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Table of Contents

- 1. PREFACE**
- 2. CHAPTER ONE**
- 3. CHAPTER TWO**
- 4. CHAPTER THREE**
- 5. CHAPTER FOUR**
- 6. CHAPTER FIVE**
- 7. CHAPTER SIX**
- 8. CHAPTER SEVEN**
- 9. CHAPTER EIGHT**
- 10. CHAPTER NINE**
- 11. CHARACTERS**

PREFACE

One day, I got up in the morning. I thought of what to do. It did not take long when the idea of writing came to my mind. I had remembered how crafty I can be and sometimes I appear to have a crafty mind. It is very easy for me to create a new story from nowhere and it appears to be true.

However, Chinua Achebe in his novels; *Things fall Apart*, *Ant-hills of the Savannah*, *The Arrow of God*, *No longer at Ease*, *The man of the People*; as well as *Animal Farm* by George Orwell, *Cry the Beloved Country* by Allan Paton and *Arms and the man* by George Bernard Shaw have inspired me to write. To put my ideas into writing for the good of the society. I realized, novels, though fictional have a message behind them. they carry more weight than simply consoling a friend.

They carry more fun than cracking jokes; their fun is accompanied by a hidden reality. They contribute to the development of the society in a very smart way while influencing social, cultural, religious, political and economic dynamics in the society.

Lokwang who is the principal figure of the story was able to pass through many hurdles to reach his destiny. He remained a happy and blameless priest, walking in the ways of God and doing his work with dedication and love. Karolina who is the second principal figure also inspired countless girls to join the religious life.

The family of Lodengo received blessing because of their conversion and virtue. They lived the true meaning of Christianity. They did not live a double life. But they surrendered to the will of God in any situation.

This novelty is more of a Catholic novel but can as well enriched anybody who has trouble following the way of God. As one will encounter rigid traditionalists like Lojuker but also flexible traditionalists like Lodengo and his family.

In all our undertaking, total dedication is essential. If you are a priest, lay person, married person, catechist, Bishop, Religious Sister or Brother, Pastor, Deacon, or any ordinary person; once transformed, do your duty to the best of your ability. Avoid double life. If you believe in God, leave your witchcrafts. You can only serve one Master at a go!

It is incredible as you will read, that a cattle raider became a Catholic Priest! This is not a common phenomenon. Many African traditions will not allow their children to join the religious life or priesthood. The common reason is marriage. Each man wants to have children who would succeed him and ensure the continuity of his family lineage. But in this novel, you will find the opposite.

Simon Lodai Amin

Nairobi, Kenya

December 18, 2024

I dedicate this work to my brother James Lobi Amin
He did Literature in high school and has high regard for novelties.
He was the one who introduced me to "*Cry the beloved Country*"
when I was just but in St Matthew Primary school in Ikwoto.
He is a teacher at St Theresa Primary school in Torit.
He is my beloved elder brother.

CHAPTER ONE

It was a very hot day; Lodengo had just returned from a hard day's work in the garden which is 60 Km away from Dari. As soon as he sat down to rest, the two young people; Lokwang and Karolina came to him. They were just from an evening Prayer at the nearest St Bakhita Catholic Church. They had an encounter with vocation promoters in the church. They were moved by the goodness of consecrating one's life to God. After bowing down in reverence of their father, he asked them curiously,

"How was the Evening service, my dear children?" "The service was good," they replied.

"We had a lot of activities with priests and Reverend Sisters. They talked to us about consecrated life. How God calls people to serve him. And a lot of things". They concluded.

"Wow I am happy for you dear children," he replied.

"Hey, Lokwang I hope you won't steal cocks again!" he added.

"No Daddy, stealing is bad. I have learned my lesson..." he replied

"What about going for raiding, no more my son... and fighting..." he flashed back to the early life of this young man in seconds and the young man assured his father;

"God has entered me,"

"What.... Entered you... how?" Lodengo curiously.

"Whatever way... but I want to be a good boy now, not just good but a better one and not just better but the best man and a dedicated servant of God." He replied.

The father was so happy that his children were such intelligent and were learning more, exploring more about the world. Though he did not understand what the children explained and or learnt from the encounters with the religious people, the eloquence and reasoning with which they spoke astonished him. The facial expression of a profound change bewildered him the more. For he knew his son, Lokwang as a clever child but was often overwhelmed by stubbornness. When he was only 5 years old, Lokwang stole the cock of a neighbor. They roasted and ate in the bush with his like-minded friends. When they were caught, each was charged to pay 5 cocks. As in the culture of the place, stealing one thing will result in a fine of four on top. On another time, he fought a boy of his age and destroyed the three front upper teeth; leaving the lad toothless from the upper side. This was a disastrous one. The Dari people pay 6 cows per tooth. So, Lodengo had to work hard to pay 18 cows for the three teeth. During this time, he hated his life. He threatened at a certain point to commit suicide but was rescued. He couldn't define life from his perspective dealing with a notorious child, who started causing him unwanted debts at an early age. He wondered what would become of the son in his youth. Nonetheless, he had to wander from village to village, house to house, asking for help from relatives. On many other occasions, Lokwang had put him into regrettable troubles.

This time around, he could easily see that his son was undergoing physical therapy and inner transformation. There was a sense of healing of the mind and heart. His way of life has completely changed. With a smile, he embraced his children saying,

“At last God has intervened in my situation. I have longed for your conversion to live good lives. To learn good morals,”

In a patriarchal society, the family has always been the basis of prosperity. Strong fathers establish strong and influential families and good wives support their husbands to run the family efficiently. So, Lodengo's view of the transformed young people made him stressed that they would enhance the future of his family and village. So he continued,

“To participate in the development of the society and establish better and stronger families in your future marriages. Remember do not forget that you are precious in my eyes, you are my hope in this life. In my old age, your children will give me strength. May God continue to be with you”

With joy, they responded,

“Amen”.

However, he was perplexed by some weird utterances which did not find space in his mind. He was first overjoyed when his father brought back to memory his wretched life and way of conversion. The way his father praised his present life and the hope adds weight to the whole matter. But on the other hand, having considered becoming a priest, he was sad to hear the father talking about families and the possibility of having children. He could remember that in their encounter with the Priest, they quoted *Mathew 19:12b: ... some eunuchs made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.* which according to him implies that Catholic Priests especially religious consecrate themselves to the kingdom of God meaning no marriage. Thus, they do not have wives or husbands, or children. Lokwang was anxious about how his father would react if he disclosed his intention to be-

come a religious Priest. Anyhow, he went his way, entered his tukul, and continued to contemplate this issue.

Iyaha was busy in the kitchen preparing some dinner for the family. Karolina went to help her. She started washing dishes. This was the work girls were supposed to do. They have to learn to wash utensils, cook, and do all sorts of housework. This is informal training for them to become capable wives in the future. However, though she hastened to go to help her mother, she was feeling tense within her. She wasn't settled. She was disturbed by the words of their father. She wonders what would become of her if she disclosed to him that she wanted to become a religious sister. She pondered this in her mind and kept on waiting for an opportune time to disclose.

All this perplexity was happening because the people in Dari village would not allow their children to join religious life or priesthood. The major reason is marriage. As in many African cultures, for a man to have his worth, the first and foremost priority is to marry and establish a family. Men without wives are always laughing stocks and topics of traditional songs, arguments, and fun. Ladies even make fun of them and abuse them. This makes them uncomfortable until they have to marry.

For the moment Lokwang went to set fire where the family would sit around to warm themselves while enjoying dinner. But also as usual his father sits with him at the fireplace and talks about matters concerning the village. Including customs and traditions which he had to internalize. He set the fire and immediately his father arrived, shivering because of the evening cold weather. He was tall but slim. He had large flat lips with pointing teeth. The cold made his teeth grind themselves alone as the lips danced, shaking like frail twigs. His hands

were no better... hardened by the cold. He stammered, "Tha – tha - - thank --- thank you my son!!" as he wrapped the flame with his frozen hands.

After a while, Karolina arrived with water to wash her hands. The food was ready. The family soon gathered to enjoy their dinner. Keeping the custom, males eat alone and females alone. Lokwang went close to his father as Karolina sat beside her mother. Uncle Lojuker was just a nearby neighbor. He was called to join in the dinner. Having starved the whole day, since his wife went for a day's journey; he hurried immediately. The whole family was waiting only for him so that they could make some short prayers and then start eating. However, Lojuker who was tortured and mistreated by hunger just dipped his hand in water; without washing it properly, then took a handful of *asida* (*posho*) in his hand. Thinking that, the game has started. He doesn't care about what prayer is and what to do with the God of Lokwang and Karolina. As he prepared a hole inside the *asida* to fill it with vegetables, the 15-year-old Lokwang said, "Let us Pray!". Lojuker already had his hand full of *Asida*. Feeling a bit nervous, he considered rebuking the boy. But was choked by some *asida* he had chopped before taking the vegetable. So the boy continued,

"God our Father, we thank you for this food you have given us from your abundance. Please accept our humble thanks on this day. Bless us and bless this food which we are going to partake..."

As he continued, poor Lojuker was dying with patience, waiting for the prayers to end so he could fill his food with vegetables to quench the day's hunger. Lokwang continued,

“Bless and provide for those who wouldn’t get anything this evening. May this food make us healthy in mind and body to do your work...”

Lojuker who became impatient began to eat the meal. When the boy concluded,

“We asked this through your son our Lord Jesus Christ who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever...”

