

The Mission of the Catholic Church in Nigeria: A Focus on the South-East Region

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Abstract

Using historical method, the article critically analysed the meaning, importance and the implications of mission as understood in the Catholic Church. It traced the various attempts the Catholic Church made to bring Christianity to Nigeria beginning from the 15th century and outlined some of the essential activities of the Catholic Church in Nigeria in general and the South-East in particular. It was discovered that the Catholic Church in the South-East has made tremendous successes in personnel and social development. The data is presented on the table form. In spite of these successes, the article discovered that there is still moral decadence in the society and even among the Christians. The article recommended that the pastors and ministers of the word of God like Christ should be real exemplary to their flock. It also strongly recommended that the word of God through the power of the Holy Spirit should be allowed to transform the life of all in Nigeria beginning with the leaders who should be the agents of change.

Key Words: Catholic Church, Christianity, Evangelization, Gospel, Mission, Missionaries

Introduction

The word mission has been used in many different ways. In recent times, it is very common to hear the 'mission statement' of an organization or an institution where these institutions and organizations underscore their strongly felt aim. Sometimes when military people intend to embark on expedition, they call it 'mission.' In the two examples cited above, the word mission strictly speaking has no religious connotation. In this article which has religious and historical undertones, the term mission will be highlighted, analysed and discussed to show how it is the force that drives and propels the activities of the Catholic Church throughout the ages in the world including Nigeria. In other words, the discussion will focus on 'mission' in general, 'Catholic Church in Nigeria, South-East specifically' and the sub-headings within these subject areas.

The methodology that guides this research is historical method. It is historical because it is a deliberate search for facts

relating to the past events; where these specifically religious past events are interpreted in the light of contemporary issues. The article which aims at exploring the various ways the Catholic Church exercised her mission in Nigeria and South-East Region specifically begins with these highlights.

Origin, Definition and Explanation of Mission

Everything created on earth has a beginning. In the same way, the mission of the Church has its own beginning. The origin of what is known today as mission is traced to Jesus Christ, who was sent first by his Father through the Holy Spirit and in turn sent his apostles whom he called, trained and sent. Thus, the word 'apostle' means one who is sent. The Document of Vatican II in its Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity (*AD Gentes*) paragraph 5 gives a detailed origin of mission in the context of this paper. Paragraph 5 of the above document states:

From the very beginning, the Lord Jesus called to him men of his own choosing... And he appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them forth to preach (Mk 3:13; Mtt 10:1-42). Thus the apostles were the first members of the new Israel, and at the same time the beginning of the sacred hierarchy. By his death and resurrection the Lord completed once for all in himself the mysteries of our salvation and of the renewal of all things. He had received all power in heaven and earth (Mtt 28:18). Now before he was taken up into heaven (Act 1:11), he founded his Church as the sacrament of salvation, and sent his apostles into all the world just as he himself had been sent by his Father (Jn 20:21). He gave them this command: 'Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you' (Mtt 28:19). 'Go into the whole world; preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized shall be saved, but he who does not believe shall be condemned' (Mk 16:15). Since then the duty has weighed upon the Church to spread the faith and the saving work of Christ... (1966, p. 589).

The narrative passage above is historic, descriptive, factual and biblical. It is historic because it happened; descriptive because it presents the evidence as factual with biblical backing. The means of achieving this mission is very well explicated in the same paragraph 5 when it elaborates:

The mission of the Church, therefore, is fulfilled by that activity which makes her fully present to all men [women] and nations. She undertakes this

activity in obedience to Christ's command and in response to the grace and love of the Holy Spirit. Thus, by the example of her life and by her preaching, by the sacrament and other means of grace, she can lead them to the faith, the freedom, and the peace of Christ. Thus there lies open before them a free and trustworthy road to full participation in the mystery of Christ (1966, p. 590).

It suffices to say that the points presented above have sufficiently delineated the origin of the term 'mission' and highlighted the means to achieve this important task of the mission. Having established the necessity of mission, what follows is a brief definition of the term mission. Paragraph 6 of the same document offers this definition:

Mission is the term usually given to those particular undertakings by which the heralds of the gospel are sent out by the church and go forth into the world to carry out the task of preaching and planting the church among peoples who do not yet believe in Christ (1966, p.590).

Bosch (2010, p.1) gives an expanded definition of mission in these words:

It referred to (a) the sending of missionaries to a designated territory, (b) the activities undertaken by such missionaries, (c) the geographical area where the missionaries were active, (d) the agency which despatched the missionaries, (e) the non-Christian world or 'mission field' or (f) the centre from which the missionaries operated on the mission field. In a slightly different context it could also refer to (g) a local congregation without a resident minister and still dependent on the support of an older, established church or (h) a series of special services

intended to deepen or spread Christian faith, usually in a normally Christian environment.

These eight (a-h) points have given the core of mission as well as the constituents of the term mission. These definitions are necessary here because they help us to have an in depth knowledge and direct focus of the mission wherever Christians are found. As the discussion progresses on the mission of the Catholic Church, these expressions will be used much more often. These include: propagation of faith, expansion of the reign of God, conversion of the heathen and much more frequently the founding of new churches. It is important to state at this moment that the specific purpose of the missionary activity is the evangelization and the planting of the church among those people and groups where the word of God has not taken firm root. This means that the pilgrim church is missionary by her very nature. On the other hand, it is instructive to say that the church exists in order to evangelize. In the course of this discussion, mission and evangelization will be used simultaneously.

