

**THE SPIRITAN LEGACY IN THE OLD ENUGU
DIOCESE: APPRECIATING OUR FATHERS IN
FAITH**

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Abstract

The Catholic Church in Igboland was born from the missionary efforts of the Holy Ghost Fathers and Brothers (Spiritans) in the late 19th into the 20th centuries. This work was begun in Onitsha by the French Spiritans, who were later replaced by the Irish. The Catholic story of Enugu belongs to this later period, with St Paul's, Eke, as its first local Church. The missionary harvest in this part of Igboland was abundant but not without its birth pangs and challenges, some of which are still part of our heritage today some of which include, nationalism, race relations, indigenization and competition. This article is of the view that addressing these challenges is important for the wellbeing and flourishing of the Catholic Church of the Old Enugu Diocese in particular and the Catholic Church in Igboland in general and suggests ways of achieving this.

Keywords: Spiritans, Irish, Enugu Diocese, Indigenization, Catholic Church, Igboland

Introduction

In this paper, I highlight the Spiritan legacy in the Old Catholic Diocese of Enugu. Because it is difficult to separate the Spiritan

legacy in Enugu from the Spiritan legacy in Igboland, I will begin at this wider scope before focusing on Enugu proper. I, therefore, begin with a history of the Catholic Church in Igboland, and then unto the advent of the Catholic Church in Enugu. I next discuss the missionary methodology of the Spiritans in Igboland, which is not different from their methodology in Enugu. These discussions will necessarily be in summary form, as books have been written on these subjects. I then discuss the problem of indigenization, a particularly difficult challenge faced by the Spiritan missionaries in Igboland in general and in Enugu State in particular, before concluding with some personal reflections on the way forward. Old Enugu Diocese in this essay refers to the current Catholic dioceses of Enugu, Abakaliki, Nsukka, and Awgu. But I also use Enugu State or simply Enugu to refer to the same place. And when I say Spiritans, I am speaking mostly of the Irish.

The Advent of the Catholic Church in Igboland

In 1985 a flurry of historical publications welcomed the celebrations marking the centenary of the Catholic Church in Igboland. These include Celestine Obi et al.'s *A Hundred Years of the Catholic Church in Eastern Nigeria, 1885-1985*; Vincent Nwosu et al.'s *The Catholic Church in Onitsha; People, Places and Events (1885-1985)*; Ikenga-Metuh and Ejizu's *Hundred Years of Catholicism in Eastern Nigeria, 1885-1985*; *The Nnewi Story*; and Eneasato et al.'s *The Advent and Growth of the Catholic Church in Enugu Diocese*. Together these publications tell a more or less complete story of the arrival of Christianity in this part of the world. All the authors who contributed to these histories are to be commended. But more needs to be done, of course. Many aspects of this story are yet untold, and some that have been told need to be told better. This is not what I am undertaking to do in this section of the paper. It will require more space and time to attempt such than is at my disposal at this time.

So, I will have to rely on the efforts of these worthy predecessors for the summary that is here presented.

Catholicism came to southeastern Nigeria in 1885 through the agency of the Holy Ghost Fathers (Spiritans).¹ The Anglicans, through their missionary arm, the Church Missionary Society (CMS), had preceded the Catholics in Igboland by 28 years, having arrived in 1857. The man who led the Catholic missionary enterprise in Igboland was a French from the region of Alsace, a veteran of the Sierra Leonean mission, Fr. Joseph Lutz.² He was accompanied on this pioneering mission by Fr. Johan Horne and Brs. Hermas and Jean-Gotte. Ikenga-Metuh and Ejizu in their book, *A Hundred Years of Catholicism in Eastern Nigeria: 1885-1985, The Nnewi Story*, provide a good summary of the circumstances leading to the founding of the Lower Niger mission.³ Fr. Lutz laid the foundation of what is today the Basilica of the Holy Trinity at the mouth of the River Niger at Onitsha. The next important phase of the mission was ushered in with the appointment of another Alsacian, Fr. Alexandre Leon Lejeune, as the head of the Lower Niger mission. Fr. Lejeune was already a seasoned missionary in Africa, having laboured in the Libreville mission in Gabon for several years. He was well suited for the tough challenge that the Niger mission had come to represent. He it was who laid a more solid foundation for the mission through a general improvement in the living conditions of the missionaries as well as a change in missionary strategy which brought about better results. Lejeune died in 1905 in Paris at the age of 45.

