

**THE CATHOLIC MISSIONARY PHASES IN NORTHERN IGBOLAND:
A HISTORICAL APPROACH**

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Abstract

This paper discusses the Catholic Missionary phases in Northern Igboland since its inception in 1885 till date. The missionary team of four that implanted Roman Catholicism in this tedious vineyard was led by Father Joseph Lutz. The findings of this paper reveal, among other facts, that Onitsha was not the primary destination of the missionaries but Lokoja in order to begin the Upper Niger Mission. However, providence changed their course to Onitsha and they began the Lower Niger Mission of which the Northern Igboland, the local context of our study, constitutes a critical part. The missionary Phases in this area are identified as the French period (1885-1905), the Irish period (1905-1969) and the indigenous period (1970-2017). The historical narrative of these missionary phases are thrilling, engaging, informative and educative. Each phase holds great and noble lessons which the present and future missionaries, scholars, historians, researchers and indeed all, ought to learn from. History is the versatile custodian and teacher of past events. This paper presents some of these articulated lessons. The methodology employed in this paper is historical approach which means that our topic under study is considered in terms of its earliest phases through its subsequent historic evolution in the unfolding of events and their interconnectedness till the present time.

Keywords: Roman Catholicism, Mission, Missionary Phases, Northern Igboland and Historical approach

Introduction

The advent of Catholic Mission in Northern Igboland has divine providence tied to its foundations. The Roman Catholic Mission in Northern Igboland initially referred to as Lower Niger Mission was founded by a group of four missionaries of the Holy Ghost Congregation. The missionary team was led by Father Joseph Lutz, a French Alsatian priest who had served previously for over ten years in Sierra Leone, a man of apostolic dynamism and experience. His colleagues were Father Johan Horne, a newly professed priest and two Brothers: Hermas and Jean – Gotto, formerly of the station at the St. Coeur de Marie (Metuh and Ejizu, 1985:12). These premier missionaries travelled through Liverpool aboard a French ship “Foulah” on 10th October 1885. After a stop at Sierra Leone, they arrived at Akassa on 20th November, aboard another ship “Lagos”. At Akassa, they met an initial draw back as one captain Christian, an agent of the Royal Niger Company refused their passage up River to Lokoja which was their destination. The plan for the evangelization by the Holy Ghost Missionaries was that they would settle at Lokoja from where they would move more down to the coastal communities of the Atlantic Ocean.

However, disappointed but not discouraged, the missionaries took a boat for Bonny and Brass. At Brass, they met another agent of the Royal Niger Company (RNC) called Mr. Charles Townsend, a protestant who welcomed them into his house. Mr. Townsend not only received them in his house but took them up the Niger in his own boat. Fr. Lutz and Horne left for Onitsha with Townsend on 25th November leaving behind brothers Hermas and Jean- Gotto to look after their seventy (70) trunk luggage which they would not carry along with them. On Saturday December 5, they arrived Onitsha. Thus, they became the first catholic missionaries who came and settled at Onitsha, after a weary nine (9) days journey, the fatigued Fathers accompanied by Mr. Townsend went immediately on courtesy visit to King of Onitsha, Obi Anazonwu with the request that they desire to settle in his town. The King received them very warmly and promised to offer them the land they might choose.

It is good to recall that the two Roman Catholic Missionaries: Fathers Chausse and Holley of the Society of African Missions (S.M.A), reportedly paid a brief visit from Lagos to the Onitsha chiefs and people in 1883 (two years earlier). These missionaries left without establishing a mission because Onitsha was not within the Lagos vicariate, their ecclesiastical area of jurisdiction (Nwosu, 1985:38).

At the religious/spiritual levels, the settling of the missionaries at Onitsha was a child of providence. Obi (1985:2) highlights this point rhetorically thus:

Why were the missionaries refused passage up to river at Akassa? Why were they granted this favour at Brass? Catholic missionaries were already in Lagos, in the west up to Asaba. What prevented them from coming over to east bank of the Niger? Holy Ghost Fathers were already working in Gabon, would it not have been easier and nearer to cross over to eastern Nigeria rather than make the long costly journey from Paris?

Bishop John Cross Anyogu in his historical narrative saw it too as providential that they settled in Onitsha. In his words:

They did want to go father up north and start from there to move downwards towards Port-Harcourt in Creeks and the Atlantic Ocean. A boat was to come from brass bringing up to Onitsha the two brothers along with their luggage. They waited and waited but all in vain: no vessel arrived. Then they (Father Lutz and Horne) set a time limit. They began a Novena prayer and decided that if no boat came before a chosen date, I don't know exactly the specific day, they would stay back at Onitsha. As fate would have it, that date came and passed, and no boat came from Brass. They then decided to stay at Onitsha. It was really providential, they never had the intention of making Onitsha their central station (Adigwe, 1966:61).