A brief explanation of the Catholic Church will help to throw more light in this article. McBrien (1994) has many ways of illustrating the expression Catholic Church. However, this article prefers the explanation given by St Cyril as documented by McBrien in this context:

The Catholic Church is called Catholic because it extends throughout the world... because it teaches universally and without omission all the doctrines which ought to come to human knowledge... because it brings under the sway of the true religion all the classes of people, rulers and subjects, learned and ignorant, and because it universally treats and cures every type of sin... and possesses in itself every

kind of virtue which can be named ... and spiritual gifts of every kind (1994, p. 4).

One thing central in St Cyril's explanation quoted by McBrien is the universality of the Catholic Church. All the functions she performs are done universally. It is this universality that helped her to spread all over the world without inhibition. The Catechism of the Catholic Church in article 830 states

The Church is Catholic in a double sense. First, the Church is Catholic because Christ is present in her. Where there is Christ Jesus, there is the Catholic Church. In her subsists the fullness of Christ's body united with its head; this implies that she receives from him the fullness of the means of salvation which he has willed: correct and complete confession of faith, full of sacramental life, and ordained ministry of apostolic succession. The Church was, in this fundamental sense Catholic on the day of Pentecost and will always be so until the day of the *Parousia*. Secondly, the Church is Catholic because she has been sent out by Christ on a mission to the whole human race (1995, p. 193).

The insight gained from these definitions and explanations has paved the way sufficiently enough for further discussions on the main theme of this article. Before we delve into the activities of the Catholic Church in Nigeria, it is very pertinent to pay heed to this wise advice given in the document of Vatican II which states:

As is quite evident throughout the text, the focus of missionary activity today is less on territorial expansion, which has been virtually achieved, than on making the Church an active presence within and native to the diverse and

developing non-Christian cultures in which it exists. For this reason, the emphasis on dialogue with non-Christians, adaptation to local conditions, and participation in community and national life is paramount (1966, p. 583).

This advice will continue to guide us as we embark on the next stage of this article namely, the presence and activities of the Catholic Church in Nigeria.

The Arrival of the Catholic Church in Nigeria

This section chronicles the events of the Catholic Church in Nigeria in its nascent stage. It is interesting to take note of this important notion about history. In the book, *A Hundred Years of the Catholic Church in Eastern Nigeria 1885-1985*, Obi et al (1985) quoted Pope Celestine VI who said: "every history is sacred history..., every history is a gospel... eliminate God from history and you 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." From one aspect of that human being; that is a religious being with faith and reason, the above quotation attributed to Pope Celestine VI is perfectly in order. The emphasis here is on 'a religious being with faith and reason.' It is in this context that history can be understood as 'sacred and gospel.' On the other hand, another version of history that is closely related to our discussion and very relevant to this section was attributed to John E. Wise who said:

History is a narration of facts in perspective. In history to have the facts correct, the dates, the names, the events, is elemental; but to select the most important and representative of what was taking place is difficult indeed. Sometimes we have only a limited amount of materials to choose from... At other times we have copious

records for entire eras from which we must judiciously examine as much as we can. Usually we rely on the interpretation and studies of scholars for many details for which we seek the perspective and the insight to a unified understanding. In all we look to the records of the past to find a deeper understanding of today (1985, p. viii).

The whole of this quotation is pertinent but the most relevant to this section revolves around these sentences 'to select the most important and representative of what was taking place is difficult indeed.' The second sentence is, 'at times we have copious records for entire eras from which we must judiciously examine as much as we can.' We underscore the facts contained in these sentences because the history of the arrival of the Catholic Church in Nigeria has many versions given by many historians and missionaries at different stages. For the purpose of this section, we examine three sources to demonstrate how they presented their facts.

Firstly, Okafor (2004) states: "The first Christian missionaries to come to Nigeria were Portuguese Roman Catholics. From 1485 when Joa Alfonso d'Aveiro visited Benin to the end of the eighteenth century, the missionaries came in different waves to evangelize the people of Benin". Secondly, Njoku (1980) gives a similar account thus: "Roman Catholics were the first to send missionaries to Southern Nigeria. By 1847, the Portuguese who had already opened up trading connection with Benin City two years earlier sent out Portuguese Catholic Christian missionaries to Benin City and old Warri." Finally, the Official Directory 2017-2020 Catholic Church in Nigeria elaborates thus:

The initial contact of the country with Christian mission was between 15th to 18th centuries. The first group of missionary contacts involved in this

encounter were mainly Capuchin missionaries and Augustinians from Portugal, Spain and Italy. Following the pattern of Church-State relations, these missionaries called at Kings' courts, sought to convert the kings and from there attempted to make the people Christians. In this respect, the Oba of Benin and the Olu of Warri both in the present day Edo and Delta states made many contacts with the Christian missionaries during the early period (20117, p. xviii).

These three sources though in various versions have central messages in their narratives. All three agreed that the first missionaries to Nigeria were Roman Catholics from Portugal. They also agreed that Benin and Warri were their first contacts. While Okafor dated his account to 1485, Njoku has 1487. The Official Directory simply says between 15th to 18th centuries. Both Okafor and Njoku generalized the missionaries that came. The Official Directory names them as Capuchins and Augustinians from not only Portugal but also from Spain and Italy. This is where Wise's statement becomes relevant when he said, 'at other times we have copious records for entire eras from which we must judiciously examine as much as we can.' Having judiciously examined these three sources, we can confidently say that we have more facts for better understanding of the past events than if we have examined only one source.