Everyone responded, "Amen" While Lojuker was swallowing a huge bolus of food, he joined everyone in acclaiming the 'Amen'.

He told them (*shouting*),

"Which kind of prayer is this? Aaah! Do you want to change this food into stones or what? Do you want us to die in front of Asida!"

Lowering his voice,

"or you have been promoted to become a bishop" jokingly. But everyone was busy eating to recover the ones Lojuker had eaten while they were praying to take equal measure.

When he kept quiet, Lodengo, proud of his children;

"I now have hope in my children. Since they started moving to the church, they have amazingly shaped their lives. I believe the church is a good mother of discipline..."

Suggesting to Mr. Lojuker,

"You could also consider sending your children to this church and you will see changes in their crooked behaviors. Because honestly, your children are just a bunch of crooks..."

Feeling tensed Lojuker interrupted with loud burst of fury,

"Your children won't get better. You are only brainwashed by a while's virtue which shall be followed by a long-term sorrow. Those nuns and priests will certainly bring you into abominable customs which our tradition/culture does not allow. Look they have started getting many youths from this village to make them priests or religious.... So-called reverend Brothers or Sisters... Hmmm, Lodengo be serious.... You will end up being alone with your wife forever without any heir who will continue to keep your family moving."

Mother interrupted, "That's enough Lojoker.... Food is getting finished" Reluctantly, he said, "Mmm... Our wife, don't worry you will cook another one for Uncle. But honestly iyaha I tell you... Haaaa, those church people are a bunch of crooks. They want to change our culture and our traditions"

The two protagonists were silent and continued eating. However, these arguments weigh their trauma the most. They foresee their vocational inclinations as a risk. One which might bring heated debate in the family. Nonetheless, Lokwang and Karolina continued to move for morning Masses and other activities at St Bakhita Catholic Church. Interacting with friends and having a nice time together with priests, sisters and brothers.

CHAPTER TWO

It was a Sunday. Usually on this day, the two children had to go earlier to the church compound. They prepare the altar and everything for the Holy Mass. The congregants were moved by their commitment. They developed an irresistible enthusiasm for serving at the altar every Sunday, though sometimes some other kids also take part. It was often a joyous day for them and their family. Because their parents have come to appreciate that the church is a perfect discipline for kids.

They found the church morals and doctrines to be helping the children to live healthy and genuine lives. They do not only go to church to pray or shout around but they are afforded all necessary catechesis which prepares them for their future. This is always seen from the vocational perspective that the children will be inclined to in their near future. This vocation is not only limited to priesthood, sisterhood, and brotherhood but also extends to married life and single life as well.

Thus, Lodengo and his wife slowly understood the positive influence of the church morals on their two children; Lokwang and Karolina.

Now, their home was 10 Km away from the church premises. They woke up very early, bath, and start the walk. On the way, the two children took that opportunity to share each other's feelings about the last arguments.

“imagine yesterday's rubble of ruthless encounter with uncle, that was shit bastard surely” Lokwang angrily cried out.

“I was hurt by the conduct of Uncle. He is so pessimistic about the church and everything therein. I am afraid he might destroy my voca-

tion with his minute primitive understanding....” Lokwang started before Karolina interrupted...

“Hmmm... I was also really getting fed up with their nonsense. It was irritating in the ear.... I don't know what to do with Uncles who have not studied. I wish Lojuker could be an Uncle who supports whatever is good and not necessarily everything the tradition dictates...”

The two children went on discussing the topic until they reached the church. Now, the St Bakhita Catholic Church was a huge magnificent building with beautiful pictures of Saints, Jesus, Mary, and other things from the Bible. Moreover, it had an adorable pretty altar with the tabernacle beside it. When one enters the building you can feel that God is present in the church. Beautiful scenes of the way of the cross are worth contemplating and the front upper side of the altar is adorned with seraphim and cherubim. Just words can't describe it ultimately.

As soon as the two children entered inside, they genuflected gently and then knelt to say a few prayers.

“.... Lord I want to be a religious priest. So that I can serve you and your people as a priest. Fr. Achaha is getting old and might die soon. Help Daddy and Uncle to understand our vocation. May they leave their evil ways and kneel before you the one True God....” Lokwang while praying.

"Lord have mercy on our stonehearted people. They do not want to listen to your servants. Do not punish them like Sodom and Gomorrha. For they have become a stiff-necked people. I want to become a Religious sister like Sr. Kiden, consecrate my life for you. Serve you all the days of my life and help others to know you....” Karolina praying.

And then after a moment of silence, they recited a few common prayers; "Our Father...., Hail Mary.... Glory be...." Then start the arrangement of the altar and other things for the Sunday service.

When the time for Prayers was approaching, many people gathered to listen to the word of God. The father and mother of the two children also came for the first time to witness what was going on in what they heard to be *church*. Though they have always been skeptical about the credibility of the church, they often appreciate the value of the church in forming disciplined children. They have experienced the change they see in their children. They were curious about the magic of the church people. Moreover, Lodengo was willing to testify to the discipline the church has played in the life of his son if given a chance.

The Procession started while the choir of 20 altos, 15 sopranos, 10 tenors, and 30 base singers burst into an entrance song. For Lodengo he felt as if God was coming. The feeling he had inside was terribly terrifying and welcomingly welcoming at the same time. He felt in his heart a burning flame of the environment.

"Ah.... Ah....ahiiii... are we in heaven! What is going on here?" he screamed. But his wife suppressed him so that not many people realized the incident. But luckily enough, he gathered some conscious feelings and stood his ground to see what would come next. He saw his children dressed in white garments in front of the procession. Lokwang was incensing the way while Karolina raised the crucifix moving majestically after him. Lodengo entered ceaseless wonderment (*whispering to his wife, Iyaha*);

"No wonder they are getting transformed... They have both become gods...."

"They are not gods Lodengo but they are servers, helping the servants of God" Iyaha explained.

"They have been doing this many times. Whenever they come to church the sisters and priest teach them how to serve in the altar...." She added.

"This is amazing....I wish I could be one of them..."Lodengo feels pleased.

"Look at your old age, your beards, and your size....hmmmm, you are not fit" she made a fan of him.

"But the big god at the end of the procession has lots of beards. He's very old and in fact, that man hanging on the cross is having beards...." Lodengo getting excited when a Legion of Mary in a white garment interrupted;

"Sh..sh...sh...Please silence. The Holy Mass has begun; reserve your rubbish for later burning"

"Rubbish... burning where?" Lodengo getting worried and nervous.

"In hell fire..." his wife aggravated the situation.

"What is hell fire?" he retorted.

"A place where people who live bad lives are burnt with unquenchable fire when they die... just like a furnace" the legion of Mary explained.

"Thank God I am still alive; I have to change my life.... but you, a woman in white clothing... now mind your business" Lodengo apologized feeling hurt.

When the time for announcement arrived, the announcer invited Lodengo to say a word or two. The people have always been moved by the conduct of his children in the church. Sometimes, they have con-

sidered visiting Lodengo at his home, but have failed. So it was an opportune time and an ideal to have him there. They were eager to hear a word from him. They have always believed that, there could be something special about his family; having bright, intelligent, and obedient children.

He was deeply torn in spirit and bones when they invited him to go to the pulpit.

“..Lodengo, father of our servers Lokwang and Karolina, please you are welcome to say a word or two to the faithful. It is a privilege and an honor to have you here....” The announcer with joy welcoming him.

Lodengo gathered some courage. Cleaned his face which was already sweating seriously though it was very cold at the time, because there was some drizzle of rain and a cloudy atmosphere. He set his steps as the congregation shouted in amazement.

“Lodengo! Lodengo! Lodengo! Ra – ra – ra – ra” Clapping their hands

Meanwhile the children were overjoyed that their parents came to church. Moreover, their father was privileged to be given a chance to stand at the pulpit and talk to the people. They thought this would change their father forever. Nonetheless, they waited for what would proceed from his lips.

Lodengo was an ordinary man, with ordinary clothing. However, for that Sunday, he borrowed the necktie of his brother Lojuker and some suit. He stood at the pulpit and addressed the people:

“In a special way, I thank the announcer and everyone for this chance which I have to share something with you. Today, when I entered this church. I felt that there was something special about this place; some-

thing greater than mortal men. There is somebody special in this place. None of us can see that person, but he sees all of us without compromise. In front of him, we are just naked truth. All this beautiful clothing we are putting on is useless. They are merely components of an advertisement in ourselves. So that one buys a beautiful helper... a beautiful husband....”

Realizing that he is straying from what is expected of him, he turned his point;

“I don’t know why I started that way... anyway, I was not supposed to say that... God, forgive me... I don’t want to be burnt in hell like rubbish. That damn legion of Mary just warned me...” he repented.

A short strong murmur went through the assembly.

“Lo—dengo...Mmmm...”

He continued:

“Ladies and gentlemen! I know you want to hear something about my children. Certainly, yes....ah... I have a testimony...”

People opened their ears attentively. Everyone wanted to hear everything about the testimony regarding the disciplined methodology he used.

“Life in my family was beautiful and enjoyable until I brought this boy... (*pointing at Lokwang*) into this world. In his early age, some of you knew very well how he troubled me.... How he made me enter into meaningless debts. How much have I paid for his debts? His stubbornness was beyond telling. (*speaking furiously while recalling the evils his son committed and his past situation*), These memories cannot be forgotten, I escaped death narrowly while venturing to pay his debts –

how troublesome it was to have a boy in the house.... but... but... (*he bends down vexed by memories of his suffering*)”

The congregation is moved by his speech and lamentation. Before he continued, a man whose property the boy stole one day shouted...