In 1935, during the Golden Jubilee of the advent of the Roman Catholic Mission, Bishop Taylor, the Vicar Apostolic of Asaba narrated the story thus:

... when the two brothers and the Fathers mounted God's liquid road between sea and desert, their little boat did not go farther than Onitsha. The missionaries were to take another boat to reach their destination. Since the boat did not arrive, Father Lutz understood that it was the mind of providence that he should remain at Onitsha and so, at Onitsha, he settled (Obi, 1985:14 - 15).

As the northward movement was delayed, the missionaries' visit from place to place made them discover that the people were friendly and that the country was densely populated with an estimate of between ten thousand (10,000) and twenty five thousand (25,000) inhabitants. They felt therefore that Onitsha was a good point to begin their work of evangelization (*cited by* Obi 1983:13).

Another factor that helped in their choice of settling at Onitsha was that they realized that the area was yet free from Islamic influence. They concluded therefore, that it was a more fertile ground to plant the church. They most importantly, observed that the Protestants especially the Church Missionary Society (C.M.S) had already established their missions in the area. Both Nwosu (1985:39) and Onyeidu (2004:2) agree to the historical truth that the protestant mission of the Anglican Communion had long been established at Onitsha and in the neighbouring communities.

The C.M.S missionaries arrived at Onitsha on July 26, 1857 (almost thirty years earlier) under the leadership of Revd. (late Bishop) Samuel Ajai Crowther (an ex-slave boy of Yoruba origin). His missionary team included: Revd. John Christopher Talyor, Simon Jones, Augustus Radaillo (liberated slaves of Igbo origin), a good number of catechists and school masters. Henry Venn gave Crowther a definite mandate to open a mission at Onitsha. On arrival, they met the reigning King Obi Akazua, his son Odin and Orikaebue the Obi's brother and Anyakoha, Obi's Councilor. At the end of the negotiations, a piece of land was immediately allocated for a mission station. On Monday, July 27, 1857, the first C.M.S church in Igboland was planted and on Sunday, August 2, 1857, the first church worship was conducted by Rev. J.C Taylor. Taylor headed the mission at Onitsha, Crowther went northwards to Idah and to the creeks. The C.M.S made an evangelical inroads into the following towns: Asaba (1874), Alonso (1877), Abo (1883) and Obosi (1883).

It was not easy for the catholic missionaries in Onitsha. Metuh and Ejizu (1985:13-15) identified few administrative and personal problems which Fr. Lutz and his team had to overcome before their work began. They had first and foremost to clear with the civil authorities. Secondly, they had accommodation problem and thirdly, the problem of acclimatization. The last was the most difficult for some of the members of the team because they were not used to the weather of Onitsha area.

As highlighted by Nwosu (1985:39), two days after arrival (on December 7, 1885), the Fathers had to go to Abutshi (Obosi) on the invitation of general agent of the RNC, Mr. Sargeant for clarification of their mission. At the end of their discussion, Fr. Lutz had to "sign a document to the effect that he will make no

(commercial) treaty in the Niger”. Thus, they (French missionaries) cleared with the civil authorities of British administration to operate in their territory.

They also had commodity problem. Fr. Lutz went back to Brass to collect the two brothers and seventy luggage left behind due to the size of Mr. Townsend’s steam engine, which could not bring them down on the first day. However, on December 29, 1885, the four missionaries re-united in Onitsha and the seventy luggage packed for the new mission were brought to Onitsha.

Next was the acclimatization problem. The environment was not conducive for most of the missionaries, except perhaps Fr. Lutz, who had worked in Sierra Leone and had gotten used at least fairly with the African environment. The missionaries suffered from terrible sickness. Fr. Horne and brother Jean had fallen sick on January 6 to be soon followed by Brother Hermas. The first assignment of Fr. Lutz became the nursing of his sick colleagues. Brother Jean died on January 18, 1886. Thus, he was the first Catholic Missionary to lay down his life for the Niger Mission. The evangelization of eastern Nigeria began on this note to gloom. He was buried on the same day. The question was, who would be next since his other companions were still down with malaria and sleeping sickness (Metuh and Ejizu, 1985:15). However, as a temporary solution to the accommodation problem, the Royal Niger Company offered them a free use of their warehouse with its over powering heat by the day. The house could not cushion the harsh climate conditions which jeopardized their health gravely.