¹ There are some who think that “Spiritans” is a modernized acronym for Holy Ghost Fathers. The fact is that both appellations have been used interchangeably from the very beginning of the order in 1703.

² Fr. Lutz had worked in Sierra Leone since 1877 before being appointed to head the Niger mission.

³ See Celestine Obi, ed. *A Hundred Years of the Catholic Church in Eastern Nigeria, 1885-1985*. Onitsha: Africana Fep Publishers, 1985, p. 117.

The appointment on September 28, 1905, of the Irishman, Fr. Joseph Shanahan, as the Prefect Apostolic of the Lower Niger mission marked a high point in the history of the mission. Shanahan was Lejeune's "apprentice" and "very cordial friend,"⁴ which might explain why he beat two more experienced missionaries⁵ to this post. His appointment must also have been informed by the desire by Rome and Paris (the Spiritan Headquarters) to yield to political expediency by changing the French face of the mission with the Irish in line with the British colonial presence in Nigeria.⁶ The beginning of the Irish missionary character of the Southern Nigeria mission must, therefore, be put at this date. But this development was not automatic, for French missionaries continued to work alongside the Irish long after Shanahan's appointment. One notices a certain kind of forgetfulness on the part of the Irish to give credit to their French predecessors in this mission, a forgetfulness that the Igbo Church has done little or nothing to rectify.

Fr. Shanahan's tenure straddles the first and second periods in the history of Catholicism in Igboland namely, the beginnings and the expansion periods. In the initial years of his administration, the mission was still a Prefecture. It was elevated to the status of a Vicariate in 1920, and Shanahan consecrated its first bishop, but even then, the mission could still be seen as still in its beginnings. However, by the time Shanahan handed over the mantle of leadership to Bishop Charles Heerey in 1927, the

⁴ Obi, *A Hundred Years of the Catholic Church*, pp. 9-15.

⁵ These were Fr. Charles Vogler, who was already 7 years in the mission before Shanahan's arrival and who we are told spoke German, French, English and Igbo, and Fr. Louis-Joseph Lena, who also spoke French, English, and Igbo, and both of whom were described as excellent missionaries.

⁶ For the role played by Sir James Marshall in bringing about this new policy, see Obi, *ibid.*, p. 111.

mission was definitively in the period of rapid expansion.⁷ The period of rapid expansion lasted all through Heerey's tenure and transitioned into the period of consolidation with the accession to the headship of the mission of Archbishop Francis Arinze, the first indigenous leader of the mission.

The Advent of the Catholic Church in Enugu State

The Catholic Church came to Enugu State⁸ by way of Eke. The first contact was at the invitation of Chief Onyeama, the Okwuluoha I of Eke, and it happened in 1914, almost 30 years after the Catholics arrived in Onitsha. The primary attraction behind Chief Onyeama's invitation to the missionaries was education. Thus, the first Catholic presence in Eke after this exploratory visit by Fr. Aloyse Muller, was the opening of a station school in Chief Onyeama's compound in 1916.⁹ Being a visionary leader, Chief Onyeama quickly read the signs of the times and saw the vital role that education was going to play in the evolving colonial dispensation. That was why he wanted to position his people well so that they can take their rightful place in the new scheme of things. That was also why he wasted no

⁷ As with the appointment of Bishop Shanahan or even more so, his Irish nationality seemed to have tilted the scale in favour of Bishop Heerey against the Spiritan General Administration's preferred candidate, Fr. Marcel Grandin, who was handicapped by his French nationality (See *Spiritan General Archives*, B/191/b/111, as cited by Mary-Noelle Ethel Ezech in her *Archbishop Charles Heerey and the History of the Church in Nigeria, 1890-1967*. Mumbai: St. Pauls, 2005, p. 57, fn 52).

⁸ This extends beyond the boundaries of present-day Enugu State to include parts of Ebonyi, Anambra, Kogi, and Benue States.

⁹ See B. Nnaji and G. C. Iloha, "St. Paul's Parish, Eke," in Eneasato et al., eds., *The Advent and Growth of the Catholic Church in Enugu Diocese*. Onitsha: Jet Publishers, 1985, p. 28. Casimir Eke gives 1914 as the date for the opening of this school, citing an as yet unpublished "History of the Catholic Church in Enugu Diocese." It's either Casimir Eke mistook the date of the arrival of Fr. Muller at Eke as the date for the opening of the school or the document he is quoting was later revised before it went to press.

time in removing the CMS from his territory when he saw that the language of instruction in their newly established school in his domain was Igbo and not English. The way he saw it, English, not Igbo, was the language of the future.

