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**THE IDENTITY OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN
IGBOLAND, NIGERIA**

Doctoral Thesis in Systematic Theology
written under the supervision of
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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the growth, strength and holiness of the Catholic Church in Igboland and the entire Universal Church.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AA	Annales Apostoliques (Annual Publications or Annual Reports of the Holy Ghost)
AA	<i>Apostolicam Actuositatem</i> , Vatican II Decree on Apostolate of Lay People
AAS	Acta Apostolicae Sedis
Acts	Acts of the Apostles
AFER	African Ecclesiastical Review
AG	<i>Ad Gentes</i> , Vatican II Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church
AIDs	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
AIT	African Independence Television
Amos	Amos
APS	Archives des Peres Spiritains, Onitsha (Archives of the Holy Ghost Fathers)
ATR	African Traditional Religions
CAN	Code of Canon Law
Cann	Canon Law
CATHAN	Catholic Theological Association of Nigeria
CBCN	Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria
CBO	Catholic Boys Organization
CCC	Catechism of the Catholic Church
CCO	Catholic Caritas Organization
CCRN	Catholic Charismatic Renewal of Nigeria
CDs	Cassettes (Video Cassettes)
Cf.	Confer
CFO	Christian Fathers Organization
CGO	Catholic Girls Organization
Chap	Chapter
CIWA	Catholic Institute of West Africa
CKC	Christ the King College/ Church
CMA	Christian Mothers Association
CMO	Catholic Men Organization
CMS	Christian / Church Mission Society
Col	Colossians
Cor	Corinthians
CSSp	Congregatio Sancti Spiritus, Paris (Congregation of the Holy Ghost Fathers)
CT	<i>Catechesis Tradendae</i> , Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II on Catechesis
CTA	Catholic Teachers Association
CWO	Catholic Women Organization
CYO	Catholic Youth Organization
Dan	Daniel
DCE	<i>Deus Caritas Est</i> , encyclical letter of Pope Benedict XVI on Christian Love
DDL	Daughters of Divine Love
Deut	Deuteronomy
DH	<i>Dignitatis Humanae</i> , Vatican II declaration on Religious Liberty
DMMM	Daughters of Mary Mother of Mercy
DV	<i>Dei Verbum</i> , Vatican II Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation
E.g.	Exempli gratia (for example)
EA	<i>Ecclesia in Africa</i> , Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II on the Church in Africa
Ed. (eds.)	Editor (editors)

EG	<i>Evangelii Gaudium</i> , Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis on the Joy and Proclamation of the Gospel
EN	<i>Evangelii Nuntiandi</i> , Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Paul VI on Evangelization
Eph	Ephesians
Et. al	Et alii (and others)
Etc.	Et cetera (and so on)
EV	<i>Evangelium Vitae</i> , Encyclical Letter of Pope John Paul II on the Sanctity and Inviolability of the Human Life
Ex	Exodus
Ezek	Ezekiel
Ezra	Ezra
F. (ff)	Following (followings)
Gal	Galatians
Gen	Genesis
GIRMA	Growing Incomes and Rural Markets in Agriculture
GS	<i>Gaudium et Spes</i> , Vatican II Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World
Heb	Hebrews
HIV	Human Immune Virus
Hos	Hosea
HV	<i>Humanae Vitae</i> , Encyclical Letter of Pope Paul VI on the Regulation of the Human Birth
I.e.	Id est (that is)
Isa	Isaiah
ITR	Igbo Traditional Religion
JDPC	Justice, Peace and Development Commission
Jer	Jeremiah
Jn	John
Joel	Joel
Jonah	Jonah
Josh	Joshua
Judg	Judges
Kgs	Kings
Lam	Lamentation
Lev	Leviticus
LG	<i>Lumen Gentium</i> , Vatican II Dogmatic Constitution on the Church
Lk	Luke
Mic	Micah
Mk	Mark
MLG	Mary League Girls
Mt	Mathew
NACATHS	National Association of Theological Students
NACS	National Association of Catholic Students
Neh	Nehemiah
no. (nos)	Number (Numbers)
Num	Numbers
p. (pp)	Page (Pages)
P	Paragraph
Pet	Peter
Phil	Philipians
PO	<i>Presbyterorum Ordinis</i> , Vatican II decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests
PP	<i>Populorum Progressio</i> , Encyclical Letter of Pope Paul II on Human Progress

Prov	Proverbs
Ps	Psalms
Rev	Revelation
RM	<i>Redemptoris Missio</i> , Encyclical Letter of John Paul II on the Missionary Mandate
Rom	Romans
RSV	<i>Revised Standard Version</i>
Sam	Samuel
SC	<i>Sacrosanctum Concilium</i> , Vatican II constitution on Sacred Liturgy
Sess	Session
Sir	Sirach
SIST	Spiritan International School of Theology (Nigeria)
SMA	Society of African Mission
SS	<i>Spe Salvi</i> , encyclical letter of Pope Benedict XVI on Christian Hope
SUSTAIN	Sustenance Training in Nigeria
Thess	Thessalonians
Tim	Timothy
TRCN	Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria
TTC	Teachers Training College
TV	Television
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UR	<i>Unitatis Redintegratio</i> , Vatican II Decree on Ecumenism
USA	United States of America
WAEC	West African Examination Council
WASSCE	West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination
Wis	Wisdom
WUCW	World Union of Catholic Women
YCS	Young Catholic Students
Zech	Zechariah

INTRODUCTION

Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) teaches that “every human person is created in the image and likeness of God.”¹ We are all sons and daughters of God. Each of us has a name. It is how we are known. To the world around us, our name identifies us, it says who we are. People often speak of identity politics, identity advocacy, and even identity theft. People rally around ethnic identity, racial identity, regional identity, and party identity. They look to factors like these because they wish to have objective markers in answering the question, “Who am I?” But there is more to the identity of each one of us as Christians and Catholics, as sons and daughters of God. It is through the sacrament of Baptism that we are made sons and daughters of God, and so share in the divine nature of God. Our identity in God as Catholics is a theme to which Pope Francis has returned often in his daily preaching. He speaks of Catholics metaphorically as having a certain ‘identity card,’ as valuable and consequential as a passport or a driver’s license. Pope Francis talking from the Catholic tradition, has spoken severally about our theological identity, our identity in God as Catholics.²

Generally speaking, “Identity is the concept one or a thing develops about oneself or itself, that evolves over the course of one’s or its life. It involves the process of coming into an existence of a person or a thing as well as the qualities, traits, characteristics, roles, beliefs, personality, looks and expressions that make a person or a thing who he is or what it is.”³ It is the qualities that distinguish a reality from other realities. Identity relates to self-image, self-esteem, self-recognition, self-consciousness, self-knowledge and individuality. It is the condition of being oneself and not another. It is the totality of one’s self-construal in which how one construes oneself in the present expresses the continuity between how one construes oneself as one was in the past and how one construes oneself as one aspires to be in the future. “Identities can be focused on the past-what used to be true of one, the present-what is true of one now, or the future-the person one expects or wishes to become, the person one feels obligated to try to become.”⁴ Identity is a part of the essence of a being. It is what gives a being or a thing his or its essential and objective characters and qualities.

¹ Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2003), no. 355.

² Francis, “Morning Meditations in the Chapel of the Domus Sanctae Marithae: True Identity,” *Daily Meditations*, 26 September, 2014, accessed 25 May, 2017, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/cotidie/2014/documents/papa-francesco-cotidie_20140926_true-identity.html. “Morning Meditations in the Chapel of the Domus Sanctae Marithae: Two Identity Cards,” *Daily Meditations*, 10 February 2015, accessed 25 May, 2017, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/cotidie/2015/documents/papa-francesco-cotidie_20150210_two-identity-cards.html.

³ Mark Leary and June Price Tangney, *Handbook of Self and Identity* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2012), 2.

⁴ Leary and Tangney, *Handbook of Self and Identity*, 6.

This work is strictly concerned with the identity of the Catholic Church in Igboland, Nigeria. “The Post-conciliar Catholic ecclesiology has been mostly focused on the Universal Church. Such universal ecclesiology earned mature methodologies.”⁵ But meantime, the Universal Church has also been present in the local and particular Churches which are making their own history and identity on daily basis. It is high time the Catholic ecclesiology opened its eyes to see the peculiarity and identity of the local Churches. This work is therefore aimed at discovering and understanding the identity of the local Church in Igboland. It will focus on the self-identity, self-reflection and the self-awareness of the Igbo Catholicism as it concerns those things that make her unique, distinctive and peculiar as a local Church in Igbo soil. The purpose of this introduction is primarily eightfold namely to state: the problem the research is aimed at tackling, the purpose of the study, the significance of the work, methodology and sources, the structure of the work, general background to Igboland and its people, Igbo Traditional Religion and Protestant Missions in Igboland, Eastern Nigeria (1840-1885) before the advent of Catholicism.

Statement of the Problem

The great consciousness and worrisome experience which I had during my few years of pastoral experience in Igboland both as a seminarian and as a priest on the lack of understanding, lack of assimilation, lack of fulfilment and shallowness of faith that accompany most of the Catholic liturgy, worships and catechesis (catechism classes and evening instructions) made a deep impression on me. To give some instances of the complex nature of the situation, a year after my priestly ordination, I met with two ‘priests’ of Igbo Traditional Religion (Southeast Nigeria). In the course of my brief discussion with them, it was revealed that both of them were previously among the leading members of their local parish community. According to them, they found it necessary to revert to Igbo Traditional Religion from where they were previously converted to Christianity because the new religion (Christianity) had failed to give meaning to their lives. It had failed to meet their aspirations. The answer that Christianity provided, they argued, were never genuine responses to their questions. They also said that Christianity had not given them any fulfilment in life. They maintained also that the God which Christianity proclaimed was not at home with their environment. For them, He was a foreign (western) God, which made it difficult for Him to understand them when they talked or prayed to Him. On the contrary, their own Igbo Supreme Being, they reasoned, because He

⁵ Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church*, (New York: Doubleday, 1987), quoted in Krzysztof Kaucha, “The Identity of Local and Particular Catholic Churches: Methodological Outline,” *Roczniki Teologiczne*, Tom LXIV, zeszyt 9 (2017): 45.

knew them to their very root, understood their plights even before they presented their supplications to Him. Therefore, they had to return to Igbo Traditional Religion because it gives them understanding, fulfilment and a sense of belonging which Christianity was not able to provide. This experience gave me serious concern. As a result of it, I decided to embark on home and zonal visitations to know actually what and how people feel about Catholic Church and her teachings in our parish. Many lukewarm Catholics I visited complained bitterly of lack of interest and fulfilment in Igbo Catholic liturgical celebrations. In the course of these visitations and discussions also, it really became quite obvious to me that many people especially the young are not interested in the Catholic Church. Even the adult were very unenthusiastic and dispassionate about Catholic faith.

I also observed with dismay that many Catholics in Igboland see Catholic Church as a visitor, something foreign and alien even as an invader in Igboland. It also came to my notice that many Catholics in Igboland are Catholics only during the day but at night or when they have difficulties, they resort to some prayer houses, spiritual centers and pagan shrines in search of solutions to their problems. Many people also complained about the abstract and dry nature of Igbo Catechisms as well as meaninglessness and lack of understanding associated with sacraments and catechisms (sacramental and catechetical teachings, concepts and terminologies). These and more similar complaints gave me a personal concern because they are serious theological problems that need immediate pastoral attention and ecclesiastical action.

As I was thinking about these problems and challenges, certain questions started coming to my mind. What are the causes of lack of understanding, poor assimilation, lack of interest and fulfilment in the Catholic liturgy and catechisms? Why the shallowness of faith among Igbo Catholics? What are the causes of dual affiliation and high patronage to paganism nowadays? What are the causes of high proliferation of Churches beyond Anglican Communion to Pentecostalism? Why do many people leave the Catholic Church despite the massive and joyful acceptance she enjoyed when she came newly? A deeper thought and reflection on these problems and challenges led me into further questions. Has the Catholicism intensively been shared by many Igbos and her demands and teachings been brought and made homely on Igbo soil? Has the local Church in Igboland really become what she ought to be as a local Church in Igboland and not as a local Church in Lublin or Frankfurt? What are the uniqueness, particularities, features, peculiarities, mission and vision that make the local Church in Igboland to be an Igbo local Church? In other word or simply put, what is the identity of the Catholic Church in Igboland? Has the local Church in Igboland discovered and attained her true and real identity as a local Church in Igboland and not as a local Church in New York?

Has the Igbo Catholicism become homely, adequately inculturated, well domesticated and ably adapted in Igboland? Can she now drink Igbo water, breathe Igbo air and eat Igbo food? The problems and challenges above show really that she is still very far from these realities. In the course of my thought and research, I discovered that a lot of things have been said and written about the history (historiography) and establishment of the Catholic Church in Igboland but we are yet to see a clear cut study and discourse on the identity of the Igbo Catholicism and how to help her (Igbo Catholicism) discover, attain and sustain her true identity as a local Church in Igboland. In other words, how to give Catholicism a lovely welcome and hospitality in Igbo soil. Sufficient effort has not been made to give Catholic Church a home in Igboland. It is only through becoming a home and attaining the height of the indigenous religion in Igboland that she can achieve her real identity and fulfil her mission and vision. Hence, the motive of this study is to dwell extensively on the identity of the Catholic Church in Igboland. However, these challenges and lack of clear identity notwithstanding, the Igbo Catholicism has made immeasurable and remarkable successes and achievements in Igboland. All these will be seen in the course of this work.

Purpose of the Study

The term ‘identity’ has become one of the most popular words used in contemporary sociology, psychology and anthropology. Today, the term has equally become one of the key words in the theological reflection on the Church. It is very important in the life of the Church for her constant self-awareness and definition of her goals and objectives. The Church is called every day to remain faithful and true to her identity and mission in imitation to the identity and mission of her master and founder Jesus Christ. Lack of identity is lack of objective, mission and vision. A Church with false identity cannot represent the true Church of Christ and so cannot achieve the Will of Christ and the mission of the Church. The extent the Church discovers and remains faithful to her true identity will determine how well she will be able to carry out her mission here on earth. The purpose of this work therefore, is to discover and describe the identity of the Catholic Church in Igboland. It is hoped that through the discovery and attainment of her true identity as a local Church in Igboland, Igbo Catholicism will feel at home in Igboland. It will no longer be seen as a stranger or intruder because of her constant clashes and altercations with Igbo cultures, inadequate understanding of her teachings, lack of fulfilment in her liturgical worships etc.

The work seeks to offer a methodological study of the identity of the Catholic Church in Igboland which itself consists of different kinds, namely; historical identity, socio-cultural identity, moral and theological identity and finally, pastoral identity in the context of

contemporary challenges. Its purpose is: to throw light on the historical identity of the Igbo Catholicism, bringing out the root, main periods and contributory events in the establishment of the Igbo Catholicism. It will equally highlight the socio-cultural identity of the local Church in Igboland, bringing out her contributions to the socio-cultural growth of the Igbos and offering better ways both for the domestication (separation of the Gospel from western culture) of the Gospel message and for a fruitful dialogue between Gospel message vis-à-vis Igbo culture in order to ensure successful evangelization, effective catechesis and fruit-bearing pastoral ministries. In line with this, the research will call for the intensification of the effort to align cultural values side by side with Christian principles in order to bring the Gospel and its demands home to the Igbos.

Furthermore, this work aims at bringing out the moral, theological (ecclesiological) and communal identity of the Igbo Catholicism which makes it a part of the Universal Church. The work will also examine the identity of the Igbo Catholicism in the context of her successes, strengths, weaknesses and challenges. It will reflect on her past and present challenges with a view of making her future better. It will proffer some possible ways and panacea through which she can overcome her challenges and weaknesses in order to attain her true identity, achieve her mission and be what Christ wishes his local Church to be. Hence, the issue of inculturation of the Catholic religion as a way to discover and achieve the true identity of the Igbo Catholicism will feature prominently. The study therefore is a solemn survey and meditation on the identity of the Igbo Catholicism. Finally, the work will present a critique on how the Igbo Catholics see and perceive the Catholic Church in Igboland today. This will be followed by a conclusion.

The Significance of the Work

Lack of adequate appreciation of Catholic doctrines and superficiality of faith among my local congregations in Igboland Nigeria, have always awoken in me the desire to make a positive contribution to my local Church especially as it concerns the discovery and attainment of the true identity of the Igbo Catholicism as well as the deepening of the Catholic faith and catechesis in Igboland. This desire became more concrete when I got the opportunity to further my theological studies at the giant citadel of learning - John Paul II Catholic University in Lublin, Poland. As a part of my contribution to my local Church, I decided to take up and dwell extensively on the identity of Igbo Catholicism. It is hoped that if the purpose, inputs, contributions, panaceas and suggestions made in this work are optimally achieved and implemented in the local Church in Igboland, It will assist intensely in making Igboland a fertile soil, an amiable ground, a favourable habitat, a welcoming environment and a friendly

home for the Gospel of Christ. It will equally contribute immensely towards adequate inculturation, stabilization and domestication of Catholicism in Igboland. It is further anticipated that the work will help to bring about profound knowledge, deep-rooted understanding, genuine acceptance, intense assimilation, great appreciation and adequate integration of Catholicism and her teachings in Igboland. Catholicism will become a part and parcel of the life of the Igbo people and no longer be seen as a visitor, something alien or foreign to the Igbo people. Paraphrasing and using the words of Chiegboka, this work will equally serve as a humble and modest venture which will launch the Igbo Catholicism into a journey of self-examination and spiritual stock-taking, taking into accounts her new dangers, new questions, new abuses, challenges and doubts in order to update, re-plan and improve the pastoral strategies of Igbo Catholicism for fruitful and better pastoral apostolate.⁶ All these will contribute significantly in the in-depth understanding of Catholic teachings and deepening of faith in the Igbo local Church. With all these, the true and real identity of the Igbo local Church will be brought to light. Dual affiliation and syncretism will be things of the past. High patronage to Pentecostalism, spiritual houses and miracle centers will stop. This will in turn help in the building and improvement of the spiritual lives of the Catholics as well as bringing more people into Catholicism. Finally, it will lead to the ultimate purpose of our creation which is the salvation of all.

Methodology and Sources

Evidently, the work is basically placed under the systematic theology since the very identity of the Church together with her mission and vision in the world are ecclesiological in nature. The study may be summarized under two major approaches: the historico-theological and the ecclesiological. Sequel to this, this work employs and combines variety of methods. In its historico-theological method, the work presents and analyses the historical identity of the Igbo Catholicism, bringing out its historical background and establishment, its historical uniqueness, events and periodization. It does all these from theological point of view bearing in mind that historical identity denotes the identity written down in the history and through the history of a local Church and is not in any way equivalent or tantamount to a body of historical literature about the Church (historiography). In its socio-cultural approach, the work is expository-descriptive in so far as the elements of the culture are exposed, examined, synthesized and purified by the Gospel message in order to ensure optimal and dynamic interplay as well as

⁶ Anthony Chiegboka, "Come Let Us Reason Together (Is 1:18) (Paper on the Reflection on the First Awka Diocesan Synod after One Year of the Publication of Acta. First Awka Diocesan Synod was held from November 5-10, 2001 at then Retreat and Pastoral Center Okpuno, Awka)

symbiotic relationship between the Igbo culture and the Gospel message. In this socio-cultural approach, the work equally describes the contributions of the Catholic Church to the socio-cultural development of the Igbo society. The expository-analytical method is equally employed to divulge and analyze the moral, theological, corporate personal and communal identity of the local Church in Igboland and at the same time noting very clearly that the local Church in Igboland is making her history and identity day by day. The approach further takes up the practical and prescriptive nature as it unravels in some comprehensive manner the challenges and obstacles to the true identity of the Catholic Church in Igboland and at the same time offers some panacea and workable ways through which the true and real identity of the Catholicism can be easily and optimally attained.

The primary sources of this research work are all the books about the origin and history of the Catholic Church in Igboland written by different Igbo theologians and historians. Catholic mission archives particularly those of the Holy Ghost Fathers in Onitsha, Nigeria were also consulted. Many relevant Catholic missionary journals, official directorates, Church magazines and bulletins both in Igboland and in Nigeria in general were also examined and consulted. Some books like the Holy Scripture, various Magisterial Documents (Documents of Pope, Church Councils and the Documents of the Roman Decasteries) and dictionaries, encyclopedias, the biblical commentaries, theological works on catechesis and evangelization, various diocesan synod Acta in Igboland, libraries both in Nigeria, America and beyond were all consulted. Finally, my personal experiences, the materials from the internet, e-mails, interviews and some other field research form the part of the sources of the work.

Structure of the Work

The work commenced with an introduction, four chapters and conclusion. Each chapter is initiated with a little explanation about the particular identity in the chapter and it ends with a summary. Chapter one will concentrate on an in-depth study of the historical identity of the Catholic Church in Igboland. It will focus on the beginning, establishment as well as on the main periods in the history of the Catholic Church in Igboland, aiming at bringing to light her peculiar historical identity. It will also state briefly the initial problems and setbacks encountered by the early missionaries. The chapter will end with main historical events that contributed in the establishment of her identity as well as the present identity of the Igbo Catholicism. Chapter two will highlight the socio-cultural identity of the Igbo speaking Church. It will focus on the role of the Church as the agent of socialization, on the concept of culture as well as on the relationship between the Gospel message and Igbo culture. Worthy of note in this chapter also is the need for more fruitful and more productive relationship between the

Christian message and Igbo culture. The chapter ends with the contributions of the Catholic Church to the socio-cultural growth and development of the Igbo society.

Chapter three features the moral and theological (ecclesiological) identity of the Igbo Catholicism. It presents both the concept of morality in traditional Igbo society and moral aspect of Igbo Catholicism. Similarly, the chapter equally focuses on both the universal theological (ecclesiological) identity of the Catholic Church and the particular theological (ecclesiological) identity of the Igbo Catholic Church. The chapter further describes the identity of the 13 local Churches in Igboland. It ends with the corporate personal and community identity of the local Church under study. The last chapter which is chapter four concentrates on the pastoral identity of the Igbo Catholicism in the context of contemporary challenges. It takes up in details the various pastoral methods and evangelization strategies operative in Igboland today. Most importantly here, the chapter delves extensively into the challenges and obstacles that prevent the Catholic Church in Igboland from attaining her true identity as well as the challenges and weaknesses that deface her already attained identity. The culmination point of this chapter comes with some strong proposals and recommendations that can lead the Igbo Catholicism to her true and real identity. The first among them is authentic and adequate inculturation.

Finally, a critical study of the present identity of the Igbo Catholicism will be presented here. The general conclusion of this doctoral research will recapitulate the entire work with attention on the salient points raised in the course of the research and study. It will also revolve round my own contributions which will be various recommendations and means through which the Igbo Catholicism can discover and remain faithful to her identity in order to remain true to the identity and will of her founder Jesus Christ. Included here also will be some ways on how to make the Catholicism in Igboland more homely and more incultured to the Igboland and its culture, how to make Catholic Church in Igboland a part and parcel of Igbo life, how to make the Catholic Church in Igboland drink Igbo water, breathe Igbo air and eat Igbo food.

General Background of Igboland and its People

Igboland is located in the South-eastern part of Nigeria. Nigeria is one of the countries in the West Africa. She prides herself as the ‘giant of Africa’ thanks to its population which is today estimated to be about 194,615,054 million people.”⁷ Nigeria is made up of 36 administrative States in addition to Federal Capital Territory Abuja. “Overall statistics indicate that about 50% of the Nigerian population are Muslim, about 40% Christians and about 10% practise African

⁷ Robert Nwadiaru, *Nigeria, A Failed State: Profound Treatise on a Crippled Giant* (Oklahoma: Tate Publishing Company, 2017), 144.

Traditional Religions.”⁸ Nigeria is divided into six geopolitical zones namely North Central, North East, North West, South South and South West and South East. The Igbo people live in South-eastern Nigeria. They are socially and culturally diverse, consisting of many subgroups. Although they live in scattered groups of villages and towns with different dialects, they all speak one language called Igbo language. The Igbos have no common traditional story of their origins. The origins of the Igbo people have been the subject of much speculation, and it is only in the last fifty years that any real work has been carried out in this subject. “Historians have proposed two major theories of Igbo origins. One claims the existence of a Jewish/ Egyptian origin. The other claims that the Igbo are descended from waves of immigrants from the north and the west who arrived in the ninth century in the core areas of Igboland which is today known as nuclear Igboland.”⁹

“According to the Jewish/Egyptian origin of Igbo people, a man called Eri was the progenitor of Igbo people. He lived in Egypt and was the special adviser on religious matters to the 5th dynasty of Pharaohs of Egypt.”¹⁰ Eri from Israel was the fifth son of Gad, the seventh son of Jacob (Gen 46:15-18 and Num 26:16:18). He migrated from Egypt with a group of companions just before the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt many centuries ago. They travelled by water and finally arrived at the confluence of Ezu and Omambala (Anambra) Rivers, located in present-day Aguleri in Igboland, where according to oral tradition, it was spiritually or divinely revealed to Eri that the point was to be their final destination and settlement. They moved into the hinterland and settled in the present-day Aguleri. Eri lived and died at Aguleri. It was from here that the three children of Eri spread to various parts of Igboland today. His last son, Menri aslo left Aguleri and settled at a big forest, where he engaged in hunting and farming, while also performing his spiritual work. He called the settlement Agu-Ukwu (Nri).

However, “contemporary views in Igbo scholarship dismiss completely these claims of Jewish/ Egyptian origin—that is, ‘the Hamitic hypothesis’—as ‘the oriental mirage.’”¹¹ Instead, there is one current opinion as a result of evidence derived from several sources that take into account oral history, archaeology, linguistics, and art history. Analysis of the sources that are available (fragmentary oral traditions and correlation of cultural traits) have led to the “belief that there exists core areas of Igboland, and that waves of immigrant communities from the north and west planted themselves on the border of these core areas as early as the ninth

⁸ Nwadiaru, Nigeria, *A Failed State: Profound Treatise on a Crippled Giant*, 164.

⁹ Adiele Eberechukwu Afigbo, *Prolegomena to the study of the culture history of the Igbo-Speaking Peoples of Nigeria, Igbo Language and Culture* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), 28.

¹⁰ Vincent Ujumadu, “Where did Igbo Originate From?,” *Vanguard Newspapers*, 10 August, 2014,1.

¹¹ Katharine Slattery, “The Igbo People- Origin and History” (PhD diss., University of Oxford, 1975).

century. These core areas are Awka-Orlu, Owerri and Nsukka-Okigwe.”¹² “One suggests the Awka-Orlu uplands as the centre of Igbo origin, from which dispersal took place. The second and more recent opinion suggests the region of the Niger-Benue confluence as the area of descent some five thousand years ago, and the plateau region, that is, the Nsukka-Okigwe Cuesta, as the area of Igbo settlement.”¹³ This first area of settlement would include Nsukka-Okigwe and Awka-Orlu uplands. It was from these core areas that Igbos spread to the various parts where they live today. From 1434 to 1807, the Niger coast was a contact point between European and African traders. This was also the period of trade in slaves. The Portuguese came to Nigerian coastal towns between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. They were the first Europeans to make contact with the Igbo. The Dutch followed in the seventeenth century and the British came in the eighteenth century. In the late nineteenth century, mission Christianity and colonialist interest worked together for the colonization of Igboland. The Protectorate of Southern Nigeria, created in 1900, included Igboland. “Until 1960, Nigeria remained a British colony, and the Igbo were British subjects. On October 1, 1960, Nigeria became an independent nation structured as a federation of states.”¹⁴

Geographically, Igbo-speaking individuals today live all over Nigeria and in diverse countries of the world. As a people, however, the Igbo are located on both sides of the River Niger and occupy most of south-eastern Nigeria. The area measures over 41,000 square kilometres (of about 15,800 square miles). Demographically, the people of Igboland constitute the entire Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo states. “The most recent estimation of Igbo population in early 2017 is about 30 million.”¹⁵ Religiously, Igboland is predominantly Christians. The Christian community is composed of Roman Catholics (the largest denomination), Methodists, Anglicans, Baptists, Presbyterians, and members of Evangelical and Pentecostal groups. “The total population of the Catholics in Igboland is about 14.1 million.”¹⁶

Having seen the general background of Igboland and its people, the next to be discussed in this chapter are Igbo Traditional Religion and Protestant Mission before the advent of Catholicism. There are two maps below namely figures A and B. The figure A shows the location of Nigeria in Africa in the world map while figure B shows the map of Nigeria indicating her neighbouring countries with Niger in the North, Cameroon in the South, Chad

¹² Slattery, “The Igbo People- Origin and History” (PhD diss., University of Oxford, 1975).

¹³ Slattery, “The Igbo People- Origin and History” (PhD diss., University of Oxford, 1975).

¹⁴ Afigbo, *Prolegomena to the study of the culture history of the Igbo-Speaking Peoples of Nigeria, Igbo Language and Culture*, 58.

¹⁵ Nwadiaru, *Nigeria, A Failed State: Profound Treatise on a Crippled Giant*, 163.

¹⁶ Cf. 2017 and 2018 Liturgical Diaries and Directories of the 13 Catholic Archdioceses (2) and Dioceses (11) in Igboland.

in the East and Benin in the West. It also shows the 36 States of Nigeria with particular reference to the five Igbo states of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo.



Figure A, The Map of the world



Figure B, The Map of Nigeria

Igbo Traditional Religion

Religion is one of man's inherent attributes. The Catechism of the Catholic Church explains thus, "in many ways throughout history down to the present day, men have given expression to their quest for God in their religious beliefs and behaviour, in their prayers, sacrifices, rituals and meditations. These forms of religious expressions despite the ambiguities they often bring with them are so universal that one may well call man a religious being."¹⁷ Africa is a very vast continent with so many countries, ethnic groups and tribes. Africans have been very religious and like other peoples of the world, their religion has known many forms. Each of the tribes and ethnic groups that makes up Africa has its own unique and particular religion which all together make up African Traditional Religions. Igboland is one of the tribes in Nigeria and in

¹⁷ Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2003), no. 28.

Africa in general. The people of Igboland have their unique and particular religion called Igbo Traditional Religion. Igbo Traditional Religion is the native and indigenous religion of the Igbo people before the advent of Christianity. It involves the indigenous religious beliefs and practices of the Igbo people. The word “Traditional means indigenous, something which is aboriginal or foundational, handed down from generation to generation, upheld and practised by the African people today.”¹⁸ The declared adherents of the indigenous religion are very conservative, resisting the influence of modernism heralded by the colonial era, including the introduction of Christianity, western education and improved medical facilities. Igbo Traditional Religion is oral rather than scriptural. In the words of Ikenga-Metuh and Ejizu, “The Igbo people are extremely religious people. Their life is pervaded by a strong feeling of the presence of the supernatural. No aspect of human life is excluded from the influence of the spirits.”¹⁹ In this sense, the Igbo makes no clear distinction between the sacred and the profane. This is clearly illustrated by Igbo beliefs and practices of sacred prohibitions (Nso) and sacrifices (Ichu Aja). The world as the Igbo people know it, is full of spirits. Their world is not limited to the material world of visible beings but includes the realm of invisible beings.

According to Jordan, “every Igbo man believes that an invisible universe is in action all around him, and his term of life was short if he happened to fall foul of its denizens.”²⁰ The principal objects of belief and worship in Igbo Traditional Religion are: ‘Chukwu’ (God), ‘Mmuo’ (Deities), ‘Arusi’ (Spirit-forces), ‘Ndiichie’ (Ancestors), ‘Amosu’ (Witches) and ‘Ogwu’ (Medicine). Among the adherents of the Igbo Traditional Religion, ‘Chukwu’ (God) is the Supreme Being. He is believed to be the Creator of all things. Hence, He is sometimes called ‘Chineke’, the Creator. He is equally called ‘Osebuluwa’, the Carrier of the world, because Igbos believe that He still sustains the world.

It is also a general belief among the adherents of Igbo Traditional Religion that God creates and cares for each individual person. This is expressed in the Igbo belief that when God creates a person, He gives him a personal ‘Chi’, the guardian spirit. The second object of belief among the adherents of the Igbo Traditional Religion is the existence of the Deities, ‘Mmuo’. “Deities ‘Mmuo’ are generally regarded as good spirits. They are non-human spirits created by God to help him govern and shepherd the different sections of the universe. Some have their abode in sky and so believed to be nearer to God. Deities like ‘Anyanwu’ (Sun), ‘Amadioha’ (Thunder) and ‘Igwe’ (Sky) are believed to be sons of God and sometimes act as his agents.”²¹

¹⁸ John Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann Books Ltd, 1969), 129.

¹⁹ Emefie Ikenga-Metuh and Christopher Ejizu, introduction to *Hundred Years of Catholicism in Eastern Nigeria 1885-1985: The Nnewi Story*, (Nimo: Asele Institute, 1985), xvi.

²⁰ John Jordan, *Bishop Shanahan of Southern Nigeria* (Dublin: Elo Press, 1971), 28.

²¹ Ikenga-Metuh and Ejizu, introduction, xvi.

Igbos also believe in the existence of Ancestors (Ndiichie). Ancestors are believed to be the spirits of the dead members of the family and lineage. Ancestors are mainly the dead elders of the family. After the burial and the funeral rites of an old man who is believed to have lived a good life, a shrine is set up on his behalf. This shrine signifies his arrival and reception into the ranks of the ancestors in the spirit world. The most important symbol of the ancestors is 'Ofo' (a symbol of authority) which is normally a small branch of a wood or tree. This 'Ofo' is always at the custodian of the first son of the family and it usually signifies the living presence of the ancestors. It is normally brought out during family meetings or while settling disputes in the name of the ancestors. The concept of 'Dibia' (Medicine Man) is also common among the adherent of Igbo Traditional Religion. 'Dibia' uses the herbal medicines and magical rites in doing their duties for the well-being of the human beings. Generally, the Igbo Traditional Religion is solely concerned with this world and its affairs.

The adherents of the Igbo Traditional Religion believe that the end or the goal of religion is to bring success and happiness in this life. Long life, good health and prosperity are signs of blessings and favours received from God and Spirits. The presence of these blessings and favours show that one has fulfilled his religious obligations and has won the favours of the deities, spirits and ancestors. These blessings are signs of life well lived. The culmination of a successful life is befitting funeral rite, for this is the rite of passage to ancestorship. According to Ikenga-Metuh, "only those who become ancestors may reincarnate to continue the cycle of life. For the visible world is preferable to the spirit world, though the ancestors who live there are believed to be more powerful."²² Igbo Traditional Religion²³ is the original religion of the Igbo people before the advent of Christianity and Islam in some parts of Igboland.

Protestant Missions (Separated Brethren in the light of Vatican II) in Igboland, Eastern Nigeria (1840-1885) before the Advent of Catholicism

The Protestant missions (Our Separated Brethren in the light of Vatican II 'Unitatis Redintegratio') were the first to plant the seed of Christianity in Igboland, Eastern Nigeria. "The first Christian mission to establish on the Eastern side of the Niger was the Presbyterians."²⁴ The Presbyterians established their first mission in Calabar in 1846 under the leadership of Hope Waddel. However, the C.M.S. (Church Missionary Society) was the first

²² Ikenga-Metuh and Ejizu, introduction, xvi.

²³ Francis Arinze, *Sacrifice in Igbo Traditional Religion* (Onitsha: St. Stephen Press, 2008), Francis Arinze, *Sacrifice in Ibo Religion* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1970), Chika Okpalike, *Ichuaja in Igbo Traditional Religion: A Comparative Study with Sacrifice in Judaism, Hinduism and Christianity* (Bloomington Indiana: IUUniverse Press, 2008).

²⁴ Emefie Ikenga-Metuh & Christopher Ejizu, *Hundred Years of Catholicism in Eastern Nigeria, 1885-1985: The Nnewi Story* (Nimo: Asele Institute, 1985), 4.

to visit Igboland Eastern Nigeria and the first to open a mission station in Igboland. The strong anti-slavery campaign and missionary feeling which began in Britain in the beginning of the 19th century led to the mission of the first Niger expedition in 1841. This expedition was championed by Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton. In his book called “The Slave Trade and its Remedy, he strongly argued that Africa can be regenerated only through the Bible and the Plough.”²⁵ The aim of the expedition was to introduce trade and Christianity along the basins of the two great rivers in Igboland, Eastern Nigeria namely River Niger and River Benue. The expedition was equally aimed at introducing a model farm at the confluence. This aim was in line with the recommendations of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton. Among the team of this expedition were members of the Church Missionary Society namely Henry Townsend and Rev. John Fredrick Schon, a German missionary of the C.M.S. Others were Samuel Ajayi Crowther, a Yoruba Christian ex-slave and a young African catechist. Also, among the group was Igbo ex-slave from Sierra Leone, Simon Jonas who acted as an interpreter to the group. However, this expedition was a disaster. It did not succeed. It was foiled by many unfavourable conditions. But the organizers were not deterred.

“Other expeditions were organised and carried out in 1854 and 1857 by the British government, Macgregor and the C.M.S. The 1857 expedition championed by Dr. Baikie was very successful. It led to the establishment of the C.M.S. mission station at Onitsha in Igboland in 26th July 1857.”²⁶ Having signed some agreements with the chiefs and the traders already in the area, Rev. John Taylor, an ex-slave of Igbo origin was placed in-charge of the new mission station. This was how the first recorded missionary operation began in Igboland, Nigeria. Taylor contributed immensely towards the spread of the C.M.S. in Igboland in particular and Nigeria in general. He was well received by the people probably because he was of Igbo parentage and also out of the curiosity of the people for novelty. Besides, the people saw the presence of missionaries and traders in their town as a very big blessing, honour and privilege which other towns in Igboland did not have.

The missionaries began their evangelization by gathering ex-slaves, social outcasts and the neglect of the Igbo society. They were kept in the mission house. The gathering of these groups of people gave the missionaries a good start but it also had its own disadvantage because, it kept some people away from Church especially the free-born who will not like to associate with these ex-slaves and outcasts. Taylor and his missionary team later supplemented

²⁵ Thomas Fowell Buxton, *The Slave Trade and its Remedy*, quoted in Emefie Ikenga-Metuh and Christopher Ejizu, *Hundred Years of Catholicism in Eastern Nigeria, 1885-1985: The Nnewi Story* (Nimo: Asele Institute, 1985), 4.

²⁶ Ikenga-Metuh and Ejizu, *Hundred Years of Catholicism in Eastern Nigeria, 1885-1985: The Nnewi Story*, 4.

their work of evangelization with school apostolate. They believed strongly that schools have a great role to play in the work of evangelization. With school apostolate, more people began to join the growing Christian community because the quality of life of the Christian was higher than that of the average member of the traditional society. Some saw Christianity as a sign of a new source of wealth, power and influence associated with the white men, the traders and the missionaries. Some even became Christians to escape the unbearable contributions for traditional ritual practices. The missionaries made great converts within a shortest possible time. As they were still rejoicing for the progress they have made in their work, problems and crises started coming up. The advice and the attitude which the missionaries gave as well as inculcated into the newly converted Christians to dissociate themselves from much contacts both with the adherents of Igbo Traditional Religion and Igbo traditional beliefs and practices, began to create ill-feelings between Christians and non-Christians in the society. Some converts also found the demands of Christianity very stressful and burdensome.

However, more serious problems arose in 1867 when disagreement and discord arose between John Taylor and other agents of C.M.S. "These agents who were also co-workers with Taylor accused him of being highhanded and very authoritarian. To solve this problem, Bishop Crowther removed Taylor from Onitsha in 1869 and replaced him with his rival W.G. Romanie who joined the mission in 1859. Taylor left in anger and protest and accused bishop of bias and great partiality."²⁷ The C.M.S Christians at Onitsha were scandalised by this in-fighting and were not happy with the treatment given to Taylor. "Another factor that led to more crisis was the replacement of African missionaries with the British missionaries. At this period, there was scramble for Africa. Many European countries were competing for Africa, trying to take control of Africa politically and economically."²⁸ Britain did not want to take chances. For them, one of the best ways to take control of Africa and Nigeria in particular was to replace all the African missionaries with British missionaries. This they did immediately. The Christians and converts who were all Africans, Nigerians and Igbos were not happy with such racial change.

As C.M.S. missions were battling for survival, they were again struck with another major problem that brought in more crisis and disaster. The problem was the dismissal of all African missionaries from C.M.S. missionary activities and evangelization and their replacement with European missionaries. Although, the European traders and the African missionaries (Missionaries of African origin and parentage like Crowther, Taylor etc) of the

²⁷ Ikenga-Metuh and Ejizu, *Hundred Years of Catholicism in Eastern Nigeria, 1885-1985: The Nnewi Story*, 5.

²⁸ Ikenga-Metuh and Ejizu, *Hundred Years of Catholicism in Eastern Nigeria, 1885-1985: The Nnewi Story*, 5.

C.M.S. came to Igboland in the same boat and had been working together for decades, they had never been the best of friends. The missionaries had often been embarrassed by the irreligious and immoral behaviour of the European traders. Crowther and some of his agents had to report to the C.M.S. headquarters, Salisbury in London, that “with the exception of a very few, the character of the foreigners in this country is very detrimental to the cause of the Christianity.”²⁹ The African mission agents themselves were not faultless, as Crowther himself admitted. The traders were quick to capitalise on that, and the reports of their immoral behaviour and competence reached Salisbury Square in such number that the secretary of the C.M.S. set up a Commission of Inquiry in 1878 to investigate the nature of the C.M.S. missionary work in Igboland. The measures taken on the basis of the recommendation of this Commission were drastic. Effectively, African missionaries were dismissed because Wood’s report revealed such a state of moral delinquency on the part of the agents of the mission. European missionaries were sent to take their places. The Bishop’s (Crowther’s) powers were purely limited to the episcopal matters. Conditions were made so unbearable for those who were left that many decided to resign. As accusations, anger, frustrations, ill-feelings, dismissals and resignations continued, the C.M.S. at this point was in total disorder and chaos. Many C.M.S. mission stations opened earlier began to dwindle because there was no more teacher to continue the leadership role. At this point, people got fed up with C.M.S. mission.

This was exactly the situation of the Anglican Mission (C.M.S.) when the Catholic Mission set its foot in Igboland precisely at Onitsha on 5 December, 1885.

²⁹ Ikenga-Metuh and Ejizu, *Hundred Years of Catholicism in Eastern Nigeria, 1885-1985: The Nnewi History*, 7-8.

CHAPTER ONE

HISTORICAL IDENTITY

It was Pope Celestine VI who once said that “Every history is the history of God. Every history is a Gospel. If one eliminates God from history, one will not be able to understand even the history of man which is just an episode, a chapter, a reflection of the history of God.”³⁰ The above statement contains an element of truth going by the nature of the history of the Catholic Church in Igboland. The history of the Catholic Church in Igboland, Eastern Nigeria can be better and more meaningfully understood only in the context of divine intervention in the history of the black people of the Lower Niger. The mystery of incarnation of Christ has been the greatest and the most significant event in the history of salvation of all mankind. This mystery has changed and shaped human destiny. Christ came into the world so that all mankind may see the salvation of God. According to Cullen, “Nearly 2000 years ago, Christ founded the Church which is like a caravan, like a group of people crossing a desert to a distant city. In their march, they are exposed to hardships like thirst, hunger, sandstorms and attacks by enemies. The Church is the caravan of Christ.....”³¹

Since God willed all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the Truth, He sent the early Catholic missionaries to come to Igboland in Eastern Nigeria to lead the people of Igboland into this caravan of the family of God. Divine Providence wanted the people of Igboland to experience and witness the salvation of God and so sent the missionaries to lead them to the Truth- CHRIST. Therefore, the history of Igboland and Igbo people can best be understood as a translation of a transcendental and supernatural history. Every human person is created in the image and likeness of God. Every man has a purpose. Therefore, one cannot examine the affairs of his family without taking into account his Father and Creator who is God Himself. Following this therefore, one sees immediately in line with Pope Clement VI, “That human history is the history of God in man in so far as God is realized on earth through man, made by Him in His image and restored by Him to that likeness by means of the redemption.”³² God in His infinite love and mercy brought His Good news of salvation to the people of Igboland at His appointed time in history precisely in 1885. Therefore, the Catholic Church in Igboland has her own mission, history and identity. Generally speaking, historical identity of a

³⁰ Giovanni Papini, (ed), “The Letters of Pope Celestine VI to all mankind,” trans., from Italian by Loretta Murnane, (New York: 1948), 128, quoted in Celestine Obi, “Background to the Planting of the Catholic Christianity in the Lower Niger,” in *Hundred Years of the Catholic Church in Eastern Nigeria 1885-1985*, ed., Celestine Obi (Onitsha: Africana-Fep Publishers Ltd, 1985), 2.

³¹ Malachy Cullen, *The Story of the Church* (Jos: Illis, 1980), 1.

³² Papini, “The Letters of Pope Celestine VI to all Mankind,” trans., from Italian by Loretta Murnane, (New York: 1948), 128, quoted in Celestine Obi, “Background to the Planting of the Catholic Christianity in the Lower Niger,” 3.

local Church can be described as the study of the historical genesis, peculiarities, features and characteristics of the historical events and institutions in the society in the past, in all its aspect, in relation to present developments and future hopes. It is the story of a Church in time, an inquiry into the past based on living evidences and life experiences. Ecclesiastically speaking, historical identity of a local or particular Church denotes the identity written down in the history and through the history of a local or particular Church, in this case the local Church in Igboland. It is not equivalent or tantamount to the Church's historiography. In discussing the historical identity of any event or institution in our society today, the idea of historical beginning first comes to mind. Historical beginning is an intrinsic part of the historical identity of any human experience or activity. Historical beginning is an inquest and analysis into what happened in the past, when it happened, and how it happened. It is an inquiry into the inevitable changes in human affairs in the past and the ways these changes affect, influence or determine the patterns of life in the society. "Bearing in mind that from the theological perspective, every local and particular Church's origins are the same as the origins of the Universal Church, every Church has her own historical beginning which throws light on understanding of her identity."³³

For proper understanding and clarity therefore, in discussing the historical identity of the Catholic Church in Igboland, a big room should be given to her historical beginning. When, why and how did the Church start to exist in Igboland? Who was at the beginning and what happened at that time? Usually, a historical beginning as an effect of receiving the Gospel with an open heart is in itself an identity-creative event in the memory of the Church. It has made her who she is. She can always, if necessary turn back to the spirit of her beginning. Another intrinsic part of historical identity is the main periods involved in the history of any event. A periodization of the history makes the understanding of the identity of any historical event easier. Similarly, a periodization of the history of the Catholic Church in Igboland will help to make the grasp and understanding of her identity better, easier and clearer. It could present what stages (growth, difficulties, persecutions and successes) she went through and how much she was tested (experienced, made stronger or weaker) by the passing of time. Historical identity takes into account also the identity established in the past. "In practice, it indicates the most important historical events like papal visits, public promises to accept the Catholic faith, synods, historical acts, decisions as well as the most influential persons, saints, martyrs, blessed people, charismatic pastors and spiritual leaders which helped in shaping the identity of the Church."³⁴ In this case therefore, this will mean the historical events and influential persons

³³ Krzysztof Kaucha, "The Identity of Local and Particular Catholic Churches: Methodological Outline," *Roczniki Teologiczne*, Tom LXIV, zeszyt 9 (2017): 51-52.

³⁴ Krzysztof Kaucha, "The Identity of Local and Particular Catholic Churches: Methodological Outline," 52.

who played important and remarkable roles in the establishment and creation of the identity of the Catholic Church in Igboland for a long time or in the past. In discussing the historical identity of the Catholic Church in Igboland therefore, all these important historical events and influential persons will be brought to light. Finally, historical identity also consists of present historical identity. Present historical identity denotes the entity of the Church which is created and witnessed by people living today. It is possible that for present generations in a local and particular Church, her old history could seem to be a matter of the past. The chapter one of this work which is the historical identity of the Catholic Church in Igboland will begin with a discourse on the beginnings of the Catholic Church in Igboland. This will include background, establishment and founding of the Catholic Church in Igboland. The initial problems of the early missionaries will equally be discussed here. Next will be the main periods in the history of the Catholic Church in Igboland as well as their inputs to the identity of the Igbo Catholicism. This will be followed by the historical events that established the identity of the Catholic Church in Igboland. The chapter will be concluded with the present identity of the Catholic Church in Igboland.

I. Beginning of the Catholic Church in Igboland

The beginning of the Catholic Church in Igboland is one that is really marked with a unique history. The Catholic Church was not there at the beginning of the Igbo people. It came to be at a particular point in time. It is a historical and timely event in the lives of the Igbo people. Certain factors and events led to her establishment. These factors and events help in the shaping of her identity. The first to be discussed under the beginnings of the Catholic Church in Igboland is the background to her establishment. Other unique features and distinctive characteristics that make the Igbo Catholicism what she is will equally come in view.

1. Background to the Establishment of the Catholic Church in Igboland

West Africa received the true faith in the context of colonization and a dehumanizing phenomenon like the slave trade. “The inhuman trafficking in human lives went on for over three hundred years during which a large population of Africans was transported into Europe, the United States and the Central and South America such that by the end of the 18th century, Eastern Nigeria alone supplied more than 20,000 slaves.”³⁵ Kidnapping and selling an enemy or a rival into slavery was the people’s way of expressing man’s inhumanity to man in those days of obscurity and not yet enlightened by the Gospel of Christ. Many of these slaves died

³⁵ Celestine Obi, “Background to the Planting of Catholic Christianity in the Lower Niger,” in *A Hundred Years of the Catholic Church in Eastern Nigeria, 1885-1895*, ed. Celestine Obi, (Onitsha: Africana-Fep Publishers Ltd, 1985), 3.

en route due to the merciless torture, starvation and exposition to the asperities of the weather. A large number of them however survived in the new world where many eventually became Christians. Anti-slavery movements were formed in England many years before the official decree of abolition in 1807. Abolitionists took the campaign inside Africa itself and sought to bring the slave trade to an end. Inside Africa, the abolitionists preached against slavery. They also embarked upon agricultural development. They saw these means as only effective ways to end the trans-Atlantic slave trade and to make amends to down trodden Africa for the many wrongs Europe had done to her. Emancipation did come at long last and many slaves regained their freedom. After their emancipation, thousands of these ex-slaves wanted to return to their original homes in West Africa. “Thus, in 1787, 377 black poor slaves landed in Freetown, Sierra Leone, followed by 1,200 in 1792, 550 slaves in 1800 and 40,000 in 1850.”³⁶ A piece of land of about 52 square kilometres was purchased for them and they settled there. These ex-slaves belonged to various Christian Church denominations. As members of various Christian denominations, they built Churches and chapels and continued to worship according to their various faith traditions and denominations. These groups of ex-slaves became instrumental in bringing salvation to the West Africans just as Joseph was to his brothers in Egypt. They were instrumental in bringing the new faith- Catholicism to their kith and kin in Nigeria particularly in Igboland, Eastern Nigeria. Already at this point in Freetown, Sierra Leone, non-Catholic Christianity was already very strong while Catholic faith was still very feeble and shallow among the ex-slaves.

Anglican mission had already in 1804 founded the Fourah Bay College for the training of Africans as teachers, catechists and clergymen. Anglican chaplains like Patrick Frazer and Gilbert Norbert continued the cause of the Anglican Church in the west coast and drew up programmes for converting the local natives while Catholic Church and her ex-slaves members suffered from neglect and lack of attention with no missionaries to care for them. This state of affairs became a matter of concern and indeed attracted the attention of Bishop John England and Reverend Monsignor Edward Barron who were missionary minded Bishops of Charleston and Vicar General of Philadelphia respectively, both in the United States of America. Reverend Monsignor Barron therefore brought this state of affairs to the notice of the American bishops who understood it as their duty to send Catholic missionaries to these people in Sierra Leone and Liberia. As Obi reported, “in 1833, Bishop John England sent a memorandum to the Sacred

³⁶ William Avery, “Christianity in Sierra Leone,” *African Research Bulletin*, 2 (1972): 3. Also cf. Thomas Powell Buxton, *The African Slave Trade and its Remedy* (London: 1839-1840. Reprinted London: Frank Cass, 1967), 306, quoted in Celestine Obi, “Background to the Planting of Catholic Christianity in the Lower Niger,” 4.

Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, suggesting that priests be sent to work among the liberated slaves in Sierra Leone and Liberia. In the same year also, the Episcopal Council of Baltimore took up the matter and presented it to Rome before the Sacred Congregation for the Evangelization of the Peoples.”³⁷ Rome welcomed the idea and was willing to support the missionary enterprise but the task was not an easy one indeed. Missionaries could not be found to take up the project. Both Jesuits and Dominicans declined the offer probably because of the tropical diseases and high mortality rate in West Africa. West Africa was then a white man’s grave where many go in but very few come out. In 1840, Pope Gregory XVI asked the Bishop of Philadelphia and the bishop of New York to send one missionary each to Liberia and the West Coast. “On December 21, 1841, three volunteers recruited by the American hierarchy, namely: Monsignor Edward Barron, Father H. John Kelly and one Mr. Dennis Pinder set out to Liberia and they arrived at Cape Palmas in Liberia on January 31, 1842.”³⁸ In the same 1842, “Pope Gregory XVI set up the Apostolic Vicariate of the two Guineas- Upper and Lower Guineas and gave it to the Holy Ghost Fathers. He equally appointed Monsignor Edward Barron as the Apostolic Prefect of the Upper Guinea.

With this appointment, Monsignor Barron immediately left for Europe and America to campaign for more missionaries while his two companions settled down for serious apostolate in Cape Palmas.”³⁹ They were so successful that they quickly overshadowed and eclipsed the Presbyterians and C.M.S. long established there before them. On October 3, 1842, Monsignor Barron was made the Apostolic Vicar of Upper and Lower Guineas, a vast area covering the whole of West Africa down to Gabon. Again, he at once set out for Europe to look for more missionaries. It was even more difficult now to find Europeans who will willingly come to evangelize Africa. This was the period when European anthropologists, traders and journalists were giving esoteric reports and descriptions about Africa, its culture and its people. Most of the first Africans who were brought to Europe and America were men and women kidnapped and sold into slavery. Thus, Africa and African people bore a kind of stigma of inferiority and exploitation, and were regarded as the underdogs of the world. This explains why it was difficult to find missionaries amidst what could be regarded as vocation boom in Europe and America.

However, even as such times as this, the world did not lack good Samaritans, people who will give without counting the cost. Such were the seven Holy Ghost Fathers Volunteers, who at the invitation of Bishop Barron landed in Liberia in November 29, 1843. The Holy See

³⁷ Obi, “Background to the Planting of Catholic Christianity in the Lower Niger”, 5.

³⁸ Obi, “Background to the Planting of Catholic Christianity in the Lower Niger”, 6.

³⁹ Obi, “Background to the Planting of Catholic Christianity in the Lower Niger”, 6.

gave this congregation a special assignment, to rally to the support of the Africans in all the places where the people call for its help. By 1844, out of the seven Holy Ghost priests and three Brothers sent to help Bishop Barron in the Gulf of Guinea, five priests and one Brother had died and two of the survivors had been invalidated. One survivor Father Bessieux wrote to Father Libermann requesting that the congregation should not abandon Africa in spite of the death of those pioneers. Father John Bessieux and Brother Gregory carried on the missionary work. They reached the French naval station of Libreville in Gabon in September 1844. Already, Bishop Barron was beginning to be impeded by failing health and in January 1845, he retired from the active missionary work. With his retirement, Holy Ghost Fathers took over completely the management of the missions in the two Guineas. Bishop Bessieux became the Vicar Apostolic of the two Guineas in 1849.

On April 27, 1857, the Vicariate of the two Guineas was divided. With this division, Upper Guinea became the Vicariate Apostolic of Sierra Leone still ruled by Bishop Bessieux, while the Lower Guinea became the Vicariate Apostolic of Gabon ruled by Bishop Pierre Le Berre. At this stage, Onitsha in Igboland was an outstation run from Gabon. According to Chigere, “Africa was arbitrarily zoned and demarcated by the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith in order to define the operational area and spheres of influence of the various enthusiastic missionary religious bodies.”⁴⁰ That was how Igboland and the entire lower Niger fell under the then Apostolic Vicariate of Gabon, of Lower Guinea. However, this demarcation created some hazards in the sense that some missionary religious orders acquired places or areas whose size weighed beyond their supplies of personnel.

The natural order then, was to minister only to the places where their limited manpower could adequately manage to the neglect of many souls. Thus, the ecclesiastical partitioning of Africa by the Holy See for missionary purposes in the 19th century created hazards that led to the neglect of many remote areas in various vicariates and territories, including Igboland in Nigeria. However, Catholic missionaries and lay evangelizers were already in several places surrounding Nigeria before ever a particular attention was specifically directed to Igboland. The missions established in Benin, Warri, Lagos, Lokoja and Borno were somehow still smouldering with flame but significant influences had not then been extended to Igboland. “Already at this time, the Society for the African Missions (S.M.A) had visited Igboland briefly from Lagos without establishing any mission there They did not establish any instant missions neither did they attempt to influence the promising potentialities but their sightseeing and the

⁴⁰ Hygienus Chigere, *Foreign Missionary Background and Indigenous Evangelization in Igboland* (Owerri: Living Flames, 2013), 156.

vital pieces of information which they availed Rome about the fertility, the location and the position of the area helped to facilitate arrangements for a real missionary ventures down the Igboland.”⁴¹ This could be explained from the fact, the Igboland or the Lower Niger was outside their jurisdiction and more so “because the rivalry among the European agents namely: explorers, traders and missionaries alike did not favour undue claims and interference from other more foreign counterparts.”⁴² According to Ekechi, “as early as 15th century, various western people from Europe and America have already engaged themselves in various trades and activities in Igboland and as early as mid-18th century, Igboland had been occupied by other Christian denominations like C.M.S., Presbyterians and Methodists.”⁴³ In effect therefore, information was not lacking about Igboland and its people. Reports were already in circulation about these black people who knew no Christian God.

In these areas, there existed only minor missionary activities especially from the Church Missionary Societies conducted mainly by the ex-slaves or freed slaves who wondered about in search of rehabilitation. They were the first to reach out to their people with the new religion and had no language and culture problems. They were taken away from this Igbo soil and have not lost completely things that mattered in their native and traditional cultural Igbo background. For these Catholics however, nothing has been put on ground. Nothing was organised and Catholic Church had no base in the area. Onitsha in Igboland was what could be called an outstation, a quasi-parish run from Gabon. There was no real Catholic population except for a few Catholics mainly from Sierra Leone who were working with the European merchants as junior clerks, interpreters, messengers, cooks and stewards. For this reason, Igboland was not given serious attention by the missionaries working in Gabon.

However, this lack of attention to the Igboland was cut short when the Society for the African Mission (S.M.A) and the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith (Propaganda Fide) through the instrumentality of the Holy Ghost Fathers decided to focus their attention and work of evangelization in Igboland instead of leaving it as an outstation run from Gabon. The pressure on the Holy Ghost Congregation to begin a thorough evangelization work in Igboland Eastern Nigeria came from the Society for the African Missions (S.M.A) who were already working in some parts of Nigeria during this period. Bishop Brown of Newport, England wrote to S.M.A authorities expressing the wish of Princess Mary Josephine Pepple, the daughter of King George Pepple 1 of Bonny, who requested that Catholic missionaries be

⁴¹ Felix Ekechi, *Missionary Enterprise and Rivalry in Igboland 1857-1914* (London: Frank Cass and Company Ltd, 1972), 72.

⁴² Vincent Nwosu, “Growth of the Catholic Church on Onitsha Ecclesiastical Province,” in *The Growth of the Catholic Church in Nigeria*, ed. Alexius Makozi et al. (Lagos: Macmillan Nigeria Publishers Ltd, 1982), 38.

⁴³ Ekechi, *Missionary Enterprise and Rivalry in Igboland 1857-1914*, 71.

sent to open a Catholic mission in her home. The S.M.A authorities referred the letter to the Holy Ghost Fathers. The Holy Ghost Fathers did not follow up this invitation. The Vicar Apostolic of Lower Guinea, Vicariate of Gabon, Bishop Le Pierre Berre who was in charge of the Holy Ghost Congregation has confessed his inability to extend his pastoral visits to Onitsha in Igboland on account of the great distance and transport difficulties. The Propaganda Fide has pressurised the Holy Ghost Fathers to open a mission in Igboland but to no avail. In 1884, it threatened to include Igboland, Eastern Nigeria and Cameroon in a new Prefecture in the Niger Benue Territory as requested by the Father Plangue, the Superior of the S.M.A. Monsignor Emonet who was at this time the Superior of the Holy Ghost Congregation raised objection about the proposed inclusion of the territories under the jurisdiction of the Holy Ghost Fathers in the new S.M.A Prefecture. It was at this stage that the Holy Ghost Congregation began to plan seriously on how to begin evangelization work in the territory of Igboland, Eastern Nigeria.

“In February 1885, Bishop Le Pierre Berre, the Vicar Apostolic of Gabon wrote to the Spiritan Mother House in France asking for permission to open a new field in Igboland. The reaction was favourable. On August 10, 1885, the Mother House through her Superior General, Very Rev. Fr. Emonet made a request to the Director of the work of the Propagation of the Faith in Paris asking for funds in order to open up a new mission on the right bank of the River that is, in Igboland and its affluent.”⁴⁴ The superior of the Holy Ghost Fathers also addressed another letter to the superior of the S.M.A requesting a detailed information about the Igboland. The information about the location and geography of Igboland was provided for him by Father Leon Lejeune who has visited the main estuary of the River Niger and obtained some useful information on the nature of the hinterland from an intelligent river chief. With all these pieces of information and funds gotten, everything was set to establish Catholic Church in Igboland.

2. The Founding of the Catholic Church in Igboland (1885)

Father Joseph Lutz, a French Alsatian priest, a man of energy, enterprise and intelligence who was till then the superior at Rio Ponge, left the mother house in Paris in the company of the newly professed Father Horne and brothers Hermas and Jean-Grotto on September 19, 1885. They had a well-defined objective namely- “to plant the Catholic faith in Igboland, South-Eastern Nigeria.”⁴⁵ Akassa was the first place they touched in hope that they will take a boat from there to Lokoja. “But on arriving at Akassa on November 20, one captain Christian, an agent of the Royal Niger Company refused them passage up river to Lokoja which was their

⁴⁴ Ikenga-Metuh and Ejizu, *Hundred Years of Catholicism in Eastern Nigeria, 1885-1985: The Nnewi Story*, 11.

⁴⁵ Obi, *Background to the Planting of the Catholic Christianity in the Lower Niger*, 11.

targeted destination, on the ground that they were unknown and had no recommendation or letter of any kind from the director in London.”⁴⁶ Disappointed but undaunted, the missionaries proceeded to Brass. Arriving the next day 21st November, they introduced themselves to the English company agent, Mr Charles Townsend, a member of Christian Mission Society (Anglican) who fortunately had made acquaintance with Bishop Le Pierre Berre in Gabon. Townsend welcomed them into his house and offered to take them up the Niger in his own steamer. The two priests left for Onitsha with Mr Townsend on 25 November, leaving behind the two brothers to look after the remainder of their 70 trunks luggage which they were unable to take with them. They arrived at Onitsha on the 5 December, 1885. “Mr Townsend must have convinced them that Onitsha would be a more fertile soil to begin their missionary work than Igbebe in Lokoja which was their original destination.”⁴⁷ The warm welcome accorded them instilled the confidence that made them trust his suggestion as a sincere one. They therefore settled at Onitsha.

A. Arrival and Choice of Onitsha as a Base

Father Lutz and Father Horne arrived at Onitsha on 5 December, 1885. On their arrival, Mr Townsend took them on familiarization tour of the environment and areas within Onitsha city. Onitsha is one of the major cities in Igboland. It is a popular area in Igboland because of its location. It is the end point of the River Niger. Traders from various parts of Igboland and beyond come to Onitsha for business enterprise. With open mind, Mr Townsend took them to see the king of Onitsha who was then Obi Anazonwu. They saw the king and made known to him their intention. The king received them very well and promised to give them a portion of land of their choice. The following day, they were taken round to see and choose a portion of land of their choice. They happily chose a piece of land. Later it was discovered that the same piece of land which they chose had been earlier given to Bishop Crowther, the Anglican Bishop. To solve this problem, king Obi directed Father Lutz to meet Bishop Crowther in order to discuss the portion of land in question. The meeting was very cordial and fruitful and the Bishop willingly surrendered the piece of land to Father Lutz with the following words, “I acquired the land for the cause of God. Take it.”⁴⁸ The land was located at a very strategic position. Father Lutz described the terrain in these words, “situated on an elevation and on the bank of the Niger, it is made up of two small hills separated from one another by a valley that

⁴⁶ Chigere, *Foreign Missionary Background and Indigenous Evangelization in Igboland*, 162.

⁴⁷ Chigere, *Foreign Missionary Background and Indigenous Evangelization in Igboland*, 162.

⁴⁸ Holy Ghost Fathers, “Annales Apostoliques,” No. 7, (September 1901), quoted in Celestine Obi, “Background to the Planting of the Catholic Christianity in the Lower Niger,” 18.

is always filled with water during rainy season....”⁴⁹ The above passage describes the site of the present Basilica of the Holy Trinity Cathedral, Onitsha in Igboland and its surroundings namely, the Holy Trinity field, the Shanahan hall down to the brink of the River Niger and the bridge across the Nkisi. Having given this portion of land to the Holy Ghost Fathers, on January 6, 1886 being the feast of the Epiphany, an agreement was drafted and signed between the Fathers and the king with his council of chiefs. With this agreement well drafted and signed, the king handed over the piece of land in perpetuity to the Fathers, giving them full right to exercise the Catholic religion and faith on the said piece of land without any hindrance or interference. The principal clause of the document reads, “I, Obi Anazonwu, king and chief of Onitsha, do of our own freewill grant unto the Roman Catholic missionaries of the Holy Ghost, the ground chosen by them in perpetuity free of all tributes and dues.”⁵⁰ The Holy Ghost missionaries were very happy and very grateful to God, king and his chiefs. In gratitude and appreciation for this great gift, they promised to provide formal education to the children of the local community.

For these zealous missionaries, the dream has now come true and the desire translated into reality. They were now beginning to have some rest of mind and to count some successes. Onitsha was the centre of a large population of pagans where Mohamedanism has not yet penetrated. Communication with Europe was very easy. Its climate was healthier than Igbebe. It was also very easy for the missionaries to procure foodstuffs because there was public market every day on the bank of the Niger. On December 8, Father Lutz did go back to Brass to bring up the two brothers and their luggage. Father Horne waited at Onitsha in a warehouse which the General Manager of the Royal Niger Company, Mr Sergent had made available to them. On December 29, Father Lutz and the two Brothers re-joined Father Horne in the Warehouse. Having come together, the team settled for work at Onitsha.

B. The First Catholic Mission House at Onitsha

On arrival at Onitsha, they immediately began the construction of their own house. Father Lutz in a very fast way, went on with the work of building the mission house. “The official opening of the mission building took place on Easter Sunday, 25 April, 1886 with a public Holy Mass.”⁵¹ Having established a base, the missionaries settled down for real work. Making converts and planting the seed of Catholic faith in Igboland was not an easy task. Lots and lots

⁴⁹ Joseph Lutz, “Letter to the Superior in Paris,” *Annales Apostoliques*, (January 30, 1886), quoted in Celestine Obi, “Background to the Planting of the Catholic Christianity in the Lower Niger,” 18.

⁵⁰ Holy Ghost Fathers, “Journal” (January 1- 6, 1886), quoted in Celestine Obi, “Background to the Planting of the Catholic Christianity in the Lower Niger,” 19.

⁵¹ Ikenga-Metuh & Ejizu, *Hundred Years of Catholicism in Eastern Nigeria 1885- 1985: The Nnewi Story*, 15.

of things were involved namely money, manpower, energy, personnel and time. Missionaries needed to train teachers and catechists, establish schools and orphanage centres that will help to ensure effective evangelization. No assistance was forthcoming from the Mother House of the Holy Ghost Congregation in Paris. For them to survive and carry on the work of evangelization, the missionaries embarked on farming projects. Thus, they planted orchards and cultivated farms on their lands to supplement their income. With the Holy Trinity Mission Onitsha as centre, the spiritual work and journey of the Catholic Church in Igboland had begun and the missionaries at once started to carry the Gospel to all the towns and villages around Onitsha and to penetrate the hinterlands. Energetically with great zeal and passion, Father Lutz and his team threw themselves into the task of winning the great parts of Igboland for Christ. “Thus, by 1889, towns like Obosi, Ossomari, Nsugbe, Umuoji, Atani, Odekpe and Nkwelle had received several visits from the missionaries.”⁵²

Many villages and town chiefs came to the missionaries with a request or invitation to come and establish a Catholic mission in their villages/ towns. These early years of mission in Igboland were filled with lots and lots of missionary activities such that by 1886, teaching of catechism and organising prayers in the mission centres have already begun. In the same year, religious instruction centres and dispensaries were set up. This initial move was so fruitful and yielding that day after day, parents and guardians did come in large numbers to the Catholic mission, where Father Lutz gave their children some medications for the treatment of their sicknesses/ diseases. Before long, Father Lutz himself was able to report back to Paris with the following words, “The care we give to the children and to their diseases has easily won for us the sympathies of the natives.”⁵³

With all these achievements, progress and successes being made by these Catholic missionaries together with great number of converts being won over to the Catholic Church, the C.M.S. missionaries felt threatened and challenged. A few years later, one of the C.M.S. missionaries observed, “The grown-ups do not trust us. The royal Niger company was not in good relationship with our people either. But with the Roman Catholics, the situation seemed different... They appeared to many local people as different kind of white men, the kind that came for the welfare of the people.”⁵⁴ By August 1886, the missionaries have made a tremendous progress in spreading the Catholic faith and religion among the natives and local people. A Christian village was set up in Onitsha and later also in Aguleri. In recognition of the great missionary efforts and marvellous achievements of these Holy Ghost missionaries in

⁵² Obi, “Background to the Planting of the Catholic Church in the Lower Niger,” 24.

⁵³ Ekechi, *Missionary Enterprise and Rivalry in Igboland 1857-1914*, 74.

⁵⁴ Ekechi, *Missionary Enterprise and Rivalry in Igboland 1857-1914*, 25.

Igboland, Southern Nigeria, “Pope Leo XIII on 25 July, 1889 erected the Apostolic Prefecture of the Lower Niger, Igboland with Onitsha as its headquarters and Father Joseph Lutz as the first Apostolic Prefect.”⁵⁵

3. The Apostolic Prefecture and Apostolic Vicariate of the Lower Niger in Igboland

Until 1889, the Holy Ghost mission on the lower Niger was simply the Onitsha mission because it was located in Onitsha in Igboland, Southern Nigeria. It had no independent name as yet, since it was part of, and an extension of the Vicariate of Two Guineas, with its headquarters in Gabon. To be erected as a Prefecture, the mission land has to attain certain degree of progress in faith and “it is the sole right of the Propaganda Fide, the Catholic Missionary Central Controlling Agency in Rome to set up any independent Catholic mission and it does this by constituting a mission either as a Prefecture Apostolic or a Vicariate Apostolic.”⁵⁶ “An Apostolic Prefecture is a missionary area where the Catholic Church is not yet sufficiently established and developed to have it as a diocese and is headed by a Prefect Apostolic while an

Apostolic Vicariate is a form of territorial jurisdiction of the Roman Catholic Church established in missionary regions or countries where a diocese has not been established. It is an intermediate stage between apostolic prefecture and a diocese.”⁵⁷ Apostolic Prefecture is headed by an Apostolic Prefect. He is a head of a mission who is not a bishop but who enjoys all the rights and prerogatives of a bishop or a Vicar Apostolic. An Apostolic Vicariate is headed by an Apostolic Vicar. He is the head of a mission district who, though a bishop does not canonically hold his bishopric as of right, in the way a normal residential bishop does. He holds the bishopric for the Pope and acts as a titular representative of the papacy. The Holy Ghost mission at Onitsha was made the Prefecture of the Lower Niger on July 25th, 1889. Five Apostolic Prefects energetically and faithfully served and worked at the Apostolic Prefecture of the Lower. These Apostolic Prefects include: Fathers Joseph Lutz, Joseph Reling, Rene Pawlas and Leon Lejeune.

Father Joseph Emile Lutz was born at Dauerndorf in Strasburg, France on 8 January 1853. He was born in a good Catholic family. After his formation in the seminary, he was ordained a priest on 23 December, 1876 and a year later, he professed in the Holy Ghost congregation. He was appointed the leader of the pioneer missionary group that brought Catholic faith to Igboland, southern Nigeria in 1885. But prior to his coming to Igboland, he

⁵⁵ Pope Leo XIII, “Ad Fovendam: The Decree for the erection of the Lower Niger Prefecture,” quoted in Celestine Obi, “Background to the Planting of the Catholic Church in the Lower Niger,” 26.

⁵⁶ Ikenga Ozigboh, *Roman Catholicism in South Eastern Nigeria 1885-1931*, (Onitsha: Etukokwu Publishers Nig. Ltd, 1988), 46.

⁵⁷ Ozigboh, *Roman Catholicism in South Eastern Nigeria 1885-1931*, 47.

was in Sierra Leone and his presence there really provided him a wealth of experience which helped him to succeed in his mission to Igboland. Thus, he was aware of the primary needs and best missionary strategies for evangelization in Igboland. His leadership of his missionary team in the 1885 made him undoubtedly an unrivalled and unprecedented pioneer missionary of the Igbo people. According to Chigere, “most documents bearing reports about his life and activities mark him out as a special Apostle of Igboland and his missionary methods and strategies made serious impact on subsequent missionary strategies and paved way for the future missionaries.”⁵⁸ He drew a plan of actions for the new mission and he pioneered the expansion but was not able to realise this plan as he has expected due to sickness that befell him in 1894. He was taken back to France for treatment. He later died on December 17, 1895. Father Lutz made a very deep impression in his apostolate in Igboland. He deeply engaged in buying, freeing and rehabilitating slaves. He did magnificent work in Church music. He sowed the seed for formal literary education. He was succeeded by Father Joseph Reling as an Apostolic Prefect for the Prefecture of the Lower Niger.

Father Joseph Reling was the second Apostolic Prefect for the Prefecture of the Lower Niger. He was born in Alsace in France in 1860 and he came down to Igboland, south-Eastern Nigeria in 1891. He was a zealous and dedicated priest. In 1895, he went back to France on account of illness. It was while he was in France on account of illness that he was appointed the Apostolic Prefect for the Prefecture of the Lower Niger in Igboland on 10 October, 1896. He set out to return to his Prefecture but fell sick again on his way back. Owing to this sickness, his journey to the Lower Niger was terminated and he was forced to stop at Senegal. He remained in Senegal hoping to recover fully but all in vain. Seeing that recovery was not on his way, he returned to France and later sent in his resignation letter on 4 July, 1898. His letter of resignation was accepted and in few months later, he resigned without setting foot in his Prefecture. Throughout the time Father Joseph Reling was sick, Father Buberndorf held the place for the absent Prefect. Father Joseph Reling was succeeded by Father Rene Pawlas as the Apostolic Prefect of the Lower Niger Prefecture.

Father Rene Pawlas was the third Apostolic Prefect. He was born at Villier-en-Argonne, France in 1866. After his priestly ordination, he was sent to Lower Niger Prefecture in 1890. The tropical diseases in Africa really set these early missionaries back in their missionary work and evangelization such that in 1893, Father Rene had to return to Paris on account of illness. When he recovered from this illness, he was sent to Senegambia instead. He worked there till July 4, 1898 when he was appointed the Apostolic Prefecture of the lower Niger Prefecture.

⁵⁸ Chigere, *Foreign Missionary Background and Indigenous Evangelization in Igboland*, 167.

According to Obi, “Father Pawlas’s appointment as Apostolic Prefect was not a surprise to many for he was an energetic priest and was familiar already with the location and culture of the people of the Lower Niger area and mission.”⁵⁹ Full of energy and zeal, Father Pawlas arrived Onitsha, the headquarters of the Prefecture on November 5, 1898. He came with Father Jean-Baptiste Engasser, two other priests and brother Yves. Having arrived at the Prefecture, he reviewed and implemented the missionary strategies of Father Lutz as contained in his letter to the office for the Propagation of the Faith in Rome on 4 October, 1899. In line with Father Lutz missionary strategies, he also outlined his own missionary strategies and methods which include: building schools and orphanages, setting up refugee camps for the outcasts, abandoned and ex-slaves. Father Pawlas died on 15 March, 1900. He was succeeded by Father Leon Lejeune.