At the beginning of January 1886, the Fathers met the king in his palace and requested for a piece of land. Fr. Lutz himself gave the description of this meeting in this way:

“...His majesty appeared before us wearing a beautiful gold crown on his head, he shook hands with us in most cordial welcome and made us sit down by his side. ...All the chiefs were convoked. The king’s brother, the king’s eldest son, the first class and second class chiefs and many notables of the palace were assembled. ...Now seated in the assembly, we related the subject of our visit: it was to get permission to set up a mission. The king showed himself very well disposed towards us and our request to be allowed to settle in his domain. He assured us that he would as far as it lies in his power to satisfy our needs and soon gave two of his children to us to be trained. As regards our volunteered help, they could not get over their astonishment and admiration of the fact that we have come from a distant country of the whites, not to trade and make money like the generality of the whites living in the place, but simply to do good to instruct and form their children (*Journal*, December 29, 1885 – January 10, 1886).

On January 6, 1886, the first feast of Epiphany, an agreement was signed between the Fathers and the King and his Council of Chiefs. The agreement reads in part:

I, Obi Anazonwu, king and chiefs of Onitsha, do of our own free will, grant unto the Roman Catholic Missionaries of the Holy Ghost, the ground chosen by them in perpetuity free of all tribute and dues (*Journal*, January 1 to 6, 1886).

With this agreement the Roman Catholic mission was given a space in Northern Igboland. We shall strive in this work to study the historicity of Roman Catholic Mission in Northern Igboland according to its phases of tripartite era. This paper’s historical periodization is 1885 – date (2017). At birth, the missionary space was called Lower Niger Mission and it covered the whole of eastern Nigeria. So, Northern Igboland was part of the Lower Niger Mission. Today, Northern Igboland consists of Onitsha Archdiocese (1885) and the Dioceses of Enugu (1962), Awka (1977), Nsukka (1991), Nnewi (2001) and Awgu (2005).

In the next section, we shall discuss the growth of this nascent Church so planted (*plantatio Ecclesiae*) by initial mission to the people (*missio ad gentes*) in Northern Igboland.

The Growth Of Roman Catholic Mission In Northern Igboland

The new catholic mission founded in northern Igboland has a thrilling history of growth which falls into three phases. The first phase (December, 1885 – June 1905) called the French period. All the missionaries who worked within this period were virtually drawn from France. This epoch had three prefects Apostolic, namely: Frs. Lutz (1885 - 1895), Reling (1896 - 1898), Pawlas (1898 - 1900), Lejeune (1900 - 1905). The second phase (September 1905 – December 1969) is known as the Irish period. The majority of the expatriate missionaries of this era were from Ireland. Then, the third period (January 1970 - Date) is referred to as the indigenous period (Anyika, 1994:30).

The second phase had Shanahan first as prefect apostolic (1905 - 1920), then as vicar apostolic (1920 – 1931), later Heery (1932 - 1967) as vicar apostolic. In 1887, only one missionary, Fr. Francis Mary

Lecuger was sent to the lower Niger mission. Thus, for two years (1885 - 1886) Frs. Lutz and Horne with Brother Hermas toiled and moiled in the vineyard of northern Igboland. In 1888, one more priest only, Fr. Joseph Bubendorf, an Alsatian French joined the mission. In 1889, Brothers Astier and Yves, both of French origin entered the evangelical field. On 15th November, that same year, four French Sisters of St Joseph of Cluny joined the mission. These were: Srs. Clothilde (mother superior), Mary Claver, Mary Thiery and Mary Charles. These sisters were the first missionary sisters to work in northern Igboland.

As soon as they settled down, they took up task of educating the girls and the little children in the Christian village. The care of the infirm and the chapel was also entrusted to them. Unfortunately, the tropical climate was adverse to their health. They fell sick one after the other. On 4th April, 1890, Clothilde, the mother superior died. She was ill for eight weeks and agitated by the thought that she was becoming more helpless to the community. When Fr. Lutz proposed to her to return to France, she bluntly refused and declared that she wanted to die among the “blacks amongst whom she had spent the greater part of her life”. The untimely death of Mother Clothilde was a huge loss to the mission and created a yawning gap in the administrative machinery of the religious women.

In 1890, the mission celebrated its fifth birthday (1885 - 1890). During these five years it survived, it recorded some successes. Within this first five years, a Christian village was established to enable the converts preserve their faith and to lay the foundations of a center for Christian life. Apart from this, the intention of the Fathers was to create a demarcation between the Catholic converts and the rest of the “pagan” community. This arrangement would enable them to perform their Christian duties without hindrances. Father Lutz saw this strategy first in Gabon and Senegambia where the first true Christian villages were established in 1852 and 1872 respectively.