“He even stole my things the other day and you haven’t paid...”

“These are all nice memories... testimonies to appreciate though I will not pay...” he said calmly,

“Ha-ha-ha-ha...” the crowd laughed.

“I appreciate the church. I am proud to see my son changed completely. I thought he would be stubborn forever, but through your divine ritual and magic, I have seen change. I think our African rituals are not valid....” He continued.

The crowd murmured with deep roaring like lions,

“Eee! Eee! Eee! Ahaaaaaah! Magic... Mmmm... ritual..... Hmmm. It’s a miracle from God”

After a moment, there was silence. The congregation was amazed to hear such a testimony. They fixed their eyes on him as he continued...

“My son is already born again.... He often tells me that he is born again by the water of what you call baptism and the Holy Spirit. I therefore encourage all parents to send their children to this church. This St Bakhita Catholic Church is an inspiration and a perfect place for the discipline of your children. There is something special about this church. The many Alleluias you shout every Sunday are not wasted, but have profit....”

The crowd applauded him with lots of hand claps shouting, "Alleluia!! Alleluia!.....Amen”

The two protagonists were silent but burst into joyous Alleluias with the crowd toward the end of his speech. They felt dignified and recognized. They were inflamed and convinced that their requests to join religious life would please their father the most. He was already pleased with a mere change of attitude and commitment to the church activities. Karolina whispered to Lokwang,

“The Holy Ghost is working..... hmmm at last he looks convinced and proud of us... thank God the Almighty...”

Before giving the final blessing, the 85-year-old Reverend Father Achaha grabbed this opportunity to say a few inspirational words. He was moved by the fruits of his work for God. He didn't believe that the children of this man were that way. He decided to take from the Gospel according to Mathew 9:13

“I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance, go and learn what these means....”

The father added,

“Jesus Christ himself loves children so much. Mark chapter 10 explains how He ask children to be allowed to come to him. For the kingdom of God belongs to such as these”

People were amazed by his pre-concluding inspiration. When the Mass was over, Lodengo and his wife waited for the children to finish undressing the church vestments, so they could go together. They were greatly joyous. Many people came to say ‘hi’ to them. Lodengo felt proud as people whispered,

"He spoke very well..." Meanwhile others say fathers like him are worth deserving children like Karolina and Lokwang.

On their way home, they had a very good conversation. They evaluated the speech their father gave in the church. Karolina told him,

“Father, today the church was filled by the power of God. You demonstrated fatherhood and a sense of conversion. Thank you so much for honoring us before God and everyone..... Mmmm, at least now we have hope” Lokwang hastily commented,

“Father I encourage you to move to Church every Sunday, learn to pray, love Prayers, and Love God..... Ah.....aaah father I am just in total bliss Daddy.... May God Bless you abundantly.”

“You are always intelligent children.... ah...ah...ah... you speak like gods or spirits. Today I have confirmed that the place you usually come to pray is true and an ideal place for your life. this place has shaped you very well.....(*pointing at his wife*) Your mother will make sure she accompanies you here every Sunday....” The father with optimism clarifies before the wife interrupts with a burst of ironic laughter,

“Heeeeeeee lok.. Heeeeeeee lok....what about you.....”

“I will make sure I attend every Sunday Mass. But in case I go for our Darian ritual, ehhe then you will have to accompany them.... I just said so because ... haa we men do not have enough time with children..... but you do...thank you Honey” Lodengo reluctantly responded.

CHAPTER THREE

The people in Dari are predominantly cattle keepers. They keep cattle in large numbers. These animals are reserved for marriage. Unfortunately, cattle rustling does not cease there. To the extent that cattle owners are not sure about the sustainability of their kraals.

In Dari, there is a belief that 'animals including cattle were created by God and so belong to God. But because they are here on earth, anybody can own them; regardless of how you acquired them. There is no permanent owner of animals except God'. This implies that, when you have cattle, they are yours temporarily depending on your strength to defend them from being taken. Anybody can raid from you. But you have to defend. If you are lucky, you will retain them. Yet, if you are unlucky, someone else will own them. However, this does not happen within the same village or same family or clan but rather between distant villages.

This ideology has spread among the Darrians from the smallest of them to the greatest. They trained their children how to acquire cattle from their neighboring villages. Usually during raiding, the young boys are taken together. They are to be chasing cows which has been seized, because they do not have weapons yet. But when one of the adults is killed, the learned ones seize the weapon and join the attack while the others continue taking the cows.

When he was 10 years old, Lokwang was taken several times on the raiding trips. It was difficult but he has often shown bravery. They succeeded several times in bringing cows from their neighboring villages. These trips continued until he became a catechumen at St Bakhita

Catholic Church. Though the trips continued, he played his cards to meddle with the situation. He dodged several times.

Besides the idea of accompanying the adults on those raiding trips, the young children were often sent as spies. Earlier before his conversion, Lokwang was sent to Lofayo. To spy on the possibility of raiding there. Lofayo was 150 kilometers from Dari which was a two-week footing journey. The two villages could not drink water together. They couldn't unite and have peace.

Lofayo could come to Dari and raid plenty of cows leaving many deaths and casualties from both sides. Meanwhile, Dari will also prepare from their end, and raid a lot of cattle from Lofayo; similarly leaving many deaths and casualties. The government tried to bring them together but failed. Many Non-governmental organizations tried their best to unite them but without success. Cattle raiding had become the way of life in the area and not a problem.

Men who died at home of sicknesses or other petty reasons were considered cowards or women. Dying in the cattle raid front line was a dignified death for the people in Dari and Lofayo men in particular. The cattle were majorly for marriage and feasting during village festivals or other important occasions for the Darians. Contemplating deeply how he had escaped death narrowly as a spy and during the raid, the young person felt sorry and thanked God that he was still alive.

When the elders of the village asked him to go and spy on Lofayo, Lokwang, being an energy youth and young practicing warrior of the time, joyfully accepted. Here the story continues...

The young person packed his attires; spear, shield, and some food. The elders blessed him,

“Our son! May the god of our fathers, who guided them during their past trips to Lofayo protect you. May he guide and order your steps. So that you will give glory to this land in due time. Receive blessing and be brave our son...”

They then performed rituals which are specifically for someone sent to spy. They told him not to look back until he had entered the bush. This means after leaving the village boundary. He took off and did exactly the way he was told.

While in the forest, he sat down to rest,

“What if I die.....(*shaking his head*) What if the Lofayonians got me..., what would become of me.... My life.... my future...Hmmmm...” He continued imagining the situation ahead of him. While lost in thought, he was careful though. Any slight noise of birds or anything will terrify him the most. He could get up with his spear, ready to defend himself.... Having been trained.

By day, by night he continued moving while meditating on what plan to implement. When he was near the territory of Lofayo, he hid his spear, chipang (*a kind of slipper made from care tire*), and shield. He only took some food with him. Carefully navigating through the pathways of cattle grazing lands.

At a certain point, being a clever boy, he considered pretending to be a mad person. He was already near the village, in fact from his hiding place he could see people moving to and fro within Lofayo village. He spent the night there, very uncomfortable. At dawn, he rubbed his clothes in mud and tore some. He disguised himself to assume the appearance of a mad – wicked person.

Very early in the morning, he started moving up and down while talking nonsense alone like a mad person. Collecting papers, rubbish, and eating from dungeons remnants of food being thrown there. He completely looked mad.

People in Lofayo wondered where he came from. They have never seen him around there. Some tried their best to investigate to find out whether he was mad.

“What is your name and where did you come from?” they asked him.

“Ha ha ha ha ... *(speaking nonsense)* Brother!....brother.....brother..... where are you going? Wait for me... Ooh no please wait for me. It is raining heavily here in Lofayo, please I need an umbrella... Mmmmmm... Hahaha..... ha ha ha ha ... hahaha *(followed by grinding of teeth and folding hands pretending it was cold)* The apparently mad kid with his words and behavior astonished the interviewers. They could not continue talking to him. A drunker walking by slurred to them, “Fools!! Fools!!!.....Hahahahaha.....Why disturb this idiot.... He is drunk! He is mad! He is a *spy!* He is stupid! He is the son of our chief who just came from America....”

Somebody there threw him out of the scene,

“Idiot!! My wife gave you a lot of Siko... you have become mad like this fellow... get out of here, you damn bastard...” *(furiously)*.

“Hahahaha.... Look at this fool, I just slept with your wife before leaving your home... what are you talking..... who’s the real idiot....” Before he completed, the man, furious by this time and feeling insulted,

“What!!... damn that shit!... how dare you!!”

He hurried to pull a bamboo from a nearby fence and then struck the man, beating him mercilessly. The helpless drunk was rescued by some passers. Meanwhile, the other people, after knowing that the boy was just a mad person and wouldn't say anything relevant; left the scene.

The boy continued moving up and down, begging for food from the small hotels within there. Sleeping on the streets of the village. After one month, he could even move up to the kraal and was often given some milk to drink. They pitied his condition, though sometimes they make fans of him. They gave him the name "Lofayang" which means 'stubborn, mad, foolish, or criminal'

He moved all around the village and spied everywhere. Many times he risked losing his life through starvation and cruel people in the village but he endured.

One day he went by night to the cattle camp site. It was unfortunate because during this time the herders were on patrol. Monitoring any potential danger around and within the camp.