On this note, let me digress a little. I am one of those who bemoan the present travails of the Igbo language, but evidently the losing battle which the Igbo language has been fighting against English did not start today. There is no doubt that the Catholic emphasis on English language in their schools during the early history of Christianity in Igboland, gave them a definite advantage, not only in Eke, but in other places in Igboland over their CMS counterparts, who emphasized Igbo instead. By the time the CMS reversed their policy in this area, the train, as they say, had left the station.

The mistake that Chief Onyeama made and which many Igbo still make today is in thinking that it is a situation of either/or when it should be one of both/and. We can, and we should have both Igbo and English. But Chief Onyeama can be excused. Maybe he was justified in sacrificing Igbo for English at the time he did, but are we justified in still making that sacrifice today? We are not and we should not! If we know the importance of language; how inextricably it is tied to a people's culture and identity, then we should not be making such a sacrifice; we should not allow the Igbo language to die. And do not fool yourself, and let no one fool you, the Igbo language is gradually dying!¹⁰

¹⁰ UNESCO lists Igbo among the endangered languages of the world, although there is no evidence that it actually predicted its death by 2025 as many researchers have claimed. The literature on the endangerment of the Igbo language is sizeable but the following are a good representation of what is available online: P. N. Ukwueze, "Language Shift and the Endangerment of Igbo: Challenges and Prospects," *International Journal of African Linguistics*, 7(2) (2021), 45–62. <https://www.ijafricanlinguistics.org/2021/vol7/issue2/ukwueze>; E. C. Okafor and I. O. Nwosu, "Intergenerational Transmission and the Survival of the Igbo

Returning to our subject, the first priest to work in Eke was Fr. Joachim Correia, the only Portuguese in the Southern Nigeria mission. He arrived Eke in 1917 and laid the foundation of what eventually became St. Paul's Parish, Eke, the mother parish in Enugu State. From Eke the Spiritans probed the northern limits of Igboland and beyond, to towns near and far including Enugu, Ebenebe, Awgu, Agenebode, and Olo, covering towns that today form part of the dioceses of Enugu, Nsukka, Abakaliki, Awgu, Ogoja, Idah, Oturkpo, and Makurdi.

With the emergence of Enugu as the seat of the Eastern Nigeria regional government and because, too, of its more central location, Eke lost its position to Enugu as the ecclesiastical seat of what eventually became Enugu diocese, which included present-day Abakaliki, Nsukka, and Awgu dioceses. The first mission station in Enugu urban to be opened was St. Patrick's, Ogbete, which became a parish in 1933. Enugu diocese was created in 1962, with Bishop John Cross Anyogu as its first bishop.¹¹

The Missionary Methodology of the Spiritans in Enugu State

When Fr. Lutz and his Spiritan brothers arrived in Onitsha in 1885, the first missionary methodology that they adopted was that of using charity as a bait to attract the people and win their trust and friendship. The arrowhead of this charity was medical services, with Fr. Lutz, who had good knowledge of medicine, acting as the village physician. The next strategy was that of the Christian village, a methodology that was similar to the Jesuit *reductions* model in Latin America in the 17th century. In this

Language in Nigeria,” *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 41(5) (2020), 421–435. DOI:10.1080/01434632.2019.1682419.

¹¹ See Obi, *A Hundred Years of the Catholic Church*, p. 282. Kieran Ogoke and Christopher Okeke seem to suggest 1957 as the date for the creation of Enugu diocese. See their entry for St. Patrick's Parish, Ogbete, Enugu in Eneasato et al., eds. *Advent and Growth of Catholic Church*, p. 59.

strategy, Christians were separated from the larger community and formed a quasi-monastic community, a kind of Christian oasis in a desert of ‘paganism and immorality.’ Except for a few prominent early Igbo converts such as Chief Idigo of Aguleri, the majority of the inmates of the Christian village were people on the lowest rung of the societal ladder – ransomed slaves, born slaves (*osu*), outlaws, fugitives from justice, and the like. Not surprisingly, the rest of the Igbo community avoided the Christian village like a plague, with the result that after several years of toil, the Spiritans had little to show for their efforts. It should be pointed out that both these strategies were accompanied by education, but more as the side and not the main dish.

