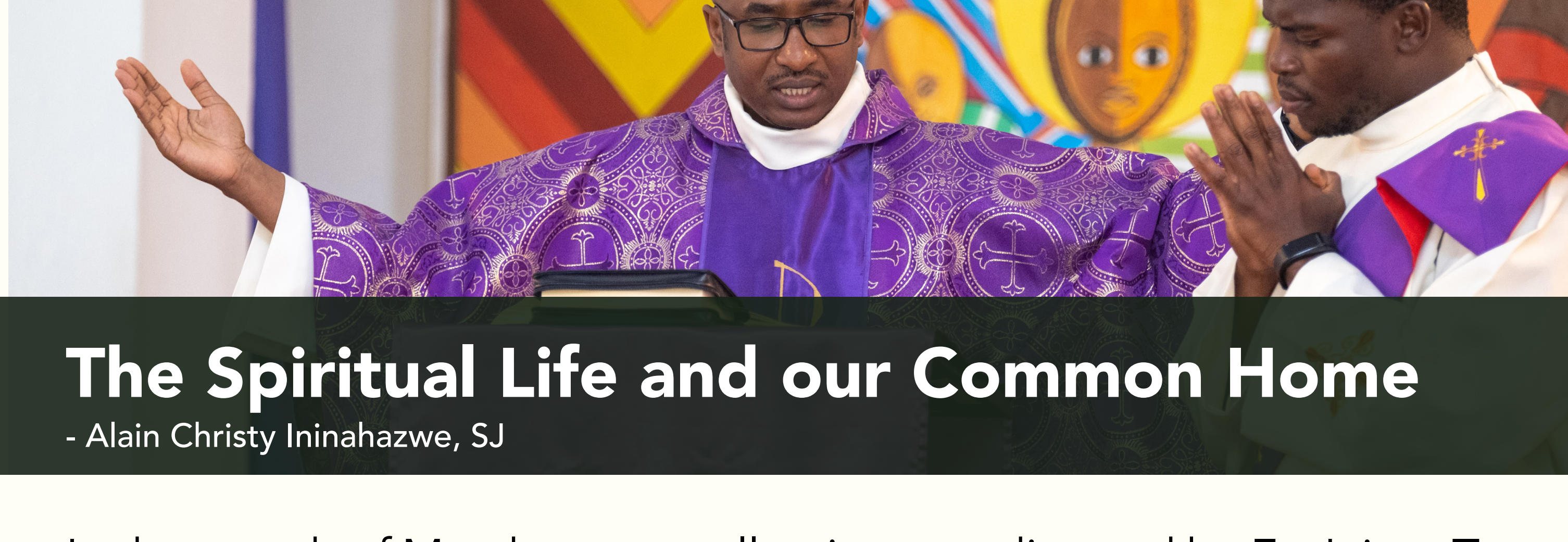




Habari Za Hekima

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March 2023



The Spiritual Life and our Common Home

- Alain Christy Ininahazwe, SJ

In the month of March, our recollection was directed by Fr. Jaime Tatay, SJ from Spain. Having done tertianship at Mwangaza Spirituality Centre, Nairobi some years ago, it was a great joy for him to recall some Swahili words which he learnt at that time. While giving us points for prayer and reflection, Fr. Tatay helped us to re-read Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'*.

He began by stating that one may question the relevance of the theme on the environment when there are so many social and economic challenges around us. For instance, people are going on demonstrations in several cities in the world to express their frustrations about life, which is becoming increasingly expensive; there are wars in some places; viruses and natural disasters are disrupting the normal flow of life at all levels of society, etc. Do we really need to prioritise ecology at this time? Through seven deep spiritual traditions, Fr. Tatay brought a plausible interpretation of *Laudato Si'*.

The first spiritual tradition is *Prophetic liberation (Laudato Si 139)* which is about the denunciation of injustice, inequality, racism and all other forms of oppression. The Catholic Social Teaching and many great figures of our time, like Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. have tried to find solutions to these problems. As Christians, it is unacceptable to remain silent in the face of these atrocities. The second dimension is *Asceticism* which comes from monastic traditions in the face of a culture of "mass consumerism". Each year, there are favourable periods of conversion from this culture: Lent, Ramadhan, Fast for the Climate, etc. Sobriety is, in this case, our weapon against it (LS 11). The third is *Wisdom*. Pope Francis states that "everything in the world is connected" (LS 16). Creation must, therefore, be considered a source of wisdom. With the fourth dimension, the *Mystic*, Pope Francis denounces the alienation, dualism and perception of nature as a mere "resource". The fifth and sixth spiritual dimensions are *Sacramental* and *Community*. For these, Fr. Tatay expounded on some traditions for which nature has a sacred dimension. For example, in Buddhism, there are rituals of the Ordination of Trees. These practices connect the preservation of ecological systems to Thai Buddhist identity. The last dimension is *Eschatological*, where Pope Francis emphasizes the fact that we need a hopeful vision (LS 244).

