, and soul. Premarital sex or sex before marriage is considered a major sin in the eyes of God. Similarly, extramarital sex, or sex outside of one's wedding, with a person other than one's spouse, is also considered immoral. Christians are expected not to engage in sexual relations outside of the confines of marriage. Your husband or wife should be the sole sexual partner you have. A virgin can

³² Timothy Barga, *Behold your Mother*, Jos: Fab Anieh, 2013, 105.

be a person, either male or female, who chooses to abstain from sex. Although the scriptures expect virginity in Christianity of both males and females, women have always been under more societal, cultural, and traditional pressures to maintain their chastity. Since Mary's virginity involved a chastity of mind, young people should imitate her in purity of heart. Any action that constitutes inappropriate behaviour: dressing, speech, or as otherwise discussed in this paper, should not be heard of among youths, especially Christians.

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