The arrival of the Catholic Church in Nigeria did not end with these first and early contacts. It is interesting and helpful to know how these missionaries were received, how they laboured as well as the results of their labour. In order to arrive at these discoveries, it is pertinent to ask this question at this stage. Why did the efforts of the first missionaries in Nigeria

especially in Benin and Warri not succeed? In her own assessment Njoku (1980) argues that despite the initial good reception, the mission to both Benin and Warri collapsed. Two reasons accounted to this collapse; namely partly due to inadequacy of the numerical strength of the missionaries and partly due to the cold feet which the Obas and their people developed later. Ikime (2012) gives a straight forward reason by saying, 'the people in this case people from Benin and Warri were in no mood to receive Christianity and they offered the missionaries little cooperation.' The important lesson to be learned from the failure of this first missionary attempt is the lesson of perseverance which sharpens one's focus. The early missionaries did not allow this transient failure to distract their aim and motive. In order to realize their goal, they tried to strategize better which brought about what is called the second wave of missionary activities in Nigeria. Though our topic is the mission of Catholic Church in Nigeria, it is helpful to say something at this stage about the separated brethren - the Protestants for the sake of ecumenism. We can rightly call the involvement of the Protestant missionaries the second wave of missionary activities in Nigeria. It is important to note that the earliest of these missionaries were sent by various missionary societies of Protestant churches. After the wave of the Protestant Reformation, these various societies were formed in the 18th and 19th centuries by Protestant churches in Europe and America. Okafor (2004) gives the names of these missionary societies and the year they were founded in these lines:

Some of these societies were: the Baptist Missionary Society founded in England in 1798, the London Missionary Society founded in 1799 and the Universities Mission to central Africa founded in 1859... Many of these missionaries came to Nigeria,

preached and established Christian churches of various denominations (p. 298).

Between 1842 and 1845, Methodist Mission and Church Missionary Society (CMS) settled in Abeokuta and Badagry. These Protestant missionaries made some remarkable contributions in Nigeria. Okafor (2004) highlights such achievements thus: "The CMS under Rev Townsend did not concern itself with the preaching of the gospel alone, a lot was done for the social welfare of the people. Townsend introduced the first printing press in Abeokuta in 1852, published the Yoruba vernacular newspaper; the '*Iwe Irohin*' in 1859 and founded an orphanage called the '*Ake* orphanage in 1862" (p. 301-302). The reference already made so far about the achievements of the Protestant missionaries in Nigeria; not only show the importance of collaboration in the Lord's vineyard but also to emphasize the significance of ecumenism.

Activities and Achievements of the Catholic Church in Nigeria

This section highlights some of the activities and achievement of the Catholic Church in Nigeria. It is instructive to state that these activities and achievements are presented here in summary form. We shall go into specifics and details when we come to the section for South-East Region of Nigeria. Our discussion here will be guided mainly by the Official Directory 2017-2020. In its introduction, the Directory has this to say:

Since the missionaries brought the Catholic faith in Nigeria; more than a hundred years ago, the country has remained a fertile land where the seed of the Word of God has germinated and visibly blossomed to the admiration of the Universal Church. Furthermore, apart from her spiritual apostolate, the

church has remained a principal stakeholder in the Nigerian nation in all its ramifications (2017, p. vii).

Illustrating how the Universal Church recognizes the progress and achievement of the Catholic Church in Nigeria, the Official Directory continues:

Despite being a young church in the context of existence, the Nigerian Church has come of age and it is therefore not surprising that Pope Benedict XVI, in 2010 in confidence and trust; invited her [Nigerian Church] to go on evangelization mission to other lands, with the Good News of Christ (Mission Ad extra) (2017, p. vii).

In fact what Pope Benedict XVI told the Nigerian Church is in line with and also in fulfilment of what his predecessors especially; Pope Paul VI told African Church in general that the African Church will one day become missionaries to itself. The Nigerian Spiritans, for example, embraced this missionary venture to Africa in 1984 when they sent their members to Zambia and Zimbabwe respectively. The writer of this article took part in the Zimbabwean mission where he laboured for 22 years and South Africa for three years bringing his missionary outreach to a total of 25 years. Specifying the areas of contribution of the Catholic Church in Nigeria, the Official Directory continues:

Also the churches remained the principal partner of government in the provision of social services for the people of the country, with a view of assuring social justice and equity. In Nigeria today, the Catholic Church remains a major provider of facilities necessary for holistic development of the human person; in consonance with the Social Teachings of the Church. Thus she has made life worth living for majority of Nigerians especially in the

rural areas, through the provision of schools, hospitals, maternity centres and clinics; as well as social service centres, in all the states of the country (2017, p. vii).

The Catholic Church in Nigeria like other Catholic Churches all over the world has always identified with the people so as to bring onto them the light of Christ and also to give them succour in times of difficulties and bereavement. In its foreword, the Official Directory 2017-2020 gives the following statistics that later will need an update:

Like the biblical mustard seed, it [Catholic Church] has spread to all parts of the country. Today the Catholic Church in Nigeria has 9 Archdioceses, 44 dioceses, 2 Apostolic Vicariates, and one Maronite Exahe; 30 male religious congregations, and 51 female religious congregations. In addition, the Catholic Church has 16

major seminaries and 10 degree-awarding institutions. The Veritas University, the citadel of the Bishops' Conference institution was opened in 2008 (2017, p. v).

It is inspiring to note how Veritas University was mentioned by name because it was founded by the Bishops' Conference of Nigeria. However, there are other many private Catholic Universities before and after the establishment of Veritas University. The number of dioceses in Nigeria has increased from 44 stated above to 49. Table 1 below shows the Metropolitan Archdioceses in Nigeria with their corresponding Dioceses.