A change of strategy was called for, and Lejeune, the next substantive leader of the Niger mission, saw this and pushed for it. The new strategy would be hinged on education. Even though he did not live to see this new strategy mature, he advanced it by making sure to recommend as his successor a man who shared his vision in this area, namely, Fr. Joseph Shanahan. This new strategy blossomed under Shanahan’s inspiring and energetic leadership. By the time the Catholic Church got to Eke, its first port of call in Enugu State, the school method of evangelization had been tested and proven and had become the preferred strategy of the Spiritans in their missionary enterprise in Igboland.

It is a point of debate whether the credit should go to Lejeune or to Shanahan for introducing the school method of evangelization in Igboland. Understandably, John Jordan and other of his Irish compatriots have sought to claim this credit for their countryman, Shanahan.¹² The fact, however, is that the school method of evangelization is neither original to Lejeune nor to Shanahan. It is a strategy that has a long history in Catholic missionary enterprise. It is also a strategy that Libermann, the second founder

¹² See his *Bishop Shanahan of Southern Nigeria*. Dublin: Clonmore, 1971.

of the Spiritans and the one who most influenced their missionary understanding, had early on directed his missionaries to adopt. But as for credits in the case of Igboland, credit should go to Lejeune for pioneering the school method of evangelization and to Shanahan for making it succeed so well in Igboland.¹³

The Spiritan Missionaries and the Challenge of Indigenization

As I have earlier mentioned, the history of the Catholic Church in Igboland is usually divided into three broad periods or time frames, namely, beginnings (the era of Fr. Lutz and Fr. Lejeune), the era of expansion (Fr. Lejeune and Bishop Shanahan), and the era of consolidation (Archbishop Heerey and Archbishop Arinze). In this periodization, the later part of the period of expansion, coinciding with the later part of Bishop Shanahan's headship of the Niger mission and the early part of the period of consolidation, coinciding with the early part of the administration of Archbishop Heerey, can be regarded as the highpoint of the evangelization effort in Igboland. This was the period that saw the explosion in the numbers of Catholics in Igboland as well as in the numbers of church structures – schools, churches, hospitals, social centres, etc. The Igbos embraced Catholicism in their numbers and towns tried to outdo one another in wooing the Church for schools and social services. This was also the period during which the first seminaries were established, which brought about a gradual but steady growth in the number of indigenous priests.

The blessing of an increase in indigenous vocations to the priesthood and the religious life seemed to have brought a curse

¹³ For a more elaborate discussion of the sundry factors that contributed to this success and related issues, see Charles A. Ebelebe, *Africa and the New Face of Mission: A Critical Assessment of the Legacy of the Irish Spiritans Among the Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria*. Lanham: University Press of America, 2009, pp. 98-100.

too. This was certainly how some of the Irish missionaries in Igboland saw it. For it seemed that the more the number of the indigenous priests grew, the worse relations between them and the Irish Spiritan missionaries got. From about 1963 onwards, this situation grew progressively worse to the point that it bordered on scandal. The cream of Igbo society of the time apparently thought it had reached that point. In his journal entry for April 10, 1965, Fr. Desmond O’Sullivan, the District Superior of the Spiritans in Nigeria, records that he paid a visit to Bishop Whelan in Owerri who shows him a copy of a letter received by the Bishops of the East from all the most prominent Catholic laymen – Ministers, Lawyers, Doctors, Businessmen, asking them to do something to restore harmony between the Irish and Nigerian priests; that at present there are “strained relationships” between these two groups, which is “deteriorating to the point of scandal.”¹⁴ Because the effects of this soured relationship are apparently still with us, it would be beneficial to examine some of the factors that contributed to the ugly situation.

Nationalism

Nigeria got its independence in 1960 following a short but intense campaign by a number of nationalists such as Azikiwe, Awolowo, Macauley, and the rest. Following independence, there was a conscious effort on the part of the politicians to nationalize government agencies and establishments. This nationalistic fervour was visible almost everywhere else except in the Catholic Church in Igboland, where the Irish held sway. Prominent Igbo politicians and leaders of thought, both Catholic and non-Catholic, were unhappy with the situation. And so were

¹⁴ Spiritan General Archives, Chevilly-Larue, France, 11I1.5a2-4. Hereafter cited as CSSP Gen. Archives. The catalogues for these archives can now be accessed online through the website of the French Spiritans (<http://www.spiritains.org/pays/europe/france.htm>), using the link under “Archives générales.”