Father Leon Lejeune was on sick-leave in Paris when he was named the Apostolic Prefect of the Lower Niger Prefecture on 23 May, 1900. Father Leon Lejeune was a revolutionary Apostolic Prefect who brought about a lot of innovations and changes in the missionary methods and strategies of his predecessors. Father Leon had already worked in Gabon and this opportunity adequately furnished him with the wealth of experiences which enabled him to carry out his missionary work well in Lower Niger, Igboland. He arrived at Onitsha, the headquarters of the lower Niger mission on Sunday 9 September, 1900. He immediately outlined his missionary strategies, laying much emphasis on the importance of hard work and self-help on the part of all the Christians. He highly discouraged the idea of people depending on the missions for their daily bread and daily upkeep.

Since he was totally dissatisfied with the methods of his predecessors, which he saw as a way of wasting meagre resources they had, he immediately discarded them all and went on to lay down his totally new strategies for immediate action. He summoned a meeting of all the Fathers working with him in the Lower Niger and outlined his plans for the Prefecture as follows, “I have refused to accept in mission any more, motherless babies and I forbid the acceptance of the same in my absence. Already, we have a large number on our hands whom we feed with milk. I have decided that the 22 old women who are taking refuge in the Church should do some bit of work.....”⁶⁰ He maintained that for them to achieve good result in their missionary work, they need to have a good living house, efficient catechist-teachers, dynamic self-help on the part of all the Catholics, catechumens and school children, more especially on

⁵⁹ Celestine Obi, “The French Pioneers, 1885-1905,” in *A Hundred Years of the Catholic Church in Eastern Nigeria 1885-1985*, ed. Celestine Obi, (Onitsha: Africana-Fep Publishers Ltd, 1985), 59.

⁶⁰ Leon Lejeune, “Letter to the Superior General in Paris,” (January 23, 1901), quoted in Celestine Obi, “The French Pioneers, 1885-1905,” in *A Hundred Years of the Catholic Church in Eastern Nigeria 1885-1985*, ed. Celestine Obi, (Onitsha: Africana-Fep Publishers Ltd, 1985), 64.

the part of all the destitute living in the Church. He stipulated that the time for using the meagre resources and money meant for the upkeep and spread of the mission and Gospel for feeding the children, the ex-slaves and the destitute had gone. Father Lejeune embarked on erecting so many buildings, getting rid of wretched huts where his predecessors lived. He achieved a lot, building so many orphanages, hospitals, refugee camps, leprosarium and nurseries. He also taught the people the need for self-help and hard labour which people initially rejected but later accepted. With the assistance of the peoples' labour, he was able to achieve all these. Father Lejeune believed that slavery in Africa will be eradicated neither by government decrees nor by missionary teams buying back and releasing slaves, no matter the number and the affluence of such teams but by evangelization strictly speaking. His zeal for a change that would lead to secure a lasting apostolate in Igboland resulted in an unprecedented spread of evangelization into the hinterlands. Having spent almost all his energies in the missionary work, he started to become weak. He later became very sick. As a result of his sickness, he returned to France and later died of Chevilly on 5 September, 1905 at the age of 44. His death marked the end of the French missionaries in the Prefecture of the Lower Niger, Igboland Nigeria. He was later replaced by an Irish missionary- Father Joseph Shanahan, the first Apostolic Vicar in Igboland.

The Apostolic Prefecture of the Lower Niger was raised to the Apostolic Vicariate of the Lower Niger on April 16, 1920, with Bishop Joseph Shanahan as the first Apostolic Vicar of the Vicariate. The change in the statue was as a result of increase in the number of the converts and development made in missionary activities. Father Joseph Ignatius Shanahan came to Onitsha towards the end of 1902, where Father Lejeune was already engaged in laying the foundations of adult Christianity among the people of Igboland. Father Shanahan joined the era which ended the French Spiritan Pioneer Missionary activities in Igboland. In the words of Chigere, "as conditions were growing more and more unconducive for French missionaries to thrive under British administrative scuffle and grudges strained from home, an alternative arrangement was made to bring the Irish, the closest neighbours, not in acceptance but only in language semblances amidst the British impact in the northern Ireland crisis which was already long in existence."⁶¹ That was how Father Shanahan emerged in the scene of Igbo missionary evangelization at the beginning of 1900's. He came to Igboland when his missionary zeal and help was mostly needed. He succeeded Father Lejeune at his death in 1905 as the prefect of the Lower Niger. He was the last Prefect before the Lower Niger was raised to Apostolic Vicariate. According to Chigere, "his push under the renewed apostolic educational strategy created the Igbo educational stalwarts which they have maintained for a long time. He cleverly realized on

⁶¹ Chigere, *Foreign Missionary Background and Indigenous Evangelization in Igboland*, p. 170.

time that the Igbo folk has a natural quest for learning through modern education and he harnessed this possibility to avail them the facilities.”⁶² Father Shanahan strongly believed that western education is the best missionary strategy in spreading the Gospel. It is the best method of evangelization. He made serious and honest efforts to convince the office for the Propagation of the Faith that the funds for redeeming slaves should better be employed in promoting literary education. Also, under his dedicated missionary activities, the first indigenous priest of Igboland was ordained on 8 December, 1930 in the person of Rev. Father John Cross Anyogu (of blessed memory). It was also under him that the Prefecture of the Lower Niger was raised to the Vicariate of the Lower Niger. Thus, he was the first Apostolic Vicar of the Vicariate. Father Joseph Shanahan was consecrated a bishop on June, 1920. Having spent his energy in the missionary works in Igboland, in 1923, his health began to deteriorate and his sight was falling. Therefore, he handed in his letter of resignation to Rome in 1926. The Holy Father advised him to return to Nigeria with a Co-adjutor of his own choice. He chose the late Charles Heerey. Bishop Shanahan died on Christmas day in 1943. After his death, Bishop Charles Heerey succeeded him.

Father Charles Heerey was consecrated a Bishop on 29 May, 1927. When Bishop Shanahan had become so weak that he cannot function any more as a Vicar Apostolic, Father Heerey was consecrated to replace him. After his bishopric ordination, Bishop Heerey succeeded Bishop Shanahan as a Vicar Apostolic for the Vicariate of the Lower Niger in 1931. The Vicariate which bishop Heerey took over in 1931 was not different territorially from the old Prefecture of 1889 but when he left the stage in 1967, the picture was quite different. In 1925, Monsignor Le Roy took a decision about the division of the Vicariate. He proposed that before a Co-adjutor bishop was nominated, the Vicariate of the Lower Niger should be divided and that the American province of the congregation should be given an independent jurisdiction carved out of the old Vicariate of Southern Nigeria. However, things did not go quite that way. “The arrival of Bishop Arthur Hinsley as Apostolic Visitor in 1929 was decisive. He recommended not only the division of the Vicariate but also the creation of a new missionary society- St. Patrick Society from the ranks of the Irish diocesan clergy. This decision carried the day.”⁶³

In July 1934, the Vicariate of the Lower Niger for the first time since its creation underwent some administrative changes. In the words of Okon, “The Vicariate of the Lower Niger was

⁶² Chigere, *Foreign Missionary Background and Indigenous Evangelization in Igboland*, p. 170.

⁶³ Fabian Okon, “Expansion and Consolidation: Growth in Onitsha, Calabar, Owerri, Ogoja and Umuahia,” in *A Hundred Years Of The Catholic Church in Eastern Nigeria 1885-1985*, ed. Celestine Obi (Onitsha: Africana-Fep Publishers Ltd, 1985), 178-179.

split for the first time. The old administrative provinces of Calabar and Ogoja were detached to form a new Prefecture- the Prefecture of Calabar which came under the jurisdiction of the St. Patrick's Society....."⁶⁴ What remained of the old Vicariate was, with the exception of parts of the Rivers Province, largely Igbo people. It became the Vicariate of Onitsha-Owerri until in 1948 when Owerri and Rivers provinces were cut off to form the Owerri Vicariate. These Vicariates have given birth to so many provinces and dioceses since the indigenous missionaries took over the missionary control and activities in the entire Igboland in 1967. This was the humble beginning of the Catholic Church in Igboland. It started from the Prefecture of the Lower Niger or what is today called and known as Old Onitsha Ecclesiastical Province.

4. Initial Problems and Setbacks Encountered by the Early Catholic Missionaries in Igboland

The work of evangelization and planting of faith especially in foreign land is not an easy task. A lot of sacrifices, sufferings, persecutions, misunderstandings, commitments, personnel, money, time, patience, endurance and initiatives are involved. Missionaries normally encounter lots and lots of difficulties, oppositions and hindrances in the course of propagating the faith. The early Holy Ghost missionaries that brought the Catholic faith to Igboland were not exception to this. The first problem which these early missionaries encountered was that they were refused passage up river to Lokoja which was their original destination. As already mentioned above, these Holy Ghost missionaries aimed to settle in Lokoja and from there move down to the communities and towns bordering on the Atlantic Ocean. But their hopes and plans were shattered when arriving at Akassa on 20 November, they wanted to move up to Lokoja but they were denied access. Obi brought out this picture very well when he said, "On arriving at Kassa on 20 November, these Holy Ghost missionaries wanted to move up river to Lokoja which was their destination but one captain Christian refused them passage up river to Lokoja."⁶⁵ Again, African weather and tropical diseases were other factors that contributed adversely towards the missionary activities in Igboland. The same is applicable to culture, food and language.

Besides these, tropical diseases of West Africa like malaria and sleeping sickness were another major setback to the work of the missionaries. On this Obi said, "Scarcely had they begun the planning of the mission buildings when sicknesses, illnesses, sufferings, drawbacks and even death knocked at their door....."⁶⁶ Furthermore, the missionaries received a lot of opposition and antagonism. The missionaries were still crying and mourning the death of one

⁶⁴ Okon, "Expansion and Consolidation: Growth in Onitsha, Calabar, Owerri, Ogoja and Umuahia," 179.

⁶⁵ Obi, "Background to the Planting of Christianity," 12.

⁶⁶ Obi, "Background to the Planting of Christianity," 21.

of them- Brother Jean-Gotto, when they received another blow, this time from the king. Despite the nice welcome and hospitality given to the missionaries by the king himself, he at a certain stage decided to show his displeasure against some of the behaviours of the missionaries. A problem came up when on January 18, 1886, one of the missionaries, brother Jean-Gotto died and the issue of where to bury him came up. It was at this time that the king- Obi Anazonwu wrote Father Lutz a letter reminding him that it was against all laws and customs to bury a stranger in Onitsha town. According to the king, “traditional beliefs have it that the spirit of the dead foreigner will be restless and revengeful until the remains were taken to his native land.”⁶⁷ This decision of the king really gave the missionaries some sleepless nights as to where to bury their brother. Further still, a more serious problem arose when in September 1889, the Royal Niger Company began a litigation against the missionaries over the piece of land given to them by the king. This was a very bitter experience for the missionaries because the Royal Niger Company was the representative of the British government in Southern Nigeria and as such, they were invested with high authority. It will not be wise to make case with them but the missionaries had to do this for them to secure the land which the king had given them.

More still, these early Catholic missionaries were the last to set their feet in Igboland. Protestant missionaries had come many years earlier. So being the last to come, these Catholic missionaries had to face sooner or later certain peculiar problems typical of any latecomer as they were. The case is clear that it could not have been otherwise, judging from their impacts in the lives of the local people, their charitable works, beautiful liturgical celebrations and music that characterised their programmes. The Protestant missionaries and other denominations who had come earlier and had settled before these Catholic missionaries came, started nursing fear, anger and hatred as they observed the powerful initiatives and edifying missionary strategies these Catholic missionaries came with as well as the great impacts they were making in the lives of the people.

As the Protestant missionaries observed that these latecomers (Catholic missionaries) were winning the hearts of the people and were progressing faster, the level of hatred and animosity increased. As Ekechi succinctly puts it, “There is no question that the coming of the Catholic missionaries had seriously shaken the security of the Protestants especially the C.M.S.”⁶⁸ In order to draw these Catholic missionaries back from their progress and distract their missionary works, these Protestants missionaries instigated the British government officials into making the Catholic missionaries sign one treaty and undertaking after the other.

⁶⁷ Holy Ghost Fathers, “Journal,” (15 September 1886), quoted in Celestine Obi, “The French Pioneers, 1885-1905,” 31.

⁶⁸ Ekechi, *Missionary Enterprise and Rivalry in Igboland 1857-1914*, 75.

Commenting on this Chigere says, “They really succeeded in making the atmosphere quite uncomfortable for these Catholic missionaries and all their subsequent actions towards them spelt further not wanted. Many clashes cropped up and unhealthy competitions were initiated which rather worsened the mutual rivalries among them.”⁶⁹ The Protestant missionaries saw the arrival of the Catholic mission as undue intrusion and one with a pernicious influence.

Despite these distractions, the Catholic missionaries through their great virtues of charity, humanitarian services and aids won the sympathy and admiration of many people even some Protestants. Their missionary strategies were quite attractive and appealing to the natives. On this Chigere also notes, “Igbos have feelings for one another and their hospitality functions even in the midst of wants and needs. The missionaries have proved to be similar to their heritable values of hospitality and generosity. Secondly, Igbos equally love signs and symbols and their language and ceremonies are replete with these qualities.”⁷⁰ Further still, Chigere observes, “These initial obstacles notwithstanding, the pioneer Catholic missionaries did not take long to make an impact on the people. They used many methods to win converts. These included distribution of charities, offering of medical services and establishment of schools. Their liturgy with its richly decorated Altar and ornate vestments appealed to the people who by nature love signs and actions.”⁷¹

It was not easy for these early Catholic missionaries but their understanding of the mission as a work of God and mission of charity as opposed to the imperial agents, who came purely for commercial purpose held them on and together to a very fruitful and successful end. “The Protestant missionaries were convinced by the British government to suppress the natives because they depended so much on them for heavy financial assistance for the success of their activities. This made the natives lose confidence on the foreign Protestant missionaries.”⁷² As a result of this therefore, all white people were looked at as the same. The effect was that the Igbo adopted an attitude of fear and suspicion to any white man until he proved otherwise. On this Chigere also said, “This really caused delays in some areas in getting a good response and turn-up, especially in areas where the European presence has caused a lot of disadvantages to the people.”⁷³ Certain foreign missionary approaches depicted nothing short of crackdown of the values of Igbo folk commonly cherished traditionally and this caused a lot of discomfort to them. That was why they experienced undiluted opposition of the natives as well as horrible persecutions on the ground of religion. According to Onuorah, “This may be that the chiefs

⁶⁹ Chigere, *Foreign Missionary Background and Indigenous Evangelization in Igboland*, 165.

⁷⁰ Chigere, *Foreign Missionary Background and Indigenous Evangelization in Igboland*, 165.

⁷¹ Chigere, *Foreign Missionary Background and Indigenous Evangelization in Igboland*, 165.

⁷² Chigere, *Foreign Missionary Background and Indigenous Evangelization in Igboland*, 165.

⁷³ Chigere, *Foreign Missionary Background and Indigenous Evangelization in Igboland*, 166.

did not want the British government to encroach on their sovereignty or their land. On the side of religion, the natives of the protectorate conceived Christianity as a direct destruction of their religious values, and therefore should not be welcome.”⁷⁴ This initial stage of Catholic faith was a very big challenge to the Catholic missionaries. It took them lots and lots of time, energy, prayer and virtues through charitable works and exemplary life to convince the natives that they were not like British government officials and Protestant missionaries.

Furthermore, the handicaps of the missionaries namely lack of adequate resources, paucity of personnel, unwelcoming attitudes of some of the natives, presence of other Christian denominations and threat of the Royal Niger Company were great obstacles to these Catholic missionaries. Again, they were not readily welcome and every activity of theirs was viewed with suspicion because they were French missionaries working in Igboland, Southern Nigeria which was a British sphere of influence. And during this time, there was Anglo-French political and commercial rivalry on the Lower Niger. Incidentally, it was never an easy task for these Catholic missionaries to plant the Catholic faith in Igboland. But thanks be to God that they were very successful in their mission.

II. Main Periods in the History of the Catholic Church in Igboland and Their Inputs to the Identity of the Igbo Catholicism

The periodization of the history of a local and particular Church could make the understanding of her identity uncomplicated. It could demonstrate what phases (expansion, difficulties, oppressions and successes) she went through and how much she was tested (experienced, made stronger or weaker) by the passing of time. Basically speaking, the era in the history of the Catholic Church in Igboland can be classified into three main periods. For the sake of clarity, the classification of these periods is based on the origin of the missionaries, years of their missionary activities as well as the missionary methods used. These three main periods include:

-The Period of the French Missionaries (1885-1905)

-The Period of the Irish Missionaries (1905-1967)

-The Period of the Indigenous Missionaries (1967-till date)

1. The Period of the French Missionaries (1885-1905)

France was the cradle of many religious congregations. For a long time, she was the door to the missions. French missionaries were among the first to spread the Catholic faith in many

⁷⁴ Anthony- Mary Onuorah, *African Monks and Culture- The Forerunners* (Enugu: Snaap Press, 1998), 45.

countries outside the continent of Europe, Igboland in Nigeria inclusive. Pope Alexander VI had with “his bull ‘Inter Caetera’ of 3 May, 1493 awarded to Spain and Portugal the exclusive right to propagate Christianity in their newly founded colonies.”⁷⁵ Spain and Portugal held tenaciously to these rights and privileges conceded to them over the centuries, for exclusive control of religious matters in their colonies. However, this plan did not work well because these bishops and heads of missions saw Spain and Portugal as their head instead of Rome. They gave account of their service and mission to Spain and Portugal, neglecting Vatican which is the head. Rome was not happy with this.

The law-conscious Vatican would not unilaterally withdraw the concessions made by the Popes in former times even after the creation of the Propaganda Fide, when the legal fictions of Prefects and Vicars Apostolic were invented by the Vatican Chancery to evade the claims of Spain and Portugal. “Since only Spain and Portugal had the exclusive right to appoint bishops or the heads of missions in their colonies, the fiction of the Vicar and Prefect Apostolic implied that the Vicars or Prefects Apostolic appointed by Rome were not the heads, as such, of the missions to which they were posted but were merely diplomatic representative of the Pope.”⁷⁶ Spain and Portugal rejected this legal quibble and bitterly contested the appointment of the Prefect or Vicar Apostolic. To fight Spain and Portugal, Rome found in the French monarchy a true though an interested ally. France eventually became “the first daughter of the Church, and until the Catholic Church in the America emerged in the 20th century, France undertook almost all the whole burden of the world-wide missionary ventures of the Vatican.”⁷⁷ Thus, France became the supplier, the financier and the inspirer of Roman Catholic evangelism in the 19th century. Practically, all the new missionary initiatives originated in and from France- the new missionary societies like Holy Ghost missionaries and the mission funding agencies.

As already seen above, it was one of these new missionary societies- Holy Ghost missionaries known as French Holy Ghost Fathers and Brothers that opened the Lower Niger mission which brought the Catholic faith in Igboland in 1885. The religious sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny also, from France joined them in 1889. It is this first set of missionaries that is referred to as – The French Pioneer Catholic missionaries in the Lower Niger in Igboland. They were the first set of Catholic missionaries to set their feet in Igboland. The period of these French missionaries in Igboland lasted from 1885 to 1905. Their missionary activities and presence in Igboland lasted for 20 years. These missionaries started their activities in Igboland on 5 December, 1885. The French Catholic pioneer missionaries have their unique missionary

⁷⁵ Ozigboh, *Roman Catholicism in South Eastern Nigeria 1885-1931*, 47.

⁷⁶ Ozigboh, *Roman Catholicism in South Eastern Nigeria 1885-1931*, 47.

⁷⁷ Ozigboh, *Roman Catholicism in South Eastern Nigeria 1885-1931*, 47.

methods and evangelization strategies which gave this period its unique identity. Through these missionary methods and strategies, they were able to plant the seed of Catholic faith in Igboland. These methods include: charity as instrument of evangelization, hospitals and medical services as missionary methods, religious activities and catechetical instructions, workshops and homes of rehabilitation, purchasing, freeing and redemption of slaves, building of the Christian village, agricultural and plantation projects. For a better understanding, these methods are presented and discussed one by one below.

A. Charity as Instrument of Evangelization

Right from the beginning, the French Pioneer Catholic missionaries led by Father Lutz have decided that they will use charitable works as a means of converting the people of Igboland. “During their first missionary journey to the Lower Niger, Igboland, the Holy Ghost Fathers brought 70 luggage filled with gifts for the villagers.”⁷⁸ These gifts really disposed the local people and the natives towards the missionaries. At once, the local people distinguished them from other categories of white people, the officials of the Royal Niger Company and the Protestant missionaries. They saw these Holy Ghost Fathers as those who came for the good of the people. Emphasizing more on the charitable works of these early Catholic missionaries, Ozigbo remarks, “The missionary policy of the Prefecture during the first fifteen years 1885-1900 may be characterised by the use of charity as an instrument of evangelization.”⁷⁹

Charitable programmes and activities were embarked upon as a means to desired end: to gain the goodwill, the good disposition, the attention and consequently the conversion of the people to the Catholic faith. The missionaries willingly and joyfully spent their meagre and limited resources on works of charity even at their own inconvenience and expense. They sacrificed their time, their effort and their intellectual and moral resources. They gave them free of charge, asking for nothing in return other than being appreciative of and receptive to their religious message. These early missionaries believed that charity lies at the inner spring of the Christian religion. Christ preached the Gospel of love, compassion and forgiveness. Love of God and of men together with charity should be the characteristic mark of his disciples. Prior to the arrival of these missionaries in Africa particularly in Igboland, the earlier European explorers and travellers in Africa in the 19th century have revealed to Europeans the impoverished material conditions inside Africa. So, on their arrival, these Catholic missionaries decided to reinforce the Christian ethos of charity and so adopted charity as a powerful means

⁷⁸ Holy Ghost Fathers, “Journal,” (December 5 –29, 1889), quoted in Celestine Obi, “The French Pioneers, 1985-1905,” 29.

⁷⁹ Ozigboh, *Roman Catholicism in South Eastern Nigeria 1885-1931*, 58.

of evangelization and conversion. This method of evangelization no doubt won over a lot of persons and Protestants to the Catholic Church. Commenting on the enormous impact the French Holy Ghost Fathers made as a result of charity, Archdeacon Johnson of Church Mission Society said, “You will excuse me for saying that I am rather uneasy in regard to the prospects of our work, when I think of the proceedings of these Roman Catholics. Our school at Onitsha is half-ruined because the children are enticed away by promises of clothing and by certainty of being fed gratis.”⁸⁰ On this, Ekechi equally observes, “These Holy Ghost missionaries with their charitable works did not only win over a considerable number of school children and adults, they succeeded also in luring away some former protestant teachers and catechists and thus accentuated their already strained relationship with the Protestants.”⁸¹

B. Hospitals and Medical Services as Missionary Methods

The apostolate that most endeared the Holy Ghost missionaries to all sections of the population in Igboland was the medical care and services they gave to people irrespective of religion. Medical apostolate has been an important traditional strategy of evangelization for the Holy Ghost Fathers. On arriving in Igboland, the Holy Ghost Fathers set up leprosarium, dispensaries and hospitals to cater for the total well-being of all. The sick received special attention. Having seen that medical care and services will win them many converts, “Father Lutz immediately did some courses in simple medicine, applied to Rome for an indult to use this and he was granted the permission.”⁸² He treated the sick to restore them to health. It is no surprise therefore that already by May 1886, Father Lutz wrote to the Mother House saying, “Many sick people come to us to ask for cures. Very often, I am called to their homes and houses to care for them. It is for us a means to win their confidence and to do some good for them.”⁸³

His reputation as a competent physician soon spread. And by 1887, queueing for medical care at the Catholic mission became a daily practice. The effects soon began to show. Mission houses and Churches began to witness a great number of people. The Catholic missionaries did not engage in medical work solely to heal the wounds and sicknesses of their patients, they also aimed at saving souls which was their primary aim of coming to Igboland. They ceased the opportunity to instruct them in the faith and to baptise those in danger of death. According to Obi, “medical services and cares were very good missionary methods because, before receiving sick children for treatment, these Catholic missionaries had already concluded agreement with their parents and guardians that such children on recovering should be allowed

⁸⁰ Ekechi, *Missionary Enterprise and Rivalry in Igboland 1857-1914*, 76.

⁸¹ Ekechi, *Missionary Enterprise and Rivalry in Igboland 1857-1914*, 76.

⁸² Obi, “The French Pioneers, 1985-1905,” 30.

⁸³ Obi, “The French Pioneers, 1985-1905,” 30.

to stay in the mission for a number of years. Parents on recognising that life is very important and counts above all 'Ndu bu isi' accepted this condition."⁸⁴ This won a great number of children to the Catholic faith. The medical care which the missionaries gave to the sick was really consoling to them and had in effect won them the goodwill of the people. It was a common sight to see people being carried or crawling on all four, to the mission to receive medical treatment. In his report to the Mother House in 1888, Father Lutz had this to say "Morning and evening, a long file of their unfortunate sick arrive at the mission so that we might soothe their ills. They are of all ages but the greater number of them are childrenIn caring for their bodies, we have the sweetest consolation of saving their souls too."⁸⁵

Thus, it can be said without exaggeration that up to 1900, the medical chest was the missionary's magic wand, in the Prefecture of the Lower Niger in Igboland. With it, the missionaries sought to capture the heart in order to dispose the head to receive the Catholic faith and message. The missionaries erected medical institutions at the two main stations-Onitsha and Aguleri but visited other stations with their medical kits. With these, they won the peoples' love and gratitude and were able to increase and expand their missionary influence and effectiveness. The European ministers who replaced the Sierra Leonian C.M.S. agents on the Niger in 1890 were alarmed at the growing influence of the Roman Catholics as a result of their medical services. Rev. Henry H. Dobinson (the future Archdeacon) reported in May 1890,

Father Lutz is the doctor of the whole town. From farm to farm he daily receives sick folk and of course everyone goes whoever he or she may be. Numbers of cases there, come to our notice in which our converts have gone over after receiving attention and kindness from Rev. Fathers and Sisters.....It does seem therefore, there is such a grand opening and need for a medical missionary to come here. The cases we see daily of disease and distortion are terrible to look at, and we feel so helpless because we have only our own stock of private medicines and none to give to natives.⁸⁶

Medical services and cares played a great role in the process of conversion and evangelization during this era. The majority of the sick people who visited these hospitals and dispensaries were treated free of charge. Indeed, the apparent benevolence of the Catholic missionaries tended to predispose the Igbos to almost blind acceptance of Catholic missionary teachings.

C. Religious Activities and Catechetical Instructions

The Holy Ghost Fathers led by Father Lutz laid the foundation for literary education in Igboland, Eastern Nigeria by opening some nursery schools, primary schools and catechetical

⁸⁴ Obi, "The French Pioneers, 1885-1905," 39.

⁸⁵ Holy Ghost Fathers, "A.P.S, Bulletin General," Vol XV, 546, quoted in Ozigboh, *Roman Catholicism in South Eastern Nigeria 1885-1931*, 61.

⁸⁶ Holy Ghost Fathers, "A.P.S, Bulletin General, 191\A\VIII, Report on Holy Trinity Onitsha," quoted in Ozigboh, *Roman Catholicism in South Eastern Nigeria 1885-1931*, 99.

centres. These missionaries started to organise the natives and children and to take them in for official modern education. In their desire to find a better way to prepare and dispose these children to accept the Catholic faith, the missionaries built some formation houses. Catechumens and children were taken from their parents/ guardians to become beneficiaries of their charitable works. "The needy, the destitute and the so called rejects of the society were kept in these formation houses and were diligently trained. They were good, docile, clever and cooperating too."⁸⁷

Here in the formation houses, these children and catechumens were taught a lot of Catholic religious activities. They were also given a lot of religious and catechetical instructions. The missionaries and their helpers (catechists) gave catechetical instruction daily to a good number of catechumens. They had learnt from experience to select their candidates for baptism in such a way as to ensure their perseverance after initiation. Therefore, only those who were sincerely disposed to accept Catholic faith were admitted for baptism. The reason for this decision was because these newly converted Christians lived and stayed together with non-Christians and non-Catholics Christians in villages and communities after their training and formation. Therefore, converts not well trained and strongly grounded in the faith could easily lapse back to the Igbo Traditional Religion. The backsliding of these newly converted natives was indeed a very bad experience for the missionaries. This was why they left no stone unturned in their efforts to see that these converts were well and strongly grounded in faith. Again, it was their conviction that if these handful of converts were well grounded in Catholic faith, they can help in converting other natives and local people including the Protestants. Father Lutz did an excellent work in Church music and equally laid a good foundation for the teaching of religion not merely out of the catechism book but incorporating it in hymns sung in the Church and during liturgical and religious functions.

The catechism, the beautiful Church music and a liturgy rich in symbols gave evangelization in Igboland, Eastern Nigeria a good start. As part of their formation and training, these catechumens and newly converted were also taught these religious hymns. They later formed choir that sang the hymns in both Latin and English during liturgical celebrations. The missionaries through catechetical education and teachings aimed at preparing the catechumens for the reception of baptism as well as the other candidates for the reception of other sacraments. According to Obi, "in less than ten months of their arrival in Igboland, the first batch of the catechumens were already trained and made ready for baptism. The first official solemn adult baptism in Igboland by the Catholic pioneer missionaries was held on 29

⁸⁷ Obi, "Background to the Planting of the Catholic Christianity in the Lower," 25.

August, 1886.”⁸⁸ On the 31st October of the same year, another one also took place. “In 1890, there were 71 baptisms and on the Pentecost Sunday that year, Father Lutz conferred the Sacrament of Confirmation on 24 of the converts. Then in 1891, there were 49 baptisms and 16 confirmed at Christmas. Liturgical feasts were celebrated with very great solemnity.”⁸⁹

D. Workshops and Rehabilitation Homes

It has been said severally that the missionaries laid the foundation for the western education in Igboland. Father Lutz made a great use of education as a means of evangelization. Complementing the education in literacy was the vocational training given to the more matured boys and girls in the workshops and training centres. Father Lutz set up workshops and training centres to cater for the well-being of all. “In Christian villages and within agricultural settlements established by the missionaries in Igboland, there existed alongside the homes, some workshops where carpentry, masonry, shoemaking, tailoring, horticulture and other forms of housekeeping and services could be taught.”⁹⁰ “The workshops and the vocational centres were aimed at providing the boys with some skills which would give them an independent livelihood after qualifying as workmen and to provide for the sustenance of various inmates of the mission especially those in the orphanage.”⁹¹ These commercially oriented programmes like carpentry, masonry, shoemaking and tailoring were aimed at enabling the beneficiaries find something doing in life and have a means of livelihood when they must have left the missions and the workshops. In these orphanages and workshops, some boys were also trained as catechists to help the missionaries in the work of evangelization.

Still, others were also trained as assistants to the missionaries such as clerks, cooks and stewards. Girls were taught housekeeping and other issues that would help them later in life as future mothers and directresses of homes. As these boys and girls were learning these, they also had time to pray and to learn catechism. These really helped to deepen their knowledge about Catholic Church and so made them stronger and faithful members of the Church. As these boys and girls exhibited their various skills of mastery in carpentry, masonry and tailoring, more and more boys and girls were attracted and they willingly joined these boys and girls in these workshops and training centres located in the missions in order to acquire the skills and learn the acts also. Through these means, the missionaries were able to get more and more converts to the Catholic Church and so increased the number of the Catholic faithful

⁸⁸ Obi, “Background to the Planting of the Catholic Christianity in the Lower Niger,” 25.

⁸⁹ Obi, “The French Pioneers, 1885-1905,” 41.

⁹⁰ Rose Njoku, *The Advent of The Catholic Church in Nigeria: its Growth in Owerri Diocese* (Owerri: Assumpta Press, 1980), 28.

⁹¹ Ozigboh, *Roman Catholicism in South Eastern Nigeria 1885-1931*, 82.

especially young boys and girls within a small space of time. The missionaries also, on their arrival set up rehabilitation homes for the accommodation and rehabilitation of the abandoned and the homeless among the natives. These rehabilitation homes served as a permanent homes for the rejects and abandoned of the society, where they can take refuge, come back to normalcy and seek anew the possible means of livelihood.

E. Purchase, Freeing and Redemption of Slaves

When the French pioneer Catholic missionaries came to Igboland, slavery was still in existence and the slave trade continued to go on as before, though in a secret form. This condition of slave trade really shocked the missionaries. They were very surprised to see that slavery was still going in such a big way despite the decrees and the campaigns against it. “Pope Leo XIII was the reigning supreme Pontiff who in his 25 years of Pontificate signed and supported the primary assignment of pioneer missionary events in Lower Niger, Igboland which was buying slaves in order to set them free. Lower Niger was one of the 248 Sees and 48 Prefectures or Vicariates he created during his reign.”⁹² Pope Leo XIII gave such a great support to anti-slavery societies and associations especially in France to buy and set slaves free after their conversion to Catholic faith. “In his encyclical letter of 5 May, 1888 ‘In Plurimis’, he also gave an order that money should be collected in all Churches all over the world on every 6 January, and that the missionaries engaged in evangelization in Africa should use the money collected to end this inhuman practice in Africa.”⁹³ Organizations such as the Saint Enfance, the Propagation of the Faith and the French Anti-Slavery Society welcome the Pope’s directive and promised to supply the missionaries the funds needed for this project. This was how and why Father Lutz and his co-missionaries embarked on the project of buying and freeing of slaves.

Through this way, the apostolate of purchase and redemption of slaves became one of the missionary methods of the early missionaries. More attention and more funds were given to this apostolate of purchase and redemption of slaves when it was discovered that most of these slaves were not only sold to far distant lands but that most of them were destined and used for human sacrifice. The Holy Ghost missionaries discovered that the most deplorable thing about slavery in Igboland was that most pagan kings and chiefs of various communities came to slave market to purchase their own provision of slaves for their sacrifices. They used

⁹² John N. Kelly, “The Oxford Dictionary of Popes,” op. cit., 312. Cf. Bruno Moser (Hg) “Das Papstum Epochen und Gestalten,” *München* (1983): 379 quoted in Hygienus Chigere, *Foreign Missionary Background and Indigenous Evangelization in Igboland* (Owerri: Living Flames, 2013), 178.

⁹³ John N. Kelly, “The Oxford Dictionary of Popes,” op. cit., 312. Cf. Bruno Moser (Hg) “Das Papstum Epochen und Gestalten,” *München* (1983): 379 quoted in Chigere, *Foreign Missionary Background and Indigenous Evangelization in Igboland*, Hygienus Chigere, 178.

these slaves for human sacrifices. These details and reports moved the Propaganda Fide to draw up the policy of redeeming slaves and to send in money specifically for this. So, when these slaves were bought, they needed to be taught the Catholic faith and doctrines before they were set free. It was from this that the need to have a Christian village which served as a catechetical and formation centre came up.

F. Building of the Christian Village

The early Catholic missionaries in Igboland engaged in the apostolate of rescuing slaves and giving refuge to the rejects of the society. The reason was obvious. No compassionate heart with the background of the missionaries could remain insensitive to the horrors, misery, inhumanity and the indignity of the slave trade. So, the early Catholic missionaries spent a lot of money buying slaves. One may ask, what did the missionaries do with the slaves they bought? The buying back of slaves led to the opening of the Christian village, “the method and ideology of the Holy Ghost Fathers in Igboland, Eastern Nigeria where the inmates lived a very strictly regulated life with a definite hours for prayers, catechesis, play and work.”⁹⁴ For the early Catholic missionaries, it was the most favourable circumstance where the Catholic doctrine could be imparted to the catechumens away from the neutralizing and watering down influences of non-Christians, Protestants, some merchants and civil servants who lived in total disregard of all moral laws. So, Christian village was a community where the freed slaves practised a kind of quasi-monastic spirituality, a fact which some historians totally ignored but rather interpreted as a device for obtaining useful pools of cheap labour before the emergency of a free labour market.

This method of Christian village served as one of the earliest strategies employed by the missionaries. Whether it was the Catholics who first began this method or the Protestants is still a matter under debate. The fact remains that the Protestants used a similar method of evangelization when they wanted to form a new people. The ex-slaves in Sierra Leone and Liberia were carved out and settled there in order to avail them a new environment where they will not have any contact with the natives and the local people. That was the method the early Catholics missionaries also used though with some modifications and improvement. Through this method, the missionaries took care of the slaves, brought them up as good Christians and helped them find Christian families. By 1892, the Superior of the Holy Ghost Fathers wrote Cardinal Prefect of the Propaganda Fide that resettlement of the redeemed slaves in Christian villages had been a major part of their society’s missionary tradition. There he remarked, “in

⁹⁴ Obi, “The French Pioneers, 1985-1905,” 35.

all our missions, our Fathers bring up young children, both boys and girls at great expense and a good number of these, especially of the girls are children brought out of slavery. We have to look after them for several years until we can establish them and they make Christian household.”⁹⁵

Besides slaves, there were other groups and categories of people redeemed and christianised by the missionaries. These were mainly outcasts of the Igbo society. The Igbo, like many other tribes or ethnic groups in Eastern Nigeria had a number of sacred prohibitions (taboos) believed and seen to be decrees of ‘Ala’ the Mother Earth, goddess of the earth. Going contrary or rather infringement of these decrees result in the pollution of the earth which consequently is a threat to the fertility of the land and agriculture, the main occupation of the Igbo people. It was a strong belief among the people of Igboland before the advent of Christianity that “uncleansed pollutions result in the disturbance of the natural order. Unusual physical deformities and happenings are believed to be signs of disturbed natural order. Hence, twins, children who cut their upper teeth before the lower teeth, cripples, those who talk before they walk, were all seen as evidence of disturbed natural order. Their removal followed by ritual cleansing are necessary conditions for the restoration of the natural order.”⁹⁶ Besides these, certain people who suffered from small pox, leprosy and dropsy were seen as outcasts by the Igbo society. These categories of people were also taken into the Christian village and christianised and they later formed the nucleus of the first Catholic population. On this, the Journal Report of February 1888 has this to say, “Since our arrival, women who gave birth to twins came to take refuge in the mission. The law of the land demanded the death of twins. At the same time, it inflicts capital punishment on parents who tried to hide them.”⁹⁷

In the Christian villages, rules and regulations were made in order to ensure discipline and good formation. It is important to note that Blessed Cyprain Michael Iwene Tansi, the only blessed in Igboland and Nigeria was a product of this Christian Village Formation System. However, this missionary method which appeared so promising at an early stage was soon to become irksome. Its weakness and failure as a hindrance rather than a help for the development of the missionary work soon became so clear. And at the time of Father Lejeune, it was abandoned. Remembering the meagre financial resources and the limited number of man power and personnel of the missionaries just lavished on only a tiny section of the large population, one can easily say no to this project further. Again, immunity from law and customs was

⁹⁵ Joseph Lutz, “Journal,” (June 12, 1886), quoted in Emefie Ikenga-Metuh and Christopher Ejizu, *Hundred Years of Catholicism in Eastern Nigeria 1885-1985: The Nnewi Story*, 17.

⁹⁶ Ikenga-Metuh and Ejizu, *Hundred Years of Catholicism in Eastern Nigeria 1885-1985: The Nnewi Story*, 18.

⁹⁷ Joseph Lutz, “Journal Report,” (February, 1888) quoted in Ikenga-Metuh and Ejizu, *Hundred Years of Catholicism in Eastern Nigeria 1885-1985: The Nnewi Story*, 18.

accorded to the Christians even against the will of the masses. Culprits and hardened criminals, outlaws and offenders began to take refuge in the Christian villages in order to flee the arm of justice and escape from customary sanctions. A lot of abuses came in. Even Christians themselves at a stage got fed up with this method of Christian village because, for them, it was too burdensome and demanding. This was how this missionary method came to be dropped during the time of Father Lejeune.

G. Agriculture and Plantation Projects

“This method of evangelization was brought to enhance the general life and sustenance of the new Christian communities initiated by the missionaries to replace the indigenous settlement groups gradually.”⁹⁸ The early missionaries used this method to ensure that the people at the mission have a regular food supply and also to teach the converts and the entire Christians the dignity of labour. They were taught through this method, the need to be hardworking and dedicated to one’s duty. Just as these people living in the mission were mobilised to go and work together in the farm so that they will always have something to eat in all seasons, so also, in the same way, they were mobilised to go and pray and to learn catechisms together also. With these group actions, many of them were able to learn to pray and to sing. They also learnt the catechism of the Catholic Church. Having learnt all these spiritual exercises, many grew up to be strong members of the Catholic Church. They were those who held on the Catholic teachings and were able to teach and hand them on to the younger generation especially after the exit of the European missionaries.

2. The Period of the Irish Missionaries (1905-1967)

Right from the beginning, the French Catholic missionaries headed by Father Lutz were not accepted to work and plant the seed of Catholic faith in Igboland by the Royal Niger Company which was the official representative of the British government in Igboland, Southern Nigeria. In the face, this British company appeared to be friendly to these French Catholic missionaries by offering them house. But in reality, they never wanted the arrival and the missionary works of these French missionaries in Igboland. “Almost from the very start, there was a controversy over why French missionaries should work in Igboland, southern Nigeria, which was a colony of the British government.”⁹⁹ The appointment of a Frenchman as Apostolic Prefect in a British political sphere of influence stirred instant reaction. Sir James Marshall, one of the directors of

⁹⁸ Chigere, *Foreign Missionary Background and Indigenous Evangelization in Igboland*, 175.

⁹⁹ Celestine Obi, “The Missionary Contributions of Bishop Shanahan, C.S.Sp. 1902-1932,” in *A Hundred Years Of The Catholic Church in Eastern Nigeria 1885-1985*, ed. Celestine Obi (Onitsha: Africana-Fep Publishers Ltd, 1985), 111.

the Royal Niger Company and the chief justice of the company became apprehensive of the political implications of the elevation of a Frenchman to such a high position. "He therefore, wrote to the Sacred Congregation for the Propaganda of Faith in Rome and Westminster, insisting on the replacement of the French missionaries in Igboland, with English missionaries (British Roman Catholic priests) because it is not proper that French missionaries should work in English territories."¹⁰⁰

The problem between the Royal Niger Company and the French Catholic Missionaries was much more than language barrier, that is between English speaking people and the French speaking people for in actual fact "the pioneer French missionaries learnt English, produced catechisms in English and evangelised the people in English as well as in vernacular."¹⁰¹ This dispute should rather be seen as part of the Anglo-French political and commercial rivalry in the Igboland. The natural competition that existed between the European warring powers over territories and products from Africa helped to heighten the hatred on the French Catholic missionaries. On this testimony Obi said, "relationship with the royal Niger company became more strained especially as George Tubman Goldie, the president suspected these French missionaries of being the agents of French government and French commercial companies. Again, the Catholic missionaries harboured some French agents like Lieutenant Mizon and Jacob Hoenigsberg out of charity as they needed their help."¹⁰² These two people were accused by the Royal Niger Company of making some diplomatic expedition and carrying illegal transactions while at the same time dodging custom duties respectively. The French missionaries were accused of favouring their native home government (French Government) and this unconducive atmosphere led to constraining them into signing one treaty after another.

At a stage, due to heightened hostility between the French Catholic missionaries and Royal Niger Company who was the official representative of the British government, it became very clear that the environment was no longer favourable, friendly and conducive for these French Catholic missionaries to continue their work of evangelization in Igboland. At this time too, a missionary priest, Father Francis Xavier Lichtenberger working in Southern Nigeria came to Europe on his annual leave and paid a visit to Ireland. He delivered a lecture to the young students in Rockwell College and enlightened them of the great harvest out there in Africa that is wasting for lack of reapers and harvesters, to gather it in and he at the same time challenged the youths to come and help to harvest these fruits in Africa especially in Igboland, Southern Nigeria. This appeal really touched Father Joseph Shanahan. He immediately applied

¹⁰⁰ Ekechi, *Missionary Enterprise and Rivalry in Igboland 1857-1914*, 83.

¹⁰¹ Obi, "The Missionary Contributions of Bishop Shanahan, C.S.Sp., 1902-1932," 111.

¹⁰² Obi, "Background to the Planting of Catholic Christianity in the Lower Niger," 30.

to Paris for missionary apostolate. Within three weeks, he received a letter appointing him as an apostolic missionary to Igboland, Southern Nigeria. He was to help Monsignor Leon Lejeune at Onitsha in the Prefecture Apostolic of Southern Nigeria. The arrival of Father Shanahan at Onitsha was very significant because it marked what could be called the Irish Missionary Movement to Igboland, Southern Nigeria.

Furthermore, it marked the beginning of the replacement of French missionaries with Irish English Missionaries in Igboland, Lower Niger. Father Joseph Shanahan came to Onitsha in Igboland in 1902. He joined Monsignor Leon Lejeune who was already working at Onitsha. It was under Father Shanahan that the Prefecture of the Lower Niger was raised to the Vicariate of the Lower Niger on April 16, 1920, with him, Father Shanahan as its first Vicar Apostolic. On June 1920, Father Joseph Shanahan was consecrated a bishop. He contributed immensely in the spread of the Catholic faith in Igboland as will be seen in his missionary methods below. He died on Christmas day 1943. But at his resignation due to illness in 1931, he was succeeded by Bishop Charles Heerey. After his episcopal consecration on 29 May, 1927, Bishop Charles Heerey became the Vicar Apostolic of the Vicariate of the Lower Niger until 1967 when the indigenous missionaries took over. 1967 marked the end of the Irish missionary activities in Igboland, Southern Nigeria. It is indeed worthy to note that, it was under Bishop Charles Heerey that the Vicariate Apostolic of the Southern Nigeria gave birth to the following: “Prefecture of Calabar formed by Calabar and Ogoja provinces. The Prefecture was carved out of the Vicariate Apostolic of Southern Nigeria, Onitsha in 9 July 1934. Prefecture of Benue formed by Igala, Idoma, Tiv, Wukari and Yola missions in 9 July 1934.....”¹⁰³ What remained of the old Vicariate Apostolic of Southern Nigeria was then known as Vicariate Apostolic of Onitsha-Owerri in the same 9 July 1934.

This later became Vicariate Apostolic of Onitsha in 12 February 1948 when the Vicariate Apostolic of Owerri was carved out in the same 12 February 1948. In 18 April, 1950, the Vicariate Apostolic of Onitsha was made the Archdiocese of Onitsha with Bishop Charles Heerey becoming the first Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Onitsha. In the same year also, 18 April, 1950, the Vicariate Apostolic of Owerri was also made the Diocese of Owerri. All these Vicariates, Prefecture, Provinces, Archdioceses and Dioceses created and carved out of the Vicariate of the Southern Nigeria, Onitsha, are today known and addressed as Old Onitsha Ecclesiastical Province. The missionary methods adopted and used by the Irish missionaries were quite unique and excellent. These were evident in their achievements in Igboland during their missionary work and activities. These methods gave this period its unique identity. Those

¹⁰³ Okon, “Expansion and Consolidation: Growth in Onitsha, Calabar, Owerri, Ogoja and Umuahia,” 179.

methods include: use of schools and education, role of teacher-catechists and beautiful liturgical celebrations and aesthetic appeals.

A. Use of Schools and Education

Charity and charitable works were the main methods used by the Pioneer French Catholic missionaries led by Father Lutz. With the exit of Father Leon Lejeune, the last French Catholic missionary in Igboland, Irish missionaries set their feet on Igboland. The first among them was Father Joseph Shanahan who later became Bishop and Vicar Apostolic of the Vicariate of the Lower Niger. Bishop Shanahan came with a totally different and unique method of evangelization. First of all, he discarded the use of charity and charitable organisations as missionary methods. He noticed very well that harbouring of freed slaves, while in itself a work of charity tended to be a source of scandal to the free born natives. In the eyes of these people, if the Christian Religion were just good enough for slaves, redeemed and the outcasts, then it must be inferior to the Traditional Religions. This is one incident that led Father Shanahan to discard the use of charity.

However, a more serious event took place, which led him to abandon the use of charity and Christian village immediately and that event is the conversation he had with one of the chiefs, “In the course of the conversation with a chief whom he gave a rough sketch of the exposition of heaven, with the hope of converting him, the chief wanted to know if the other chiefs were also to go to heaven. When Father Shanahan replied that this was doubtful, the chief then answered, ‘if I go to heaven and they all, my brother-chiefs will be down in the other place you speak of (hell), oh no, I would rather be with my own.’”¹⁰⁴ This brief dialogue was a great eye-opener to Father Shanahan. He began to ask himself, “if the chief is not willing to go to heaven because his blood relatives and companions are going to hell, what will he not do to avoid perdition, if all his grandchildren and his sons and daughters are going to heaven? Would these children not want their father and mother to be with them in heaven?”¹⁰⁵ This led Father Shanahan to the resolution to provide many schools where these children could learn the principle and act of faith and later on pass it to their parents.

Having seen the impact and positive effects, education should make in the work of evangelization, Bishop Shanahan immediately wrote a letter to Cardinal Gotti, Secretary and Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith in Rome, seeking two things: “to solicit more generosity in the allocation of funds and above to convince the Propaganda Fide that the funds for redeeming slaves should be better employed and used in

¹⁰⁴ Obi, “The Missionary Contributions of Bishop Shanahan, C.S.S.p., 1902-1932” 120.

¹⁰⁵ Obi, “The Missionary Contributions of Bishop Shanahan, C.S.Sp., 1902-1932” 120.

promoting literary education.”¹⁰⁶ Bishop Shanahan “believed that what the natives, local people, ex-slaves and converts needed as a preparation for the faith and as a safeguard for it after its reception was a new orientation of mind based on the acceptance of Christian standard judgement.”¹⁰⁷ Bishop Shanahan hoped and believed that such a change could be effected only by literary education. He saw literary education as a very effective and dynamic means of spreading the faith. The school was one of the many ways of christianising the Prefecture.

Also, dynamic evangelization in the form of catechetical instructions and teachings were organised in various towns and villages. They made the means of salvation available to as many as possible. They introduced literary education not for its own sake but as a means to this end. Many people held that the educational efforts of Bishop Shanahan should head the list of his achievements. He made his purpose clear right from the start. For him, the introduction and promotion of western education was simply a means to an end and this end was the eternal salvation of the people of the Vicariate and all the people who will later come to know God through these educated people of the Vicariate. The people of Igboland had great admiration for the white men particularly the agents of the Royal Niger Company. The people had bowed to the power of literacy of the white men. They came to realise that the secret of the whiteman’s power and success did not lie in his physical strength. They believed that the secret lay in his learning that is, education.

Thus, the positive response to the new opportunities and the general popular assessment of the school as a royal road to success explained the mass enthusiasm for education which gave rise to the Catholic school policy. Father Lejeune had recognised this popular interest in education at Onitsha and Calabar. He responded most effectively to it. He had reported in 1904, “Education in Africa is the surest and most effective method of converting the people. It has even become the only way. Without the schools, we are nowhere.”¹⁰⁸ Father Shanahan not only continued this policy but, with the increasing advance into the interior, gave his total commitment to education as the primary instrument of evangelization. It was in fact, in this education question, that he made his name. In his report as a Prefect in 1905, he wrote, “The government and the Protestants are building schools. The government insists on inspection.....A struggle is going on for the soul of the Igboland. It is through the school that this nation will be won. Victory is ours if we continue on the educational system of

¹⁰⁶ Obi, “The Missionary Contributions of Bishop Shanahan, C.S.Sp., 1902-1932” 124.

¹⁰⁷ Jordan, *Bishop Shanahan of Southern Nigeria*, 61.

¹⁰⁸ Ozigboh,, *Roman Catholicism in South Eastern Nigeria 1885-1931*, 182

evangelization. This is why I insist so much on school. That is why we spend so much to improve and to build more schools.”¹⁰⁹

B. The Role of Teacher-Catechists

Father Shanahan knew right from the beginning that the success of his apostolate in Igboland depended so much on the great roles of the catechist teachers. He therefore set out to the task of working out his scheme in detail. His first move was significant. For the year 1906, he put two Fathers and two brothers into the schools in Onitsha. Their work was to be full time and one of them, Father Feral had the task of training three pupil-teachers. The two brothers (David and Otteran) were given charge of the highest classes, from which future teachers were to be picked. He did this in order to produce well educated and qualitative teacher-catechists who will help him in the work and to carry on with the work of evangelization when he (Shanahan) must have left Igboland. Father Shanahan knew so well that without the teacher-catechists, his plan to evangelise, plant and sustain the seed of the Catholic faith in Igboland would never see the light of day, and would remain a wonderful dream that will never turn into reality. For how could he establish schools and Churches in many towns, villages and hinterlands with such a limited number of priests? How could he also bridge the cultural gap and linguistic differences between the European missionaries and natives?

More so, how could the missionaries effectively combine missionary work and school apostolate? All these point to the fact that the roles and functions of these teacher-catechists in Igboland are indispensable. The Prefect was aware of this and that is why he made adequate provision early during the planning stage for the training of the teacher-catechists. This was such that by January 1909, a handful of these teacher-catechists trained at Onitsha were ready for employment. “Such great names like Patrick Okolo, Charles Nduagba, Willie Onuchukwu and Paul Anekwe and many others belonged to this first generation of teacher-catechists who through their dedication and sacrifices built up the vast empire of Catholic schools of Father Shanahan’s dream and thus, transformed Eastern Nigeria into a predominantly Catholic area.”¹¹⁰ Through the agency and roles of these catechist-teachers, the missionaries were able to overcome the problem of insufficient personnel. The catechist-teachers, the converted pagans of yesterday, became a force to be reckoned with. Learning on the job, they began to instruct the people on the major truths of the faith, to teach prayers and some hymns, some readings, writing and Arithmetic. The catechist-teachers were in effect priests without priestly ordination. They catechised and evangelised. They conducted Sunday services in the

¹⁰⁹ Ozigboh, *Roman Catholicism in South Eastern Nigeria 1885-1931*, 182-183.

¹¹⁰ Ozigboh, *Roman Catholicism in South Eastern Nigeria 1885-1931*, 186.

outstations. They examined the candidates for the sacraments of Baptism, Holy Communion and Confirmation. They also made home visitations in the villages and hinterlands to instruct and baptise those in danger of death. They acted as liaison and as public relations officers and link for the missionaries. They equally interpreted for the priests when the latter were on a station for visitation. In fact, the local Church of the village station grew around the catechist-teachers. These catechist-teachers gave intelligent, sincere and zealous cooperation. Every catechist-station was a hive of Christian activities. Each had his school and chapel where Sunday services were frequently organised morning and evening. A committee of elder Christians saw to it that the catechists, the Catholics and the Catechumens did their work. These catechist-teachers spent most of their time in visits, in instructing the faithful and in giving Christian burial to the dead. Through the efforts of these catechist-teachers, Catholic faith was able to spread so fast in Igboland, down to the villages and hinterlands. Through their indispensable roles also, the Catholic Church was able to be rooted in Igboland today, even stronger than other denominations.

C. Beautiful Liturgical Celebrations and Aesthetic Appeals

The liturgical celebrations and religious activities which the early Catholic missionaries practised in Igboland were so beautiful and appealing to people, such that, they became a centre of attraction and admiration. The liturgies were so beautiful and colourful. The missionary use of aesthetic appeals was calculated to influence the attitudes and responses of the people. These aesthetic appeals were employed by the missionaries to gain the attraction and the interest of the people so as to win and sustain them in the Catholic faith. These appeals operated more directly on the religious sentiments of the people than did the medical services and material aids given by the missionaries. According to Ozigboh, "These appeals are two-fold: the dogma bound and the non-dogma bound. The dogma bound appeals are the dogmatic teachings and message regarded as the distinctive attributes and attraction of Christianity."¹¹¹

It is always good to translate and synthesize the elements of the Christian message in philosophical and abstract forms (Dogma and Theologies). As these are not easily understood and comprehended especially by the beginners and neophytes, an effort is made to imitate them through a process of indoctrination whose most potent vehicle is the catechism. Catechism helps to simplify these high theologies and make them easy to understand. The personality of Jesus Christ, his captivating message of love and forgiveness and the mystery of his martyrdom and death can be classified as dogma bound appeals and they have always been the great

¹¹¹ Ozigboh, *Roman Catholicism in South Eastern Nigeria 1885-1931*, 83.

attraction of Christianity. The teaching of the Catholic Church about heaven as a place of consolation and eternal rest and hell as a place of damnation is really a matter of interest to the human hearts. These teachings have lots and lots of effects and impacts on the psychology of Igbo people.

“The non-dogma bound appeals are grouped under three heads: the liturgical and quasi liturgical, the sacramental and the social.”¹¹² The liturgical and quasi liturgical deal with Catholic worships and their various aspects. These liturgical worships and ceremonies were really palatial, captivating and attractive. The older Igbo Catholics today still remember with nostalgia the ‘Missa Cantata’ and the ‘Missa Solemnis’ of their earlier years. One needs to attend a Latin sung Mass for an Igbo congregation in order to appreciate the beauty and attraction which the Catholic liturgy had for the Igbos. The newly converted natives could not understand Latin texts but the heart-throbbing refrains and rhythms of the Gregorian plain chant transmitted a compelling aesthetic pleasure. The prefaces were excellently and beautifully sung to the admiration of the natives to the point that one Ephraim, a former member of the Church Mission Society and chief native agent at Onitsha being highly impressed by the singing and beautiful liturgy during a Catholic Holy Mass said to Father Kuntzmann, a Catholic priest who was instrumental to his conversion “This is how God ought to be worshipped. It is indeed a beautiful liturgy.”¹¹³

Sister Mary Claver was a very good organist and she used to accompany the Holy Mass and liturgy with organ. Associated with the liturgy were other aspects of the Roman Church calendar. The Church feasts of Christmas, Easter, Holy Week, Palm Sunday and Corpus Christ, Mid-night Masses, Ash Wednesday and Stations of the Cross were very popular and exceptionally beautiful. The decoration of the Churches especially during big occasions like Christmas and Easter attracted much attention. The liturgical vestments for priest and other minor ministers rich in their variety of colours and symbolism were a wonder for many converts. The missionaries adopted vestments for such occasions as Baptism, Holy Communion and Confirmation.

The second group of non-dogma bound appeals are the sacramental. These are usually religious symbols, objects or practices to which some religious meanings are attached. Because of their close resemblance to Igbo traditional symbols and practices, they exercised great appeal to the people. Some people interpreted the symbols according to their own understanding. Sometimes, they put their own interpretations on the symbols without the missionaries ever

¹¹² Ozigboh, *Roman Catholicism in South Eastern Nigeria 1885-1931*, 83.

¹¹³ Ekechi, *Missionary Enterprise and Rivalry in Igboland 1857-1914*, 79.

suspecting or knowing. Some of these symbols are medals, crucifixes, scapulars and chaplets, devotion to saints, statues, bells, holy pictures and Christmas crib. A Calvary was erected at one of the villages at Aguleri town. It really became a centre of attraction for the natives. The journal of Onitsha had many entries about the peoples' great admiration for the life-sized statue of the Sacred Heart of Jesus placed in the Church. Crowd of converts, non-converts and Protestants came regularly to take a look at it. Chief Idigo was also very proud of the conspicuous crucifix which the missionaries gave to him after his conversion and baptism. He used to put this on always and people used to admire him.

The third group of appeals were social in their connotation and they too were quite appealing to the people including the non-converts and the Protestants. Some of these social appeals belonged to the people of Igboland themselves. Some of them are the use of cannon shots to announce the important events like life festival of a king. The missionaries also used Chinese magic lanterns and gramophone recitals to attract and impress the people. The impact of these psychological and aesthetic appeals was indeed great. They satisfied the desire and aspirations of the people

3. The Period of the Indigenous Missionaries (1967-Till Date)

Although the first indigenous priest of Igboland, Fr. John Cross Anyogu was ordained on 8 December, 1930 and the first indigenous Igbo Bishop, the same John Cross Anyaogu, was consecrated on 9 June 1957, the actual indigenous leadership in Igbo Catholicism began in 1967 when Archbishop Francis Arinze took over the leadership role from the foreign missionaries. With the death of Archbishop Charles Heerey in 1967, who was until his death the Archbishop of Onitsha Archdiocese, the jurisdiction of the Archdiocese fell on Archbishop Francis Arinze. His appointment and elevation made a history in the entire life and history of the Catholic Church in Igboland. His elevation to the throne marked the end of one era and the beginning of another era. It marked virtually the end of foreign missionary work in the Archdiocese of Onitsha and in the entire Igboland in general. The Holy Ghost missionaries regarded the appointment and elevation of Bishop Francis Arinze (an indigenous Bishop of Igboland) as the Archbishop of Onitsha Archdiocese and metropolitan of the Onitsha ecclesiastical province as the pinnacle of their effort and the consummation of their mission in Igboland, Southern Nigeria. It is now left for the indigenous missionaries to continue the work of nurturing and solidification of the faith already planted by the foreign missionaries. With the exit of the foreign missionaries, the role of leadership fell on the hands of the indigenous hierarchies with Archbishop Francis Arinze as the first indigenous Archbishop of Igboland. Archbishop Francis Arinze was born in 1 November, 1932 in Eziowelle, Idemili North Local

Government Area of Anambra State. He was of Igbo origin. He became a Christian at the age of nine. He was ordained a priest in 1958. He had a lightning-fast rise in the hierarchy of the Church and became then the world's youngest Bishop in 1965 at the age of 32. He was the first indigenous bishop of Igboland to assume the leadership of the missionary works and activities in the Archdiocese of Onitsha which is the seat and kernel of Catholicism in Igboland. He worked very hard during the transition period and his effort led to the sustenance of the Catholic faith in Igboland today. In fact, the history of the Catholic Church in Igboland today cannot be complete if his name and roles are not given the first place. With him, the enormous task of continuing the missionary work of evangelization and stabilisation of the Catholic faith in Igboland fell in the hands of the indigenous missionaries. At the time he took over the leadership of the Igbo Catholicism, all the expatriate priests hitherto working in the Igboland have been forcibly expelled from the country as a result of civil war and the Nigerian government had taken over all the schools from the Church. Archbishop Arinze was at this time left with only a handful of local priests.

“The first thing he did from which he derived and developed his missionary strategies and methods was the reorganization of the administrative and pastoral structure in the Archdiocese. His belief in proper administration and participation of clergy and laity in the Church's apostolate led him to create various councils, organizations, commissions, committees and directorates. These served as his missionary methods and strategies.”¹¹⁴ Archbishop Arinze was greatly influenced by the Second Vatican Council's decree on laity in the choice and selection of his missionary methods and strategies. He was also influenced by the nature of Igbo people. Being fresh from the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) as well as his good knowledge of Igbo people, as people of community and communal life, accorded him the initiative to give the laity an active role in the work of evangelization. The indispensable role of the lay people has always been recognised even from the time of the Apostles. St. Paul made full use of them, men and women alike for his missionary works and journeys (Rom 16: 1-2, 11). With the increasing number of Christians and the limited number of priests in Igboland then, Archbishop Arinze recognised that the role the laity has to play can never be too stressed, for they are all called to the priestly office of Christ through baptism.

The Second Vatican Council on 18 November 1965 promulgated the Decree on the Apostolate of lay people. The decree explained the nature of the lay apostolate, its character and the variety of its forms. It stated its fundamental principles and gave pastoral directives for its more effective exercise. The Council Fathers recognised that without the laity, the clergy

¹¹⁴ Okon, “Expansion and Consolidation: Growth in Onitsha, Calabar, Owerri, Ogoja and Umuahia,” 187.

will not be able to obtain full realization of their mission. Thus, the Council concludes the decree on the lay apostolate with the exhortation, “This holy Council earnestly exhorts in the Lord, all lay people to give a glad, generous and prompt response to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and to the voice of Christ....”¹¹⁵ With above exhortation, the Council calls upon and admonishes the laity to be more fully involved now than before in all that is good for the survival of the Church. This admonition of the Council to the laity as well as the democratic and team-spirit of Igbo society became the decisive factor in the life of Archbishop Francis Arinze as he set out to choose and form his missionary methods. In Igbo society, the council of Elders, the Age Grade, the ‘Umuokpu’ or ‘Umuada’ (an association of married women) and the Title-Holders usually help the community head in governing the society.

In fact, in Igbo setting, governance is meant for all both the head and the members. Everybody is involved and this is why Igbos are very progressive. Everybody contributes in decision making. Therefore, this Vatican Decree on laity is not something new to Igbo community. Rather than innovation, people saw it as coming to ratify this trend in their local democratic society. Therefore, for the Igbo society, the Vatican II’s Decree on the Apostolate of the laity is a papal formal approval of their traditional way of governing themselves. Archbishop Arinze knew all these and that was why he greatly and to a large extent unlike the foreign missionaries incorporated in addition to his clergy, the lay people in the work of evangelization through the establishment of various diocesan and parish councils, lay organizations, commissions, lay committees and lay directorates. These served as his missionary methods and strategies. With these commissions and organizations, he showed clearly that wanted to create a proper administrative teamwork and collaboration in the running of the Archdiocese. He valued the imports of these structures and organs. Up till today, they still serve as effective forces and management techniques in running the Igbo Catholicism.

A. Diocesan and Parish Councils

On taking over the role of leadership, “Archbishop Arinze established Archdiocesan and parish councils in the Archdiocese and in all the parishes in the Archdiocese.”¹¹⁶ This council exists in all the Archdioceses, Dioceses and Parishes in Igboland today. In the Archdiocesan and Diocesan level, it is called the Archdiocesan or Diocesan Pastoral Council while in the Parish level, it is called Parish Pastoral Council. The diocesan and parish pastoral councils therefore are the highest court of appeal for the activities in the diocese and in the parish respectively. Diocesan Pastoral Council is the highest decision making body in the diocesan level. The

¹¹⁵ Vatican Council II, *Apostolicam Actuositatem; Decree on the Apostolate of the Lay People*, no. 33.

¹¹⁶ Vincent Nwosu, *Archdiocese of Onitsha since 1970* (Onitsha: Africana-Fep Publishers Limited, 1988), 187.

diocesan Bishop is normally the head and chairman. The members of this council are usually the diocesan bishop, his auxiliary if any, the members of diocesan Curia, the parish priest of all the parishes and the vice chairmen of all the parish councils of all the parishes within the diocese, the chaplains and rectors of all the chaplaincies, seminaries and Catholic institutions within the diocese. This council normally has monthly meetings to discuss the welfare of the diocese. Diocesan Bishop is the one that has the final say in all cases and decisions but he may consider the opinion of others.

Similarly, parish pastoral council is the highest court of appeal in the parish level. It is also the greatest decision making body in the parish. The parish priest is the head and chairman of this council. Members of the council are elected to fill these offices and posts. In places where the entire parish or community is divided into groups, the chairmen and the secretaries of each of these groups will therefore form the body that will constitute the members of the parish council. People can also be selected from the floor of the community to join this body. The tenure for membership into this council lasts for three years, after which a fresh election is conducted. One can also be re-elected but the maximum period is six years. “The parish pastoral council is the highest ruling body in the parish. It is responsible for all decisions and executions of duties in the parish and all that relates the parish community to the diocese.”¹¹⁷ Bishop Unegbu addressing the Diocesan Pastoral Council of then Owerri Diocese (now Archdiocese) on March 1975, said, “The aim of the pastoral council is to remind the Catholic community of their privilege and duty to share with the bishop and priests in the mission of the Church.”¹¹⁸ These councils encourage the active participation of the laity.

B. Lay Organizations

These are also major groups that represent lay participation in the work of the stabilisation and spread of the Gospel in Igboland. Through these lay organisations, lay people take active roles in the work of evangelization. Such lay organizations include: Catholic Men Organisation, Catholic Women Organisation, Catholic Boys Organisation, Catholic Girls Organisation and Holy Childhood Association. For clarity sake, these organisations are well discussed and detailed below.

Catholic Men Organization (C.M.O): This is also called Christian Fathers Organization (C.F.O). It is an association of men in the Church who have established their own families. In order to share more collective responsibility in the work of evangelization and to help the clergy in this singular duty of evangelization, men of every parish do come together under this

¹¹⁷ Vincent Nwosu, *Archdiocese of Onitsha since 1970*, 190.

¹¹⁸ Rose Njoku, *The Advent of The Catholic Church in Nigeria: Its Growth in Owerri Diocese*, 150.

umbrella called Catholic Men Organization. The Catholic Men Organization as a body is always called upon to help the priests in spreading the Gospel of Christ. They are expected to assume a huge and collective responsibility in the running of the parishes. In order to support the parish and community apostolate, the C.M.O usually undertakes difficult tasks and through hard experiences, they have penetrated into the grassroots to keep the rhythm of Christian activities high, even within areas where priests are not available in regular returns for the celebration of Masses and other liturgical community functions. Through their generous material and financial aids and contributions in the parishes, the parish priests are sustained regularly. In the same way, they undertake collective and private charitable works both in the diocesan and parish levels. Many sick and aged Catholics, poor families, orphans and widows have survived a bit of their hard conditions out of the generous concern and assistance of the C.M.O in their parishes. Through this way, deep faith and good Catholic practices have been encouraged and supported among the Igbo Catholics. These generous activities and contributions of the Catholic Men Organization are indeed helping evangelization to acquire more meaning in concrete life issues. Their cooperation with the clergy help greatly in the work of evangelization. They appear in their uniform during official liturgical functions. Their major feast day is St. Joseph's Feast day.

Catholic Women Organization (C.W.O): This is also known in some dioceses and parishes as Christian Mothers Association (C.M.A). "The formation of Catholic Women Organization into a force in the Catholic Church is a sign of the growing awareness of women's dignity and their specific role in the Church and in the society at large."¹¹⁹ Catholic Women Organization began in 1964 as an autonomous organization responsible for uniting, unifying and coordinating all activities of Catholic women. It started in the Archdiocese of Onitsha, the kernel of Catholic evangelism and from there, it spread to other parts of Igboland. Today, C.W.O has grown to be a strong arm of apostolate as well as an influential arm of coordination and functions in the Catholic Church. The roles and contributions of the Catholic Women Organization today in the Catholic Church cannot be over-emphasized. Their support for the Church within their parishes and diocese at large speak for themselves and have gone beyond domestic assignments. Through their generous and bountiful contributions and aids, the lives of the ordained ministers and seminarians in training have been well sustained. To assist bishops and priests in their private needs, the regular supply of household needs and equipment have remained an added spontaneous and voluntary responsibility of the Christian mothers in most dioceses and parishes. They have helped in building many projects both in the parish level

¹¹⁹ John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa* (Vaticana: Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 1995), no. 121.

and diocesan level. In fact, “without the generous contributions, unalloyed active participation in decision-making and other solidarity undertakings of the Catholic Women Organization in Igboland today, it would have been hard for the indigenous evangelization to operate on the level it is now in the entire Igboland.”¹²⁰ Catholic Women Organization is the strongest support and backbone of every diocese and parish in Igboland. It is the most generous, most organised and most beneficial organization in the Catholic Church in Igboland today. C. W.O as a body not only exists in Igboland. It also exists in the entire federation of Nigeria at various levels like stations, parishes, zonal, diocesan, provincial as well as national. It has recently gained affiliation to World Union of Catholic Women (W.U.C.W). Evaluating their general role and activities in the society, Ozigbo says, “It runs seminars, workshops, and retreats to conscientise women about their rights and roles in the community, to raise their moral and spiritual fibre and to encourage them to cultivate the habit of industry in order to be self-reliant.”¹²¹

Catholic Boys Organization (C.B.O): This is also known in some dioceses and parishes as Catholic Youth Organization (C.Y.O). The Church in Igboland is reaping the fruits of youthful exuberance and the youths themselves are indeed contributing immensely in promoting faith in the Catholic Church in Igboland as well as encouraging active participation among themselves. Through this way, all the youth of every parish are called to become an active agent of evangelization both to himself and to others. Through this Catholic Boys Organization, all the boys of every parish are encouraged to participate actively in all the parish exercises and meetings. This organization has its own rules and regulations, which are binding on all the members. This is to ensure that all the boys are active members of the Catholic Church. Through their various apostolates, the Christians in Igboland are growing to the awareness that youths are the strength of the communities not only in the present but more so of the future humanity. The indication and implication could likely be; “that to fail to encourage the youth means also to risk a future that is bleak, what can also lead to extinction sooner or later.”¹²² These young boys make some financial contributions to the development of parish projects. They organize annual harvest and bazaar as well as launching to raise funds for the well-being of the parishes and societies. Their yearly rallies and functions aim at attracting other youths outside their fold. Their piety and good exemplary lives challenge the rest of their mates in the society. The youths are forces to reckon with in the defence of the Catholic faith.

Catholic Girls Organization (C.G.O): This is equally known as Mary League Girls (M.L.G). This Marian Movement is a popular devotion in Igboland and has been attributed to

¹²⁰ Chigere, *Foreign Missionary Background and Indigenous Evangelization in Igboland*, 485.

¹²¹ Ozigboh, *Igbo Catholicism: The Onitsha Connection 1967-1984*, 44.

¹²² Chigere, *Foreign Missionary Background and Indigenous Evangelization in Igboland*, 488.

Blessed Cyprian Iwene Tansi of Aguleri. He initiated this Marian Movement in order to protect and prevent the adolescent Christian girls from moral mutilations. It also helps to secure the traditional principle of the sacredness of virginity of young girls before marriage as well as to preserve the girls from being tainted with non-Christian fetish customs and practices. This League helps to keep the young girls at the close watch and under the protective eyes of the Church, availing them at the same time with a set of stringent rules to observe and follow to ensure that the Catholic faith is ever alive and active in them. Through this way, the young girls are challenged to live out the principal message of the Gospel. Through this association, young girls are urged to contribute to the success and order in the indigenous apostolate and community life through their manual labours, cleaning of the rectory, Church and environments as well as support the clergy by the supply of the needs at will.

The association helps to make liturgical celebrations in the parishes very lively and active. Dancing, clapping of hands as well as beating of instruments are now introduced by the Mary League Association. The members also help in teaching Catechisms to the children, youths and adults. They also visit the sick and fallen Catholics in their homes to pray for them, offer them some gifts, share their problems with them, offer them hope and sustain them in the Catholic faith. In this way, they make great contributions in the spread of the Catholic faith in Igboland and beyond. The first Friday or first Saturday of every month is their special day of Masses, Prayers and Meetings. They maintain yearly feasts along the feast of Mary like 25 March and 8 December, the Annunciation and the Immaculate Conception respectively.

Holy Childhood Association: This is an association of young children from a year old to the age of twelve. This is in line with Christ injunction in the Gospel of Mathew where he says, "Leave the little children to come to me. Do not prevent them for such are the kingdom of heaven." (Mt 19: 14). Through this holy association, young children are brought to Christ. They are caught young for God. Just as the word of God has it in the Book of Proverbs where it says, "Teach a child a way to follow, when he or she grows up, he or she will never depart from it." (Prov 22:6). The local Church in Igboland in her wisdom listens and obeys this injunction of our Lord. She tries to gather young children for God. She starts in time to inculcate in them the fear of God and the teachings of the Church. Through this association, young children learn the good things which they should do and the bad things which they should avoid. As a group in this association, these young children are taught little prayers and catechism of the Catholic Church. In the Church during liturgical celebrations, they stay before the Altar, listening to priest both during homily and at the other parts of the Holy Mass.

C. Church Commissions

In the spirit of the Vatican II Fathers, the laity share the responsibility by right for the life and work of the Church and for the salvation of the whole world.¹²³ They are said to work with and not for the clergy. As already said above, with the expulsion of many foreign missionaries during the civil war in 1970, only a handful of indigenous priests were left to continue the work of evangelization. This really became a very big challenge to the Catholic Church in Igboland. To solve this problem, many indigenous bishops and local clergy began to initiate many avenues for the lay pastoral participation in the work of evangelization. In Onitsha for instance, the Archbishop Francis Arinze began with his noble task of incorporating some lay arms of services like various commissions in 1970. Other Bishops and dioceses later followed. To facilitate the work of evangelization, many dioceses today in Igboland have many lay commissions with bishops and priests as their overseers, directors and chaplains.

There is a Liturgical and Music Commission which is responsible for the diocesan and parish liturgy and music. This group also receives instructions from the national liturgical commission, implements the instruction in the diocesan level with the permission of the diocesan bishop and then passes the instruction and information to all the liturgical commissions in all the parishes within the diocese for actual implementation. This commission plays a vital role in the area of inculturation in Igboland today. There is also Finance and Building Commission which is responsible for raising money for the dioceses and parishes as well as for erecting buildings, structures and other financial projects. Members of this commission are usually some lay persons who are engineers, architects, builders and surveyors. They give professional advice and directives to the diocesan bishop and parish priests in the areas of buildings and projects.