Table 1: Distribution of Dioceses among the Metropolitan Archdioceses in Nigeria

Abuja	Benin	Calabar	Ibadan	Jos	Kaduna	Lagos	Onitsha	Owerri
Gboko	Auchi	Ikot-Ekpene	Ekiti	Bauchi	Kafanchan	Abeokuta	Abakiliki	Aba
Idah	Bomadi	Ogoja	Ilorin	Jalingo	Kano	Ijebu-Ode	Aguleri	Ahiara
Katsina-Ala	Issele-Uku	Port-Harcourt	Ondo	Maidugiri	Kotagora		Awgu	Okigwe
Lafia	Uromi	Uyo	Oshogbo	Parkshin	Mina		Awka	Orlu
Lokoja	Warri		Oyo	Shandam	Sokoto		Ekwulobia	Umuahia
Makurdi				Wukari	Zaria		Enugu	
Oturkpo				Yola			Nnewi	
							Nssuka	

The Metropolitan Archdiocese of Onitsha has the highest number of dioceses 8, followed by Abuja and Jos with 7 each. Kaduna is next with 6; Benin City, Ibadan and Owerri have 5 each. Calabar is next with 4 while Lagos has 2 dioceses. These statistical figures show an encouraging growth of the Catholic Church in Nigeria

The Activities of the Catholic Church in the South –East Region of Nigeria

Whenever we talk of the activities of the Catholic Church in Nigeria, Onitsha comes to mind as the starting point. Sources available confirm that the members of the Holy Ghost Congregation led by Fr. Lutz arrived at Onitsha on

December 5, 1885. Describing this very important day, Obi et al (1985, p. 12) states "On Saturday December [1885], Fathers Lutz and Horne arrived at Onitsha wharf. Thus they became the first Catholic missionary team to come to Onitsha and settle in Igboland on the Eastern side of the Niger." For her own part, Njoku (1980) has this to say: "On December 6 1885, a missionary group of Holy Ghost Congregation (Spiritans) and African Mission of Lyon stopped at Onitsha. They were led by Reverend Father Joseph Lutz." Both Obi et al and Njoku agreed that Onitsha at that time was an out station of the vicariate of Libreville, Gabon. Like any other missionary, this first group that came to Onitsha faced their own difficulties but the most devastating was the early death that visited them. For example by January 18, 1886 they lost one of their members in the person of Rev Brother Jean known as the professional mason and builder. However, this death did not dampen their missionary zeal. At this juncture it is helpful to recall the encounter the missionaries had with the Obi of Onitsha. The Obi of Onitsha welcomed the Spiritan missionaries gladly. When the Spiritans asked for a piece of land to settle, the Obi of Onitsha referred them to Bishop Crowther who was already present in Onitsha. The Obi of Onitsha perceiving that Bishop Crowther had not developed the vast land given to him thought it reasonable that Bishop Crowther should share that land with his fellow missionary.

When the land was given to Fr. Lutz he set out to work with his team. Both Eke et al and Obi et al agreed that on Easter Sunday April 25, 1886 the Onitsha mission was officially opened with a Holy Mass. Progressively on August 29 and October 31, 1886 Onitsha witnessed the first adult baptisms. With this background the Holy Ghost (Spiritan) missionaries embarked on massive development and expansion of

their territories in different ways. The discussions below focus on the specific activities embarked on the missionaries in order to enhance evangelization and growth of the Catholic Church in the then Eastern Nigeria.

Christian Village

One of the strategies employed by the early missionaries led by Fr. Lutz was the establishment of Christian village. As soon as the missionaries arrived in 1885, they discovered that opposite their Onitsha mission was a flourishing slave market where slaves were sold on daily basis. Seeing this practice as a sin against humanity, they started buying these slaves and kept them to live within the mission premises. In 1886, the missionaries built the first Christian village in Onitsha. The aim was to protect these redeemed slaves from falling prey to further slavery as well as to teach them Catholic doctrines and practices. Describing the nature of this Christian village, Nwosu et al (1985, p. 22) opined:

It was for a long time the point where Catholicism and the local cultures met for meaningful dialogue. Catholic doctrine was taught and put into practice by this small community. It was a kind of miniature parish or diocese so to say... In Christian village, only Christians and potential Christians live there in an environment that was regimental and quasi-monastic. Every Christian villager was expected to be fervent; there was no room for laggards.

As time went on however, the Christian village was expanded beyond liberated slaves to include groups of catechumens and already newly baptized Christians. In principle the idea of bringing these people together shows that in Christ there is no 'Jews or Gentiles, no slave or

master, no male or female' (Gal 3:28). In other words we are all one in Christ. Though this strategy worked for the missionaries at that early stage, it had its implications. In Africa in general and the Igbos in particular, people live together as community kit and kin in their ancestral villages. Here in the Christian village, they were kept together irrespective of where they came from. The conglomeration of different cultures caused some frictions. The Christian village established a dialogue between the Christian and the local cultures - a system encouraged by theology of inculturation in recent time. Though some critics argued that the missionaries established Christian village in order to gain cheap labour; on the contrary, the Christian village had no economic gain in mind in its evangelization programme. A more positive look at the Christian village saw it as a preparatory ground for future seminaries and convents where aspirants and candidates are trained and nurtured to answer their vocational call to the full. Onitsha and Aguleri were the two prominent Christian villages in the South-East Region of Nigeria. Other missionary activities of great importance are discussed below.