the growing number of indigenous priests, who accused the Irish Spiritans of wanting to establish an Irish spiritual hegemony in Igboland. The primary symbol of this said hegemony for both clergy and lay was the archdiocesan See of Onitsha, which was occupied by Archbishop Charles Heerey. Through subtle and not-so-subtle representations, these forces tried to get the archbishop to resign and cede his seat to an indigenous priest in the spirit of indigenization and Nigerianization, all to no avail. The longer the archbishop remained on seat, the greater the level of discontent and anxiety in the ranks of the clergy and the lay leaders of thought in Igboland. By the time Archbishop Heerey eventually heeded this call, the damage had been done. The bad blood between the Irish Spiritans and the indigenous clergy had already settled, never to be dissolved until the civil war came and all alike faced full time the struggle for survival.

Race Relations

There was no doubt that some of the Irish Spiritans harboured racist attitudes towards the Igbo, lay and clergy alike. A good many of those who cannot be associated with this attitude did have some measure of superiority complex. This made it difficult for them to accept the indigenous Igbo priests as equals. The indigenous Igbo priests, on their part, had an inferiority complex as well as the typical minority suspicions and insecurities. O'Sullivan accuses them of having "the minority group attitude of suspicion and hostility towards the CSSp priests."¹⁵ Both groups found it difficult to mix and relate cordially under these circumstances. These explain why white and black clergy in Igboland in the 1960s were segregated. Not only was it difficult to find black and white priests working together in the same parish, but it was even rarer to find a white priest working under

¹⁵ O'Sullivan journal. Entry for April 18, 1965. CSSp Gen. Archives, 1111.5a2-4.

a black priest. It was a counterwitness and made for restiveness in the rank and file of the indigenous clergy.

The Language Issue

For many of the indigenous priests and lay elites, clear evidence of the Irish Spiritans' superiority complex and Eurocentrism was their mass failure to master the Igbo language. While it is true that compared to their French Spiritan brothers, who preceded them in the Igbo mission, the Irish Spiritans generally struggled to learn the Igbo language, there could be another explanation for this deficiency other than superiority complex and Eurocentrism. In the early years of the Igbo mission, there was not much work for the missionaries to do in terms of evangelization, giving them more time to devote to learning the Igbo language. This was not the case in the period of rapid expansion, which coincided with the period of Irish dominance of the mission. Newly arriving Irish Spiritan missionaries to the Igbo mission received barely six weeks of language training, just enough to hear Confessions, before being thrown into the missionary field. The need was so great and the personnel so few. This explanation mitigates the accusation of superiority complex and Eurocentrism levelled against the Irish Spiritans by the indigenous clergy and Igbo elites but does not entirely absolve them of the same. According to Ebelebe, "People's effort to master a foreign language can be said to be directly proportional to how much they value or esteem the language in question."¹⁶ There is no doubt that if the Irish Spiritans had much respect for the Igbo language and culture, they would have made greater effort to learn the language, the pressure of work notwithstanding.

¹⁶ Ebelebe, *Africa and the New Face of Mission*, p. 101. The author has a more detailed discussion on this subject in this work. See pp. 100-102.

Congregation versus Secular

By the early 1960s, the Irish Spiritans in Igboland had already started accepting indigenous vocations for the Spiritan Congregation and by the mid-1960s a new Eastern Nigeria Province of the Spiritans was already in the making. Many of the indigenous secular or diocesan priests did not like this and saw it as a ruse by the Irish Spiritans to perpetuate their stay in Igboland, another evidence, as they saw it, of the Irish hegemony that they sought to institute in Igboland. They also accused the Irish Spiritans of inculcating a superiority complex into their local candidates in training, which made them see themselves as superior to the diocesan clergy. It was as if the indigenous Spiritan priests were grade A priests and the diocesans grade B.

Struggle for Power and Money

There were also the twin problems of power and money. The indigenous priests accused the Irish Spiritans of holding all the powerful positions and the plum jobs in the growing number of lucrative posts in the schools and parishes. As previously mentioned, the Irish and indigenous clergy did not usually live and work together, and the indigenous clergy felt relegated to grade B parishes and schools, where there was little money and even less influence.