There exists also a commission known as Vocation Commission. This commission is responsible for vocation and training of priests in the diocese. Through their generous contributions to the dioceses and seminaries, they help the diocesan bishops in the work of training future priests. Their contribution are both spiritual and material. Their observations, suggestions and pieces of advice help in the formation of good priests after the mind of Christ and his Church. Catholic Church in Igboland equally has a commission called Ecumenism Commission. This commission is responsible for ensuring the unity of all Christians in spite of diverse Christian denominations. Finally, there are Justice and Peace Commission as well as Christian Family Commission. It is the responsibility of the Justice and Peace Commission to ensure peace and unity among the various arms or groups in the diocese or parish. They also

¹²³ *Apostolicam Actuositatem; Decree on the Apostolate of the Lay People*, no. 2.

help to resolve conflicts and crisis existing among various groups or even individuals. Through this arm of commission, the Catholic Church helps in settling disputes and quarrels among various towns and communities in Igboland today. This commission is very important and vital. It helps to ensure that all the communities, towns, States, kindred and even families live in peace and harmony. There is also a Further Studies and Education Commission which is responsible for the further education and studies of the priests. They sit from time to time to decide on the priests that should go for further studies. They also decide on the course each of them will read depending on the need of the diocese and seminaries where professors and formators are needed. Through all these commissions, lay men and women contribute in the work of evangelization. They become active agents of evangelization.

D. Directorates and Advisory Councils

Some lay persons are also appointed by bishops to be directors and directresses of some diocesan directorates, projects, investments and establishments. A diocesan Audit Firm normally has a lay person who is a chartered accountant as its director or directress. Again, some diocesan projects and establishments like Diocesan Agricultural Project, Diocesan Environmental Development, Diocesan Communications Centre and Diocesan Oil and Gas Stations can have some lay men and women who are experts in these fields and areas as their directors and directresses. A diocesan Bishop or priest may not be an expert in these fields. Therefore, he needs some lay men and women who can help him coordinate and manage all these areas for better and efficient production and for the good of the diocese or parish. These lay people will help to ensure maximum and effective management and production in all these areas.

Through these means, lay men and women contribute their quota to ensure the continual growth of the local Churches in Catholic faith in Igboland. “Also, there exists in some dioceses a body called- Advisory Council.”¹²⁴ Their role is to advise the diocesan bishop on certain issues concerning the welfare and the growth of the diocese. The members of this group are also lay men and women who are experts and specialists in various disciplines, fields and areas. It is often said that nobody is the monopoly of all knowledge. A Bishop or a priest does not know everything. A bishop or a priest may be an expert in the field of theology and philosophy because this is an area where he specialises in his studies. But he may not be well learned in Accounting, Architecture, Law, Medicine and Engineering. Therefore, he needs advisers in these areas. It is these experts in these various fields that come together to form a body called-

¹²⁴ Okon, “Expansion and Consolidation: Growth in Onitsha, Calabar, Owerri, Ogoja and Umuahia,” 187.

Advisory Council. Through all these means also, the lay faithful of God give active participation in the effective management and efficient running of the dioceses and parishes.

III. Historical Events Establishing the Identity of the Catholic Church in Igboland

The Catholic Church in Igboland is 133 years old today (1885-2018). Many significant and historical events have punctuated these past decades. These events should be interpreted and understood as a sign of peoples' maturity in faith and rapid growth of Catholic Church in Igboland. These events have been contributive and dynamic factors in the foundation and establishment of the Catholic Church in Igboland. They have also played a significant role in giving meaning, purpose and identity to the Catholic Church in Igboland. Today, the Catholic Church in Igboland owes its foundation, existence and sustenance to these events. They serve as its basis and spring force. The history and identity of the Catholic Church in Igboland cannot be complete if these events are not well mentioned and recognised. These historical events are discussed below.

1. Conversion and Baptism of King Idigo

The zealous Holy Ghost Fathers who came to Igboland in 1885 to sow the seed of Catholic faith were not making progress as they really expected and wanted, because they were able to lay their hands only on the ex-slaves, the outcasts, the abandoned and the rejects of the society. These people will not be able to sustain the faith. The influential people, chiefs, elites and kings were unwilling to accept and embrace the Catholic faith. This really gave the missionaries some sleepless nights. Father Lutz and his companions in spite of their deep faith and optimism were greatly worried and disturbed about the future of a Christian Church founded upon the rejects of the society. These missionaries could no longer keep this disturbing thought to themselves, and in one of the reports to the Superior General in Paris, they spoke out their fear, "What is the future of a mission with such a foundation as ours. The Catholic Church in Igboland cannot stand if the foundation is not solid and strong."¹²⁵ By human reckoning, their mission had very bleak chance of winning converts in hundreds and thousands. Bringing kings, chiefs, elites and influential people into the Church seemed like an unrealisable dream. However, providence made the impossible possible, turned the dream into a reality with the conversion and baptism of king Idigo of Aguleri. The Catholic faith and mission in Aguleri and Igboland in general owed its strong foundation to the courageous and generous initiative of king Ogbuanyinya Onyeka-Omeli Idigo who invited the missionaries as early as 1888 to come and settle at Aguleri. He came to know about the arrival of the Holy Ghost missionaries at Onitsha through

¹²⁵ Obi, "The French Pioneers, 1885-1905," 43.

the white men who were the agents of the Royal Niger Company who had a base at Aguleri. Because of the limited number of the missionaries, they could not honour this invitation immediately. However, towards the end of the January 1890, the missionaries answered this invitation. They went down to Aguleri to establish a mission there. On their return to Onitsha, king Idigo gave them one of his sons to be educated in the mission school at Onitsha. After some days, Father Lutz went back to Aguleri and met king Idigo. King Idigo received him with warmest cordiality. When Father Lutz declared the purpose of his visit, “that he has come to choose a site for a mission house, ‘king Idigo, overflowing with joy turned to his household Altar and prayed aloud thanking Providence for bringing peace and joy to his own house. History was made the following day, 28 May when Father Lutz celebrated the first Holy Mass in the market place surrounded by a small crowd of Aguleri.”¹²⁶

Having seen his great zeal and desire to accept the Catholic faith, the missionaries paid more attention on Aguleri and particularly on the king and his household. He was so well instructed in the Catholic faith that he became a man of dynamic living faith. Having accepted and embraced Catholic faith, he immediately volunteered himself as a catechist in order to share the Gospel with his people. As a sign of his true faith and belief in the Catholic Church, when Father Lutz explained to him that the law of God forbids the keeping and worshipping of idols, king Idigo answered, “Very well, you can remove these idols and burn all of them when you please.”¹²⁷ As a king and high priest of his community, these idols, over 50 of them were source of his respect, honour dignity and influence before his people. They were his inheritance, his riches, his treasures and his sure source of income, even the sign and the symbol of his authority as a king and chief priest.

Ordinarily, it would not have been easy for any man to give them up. But for king Idigo to have given them up so willingly and happily without any external pressure really showed his inner and deeper faith, commitment, dedication, devotion and love for Christ and his Church. To give them up so easily and willingly was the sign that he had wholeheartedly accepted the Catholic faith. This was indeed, a great sacrifice on the part of king Idigo. This act of sacrifice and conversion by king Idigo was not welcomed by the people of Aguleri. Many of them saw his act as an abomination and taboo, and therefore gave a forecast that king Idigo will surely die before the end of the year. Father Lutz later took the idols down to Onitsha and got them burnt. To the indignation of the witch-doctors, fortune-tellers and elders of Aguleri community who gave a forecast that king Idigo had committed an abomination and taboo and

¹²⁶ Obi, “The French Pioneers, 1885-1905,” 44.

¹²⁷ Holy Ghost Fathers, “Journal,” (October 3, 1890) quoted in Obi, “The French Pioneers, 1885-1905,” 46.

must inevitably die that year, the year 1890 ended leaving Idigo bouncing in good health and happiness. At this point, a history was made in the Catholic Church in Aguleri and Igboland in general. People were really shocked and surprised to see that king Idigo was still alive, very active and full of energy. This became an eloquent sermon and testimony to the entire Igboland. The news spread like a wildfire immediately and about 15 members of king's extended family and kindred presented themselves for enrolment as catechumens after the king's example. As a further step to show his belief and faith in the Catholic doctrines, king Idigo decided to choose and live with one wife out of his three wives. He therefore, chose the one willing to be a Catholic, as his wife. Catholic Church preaches one wife to one man and king Idigo wanted to keep the Catholic teaching to the full. However, "he was still fully responsible for the decent maintenance of other wives but never shared the same roof and bed with them again."¹²⁸

King Idigo was greatly touched and influenced by the account of the conversion of St. Paul. He became a strong Catholic, teaching and instructing his people in Aguleri before his baptism. The end of the 1891 witnessed serious preparations for the baptism of the king and his formal and official reception into the Church. Many people from Onitsha wanted to witness this historic baptismal ceremony. Having prepared himself for the Sacrament of the Baptism, "he was baptised on 3 December, 1891 during the feast of St. Francis Xavier. He was baptised at Aguleri by Father Lutz along with six of his children. During mid-night Holy Mass on 25 December, 1891, he received his first Holy Communion and Confirmation along with one of his sons amidst solemn ringing of bells and canon shots."¹²⁹ The Baptism of king Idigo just like his conversion was a milestone and a very significant event in the history of the Catholic Church in Igboland as well as in the missionary's activities of the Holy Ghost Missionaries in Igboland.

The evangelization of the Holy Ghost Fathers gathered greater momentum and the peoples' acceptance of the Catholic faith manifested itself on higher scale with the Baptism and the solemn reception of king Idigo and some members of his household and kindred into the Catholic Church. That singular but significant event changed the image and the concept of the Catholic Church in the minds of thousands of people especially the elites, the influential people, the kings and chiefs. With king Idigo and his actions, they came to believe that Christianity, particularly Catholic Church is also for kings, royal family members and notables and not just for the rejects, outcasts and underdogs of the society. King Idigo later visited other

¹²⁸ Holy Ghost Fathers, "Annales Apostoliques," 1891, no. 24, quoted in Obi, "The French Pioneers, 1895-1905," 47.

¹²⁹ Holy Ghost Fathers, "Journal," (December 22-25, 1891) quoted in Obi, "The French Pioneers, 1895-1905," 47-48.

chiefs at Onitsha. One of them was chief Ezeoba. King Idigo invited him and other chiefs to follow his great example. Some of them promised to become Catholics. One of them was chief Ezeoba. King Idigo's conversion, Baptism, Holy Communion and Confirmation opened the way for many who seemed to have been waiting to enter the Church. "Two weeks after his first Holy Communion and Confirmation, eight families gave up their idols and became Catholics after Idigo's example. Another two families gave up idolatry a week after and asked to be received into the Catholic Church. Many converts were made at this time and many people joined the Catholic Church."¹³⁰ With the conversion, baptism, reception of the Holy Communion and Confirmation of King Idigo, the Holy Ghost Missionaries as well as the Catholic Church in Igboland opened a new and significant chapter in their history. It is also worthy to note that today, one of the sons of this royal family- king Idigo family is a priest in the Archdiocese of Onitsha, the very place where the missionaries first came in Igboland. Blessed Cyprian Michael Iwene Tansi, the only blessed in Nigeria as will be seen later in this work is also from Aguleri.

2. Conversion and Election of John Samuel Okolo Okosi as a King of Onitsha

Another very significant event that gave the Catholic Church in Igboland its identity and history was the election as the king of Onitsha in 1900, of one John Samuel Okolo Okosi, a former protestant who later became a Catholic. Okolo Okosi was from Onitsha and was a rich man too. He was a pagan who later converted to Protestantism in 1862. He was baptised in the Church Mission Society (C.M.S) on 23 November, 1862. During his baptism, "he was given the name of the two pioneer C.M.S missionaries namely John Taylor and Samuel Crowther. Thus, he became John Samuel Okolo Okosi."¹³¹ Taylor counted this as a great achievement on the part of the C.M.S. The C.M.S. missionaries were very happy for this. Okolo Okosi was a very influential rich man and the C.M.S. missionaries know a great impact and contribution he will make in the spread of the C.M.S. in Igboland. However, things did not work out as they had expected and hoped. With the passage of time, Okolo Okosi began to change his views and beliefs about the C.M.S. By 1865, he began to raise some doubts and show some inner conflicts about C.M.S. To see that Okolo Okosi did not leave the C.M.S., the missionaries of C.M.S. came to him and made a lot of promises to him. However, "To the great disappointment of Taylor and all C.M.S. missionaries and the entire C.M.S. communities, Samuel John Okolo Okosi ignored and turned down all the promises and offers from the C.M.S. missionaries and

¹³⁰ Obi, "The French Pioneers, 1985-1905," 48.

¹³¹ Ekechi, *Missionary Enterprise and Rivalry in Igboland 1857-1914*, 15-16.

lapsed back into Igbo Traditional Religion.”¹³² Next, he began to think of becoming a Catholic. Having seen many charitable works, medical services, the Christian villages, the leprosarium, the hospitals and the workshops built by the Catholic missionaries but more especially having seen the dedication, commitment, selfless services and the spirit of sacrifice inherent in the lives and missionary activities of these early Catholic missionaries, he decided to join the Catholic Church. Hence, in 1894, he moved over to the Catholic Church. His lapse from C.M.S. to Traditional Religion and his eventual conversion to Catholicism was such a historical and significant event that has left a memorial, an indelible mark and impression in the lives and hearts of the entire Igbo people till today. His conversion was such a remarkable event that people will not forget in a hurry. With his conversion, history was made in the lives of the Catholic Church and Catholic missionaries in the entire Igboland and beyond. His conversion was a great source of jubilation for the Catholics but for the C.M.S, it was a very big disappointment and hopelessness.

The news of his conversion was everywhere. Many Catholics said with joy, “Once a protestant and a furious and fanatical enemy of the Roman Catholic Church, has now like St. Paul become a zealous companion and follower of the Catholic missionaries.”¹³³ He later became a full time catechist at Nsugbe and Aguleri, a work which he creditably and excellently discharged. It was while he was on active duty and service as catechist, that word came to him in October 1900 that, he has been chosen to be the king of Onitsha. This was the most significant and historical event in his life and in the history and life of the Catholic mission in Igboland. His conversion and election as king gave the Catholic Church a very nice and positive image. Besides being Roman Catholic, he was ordinarily not eligible for the throne because just two years before his selection and election, he has refused to kill his two sons (twins) as the law of the land required. “It should be recalled that ‘twins’ were regarded as abomination and taboo at this time and they must be killed.”¹³⁴ But Okolo Okosi having accepted the Catholic faith and teachings, refused to practise this pagan act and belief. There was a great joy among the Catholics at his enthronement as the king of Onitsha. His refusal to sacrifice to his ancestors, to kill his twin sons and to worship the royal idol which was traditionally placed above the king’s throne were signs that he was deeply committed to his Catholic faith and life. That a Catholic should be elected as the king of Onitsha was an event of singular significance and honour both for the Catholic Church and the Catholic missionaries. His election and enthronement as king brought to an end many pagan sacrifices and practices in Igboland. The

¹³² Obi, “The French Pioneers, 1885-1905,” 73-74.

¹³³ Obi, “The French Pioneers, 1885-1905,” 73-74.

¹³⁴ Ozigboh, *Roman Catholicism in South Eastern Nigeria 1885-1931*, 65.

big city of Onitsha is full of trees, some very old. These were the trees on which human blood was smeared during many occasions of human sacrifice. In the word of Obi, “By giving to Father Vogler, his spiritual director, the piece of wood (wand of authority) which he held in his hand while judging and condemning the victims destined for sacrifice, he indicated that human sacrifice would never again be performed in the future in Igboland.”¹³⁵ Some people especially the pagans and Protestants saw this as a violation of the customs and traditions. On the day he was installed as a king, he refused to offer customary sacrifice of slaughtering a goat to appease the anger of the river (Niger) nor did he practise the abominable and fetish acts which ordinarily followed the election of a king.

“He equally altered the age-old tradition of subjects prostrating and kissing the dust before the king. Next, for the first time among the kings, he put a crucifix on the right side of his throne, so that, his subjects, pagans, Catholics, Protestants and all might venerate or prostrate and make the sign of redemption and salvation.”¹³⁶ What an honour and dignity to the Catholic Church and her missionaries. To ensure that Catholic Church gets stronger and deeper in Igboland, he offered a piece of land to the Holy Ghost missionaries for building a chapel and a school. He also arranged for religious instructions and catechesis to be given to about 60 to 80 young people both slaves and free-born together in his premises. “On 15 February, 1901, “Pope Leo XIII gave King John Samuel Okolo Okosi a gift of the statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary for his outstanding contributions in the spread of the Catholic faith in Igboland.”¹³⁷

The conversion of John Samuel Okolo Okosi was the greatest victory which the Catholic Church in Igboland has made. It is the highest victory that could be inflicted against paganism and Protestantism. His conversion and election as king was an event of historical importance for the success of evangelization in Igboland. The conversions of king Idigo and king Okolo Okosi made a great and indelible impact in the lives as well as hearts of the entire people of Igboland. (Pagans, Catholics and Protestants) Their providential conversion drew a great honour and dignified attention to the Catholic Church. With their conversions, many influential members of the society started to join the Catholic Church.

3. Ordination of the First Indigenous Priest, Rev. Fr. John Cross Anyogu

History was made in the lives of the Catholics in Igboland when on 8 December, 1930 being the feast of the Immaculate Conception, the first indigenous priest of Igboland by name John Cross Anyogu was ordained a priest. His ordination marked forty five anniversary of the

¹³⁵ Leon Lejeune, “Letter to his Eminence, the Cardinal Prefect of the Propaganda Fide,” Onitsha, (November 15, 1900) quoted in Celestine Obi, “The French Pioneers, 1985-1905,” 75.

¹³⁶ Obi, “The French Pioneers, 1985-1905,” 78.

¹³⁷ Obi, “The French Pioneers, 1985-1905,” 78.

coming of the Holy Ghost missionaries in Igboland. With his ordination, the long existed question and mystery among the Catholics in Igboland whether black man can become a priest was answered and unravelled. The atmosphere was filled with joy both on the side of the Catholics and the missionaries. With his ordination too, the Holy Ghost missionaries came to know that their labour was never fruitless. His ordination gave them hope that Catholic faith has gained ground in Igboland. On the part of the Catholics, his ordination increased the level of participation of the natives in the work of evangelization. Many natives and Protestants joyfully joined the Catholic Church. It also increased the desire and enthusiasm to become priests among many young boys.

For the Igbo youths aspiring to the priesthood, Anyogu's ordination symbolized a breakthrough. It promoted vocation to the priesthood. Other young men took courage after him to reach the goal. "Thus in 1937, William Obelagu, Michael Iwene Tansi (now Blessed) and Joseph Nwanegbo were ordained priests."¹³⁸ The ordination of Rev. Anyogu attracted a great number of bishops and priests. "It was indeed the first time the Igboland was witnessing such a great number of priests and bishops in such a solemn function. All the Holy Ghost Fathers, diocesan priests working in other parts of Nigeria then, Associates of St. Patrick's Missionary Society and Fathers of the African Mission (S.M.A) were all present. To such great an assembly of priests, the presence of the three bishops added still greater solemnity.

4. Appointment of Archbishop Francis Arinze both as a Pro-President of the Secretariat for Non-Christian Religions (Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue) and as a Cardinal

The appointment of Francis Cardinal Arinze both as a Bishop and as an Archbishop in 1965 and 1967 respectively gave Igbo Catholicism a sense of recognition and identification by the Universal Church. Also, his appointment as the president of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue as it is now called and his elevation to the Cardinalate added more to this unique honour. Impressed by Archbishop Arinze's many accomplishment as a leader of an Archdiocese with few resources and personnel as well as with his ability to work side by side with Muslims in a country that is Muslims dominated, Pope John Paul II in 1979 appointed Archbishop Arinze Pro-President of the Vatican's Secretariat for Non-Christian Religions, later renamed the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. Again, with a reputation as a well-linked diplomat and expert on Inter-faith relations, Arinze was called to the Vatican in 1984 and elevated to Cardinal in 1985. The radio broadcast of 24 April, 1985, brought the news

¹³⁸ Obi, "The Missionary Contributions of Bishop Shanahan, C.S.Sp., 1902-1932" 165-166.

of the nomination of His Grace, Most Rev. Francis Arinze as a cardinal. With his installation during the Consistory in Rome of 25 May, 1985, He became the second cardinal from Nigeria after Dominic cardinal Ekanden and the first cardinal from the Igboland. This was indeed a very big papal honour and appreciation to Nigeria in general and Igboland in particular. According to Obi, “Exactly one year ago, on 6 April, 1984, Francis Cardinal Arinze was appointed Pro-President of the Secretariat for Non-Christian Religions. Already a century ago, some dynamic French soldiers of Christ arrived at the Igboland southern Nigeria, to bring the message of Christ to the non-Christians of Igboland. The people received the Good News and promoted its growth. This year, the first hundred years, the local ordinary of the same very spot and metropolitan of the very region, where missionaries first sowed the seed of the Gospel, has been appointed and sent to be the ambassador of Christ to the non-Christians of the world.”¹³⁹ What a quick growth for the Catholic Church in Igboland.

From 1984 to 2002, Cardinal Arinze headed the Vatican’s Secretariat for non-Christian Religions since 1985 called the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. In 2002, he became Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments. These elevation to Cardinalate as well as the appointment was a very big honour and recognition for the Catholic Church in Nigeria and Igboland in particular. “His appointment marked for the first time an indigenous son and bishop of Igboland and Nigerian prelate was given a greater responsibility in the Universal Church.”¹⁴⁰ What a beautiful recognition and honour to the Catholic Church in Igboland Nigeria. During his reception at Onitsha, the joy of the Catholics knew no bounds. There was a great jubilation all over the entire Igboland. His elevation and appointment were another historic event in the life and history of the Catholic Church in Igboland. It helped to bring about increment and growth in the number of Christ followers in the Catholic fold in Igboland. Equally, Cardinal Francis Arinze was privileged to be among the Bishops that attended the last sessions of the Second Vatican Council which produced laudable documents that guide the Church today. His presence and contributions there were ‘ipso facto’ the presence and representation of the Igbo Catholicism in the wider Universal Church.

5. Apostolic Visits of Pope John Paul II to Nigeria

Pope John Paul II was a pilgrim to Nigeria first in 1982 and second in 1998. His second visit which lasted from Saturday 21st to Monday 23rd March 1998 marked his second apostolic

¹³⁹ Celestine Obi, forward to *A Hundred Years of The Catholic Church in Eastern Nigeria 1885-1985*, by Celestine Obi (Onitsha: Africana-Fep Publishers Ltd, 1985), iv.

¹⁴⁰ Celestine Obi, epilogue to *A Hundred Years of The Catholic Church in Eastern Nigeria 1885-1985*, by Celestine Obi (Onitsha: Africana-Fep Publishers Ltd, 1985), 396.

voyage to Nigeria. During these two visits, he touched and celebrated Holy Mass for the Catholics in Igboland Nigeria. During his first visit, he came to Onitsha in Igboland, the very town where the Holy Ghost missionaries first landed and started their missionary activities. He celebrated a Holy Mass there at Onitsha. Now, a gigantic Church has been built on that very spot where Pope celebrated Holy Mass. The Church is named Saints John and Paul, Iba Pope, Pope John Paul II.

During his second visit in 1998, he also came to Onitsha in Igboland, the very town, on the very spot and right inside the same mission Church which the foreign Catholic missionaries built but which has undergone some renovations with the passage of time. During this second visit, he celebrated a Holy Mass on this very spot and right inside the same Church for the Beatification of Father Cyprian Iwene Tansi, an indigenous son and priest of Igboland. Both visits of Pope in 1982 and 1998 were very big honour to the Catholic Church in Nigeria and Igboland in particular. The details of his visits, messages, homilies and addresses will be well presented and discussed in chapter four under the reception and implementation of the documents of the Church and papal messages in the Igbo Catholic Church. As Obi put it, “His visits came as a seal of approval to the maturity of the Nigerian Church particularly the Catholic Church in Igboland.”¹⁴¹ His visit was a milestone in the life and history of the Igbo Catholicism and in Nigeria in general.

6. Beatification of Rev. Father Cyprian Michael Iwene Tansi

The beatification of Father Cyprian Michael Iwene Tansi by Pope John Paul II on Sunday 22 March, 1998 is another significant and historical event in the annals of the Igbo Catholicism. Father Cyprian Michael Iwene Tansi was a son and an indigenous priest of Igboland. He was a dedicated and devoted priest who served God and humanity with utmost humility and love. Father Iwene Tansi was beatified on Sunday 22 March 1998. With his beatification, he became the first and only Nigerian and Igbo man in the Church’s history to be officially proclaimed ‘Blessed.’ Thus, with his beatification, the Igbo Catholic Church became the first and the only tribe and Church that has produced a ‘Blessed’ in Nigeria. What an honour to the Catholic Church in Igboland. This should be interpreted as another sign of peoples’ maturity in the faith. It shows that some of the early converts did really make honest efforts to approach not only true but indeed heroic Christian ideals and virtues. His Beatification was also another milestone and historic event in the life of the Catholic Church in Igboland. His biography, spiritual works and heroic virtues which led to his beatification will be well articulated, detailed and presented

¹⁴¹ Celestine Obi, epilogue to *A Hundred Years of The Catholic Church in Eastern Nigeria 1885-1985*, 396.

in chapter three under the personalist and communal identity of the Catholic Church in Igboland.

7. Bigard Memorial Major Seminary, Enugu Nigeria

Bigard Memorial Seminary, Enugu, the biggest seminary and the seminary with the highest number of seminarians in Africa, if not in the world, is located in Igboland.¹⁴² It started as St. Paul's Seminary, Onitsha in 1922 at the initiative of Rt. Rev. Joseph Shanahan, the then Vicar Apostolic of the Vicariate of Southern Nigeria. The first senior seminarian that began his philosophical studies in the seminary was Father John Cross Anyogu who later became Bishop John Cross Anyogu. The seminary was first moved from Onitsha to Igbariam because of distractions and noise. Onitsha is a business area and is usually noisy right from its beginning. However, the seminary was later moved back to Onitsha beside St. Charles Training College. Father William O' Donnel was its first rector. In January 1939, the seminary was moved again to the present Holy Ghost Cathedral ground, Ogui Enugu, with Father Louis Kettels as its fifth rector. With the decision of the Propaganda Fide to build one regional seminary for both western and eastern Nigeria, Archbishop Charles Heerey got permission and fund to build a seminary in the east. Work started at the present site and the seminary was officially opened on March 4, 1951. The name of the seminary became Bigard Memorial Seminary to perpetuate the memory of two French ladies: mother and daughter Stephanie and Jeanne Bigard, the foundresses of the 'Opus Sancti Petri Apostoli' that supplied the fund for the building. The seminary started in 1951 with 25 seminarians.

Presently, this seminary has the highest number of seminarians in the whole of Africa, if not in the whole world. It has a total number of 800 seminarians. It has also 56 members of academic staff (18 resident as priests and 38 part-time) Bigard Seminary has so far produced 3 Cardinals, 11 Archbishops, 31 Bishops and numerous priests as well as prominent Nigerian, Sierra Leonean and Cameroonian citizens.¹⁴³ Increase in vocation and the need for a very effective formation led to the birth of two more campuses of Bigard at Awka and Onitsha named John Paul II Major Seminary (Philosophy Department) and Blessed Iwene Tansi Major Seminary Onitsha (Theology Department) respectively. This Catholic seminary –Bigard with the highest number of seminarians located in Igboland is another landmark in the life and history of the Catholic Church in Igboland.

¹⁴² Bigard Memorial Seminary Enugu, "Brief History of Bigard Memorial Seminary Enugu," in *Bigard Seminary Website*, accessed 10 August, 2017, <http://www.bigardenugu.org/brief-history.html>.

¹⁴³ Bigard Memorial Seminary Enugu, "Brief History of Bigard Memorial Seminary Enugu," in *Bigard Seminary Website*, accessed 10 August, 2017, <http://www.bigardenugu.org/brief-history.html>.

IV. Present Identity of the Catholic Church in Igboland

Reflecting on the whole past of the local Church in Igboland, starting from her historical beginnings, activities, influential persons and key events and summing them up with present events and views in Igboland today, could lead and give present identity of the Igbo Catholicism. The historical events and significant contributions of the early Catholic missionaries in Igboland which helped immensely in shaping the identity of the Catholic Church in Igboland are now things of the past but the historical identity of the Catholic Church in Igboland is still on going. An actual identity of the Church denotes the entity of the Church which is created, witnessed and shared by the people living today. So, the actual identity of the Church is created by the people living today from the events happening today in the Church. Some significant events and happenings in the present life of the Igbo local Church help in the continuous shaping of her historical identity, thus leading to her actual identity. Presently, as a result of the current significant and historical events in the life of the Catholic Church in Igboland, the Igbo Catholicism has been given some names by some present historians in an effort to describe her present identity. Such names include: “a flourishing Church”¹⁴⁴, “the kernel of Catholic evangelism in Nigeria and other parts of Africa”¹⁴⁵, “the land of great vocation to Catholic priesthood and a Missionary Church”¹⁴⁶ and “the blessed Cyprian Michael Iwene Home Church.”¹⁴⁷

1. A Flourishing Church

The recent events in the life and history of the Catholic Church in Igboland have given credence to the fact that she can be rightly described as a flourishing Church in talking about her actual identity. Since the exit of the foreign missionaries in 1967, the history and life of the Church in Igboland up till today have been a better and progressive one indeed. The exit of the missionaries did not in any way hinder the progress and the continual growth of the Church in Igboland. “During the time of the foreign missionaries, there were only 5 dioceses with 5 indigenous bishops, 109 parishes, 56 indigenous priests, one major seminary and about 19,000 Catholic faithful in Igboland.”¹⁴⁸ “There were also only 5 Catholic hospitals, about 694 Catholic primary schools and 132 secondary schools established by the foreign missionaries. They did not establish nursery schools and universities.”¹⁴⁹ But today in Igboland, the number

¹⁴⁴ Anthony Njoku, “The Reception of Vatican II in the Igbo Speaking Church, Southeast Nigeria” (A paper presented at Seat of Wisdom Seminary, Owerri Nigeria, October 16, 2012)

¹⁴⁵ Chigere, *Foreign Missionary Background and Indigenous Evangelization in Igboland*, 454.

¹⁴⁶ Anthony Njoku, “The Reception of Vatican II in the Igbo Speaking Church, Southeast Nigeria” (A paper presented at Seat of Wisdom Seminary, Owerri Nigeria, October 16, 2012)

¹⁴⁷ Sam Eyoboka, “Catholic Bishops Immortalise Rev. Tansi,” *Vanguard Newspapers*, June 6, 2010. 1.

¹⁴⁸ Okon, “Expansion and Consolidation: Growth in Onitsha, Calabar, Owerri, Ogoja and Umuahia,” 190.

¹⁴⁹ Ozigboh, *Igbo Catholicism: The Onitsha Connection 1967-1984*, 96.

of all these establishments has increased, enlarged and grown by 100%. Presently, a tremendous achievements and progress have been made in the life and history of the Igbo Catholicism Church. “Today, there are 13 dioceses in Igboland with 16 bishops. There are equally about three Igbo sons who serve as Papal Nuncios in different parts of the world. There are over 1800 parishes, 50 chaplaincies and about 14.1 million Catholics. There are equally over 9000 priests both diocesan and religious.”¹⁵⁰ Today also, there are 9 major seminaries and 3,207 Catholic schools established in various parts of Igboland.”¹⁵¹ A lot of spiritual programmes like retreats, seminars, conferences, workshops and trainings have been put in place to help sustain the spiritual life of the clergies and faithful. A lot of lay organisations and commissions have equally been established to encourage active participation by the laity. The same is applicable to the various pious societies as well as many financial establishments and investments established by the various parishes and dioceses.

2. The Kernel of Catholic Evangelism in Nigeria and Other Parts of Africa

The Igbo Catholic Church has served and continues to serve as the source and root of Catholicism in many other parts of Nigeria and beyond. According to Chigere, “The Igbo Catholicism is the root and kernel of Catholic evangelism in many other parts of Nigeria and beyond. Catholic Church still exist in many parts of Nigeria even in the northern parts dominated by the Muslims because of the Igbo Catholics.”¹⁵² The people of Igboland who are mostly Catholics establish Catholic Church in all parts of the country where they live. If you visit all the parts of Nigeria today including the Muslim dominated north, one will see that all those at the helm of the affairs and who occupy the prominent positions in the Catholic Churches established there are Igbo people. Similarly, all those who support the Church in those places both physically, spiritually and financially are Catholics from Igboland who have those places as their base.

Many Igbo sons and daughters have built Churches single handedly in some parts of Nigeria. Igbo Catholics are very good in supporting the Church wherever they live and carry out their civil services and businesses. According to Njoku, “Igbo people who are a foot loose people, travelling up and down the country and settling wherever they find greener pastures, are in the forefront of establishing Catholic Churches in various parts of Nigeria, whether it is Abuja or Lagos, Kano or Kaduna, Maiduguri or Sokoto.”¹⁵³ Without the Igbo Catholicism and

¹⁵⁰ Cf. 2017 and 2018 Liturgical Diaries and Directories of the 13 Catholic Archdioceses (2) and Dioceses (11) in Igboland.

¹⁵¹ Sebastine Onuorah, Secretary, Awka Diocesan Education Commission, e-mail message, 9 June, 2017.

¹⁵² Chigere, *Foreign Missionary Background and Indigenous Evangelization in Igboland*, 454.

¹⁵³ Anthony Njoku, “The Reception of Vatican II in the Igbo Speaking Church, Southeast Nigeria” (A paper presented at Seat of Wisdom Seminary, Owerri Nigeria, October 16, 2012).

Catholics, the Catholic Church in Nigeria will encounter a serious setback and difficulties. Similarly, many Igbo Catholics have also contributed immensely in the establishment and foundation of the Catholic Church in some other countries in Africa where they base and do their daily businesses. Though rightly seen and described as the kernel of Catholic evangelism in Nigeria and beyond, she still her challenges and weaknesses which need to be solved so that her actual identity will shine out more brightly.

3. A Land of Great Vocation to the Catholic Priesthood and a Missionary Church

Presently, there is a vocation boom in Igboland. “Bishop Moynagh of Calabar Nigeria in his vote for the Second Vatican Council, called on the Universal Church to use her personnel in a judicious manner such that areas without priests can be supplied with their needs instead of a situation whereby some local Churches had duplications of personnel while their counterparts did not and suffered while others had unnecessary surplus.”¹⁵⁴ He was then speaking for mission Church in Nigeria and Igboland that had limited Church personnel where vast areas and great populations were left in the hands of few foreign missionaries labouring through rationed, spaced out ministry to reach the nooks and crannies of their expanding missions.

Today, the tables have turned around. Europe and America who supplied the missionaries to Africa in general and Igboland in particular are going through hard times, trying to get vocations. Europe and America are increasingly turning to the Igboland for missionary assistance.

“Presently, more than 2500 Igbo priests and religious are working in Europe, America and Australia as missionaries and more are still being demanded”.¹⁵⁵ Not only Europe, America and indeed Australia but also the immediate neighbours of the Igbo people such as people in the west and north of Nigeria and other parts of Africa, are increasingly looking towards the Igbo Church for priests and religious supplies. As said above also, the seminary with the highest number of the seminarians in Africa, if not in the whole world is located in the Igboland. This leads to the great turn out of new priests in Igboland every year. She has grown from being a mission land to being a missionary Church in terms of increase in vocation and high supply of priests and religious as missionaries in various parts of the world.

¹⁵⁴ Anthony Njoku, “The Reception of Vatican II in the Igbo Speaking Church, Southeast Nigeria” (A paper presented at Seat of Wisdom Seminary, Owerri Nigeria, October 16, 2012).

¹⁵⁵ Anthony Njoku, “The Reception of Vatican II in the Igbo Speaking Church, Southeast Nigeria” (A paper presented at Seat of Wisdom Seminary, Owerri Nigeria, October 16, 2012).

4. Blessed Cyprian Michael Iwene Tansi Home Church

Blessed Cyprian Michael Iwene Tansi is the only blessed in Nigeria. The Catholic Church in Nigeria has not produced any officially and canonically recognised saint. She has produced a blessed who is on the course for canonization. He is from Aguleri in Igboland. His origin as Igbo has led some historians to describe the Catholic Church in Igboland as Blessed Cyprian Michael Iwene home Church.

Having seen these claims on the present identity of the Catholic Church in Igboland, one may simply ask, how true are these claims based on the objective and critical look at the nature of the Catholic Church in Igboland today? The answer to this question will be part of the researcher's personal input and submission in chapter four when he must have critically and objectively analysed and examined the claim on the present identity of the Catholic Church in Igboland today. There, the validity or invalidity of these claims will be made manifest.

Summary

The chapter one of this work begins with the idea of historical identity of the local Church. It goes further to give the historical identity of the local Church in Igboland. Historical identity denotes the identity written down in the history and through the history of a local or particular Church, in this case the local Church in Igboland. It is not equivalent or tantamount to the Church's historiography. The identity of any local Church is deeper than her history. Identity of any particular Church goes deeper and higher than her historical development. Therefore, the identity of any particular or local Church comprises not only historical origin but also the cultural, theological, moral and pastoral dimensions of the Church in question. This is why the identity of the Catholic Church in Igboland will discuss not only her historical identity but also her cultural, theological, moral and pastoral identity. These will be seen and discussed in the subsequent chapters.

The chapter one concentrates on the historical identity of the Igbo Catholicism. It notes that Catholicism came to Igboland through the missionary efforts of the French missionaries led by Father Joseph Lutz. Other prominent missionaries in Igboland were: Fathers Joseph Reling, Rene Pawlas, Leon Lejeune and Bishops Joseph Shanahan and Charles Heerey. They really encountered lots and lots of difficulties ranging from strong anti-Christian environment, tropical disease, harsh weather, intolerance and suspicion from both other Christian denominations and officials of the Royal Niger Company. This chapter goes on to say that Catholicism in Igboland has three different periods or epochs namely: the French Missionaries' epoch, Irish epoch and the present indigenous missionary's epoch. The chapter equally states some of the missionary methods used by these early missionaries such as Christian village

system, buying and freeing of slaves and the use of school education. It equally highlights some key and historical events that established the identity of the Catholic Church in Igboland today. Some of them are: conversion and baptism of king Idigo, appointment of Archbishop Arinze as a cardinal, ordination of the first indigenous priest, visits of Pope John Paul II to Igboland and beatification of Father Cyprain Michael Tansi. These key and historical events helped to solidify the faith brought to the Igboland by these early Catholic missionaries. Today, Catholic faith is fast growing on the Igbo soil.

Finally, the chapter one concludes by showing the present historical events in the life of the Catholic Church in Igboland which help in the definition of her present identity. Some present historians have given the actual and present identity of the Catholic Church in Igboland as a flourishing Church, kernel of Catholic evangelism as well as the land of great vocation to the Catholic priesthood and a mission Church and the blessed Cyprian Michael Iwene Tansi home Church. These descriptions and actual identities are drawn from the present nature, life and activities of the Catholic Church in Igboland. It is the identity which the Catholic Church in Igboland has acquired as she continues to pass through her life history. It is her present identity which is different from her identity during the time of the early foreign missionaries. This identity may change tomorrow with the passage of time. But for now, it is believed to be the present and actual identity of the Catholic Church in Igboland. It is hoped and expected that by the end of this research, it will be well stated whether the claim on the present identity of the local Church in Igboland is valid or not.

CHAPTER TWO

SOCIO-CULTURAL IDENTITY

“Socio-cultural identity is the feeling of belonging to a particular cultural group or society. It is part of a person’s self-conception and self-perception and is related to a nationality, ethnicity, religion, social class, generation, locality or any kind of social group that has its own distinct culture.”¹⁵⁶ Social-cultural identity has to do with social and cultural factors which are customs, lifestyles and values that characterise a society or a group as well as socio-cultural aspects which include concepts of beauty, education, language, law, politics and religion. Rightly speaking, Socio-cultural identity of the Catholic Church deals with cultural context and social setting of any nation or region where the Gospel message is meant to take root. Church practically affects the culture and all its crucial social components like education, literature, architecture, music, health facilities and arts. Gospel and culture are called upon to engage in a fruitful dialogue in every locality and nation. This dialogue allows the Word of God to exercise a power within the lives and culture of the people, without imposing, at the same time, alien cultural factors which would make it difficult for them truly to receive that Word.

Thus, one can rightly say that the cultural identity of the Catholic Church in Igboland involves a dynamic relationship that is expected to exist between the Catholic Church and the local culture of the Igbo people (inculturation: on one hand, the Church appreciates what is good and acceptable in a local culture and on the other hand, the Church inserts ideas of Christian culture coming from the Divine Revelation) and a practical contribution of the Church to the culture. More specifically, such a contribution embraces a contribution to education, a contribution to resolve basic needs in the society (medical care, charity, social and political values), a contribution to language and literature, a contribution to music, a contribution to journalism and a contribution to everyday lifestyle (openness, hospitality, politeness and responsibility for others). In treating the socio-cultural identity of the Igbo Catholicism therefore, such features as socialization in Igbo society, agents of socialization, Church as an agent of socialization, understanding the concept of culture, the interplay between Christian message and culture in Igboland as well as the contributions of the Catholic Church to the socio-cultural growth of the Igbo society will be presented and discussed.

I. Socialization in Igbo Society

Socialization can simply be defined as “the process of learning and practising the culture of a given society by both the young and the adult members. It is the way of acquiring the specific

¹⁵⁶ Moha Ennaji, *Multilingualism, Cultural Identity and Education in Morocco* (Binal: Georgetown University Press, 2004), 19.

prescriptions and proscriptions of standardized practice of a given society.”¹⁵⁷ When a child is born, he or she is gradually taught and introduced to the culture of his or her society by the parents and the significant others within his or her family. Without stress, consciously or unconsciously, the baby learns gradually such things as the mode of greetings, dressing, eating, and other ways of relating and associating with members of his or her society in an organized and orderly manner. Socialization is not limited to the learning experiences of the young child but also the adult members. The adults may have to learn some basic skills and rules that have to do with the new status they occupy in a social group. Learning itself is a continuous process in human life. Each new day brings with it new experience that may also need new response, which needs to be learnt in a special way. Socialization transforms the raw human animal into a human being capable of rational actions with others in the society. As a result of that transformation, most babies grow up into fully functioning social beings, able to use the language of their parents and competent in their society’s culture. Church plays a vital role in the socialization process in the Igboland. Since the arrival of the Catholic Church in Igboland, the socialization processes in Igboland has indeed improved for better. It can be said that Catholic Church is the best and the most important agent of socialization in Igboland today. This will be presented and discussed below under the Church as an agent of socialization.

1. Agents of Socialization in Igboland

The principal agents in the socialization process in Igboland are the significant others most especially the parents and the siblings of the child (immediate family), the extended families, kindred and the vital influences of the peer groups. Others are Igbo traditional institutions like age grade, town union etc, as well as the Church from where the child learns the moral values, virtues and ethical norms. Originating from the Church are school and mass media, both print and audio visual from where he picks values, norms and ideas about the larger society outside his home base with which to interact with and belong to the social system

A. Family

The family is the first point of contact with the outside world by any child. Here the basic tools with which he has to deal with the society and future life are passed to him. Here he learns good or bad morals as the case may be. He gets fixed up into the social strata by being a member of a family. The parents and other siblings are the representatives of the larger society from whom the child first learns the appropriate behaviour patterns, attitudes, values, norms, mores and the folkways of the society. Extended families and kindred also play a vital role in the

¹⁵⁷ Edward Collins, *Socialization and Human Development* (Bloomington, Indiana: I Universe Press, 2007), 13.

socialization process in the Igboland. “Prior to the arrival of Catholicism in Igboland, many kindred families had their particular gods which were located at their Obis (centre houses from where the members of the kindred originated and spread to various places where they now live that is, the houses of their first parents).”¹⁵⁸ “A small mud house was built for these gods. These gods were believed to be protectors of the members of these kindred. They were believed to be the sources of progress, long life, good health and fertility.”¹⁵⁹ This was why it was a practice in Igboland that eight days after the delivery of a child, the child was presented to the god of his or her kindred. There, elders of the kindred used to gather in order to perform some rituals and sacrifices. Palm wine was offered to the god and hen (female fowl) was killed to thank the god of fertility and to pray for more children. This presentation of the child is the first official outing of the child to the society and social setting. It is the first socialization process of the child to the society.

Also, in traditional Igbo setting, during the end of the year festival or new yam festival, all the children born within that year were presented to the god of the kindred. The parents and families of these children used to bring tubers of yam, palm wine and fowls. These were offered to the god and cooked and all present partook of them. As a part of socialization in Igboland also, boys in Igboland were initiated into masquerade as a sign of coming into adulthood. These socializing processes and rites involved lots and lots of fetish, pagan rituals and practices which stood against the tenets and practices of the Catholic Church. However, most of these socializing processes are no longer obtainable in Igboland today as Christianity has superseded them. They have been overtaken by Christianity. That will be well detailed and explained under Church as an agent of socialization.

B. Igbo Traditional Institutions

Igbo traditional institutions namely “Igwe,” age grades, town unions and women groups (umuada, inyomdi and umuokpu) are long socio-cultural institutions in Igboland. They are the oldest institutions used in the administration before the advent of the white missionaries. ‘Igwe’ is the king in every town. He works hand in hand with the town union representatives. They settle disputes and ensure that there is always harmony, peace and progress among their people. Also, people of the same age – born same year (grade) or within a two or three year period (group) identify themselves and come together to form an organization. And because they are about the same age, democracy becomes the order of the day as issues are raised and decisions taken by simple majority. The age grade is an important agent of socialization in Igbo

¹⁵⁸ Francis Arinze, *Sacrifice in Igbo Religion* (Onitsha: St. Stephen Press, 2008), 46.

¹⁵⁹ Arinze, *Sacrifice in Igbo Religion*, 46.

traditional society. Generally, age grades function in relation to service pertaining to security, sanitation and general administration. “The general activities and forms of the age grades provide the platforms for the training and orientation of young ones especially the males into adulthood and full membership in Igbo society. In some part of Igboland, it can lead to a form of initiation which is related to maturity to manhood.”¹⁶⁰ It is a vital instrument for fostering unity, good human relation and development among the Igbo. Equally, women groups such as ‘umuada,’ ‘inyomdi,’ and ‘umuokpu’ are important agents of socialization in Igboland. They are usually very organized, peaceful and endowed with different kinds of gifts and talents. They are composed of Igbo women that are already engaged in marriage. Their developmental efforts are remarkable in the families, communities and the Church. They play a major role in the empowerment of rural women since they appreciate that empowerment is essential for a new world order and essential to find solutions to many challenges and conflicts. As an organized group, they have established goals and strategies to pursue peace and order. They are cherished agents of reconciliation and vanguards of development. These women groups help in the enforcement of the decisions of the community. They also have their way of punishing the erring members, a role that enhances people code of conduct in the community.

C. Peer Groups

The child also learns a lot from his peers. The group to which a child belongs is a measure of his social or anti-social behaviour. In societal gatherings, children want to join the happening groups in order to exercise their hidden prowess on a lot of social issues. He displays an unalloyed loyalty to the group that offers him voice, recognition and protection. He participates in group activities, its values and de-values thereby becoming self-conscious. “In Igboland today, children do gather in village squares at night for moonlight plays. There also, some elders do come to tell the children some stories about the history of their villages and towns, their origin, wars they have engaged in, their festivals and cultures.”¹⁶¹ Folktales are also told by the elders in order to pass some vital pieces of information to the children. Here also, the children are taught the dos and don’ts of the land as well as the taboos and societal values. Although peers can be a positive force of influence seen in such things as sports, girls guide, scouting, and other positive influences, they are also of negative influence. The most detrimental impacts of this are drug and alcohol use, premature sexual engagements and other social proscribed behaviours.

¹⁶⁰ Elizabeth Ishichie, *Igbo Worlds* (London: MacMillan Publishers Ltd, 1977), p. 32.

¹⁶¹ Emmanuel Okoye, e-mail to the researcher, 19 May, 2017.

D. Church

“Church is another scintillating agent of socialization. In fact, it is the most important and most valuable agent of socialization in Igboland today. Values about morality, truth, honesty and just living are both taught in religious gatherings.”¹⁶² Church inculcates social virtues and moral values. In the Church, the Igbo sons and daughters are brought to the knowledge of good that is to be done and evil that should be avoided for peace and unity in the society. The knowledge of rightness and wrongness of actions are best taught and imparted by the Catholic Church in Igboland today. Virtues such as community life, sincerity, chastity, charity, love, modesty, altruism and other such qualities highly cherished by the society are recommended by the Church for the people to imbibe.

Church promotes the major social virtues like justice, peace, non-violence, selfless services and discipline. Religion is a collection of cultural systems, belief systems, and worldviews that relate humanity to spirituality and to moral values. “Many religions have narratives, symbols, traditions, and sacred histories that are intended to give meaning to life or to explain the origin of life or the universe. They tend to derive morality, ethics, religious laws, or a preferred lifestyle from their ideas about the cosmos and human nature.”¹⁶³ Followers of the Christian religion are urged to always internalize these virtues and become disciplined citizens of the society. Children are socialized into religion by their parents and their peers and, as a result, they tend to stay in religions. For example, Igbo children raised in religious homes are more likely to have some degree of religiosity in their lives. They are also likely to raise their own children with religion and to participate in religious ceremonies. In Igboland, Christian religion gives values about what is holy, which should be treated with awe and reverence.

In its entirety, Christian religion provides the child with a code of conduct. Most of the acts the society prohibits or prescribes in terms of dressing, friendship, food, sex and sexuality and alcohol derive from the religion practised by a people. Church as an institutionalised religion is an important avenue of socialization. Church serves as religious communities where people gather to worship and learn. Church teaches the people how to interact with one another in brotherly affection and love. She upholds gender norms and contributes to their enforcement through socialization. From ceremonial rites of passage that reinforce the family unit, to power dynamics which reinforce gender roles, religion fosters a shared set of socialized values that are passed on through society. Social discriminations and injustice often exist in human society.

¹⁶² Chigere, *Foreign Missionary Background and Indigenous Evangelization in Igboland*, 488.

¹⁶³ Chigere, *Foreign Missionary Background and Indigenous Evangelization in Igboland*, 66.

They are main obstacles and hindrances to the socialization process of every society. These social discriminations and injustice are against the principles of human equality, social justice and human dignity. Unless they are eradicated and destroyed, social interaction, social justice, peace, unity and development cannot be easily attained in an optimal level in any human society. There are some social discriminations inherent in Igboland today. Chief among them is 'Osu' Caste System. 'Osu' Caste System has remained a major barrier and a paramount obstruction to a smooth socialization process in Igboland today.

"Osu, by traditional definition, is somebody offered as sacrifice to or dedicated to a god or an idol. 'Osu,' in this sense, is the universally accepted Igbo term for a caste of its people, dedicated from time immemorial to everlasting ownership of a specific deity whose properties they equally inherit and pass unto their own offspring."¹⁶⁴ People were made 'Osu' by various ways. A majority was offered to deities as human sacrifices and in their service, they propagated and raised a family of 'Osus.' Others were people on the run either from danger or from their crimes who were conscripted into the 'Osu' caste. Some were courageous young fellows who opposed the evil machinations of the elders of the land who either conspired to sell them into slavery or offer them to the deities and they became 'Osu.' There are also people whose children became 'Osu' because the deity whose priests they were, asked them to take 'Osu' females as wives.

Yet there are others who out of gluttony for the property of the deity and perhaps the incessant cock and goat delicacies around its shrine, chose to become 'Osu.' 'Osus' were subjected to various forms of dehumanizing treatments including discrimination in the buying of their goods in the market, forcing them to grow very long and dirty hairs and giving them separate seats in the social gatherings. "In Igboland today, people do not give out their daughters in marriage to the Osu families. Equally, families do not allow their sons to marry daughters whose family is 'Osu.' This has become a socio-cultural practice that has had a far reaching impact on Igbo marriage institution than any other consideration as it is still a taboo, just like in the days of old for an ordinary Igbo person to marry an 'Osu' person."¹⁶⁵ The 'Osus' are highly discriminated against. They do not have full and equal right with other members of the society. They are seen as second class citizens. 'Osu' people are being regarded as an inferior stock, foreigners and slaves in their own lands. Socially, 'Osus' are denied the 'Ozo,' the 'Nze' and 'Eze' titles, the highest sign of honour and prestige in Igboland. People of substance in Igboland are denied titles and positions they deserve just because of the lame

¹⁶⁴ Dunu Okigbo, *Obindigbo: A Quick Look at Osu Caste System of Igbos in the 21st Century* (Ibadan: University Press, 2015), 6.

¹⁶⁵ Okigbo, *Obindigbo: A Quick Look at Osu Caste System of Igbos in the 21st Century*, 8.

‘Osu’ tag while riff-raffs, school dropouts and criminals cart these away. “There is no Igbo family today which has not suffered one ‘Osu’-related embarrassment or another, and in fact there is hardly one Igbo family today that has no grand-son or grand-daughter today growing in their homes illegitimately because they were repatriated from their homes together with their mothers on discovery that they had an ‘Osu’ lineage, no matter how faint.”¹⁶⁶ Today in Igboland, there are many broken marriages and broken ambitions, all because of ‘Osu.’

Catholic Church is the chief institution that preaches against social discriminations and injustice in Igboland today. She is the best institution that teaches the equality of all people despite religious, ethnic, racial, sex and colour differences. It is her teaching that “every form of social and cultural discrimination in fundamental personal rights on the grounds of sex, race, colour, social conditions, language or religion must be curbed and eradicated as incompatible with God’s design.”¹⁶⁷ The Catholic Church in Igboland fights against the social discrimination and unjust treatment given to the ‘Osu’ people. She encourages free association, affiliation and organization of all. The Universal Church has always taught that all persons have equal right and dignity because every human being is created in the image and likeness of God. The Catholic Church in Igboland has taken up the crusade of liberating Igboland from the slavery of the ‘Osu’ Caste System which has humiliated its people. She has remained the voice of the voiceless and the hope of the hopeless.

During his homily at the abolishment of the ‘Osu’ Caste System in Agulu, a town in Anambra State where ‘Osu’ Caste System was very much pronounced and dominant, Bishop Simon Okafor said, “When one looks at the making of an ‘Osu,’ one can easily identify the deceit and fallacy in it. ‘Osu’ is man’s inhumanity to man created by a cult of wicked elders in order to intimidate the less privileged. Since it is linked to gods which most of us have today rejected and abandoned, at least, in public, the ‘Osu’ cult ought not to be sustained by a supposedly learned and a civilized Christian society like our Igboland.”¹⁶⁸ Many Igbo Christians say that the ‘Osu’ Caste System is a cultural matter into which the Church should not dabble. The Catholic Church in Igboland has always maintained that ‘Osu’ is not a cultural matter. It is rather, a despicable and an atrocious feudal heritage which ought to have been done away with when the killing of twins and children who cut the upper teeth first were stopped. It is the position of the Church today in Igboland that ‘Osu’ Caste System prevents association of the individuals. It is a system that encourages man inhumanity to his fellow man and as such

¹⁶⁶ Okigbo, *Obindigbo: A Quick Look At Osu Caste System of Igbos in the 21st Century*, 9.

¹⁶⁷ Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church- Social Justice*, no. 1935, par. 40.

¹⁶⁸ The Homily of late Bishop Simon Okafor, the Catholic Bishop of Awka Diocese at the Holy Mass celebrated for the ordination of priests and abolition of Osu Caste System at Agulu in Anambra State Nigeria on August 15, 2000. (Unpublished)

should be eradicated and done away with. “The Church has equally asked the Igbo intellectuals to hold periodic discussions and seminars on the ‘Osu’ Caste System. She asked Igbo traditional rulers in totality, to set out a day of freedom for all ‘Osus’ in Igboland, a day when like the dedication of Russia to the Immaculate Heart of Mary by all Catholic Bishops of the world in the early eighties which preceded the ignominious capitulation of Communism, when all ‘Osus’ in Igboland would be set free.”¹⁶⁹ The Catholic Archdiocese of Onitsha in its synod has categorically criticised ‘Osu’ Caste System in its totality as going against the teaching of the Church on the equal right and dignity of all human persons. According to the Archdiocesan Synod Acta,

Osu Caste System is against the first commandment of God. Belief in other gods is idolatry. These gods, ‘Ekwensu Umukaje’, ‘Amadioha Ozuzu’, ‘Obila, Umuchem’, ‘Ala’, ‘Umudim’, ‘Ekwelaru Nworie’, ‘Okija’ and ‘Deity’ to which the Osus are dedicated are the same gods which Prophet Isaiah told us were dead as they had dysfunctional sense organs. If these gods are lifeless, they cannot own properties, let alone human beings created in the image of God. So, this makes the Osu Caste System a charade, and to believe that anybody is Osu is to propagate the dignity of the deity to which the Osu is dedicated, hence a sin against the First Commandment of God.¹⁷⁰

On this same note also, His Grace, Dr Anthony Obinna, Catholic Archbishop of Owerri has in recent times, devoted much energy to the invigoration of the ‘Osu’ debate in order to arouse the sensibilities of the Igbo Christian intellectuals to the enormity of evil embedded in the ‘Osu’ Caste System, so as to make them join him to destroy it. He has in various occasions spoken against the despicable ‘Osu’ Caste System which is bringing the Igbo man to ridicule. According to him, “it is indeed regrettable that over hundred years of Christianity in Igboland, the people though educated and forward-looking still hold many fetish practices particularly ‘Osu’ Caste System to heart.”¹⁷¹ Again, Catholic Church has proven its vital force in the socialization processes in the Igboland today. Catholic Church and her teachings have indeed permeated and overtaken some of these traditional socialising processes in Igboland like presenting children to the god of the kindred and initiation into masquerade cult. “With the advent of Catholicism in Igboland, churching (child dedication) where a child is presented before a priest in the Church has replaced the annual event of presenting the new born babies to the gods of the kindred.”¹⁷² The present Igbo society attaches great importance to the Church

¹⁶⁹ Chidi Kalu, “2017 Odenigbo Lecture of Owerri Catholic Ecclesiastical Province Holds Saturday,” *Daily Times Newspapers*, August 19, 2017, 1.

¹⁷⁰ Archdiocese of Onitsha, *Synod Acta, The Second Onitsha Archdiocesan Synod* (Onitsha: Trinitas Press, May 22-29, 2016)

¹⁷¹ Chidi Kalu, “2017 Odenigbo Lecture of Owerri Catholic Ecclesiastical Province Holds Saturday,” *Daily Times Newspapers*, August 19, 2017, 1.

¹⁷² Emmanuel Okoye, e-mail to the researcher, 19 May, 2017.

especially to the Catholic Church. This is made evident especially in the celebration of some rites of passages. Right from the birth of a child to the attainment of puberty, to marriage, old age through to death come with some rites associated with and performed by the Church. There are rites of initiation such as naming ceremony, puberty rites among others. Also there are rites of marriage, widowhood and funeral rites. In all these social celebrations and societal activities, it is the Church that plays a major role. At every point in time and at every point in the socialization process throughout one's life in Igboland, the individual is encouraged to walk side by side with Church.

Social and cultural development in any society is not possible without the full integration of the religious dimensions of social life. Today in Igboland, social progress and growth cannot be achieved in isolation of religious elements and Church activities. The human society can only achieve progress when all the component institutions are integrated for holistic development. Christianity has become a potent social force in every facet of Igbo life. The agents of socialization in Igboland as stated above are many and each helps the individual in a way as long as societal issues and problems are concerned. But many a time, the fundamental and really mind bothering questions are not appropriately dealt with. The individual seems to get answers but such answers without religious flavour are not exhaustive and as such leaves the individual wondering about so many things. "It is religion and Church that is able to deal with such societal issues as evil, death, sin among others and come up with satisfying if not exhaustive answers about them."¹⁷³

Linked to the point raised above is intimation of the individual with the idea of the sacred. Once an individual comes into contact with Catholic Church in Igboland, he or she is made conscious of the invisible aspects of life and the influences they intend to yield on the human beings. It is in the Church more than any other place that the individual gets confirmation or rejection of some hearsays and unfounded superstitions circulating in the Igbo society. In Igboland today, Church and her teachings serve as ground which provide a positive framework that helps the individual to bear with life. To be able to manage the many frustrations, miseries of life and crisis in Igbo society today, one needs Catholic Church and her teachings. She teaches one to be balanced and firm, not so much overwhelmed by the negativities of life. The strength needed to be able to sail on in the face of difficulties, firm hope in hopeless situations among others are all derived from the Church and her teachings. In Igboland, Catholic Church serves as an integrative social force which shapes collective beliefs into collective identity. Church sacramental activities and events such as wedding, churching

¹⁷³ Chigere, *Foreign Missionary Background and Indigenous Evangelization in Igboland*, 488.

(child dedication), baptism, confirmation, first Holy Communion, burials and birthday celebrations promote group solidarity and cohesion. Catholicism being a strong denomination in Igboland today gives her members a sense of belonging. It is unfortunate that some scholars for anti-religious orientation have denied Church its position as a veritable platform for socialization. If socialization is the process by which Igbo society achieves cultural continuity and perpetuates itself, then it is counter-productive to exclude Catholic Church, her teachings and activities from the things to be imparted to posterity.

E. School

The advent of Catholicism in Igboland ushered in another agent of socialization namely school system. From the school the child obtains skills with which he arms himself to interact with the social world. At this point in a student's socialization process, teachers play a significant role in shaping the lives of the young in society. "Education is a process in which and by which knowledge, character and behaviour of the young are shaped and moulded. It is the means through which the aims and habits of a group of people is transmitted from one generation to the next."¹⁷⁴ It is understood by many to be a means of overcoming limitations, achieving greater equality and acquiring wealth of knowledge and social status. More of these will be discussed under the contribution of the Catholic Church to education in Igboland.

F. Mass Media

The mass media has an enormous influence on the young and even the adult minds. The introduction of the internet has added to the role of the television and radio in shaping the lives of people in present day society. What a man watches or sees has the potential of sticking to the brain than what he hears. Hence the audio-visual system of dissemination of information plays a very significant role in shaping and reshaping, moulding and remoulding of the lives of both the young and adult members of the Igbo society. Mass media is intended to be informative. The media provides the public with this knowledge through a variety of means: radio, print journalism, television and the Internet. It plays important role in the socialization process. Children are exposed to the events in the wider world through these media.

II. Understanding the Concept of Culture

Culture is a commonly used term. However, as many scholars have observed, its meaning remains evasive. The British cultural and political analyst, Raymond Williams has described it

¹⁷⁴ Satish Kumar and Sajjad Ahmad, "Meaning, Aims and Process of Education," in *Human Growth and Education* accessed 20 August, 2017, <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/1146/1167f80224e937ae5d5231320f729a29681a>.

as “one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language.”¹⁷⁵ He attributes this to the intricacy of its development through history and the fact that it is used by scholars across different academic disciplines and ideological persuasions. For the American professor of law, Nomi Stolzenberg, it is “an exceedingly vague and ambiguous term.”¹⁷⁶ The Irish theologian, Michael Gallagher, describes it as a “chameleon term, the scope of which seems so inclusive that it can easily be manipulated by authors to serve their own specific ends.”¹⁷⁷ This made some scholars avoid any form of association with it, while some others move for its exclusion in academic discourse. Scholars have identified what could be judged to be the first challenge to the normative understanding of culture in the thoughts of the German theologian and philosopher, Johann Herder, about the end of the eighteenth century.”¹⁷⁸

Herder has persuasively argued in his unfinished work, *Ideas towards a Philosophy of the History of Man* (1784-1791), that there is no society in the globe that has not got a culture, which is their own distinctive set of values and ways of life reflecting their specificity as a people with peculiar circumstances and experiences at a given time. In this sense, he argues, one can comfortably talk about the plurality of cultures, for it is not a property that can only be claimed by a specific group of people but one possessed by all societies.”¹⁷⁹ Herder distinguishes culture from civilisation. According to him, “unlike culture which identifies a people, civilisation can cut across nations and has to do with intellectual and techno-scientific achievements.”¹⁸⁰ Culture¹⁸¹ from the German word ‘Kultur’ has accumulated a plurality of definitions throughout the centuries. The English anthropologist, Edward Tylor (1832-1917) is often mentioned as one of those whose contribution is very significant for the development of the modern pluralist notion of culture. Just like Herder, he believes that all societies possess culture and none should be regarded as bereft of it. He, nevertheless, worked within the evolutionist understanding of culture by which it is argued that there is a progression of culture from the lowest, most inferior, primitive, and savagery stage to the most complex, advanced and rationalistic form. One implication of this is the conclusion that some societies are more

¹⁷⁵ Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fontana, 1976), 76

¹⁷⁶ Nomi Stolzenberg, “What We Talk about When We Talk about Culture,” *American Anthropologist* 103, no. 2 (2001), 443.

¹⁷⁷ Michael Gallagher, *Clashing of Symbols: An Introduction to Faith and Culture*, Revised and Expanded ed. (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2003), 13.

¹⁷⁸ See Terry Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 12-13.

¹⁷⁹ Johann Herder, “Ideas towards a Philosophy of the History of Man,” in *Theories of History*, ed. Patrick Gardiner (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1959), 31-51.

¹⁸⁰ See Roger Scruton, *Modern Culture* (London: Continuum, 2007), 1.

¹⁸¹ For a thorough explanation of the development of the concept ‘culture’, see the following authors: Herve Carrier, “The Church Meeting Cultures: Convergences and Perspectives,” in *The Church and Culture since Vatican II: The Experience in North and Latin America*, ed. Joseph Gremillion (Notre Dame, Indianapolis: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), 140-152. Loius Luzbetak, *The Church and Cultures. New Perspectives in Missiological Anthropology* (Maryknoll: New York: Orbis Books, 1988). 133-149.

cultured and better cultured than others. In 1871, Tylor published his work, where he defined “Culture as a complex whole including knowledge, belief, art, morals, laws, customs and any other abilities and habits acquired by people as members of society.”¹⁸² Lohmann accepts the definition given by Tylor for its four major accomplishments which according to him are: “first, it makes it impossible to regard a people as lacking a culture simply because one sees their way of life as different from one’s own. Secondly, with it, scholars are able to talk about cultural differentiations as one moves from one society to the other. Thirdly, each culture is seen as having something unique to contribute to the overall progress of the human society as a whole. Lastly, it portrays culture as a common property of any given society and not simply that of the individual per se that make up the society.”¹⁸³ Another significant point in his definition that is worth noting is its account of culture as something not genetically inherited but transmitted through learning and education.

Despite the merits of this definition, some scholars see it as too broad and as falling short of the kind of precision needed in the social sciences. Hence, in the quest to arrive at such a precision, many other different definitions have been given by anthropologists since the time of Tylor. In 1952, two American anthropologists. Alfred Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn made a critical review and research on the concept of culture. After such a detailed research, they offered a definition, by which they hoped to unify the various definitions already given by some authors and researchers. According to them, “culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behaviour acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (that is, historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their considered products of action, on the other as conditioning elements for further action.”¹⁸⁴ What one notices in more recent definitions of culture, although with some notable exceptions is the greater tendency to see culture as having primarily to do with the mind and only secondarily with behaviour. Luzbetak argues that although culture is manifestly embodied in artifacts, concrete behaviours, material objects, rituals and events, these are not culture per se. He is of the view that, while some anthropologists regard these as essential components of culture, they are only mere expressions of the underlying ‘ideational code’ - the inner core of culture, consisting of symbols, values, concepts, meanings, beliefs, attitudes and so forth. As he argues, essentially speaking, “culture is the fundamental ideational code that gives rise to

¹⁸² Edward Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Arts and Custom*, vol. 1 (London: Murray, 1871), 1.

¹⁸³ Roger Lohmann, “Culture,” *Encyclopedia of Religion* 3 (2005), 2087-2088

¹⁸⁴ Alfred Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn, *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions* (New York: Vintage, 1963), 357.

the external expressions.”¹⁸⁵ Luzbetak notes, however, that such codes cannot exist fully detached from reality, that is, from the concrete lives of the people. In other words, to talk about culture is not only to talk about its inner core but also of its outward expressions. In sum, one can affirm that culture is the way of life of a people, which comprises basically learned ideas, symbols and meanings, but also their mode of production and their expressions in behaviour, arts, languages and other human capabilities by which the people are able to confront the different challenges posed by their environment. It could be stated in general that culture is understood as the world vision of a group, its manner of perceiving the human person and its destiny, of working, of recreation, of expressing oneself through art, of transforming nature through its techniques and inventions, of interpreting life and the universe, of celebration, of tradition and faith, of characteristic attitude and behaviour. “These embody meanings and beliefs, ethical norms and customs and traditions and express themselves in institutions and systems as well as in symbolic forms in the most varied kind.”¹⁸⁶ Culture is the key to understanding any particular society because it is central to their life. There can be no society without a culture.

Igboland has its culture which is embodied in the religious, social, economic, political and educational lives of its members and society at large. The people of Igboland have their meanings and values which are made manifest in symbolic, artistic, philosophical, historical and linguistic expressions as well as in human behaviour and interactions. Through its culture, the Igbo society is able to preserve its inherited tradition as well as deal with the present challenges and problems. Being a way of life that Igbo people have developed over a long period of time, stretching back to centuries, it often serves as a source of cohesion, stability, meaning and sense of purpose for them as they adapt to new and often challenging conditions of life. Being like a lens through which the members of a given society visualise reality, culture should not be neglected once one wants his or her message, be it Christian or non-Christian to get across to them. Through Igbo culture, Igbo people are able to be guided towards what Igbo society considers valuable, useful, noble and beautiful. But it can as well become oppressive and serve as a tool for victimisation and marginalisation for some people and religions within the society. This is why the Holy Mother Church in her wisdom, and being guided by the Holy Spirit has fashioned out the need for a thorough evangelisation of the culture and inculturation of the Gospel in every human society. This need for a meticulous and intensive evangelization of the culture and inculturation of the Gospel is highly felt in Igboland today.

¹⁸⁵ Luzbetak, *The Church and Cultures: New Perspectives in Missiological Anthropology*, 156-157.

¹⁸⁶ Peter Phan, “Spiritual Direction in a Multicultural Church: Helping Others Encounter God in Their Own Culture.” In *New Theology Review*, XIII, no. 1 (2000), 18.

III. The Interplay between Culture and Christian Message in Igboland

When John Paul II describes the human person as not only “an ontic subject of culture, but also its object and term,”¹⁸⁷ he seems to harp on the mutual interaction and influence between culture and the human person, meaning that humans are not mere passive receptacles for culture. To be sure, the British sociologist, Margaret Archer, has stated that “failure to acknowledge the interplay between culture and human agency can either lead to the elision or conflation of the two, or undue exaggeration of the influence of one on the other or of both on each other.”¹⁸⁸ For her, acceptance of cultural constraints does not mean endorsement of cultural determinism. There is in human beings, she argues, “the quintessential reflective ability to fight back against conditioninggiving them the capacity to respond with originality to their present context.”¹⁸⁹ This peculiar ability makes it possible for humans to effect significant changes to their cultural milieu and create a better future and society for themselves.

Certainly, John Paul II was deeply formed in his own culture, by which he learned the key role of culture in human life more broadly. He has testified that “Poland, his homeland, has kept its identity and its national sovereignty, in spite of partitions and foreign occupations, not by relying on the resources of physical power, but solely by relying on its culture.”¹⁹⁰ This culture turned out in the circumstances to be more powerful than all other forces.” He recognized the power of culture in his homeland, and therefore saw culture as key to the life of Christianity, an essential means by which the faith needs to be supported and lived out. He understood the fundamental role of culture in the work of evangelization and so created the Pontifical Council for Culture. He also emphasized the vital role of culture in the Church’s mission of evangelization throughout his magisterial writing. In this respect, he continued the vision of the Second Vatican Council, which emphasized the importance of culture in ‘Gaudium et Spes’ and called Christians to dynamically engage the modern world.

In a series of annual lectures to the Pontifical Council for Culture, John Paul advanced a vision for how culture is the priority of the New Evangelization. A transformed culture that is more informed by Christianity through dialogue is one of the key goals of John Paul’s call for a New Evangelization. For him, “faith and culture stand in a reciprocal relation and dialogue in which the two require each other if they are to flourish. Thus, faith is incomplete if it is not lived out in a culture, and a culture opposed to the faith creates obstacles to the living out of

¹⁸⁷ John Paul II, “Address to UNESCO, 2 June 1980,” *Origins* 10, no.4 (1980): no. 7.

¹⁸⁸ Margaret Archer, *Culture and Agency: The Place of Culture in Social Theory*, Revised ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), xv.

¹⁸⁹ Archer, *Culture and Agency: The Place of Culture in Social Theory*, xv.

¹⁹⁰ Jared R. Staudt, “Culture in the Magisterium of Pope John Paul II: Evangelization through Dialogue and the Renewal of the Society,” *Claritas, Journal of Dialogue and Culture*, vol. 3, no. 1 (March, 2014): 54, accessed 10 January, 2018, <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1066&context=claritas>.

that faith.”¹⁹¹ For him, there is need for a constant dialogue between the Gospel and culture. Dialogue is meant to be a tool of evangelization so that the Gospel is presented within the context of a conversation, one that takes seriously the thoughts and feelings of people in our current cultural context. The Church can no longer presume to have an immediate audience for its message but must seek out and dialogue with those with whom it would like to share the word of God. The dialogue is not just with the individual. Effective dialogue must be cognizant of the culture informing the dialogue partner. If the Church’s message is to take root in contemporary culture, then it will be greatly assisted by familiarity with that culture, by understanding not only the context of the modern world but also how to present its message in a way that directs it toward the culture. This give and take—receiving from the culture and speaking to it—is expressed by John Paul II when he said, “it is required that the evangelizer familiarize himself with the sociocultural environments in which he must announce the Word of God. More importantly, the Gospel is itself a leavening agent for culture to the extent that it reaches man in his manner of thinking, behaving, working, enjoying himself, that is, as it reaches him in his cultural specificity.”¹⁹²

The Universal Church, right from beginning has been confronted with the issues of Gospel and culture. The question of the admission of Gentiles into the Church without imposing Jewish law on them initiated (Acts 15) the first major interplay between the Gospel and culture in the early Church. Therefore, the tension that often exists between Christian message and culture is not new in the life and history of the Church. The Catholic Church right from her history is ever confronted with issues of conflict between the old and new things, about faith and belief and how they had been directed and lived out for good. However, a more significant contribution to the mutual relationship that should always exist between the Gospel and culture came with the Second Vatican Council. The Council Fathers of the Vatican II were quite alive to the issues of conflicts that emanate from the encounter of the Gospel with new cultures. That was why they devoted time to study it and made their own recommendations.

Very imperative is the way the relationship that exists between the Gospel and culture is handled. This relationship, the Council makes clear, is theologically founded on the mystery of the incarnation of the Son of God. Through his incarnate Son, God has revealed Himself to different people in accordance with their culture and age. Just as God assumed the human nature in order to offer His salvation to all, the Gospel should be allowed to assume the different

¹⁹¹ Jared R. Staudt, “Culture in the Magisterium of Pope John Paul II: Evangelization through Dialogue and the Renewal of the Society,” 53.