Social Development in the South-East Region of Nigeria

The mission of the Catholic Church in this area of development is vast and immense. It could be recalled that before the Catholic Church arrived at Onitsha, the Anglican missionaries were already present. The British traders under the Royal Niger Company were also operating at Onitsha. Since the Anglican missionaries were literarily by the side of the British traders who the Igbos regarded as their oppressors, they looked for alternatives which they found in the Catholic missionaries. When the Igbos discovered

that the Catholic missionaries were by their side, they started to trust these Catholic missionaries more than the Anglicans. On their own part, these Catholic missionaries tried to win the hearts of the Igbos by their presence and out-reach. Realizing the importance of peace among themselves, (Nwosu et al, 1985) observed that the Igbos appealed to the Catholic missionaries to intervene in the quarrels between neighbouring towns. For example in June 1888, Fr. Lutz's intervention at the request of Onitsha prevented the impending war between Onitsha and Nkwelle. Nwosu et al (1985) also recalled that the Catholic Church was instrumental in bringing peace between Ogidi and Umoji when the chief of Ogidi was determined to extend his influence over the neighbouring town. Having helped to create some fundamental peace and stability among the people, the Catholic missionaries embarked on other social development services. At the early stage of these social services was the 'foster care' where redeemed slaves, young and old were given freedom and resettled around mission compound. Realizing the presence of the Catholic missionaries and their good work or rehabilitation, some parents were secretly bringing their twin children to the missionaries or they deliberately abandoned these twins where the missionaries could collect them. For Nwosu et al (1985), it were these children and some of the redeemed slaves that formed the foundation of school education.

Vocational Centres

With the arrival of the Catholic missionaries in 1885, there arose different needs that required the help of the indigenous people in areas such as: carpentry, tailoring, brick-laying, etc. This humble attempt of the Catholic missionaries later gave rise to the establishment of formal vocational institutions. Places in the archdiocese of

Onitsha where these vocational institutions exist till today are: Dunukofia, Oraifite, Nkpor, Ozubulu, Nnewi and Onitsha. Describing one outstanding vocational/social centre at Onitsha, Nwosu et al (1985, p. 232) have this to say:

It was built at the cost of N72, 000. At its inception it offered courses in home Economics, Business studies, Carpentry, and Social studies. The Social centre made such an immediate impact in Onitsha that in the same year one of its workers in the trade union department, Mr Onuobia was elected president of Onitsha council of labour.

Later the Catholic missionaries expanded the social centre to other places such as Nnewi, Adazi, Obeledu and Nimo. These extensions offered courses in Home Economics only. Regrettably these progressive social centres were destroyed during the Nigeria-Biafra civil war. At the end of the civil war, they were rebuilt and reactivated as part of the on-going rehabilitation efforts. Such vocational centres are highly needed at this present time when there is unemployment everywhere.

Youth Formation

In order to show how important youth formation is to the Spiritans, Eke et al (2006, p. 36) highlight Libermann's vision on this aspect:

He [Libermann] saw the people of the African continent presenting a tremendous opportunity for the church. To exploit the opportunity, however, he realized the church must establish stable Christian communities headed by native hierarchies. To bring this about he ordered his congregation [Spiritans] to devote particular care to the education of the young people and to provide the most perfect civilization we are able to offer.

Father Francis Libermann was the co-founder of the congregation of the Holy Spirit. No wonder, therefore, that Fr. Lutz and his companions who championed this youth formation were the early Spiritan missionaries at Onitsha. These missionaries tried to engage the youths in different skills acquisition. For example as early as 1908, a brass band was bought for the youths which they mastered instantly. With this musical instrument, the youths were invited from time to time to perform on various religious ceremonies even on civil occasions. These interested youths were given both leadership and skill training. The youths were gathered into choral groups from time to time for the study of music. This was later inaugurated into a formal society - the 'St Gregory Society.' The intervention of the then Fr. Shanahan who later became a well-known bishop brought about the 'Society of St Vincent de Paul and the Solidarity of Mary.' Visualizing the importance of youth formation in the society in general and in the church in particular, Pope John Paul II argues:

It is thus necessary to help young people to overcome the obstacles of thwarting their development: illiteracy, idleness, hunger, drugs. In order to meet these challenges, young people themselves should be called upon to become the evangelizers of their peers. No one does this better than them. The pastoral care of youth must clearly be part of the overall pastoral care of dioceses and parishes, so that young people be enabled to discover very early on the value of the gift of self, an essential means to the person to reach maturity (1995, p. 71).

The need to get the youth to acquire the correct information for the development of authentic personality and mature human being is well explicated in the above

quotation. In another discussion, Pope Paul II emphasizes: "Youths must not simply be considered as an object of pastoral concern for the church; young people ought to be encouraged to be active on behalf of the church as leading characters in evangelization and participants in the renewal of society (1994, p. 85). These policies and suggestions have yielded fruitful results both in the past and in the present because in the present South-East region, there are many societies formed to cater for various interests of the youth: recreational, spiritual, doctrinal growth and leadership development to empower the youths to reach their potentials.

Health Care

Fundamentally, health care was paramount in the instruction Christ gave his Apostles when he sent them out saying: "Heal the sick, bring the dead back to life, cleanse the lepers and drive out demons" (Matt 10:8). With this instruction every aspect of health care is taken care of. This explains the reason why Fr. Lutz and his companions stocked themselves with medicine before leaving the shores of Europe. As soon as they arrived at Onitsha, they began to proclaim the word of God as well as providing care to the sick people. Nwosu et al observe that between 1886 and 1888, more and more sick people were flocking in the mission for medication. Frequently, Fr. Lutz was called to visit the homes of many sick people so as to administer medicine and sacraments. For more serious cases he advised that they be brought to the mission for more intensive care. Fr. Horne was fully involved in this initial medical care of the people. Nwosu et al (1985, p. 236) gave a good account of Fr. Horne's mission expedition:

When Fr. Horne was leaving Onitsha in 1887 to open a mission station in Atani, he left with good stock of medicine.