These seven spiritual traditions are transversal and give a global view of the Encyclical. They are put in contrast with "eco-social evil" dimensions which show the challenges of the dangers that threaten our *common home*: injustice (oppression); consumerism; insanity; alienation; utilitarianism; individualism; and catastrophism.

Finally, Pope Francis says that we cannot completely separate the economic from the social crisis as together they constitute one complex crisis that is both economic and social. The earth is our common home and everything we do is done in this home. Although there are many other issues which call for our attention, we cannot talk about them without our home. Also, since ecology is one of the *Universal Apostolic Preferences* of the Society of Jesus, this subject remains pertinent in Ignatian and Jesuit circles.



Learning to be Honest and Genuine

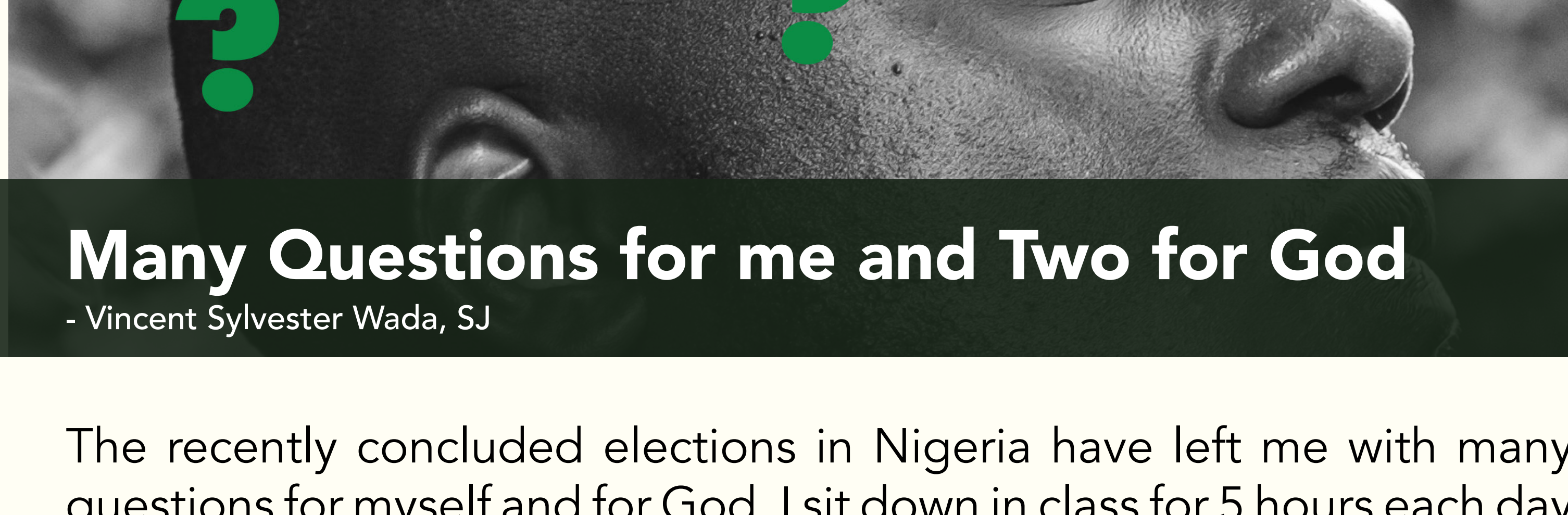
- Mlen Friday, SJ

Doing my apostolate at St. George's Girls Secondary School, Nairobi has been profoundly exciting and inspirational. It has been a time to journey with the young and an opportunity to practicalize the Society's Universal Apostolic Preference of accompanying young people in the creation of a hope-filled future. There are five of us missioned to this apostolate: Conrad Azefac, Enock Posse, Rogatien Goukpanian, Paul Kanda, and I. We assist with the liturgical life of the Catholic students at the school. We also help to teach catechism. The catechism classes are in preparation of students for Baptism, First Holy Communion, Confirmation, and a class for post-Confirmation. The post-Confirmation class is about helping the students who have received the Sacrament of Confirmation to continue to deepen their understanding of their faith in light of their daily life experiences and encounters. These may include faith and family life, faith and career, etc.