Apart from the establishment of the Christian village, another milestone event took place on 1st September 1889 when the mission was in Gabon and elevated to status of a prefecture named: The Apostolic Prefecture of the Lower Niger. A new convent was begun and completed for the sisters. Two flourishing workshops, one for carpentry and the other for shoe-making were opened. A crèche to take care of orphans and unwanted children like those who developed the upper teeth first was built. A good number of slaves have been ransomed with a special fund made available to the mission by the *propaganda fide* (propagation of faith) in Rome. These slaves converted to Christianity.

The sacred returns continued to show a good evidence of a growing mission. In 1888 alone, 23 were baptized while in 1889, the number was not less than 72 excluding the numerous children baptized “*in articulo mortis*” (in danger of death). By the end of 1890, the mission had four (4) priests, two (2) brothers, two (2) missionary sisters, 378 Catholics. 78 converts were recorded in 1890 alone. The mission in 1890 had one (1) Church building, one (1) Boys’ school, one (1) Girls’ school and one (1) Dispensary (Anyika, 2006:78 - 79).

Many church historians would see these apostolic results against the background of a five-year missionary activity as poor. However, if their position were to be acceptable, then it is blamed on the scarcity of personnel in the vast, tedious vineyard. If the missionary personnel were to be adequate, the mission would have grown more territorially and numerically. Indeed, long before 1889, His Majesty Ogbuinyinya Idigo, the traditional ruler of Aguleri, an important agricultural town situated on the banks of Anambra River had been appealing to Fr. Lutz to send missionaries to evangelize his town. His majesty understood the enormous material and spiritual gains which his Onitsha neighbours got from the evangelical enterprise of Roman Catholic Missionaries and wished to have same for his subjects (Anyika, 1987:164). However, the paucity of church personnel made it impossible for Fr. Lutz to respond to king Idigo’s repeated appeals. It was not until more priests (Revd. Frs. Rene Pawlas and Joseph Mary Reling) joined the mission in 1890 and 1891 respectively that he could comfortably send one of his dynamic missionaries, Revd. Fr. Joseph Bubendorf to Aguleri. Fr. Bubendorf had the assignment to determine the possibility and desirability of establishing a mission station in the place.

The series of milestone and memorable events that followed were all good evidences of growth of the new mission. The apex of all was the baptism of King Idigo, the Aguleri Monarch and his grandson at Mid-night Mass of 24th December 1891, and their confirmation on the following day being the feast of Nativity of our Lord (Christmas day).

In January 1892, Fr. Lutz went for the first time to Nsugbe, another agricultural town near the Anambra River. This pastoral visit was a favourable response to the persistent appeals from the king of Nsugbe, Obi Fatou. Two months later (21st March, 1892), a catechist was posted to the Nsugbe mission. But no sooner had this been done than the newly opened mission station was closed down due to the scarcity of missionaries, for not even a single missionary was recruited in the lower Niger mission in 1892. It was not until 17th April 1894 that it was re-opened when Revd. Fr. Xavier Cadio was appointed the local superior

of the mission with Revd. Fr. Francis Xavier Lichtenberger who joined the mission in 1893 as his curate (*Bulletin de la congregation*, 1894).

The 1894 – 1895 Annual Report on the mission opened as follows:

Since our last bulletin of September, 1894, many hardships hit our poor mission. Death took away from us our good and regretted apostolic prefect, Fr. Joseph Lutz. A long period of labour had deprived Frs. Bubendorf and Kutzman of their strength and illness forced them to go away for a while. Their departure caused us great sorrow. The staff of the station of Onitsha became so small that we could hardly cope with the spiritual needs of the mission. Fr. Vogler who had arrived the year before, was the only priest in Onitsha (Anyika, 2006:80).

The growth of Roman Catholicism in Northern Igboland had distinctive characteristics according to the capabilities of the head of mission and the unique social forces of each period. We begin with the first era.

The French Period (1885 - 1905)

The period started with Fr. Joseph Lutz (1885 - 1900). As already mentioned above, Fr. Joseph Lutz arrived Onitsha with a team of other three missionaries to start the catholic mission east of the Niger. After about four years of pioneering evangelical work, precisely on July 25, 1889, the Father superior of the mission Fr. Lutz became its first prefect. Therefore, Fr. Lutz worked hard for five more years before his failing health forced him to go back to France in August, 1895. His Chief contributions to the growth of the young prefecture were his choice of Onitsha Missionary headquarters in South-eastern Nigeria, his founding of the Holy Trinity Mission Onitsha in 1886 and the Notre Dome residential station at Nsugbe in 1894. He introduced the missionary policies and methods which characterize the catholic mission in Northern Igboland up till date. In other words, apart from the usual direct methods of winning souls for Christ such as preaching, catechesis, liturgy etc, he introduced poverty alleviation strategies as indirect means of evangelization. He introduced the use of schools (for boys and girls), charity (dispensaries, hospitals, orphanages and asylum), vocational establishments like carpentry, masonry, tailoring, shoe-making and agriculture (farming and gardening) as means of attracting and retaining converts to Roman Catholicism (Metuh and Ejizu, 1985:20).