¹⁹² Jared R. Staudt, “Culture in the Magisterium of Pope John Paul II: Evangelization through Dialogue and the Renewal of the Society,” 58.

cultures of the people to whom its message is addressed. “The Council equally urges that the good cultural values of various people and nations be well utilised in spreading the Gospel among them.”¹⁹³ Without using the working term of missionary evangelization in the new era, namely inculturation, the application and usage was already implied in the Vatican II declarations. That is why the document affirmed that reciprocated attitudes and tendencies towards one another and openness formed between culture and the Christian faith should lead to a lasting dialogue and coexistence and out of this, a unique Catholic Church also can exist.¹⁹⁴ The Catholic Church has always sought to make the Gospel of Christ homely by making recourse to culture through the process of dialogue. This is what is known in the contemporary theology of the Church as inculturation. The call of the Second Vatican Council upon the Church to enter into dialogue with culture should never be neglected. The aim of entering into dialogue is not to leave the dialogue partner in his or her current state but to propose the Gospel message in such a way that it will take root in his or her life as well as in modern culture. Thus, “the goal of dialogue is to work toward a renewed culture, a way of life that at once meets the needs of the modern world and embodies the truth of the Gospel. Therefore, it is not a return to a past way of life but a new construction implemented by Christians working with all people of good will.”¹⁹⁵

The Council Fathers also gave special directives to each local Church as a help to the particular matters that may confront them in new and particular forms. The local Church in Igboland and her hierarchies are therefore called upon to follow the path of the Universal Church in the area of inculturation. It is important, to point out here that, not much has been done in the area of mutual and dynamic relationship between Gospel and culture in Igboland. In other word, inculturation and its useful advantages have not been deeply and adequately felt in Igboland. The only places where inculturation has taken place even though in an inadequate and slow form is in the use of vernacular and local musical instruments during liturgy and worships as well as in new yam festivities. Igbo language and musical instruments are used today in many Igbo parishes. Also, in the area of yam festivity which is the highest traditional festival in Igboland because of the great importance attached to yam, many Catholics no longer observe some fetish and pagan practices attached to this celebration like offering tubers of yam to idols and shrines during planting season in order to pray for a bountiful harvest, good health and life to witness the next harvesting season.

¹⁹³ Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 58

¹⁹⁴ Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 23. Also, Cf. Shorter Aylward, *The African Synod. A Personal Perspective* (Nairobi Kenya: Pauline Publications, 1991), 55.

¹⁹⁵ Jared R. Staudt, “Culture in the Magisterium of Pope John Paul II: Evangelization through Dialogue and the Renewal of the Society,” 59.

Again, many no longer offer praises and tubers of yam to idols and shrines after harvest in thanksgiving for the rich harvest, good health and life granted to them to celebrate the yam festival. All these have been replaced with Holy Mass and Catholic rituals. Many Catholics now invite priests for Holy Masses during planting season in order to bless their tubers of yam and other farm items and to pray also, for rich harvest, good health and life. Many also offer some tubers of yam and other items in thanksgiving to God for a rich and bountiful harvest. All these are indications that Igbo cultural values have really helped and are still helping in embellishing Catholic liturgy in Igboland. They equally show that Gospel has penetrated and purified some aspects of Igbo cultural life. However, more still needs to be done in the area of dynamic interplay between Gospel and Igbo culture. Inculturation has been mostly on the theoretical level rather than on the praxis. The movement has been very slow. Commenting on this, Onwubiko says, “The greatest obstacle which hinders the adequate penetration and intensive integration of the Gospel message in Igboland today is lack of inculturation.”¹⁹⁶ A lot of factors account for this. They will be seen under inculturation at the service of true self identity of Igbo Catholicism in chapter four. There, inculturation will be discussed in details as a way through which Catholicism will feel at home in Igboland.

IV. The Contributions of the Catholic Church to the Socio-Cultural Growth and Development of the Igbo Society

“Since the day the Holy Ghost missionaries led by Father Joseph Lutz stepped their feet on the soil of the ancient city of Onitsha in Igboland in 1885, the history and life of the Igbo people have never been the same again. Their history and life have changed for better.”¹⁹⁷ There have been series of reflections and remarks on the heroism and sacrifices of these European missionaries, who left the relative comforts of their homes to come to Igboland and the rest of Eastern Nigeria from 19th century in order to bring the Good News and social development to the people of Igboland. Some died on the high seas. Some died of some tropical diseases like malaria and sleeping sickness. Some were killed and murdered by these very Igbo people themselves, who innocently thought that these European missionaries were strange, dangerous and threatening beings because these Europeans appeared totally different from them. Yet, the Holy Ghost missionaries persisted because of their immense love of God and humanity. These devoted and authentic men of God did not just bring the Gospel to Igboland. They saw to the establishment of education and schools. They introduced into Igboland, the idea of nation-

¹⁹⁶ Oliver Onwubiko, *The Theory and Practice of Inculturation (An African Perspective)*, *Christian Mission and Culture in Africa*, vol. II (Enugu: Snaap Press Ltd, 1992), 144.

¹⁹⁷ Chike Maduekwe, “125 Years of Catholic Church in Igboland Eastern Nigeria,” *Vanguard Newspapers*, December 30, 2010, 1.

building of contemporary Europe. Hence, Oduyoye would say that “in spite of their pietistic theology, the early missionaries came from a culture which kept one eye fixed on heaven, while the other was focused quite firmly on the earth. The advanced technology and high standard of living which were beginning to emerge as beneficial effects of the industrial revolution in Europe were regarded as benefits which God has bestowed upon His Christian people. Therefore, in the first human relations between Europe and Africa (Igboland), the sharp distinction between mission and technology was not strictly observed.”¹⁹⁸ These early Catholic missionaries were the driving force behind the abolition of some improper, inhuman and fetish cultural practices like killing of twins and ‘Osu’ and ‘Ohu’ caste system. They also brought modern health care and established hospitals and medical services in so many places. In fact, their generous and selfless contributions towards the civilization and development of Igboland cannot be over-emphasized. The Catholic Church in Igboland has continued to grow from strength to strength since the exit of the early Catholic missionaries. Their exit did not in any way hinder the progress and achievements of the Catholic Church in Igboland. In fact, an uncountable number of schools, hospitals, roads and other infrastructures have been built by the Catholic Church in Igboland. During the time of the missionaries, there was no Catholic university in Igboland but today, there are five Universities and five higher institutions in various parts of Igboland owned and managed by the Catholic Church. Many musical and liturgical innovations have also been done. Below are the contributions of the Catholic Church to the Igbo socio-cultural development.

1. Contribution to Education

According to Abernethy, “All the mission groups in Southern Nigeria were interested in educating the common people but none served this cause more energetically than the Roman Catholic Church.”¹⁹⁹ In fact, any study of the origin and development of western education which does not give the Catholic Church its proper place based on the role it played and impact it made should of course be seen to be grossly incomplete and lack the heart and essence of the matter. “This is because Catholic Church was the first Christian mission to adopt school system and education as its chief evangelization strategy and missionary method.”²⁰⁰ Education has been the chief and best evangelization strategy for the Catholic Church. Christ himself mandated his apostles to teach all nations (Mt 8:19). The successors of the Apostles continued

¹⁹⁸ Modupe Oduyoye, “The Planting of Christianity in Yorubaland 1842-1888,” in *Christianity in West Africa: The Nigerian Story*, ed. Ogbu Kalu (Ibadan: Daystar Press, 1978), 264.

¹⁹⁹ David Abernethy, *The Political Dilemma of Popular Education: An African Case* (California: Stanford University, 1969), 39.

²⁰⁰ Abernethy, *The Political Dilemma of Popular Education: An African Case*, 39.

the work of teaching and educating the nations of the world. Catholic missionaries all over the world therefore see education, schools and evangelization as part and parcel of their vocation. This motive served as basis and source of inspiration to the early Catholic missionaries in Igboland to employ and use education as a means of evangelization. The first school in Igboland was built by the Holy Ghost Fathers led by Father Joseph Lutz. Right from the beginning, Father Lutz regarded the opening of schools as an essential tool for the work of evangelization. According to Ekechi, “When he, Father Lutz with his team of missionaries had decided to stay at Onitsha, Father Lutz approached the king and his cabinet and told them, we come to live near you, to open a school, to teach your children and your good people, all who may wish to come and learn knowledge from the white men of Europe.”²⁰¹ Thus, with a combination of acts of charity and offer of western education, these early Catholic missionaries gathered around them a group of converts comprising of freed men and slaves. These groups formed the nucleus of the pupils of Father Lutz’s school at Onitsha Mission, the first Catholic Church in Igboland. Commenting on this school and its pupils, the missionaries said, “Shortly after our arrival, we began a school. It brings children together. Twenty of these children live with us in the Mission.”²⁰² As part of their deep contribution to education, these missionaries were not only preachers and evangelizers, they were also classroom teachers. Hence, according to Adigwe, “In 1887, Father Lutz taught English and Music, Father Horne taught Arithmetic and Writing.”²⁰³

With the coming of Father (later Bishop) Joseph Shanahan, an Irish priest to Igboland in the early decades of the 20th century, there was a great expansion of Catholic schools in Eastern Nigeria. He was the first Irish Father to reach Igboland. His towering personality looms so large in the expansion of Catholic schools in Igboland in the early decades of the 20th century. In the word of Ayandele, “writing the history of pioneer work in education in Igboland without Shanahan would look like playing hamlet without the prince of Denmark.”²⁰⁴ Bishop Shanahan evolved a policy of conversion through schools rather than through slaves and charitable acts. His arrival marked a turning point in the history of Catholic education in Igboland. His strategy was to educate not a few but as far as possible, to educate everywhere and everybody. Having seen that the policy of evangelization through schools is the most

²⁰¹ Ekechi, *Missionary Enterprise and Rivalry in Igboland 1857-1914*, 73.

²⁰² Holy Ghost Fathers, “Bulletin of the Congregation,” xiv, no. (February 13, 1888) quoted in Casimir Eke, “The Creation of more Dioceses after 1960,” in *A Hundred Years of the Catholic Church in Eastern Nigeria 1885-1895*, ed. Celestine Obi (Onitsha: Africana-Fep Publishers Ltd, 1985), 227.

²⁰³ Hypolite Adigwe, “The Beginning of the Catholic Church among the Igbos of South Eastern Nigeria, 1885-1930” (PH.D diss., University of Vienna, 1966)

²⁰⁴ Emmanuel Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria 1842-1914: A Political and Social Analysis* (London: Longman, 1966), 265.

effective means of reaching the greatest number of people, Father Shanahan immediately set to the task of working out his scheme in detail. His first move was significant, “For the year 1906, he put two Reverend Fathers and two Brothers into the schools in Onitsha. Father Feral had the task of training three pupil teachers. The two Brothers David and Otteran were given charge of the highest classes, from which teachers of the future were to be picked. For himself, he reserved the task of touring the bush so that he would have the opportunity of contacting the people in the nearby towns and stimulating them to an interest in education.”²⁰⁵ Bishop Shanahan went about convincing the people about the utility of school as a means of educating their children and preparing them for securing well paid jobs and good positions in the development to their towns and villages. He believes so strongly that education is the surest way of converting people and the best way to development. He aimed at winning souls easily and perpetually for God and His Church. In his great insight, determination and effort, he embarked upon building and revolutionizing the school methods as a priority. His flair to win the population made him to go out of his way for the best method in school system, thus indirectly forming a nucleus for an enlightened Catholic community for all future prospects, education being the means to his timely golden goal. Many people, having seen the fruits and impacts of education started requesting the missionaries to come and establish schools in their villages and towns. The request for schools developed rapidly and the missionaries did all they could to satisfy most of the requests, as best as they could depending on the available manpower and personnel.

Moreover, they began to discover the natives in their pragmatic approach and this made them to intensify and empower the school project as the best way to reach the heart of the Igbo. All the changes, positive impacts, fruits and good things said to be coming to the natives were attributed to the productivity and lucrativeness of the schools. Some villagers agreed to build schools and pay the teachers so long as the missionaries would agree to establish school in their villages. This singular effort led to the establishment of schools almost in all the villages. During this missionary era, there was rapid growth of schools in Igboland. As more and more teacher-catechists completed their training, new schools were opened in the interior and hundreds of children were admitted into schools, instructed in the Catholic faith and baptised. Teachers were constantly being trained to meet up with the demands of the people who wanted schools established in their villages. Bishop Shanahan worked very energetically to see that many teachers were trained. According to Ikenga-Metuh, “The average number of teachers trained out annually between 1909 and 1911 was 20, and in 1912 alone, 50 teachers were

²⁰⁵ Ikenga-Metuh and Ejizu, *Hundred Years of Catholicism in Eastern Nigeria 1885-1985: The Nnewi Story*, 43.

trained. And between 1906 and 1912, about 43 new primary schools were opened. By 1920, when Father Shanahan was consecrated the first Roman Catholic Bishop of the Niger, there were between 300 and 400 Catholic primary schools in Igboland, Eastern Nigeria and about 25,000 primary school children.”²⁰⁶ Bishop Shanahan made an excellent effort and contribution that yielded such a rapid growth in education in Igboland. His missionary era was the root, the basis and the foundation of education in Igboland and Nigeria in general. Nnabuike knew this when he said, “For the Catholic missionaries, the school was the key word. Without school and education, there would be no evangelization, no development, no civilization and in fact no anything.”²⁰⁷

These Catholic missionaries did not stop at increasing the number of schools, pupils and teachers, they went ahead to ensure that these schools and pupils have qualified, qualitative and certified teachers. As the number of schools and pupils increased, it became necessary to establish Teacher Training Colleges (T.T.C.) to train out certificated and more qualitative teachers who could teach the primary schools and higher classes of the secondary schools. They would take over the task of training the pupil-teachers from the Reverend Fathers and Brothers. Hence, the missionaries made extra-ordinary effort to establish Teacher Training Colleges. “Teacher Training College is an institution of learning solely established for the training and formation of teachers who will serve as facilitators and teachers of education and knowledge to pupils and students. Here, teachers in formation are equipped with some necessary skills and knowledge that will help them in discharging their duties very well as teachers. Between 1920 and 1950, there were about 51 Teachers Training Colleges and about 400 teachers already trained and ready to take up teaching appointment.”²⁰⁸

If the breakthrough in Catholic evangelization was the hallmark of the Shanahan administration, the consolidation of the Catholic education was perhaps, the greatest contribution of the Heerey administration. Heerey was thoroughly acquainted with the education problems of the Vicariate before he took office in 1931. He had been the Vicariate’s representative in the Government Board of Education. His regime exploited the Igbo fascination for literacy and learning particularly at the secondary school level. In December 1937, “Bishop Heerey divided the Vicariate into four education zones: Onitsha, Enugu, Okpala and Port-Harcourt. He made Fr. John Jordan both the Education Secretary and Education

²⁰⁶ Ikenga-Metuh and Ejizu, *Hundred Years of Catholicism in Eastern Nigeria 1885-1985: The Nnewi Story*, 45

²⁰⁷ Felix Nnabuike, *The History of the Catholic Church in Eastern Nigeria, The Foundation Period 1885-1905* (Rome: Urban University, 1983), 193.

²⁰⁸ Benjamin Onwubiko, “The Catholic Church and the Development of Education in Eastern Nigeria 1885-1984,” quoted in *A Hundred Years of the Catholic Church in Eastern Nigeria 1885-1985*, ed. Celestine Obi (Onitsha: Africana-Fep Publishers Ltd, 1985), 246.

Advisor in 1946. Two years later, the Catholic Education House, Onitsha Waterside was created.”²⁰⁹ The history of Catholic secondary schools in the Vicariate began in 1933 with the opening of Christ the King College (C.K.C.) at Onitsha. This Premier Catholic secondary school quickly established itself on the education map of South-eastern Nigeria. It excelled in both academics and sports. Many other secondary schools were also established. “Between 1933 and 1967, there were about 81 secondary schools in Igboland.”²¹⁰ These early missionaries did not just think of themselves actually building the Igbo nation and Nigeria. They knew that their stay in Igboland will not be very long because of high mortality rate of Europeans in West Africa and also because of uncertainty as to the whole future of Afro-European relations. Because of these fears and uncertainties, the Europeans aimed at initiating the revolution, raising Churches and training local men who would themselves build the new nation of Igboland and Nigeria at large. Hence, their emphasis on education and on raising a local staff, a local body of educated Nigerians. This is why the missionaries embarked upon education because they knew that it was only through education that the Igbo people and Nigerians in general would be able to continue with the revolution already initiated by the Europeans and so be able to develop themselves and their nation. It is against this background that the efforts of Christian missionaries in the development of modern Igboland and Nigeria in general can be clearly appreciated. They sought to effect a social change and regeneration through their Churches and schools and in this way, they won the universal approbation of nations builders.

Before 1900, the western form of education was appreciated and patronized since the people of Igboland and Nigerians in general looked upon mission education as the only agency that could bring about the social and political revolution they envisaged for the Igbo people and Nigerians as well. This was why the mission schools spread like a wildfire in Igboland. It is not surprising then that mission schools were largely welcomed and appreciated in Igboland and in Nigeria. To this Ayandele opines “that the concentration of intellect in the Church provided a moderating influence to Nigerian nation building.”²¹¹ Through her education system, the Church prepared the people of Igboland and the entire Nigerians for emancipation from the British rule, by creating elites who fought for the political and economic independence of the nation. From these elites grew the national civil service which has helped the orderly administration of the nation during both military and civilian regimes and governance. As Uruakpu observed, “At independence in 1960, as a result of missionary training, the young

²⁰⁹ Ozigboh, *Igbo Catholicism: The Onitsha Connection 1967-1984*, p.21.

²¹⁰ Onwubiko, “The Catholic Church and the Development of Education in Eastern Nigeria 1885-1984,” 246.

²¹¹ Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria 1842-1914: A Political and Social Analysis*, 265.

Igbo tribe and Nigeria in general inherited a civil and public services, staffed and led by some men and women who possessed the requisite skills, techniques, knowledge and attitudes to achieve the objectives of government by transforming paper plans into real practical services.”²¹² Thus, missionary training succeeded in providing the intellectual, political and skilled man-power for nation buildings. In all, the contributions of the Catholic Church to the educational development of Igboland, Eastern Nigeria and Nigeria in general remain unparalleled and unequalled. The Igbo people will never forget the enormous contributions and sacrifices of these early Catholic missionaries especially in the education sector. The Igbo nation is where it is today in the world developmental map because of the strong foundation led by these early Catholic missionaries in the education sector. Their names are indelible and cannot be removed in the history of Igboland especially in the history of education, development and nation building. The missionaries used their limited resources to build schools all over the place, and products of these schools are competing favourably with their counterparts anywhere in the world. “Generations of Igbo best teachers, professors, lawyers, medical doctors and other professionals were trained in places like Christ the King College, Onitsha. Up to 1970, about 781 primary and secondary schools in various places in the Igboland were either established or managed by the Catholic Church.”²¹³

Like in other parts of the world, it has always been a thing of pride to associate with a Catholic Church owned or run school. Without the early Catholic missionaries and Igbo Catholicism today, there is no way Igboland could have made the stupendous progress it has recorded in education, especially from 1945 when the Second World War came to an end. “The Yoruba people of Western Nigeria, for instance, have a historical head start over the Igbo in education principally because major Yoruba towns and cities like Lagos are located on the coast. The white people who brought formal education to Nigeria came through the sea, and this really gave the Yoruba whose cities are located on the coast, the opportunity to be the first to receive education from them. Yet, within only two decades, the Igbo, to use Professor Chinua Achebe’s language, “had wiped out their educational handicap in one fantastic burst of energy.”²¹⁴ The people of Igboland now compete favourably with other tribes in Nigeria. It is regrettable that the government took over Church schools in Nigeria in 1970, beginning with, of all places, East Central State (today’s Igboland). The forcible acquisition practically sounded the death knell of quality and solid education throughout the country. This is one of the major

²¹² John Uruakpu, *The Anglican Church and Educational Development in the Eastern States of Nigeria*, in: *The Niger Mission: Origin, Growth and Impact, 1857-1995*, ed. Adiele (Aba: Isaeco Press, 1993), 136.

²¹³ Maduekwe, “125 Years of Catholic Church in Igboland Eastern Nigeria,” 1.

²¹⁴ Maduekwe, “125 Years of Catholic Church in Igboland Eastern Nigeria,” 1.

challenges facing the Catholic Church in Igboland today. Hitherto, the people of Igboland received a kind of education which combined high academic standards with high morals and discipline. This was in line with the tradition of Catholic education everywhere in the world. Catholic Church has always taken a lead in the education system in the world. The policies guarding the Catholic schools in Igboland today are in line with the official documents of the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education which was established in 1824.

The official Catholic blueprint and programme on education whose various outlines and forms began to emerge under Popes Pius IX (1846-1878) and Leo XIII (1878-1903), found its classic formulation in the Encyclical Letter of Pope Pius XI, 'Divini Illius Magistri' translated into English as 'The Christian Education of Youth in December 1929'.²¹⁵ "Pope Pius XI equally affirmed that the right of the Catholic Church in school education is, by nature and divine law, prior to that of the State. He insisted that the role of the State was to protect and foster, but not to absorb the functions or roles of the family and the Church."²¹⁶ Based on the above premise, the Catholic Igbo hierarchies have severally asked the government to return the schools back to the Church. According to Cardinal Arinze, "It is indeed very painful that government forcefully snatched and seized all the mission schools thereby elbowing and edging out the Church. He concluded with an appeal for a partnership between parents, teachers, Churches and States."²¹⁷ This plea is being harkened to by some State governments. It is therefore, to be noted with joy that some State governments have begun to return some of these schools to their rightful owners- Church.

Since the exit of the European missionaries in 1967, the Catholic Church in Igboland has made a tremendous progress in the education sector. "During the time of the early missionaries, there was no nursery schools and universities. The missionaries established about 649 primary schools, 132 secondary schools and 51 Teachers Training Colleges."²¹⁸ But today in Igboland, almost all the Catholic parishes have nursery schools. "The total number of nursery schools in Igboland today is about 1,011. The number of primary and secondary schools has also increased geometrically. The Catholic Church in Igboland today has about 1,431 Catholic primary schools and about 760 Catholic secondary schools."²¹⁹ It is also to be noted with delight that the Catholic Church in Igbo has demonstrated great keenness on the development of higher education, particularly since the liberalisation of the ownership and management of

²¹⁵ Ozigboh, *Igbo Catholicism: The Onitsha Connection, 1967-1984*, 103.

²¹⁶ Ozigboh, *Igbo Catholicism: The Onitsha Connection, 1967-1984*, 103.

²¹⁷ Francis Arinze, *The Impact of Christian Education at Present*, Africana-Fep Publishers Ltd, Onitsha, 1982, 3.

²¹⁸ Ozigboh, *Igbo Catholicism: The Onitsha Connection 1967-1984*, 96.

²¹⁹ Sebastine Onuorah, Secretary, Awka Diocesan Education Commission, e-mail message, 9 June, 2017.

tertiary institutions in Nigeria. “She has five Universities namely Madonna University, Tansian University, Renaissance University, Bishop Godfrey Okoye University and Caritas University.”²²⁰ She has far more private Universities than any private organisation in Nigeria. Some of the higher institutions she owns directly or indirectly are: Madonna University which is the first private University. It was established in 1999 and is located in a town called Okija, in Anambra State. Tansian University was established in 2007 and is located in Umunya, Anambra State. Renaissance University was established in 2005 and is located in Enugu State. Bishop Godfrey Okoye University was founded in 2009 and is situated in Enugu and finally, Caritas University which was established in 2005 and is located in Enugu.

According to Nigerian Universities Commissions Annual Documentary Journal on the number of students in the Nigerian Universities, “Madonna University has about 12,000 students, Tansian University has about 9,000 students, Renaissance University has about 8,400 students, Bishop Godfrey Okoye University has about 3000 students while Caritas University has about a total number of 10,000.”²²¹ About five more Universities are under construction in Igboland and will soon take off. Presently in Igboland, there are about 31 Teacher Training Colleges which help to ensure that schools are equipped with qualified, qualitative and certificated teachers. It is only those with their first degrees already that can attain these colleges. After their training here, they are awarded with Post Graduate Diploma in Education Certificate which qualifies them to teach in the nursery, primary and secondary schools. They should also register with the National Council of Teachers called Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (T.R.C.N). Thanks to the honest effort and great initiatives of the Catholic Church in Igboland today. It is also a thing of pride that the Catholic Church in Igboland has remained faithful to its principal role: saving souls by reconciling man with his creator through preaching and practising the Good News and by bringing about the material development for the betterment of the lives of the entire Igbo people and Nigerians in general. Thanks to the great sacrifice and wisdom of the Catholic Church in Igboland and her leaders.

“Also, in order to ensure a high level of discipline and commitment among all the Catholic teachers in Igboland, there exists in every Catholic Archdioceses and Dioceses in Igboland, an association of all the Catholic teachers called- Catholic Teachers’ Association, (CTA).”²²² This association was necessitated by the Government takeover of all schools in

²²⁰ Oduloye Oloyade, “The Annual Admission of Students in Nigerian Universities,” *Nigerian Universities Commissions Annual Documentary Journal* 128 (2017): 99.

²²¹ Oduloye Oloyade, “The Annual Admission of Students in Nigerian Universities,” *Nigerian Universities Commissions Annual Documentary Journal* 128 (2017): 108.

²²² Wenceslaus Ofojebe and Fabian Obi, ed., *A Short History of the Catholic Diocese of Awka at Forty* (Awka: Fides Communications, 2017) 105.

1970. The association aims at regrouping the Catholic teachers who are conscious of their all important role in the society. Their existence and activities aim at upholding the canons and aims of teaching profession. “In a society such as ours, in which there are always deliberate efforts at undermining the dignity and apostolate inherent in the teaching profession, the association forms a bulwark in the maintenance of conscientious culture in the upbringing of children, wards and youths in the schools and society.”²²³ The association also helps to protect and preserve the interest of the Catholic Church in the State and public schools. Also, in order to ensure a high level of discipline and morality among the Catholic students, the Catholic Church in Igboland has equally established associations of Catholic students both in the secondary schools and in the higher institutions of learning. In the secondary school level, the body is called- Young Catholic Students while in the University, it is called- National Federation of Catholic Students. All the Catholic students are obliged to join these associations. They have their rules and regulations which help to maintain high level of discipline and virtues among the students. These associations also help to nurture these young students in the Catholic faith.

There is also in every Catholic diocese in Igboland a body called- Diocesan Education Secretariat. This body represents the Catholic Church in any meeting with the State government. It is the agency through which State passes any information to the Catholic schools. This body normally has meeting on monthly basis with State Education Commission to discuss about the progress and welfare of all the Catholic schools in the State. Today in Igboland, all the Catholic schools have their diocesan bishops as their sole proprietors while priests serve as their managers and administrators. Priests see to the management of these schools Holy Masses are said every morning and prayers are conducted before and after any classes or activities. Each of these schools also have priest confessor. This helps to ensure that students are always in a state of grace. Catechism classes and moral instructions are also organised. The best is given to the students in terms of morality, religion and education.

These Catholic system and methods of administration in the Catholic schools have really helped to bring back the lost glory of the schools namely discipline, honesty, high level of morality, high academic standard and performance, punctuality, diligence, hard work, neatness et cetera. Catholic Church also assigns chaplains and confessors even to the State and public schools. Holy Masses and moral instructions are organised by these chaplains and confessors every Thursday in these State and public schools. This also offers the students who cannot attain Catholic schools the opportunity to learn about Catholic faith in their various

²²³ Wenceslaus Ofojebe and Fabian Ob, ed., *A Short History of the Catholic Diocese of Awka at Forty*, 105.

State and public schools. Equally, Catholic Church in Igboland builds Catholic chaplaincies and assigns some priests as chaplains in all the Universities in Igboland both Catholic, Federal, State and private Universities. This system also helps to nurture and sustain the Catholic faith and teachings in the lives of these young students. There is no partnership between the Federal Government of Nigeria and Church in the management of the schools in Igboland and in Nigeria in general. Partnership between the Church and the government exist only in those States where the State governments have returned schools back to the Church. In Igboland, it is only Anambra State out of the five States in Igboland that has returned schools back to the Churches. There are three Catholic dioceses in Anambra State namely Archdiocese of Onitsha, Diocese of Awka and Diocese of Nnewi. Hence, there is a partnership between the various Churches in Anambra State and Anambra State Government. In this State, the State Government pays the teachers and workers while Churches run and manage the schools. This system really helps the Church to instil discipline in the school system. In all other states in Nigeria, Churches are free to establish schools and Universities but the approval must come from the State and Federal governments. “Accreditation and approval of all schools must come from the State Education Commission and Ministry of Education. These two bodies are responsible for the running and administration of schools in the various States in Nigeria. Catholic schools are fully managed and funded by the Church. However, in some States where the State governments have given back to the Church those schools previously owned by the Church, the State government pays the teachers and workers while the Church does the management function.”²²⁴

In all other States in Nigeria, State government gives subsidy to the State owned and public schools only. Catholic schools are distinct from their public counterparts in focusing on the development of individuals as practitioners of the Catholic faith. In Igboland, Catholic schools participate in the mission of the Church, integrating religious education as a core subject in their curriculum. In Catholic schools, teachers teach a Religious Education Program provided by the Bishop. Both teacher and Bishop therefore, contribute to the planning and teaching of Religious Education Lessons. In Igboland also, Catholic schools are more expensive than state and public schools. However, Church schools provide more quality education and high discipline than public schools. “Anambra State in South-East Nigeria has continued to emerge the overall best in West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) because, this is the only State in Igboland where the State government has given

²²⁴ Sabestine Onuorah, Secretary, Awka Diocesan Education Commission, e-mail message, 21 August, 2017.

schools back to the Church.”²²⁵ Catholic Church in Igboland has produced prominent scholars and scientists who are experts in the various fields of life. Such prominent scholars are: Philip Emeagwali, who is a renowned computer scientist in America, Charles Soludo, who is an Economic professor and one time governor of central bank of Nigeria, Patrick Acholonu, who is a professor of Law and Supreme Court judge, Chile Eboe-Osuji, a judge of the International Court of Justice, Dora Akunyili, a professor of pharmacy, Emeka Anyaoku, former secretary-General of the Commonwealth of Nations, Fabian Udekwu, a cardiac surgeon and numerous others. Among her priests, there are such renowned professors like Anthony Chiegboka, Ikechukwu Obiora, John Paul Nzomiwu among so many others. In fact, the Catholic Church in Igboland today remains unrivalled as long as school education is concerned. Thanks to the great wisdom, effort, zeal and inspiration of the Catholic Church in Igboland and the Universal Catholic Church in general.

2. Contribution to Medical Services

Another area where the early Catholic missionaries played a very vital role during their missionary activities in Igboland was in medical services and hospital apostolate. During their mission in Igboland, these missionaries took great care of the sick. Father Lutz made the medical apostolate the guiding principle of his missionary policy. On arriving to Igboland, he saw the high level of sickness predominant among the natives. The enormity of the prevailing sickness which the missionaries found impressed them very deeply. The prevailing sicknesses at the time were fever, dysentery, leprosy, sores and wounds. Most of these sicknesses were due to environmental hazards, poor hygiene and malnutrition. In most of these cases, the traditional and local medicines and herbs were not very effective. Because of this, there was a high mortality rate among the Igbo people.

Having seen these conditions, the missionaries embarked upon medical services as one of their methods. To these missionaries, ministering to the sick became a great consolation. Morning and evening, a long file of their unfortunate sick arrive at the mission so that the missionaries might soothe their wounds and ills. The curative treatments and cares which the people received from the Catholic missionaries were a source of great joy and consolation to them. Many parents stopped losing their children as a result these curative services and treatments. Mortality reduced drastically. As a result of these advantages, people continued to trip into Catholic missions every day. Great number of the natives came to believe in the Catholic Church. People had such great faith in the missionaries that they even attributed super-

²²⁵ Odinkalu Ofoegbu, “Anambra Takes First Position in WASSCE,” *New Express*, September 2014, 1.

human curative powers to them. The missionaries erected medical institutions at the two main stations –Onitsha and Aguleri but visited other towns and villages with their medical kits and instruments in order to treat those who could not come to hospital. Their medical services and cares procured them great influence and respect. The natives were naturally grateful for these services. Another impact of the Catholic medical services and care was that it led the C.M.S to embark on similar projects, that is, the establishments of medical services and hospitals. This is why today in Igboland, there are about 13 hospitals and dispensaries owned and managed by the Anglican Church. Writing in 1892, Father Lutz noted, “The protestant ministers following our example have begun to care for the sick. However, most sick people at Onitsha did by-pass their mission to come to ours. Even protestant Christians prefer our own treatment.”²²⁶ “The C.M.S missionaries rejected the use of material gifts for the preaching of the kingdom of God.”²²⁷ They criticised the early Catholic missionaries for their work of charity and medical services in their missionary evangelization. They held that it was wrong to offer medical services, cares and temporal advantages in order lure converts to the Church which is a spiritual reality.

However, things changed when they saw the great impact the Catholic missionaries were making as a result of these medical services and cares. The C.M.S became increasingly apprehensive of the effects of the Catholic medical approach to evangelization. The C.M.S lacked the medical facilities. The lack of medicines to give away at such a crucial time was a matter of great distress to the C.M.S. The Secretary at Onitsha confessed that he often felt humiliated by the inability of his society to provide medical services to the natives in order to win them to their Faith. “People asked us for medicines but we feel so helpless because we have none to give to them.”²²⁸ In view of the fact that medicine had become a ‘sine qua’ for successful missionary propaganda, he recommended immediately and strongly to the parent committee that a medical mission should be established at Onitsha to blunt and weaken the force of the Roman Catholic influence. With this, the C.M.S changed their initial policy. The missionaries of the C.M.S, by accepting medical rivalry as an instrument of evangelization, were fundamentally reversing their position on the use of temporal means to secure spiritual ends. It is quite clear that the change of policy was influenced by the serious ground which the society was losing owing to the Roman Catholic use of medicines to attract adherents. However, this change of policy helped to increase the number and quality of the mission

²²⁶ Holy Ghost Fathers, “APS, Bulletin, 191/A/VIII, Report on Holy Trinity Onitsha,” quoted in Ozigboh, *Roman Catholicism in South Eastern Nigeria 1885-1931*, 65.

²²⁷ Ekechi, *Missionary Enterprise and Rivalry in Igboland 1857-1914*, 77.

²²⁸ Ekechi, *Missionary Enterprise and Rivalry in Igboland 1857-1914*, 77.

hospitals in Igboland today. In all, the contributions of the early Catholic missionaries in medical services and hospitals remain unique and unprecedented. “They brought us modern healthcare. The impressive hospitals they established in places like Onitsha and Adazi, all in Anambra State, several decades ago still provide our people with quality services. The Holy Rosary Hospital at Emekuku, Imo State, and St Luke’s Hospital, Anua, Akwa Ibom State, are among the numerous medical facilities established by the Church in Eastern Nigeria which have been of immense benefit to our people.”²²⁹ Many people abandoned by their families and communities because they were afflicted by diseases like leprosy were treated in Catholic hospitals free of charge. One wonders what Igboland and Nigeria in general would have been without these early Catholic missionaries.

The charitable acts and medical services of the Catholic Church did not come to an end with the exit of the early missionaries. Today in Igboland, Catholic Church has been on top of the affairs as long as charity and medical services are concerned. At the exit of the Holy Ghost Fathers in Igboland, there were only five hospitals namely St. Charles Borromeo at Onitsha, Waterside Hospital at Onitsha, St. Joseph Hospital Adazi, Holy Rosary Hospital Emekuku in Owerri Imo State and St. Luke Hospital Anua. The C.M.S. Missionaries also established one hospital at Onitsha called Inyienu Hospital. But today in Igboland, not only that these five hospitals have been well renovated, equipped and furnished but also that there are more than 50 Catholic hospitals located in various parts of Igboland. Surgeons, Neurologists, paediatricians, obstetricians, physicians, oculists, dentists and various experts, consultants and professors in different fields of medicine are employed to give the people the best treatment.

These Catholic hospitals are run, managed and funded by the Catholic Church. Today in Igboland, all the diocese has Catholic hospitals. Earlier before now, the people of Igboland and beyond used to travel abroad for the treatment of sicknesses. But now, it is no longer the case. The trip outside the country for treatment has reduced. These Catholic hospitals are equipped with physicians and experts who can treat and cure many curable diseases and sickness. The Catholic Church in Igboland from time to time uses these Catholic medical facilities and hospitals to offer free medical treatments especially to the less-privilege. From time to time also, the Church through her pious and charitable members visit the sick in these hospitals and pay their hospital bills. “On Easter Sunday, 16 April, 2017, the Catholic women Organization of Onitsha Archdiocese visited St. Charles Borromeo Hospital, Onitsha and

²²⁹ Maduekwe, “125 Years of Catholic Church in Igboland Eastern Nigeria,” 1.

celebrated Easter with the patients. They cooked food and bought so many drinks and fruits for the patients. They equally paid their hospital bills.”²³⁰

Through the generous acts of the Catholic Church and her members in Igboland today, many people including non-Catholics have learnt to celebrate their birthdays, anniversaries and feast days no longer by throwing big parties in the hotels with rich people and friends. People now go to prisons, motherless babies’ homes, orphanage centres and hospitals to celebrate their birthdays, anniversaries and feast days with the sick and the less-privileged members of the society. Many Igbo Catholic parishes show these acts of solidarity and charity from time to time. Indeed, the Catholic Church in Igboland has through her medical services and charitable acts proven to be a father, mother, brother, sister and friend to the outcasts, the abandoned, rejects of the society, the prisoners and the sick. They are legacies of the Catholic Church and they have indeed brought a lot of credit and honour to her. Today also, Igbo Catholic has through her charitable organ- Caritas Organization rendered an uncountable number of services and help to people. After existing for many years as a unit of the Department of the Church and Society of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria, Caritas Nigeria was re-established as a juridical person in the Catholic Church in September, 2010. It serves as an umbrella organisation that assists and supports those that have different kinds of needs. Its actions and assistance are addressed not only to Catholics but also to persons in most need, regardless of creed, race or nationality.

The members make freewill donations. Non-members also donate to them. They use all these for charity. The organisation carries out different projects in the rural and poor areas. For instance, “its major project in the health sector is a comprehensive HIV and AIDS (Human Immuno deficiency Virus and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) treatment programme, including prevention from mother to child transmission of HIV. About 80 000 persons have been enrolled to benefit from these services since 2013.”²³¹ “On agriculture, Catholic Caritas within the 13 dioceses in Igboland has a common project called GIRMA (Growing Incomes and Rural Markets in Agriculture) GIRMA started in July 2013 and has indeed improved the livelihoods of 294,000 vulnerable households.”²³² It has helped so many households to adopt improved agricultural practices and diversify their income. Vulnerable groups are able to have access to adequate financial services. Some poor zones in the Northeast of Nigeria have also

²³⁰ Franca Anikpe, President of the Onitsha Archdiocesan Catholic Women Organization, Oral Interview, 1 August, 2017, Onitsha, Nigeria.

²³¹ Catholic Caritas Organization of Nigeria, “Help to the Needy,” in *Caritas Organisation of Nigeria Website*, accessed 8 June, 2017, <http://www.caritas.org/where-we-are/africa/nigeria>.

²³² Catholic Caritas Organization in Nigeria, “Help to the Needy,” *Caritas Organisation of Nigeria Website*, accessed 8 June, 2017, <http://www.caritas.org/where-we-are/africa/nigeria>.

benefited from a one-day immunization exercise against the deadly meningitis epidemic carried out on April 12, 2017. “Following the recent killings in Southern Kaduna, Nigeria which has shocked the whole world, Catholic Caritas Organization (C.C.O.) has lent its voice to the numerous humanitarian intervention efforts across the nation. It has equally sent lots and lots of help to the victims of Boko haram attacks in the Northeast Nigeria.”²³³ All these acts of charity make the Catholic Church in Igboland unique and special. There are 2 Catholic Archdioceses and 11 Catholic dioceses in Igboland and each of them has at least 3 Catholic hospitals. Each of these hospitals has the diocesan bishop as its sole proprietor. Each of these hospitals has also a Board of Directors chosen from among the Catholic doctors, professors and consultants. There is equally Management Body made of the manager, administrators and workers in the hospitals. “The Catholic bishops in the two ecclesiastical provinces in Igboland, each in his own diocese, after due and intelligent consultations and meetings with medical experts who are the members of the Board of Directors normally issues a document called- “Ethical, Moral and Religious Directives on the management of the Catholic Hospitals in the Diocese.”²³⁴ This document issues to the management body of the hospitals the directives, procedures, ethical norms and moral principles that the management body, administrators and workers in the hospital ought to follow in the discharge of their duties.

This document on hospital management is designed and formulated following the moral principles and directives of *Humanae Vitae* of Pope Paul VI (25 July 1968) and *Evangelium Vitae* of Pope John Paul II (25 March 1995) on the preservation of human life from conception to death. This document states the modalities and directives which the doctors, nurses and health care givers should always follow in providing their health care services. Thus, the above mentioned Onitsha Archdiocesan Document states: Throughout the centuries, with the aid of other sciences, a body of moral principles has emerged that expresses the Church’s teaching on medical and moral matters. In response to today’s challenges, these same moral principles of Catholic teachings provide the rationale and direction for the formulation of the Ethical, Moral and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services in the Catholic Archdiocese of Onitsha and other dioceses in Igboland.”²³⁵ The Document goes further to state that, “Human life is the most precious gift of God and it is our solemn duty as human beings who are created in the image and likeness of God to preserve it. Homologous artificial fertilization that is, any technique used to achieve conception using the gametes of the two spouses joined in marriage,

²³³ Luka Binniyat, “Southern Kaduna Killings: Death Toll Rises to 26,” *Vanguard Newspapers*, February 22, 2017, 1.

²³⁴ Michael Ihesiame, *The Apostolate of the Hospital Management in the Archdiocese of Onitsha*, (Onitsha: St. Stephen Press, 2005), 42.

²³⁵ Ihesiame, *The Apostolate of the Hospital Management in the Archdiocese of Onitsha*, 43.

is prohibited when it separates procreation from the marital act in its unitive significance (e.g., any technique used to achieve extracorporeal conception. Abortion (that is, the directly intended termination of pregnancy before viability or the directly intended destruction of a viable fetus) is never permitted.”²³⁶ Every procedure whose sole immediate effect is the termination of pregnancy before viability is an abortion, which, in its moral context, includes the interval between conception and implantation of the embryo. Catholic health care institutions are not to provide abortion services. In this context, Catholic health care institutions need to be concerned about the danger of scandal in any association with abortion providers. “Catholic hospitals should not promote or condone contraceptive practices but should provide, for married couples and the medical staff who counsel them, instruction both about the Church’s teaching on responsible parenthood and in methods of natural family planning.”²³⁷ These directives have really helped the Igbo Catholicism in protecting human life and dignity. It is the pride of the Catholic Church in Igboland today because it shows that she practises what she preaches. She is the only Christian denomination in Igboland that openly and vehemently preaches against abortion, use of contraceptives and other immoral issues.²³⁸ She ensures through the Board of Directors and management Body that all doctors, nurses and health care givers strictly follow and observe the directives.

Also, the local Church in Igboland has an Association of Catholic Doctors. This exists in every diocese. Its members are devoted Catholics who are doctors, experts and professors in the field of medicine. They have their Ethics of Conduct. Their duty is to ensure that the above directives are strictly followed and adhered to by all the doctors, nurses and health care givers in all the Catholic hospitals. They have their rules and regulations and they have the right to suspend or punish any doctor, nurse or worker who violates the afore- mentioned directives. Catholic Church in Igboland today has continued to be the light in the provision of health care and medical services. She continues to show that Christ came to heal the body and save the soul. All the Catholic dioceses in Igboland have priests both as managers and as chaplains. This really helps to ensure adequate and proper management of these hospitals. There are always priests who are there as hospital chaplains to provide sacraments to the sick and needy at any point in time. Many people prefer to go to Catholic hospitals because of the excellent services and care they offer both spiritual and physical.

²³⁶ Ihesieme, *The Apostolate of the Hospital Management in the Archdiocese of Onitsha*, 51.

²³⁷ Ihesieme, *The Apostolate of the Hospital Management in the Archdiocese of Onitsha*, 53.

²³⁸ Joachim Oforchukwu, “A Theological and Biblical Appraisal of Ozo Title Taking and its Implications for Current Leadership Issues in Igbo Catholic Church, Nigeria” (PhD diss. South African Theological Seminary, 2001).

Thus, the Igbo Catholicism not only heals the body, she also saves the soul. For Catholic patients or residents, provision for the sacraments is an important part of Catholic health care ministry. Every effort should be made to have priests assigned to hospitals and health care institutions to celebrate the Eucharist and provide the sacraments to patients and staff. Even the community and State owned hospitals now request the diocesan bishops to send priests to these hospitals for the spiritual care of the sick and workers. Pastoral care personnel works in close collaboration with local and community priests. Parish priests who have community hospitals close to their parishes or within their parish communities, voluntarily and free of charge visit these hospitals to administer the sacraments to the sick and workers. The priests are also called at any time there is an emergency. All these achievements have been the source of joy, fulfilment and admiration of the Igbo Catholicism.

3. Contribution to Language and Literature

One of the far reaching implications of the Christian missionary presence in Igboland was the great study which was made in the field of literacy. Indeed, nothing shows the ardour of the pioneering missionaries better than the effort devoted, within the limited resources of the missions and the ability of the missionaries to delve into the study and formulation of the principal Nigerian languages, especially Igbo language, reducing them to writing, in most cases for the first time. “Interest in the development of Igbo language had begun as early as 1841 when arrangements were being made for the Niger expedition and mission was projected for the model farm at Lokoja. J. F. Schon, a German linguist and C.M.S. missionary was charged with the duty of training interpreters and himself acquiring the languages he considered most essential.”²³⁹ The languages he chose were Hausa and Igbo languages. “Interest in Hausa and Igbo languages were intensified with Henry Barth in Northern Nigeria and Mac-Gregor Laird’s mail contract to ascend the Niger by steamer in 1854.”²⁴⁰ According to Ajayi, “The driving force behind the work on the Nigerian languages especially the Igbo language was the anxiety to teach and help the converts and would-be converts to read and understand the Bible and catechism in vernacular.”²⁴¹

The missionaries emphasized that it would be impossible to convey the Gospel message effectively to any people unless the evangelist himself was able, not only to master the local

²³⁹ Chika Okpalike, “The Evolution of Modern Nigerian through Missionary Activities within Colonial Schemata, 1840-1960,” (Paper presented at international conference for the Igbo studies association, Marquette University, Marquette USA, April 11-14, 2015).

²⁴⁰ Chika Okpalike, “The Evolution of Modern Nigerian through Missionary Activities within Colonial Schemata 1840-1960.

²⁴¹ Samuel Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria 1841-1991: The Making of New Elite* (London: Longman Press, 1965), 13.

tongue of the people but also to understand their thought and value system. It was these considerations that led them into producing literatures and teaching materials in the vernacular. Although, the vernacular literatures were first produced primarily for evangelistic considerations, they also had considerable positive effects in the development and building of Igbo language, culture and tribe. The early Catholic missionaries led by Father Lutz devoted their time in teaching and in instructing the natives of Igboland. They set up many religious and instruction centres in 1886 for the formal preparation of the people for baptism. According to Obi, The first group of catechumens in training were docile and eager to learn and the missionaries devoted their whole time instructing and teaching them in vernacular with the aid of some learned natives and teacher-catechists. "During the Feast of the Blessed Trinity, the catechumens were able to sing some hymns in Latin, English and more especially in vernacular."²⁴² Emphasizing the great efforts and enormous time and energy which the early Catholic missionaries put in the development of the local language, Obi said, "the effort and the zeal to teach and instruct the people in the local language was very much, such that, shortly before the death of Father Lutz in 1895, Father Cadio, one of the missionary priest working with Father Lutz, with the help of some natives was able to produce the first beautiful catechism book in vernacular."²⁴³ This production contributed immensely in the work of evangelization.

The era of Father Lejeune also witnessed a giant stride in the development and promotion of Igbo literature and language. According to Ozigbo, "in order to ensure a faster spread of the Gospel in vernacular, Father Lejeune commissioned Ephraim Agha, the chief catechist and teacher whom the missionaries have trained in the very act of literacy and English language at the Holy Trinity Mission, Onitsha, to translate the Westminster Penny Catechism, which with few modifications he published in 1903 as the famous and popular Igbo catechism."²⁴⁴ Father Lejeune also played a vital role in the building and development of Igbo culture. Language is the vehicle of culture. "These early Catholic missionaries put the Igbo culture on the world map by the publication of an English-Igbo-French Dictionary as well as a Manual of Catholic Doctrine called 'Katechisma Nke Okwukwe.'²⁴⁵

To help them in listening and hearing confessions, "the missionaries had a list drawn up in Igbo language, of mortal and venial sins. This list was later incorporated into the 'Katechisma' under the headings: 'Ndia buga nnukwu njo' and 'Ndia buga obele njo' (mortal and venial sins)."²⁴⁶ Thus, the first Igbo catechism book in Igboland was produced by these

²⁴² Obi, "Background to the Planting of Catholic Christianity in the Lower Niger," 25.

²⁴³ Obi, "The French Pioneers, 1885-1905," 58.

²⁴⁴ Ozigboh, *Igbo Catholicism: The Onitsha Connection 1967-1984*, 9.

²⁴⁵ Obi, "The French Pioneers, 1885-1905," 81.

²⁴⁶ Obi, "The French Pioneers, 1885-1905," 81.

European missionaries. Furthermore, before the coming of the early Catholic missionaries, the Igbo people could speak their language but they could not write it down. They were not able to construct and produce the vowels and alphabets that make up the Igbo language. The arrival of the early Catholic missionaries helped in the invention of the Igbo alphabets and vowels as well as in the reduction of Igbo language to writing. They came, listened to the natives and local people as they spoke, noted the phonetics and sounds of their speech and letters and were able to produce the corresponding and matching vowels and alphabets. They were the first to put Igbo phonetics into writing, vowels and alphabets.

However, with some Igbo professors and educationists like Tony Ubesie, this singular achievement of the missionaries underwent some corrections and improvement. Again, the Igbo people used to count the days of the week using the four market days in Igboland namely- 'Nkwo,' 'Eke,' 'Oye' and 'Afor.' But with the coming of the early Catholic missionaries, the present system of counting the seven days of the week, four weeks of the month and twelve months of the year came into existence. It must be conceded therefore that the missionaries rendered remarkable services to the building and development of Nigerian languages and literature especially Igbo language by reducing them to written languages, through numerous catechetical tracks in the vernacular and through the translation of the Bible into vernacular. Apart from the enormous roles they played in the building and development of the indigenous languages in Nigeria especially Igbo language, these early missionaries also played a vital role in Nigeria and in Igboland in particular with their own native language-the English language. By the aid of these missionaries and schools, English language became the common medium of communication of all Nigerian tribes as the Roman language was to the modern nations of Europe. In this way, the Church became an integrative bond uniting individuals of different and hostile communities.

Nigeria is made up of more than 250 ethnic groups and tribes. Each of these ethnic groups has its peculiar local dialect and language, yet Nigeria is seen and still exists as one nation and one entity with one federal governing body. This is made possible by English language. English language is the commonest and strongest unitive and integrative factor reducing all these tribes and ethnic groups to one entity called Nigeria. It is the lowest common factor. Peace, reconciliation, love, unity and progress are achieved in Nigeria today through the use of English language. It is commonest and official medium of communication and dialogue. It is also an approved language of instructions and learning in Nigerian schools. This is why it is made compulsory in all schools and institutions of learning in Nigeria. Catholic Church is always associated with English language today in Nigeria. This has always been her pride and admiration. Today, English language is taught in all the schools in Nigeria. It is the official

language of the Nigerians. There are many prominent English authors and writers, poets, actors and actresses in Igboland who are Catholics. Among them are: Albert Chinua Achebe, Cyprian Ekwensi, Buchi Emecheta and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie as authors and writers, Pete Edochie and Osita Iheme as actors, Rita Uchenna Dominic and Genevieve Nnaji as actresses.

4. Contribution to Journalism

Journalism which began in Nigeria from 1850's derived its origin and inspiration from the early European missionaries. The early Christian missionaries used newspapers and writing materials as very effective means of spreading the Gospel and the Christian message. They saw it as an efficient means of evangelization. The effective use to which these early Christian missionaries put the newspapers and other written articles in the mobilization of opinion in favour of their programmes established newspapers and printing presses as essential and indispensable instruments of the mission work. The use of newspapers and other written materials as means of evangelization began in Igboland with the coming of the early missionaries but they became more effective means of evangelization after the establishment of schools by these European missionaries, when people have learnt the acts of reading and writing. People could now understand the content and message of the newspapers. Press materials and newspapers are very important and quick means of disseminating pieces of information because they can reach and cover a wide range of people. With modern advancement and development in science and technology, it takes just a second for a piece of information to get to the whole world. This is the effectiveness and efficiency of the press. Catholic missionaries were not the first to make use of newspaper publication for their missionary activities.

According to Olukoju, "It was the C.M.S missionaries that first made use of newspapers in the course of their missionary work when they published in 1859, Nigeria's first newspaper called 'Iwe Irohin,' a fortnightly publication."²⁴⁷ The Christian missionaries thus pioneered the establishment of newspaper publications in Nigeria, an industry that played a decisive role in the country's later history. It also played a vital role in the establishment of Christianity especially Catholicism in Igboland and Nigeria in general. Omu states further that "not only did these missionaries inaugurate journalism in Nigeria particularly in Igboland, they also started the tradition of the large number of one room printing works in several large towns in Nigeria, some of which, printed some of the early nationalist newspapers."²⁴⁸ The Christian

²⁴⁷ Anthony Olukoju, "Christianity and the Development of the Nigerian State," in *Nigerian People and Culture* ed. Anthony Osuntokun and Anthony Olukoju (Ibadan: Iota Press, 1974), 142.

²⁴⁸ Fabian Omu, "Journalism and the Rise of Nationalism," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria 1848-1915*", 3 (1979), 529.

mission also introduced a variety of magazines. Such magazines include African Church Gleaner (1872), Nigerian Baptist (1873) and The African Church (1875). They were used by the early Christian missionaries in the spread of information both about the Church and about national issues. Through all these means, the missionaries were able to carry on the work of evangelization. Through the initiatives, ingenuity and efforts of these early missionaries, the first Nigerian owned Newspaper known as Lagos Times was begun in 1880. Twenty four months later, 'Lagos Observer' surfaced. 'The Eagle' and 'Lagos Critic' emerged in 1883 and in 1887, 'The Mirror' appeared. All these printing Presses and newspapers arose as a result of the ingenuity and initiatives of the early European missionaries.

During their mission in Igboland, the early Catholic missionaries also produced and printed so many liturgical books, music books and catechism books in English, Latin and Igbo. They also published other important documents and articles that helped them in spreading the Catholic faith. However, the first ever well-known established and standard Catholic press in Igboland was Assumpta Press at the Catholic Archdiocese of Owerri. This Assumpta Press was started by Bishop Joseph Whelan, a missionary and the first bishop of Owerri Archdiocese. This Assumpta Press just like any other press and communication centres in all other Dioceses and Archdioceses today, serves and stands as the mouth piece of the Archdiocese. This Assumpta Press started at Okpala, a town in Owerri Igboland in a humble one-room bookshop cum office under the Fathers' residence at the seminary. But today, because of its enormous and vital role in the spread of the Catholic faith in the Archdiocese and beyond, this Assumpta Press has grown to be a gigantic building. Today also, all the Catholic Archdioceses and dioceses have Press and Communication centres. These Press and Communication centres are indispensable in every diocese and Arch diocese because of its vital role and function in the spread of the faith and other vital pieces of information for the growth and well-being of dioceses and its members.

These Press and Communication centres serve as mouth piece of every diocese and Archdiocese in Igboland. It is the quickest and easiest means of passing correct and true information within diocesan, provincial and national levels. It is the voice of every diocesan bishop. It is the best medium through which people or members of a particular diocese come to know the latest, correct and true news or information from Vatican, papal pronouncements and declarations, the stand of the Catholic Church on any moral issue, the authentic teachings of the Church, the stand and position of the regional, provincial or national Bishops on any issue as well as the stand of a diocesan bishop on a particular issue or event within a diocese. In fact, the Press and Communication centres are highly indispensable in any Diocese or Archdiocese. No Archdiocese or Diocese can function properly without Press, just as no nation

can exist and function properly without Press. Great thanks to the initiatives and ingenuity of these early Christian missionaries. There exists Press and Communication centres in every Diocese and Archdiocese in Igboland today. The Archdiocese of Onitsha has Trinitas Press and Communication Center while that of Owerri Archdiocese is called Assumpta Press. Awka diocese has Fides Communication Centre while that of Enugu diocese is called Flames. Nnewi has Cathcom Press while that of Abakaliki diocese is called Citizen's Advocate. Awgu diocese has Sophia Press Communication. There are also weekly diocesan newspapers and periodicals. Each diocesan communication centre releases and passes relevant messages through these newspapers and periodicals. Through these Press and Communication Centres, catechesis, Good news and other important information meant for the spiritual as well as material growth and development of human persons are passed to all the members of Igboland and beyond both Catholics, natives and Protestants alike. There is also a Radio Station- Sapientia Radio Station owned and run by the Archdiocese of Onitsha. This station runs many Catholic programmes, plays many Catholic music and educate Catholics and non- Catholics on sensitive moral issues like abortion and contraceptives. Today, it is a strong means of evangelization in Igboland.

There is also a TV Service- Catholic Television of Nigeria owned and run by the Archdiocesan Communications Department, Catholic Archdiocese of Abuja. This Communication Department now produces daily morning devotional programs called, "A Light for the Nation and Faith in Action", a program about the activity of Catholics and the Church in society and transmit them via DAAR's Satellite Television channel- African Independent Television (AIT)."²⁴⁹ In the Bigard Memorial Seminary Enugu, there are many Catholic journals produced on annual basis. Some of them are: National Association of Theological Students, (NACATHS), Bigard Annual Journal and National Association of Catholic Students (NACS). On the national level also, there are national dailies in Nigeria today. They include: Nations Newspapers, Vanguard Newspapers, Champions, Punch, Leadership, Authority et cetera. All these are the joy and achievement of the Christian Churches who serve as their origins and foundation.

5. Contribution to Liturgy and Music

Another area where the early Catholic missionaries played a vital role in the Igboland today was in the development of music especially liturgical music, hymns and songs. Virtually, all the liturgical music used in the Igboland today have their origin, source and root on the

²⁴⁹ Catholic Archdiocese of Abuja, Nigeria, "Catholic Channels," *Nigeria Television Association*, accessed March 3, 2016, <http://pulse.ng/religion/spreading-the-gospel-abuja-catholic-diocese-to-launch-tv-station-id3346681.html>

ingenuity and initiatives of the early Catholic missionaries. These missionaries devoted their time and energy in building, developing and organising so many liturgical hymns and songs. They also devoted their time in teaching the natives and the catechumens not only catechisms but also sacred music and songs. According to Obi, “Father Lutz did a magnificent work in Church music. He laid the foundation for the teaching of religion not merely out of the catechism book but by incorporating it in hymns sung in the Church and during other religious functions. He also produced a very beautiful Church liturgical music which gave evangelization in Igboland a good foundation.”²⁵⁰ In fact, one of the major events or things that really aided the early missionaries in their missionary work and indeed attracted and won over a great number of the natives to the Catholic Church was liturgy coloured with beautiful songs and sacred music. The natives really admired these beautifully sung liturgies and eventually got won over to the Catholic Church. Many Protestants were won over to the Catholic Church as a result of beautiful Holy Mass embedded and garnished with songs and music. The seduction of Ephraim Agha of Onitsha was a case in point. Ephraim was a former C.M.S chief native agent at Onitsha from 1892 to 1896. At a time when the C.M.S and Roman Catholics were struggling for dominance at Onitsha, Ephraim was indeed a great asset to the CMS.

However, despite his deep commitment and dedication to the affairs and works of the C.M.S at Onitsha, Ephraim later got converted to the Catholic Church. As afore-mentioned, according to Ekechi, “in their effort to win Ephraim to the Catholic Church, the early Catholic missionaries started to invite Ephraim to the Holy Masses and other liturgical celebrations. At one of these Holy Masses, Ephraim was deeply impressed by the beautiful liturgy, music, singing and the complicated but edifying rituals and he at once told the Catholic priest, Father Kuntzmann who was instrumental in his conversion that ‘this is how God ought to be worshipped.’”²⁵¹ The conversion of Ephraim was a great asset to the Catholic Church. Many Protestants who were previously fanatical enemies of the Catholic Church were converted to the Roman Catholicism in Igboland because of their great admiration of the various Catholic programmes especially their music and singing programmes.

Equally, the people of Igboland came to know about the solfa and staff notations as well as music melodies through the great effort, tutorship and agency of these early Catholic missionaries. Their liturgy was indeed delight and enthrall. The older Igbo Catholics still remember and recall with delight and yearning the ‘Missa Cantata’ and the ‘Missa Solemnis’ of these early Catholic missionaries. These were sources of joy, admiration and attraction to

²⁵⁰ Obi, “The French Pioneers, 1985-1905,” 59.

²⁵¹ Ekechi, *Missionary Enterprise and Rivalry in Igboland 1857-1914*, 79.

many especially non-Catholics and adherent of Igbo Traditional Religion. One needs to be present at a Latin sung Holy Mass in order to appreciate the attraction which the Catholic liturgy had for the Igbo. These Latin texts were unintelligible to the converts but the heart-throbbing refrains and rhythms of the Gregorian plain chant transmitted a compelling aesthetic pleasure. Ozigbo recalls his own experiences as a school child, “when in the company of other children, he trudged home from a Sunday Holy Mass, humming the mysterious but angelic preface the priest sang so captivatingly.”²⁵² That was the time when Pope Pius X has given a compulsory order that the Gregorian chant should be used during Holy Masses throughout the whole world. Today in Igboland, thanks to the generous effort and sacrifices of late Monsignor Cyril Ezenduka and his likes. They were able to continue from where these early Catholic missionaries stopped. They have composed and produced so many liturgical songs and hymns which also make Catholic liturgy really beautiful, presentable and attractive in Igboland today.

“The 1970-1974 period was, perhaps the most fruitful and innovative years of Father Cyril Ezenduka who presided over the Onitsha Archdiocesan Liturgical Music Commission. He translated the English Order and Rite of Holy Mass into Igbo language in 1971.”²⁵³ With this translation, the Catholic Church in Igboland began to celebrate the Holy Mass and other liturgical celebrations in Igbo language. His new tunes for the Common of the Holy Mass became instant success in many Catholic parishes. Igbo Catholicism will for a long time, remain grateful and indebted to him and to his pioneer predecessors in Igbo liturgical music. The Catholic Church in Igboland has so many musicians, singers, composer and music professors and directors. Prominent among are Jude Nnam, Dorothy Ipere, and Chigozie Okeke. However, more still needs to be done in this area especially as it concerns the inculturation of liturgical music, hymns and songs.

Summary

The chapter two of this work begins by looking at the general meaning of the socio-cultural identity. It goes on to state that social-cultural identity deals with social and cultural factors which are customs, lifestyles and values that characterise a society or a group as well as socio-cultural aspects which include concepts of beauty, education, language, law, politics and religion. Rightly speaking, Socio-cultural identity of the Catholic Church deals with cultural context and social setting of any nation or region where the Gospel message is meant to incarnate and take root. The chapter also presents what the socialization in Igboland is all about as well as five major agents of socialization. Socialization is not limited to the learning

²⁵² Ozigboh, *Roman Catholicism in South Eastern Nigeria 1885-1931*, 85.

²⁵³ Ozigboh, *Roman Catholicism in South Eastern Nigeria 1885-1931*, 34.

experiences of the infants and children but also the adult members. The adults may have to learn some basic skills and rules that have to do with the new status they occupy in a social group. The six major agents of socialization in Igboland include: family, peer groups, traditional institutions, Church, schools and mass media. Among these agents, Church plays the most important role as far as socialization, free interactions and just association of individuals in Igbo society are concerned. This claim is well brought in the issue of 'Osu' Caste System. The chapter also highlights the dynamic interplay that should always exist between the Church and culture. It clearly points out that one of the essential missions of faith-culture interplay is to transform culture in the light of the Gospel as well as to nourish the Gospel message and liturgical lives and worships with good ingredients inherent in the culture. Church prepares and disposes her members to relate the Catholic faith to their particular culture and to live that faith in practice. Church strongly believes and teaches that faith and culture are intimately related, and that her members should be led, in ways suitable to the level of their intellectual development, to grasp the importance of this relationship. Church is always reminded that while faith is not to be identified with any one culture and is independent of all cultures, it must influence and animate every culture.

The chapter equally deals with major contributions of the early Catholic missionaries and Igbo Catholicism in the building, development and civilization of Igboland and its people. The chapter shows the efforts of the early missionaries in the evolution, growth, expansion and progress of Igboland. They laid a solid foundation for the people of Igboland. They made the greatest contribution in the education sector knowing that education is the key and foundation to success and development of any nation. The chapter further presents other contributions of the early missionaries in the areas of medical services, language, literature and writing, communication systems, journalism and in liturgy and music too. Furthermore, the chapter looks at the great role the Catholic Church in Igboland has made and is still making to retain and improve on these solid foundations and contributions. The missionaries have laid the foundation and the Catholic Church is really making sincere effort on the line of continual growth and development. Lots and lots of educational initiatives have been created ever since the early missionaries left the people of Igboland in 1967. A lot of innovations and improvements have also taken place and continue to take place in the medical services, language, literature and music.

CHAPTER THREE

MORAL AND THEOLOGICAL IDENTITY

Morality and theology are intrinsic and ontological to the very life and identity of the Catholic Church. The most important and distinctive aspects of the Catholic Church are her moral and theological identities. The moral and theological life of the Church finds its source and summit in the life of her Founder, Jesus Christ. Catholic Church imitates, follows and teaches the life of Jesus Christ who is a standard of morality and embodiment of theology. The Church, the pillar and bulwark of the truth, has received this solemn command of Christ from the apostles to announce the saving truth. “To the Church belongs the right always and everywhere to announce moral principles, including those pertaining to the social order, and to make judgments on any human affairs to the extent that they are required by the fundamental rights of the human person or the salvation of souls.”²⁵⁴ In dealing with moral and theological identity in this chapter therefore, identity in the field of morality will be discussed first. This will be followed by the concept of morality in Igbo traditional society as well as moral aspect of Igbo Catholicism. Next will be theological (ecclesiological) identity of universal and Igbo particular Churches. This is to be followed by the identity of the Igbo local Churches, corporate personal and community identity as well as the identity of the religious congregations and societies in Igbo Catholicism.

1. Identity in the Field of Morality

Etymologically, the term “Morality is derived from the Latin word ‘moralis’ meaning that which concerns manner, character, behaviour or action considered or judged as being good or evil, right or wrong.”²⁵⁵ “Morality is the differentiation of intentions, decisions, and actions between those that are distinguished as proper and those that are improper.”²⁵⁶ “Morality can also be seen as a body of standards or principles derived from a code of conduct from a particular philosophy, religion, or culture, or it can derive from a standard that a person believes should be universal.”²⁵⁷ Morality may be specifically synonymous with ‘goodness’ or ‘rightness’. In philosophy, the terms ‘moral’ and ‘ethical’ are often taken to be identical, and have as their cognate the word “morality”. Broadly construed, however, morals refer to the

²⁵⁴ Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Vaticana: Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 2003), no. 2032.

²⁵⁵ Anthony Long & David Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers: Translations of the Principal Sources with Philosophical Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 366-367.

²⁵⁶ Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers: Translations of the Principal Sources with Philosophical Commentary*, 366-367.

²⁵⁷ Stanford University, “The Definition of Morality, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,” in *Stanford University Website*, accessed March 10, 2017, <http://www.morality.com/corp/about/factsheets.html>.

models and standards of conduct people adhere to. As a concept, it reflects the actual behaviour of members of big or small social groups as well as what the members of these groups allow or prohibit themselves to do. Morals, says Kwasi Wiredu, “covers ethical rules proper as well as customs and taboos.”²⁵⁸ In other words, morals taken as a whole bear on the morality of a social community. It entails human principles of right and wrong, and deals with how people treat themselves in order to promote mutual welfare, progress, creativity and meaning in striving for what is right over what is wrong, and what is good over what is bad. In the Church, when we deal with matters of faith and morals, the authoritative voice of Christ is exercised by the Pope and Bishops, successors of Peter and the Apostles who form the Magisterium, to lead all humanity into all truth. The Church is the custodian and teacher of morality. Thus from generation to generation, under the aegis and vigilance of the pastors of the Church, the ‘Deposit’ of Christian moral teaching has been handed on, a Deposit composed of a characteristic body of rules, commandments, and virtues proceeding from faith in Christ and animated by charity. The basis for this catechesis has traditionally been the Decalogue which sets out the principles of moral life valid for all men.

“Moral identity is a construct at the intersection of moral development and identity formation. It is generally defined as the degree to which moral concerns (e.g., justice, love, truth, generosity etc) are a central part of one's identity (that is, one's sense of who he or she is).”²⁵⁹ Moral identity is a network of cognitively accessible moral schemas which aid in the processing of social information in moral situations. Some individuals have a strong moral identity while others have a weak one. Individuals with a very strong moral identity prioritize moral commitments over all other non-moral commitments, obligating themselves to live consistently with their respective moral concerns. Thus, one who has a strong moral identity would feel compelled to be a good person, at least respective to his or her prioritized moral commitments. People with a stronger sense of moral identity will be more likely to do what they know is right, and more likely to show enduring moral commitments. A person with a weak moral identity, on the other hand, would highly prioritize non-moral commitments over moral commitments. Thus, he or she would be more likely to know the right thing to do but not act accordingly with their knowledge, presumably because they are more driven by their highly prioritized non-moral commitments.

²⁵⁸ Kwasi Wiredu, “Death and the Afterlife in African Culture, Person and Community,” in *Philosophical Studies*, ed. Kwasi Wiredu et al. (Nairobi: Bookwise Limited, 1992), 143.

²⁵⁹ Tonia Bock, “Are You a Good Person,” *The Notion of Morality*, accessed on May 2, 2013. <http://www.stthomas.edu/news/are-you-a-good-person-the-notion-of-moral-identity/html>.

1. The Concept of Morality in Igbo Traditional Society

Igbo as an ethnic group has peculiar tradition, customs, values and morality. The understanding and application of these realities differentiates it from other tribes and ethnic groups. The Igbo society esteems order and harmony in will and purpose. It ensures this harmony and order by various devices which are similar to other people of different cultures. A good understanding of the Igbo traditional morality will be of immense help in assessing the Roman Catholic missionizing and evangelising efforts in the Igbo region. It will help to show whether missionary endeavours and teachings of the Roman Catholic Church on morality are indeed a fulfilment of the traditional Igbo morality, a truly beneficial and uplifting enterprise or new teachings that were totally against and contrary to the traditional Igbo moral teachings.

A. The Moral Life of the Igbo People

Igbo religion and morality are interwoven. In fact, they are not only complementary but also inseparable. In spite of this marriage of morality and religion, there is nevertheless a well-defined code of morality in Igbo society. Igbos have a high sense of morality. In a typical traditional Igbo society, “morality can be said to be “a normative ordering, in terms of perceived meanings, values, purposes and goals of human existence, of the lives of persons with regard to the ways in which they can choose to relate themselves to reality.”²⁶⁰ When one stands back and tries to understand this system of ordering of meanings and values, one sees the ethics of the Igbo people. Ethics then is “the scientific study of such normative order.”²⁶¹ The foundation of morality in traditional Igbo society is solidly based on religion as well as on humanism. They do not separate the two. Their ethical behaviours are integrated on a religious basis such as the will of God and also on their relationship with their fellow human beings.

Thus, wrong behaviour is regarded as a breaking of some specific rule of conduct as well as the flouting of some divine or absolute law of the universe. This moral belief is also obtainable among other tribes and countries in Africa. Hence, Mbiti observes, “Morality in traditional Africa societies is seen as intimate relationship with the ontological order of the universe. Any infraction of this order is a contradiction in life itself and it brings about a physical disorder which reveals the fault.”²⁶² The traditional Igbo society has deep respect for the sacredness of human life as belonging to God. Anyone who spills blood is banished. Wealth although important is not valued more than human life. In Igbo morality, honesty and good life

²⁶⁰ Nobert Rigali, “The Uniqueness and the Distinctiveness of Christian Morality and Ethics,” in *Moral Theology: Challenges for the Future*, ed. Charles Curran (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), 74-75.

²⁶¹ Uzodinwa Nwala, *Igbo Philosophy* (Abuja: Niger Books Publications, 2010), 87.

²⁶² John Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann Publishers, 1969), 262.

surpass possessions. According to Okafor, “Igbo moral ethics revolves around justice.”²⁶³ In his opinion, “a just man in the Igbo moral estimation is one who gives to everyone what is his due; one who tells the truth regardless of who or what is at stake; one who is objective in his judgement.”²⁶⁴ He goes further to state “that for the Igbos, the classical sinner is the thief. This is because theft is seen as an aggression and infringement on other people’s rights, which is a violation of social justice.”²⁶⁵ Traditional Igbo religion and morality believe in the existence of Supreme Being (Chukwu) and gods, that is, the deities and divinities who are believed to be the ministers of God and are subordinate to him. God (Chukwu) is conceived like a monarch, an absolute monarch surrounded by his chiefs (gods) who are at his service. “It is believed that they are the agents that execute his wishes. Everyone strives to establish cordial relationship of man to the deities, man to man and man to the universe as a whole. The deities and the divinities have been apportioned different assignments and also empowered by the Supreme Being (Chukwu) to attend to human problems and needs.”²⁶⁶

More importantly, Igbo people believe that these deities and divinities exercise great influence on the morality of the people. They are believed to reward the virtuous and inflict great pains and sufferings on those who step on the law of the cosmic order. So every person is encouraged to do good and avoid evil, as any good done has a reward while any evil committed has also its punishment. Therefore, coming down to the understanding of morality in Igbo world view, their morality is so tied to their life, that in Igboland, both life and morality telescope into the same phenomenon.”²⁶⁷ Thus, Igbo morality pertains in every aspect of an individual’s life: as member of the community, as a social being and as a religious being. Nwala identifies the character of “Igbo traditional morality to be not only traditionally enjoined system of individual responsibilities, but the community as a whole is held responsible for the conduct of each individual member.”²⁶⁸ A community is made to suffer because of the bad conduct of any one of its members. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the whole community to control the conduct of its members.

²⁶³ Fidelis Okafor, *Igbo Philosophy of Law* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishing Co. Ltd, 1992), 32.

²⁶⁴ Okafor, *Igbo Philosophy of Law*, 32.

²⁶⁵ Okafor, *Igbo Philosophy of Law*, 33.

²⁶⁶ Emefie Ikenga-Metuh, *God and Man in African Religion: A Case Study of the Igbo of Nigeria*, 2nd ed. (Enugu: Snaap Press Ltd, 1999), 113.

²⁶⁷ Malachy Aguzuru, *Superficiality of Igbo Moral Christian Behaviour: How to Deepen it* (Onitsha: Spiritan Publication, 2007), 44.

²⁶⁸ Nwala, *Igbo Philosophy*, 205.

B. The Igbo Traditional Moral Code

Igbo traditional morality is enshrined in what is referred to as 'OMENANI' or 'OMENALA'. Omenala²⁶⁹ the embodiment of Igbo life, is the mother word that encompasses all the principles of belief, customs, conduct and morals that bind the Igbo together as a people. According to Nwala, among the Igbos, "their philosophy of nature and life, its general principles and social practices are embodied in the concept of Omenala."²⁷⁰ "Omenala is the totality of the lore of the land, customs and tradition, a complex of beliefs and practices which every Igbo person inculcates as a guiding philosophy and code of behaviour."²⁷¹ "Omenala' derives from three Igbo words, 'Ome' (that which obtains); 'na' (in); and 'ala' (land or society), meaning that which obtains in a society or land (Igbo society)."²⁷² All the taboos, totems and prohibitions hedged around 'Omenala' are designed to ensure that the natural order is not violated and that proper relationship among spirits, between spirits and men, among men, between men and the lower beings, between husband and wife, child and parents, among kinsmen etc; are maintained. The gamut of natural order stretches from the lightest principles and basic beliefs about life and the universe to the principles that guide economic pursuits and the lowest items of etiquette. In all, there is unity of all things. The highest principle within 'Omenala,' which underscores the behaviour and actions of all beings, is 'Ofo' (justice), symbolized in 'Ofo stick' held by elders, priests and the initiated. The holders of 'Ofo' are the guardians of 'Omenala' and its codes, which protect the cosmic, natural and social balance.

Generally among the Igbos, the norm of right or wrong is said to be social custom. As with most societies in the world, among the Igbos, the good is usually that which receives the community's approval while the bad is that which the community prohibits or frowns at. While the good actions build up society, the bad ones tear it down. One is social, the other anti-social. With the Igbos, 'Omenala' or social custom is the means by which society enforces conformity to its rules. According to Okorochoa, "the moral code of Igboland commonly spoken as 'Omenala' defines the various aspects of behaviour and social activities that are approved, while at the same time indicating those aspects that are prohibited. It is the means by which the social ethos is measured, and the values of the society controlled from one generation to another. It is also the process of socialization through which the education of the young ones

²⁶⁹ Nwala, *Igbo Philosophy*, 205. This word is used to substitute and describe the various aspects of Igbo life, beliefs and practices put together. The term is very complex and laden with lots and lots of meanings. It also serves as the embodiment of Igbo traditional world-view namely morals, customs, laws, beliefs practices et cetera. It is general way of life of Igbo people.