They surprisingly heard some noise similar to the sound of a man walking. They all cocked their guns and wait to fire the individual as one person from a standpoint asked,

“Who are you?...”

But no answer. After three times, they fired one bullet which passed through the head of Lokwang, making him escape the corruption of the body narrowly.

“Oooooo....Ooooo yiiii..idiots you shot me. What have I done to you?” shouting from down after falling. He was terrified though he camou-

flaged to maintain his nature. He feared that they might come to finish him.

However, when they found that he was Lofayang, they became sorrowful and apologized to him.

Of course, many mad people undergo such wild treatments.

After two years of pretended madness, he had already mastered all corners of the village that could afford them raiding successfully. He rose by night and started the journey back to Dari. When he came to the place where he had hidden the spear, shield, and chipang, he rested. But unfortunately, he found that the slippers were already eaten by termites. The spear was only left with the blade/arrow; the rod was consumed. However, the shield was still in a fairly good situation not effective.

Lodengo and the people in Dari were already worried about the life of the young person. After three months, they considered that his mission failed. He has been killed by the people of Lofayo. So, they mourned him for one week. All rituals and rites for the death were done. Lodengo forgot about him. Everyone in the village too forgot about him. Activities in the village resumed as usual. For two years the elders refused to send spies to neighboring villages.

While on his way back to Dari, Lokwang spent two weeks footing. He came through the jungles of the forest. The place was already looking new. There were a lot of physical changes. He meditated on how he succeeded in bearing the conditions and duties of mad people. The way he disguised himself to fit a mad person just to spy. He also recalled how he escaped death narrowly while on his ups and downs. Lokwang couldn't forget the first time he was investigated; especially

when asked, "What is your name?" he imagined the kind of irrelevant answer that he had to craft to fully assume the picture of an idiot.

He recalled the drunkard who helped disorganize the situation while he was being interviewed.

"....Hahahaha.... Look at this fool, I just slept with your wife before leaving your home... what are you talking..... who's the real idiot...."

Recalling the statements of the drunkard who slurred at one of the active attendants that time. At this point, Lokwang burst into meaningless laughter:

"Hahahahaha..... I slept with your wife before leaving..... Hahahaha..." *(really excited)*

Now it was earlier in the morning. Usually this time, the villagers would be busy milking cattle and doing other things at home. Meanwhile, others could go to the fields to prepare their gardens for planting or do other activities. Lodengo however, was feeling uneasy. His body was weak. The people of Dari have a culture that when this happens that means you might have good or bad news. Or else something will happen soon. He contemplated what could be the problem or the news.

"what is wrong with me today..." *(in a slow disgusting voice)*. He has never felt this way for quite a long period. As he was lost in thought, a little girl called Angelina came running hastily towards him. She appears to have brought some news that Lodengo was expecting as good or bad.

"No doubt... I was sure that trouble would come.... But why.... why this morning? I lost Lokwang.....Hmm and now what could this be

(Lodengo terrified, vexed by evil thoughts; complained while the girl was approaching him)

“Lokwa....Lokwang.....Lokwang..... *(Angelina breathing heavily while stammering to reveal the information)*. Lokwang has come...” she said.

"what!!.... where's he?.....my son.....my son..." He thundered.

“Follow me...” the little girl replied. The mother overheard the conversation and quickly picked an egg and some ashes for the ritual together with a chick.

Lokwang was at the village's main entrance. Many people had stopped him there together with some elders. To make traditional rituals for someone who was mourned as dead, but has come alive.

On reaching the scene he saw many elders weeping in amusement. They were happy to see the boy they had mourned two years ago.

Lokwang was disgusted completely by the figure. He looked different this time; dirty outlook, malnourished, weightless appearance, and disfigured nature. Some villagers said of him,

"This is not Lokwang, son of Lodengo... the boy just resembles him...."

“I am the one.... *(insisting)* Please believe I am Lokwang son of Lodengo" he clarified their doubts. They were not only convinced by his words but also by the remnants of the attires he took. He showed them the spear blade and the shield which were rusted but in fairly good condition.

“This is my son....." Lodengo jumped onto Lokwang while embracing him hard. He wept at the spot. They both wept in amazement. The at-

tendants joined. Then the mother also arrived and embraced his son with affection. They put the egg on the entrance and then remove the intestines of the chick. Lojuker spread it on Lokwang's forehead, hands, and chaste. Then he was asked to step on the egg while entering the village while they shouted this song:

Lokwang, Lokwang, Lokwang

Lokwang la hito ho Dari (2)

Oremi na fere lohitwonge

Iningo ning ning ning (2)

A ite Lofayo ijima aji (2)

Itilausu nohote bo.

Lodengo, Lodengo, Lodengo

Oyisu Lodengo

Lahijwahani hoje la ja opit.

Ngete Lokwang

O many Lofayo nengaji harik,

Logianya! oluloro ahafajani,

Ongida ojuru nolofioro ho sing

Awaa bebe kuda, lohito, loriet

The song is in Lango, Lokwa's native language; the villagers praised Lokwang so much. They considered him their savior, who fought battle while seated and quiet. They equally praised Lodengo for bringing forth their shepherd to the world. They mocked Lofayonians saying,

"what do you say? What will you say?" adding that clever but changed to become a mad person to drain the knowledge and wisdom of Lofayo. In optimism they said,

"Lofayo wait for your fate...".

Everyone was happy. They slaughtered a bull and since it was still earlier, only a few people went out, the majority who remained contributed money, and alcohol in addition to the bull provided by his Uncle Lojuker. They feasted. Dancing and singing with great joy the whole day.

Lokwang this time was gaining fame. As he narrated how he had to disguise himself as a madman, endured cruelty, and escaped death narrowly on certain occasions; many considered him a young warrior. Moreover, he told them that he was given a new name,

"Lofayang". They laughed at this and ridiculed the Lofayonians

"Foolish people,..... Thoughtless people,..... the same Lofayang will come and vandalize your kraals".

Girls praised Lokwang highly for this recitation in a slow breathtaking rhythm,

Oh dear, humble and brave young warrior

All our eyes are thirsting for a man like you

There is no joy and no worry

A lady can have than in having a brave man like you

Beauties of Dari, come forth

*Arise in front and dance for
Our young warrior,
Who quenched all fears and horrors.*

*Dance, dance Nahatar enjoy
Swiftly move your Tandura
Let him feel the affection
Before the time for dura*

*Men of Dari, where are you?
Prepare your weapons
Show manhood, carry the York
Conspire together to destroy the foes.*

*Oh, dear lovely KwangKwang,
Ladies are at your service
You are the hope of the young
At your request, all will suffice.*

The whole village was amazed and moved by the poetic song sung by the young ladies of the village. They all praised together and exalt the family of Lodengo. They considered his lineage to be of bravery.

Though Lokwang was amazed and fell madly in love with the song sung by the ladies, he did not mean to possess one girl for himself as

a partner. This was because, he was still young and his father, Mr. Lo-dengo did not have enough cows to make a complete marriage. However, he chose to be what he would like to be in the future; a brave, famous, energetic, and admired warrior of the village as well as a defender of the traditions of the society. He paid little attention to marriage but was fond of having fun with girls and his peers too.

In response to the beautiful song of the ladies, he exclaimed in a poetic rhythm:

Oh ladies Oh Ladies Oh ladies

Every sort of beauty is found in you

In you is every man's desire

Lokwang may get one soon

Where on earth can man find happiness?

Is it not in your beauty?

Your smile and gaze

Stimulates man's desire for you

Where are the hearts of men?

What are they longing for?

In you, they find life's meaning

You hold man's desires from the four corners

Happy is he who finds a spouse

Happy is she who has been espoused

Blessed is he who is desired by ladies

Blessed is the young warrior Kwangis

In such a way Lokwang exhorted the ladies in their beauty and magnificence. They had a nice time; enjoying themselves for about three months.

The people of Lofayo did not pay attention to the madman who used to be in their village. They could not wonder where he had gone. They continued their activities in the village as usual.

CHAPTER FOUR

One evening, at the fireplace, all the elders and youth of the village gathered together to organize a raid. This time, Lokwang was the focus and leader of the conspiracy.

“How many kraals do they have?” one of the elders asked. “Well, they have five kraals. The first has 500 herds of cattle, the second 300, the third 700, and the other two have 200 each. The total number of their cattle is 1900 cattle” Lokwang replied.

“That’s a good number... it will be great if we bring everything to Dari” *(Excitingly)* Replied the elder. “Surely, depends on our courage and bravery as well as careful approach to the situation,” Lokwang said.

He (Lokwang) carefully explained the corners of Lofayo and their cattle camps. He arranged all men according to their abilities and strength as well as bravery. They all listened carefully to him. They agreed to leave as early as Cockcrow. Everybody disappeared to their home after the meeting to prepare for the journey. They also warned against revealing the act to their wives or friends who were not part of the convoy:

"This should remain a secret. No one should tell even his wife or friend who is not part of this expedition until we are back. We do not want to run into the misfortune of falling into an ambush or any kind of unexpected circumstance. Anyone guilty of this shall be liable to a fine” *(One of the elders seriously advised the convoy).*

When he got home, Lokwang prepared his weapons very well. Throughout the night he could imagine and picture Lofayo in his mind.

Bringing memories of all corners into his mind. Carefully planning the raid.

When the time arrived, all gathered at a fire camp called *Nabali*. All were prepared for the journey. There were about 200 men.