The Problem of Contracts

From about the mid-sixties, the District Superior of the Spiritans began to enter into contract agreements with the diocesan bishops which entrusted the running of certain parishes and schools to the Spiritans, some in perpetuity. This did not sit well with most of the indigenous diocesan priests who saw this as an attempt by the Spiritans to use their expatriate brother bishops to despoil the Igbo Church for the benefit of the Spiritan Congregation.

These were some of the factors that contributed to the frosty relations between the Irish Spiritans and the indigenous clergy in the waning years of the Irish stay in Igboland, and it seemed to have left a sour taste in the mouths of both groups, a taste that seems to persist in some quarters still. I think it is time to let go. It is unfair to the Irish Spiritans to let their several decades of meritorious work in Igboland be rubbished by a few last years of not-so-stellar performance.

A Time to Remember, to be Grateful, and to Look to the Future with Confidence

From the previous section, we can surmise that the Irish Spiritan missionary sojourn in Igboland did not end amicably. Towards the end of their stay in Igboland, that is, in the years leading up to the Biafran war, the relationship between the Irish Spiritans and the local clergy turned very sour. That was why, for many of the local clergy, the war was a *felix culpa*, for it brought about the expulsion of the Irish Spiritans from Nigeria. On their part, many of the Irish Spiritans left Nigeria with bitterness. Those of us who have encountered some of them in their Spiritan retirement home in Kimmage, Ireland, would have experienced this. Many of them feel that the Igbo had not treated them fairly, that the Igbo had not shown enough gratitude for all their missionary labours in their land, that they had been unceremoniously pushed aside after spending themselves for the Igbo and standing by them, especially during their darkest hour in the three-year brutal civil war. Maybe they have a point. Some Igbo people seem to agree and have apparently sought to make amends by inviting some of the retired Irish veterans of the Igbo mission back home for a special recognition, complete with chieftaincy titles. We might need to do more. The Irish Spiritans may have gone, but their progenies are still very much here with us. We might make amends to the Irish through them.

Unfortunately, it appears that that air of suspicion and antagonism between the Irish Spiritans and the indigenous clergy which marked the last years of the Irish Spiritans' sojourn in Igboland has been bequeathed to later generations like original sin. Otherwise, how does one explain the fact that until quite recently, the Spiritan presence in Enugu diocese was very minimal, and even now, it is still at a low level.¹⁷ It is interesting that Enugu is one of the few dioceses in Igboland where the Irish Spiritans got no parish or school given to them by contract. An encounter between Fr. Des O'Sullivan, the then District Superior of the Spiritans, and Bishop Anyogu, the then bishop of Enugu, might explain this. It is a lengthy journal entry by O'Sullivan, but I will cite it in full:

The Bishop [Anyogu] asks me what my mind is on contracts with the Congregation; obviously he feels this is the objective of the Superior General's visit. Not having my directives on contracts from Paris, or any indication as to the purpose of the Superior General's visit, I give him the following as my personal opinion: The Holy Ghost Congregation, since it has been entrusted with the territory of Iboland, stands in a different relationship to the territory from that which stand other societies working in it, such as the Marists or Benedictines. They are strangers. We are parents. Strangers may look for a return. Parents look for no return. From the beginning we have put the Congregation money into the territory (personal gifts and earnings in money and in kind). This we ought to continue, not comparing ourselves with Marists and Benedictines who may work here on condition of appropriating all revenue by way of government salaries, etc. However, when a child grows up, if a parent stands in need, it looks to the child to assist him or her, not *ex justitia* but *ex pietate*. So when the territory of Iboland develops, the Congregation of

¹⁷ Credit is due to Bishop Anthony Gbuji, the bishop emeritus of Enugu, for improving the situation to where it is at the moment.

the Holy Ghost may turn to it and expose its needs. In fact, at present it has needs – the upkeep of the houses of formation at Ihiala and Awo-Omama; and so far the territory has been supplying the needs by way of contribution of 100 pounds from each CSSp Father earning a government salary in a secondary school. But this now proves inadequate, and the congregation looks for more help. Bishop Anyogu expressed himself most pleased with this view of things and even went so far as to say this view should be incorporated into the Ecumenical Council's Schema on the Missions.¹⁸

It would seem that this policy of not seeking contracts with bishops applied only to Enugu diocese. For less than a year after this entry, O'Sullivan writes of his meeting bishop Whelan in Owerri and Archbishop Heerey in Onitsha to discuss contracts with the Congregation. Maybe it was a question of different strokes for different folks. Maybe O'Sullivan sought contracts with his Irish-brother bishops but not with the Igbo bishops, for we also did not find a mention of contract negotiations with Nwedo in Umuahia or Okoye in Port Harcourt. Still, O'Sullivan makes a valid point above. The Spiritans are the parents of the Igbo Church, and as such they stand on a special relationship with this church. Igbo culture expects children to take care of their parents, out of filial piety if not out of justice. The dioceses in Enugu State should take care of the Spiritans, and if you ask me, they are doing a less than adequate job of it at the moment.