²⁷⁰ Nwala, *Igbo Philosophy*, 76.

²⁷¹ Nwala, *Igbo Philosophy*, 76.

²⁷² Nwala, *Igbo Philosophy*, 76.

is facilitated.”²⁷³ Igbo observe their traditional ‘Omenala’ to ensure their existence, maintain it with all authority and sacredness. The genuine effort and desire of every parents from the early days of child’s moral growth and acquisition of values is to ensure that the inculcation of such values come first namely manners and morals, conventions and customs, beliefs and laws of the society. All parents make genuine efforts to see that their children be conscientised, sensitive and active to the moral challenges and demands of their environments and societies. Children are also encouraged to acquire those traditional values like honesty, truth, courage, humility, tolerance and perseverance. The training of conscience is also very important in the formation of children. These and other moral aspects needed in the society are made lively and inculcated into the children through the actions and examples of the elderly ones. All acts of waywardness and vagabondage are never encouraged by any means at all in Igbo traditional society. Through all these virtues and moral acts, the moral life of traditional Igbo society is maintained and upheld.

C. The Igbo Sense of Moral Values and Social Taboos

Morality is connected with values. According to Nwabuisi, “values are fundamental to all human activities and actions.”²⁷⁴ Values are therefore universal phenomena. In Igboland, there are dos and don’ts which represent positive and negative moral values. The dos are actions enjoined and they don’t prohibit. Negative moral values are mostly definitive prohibitions of improper behaviours including the more serious ones in the nature of taboos. They include murder, stealing, patricide, incest, disrespect, dishonesty, abuse of elders, improper sexual relations, lying, witchcraft etc. Violations of most of these are ‘aru’ abomination which call for serious rituals and sanctions. There are traditional moral values that are well known among the Igbo. According to Ugwu, “these traditional moral values include truth, and a life of rectitude, humility, obedience, honesty, justice, goodness, hospitality, chastity, respect for sanctity of human life etc.”²⁷⁵

He further states that moral values have the potent powers of facilitating and creating the enabling environment for societal development in Igboland because at any level of disobedience or infringement of these highly valued moral elements, the culprit is always punished either by the living or highly revered ancestors. Punishment therefore, deter people from being immoral. For Mbiti, “It is believed in many African societies (Igboland), that these

²⁷³ Cyril Okorochoa, *The Meaning of Religious Conversion in Africa* (Brookfield: Brookfield Publishers, 1987), 101.

²⁷⁴ Malachy Nwabuisi, *Values and Education* (Onitsha: Spiritan Publications, 2001), 1.

²⁷⁵ Christopher Tagbo Ugwu, *Religion and Societal Development* (Lagos: Merit International Publications, 2004), 289-290.

morals are given to them by God from the beginning. This provides an unchallenged authority for the morals.”²⁷⁶ It is also believed or thought that some of the departed and the spirits help watch over people to make sure that they observe the moral laws and are punished when they break them deliberately or knowingly. This additional belief strengthens the authority of the morals. Ugwu notes that “it is the above that underscores the relevance of moral values in the development of an Igbo society.”²⁷⁷ If there are no sanctions attached to moral laws, its violation will be done with impunity especially in our society where the might is always right.

2. The Moral Aspects of Igbo Catholicism

Because the Universal Church is of moral nature, her identity among others is also moral. The Universal Church believes that acting morally means acting in accordance with the eternal laws of God, which are written into the heart so deeply that even those who know nothing of God can follow the path of morality. Natural law, as this interior marking is called, comes to humans through their capacity to reason, which sparks the conscience to respond to the eternal law. This means that people of other faiths and no faith at all have the capacity to act as morally as Catholic Christians, although they will struggle more since they will not have the benefit of the sacraments that open them to the grace to resist sin. By all means, the Universal Church distinguishes herself in ethical and moral spheres. An ethical-moral dimension is an essential part of Christianity and of the Church - of her identity. Being a Catholic means following the whole teaching of the Church in doctrinal matters and ethical-moral norms. The Universal Church is obliged to follow and teach what Jesus Christ taught in moral matters. The ethics covers norms and principles which are the base of human moral decisions and actions (morality).

The Universal Church ethical-moral identity embraces fundamental presuppositions, norms and principles like every human being’s dignity, the principle of loving God and neighbours, human rights, the inextricableness of marriage, the ban of abortion, euthanasia and experiments on embryos, the primacy of common (society) goodness over individual benefits etc. As part of the Universal Church, the Igbo Catholicism shares the same moral originality and qualities with the Universal Church. She enjoys the same moral-ethical features and elements with the Universal Church. The moral strength of the local Church in Igboland can be seen in the moral quality of her members and her influence on the moral sphere in the Igbo society.

²⁷⁶ Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy*, 173.

²⁷⁷ Ugwu, *Religion and Societal Development*, 290.

A. Reception of the Universal Catholic Moral Teachings

From moral standpoint, every local Church's moral basis and teachings are the same with the moral basis and teachings of the Universal Church. Being a part of the Universal Church, the moral identity of the local Church in Igboland is the same with the moral identity of the Universal Church. Igbo Catholicism is obliged to follow, practise and teach the moral doctrines of Christ and his Church. She is required to accept and follow diligently and meticulously the entire universal moral teachings and principles as contained in the Ten Commandments and other Catholic Church Magisterium's teachings. "The people of Igboland have a high consciousness of morality."²⁷⁸ They are morally conscious people. Before the coming of the pioneer Catholic missionaries who taught the people of Igboland the Universal Catholic moral doctrines, the people of Igboland were already conscious of these universal moral principles and teachings and were already living in accordance with them. They had their moral dos and don'ts. They acted in accordance with the eternal laws which were written in their hearts. Therefore, the advent of the early Catholic missionaries and the establishment of Roman Catholicism in Igboland was a fulfilment of the Igbo traditional morality. It did not introduce something strange or foreign to the Igbo morality. This is why the Igbo Catholics, at the coming of the early missionaries wholeheartedly accepted, willingly observed and still observe up till today, the moral teachings of the Universal Church. Their coming brought more enlightenment, understanding and illumination to the Igbo traditional morality from Catholic perspective. They shed and gave more light to the Igbo Catholics on their idea and knowledge of morality and opened them to the life of the sacraments and grace, which will help them to be closer to God and to resist temptations and sins more easily.

The Universal Church sees the Ten Commandments found in the Hebrew Scriptures as the basic groundwork for moral action, which together with the life of Jesus provide a deep and abiding understanding for how to act with love and justice in the world.²⁷⁹ The Gospel of Matthew relates that upon being asked which commandment was most important, Jesus replied that all of the law is contained in the commandments to love God and love your neighbour (Mt 22:36-40). Catholics see this as going beyond the injunctions of moral law by drawing believers into a relationship with others as well as with God, and it is the foundation of the Church's teaching on issues of social justice. Like the Universal Church, the Catholic Church in Igboland also sees the Ten Commandments found in the Hebrew Scriptures as the basic groundwork for morality and for all moral actions, which together with the life of Jesus provide a deep and

²⁷⁸ Jordan, *Bishop Shanahan of Southern Nigeria*, 29.

²⁷⁹ Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Vaticana: Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 2003), nos 2052-2054.

abiding understanding for how to act with love and justice in the world. Even morality in Igbo traditional setting has some basis in the Ten Commandments.

B. Ten Commandments

Having the same founder and the same theological basis, every Universal and local Church also have the same moral basis. The Universal Church and the local Church in Igboland have the same moral foundation namely - Ten Commandments. Even in the traditional Igbo milieu, the Igbo traditional concept of morality is not very much different from the biblical one. In both scenes, there is an emphasis that good such as love, honesty, charity etc should be done while evils such as wicked, envy, killing, stealing etc should be avoided. Therefore, Christian morality came to fortify and throw more light on the Igbo traditional morality and consequently on Igbo Catholic morality. Both have a common moral foundation. This common moral foundation also serves as another sign of the credibility and identity of the Igbo Catholicism. So, in the Igbo traditional society, there exists a harmonious interplay between the Igbo moral code and the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments are divided into two parts namely love of God and love of neighbour. While the first three commandments concern our love for God, the last seven concern our love for our neighbours. Both the moral teachings of the Universal Church and that of the Igbo local Church agree to this. A critical look and analysis of these commandments one by one will help to give a better understanding to this fact.

The first commandment says, “I am the Lord your God, you shall have no other gods before me.” (Ex 20: 2-5, Deut. 5:6-9) Here, the Universal Church teaches that God alone is Almighty, All-Merciful, All-powerful and Infinitely Beneficent. It follows that all should have a complete faith in God alone and place all our hope in Him alone. Such an acknowledgement of God expresses adoration. God is the source of all we have. The Catholic Church in Igboland also believes, confesses and preaches this belief in God. She believes that God is Almighty and All-powerful. Only He is the source of life. Even in their traditional Igbo morality, “the Catholics in Igboland (yesterday pagans) had a cultural and moral value of holding the divine in high esteem. They believed that God (Chukwu) is a Supreme Being who is also invisible. He is the creator of all things and the entire universe.”²⁸⁰ This knowledge they had about God in their traditional beliefs helped them to accept the universal moral teachings of the Catholic Church very easily and willingly too.

The second commandment says, “You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God.” (Ex 20:7, Deut 5:11) Here, the universal moral teaching of the Catholic

²⁸⁰ Ikenga-Metuh and Ejizu, *introduction to Hundred Years of Catholicism in Eastern Nigeria 1885-1985: The New Story* (Nimo: Asele Institute, 1985), xvi.

Church instructs that we should not use the name of God in vain, in taking false oath and in lying too. All these are acts of disrespect to God. Similarly, the Catholic Church in Igboland also teaches the same. She shares in this same moral teaching and so shares in the moral identity of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. Even in their traditional moral code, the Igbo Catholics, (yesterday pagans) were not allowed to mention the name of God at all and in any situation. The name of God is highly sacrosanct. His name should be used with respect and dignity where it should be used. In the third commandment, the Universal Catholic morality teaches that Sundays and Holy days of Obligation should be kept holy. The Catholic Church in Igboland also teaches and practises the same. The fourth commandment admonishes us to respect and honour our parents and all our elders. We should also show obedience to the civil authority. The Catholic Church in Igboland also teaches this. In fact, respect for and obedience to one's parents and elders is a core moral value in Igbo traditional society, which every Igbo person must and should have. It is a cultural as well as moral value that cuts across every religion in Igboland.

The fifth and sixth commandments forbid killing and adultery respectively. The Universal Church teaches that these are mortal sins that take away the sanctifying grace of God in the life of the Christians. They should be avoided. The Catholic Church in Igboland also teaches the same. Even in their traditional moral setting, killing and adultery are highly prohibited and forbidden. The Igbo moral code teaches that only God is the giver of life and only He can also take away life. The traditional Igbo society has a heavy reverence for the sacredness of human life. Anyone who spills blood is ostracized and exiled. Again, it teaches that adultery is a serious sin against the earth-goddess. The sin of adultery can pollute the land and make the harvest very poor. It is a serious sin that must be atoned for whenever it is mistakenly committed. It can also wipe away the life of the entire village if not handled with care. All these similarities among the traditional Igbo morality, Igbo Catholicism and the Universal Church show why it was very easy for the Catholics in Igboland to accept and see the Ten Commandments as the basis of their morality also.

In the same way, sixth, seventh and eight commandments forbid all acts of theft and perjury. The Universal Church teaches and upholds that these are serious sins against God and neighbour. These acts of stealing and perjury found in the sixth, seventh and eight commandments respectively are all similar to the cultural and moral values that Igbos have upheld and have already imbedded in their Catholic moral teachings when they accepted Catholicism in 1885. "For Christianity, as for Igbo culture and morality, no human action or behaviour good or bad, escapes the vigilant attention of both God and the earth god, 'Ala' respectively. They reward or punish man according to his actions, good or bad. Christianity

and Igbo culture diverge from each other only in their choice of the instrument and mode for the execution of the reward or punishment. While Christianity teaches that on the last day, the Angels of the Lord will gather the righteous ones into heaven while the unrighteous will go to hell, Igbo traditional religion teaches that poor harvest, sickness and sudden and premature deaths are punishment for evil doings while long life, good health and rich harvest are rewards for good deeds sent by gods.”²⁸¹ Despite this divergence, there are many similarities between the two. It was all these moral beliefs and practices inherent in the traditional moral code that gave Catholics in Igboland easy adaptations and better acceptance of the universal moral teachings of the Catholic Church. Today, there is a high moral strength among the members of the local Church in Igboland and in Igbo society in general.

The Igbo values of hospitality (charity) and communal life are also practised on a much higher degree in the Universal Church and Christianity in general. These values of communal life and generosity are shared among Africans in general. According to Joseph Omoregbe, “An African makes no distinction between brother, half-brother, nephew, cousin. Whosoever has the fortune of being even little better off than the other members of the extended family comes to the aid of others. The misfortune of one member of the extended family is shared by all, and the fortune of any member is shared by all.”²⁸² In a similar way, Acts of Apostles, praises the communal life of the early Christian community. They shared their possessions with each other so that those who have nothing shared in the wealth of those who had enough (Acts 4:32-5:1-17). The Universal Church is seen as one large institution domiciliating all members of the one family of God (communal life of the Church). All people become brothers and sisters under one God, as all strive for the same home and destiny which is heaven. The Catholic Church in Igboland sees herself also as one family of God and this is why Hilary Okeke calls the Catholic Church in Igboland particularly in Nnewi Diocese the “Family of God on mission.”²⁸³

Other important moral values that are held in high esteem both by the traditional Igbo morality, Catholic Church in Igboland and the Universal Church include: respect for life, honesty and purity. The Universal Catholic Church sees herself as an innocent and spotless Lamb of God. Catholic Church in Igboland sees herself in the same way also. Again, another important value in the Catholic Church in Igboland is the respect and obedience to the elders and authorities. This moral value is also highly practised and revered in Igbo traditional moral society. On this, Pantaleon Ireogbu states that this “moral value is common to all Igbos (Africans) and that respect is given to elders irrespective of social status or position. Respect

²⁸¹ Elochukwu Amucheazi, *Readings in Social Sciences* (Enugu: Snaap Press, 1980), 43.

²⁸² Joseph Omoregbe, *Knowing Philosophy* (Lagos: Joja Educational Research, 1990), 23.

²⁸³ Hilary Okeke, *Lenten Pastoral Letter* (Nnewi: Cathcom Press, 2010), 186.

is accorded to them because they are the custodians of traditional norms and customs.”²⁸⁴ Similarly, these moral values are also seen in the Christian Decalogue as commandments and laws of the Universal Church. Catholic Church is hierarchical. Therefore, the moral value system of the Universal Church is the same with that of the local Church in Igboland.

II. Theological (Ecclesiological) Identity

The Universal Catholic Church is a religious institution and community. Because the Church is of religious nature, her identity is also religious. Church should never be seen only as a neutral institution, history, society or culture without any religious connotations. “Viewing the Church only as a neutral institution or society without any religious connotations will only lead to a reductionist theory of the Church. Theology as an intellectual reflection on Christian faith is the most proper way to describe the core of the Church’s identity.”²⁸⁵ God is the premier source of everything which is truly religious. He is also the source and fount of the Church including her identity. He is the genesis and architect of the Church. The Church owes her identity in God. She fully belongs to Him, depends on Him and should serve Him. “The Church comes from God and must go back to God. If the Church looks for her origin, identity and destination, she must turn to God as He is, to Him as speaking through His Revelation and to Jesus Christ as its fulfilment. God always carries the whole Church (the Universal Church and all local and particular Churches) in His Heart.”²⁸⁶

1. Universal Theological (Ecclesiological) Identity of the Catholic Church

God is the birthplace and fountainhead of the Universal Church. He is the designer of her identity, shape and structure. He knows all about the Church’s profile. The Universal Church takes her identity and form from God. Only God knows the whole truth about the Church, her conditions, beauty, strength, weaknesses, shortcomings, challenges, prospects and future. He is always involved in the renewal of the Church because He wants to have her ‘without spot or wrinkle’ (Eph 5: 25-27). The Universal Church has her unique identity and features. In practice, these identity and features are described in the Catholic Church Magisterium’s teachings namely Vatican II documents, post-conciliar Magisterium’s teaching on the Church and other Catholic ecclesiology books. The Second Vatican Council contributed outstandingly and tremendously in shaping the theological (ecclesiological) identity of the Universal Church. It was a giant step towards the renewal and new identity of the Catholic Church. Thus, John

²⁸⁴ Panteleon Iroegbu, *Ewizdomization and African Philosophy* (Owerri: International Universities Press Ltd, 1994), 92.

²⁸⁵ Krzysztof Kaucha, “The Identity of Local and Particular Catholic Churches: Methodological Outline,” 49.

²⁸⁶ Krzysztof Kaucha, “The Identity of Local and Particular Catholic Churches: Methodological Outline,” 49.

XXIII in his opening speech to the Council said, “It was indeed a different mode of procedure, a different council stripped of the terrifying anathemas that marked other ages. The Bishops of the whole world had been called together to be teachers and shepherd and not judges. They did not convene in order to condemn and the Council would not be directed against heresy (like the Council of Trent) but rather to give a new face to the Church.”²⁸⁷ Through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the face of the Church was renewed and her theological and ecclesiological identity made more positive and optimistic. Hence, the Church is aimed at construction not condemnation, blessings not anathemas and love not fear because her founder and head, Christ the Lord wants the salvation of all people (1 Tim 2:4). Church is a sign of Christ’s presence in the world, a witness, the salt of the earth, the leaven penetrating the dough, a standard raised among the nations, a city built on a hilltop, a light shining among the people and able to enlighten all men with the radiant light of Christ that shines on the face of the Church.

With Vatican II, the Church became much more distinguished by a new spirit. She became the starting point for a general renewal and a new and mighty flowering of the Holy Spirit throughout the world. It can be rightly said that the Second Vatican Council added new, special and important identity and features to the nature and image of the Church. Other identities and images added to the very being of the Universal Church by the Second Vatican Council include: “Church’s willingness to enter into dialogue and even cooperation with non-Catholics, non-Christians and non-believers, her conviction of being the sign, instrument or sacrament of the glorified Lord, her recognition of being the universal sacrament of salvation, her great confidence in the presence and action of the Holy Spirit, her splendid Christocentrism, her rediscovery of the liturgy as the principal means of sanctification, her new concept of unity (not synonymous with uniformity) and Catholicity, admitting and even valuing a theological, liturgical, disciplinary and spiritual pluralism.”²⁸⁸

Others are: “her surprising humility in acknowledging its limitations and weaknesses, her abandonment of juridicism and extrinsicism, her less triumphalist attitude, her renunciation of fixism and legalism and her awareness of being a pilgrim, essentially oriented to the final goal, always on the move, incomplete, dynamic, alive, set amid present day history and a passing world, among creatures that groan and suffer until He returns.”²⁸⁹ Church is also a sacrament in Christ. “By her relationship with Christ, the Church is a kind of sacrament, sign and instrument of intimate communion with God and unity among all men and women.”²⁹⁰ The

²⁸⁷ Bonaventure Kloppenburg, *The Ecclesiology of the Vatican II* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1974), 5.

²⁸⁸ Kloppenburg, *The Ecclesiology of the Vatican II*, 8.

²⁸⁹ Kloppenburg, *The Ecclesiology of the Vatican II*, 8.

²⁹⁰ Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 1.

Church was convoked and established so that for each and all, she may be the visible sacrament of this saving unity. Christ established his Church as the universal sacrament of salvation “for from the side of Christ as he slept the sleep of death upon the cross, there came forth the wondrous sacrament which is the whole Church.”²⁹¹ The Church is also the germ and sacrament of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is the final goal, the consummation that will be effected when all things are made new (Acts 3:21). Church is also a mystery. She is a divine, transcendent and salvific reality which is visibly present among men. It is of the essence of the Church that she be both human and divine, visible and yet invisibly endowed, eager to act and yet devoted to contemplation, present in this world and yet not at home in it. “She is all these things in such a way that in her, the human is directed and subordinated to the divine, the visible likewise to the invisible, action to contemplation and this present world to that city yet to come which we seek.”²⁹² The Church acts as Church only when she acts as an instrument of the glorified Lord.

The Church is equally the mystical body of Christ. By his death and resurrection, Christ redeemed man and transformed him into a new creature and when he gave men the Holy Spirit, he made of his brothers mystically his own body. As a mystical body of Christ, the Church’s internal, invisible, sacramental and supernatural unity with Christ is emphasized. Without such unity, all the external, visible, social, ritual, juridical and canonical unity is worthless. “Through baptism, all the members of the Church are incorporated into Christ, made his body and members of his body. By baptism, men are plunged into the paschal mystery of Christ.”²⁹³ ‘Lumen Gentium’ goes on to indicate that the supernatural interior unity which baptism has effected is maintained, nourished, increased and marvellously brought to perfection by the Eucharist.²⁹⁴ The Church is therefore the mystical body of Christ. Finally, “Church is also seen as the people of God. ‘Lumen Gentium’ does not hesitate to use the expression ‘new people of God’ which does not occur in the Bible to describe the Church.”²⁹⁵ The above describes the theological identity of the Church in the light of the Second Vatican Council.

2. Particular Theological (Ecclesiological) Identity of the Igbo Catholic Church

According to the Catholic faith, “the Church established by Jesus Christ subsists in the Catholic Church as a Universal Church ‘Ecclesia Universalis Catholica’. This Church is also ‘Communio Ecclesiarum’ and subsists in local and particular Churches and in community

²⁹¹ Vatican Council II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* no. 5.

²⁹² *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 2.

²⁹³ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 6.

²⁹⁴ *Lumen Gentium*, no. 7.

²⁹⁵ *Lumen Gentium*, nos 9, 10 and 13.

among them.”²⁹⁶ From theological point of view, every local Church’s origin is the same as the origin of the Universal Church. Being a part of the Universal Church, the theological identity of the local Church in Igboland is the same as the theological identity of the Universal Church. Even in the traditional Igbo setting, the traditional Igbo concept of God is not different from the biblical one. In both context, there is emphasis on one God, who is Invisible, Eternal, Supreme, All-powerful, All-knowing and All-loving, who hates evils and rewards good deeds. Thus, Christian faith came, strengthened and enlightened more the faith which the Igbos already had. The Catholic Church in Igboland shares in the very nature, sacraments, teachings, doctrines and mission of the Universal Church. The Igbo Catholicism received her identity with the coming of the early Catholic missionaries through her reception of the doctrines and faith of the Universal Church. 5th December, 1885 was a day history was made in the life of the Catholics in Igboland. It was the day the Catholics in Igboland received a completely new, true and enduring identity in God as people of God and members of His household, the identity of being the children of God in the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.

The Catholic Church in Igboland fully belongs to God. God is the source of her origin, being, essence and existence. She completely depends on God for her sustenance and survival. Only God Himself has the best knowledge and truth about her conditions, strength, frailties, challenges and future. By virtue of receiving the Gospel, the sacraments and becoming Christians, the members of the Catholic Church in Igboland now share in the very identity of God Himself. This identity is essential, enduring, and true. It is the identity the members of the Igbo Catholicism receive in baptism in union with the Universal Church, their identity in God. It is permanent. Indeed, it is all they can hope to keep at the end of their earthly life. Through this unique identity, the Catholic Church in Igboland in union with the Universal Church shares in the divine nature of God. To be more specific, the Catholic Church and her members in Igboland are and will be characterized accurately with the following terms: members of God’s family, adopted children of God, disciples of Jesus, awareness of her call to holiness, An enduring Church in anticipation of eternal glory, a source of Christ’s light in Igboland, her call to evangelization and mission and her call to love, charity, mercy and service.

A. As Members of God’s Family (Community of Believers)

All Christians are brothers and sisters because they are all members of God’s family. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, they are united so closely to Jesus that they are actually identified with him. They are incorporated into the Church, his Body in the world. When Jesus came to

²⁹⁶ Krzysztof Kaucha, “The Identity of Local and Particular Catholic Churches: Methodological Outline,” 45.

save all mankind, his Apostles spoke of salvation in family terms. They presented Jesus as a bridegroom, and the Church as his bride (2 Cor 11:2; Eph 5:31-32; and Rev 19:7). They identified members of the Church as Jesus' brothers and sisters (Rom 8:29). As Catholics, we do not make our way through life alone, but together as members of God's family, his Church. Her members, those baptized into the life of Christ, are brothers and sisters with one another and form a body with Christ as its head. The Catholic Church is the living and saving presence of Jesus Christ in the world. Africans in general and Igbo people in particular see life as a community and as a family. This is very evident in the famous dictum of Mbiti, "I am because we are."²⁹⁷ Going by this, an Igbo Catholic can rightly say that he is because we are and we are because God is. In Igboland, life is communal. The African Church (Igbo Church) emphasises care for others, love, unity, solidarity, warmth in human relationships, acceptance, hospitality, dialogue and trust. She does all these because she believes that all belong to one family. "The new evangelization in Africa (in Igboland) aims at building up the Church as family, avoiding all ethnocentrism and excessive particularism, trying instead to encourage reconciliation and true communion between different ethnic groups, favouring solidarity and the sharing of personnel and resources among the particular Churches, without undue ethnic considerations."²⁹⁸ Igbo people have no room for individualism. They are always encouraged to see themselves as members of one family, as brothers and sisters.

With the establishment of Catholicism in Igboland, the Catholics also went into this new religion with this mentality, practice and attitude. This is why the teaching of the Second Vatican Council that we are all members of God's family makes a very deep meaning and sense to the Catholics in Igboland. Igbo Catholics now see themselves as sons and daughters of God, as brothers and sisters in Christ and members of one family - the Church. "In Igboland, Church is seen as a spiritual home. She is established to be God's family where we live as brothers and sisters."²⁹⁹ In other words, Igbo Catholicism is not a man-made institution. She has a divine and spiritual origin. Her origins are found in the will and actions of Christ because "Church, a people gathered into the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, was instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ as a sacrament, a sign and instrument of intimate union with God and of unity among all people."³⁰⁰ The Church is God's household (1 Tim. 3:15).

Since Igbo Catholicism is a part of the Universal Church, her sons and daughters are also members of God's household. They see themselves as community of God's people. This

²⁹⁷ Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy*, 279.

²⁹⁸ *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 63.

²⁹⁹ Anthony Gbuji, *Lenten Pastoral Letters*, (Enugu: Holy Trinity Press, 2001), 3.

³⁰⁰ Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium* no. 1.

is an identity they share in God through the sacrament of baptism. This is why parish settings are always referred to as family of God or community of believers in Igboland. According to Chigere, “In Igboland, family is the hall mark of community life and events both in the Church and in the traditional Igbo society and any attempt to play it down is only tantamount to attempting the impossible. In the Church setting, every parish community is seen as a family.”³⁰¹ African cultures (Igbo cultures) have an acute sense of solidarity and community life. Emphasizing the communal life of the Africans, Pope John Paul II, “in Africa it is unthinkable to celebrate a feast without the participation of the whole village. Indeed, community life in African societies expresses the extended family. It is my ardent hope and prayer that Africa (Igboland) will always preserve this priceless cultural heritage and never succumb to the temptation to individualism, which is so alien to its best traditions.”³⁰² This communal life is very much practised and loved by the Igbo Catholics. During Christian funerals, weddings and other community activities in the Church, all the parish members participate as one family and community of God. Sanctions and fines are marked out for those who absent themselves without any serious reason or excuse.

B. As Adopted Children of God

By the sacrament of Baptism, one is freed from all sins – original and personal, born anew as a son or daughter of God and is permanently marked with the sign of Christ.³⁰³ Just as in the beginning, when God created everything and sent his Spirit to form out of nothing everything that was to be, so in his new creation, the Spirit is sent to bring forth a whole new level of life in each believer – life in the Spirit. Being made into a new creation speaks of the new character one receives in baptism. Once cleansed of sin and restored to a state of grace, we become God’s adopted children, “heir of all things” (Heb 1:2). Baptized into Christ, we are one with him and incorporated into his Body. Saint John Paul II notes, “Since the ‘Good News’ is Christ, there is an identity between the message and the messenger, between saying, doing and being. His power, the secret of the effectiveness of his actions, lies in his total identification with the message he announces. He proclaims the ‘Good News’ not just by what he says or does, but by what he is.”³⁰⁴ The above statement really means that there is an identity between us and God the Father who is the Sender and Jesus Christ himself who is the Word, Good News and the Sent.

³⁰¹ Chigere, *Foreign Missionary Background and Indigenous Evangelization in Igboland*, 39.

³⁰² *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 43.

³⁰³ Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (Vaticana: Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 2003), no. 1213.

³⁰⁴ Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 13.

The above statement describes exactly what happened in 1885 when the seed of Catholicism was planted in Igboland, when the people in Igboland received the Good News and ‘ipso facto’ received a new identity, an enduring identity and so became sons and daughters of God and adopted children of God. In line with St. Peter, prior to the arrival of the missionaries in Igboland in 1885, the Igbo people were nothing in terms of Christianity. They were like no people before but now they have become a people, adopted children of God (1 Pet 2:10). Through the establishment of Catholic Church in Igboland and reception of the sacraments, the Catholics in Igboland shared in the divine nature of God, became new creatures and adopted children of God. They left their old way of life having accepted God as their creator and Jesus Christ as their redeemer and saviour. They now become members of Christ’s Body on earth and so share in the very nature and identity of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. As the Body of Christ in the world, all the baptised Igbo Catholics are engaged in a new life of the Spirit so that working in and through them, the Spirit might transform the whole world. They are always urged and encouraged to follow and obey the teachings of Christ and his Church. This is how the Igbo Catholics are also the disciples of Jesus.

C. As Disciple of Jesus

If the members of the Church call themselves Christians and disciples of Christ, then Christ must be recognizable in them, both personally and in the institutions of his Church. To be his disciple is to do the same. The Church is not a business, a club, or a special-interest group. The Church is not the result of like-minded people coming together and deciding to form an organization, nor are her moral teachings decided by popular vote or societal trends. In the Rite of baptism we hear the words, “As Christ was anointed priest, prophet and king, so may you live always as a member of his body sharing everlasting life.”³⁰⁵ Pope Benedict XVI explained that “the Church’s deepest nature is expressed in her three-fold responsibility: of proclaiming the word of God (kerygma-martyria), celebrating the sacraments (leitourgia), and exercising the ministry of charity (diakonia).”³⁰⁶ While some in our society would limit the exercise of our Catholic faith to our houses of worship, Pope Benedict XVI made it clear that these duties presuppose each other and are inseparable and therefore should be practised everywhere and all the time.³⁰⁷ We are called to manifest the kingdom of God not merely within our Church buildings, but out in the world, building up the common good. When we correspond to God’s

³⁰⁵ Catholic Church, *Rite of Baptism for Catholic Church* (Catholic Book Publishing Company, 1999) no. 3 and 9 in Donald Wuerl, “Being Catholic Today: Catholic Identity in an Age of Challenge,” *Pastoral Publications in Archdiocese of Washington Website*, 24 May, 2015, accessed 15 May, 2017, <http://adw.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Being-Catholic-Today-Pastoral-Letter.pdf>.

³⁰⁶ Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 25.

³⁰⁷ Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 25.

grace, we are extending the kingdom, we are able to be the image of Christ to all those we encounter.

In line with St. Paul, The Catholics in Igboland see themselves as people called to clothe ourselves with the Lord Jesus (Rom 13:14). They manifest Christ's kingdom of truth and love and by this, they show that they are disciples of Christ (Jn 13:35). Love, in his truth, in his mercy, and in his justice make them a gift of themselves in service to communion with God and one another. The Igbo Catholics, in their desire to be disciples of Christ, willingly gave up their old way of life and wholeheartedly embraced and accepted Roman Catholicism. They are always admonished to become witnesses of Christ to the world. Their constant acts of love and charity are living testimonies of their deep faith in God. As parish community, they visit their sick members in the hospitals and offer them both material and spiritual assistance. They also offer help to the poor, needy and prisoners. They spread the kingdom of God here on earth both by deeds and words. They are equally implored to remain obedient and faithful to the teachings of Christ and his Church. The holy and virtuous life of their son and blessed, Cyprain Michael Tansi, their many dedicated and devoted priests, religious and lay faithful bear eloquent testimony to this.

D. Awareness of Her Call to Holiness

All Christians, that is, all the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status, are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of Christian charity which is holiness of life. In order that the faithful may reach this life perfection and holiness, they must use their spiritual strength and grace accordingly as they have received it, as a gift from Christ. They must follow in His footsteps and conform themselves to His image, seeking the Will of the Father in all things. They must devote themselves with all their being to the glory of God and the service of their neighbour. In this way, the holiness of the People of God will grow into an abundant harvest of good, as is admirably shown by the life of so many saints in Church history.

God is holy and the Catholic Church in Igboland shares in this holiness of God. She knows that she is called to the life of holiness and she makes effort to respond to this all important call. This is evident in their willingness to be close to God through so many spiritual exercises taking place among the faithful and the Catholic community. The number of churchgoers and communicants is increasing every day. Lots and lots of religious and pious associations are coming up every day and a lot of spiritual exercises like retreats are also organised and people willingly participate in them. As Ikeogu observed, "I sincerely thank God that the number of those who attend Sunday and week day Masses, those who go for confession and those who receive Holy Communion in our parish is increasing every day. Many priests

also say the same in their various parishes. This is really encouraging. It is a sign of spiritual growth and acceptance of Christ by the Igbo Catholics.”³⁰⁸ This shows the zeal of the people to be holy. The classes and duties of life are many but holiness is one-that sanctity which is cultivated by all who are moved by the Spirit of God, and who obey the voice of the Father and worship God the Father in spirit and in truth. Igbo Catholics are frequently advised and enjoined to follow the poor, the humble and cross-bearing Christ in order to be worthy of being sharers in His glory. They are urged through homilies, teachings and preaching to walk unhesitatingly according to their own personal gifts and duties in the path of living faith, which arouses hope and works through charity. The Igbo Catholics are the bedrock of Catholicism in Nigeria. They are always called and enjoined to show great passion for spiritual exercises and holy activities taking place in various parishes so that they can be holy just as our heavenly Father is holy. They respond to these calls and this is why Bishop Shanahan described Igbo people as “natural Catholics and religious people.”³⁰⁹

E. An Enduring Church in Anticipation of Eternal Glory

Different religious contexts in many ways influence the Church’s identity. Some Catholic Churches face a particular religious context which affects their identity. This normally happens when the Church is a small minority in a non-Christian society dominated by other religious majorities or a secular (post-Christian, post-religious) society. This is the case with Igbo Catholicism that exists in a Muslim majority society where she faces a lot of persecutions and killings. These constant persecutions and attacks have contributed in shaping her identity, mission and vision.

Hence, the Igbo Catholicism can be described as an enduring Church living in the hope of eternal glory. Despite the killings, persecutions, oppressions, suppressions and attacks on her by the Muslim majority, Boko Haram insurgency and Hausa-Fulani herdsmen, she and her members have continued to persevere in the faith and daily spiritual activities. Despite numerous attacks on Igbo Catholics and bombing of Catholic Churches in the northern Igbo Christian areas, Igbo Catholics have continued to worship God through their frequent attendance to Holy Masses and other spiritual exercises. They are not discouraged by these attacks and killings because they believe that their rewards and citizenship are in heaven. “Many mass burials have been organised by the Igbo Catholics for the brothers and sisters

³⁰⁸ Venatius Ikeogu, *The Brochure for Harvest and Bazaar Thanksgiving Holy Mass at St. Anthony’s Parish, Umudioka* (Onitsha: Trinitas Press, 2016), 19.

³⁰⁹ Maduekwe, “125 Years of Catholic Church in Igboland Eastern Nigeria,” 1.

killed during Catholic worships in the northern parts of Nigeria.”³¹⁰ “Many Igbo Catholics have seen their parents, sons, brothers and sisters perish within a single day during worship in the Church, yet they never gave up in their faith and in going to Church. They accept these crosses and bear the losses with good courage and faith because of their hope in the resurrection.”³¹¹ They are always instructed that their present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed and given to them heaven. They are regularly reminded that they are children of God, heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. They are reminded consistently that if they suffer with Him here on earth, they will also be glorified with Him in eternal glory. “They have the hope that through God’s mercy and love, they will one day unite with God and with their brothers and sisters in heaven. Their endurance and patience in the midst of persecutions and killings are sustained by their hope in the eternal glory where they will be rewarded for their resolve and determination.”³¹²

F. A Source of Christ’s Light in Igboland

Christ is the light of the world. He is the Sun, sole source of light. At the side of this Sun which is Christ, stands the Church like the moon which receives all its light, brilliance and warmth from the Sun. The local Church in Igboland shines forth in the darkness of the Igbo society, shedding light in the night of the ignorance of its members in order to show them the path of salvation. Through the Good News of the Igbo Catholicism, the history and life of the Igbo people have changed for better. The local Church in Igboland has brought about the abolition of improper and fetish cultural practices like killing of twins and ‘Osu’ Caste System. Through her Gospel, she has shed and continues to shed light of Christ on the moral, cultural and social lives of the Igbo people, purifying and elevating their cultural lives and practices in order to enable the Gospel permeate all aspects of Igbo life. The Church is able to be the ‘light of the world’ (Mt 5:14) only in the measure that she reflects the light of Christ. Therefore, Igbo Catholicism always exhorts her sons and daughters to purify and renew themselves so that the sign of Christ may shine more brightly over the face of the Igbo Church and society.

G. Her Call to Evangelization and Mission

This is another area where the Catholic Church in Igboland shares deeply in the very identity of God Himself. Christ is the Word, the Gospel and he calls us all to himself, to be part of him

³¹⁰ Vincent Ujumadu, Wailing and Crying as Adazi Catholic Community buries Mubi 12,” *Vanguard Newspaper*, February 4, 2012. 1.

³¹¹ John Ozoemena, e-mail to the researcher, August 15, 2017. John Ozoemena lost his wife and four children when St. Theresa Catholic Church, Madalla Niger State was attacked and bombed by the Muslim Boko Haram terrorist group on Christmas day, December 25, 2011.

³¹² John Ozoemena, e-mail to the researcher, 15 August, 2017.

and to share in his own very identity as evangelizers and carriers of his Good news. The Church, of which we are members, exists to evangelize, to preach and teach, and to invite people to an encounter with Jesus. This is her nature – this is “her deepest identity,”³¹³ affirmed Blessed Pope Paul VI. Being a Catholic means to recognize a unique and special relationship with Jesus risen from the dead, and his mission to bring everything to God the Father. Christians are not bystanders but rather participants in this work. “In virtue of their baptism, all the children of God have become missionary disciples,”³¹⁴ Pope Francis affirms. All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization, and it would be insufficient to envisage a plan of evangelization to be carried out by professionals while the rest of the faithful would simply be passive recipients. “The new evangelization calls for personal involvement on the part of each of the baptized. Every Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in the work of evangelization.”³¹⁵

The Catholic Church in Igboland is not left out in this unique task and call. She is always encouraged to be an active agent of evangelization and mission. This is evident in the number of priests in Igboland today. “Igboland has the greatest number of priests in Nigeria, in West Africa and in the whole of Africa. Igboland is being evangelized today by the indigenous missionaries. It equally has its sons and daughters who are priests and religious scattered all over the world as missionaries. It has also the greatest number of priests working as missionaries all over the world today.”³¹⁶ As already mentioned in chapter one under the present identity of the Igbo Catholic Church, Igbo Catholicism is a missionary Church. She is the kernel of Catholic evangelism in some parts of Africa, Europe and America. The Bigard Seminary, a major seminary located in Igboland has also the highest number of seminarians in the world being trained for priestly and missionary work. Similarly, many seminaries and formation houses located in various parts of the world have Igbo students as candidates preparing for priestly ordination and ministry.

Furthermore, every baptised Catholic in Igboland is admonished to be an agent of mission. This is why youth ministry and lay organizations are very active in Igboland today. Everybody is encouraged to be eager to carry and pass across the message of God both by words, deeds and examples. Through this means, the Catholic Church in Igboland participates in the very mission of Christ and his Church, and so shares in the very identity of God who sent his son as a first missionary to save and redeem fallen mankind (Jn 3:16). In Igbo

³¹³ Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no.14.

³¹⁴ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 120.

³¹⁵ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 120.

³¹⁶ Cf. The Liturgical Diaries and Directorates of the 13 Catholic Dioceses in Igboland, 2017 publications.

Catholicism, not only the ordained ministers are seen as agents of mission and evangelization, lay people also contribute immensely in the work of evangelization “Church is founded by Christ to share the Good News of his liberating truth and saving love and thereby reconcile sinners with God.”³¹⁷ Baptism gives each of us a common identity and role in the life and mission of the Church. Each of us has a part to play. Every Igbo Catholic is encouraged to spread the Gospel and be the light of Christ in the society. However, each person is encouraged to do it according to his or her capacity and role assigned to him or her by the Church. The Lord established his Church on this foundation rock – Saint Peter (Mt 16:18), the first pope – to ensure that each subsequent generation would have the opportunity to hear of his kingdom, to know his Gospel and to receive his invitation to follow him, as well as the assurance of knowing that what they hear is true. Our understanding of the nature and significance of the Church explains why the missionary activity of the Church is essential to her identity. We experience the source and summit of our Catholic faith at Mass, when we receive Jesus in the Eucharist. Then at the end of the liturgy, we are called to “go forth” and bring the Lord’s truth and love to the world as missionaries of Good News.

H. Her Call to Love, Charity, Mercy and Service

God is love. Christ established the Church as a communion of love, life, charity and truth. This is another area where the Catholics in Igboland shares in the very nature of God Himself. The Igbo Catholicism partakes in the very identity of God Himself who is Love, Charity and Mercy. For the Igbo people, life is supportive and should be lived in love and charity. Life ought to be shared because we are all brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus and members of the same household. People of Igboland are called to exist for one another and to the very life of hospitality. In God’s plan, we are each called to love Him and one another in truth (Mt 22:37-40). Our original parents were led astray by a lie. They turned away from truth in turning away from God. They were not honest with themselves in their identity as children of a loving Father. We call this failure original sin. Its effects are well known because each of us can put ourselves first instead of God. We are impaired in our ability to know what truth is and fully be ourselves as God made us to be.

However, God is always good, merciful and loving. We were not left alone to make our way without hope or help. What was lost in sin is restored to us by Christ and in Christ. One of the great voices of African Christianity in the second century, Tertullian, noted that Christians wore charity like a brand upon their bodies. As slaves bore the brand marks of their owners, so Christians bore the mark of God’s love. Thus, Tertullian wrote: “It is mainly the

³¹⁷ Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii nuntiandi*, no.14.

deeds of a love so noble that lead many to put a brand upon us. ‘Look,’ they say, ‘how they love one another ... and how they are ready to die for each other.’³¹⁸ He does not speak in pious generalities, but lists the specific ways that Christians habitually helped others, even at the risk of their own lives. Christians supply the wants of destitute orphans, and of old persons who are homebound; those who have suffered shipwreck, or have been condemned to the mines, or banished to the islands, or shut up in prisons. This was the public work that, like the Creed and the sacraments, set Catholics apart and gave them their identity in second century North Africa. They were known by their charitable love. A writer in the city of Rome, Saint Justin Martyr, “confirms Tertullian’s claim by an almost identical list of charitable deeds.”³¹⁹ Love, shown in action, was a universal mark of Christian faith in those earliest years of the Church’s life. Hence, Igbo Catholic faithful are always encouraged to go forth and be Spirit filled missionary disciples, bringing Christ’s love and mercy to the poor and forgotten, especially those on the margins of society, family members, friends, co-workers, and all the people we meet. They are equally encouraged to be charitable to God and to all human beings, and be of good service to all people in obedience to the will of Christ, who came not to be served but to serve. Several acts of charity, mercy and selfless services among the Igbo Catholics bear eloquent testimony to this. Some individual Igbo Catholics have donated their pieces of land to Church and many have equally built Churches single handedly.

III. The Identity in the Local Churches in Igboland

It has been earlier said that the Apostolic Prefecture of Lower Niger was carved out and established in 25 July, 1889 from the Apostolic Vicariate of Benin Coast. “On 16 April, 1920, it was raised and promoted to Apostolic Vicariate of the Southern Nigeria. On 9 July, 1934, many Provinces and dioceses were carved out from the Apostolic Vicariate of the Southern Nigeria (Igboland) and were established as independent Provinces and Dioceses. What remained of the Apostolic Vicariate of the southern Nigeria at this time (9 July, 1934) was renamed and known as Apostolic Vicariate of Onitsha-Owerri.”³²⁰ “On 12 February, 1948, the Apostolic Vicariate of Onitsha-Owerri was divided into two and each became an independent Apostolic Vicariate renamed and known as Apostolic Vicariate of Onitsha and Apostolic Vicariate of Owerri. On 18 April, 1950, the Apostolic Vicariate of Onitsha was promoted and

³¹⁸ Cf. Tertullian, “Apologeticum,” no. 39 quoted in Donald Wuerl, “Being Catholic Today: Catholic Identity in an Age of Challenge,” *Pastoral Publications in Archdiocese of Washington Website*, 24 May, 2015, accessed 15 May, 2017, <http://adw.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Being-Catholic-Today-Pastoral-Letter.pdf>.

³¹⁹ Cf. Saint Justin the Martyr, “First Apology,” no. 67 quoted in Donald Wuerl, “Being Catholic Today: Catholic Identity in an Age of Challenge,” *Pastoral Publications in Archdiocese of Washington Website*, 24 May, 2015, accessed 15 May, 2017, <http://adw.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Being-Catholic-Today-Pastoral-Letter.pdf>.

³²⁰ Okon, *Expansion and Consolidation: Growth in Onitsha, Calabar, Owerri, Ogoja and Umuahia*, 179.

renamed Metropolitan Archdiocese of Onitsha while the Apostolic Vicariate of Owerri was promoted as diocese of Owerri. It was in March 26th 1994 that the diocese of Owerri was promoted as metropolitan Archdiocese of Owerri.”³²¹ It is these two metropolitan Archdioceses of Onitsha and Owerri that make up two Ecclesiastical Provinces that make up the Catholic dioceses in Igboland. It is important to note that whenever the ecclesiastical Provinces, metropolitan Archdioceses and dioceses in Igboland are discussed, they are now limited to these two ecclesiastical provinces comprising two metropolitan Archdioceses and eleven Dioceses. Hence, the Catholic Church in Igboland today has two ecclesiastical Provinces namely ecclesiastical province of Onitsha and ecclesiastical province of Owerri which are also called metropolitan Archdiocese of Onitsha and metropolitan Archdiocese of Owerri respectively.

An ecclesiastical province is a general term for large jurisdiction of Christian religious government including western Christianity and Eastern Christianity. In the Greco-Roman world, “ecclesia (Greek ἐκκλησίᾱ, *ekklēsiā* (Latin *ecclesia*) meaning ‘congregation, church’) was used to refer to a lawful assembly, or called legislative body. As early as Pythagoras, the word took on the additional meaning of a community with shared beliefs.”³²² “This is the meaning taken in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures (the Septuagint), and later adopted by the Christian community to refer to the assembly of believers.”³²³ In hierarchical Christian Churches that have dioceses, a province is a collection of those dioceses (as a basic unit of administration). Generally speaking, the Church is made of a number of ecclesiastical provinces or ‘metropolises’. An ecclesiastical province is made of a metropolitan Archdiocese and a number of suffragan dioceses. The term suffragan simply refers to those dioceses of a Province under the leadership of the Archdiocese. “The purpose of forming such a Province is to foster cooperation and common pastoral action within a region.”³²⁴ These provinces are led by a Metropolitan Archbishop.

In the Catholic Church, a Province consists of a metropolitan Archdiocese and one or more of other particular Churches, usually dioceses. The Archbishop of the metropolitan See is the Metropolitan of the province. “The word ‘Diocese’ is a Greek word meaning ‘administration.’ A diocese is a district under the pastoral care of a Bishop in the Christian

³²¹ Catholic Archdiocese of Onitsha, “History of the Archdiocese of Onitsha,” in *Onitsha Archdiocesan Website*, accessed 20 March, 2017, <https://www.onitsha-archdiocese.org/>.

³²² Diogenes Laertius, “Ecclesia in Community Terms,” *The Work of Diogenes*, accessed 1 January, 2017, <http://www.ecclesiastical.province.org>.

³²³ Walter Bauer. & William Fredrick.Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 128.

³²⁴ *Code of Canon Law*, no.434

Church. It is a geographical area under the administration of a Bishop.”³²⁵ Within each diocese are miniature local Churches structured into Regions, Deaneries, Parishes, Outstations and Zones. Today, the individual ‘particular’ Churches which make up the Universal Church are usually ‘dioceses’. Each diocese is the local Church given to the care of a single Bishop. A diocese of historical importance is called Archdiocese, and the bishop there is called an Archbishop. Various Archdioceses and dioceses in Igboland will be discussed below noting their unique identities and peculiarities. These Archdioceses and dioceses include: metropolitan Archdiocese of Onitsha which has six dioceses namely: Enugu, Abakaliki, Awka, Nsukka, Nnewi and Awgu, and metropolitan Archdiocese of Owerri which has five dioceses namely: Umuahia, Orlu, Okigwe, Ahiara and Aba.

A. Archdiocese of Onitsha

This Basilica of the Most Holy Trinity (Archdiocese of Onitsha and Metropolitan of the Onitsha ecclesiastical province) as it is now called is located in the Igboland in the Southern part of the country and is the first Catholic Cathedral in Igboland. It was constructed on a part of the 20 acres of land donated to the first Catholic missionaries in Igboland by local authorities on 6 January, 1886. “The Basilica holds the relics of the Nigerian saint, Blessed Cyprian Iwene Tansi, and the remains of the late Bishops Joseph Shanahan, Charles Heerey and Stephen Ezeanya.”³²⁶ In 1920, Bishop Shanahan initiated construction of the modern-day Basilica, which was completed in 1935 by his successor, Archbishop Heerey. The Cathedral was dedicated on 5 December, 1960, and later declared a Minor Basilica on May 28, 2007. The canonical title of ‘Basilica’ is bestowed on those Churches that correspond to certain requirements and are granted liturgical privileges accordingly. A Basilica can also become a pilgrimage site. The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Onitsha is the Metropolitan See for the ecclesiastical province of Onitsha in Anambra State, Nigeria. The seat of the Archbishop is the Holy Trinity Basilica (the only Basilica in Nigeria) in Onitsha.

As already seen briefly above, what is today known as Basilica of the Most Holy Trinity went through some metamorphosis and developmental stages. “What began as Onitsha Mission in 5 December 1885 was later made a Prefecture and then later again, raised to the statue of Vicariate of Southern Nigeria by Pope Benedict XV.”³²⁷ “Then, on 6 June, 1920, there was episcopal ordination of Joseph Ignatius Shanahan C.S.Sp as Apostolic Vicar of the Vicariate

³²⁵ Frank Leslie Cross & Elizabeth Livingstone, “Diocese,” *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 15 March 2017 accessed on 24 March 2017, <https://www.diocese.com/facts/about.html>.

³²⁶ Catholic Archdiocese of Onitsha, “History of the Archdiocese of Onitsha,” in *Onitsha Archdiocesan Website*, accessed 20 March, 2017, <https://www.onitsha-archdiocese.org/>.

³²⁷ Catholic Archdiocese of Onitsha, “History of the Archdiocese of Onitsha,” in *Onitsha Archdiocesan Website*, accessed 20 March, 2017, <https://www.onitsha-archdiocese.org/>.

of Southern Nigeria. The principal consecrator was Bishop Denis Kelly of Ross, Ireland. On 27 May 1927 there was another episcopal ordination, this time, of Charles Heerey C.S.Sp. as the coadjutor Bishop of the Vicariate. The principal consecrator: Bishop Joseph Ignatius Shanahan C.S.Sp. Then, on 28 April 1950, the Vicariate was raised by Pope Pius XII to the status of Archdiocese and Metropolitan See of Onitsha Ecclesiastical Province with Bishop Charles Heerey C.S.Sp. as the first Archbishop. On 29 August, 1965, there was an episcopal ordination of Francis Arinze as coadjutor and first indigenous bishop of Onitsha Archdiocese. The principal consecrator was Archbishop Charles Heerey C.S.Sp.”³²⁸ 26 June, 1967 was appointment of Bishop Francis Arinze as Archbishop of Onitsha. On 11 May, 1985, there was episcopal ordination of Stephen Ezeanya as the 2nd indigenous Archbishop of Onitsha. The principal consecrator was Cardinal Francis Arinze.

May 6, 1995 was enthronement of Bishop Albert Obiefuna (formerly, Bishop of Awka) as Archbishop of Onitsha. Episcopal ordination of Valerian M. Okeke as Co-adjutor Archbishop of Onitsha was on 9 February 2002. The principal consecrator was Archbishop Osvaldo Padilla. On 1 September, 2003, Most Rev. Valerian Okeke became the Archbishop of Onitsha, and the Metropolitan of the Ecclesiastical Province of Onitsha. An auxiliary bishop was also consecrated for the Archdiocese in the person of Most. Rev. Dennis Isiuzoh on 1 May 2015. The Holy Trinity is the Patron of the Archdiocese. “The geographical area of the Archdiocese is 2,968 sq. km. It has a total population of about 3.5 million people, out of which of about 2.2 million are Catholics. The Archdiocese has about two bishops and 482 priests. It has 169 parishes.”³²⁹ The Archdiocese is also divided into six (6) regions and twenty (20) deaneries.

The Archdiocese has also a minor seminary-All Hallows Seminary Onitsha. “All Hallows Seminary is the pioneer minor seminary in Igboland, instituted for the training of priests. It was established in 1924 by Bishop Joseph Shanahan with Rev. Fr. William O’Donnel, C.S.Sp, as the first Rector. The seminary travelled to many places before it finally settled in the present location. It moved from Igbariam to Onitsha in 1928. In 1933 it was separated from the major seminary and attached to Christ the King College, Onitsha for 14 years. In 1947 it moved to Nnewi (St. John Cross Parish ground, Nnewi) where it started off an independent existence.”³³⁰ January 1950 saw the seminary at Enugu (Holy Ghost Cathedral

³²⁸ Catholic Archdiocese of Onitsha, “History of the Archdiocese of Onitsha,” in *Onitsha Archdiocesan Website*, accessed 20 March, 2017, <https://www.onitsha-archdiocese.org/>.

³²⁹ Catholic Archdiocese of Onitsha, “History of the Archdiocese of Onitsha,” in *Onitsha Archdiocesan Website*, accessed 20 March, 2017, <https://www.onitsha-archdiocese.org/>.

³³⁰ All Hallows Seminary Onitsha, Nigeria, “History of the Seminary,” in *All Hallows Seminary Website*, accessed 24 March 2017, <http://www.allhallowsseminary.com.ng/>.

compound) until February 1952 when it moved down to the present site in Onitsha, Anambra State, with the name All Hallows. The site used to be a very quiet place until development caught up with it and express roads were sited in front and buildings sprang up around it. The seminary has trained great men serving both in the Church and the society. The provincial seminary - Tansi Seminary named after Blessed Cyprian Michael Iwene Tansi is also located within the Archdiocese. The Archdiocese has also many men and women religious congregations established in order to help in the work of evangelization. It has some established projects like banks, fuel stations, printing press, radio station, schools and hospitals which serve as sources of money and funds for the Archdiocese. There are also many schools owned by the Archdiocese. The Archdiocese of Onitsha is really growing from strength to strength. The number of Catholics is growing every day and more and more parishes are being created every day. "The Archdiocese of Onitsha is unique in Igboland because it is the kernel of evangelism in Igboland. The Archdiocese is located on the very spot where the missionaries first landed in 1885. The Archdiocese was also blessed with the two visits to Onitsha of His Holiness Pope John Paul II in 1982 and 1998."³³¹

B. Diocese of Enugu

Enugu was part and parcel of the Apostolic Prefecture of the Lower Niger, which His Holiness, Pope Leo XIII created in 1889 in acknowledgment of the efforts of Fr. Joseph Lutz and his team. "However, it was under Fr. Joseph Shanahan (later Bishop), as the fifth Apostolic Prefect of the Prefecture of Lower Niger, that the Good News of salvation in Christ Jesus had a grip on the soil of Enugu."³³² The beginnings of the Catholic mission in Enugu Diocese went back to the early 1900s. In 1908, coal was discovered in Enugu. This discovery brightened the beam already focused on the city, and attracted the attention of European explorers and merchants. It also drew the attention of the Catholic missionaries to the area. Christian missionaries saw the opportunity to put out into the deep in the region. The early penetration and achievement of the missionaries in this part of Igboland cannot be complete without the mention of Chief Onyema Onwusi. In fact, "the success of both colonizers and missionaries was linked to the overriding influence of this paramount Chief of Eke, Chief Onyeama Onwusi, who was long exposed to trade relation with the Europeans.

In 1910, Chief Onyeama, the Okwuloha of Agbaje, was made a warrant Chief in recognition of his influence in British foreign rule."³³³ At this time his interest in western

³³¹ Okon, *Expansion and Consolidation: Growth in Onitsha, Calabar, Owerri, Ogoja and Umuahia*, 188.

³³² Catholic Diocese of Enugu, Nigeria, "Brief History of Enugu Diocese," in *Enugu Catholic Diocesan Website*, accessed 24 March 2017, <http://catholicdioceseenugu.org/>.

³³³ David Onyeama, *Chief Onyeama* (Asaba Nigeria: Delta Press, 1982), 64-66.

education came to its peak and sought immediate realization. Thus, he invited missionaries of the Church Missionary Society (C.M.S) to Eke to communicate the white man's knowledge. Unfortunately, their method and content of education did not appeal to him. The use of vernacular adopted by them did not give him the impression of something new. Consequently, he made them quit and make space for another group. Then, he extended his invitation in the same year to Fr. Joseph Shanahan in Onitsha. His principal motive was to gain the power and prestige which he believed Catholic presence and especially Catholic schools would bring to him and his people, especially after the C.M.S has disappointed him with their apparent lukewarmness, tardiness and use of vernacular in some of the schools they managed to open. Fr. Shanahan acted swiftly and sent Fr. Aloyse Muller, who was resident in Igbariam, to explore the new area and put up scheme for missionary activities. Fr. Aloysius Muller arrived at Eke after his diurnal journey, and celebrated the Holy Mass there the following morning to inaugurate his activities. He started to familiarize himself with the area and draw up his plan. The blueprint designed by Fr. Muller, which consisted in the erection of a school, health centres, the use of English language among other things in the evangelization of the region, was happily welcomed and approved of by chief Onyeama.

This approval led to a decree that forbade missionary activity in Eke, Agbaje and their environs by any other group outside the Catholics. "On his part, chief Onyeama never regretted his actions in inviting the Catholics; instead, he desired their permanent presence. Consequently, in 1914, he requested for a resident priest. In response to this request, Fr. Joachim Correia, a Portuguese Holy Ghost priest, was sent."³³⁴ Enugu mission continued to grow. "On 12 November, 1962, Enugu was carved out of Onitsha Archdiocese and raised to the status of a Diocese- Holy Ghost Cathedral Enugu. It comprised the old Enugu and Nsukka districts. Rt. Rev. Dr. John Cross Anyogu, who had been the Auxiliary Bishop of Onitsha from 1957, was appointed the chief Pastor of the new diocese. Installed on January 15, 1963, he worked assiduously to give the new diocese a firm foundation."³³⁵ After a period of four years, Bishop Anyogu died on 6 July, 1967. His death came at the outbreak of the Nigerian civil war; consequently, Msgr. Stephen. N. Ezeanya was asked to administer the Diocese and lead it through the Nigerian civil war. This he did very competently.

"As soon as the war ended, Bishop Godfrey Mary Paul Okoye, who was the Bishop of Port-Harcourt, was appointed to succeed Bishop Anyogu in 1970. He was installed as Bishop of Enugu on 17 March, 1970. He was a dynamic, foresighted and indefatigable character. On

³³⁴ Onyeama, *Chief Onyeama*, 64-66.

³³⁵ Cyprain Eke, "The Creation of more Dioceses after 1960," in *Hundred Years of the Catholic Church in Eastern Nigeria 1885-1895*, ed. Celestine Obi (Onitsha: Africana-Fep Publishers Ltd, 1985), 293.

10 November, 1977, Msgr. Michael Ugwu Eneja was appointed as the successor of Bishop Okoye. He was consecrated and installed Bishop of Enugu on 26 February, 1978. Bishop Eneja was a pastor of rare qualities. As a loving father and a spiritual giant, he gave Enugu Diocese a solid spiritual foundation. His leadership inspired enormous growth. Under him, Nsukka diocese was created and carved out of Enugu diocese in 1991 with Most Rev. Francis Okobo as its first Bishop. He retired on 8 November, 1996 after 18 years of successful pastoral leadership. The next Bishop was Bishop Anthony Okonkwo Gbuji who, until his appointment, had been the Bishop of Issele-Uku. He initiated many other projects which would see their fruition in the succeeding administration. Bishop Gbuji retired on February 9, 2009, but handed over later in May. Following the retirement of Bishop Gbuji, Msgr. Callistus Valentine Chukwuma Onaga was appointed the next Bishop of Enugu. He was consecrated and installed on 2 May, 2009. He is the current bishop of Enugu diocese. Presently, “the total number of the inhabitants in the diocese is about 2.8 million, while the total number of the Catholics in the diocese is about 1, 368, 904. The diocese which began with about 5 priests and 17 parishes now has about 378 priests and 200 parishes and 5 chaplaincies. The diocese is divided into six deaneries. The diocese has also a junior seminary called Sacred Heart Seminary Nsude which has a population of about 510 junior seminarians. The diocese has a total number of about 238 senior seminarians.”³³⁶

It is within this diocese that the biggest seminary in the whole Africa- Bigard Memorial Seminary is situated. The diocese has also many men and women religious houses and congregations that help in the work of evangelization. The diocese of Enugu is also blessed with some good projects and investments that yield money for the development and maintenance of the Diocese such as filling stations, banks, book shops etc. It has also a good and well equipped publishing/ printing press.

C. Diocese of Abakaliki

“Between 1922 and 1923, there was an attempt to establish a Catholic mission at Ishiagu, a town in what is today known as Abakaliki Diocese. At the request of the local chiefs, Fr. Grandin in-charge of Eke Parish sent one Mr. Marcel Okeke to open up a school and Church at Ishiagu. In February, 1925, sacrament of Baptism was administered to the first 25 converts by Fr. Davey. And later, in September of the same year, Bishop Shanahan conferred the sacrament of Confirmation on them.”³³⁷ “It was not until 1973 that what is today known as

³³⁶ Catholic Diocese of Enugu, Nigeria, “Brief History of Enugu Diocese,” in *Enugu Catholic Diocesan Website*, accessed 24 March 2017, <http://catholicdioceseenugu.org/>.

³³⁷ Catholic Diocese of Abakaliki, Nigeria, “The History and Growth of the Diocese,” in *Abakaliki Catholic Diocesan Website*, accessed 15 October, 2017, <http://abakalikidiocese.org/>.

Abakaliki diocese was carved out of Ogoja diocese and in September of the same year, Bishop Thomas McGettrick, a veteran missionary of St. Patrick's Society who had been Bishop of Ogoja since 1955 was installed as its first Bishop.”³³⁸ At its creation, Abakaliki Diocese suffered a lot of challenges and setbacks ranging from cultural barriers, opposition to Catholicism by the natives and scarcity of priests. Following the strategy adopted by Bishop Shanahan, great emphasis was placed on evangelization through schools. By 1960, there were 178 Catholic Primary Schools in the Diocese. “The only junior seminary in the diocese, St. Augustine's Seminary, Ezzamgbo was founded in 1958 with about half a dozen students. Today, there are 630 junior seminarians and 184 senior seminarians. Abakaliki Diocese has also one Spiritual Year Seminary.”³³⁹

The Catholic diocese of Abakaliki has equally many well established and equipped Catholic hospitals. In the provision of health care services especially for lepers, hospitals, outstation clinics and leper settlements were established by the Church through the help of Medical Missionary sisters. The feat achieved by the Catholic Diocese of Abakaliki here has not been rivalled by any other Diocese or Archdiocese in Igboland. Again, since 1978, the Church has launched a new campaign in family planning and a concerted effort was put to teach Ovulation Method in different hospitals run by the Church. With the retirement of Late Bishop Thomas McGettrick in June 1983, Bishop Michael Okoro was installed as a residential Bishop on 27 November, 1983, six years after his episcopal ordination. He began presiding over a Diocese that had 144,000 Catholics out of a total population of 1,240,000, some 17,000 Catechumens, 22 parishes, 3 hospitals, one leprosy centre, one monastery and ten marriage training centres.

Still faithful to the tested tradition of his predecessors of evangelizing through schools, Bishop Okoro opened a good number of secondary, primary and nursery schools in the diocese. Recently, a school aimed at catechizing the catechizers who would assist the priests in instructing the faithful was opened. Today, “Bishop Okoro presides over a diocese that has about 700, 000 Catholics, 151 parishes and 187 diocesan priests.”³⁴⁰ The Pastoral Centre (Bishop Thomas McGettrick Memorial) recently completed stands out as one of the best in Africa. To ensure the easy dissemination of the gospel, the Bishop has been able to establish a printing press with an ultra-modern studio. The press sees to the publication of her annual Directory/Liturgical Calendar and then monthly Newspaper Citizens' Advocate. Again, in

³³⁸ Eke, “The Creation of more Dioceses after 1960”, 293.

³³⁹ Sanit Augustine Seminary, Abakaliki, “The Establishment and Life of the Seminary,” in *St. Augustine Seminary Website*, accessed 5 Novemner, 2017, <http://staugustineseminary.org/>.

³⁴⁰ Catholic Diocese of Abakaliki, *2018 Directory and Liturgical Calendar* (Abakaliki: Citizens' Advocate Press, 2018), 33-36 & 56-107

order to ensure the continual growth and sustenance of the diocese, the diocese has invested into some profit oriented projects such as banking, farming, poultry, oil and gas stations etc. For the spiritual growth and sustenance of the diocese equally, some spiritual exercises like retreats, seminars, workshops, conferences etc, are organised in the diocesan and parish levels annually.

D. Diocese of Awka

The actual history of Awka Diocese began when Fr. Albert Bubendorf (French priest) joined the missionary team of Fr. Lutz in January 1890. He should be called the first apostle of Awka diocese.”³⁴¹ While resident at Nteje, Fr. Bubendorf and his team began to evangelize Nimo as far back as 1911. A mission was established at Adazi the following year, 1912, when Chief Orjiakor welcomed Fr. Bubendorf and Brother Joseph. Both Nimo and Adazi continued to be served from Nteje, until after some years when permanent mission was established at Adazi. The parish, which was officially opened in 1925, became a mission headquarters that served a hundred and seven stations in the old Awka and Orlu divisions then. The Anglican missionaries, who arrived earlier than their Catholic counterparts at Onitsha, already had a strong foothold at Awka town, almost to the point of prohibiting other missionaries. A demand for Catholic education began to be felt when some Anglican catechists were alleged to have encouraged their catechumens to break some customs and taboos. Some people were sent to Nteje to invite the Catholic missionaries. A piece of land was donated by Chief Ofodile for a school and a Church with Mr Felix Udeme as its first teacher-catechist.

Awka was eventually raised to the status of a parish in 1952 and Fr. Segrave was sent to be its first resident priest. “Awka parish was part of Onitsha Archdiocese until November 10, 1977, when it was created and erected as a new diocesan headquarters-St Patrick Cathedral to govern the area covering the then three Local Government Areas of Njikoka, Aguata, Awka and part of Oji River. Its first diocesan Bishop, Late Most Rev. Albert Kanene Obiefuna was consecrated on 5 February, 1978. On May 30, 1992, His Lordship, Most Rev. Simon Akwali Okafor was consecrated the Auxiliary Bishop of Awka Diocese and was installed the Diocesan Bishop of Awka on 17 December, 1994, after the transfer of Bishop A. K. Obiefuna to Onitsha Archdiocese.”³⁴² In the night of 29 August, 2014, the Lord of life and death called his servant, Most Rev. Simon Akwali Okafor to himself. Most Rev. Solomon Amamchukwu Amatu, longtime Chancellor of the diocese was consecrated the Auxiliary Bishop of Awka diocese on

³⁴¹ Catholic Diocese of Awka, “The History and Growth of the Diocese,” in *Awka Catholic Diocesan Website*, accessed 4 November, 2017, <http://www.awkacatholicdiocese.org/>.

³⁴² Wenceslaus Ofojebe and Fabian Obi. ed., *A Short History of the Catholic Diocese of Awka at Forty*, 77.

April 28, 2001 and later transferred to Okigwe diocese as Co-adjutor Bishop of Okigwe. He eventually became the Bishop of that Diocese.

“On 20 January, 2007, Most Rev. Paulinus Chukwuemeka Ezeokafor was named Auxiliary Bishop of Awka and consecrated Bishop on 28 April, 2007. After the Seat of the Bishop of the diocese became vacant (*sede vacante*) in 2009, he was appointed the Apostolic Administrator of the diocese and later became the Bishop of Awka on 8 July, 2011.”³⁴³ Yet another blessing for the diocese. On 30 May, 2014, the Holy Father, Pope Francis appointed Rev. Fr. Dr. Jonas Benson Okoye the Auxiliary Bishop of Awka diocese. He was consecrated on the 22nd anniversary of his priestly ordination, that is, on the 29th August 2014. “The total population of the Catholics in the Diocese is about 1, 714, 608. Awka diocese has grown from 18 parishes at its inception to 184 parishes and 7 chaplaincies. The diocese is divided into 6 regions and 23 deaneries. The diocese too is particularly blessed with increased vocations to the priesthood and religious life. The number of priests has grown too from 40 in 1977 to almost 588 in 2017.”³⁴⁴

Priests of Awka Diocese are working and studying in more than 25 dioceses in the following countries Austria, Cameroun, Canada, Chad, Germany, Mali, Niger Republic, Poland, South Africa and the United States of America. The diocese has also 2 junior seminaries namely St. Dominic Savio Seminary Akpu and St. John Bosco Seminary Isuaniocha with about 370 and 230 junior seminarians respectively. Awka diocese has also one Spiritual Year Seminary. There are about 195 senior seminarians in the diocese equally. For the work of evangelization, there are also many men and women religious congregations and houses established in the diocese. Awka diocese has also many lay apostolates who are very active and supportive to the clergy. Awka diocese has equally one Retreat, Pastoral and Conference center. There are equally many established projects and investments like banks, fuel stations, hospitals and agricultural projects like fish ponds and piggery that serve as sources of money and income for the diocese. The diocese has many nursery, primary and secondary schools. Another milestone is the proposed Catholic University at Achina town. With it, the diocese is hoping to go a long way towards the much needed human resources development in the diocese. “With the Government handover of schools by the Governor of Anambra State, Mr Peter Obi, another area of consolidation has emerged. It is good here to point out that it is only in Anambra state in Nigeria that Church has taken over the management of the schools from the

³⁴³ Catholic Diocese of Awka, “The History and Growth of the Diocese,” in *Awka Catholic Diocesan Website*, accessed 4 November, 2017, <http://www.awkacatholicdiocese.org/>.

³⁴⁴ Awka Diocesan Liturgy Commission, *2017 Diary and Directory*, (Awka: Fides Communications, 2017), 34-37, 71-94.

government.”³⁴⁵ There are also many pious and religious organizations and movements within the diocese. “To build up strong cooperation among themselves and with their Bishop, the ‘presbyterium’ of Awka diocese has embarked on a number of programmes. One is monthly recollection for all priests working in the diocese, to enhance a communal efforts towards sanctity of life so vital for a fruitful apostolate. Seminars, workshops, conferences and retreats are also organised for the priests on theological, pastoral and administrative issues that relate to their ministry. Also, a system of mutual aid has been inaugurated whereby the richer parishes contribute to the support of poorer ones.”³⁴⁶ In spite of the rising challenges from the Pentecostal Churches, the diocese has continued to experience tremendous growth in the population of the laity and in religious and consecrated life. The diocese has many priests and religious in many Nigerian tertiary institutions as professors and lecturers.

E. Diocese of Nsukka

“What is known as the Nsukka political zone coincides with the most populous and promising zone created out of the Catholic Diocese of Enugu, which has become the Catholic diocese of Nsukka.”³⁴⁷ “In 1932, His Lordship, Bishop Shanahan, transferred Rev. Fr. James Mellet from Ogoja to Nsukka to become the first Catholic Parish Priest of Nsukka.”³⁴⁸ Rev. Fr. Aloysius Muller and other priests who were sent by Father Shanahan from Aguleri Parish to Nsukka zone were among the first to bring Good News to Nsukka area, Uvuru and other parts of Igbo Oda in 1910. “However, the credit for sowing the seeds of evangelization in Nsukka area should go to the priests from Eke Parish led by Rev. Fr. Vincent Davey. On the request and invitation of Chief Atama Nwamba, Fr. Davey visited Eha-Alumona in 1920 and built a rest house.”³⁴⁹

In 1919 a Catholic mission house and school was established in Nsukka area. From here, the missionaries spread their work to other parts of Nsukka through the establishment of schools. The existence of a school meant the existence of the Catholic Church and therefore a permanent forum for recruitment and evangelization of the people. Catholic mission continued to grow in Nsukka area. In 1956, Rev Msgr. Peter Meze Idigo took over what was left of

³⁴⁵ Vincent Ujumadu, “Obi hands over 1,040 Schools to Original Owners (Church),” *Vanguard Newspapers*, 22 November, 2011 accessed 15 January, 2018, <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2011/11/obi-hands-over-1040-schools-to-original-owners/>.

³⁴⁶ Eke, “The Creation of more Dioceses after 1960”, 298.

³⁴⁷ Catholic Diocese of Nsukka, Nigeria, “Brief History of Nsukka Diocese,” in *Nsukka Catholic Diocesan Website*, accessed 26 March 2017, <http://www.nsukkacatholicdiocese.org/brief-history.html>.

³⁴⁸ Catholic Diocese of Nsukka, Nigeria, “Brief History of Nsukka Diocese,” in *Nsukka Catholic Diocesan Website*, accessed 26 March 2017, <http://www.nsukkacatholicdiocese.org/brief-history.html>.

³⁴⁹ Catholic Diocese of Nsukka, Nigeria, “Brief History of Nsukka Diocese,” in *Nsukka Catholic Diocesan Website*, accessed 26 March 2017, <http://www.nsukkacatholicdiocese.org/brief-history.html>.

Nsukka parish from Fr. Horgan. The engine of evangelization was grinding gradually but steadily towards a total spread of Christianity in Nsukka area. In 1985, as a result of great increase in the number of Catholics in Nsukka area, His Lordship, Most Rev. Michael U Eneja raised Nsukka to the status of a deanery with Rev. Fr. George Dine as the deanery head. Five years later, this denary became a diocese. “The Catholic diocese of Nsukka was carved out of Enugu diocese on the 19th of November 1990 by His Holiness Pope John Paul II. Very Rev Msgr. Francis Emmanuel Ogbonnaya Okobo was consecrated her first Bishop on 6 January, 1991, at St. Peter's Basilica, Rome and installed on 2nd February 1999 at St. Theresa's Cathedral, Nsukka as the first Bishop of Nsukka diocese.”³⁵⁰ Bishop Francis Okobo reigned until 13th April 2013 when Pope Francis appointed Very Rev. Msgr. Godfrey Igwebuike Onah as the Second Bishop of Nsukka diocese. He was both consecrated and installed as the Second Bishop of Nsukka diocese on 4th of July 2013 at St. Theresa's Cathedral Nsukka by His Eminence John Cardinal O. Onaiyekan. The

Diocese covers the land area of seven local government areas that make up Nsukka cultural zone. “The number of parishes has risen from 27 in 1991 to 182 in 2018. Today, in 2018, the number of incardinated priests of the diocese has risen to 301. There are many professed religious men and women. Nsukka diocese has equally about 225 major Seminarians, 382 minor Seminarians, about 732 Catechists, and a Catholic population of about 1.1 million.”³⁵¹ “There are many religious houses in the diocese including; Holy Ghost Congregation, Discalced Carmelites, Brothers of St. Stephen, St. Joseph's Monastic Community, Daughters of Divine Love Sisters, Immaculate Heart Sisters, Holy Rosary Sisters, University Sisters of Assumption, Carmelite Missionary Sisters and Sisters Servants of the Visitation, Sisters of Perpetual Eucharistic Adoration, and Tersian Sisters.”³⁵²

Also present in the Diocese is the Prelature of Opus Dei, situated at Amaogbo lane off Ibagwa road. There are also many active lay apostolate of men and women within the diocese as well as many pious and religious organizations and societies. In all, Nsukka diocese also has 13 deaneries. The number of Church institutions has also grown larger. There are many Nursery Schools, Primary Schools, Post-primary Schools, Vocational Centres, one minor Seminary named St. John Cross Seminary, one Spiritual Year Seminary named Good Shepherd Seminary, one major Seminary (School of Philosophy), 4 Health Institutions and Catholic

³⁵⁰ Catholic Diocese of Nsukka, Nigeria, “Brief History of Nsukka Diocese,” in *Nsukka Catholic Diocesan Website*, accessed 26 March 2017, <http://www.nsukkacatholicdiocese.org/brief-history.html>.