The second prefect, Fr. Joseph Mary Reling succeeded Fr Lutz in September 1896. Because of his continued ill-health, he was unable to take possession of the prefect and had to resign in July 1898. He earlier served as a missionary at Onitsha and Aguleri between 1891 and May 1895 but had to return to France due to ill-health. During the years, the prefects were away from Onitsha (August 1894 – December 1898), Fr. Joseph Bubendorf stood in for them as Acting Prefect. Within the period of interregnum, new initiatives were scarcely taken. However, the main progress recorded for the four years were the two out stations opened at Igbariam and Osomare in 1898.

Fr. Reling was succeeded by Fr. Rene Pawlas as the third prefect. He had served first in the prefecture from 1890 and 1895 when illness forced him back to Europe. During that first missionary work in the prefecture, he had the triple honour of being the first resident priest of Aguleri in 1891, of preparing Chief Idigo, the king of Aguleri for baptism in December that year and of establishing the Aguleri Christian Village.

Fr. Alexander Leo Lejeune (1900 - 1905) achieved a rare feat. But the success he recorded were not achieved on a platter of gold. He laboured for them as it is written of him:

Lejeune was a beehive of activity. In material work, intellectual and moral, in discussion with the indigenous Christian, in construction work, in settling cases among Christians, in pioneering to the interior, in catechizing inquiries, in establishing palm plantations, in committing local languages to writing, in spreading western education and in producing hymns he was the centre of it all without ever getting husky. Lejeune was personally a splendid specimen of the men who went out from France as missionaries to subdue distant lands for Christ and who in a splendid manner contributed immensely to the building of modern civilization in many parts of Africa (Anyika, 1994:66).

As the fourth prefect apostolic, Fr. Lejeune was a tireless evangelizer who was poised to conquer beyond the frontier of northern Igboland which included the Efik and Benue lands. He lived and worked in an atmosphere of rivalries – rivalry with Anglicans in Igboland, war with the Moslems in their Benue, conflict with the Presbyterians in Efik land and clashes here and there with the African traditional Religionists. He died in September, 1905 in his native home of France of cancer of the throat. The French period ended with his death. The next missionaries were the Irish, hence the Irish period.

The Irish Period (1905 - 1969)

This period is the second era. The Irish missionaries Fr. Joseph Ignatius Shanahan (1905 -1931), the fifth prefect was appointed on September 26th, 1905 to succeed Fr. Lejeune. Then Onitsha mission was 20 years old. Fr. Shanahan successfully and in great ability explored, tapped and brought to bear the perennial strategies of positive pragmatic effects which largely constituted his epic story as great apostle of lower Niger mission. He was a prefect-Apostolic for the first 15 years of his tenure until he ascended the episcopacy as bishop and vicar apostolic of Southern Nigeria in April, 1920.

Eleven years later (1931), he was forced by the combined pressures of ill health and oppositions from his continental priests to tender his resignation to Rome. His 26 years of administration (1905 - 1931) fall within the expansion period of the catholic mission in Igboland and very remarkably too, the time that saw the constitution of the local clergy. His years can be divided into two marked, though unequal periods. The first (1905 - 1919) was the period of aggressive expansion while the second (1920 - 1919) was identified with re-organization and initial consolidation processes. The first period (1905 - 1919) was the most productive years of the entire Shanahan's tenure. The wonderful, fantastic stories and myths associated with Shanahan belong to this period. After 1920, Bishop Shanahan of Southern Nigeria became physically weak. His opinionated and seeming religious conservatism which had been overshadowed by the absorbing years of new contacts and tactical adjustments became very noticeable.

The success story of Shanahan came also through his school apostolate. Education is a powerful tool for integral human development and a good means of poverty alleviation. During the 1905 – 1919 period, village after village stormed the various catholic missionary residences with requests for schools and teachers. The villages welcomed the priest “*fada*”. They eagerly accepted his school and by that way, the religious affiliations of his school which the excited villagers did not understand, at least at its inception. However, they had their own reasons which include religion and denominational interests. This period witnessed the financing system of the catholic schools by the government. The grant-in-aid from the government helped in some great measure in the expansion of schools within the prefecture (Nwosu, 1985:42-43).

Expansion was Shanahan's chief interest. To finance this, a compulsory levy was fixed annually per church member. This Collection was first started in 1915 at Anua near Uyo. Hence, it was called Anua Mission Collection (A.M.C). However, this collection became mandatory throughout the prefecture in 1919. It has continued to exist as church's source of revenue till date as Annual Mission Collection (A.M.C).