So far, working at St. George's has helped us – me in particular – to keep in touch with the concerns of people who will be the future of the Church. Although there are shortfalls here and there in the organization and preparation put in place for every celebration of the Eucharist, nonetheless, the joy and commitment of the students inspire me. The catechism class is a time for listening. It is also a time to engage in discussions on questions concerning my Catholic faith and theirs. Although I do not teach the post-Confirmation class, my encounter with the students, their questions, and inquiries challenge me to remain in touch with the theological studies I'm doing at Hekima.

I love and appreciate this apostolate. It so happened that my first preference for apostolate assignment was granted: to work with the St. George's Catholic community. The students are welcoming and excited by our presence. Sunday Masses are usually vibrant and invigorating. It is always a moment for the students to offer and celebrate their youth before God. I have learned from the students the practice of being honest, genuine and simple. They are very curious in asking questions concerning their faith. Some questions come up about the reason behind fasting during Lent or the reason we do not have women as priests in the Church. Keep in mind that all of the students at this school are female. In all this, I find consolation when I see these young students excited and motivated about their religious lives.

The apostolate also helps me to review my knowledge of catechism. It is a preparation for practical ministry after ordination. Additionally, I see myself contributing to the growth of the Christian faith, particularly among these young believers. I hope that by studying theology well, I will be able to respond to the important questions raised by the students during catechism classes and other encounters with them. This apostolate is also an opportunity for me to spread Ignatian Spirituality. Already, I can see the sense of the *Magis* exhibited by the students. Thus, what I want to do is enrich and support this sense. Together with my brothers, we can help to grow a spirit of commitment, courage, and doing more for the greater glory of God among the students.



Many Questions for me and Two for God

- Vincent Sylvester Wada, SJ

The recently concluded elections in Nigeria have left me with many questions for myself and for God. I sit down in class for 5 hours each day from Monday to Friday learning theology. Yet, I do not make sense of my continent. Our churches are full and we Christians profess our faith in one true God, yet these same Christians steal the people's mandate in broad day light. What do Greek and Church History have to do with ballot boxes? What has Pastoral Theology to do with voter intimidation? What does Christology have to do with voter buying? What does Moral Theology have to do with the announcement of adulterated election results? What does Ecclesiology have to do with issuing certificates of return to politicians who rig elections? These questions rattle my mind as I am reminded every day of the need to be hopeful as a Christian. I am also expected to give hope to the people of God, yet I have so little hope to spare. I am expected to answer their difficult questions in the future, but at present, I have questions of my own. In turn, I am moved to ponder what questions to ask God since God has decided to call me to help make this world a better place.

I was looking for relevance! Attending theology classes during the week of the elections in Nigeria might have been the most challenging moment for me at Hekima. For once, I was confronted with the madness of the world where I might be thrown in after my studies in theology. I have been asking myself what this moment of theology studies might offer to the Nigerian situation. It was depressing to watch the news and proceedings of the elections on both mainstream and social media. I have seen many Nigerians in the diaspora destroy their Nigerian passports and denounce their nationality. I witnessed through online videos, broad day robbery of the people's mandate. I watched ballot boxes being snatched. I witnessed religious and tribal bigotry. I saw politicians and police cooperating with thugs on national TV.

Though far away in Nairobi, Kenya, I felt threatened and afraid to vote. I was told that I could not vote because I belonged to a particular tribe. I was told that I could not vote because I wanted to vote for a particular political party. Lies were told on national TV. People were threatened openly and publicly. Mandates were stolen and shocks of desolation spread across the nation. Lives were lost. But I am here in a classroom, in faraway Nairobi, studying Greek, Moral theology, Pastoral Counselling, Christology, African Theology and the likes. I am forced to ask a difficult question. How do these hours of theology prepare me for a life in Nigeria? How does theology prepare me for a life on the African Continent? How can my philosophy and theology ensure free and fair elections in Nigeria and across the continent? Is there a relationship between my studies and the reality? How can my theology studies eliminate religious and tribal bigotry across the continent? What is the relevance of theology in a continent where corrupt politicians visit churches days before an election to get endorsements from priests and pastors?

How must I do theology, is therefore, a question for all of us. If theology is truly a study of God, it presupposes some knowledge of God. These same questions could be directed to anyone who claims to know something about God. The questions I have raised are for all of us as we theologize through our various disciplines and areas of expertise. I now turn to God - Dear God, are we enough to transform your world? Is our hope in you enough to build a better world? I am still praying, and I hope God answers me soon.

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