³⁵¹ Catholic Diocese of Nsukka, *2018 Diary and Directory* (Nsukka: Shepherd Publications, Nsukka, 2018), 33 & 59. (Also, cf Nsukka Diocesan Chancery Office Register)

³⁵² Catholic Diocese of Nsukka, *2017 Diary and Directory* (Nsukka: Shepherd Publications, Nsukka, 2018), 39-43.

hospitals and one Retreat and Conference Centre. There are also other projects and investments established by the diocese like Kenekwukwu bank, fuel station etc. The diocese has also a printing and publication press called Shepherd Publications.

F. Diocese of Nnewi

Though individuals from various communities in Nnewi zone have come in contact with the faith as they travelled to Onitsha and other places for trade and in quest of western education, “the actual planting of the seed of the Catholic mission in what is today known as Nnewi diocese sprang from the treks of Fr. Victor Duhaze to Ozubulu through Oguta (1906) and of Frs. Shanahan and L.J. Ward to Nnewi through Umuoji, Ojoto Mili Agu down to Odida Nnewichi in 1906.”³⁵³ Requests were made by Odida Community in Nnewichi inviting Fr. Joseph Shanahan. In the same year, some Ozubulu indigenes had registered the same requests for establishing a Church station at Ozubulu. Thus, on 29th January, 1906, St. Peter Claver’s outstation was opened at Odida Nnewichi by Fr. J. Shanahan who came with Fr. L. J. Ward. This Nnewi station was run from St. Mary’s mission Inland Town Onitsha. The same year saw the arrival of the missionaries at Ozubulu to begin St. Michael’s station, Eziora Ozubulu. However, Nnewi became a parish in 1933. But from 1931, the Okofia outstation had served as a form of ‘Parish Centre’ for Nnewi under Fr. Joe Delany, the first Parish Priest of Nnewi. Until it was moved to Akwuegbo, Uruagu, under the late Bishop John Cross Anyaogu in 1935. The Blessed Cyprain Michael Iwene Tansi joined Bishop Anyaogu as his assistant in 1938. The year 1954 witnessed the creation of Amichi parish with the following outstations: Amichi, Utuh, Osumenyi, Unubi, Ezinifite, Ekwulumili, Ebenator, Azigbo and Akwaihedi. The area known today as Nnewi diocese witnessed the establishment of many parishes and out-stations until it became a diocese in 2001.

“With the official announcement from the Vatican and from the Holy Trinity Cathedral Onitsha of the creation of the Catholic diocese of Nnewi, Nnewi diocese was carved out of Metropolitan Archdiocese of Onitsha and created as Nnewi diocese on 28 November, 2001, and her first Bishop, Most Rev. Hilary Odili Okeke was consecrated and installed on 10 February, 2002.”³⁵⁴ “Hence, the evangelization of Nnewi area which started 111 years ago has given birth to a Nnewi diocese which has about 544,789 Catholics, 5 regions, 10 deaneries, 102 Parishes, 312 diocesan Priests, a junior diocesan Seminary named St. Paul’s Junior Seminary Ukpok, St. Gabriel’s Spiritual Year Seminary Ozubulu and Holy Ghost Juniorate

³⁵³ Catholic Diocese of Nnewi, Nigeria, “Brief History of Nnewi Diocese,” in *Nnewi Catholic Diocesan Website*, accessed 26 March 2017, <http://www.nnewidiocese.org>

³⁵⁴ Catholic Diocese of Nnewi, “Brief History of Nnewi Diocese,” in *Nnewi Catholic Diocesan Website*, accessed 26 March 2017, <http://www.nnewidiocese.org>

within the diocese, a Diocesan Hospital, Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital Ihiala, a Hospital Chaplaincy St. Luke's Chaplaincy, Nnamdi Azikiwe University Teaching Hospital, Nnewi, many convents and fraternities for men and women religious."³⁵⁵

The diocese has also a Monastery named Benedictine Monastery, Ozubulu and many mission schools from nursery to secondary. There are many active lay apostolates in the diocese as well which contribute a lot in the work of evangelization. There are equally many pious and religious organizations and societies. Nnewi diocese has also many projects and establishments which serve as sources of income for the diocese namely Chukwunenye Microfinance Bank, Chukwunenye Oil and Gas and St. Gabriel Pastoral Center. Such is the level of the ecclesiastical development in Nnewi Diocese today. The efforts of Nnewi Catholic Community to build a central Church for the whole of Nnewi have given the diocese the Cathedral of Our Lady of Assumption, Okwuana, Nnewi, a Cathedral when completed will be one of the biggest and most beautiful Churches in Nigeria. Today in Nnewi diocese, there are still some primal religionists 'pagans'. There are equally mainline and Pentecostal Churches.

G. Diocese of Awgu

The remotest beginning of the Catholic presence in the Awgu division dates back to the works of the French Catholic missionaries that came to Eastern Nigeria under Fr. J. E. Lutz in 1885 pitching their first tent at Holy Trinity in Onitsha and moving towards Eke in Enugu area. What we call Awgu diocese today is a historical effect of synthetic, missionary roles and contributions from Eke and Uturu Catholic missions. It was indeed at Eke that the religious tree which spread its branches to other parts of Enugu diocese was planted, watered and nurtured."³⁵⁶ "It was in 1921 that the Roman Catholic Mission set up a School/Church at Oke-Oli, Ali-Awgu (St. Michael's Awgu) which attracted over 100 converts in less than one year. They were received and harbored by late Chief Chukwunta Nwachumolie. The first teacher to St. Michael's School/Church, Awgu, one Mr. Ofodiamah from Ogwashi Uku of the present Delta State of Nigeria. And the first Holy Mass at St. Michael's Awgu was at Oke-Ali-Ohaja Awgu by Rev. Fr. Grandin."³⁵⁷ On the other hand, the missionary movement into Awgu from Uturu, Okigwe was orchestrated by the existence/construction of railway line from Enugu to Port Harcourt in 1915. This made that Ndeabor Railway Stations a whirlpool of so many itineraries, mercantile and even evangelical interactions. This created and provided a pastoral

³⁵⁵ Catholic Diocese of Nnewi, *2018 Diary and Directory* (Nnewi: Cath.com Publications, 2018), 17.

³⁵⁶ Catholic Diocese of Awgu, Nigeria, "Creation and Growth of Awgu Diocese," in *Awgu Catholic Diocesan Website*, accessed 26 November, 2017, <http://www.awgudiocese.org/>.

³⁵⁷ Catholic Diocese of Awgu, *Diocesan Directory and Liturgical Calendar* (Awgu: St. Michael's Publication, 2016), 7.

relationship between St. Michael's Awgu and the Roman Catholic Mission at Uturu, Okigwe (which was nearer to Awgu than Eke) which was already established in 1912. "In 1926, Rev. Fr. Treich, the first priest to minister to the faithful at St. Michael's Church, Awgu from Uturu prepared Catechumen who received their First Holy Communion on 21 October 1926."³⁵⁸ However, given the foundation of another Church in Awgu region at Mmaku, which was raised to a parish status in 1922, St. Michael's Awgu was under Mmaku parish until 1948 when she was made a parish too. Out of these two sources (Eke and Uturu), the Church continued to spread in Awgu area and its surroundings with joyful yet uneasy circumstances, both on the sides of the missionaries and mission converts. "They were days of thug-of-war between native ancestral religion and Christianity and of oscillation of people from old traditional civilization and the emerging one that is Christian and exotic. Given limited pastors and prevalent pressures from conflicting old and new faiths, it was really martyrdom like and heroic to be a Christian then."³⁵⁹ But it was out of these rocky roots that today, the Church in Igboland rejoices to the harvest of a young, buoyant and vibrant diocese of Awgu.

"The Catholic diocese of Awgu was created by His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI on the 8th of July, 2005, when it was split off from the diocese of Enugu. On the 29th day of September, it was canonically erected and Most Rev. John Ifeanyichukwu Okoye was consecrated and enthroned as its first Bishop."³⁶⁰ It is a suffragan diocese of the Archdiocese of Onitsha. The diocese covers an area of 1,310 km of the Enugu State, covering the local government areas Awgu, Agbogugu, Inyi, Ndeabor, Nnenwe, Owelli and Oji Rivers (except the parish of Ukwuoba). Neighboring dioceses are Enugu to the north, Abakaliki to the east, Umuahia to the south and Awka to the west. "The total population of the diocese is about 360,000 Catholics. The diocese is subdivided into 5 regions, 2 denearies and 46 parishes. It has also about 69 priests, 23 lay religious (2 brothers, 21 sisters), 104 major seminarians and 272 minor seminarians."³⁶¹ The diocese equally has one junior seminary and one spiritual year seminary. There are many men and women religious congregations in the diocese which help in the work of evangelization. There are also active lay apostolates. The diocese also has some projects and investments like bank, printing press etc which serve as sources of income for the diocese. There are equally many hospitals and schools owned by the diocese.

³⁵⁸ Catholic Diocese of Awgu, *Diocesan Directory and Liturgical Calendar*, 6.

³⁵⁹ Catholic Diocese of Awgu, Nigeria, "Creation and Growth of Awgu Diocese," in *Awgu Catholic Diocesan Website*, accessed 26 November, 2017, <http://www.awgudiocese.org/>.

³⁶⁰ Catholic Diocese of Awgu, *Diocesan Directory and Liturgical Calendar*, 7.

³⁶¹ Catholic Diocese of Awgu, *Diocesan Directory and Liturgical Calendar*, (Awgu: St. Michael's Publication Press, 2016), 8.

A. Archdiocese of Owerri

“The coming of the missionaries to where is today known as Owerri Archdiocese (Metropolitan of the Owerri ecclesiastical province) marked the completion of the project to evangelise and plant the seed of Catholic Church in Igboland.”³⁶² “Emekuku was the first place a mission center was opened in Owerri. Emekuku mission was opened by Fr. Feral in 1912 after a series of preparatory visits.”³⁶³ The arrival of Fr. Daniel Walsh in 1913 led to the expansion of Catholic Church around Emekuku and beyond. He went from town to town around Emekuku, laying the foundation of the Catholic Church. Between 1913 and 1922, many stations were opened in Nguru, Ahiara, Ezinihitte, Amumara Onicha Ezinihitte, Umuokirika, Ekwereazu and Obosima and on March 4, 1916, Fr. Walsh said first Holy Mass.”³⁶⁴ The growth of the Catholic Church in this area was so fast that on 12 February, 1948, Owerri became a Vicariate and that same year, Fr. Joseph B. Whelan was consecrated Bishop with authority over the new Vicariate. “On April 18, 1950, history was made. Owerri became a diocese with Bishop Whelan as its first Bishop.”³⁶⁵ “When Bishop Whelan left Nigeria as a result of war and its effects, Monsignor Mark Unegbu was consecrated the Bishop of Owerri on September 20, 1970 and he retired on July 1, 1993.

At his retirement, Monsignor Anthony John Valentine Obinna was consecrated a Bishop of Owerri on 4 September, 1994. On 26 March, 1994, the diocese of Owerri was promoted and raised to the Metropolitan Archdiocese of Owerri with Bishop Anthony John Valentine Obinna as the Metropolitan Archbishop.”³⁶⁶ “The Catholic Archdiocese of Owerri spreads through eight local government areas of Imo State, the heartland of Igboland in Eastern Nigeria. It has a population of about 1, 680, 806 Catholics and covers an expanse of 2996.27 sq km. It has more than 89 parishes administered by 259 diocesan priests, over 50 religious priests and about 300 catechists.”³⁶⁷ There are four male and five female religious congregations working in the Archdiocese. Bishop Whelan initiated the establishment of the monastery, but Bishop Unegbu finally set it up in 1974. “For the training of priests, the Archdiocese has 2 junior seminaries: the St Peter Claver Seminary Okpala formally St Paul’s Major Seminary during the missionary days established in 1942 but converted to junior seminary in 1951. Then, Assumpta Minor Seminary established in 1990 by Bishop Unegbu.

³⁶² Ekechi, *Missionary Enterprise and Rivalry in Igboland*, 4.

³⁶³ Rose Njoku, *The Advent of the Catholic Church in Nigeria, its Growth in Owerri Diocese*, 42-43.

³⁶⁴ Njoku, *The Advent of the Catholic Church in Nigeria, its Growth in Owerri Diocese*, 53.

³⁶⁵ Okon, “Expansion and Consolidation: Growth in Onitsha, Calabar, Owerri, Ogoja and Umuahia,” 207.

³⁶⁶ Catholic Archdiocese of Owerri, Nigeria, “History and Creation of the Archdiocese,” in *Owerri Catholic Archdiocesan Website*, accessed 22 December, 2017, <http://www.owarch.org/>.

³⁶⁷ Cf. Catholic Diocese of Owerri, *Diocesan Directory and Liturgical Calendar* (Owerri: Assumpta Press, 2017), 7.

The Archdiocese has also the Assumpta Spiritual year centre, a preparatory institute at Ogbaku.”³⁶⁸ The Archdiocese houses two senior seminaries: Seat of Wisdom Seminary Ulakwo for the Diocesan priests and the Claretian Institute of Philosophy for the training of religious clergy. The Spiritans also have a postulate house at Akabo. The Archdiocese has also many lay apostolates who serve as active agents in the work of evangelization. These constitute the high points of her apostolate. There are also some projects and investments owned by the Archdiocese which serve as means of income. There are also many good hospitals owned and managed by the Archdiocese. The Archdiocese of Owerri has many primary schools, secondary schools and teacher training colleges. Institute of advanced studies has been added by the Archbishop, Rev. Dr. Anthony J.V. Obinna. The Whelan Research Academy is intended to be a centre for religious and cultural research. The Archdiocese is making profound effort to satisfy spiritual appetite and instil in the faithful an increased flame for the practice of the faith. It has in place an up-to-date and standard institute for the continued and ongoing spiritual formation of the faithful: the Assumpta Pastoral Centre, centre for ongoing formation. The centre provides facilities for various forms of spiritual retreat, seminars and conferences. The present Bishop also initiated the Eucharistic congress outreach. The Eu-care outreach as it is called is a monthly devotional forum which is aimed at sustaining the spiritual fruits of the 2nd Nigerian National Eucharistic congress hosted in Owerri in 1992. The metropolitan Archdiocese of Owerri has 6 suffragan Dioceses.

B. Diocese of Umuahia

“Gospel was first brought to Umuko/Umunkpeyi, a town in Umuahia now known as Sacred Heart Parish Umunkpeyi in 1916 from Emekuku in Owerri Archdiocese through Rev. Father Liddane, C.S.Sp., a curate under Rev. Father Daniel Walsh, C.S.Sp., both of whom were then at Emekuku.”³⁶⁹ Towards the very end of the same year, 1916, the Catholic Church came to Ohuru, the present St. Jude Parish through Calabar. In 1917, the seed of Catholic Church was planted at Mbutu Ngwa and C.K.C Aba, all through Emekuku. “In Umuahia area, the Catholic faith came to Bende which is the first centre of Umuahia, in 1921 from C.K.C Aba through Rev. Father Herbert Whytte, C.S.Sp.”³⁷⁰ “The quick spread of the Catholic Church into different areas in Umuahia led to the creation of Umuahia Diocese out of Owerri Archdiocese on 23 June, 1958.”³⁷¹ The Ordinary, Bishop Anthony G. Nwedo C.S.SP., consecrated on 17

³⁶⁸ Catholic Archdiocese of Owerri, Nigeria, “History and Creation of the Archdiocese,” in *Owerri Catholic Archdiocesan Website*, accessed 22 December, 2017, <http://www.owarch.org/>.

³⁶⁹ Okon, “Expansion and Consolidation: Growth in Onitsha, Calabar, Owerri, Ogoja and Umuahia,” 220.

³⁷⁰ Okon, “Expansion and Consolidation: Growth in Onitsha, Calabar, Owerri, Ogoja and Umuahia,” 220.

³⁷¹ Nwosu, “The Growth of the Catholic Church in Onitsha Ecclesiastical Province,” 49.

May, 1959, became the first Nigerian Bishop to take charge of a diocese. The evangelization of the area by the Roman Catholic missionaries was difficult. The Catholic penetration of the area was checked by the presence of the Methodist and Presbyterian Churches. When the diocese was created in 1958, and entrusted to Bishop Nwedo, the task ahead was by no means easy, despite the progress already made when the area was under Owerri diocese. There were few priests. The need of personnel was felt and this partly prompted the formation of indigenous religious congregations to supply workers for the diocese.

“The first congregation he founded was the Daughters of Mary, Mother of Mercy (D.M.M.M.) in 1962, just three years after he became a Bishop. The congregation grew rapidly and helped in the spread of the Catholic faith. In 1974, the Bishop founded a congregation for men-Sons of Mary, Mother of Mercy.”³⁷² “When Bishop Nwedo retired in April 2, 1990, Monsignor Lucius Iwejuru Ugorji was consecrated as the Bishop of Umuahia diocese. He became a Bishop of Umuahia diocese on 2 April, 1990.”³⁷³ The diocese has also grown tremendously despite the presence of other Christian denominations. “The total number of the Catholics is about 800, 000. Umuahia diocese has about 70 parishes which are divided into 5 regions and 7 deaneries. The total number of the priests in the diocese is about 202.”³⁷⁴ The diocese has also one junior seminary. There is also a provincial senior seminary located within the diocese. “There are about 82 senior seminarians and 435 junior seminarians in the diocese.”³⁷⁵

The diocese has also many lay apostolates which are very active in the work of evangelization both within and outside the diocese. There are equally many religious men and women within the Diocese. The diocese of Umuahia has also many Catholic schools and hospitals. There are also other projects and investments. Prominent among them are Umuchukwu Micro Finance Bank and Pax Bureau De Change. They serve as sources of income for the diocese. The Cathedral is called Mater Dei Cathedral. This elegant edifice which has helped to beautify the ancient city of Umuahia was dedicated on December 8, 2000. In 1981 and 1990, two dioceses - Okigwe and Aba, respectively, were carved out of the old Umuahia diocese. Umuahia diocese is located in the part of Igboland where there are predominantly other Christian denominations. Catholic Church is a minority there but she is growing despite the challenges and difficulties she is encountering.

³⁷² Okon, “Expansion and Consolidation: Growth in Onitsha, Calabar, Owerri, Ogoja and Umuahia,” 221

³⁷³ Catholic Diocese of Umuahia, Nigeria, “Creation and Growth of the Diocese,” in *Umuahia Catholic Diocesan Website*, accessed 19 November, 2017, <http://umuahiadioecese.org/>.

³⁷⁴ Catholic Diocese of Umuahia, Nigeria, “Creation and Growth of the Diocese,” in *Umuahia Catholic Diocesan Website*, accessed 19 November, 2017, <http://umuahiadioecese.org/>.

³⁷⁵ Catholic Diocese of Umuahia, *Diocesan Directory and Liturgical Calendar* (Umuahia: Lumem Press, 2016), 18. (Also see Umuahia Diocesan Chancery Office Register)

C. Diocese of Orlu

Orlu, though a new Diocese has had contacts with the Catholic mission since 1919, when Rev. Father Bindel visited the area from Ozubulu. Before the missionary visits of Father Bindel, “some enthusiastic Orlu youths were said to have made frantic efforts to attract Catholic priests and teachers to open up missions in their area. As the story has it, these young men travelled to Calabar on foot in search of a station teacher, then to Emekuku and were about to go to Ozubulu when Father Bindel arrived Orlu.”³⁷⁶ The first Parish to be established in the Orlu area was at Amaigbo in 1937, with Rev. Fr. Dr. Hackette as its Parish Priest. “It was in 1966 that the confines of the present Catholic Diocese of Orlu were raised to Deanery with Rev. Fr. Lawrence Doyle, C.S.Sp., as its first Dean. On 29 November, 1980, the diocese was created out of the then Owerri Diocese (now Owerri Archdiocese), by His Holiness, Pope John Paul II.”³⁷⁷ Most Rev. Gregory O. Ochiagha, consecrated a Bishop in Rome on the 6th of January 1981, was appointed its first Bishop subsequent to the inauguration that took place on February 15, 1981. The Patron of the diocese is the ‘Most Holy Trinity’. “The total population of the diocese today is above 2 million with Catholics numbering over 1 million. It has 691 junior seminarians 170 Senior Seminarians. Presently 5 Religious Brothers and 119 Religious Sisters are working in the diocese.”³⁷⁸

“The number of Orlu diocesan priests is 410 excluding 26 priests who have gone before us, marked with the sign of faith. The diocese of Orlu which at its creation had 23 parishes now enjoys a total number of 159 Parishes and 4 Chaplaincies. The Diocese is also divided into four regions created with a view of making its administration easier.”³⁷⁹ There is a high sense of unity, co-operation and co-ordination between the Bishop, the priests, religious and the laity. Under the charismatic leadership of Bishop Ochiagha, the establishment of various solidarities and communities especially the Porta Caeli Cistercian Monastery on the 10th of March 2007, help in the spiritual growth and propagation of faith. The Diocese has also many active and vibrant lay apostolates who are very active in the work of evangelization. The diocese is also blessed with many good schools, hospitals and other projects and investments like bank, printing press, bookshop and studio which serve as sources of income for the Diocese. Another major land mark was made in the annals of Orlu Diocese on 21 June, 2008 when Most Rev. Augustine Tochukwu Ukwuoma was ordained and installed the Bishop of Orlu, taking after

³⁷⁶ Njoku, *The Advent of the Catholic Church in Nigeria, its Growth in Owerri Diocese*, 71-72.

³⁷⁷ Catholic of Orlu Diocese, Nigeria, “Brief History of Orlu Diocese,” in *Orlu Catholic Diocesan Website*, accessed 26 March 2017, <http://www.orludiocese.org/diocese.html>.

³⁷⁸ Catholic of Orlu Diocese, Nigeria, “Brief History of Orlu Diocese,” in *Orlu Catholic Diocesan Website*, accessed 26 March 2017, <http://www.orludiocese.org/diocese.html>.

³⁷⁹ Catholic Diocese of Orlu, *Diocesan Directory and Liturgical Calendar* (Orlu: Trinity Press, 2014), 38.

the pioneer Bishop, Most Rev. Gregory Ochiagha. The dynamic leadership of the Bishop has led to the creation of more parishes, increase in the number of Priests and Vocations to the Priesthood, active contributions of the religious and great support of the laity in the work of the Diocese.

D. Diocese of Okigwe

Like the mother diocese of Umuahia, the Christian missionaries, Catholics and Protestants came in contact with Okigwe area as early as 1900's. "Between 1910 and 1912, Bishop Shanahan had already visited and opened a small mission at Uturu and from Adazi, another station was opened at Nneato- Ubahu at about 1918. Rev. Father D. Walsh also at the request of one chief Eluwa established a station at Umunomo in 1916."³⁸⁰ "This is to say that the missionaries to Igboland evangelized the present Okigwe diocese from two wings namely: Adazi in Anambra state and Emekuku in Imo State. While Okigwe North was evangelized from Adazi, Okigwe south was taken care of from Emekuku."³⁸¹ Consequently, they created two parishes: Holy Cross Parish, Uturu (1912) and St. Columba's Parish, Nsu (1917). From these two parishes, the Catholic faith sprouted and began to grow into what we have today as Okigwe diocese. The Church in the zone continued to grow from strength to strength under the leadership of Bishop Anthony G. Nwedo of Umuahia diocese. "On 24 January, 1981, Pope John Paul II carved out Okigwe from Umuahia diocese and elevated it to a Diocese of its own. Most Rev. Anthony Ilonu was consecrated and appointed as the pioneer Bishop. He served for 25 years."³⁸²

Before his retirement, the then auxiliary Bishop of Awka, Most Rev. Solomon Amatu was appointed as the Co-adjutor Bishop of Okigwe diocese in July 2005. He took over as the local Ordinary of the Diocese at the retirement of Bishop Ilonu on 1 July, 2006. The diocese is dedicated to Our Lady of Immaculate Conception. Today, Okigwe Diocese continues to grow from strength to strength, exemplifying the historic mustard seed. It has an enviable population of Catholic Christians, Clergy, religious houses and para-institutions. "Okigwe diocese has total population of about 826, 000 Catholics. It has 98 parishes which are divided 4 regions and 8 deaneries."³⁸³ It is also worthy to note that Okigwe diocese has produced three eminent Bishops which have served in various Dioceses namely late Bishop Mark Unegbu of Owerri, Bishop Gregory Ochiagha of Orlu and Bishop Ilonu of Okigwe. "The Diocese has also 2

³⁸⁰ Eke, "The Creation of more Dioceses after 1960," 302.

³⁸¹ Catholic Diocese of Okigwe, Nigeria, "Brief History of Okigwe Diocese," in *Okigwe Catholic Diocesan Website*, accessed 26 March 2017, <http://www.catholicdioceseokigwe.org>.

³⁸² Catholic Diocese of Okigwe, Nigeria, "Brief History of Okigwe Diocese," in *Okigwe Catholic Diocesan Website*, accessed 26 March 2017, <http://www.catholicdioceseokigwe.org>.

³⁸³ Catholic Diocese of Okigwe, *Diocesan Directory and Liturgical Calendar* (Okigwe: Sage Press, 2014), 18.

seminaries. She has equally 187 senior seminarians and 391 junior seminarians.”³⁸⁴ The diocese has equally many religious men and women who help out in the work of evangelization. There are also many lay apostolates within the Diocese. Okigwe diocese has schools, hospitals, printing and communication press as well as other projects and investments which serve as source of income for the diocese.

E. Diocese of Ahiara

The Roman Catholic Diocese of Ahiara is a diocese located in Ahiara in the region of Mbaise in Imo State in the Ecclesiastical province of Owerri in Nigeria. Catholic faith and mission came to Ahiara in Mbaise as early as 1923 through the missionary work of the early missionaries. “However, it was on 18 November, 1987, that the Catholic diocese of Ahiara was carved out and established as a diocese from the Archdiocese of Owerri. The Cathedral is Mater Ecclesiae Cathedral in Ahiara. The first Bishop of the diocese, Most Rev. Victor Adibe Chikwe was consecrated the Bishop of the diocese on 6 January, 1988.”³⁸⁵ Bishop Victor Adibe Chikwe (June 24, 1938 – September 16, 2010) was the Nigerian Roman Catholic prelate who served as the first Bishop of the Roman Catholic diocese of Ahiara from his appointment on 18 November, 1987, until his death on 16 September, 2010. “Bishop Peter Okpalaeke was consecrated as a substantive Bishop of Ahiara on 21 May, 2013 but up till now, he could not take a canonical possession of the diocese due to a problem that has lingered on for more than four years now.”³⁸⁶

The diocese is not fully operational for over seven years since the demise of the former Bishop. The diocese became an impeded See leading to the appointment of John Cardinal Onayekan as the Apostolic Administrator pending the time when the appointed substantive Bishop takes canonical possession of the diocese. Bishop Okpalaeke was rejected and denied possession of the Ahiara diocese by some clergy and laity of the diocese, on the ground that the process that led to his selection was flawed and that also, he Bishop Okpalaeke is not a son of the soil. The Catholics of Ahiara diocese wants their own son to be appointed and consecrated as their Bishop. According to some clergy and lay faithful of Ahiara diocese, “the emergence of Bishop Peter Okpalaeke as their Bishop was a surprise to them.”³⁸⁷ Against this background the clergy and laity are demanding to be given a Bishop from amongst them. On a

³⁸⁴ Catholic Diocese of Okigwe, *Diocesan Directory and Liturgical Calendar*, 18.

³⁸⁵ Catholic Diocese of Ahiara, Nigeria, “Brief History of Ahiara Diocese,” in *Ahiara Catholic Diocesan Website*, accessed 12 December, 2017, <http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/diocese/dahia.html>.

³⁸⁶ Ugonna Maureen, “Bishop Peter Okpalaeke in: Mini Biographies of Notable People,” November 2015 accessed 29 March 2017, <http://www.nigerianbiography.com/2015/11/peter-ebere-okpalaeke-bishop.html>.

³⁸⁷ Catholic Diocese of Ahiara, Nigeria, “Brief History of Ahiara Diocese,” in *Ahiara Catholic Diocesan Website*, accessed 12 December, 2017, <http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/diocese/dahia.html>.

sad note, it must be pointed out here that the rejection of a bishop duly appointed by Pope by a section of Igbo Catholics is indeed unfortunate and regrettable. This sad and disappointing incident is totally against the values and precious identity of obedience, respect, hospitality and fraternity for which Igbo Catholics are known. It really calls for apology on the part of the Igbo Catholicism. Every local Church is admonished to accept the Pontifical acts of appointment in the spirit of obedience, respect and salvation of souls.

“Ahiara is a Catholic dominated area with over 800, 000 Catholics. Ahiara diocese has made a lot of remarkable development since its establishment. The diocese has about 72 parishes with over 400 priests. The diocese also has one junior seminary and one spiritual year seminary.”³⁸⁸ There are also many religious men and women within the diocese. There are equally many active lay apostolates within the diocese which help out in the spread of the Gospel of Christ. The diocese also has few established projects and investments like Press Center and Bank which serve as sources of income for the diocese.

F. Diocese of Aba

Catholicism was a late-comer in Aba area. The Anglicans and the Sabbatarians had made many converts among the Ngwa, Asa (Aba) and Ndoki peoples in Aba area before the arrival of Catholicism in the area. “Catholicism was launched in Aba in 1916 through the unrelenting and unflinching apostolic spirit of Rev. Fr. Cornelius Liddane, C.S.Sp.”³⁸⁹ Catholicism spread so fast in Aba area as a result of many immigrants coming into Aba to do business in Aba Ngwa market. This led to the development and growth of Aba area.”³⁹⁰ The growth of Aba as a township indirectly served the cause of Christ. It meant the growth of Catholicism. “In 1917, Rev. Fr. Liddane led a formal mission to Asa (Aba), and set up what is today Christ the King Church Aba. At this time, the Church in Umunkpeyi was already functioning. In 1918, Fr. Liddane also visited Amiri and Mbutu Ngwa and set up a mission there.”³⁹¹

In 1927, Rev. Fr. Daniel Walsh, C.S.Sp, proclaimed the faith at Obuzor, today Holy Trinity parish Obuzor. All these small stations and missions had Aba as their headquarters. It is from these nuclei Churches and missions established between 1916 and 1927 that the Catholic Church sprout up, crept and penetrated into different areas at different times, then grew into a huge tree, like the Biblical mustard seed, foliated, sheltering all kinds of birds and

³⁸⁸ Catholic Diocese of Ahiara, Nigeria, “Brief History of Ahiara Diocese,” in *Ahiara Catholic Diocesan Website*, accessed 12 December, 2017, <http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/diocese/dahia.html>.

³⁸⁹ Catholic Diocese of Aba, “Brief History of Aba Diocese,” in *Aba Catholic Diocesan Website*, accessed 28 March 2017, <http://www.catholicdioceseofaba.org/>.

³⁹⁰ Catholic Diocese of Aba, “Brief History of Aba Diocese,” in *Aba Catholic Diocesan Website*, accessed 28 March 2017, <http://www.catholicdioceseofaba.org/>.

³⁹¹ Catholic Diocese of Aba, *Diocesan Directory and Liturgical Calendar* (Aba: Rex Publications, 2017), 6.

became what is today known as the Catholic Diocese of Aba. Rev. Fr. Groetz's tenure as the parish priest of C.K.C and its environs, which lasted for 23 years (1925 to 1948) was a major landmark in the history of the Catholic Church in Aba Diocese. He built many Churches and schools. "Aba zone excised from Umuahia and became a diocese on April 2nd, 1990. Its first Bishop, Most Rev. Dr. Vincent Valentine Ezeonyia C.S.Sp. was installed on the 2nd July, 1990 at Christ the King Church. He was consecrated a Bishop on 1st July, 1990 at Mater Dei Cathedral Umuahia."³⁹² At the time the Catholic diocese of Aba was created, there were 24 Parishes, 33 indigenous priests including those born and bred in Aba, many Religious men and women and a Catholic population of about 30,000. The bulk of the Catholic population was concentrated in Aba Urban and its immediate environs.

The Catholic diocese of Aba has recorded some striking progress since its inception in July, 1990, when His Lordship, Most Rev. Vincent Valentine Ezeonyia C.S.Sp, began to pilot the administrative reins. "The Diocese has now about 1.1 million Catholics, 264 priests, 61 parishes which are divided into 6 deaneries for easier and proper administration and management. The diocese equally has a Junior Seminary and one Spiritual Year Seminary. It equally has a handsome number of her sons in the seminaries estimated at about 78 and good number of her daughters in the convents."³⁹³ The diocese has few projects like schools, Oil and Gas stations etc which serve as a sources of income. The diocese of Aba is now 'sede vacante' since the death of the first Bishop, Most Rev. Vincent Ezeonyia, after his 25 years of reign. There is in place now a diocesan Administrator elected by the college of consultors (cann 421, 422) who is in charge of the diocese now (can 427). His name is Very Rev. Fr. Innocent Ajuonu.

IV. Corporate Personal and Community Identity of the Igbo Catholicism

According to a personalistic or corporate personal model of the Church, Church should be understood as a personal being. The identity of local and particular Churches is like a personal being's identity. "The Church is not 'something', she is somebody, a living being, a community of persons. The Church identity creates individual's identity (as Catholics, as members of the Church) and also, in reverse, individual's identity shapes the Church's reality or identity."³⁹⁴ Personalistic or corporate personal identity of a local Church refers especially to all saints, martyrs and blessed people within that local Church. The local Church in Igboland has produced certain persons who are recognised as having an exceptional degree of holiness and

³⁹² Catholic Diocese of Aba, "Brief History of Aba Diocese," in *Aba Catholic Diocesan Website*, accessed 28 March 2017, <http://www.catholicdioceseofaba.org/>.

³⁹³ Catholic Diocese of Aba, "Brief History of Aba Diocese," in *Aba Catholic Diocesan Website*, accessed 28 March 2017, <http://www.catholicdioceseofaba.org/>.

³⁹⁴ Krzysztof Kaucha, "The Identity of Local and Particular Catholic Churches; Methodological Outline," 50.

likeness to God. Their lives and memory kept in the local Church are milestones of her ecclesial identity. Personalistic and corporate personal identity of any local or particular Church is also shaped by ecclesial communities such as congregations, religious movements and Catholic societies active within that local and particular Church. All these are present in the Igbo Catholicism and they help in shaping her corporate personal identity.

1. Blessed from Igboland

The Catholic Church in Igboland being a young though active Church has not produced any saints or martyrs who are officially recognised and proclaimed by the Universal Church as canonical saints and martyrs. However, there are many Catholics in Igboland today who have shed their blood and lost their lives for the sake of Christ and his Gospel. They are martyrs though not yet officially recognised by the Church. However, the Catholic Church in Igboland has produced one blessed who is officially recognised, proclaimed and beatified by the Universal Church as a blessed. One becomes a blessed through the process of beatification. “Beatification is an official act of the Pope and Catholic Church whereby a deceased person is declared to be enjoying the happiness of heaven, and therefore a proper subject of religious honour and public cult in certain places.”³⁹⁵

The local Bishops had the power of beatifying until 1634, when Pope Urban VIII, in the Apostolic Constitution, *Cœlestis Jerusalem* of 6 July, reserved the power of beatifying to the Apostolic See. “Since the reforms of 1983, one miracle must be believed to have taken place through the intercession of the person to be beatified, though the medical investigations of the Church are conducted privately and are therefore subject to speculation about their methods.”³⁹⁶ The Catholic Church canonizes or beatifies only those whose lives have been marked by the exercise of heroic virtue, and only after this has been proved by common repute for sanctity and by conclusive arguments. The only blessed which the Catholic Church in Igboland has produced is Blessed Cyprian Michael Iwene Tansi. He was born in Aguleri, Anambra State, Nigeria in September 1903. He was an Igbo Nigerian ordained a Roman Catholic priest of the Archdiocese of Onitsha, Nigeria on 19 December 1937. He worked in the parishes of Nnewi, Dunukofia, Akpu/Ajalli and Aguleri.

As a priest in Nigeria, he lived a saintly and austere life. He refused to live in a nice home and he used to build his own home using adobe, mud brick or other traditional materials. He used to sleep on an uncomfortable bed containing pieces of stones and hard objects. He did

³⁹⁵ Archdiocese of Onitsha, Nigeria, “Beatification of Cyprian Michael Iwene Tansi,” in *Onitsha Archdiocesan Catholic Website*, accessed February 29, 2017, <https://www.onitsha-archdiocese.org/>.

³⁹⁶ Fabian Peter, *Mother Theresa Miracle Cures nuns*, in: *The Daily Telegraph*, 5 September 2007 accessed May 13, 2017, <https://www.org/wiki/Beatification.com>.

this as an act of self-mortification. “He would eat even poorer food than what the local people ate, surviving on tiny portions of yam. He sometimes had a motorbike provided to him, but he often preferred to use a bicycle or even just to walk. He was not deterred from doing his work by tropical rainstorms. He lived a very poor life as a priest. He spent most of his night praying. He was later a Cistercian Monk at Mount Saint Bernard Monastery in England.”³⁹⁷ He excelled in the life of holiness and virtues. He died in Leicester, England on 24 January 1964. After being recommended by Cardinal Francis Arinze, who was inspired by Tansi as a boy (he had been one of Tansi's students and knew him personally), he was beatified by Pope John Paul II on 22 March 1998, who said, “Blessed Cyprian Michael Tansi is a prime example of the fruits of holiness which have grown and matured in the Church in Igboland Nigeria since the Gospel was first preached in this land. He received the gift of faith through the efforts of the missionaries, and taking the Christian way of life as his own he made it truly African and Nigerian.”³⁹⁸ In 1965, Pope Paul VI named Father Francis Arinze auxiliary Bishop of Onitsha, and two years later as its Archbishop. Calling together several Nigerian priests who had known Tansi, Archbishop Arinze said they must start gathering materials on the life of Cyprian Tansi, with a view to his canonization.

“In 1984, Pope John Paul II called Arinze to Rome to head the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. On his departure, His successor back home, late Most Rev. Stephen Ezeanya opened the cause of canonization for Cyprian Michael Tansi in 1984. The case was well documented, and Michael was declared venerable in 1995.”³⁹⁹ Meanwhile, Tansi’s body had been brought back from England to Nigeria (Onitsha) for reburial. “Now, at Onitsha, there was a young woman named Philomena who worked for the local nuns. She had been operated on unsuccessfully and was declared incurable by her physicians. She could neither eat nor stand nor walk. One of the nuns, Sister Mary, decided to take her to the reinterment service. Philomena had to be carried through the great crowd in the Cathedral cemetery, but she was able to reach out and touch the priest’s coffin (Cyprian Michael Tansi’ coffin). Suddenly Philomena, the cripple stood up, ‘Let’s go to the Mass,’ she said to Sister Mary. There’s no need for anyone to help me. I can walk.”⁴⁰⁰ The crowd marvelled at the miraculous cure and

³⁹⁷ Carole Breslin, “Catholic Heroes.....Blessed Cyprian Michael Iwene Tansi,” *The Wanderer*, 17 January, 2017, accessed 28 February, 2018, <http://thewandererpress.com/saints/catholic-heroes-blessed-cyprian-michael-iwene-tansi>.

³⁹⁸ Pope John Paul II, Homily at the Mass for the Beatification of Father Cyprian Michael Iwene Tansi, 22 March 1998 accessed April 22, 2017, <https://www.onitsha-archdiocese.org/about-us/blessed-cyprian-michael-tansi/157-pope-johnpaul-ii-s-homily-on-beatification-of-tansi>.

³⁹⁹ Robert F. McNamara, “Beatification of the Blessed Michael Iwene Tansi,” in Onitsha Archdiocesan Catholic Website, accessed February 29, 2017, <https://www.onitsha-archdiocese.org/>.

⁴⁰⁰ Robert F. McNamara, “Beatification of the Blessed Michael Iwene Tansi,” in *Onitsha Archdiocesan Catholic Website*, accessed February 29, 2017, <https://www.onitsha-archdiocese.org/>.

healing. Later on, she married and today has three children. She went to Rome in 1990, attended the Pope's Mass, and broke bread with Cardinal Francis Arinze. The miracle was officially recognized by the Roman Congregation for the Causes of Saints in January 1996, and Tansi's beatification took place in Onitsha on March 2, 1998, during the visit of Pope John Paul II to Nigeria. The Igbo Catholics are praying that he may attain canonization as soon as possible.

2. Catholic Communities

One of the strongest elements that is inherent, intrinsic and ontological to the Africans in general and Igbo people in particular is the life of community or communal life. Igbos believe that together they stand but divided they fall. They believe and hold that togetherness is strength. This is why the bond of relationship and extended family ties are so strong among the people of Igboland. These ties and bonds can last for generations. With the arrival of Catholicism with her strong emphasis on love and unity, the communal life among the Igbo Catholics is strengthened and fortified. The strong affinity and communal ties among the members of the Catholic Church in Igboland today is one of the greatest assets that clearly makes the Catholic Church in Igboland unique and special. Igbo Catholicism sees herself as a community. There is strong ties and cooperation among her members. The Catholic Church in Igboland sees herself not only as a community of believers who gather to celebrate the Eucharist and the Sacraments but as brothers and sisters who gather to seek the well-being and betterment of one another especially the sick, the poor and the needy. They believe that the celebration of the Eucharist goes together with both the liturgical meal and 'physical' meal (charity, and material assistance) shared by Christians meeting together in one large unit. For effective evangelization and administration, Catholic communities in Igboland exist in five major forms or levels namely: zones, outstations, parish settings, deaneries and regions.

A. Zones

Zones are the first level of Catholic communities in Igboland. Zones are made up of various kindreds and families within a parish village or outstation. They are the lowest and first level of grassroot evangelization in Igboland after family. Every Catholic is expected to register in his or her zone. Zones are first point of call for clearance or to ascertain the suitability of any Catholic for the reception of any rite in the Church especially the rite of Christian funeral. They are normally headed by a zonal leader who is elected by the members of the zone. The zonal leader work hand in hand with the parish priest and feeds him with the up-dates of what happens in the zone. When there is need for financial contribution for the well-being of the parish or outstation, contributions are normally done on the zonal levels. There are also zonal Masses. Zones also have meetings where the members discuss the challenges facing the Church and

individuals in order to find lasting solutions to them. Zones contribute immensely to the growth of the Christian faith and grassroot evangelization in Igboland today.

B. Outstations

Many mission Churches have outstations as means through which they spread the Good News of Christ. A mission Church is a Church that is not locally self-supporting but that depends at least partially upon the support of mission funds from the larger religious organization that established it. “An Outstation is generally a small group of individuals who have formed a community that at some point would become a parish.”⁴⁰¹ Generally an outstation is an offshoot of a “mother parish” or a completely new community which is started in an area where there had formerly been no Orthodox presence. It does not have an assigned pastor of its own but has a priest, who visits with some regularity, sometimes even weekly. The Catholic Church in Igboland is a mission Church and as such, she does not have parishes in many rural and remote areas. There are many hinterlands in Igboland where parishes have not been established because of lack of numerical strength and financial capacity of the people to build the church and maintain the priests and the workers in the church. These Catholic communities in remote areas in Igboland cannot sustain themselves financially without significant assistance from external groups. In these situations, most of them are funded primarily through funds from the mother parish and diocese, since Catholic congregations there are generally too poor to support themselves.

Generally in Igboland, outstations are avenues through which the Gospel of Christ is transmitted and propagated in the remote areas. An outstation is a very simple structure, usually made of some kind of brick. Most don’t have covered windows, and a few don’t even have doors with locks. The outstation is assigned to one of the existing parishes, and the parish priest has an obligation to visit the outstation as frequently as is possible. The number of outstations in Igboland today is no longer as many as it used to be. Outstations are, by definition, not self-supporting. When an outstation has grown sufficiently that it can support a priest of its own, can purchase a facility of its own, is capable of paying for administrators and can provide the personnel to fill the administrative roles for the outstation, the outstation is elevated to the status of a ‘parish’ of its own and a priest is assigned there.

⁴⁰¹ Ignatius Igboaja, *Outstations and its Importance in the Spread of Catholic Faith in Igboland* (Enugu: Snaap Press, 2000), 16.

C. Parishes

In the Roman Catholic Church, “a parish (Latin: *parochus*) is a stable community of the faithful within a particular Church, whose pastoral care has been entrusted to a parish priest (Latin: *pastor*), under the authority of the diocesan bishop.”⁴⁰² “It is the lowest ecclesiastical subdivision in the Catholic episcopal polity, and the primary constituent unit of a diocese.”⁴⁰³ “The parish priest is the proper clergyman in charge of the congregation of the parish entrusted to him. He exercises the pastoral care of the community entrusted to him under the authority of the diocesan bishop, whose ministry of Christ he is called to share, so that for this community he may carry out the offices of teaching, sanctifying and ruling in accordance with the law.”⁴⁰⁴ For the Catholics in Igboland, “parish is the place which manifests the communion of various groups and movements, which find in it spiritual sustenance and material support. Priests and lay people are always encouraged to see to it that parish life is harmonious, expressing the Church as Family, where all devote themselves to the worship of God and service of humanity.”⁴⁰⁵

For the Igbo Catholics, parish is not simply a place, a location, a Church building – a nice backdrop to wedding and funerals. It is not just where we go for Masses on Sundays and weekdays – a sort of sacramental service station. The communal and charitable aspect of parish life is very much emphasized in Igboland. Through these practical help, charitable acts and works of mercy, many pagans and people of other denominations have been won and are still being won over to the Catholic Church. It is a practical gospel. Catholics in Igboland believe that every parish belongs to a wider Church of the diocese. And that diocese in turn is in communion with the wider universal Church. Priests, representing the diocesan bishop, make that bond visible when they preside at the Eucharist. For priests and the people alike, the parish Eucharist is the sacramental bond, through which the parish is in full communion with the whole Church. Now we can see how family, community and communion are interconnected. In Baptism we become members of God’s family. At the Eucharist we become a community of faith. As the Body of Christ we become the living presence of Christ in the world around us.

D. Deaneries

Deaneries are made up of several parishes joined together. Deaneries just like parishes are created by the diocesan bishop. These deaneries serve as administrative synergies which help diocesan bishop in the running of the diocese. They serve as important structures and valuable

⁴⁰² 1983 *Code of Canon Law*, no. 515.

⁴⁰³ 1983 *Code of Canon Law*, no. 515.

⁴⁰⁴ 1983 *Code of Canon Law*, no. 519.

⁴⁰⁵ Okoye, Emmanuel, e-mail to the researcher, 19 May, 2017. Ukp, Nigeria.

organs in delivering the goods and services of the Church to the people. Deanery formations assist the local Church of a diocese to discharge its responsibilities to and for the people of God. They contribute efficiently in the grassroots evangelization also. Deaneries are manned by the administrative personalities that are composed of the clergy and the laity. Every deanery is headed by a priest called a dean who is appointed by a diocesan bishop. He helps the bishop in running the diocese by supplying him with information on what happens on the deanery level. Also, all the lay organisations and societies like C.W.O, C.M.O, C.Y.O, etc have also their deanery umbrellas which are headed by the deanery organizer, deanery C.M.O president and deanery C.Y.O president respectively. The members of every deanery are representatives (vice chairmen and secretaries) from all the parishes that make up the deanery. Several deaneries joined together within a diocese help in the formation of regions within the diocese.

E. Regions

In the regional structure of the dioceses in Igboland, a number of deaneries are yoked together (naturally by their geographic proximity) to form a bloc or a unit of administration called a region under the supervision of the regional co-ordinator or episcopal vicar. “The regional arrangement is geared towards achieving some measure of decentralisation of administration and effective grassroot evangelization in the running of the dioceses in Igboland.”⁴⁰⁶ Regional co-ordinators and episcopal vicars oversee the administration of the regions. They are allowed some measure of jurisdiction by the diocesan bishop, as they represent him and make his presence and concern felt in the pastoral affairs of the diocese. In Igbo Catholicism, the regional co-ordinators, episcopal vicars, deans and members of the diocesan curia are seen as proper assistants to the diocesan bishop in attending to the proper running of the diocese. In running a diocese, a bishop not only takes into confidence his team of consultors, he also seeks the opinions of the regional co-ordinators and deans. So, in Igbo Catholicism, the order is from zone to the parish or outstation as the case may be, to the deanery, to the region and finally to the diocese or Archdiocese. It is advised that any problem, challenge or even progress is reported following the above mentioned order. However, any person is free to meet the dean or the regional co-ordinator or the bishop without following the order. Various regions joined together make up a diocese in Igboland today.

3. Religious Congregations in Igboland

The limited number of priests created the need for the establishment of the indigenous religious congregations for men and women who will help in the work of evangelization. Hence, some

⁴⁰⁶ Wenceslaus Ofojebe and Fabian Obi. ed., *A Short History of the Catholic Diocese of Awka at Forty*, 81.

of the religious congregations for men and women were established. They include: Sisters of the Handmaids, Daughters of Mary Mother of Mercy, Daughters of Divine Love etc for women and Brothers of St. Peter Claver and St. Stephen for men. They are discussed below.

A. Women Religious Congregations

Many things go into the making of women religious congregations namely: an original inspiration, a charism that gives the congregation its corporate identity, the permission to begin and approval by ecclesiastical authority and the formation of the members in the way of religious life. Equally, the training and formation were to be undertaken by the women themselves. Having fulfilled these requirements therefore, there are many women religious congregations in Igboland presently.

The first among them is Sisters of the Handmaids of Holy Child Jesus. The first indigenous religious congregation ever founded in Igboland is the Handmaid Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus. “The inspiration and foundation stone which later matured to be congregation of the Handmaids of the Holy Child Jesus was laid by Sr. Mary Charles Walker in 1931, when she received its first four foundation members as aspirants.”⁴⁰⁷ On 21 April, 1940, the first set of four made their first religious profession. The congregation of the Handmaids of the Holy Child Jesus has spread to many parts of Igboland and beyond. The congregation has also produced catechists, teachers, nurses, medical doctors and social workers to work among various groups of people in the Dioceses where they work. Their major apostolate is teaching and hospital apostolate.

Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary is the second women religious congregation in Igboland. This congregation was founded by Bishop Charles Heerey. Like the mustard seed of the Gospel, the congregation has grown from its cradle in Ihiala in 1937 to a big tree with branches spreading to many Dioceses in Nigeria and beyond. “Under the guidance of the Irish Holy Rosary Sisters, the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary opened a novitiate at Urualla in 1944, which was later transferred to Nkpor in 1972.”⁴⁰⁸ This congregation has also produced many medical doctors, nurses, teachers and social workers. Their mission and vision is mainly in the hospitals and schools. The third women congregation that was established in Igboland is Daughters of Mary Mother of Mercy Sisters (D.M.M.M). The congregation of Daughters of Mary Mother of Mercy Sisters was founded by late Bishop Anthony Nwedo on 29 December, 1961. When Bishop Nwedo found it very hard to obtain religious personnel for the works of his diocese as a result of many expatriate missionaries and priests expelled from Biafra at the

⁴⁰⁷ Eke, “Priestly and Religious Vocations”, 316.

⁴⁰⁸ Eke, “Priestly and Religious Vocations”, 320.

end of the Civil War, he appealed to the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, got their permission and founded a new congregation which he gave the name - Daughters of Mary Mother of Mercy (D.M.M.M) “Thanks to the Sisters of St. Peter Claver who assisted in the formation of the congregation.”⁴⁰⁹ Like the sister religious congregations established in Igboland, the Daughters of Mary Mother of Mercy congregation witnessed a rapid a growth. From their home base in Umuahia diocese, the D.M.M.M sisters have carried their mission to many Dioceses in Nigeria and beyond. Their mission is mainly the formation of young children in the school system and hospitals.

The fourth women religious congregation is Daughters of Divine Love Sisters (D.D.L) “The congregation of the Daughters of Divine Love was founded by the late Bishop Godfrey Okoye on 16 July, 1969 during the Nigerian civil war.”⁴¹⁰ “The founder’s desire was to found a community of religious women who will live out, bear witness and propagate the infinite love of God for mankind especially as manifest in the Incarnation, hence the name ‘Daughters of Divine Love.’”⁴¹¹ The first set of these sisters were professed on 4 November, 1973. This was also the very year their founder died. Just like other women religious congregations in Igboland, the Daughters of Divine Love congregation work in various parts of the world as nurses, teachers and catechists.

The fifth female congregation to come to Igboland is Sisters of Charity. Rev. Father Dennis Ononuju, an Igbo priest was the founder of the Sisters of Charity congregation. “He began this religious congregation in 1982 in St. Paul Catholic Church Owerri in his bid and effort to support indigenous apostolate especially in the areas where financial constraints hinder the spread of the Gospel.”⁴¹² The apostolate of this religious congregations is to care for the poor, the sick, the less privileged members of the society, orphans and motherless babies. Most outstanding in Igboland today is the motherless babies’ home in Nekede which this congregation built and manages. This home accommodates unwanted babies and children and offers them the chance to live on. Another female congregation in Igboland is Sisters of Jesus Our Saviour. Sisters of Jesus Our Saviour congregation was born out of the need to care for the sick, the needy and the less-privileged. It was founded by an indigenous Holy Ghost priest, Rev. Father Emmanuel Ede in 1985 out of the need for proper care of the abandoned, the sick and the needy. Among the women religious congregations in Nigeria is also Carmelite Sisters. This congregation was established by Bishop Mark Unegbu in 1974. Its members working in

⁴⁰⁹ Chigere, *Foreign Missionary Background and Indigenous Evangelization in Igboland*, 293.

⁴¹⁰ Eke, “Priestly and Religious Vocations”, 322.

⁴¹¹ Eke, “Priestly and Religious Vocations”, 322.

⁴¹² Chigere, *Foreign Missionary Background and Indigenous Evangelization in Igboland*, 293.

various parts of Nigeria as nurses and teachers. This congregation has also contributed immensely in the spread of the faith in Igboland.

B. Men Religious Congregations

There are also many men religious congregations in Igboland today. The efforts of the Bishop Shanahan to Catholicism an Igbo Apostolate was complemented and fulfilled by the successes of his successor, Bishop Heerey in this direction. Through his effort, “the first men religious congregation- Brothers of St. Peter Claver was inaugurated in 1943 as Pious Union of Brothers Associate.”⁴¹³ The members of this religious congregation were those who were following and helping the missionaries since 1920’s either as houseboys or catechists or even both as case may be. This congregation yielded immediate fruit through their active involvement in the evangelization. However, the activities began to wane down as a result of lack of new members. The congregation finally came to an end in 1956.

The second men congregation that was established in Igboland was Marist Brothers of Schools. It was established in 1948. Its apostolate includes schools and hospitals. Another men religious congregation that exists in Igboland today is Brothers of St. Stephen. With the split of Onitsha Vicariate into two in 1948, the congregation of the Brothers of St. Peter Claver fell to the Owerri Archdiocese. Hence, there was need to establish men religious congregation in the Archdiocese of Onitsha. This singular need led to the establishment of the congregation of the Brothers of St. Stephen. This religious congregation helps in the spread of the faith in the Onitsha Archdiocese and beyond. They work in the parishes, helping priests in their capacities as brothers.

4. Religious Movements and Societies

“The early missionaries found the Igbo people quite religious. Their entire life speaks out clearly about their proven religious dispositions and tendencies.”⁴¹⁴ Right now, the Igbo people are being urged to encourage many Christian popular devotional pieties and practices as a healthy strategy to the evangelization. The spread of the kingdom of God, a major task of the Church is done by both individuals and groups in Igboland not just by words only but through other pious group actions. “Today, many pious and religious movements and societies have been established in Igboland and each of them is always enjoined to do its best in the spread of the Gospel in Igboland.”⁴¹⁵ Generally, these religious and pious societies are called upon to

⁴¹³ Njoku, *The Advent of the Catholic Church in Nigeria: Its Growth in Owerri Diocese*, 240.

⁴¹⁴ Chigere, *Foreign Missionary Background and Indigenous Evangelization in Igboland*, 501.

⁴¹⁵ Gabriel Afolabi Ojo, “The Emergency of the Laity Organization in Nigeria,” in *The History of the Catholic Church in Nigeria*, ed. Alexius Makozi & Gabriel Ojo (Lagoo: Macmillan Nigeria Publishers Limited, 1982), 74.

offer the local Church in Igboland and beyond a lively contribution. Among the Igbo Catholics, Marian devotions are very popular. The proclamation of Mary as the new Eve began with saint Ireneaus and Justin in the 2nd century. More insights appeared later by the painting in the catacombs about Mary. They therefore served as the new forces that opened vistas to devotion and honour of Mary towards the 4th century. Marian devotion was introduced by the Catholic pioneer missionaries in Igboland. Holy Rosary was made the major Catholic devotional piety by the missionaries. Among the Igbo Catholics, the Holy Rosary is a special Christian community spirituality, second to the Holy Mass. Out of this common piety, various Marian movements and societies have originated.

The first among them is Legion of Mary. The ancient Marian Association called Legion has remained one of the ancient practices in the Catholic Church. “The Legion of Mary was introduced in Igboland in 1933 at Ifuho in Ikot Ekpene Diocese jointly by Father James Moynagh (late Bishop of Calabar) and Father Peadar.”⁴¹⁶ The Legion of Mary as an association is widely spread in Igboland. It assists in conversions, solidification, exhortation and edification of fellow Christians. The members of this association are the champions of rural evangelization in Igboland. The teaching of catechism is one of their major apostolates in the parishes and outstations. They prepare the candidates for the various sacraments. They also offer some spiritual and financial assistance to the sick and poor. They also visit the fallen Catholics and Christians and give them some words of encouragement in order to bring them back to faith. They help to inform the parish priest about any abnormal or fetish practice among the Catholics in a particular parish or area. The members serve as eyes of the parish priests. Their roles in the work of evangelization are indeed indispensable. This association consists of both junior and senior preasidia made of both active and auxiliary members, and within the diocese, they are divided into associations called curia which must belong to the ecclesiastical and regional zones.

The second prominent and widely spread religious society in Igboland is Block Rosary Crusade. The Rosary prayer became very strong among Christians in the middle ages especially with the spread of Marian devotions and movement and the rise of monasticism. The apparition of Mary at Fatima in Portugal also added impetus to this age-long Christian tradition. “Moreover, the saying of the Rosary was directed towards the conversion of Russia whose communist influences as well as the feelings of another extensive war which was raging in the

⁴¹⁶ Nwosu, “The Laity and Church Growth,” in *A Hundred Years Of The Catholic Church in Eastern Nigeria 1885-1985*, ed. Celestine Obi (Onitsha: Africana-Fep Publishers Ltd, 1985), 343.

early 20th century.”⁴¹⁷ It became a combatant means of fighting godlessness, hence the name Block Rosary Crusade. “In Igboland, the Block Rosary Crusade as a movement began during the Nigerian-Biafra war especially by women and children who were exempt from shooting in the battle field.”⁴¹⁸ The new movement attained its height in 1970 after the war. Families were then forced by the threatening events to be together in their homes and pray the rosary. Rosary was then made to assume a family and community devotion in the indigenous apostolate. This Block Rosary Crusade has spread to all parts of Igboland. The third religious society prominent in Igboland today is Blue Army of Our Lady. This religious association also functions as a wing of the Confraternity of the Most Holy Rosary. It is a strong and popular Marian devotion among the people of Igboland. The members gather also twice in a week to pray their Rosary together in order to give honour to the Blessed Virgin Mary as well as to pray for the conversion of all the sinners.

Another pious society in Igboland is Sacred Heart of Jesus. This is also a popular and wide spread religious society in Igboland. The devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus began in the middle Ages with acclaimed private apparitions and revelations of Jesus Himself to the Visitandine St. Margaret Alacoque at Paray-le Monial in 1673-1675. Its spread to missionary areas and fields began with the understanding of Pope Pius XI and his committed prescriptions for celebration as a feast of Reparation on Friday. This spirituality and popular devotion was extended to Nigeria by the erstwhile missionaries. Just like Legion of Mary, the Sacred Heart of Jesus is one of the oldest and most lively pious associations in Igboland. Membership is open to all categories of persons, men and women alike, children and adults. Many families are also dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The members of this League are equally admonished to function as agents of evangelization and conversions. They are called to help strengthen many Igbo Catholics and Christians whose faith in God is getting more tenuous due to hardships of the modern times, spiritually and temporally. Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus is akin to other associations, the Pioneer Abstinence as well as Precious Blood League. The members always gather on Fridays for the spiritual devotions and activities.

Furthermore, there is also a strong religious movement in Igboland called Catholic Charismatic Religious Movement. The origin of the Catholic Charismatic Movement in Nigeria traces its beginning to the group-gatherings to pray together. It began significantly in Ibadan in 1981 where Fr. Riley made possible arrangements for some Catholics to gather together apart from the common ceremonies to give themselves in prayer. The Charismatic

⁴¹⁷ Chigere, *Foreign Missionary Background and Indigenous Evangelization in Igboland*, 504.

⁴¹⁸ Chigere, *Foreign Missionary Background and Indigenous Evangelization in Igboland*, 504.

Renewal Movement appears to be the newest arrival among the many purely pious societies in Igboland. It really came with new forces and outlook and aims at quickly conquering all moral weakness. The members of this group are so ecstatic and loud in both approach and execution of their activities. They emphasize healing and speaking in tongues. They are always very lively and enthusiastic. The members always believe that they are inspired and controlled by the Holy Spirit. They gather mostly on Mondays and Fridays for their weekly prayers. Another religious movement in Igboland is Purgatorian Society. The tradition of respecting the dead especially through a befitting burial and funeral ceremonies has always been cherished by the Catholics in Igboland. Also the devotions of prayer and offerings for the dead are very strong among the Igbos. Works of charity and prayers are dedicated to God on behalf of the dead, in order to beg God to free them from their sins. This is exactly the work and duty of the purgatorian society. They offer sacrifices, prayers and Holy Masses for the dead in Purgatory, asking and begging God to cleanse them of their sins and receive them into His kingdom. This pious society is also very strong in Igboland.

Summary

In summary, chapter three deals with both the moral and theological identity of the Catholic Church in Igboland. It begins by giving the meaning of the term- morality. Morality has to do with manner, character or action considered as being good or bad. An action can be morally good or morally bad depending on the nature of the action itself, the intention of the action and the circumstance under which the action is performed. They are the three factors that determine the moral rightness or moral wrongness of an action. The same chapter three goes further to treat the moral life of the Igbo people before Christianity. It makes it clear that Igbo people had a good moral understanding prior to the arrival of the Christianity. Igbo as a nation has tradition, customs, values and high sense of morality. The people of Igboland esteem order and harmony. They have their moral norms, dos and don'ts which are contained in their moral code called 'Omenala'. This word 'Omenala' is used to describe all the beliefs, customs, conducts and morals that bind the Igbo people together. It tells the people the good things to do and the bad things to avoid.

In Igbo traditional setting also, honesty, humility and love of neighbour are also highly encouraged. Igbos believe strongly that God punishes those who do evil and rewards those who do good. This is why everyone is encouraged to do good and avoid evil. Chapter three also makes it clear that the people of Igboland have a moral understanding similar to that of the Christianity and this is why they never found it very difficult to accept the Christian morality when the early missionaries came. Like the Universal Church, the Church in Igboland also sees

the Ten Commandment found in the Hebrew Scriptures as the basic groundwork for morality and for all moral doings. Morally speaking, the Universal Church and the Catholic Church in Igboland have the same moral identity. This really gives the local Church in Igboland a high sense of credibility. Going further, the chapter three discusses the theological identity of the Catholic Church in Igboland. Theological identity is the most important aspect which every local Church ought to have in common with the Universal Church. Any local Church that does not have the same theological identity with the universal Church lacks the essence and credibility and as such cannot be regarded as a part of the true Church founded by Christ. This chapter makes it clear that the local Church in Igboland has her local and particular theological identity as a local and particular Church but these local and particular theological identities are line with the theological identities of the Universal Church. It states the particular theological (ecclesiological) identities of the Church in Igboland as: members of God's family, adopted children of God, disciples of Jesus, an enduring Church in hope of eternal glory, a source of Christ's light in Igboland, her awareness to her call to holiness, her call to evangelization and mission, her call to love, charity, mercy, service and moral life and finally that the Church in Igboland is kingdom-centered.

The chapter goes further to state the nature, features and identities of the two ecclesiastical provinces (Archdioceses) in Igboland which include Onitsha and Owerri ecclesiastical provinces as well as the eleven dioceses that make up these two ecclesiastical provinces. These dioceses include: Enugu, Abakaliki, Awka, Nsukka, Nnewi, Awgu, Umuahia, Orlu, Okigwe, Ahiara and Aba. Further still, the chapter concludes by stating the corporate personal and community identity of the Igbo Catholicism. Among the special individuals whose heroic and virtuous lives have really given an evident testimony and credibility to the Catholic Church in Igboland is blessed Cyprain Michael Iwene Tansi. The chapter further examines various levels of Catholic communities namely: zones, outstations, parishes, deaneries and regions. Finally, it presents and discusses various congregations and religious societies that exist in Igboland.

CHAPTER FOUR

PASTORAL IDENTITY IN THE CONTEXT OF CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES

Pastoral identity of a local Church denotes her pastoral needs, goals, activities, strategies, achievements and experiences. It is usually shaped by the pastoral challenges and difficulties faced by a local Church. These pastoral challenges as well as goals and objectives usually determine the pastoral methods and strategies to be adopted by each local Church. Pastoral strategies and initiatives are directed towards the evangelization of the people. Evangelization simply means to make Christ and his Gospel present and known to a particular people or locality. In evangelization, the Church fulfils her missionary role. Mission is essentially the self-communication and self-giving of God to humans. In communicating and giving his very being to humans, God has willed to use the Word, who became Christ as the only mediator and saviour. The Church is the first and most blessed beneficiary of God's self-communication and self-giving.

According to Pope Paul VI, the Church born of a mission, 'Christ mission' is sent and called to prolong and continue the saving mission of Christ himself in the power of the Holy Spirit. Thus. The whole Church has received the mission to evangelize.⁴¹⁹ For this reason, the Church has the obligation to keep alive its missionary spirit. The Igbo local Church has her missionary strategies which she uses in the evangelization of the Igbo people. These methods and strategies contribute in shaping her pastoral identity. To be discussed under the pastoral identity in the context of contemporary challenges are: pastoral methods and evangelization strategies of the Igbo Catholicism, challenges and obstacles to the identity of the Catholic Church in Igboland, ways to achieve true and full identity of the Igbo Catholicism as well as critical reflection on the present identity of the Catholic Church in Igboland.

I. Pastoral Methods and Evangelization Strategies of the Igbo Catholicism

The Catholic Church in Igboland has her unique pastoral strategies and methods which have aided in fast and quick spread of Christ and his Gospel in the entire Igboland ever since the early Catholic missionaries left the land. These pastoral strategies and methods include: grassroots evangelization, home and zonal visitations, honorary recognition and awards, bazaar and launching, project Sunday, other spiritual exercises like retreats, seminars, workshops, lectures and conferences.

First, Grassroots Evangelization: When the early Catholic missionaries finally left the Igboland as a result of war in 1970, there was a limited number of Catholics among the native

⁴¹⁹ Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, nos 15 & 51.

Igbo people. Some foreign missionaries who knew Igboland well were pessimistic about the possibility of launching a deep Catholicism there. On this Nwakamma observed, “The indigenous clergy will have little chance of making new converts in this part of the country. The best strategy will be to bring in some Christians from the west, where the Church has long been established. Their presence will give new respectability to Christians here. That’s the only way they can hope to have any success.”⁴²⁰ This advice was not heeded. Instead, the local clergy embarked on grassroots evangelization. From the start, they strove to build up the Church with local people who accepted the Gospel. The local clergy and missionaries knew that a living local Church cannot be imported. It must take root and grow among the people. Evangelization must embrace every aspect of their lives: economic growth, cultural development, social awakening, and fellowship in faith.

Today, the local clergy have watched their missionary vision slowly bear fruit. The Catholic community of Igboland has grown from about 80,000 members in 1970, most of whom came from outside in search of jobs, to over 14.1 million, the majority of them, new converts to Catholicism from among the local people. In Grass-root evangelization method, the clergy are called upon to reach out to their people in their various places of living. They do not need to wait for the people to come to them. They are expected to share and feel with the people in their poverty and sufferings, in their difficulties, in their sickness and in their agony. In this method, the clergy are called upon to visit and associate with all both the rich and the poor, the sick and the healthy, the big and the small. Everybody is carried along and given equal attention, even the poorest of the poor and social outcasts. They are called to always look for the best ways to help their people both spiritually and economically.

Another pastoral strategy used in Igboland today are Home and Zonal Visitations. “Under this strategy, the priests in Igboland are required to visit the homes of their parishioners and Catholic faithful. They are encouraged to visit them in their homes, discuss with them, know their problems both spiritual and temporal and offer the best advice and solutions they can.”⁴²¹ They are also urged to pray for the family members and give Holy Communion to the sick. This pastoral act is usually a source of great encouragement and motivation to the people. They feel belonged and recognised. This pastoral ingenuity helps to increase the effort and desire of the Catholics in Igboland to be more ardent and faithful members of the Church. This also helps the priests to know the members of their community and their problems for better and more fruitful pastoral care and attention. Also, every parish in Igboland today is divided

⁴²⁰ Fidelis Nwakamma, *Evangelising Mission of the Church in Igboland* (Owerri: Assumpta Press, 1998), 63.

⁴²¹ Emmanuel Okoye, e-mail to the researcher, 19 May, 2017.

into various zones. The parish priests and their vicars normally organise zonal visitations and Masses. These also give both the clergy and the zonal members the opportunity to come together, know themselves better on a close range, know their problems, make suggestions on the best pastoral methods to be used in order to build a stronger faith, deeper love, lasting peace and more communal life among the people. Zonal visitations also give the priests the opportunity to understand them and then be able to carry them along.

Another vital pastoral strategy in Igboland is Honorary Recognition and Awards. “This is simply giving honour and recognition to those who have distinguished themselves in the works of excellence, virtues and, charity and who have contributed immensely in various ways in building up the parish or diocese either through monetary assistance, advice, selfless services and personal contributions.”⁴²² Such titles and honours as ‘Nneoma’ and ‘Ezinne’ (worthy mother), ‘Nne Okwukwe’ (mother of faith) and ‘Ide’ (pillar of the Church) are given to men and women who have distinguished themselves in the service of God and humanity. On the diocesan level also, such awards like papal knights (Knights of Saints Sylvester and Gregory) and lady auxiliaries are given to men and women who have contributed immensely in the building of the diocese (both spiritually and materially) either through monetary assistance, personal service to the diocese or exemplary life. These awards, honours and recognitions are very good pastoral strategies in Igboland today because they are signs to these benefactors and benefactresses that their excellent services and virtuous contributions are very well recognised and appreciated. This in turn will help to encourage and motivate the recipients to continue in their excellent services, exemplary lives and works of charity. This strategy also serves as a source of motivation to others to follow the same line.

More still, Bazaar and Launching are another pastoral strategies in Igboland today. “In order to continue the work of evangelization which most often require a huge amount of money and financial demands, Bazaar sales and Launching are organised both in the diocesan and parish levels.”⁴²³ Bazaar sales normally take place towards the end of the year. It is also called thanksgiving because it is the period when people give to God out of what He has blessed them with through the year. People offer material items like television, cars, cow, tubers of yam to God and in turn buy these items back in prices. Through these voluntary sacrifices, people contribute to the work of God. Also during launching, people donate money to see that the work of evangelization continues. The great advantage of this strategy is that nobody is given any financial obligation. Each person buys or donates willingly according to his or her financial

⁴²² Cynthia Idemobi, *Lecture at the Annual General Meeting of the Catholic Women Organisation, St. Joseph's Parish Oraukwu* (Enugu: Potter's Publications, 2016), 23.

⁴²³ Cyprain Okoye, e-mail to the researcher, March 21, 2017.

capacity. In this method, the rich make the financial aspect of the Church easier for the poor, who otherwise would have been levied heavily. Experience has shown that taxing people heavily in the Church especially the poor ones can send them out of the Church. In addition to the above mentioned is also, what is called Project Sunday. This is a common agreement among all the bishops in Nigeria. Normally, a Sunday is brought out every month in which people of God are urged and encouraged to donate generously for the work and maintenance of the parish and parish workers. People willing donate and contribute according to their capacity. Nobody is forced and coerced to donate. Through this strategy, the financial burden of the parish is made lighter and easier for everyone especially the poor.

Again, hospital apostolate and visitation is another pastoral strategy that has really won the hearts of many people to the Catholic Church. In America and some parts of Europe, priests who work in the hospitals and administer sacraments to the sick are paid. This is not so in Igboland. In Igboland today, many communities and towns have hospitals. The priests who work in these towns are also obliged in conscience to visit these hospitals from time to time, celebrate Holy Mass for the sick and workers and also administer the sacraments. They do this without being paid. Further still, retreats and other programmes like seminars, workshops, conferences and lectures are important pastoral strategies in Igboland today. Through these programmes, the spiritual lives of the parishioners are nourished as well as sustained.

II. Challenges and Obstacles to the Identity of the Catholic Church in Igboland

The Universal Church is faced with lots of challenges and crisis which really affect her identity. Such challenges are sexual scandals, gay marriages etc. These challenges affect the identity and credibility of the Universal Church. Similarly, every local Church has her own peculiar challenges which question her credibility, muddle her identity and weaken her mission. Today, there are many challenges and obstacles that endanger the mission and blur the real identity of the Catholic Church in Igboland. The haze, mist and smudge seen in the theological and liturgical life of the Catholic Church in Igboland make her real identity and mission very vague, misty and obscure. The question of the real and true identity of the Catholic Church in Igboland especially in the area of theological identity and liturgical life which define the essence of the Catholic Church, is one that needs urgent ecclesiastical solution in Igboland today. This is particularly so as Iloh avers that “people who are not self-conscious and who cannot define where they stand in their cultural and religious identity from a human point of view, cannot really and concretely take control of their fate and future in the historical process.”⁴²⁴ A lack

⁴²⁴ Stan Iloh, *The Face of Africa: Looking Beyond the Shadows* (Ibadan: Spectrum Press, 2008), 39.

of clear identity creates religious bereavement, leaving people with fragment systems, a vague sense of right or wrong and a lack of direction. Looking at the mission, challenges, difficulties and weaknesses of the Igbo Catholicism today, one may be forced to ask, what is the identity of the Catholic Church in Igboland? Or in other word, has the Catholic Church in Igboland attained her real and clear identity as a local Church in Igboland and not as a local Church in Texas?

Considering the challenges, difficulties, weaknesses and failures of the Igbo Catholicism, it cannot rightly be said that she has indeed discovered and attained her true and clear identity despite the successes and achievements she has recorded. Some of these challenges and weaknesses arise due to inability of the indigenous clergy and faithful to engage in authentic and significant inculturation since the exit of the Catholic foreign missionaries. “According to Vatican II mission theology of sowing the Good News, “inculturation means allowing the word proclaimed to grow and mature using the soil nutrients of the place where it is being planted.”⁴²⁵ Considering the context at hand, this implies that the Gospel brought to the Igboland by the foreign missionaries ought to grow using the nutrients of Igbo soil. In other words, inculturation implies that Christianity can take root in the new culture only if it assumes those cultural forms. In inculturation process, there is need for a critical symbiosis. The faith criticizes the culture and the culture enriches the Christian faith. Inculturation will be discussed in details below under inculturation and its relevance to true self identity of the Igbo Catholicism. As mentioned above, Igbo Catholicism suffers heavily from inadequate inculturation. Thus, inadequate inculturation and other challenges which blur the true identity of the Igbo Catholicism will be discussed below.