With the discovery of coal in the Udi hills (1909) and the expansion of the C.M.S to Udi from Awka, it became imperative that the presence of Roman Catholicism be established in the Udi, Ezeagu and Nkanu areas. Fr. Shanahan saw Chief Onyeama of Eke a missionary instrument for the growth and spread of Roman Catholic Church. Until his death in 1933, Chief Onyeama made the Catholic Church enjoy the missionary monopoly in the 34 towns of Udi Zone. Eke eventually, became the residential center for the Catholic Missionaries.

It was from Eke center that the Catholic Mission made significant spread into interiors of Nkanu, Awgu, Nsukka and some parts of Abakaliki. Enugu as a growing urban city then attracted to itself the posting of Catholic priests to coal camp (St Patrick's Ogbete) in 1933. This same year (1933), the Nsukka Division was carved out of Eke and constituted into a separate parish (St Theresa's Nsukka) under Fr. James Mellet, the apostle of Nsukka.

Archbishop (former Bishop) Charles Heery continued from where his predecessor Bishop Shanahan stopped. The remarkable events of this tenure were the establishment of the prefectures of Calabar in July 1943, from which the Diocese of Ogoja, Ikot Ekpene, Abakaliki and Uyo grew. In 1948, the Vicariate of Owerri was established from which the Archdiocese of Owerri and Dioceses of Umuahia, Aba, Ahiara, Okigwe, Port Harcourt, Orlu and Okigwe grew. What was left of the old Onitsha vicariate became an Archdiocese in 1950. From this seat of the church in northern Igboland emerged the Dioceses of Enugu, Awka, Nsukka, Nnewi and Awgu.

Heery's apostolic tenure saw the ordination of the first indigenous Igbo priest, Fr. JohnCross Anyogu on December 8, 1930 and the consecration of the first Igbo Bishop, Bishop JohnCross Anyogu and first Igbo Archbishop (now Cardinal) Francis Arinze. Archbishop Charles Heery died on February 7, 1967. 1967 – 70 were years of Nigeria/Biafra Civil war that saw the deportation of many Irish missionaries back to their native home. The Church in Northern Igboland which has suffered gravely the scarcity of church personnel and inadequate finances became even more handicapped. However, 1970 became the beginning of a new era of the indigenization of church personnel, this is the third period. We shall discuss it below.

The ERA of The Indigenization Of Church Personnel (1970 – 2017/Till Date)

This is also called the indigenous period. The Church in Northern Igboland was left with a few missionaries by the end of Nigeria/Biafra civil war in 1970. The majority of these missionaries were the local clergy, religious, catechists and teachers. Evangelization had difficult times. However, God blessed the fruits of the missionary work with some successes.

In 2017, the Church in Northern Igboland comprises of the Archdiocese of Onitsha (1885) and the Dioceses of Enugu (1962), Awka (1977), Nsukka (1991), Nnewi (2001), and Awgu (2005). The Archdiocese of Onitsha was founded by the French missionaries on 5th December, 1885 and was erected prefecture in July 1889. She became a variate of Southern Nigeria in April 1920 and in 1948, became the vicariate of Onitsha and in April 12, 1950 became an Archdiocese. She has Revd. Fr. Lutz Cssp as her first missionary and Bishop Shanahan, Cssp, as her first Bishop. She has had the episcopal tenures of Archbishop Charles Heery, Cardinal Francis Arinze, Archbishop Stephen Ezeanya and Archbishop Albert Obiefuna. Most Revd. Dr. Valerian M. Okeke is her present Archbishop (February 9, 2002 till date). Bishop Denis Chidi Isizor is the Auxiliary Bishop of Onitsha (May 1, 2015 till date).

ENUGU

In November, 1962, Enugu Diocese was carved out of Onitsha Archdiocese and comprised of the Old Enugu and Nsukka districts. Bishop JohnCross Anyogu was installed her first Bishop on 15th January, 1963. She lost her first Bishop to the cold hands of death on 6th July, 1967. During the Nigeria/Biafra civil war, the diocese was without a bishop. However, Msgr. Stephen Ezeanya served as her vicar capitular during the war. By the end of the war in 1970, Bishop G.M.P Okoye was transferred from Port Harcourt Diocese to succeed Anyogu on 17th March, 1970. He died on 17th March, 1977. On February 26, 1978, Bishop M.U. Eneja succeeded Bishop Okoye. The Catholic Diocese of Enugu witnessed a tremendous growth under the leadership of Bishop Michael Ugwu Eneja. During his tenure, Nsukka Diocese was created in 1991. At his retirement in November, 1996, Bishop Anthony Okonkwo Gbuji, the former Bishop of Isele-Ukwu Diocese was installed its fourth Bishop on 8th February, 1997. Under his leadership, Awgu Diocese was created in 2005. Bishop Callistus Onaga is now the Bishop of Enugu. He succeeded Bishop Gbuji as the fifth Bishop of Enugu on May 2, 2009.