“Now gentlemen, the time has come for us to leave for the expedition. Let us invite our elder Mr. Lojuker to bless us; that our journey may be a fortune of all times for the glory of the Dari people.” (*Lokwang remarked with a low voice*).

Lojuker came forward and everyone knelt before him as he sprinkled water onto everyone's body while muttering these words:

"May the gods guide your path, show you favor, and bring victory to the Dari people. Be blessed abundantly with good health of mind and body. You are the new generation of warriors for the Dari people, the hope of the hopeless, the wealth of the poor, and the seed of salvation for the Dari land. At your hands shall the gods deliver the wretched Lofayonians. For a long time, they have exploited our land and made us a desolate society. This time, let them become desolate, their land fruitless and their prosperity no more yields any good but misfortune.... Misfortune...misfortune to the Lofayo people and Fortune... Fortune... Fortune to the Almighty Dari inhabitants”

“The ritualist has spoken... the ritualist has spoken... the gods have spoken!!” the team in a slow breath-taking rhythm replied.

After the ritual was done, the team left in groups of four, fifty (50) men each.

It was a rainy weather in August. The reluctant warriors of Lofayo left some few cattle keepers and children in the kraals. Of course, they do not worry about anything. Though they used to check the whole area

for footmarks of enemies, this time it was hard to see because the rain washes them. Since for the last three years, they have not encountered any raiding, they become even more reluctant saying,

"The foolish Darrians have forgotten all that we did to them. Imagine for the last three years they have not even spied on our cattle camps, no footmarks, no raids.... Rejoice Lofayo for you are strong warriors ever in this territory; leave about the wretched and coward Darrians."

It had been raining the whole day and night. The Dari warriors already arrived and were hiding in the caves of the mountainous Lofayo area. At about 4 PM, as they agreed, the two subgroups of fifty men each went near the village meanwhile the other two teams went to camp near the kraals. The kraals were about 35 km away from the village. They waited until it was night. At about 10 PM the village was surrounded by the two sub-groups and so was the cattle camp.

The people in Lofayo were in deep sleep. The ones around the cattle camp immediately attacked the tukuls in the kraal where the herders on duty were sleeping. They killed everyone in the kraal except two young boys who escaped. These boys managed to carefully sneak into the residents of the village and tell the sad news mutedly to some few homes they entered.

"Our village has been surrounded and the cattle taken by the Dari warriors. Everyone in the kraal is dead except two of us who escaped from the horrible attack. Please let us rescue our village and cattle..." the boys reported with shaking lips.

Meanwhile, the raiders mobilized all cattle from all the five kraals and started the journey to their village in haste. For now the team guarding homes were already in confrontation with the youth of Lofayo.

Lokwang fell into the hands of horrible warriors. He fought and eventually escaped death narrowly. Though he wanted to show his manhood; it was difficult because the pressure was too much. Somebody missed his head with a spear,

“Viuuuuuuu” (*the spear sounded*) “Oiii Kwangiteeeeeeeeeee... things are hot, no way out” he cried mutedly.

So he had no option other than to run for his life.

Nevertheless, they were in a good position in the conflict because they were ready and controlled all areas. They fought and overcame the Lofayo youth leaving many deaths and casualties. Though the confrontation was terrible; the Darrians sustained only a few casualties and no deaths. They carried all their casualties and departed.

There was mourning everywhere in Lofayo village. There was a funeral everywhere in the village. At this, the chief exclaimed:

Funeral! Funeral! Funeral everywhere!

Like the people of Egypt during the plague

Do we have any youths left here?

Every root has been plugged

No mercy No mercy at all

The wretched Darrians have driven every cattle from my land

What shall we use for marriage as of old

Is there any hope for this homeland?

Love for wealth drove the foolish Darrians

*To this precious land of great abundance
They have left the mooing animals' camp empty
Traditional weddings shall have no dance*

*What shall we do my little flock
Revenge? Or forgive
Forgiveness won't work
Revenge is the only hope to give*

*Wake up, mourners! Wake up!
Lest you be finished by the enemies
Brush your teeth white
Prepare for their demise*

*Are you afraid? Fear for your lives?
This life is one!
We have always survived
We always win, come on...*

In that way, the chief, Mr. Deng, expressed his sadness and hope for revenge. It was a difficult time. Many people died. However, some survived. It was only the children and women who were still inside the house who did not sustain any deaths or casualties.

A newly married lady whose husband has been killed, frustrated cries,

“Why....Why.... Why him..... (*crying*) My love is gone; no child yet, no proper life yet, no no... no.... everything no..... no. but why for me and him...”

"Daddy.... Daddy... I can't believe you are no more Daddy.... Why! Who will bring me milk Daddy from the Kraal? Who will pay my bride's price? Will I ever marry my darling beauty... Hmmm (*a boy, crying and in terrible agony*)”

There was a complaint everywhere in the village. For about three months, the whole village was in terrible agony. After these three months, they convene a meeting of the whole village youth at the home of the chief. Everyone who survived the raid suffices for the meeting. The chief addressed the crowd with these words,

“My dear fellow citizens and warriors of Lofayo village. We are all aware of the tragedy of the recent past. We have seen that we have as few cattle as would not support our living. Our enemies conspired together. They have vandalized the great Lofayo cattle camps.”

“Dear brothers,” he continued “These wretched fellows.... (*sighing deeply in sorrow*), surely deserve retaliation. We can't sit down and watch the graves of our fallen heroes fade. We must do something... something worse than they have than....”

"Lofayang, the madman was among the raiders, I saw him and recognized his voice during the confrontation" a young warrior shouted from the midst of the crowd. This was the fellow who suspected that Lofayang (as the Lofayonians called him) was a spy. He then continued,

"Three months before this incident, while Lofayang just appeared in this land, I told some guys that he was a spy but they threw me out,

saying I was a blunt-minded drunk. Now see the consequences. He has spied everywhere”

“that testimony is enough” the chief thundered

“Yes your Majesty...” with reverence the fellow sat down.

They discuss ways to recover their cows. They planned together and planned but ideas were not agreeing. They tried hard but found themselves in a terrible situation where there existed little hope for success. Instead, the chief intervened in the issue,

"More than half of our cows have been taken. The less than half we are left with should support the village. We should therefore cooperate to make life in this precious land enjoyable and easy. Many of our warriors have died. It is a greater risk for all of us to go for revenge; ...” *(the crowd nodded their heads in affirmation as the chief continued)*

“We have a large portion of land left for agriculture. We shall train all youths in ox-ploughing and let us establish agriculture as our survival ground. Revenge won't help us otherwise we risk losing everyone... ”

“Mmmm.... Mmmm.... Mmmm...” *(The gathering murmured as the chief continued)* “May the wrath of our gods, rain on the people of Dari, break their jaws, punch the foe and scatter their teeth... cursed is Dari forever without end Amen” he concluded the assembly.

Meanwhile, the raiders have already advanced toward their village. They camp 15 KM near the village. They killed many cows, ate, and had fun. They know that the Lofayo youths will not follow them up to that point.

After enjoying themselves, they advance toward the village. They then send two young people to tell the village elders about the good news.

"Ululululu.... Ulululululu..... The warriors have arrived. Everybody gathers at the dancing ground to celebrate the greatest success of all times." The two boys shouted

Going toward the youth camp, they explained everything to the elders. Delighted with the good news, they all gathered at the dancing ground to wait for the warriors. As they waited, they could not believe their eyes, a group of 50 people came forward chanting songs of war;

Ooooooh! The foes are left in mourning

Attacked in the night

And came forth in the morning

In the shining new sun bright

A lesson is what you deserve

Because idols you serve

gods who cannot save

You are women to serve

Men of the great lands

The mighty conquerors of the wicked

Putting in their hands

Every fool crooked

How much is the harvest?

1500 cattle

Did you fight with your vest?

With everything that we dismantle

Oh people of the Greatlands

Dari of all times

On your warrior's hands

Is the prosperity of the great allies!

Fortune we have brought

Young ladies and gents rejoice

We have the foe in mourning

We have plenty of cattle for every joy

Dari... Dari... Dari...

You have won! You have won the battle

Be at peace! Be at peace my Darians

The beautiful land! The beautiful land is full of cattle!

Welcome! Welcome! Welcome

Welcome my warriors

The victory is at home

Do not worry

The whole crowd gathered at the dancing ground and joined the team. They dance until the other warriors arrive at the scene. The youth who did not go for the raiding were asked to take care of the cattle while the others celebrated.

Everyone was happy though there were some few casualties sustained. The women yelled,

“Ye-le-le-le-le-le-le...Ye-le-le-le-le-le-le... Ye-le-le-le-le-le” in triumphant jubilation of the victory.

CHAPTER FIVE

Lokwang clearly remembered this tragic memory. He could not forget the evil they did to the people in Lofayo; particularly him being the team leader. Being immersed in church morals and traditions, Lokwang became very sorrowful.

“Will God forgive my sins really? ...” (*Lokwang speaking alone while reading the Holy Bible*). When his father interrupted immediately,

“What are you doing my son?”,

“I am reading the Holy Bible.” He replied.

“What is the Holy Bible?” (*The father asked curiously*)

“It’s the Holy book of God, used by Christians”

“Wow that’s interesting... but who are Christians?” (*interested in the definition*)

The son replied, “Christians are followers of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, a man from Israel who instituted the apostolic ministry to carry on his message to the ends of the world. In his lectures, Jesus Christ said, **‘I am the way, the truth, and the life’** and in another, he said, **‘For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whoever believes in him shall not die, but will have eternal life’**. Jesus Christ taught his disciples to love one another and to pray daily. He showed himself the light to God the Father.”.