1. Inadequate Inculturation

According to Ozigboh, “the failure to engage in an authentic and meaningful inculturation since the exit of the Catholic foreign missionaries by the indigenous clergy is the greatest challenge which the Catholic Church in Igboland has today. This failure is also the greatest indictment and weakness of the indigenous missionaries who took over the evangelization and missionary work in the Catholic Church in Igboland from the foreign missionaries.”⁴²⁶ This is because the task of inculturating and incarnating the Gospel in local cultures lies principally with the local hierarchies under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and in communion with the Universal Church and not with outsiders (foreign missionaries). In other word, the primary agent of inculturation

⁴²⁵ Francis Oborji, *Concepts of Mission, The Evolution of Contemporary Missiology* (Maryknoll; New York: Orbis Books, 2006), 110.

⁴²⁶ Ozigboh, *Igbo Catholicism: The Onitsha Connection 1967-1984*, 62.

is the local Church. The early Catholic missionaries sowed the seed of Catholic faith and played a vital role in the development of Igboland and Nigeria in general. This is evident in the numerous and selfless sacrifices and services they made. They brought and planted the seed of the Catholic faith in Igboland. They also came up with school policy and medical services which helped so much in the development of the Igbo society. The people of Igboland are where they are today because of the great sacrifices and developmental efforts of these early missionaries. Under these foreign missionaries, many mission houses (Onitsha Basilica) were equally erected in Igboland and many Igbo sons were ordained priests.

These foreign missionaries also worked so hard that, at their exit, an indigenous Archbishop (Archbishop Francis Arinze) became their successor, and took the mantle of leadership in Igbo Catholicism. The Holy Ghost missionaries regarded the event as the culmination of their effort and the fulfilment of their mission in Igboland. Their joy was expressed in these words, “The Holy Ghost Fathers at home and on the mission and their missionary associates, rejoice in the fulfilment marked by the appointment of an Igbo priest to the exalted office. Our aim as missionaries is to bring the Gospel to people who are far away and till the soil and sow the seed. The work of nurture, stabilisation and furtherance must come from the native hierarchy and priests. Bishop Shanahan and Archbishop Heerey and those who worked with them tilled and sowed. Their greatest monument is the Cathedral Church of Onitsha, their achievement is embodied in its young Archbishop.... Under him the Archdiocese and the ecclesiastical territory of which he is the metropolitan will come to maturity.”⁴²⁷ Going by their word, the Holy Ghost missionaries knew very well that they have really done their best. They have indeed tilled the land and sowed the seed- the Catholic faith.

The work of inculturation and stabilisation should come from the local and indigenous clergy who know best the values, customs and socio-cultural environment of their people. There is a border to which a foreigner cannot go in the work of inculturation and stabilisation. According to Izuegbunam, “In the area of catechesis, the role and responsibility of the indigenous missionaries are inestimable. In the process of inculturation, stabilisation and furtherance of the Gospel, there is a limit beyond which, a foreigner cannot go. Our expatriate missionaries, particularly the pioneers did their best but the indigenous missionaries who took over from them have not done very well regarding the preservation of Igbo Catholic identity.”⁴²⁸ It is often said that the critical reason for appointing indigenous people as missionaries in their native country and to lead their Churches is to enable them to inculturate

⁴²⁷ Okon, “Expansion and Consolidation: Growth in Onitsha, Calabar, Owerri, Ogoja and Umuahia,” 186-187.

⁴²⁸ Paul Izuegbunam, “The Missionary Impact in the Development of the Igbo Identity: The Dialects of Change and Continuity,” *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, no. 4 (2015), 10.

the Christian religion to the genius and culture of their people. Writing about this, Ozigboh observed that “linked as they are, by bonds of origin, character, feeling and inclination, they (indigenous missionaries) possess exceptional opportunities for introducing the faith to the minds and lives of their own people whom they know better than the foreign missionaries.”⁴²⁹ Hence, the responsibility of initiating and sustaining the Igbo Catholic identity and marring the acceptable Igbo cultural practices with the Gospel message which will enhance quick and easy spread of the Catholic faith as well as its in-depth assimilation in Igboland rest on the indigenous missionaries and Christians.

With the demise of the Archbishop Heerey, the last foreign missionary in Igboland and with the eruption of the civil war in 1967, many expatriate missionaries were expelled from Igboland. Indigenous and native drivers (indigenous priests) were given the steering and the road was cleared of possible sources of obstruction-the expatriate missionaries. The part became velar though rugged and difficult. The task to which the new crop of Igbo Catholic leaders were set was not an easy one. It required accuracy, focus, courage and patience. These indigenous priests and missionaries obviously have continued to do their best but they have really missed out on the most pressing task of the day-adequate and authentic inculturation. And ever since then, the Igbo Catholicism has continued to struggle in order to gain her balance and identity. According to Ozigboh, “The Igbo indigenous missionaries especially the early ones failed to identify very clearly from the outset, the historical thrust open to them and the most yawning vacuum that needed filling in the missionary endeavours of their expatriate missionaries. As it was, they merely hit the old track and sought to perfect the pet ideas and programmes of their missionary predecessors.”⁴³⁰ “As the first Igbo priests and missionaries, the greatest expectation of their people was that they would help to make Christ breath Igbo air, eat Igbo food, drink Igbo water, live Igbo life and speak Igbo tongue.”⁴³¹

Going by this expectation therefore, by now there is supposed to have been adequate and sufficient inculturation in liturgical lives and activities of the Igbo Catholics. They failed in these areas while admirably upholding the missionary status quo. The Catholic Church in Igboland was yearning for the stopgap that will provide it the needed poise, balance and identity – a properly articulated and executed programme of inculturation and maturation. Given the right leadership, such a programme was most feasible. The exit of the expatriate clergy gave the indigenous missionaries the opportunity to put their stamp on their Catholic religion and so clearly establish a true and proper identity of the Catholic Church in Igboland through the

⁴²⁹ Ozigboh, *Igbo Catholicism: The Onitsha Connection 1967-1984*, 39.

⁴³⁰ Ozigboh, *Igbo Catholicism: The Onitsha Connection 1967-1984*, 62.

⁴³¹ Ozigboh, *Igbo Catholicism: The Onitsha Connection 1967-1984*, 62.

process of authentic inculturation and stabilisation. This will make Catholic faith and teachings easily acceptable and welcome by the people of Igboland. However, that opportunity was to a large extent missed. Today, lack of adequate and authentic inculturation has continued to constitute a very big challenge to the identity of the Catholic Church in Igboland. It adversely affects the Catholic Church and her mission. This inadequate inculturation is mostly felt in the areas of catechesis, ritual, music and marriage. They will be discussed below.

A. Inadequate Catechetical Inculturation

Catholic pioneers made sincere efforts to learn Igbo language in their bid to produce necessary catechetical materials for their converts. “Fr. Aime Ganot had published his ‘Katekismi Ibo’ (Igbo Catechism Book) in 1901 but it was not until January 1904 that Fr. Lejeune’s famous ‘Katekisma nke Okwukwe Nzuko Katolic n’Asusu Igbo (Catechism of the Catholic Church in Igbo Language) appeared.”⁴³² These foreign missionaries formulated Igbo Catechism for the Igbo Catholics with their little knowledge of Igbo language. They transliterated their English Catechism into Igbo language. There are a lot of mistakes, misconceptions and misinterpretations in their formulated and transliterated Igbo Catechisms. Most of them do not convey any theological meaning in the Igbo context. They make no meaning to the Igbo Catholics. “Take for instance, the sacrament of Confirmation was formulated and known in Igbo Catechism Book as ‘Ikwo aka n’isi’ or in some Igbo Catechism Books as ‘Konfameshon.’”⁴³³ ‘Ikwo aka n’isi’ means in Igbo linguistic expression to wash hand on one’s head. This is really an abomination in our cultural setting and as such meaningless as long as the sacrament of Confirmation is concerned. It does not have any linguistic meaning or symbolic expression to the sacrament of Confirmation in Igbo context. It does not equally convey the spiritual significance and theological meaning of the sacrament of Confirmation in Igbo language. Even the transliterated equivalent ‘Konfameshon’ does not convey any sense in Igbo context and understanding of the sacrament.

The same loss of meaning is applicable to the sacraments of Matrimony and Holy Orders expressed in Igbo Catechism as ‘Igba Akwukwo’ and ‘Odaasi di Aso’ respectively. In typical Igbo context and understanding, ‘Igba Akwukwo’ means to have sex with a book. The Igbo understanding and expression of these sacraments as contained in Igbo Catechism Book does not in any way show the real theological meaning and spiritual significance of these

⁴³² Holy Ghost Father, “Archives, Paris, General Bulletin,” vol. 21, 279-280; vol. 22, 448, 789. The latter catechism was produced in the Onitsha dialect by catechist-teachers (Ephraim Agha & Co) under the direction of Fr. Charles Vogler quoted in Celestine Obi, “The French Pioneers, 1885-1905,” 42.

⁴³³ Jeremiah Nwosu, *Katikiizim Nke Okwukwe Nzuko Katolik N’Asusu Igbo*, (Onitsha: St Stephen Press, 1996), 80.

sacraments. It is really surprising that these anomalies are still in use up till today in Igboland. They have their negatives effects in the lives of the Igbo Catholics. Lack of true understanding of the spiritual effects of these sacraments is partly responsible for the lack of interest among the Igbo Catholics in these sacraments. These anomalies in the Igbo Catechisms ought to have been corrected and reformulated long ago by Igbo Catholic hierarchies and theologians so that the real theological meaning and spiritual effects of these sacraments will be well understood and appreciated by the Igbo Catholics.

Further more, some of the current Igbo catechetical terminologies and concepts not only lack psychological punch but are manifestly miseducative and meaningless. The Igbo equivalent of some catechetical and religious terminologies like Heaven ‘Enuigwe,’ Church ‘Uka,’ a Church member ‘Onye Uka,’ and members of the Church ‘Ndi Uka’ are meaningless. These terminologies are catechetically damaging and should be reformed and corrected. Some panacea to these anomalies will be proffered below. Again, the names of some Christian feasts like ‘Kristimasi’ (Christmas), Easter and ‘Lenti’ (Lent) are adaptations and transliterations from the Christian traditional feasts in Europe. Up till today, these terminologies are still used like this in Igbo catechisms and feasts in Igboland. The Igbo Catholics find it difficult to understand these religious concepts and terms used for these feasts and as such cannot understand the spiritual meaning and significance of the feasts themselves. Again, Igbo Catechism cannot fully identify with Igbo locality when she is still saddled with many foreign elements. “During catechism classes in Igboland today, our children and illiterate adult converts are still saddled with such catechetical terms like: ‘Pesin’ (Person), ‘Odaasi di Aso’ (Holy Orders), ‘Baptizim’ (Baptism), ‘Penansi’ (Penance), ‘Yukarisia di Aso’ (Eucharist), ‘Agbamakwukwo’ (Wedding), ‘Indulgentia’ (Indulgence).”⁴³⁴ Better adjustment and conformity through a process of inculturation should be given to these catechetical concepts. Mere transliteration is not theologically adequate.

Again, the early Catholic missionaries in their lack of understanding of Igbo cultural values totally condemned and dismissed many socio-religious societies like ‘Ozo Omambe,’ moonlight play and dance, festivals and ‘Muo associations’ masquerades. Isolation and social absenteeism from the traditional societies like ‘Umunna’ (kindred family), ‘Otu Ogbo’ (Age Grade), ‘Otu Umuada’, ‘Otu Umuokpu’ etc were greatly encouraged even when these practices have no fetish element or pagan connotation. All these really pose a great challenge to the community identity of the Igbo Catholicism. However, possible solutions to the above

⁴³⁴ Jeremiah Nwosu, *Katikiizim Nke Okwukwe Nzuko Katolik N’Asusu Igbo*, 80.

mentioned problems and inadequacies will be given below under adequate catechetical inculturation.

B. Insufficient Ritual Inculturation

Sacred time for various liturgical feast is another area where African (Igbo) Church has not given adequate inculturation. It would be ridiculous, for example, liturgically to celebrate the harvest season during the time of planting, or to use symbols of death when one wants to celebrate life. Devotional practices and liturgical signs and symbols tend to lose their meaning and value when removed from their cultural milieu. This is the case with some of the liturgical signs in Igboland today. Take for instance, striking of one's breast or chest during 'Confiteor' may not be the best sign of contrition in Igbo tradition. "In Igboland, some titles which are attributed to the Blessed Virgin Mary as contained in the Catholic Igbo Hymn and Prayer Book, Onitsha, are direct transliteration from the European ritual and liturgy which do not have any deeper meaning and significance in the African (Igbo) understanding of mothers, especially Mary as our special mother."⁴³⁵

More still, there are no designs of vestments and liturgical symbols of local inspiration in Igboland today. Most of these are imported. The Catholic Church in Igboland still, practically and ideologically imports Altar utensils, Church furnishings, thuribles, Church bells etc. In Igboland today, the designs and architecture of the Churches, Cathedrals and Basilicas are typically European. One may be allowed to ask hypothetical but relevant question here about the places of worship and sacred spaces in Igboland today. What form would spaces of worship have taken had they arisen from within the worship experience of Igbo people themselves? Would Igbo Church buildings be designed with arched windows, a high tower with a bell, as in Poland, Germany or Austria or any other part of the western world? Would benches or chairs be arranged in the way they are now, as given to the Igbos by the early missionaries? These questions are important because they apply to many other things that missionary Christianity brought with it as part of proper Christian worship, even when they do not work well in Igboland. The answer and solution to these questions will be offered below under sufficient ritual inculturation.

Again, up till today, Igbo Church buildings are still designed and constructed according to the plan brought to the Igboland by the early missionaries. The Catholic Church in Igboland lacks local and indigenous initiatives and inputs. She does not encourage inculturation as she should. The less Igbo a convert appears in his or her worship, the more Christian he or she is

⁴³⁵ Ozigboh, *Igbo Catholicism: The Onitsha Connection 1967-1984*, 77.

deemed to be. Igbo Catholicism seems to be more Roman than Rome. Again, in Igbo Catholicism, Igbo names are not deemed fit and suitable enough to be used as baptismal and confirmation names, and as first and official names both in the ecclesiastical setting and in the society. Preference is given to foreign names during baptisms and confirmations. All these anomalies should be discouraged and stopped. Possible solutions to these anomalies arising from insufficient ritual inculturation will be given below under sufficient ritual inculturation

C. Lack of Adequate Inculturation of Music and Dance in Igbo Liturgy

The Igbo liturgical music and dance among the Igbo Christians are not properly tapped for an optimal result. The vast treasures of the Igbo traditional worship namely liveliness, vivacity, active participation, cheerfulness and love for flowery expressions are not given adequate motivation. Some priests see these lively expressions of bodies and dances during liturgy as noise-making and as something aliturgical. This is partly as a result of the condemnation of Igbo traditional dances and musical instruments by the early Christian missionaries. Traditional dances and musical instruments were completely forbidden, abandoned and outlawed by the early missionaries because of their inability to understand Igbo traditional values. Today, undue attachment to the Roman liturgy in Igbo liturgical celebrations leads many Christians to seek for solace in the popular devotions and worship centers outside the Catholic Church, to fill up the gap. The reception and implementation of the second Vatican's encouragement and directives on the use of the indigenous music and musical instruments in sacred worships and devotions have not been fully carried out in Igboland. There is still much room for the inculturation and development of Igbo liturgical music.

“Igbos are very much behind in indigenous liturgical music and dance when compared to other tribes in Nigeria like Efik and Yoruba.”⁴³⁶ Even most of the so called Igbo music, songs and hymns have foreign rhythms, tunes and melodies. They have not changed from what were given to the Igbo Catholics by the early Catholic missionaries. There has been complaints by some theologians that some of the music especially choruses, while good to the ear in terms of their sound, are very poor theologically in terms of the content of their lyrics. Absence of indigenous music and songs do not in any way give the Catholic Church in Igboland her true identity. Similarly, many Igbo local instruments are not given due attention and encouragement in many parishes in Igboland. Their usage is fading away and they are being replaced with western musical instruments. Presently, the musical and liturgical efficiency, quality and standard of each Catholic parish in Igboland is measured on how well the youths and choir

⁴³⁶ Ozigboh, *Igbo Catholicism: The Onitsha Connection 1967-1984*, 77.

groups are able to perform western bandsets, organ, piano, keyboard, guitar and other foreign musical instruments. They are speedily taking the place of the local musical instruments. Many choir groups are not interested in learning and incorporating local musical instruments into liturgy any more. Most often, choir groups prefer to render their songs and hymns in foreign languages. On this Chiegboka observes, “in order to ensure active participation, choir groups should ensure that Masses are not turned into theatre of entertainment. Songs known to the people should be rendered.”⁴³⁷ The simple truth about all these foreign hymns and songs is that people who come to Church are never satisfied and fulfilled when they are used. The constant use of these hymns and songs in foreign languages accounts for lack of interest in liturgy, lack of fulfilment and consequently low and poor faith among the Catholics in Igboland. However, possible panacea to these problems and challenges will be offered below under adequate inculturation of music and dance in Igbo liturgy.

D. Lack of Inculturation in Christian Marriage

Catholic marriage is another area where the Catholic Church in Igboland encounters a lot of difficulties and challenges. Up till now, the identity of the Catholic Church in Igboland is not well brought out in the Catholic marriages. The Catholic marriage ritual was introduced with all its western social trimmings into Igboland by the missionaries. The foreign missionaries insisted from the very beginning that the Igbo traditional marriage rites were not valid and sufficient for the Christian marriage. According to Ozigboh, “The unbending insistence on the canonical form of marriage with all its European paraphernalia made both the Igbo understanding of what Christian marriage is and the missionary appreciation of the advisability of christianising the Igbo traditional marriage ritual, extremely difficult. What has obtained since then, has largely been a dialogue of the deaf.”⁴³⁸ Today in Igboland, marriage is celebrated at least two times per couple; the traditional wedding and the Church wedding. This has its attendant costs. Both weddings cost a lot of money for the couple especially at this time of economic hardship.

Today in Igboland, a Catholic couple have to contract marriage first according to the native and traditional custom and only thereafter perform the Church wedding. Between the two marriage rites, a lot of water passes below the bridge. Spiritual and moral problems are brewed for the couple. After the celebration of the traditional marriage rites, the couple begin to live together as husband and wife even when Church wedding has not taken place. This is

⁴³⁷ Anthony Chiegboka, “50 Years of Second Vatican Council Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Sacrosanctum Concilium (1963-2013) in the Year of Faith: Its Relevance for Awka Diocese and Universal Church Today and Tomorrow” (Paper presented at the Awka Liturgical Seminar, May 6, 11 and 18, 2013)

⁴³⁸ Ozigboh, *Igbo Catholicism: The Onitsha Connection 1967-1984*, 79.

the source of the numerous cases of cohabitations, abortions and pregnant brides for the later Church wedding. In most cases, many couple do not show up for the Church wedding anymore. Many people in Igboland today do not celebrate Church wedding because they see it as an European culture otherwise called white wedding. Again, many people in Igboland are of the view that Church wedding is also very expensive. It amounts to double expenses and money wasting after one has celebrated the traditional marriage. The bride is bothered by the wedding gown and veil, the hand gloves and bouquet of flowers, the flower girls and her maids. The groom on his part has to take care of his suit with the right tie and pairs of shoes to match. He also takes care of his best man, friends, well-wishers, families, photographs, video recordings and other expenses. In fact, it is these frightening requirements of the Church wedding as well as its foreign mentality among the Igbos that are responsible for the ever-increasing rates of concubinage, pregnant brides, pre-marital sex and irregular access to the sacraments. Efforts should be made through inculturation process to make the two marriages one ritual act. Solution to this marriage difficulties will be given below appropriate inculturation in Christian marriage.

2. Lip Service Ecumenism (Strong Inter-Denominational Hatred and Rivalries)

The issue of Christian disunity is a deep problem among the Christians in Igboland. This division contradicts the very will of Christ who prayed as follows, I pray not only for these, but for those also who through their words will believe in me. May they all be one (Jn. 17:20-21). There are many Christian Churches in Igboland but the two prominent ones are Roman Catholic Church and Anglican Church. These two main Christian Churches are today matched in a bitter struggle for the souls of the Igbo people. Christian disunity is a human problem. “A careful historical analysis shows that the disunity among Christians has stemmed partly, from one of the fundamental mistakes which Christians, individually and corporately have been making, namely the quest for uniformity rather than unity in their understanding and interpretations of the teachings of Christ.”⁴³⁹

Despite the ecumenical body between the Catholic Church and Anglican Church in Igboland, the level of antagonism, hatred, rivalry and competitiveness between the two Churches are really very high, scandalous and misleading. This disunity affects all aspects of life in Igboland namely: political, social, economic, cultural and educational. Each of these two Churches wants her members to be at the helm of affairs and corridors of power in all sectors of life in Igboland today. This leads to unhealthy competition and mutual suspicion and mistrust between the two Churches and their members. The ecumenical movement has not yielded any

⁴³⁹ Ozigboh, *Igbo Catholicism: The Onitsha Connection 1967-1984*, 81.

positive fruit between the two Churches. The disaster brought about by the divisions within the Christianity in Igboland is indeed immense. How could the non-Christians in Igboland be interested in the Gospel, if it is presented by the Churches that are divided and competitive? There is therefore need for Christian Churches in Igboland to achieve unity if they really want to be faithful to the Gospel and identity of Christ. How these Christian Churches can achieve unity will be discussed below under ecumenism in praxis.

3. Inter-Religious Crisis between Christians (Igbo Catholics) and Muslims

Nigeria is a multi-religious country. Prominent among these religions are Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion. When generalizing the demographic populations of Nigeria, the North would be considered Islamic and the South Christian. Today, many conflicts and crises in the country put Christians and Muslims against each other due to differing religious beliefs and practices. It is no longer news that there is a deep religious crisis and violence in Nigeria today. There have been many bomb blasts and explosions from suicide bombers in the Catholic Churches in the northern part of Nigeria. Thousands of people have lost their lives, and property worth millions of Naira (Nigeria Currency) lost as a result of constant religious crisis. In the last two decades, there has been an increase in Muslim-Christian conflict in Nigeria. “Of the 150 Nigerians that were killed on 4th November 2014 when the Islamic extremist group, Boko Haram, stormed Damaturu, the capital of Yobe State, 130 were Christians. Hundreds of Christians are still missing and the destruction during the four-hour rampage included the bombing of at least 10 Church buildings.”⁴⁴⁰ “More than 200 Boko Haram members blocked all four major highways leading into town, dislodged security agencies after a series of gun battles and the detonation of explosives, then led other area Muslims to the only Christian area of town, called New Jerusalem, which is home to more than 15,000 Christians. Any Christian who could not recite the Islamic creed was instantly killed. Most of these people persecuted and killed were Igbo Catholics and Christians who resided in the northern part of the country.”⁴⁴¹

The killing of Christians in northern Nigeria has increased by 62% in just one year. The 2016 World Watch List shows a staggering 62% increase in violent killings of Christians in northern Nigeria according to the Open Door Watch reports. “In 2015, there were 4,028 killings and 198 attacks on Christian Churches that Open Doors was able to record. The figures

⁴⁴⁰ Mathew John Luoga, “Nigeria: Violence in Yobe State Aimed Mainly at Christians,” *Christian Newspapers Headlines Nigeria*, January 15, 2015, 5.

⁴⁴¹ Mathew John Luoga, “Nigeria: Violence in Yobe State Aimed at Christians,” 5.

recorded for the previous year were 2,484 killings and 108 Church attacks.”⁴⁴² “An estimated 30 million Christians in northern Nigeria form the largest minority in a mainly Muslim environment. They are at risk of violent persecution, as the report states. For decades, Christians in the region have suffered marginalization and discrimination as well as targeted violence.”⁴⁴³ “Nigeria is 2nd on the Open Doors World Watch List which ranks countries according to how difficult it is to be a Christian.”⁴⁴⁴ Igbo Catholics and Christians who live in the northern part of the country are killed on daily basis and their Churches burnt by the Islamic fundamentalists called Boko Haram. Christians now go in hiding and are afraid to practise their faith freely, openly and publicly in the north. Even in the Igboland, Muslim Fulani herdsmen also attack Christians and Christian Churches. Once these attacks and violence erupt, Muslims are neither spared equally. Once Igbo Christians are attacked in the north, there is always a reprisal attacks in the East, where the Igbos will start to kill the Muslims and Hausas living in the eastern part of the country. These have led to the loss of many lives and property in Nigeria today. They have also affected Igbo hospitable and friendly identity. Igbos are very hospitable, enterprising and friendly. They even welcome, accept and employ northerners as security men and agents.

Furthermore, there has been a perceived attempt and effort by the federal government to islamize Nigeria and make it one religious country-Muslim country. Just recently, “President Muhammad Buhari, Senate President, Bukola Saraki and Speaker of House of Representatives, Yakubu Dogara, all Muslims, were dragged to the Federal High Court, Delta State, over allegation of attempting to islamize the country.”⁴⁴⁵ Christians (Igbo Christians and Catholics) have been denied the right to establish Churches and Chaplaincies in some of the northern States and Universities without the federal government doing anything about the injustice and marginalization. Just recently also, there has been an outcry against the federal government concerning their alleged attempt to remove Christian Religious Education from the Nigerian curriculum for the primary and secondary schools. “It was noticed that according to the new curriculum, that Christian Religious Knowledge would no longer exist as a subject in schools but rather as themes in Civic Education, Islamic/Arabic Studies or French subjects. With this

⁴⁴² Patience Janelle, “Killing of Christians in Nigeria Has Increased by 62%,” *Open Door Watch World Newspapers*, March 1, 2016, 3.

⁴⁴³ Janelle, Killing of Christians in Nigeria Has Increased by 62%,” 4.

⁴⁴⁴ Janelle, Killing of Christians in Nigeria Has Increased by 62%,” 4.

⁴⁴⁵ Festus Ahoh, “Alleged Islamization: Nwankwor Drags Buhari, Saraki, Dogara and Malami to Court,” *Vanguard Newspapers*, 27 June, 2016, 1.

new arrangement, students and pupils will have to study either of Islamic Arabic Studies or French.”⁴⁴⁶

The end result is that Christian students and pupils will be left with no option than to settle for Islamic Arabic Studies since French teachers are more or less non-existent in many Nigerian schools. In this new curriculum still, under the theme “Islamic Studies and sub theme Sarah and Tahdib, primary 1 to 3 pupils in their formative years are taught the supremacy of prophet Mohammed and the Quran over all other Founders (Jesus Christ, Buddha etc) and Holy Books respectively. That Mohammed was the seal of all the prophets sent to the whole world and the Quran, the final guidance of Allah to mankind, that ‘Isa’ known to Christians as Jesus Christ is not the Son of God and that Jesus was not crucified.”⁴⁴⁷ The implications are the creation of a sense of supremacy of Islam over other religions especially Christianity. This time-bomb, obnoxious, divisive and ungodly arrangement will have a lasting negative consequence upon the citizens because it will deprive Christian pupils and students of moral trainings and values which Christian Religious Education offers. It cannot be too stressed that Christian moral values and teachings are in jeopardy in Nigeria particularly in Igboland which is a Christian dominated region.

The fact remains that Christianity (Catholicism) which is a dominant religion of the Igbo people is not a free religion in Nigeria. This view was well articulated by Femi Fani Kayode when he said, “How can anyone describe Nigeria as being free when Christians are banned from buying land to build Churches in most parts of the core north? How can anyone describe Nigeria as practising freedom of religion when the words Christ, Church, Christianity or Christian are not mentioned once in the Nigerian constitution and when the word Sharia is mentioned 73 times, Grand Khadi 54 times, Islam 29 times and Muslims 10 times?”⁴⁴⁸ All these pose great threats and danger to the Catholic Church and other Christian Churches in Igboland today. Ways out of these inter-religious challenges and crisis will be given below under adequate and fruitful dialogue between Christians and Muslims.

4. Syncretism and Dual Affiliation

“Syncretism is seen as the union of two opposite forces, beliefs, systems or tenets so that the united form is a new thing, neither one nor the other. In religious syncretism, elements of two religious systems are mixed to the point where at least one, if not both of the systems loses

⁴⁴⁶ Omololu Ogunmade, “Christian Association of Nigeria Protests Replacement of Christian Religious Education in Secondary School with Islamic Studies,” *Thisday Newspapers*, 16 June, 2017. 2.

⁴⁴⁷ Omololu Ogunmade, “Christian Association of Nigeria Protests Replacement of Christian Religious Education in Secondary School with Islamic Studies,” *Thisday Newspapers*, 16 June, 2017. 3.

⁴⁴⁸ Wale Odunsi, “Nigeria is not a Free Country, Moslem North Controls Affairs-Femi Fani Kayode,” *Nigerian Daily Post*, 25 June, 2017, 1.

basic structure and identity.”⁴⁴⁹ Theologically speaking, the concept of syncretism is a negative term but it can be a positive term when used in a historical, anthropological or political context. It is important to note that the concept of syncretism is used in its theological understanding in this work, and so is seen as a negative concept and practice. Syncretism of the Christian Gospel occurs when basic elements of the Gospel are replaced by anti-religious elements from the host culture. On the other hand, “dual affiliation, when used in a religious context means connection with or belonging to two religious groups.”⁴⁵⁰ Syncretic practices and dual affiliation are very deep among the Catholics in Igboland. Many fetish practices and beliefs of African/Igbo Traditional Religions are still very strong and influential even among Catholics in Igboland. Take for instance, in the Igboland, some Catholics still believe in reincarnation. “Some still compel an accused to drink the water used in washing the corpse as a sign of his or her innocence.”⁴⁵¹ “Some equally put weapons like matchets in the grave with the intention that the deceased will use them to fight those who are believed to have killed him”⁴⁵². Some also do not want dust to dust rite during burials.

In the course of the Second Synod for Africa held at the Vatican from 5 to 25 October 2009, the Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, president of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue observed, “African Traditional Religion still exercises a strong influence over Africans, who are naturally religious.....”⁴⁵³ The cardinal’s declaration explains well, in my view, the current state of the soul of the Catholic Church in the face of Africa’s religious heritage especially in Igboland. As seen above, some religious roots, beliefs and practices of the African peoples are barbaric, fetish and idolatrous - something diabolical whose exact contours are unknown. All of these were contrary to the Christian religion that the missionaries had brought, and they forbade these practices and devotions among the faithful, under pain of exclusion from the Christian community. Hence, many Christian faithful resorted to following the prescriptions of the Father (God) during the day, but nightly returned to the practices of their ancestors. Hence, there is a problem of dual affiliation to Christianity and to African Traditional Religions. This situation has continued up till today. Many Igbo youths now turn to cultism, secret societies, pagan shrines and festivals like ‘Imo’ Awka in Awka city. Most often, they receive the support and encouragement of the elders and adults in these practices.

⁴⁴⁹ Paul Izuegbunam, “The Missionary Impact in the Development of the Igbo Identity: The Dialects of Change and Continuity,” *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, no. 4 (2015), 10.

⁴⁵⁰ Paul Izuegbunam, “The Missionary Impact in the Development of the Igbo Identity: The Dialects of Change and Continuity,” 14.

⁴⁵¹ Cyprain Okoye, e-mail to the researcher, March 21, 2017.

⁴⁵² Witnessed by the researcher himself at St. Simon Catholic Church, Ukpo during the burial of a youth on November 23, 2010.

⁴⁵³ Jean-Baptiste Sourou, “African Traditional Religion and the Catholic Church in the Light of the Synods for Africa: 1994 and 2009,” *African Human Right Journal* 1 (2014): 18.

This is a very big pastoral challenge facing the Catholic Church in Igboland today. A fundamental question now is: is it possible for the Igbo Catholics to live with the prescriptions of the new religion (Catholicism) and renounce the ‘fetish and idolatrous religious roots’ that had been left to them by their ancestors and had served to cement their communities up to this point? Is it possible for the Igbos to be Igbos and Catholics at the same time? The answers and panacea to these syncretic and dual affiliation challenges will be offered below under deeper catechesis and mutual dialogue between Igbo Catholicism and Igbo Traditional Religion.

5. Pentecostalism

“Pentecostalism is a renewal movement within Protestant Christianity that places special emphasis on a direct personal experience of God through the baptism with the Holy Spirit.”⁴⁵⁴ Pentecostalism waters down the teachings and theology of the Catholic Church. Many of their teachings and practices go against the teachings and practices of the Catholic Church. Pentecostals do not practise infant baptism. It adheres to the inerrancy of Scripture. It takes and interprets Scripture literally. Pentecostal Churches tend to avoid anything that might be seen as sacrament. Most of their teachings and tenets are against the doctrines and tenets of the Catholic Church. However, their liturgical services are always very active, vibrant and even noisy. They also have the best of modern music and musical instruments that go with modern dances. Their public address systems are also very sound and good. All these make their services very sound, active and attractive as against some Catholic liturgies that are usually very solemn and quiet. These really pose great danger and challenge to the Catholic Church in Igboland. This is because Igbos and Africans naturally like dance, prefer watered-down theology and are always attracted to beautiful and dynamic liturgy and occasions. Today, many Igbo people have left and are still leaving the Catholic Church for Pentecostal Churches. Solutions to this will be offered below under more pastoral initiatives and commitment.

6. Polygamy and Inter Faith Marriages

“Polygamy is a state of marriage to many spouses. It is the practice of marrying multiple spouses. When a man is married to more than one wife at a time, sociologists call this polygyny. When a woman is married to more than one husband at a time, it is called polyandry. If a marriage includes multiple husbands and wives, it can be called a group marriage.”⁴⁵⁵ The polygamous marriage prominent among the people of Igboland today is polygyny. A lot of factors account for this. African in general and Igbo people in particular value and cherish greatly male children because it is these male issues that take the place of their fathers and so

⁴⁵⁴ Edward Appiah, *The Challenges Facing Christianity in Africa* (Kumasi: Zull Press, 2010), 21.

⁴⁵⁵ Edward Appiah, *The Challenges Facing Christianity in Africa*, 43.

continue their family lineage and genealogy. Daughters are given away in marriages. So, any family in Igboland that does not have male children face the risk of coming to an end as there will be no one to propagate and continue the family lineage. In Igboland today where a wife is not able to produce a male child, the man normally marries a second or even a third wife in order to get male children who will continue the family name and lineage. Polygamy is against the teaching of Christ and practice of the Universal Church which emphasises the monogamous system of marriage. Presently, this practice is very rampant and much pronounced in Igboland. It is really a very big challenge and threat to the Catholic Church in Igboland because many men in Igboland today have left the Catholic Church in a bid to have a second or third wife in order to have a male issue.

Again, inter faith marriages which are marriages between a Catholic partner and a non-Catholic partner is equally a total failure in Igboland today. The purpose is defeated. The celebration of the mixed-marriage is done in the Catholic Church with the promise from the man who is normally a non Catholic or a pagan, that his wife is free to keep on practising her Catholic faith after marriage and also that their children will be brought up in the Catholic faith. But results so far show that this practice has not worked out as promised and expected. In most cases, soon after the marriage ceremonies, the husband threatens the wife to join him in his protestant Church. Also, husbands being the heads of the families, normally insist that their children will be brought up according to their own faith denomination. And in most cases too, the wife and children end up following her husband and their father to his own Church. This is also another challenge to the Catholic faith in Igboland today because it has led to so many broken families as well as losing many Catholic members and families to other denominations and religions. Possible solutions will be proffered below under monogamy.

7. Lack of Self-Reliance and Self-Sufficiency

Poverty seems overwhelming in Africa and Igboland up till today, not necessarily as a result of natural resources and lack of man power but as a result of bad, corrupt and selfish leaders and government. Many people today have no access to quality education and good health care system. This poverty affects the Church also because she is a part of the African and Igbo societies. Many Churches in Igboland today still need foreign financial aid and support in order to survive. Evangelization is slowed down because of inadequate finances. According to Pope John Paul II, "In Africa (Igboland), the need to apply the Gospel to concrete life is felt strongly. But how can one proclaim Christ on that immense Continent while forgetting that it is one of the world's poorest regions? How could one fail to take into account the anguished history of a land where many nations and regions are still in the grip of famine, ethnocentricity, tribal

oppositions and liberation of women, war, racial and tribal tensions, political instability and the violation of human rights? This is all a big challenge to evangelization.”⁴⁵⁶ A lot of Churches and seminaries in Igboland today still depend on foreign help and support for maintenance and sustenance.

However, with the global economic crisis and melt down, these foreign aids and supports no longer come as they used to come before. Many indigenous missionaries in the remote and mission areas in Igboland cannot continue their missionary works effectively and efficiently because of lack of funds and resources. Many outstations and parishes celebrate Holy Masses under the trees because of lack of Church buildings. Senior seminarians now pay school fees and provincial bishops are now highly levied in order to maintain their seminarians and keep the seminaries going because of inadequate funding of the seminaries by the Propagation of the Faith in Rome. Many seminarians who cannot afford to support themselves financially are forced to discontinue their priestly formation in the seminaries. Some dioceses, parishes and seminaries cannot on their own sustain themselves because they do not have major sources of income. In Igboland today, many people have fallen from or even left the Catholic Church because of over-taxation and over-levying. Many Catholic faithful who could not meet up with their financial obligations and requirements prefer to leave the Church so that they will be free from all these constant financial demands regardless of the danger they put their life and salvation in by leaving the Catholic Church and her sacraments. Sooner or later, there will be a massive retirements of priests in various dioceses in Igboland. How will Igbo Catholicism cater for the high cost that will be involved in the maintenance of these sick and retired priests? All these constitute a great challenge to the Igbo Catholicism. However, possible solutions will be proffered below under cultivation of self-empowerment and self-reliance.

8. Government Takeover of schools

School education was started in Igboland by the early C.M.S and Roman Catholic missionaries. They made the schools their chief instruments of evangelization. Under these missionaries, schools became the magic wand and the ready key that opened Igbo towns and villages to the Catholic Church. Catholic Church built up an enviable system of Catholic primary and secondary schools. By 1955, the Catholic Church controlled about fifty percent of the primary and secondary schools in the Igboland. Many people were attracted to the Catholic Church not because of the Gospel and the message of Christ which she preached but because people saw Catholic schools as powerful instruments and means for rapid development and civilization.

⁴⁵⁶ *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 51.

They saw in education the chief instrument of occupational selection and role allocation. Being educated was seen as the only way through which people can get good jobs and works in the government offices. In fact, education was regarded as the keystone of the social services and as supplier of knowledge and expertise necessary for citizens to realize and carry out their functions in the society.

However, this peaceful and co-operative atmosphere between the Church and government began to decline in 1957, when the government of the Eastern region of Nigeria (Igboland) proposed to start a Universal Primary Education. In that regard, the government decided to lean more on the local government councils rather than on the Church. That was the beginning of the disagreement and confrontation between the government and the Church. The Regional Government accused mission schools of being clearly colonial and western in their contents, orientation and management. Hence, with the “Public Education Edict 1970, the Government of Ukpabi Asika took over the ownership and management of all primary and secondary schools in East Central State of Nigeria (the present Igboland). It was indeed an education coup. In the word of Cardinal Arinze, “the loss of mission schools to the Government is understandable a great tragedy.”⁴⁵⁷

Ever since the Government takeover of the mission schools in Igboland in 1970, the Igboland has never been the same again—morally, academically and discipline wise. A strange wind of change is sweeping across the entire shore of the Igbo moral world with a near supersonic velocity. The moral values like honesty, sincerity, obedience, respect, diligence, integrity, responsibility, truth, love and trustworthy are things of the past in Igboland today. Ethical principles are shattered to pieces. The government and political institutions in Igboland have become highly corrupt and disoriented. Law enforcement agents are totally drowned in the swimming pool of bribery and corruption. There is no more discipline in the schools, families, Igbo society and Nigeria. “Nigeria Police Watch has to report that the rate of crime is in increase in Anambra State, one of the States in Igboland.”⁴⁵⁸ Armed robbery activities, which ranked first in list, are so rampant that it has become a great monster that harry people by day and hunt at night. Both in their homes, along the streets, and on the high ways, peace and innocent citizens are constantly abused, robbed and molested at gunpoint, and some killed in the process. Today kidnapping has taken over the stage. There is need therefore to restore discipline and high moral standard in Igboland and Nigeria in general. These problems and challenges can be overcome by returning schools to the Church as will be discussed below.

⁴⁵⁷ Ozigboh, *Igbo Catholicism: The Onitsha Connection 1967-1984*, 101.

⁴⁵⁸ Nnamdi Ezech, “Crime Rate on the Increase in Anambra State”, *Nigeria Police Watch*, 23 September, 2013, 1.

III. Towards Achieving True and Full Identity

Looking at the challenges, weaknesses and failures described above, it becomes quite obvious that the Catholic Church in Igboland has not really assumed or achieved her true colour and real identity as a local Church on Igbo soil. Many structures and institutions as well as some practices brought to Igboland by the early Catholic missionaries are still as they were when they were brought initially. Proper inculturation has not taken place. Indeed, one hundred and thirty three solid years (1885-2018) have passed since the arrival and establishment of Catholicism in Igboland. Within that period, some challenges, setbacks, new questions, new dangers, new abuses and doubts as already discussed above have raised their heads against the proper growth and adequate maturity of the Igbo Catholicism, thus hindering and beclouding her true and clear identity. Need has arisen therefore, to review the apostolate so far and update or re-plan the missionary strategies and initiatives in order to give Catholicism a true face in Igboland. Catholicism needs to be given a home and deep tap roots in Igboland and be made to breathe the native air of Igbo life and culture. She needs to identify herself with the Igbo locality where she is located in order to attain her true, clear and better identity as a local Church in Igboland. In order to achieve these therefore, the following measures should be taken and implemented in her life.

1. Reception and Implementation of the Documents of the Church and Papal Messages in the Igbo Catholic Church

According to Chiegboka, “The Nigerian Church like other Churches (Igbo Church inclusive) is still in the process of reception of the dispositions of the Second Vatican Council and the 1983 Code of Canon Law that made far reaching legislations on personnel administration especially in determining the personnel needed in the Church, their qualities, the procedures for their appointments/placements, resignations, transfers, removal/deprivations, maintenance, training, and coordination, adaptation and so many other vital issues.”⁴⁵⁹ The aim of the Second Vatican Council and other documents of the Church is to allow Catholicism speak the languages of the whole world and be able to reach all the parts and cultures of the world. The universality of the Catholic Church entails that every nation, every country and every region should be allowed and encouraged to understand the Gospel of Christ in their local language and culture. Many documents of the Church have sincerely given this call and recommendation. To ensure that the Catholic Church in Igboland assumes her full and true identity,

⁴⁵⁹ Anthony Chiegboka, “The Diocesan Church And Clergy Personnel Administration” (A Paper Presented to the Okigwe Diocesan Clergy on the occasion of their annual Theological Conference/Seminar at the Conference Hall of the Cathedral of Immaculate Conception, Okigwe, on Monday May 23, 2011).

recommendations and calls of the following documents must be harkened to and implemented in Igbo Catholicism.

A. Second Vatican Council Constitution on Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, (1963)

Sacrosanctum Concilium of the Second Vatican Council urges and encourages all local Church to adapt liturgy and liturgical celebrations to its local setting, language and culture. Thus it states, “Since the use of the vernacular, whether in the Mass, the administration of the sacraments, or in other parts of the liturgy, may frequently be of great advantage to the people, a wider use may be made of it, especially in readings, directives and in some prayers and chants.”⁴⁶⁰ The Council thus empowers the local Bishops to adapt the liturgy according to their local settings, subject to the approval of the Apostolic See. In the liturgical celebrations, the Church does not wish to impose a rigid uniformity. To promote active participation, the people should be encouraged to take part by means of acclamations, responses, psalms, antiphons, hymns as well as by actions, gestures and bodily attitudes all in their local languages. Also, the rites should be distinguished by a noble simplicity. They should be short, clear, and free from repetitions. They should be within the people's powers of comprehension, and normally should not require much explanation. In order to encourage active participation, vernacular liturgy is highly recommended. These blessings and recommendations of the *Sacrosanctum Concilium* have not been deeply felt in the Igbo Catholicism. This greatly affects the level of commitment to Catholic faith in Igboland today. To make the Igbo Catholicism feel very much at home and welcome in Igboland, the voice and proposal of the *Sacrosanctum Concilium* must be obeyed.

1●. The Need for Regular and Common Vernacular Liturgy/Liturgical Texts in Igboland

Up till now, the Catholic Church in Igboland has no common and identical Igbo Missal officially approved by Rome. Igbo hierarchies and faithful are still waiting for the Vatican authority in Rome to approve the prepared copy of the Igbo Missal sent to them (Rome) by the Igbo bishops since six years ago. The Igbo Missal being used in Igboland earlier before now has been rejected by Rome on the ground that it has some errors and mistakes. Igbo Catholic hierarchies should see to it that Vatican offices for the Evangelization of the people, Sacred Liturgy and Divine Worship and Sacraments should help in the provision of the official Roman approved Igbo Missal as soon as possible. Similarly, most of the liturgical texts, sacramental rites and Church documents like Vatican II Documents, Canon Law, New Catechism, New Rites, Key devotional literatures and works of spiritual authors crying for attention in the area

⁴⁶⁰ Vatican Council II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, no. 36, par. 2.

of translation have not been listened to due to lack of interest in Igbo liturgical celebrations. This really encourages inactive participation because people easily get bored after sitting for hours watching and listening to a Mass pattern or other liturgical/ sacramental celebrations that is in Latin or in any unfamiliar language. Again, many unlettered Igbo Catholics who want to know more about the history, laws, councils and teachings of the Church cannot do so because most of the Church documents in Igboland are still in foreign languages.

Even some of them that have been translated into Igbo language like Igbo Lectionaries and some Sacramental Manual Rites have lots and lots of variations and differences among various Catholic communities and localities in Igboland, thus discrediting the very common identity and even heritage of the Igbo Catholicism. Igbo Catholic hierarchies should see to it that all these documents are translated and put into Igbo language in order to ensure active participation and better comprehension and celebration of the sacraments as well as easy understanding of the history, laws and teachings of the Church. Equally, all the Catholic Archbishops and Bishops in Igboland must through their Liturgy Committee and in accord with Holy See, agree and adopt common and identical Igbo liturgical books for the celebration of these Sacraments. The common identity of the Igbo Catholicism ought to come out clearly in this area. There should be no dissimilarities, contrast nor variations among the Igbo liturgical books used in the various Archdioceses, Dioceses and parishes in Igboland except may be, in the choice and usage of local dialects of each province or locality. Further more, there are some priests who do not have interest in vernacular liturgy. There are priests who cannot celebrate an Igbo Mass without adulterating it with intrusive English, German, Italian, Spanish and French languages. This liturgical anomaly is mostly done by some priests who have studied abroad. They take to these languages as prestige symbols. When there are very important people around especially in our Cathedrals, the homily is delivered in English. The Igbo language is not deemed fit and dignified enough for such occasions. All these ought to be discouraged and discontinued. It is high time the Igbos cherished and used their indigenous language in their liturgical celebrations.

Every liturgy is a public worship of God by the people. Therefore, active participation of the people is required and needed. For the people of God to participate actively, they must understand the language of the liturgy. A convinced Christianity can never arise out of liturgical parrotry. Such languages do not encourage the growth of faith and fulfilment among the members of the worshipping community. Though Vatican II and post-conciliar directives retain Latin as the language of the Church, ample allowance has been made for the use of the vernacular in each local Church. The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (Sacrosanctum Concilium, 4 December 1963) calls for adaptations and inculturation of the sacraments and

liturgical language.⁴⁶¹ The Church in Igboland should be proud to use Igbo language in her liturgical celebrations and public worships. The use of indigenous languages has meant that translations become an important and ongoing work in the life of the Church. Today, Latin language is still a compulsory subject taught in our seminaries in Igboland, and one can be sent out of the seminary simply because he fails Latin subject. Many vocations have been lost because of undue importance and prominence attached to the Latin language.

B. 'Instrumentum Laboris' for the First African Synod of Bishops (1993)

The Instrumentum Laboris was announced on January 6, 1989. It was a surprise announcement which generated a lot of interest by the African Episcopate. The Instrumentum Laboris was published in 1993. The theme focused on: The Church in Africa and her Evangelizing Mission Towards the year 2000: —You shall be my witnesses (Acts 1:8). As the theme suggests, Instrumentum Laboris was specifically meant for the local Church in the African Continent. The Instrumentum Laboris is a theological framework which highlights the central concern of evangelization in Africa. It strongly recommends that Catholic Church should be given a home and at the same time feel at home in Africa (Igboland). In order to do this, it endorses and urges the great and sufficient use of the African native arts, designs, paintings, sculptors, crafts, objects and skills in the liturgical celebrations and worships in all the local Churches in Africa. The shape of some Christian symbols such as crucifixes, Altars and tabernacles should take on a more African cultural (Igbo) look. Sacred vessels should also have local designs. In this way, Africans in general and Igbo people in particular will be able to understand the Gospel in their own worldview.

Signs and symbols in the African (Igbo) Church should reflect the cultural richness of the African (Igbo) locality. Homilies and preachings are meant to bring about conversion and continual spiritual growth of the faithful. As such, they are characterised as ritual words. "To drive the message of the Gospel home in Igboland through homilies, Igbo preachers are encouraged to employ styles of oratory that carry with them a characteristically Igbo flavour, including story telling, use of proverbs and riddles, and illustrative songs."⁴⁶² Adequate implementation of these recommendations and calls in Igbo Catholicism will help to make Catholicism homely in Igboland and to bring about active participation, fulfilment and in-depth faith among the Igbo Catholics. However, in implementing and using these Igbo arts, sculptors, crafts and native creativities, care must be taken to ensure that they do not pose danger or go against the liturgical teachings and practices of the Universal Church.

⁴⁶¹ *Sacrosanctum Concilium, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, no. 39.

⁴⁶² Roseline Okafor, *Oral Interview*, 25 August, 2017. Nanka, Nigeria.

C. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation: Ecclesia in Africa (1995)

Ecclesia in Africa followed immediately after the African Synod in Rome. The African clergy and theologians have expressed the desire to have an African Council or African Synod to discuss issues that affect evangelization in Africa. This request was welcomed. Thus, the convocation of Ecclesia in Africa. Ecclesia in Africa discussed issues that affect the African continent. The Church in Africa was described as a missionary Church. The African Church is a Church of mission which, itself, becomes missionary: You shall be my witness to the ends of the earth (Acts 1: 8). One of the major issues or themes discussed by the Ecclesia in Africa is evangelization in Africa and its present day challenges. Africans have a profound religious sense, a sense of the sacred, of the existence of God the Creator and of a spiritual world. The Church in Africa has become the new homeland for Christ. However, they need to extricate themselves from many pagan and fetish practices and deepen their faith and beliefs in Catholic doctrines. Besides, there are millions of people in Africa who are not yet evangelized.

Hence, the Synod recommends that in order that the Word of God may be known, loved, pondered and preserved in the hearts of the faithful (Lk 2:19, 51), greater efforts must be made to provide access to the Sacred Scriptures through the scriptural formation of clergy, religious, catechists and the laity in general. Careful preparation of celebrations of the Word, promotion of the biblical apostolate with the help of the Biblical Centre for Africa and the establishment of other similar structures at all levels must be encouraged.⁴⁶³ The Synod concludes by saying, “in brief, efforts must be made to put the translated Sacred Scriptures into the hands of all the faithful and children right from their earliest years. To be provided also are study guides for use in prayer and for bible study in the family and community.”⁴⁶⁴ Post synodal apostolic exhortation of Benedict XVI, ‘Africae Munus’ (2011), also makes the similar recommendations.

When the recommendations of the synod are brought home to the local Church in Igboland, they will help to encourage and ensure that young Igbo children, boys and girls are provided with Igbo children bibles, Igbo spiritual books and other relevant Church books, all in Igbo language and be instructed right from their earliest years in the families. They should be encouraged to study bible. Ample opportunity should be provided for the children for learning religious instructions and catechisms both in the families and schools. People should start to learn religion during infancy. This will serve as a way of catching them young for Christ. Parents and guardians should always remember that family is a domestic Church.

⁴⁶³ *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 58.

⁴⁶⁴ *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 58.

D. Addresses and Homilies of Pope John Paul II during his Visits to Nigeria and Igboland in 1982 and 1998

Two major events in the history of the Church in Nigeria mark out the starting point of the new era of evangelization in Igboland. They are the maiden visits of Pope John Paul II in 1982 and 1998 respectively. Both visits of Pope John Paul II were occasions of reflections about the success and failures of former missionary strategies and evangelization in Igboland in order to improve on them. In his own well-chosen word, the “Pope John Paul refers to his visit to Nigeria and Igboland as an unfolding of a vision of hope.”⁴⁶⁵ These pastoral visits revealed equally his esteem for the worthy religious values that are cherished in Igboland as a people. On his wonderful visits to Nigeria and Igboland, Pope John Paul II had time to speak to the Bishops of the Igboland in a special manner regarding their indispensable role and duty to make their apostolate homely by making recourse to culture because Christianity and Gospel of Christ can best be practised and lived in culture and language of each region and nation. The Pope during his first visit urged the Catholic hierarchies and faithful in Nigeria (Igboland) to eradicate estrangement in the work of evangelization and salvation initiated by the pioneer missionaries and to seek suitable typical Nigerian (Igbo) means to deliver both the theology and pastoral works devotedly and to render it more homely and meaningful in effect. Hence his words, “By now, you Nigerian Church (Igbo Church) are missionary to yourself, therefore use your locally and naturally endowed gifts, talents, pastoral initiatives and strategies to make the Gospel more homely in Nigeria.”⁴⁶⁶ It is only in this way that the Catholic faith will flourish and blossom in the Nigerian nation and in Igboland too.

Christian missionary activities should not be seen as an expansion of the western culture. Rather, they should be seen as a propagation of the kingdom of God. This recognition demands maturity in seeking to cherish and nourish the originality of personal, ecclesial and even civil personality in the task of building up the Church. It is only through the employment of her local gifts and native talents in her pastoral work of evangelization that, the Church in Igboland can become true to her call and show her real picture. The Church in Igboland must take a positive step of identifying with the signs of the time which requires in its force the total application of the naturally endowed traditional talents and expressions in order to contribute to a better self-understanding, self-identity, self-awareness and self-knowledge of the Igbo Catholicism.

⁴⁶⁵ Cf. John Paul II, *Address of the John Paul II at the Arrival in Lagos, Nigeria*. Saturday, 12 February, 1982 (Vaticana: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1982), no. 1. On arrival at the International Airport, the Murtala Muhammed International Airport at Lagos, the Pope in his usual respect, love and homage kissed the soil of Nigeria and broke his silence with the first address to the Nigerian peoples.

⁴⁶⁶ Chigere, *Foreign Missionary Background and Indigenous Evangelization in Igboland*, 439.

Igbo Catholicism must be Igbo both in her practices and in her worships. This is the only way, her identity can easily shine out and be brought to light. This does not imply infidelity to the substance of the ancient doctrine of the Deposit of Faith. The kernel of the Gospel message (Substance) must remain the same but the methods, strategies, processes and procedures (Accidents) which are other things, are made to vary from age to age, culture to culture, language to language and even from people to people due to the corresponding variations in locality, culture, mentality, reactions and responses as well as expressions. That will then correspond to the direction of ‘aggionamento’ of John XXIII in our time, the modern time, not to guard this precious treasure as though we are concerned only with antiquity. The fact remains that the Gospel of Christ presented to the Igbo people still remains to be duly and truly solidified in Igboland and inculturation should serve as the method of achieving this indispensable human task. Above all, she requires still a method of assimilation of the faith and practice in natural patterns and styles, feelings and general aesthetics.

The Gospel in Igboland should cleanse and embrace the root cause of the people’s life, culture and tradition in the way they are and operate. Church truly respects and recognizes the culture of each people and every region. She does not intend to erase and exterminate whatever that is good, beautiful and useful about people’s natural life. Concluding his address, the Pope said to the Nigerian and Igbo Bishops, “Having herself embraced the Gospel, the Church is called to communicate it by word and action. The Catholic people under your leadership have the opportunity, the privilege and the duty to give a corporate witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the culture, way and language in which they live. They have the power to bring the Gospel into the very heart of their culture, into the fabric of their everyday lives.”⁴⁶⁷ There is therefore the need for a thorough inculturation and application of the indigenous missionary methods and strategies of administration and evangelization as Pope recommended, in order to realize the touching effects of the Gospel on the lives of the Igbo Catholics as well as to achieve self-actualization, self-awareness and self-identity of the Igbo Catholicism. The humble advice of Pope John Paul to the Igbo Catholicism and her hierarchies will lead to the second major point in this work which is inculturation and its relevance in Igbo Catholic Church.

2. Inculturation: its Meaning and Relevance to the Universal Church

For some time now, the term ‘inculturation’ has assumed a central place in mission studies. Mission theology studies inculturation as a means of evangelization. The reality that inculturation expresses is as old as Christianity itself, since the Church has always sought ways

⁴⁶⁷ John Paul II, *Address to the Bishops of Nigeria, Lagos*. Monday, 15 February 1982 (Vaticana: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1982), no. 6.

of expressing its message in a local culture. The Church, based on the mandate of Christ to her, to make disciples of all nation, (Mt 28:19) has always seen the scope of its mission as universal and all-embracing. It entails crossing all human boundaries and meeting people of all cultures and all religious traditions. The question of the admission of Gentiles into the Church without imposing Jewish law on them initiated the general Council that sought the answer (Acts 15). That was the first major inculturation in the early Church. “Therefore, the exigency of inculturation is not new in the life and history of the Church. What appears new is the term ‘inculturation’ itself and the shift of emphasis that came with it.”⁴⁶⁸ Missionary adaptation was previously used in many magisterial documents by the missiologists. “Hence, inculturation could be said to be a relatively recent term in theology and was first employed by theologians about the middle of the last century.”⁴⁶⁹ Though fairly new, it has been adjudged by many theologians as a term that is capable of articulating most adequately the needed respect and promotion of healthy cultural pluralism in the process of expression of Christian faith. With the use of the term- Inculturation in Pope John Paul’s publications, beginning with his second apostolic exhortation, ‘Catechesis Tradendae,’ this neologism began to be part and parcel of intensive theological discussions for the world-wide missionary evangelization in subsequent decisions of the Universal Church. A Filipino theologian, Virginia Fabella, “describes inculturation as a theological process that not only allows for pluralism but actually encourages it.”⁴⁷⁰ It re-enforces that conviction that the peculiarity of the historical and cultural experiences of different people calls for a distinctive approach to evangelization in order to address the unique and legitimate hopes and aspirations.

The encounter between faith and culture that happens in the process of inculturation is very dynamic and too deep to be visualised as mere mixture, intermingling, much less adaptation or assimilation. Hence, Pedro Arupe defines inculturation as “the incarnation of Christian life and of the Christian message in a particular cultural context, in such a way that this experience not only finds expression through elements proper to the culture in question (this alone would be no more than a superficial adaptation), but becomes a principle that animates, directs and unifies the culture, transforming and remaking it so as to bring about a new creation.”⁴⁷¹ Its cardinal motive is to make Christianity (Catholicism) a religion that is

⁴⁶⁸ Francis Oborji, *Concepts of Mission, The Evolution of Contemporary Missiology* (New York Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2006), 18.

⁴⁶⁹ Michael Muonwe, *Dialectics of Faith-Culture Integration: Inculturation or Syncretism* (America: Bloomington, 2014), 91.

⁴⁷⁰ Virginia Fabella, “Inculturation”, in *Dictionary of Third World Theologies*, ed., Virginia Fabella and Rasiah Sugirtharajah (New York Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2000), 105.

⁴⁷¹ Pedro Arupe, “On Inculturation,” *Acta Romana Societatis Iesu* 17, no. 1 (1979): 257.

acceptable to all cultures and nations. Inculturation is a dynamic encounter and exchange between the culture of a certain place and the culture which comes from the Gospel.⁴⁷²

The theological foundation of inculturation is the incarnation. The basic argument is that just as Jesus Christ, the Word of God, became incarnate in a human culture, in the Jewish milieu, the Gospel of Jesus Christ should be allowed to be inculturated or incarnated in the local culture and context (Mt 5:17, Acts 10:34). Since God, by manifesting Himself through the incarnation, no longer seems distantly separated from humanity, the Church in the same way, is challenged to come nearer to the people, thereby bringing the faith very close to them through the process of inculturation. Unless faith is allowed to follow this path in its encounter with culture, all efforts will always end up with superficial adaptation or imposition. Inculturation is recommended for evangelization. It entails a sincere and honest appreciation of the dimensions of other cultures in so far it does not alter the main essence of the Church's identity. The goal of inculturation is to make Christianity a religion that is acceptable to all ages and all times. It is about helping the Church to be truly local by making the Gospel applicable to different cultures. "Just as 'the Word became flesh and dwelt among us' (Jn 1:14), so too the Good News, the Word of Jesus Christ proclaimed to the nations, must take root in the life-situation of the hearers of the Word."⁴⁷³ Thus, inculturation plays a prophetic role to cultures. Cultures need to be open to the Gospel and converted to Christ and Gospel also needs to be opened to the local culture so that it may attain fullness of meaning among the local populace. "Again, the fact that Jesus died and rose points to the fact that inculturation involves challenging cultures to a new life. Therefore, inculturation is an ongoing dialogue between faith and culture or cultures."⁴⁷⁴

From Christian theological perspective, "inculturation is understood to be the process whereby the faith already embodied in one culture encounters another culture. In this encounter, the faith becomes part and parcel of this new culture. It fuses with the new culture and simultaneously transforms it into a novel religious- cultural reality."⁴⁷⁵ The Church never proposes to annihilate or eliminate whatever is good and meaningful about peoples' way of life when the Gospel is brought to them. What the Universal Church does amidst cultural differences and variations among the people to whom the Gospel is brought, is to identify many cultural practices and values and through her faculty and authority purges, cleanses, refines and takes into Christian worship certain elements and values of the peoples' customs. The

⁴⁷² *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 60.

⁴⁷³ *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 60.

⁴⁷⁴ Oborji, *Concepts of Mission, The Evolution of Contemporary Missiology*, 111.

⁴⁷⁵ Laurenti Magesa, *Anatomy of Inculturation: Transforming the Church in Africa* (New York: Orbis Books, 2004), 5.

atmosphere of penetrating in order to cleanse and raise the culture by the power of the Gospel is a reality that is encouraged and promoted by the Universal Church.

Inculturation is very essential and relevant to the Universal Church because it sustains and maintains the catholicity and unity of the Church. It is often said that the more inculturation is encouraged and practised, the more the Church grows in her catholicity and more realistically united it becomes. Indeed, without mincing words, Schineller clearly states that “the process of inculturation is the only possible way to full catholicity because the changes brought about by authentic inculturation are not loss or diminishment, but growth in the true Catholic nature of Christianity.”⁴⁷⁶ That understood, any attempt to scuttle genuine inculturation in the Church, in some sense jeopardises the catholicity of the Universal Church. Doubtless, John Paul II is aware of this when he states, “The Church is also Catholic because she is able to present in every human context the revealed truth.....in such a way as to bring it into contact with the thoughts and just expectations of every individual and every people.”⁴⁷⁷ It is only when the Church is truly inculturated in every place that it can be said to be present to all nations and thus becomes a universally tangible sign and instrument of redemption.⁴⁷⁸ It is unity in diversity that the beauty and Catholicity of the Church is enriched and polished.

1. Adequate Inculturation at the Service of True Self Identity of the Igbo Catholicism

There is no way one can talk about the universality of the Church when the concrete and particular manifestations of God’s grace in specific cultural contexts are not appreciated by the Church. According to Paul VI, “Legitimate attention to the local Churches cannot fail to enrich the Church. Such attention is indispensable and urgent.”⁴⁷⁹ With inculturation, the local Church is called to play an essential role and is understood as a maker of its own theology and identity, though in dialogue and union with the Universal Church. This means that any genuine inculturation begins from below, not from above, thus ensuring the much valued ingenuity and originality needed in the process of self identity of any local Church. “This entails (using insights from Vatican II) sincere respect and utilisation of peoples’ philosophy and wisdom, their cultural endowments and general worldview.”⁴⁸⁰

In Igboland therefore, it will mean utilising Igbo concepts, wisdom, philosophy and worldview which serve as prism through which the people perceive and express who God is, the nature of the human person, the meaning of the world around them and their relationship

⁴⁷⁶ Peter Schineller, “Inculturation as the Pilgrimage to Catholicity” *Concilium* 204, no. 4 (1989), 100.

⁴⁷⁷ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *The Apostles of the Slaves, Slavorum Apostoli* (SA), 2 June 1985, no. 4.

⁴⁷⁸ *Lumen Gentium*, no. 1.

⁴⁷⁹ Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 63.

⁴⁸⁰ Vatican Council II, *Ad Gentes*, no. 22.

with it. Just as the different communities, cultures and traditions of the New Testament writers made them render different accounts of the common narrative of Jesus Christ, so also can different local Churches in their cultural embeddedness bear authentic witness to Christ even amidst the differences necessitated by their circumstances. The importance and the urgency of the situation (inculturation) has been articulated by David Tracy when he says, “Catholic Christianity can no longer afford to be Eurocentric anymore than early Christianity could afford to be purely Judaic if it would reach the Gentiles in ways that they could understand and appropriate the common faith in their own cultural forms.”⁴⁸¹

According to Muonwe, “It is evident that part of the reason why inculturation was not given due attention prior to Vatican II was because, the Church’s understanding of culture by then was primarily ‘classicist’ which promoted the feeling of cultural superiority by which the western Christianity understood itself as the bearer of a universal culture according to which the lives of all other people were to be more or less patterned.”⁴⁸² This way, the hegemonic imperative that one’s ‘particular’ predominates as the ‘universal’ became the operative principle. This in some sense, legitimized the understanding of missionary activity to other people outside the West as involving a movement from the cultured or the civilised to the uncultured, faithless, barbarians and ‘pagans’. These other people cultures were denigrated in favour of the western. With this classicist mindset, the Church was convinced that part of her noblest actions was her conversion of the non-western ‘other’ from his or her specific culture to the ‘universal’ western culture presumed to be ‘culture of humanity’. Since others were seen to have no culture in the real sense of the word, whatever they had was perceived as unable to adequately convey the message of Christ. Western Christians thought that they alone had a narrative to tell. Others were previously in the dark and it was only with their Christianity could these people behold the light.

This mentality continued and was re-enforced by colonialism. It later created an atmosphere where the Church’s creeds and dogmatic statements were assumed to enjoy unchangeable essence. Consequently, theologians laboured to produce uniform theology that enjoyed both geographical and temporal universality, identical applicability and comprehensibility. Little wonder, then, that Christianity was, in so many cultures, Igboland inclusive, labelled a foreign import which could not adequately address the people’s legitimate needs and aspirations. Interestingly enough, at Vatican II, the Church improved on the classicist

⁴⁸¹ David Tracy, “World Church or World Catechism: The Problem of Eurocentrism”, *Concilium* 204, no.4 (1989), 29.

⁴⁸² Michael Muonwe, *Dialectics of Faith-Culture Integration: Inculturation or Syncretism* (America: Bloomington, 2014), 220.

view she had held for almost two millennia, and officially adopted a more comprehensive, descriptive and anthropological view of culture. In this sense, “culture is understood as natural to all human beings in so far as it is in the human nature to strive towards self-realisation through transformation and humanisation of the universe.”⁴⁸³ This understanding of culture ushered in the theological climate favouring the development of the theology of inculturation. Theologians have come to understand that theology is a cultural practice. According to Luzbetak, “there is no other way of establishing, consolidating and perpetuating the Church in a society than through its culture.”⁴⁸⁴ Faith is always lived in a cultural milieu. Consequently, any effort to consolidate the faith without adequate reference to the cultural nature of the human person is, to say the least, unrealistic. Hence, every local Church is encouraged to continue with the theology and practice of inculturation. Inculturation in its proper workings has become a great help to the Church today in the greater and wider encounters with nations of varying cultures and customs. However, this is yet to become true and a reality with the Church in Africa particularly with Igbo Catholicism.

To make Igboland a fertile land and suitable home for Catholicism, inculturation is highly needed. Inculturation will offer the best model for the realisation of the goal, mission and identity of the local Church in Igboland and Africa in general. Inculturation is the surest way to establish the true identity of the Igbo local Church because it will help to ensure that Catholicism is localized in Igboland, that Igbo people understand the Christian faith and teachings better, that Igbo people live their faith more integrally as Igbos and that Catholicism spread so fast and deeply too in Igboland and beyond. It is only through inculturation that the local Church in Igboland can properly affirm and adequately address the challenges posed by the plurality of cultures in her theology and evangelising mission. Through it, the different Igbo cultures should be taken seriously as dialogue partners with Christian faith and tradition, a dialogue that is doubtless of vital importance for the true self identity and mission of the Igbo Catholicism.

For the Catholic Christianity in Igboland to stand firmly, there is need for inculturation which implies integrating Christian doctrines with ‘useful’ Igbo traditional cultural values. Through inculturation, the various aspects of Igbo indigenous cultures will be brought together into Christian context so as to construct a more authentic Catholic Christian life among the Igbo Catholics. Through inculturation also, Igbo Catholics will be enabled to identify more ‘deeply’ with Catholicism and treat her (Catholicism) as their own rather than as an alien

⁴⁸³ Muonwe, *Dialectics of Faith-Culture Integration: Inculturation or Syncretism*, 221.

⁴⁸⁴ Louis Luzbetak, *The Church and Cultures: New Perspectives in Missiological Anthropology* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1988), 133.

institution or religion. According to Magesa, through inculturation, Catholicism will be rooted in the African (Igbo) local cultures, taking into account the peoples' customs and ways of doing things. Catholicism shall in this way not only influence peoples' lives more, but she will also help to create understanding and harmony among the diverse African (Igbo) religious and cultural perspectives.⁴⁸⁵

Therefore, for the Catholic Church in Igboland to assume her real identity, be at home as a local Church in Igboland, be faithful and truthful to her teachings and be able to achieve her mission, there is every need for adequate inculturation. These beautiful religious and non-religious elements of Igbo culture must be purified, elevated, incarnated and animated in the life of the Igbo Church. Igbo cultures are therefore called upon to surrender themselves to be evangelized in the light of the Gospel so that negative elements are purified. This involves in turn the real introduction of these Igbo cultural elements into the life of the Church in a wonderful mutual exchange. Thus, a double activity is reached, whereby faith takes from Igbo culture those elements which are suitable to illustrate her mysteries while culture seeks at the same time to appropriate to herself the truths revealed.

During the course of this research, I asked one elderly woman who was an eye witness and disciple of the early foreign missionaries, why the people of Igboland did/ do not adhere strictly to the teachings given them by the early Church missionaries especially at this moment in time. She smiled and replied, "We eat everything they give us but we digest them in our own way."⁴⁸⁶ The 'digestion' in the reply refers to the process of the appropriation of the faith. Food cannot be assimilated by the body without being digested and any food eaten must be digested according to the digestive system of the eater and not the giver. The Christian faith cannot be assimilated by people of a given culture unless it is digested by that culture. The process of assimilation in either case is particular because the body in the case of the individual and the environment in the case of a culture are particular. This shows that before a Christian faith will be received and concretely lived by a people of a given culture, it must first of all be digested and assimilated by their culture.

Christian message must be perceived and appropriated in relation to the spirituality and practical expectations of the Igbo people. This is all about inculturation and it is what is needed in Igbo Catholicism today in order that her true and clear identity will be brought to light. Gospel is a Good news of salvation and it applies to all people no matter their culture. It is God's offer to mankind which is meant for all nations and cultures including Igboland and its

⁴⁸⁵ Magesa, *Anatomy of Inculturation: Transforming the Church in Africa*, 10.

⁴⁸⁶ The response of Roseline Okafor during my brief discussion with her (Oral Interview) on Catholic faith on 25 August, 2017.

people. Therefore, it is the prerogative of the Church in Igboland to ensure and discharge this duty with concern unhindered. What the Igboland and its people require now in their peculiar situation, like any other land is pure Christianity as applicable to all human beings but also wrapped with the cloak of beautiful Igbo traditional endowments and cultural values. “For Christianity and Catholicism to make a far-reaching impressions and have their roots deep in the life of the Igbo people therefore, there is a serious need for real inculturation and proper application of Catholicism and her liturgical acts in ways that they can spontaneously render life more homely, more practical and more meaningful in Igboland.”⁴⁸⁷ “The Catholic Church and her liturgical actions should therefore be expressed to influence the daily life of the Igbo man as he has been living traditionally so as not to allow any religious lacuna or a dichotomy to overtake his natural or native piety.”⁴⁸⁸

There is thus a demand for humility from both the Church and Igbo cultures so that they can both learn from each other in an atmosphere of mutual respect and dialogue. In order to harmonise the principle of integration of Gospel values into particular cultures (Igbo cultures) with the transcendence of these values over all cultures, the Second Vatican Council affirms “that there is no particular people or culture, whether of the past or of the present, to which the Church is exclusively and indissolubly tied. Rather, in order to realise her mission, Church enters into communion with all.”⁴⁸⁹ There is need for thorough evangelisation of the culture and inculturation of the Gospel in Igboland. Efforts should be made to see that liturgical practices and ritual acts of the Igbo Catholics are adapted to traditional understanding and Igbo mentality. In other word, there is need for an adequate catechetical inculturation, sufficient ritual inculturation, adequate inculturation of music and dance in liturgy and appropriate inculturation of the Christian marriage.

A. Adequate Catechetical Inculturation

As already discussed above, inadequate catechetical inculturation constitutes a great challenge to the very essence and identity of the Igbo Catholicism. In order to tackle this challenge, there is a need for adequate catechetical inculturation in Igbo Catholicism. There is need to produce a thorough, simple, clear and easy comprehensible Igbo catechism devoid of linguistic and conceptual infelicities, ambiguities and inadequacies. This proper reform and inculturation in the Igbo catechism is needed in order to put to an end the increasing mis-education and meaninglessness in Igbo Catechism. A Catholic catechism ought to formulate concisely and in

⁴⁸⁷ Chigere, *Foreign Missionary Background and Indigenous Evangelization in Igboland*, 554.

⁴⁸⁸ Chigere, *Foreign Missionary Background and Indigenous Evangelization in Igboland*, 554.

⁴⁸⁹ *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 58.

the clearest possible language of every nation, region or locality what the Universal Church believes and teaches. This is the primary duty of indigenous hierarchies. In the view of Ozigboh, “Fr. Lejeune’s Igbo catechism which is still used in its various modifications in Igboland today is no longer recommended. It is now necessary and urgent to adapt it, to decode and rephrase its Christian message especially for Igbo children and unlettered adults.”⁴⁹⁰

Catechetical imperfections in Igbo catechism should be avoided. Meaningless Igbo catechetical terminologies such as ‘Ikwo aka n’isi’ for Confirmation, ‘Igba akwukwo’ for Matrimony and ‘Odaasi di aso’ for Holy Orders should be scrapped and replaced with more meaningful and significant Igbo terms which will convey the exact meanings, functions and effects of these sacraments to the Catholics in Igboland. Many Igbo Catholics do not adequately appreciate the sacraments of the Church not out of bad will but because of lack of understanding resulting from the use of wrong and ambiguous nomenclature and concepts. More emotive and better Igbo concepts should be used in order to make these sacraments more meaningful and understandable to the Igbo Catholics. Hence, such expression as ‘Ido ike n’okwukwe’ (to strengthen one in faith) rather than ‘Ikwo aka n’isi’ (to wash hand on one’s head) should be used for the sacrament of Confirmation. ‘Ijiko nwoke na nwanyi n’ihu Chukwu na ndi Uka dika di na nwunye,’ to join a man and a woman before God and His people as husband and wife) rather than ‘Igba Akwukwo’ (to have sex with a book) should be used for the sacrament of Matrimony. These precise and meaningful Igbo catechetical concepts and expressions will help to bring out the actual nature, meaning, effectiveness and purpose of these sacraments and celebrations, and so give the Igbo Catholic liturgy her real and true identity.