AWKA

Awka Diocese was carved out of Onitsha Archdiocese on November 10, 1977. Her first Bishop was Bishop Albert .K. Obiefuna (the Archbishop emeritus of Onitsha) consecrated on February 5, 1978. Bishop Simon A. Okafor was consecrated the auxiliary Bishop of Awka on 30th May, 1992 and installed her second bishop on December 17, 1994. Awka Diocese had Bishop Solomon Amatu, the present Bishop of Okigwe as an auxiliary bishop. After the Episcopacy of Bishop A.K. Obiefuna, she had Bishop S. Okafor as her local ordinary and Bishop Paulinus Chukwuemeka Ezeokafor as an auxiliary bishop, (20th January, 2007). Today Bishop P.C. Ezeokafor is her Bishop (July 8, 2011) with Bishop Jonas Benson Okoye as the Auxiliary Bishop of Awka.

NSUKKA

Nsukka Diocese was carved out of Enugu Diocese on November 19, 1990. Her first local ordinary, Bishop Francis Ogbonna Okobo was ordained in Rome on January 6, 1991 and installed on February 2, 1991. Pope John Paul II created Nsukka Diocese during his dynamic papacy. Bishop F.E.O. Okobo's eventful episcopacy ended with his graceful retirement; his tenure was a tedious but satisfactory pioneering stewardship. Appointed by Pope Francis, Bishop Godfrey Igwebuike Onah became the second Bishop of Nsukka (July 4, 2013 till date). Under his watch and shepherding style, Bishop G.I. Onah is making huge pastoral impacts in more fronts than one.

NNEWI

Nnewi Diocese was created out of Onitsha on November 28, 2001. Pope John Paul II created the Diocese and appointed Bishop Hilary Paul Odili Okeke as her first bishop (February 10, 2002). He is still her present bishop. Nnewi Diocese is made up of Nnewi, Amichi, Ozoubulu and Ihiala Episcopal regions.

AWGU

Awgu Diocese was created by the papacy of Pope Benedict XVI on July 8, 2005. Bishop John I. Okoye was installed on September 28, 2005. The Diocese has rich pastoral plans and the development of her priests and laity.

The Catholic Church in Northern Igboland from 1885 – 2017 (our terminal date) recorded some progress in many aspects of church life especially in the areas of vocations to the family life, priesthood and religious life, laity formation, catechesis, charity desks, creation of dioceses and evangelization through schools, hospitals, Justice, Development and Peace Commission and various poverty alleviation strategies. The growth of the church of the lower Niger mission which started on December 5, 1885 with 2 priests, 2 brothers and no lay catholic member has today quite a bountiful harvest to show as indicated in the chart below.

Archdiocese / Diocese	Population of Diocese	Catholic Population	Nigerian Priests	Missionary Priests	Nigerian Sisters	Missionary Brothers	Nigerian Brothers	Major Seminarians	Sisters in formation	Minor Seminarians
Onitsha	2,214,500	1,476,326	350	27	483	11	70	238	-	-
Enugu	3,500,00	2,000,000	176	10	312	18	20	296	95	440
Awka	1,099,949	560,974	273	-	10	-	5	228	5	556
Nsukka	857,974	732,503	180	6	73	2	2	141	-	-
Nnewi	658,358	438,905	166	1	104	-	8	120	-	-
Awgu	1,500,00	400,000	55	18	35	-	100	76	-	140

Sources:

1. *The Official Directory of the Church in Nigeria (2008 - 2009).*
2. *Nsukka Diocesan Directory 2009.*

The Catholic missionary phases in northern Igboland studied above reveal an eventful dynamic history of a church planted as a mustard seed (Matthew 13:31, Mark 4:30-32, Luke 13:18-19) but which has grown with positive influences and thus confirmed the purpose of many in Christ. It is a robust history with many lessons which make one appreciate the predecessors in the faith, both clergy and laity alike, enable one evaluate the present objectively and help one with the guide for the future missionary activities. Some of the lessons are articulated below:

Lessons From History

The history of catholic mission in Northern Igboland had a good number of lessons with esteemed pastoral, ecumenical, catechetical, church-state relationship, educational, administrative, spiritual and moral values, among others. We highlight them as follows:

1. **The Role of Traditional Rulers:** The role of traditional rulers in the spread of the gospel of Christ cannot be underestimated. Traditional rulers such as Obi Anazonwu of Onitsha, Idigo of Aguleri, and Fatou of Nsugbe need special mention in context. The traditional stool and institutions are part of the schemes for the gospel. Unnecessary antagonisms with traditional system and structures which have no gospel values should be avoided responsibly.
2. **The Positive Effects of Indirect Methods of Evangelization:** There is gain in indirect methods of evangelization. Apart from the ordinary methods of preaching such as the pulpit, indirect methods through the schools, skill acquisition centres, hospitals, farming, carpentry and masonry were used by the missionaries. This method yielded huge positive results, in the persons of civil servants, mission workers and the realization of poverty alleviation and self actualization. In the wake of new evangelization, both direct and indirect methods should be given fresh ardour and expressions.
3. **The Good Results of the Nigerian/Biafra War:** The impacts of the Nigerian/Biafra civil war were devastating, dehumanizing and destructive in so many ways on the Church, Biafra and Nigeria. However, based on positive interpretation of the war's historical narrative, the Church saw the beginning of a new era. It became, *modus loquendi*, a blessing in disguise. God in his providence increased vocation in Igboland in order to address the scarcity of missionaries which came as a result of the forceful expulsion of the expatriate missionaries by the Nigerian government. This divine blessing of increase in priestly/religious vocations is an index of faith testimony among the Christians in Igboland.
4. **The Church-State Partnership:** Missionaries should partner with government in some secular affairs such as schools, hospital, rural development and human progress. The government should at all times give grant-in-aid to encourage the church in her contributions to better the society. The pupils/students being educated or the sick being healed, for examples, are at once members of the church and citizens of the state. The catholic schools that were forcefully taken away from her by the government which are now being returned to her by the state is commendable.
5. **The Missionary Joy:** The missionaries who came far away from their homeland showed wonderful commitment in the Lord's work in the vineyard. Christ and his love were their missionary joy. They

endured deprivations and some even died in active apostolate to plant the church (*plantatio ecclesiae*) in our land in order to save us in Christ (Mathew 28:19-20, Mark 16:15, Acts 1:8, 1Tim 2:4). The contemporary missionaries and the future ones should learn from these good examples and ensure that the labours of their venerable predecessors are not in vain. In the midst of rivalries from Protestants, stiff opposition from traditional religionists and suspicion from colonial governments, they maintained their missionary joy.

- 6. The Hand of Providence in Mission:** In Acts 16:6-10: Paul and his companions wanted to enter Bithynia but providence took them to Macedonia. At night, Paul saw the vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him “Come over to Macedonia and help us”. Acts 8: 26-40 narrates how the angel of the Lord guided Philip to meet the Ethiopian Eunuch who was baptized by him. The above citations are some scriptural evidences of providential hand in mission. The first missionaries Fr. Lutz and team’s initial plan was to establish the Upper Niger Mission. However, the hand of providence changed their time-table in apparent disappointments and they settled at Onitsha. Missionaries should trust God and his incomprehensible ways (Isaiah 55:8-9).

Conclusion

The Roman Catholic Mission in eastern Nigeria initially referred to as Lower Niger Mission was founded by a group of four French missionaries of the Holy Ghost Congregation under the headship of Father Joseph Lutz in 1885. These missionaries providentially settled at Onitsha which became the headquarters of Roman Catholic Mission east of the Niger. Conversion into the catholic faith was very difficult because of the Anglican presence whose missionaries were the first to enter the territory twenty eight years earlier in 1857. Again there was stiff opposition by the practitioners of African Traditional Religion who saw the new Christian faith as an imported world view brought into their African world view to disorganize their socio-religious system. When the catholic missionaries saw that the Northern Igbo people were mostly rural poor dwellers and agrarian citizens of peasant variety, they hinged their attractions on poverty alleviation strategies. So, apart from the usual direct method of winning souls for Christ such as preaching, catechism, freeing of slaves, liturgy, building churches, creating parishes and constituting the indigenous clergy etc, the Roman Catholic mission in northern Igboland introduced poverty alleviation strategies as indirect means of evangelization. This method of material humanitarian services was very effective as a means of conversion and retention of members. The natives of Northern Igboland who received bread before they were given the bible and medicine before matrimony from the missionaries got disposed positively towards the new faith. They joined the Roman Catholic Church as members and furthered her evangelical course in the area. Even though the civil government in Nigeria whose major priority is the welfare of the people has lapses in her response to poverty alleviation issues in the country, the Roman Catholic Missionaries of today have continued to toe the line of their predecessors in those acts that benefit the poor. Now that over 99% of the Catholic missionaries in northern Igboland are natives, there is urgent need to study the people’s culture and worldview in order to make Christianity in Igboland truly Christian and truly African with deep roots and abundant fruits for harvests.

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