"Wow that's so good," said his father. "Ah... please! Ah, where is this man? I want to see him, touch him, and believe in him. I also want to find out more about him; I would appreciate it if you would make me meet him for some counseling" he continued.

There was silence for a moment. Lokwang was perplexed by this saying. Though he was happy that his father was open to learning and believing, he regrets how he could show Jesus to him. However, he tries hard to recall whatever was taught to them in the Catechism. In which he realized that the Apostolic Creed has something to say. He decided to answer his father by reciting the Apostolic Creed. While doing this, he paused at the point;

“He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. On the third day, he rose again from the death. He ascended into heaven. He is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty. He shall come again to judge the living and the dead”

While his son was going through this noble recitation of the Apostolic creed, the father was perplexed by a lot of questions about certain possibilities. When Lokwang was ending the recitation he shouted all the louder in awe and amazement,

“Incredible.... Incredible... hmm...hmmm... death is the end; how can a man rise from the dead... or have you gone mad... ascended to heaven!! This is madness...” Lodengo said in total disguise.

He moved away to contemplate this seeming reality. Meanwhile, Lokwang remain there, trying to reason out and understand what Lodengo was thinking. Since he was interrupted, he continued to reflect on the evil he did as a young warrior. He wondered whether God would accept him to become a priest. He dived into extreme contemplation and meditation on the matter.

This was a difficult decision that he wanted to make. Lokwang became a judge to himself. He wondered how the hell things could come the

other way round to a person; from an evil way of life to a righteous one.

Life is a complex reality whose challenges a person has to face head-on. considering comfort zones will only turn to fire.

In his long meditation, the young man said,

"it is difficult my dear Jesus, to accept to serve you as a priest. I don't know how you feel about my past life... *(long pause and silence)*. I know I have offended you badly! However, my dear, I have considered to take the risk of asking you to admit me to the vocation to priesthood..."

When it was morning, Lodengo decided to meet his boy for some clarification. Since the last time they had a conversation on Biblical matters, his mind was not at rest. He has been disturbed by too much thinking. He wanted to take the risk of believing in that man who died and rose again to give life to the world. They call him Jesus Christ.

"After much thought," he began.

"I have considered becoming the follower of that long dead Jesus Christ whom you claim died and rose again.... That he will come again to judge the living and the death."

"Holy Mary Mother of God!," Lokwang wondered in amazement.

However, it was notable that the conversion of this outstanding and unique personality magnetized the interest of many local people around the village. The number of catechumens was increasing; as many people wanted to be Christians.

Meanwhile, for the two children, it was high time for them to disclose their decisions. One day, they came before their father. Lokwang was

often a quick gentle boy. He does not waste time but starts conversations immediately. After a moment of silence, Lokwang boldly spoke out,

“Daddy, I want to be a Priest!”

When Lodengo realized that the two children both had something to say, he decided to let them speak all, then answer at once. Before he could even comment anything, the young girl stood up and said,

"As for me, I want to be a Reverend Sister!"

After putting the sign of the cross gently, he breathed in heavily and spoke out;

“God is Love. God is good. God is all-knowing. God provides! I am happy for you my dear children. If it is the will of God that you become what you decide... what you intend, may his name be blessed; now and forever more...”

The two children were filled with awe and joy. They could not control their beautiful smiles. They nod their heads continuously in affirmation. As their father continues,

“I know all this will cost me, but God will provide! It will not be easy... there are hurdles in vocation which one needs to overcome to succeed!”

The whole village had known the Christian way of life embraced by the family of Lodengo. Everyone everywhere was rumor-mongering about this impossibility. They named it so because they marveled how on earth a person can abandon his way of life and embrace a strange religion.

These reports reached the two ears of the traditionalist; Lojuker. He was enraged with anger and bitterness. He considered this as a betrayal of the village's way of life, its traditions, and customs.

“I must meet Lodengo immediately!... this is insane. How the hell can someone of that dignity sell social prestige to what is not tangible!... a kind of fake theoretical so-called god! I must... must meet Lodengo!” Lojuker murmured in fury.

It was morning. Everyone was preparing to go for fieldwork and other activities of the day. Lodengo too was preparing to go to the garden. After eating some leftovers, he came out of the house with the seeds, a hoe, and panga as well as his usual *jujumia* (*a special small jerrican well coated with clothes used to keep water cool. It is often used when one goes for a hard day's work*).

No sooner had he come out than the traditionalist in a haste reached his home.

“This cannot happen! This cannot happen!” he slurred.

The fellow was breathing heavily and looked anxious. His figure of stammering speech and body figure speak the story. It tells us that there is an issue. Nonetheless, Lodengo hastened to settle him down and asked if he was being chased by some mob. The old man instead shouted,

“How dare you? How dare you...”

Before he continued immediately, Karolina brought a cup of cold water and gave him,

“Welcome uncle! Please take this first.”

As he was taking the water, Lokwang brought some leftover food;

“you must be really tired my dear Uncle, please let me not offend you by kindly requesting you to wash your hands,”

Bending gently, “Then my Uncle may enjoy this little offer.... Please!”

The old man was overwhelmed by such politeness. Since he had not eaten some and was even in need; he shut up and started enjoying the food.

“This food is sweet oh...,” as he licks his hands in total enjoyment.

When he was done. The whole family gathered around him to listen to what he had to say.

"We must respect traditions," He roared with a deep shaky voice.

“Your involvement in the foreign religion is an abomination before the gods of the land of Dari,” he added.

"Never has it happened that well-recognized men like you, custodians of traditions, executors of customary laws, and guardians of the young generations; could do such abominable acts," he lamented. As the family became attentive to this matter. Lodengo already has a comprehensive idea of what Lojuker was bringing forward. He just relaxed and tried to ignore it while preparing his statement.

“Why have you abandoned the ways of the village and traditions and customs as well? ... just for a mere ideological God whom we cannot see!!...” he reiterated in conclusion.

"God is one, God is God of all; maker of heaven and earth. As well as the creator of mortal men!" Lodengo answered reluctantly.

“Salvation is offered for all men to accept. However, men are free to accept and reject this salvation! In my case, my family and I have ac-

cepted salvation through Jesus Christ wholeheartedly. Whatever the matter, die with your traditions and customs!" he added

"What miracle can you perform to proof for me all this! You don't claim your God is greater than our gods, do you?" Lojuker furiously questioned.

"Men are free to honour and dishonor God. To obey and disobey God. If you need miracles you should be ready to accept the way of suffering, of being hated and scorned in the village because of believing in God, the one and true Father of all." Lodengo answered when the two children; Lokwang and Karolina began to sing,

I have decided to follow Jesus,

I have decided to follow Jesus,

I have decided to follow Jesus.

No turning back... no turning back

The world behind me, the cross behind me.

The world behind me, the cross behind me.

The world behind me, the cross behind me.

No turning back... no turning back

Have you decided to follow Jesus.

Have you decided to follow Jesus.

Have you decided to follow Jesus.

No turning back... no turning back

This roused violence from the inner depths of Lojuker. His bones were poked hard. His mind went blackout. He couldn't figure what to do with what he called madness. He became as bitter as he could be. He became angry to the best of his ability. All he could do was to leave the family with a lot of bitterness;

“gods of our fathers! What is all this... trying to convinced me? I swear I won't step my feet on this door again!... this is madness” he departed.

CHAPTER SIX

The seminary accepts candidates to join in August. So Lokwang had been anxiously waiting for this day. He had received news from his parish priest, Fr. Achaha that his documents had been verified and accepted. The scheduled date for reporting was August 1st. throughout the year Lokwang and his father Lodengo had to work hard to save some money for his school in the seminary.

Lodengo sold some of his cows, sorghum and other produces in order to make sure his son goes to the seminary. God blessed Lodengo in his work. Whatever he does succeeds however smaller it could be. His cows greatly increased in number as quick as possible. There was no doubt that this pious convert attributed all this fortunes to God. Lodengo offers special offering to God monthly. Sometimes from his garden, and sometimes from his kraal.

He lived an exemplary life in the society. However much he was hated by his village mates, Lodengo did not retaliate. He learned to return evil with good as the Christian virtue dictates.

When it was time for Lokwang to leave, the family held a thanksgiving Mass at home. This Mass was celebrated by Fr. Achaha. Many Christians gathered together to join Lodengo and his family in this vital gift of vocation. They all wished Lokwang save journey and success in his studies.

“it is our hope that one day you come to celebrate for us Mass like Fr. Achaha.” An elder in the crowd commented.

“You will come to baptize our babies too my dear...” a young lady joyfully also supplemented from the choir section.

As for Lodengo, he was overjoyed that his son was taking the path of God, to serve God as a missionary priest. He was okay with the conditions thereof.

“I understand that the road to priesthood will not be a smooth undertaking but rather a rough path with hurdles to be overcome. You are going to become a public figure. You are going to be the microphone for the church, for God and a light to show the way for the blind to see and accept salvation through Jesus Christ. Therefore, my son; be yourself, pray enough, study enough and eat enough. Show the hurdles of vocation that you can overwhelm them by the mighty grace of God. Be obedient to your superiors and teachers... May God be with you” Lodengo concluded after a long emotionally but rather joyful presentation.