From Odekpe he began to provide medicine for the sick people he came across. It was reported that he was very well received in this mission.

This care for the people disposed the natives to receive the missionaries who had their physical and spiritual interests at heart. It became certain that taking care of the sick people and also minister to them spiritually was not an easy task. With time the need to build a dispensary in Onitsha came up. More hands were also required. Thus the Sisters of St. Joseph Cluny were invited and they arrived at Onitsha promptly. In 1893, a hospital was built which provided in-patients and out-patients care to the people. Later, Holy Rosary maternity hospital waterside was opened. Expanding beyond Onitsha the early missionaries thought of having a central mission station between Onitsha and Calabar. According to Nwosu et al, Emekuku was finally chosen as the station in 1912. Emekuku, therefore, became 'a mission station as well as a centre for rural health care services.' When the Holy Rosary sisters arrived, they relieved the priests of medical work so as to concentrate more on the spiritual care of the people.

Leprosy Control Care

Since the Catholic Church is concerned with holistic well-being of the people in the society, it extends its services to the lepers who are the neglected members of the society. It is always said, 'good deeds attract.' When some lepers heard about the good works of the early Catholic missionaries in the area of health-care, they were alerted. Thus in August 1888, the first leper from Asaba was received at Onitsha by Fr. Lutz. Nwosu et al narrate how this second shift in health-care happened:

Fr. Lutz provided him [leper] with shelter [a little hut] and medicine, but his people were to provide him with

food and firewood. Within seven days another leper arrived; but was required to work for his supplies. Only medicine was provided free. Other lepers gradually arrived and eventually a leper settlement developed (1985, p. 245).

The principle the missionaries adopted in handling the lepers from the beginning was consistent, straight forward and transparent. They did not give these lepers false hope by promising what they could not afford. The provision of medicine was basic and necessary. It is interesting to observe the place of firewood in this narrative. Though lepers need firewood for warmth, the missionaries assigned the relatives of the leper to provide this essential service.

With the arrival of Holy Rosary Sisters, these nuns became involved in providing services to the lepers. In 1937, for example, a Holy Rosary Sister, Dr. L. Theresa was operating from Ihiala visiting lepers in Onitsha. Later some lay workers joined to help Holy Rosary Sisters in treating the lepers. This time, the treatment of the lepers took the form of a mobile clinic whereby the doctor and her team moved from one station to another on fixed days. In 1945, therefore, about 500 lepers were receiving treatment. By the same year, precisely in April 1945 'the government started Nigerian leprosy service where it adopted the existing leprosy settlement run by the church.' For Nwosu et al, this means 'the church received public grants for leprosy work, became responsible to the government for the work, but continued with the management of the programme.' When the leprosy programme in Onitsha shifted from Ihiala to Nnewi, its management was entrusted to the Immaculate Heart Sisters but the supervisory work was by a Holy Rosary medical doctor. According to Nwosu et al

(1985), 'it was now that the catholic leprosy control became more circumscribed and focused.' Consequently, leprosy settlements were established in these areas: Lilu, Ozubulu, and Okija. The clinic that provided services to these lepers were situated at: Amichi, Lilu, Mbanesi, Nnewi, Okija, Oraifite and Ozubulu. It was unfortunate that when the Nigerian civil war broke out in 1967-1970, the attention given to the lepers was reduced drastically. This was so because more demanding attention was on starving children, malnourished nursing mothers and the sick and fragile old people. At the end of the civil war, the leprosy service resumed with lesser number of lepers. It is interesting to note that when Archbishop Francis Arinze was the archbishop of Onitsha, he created an effective chaplaincy services for the leprosy settlements.

Another area where the early Catholic missionaries did important work and which is continued at present is the care of the orphans. Orphanages were stabled to look after children whose parents were dead. Many of these orphanages have been founded because of the prevailing circumstances of our time. Besides those orphans who lost their parents at war, there is also a situation where teenage girls (mothers) either abandoned their children or brought them to the orphanages to be taken care of by the Catholic nuns and their workers. Through the establishment of orphanages, the church has touched and saved many innocent lives. Some of these orphans have become great and prominent people in the society who are contributing towards the development of the country in different ways. The area that will encompass these ideas and others yet to be mentioned is education.

Education: A Necessary Tool for Catholic Church Evangelization

It is important to recall the pronouncement by Vatican II when it declares in *Ad Gentes* paragraph six that: "The specific purpose of this missionary activity is evangelization and the planting of the church among those peoples and groups where she has not taken root." One strategy of realizing this missionary evangelization is through education. Assessing the achievements of the early Holy Ghost missionaries Amadi (2016, p. 22) asserts, 'In the history of missionary attempts in Nigeria, the Holy Ghost missionaries were more successful than the early Portuguese missionaries in the 15th century. One of the strategies that made them successful was the school apostolate the Spiritans adopted and implemented from the first time they arrived in Onitsha.' However, these Holy Ghost missionaries could not have adopted the school apostolate as their primary tool of evangelization if they were not instructed and prepared for it. This was how they implemented the vision of the co-founder, Francis Libermann. Eke et al. (2006) explained this vision properly thus: 'To bring this about, he [Libermann] ordered his congregation to devote particular care to the education of young people and to provide the most perfect civilization we are able to offer.' This explains why immediately Fr. Lutz and his companions arrived at Onitsha, their first request to the Obi of Onitsha was to build a school. Obi et al (1985) recorded this request thus, '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 white men of Europe.' Certainly the king was impressed and interested to have his people acquire white man's knowledge. This early and humble request of Fr. Lutz paved the way for the establishment of a school at Onitsha. This

is how it happened as documented by Obi et al (1985, p. 226).