Again, the use of transliterated catechetical terminologies ought to be stopped. The Igbo use of ‘Enuigwe’ for Heaven should be discouraged and stopped. Rather, a more appropriate Igbo catechetical terminology that conveys the same meaning with Catholic concept of Heaven should be adopted and used. “Igbo catechetical terminologies like ‘Ulo Anuri’ or ‘Ulo Aku’ meaning where the riches of God are made available to man (Rom 9:23) or God’s holy city ‘Ulo Chukwu,’ ‘Ulo Ndokwa’ are more meaningful, adrem, evocative and educative than ‘Enuigwe.’”⁴⁹¹ These better and more meaningful Igbo catechetical concepts should be adopted and used. After all, an Igbo Christian’s ultimate quest is to be with God, hence, ‘Ulo Chukwu’, ‘Ulo Anuri’, et cetera. Again, traditional Igbo societies which have no fetish element and pagan connotations such as ‘Umunna’ (Kindred family) ‘Umuada’, ‘Otu Ogbo’ Age Grade, New Yam Festival, should be encouraged among the Igbos. These societies help the Igbo Catholics to see

⁴⁹⁰ Ozigboh, *Igbo Catholicism: The Onitsha Connection 1967-1984*, 73.

⁴⁹¹ Ozigboh, *Igbo Catholicism: The Onitsha Connection 1967-1984*, 73.

Church as a community of believers and to solidify their life of community, love, unity and peace as well as to increase their human relationship with one another.

1●. The Correct Use of the Concept of the Church ‘Uka’ in Igboland

A great attention needs to be given to the terminologies used for the Church and members of the Church in Igboland today. The very identity of ‘Church’, ‘a Church member’ and ‘members of the Church’ is completely lost and grossly distorted in the linguistic terminologies: ‘Uka’, ‘Onye Uka’ and ‘Ndi Uka’ respectively. These were derogatory and negative names first conferred on Catholic converts by unbelievers and pagans when the disruptive influence of the new religion began to dawn on the Igbo society. This term ‘Uka’ is a denigratory and discrediting name given to the early converts to the Catholic Church in the Christian village by the adherents and believers of Igbo Traditional Religion when they saw that these early converts to the Catholic Church no longer observed and kept the practices and beliefs of the Igbo Traditional Religion. These early converts started to fight and go against the teachings, beliefs and practices of the Igbo Traditional Religion. The converts were regarded as trouble makers and a nuisance to the Igbo Traditional Religion and society. The adherents of Igbo Traditional Religion now saw them as trouble makers to the local communities because they tended to trample on the age-old traditions and customs of the people. This is why they were given the name ‘Ndi Uka’ meaning ‘Trouble Makers’. In typical Igbo language and linguistic expressions, ‘Uka or Okwu na Uka’ means ‘Trouble’, ‘Onye Uka or Onye Okwu na Uka’ means ‘Trouble Maker’ while ‘Ndi Uka’ or ‘Ndi Okwu na Uka’ means ‘Trouble Makers’ So, in the real sense of the term, ‘Uka’ Church and ‘Ndi Uka’ members of the Church are negative, derogatory, denigratory, disrespectful, discrediting, dishonouring, pejorative, insulting, offensive, abusive and vituperative concepts. So, ‘Ndi Uka’ or ‘Ndi Okwu na Uka’ really means ‘Trouble Makers’ and never members of the Church while ‘Uka’ means ‘Trouble’ and never Church.

It is therefore surprising and indeed regrettable that up till today in Igboland, these concepts ‘Uka’, ‘Onye Uka’ and ‘Ndi Uka’ are still being used for the ‘Church’, ‘member of the Church’ and ‘members of the Church’ respectively. What a flaw. These catechetical anomalies have been major obstacles to the growth and spread of Catholic faith in Igboland. Many pagans and fallen Catholics especially the elites and learned among them cannot reconcile the teachings of the Catholic Church (peace, love, unity et cetera) with the name she is called (Uka = Trouble, Ndi Uka- Trouble makers). Better, precise, more meaningful and more adrem Igbo catechetical concepts should be adopted and used. Thus, in Igbo Catholicism and Catechism, Church will no longer be called and addressed as ‘Uka’ but ‘Otu Kristi,’

Catholic Church no longer as ‘Uka Katoliki’ but ‘Otu Kristi Nke Katoliki,’ and a member of the Catholic Church no longer as ‘Onye Uka Katoliki’ but ‘Onye Otu Kristi Nke Katoliki’. Members of the Catholic Church should no longer be called and addressed as ‘Ndi Uka Katoliki’ but ‘Ndi Otu Kristi Nke Katoliki’ just as there are ‘Ndi Otu Nke Angilikan’, ‘Ndi Otu Kristi Nke Pentecostal’ etc. Similarly, in Igbo Catholicism and catechism, Pope should no longer be called and addressed as ‘Onye isi Uka Katoliki n’uwa nile’ (The head of all the Catholic trouble makers in the whole world) but rather as ‘Onye isi otu Kristi nke Katoliki n’uwa nile’ (The head of all the Catholic Church in the whole world).

The wrong usage of the term ‘Uka’ should be eliminated and avoided. Sunday should no longer be called ‘Ubochi Uka’ (The day for trouble-making) but ‘Ubochi otu Kristi’ (The day the members of the Church gather to worship their God). Furthermore, some Greaco-Roman and Germanic-Celtic terminologies which glut and cloth Igbo catechism should as much as possible be expunged and replaced with more meaningful terms. The transliteration of the English equivalents as is being practised in some parts of Igboland today is not a suitable alternative. Hence, such names of feasts as Christmas, Easter, Sunday, Lent and Paschal should be discarded and replaced with more suitable and more meaningful Igbo terminologies that will convey the real and true meaning of the feast in question. Hence, ‘Christmas’ in Igbo catechism should no longer be ‘Kristimas’ or ‘Ekeresimesi’ but ‘Oge Omumu Onye Nzoputa’. Easter should now be ‘Oge Mbilite n’onwu Onye Nzoputa’. Lenten period should no longer be called ‘Oge Lenti’ in Igbo catechism and liturgy but ‘Oge Opihia na ibu Onu,’ just as it is called ‘Fastenzeit’ (Fasten= not to eat and Zeit= time) in German language. ‘Fastenzeit’ means time one should not eat in German language. Furthermore, such catechetical terms as Person, Grace/Grasia, ‘Baptizim,’ ‘Yukarisia di Aso,’ ‘Penansi/Penitentia’ should be discarded and replaced with more perfect terminologies that have no linguistic and theological sophistication in the present Igbo language. Adequate inculturation in these areas will really help the Catholics in Igboland to understand very well the nature, functions, effects and efficacies of these sacraments and catechetical terms. Better knowledge and understanding increase the level of faith and belief among believers. They equally encourage active participation.

2●. Correction of the Notion of ‘Uka Fada’ (Catholic Church) in Igboland

Many people in Igboland misplace the origin and identity of the Catholic Church by seeing priests instead of Christ as the founder, origin and the source of identity of the Catholic Church. This is why they refer to Catholic Church as ‘Uka Father’ Church of priest. “Ask some Catholics and candidates for catechism classes which Church they go and they will respond

‘Uka Father’ instead of Catholic Church.”⁴⁹² This has its consequential effects in the sense that people build their faith on priests instead of Christ. The result is that, at any little scandal, disagreement or provocation by a priest, people stop going to Church because for them, Church belongs to priest. He is the founder and owner of the Church. “In Europe and America, if someone is not happy with his parish priest or pastor for any reason at all, he or she will change to another parish or worshipping community to continue to worship his or her God. But in Igboland today, if someone is not happy with his or her parish priest, he or she will stop going to Church completely.”⁴⁹³

The point is that many Catholics in Igboland worship priests instead of Christ. This understanding and notion should be corrected. Adequate catechesis is needed to help people understand that Christ is the founder, the origin, the source, the owner and the head of the Catholic Church. Church belongs to him and not to priests. All Igbo Catholics should look up to Christ and not to priests. They should build their faith on Christ. They should see Christ as the head and centre of all liturgical worships and not priests. Catholic Church draws her identity from Christ and not from priests.

B. Sufficient Ritual Inculturation

As already seen above, insufficient ritual inculturation is another factor that affects the very being of the local Church in Igboland. However, this problem can be solved through sufficient ritual inculturation. The commemorative, recalling and making-present aspect of the sacred events that sacred time suggests gains its full impact when it is synchronized as much as possible with ‘real’ time in terms of seasons and so on. Vatican II explains that in the course of the year, “the Church has established a calendar in which she unfolds the whole mystery of Christ from the incarnation and nativity to the ascension, to Pentecost and the expectation of the blessed hope of the coming of the Lord.”⁴⁹⁴ This also includes Sundays, the Lord’s Day, and the days commemorating martyrs and saints whose lives of perfection and holiness, the Church puts forward as examples for the faithful to follow. Except for Sundays, which the Council in this Constitution characterises as the original feast day and whose observance can be traced back to the earliest Christian practices, the Constitution does not close the door on necessary inculturation and adaptations of the liturgical year.⁴⁹⁵ It only cautions that care must be taken so that the specific character of the traditional customs and discipline of the sacred

⁴⁹² Cyprain Okoye, e-mail to the researcher, March 21, 2017.

⁴⁹³ Cornelius Ifezim, “Towards Adapting Catholicism in Igboland” (Paper presented at the Annual Conference for the National Association of Theology Students, Enugu, June 20 – 24, 2003).

⁴⁹⁴ *Sacrosanctum Concilium, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, no. 102.

⁴⁹⁵ *Sacrosanctum Concilium, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, nos. 106 & 107.

seasons shall be preserved or restored in order to nourish the piety of the faithful who celebrate the mysteries of the Christian redemption and above all, the paschal mystery.

In case there is a need for even ‘more radical’ adjustment, the local ecclesiastical authorities have to study which new local cultural and geographical values and elements must be taken into account in divine worship....⁴⁹⁶ The Igbo Catholicism needs to consider the above statement especially as it concerns some of her devotions like May devotion, which is observed during rainy season. Five seasons form the liturgical year in the Catholic Church namely; Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter and Ordinary Time. Each of these seasons emphasizes a fundamental mystery in the economy of salvation: anticipating the birth of the Lord during Advent, celebrating his presence among us during Christmas, recalling his passion and death for the sake of the entire humanity during Lent, reliving his resurrection and ascension during Easter and commemorating the significance of the entire covenant relationship between God and us during Ordinary Time. No one is saying that any one of these mysteries of faith should not be commemorated. But given varying chronological, geographical and climatic conditions, it is my humble suggestion in line with Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy nos. 39 and 40, that local Churches (Igbo Catholicism) should be encouraged to investigate ‘when’ in their regions they should be celebrated so as to make maximum sense and great spiritual impact in the lives of the faithful. This is all about inculturation.

The Church should always be encouraged to go on with these variations which she has always allowed in some of her feasts, celebrations and devotions because of differences in time and seasons. It should be recalled that, because of the heavy rainfall in the month of May and June, the Feast of the Corpus Christ is celebrated together with the Feast of Christ the King in the month of November (month of dry season) in Nigeria rather than in the month of May or June as it is the case in Europe. It should be recalled also, that the solemnity of Ascension is celebrated on Thursday in the 6th week of Easter (40 days after Easter) while in some parts of Europe, it is celebrated on the 7th Sunday of Easter (43 days after Easter). Each local Church should know the best and most suitable season and time to celebrate these liturgical feasts and devotions especially the movable ones. After all, the sole aim of all these feasts and devotions is ‘salus animarum’ that is salvation of the souls. However, all necessary changes and inculturations must be effected with the authority, approval and permission of the Apostolic See. The ones to be changed and incultured are the ones which the Apostolic See, being guided by the Holy Spirit has given approval to. Liturgical and devotional practices should be given the most suitable seasons in order to retain their meanings and values for the Catholics in

⁴⁹⁶ *Sacrosanctum Concilium, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, no. 40.

Igboland. One needs to see the flowers and the beauty of the season of spring in Europe in order to appreciate and enjoy the meaning of the hymn: Our Lady of May being sung during May devotion in Europe.

Again, more meaningful and emotive Igbo linguistic expressions and titles should be included and added to the titles and honours given to the Blessed Virgin Mary in Igboland as contained in the litany. In the words of Nwankwor, “such Igbo expressions like ‘Ojiugo’, ‘Urimma,’ ‘Uzumma,’ ‘Mkpulumma,’ ‘Akwaugo,’ ‘Adaugo’ and ‘Anyanwu Ututu’ (all signifying beauty and goodness), ‘Ocheze,’ ‘Odibeze,’ ‘Abadaeze’ and ‘Ochiora’, (all signifying queenship) would make a better meaning and readily reach the hearts of Igbo men and women than some of the titles like ‘Ulo nche David’ (Tower of David), ‘Ulo nche odu’ (Tower of Ivory) and ‘Ugbo nke agba’ (Ark of the Covenant) given to Our Blessed Mother Mary.”⁴⁹⁷ According to Onwubiko, in credence to the great value inherent in the theology of inculturation, Igbo Churches should be constructed and built in line with some patterns and plans that bear some Igbo significance. This should imply rotund structures because this is the artistic tradition of Igbos. Igbos live in round huts, prefer round stools and circular dance formation.”⁴⁹⁸ Rotund buildings and structures would certainly facilitate the physical setting for worship on account of their familiarity. Chairs and benches should be arranged so that there is plenty of space in the Churches for people to dance, clap and use their body movements to worship God. Current arrangements confine worshippers and are not conducive to body movement. Igbos prefer to worship in free space and open air, because for them, it is more inspirational. This is because there is much more movement and communal participation in Igbo liturgical action. In the spirit of inculturation also, penitential rites, prayers and other rites and rituals during Igbo Catholic liturgy should not always be read from a book. Instead, they should be improvised so as to be more related to the actual circumstances of the prayer and ritual. Prayers for the celebration of the liturgy ought to capture the style and spirit of Igbo prayers.

For one thing, as an oral culture, Igbo traditional prayers during sacrifices, offerings and rites of passage are spontaneous. This enables them to address the need for prayer directly, taking into account all or at least the major elements surrounding the occasion. However, looking at the highly formalized liturgy of the Church today, one does not need to insist totally on this characteristic of traditional Igbo prayers. But some room should be given for it in the

⁴⁹⁷ Theresa Nwankwor, Oral Interview, 20 September, 2017. Nanka, Nigeria. Theresa Nwankwor was an Igbo Traditional Religious believer for 51 years but who later converted to the Catholic Church. She wants to understand very well the teachings of the Church, the life of Christ, Our Blessed Mother Mary etc.

⁴⁹⁸ Oliver Onwubiko, *Theory and Practice of Inculturation (An African Perspective)*, *Christian Missions and Culture in Igboland and Africa*, 144.

spirit of inculturation in order to make Catholicism an Igbo religion too. The fact remains that local prayers need to emerge from Igbo local situations so that they are situated to the language and mentality of the Igbo people. Equally, the Catholic Church in Igboland should have designs of vestments and liturgical cloths and symbols of local origin and inspiration. Igbo made cloths and materials should be used as liturgical clothings, in decorating Altars, tabernacles and places of worship. Sacred linens should equally be sowed and designed using traditional Igbo materials. Local productions and ideas should be encouraged and used in the Church. Igbo local Church should pride herself on being local and native. The Catholic Church in Igboland should do better to focus her searchlight on her own cultural and seasonal environment. This is the inculturation and it is the only avenue through which the Catholic Church in Igboland can earn her true identity and fulfil her salutary and salvatory role among her faithful. In doing this however, local Church in Igboland has to carefully determine at what point certain inculturations become syncretistic and deformational to the Gospel message

1●. Inculturation of Baptismal and Confirmation Names in Igboland (Igbo Names as Christian and First Names)

Another area that needs immediate and total inculturation in the lives of the Igbo Catholics is in the choice of the names during baptismal and confirmation ceremonies. Up till today in Igboland, foreign names rather than native names are used during baptisms and confirmations. They are equally used as first and official names. Some priests reject the Igbo names chosen by parents and guardians during the baptism of their children because they consider such Igbo names as being paganistic, barbaric and even fetish. Many parents equally prefer foreign names. Also, many offices both in the Church and in the society reject Igbo names as official and first names. In Igboland, Christianity is identified with foreign names. These foreign names are regarded as first, official and superior to the indigenous names even when their meanings are not known to the users and bearers. It is a well-known fact in Igboland today, that official matters, documents both civil and ecclesiastical, educational certificates and papers, all bear only English baptismal names as official and first names. Igbo names are not given official or first recognition either in religious and ecclesiastical institutions or in educational sectors. This is not proper especially as regards the very identity and self-actualisation of the Catholic Church in Igboland.

The Catholic Church in Igboland cannot fully realise her identity and her self-awareness if she cannot use the Igbo names in her baptismal and confirmation ceremonies. This is so because she lives on one soil and practises the culture of another soil. Distinction must be made between Christianity and culture, between Christianity and European culture. Catholicism

came to Igboland from Europe amidst European culture. However, the Catholic Church in Igboland must be able to separate the constituents of Christianity from the elements of the European culture. It is only in this way that the Church in Igboland can be authentic to her true identity and self-image. According to John Paul II, “The Church comes to bring Christ and his Gospel. She does not come to bring the culture and cultural elements of another race as Gospel message.”⁴⁹⁹ Every local Church even though in union with the Universal Church should try to maintain her locality and originality. It is only in this way that the Gospel of Christ can penetrate the soil of every region, breathe the air of every locality and drink the water of every nation. Germans uses German names for baptism and confirmation. Polish Christians equally use Polish names for baptism and confirmation. But this is not the case in Igboland today. The Church in Igboland should get rid of all alienations and strange elements in her work of evangelization and sacraments initiated by the pioneer missionaries and strive for typical Igbo means and avenues to deliver her works of evangelization and salvation in order to make the Catholic Church in Igboland more homely, more meaningful and more authentic. It is also only in this way that the Catholic Church in Igboland can be truthful to her teachings, faithful to her mission and authentic to her local self-identity.

Moreover, using Igbo names like ‘Chukwudi’ (God exists), ‘Chinedu’ (God leads), ‘Ikechukwu’ (Power of God) etc for baptisms and confirmations will make more meaning and sense to the Igbo Christians. It will also lead to the increase of faith, trust in God, high morality and better understanding of the Catholic teachings because names are very significant in Igboland. Igbo people are always called and encouraged to live according to their names. These Igbo names are more meaningful and understandable, even to the unlettered adults in the village who never went to school than such English names like Edwin, Cajetan, Innocent, Joseph and Lazarus. The early Catholic missionaries used their English names during baptisms in Igboland. Part of the reason for this was that they found it very difficult to pronounce Igbo names.

Also, the officials of the Royal Niger Company and British Government in Igboland for trades and commercial purposes picked some Igbo people to help them as agents, stewards, cooks and messengers. “These white people could not pronounce the Igbo names of these Igbos they have chosen as their helpers. To make the pronunciation of their names easier and better for them, they decided to give them English names even without Baptism. This is why many unbaptised people go by English names in Igboland today. And even since then, an average

⁴⁹⁹ John Paul II, *Address to the Bishops of Nigeria, Lagos, 15 February 1982*, no. 6.

Igbo man comes to view English names with superiority and officially too.”⁵⁰⁰ Using Igbo names will therefore help Igbo Catholics to see Catholic Church as part of their life and culture and not as something strange and alien to them. Today, many people in Igboland still regard Catholic Church as a visitor (Uka biara abia or Uka bu onye obia) because of all these estrangements and foreign elements. Furthermore, using Igbo names as baptismal and confirmation names will evoke more faith among the Igbo Catholic faithful and remind them about God in their lives always. Igbo believe that the names they answer influence their actions when they understand the meanings of such names. “In a text message to the researcher on June 1, 2017, Augustine Okafor revealed that more than 90% of the Igbo people do not know the meaning of the English names they answer as their baptismal names. So, how can such names evoke faith and remind them the presence of God in their lives.”⁵⁰¹

C. Adequate Inculturation of Music and Dance in Igbo Liturgy

Again, as highlighted above, lack of adequate inculturation of music and dance in Igbo liturgy is another drawback to the true identity of the Igbo Catholicism. In order to overcome this challenge therefore, there is a need for an adequate inculturation of music and dance in Igbo liturgy. For the true identity of the Catholic Church in Igboland and in the spirit of inculturation which the reformed liturgy of the Second Vatican Council has given an open cheque to enrich the liturgy with cultural values and genius of the people, the Catholics in Igboland are urged to use in their liturgies, music, songs and dance, which are sacred, richly rooted in the culture of the Igbo people and yet befitting to the solemnity of the rite performed. Adequate and proper use of Igbo traditional dances, indigenous music and local musical instruments such as drums, gongs, rattles, fiddles and hand-pianos should be highly encouraged and incorporated into Igbo liturgical celebrations while undue opposition to liturgical inculturation of indigenous music and musical instruments should be discouraged.

Given the mood for worship that the early missionaries bequeathed to the Igbos, in which piety means soberness, Igbo ritual dance and music may appear somewhat chaotic and that is why some so called ‘Igbo Vatican I priests and lay faithful’ oppose them. But it must be recalled in this case again, what Magesa says about spirituality, “that if such movement helps to connect people with God, that if it aids them in the task of inner transformation, it must be considered a positive element and not be curtailed. The appropriateness of something like this can be judged only within the culture, that kind of judgement cannot legitimately and validly

⁵⁰⁰ Emmanuel Okoye, e-mail message to the researcher, March 21, 2017.

⁵⁰¹ Emmanuel Okoye, e-mail message to the researcher, March 21, 2017.

be imposed from the aesthetics of another culture.”⁵⁰² Equally, “the Universal Church respects all that is good and praise-worthy in peoples’ cultures. She praises and takes to herself in so far as they are good, the abilities, resources and customs of peoples.”⁵⁰³ The Catholic hierarchies in Igboland should as a matter of urgency, encourage and incorporate into Catholic liturgy, worship and teachings all the aspects of traditional Igbo musical values that are not indissolubly bound up with superstition and error. There should be a substantial use of traditional forms to express certain elements of faith: beating of drums, clapping of hands, dancing and body language and attitudes. Encouraging Igbo songs which make liturgy livelier, more active and more enjoyable is a step in the right direction. The use of Igbo musical forms, melodies, tunes and rhythms should be allowed and encouraged as long as they are suitable for sacred use and are in accord with the dignity of the place of worship. These music and dance play an important role in the Igbo liturgy. Their ultimate aim is to promote active participation of the entire worshipping community. “Music helps the soul to commune with its Maker.”⁵⁰⁴ Igbo Church music has been enriched over the years by the introduction of western musical instruments such as the organ, piano, guitar and others. This is a blessing and is in line with the principle of cross-cultural fertilization. However, it becomes distortion and mutilation to the liturgical identity of the Igbo Catholicism when the Igbo local songs and musical instruments are being replaced with these foreign songs and instruments. During Christmas liturgy in Igboland, such foreign hymns and songs like silent night, ‘feliz navidad,’ merry Christmas etc are sung. The same is applicable to other major solemnities and feasts. This practice should be discouraged. Rather, the Igbo equivalent of these solemn liturgical songs and hymns should be produced and used during liturgies so that the Igbo Catholics especially the unlettered adults and children can, through these meaning laden and solemn Igbo songs have a better understanding, easier appreciation and deeper assimilation of the spiritual significance of these solemnities and feasts in their lives as Christians.

Renowned Catholic Igbo musicians, musicologists and vocalists should be encouraged and assisted to compose Igbo songs, hymns and lyrics with deep theological leanings on Christian demands and on the problems of daily life: faith, hope, forgiveness, peace, unity, etc. The rich potentials of these musical geniuses should be given adequate patronage and support and should be fully harvested. It is the duty of the Igbo indigenous hierarchies to implement this. These musical geniuses need the support of the Igbo hierarchies for them to produce fruits in plenty. The architectural geniuses of Michelangelo and Giovanni Bernini would not have

⁵⁰² Magesa, *Anatomy of Inculturation: Transforming the Church in Africa*, 210.

⁵⁰³ *Lumen Gentium*, no. 13.

⁵⁰⁴ Ikenga Ozigbo, *Igbo Catholicism: The Onitsha Connection 1967-1984*, 101.

seen the light of the day without the patronage from the Popes. Annual diocesan music competitions should be organised. These competitions help immensely to spread and acclimatize the newly composed Igbo hymns and songs. In incorporating Igbo songs and hymns into liturgy, efforts should be made to see that profane and aliturgical Igbo songs and hymns which distract people from the focal point of worship and present them with deficient and diluted theology should be prohibited. Catholic theologians and liturgists in Igboland must ensure that those music and songs are theologically sound and enriching before admitting them in the liturgy. They should be charged with conducting seminars and workshops to enlighten composers and make them see the need to subject their works to theological scrutiny before they are brought to public for use in the Church and for popularization in CDs and other media.

D. Appropriate Inculturation in Christian Marriage

Furthermore, as already stressed above, another handicap to the true and better identity of the Igbo Catholicism is lack of inculturation in Christian marriage. To eliminate this handicap therefore, there is a need for appropriate inculturation in Christian marriage in Igboland. The afore-mentioned problems which are associated with Catholic marriage in Igboland today are created by the current attitudes and practice of Church marriage in Igboland. In my opinion, they are man-made problems which need not to exist at all. The Second Vatican Council gives the permission to ensure that these afore-mentioned problems do not exist when it says, “If certain regions traditionally use other praiseworthy customs and ceremonies, when celebrating the sacrament of Matrimony, the Sacred Synod earnestly desires that these, by all means be retained.”⁵⁰⁵

The current practice of Church wedding can be revised and a new form, in line with the Igbo traditional marriage evolved. But instead of seeking the solutions to these marriage problems, the Igbo Church leaders and hierarchies have resorted to depriving pregnant brides of the veils or celebrating their marriage either under a mango tree, in Father’s house chapel or at 5am Mass. The Instruction on the New Roman Ritual on marriage allows for inculturation and variations, or even special rituals adapted to local customs and needs.⁵⁰⁶ The territorial body of Bishops have the right to make these inculturation and variations and to adapt the ritual to the linguistic and other needs of the different regions subject to the approval of the Holy See.⁵⁰⁷ The Catholic hierarchies in Igboland should use this permission and authority to solve these problems once and for all. The time gap between the two marriage rites should not exist.

⁵⁰⁵ *Sacrosanctum Concilium, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, no. 77, par. 2.

⁵⁰⁶ Ikenga Ozigbo, *Igbo Catholicism: The Onitsha Connection 1967-1984*, 101.

⁵⁰⁷ *Sacrosanctum Concilium, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, no. 22, par. 2.

The interval should be bridged and the unnecessary duplication of marriage rites and forms, which has been a major source of challenge to the Catholic marriage in Igboland, avoided. It is a possibility indeed to work out an acceptable formula of unifying or inserting the essential traditional marriage form into the required Church marriage or vice versa. Efforts and study should be made by the Igbo theologians and liturgists that should aim at understanding and integrating the two events into one holistic sacramental event. By so doing, Church marriage will become truly inculturated both in its essentials and its consequential. The New Order of Marriage specifically allows that the local marriage customs in mission countries be admitted into the Catholic liturgy provided that they do not involve anything superstitious or evil or contrary to the indissolubility of marriage.⁵⁰⁸ Therefore, the suggested reform is possible and practical. The Bishops of the dioceses and the Episcopal conferences are allowed and even invited to undertake the tasks of inculturation and of new ritual composition. It is therefore the duty of the Igbo Bishops, priests and laity to accomplish this inculturation needed in marriage with the approval of Rome. This will go a long way in solving the marriage problems and challenges such as concubinage, cohabitation, pre-marital sex, unwanted pregnancy, abortion etc which becloud the true identity of the Catholic Church in the area of marriage in Igboland.

Inculturation is not taking place in many local Churches in Igboland. Where it does, it takes place at a very low and limited pace. Some factors are responsible for this. The first among them is that any move towards authentic and adequate inculturation is often hindered by fears that it entails falsification of Christianity. According to Ozigboh, “what prompts such fears may not be unconnected with the fact that some conservative Igbo Catholics have identified Christianity with its western form. Therefore, any other expression apart from this form cannot but be a false one.”⁵⁰⁹ Such people, thus, resist any attempt towards genuine inculturation. For them, inculturation involves too much engagement with the cultural context, thereby risking Christian’s identity. Such people more often than not, are preoccupied with maintaining status quo and are uncomfortable with anything new or different. Again, another hindrance to inculturation is the often-noticed obsession with preservation of one’s culture. This is really prevalent in Igboland. The desire to recover the integrity of the Igbo cultures which they believe have been destroyed in the past through evangelization and colonialism, easily leads to a kind of cultural romanticism. As such, only good side of culture is emphasized without much attention to those areas that need some form of transformation. In certain cases, the culture might be viewed as not having any negative element within it.

⁵⁰⁸ Ikenga Ozigboh, *Igbo Catholicism: The Onitsha Connection 1967-1984*, 101.

⁵⁰⁹ Ozigboh, *Igbo Catholicism: The Onitsha Connection 1967-1984*, 132.

Furthermore, some Igbo hierarchies have also decided not to go into inculturation process because of possible tension and conflict that may arise between the local Church and the Roman curia, which always cling to ‘typical’ nature of the Church’s structure and function. Also, some priests do not sensitize their people to inculturation. Some people are also of the view that inculturation is expensive, that some Church leaders are very rigid in their ways, that some of them do not know the culture of the people very well and that some people seem to be indifferent to inculturation. Finally, inculturation is understood as restricted to some aspects of the life of the people or the Church. According to Muonwe, “In Igboland, once one mentions inculturation, the minds of the people immediately go to the liturgy. This is not surprising because, in most of the dioceses in Igboland, this is the only aspect of the Church’s life where inculturation seems to be discussed even though in a very dull way .Such restrictions undermine the immense possibilities open to inculturation.”⁵¹⁰ Inculturation should embrace the entire life of the Church in a given society. It should also address the implications of the social, political and economic structures of the given society and how they affect the masses. In other words, inculturation aims at the total wellbeing of the people and how faith can facilitate this.

All hands should be on deck towards clearing all the obstacles that impede adequate inculturation in Igboland. The Catholic Church in Igboland is therefore called upon to benefit and profit from many experiences and riches hidden in various Igbo cultures and environment. Igbo Catholics and hierarchies should know that inculturation needs some sort of courage to undertake. Everyone must be ready to let go the monolithic expression of the faith. Every Igbo man and woman especially the hierarchies and theologians should have the courage to risk even making mistakes and learning from them in the process. Otherwise, no meaningful progress can be achieved in the area of inculturation. There should be a reciprocated openness and exchange of ideas between the Church and culture. This exchange of ideas and values between the Church and the culture must be seen as an imperative exercise and not just a mere temporary option.

All should be geared towards the sustenance and improvement of the both. Therefore, there should be mutual interplay and reciprocal openness between the Church and culture in Igboland. The Good News is supposed to be preached to the people of Igboland through their culture. This understanding will indeed help in the continued building of the mystical body of Christ, which is the Church in Igboland. The Universal Church is ever aware and confident of the missionary imperative which does not tie her exclusively to any race, nation or culture, ancient or modern, a matter which is quite reassuring about the Church’s openness to the world.

⁵¹⁰ Muonwe, *Dialectics of Faith-Culture Integration: Inculturation or Syncretism*, 138.

In line with this, the Father of the Second Vatican Council observes, Faithful to her own tradition and at the same time conscious of her universal mission, the Church can enter into communion with various cultural modes, to her own enrichment and theirs too.⁵¹¹ This serves as an indication that the Church can be present in cultures where she has not been. Evangelization in this form of approach therefore requires that cultures be touched, pierced as well as modified in order to serve the needs of the new faith and vice versa. Through the dynamics of the Christian message, God should take a new home among the Christian indigenes of Igboland and through His Holy Spirit move and recreate them as well as operate through them in their own culture, environment, style of life and feelings without any fear of contradiction.

2. Ecumenism in Praxis (Overcoming Inter-Denominational Hatred and Rivalries)

Morestill, as already underlined above, lip service ecumenism is another stumbling block that affects the life of all the Christian Churches and denominations in Igboland and Nigeria in general. To overcome this challenge therefore, there is a need for ecumenism in praxis. Christian unity is a possibility which Christians in Igboland can achieve if they really want to do so. They can do so by moving from ecumenism in theory to ecumenism in praxis. Ecumenism in praxis is simply putting into practice all the principles, decisions and agreements reached in the ecumenical dialogues and meetings. No Church of Christ can wear the cloth of her real identity when she is in a state of disunity with other Christian Churches. The Catholic Church in Igboland cannot boast of having achieved her identity when there is still disunity among various Christian denominations in Igboland. There is need therefore, for unity among various Christian denominations in Igboland. The only way to achieve this is through Ecumenism in praxis. “The only test and ultimate criterion of true ecumenism must be Christ and His Gospel, as ascertained in the common normative Deposit of Faith (Scripture and Tradition).”⁵¹²

Ecumenical bodies and movements were formed in Igboland in 1960 but up till now, there is still that fundamental unwillingness on the part of every Church in Igboland to engage in meaningful and true dialogue with other Christian Churches. The cause of this is lack of interest as well as bitter memories of strife and rivalry in Igboland between the Catholic mission and other Protestant Churches especially Anglican Church. Today in Igboland, Protestants do not allow their children to attend Catholic schools and vice versa. Some Catholic parishes still insist on baptism for converts from the Anglican Church contrary to the current theology and

⁵¹¹ *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 40.

⁵¹² Ozigboh, *Igbo Catholicism: The Onitsha Connection 1967-1984*, 85.

practice of the Catholic Church. Inter Church marriages continue to exacerbate the relations between the Catholic and the Protestant Churches in Igboland. Disunity is an unqualified calamity as far as Christian Churches in Igboland is concerned. Anything possible should be done to remove the disturbing scandal. Each Christian Church should endeavour to translate ecumenism in theory into ecumenism in praxis. Each must try to put into action the decisions, agreements, principles and consensus reached during ecumenical meetings and gatherings. Each Church should also embark on processes of re-education and re-orientation of their members at the grass root level. All hands should be on deck and every effort should be made towards eradicating and overcoming all the initial hatred, rivalries, prejudices and wars among different denominations that started with the early missionaries and have lingered on up till today.

United to Jesus Christ by their lives of witness, all the Christian denominations in Igboland are invited to develop an ecumenical dialogue with all their baptized brothers and sisters in order that the unity for which Christ prayed may be achieved, and in order that their service to the peoples of the land may make the Gospel more credible in the eyes of those who are searching for God. Such dialogue can be conducted through initiatives such as ecumenical translations of the Bible, theological study of various dimensions of the Christian faith or by bearing common evangelical witness to justice, peace, charity and respect for human dignity. For this purpose, care will be taken to set up national and diocesan commissions for ecumenism. Through these avenues, the Christian unity will be restored. The restoration of the Christian unity through constructive, valid and worthwhile ecumenical dialogue will help the Catholic Church in Igboland to figure her real mission and identity. In carrying out this ecumenical dialogue however, the Igbo Catholicism should never compromise on anything that clearly belongs to the Deposit of the Faith.

3. Adequate and Fruitful Dialogue between Christians (Igbo Catholics) and Muslims

Again, as already well detailed above, another obstacle to the growth and true identity of the Igbo Catholicism is the constant inter religious crisis between Christians (Igbo Catholics) and Muslims, which most unfortunately and regrettably too, is normally caused by our Muslim brothers and sisters. However, it is my humble opinion that this ugly element (constant crisis) can be conquered through adequate and fruitful dialogue. The various forms of division among different religions in Nigeria and Igboland can be healed through honest and fruitful dialogue. Tribal oppositions endanger peace and the pursuit of the common good of the society. They also create difficulties for the life of the Churches. This is why the Church in Igboland feels challenged by the specific responsibility of healing these divisions. There is need therefore for

a fruitful dialogue between Christianity and Islam. “Dialogue is born from an attitude of respect for the other person, from a conviction that the other person has something good to say. It assumes that there is room in the heart for the person’s point of view, opinion, and proposal. To dialogue entails a cordial reception, not a prior condemnation. In order to dialogue, it is necessary to know how to lower the defences, open the doors of the house, and offer human warmth.”⁵¹³ Dialogue helps to resolve conflicts and misunderstanding in order to ensure peace and unity. “The Universal Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men.....”⁵¹⁴ The Church, therefore, exhorts her sons, that through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life, they recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these men.

The Catholic Church in Igboland and Nigeria in general is called upon to follow this excellent path and route of the Universal Church. United to Jesus Christ by their witness in Igboland, Christians and Catholics in Igboland are invited to develop a true and sincere dialogue with their brothers and sisters of other religions, in order to make the Gospel more acceptable and trust-worthy in the eyes of those who are searching for God. Christians cannot forget that many Muslims try to imitate the faith of Abraham and to live the demands of the Decalogue. Similarly, Muslims in particular should be open to dialogue. They should understand to respect the principle of religious freedom with all that this involves, also including external and public manifestations of faith. In the spirit of dialogue, Muslims should understand that God is the Father of one great human family to which all human beings belong. As such, He wants all human persons to bear witness to Him through their respect for the values, traditions and religious freedom of each person. Far from wishing to be the one in whose name a person would kill other people, he requires believers to join together in the service of life in justice and peace. They should know that killing and persecutions are not the way of God, peace and love. Addressing the Muslim leaders during his visit to Nigeria, John Paul II said,

Both Christianity and Islam stress the dignity of every human person as having been created by God for a special purpose. This leads us to uphold the value of human life at all its stages. As a result, we see as a sin against the Creator, every

⁵¹³ The Episcopal Commission for Christian Unity; Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, *A Church in Dialogue: The Catholic Church and Interreligious Dialogue* (Ottawa: Joseph Communications, 2015), 1.

⁵¹⁴ *Nostra Aetate*, no. 2.

abuse against the weaker members of society. It is a disquieting reflection on the state of human rights today that in some parts of the world including Nigeria, people are still persecuted and imprisoned for their religious beliefs. I am convinced that if we (Christians and Muslims) join hands in the name of God, we can accomplish much good and collaborate in the promotion of justice, peace and development. It is my earnest hope that our solidarity of brotherhood, under God, will truly enhance the future of Nigeria and all Africa.⁵¹⁵

His Holy Father continued

Religion itself is sometimes used unscrupulously to cause conflict. Nigeria has known such conflicts. People with different religious traditions can live side by side as good and peaceful neighbours. Ethnic and religious differences should never be seen as justifying conflict. Rather, like the various voices in a choir, these differences can exist in harmony, provided there is a real desire to respect one another. Above all, whenever violence is done in the name of religion, we must make it clear to everyone that in such instances we are not dealing with true religion. For the Almighty cannot tolerate the destruction of his own image in his children. From this place in the heart of West Africa, I appeal to all Muslims, just as I have appealed to my Brother Bishops and all Catholics: let friendship and cooperation be our inspiration! Let us work together for a new era of solidarity and joint service in facing the enormous challenge of building a better, more just and more humane world.⁵¹⁶

Effort must be made to ensure that when problems arise, whether at the local, regional or national levels, solutions must be sought through dialogue. It is only through this means that peace, love and mutual understanding can be established. “Christians (Igbo Catholics) and Muslims are called to commit themselves to promoting a dialogue free from the risks of false irenicism or militant fundamentalism, and to raising their voices against unfair policies and practices, as well as against the lack of reciprocity in matters of religious freedom.”⁵¹⁷ ‘Nostra Aetate’ continues to provide inspiration and guidance as to how, despite the differences, Christians and people of other beliefs can work together to build up a world that reflects the best of our religious heritages, where religion is a source of peace and collaboration, instead of an excuse for violence or division.

4. Deeper Catechesis and Mutual Dialogue between Igbo Catholicism and African/Igbo Traditional Religions

As already emphasized above, syncretic practices and dual affiliations found among many Igbo Catholics pose great obstruction and barrier to the true identity of the Catholic Church in Igboland. Syncretic beliefs and practices are fetish, barbaric, idolatrous, morally evil,

⁵¹⁵ Pope John Paul II, *Address to the Muslim Religious Leaders Kaduna, Nigeria* (Vaticana: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Sunday, 22 March 1998), no. 2.

⁵¹⁶ Pope John Paul II, *Address to the Muslim Religious Leaders Kaduna, Nigeria*, no. 3.

⁵¹⁷ *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 66.

theologically wrong and pastorally challenging. They water down the teachings of Christ, lead to the loss of Catholic faith and becloud the real and true identity of the Catholic Church in Igboland. Orthodoxy and faithfulness to the teachings of the Catholic Church are the core marks and identities of the Catholic Church and her members. Therefore, the Catholic Church in Igboland cannot boast of having achieved her true and full identity when her members are Catholics during the day or when the life is normal, while at night or when life becomes difficulty as a result of sickness or calamity, they secretly return to Igbo Traditional Religion in order to seek solutions to their problems. However, as a solution to these problems, it is my humble suggestion that the challenges of syncretic practices and dual affiliations can be overcome through more and deeper catechesis and evangelization especially at the grass root level, as well as through proper mutual dialogue with African/Igbo Traditional Religions. According to John Paul II, "Catechesis is an education in the faith of children, young people, and adults which includes especially the teaching of Christian doctrine imparted, generally speaking, in an organic and systematic way, with a view of initiating the hearers into the fullness of Christian life."⁵¹⁸ This catechesis will help to make the Igbo Catholics full and mature in faith. Through catechesis, they will understand very well the teachings and doctrines of the Catholic Church and be able to put them into practice. Faith comes from what is heard and what is heard comes from what is preached and what is preached comes from the one sent (Rom 10:17).

The specific aim of catechesis is to develop, with God's help, an initial faith, and to advance in fullness and to nourish day by day the Christian life of the faithful, young and old. It is in fact a matter of giving growth, at the level of knowledge and in life, to the seed of faith sown by the Holy Spirit with the initial proclamation and effectively transmitted by Baptism. Catechesis aims therefore at developing understanding of the mystery of Christ in the light of God's word, so that the whole of a person's humanity is impregnated by that word. Changed by the working of grace into a new creature, the Christian thus sets himself to follow Christ and learns more and more within the Church to think like Him, to judge like Him, to act in conformity with His commandments, and to hope as He invites us to Himself. Through adequate catechesis, the Catholics in Igboland can become more mature and more devoted in faith and so become pious, dedicated and faithful followers of Christ and his teachings in the Catholic Church.

⁵¹⁸ John Paul II, *Post- Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, Catechesi Tradendae- On Catechesis in Our Time* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1979) no. 18.

Also, more efforts and deeper dialogue must be made and encouraged between the Igbo Catholicism and Igbo Traditional Religion. Good and beautiful elements inherent in Igbo Traditional Religion must be brought out and incorporated in the Igbo Catholic liturgy and worships while negative elements discouraged and discarded. In line with the above, Pope John Paul II observes, “with regard to African traditional religion, a serene and prudent dialogue will be able, on the one hand, to protect Catholics from negative influences which condition the way of life of many of them and, on the other hand, to foster the assimilation of positive values such as belief in a Supreme Being who is Eternal, Creator, Provident and Just Judge, values which are readily harmonized with the content of the faith. They can even be seen as a preparation for the Gospel, because they contain precious ‘semina Verbi’ which can lead, as already happened in the past, a great number of people to be open to the fullness of Revelation in Jesus Christ through the proclamation of the Gospel.”⁵¹⁹ The adherents of African/ Igbo Traditional Religion should therefore be treated with great respect and esteem, and all inaccurate and disrespectful language should be avoided. For this purpose, suitable courses in African/ Igbo Traditional Religions should be given in houses of formation for priests and religious in Igboland.

5. More Pastoral Initiatives and Commitment

As equally seen above, Pentecostal Churches are fast growing in the Igboland today, and this really poses great barrier to the spiritual growth and true identity of the Catholic Church in Igboland. In the word of Okoye, “this is so because those who are patronizing these Pentecostal Churches are the members of the Catholic Church who prefer watered-down theology. Catholic Church loses their members to the Pentecostal Churches on daily basis.”⁵²⁰ There is need therefore for the Catholic Church to work very hard to stop this ugly development. It is my humble suggestion that this great challenge can be defeated and subdued through more committed apostolate and pastoral ministry especially on the part of the clergy. It is the duty of the Catholic hierarchies, priests and pastors in Igboland to work hard to stop this problem by bringing more pastoral initiatives. They should look at their pastoral strategies and evaluate their efficiency and effectiveness. They should incorporate some elements of Igbo culture which are not against the Gospel into their ministries.

Igbo people are naturally very dynamic and energetic. They equally like dynamic and active celebrations. Priests should always bear this in mind. They should always endeavour to make their liturgical celebrations very dynamic, lively and active. The priests should always

⁵¹⁹ *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 67.

⁵²⁰ Cyprain Okoye, e-mail message to the researcher, 21 March, 2017.

do their best to add colour and beauty to the liturgy and thus make liturgical celebrations very attractive and charming. This will really help the Catholics not to leave the Catholic Church again and even encourage the Pentecostals and non-Christians to join the Catholic Church. All that is required is having good pastoral initiatives and cultivating a high sense of commitment to their duty and work as priests. Priests should show love, care and attention to the people. There should be also good public address system in the Catholic Church and parishes for effective and efficient delivery especially the homilies. Faith no doubt comes from what is heard. People will not be able to know and understand the teachings, tenets and faith of the Catholic Church if they do not hear what is said and preached in the Church as a result of poor address system. Good homilies and adequate catechesis are also very important in sustaining the faith of the people. Priests should always prepare their homilies very well. They should also make out time to give the people of God the proper catechesis of the Catholic Church. Most often, people leave the Catholic Church out of ignorance. They see all the Churches as one and the same. The people of God should be taught the history of the Church, the importance and differences in the sacraments, apostolic succession and other areas of divergence between the Catholic Church and Pentecostal Churches. Equally, lay faithful should always encourage one another in the faith. Their exemplary lives ought to be a source of light and encouragement to the weak and lukewarm members.

6. Catholic Teaching on Marriage-Monogamy

As equally discussed above, polygamy is another strong factor that impede the very identity of the Igbo Catholicism. However, this challenge can be overcome through deep catechesis on monogamy. Monogamy is a marriage between a man and a woman. Catholic Church teaches that monogamy is the system of marriage which Christ himself teaches and encourages. The clearest evidence that monogamy is God's ideal is from Christ's teaching on marriage in Matt. 19:3–6. In this passage, He cited the Genesis creation account, in particular Gen. 1:27 and 2:24, saying 'the two will become one flesh', not more than two. Another important biblical teaching is the parallel of husband and wife with Christ and the Church in Eph. 5:22–33, which makes sense only with monogamy. Jesus will not have multiple brides. The 10th Commandment '... You shall not covet your neighbour's wife (singular) ...' (Ex 20:17) also presupposes the ideal that there is only one wife. Polygamy is expressly forbidden for Church elders (1 Tim. 3:2). And this is not just for elders, because Paul also wrote: 'each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband.' Paul goes on to explain marital duties in terms that make sense only with one husband to one wife (1 Cor 7:2).

In the same New Testament, the Corinthians are told ‘Let every man have his own wife, and every woman have her own husband’ (I Cor 7:2). Here ‘wife’ is singular, and ‘husband’ is also singular. Again, when Jesus was asked about the practice of divorce, He pointed back to the ‘beginning’ and that God made one woman for one man, and that the ‘two’ should become one flesh (Mt 19:3). Again, marrying another constitutes adultery. “So then if, while her husband lives, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man’ (Rom 7:3). So the wife is bound to one man. ‘Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, commits adultery against her’ (Mk 10:11). Now, if divorcing and remarrying is committing adultery, what if a man simply marries a second wife? Yes, that second marriage would constitute adultery also, because it adulterates God's plan for marriage from the beginning. Neither Christ nor the apostles ever gave their approval of polygamy, while both approved monogamy. Igbo Catholics must abide within the things taught and given to the Church by Christ. “Many people have left the Catholic Church in their bid to marry a second or third wife.”⁵²¹ Polygamy has also led to many broken families. It has brought about a lot of chaos and unrest among families in Igboland. Monogamy should be taught and encouraged with every seriousness it deserves in Igboland today. Igbo Catholics should always be enjoined to be faithful and obedient to the teachings of Christ and his Church. Also, on the part of the mixed and inter marriages, adequate catechesis and preparations must be given to those about to engage in these types of marriages. It should be emphasized to them the need to retain their Catholic faith as well as to bring up their children in the Catholic as they have already agreed and signed. Priests must also help to ensure that those who engage in these types of marriage are already mature in faith.

7. Cultivation of Self-Empowerment and Self-Reliance

As already noted above also, lack of self-sufficiency and funds is another big challenge to the Igbo Catholicism. This is so because evangelization requires a lot of finances. Church must be sustained financially for her to continue her work of evangelization. In order to overcome this economic challenge and difficulty, self-empowerment and sustenance is required on the part of the Igbo Catholicism. There is serious need therefore, that the Church in Igboland become self-reliant and self-empowered. Many diocesan bishops and seminary authorities have seen the red sign and began to make some major investments like banks, oil and gas stations, piggery farm, poultry and bookstores. However, more still needs to be done because with time, financial

⁵²¹ Linus Okafor, e-mail message to the researcher, July 27, 2017.

assistance and aid from Propagation of Faith in Rome may stop. This will lead every diocese, parish and seminaries in Igboland to depend on what they can produce and achieve on their own in order to sustain themselves and continue their work of evangelization. There is need therefore for self-empowerment, self-sustenance and self-reliance through big investments and self-funding sources among all the Catholic institutions in Igboland. This will help to ensure continual existence, growth, adequate spread of the Gospel and proper evangelization in Igboland. Taking adequate care of priests who have retired in some dioceses in Igboland today is a very big problem because the sources of income are not much and these priests being sick and inactive now, cannot help themselves. With time, more priests will retire, and unless something is done now that can yield money for the various dioceses, taking care of them will be a very big challenge.

8. Return of Schools to the Church

As already discussed above, Government takeover of schools from Church is the worst tragedy in the life of the Church in Igboland. Cardinal Arinze constantly regarded State schools as necessarily Godless- hence his frequent use of the analogy, “Education without God is like a sentence without a verb.”⁵²² Since the state takeover of schools in 1970, certain new and unwelcome characteristics hitherto strange and odd with the school environment before 1970 have emerged in the behavioural patterns of the products of the State school system and teachers. On the part of the pupils and students, one observes such immoral and unfortunate developments and behaviours as falling standard of education, examination malpractices, revolting and immoral habits, recalcitrant behaviours, dishonesty, drug abuse and above all, a growing sense of irreligion and immorality arising from little or no knowledge of the Christian religion and values. People pass through the primary and secondary even up to University without developing a moral and religious sense which is a necessary element in the character formation of a good Christian and a good citizen. All this is due to the fact that teaching of religion is neglected in the State schools. God, Church and religion have been elbowed out of the schools. In order to overcome these challenges, schools need to be given back to the Church.

Indeed, the circumstances of our time (the present situation of Igboland and Nigeria) have made it very necessary and at once, more urgent to educate young people in a moral and Godly way. There is serious need therefore, to return the schools to the Church. This will help bring back God and religion in the schools in Igboland and Nigeria. This will in turn help to restore morality, discipline, honesty, respect, obedience, high education standard and

⁵²² Ozigboh, *Igbo Catholicism: The Onitsha Connection 1967-1984*, 101.

orderliness. Church is and has always remained the custodian of morality. Catholic schools and teachers should always ensure that students understand and accept the teachings of Christ and the moral demands of the Gospel, and so contribute immensely to moral growth and economic development of the Igboland and Nigeria. In the words of the Igbo Catholic Bishops, “It is contradictory for some people to try elbow God and religion out of schools and then to turn round and say that we want good citizens. We cannot get good citizens without religion and moral values being deeply taught and cherished in our schools.”⁵²³ The Catholic Church in Igboland cannot shine out, cannot show her real colour, her true message and true identity when schools which are her chief agencies and strategies for evangelization and through which she teaches and passes her message and makes known her purpose, goal and identity known to all the people, have been dispossessed of her. Thanks be to God that today, some States in Igboland have realised this need of returning schools to the Church. In June 2016, Oyo State declared that 30 public secondary schools in the State would be returned to their respective owners. In 2009, Anambra State under the leadership of Governor Peter Obi returned all the previous mission schools to the Church. Even since Anambra State made this giant step, the State has continued to take the lead by taking first and best positions in Nigeria in the general examination called West African Examination Council (WAEC) taken by all the States in Nigeria and in West Africa. The schools which have taken these first positions are mission schools in Anambra State.

Again, during WASSCE’s 54th Annual Meeting of Nigeria National Committee held in Lagos, Nigeria, the Head of the WAEC National Office, Mr Olu Adenipekun announced Babalola from Oritamefa Baptist Model School, Ibadan, Oyo State, Alabi Philip from Our Lady and St Francis Catholic College, Osogbo, Osun State and Nkata Ugomma from Loyola Jesuit College, Federal Capital Territory, Abuja as the overall best students in the 2015 WASSCE. They equally received some awards as winners. “As the trio, Master Babalola David Oluwasayo, Master Alabi Philip Toluwase and Miss Nkata Lewechi Ugomma, all from mission schools emerged first, second and third respectively at the May/June 2015 WASSCE, some stakeholders are of the opinion that it is high time government handed over missionary schools to their owners.”⁵²⁴ “The returning of schools to missions is a laudable idea, adding that it will afford the delivery of quality education, ensure proper character formation, discipline, full development of the potentials of students and total upgrading of the society.”⁵²⁵

⁵²³ Anthony Nwedo, *Easter Joint Pastoral Letter on Education* (Onitsha: Tabansi Press, 1971), 14.

⁵²⁴ Dayo Adesulu, “Return Schools to Missionaries,” *Vanguard Learning Newspapers, One of the Nigerian Dailies*, 8 December, 2016, 1.

⁵²⁵ Adesulu, “Return Schools to Missionaries,” 1.

IV. Critical Reflections on the Present Identity of the Catholic Church in Igboland

Having gone thus far, I deem it necessary and worthwhile at this juncture to give my own personal critical reflection and analysis on the present identity of the Igbo Catholicism as claimed and seen by some Church historians and theologians in Igboland. This critical reflection and analysis is very necessary because seeing the Catholic Church in Igboland as a flourishing Church, a land of great vocation to Catholic priesthood, a missionary Church and the kernel of Catholic evangelism in various parts of the world will present her as an ideal Church that has already attained her true identity and has already become what Christ wants his Church to be. But, in my opinion, she has not. A critical reflection will help us here. To begin with, the above challenges and weaknesses show that Igbo Catholicism is still struggling to be a true Church of Christ here on earth. She is not yet an ideal, flourishing and spotless Church but she aspires towards that goal. The constant pagan and fetish beliefs and practices among the Igbo Catholics like dust to dust controversy,⁵²⁶ the practice of forcing an accused to drink the water used in bathing the corpse,⁵²⁷ the basket corpse ritual⁵²⁸ (ozu ngiga) et cetera are clear indications that Catholic Church in Igboland still has some obstacles and weaknesses that impede her growth. One may not be totally right to describe the Igbo Catholicism as a flourishing Church in the midst of all these fetish practices and dual affiliations.

According to Obi, “Many Igbos accepted Catholicism not necessarily out of their faith and conviction in the Catholicism but out of the reverence and superiority which they attached to the foreign missionaries. But more importantly, they accepted Catholicism because of the social advantages like schools, education, hospitals, charitable materials and mechanized agriculture which the missionaries used as methods of evangelization.”⁵²⁹ This is justified on the ground that missionaries came when the Igboland and Africa in general were in a state of total darkness, abject poverty and diseases. This will imply that many Igbos accepted Catholicism because of the social contributions and better services from missionaries not necessarily out of the faith, love and understanding which they had for the Catholic Church and her teachings. This will equally suggest that they had little understanding and conviction of the Catholic teachings at that moment. Presently, the little faith, conviction and zeal they had for the Catholic Church are seriously fading because of lack of understanding and proper

⁵²⁶ Christopher Adunchezor, *Controversy on the Dust to Dust Rite in Awka Diocese; My Take on it* (Awka: Fides Communication Press, 2015), 13.

⁵²⁷ Gabriel Enogholase, “How I was Forced to Drink my Late Husband’s Bath Water by Family” Vanguard Newspapers, September 16, 2017.

⁵²⁸ E-mail from Cyprain Okoye on April 20, 2017, A Catechist at St. Simon Ukpo. A situation. Basket Corpse ritual is a pagan practice whereby a woman who was buried in her husband place is carried symbolically in a basket (Ozu Ngiga) to her maternal home for a second burial with the belief that her spirit will continue to hover on the earth and disturb people until this ritual of second burial is performed.

⁵²⁹ Ozigboh, *Igbo Catholicism, The Onitsha Connection 1967-1984*, 81.

assimilation of Church's teachings and liturgies. This lack of understanding and assimilation is as a result of deficiency of inculturation and mature consolidation in Igbo Catholicism which Ozigbo termed "lack of igbonization, stabilization and domestication of the Catholic religion in Igboland."⁵³⁰ It was St. Anselm who defined theology as a "faith seeking understanding."⁵³¹ Understanding deepens faith. Faith without understanding and assimilation is bound to collapse. The initial little zeal and faith of the Igbo Catholics are fading away and many people are leaving the Catholic Church because of lack of understanding and fulfilment. Proper understanding and assimilation of the Catholic liturgy and teachings which should have helped to deepen and sustain their faith in Catholicism are lacking. Many Igbo Catholics now resort to all sorts of pagan and fetish practices as my home and zonal visitations as well as discussions above revealed. A Church with all these kinds of members may not be rightly described as a flourishing Church. Again, some people see the Igbo Catholicism as a flourishing Church because of many registered number (quantity) of the Catholics in the parish register. These people seem to forget that quantity is not always quality. They seem not to recognise also that because of the large number of the Catholic faithful in the various parishes, one may not notice easily that there are many Catholics who no longer attend Church.

Again, many priests and parishes do not normally count those who attend Holy Masses particularly on Sundays as well as those who receive Holy Communion. Addressing his priests during Holy Mass on Holy Thursday, Bishop Okeke said, "My dear brother priests, let me remind each and every one of us, the need to be committed to our priestly ministry. Many people leave the Catholic Church on daily basis but because of the large number of our members and our inability to count those who attend Holy Masses, we do not notice that, but one day, it will be very clear to us."⁵³² Again, because of high birth rate in Igboland and Africa in general, many children are registered in the Church during infant baptism. These people leave the Church as soon as they grow even when their names are still in the parish registers as Catholics. They are nominal members. They do not go for the sacraments of the Church. They are the types that come to Church only three times namely during their Baptism, during their wedding and during their funeral Mass. Many people see the Igbo Catholicism as a flourishing Church because of the great number of the registered members in the parish and diocesan registers. But this is not correct because many of these registered members might no longer be practising Catholics. Even some of them who still show their presence in the Church, also visit other prayer houses, spiritual centers and miracle homes. It may not be proper to see a Church

⁵³⁰ Ozigboh, *Igbo Catholicism, The Onitsha Connection 1967-1984*, introduction, xiii.

⁵³¹ Charles Belmonte, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, (Manila: Studium Theologiae Foundation, Inc, 2006), 26.

⁵³² Hilary Okeke, *Lenten and Easter Pastoral Message* (Nnewi: Cathcom Publication Press, 2016), 9.

with such members as a flourishing Church. No doubt, Igbo Catholicism is really aspiring towards realizing her mission but a lot of negative factors still hinder her growth. She is better understood as an aspiring Church. Pastors and devoted Catholics are called upon to be close to their parishioners in order to know those who are still Catholics in spirit and in truth. Many Catholics might have secretly renounced their faith through their actions and inactions but people still see them today as Catholics.

Secondly, people describe the local Church in Igboland as a land of great vocation to the Catholic priesthood as well as the kernel of Catholic evangelism. But for me, this claim may not be the best description. Africa (Igboland inclusive) is still in a state of poverty not necessarily because of lack of natural resources and manpower but because of selfish, corrupt and inept leadership. What does one expect in a land where there is a high level of poverty, unemployment, joblessness, lack of security, lack of adequate social amenities and high economic hardships, where people find it difficult to eat three square meals a day. On the other hand, in the same land, there is a system or rather an institution (Catholic Priesthood) which makes life easy, where one is assured of daily meals, job, security, good house, good social amenities like electricity, air condition, social recognition and honour. In this kind of situation, some young people will like to opt for priesthood in order to enjoy a better and more comfortable lives even when they may not be ready and willing to carry out their priestly ministry in accordance with the will of Christ and his Church.

Igbos love and respect Catholic priests, and they do all they can to make them comfortable and happy. At ordination, a priest is given a car, a house and house equipment like television, video, freezer, fridge, air conditioner et cetera even when some of his age mates in the society are still searching for jobs, not to talk of settling down in a family way. An Igbo Catholic who has not eaten a chicken for years will always use chicken for thanksgiving in the Church. There are many similar acts of charity and generosity towards priests among the Igbos. This material side of the priesthood is the reason why many opt for priesthood. This claim is proved by the fact that some priests in Igboland like the comfort side of the priesthood while they display a great indifference, laziness and lukewarmness in the discharge of their priestly ministry. Going by this then, one may be right to say that the vocation boom in Igboland today may not be necessarily and 100% out of love for Christ and his Church but as a result of poverty and economic hardships. This will take me to the third point or claim which sees the Igbo priests as missionaries all over the world. When a priest with these kinds of attitude and mentality towards his priestly ministry as described above is meant to undertake a missionary work abroad in a civilized country, one wonders how efficient and effective he will be. He will simply go after the material things and comfortable lives obtainable in the western world. Some

even end up refusing to go back to their home diocese because of the comfortable and better conditions of life abroad. Some even opt to excommunicate from their home dioceses in order to incardinate in some dioceses in Europe and America. At his pastoral Lenten message, “Bishop Solomon Amatu lamented over the large number of priests of the diocese who have excommunicated from the diocese and incardinated in various dioceses in Europe and America.”⁵³³ This is why many Igbo bishops are hesitant about sending their priests abroad for studies and mission. The worst happens when some priests decide to leave the priesthood and get married simply because of comfort and material things. It may not be utterly fair to describe a Church which produces such missionaries as a missionary and flourishing Church. However, my critical reflection does not attempt to go into the fallacy of over generalization. There are many genuine vocations and committed priests in Igboland today. There are also many committed Igbo priests and missionaries who are working abroad presently. But the fact remains that there are also many who do not measure up to the expectations, who are after the greener pastures and material things in the western world and who are very recalcitrant to their home bishops, local ordinaries and superiors.

From the above, it becomes quite obvious that the present identity of Igbo Catholicism as held by some Igbo historians and theologians may not be objectively justified. She has not measured up to what Christ wants her local Church to be. She has her challenges and weaknesses. Therefore, the panacea and ways towards achieving her true identity as described above should be implemented in its entirety in the life of the Igbo Catholicism.

Summary

Chapter four of this work which is the last chapter begins by looking at the pastoral identity as well as contemporary challenges facing the Church in Igboland today. The Church is the first and most blessed beneficiary of God’s self-communication and self-giving. Church is born of a mission and is sent to continue the saving mission of Christ himself. In doing this, the Church in Igboland adopts some strategies and methods to ensure that this Good News of salvation reaches the entire parts of Igboland and beyond. The chapter makes it clear that the Catholic Church in Igboland has her peculiar pastoral strategies and methods which have indeed aided her in quick spread of Christ and his Gospel. Some of these strategies and methods include: Grassroots evangelization, home visitations, zonal visitations, hospital visitations, honorary recognition and award to those who have distinguished themselves in faith, charity and service within the Church community. It is good to note that this particular strategy serves as a source

⁵³³ Solomon Amatu, *Lenten Pastoral Message* (Okigwe: Sage Publication Press, 2017), 6.

of encouragement to the lukewarm, indifferent and noncommittal members of the Church. Other methods include: Bazaar and Launching strategies, seminars, conferences, lectures etc. This chapter also looks at the various challenges and obstacles that the particular Church in Igboland encounters in the course of her evangelization. These obstacles and challenges impede her from achieving her goals and mission, blur her identity and make her alien in Igboland. Prominent among these is lack of inculturation in Igbo Catholic liturgy and worship. This lack of inculturation has been a major setback in Igbo Catholicism. Up till now in Igbo Catholicism, there is no Roman approved Igbo Missal. Other obstacles include: inadequate catechetical inculturation, lack of inculturation of Igbo liturgical music, lack of inculturation of Christian marriage etc. The chapter goes on to enumerate other challenges which are strong inter-denominational hatred and rivalries, inter-religious crisis, syncretism and dual-affiliation, lack of self-reliance, polygamy and inter faith marriages and government takeover of schools. These challenges and obstacles cripple the true mission of the Catholic Church in Igboland and obscure her real identity.

However, the chapter concludes by offering some ways forward. It gives some channels through which the mission of the Church can be better realised and her true identity discovered. Some of the ways are: total reception and implementation of the documents of the Church in Igbo Catholic Church. Such documents of the Church include: Second Vatican Council, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation (*Ecclesia in Africa*) as well as the addresses and homilies of Pope John Paul II during his visits to Nigeria and Igboland in 1982 and 1998. Other channels include adequate and authentic inculturation in Igbo Catholicism, ecumenism in action, proper catechesis, sufficient and fruitful dialogue among Christianity (Igbo Catholicism), Islam and Africa/ Igbo Traditional Religions, practice of monogamy, self-empowerment and reliance as well as return of the schools to the Church. If these ways forward are diligently implemented and adequately applied, the identity of the Catholic Church in Igboland will be maximally attained and her goals optimally reached. Equally, it is hoped that if these proposals, ways forward and recommendations are well implemented in Igbo Catholicism today, they will help the Catholic Church in Igboland to attain her true, real and clear identity. They will equally help to correct her defaced identity. It is hoped that when these are done, the Catholic Church in Igboland will be an ideal Church, a Church after the mind of Christ and his Church. She will feel at home in Igboland and so be able to bring about the fulfilment of her mission and Will of Christ in Igboland namely the salvation of all.

CONCLUSION

For many recent decades, Catholic academic ecclesiology has mostly focused on the Universal Church. In a traditional ecclesiological language before the Second Vatican Council, the term ‘identity’ was reserved to the Universal Church and seen as her static nature and attributes. Time has now come to discover on the academic level, the presence of God in the local and particular Churches especially, the local Church in Igboland. That was the purpose of this ecclesiological study. This Catholic ecclesiological work has therefore focused and dwelt extensively on the peculiarity and identity of the local Church in Igboland. Therefore, having gone thus far and now at the concluding part of this work, it will be pertinent to give a recap of the work. The work has offered a methodological study of the identity of the Catholic Church in Igboland. It has clearly presented the peculiarities, particularities and uniqueness of the Igbo Catholicism as a local Church in Igboland and still in union with the Universal Church.

In its chapter one, the work focused on the genesis, origin and birth of Catholicism in Igboland. It presented an in-depth study on the historical identity of the Catholic Church in Igboland, showing her beginning, establishment as well as main periods in her history. The chapter equally stated the early foreign missionaries to Igboland, their great sacrifices and benefactions as well as the initial problems and setbacks they encountered. The chapter concluded with main historical events that contributed to the establishment of the identity of the Igbo Catholicism.

Chapter two began with the socio-cultural identity of the Igbo speaking Church. It focused on the vital function of the Catholic Church as the agent of socialization in Igboland. It equally highlighted mutual and symbiotic relationship between the Gospel message and Igbo culture. The chapter ended with the great inputs of the Catholic Church to the socio-cultural growth and development of the Igbo society. Chapter three featured the moral and theological identity of the Igbo Catholicism. It emphasized both the Igbo morality and moral aspect of Igbo Catholicism. Equally, the chapter presented the universal theological identity of the Catholic Church and the particular theological identity of the Igbo Catholic Church. It further described the identity of the 13 local Churches in Igboland and ended with her corporate personal and community identity. The last chapter which is chapter four dwelt on the pastoral identity of the Igbo Catholicism in the context of contemporary challenges. It presented in details the various pastoral methods and evangelization strategies used in Igboland. The chapter also delved extensively into the challenges and obstacles militating against the Igbo Catholicism. The culmination point of this chapter came with some strong proposals and recommendations that can lead the Igbo Catholicism to her true and real identity. Equally, my personal critical reflection on the present identity of the Igbo Catholicism was given.

To say that the arrival and establishment of the Catholic Church in Igboland is the best benefaction that has ever taken place in Igboland will not be saying too much. This is evident in her numerous contributions and achievements to the growth and development of Igboland and Nigeria in general. Igboland in particular and Nigeria in general are where they are today –religiously, educationally, politically, socially, economically and culturally because of the immeasurable and monumental blessings and accomplishments of the Catholic Church. Spiritually and religiously speaking, the people of Igboland who were hitherto pagans are now counted as sons and daughters of God because of the advent of Catholicism in Igbo soil. They are now children of God who share in the very identity of God Himself through the sacrament of Baptism and other sacraments. They equally share in the very priesthood of Christ.

As a local Church in Igboland, her members in union with the Universal Church are pilgrims, moving towards their heavenly home where they are citizens. All these are made possible because of the presence of Catholicism in Igboland. Today, the people of Igboland can rightly be described as a people of God, adopted children of God, disciples of Christ, members of Christ Body, the mystical Body of Christ, anointed children of God et cetera. Similarly, the contributions of the Catholic Church in social, educational and economic life of the Igbo people and Nigerians in general are quite immense. One is right to say that from the day Catholicism stepped her feet on the soil of the ancient city of Igboland, the history of the Igbo people and Nigeria has changed for the better. Catholicism does not just bring the Gospel into Igboland. She equally champions free social interactions and equality of all through the abolition of improper cultural practices like the killing of twins and the ‘osu’ caste system. In so doing, she teaches and emphasises human dignity which is a precious gift of God to all human persons.

The early Catholic missionaries brought modern healthcare in Igboland. The impressive hospitals they established in places like Onitsha, Ihiala and Adazi, all in Anambra State, several decades ago still provide Igbo people with quality health services. The Holy Rosary Hospital at Emekuku, Imo State, and St Luke’s Hospital, Anua, Akwa Ibom State, are among the numerous medical facilities established by the Church in Eastern Nigeria which have been of immense benefit to Igbo people and beyond. Catholic Church in Igboland has continued to maintain these hospitals. Many people abandoned by their families and communities because they were afflicted by diseases like leprosy were treated in hospitals like these ones free of charge. One hesitates to imagine what Eastern Nigeria would have been without the Catholic Church. If not for Caritas, the Catholic charity, millions of Igbo people would have perished during the civil war due to acute hunger. The contribution of the Church to the educational development of Eastern Nigeria remain unparalleled. The missionaries used their limited

resources to build schools all over the place, and products of these schools are competing favourably with their counterparts anywhere in the world. Igbo Catholicism has continued to maintain this giant step and lead up till today. Many Catholic schools have been established and added to the ones built by the early missionaries. Many of the schools in various places in the Southeast were either established or managed by the Church. Generations of Igbo best teachers, professors, lawyers, medical doctors and other professionals were trained in places like Christ the King College Onitsha. It is always a thing of pride and joy to associate with a Catholic Church owned or run school. Catholic Church also brought in modern and mechanised system of agriculture and other social amenities. Catholicism put Igboland in the historical map of Africa and world. Without the Church, there is no way Igboland and Nigeria in general could have made the stupendous progress they have recorded in all aspects of their lives. Going by the above achievements therefore, one can rightly observe that it is no longer gain-saying to claim that the Igbo Catholicism has established her identity through her acceptance of the saving and redeeming messages and values of Christianity. Igbo Catholicism is making progress. Many people have indeed accepted the Catholic faith in Igboland.

However, quantity does not always mean quality and where there is no quality, quantity will soon disappear because quantity is supposed to be built on the solid foundation of quality. Many Catholics in Igboland have accepted the Catholic faith. However, the abandonment of the Catholic Church by some Igbo people together with the increasing rate of patronage to syncretism, dual affiliation, Protestantism and indifferentism to the saving sacraments of the Church today in Igboland is a clear sign that there is a lack of quality among the large number of Catholics in Igboland. This clearly reflects what Obiefuna had in mind when he said that the “Catholics in Igboland are like castor oil leaves which are usually many (quantity) but worth nothing (lacking quality).”⁵³⁴ As already said before, many Catholics in Igboland are Catholics during the day but at night, they return to their particular gods, shrines and idols. Many are also Catholics when life is going on well for them but at the moment of trials, sufferings, sickness or death, they go back to their idols and shrines for consultations or to different spiritual and prayers houses for spiritual assistance, all to the detriment of their Catholic faith.

The fact remains that the Catholic faith and teachings which have been accepted by the Igbo Catholics have not yet been deeply rooted in their lives because of lack of adequate and authentic inculturation as well as non-implementation of some recommended documents of the Church in Igbo Catholicism. As a result of this, the Church in Igboland has not really assumed

⁵³⁴ Albert Obiefuna, “Homily during Priestly Ordination at the Basilica of the Most Holy Trinity, Onitsha on August 12, 1998,” in *Compilation of the homilies of Archbishop Albert Obiefuna from 1994-2005*, edited by George Mbam, Onitsha: St; Stephen Press, 2005), 19.

her true and real identity which she is supposed and ought to assume as a local Church on Igbo soil for the better fulfilment of the salvific will of Christ and the mission of the Universal Church among the people of Igboland and beyond. Many Catholics still go to Catholic Church in Igboland today not because they are convinced of their Catholic faith but simply because they were born into the Catholic Church or that their family, kindred, village or community members are Catholics and they join them to go to the same Church because they do not want to be left out because of the communal or community system of life of the Igbos and Africans in general.

Lack of true faith and clear identity as well as lack of conviction and assimilation is simply because, most of these Catholic liturgies and rituals are wrapped in foreign cultures. There is therefore need for urgent and proper inculturation as well as consolidation of Catholic liturgy and worships in Igboland. The Church is not a uniform organization all over the world. Evangelization, as it is understood now, is no longer mixed up with transfer of the so-called foreign and modern cultures. Now that evangelization is in the hand of the indigenous, all aspects of human conscious religious impositions or even certain secular administrative colonialism should be avoided in effect. There is need for serious and intensified efforts to reconsider the place and relevance of Igbo cultural heritage and values to the Gospel message within the given socio-cultural context.⁵³⁵ Those aspects of Igbo lives taken to be barbaric and evil before as a result of ignorance are the cause of the limping attitude among the native Christians in Igboland today. What is needed today is the inculturation, reinterpretation, purification and then introduction of the invaluable elements of Igbo life and culture into Christianity to suit the people's style of life and living namely thinking, aesthetic, feelings, reactions, interpretations and expressions. In other word, there is a need for authentic and adequate inculturation in Igboland.

For Catholicism to have her real identity, make profound impacts and have her teachings deep-rooted in the life of the Igbos therefore, those life and cultural elements must not be suppressed. They must be brought to bear on faith and practice in the measure that they are not opposed to Catholic principles and teachings. What the Igbo Catholics need at the moment is pure Catholicism as applicable to Catholics all over the world but also wrapped with the cloak of Igbo traditional endowments and cultural values. The sacred treasures and theological traditions of the Catholic Church are irreplaceable. These riches, treasures and traditions are universal in application but for the Igbos, just like every other local Church, they are to be rendered in true Igbo manner for easy assimilation by Catholics. This is another way

⁵³⁵ Hygienus Chigere, *Foreign Missionary Background and Indigenous Evangelization in Igboland*, 553.

of saying Igbo Catholicism understood in the sense of universal Catholicism and which does not contradict the one universal Catholic Church for the Church is both local and universal. Very urgent therefore is an unprecedented effort to inculturate Catholicism which has eventually come to stay in Igboland with its replacement effects. The true and clear identity of the Catholic Church in Igboland will ever remain partial and vague unless the traditional life of Igbo people is made to enter the workings of Catholicism in order to give it the traditional spiritual sustenance that is required in the spirit, openness, understanding and operations of inculturation. It is my great contention that the local Church in Igboland, just like every other local Church, has her peculiar questions, needs, aspirations and concerns, which can only be discovered, solved and answered when she is given the needed attention.

To achieve this, the Igbo Catholicism and hierarchies must recognise more, than is currently the case, their responsibility and authority to manage their own affairs, of course in union with the Universal Church. The Igbo local Church has her particularities and peculiar identity which must be encouraged and fostered within the context of authentic inculturation. It must always be borne in mind and at heart too that a food given, can only and must be eaten and digested according to the digestive system of the eater and not the giver for a proper nutrition and nourishment. Therefore, there is a serious need for authentic and adequate inculturation, religious decolonization (both institutional and mental) and domestication of the Catholic religion in Igboland today. Until this is done, the true, clear and better identity of the Igbo Catholicism as a local Church in Igboland will ever remain elusive and her mission and vision consequently evasive.

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