During this Mass, present was Reverend sister Kiden. In her speech, she said

“We have also received the letter and documents of Karolina. We have verified and accepted her to start her journey of vocation to religious life. She shall start her first stage of formation in August 15th...”

“Mmmmm.... Mmmmm” the crowd murmured in joy and eventually clapped their hands in applaud.

Lodengo and his wife were so faithful and trust God that even though their only two children were going to go away for their interest in life, they were not saddened but rather filled with joy. The parents were hopeful that God will provide for any situation.

They always believe that whatever happens is the will of God and or that there is something good to be learnt from it.

It is not a surprise to say that all parents love their children. In the African context, it is impossible to see parents allowing their children to go for priesthood and religious life. This is worse especially when they have only one child. Africans believe that for a man to have his worth or to be considered a hero or a real man in the society he should marry one, two or more women. He should raise up children who will in turn marry and keep the continuity of the family lineage.

However, Lodengo and his wife Iyaha have broken the custom. They had assimilated the word of God so much to the tips of their fingers and they were floating on the palm of the Almighty God.

This behavior did not please Uncle Lojuke. Being a rigid and a traditionalist as well as a hard-minded fellow, he completely became disgraced by such behavior by his brother.

He thought for a long time what would happen to the family if the two couple die. It was obvious that the religious people do not marry. He tried his best to convince the two people but it was too late for any form of persuasion.

There was nothing he could do but rather to keep calm and let things go. Nonetheless he considered one possible thing which will definitely make the two young people to surrender their ways. He threatened to curse the young people. However, Lodengo's family have always been a prayerful family, one guided by the grace of God and Lodengo usually claims that his house is surrounded by the blood of the lamb of God. No evil will prevail against it.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Entering a new environment was so amazing for Lokwang. As he could not believe his eyes meeting new people from different dioceses and cultural backgrounds. He acquainted himself with colleagues there was a good role model to imitate. He lived a good life of piety, hard work, and honesty and was gifted with great intellectual ability.

Every weekend their formator sends them for apostolate in the nearby parishes and prayer centers. Usually, some of them are sent to prisons, hospitals, chapels, parishes, and other prayer centers to assist in the choir, Holy Childhood, and altar servers. This was to help them enculturate the aspects of priestly attributes and to experience the reality of priestly life by meeting the people, serving them, and working together with them.

These were tempting moments for Seminarian Lokwang. They were able to meet with beautiful ladies who were seductively attractive wife materials. One Sunday, Lokwang came across a lady who seduced and took his attention. The young man lost his mind. Everything within and without was vibrating. He started salivating at the beautiful queen before his eyes. He could not believe his eyes seeing such a beauty.

"... not even in Dari have I seen such beauty!" Lokwang complimented as the lady moved her body seductively to make him mad with giggling eyes of attraction showing off her thighs before the young man.

"Oh God! Young lady may I talk to you..." getting emotionally drunk with lost reasoning.

“I am here for you, please come over... do you need this...” the lady gently spoke out with signals to the young man.

The rosary fell alone from the side pockets and the whole attention was fixed on the god in front. A small corner became the heaven of these two young people. They were no more reasoning. No wonder what would happen next!

The two young people got on each other. Only body language sufficed. No more words. Things were getting to the peak of evil.

Luckily enough, a legion of Mary who was passing by noticed the plight of the young man. Knowing him to be one of the seminarians, she made a plan to disorganize this little heaven.

She started praying the Rosary as loud as she could while moving across but not staring at them, “Hail Mary full of grace, the Lord is with you...” she continued louder enough for them to get scared.

When they realized what was going on, Lokwang immediately gained himself and pretended like having a usual conversation and nothing further than that. He then pretended to be advising the young lady. Just as if they were for a Bible-sharing program. He opened a Bible and started sharing his reflection with the young lady.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whoever believes in him will not perish but shall have eternal life...” taking from the Gospel of John 3:16.

“In the Gospel of John chapter 13 verse 34, Jesus gave a new commandment; ‘I give you a new commandment: Love one another; just as I have loved you,’” the promiscuous lady quoted.

Lokwang interrupted, "That is very correct!"

"Good," she said.

"Now, do you love me?" she added tactically.

"Chaii... that is enough. He is our upcoming priest, young lady, are you okay? Can't you see him. Leave him alone" The legion of Mary who was attentive to the Bible quotes shouted at the lady's tricky question.

Lokwang felt ashamed but strengthened by the concern of the Legion of Mary.

Just then, he left the scene. While moving to the seminary, he felt so sorry for himself. He almost fell into the ditch of darkness. He realized that the devil was very smart in his dealings. The devil is beautiful and comes beautifully to devour the elect of the Mighty God.

From that day on, he became more careful about with whom he dealt. He distanced himself from tempting situations to protect his vocation. He became committed to prayers, studies, and work. His formators appreciated his efforts and encouraged him to keep up the spirit.

During visitation day, his parents came to visit him and to find out how he was doing. The formators were pleased to meet such a pious family with a well-brought-up son who was heroic in virtue.

"My son... dear formators... we have brought for you some little presents: you may have the milk, peanut butter, maize, and a cow to enjoy with your friends and formators.

Please this is the little we can contribute to your vocation journey. Accept our humble offering." Lodengo in a humble posture stated after appreciating the priests for their work in forming the young people in ways of God.

The priests were shocked to receive such a humble offering from a humble family. They encouraged the family to pray for their son who was completing theology. They informed them that their son would be ordained soon.

"Thank Daddy and Mama for the love you have shown me. May God bless you more..." Lokwang said.

"Amen...Amen...Amen..." the parents responded with gratefulness.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The little girl Karolina had already left for the convent. She entered a new environment which is full of rules and instructions. That was the convent for St. Oduho Missionary Sisters. They have higher discipline to enhance community life in the convent and to live the reality of their charism. Karolina, for the first time met new friends from new places with new realities. She was excited about this opportunity. She promised to do her best to succeed in the formation and become a Reverend sister one day.

"Lord thank you for bringing me here!..." she said after entering her room bowing gently before a crucifix.

This was not an easy time for Karolina. She had to endure patients for a long time. This was because her superiors detained their group. The reason being that they were few to start the Postulancy. So they were waiting for some members to join so they could start together. The young girls were given some orientation for the time being. Sometimes, they are sent to teach in the nearby schools that belong to the congregation. Although this was affording the young girls a good experience most were getting anxious about the long time they had to take waiting for the others. Two of her colleagues due to impatient had to quit the journey and resort to something else.

"This is too much... by the time we become Reverend sisters, we shall be already old. This vocation is boring..." they said out of frustration and impatience.

"See our colleagues in other congregations are almost to finish their course. This is embarrassing." One of them commented with jeers.

They both quit and decided to leave the convent.

As for Karolina, she learned to be patient. Despite the trials and temptations to quit her vocation, she endured.

After three years, some new aspirants were accepted and the team began together. Karolina was so happy and was often loved by her mother's superiors and the sisters in the convent. This was because she displayed dispositions worth of a religious sister. She is always kind, honest, thoughtful and prayerful. She enjoys community life and activities.

“She is a good girl. She will make up a good religious’ sister...” one of her formators whispered to the others.

When it was time to have a holiday, Karolina was taken to her home parish and village. This was intentional to show the village girls that they could also participate in religious life, fully dedicating their lives to God.

The parents welcome her warmly at home with a lot of jubilation and singing. She was given a chance that Sunday to say a word to the congregation. With a humble gesture the little sister to be revered the Holy Altar before appreciating the parish priest, congregants, and her fellow sisters from St. Oduho Missionary Sisters.

"Brothers and sisters, fathers and fellow parishioners, today, it gladdens me to speak before you. Life does not end in the grave my dear brothers and sisters. After the breath is gone, thereafter another life begins. That life is only possible if we give ourselves entirely to God as a holy and consecrated nation. A people set only for God," she confidently and vigorously addressed the faithful.

“I invite my fellow ladies to discern ways to consecrate themselves to God as religious sisters. The church needs young people to carry on with apostolic succession of the Gospel that had been handed on to us. Therefore, my dear brethren let us explore different ways to carry on this message to the utmost ends of the planet,” she continued.

And directing her attention towards boys, “To my brothers – boys, ‘I am now a bride for Christ not for any of you. So please not what you are thinking (*smiling as the congregants burst into laughter*).”

While people were in total amusement, someone from the crowd shouted,

“What shall I do Baby girl sister reverend! Eeee woooo yiii you are gone beauty Queen Karolina Baby... (Crying...)”.

“Wasted resource, wasted material” he added.

Giving the young man confidence, she added; “But you can serve God in different ways. Discern the will of God for yourselves my dear brothers and sisters. (jokingly) Do not be temptations to my vocation”

(the crowd clapped hands with murmurings: “Hmmm ... Mmmm – boys take care of our religious icon.”

This dramatic moment strengthened Karolina in that she gained the confidence of making a presentation before the congregation which echoes her future work as a religious sister. To speak with confidence in proclaiming and living the reality of the gospel.

CHAPTER NINE

The local ordinary had written a circular to be read in every parish. It was none other than one which was about the ordination of a young man. A deacon from Tseretenya Diocese. This young man was the son of a well-known icon of Christian virtue in a parish run by St Oduho Missionary Society. He is a young man who has been a cattle raider.

Bishop Johnson Akio wrote,

“...The diocese of Tseretenya is glad to announce the ordination for our most Rev. Deacon Lokwang which will take place on the 30th of September 2023 at St Bakhita Catholic Church in Dari County. If anyone has any reason that could impede him from the sacrament, they should report to the nearest parish and or diocesan administration.”