Thus, with a combination of acts of charity and the offer of knowledge of white man's wisdom, these pioneer Catholic missionaries gathered around them a group of converts comprising of freed men and slaves, adults and children. Some of the latter (children and adults) were taken under the care of the mission and they were given shelter. These groups formed the nucleus of the pupils of Fr. Lutz's school at Onitsha - the first Catholic school in Igboland.

This documentation with its commentary rightly highlights the important facts about the humble beginning of the missionary Catholic school in Igboland. This early school situated in Igboland is like the mustard seed spoken about in Matthew 13:31-32 which spread to other places. The missionary report of Fr. Lutz to his superior as recorded by Obi et al (1985) states:

Shortly after our arrival, we began a school, it brings forty children together. Twenty of these children live with us in the mission. They are the children whom we redeemed from slavery and most of whom are saved from death. We would be able to increase this number, but alas! We are forced to restrict it to this due to lack of accommodation, and especially due to lack of resources.

The fact that these early Catholic missionaries were able to start the first school with forty pupils was a good sign that the school apostolate had good prospects. In 1887, the subjects taught were English and music by Fr. Lutz, Arithmetic and writing by Fr. Horne. When Rev Brother David Doran took full charge of

the school administration in 1894 more subjects were added to include, 'vocational training in shoe-making, carpentry and joining.' The school apostolate continued to progress steadily till 1900 when the move for expansion of missionary work into the interior East of the Niger started. There were plausible reasons motivating this expansion into the interior. 'One dominant features of this drive into the interior was the opening of church-schools or catechumenate schools, more popularly called 'bush schools.' The bush school served important purpose for direct outreach. This was a very good strategy at that early stage. From 1902 onwards, the management of schools took another phase when Fr. Joseph Shanahan who later became a bishop came on board. The new initiative of Shanahan that brought rapid expansion of schools was described by Obi et al (1985) thus:

Shanahan evolved a policy of conversion through the schools rather than through the slaves and charitable institutions. It was the turning point in the history of Catholic education in Eastern Nigeria. His strategy was to educate not few but as far as possible to educate everywhere and everybody. So he decided to build, if possible, a school in every town that requested it.

The desire to bring education to everywhere and to everybody would require building schools in many towns. However, Shanahan's expectation was that as many towns as possible that would request for schools will own up their schools. Shanahan was a good visionary missionary. This open door educational policy brought about an upsurge in the establishment of schools in different places. The request for schools is well explicated in this statement documented by Eke et al (2006). 'During the period the school became clearly the principal

instrument of Catholic evangelization. Village after village stormed the various Catholic residencies with requests for schools and teachers.' The fruits of education were made manifest in the lives of those who received it at that early time as recalled by Njoku (1980): 'The first set of people who received education helped in spreading Christianity. They were sent out to mission stations as teacher/catechist. The demand was steadily increasing.' Though parents wanted their children to go to school, they also prevailed on their children from time to time to go to work in the farms. This made it impossible for the children to be regular at school. Seeing that children were not regular at school, the early missionaries introduced 'boarding houses.' There was rapid expansion of mission stations with their mission schools attached to them. At this time the expansion had gone beyond Onitsha to other places. Obi et al (1985, p. 232) provide the list of these substations in these lines:

There were for instance in 1918, six central stations with a large number of sub-stations attached to each. There were Ogboli with 28 sub-stations; Calabar with 13; Nteje with 43; Ozubulu with 47; Emekuku with 125; and Anua with 91. Each sub-station had a school running up to standard two, a few to standard four. The central stations ran up to standard six and produce teachers for schools in the sub-stations.

This was a golden time in the history of education when standard six could fetch a lucrative job; unlike our time when university graduates are jobless and unemployed for a long time after graduation. It is interesting to note that it was during the time Fr. Shanahan ordained bishop on the 6th June, 1920, that the expansion of education reached its apex. This great pastor and educationist started

having the feeling more urgently for the need to promote indigenous vocations to the priesthood. This thought brought about the establishment of the first seminary in Igboland. Eke et al (2006, p. 127) beautifully chronicled this fact thus:

St Paul's Seminary Igbariam actually opened on July 19, 1924 with nine students... Of the nine, three (John Anyogu, Patrick Doyle and Chales O' Donoghue) were studying Philosophy while the other six were minor seminarians. Only two Nigerians of this 1924 batch of admission eventually made it to the priesthood (John Anyogu and later William Obelagu). In 1925 only one student joined the seminary Michael Tansi who later became a Cistercian monk and the first Nigerian Catholic to be beatified in 1998.

The establishment of the first seminary gave the energetic Bishop Shanahan the courage to think of establishing a training college where certified teachers are trained. In 1928, St Charles Borromeo training college was established at Onitsha. In the same vein, the first Catholic secondary school Christ the King College Onitsha was started in 1933. At that early stage the Catholic missionaries had in mind of educating girls though parents were slow to allow their daughters to go to school. Commenting on this deprivation of girls of their right to education, Dutse and Sauri (2021) lament: "Today millions of women are deprived of this basic right of, which some of them are still unaware that this is a right they can demand." It could be recalled that during Fr. Lutz's time there was a mixed school where few girls had the opportunity to study with their male counterparts. On the other hand, it was during the time of Bishop Shanahan that he thought of building a separate school for girls came up. According to Obi et al

(1985), 'That was the motive force behind his founding of religious congregation of the Missionary Sisters of our Lady of the Holy Rosary.' This new congregation which began at Killeshandra, Ireland in 1924 sent its first batch of professed sisters to Onitsha in 1928. Obi et al (1985) describe the rapid progress that took place when these Holy Rosary Sisters arrived at Onitsha:

Soon the Holy Rosary Sisters spread throughout the Onitsha and Owerri provinces opening convent schools. In Owerri area for instance, six Holy Rosary Sisters... opened a convent school in Emekuku in 1930. From here they spread to Ogbor Nguru and Oru Ahiara in Mbaise... By 1954, 150 girls' schools with a population of 22,000 girls were recorded for Onitsha and Owerri provinces.