One area where the Irish Spiritans left a solid legacy in the Old Enugu Diocese even more than they did elsewhere in Igboland is in the area of education. And this is not surprising, as our journey down memory lane has shown that education was the primary reason that brought the Spiritans to Enugu State. Even though, compared to Onitsha Archdiocese, the Church came to Enugu

¹⁸ O'Sullivan journal. Entry for February 20, 1964. CSSp Gen. Archives, 1111.5a2-4.

diocese late, Enugu soon caught up with Onitsha in terms of the number of mission schools. In 1977, for instance, while Onitsha diocese had 4 Teachers' Training Colleges (TTCs) and 15 Secondary Schools, Enugu had 4 TTCs and 13 Secondary Schools.¹⁹ It is regrettable that the Spiritans who brought education to the Old Enugu diocese are not presently represented in its education sector. The government of Enugu State has recently taken the bold and laudable step of returning to the Church mission schools taken over by the then Eastern Nigeria government. Now, therefore, is the time to remedy this anomaly. Enugu diocese should hand over a few of these returned schools to the Spiritans, their original proprietors.

Besides education, the Spiritans have a few other unique relationships with Enugu State. During the civil war, Enugu, the capital city of Biafra, fell early to the federal troops. Thus, the people of Enugu were caught behind enemy lines for most of the war. The few indigenous priests available as at then evacuated with the people. Those left behind in Enugu had no ministers except for the brave Irish Spiritans who stayed behind enemy lines to look after both the spiritual and material needs of their beleaguered flock. The story of these courageous missionaries is yet to be told. Enugu State and its people owe them a debt of gratitude.

This solidarity in good times and in bad, this friendship which withstood the horrors of the Nigerian civil war, this steadfastness in love, is probably why Enugu was the only State in Igboland in which Irish Spiritans still lived and worked up until a few years ago. For the Irish Spiritans, Enugu was like the last State standing, and Frs. Peter Dinan and Tim Buckley were the last men standing, the last thread to a glorious Irish Spiritan presence in Igboland. That thread cut with the passing away in 2007 of the last Irish Spiritan to live and work in Igboland, Fr. Tim Buckley,

¹⁹ C. A. Obi et al., *A Hundred Years*, p. 244.

the parish priest of St. Joseph's, Emene for 32 years. Fr. Peter Dinan, Buckley's compatriot and fellow Igbo survivor, had had a similar longevity of life and service at St. Michael's, Asata, having served as its parish priest for 27 years until his death on April 19, 2000. Enugu State and its people owe a debt of gratitude to these gallant Irish Spiritan missionaries. I am happy to see that Joseph Emeruom has already set the ball rolling with his slim panegyric to Fr. Dinan, titled, *The Secrets of Very Rev. Fr. Peter Chukwudi Dinan 'Ochendo; 'His Smile, Courage and Erudition.* Much more would be needed. Immortalizing the Spiritan presence at these parishes through bequeathing them to their local Spiritan brothers would be a commendable gesture.

Conclusion

This article is a journey of remembrance. It is an effort at tracing the Spiritan roots of the Catholic faith in the great State of Enugu. The goal was to help us understand our past so that we may better appreciate our present and so that we may plan adequately for our future. The Irish Spiritans left a great legacy in the Old Catholic diocese of Enugu. The fact that this legacy is not without its dark spots only goes to show that they were human, as we all are. It should take nothing away from the debt we owe them for spending themselves for us. It is now our turn to spend ourselves for others. Many of the structures the Irish Spiritans left behind here in Enugu State were built with money from parishes in Ireland. What percentage of the annual income from our parishes goes to the support of our missionaries labouring in various parts of the world? How much support do we give our fathers in faith, our Spiritan brothers, who are now the new Irish of the Spiritan Congregation, in their mission of carrying the Gospel message to the ends of the earth? We cannot honour our Irish Spiritan roots and yet ignore such question