The information was circulated to all parishes in the diocese one month in advance to the ordination. At this moment Lokwang was asked to serve the Bishop at the Cathedral until his ordination time.

While the information continues to circulate, Lojuker has a conspiracy with some village girls. This was the only way he thought would block the potential Reverend priest from proceeding to his destiny. they arranged;

“Paska, please pretend to be his hidden wife. I know when all things go well he will marry you,” Lojuker instructs some beautiful girl from the village.

“Trust me... deal??” he reiterated.

The girl who was also looking for a fine gentleman like Lokwang was quick to accept the offer;

“Deal...” in affirmation Paska replied.

It was a better opportunity because the lady was a choir member and she tried fabricating stories inducing facts that Lokwang had an illicit relationship with her. After the two were satisfied with the conspiracy, they went to meet the parish priest, Fr. Achaha.

"Hey, Father... please let me talk to you!..." Lojuker in a furious and harsh tone confronted the Priest who was almost going out for apostolate.

"What is the matter, my son?" Fr. Achaha was amazed by the approach of the old man.

“I am not your son, don't you see this grey hair... so you priest enter into illicit relationships with ladies and you claim to be celibates and virgins... whatever term you may give... you just claim not to marry on the pretext of having multiple wives belonging to other people,"

The priest was bewildered at all. He did not know what to say or how to say anything to calm the old man. He thought of any illicit relationship he might have had in his youth but none came to his memory. Before he could say a word the old man continued,

"Where is Lokwang? The so-called Reverend or Deacon...so you want to ordain a married man?"

“Please what is the matter let me know precisely. So I may help!” the priest put forward after gathering some courage.

"Honestly speaking, Lokwang has an illicit relationship with a lady who is in your parish choir. She is Paska!" the old man declared.

The priest had to postpone his apostolate to attend to this serious matter. At his jurisdiction, he did his best to investigate the old man and figure out what to tell the Bishop. However, he wrote his report and sent it to the Bishop,

"... A man named Lojuker in Dari, St Bakhita Parish filed a claim against the Deacon accusing him of having an illicit relationship with Paska, a choir member in the Parish. So, your Lordship, I suggest you come and investigate the claim yourself or what you deem appropriate." The letter partly reads.

When the Bishop received the email with such a letter he immediately responded,

"Dear Fr. Achaha, this is a delicate matter! I shall come there myself to investigate the case. I will come any time when the Holy Spirit deems appropriate..."

Lojuker on his side was happy that Lokwang would certainly be discontinued from the way to priesthood. The same evening, he went to Lodengo and explained the whole story. This made Lodengo immerse in deep prayers, fasting, and contemplation. He believes his son cannot dive into such evil.

The Bishop contacted Lokwang about the issue but he denied the claims. Not long after, the Reverend Bishop Johnson arrived in the parish together with Deacon Lokwang. The old man was summoned with the young lady. After the Bishop had a superficial interview with the victim, he arranged for a major interview on Sunday.

During the Sunday Mass after a brief homily, the bishop called the young lady to come forward. Lokwang was also brought forward.

“That is an abomination.... How dare you challenge the man of God!!” the crowd murmured in annoyance with deep roaring across the House of God.

Lojuker intending to see the shame that would thunder Lodengo and his son attended the Mass during that Sunday. He wanted to see the downfall of the potential priest.

The Holy Bible was placed on the Altar and the young lady was invited to swear before the congregation and the throne of God that she truly had an illicit relationship with the accused Deacon. The Bishop asked her to repeat these words,

“I swear by the name of the Living God in the presence of the people of God, that Lokwang is my husband. He cannot climb the high Altars of the Lord alone leaving me behind. I swear by an oath that he is truly my husband, lover, and friend.”

She came forward and after looking around her; all eyes fixed on her. Staring at Lokwang in the eye, she saw the confidence of the young man, determined to continue his vocation to the priesthood. She could not spot Lojuker. Looking at the Bishop in the eye, she burst into tears:

“No...no...no really....Uhu... Uhu...Uhu(Crying..). I can't do this. I was deceived to do this! I can't risk my life for what is not right. I have nothing with the Deacon.”

The Bishop was sorrowful. He comforted the young lady and after Mass, he had a moment of counseling for her. After freeing her

from disgrace, he left immediately with Deacon to prepare for the ordination.

Meanwhile Lojuker, noticing the young lady was overcome by tears, escaped away from the church.

"This is a disgrace to the tradition. How dare she confess everything like that..." grumbling alone.

From that day on, he could not stand eye contact with the young lady.

Conversely, Lodengo praised God for answering his prayers. He was so happy and his faith in God became like that of Abraham of the Old Testament.

When the time was over, the Bishop ordained Lokwang in his home parish, St Bakhita Parish. This ceremony was attended by the Rev. Sr. Karolina who had already made her final vows. It was a moment worth celebrating. The family was happy more than ever. In his homily, the Bishop said,

"A successful vocation has walked over hurdles on the way. There are a lot of temptations and trials. But God is always there for us, to guide us on the right path. He helps us to make the choice that is appropriate for us distinctively. The Church needs young men and women to serve as priests, sisters, brothers, catechists, married lay people, and many other vocations in the church. Please listen to the voice of God and respond to where he calls you. Lokwang and Karolina have listened to the voice of God and have reached their destiny. As you all know Lokwang had been your warrior, young as he was; he was able to navigate in between and across thick forests to steal cattle but from now on the ward he will

have to navigate in between and across countries and continents to steal people from the kraal of Satan; gathering them to the family of the True God.”

The ordination of this young man brought total change to the people in the village. As they see the young man dressed in a priestly vestment they whisper to one another,

“He’s become a small god! This thing is good oh...oh...”

Many were coming to him for guidance on how to join the priesthood while ladies were going to Sr. Karolina enquiring about the procedures of becoming a religious sister.

During his first homily as a priest, He said,

"For the Israelites to reach the promised land, they had to suffer in the desert. Many of them died in the desert. They had to risk their lives fighting with the Amorites, and all the other cities, but in the end, they reached the promised land,"

(Sighing heavily he continued)

"I have overcome evil and have reached the promised destiny of my vocation. Pray for me dear brothers and sisters that I may remain faithful to God who has called me to serve him as a priest. That I may raid men from the kraal of the devil to gather them to the flock of the Good Shepherd. I have a long way to go. You have a long way to go. We have a long way to go. Let us pray for each other." He concluded.

This young priest has made his journey from cattle raiding to the Catholic Priesthood. He serves the Lord all the time with dedication and devotion. His vocation has transformed the whole village from its traditional way of life to the true meaning of life. Nonetheless, that was not the end of everything in the life of the young man.

Becoming a religious priest was not enough. Being ordained was not enough. He believed he still has a lot to go through. Like many ordinary people, priests are perceived to be immune from worldly temptations and allurements.

Children may think that ordination is the climax and ultimate end of priest as do many other people. However, it is the contrary. There is much to learn in the pages of the future while scrolling through the past and present with great care and simplicity.

CHARACTERS

Lodengo: A 45-year-old father of Karolina and Lokwang who lives in Dari County; husband of Iyaha. He shows rigidity in accepting the path of his children as they choose to join religious life and priesthood. But later accepted without regretting.

Iyaha: Wife of Lodengo she is an open-minded person and appreciates any good thing their children do.

Lokwang: a youth of 18-year-old who is aspiring to join the Catholic priesthood. In his early years, he has been a young warrior and have fought wars. He has raided cattle from their neighbours as was the custom those days.

Karolina: a 16-year-old daughter aspiring to join the religious life as a Reverend sister for St. Oduho Missionary Sisters. She is a serene and pious young

lady, zealous for her vocation to religious life.

Angelina: A little girl in the village who brought report about the return of Lokwang from spying. She stands as the girl of the shocking news.

Sr. Kiden: a 35-year-old Religious Sister of Saint Oduho Missionary Sisters, vocation promoter in Dari Province; who inspired Karolina. She had many encounters with Lokwang and Karolina individually as well as many other children in the parish. She hooked them to religious life and to priesthood

Lojuker: The uncle of Karolina and Lokwang; a traditional ritualist. He is presented as an obstacle to the vocation of the two young people; Lokwang and Karolina. Most often he opposes things to do with the Church. He likes to dwell in traditional matters and customs.

Achaha: a 47-year-old religious priest of St Oduho Missionary Society who inspired Lokwang to roused the zeal to join the Priesthood.

Bishop Johnson Akio: The prelate of the diocese of Tseretenya. He would be the future Bishop to ordain Lokwang as a religious priest.

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Simon Lodai Amin Salvatore is a second year student of philosophy at Tangaza University in Nairobi. He is studying to become a Comboni Missionary Priest. Hailing from South Sudan's Eastern Equatoria State far east - Tseretenya of Ikwoto County, Simon has extensive experience in the Catholic Church. He studied at St Mary Minor Seminary in Torit from 2016 to 2019, after completing Primary Leaving Examination from St Matthew Primary School, Ikwoto in 2015. He spent more than five years teaching and working in the social impact field. Knowledge of the traditions and customs of his place where cattle raiding is prevalent gave insights into the writing of this work.

It is with great and profound hope that this material is presented to all readers. Going through the pages makes one to discover the hurdles in vocation, mystery of vocation and the need for transparency, sincerity and support for vocations.

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