The quotation above shows a rapid increase in girls' schools where in 1954 there were 150 girls schools populated with 22,000 girls in two ecclesiastical provinces of South-East Region of Nigeria. This is a laudable achievement by the Catholic Church in bringing education to both boys and girls. The number of schools for both boys and girls has increased remarkably up to our present time. The Official Directory captures and highlights these figures arranged according to the dioceses within the South-East Region of Nigeria. This data is arranged alphabetically.

Table 2: Distribution of training institutions according to dioceses

Diocese	Nursery/ Primary	Secondary schools	Seminary	Vocational Inst.	Higher Inst.
Aba	40	50	-	-	-
Abakiliki	39	25	-	3	-
Ahiara	40	5	-	-	-
Awgu	5	9	-	-	-
Awka	-	19	-	-	-
Enugu	-	34	5	-	10
Nnewi	-	6	3	-	-
Nsukka	-	12	3	-	-
Okigwe	35	35	3	5	-
Onitsha	-	21	3	-	-
Orlu	-	5	-	-	-

Note: In those dioceses where no figures were recorded may not mean that they do not have nursery, primary or secondary schools. The absence of these figures may suggest that there were no statistics from those dioceses before the publication of the directory. Furthermore, the figures above show the number of schools without showing the number of pupils and students in those schools. The focus is on the number of schools available not necessarily the number of pupils/students. The continuous growth in the number of schools also shows the good work the Catholic Church has done in promoting education in the South-East Region of Nigeria. We have already indicated that the first seminary in this region where candidates for the priesthood are trained was started in 1924. It is interesting to highlight the number of ordained Catholic priests in the various dioceses of the South-East Region of Nigeria. These figures were published in the last Official Directory of the Catholic Church 2017-2020. The dioceses with their number of priests before 2020 are presented below:

Aba Diocese 169, Abakiliki Diocese 158, Ahiara Diocese 204, Awgu Diocese 70, Awka Diocese 450, Enugu Diocese 256, Nnewi Diocese 259, Nsukka Diocese 263, Okigwe Diocese 390, Onitsha Diocese 480,

Orlu Diocese 396, Owerri 353, Umuahia Diocese 188 priests. These priests were trained in many seminaries within the region; quite unlike the only seminary then called St. Paul's Igbariam. It is important to emphasise that the figures above are diocesan priests excluding religious priests who are not ordained exclusively for their local dioceses. Furthermore, the figures above were published in the last Official Directory of the Catholic Church in Nigeria 2017-2020. This means that the figures did not include the priests ordained from 2020 to the present day. A typical example is Enugu diocese which in 2014 had 256 priests but in 2022 diocesan update; the figure came to 409 ordained priests. When other dioceses update their own figures, there will be remarkable increase. The presence of these priests has brought about the creation of many parishes that make proximity to the parish centre accessible to the people of God in their different dioceses. In the same way, the Catholic Church in this region has continued to establish many convents where religious women are trained in hundreds and thousands. As the number of priests and religious women increases, more parishes, schools, hospitals and other institutions are created in order to meaningfully employ these priests and religious women. Even at this, some of the priests and religious

women work outside their own dioceses and beyond Igboland and outside Nigeria. This is where the author of this article advises those European dioceses that lack priests to reach out to these dioceses of South-East of Nigeria for help. A typical example here is a German bishop called Overbeck; who painfully lamented that 'in his 13 years as a bishop, he has buried 300 priests and ordained only 15 priests.' He went on to say that 'he has no seminarian in his diocese.' It is amazing to observe that bishop Overbeck ordained 15 priests in 13 years while in Enugu diocese for example, the diocesan bishop Onaga ordained 28 priests in 2020, 23 priests in 2021 and 26 priests in 2022 that is more than 20 priests for these three consecutive years.

While we appreciate the increase in the church's personnel and institutions, it is equally important to bemoan the spiritual and moral decadence that prevails among the people of God and in the society as a whole. Both the ordained ministers and the laity must allow the word of God - the good news to enter and transform everybody in the society. In the same vein, the Nigerian society needs upright leaders that will act as agents of change beginning with themselves where all will be taken care of including the poor. Following the footsteps of Jesus, the Catholic Church in the South-East has identified with the poor and suffering masses in good and bad times because the poor are always among her members.

Conclusion

This article has brought to the fore the significance of mission in general and in the Catholic Church in particular. It explained the relationship between mission and evangelization as understood in the Catholic Church. It chronicled in a historical form the arrival and activities of the Catholic Church in Nigeria with emphasis on the South-East Region of

Nigeria. Discussing the activities of the Catholic Church, the article highlighted and analysed some areas of importance with concrete data to authenticate the claims. It was discovered that the Catholic Church has made tremendous success in the South-East Region of Nigeria in terms of numerical strength, personnel, institutions and infrastructures. The lesson here is that Christians should be ready to sacrifice their lives in good and bad times in the imitation of Christ. Finally, the article emphasized that there is need for the Catholic Church to use the word of God to bring about the spiritual and moral transformation of the people in Nigeria as a whole.

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