ALTERNATIVE VOICES IN THE MISSION PROJECT:
THE CHALLENGE OF EVANGELISATION IN WEST AFRICA

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BISHOP JOSEPH SHANAHAN AND THE EVANGELISATION OF NIGERIA

By

Patrick Roe C.S.Sp.
[Milltown Institute of Theology and Philosophy, Dublin]

Introduction

The year of arrival of the Spiritans on the Niger River (1885) led by Father Joseph Lutz coincided with the Berlin Conference of European powers, designed to open Africa to colonial development, and gave us the modern map of Africa with all its absurdities. In particular, the consequent Act of Berlin (February 1885) recognised the Niger as an area of British colonial interest and declared the area open to free trade. It was not an auspicious time for a group of missionaries, mainly Alsatian, to find welcome from the administrators of the dominant colonial power in the area, Great Britain, whose main rival to colonial ascendancy in West Africa was France.

The Anglican Church Missionary Society (CMS) had been on the Niger for 40 years, and had built an impressive series of mission stations and schools, whose main purpose was the training of evangelists. Because of their purpose these schools emphasised learning through the medium of local languages, at the expense of English. Coincidentally, the arrival of the Spiritans corresponded with two decades of demoralising internal strife in the CMS missions, which left the Spiritans considerable room for initiatives, which might have otherwise faced greater opposition.

Lutz’s initial strategy was the establishment of ‘villages of liberation’ for redeemed slaves, a strategy which was already discredited and in decline in other Spiritan missions, especially in East Africa. Lutz died in 1895 and was followed by two leaders Joseph Reling and René Pawlas, who died in quick succession
without having the opportunity to leave a significant mark on the development of the mission.

Shanahan’s immediate predecessor as Prefect Apostolic, Léon Lejeune, led the mission from 1900 until his death in 1905, during which time mission strategy changed radically. This was partly due to global thinking in the Spiritan Congregation under the superior generalship of Alexandre Le Roy, and partly due to changes in British colonial policy, which from 1902 provided substantial subsidy for the development and running of mission primary schools, on condition of their being brought to a certain standard of excellence. Lejeune was sufficiently insightful to see the potential of these developments for a new mission strategy on the Niger. Lejeune wrote to his superior general, Mgr. Le Roy in 1904: "education is the only way ahead in Africa, there is no other possible way to convert people". Two years previously he had written to Le Roy: "it is perilous to hesitate, the Christian village must go, and all our concentration must be on the schools......"\(^1\)

In October 1901 Lejeune sent Fr. Xavier Lichtenberger to Ireland to plead for personnel for Nigeria, and it was the same Fr. Lichtenberger whose talk at Rockwell College inspired Joseph Shanahan to seek a missionary appointment. Lejeune's strategy in seeking help from Ireland was more far-sighted than he is often given credit for. The pieces were gradually coming together which would make a grand strategy possible. The Irish Spiritans were already famous, and in some quarters infamous, within their Congregation for their involvement in Irish education. By seeking Irish Spiritans for the mission in Nigeria, Lejeune was simultaneously getting mission staff with experience in educational work, and at the same time getting British nationals who would be more able to deal with the British administration

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on the Niger.\textsuperscript{2} This explains how Shanahan, in spite of his juniority, found himself Prefect Apostolic, in charge of the Spiritan mission on the Niger, within three years of his arrival.

**The Shanahan Era (1905-1930)**

**The Grand Strategy**

A later myth would circulate in Irish Spiritan Province circles, cultivated by the writings of Edward Leen and Reginald Walker, that little was achieved on the Niger until Shanahan arrived to envision a new strategy.\textsuperscript{3} The evidence seems to suggest otherwise. The vision was Lejeune’s.\textsuperscript{4} What therefore was the contribution of Shanahan? It was to take Lejeune's original embryonic idea and develop it into a grand strategy, whose obvious success would send ripples far beyond the mission on the Niger. He would prove that to approach evangelisation indirectly, and make the development of schools the prime strategy of mission, was the most appropriate and effective ordering of priorities for the purpose of evangelisation in the circumstances in which he found himself.\textsuperscript{5} He had to develop and defend his strategy against the prevailing 'wisdom' of his own Spiritan Congregation and throughout the Roman Catholic missionary world.\textsuperscript{6} In the period from 1902 to 1930 Shanahan had the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{4} V.A. Nwosu ed., *op. cit.*, p. 130.
\item \textsuperscript{5} See Daniel Murphy, *A History of Irish Emigrant and Missionary Education* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), pp. 446-47.
\item \textsuperscript{6} This had been influenced unduly by the French background of the Spiritans and the unfavourable impression created by the French precedent of the ‘école laïque’. See John Jordan, *Bishop Shanahan of Southern Nigeria* (Dublin: Elo Press. 1971), p. 29. Working from this precedent, the trend of French Spiritan
\end{itemize}
satisfaction of seeing his strategy vindicated by the phenomenal growth of the Church in his own vicariate, and in his final years in Nigeria, to see a major swing in mission priorities throughout the whole of sub-Saharan Africa broadly towards the general principles of his own approach.

Mgr. Arthur Hinsley, rector of the English College in Rome, was appointed Visitor Apostolic to the Catholic missions in the British colonies in Africa in 1927. He spent two years (1927-29) touring sub-Saharan Africa and his reports were destined to have enormous influence on the direction of mission strategy throughout the continent. He also kept a diary to record his impressions throughout. He visited Southern Nigeria in September 1929 and recorded the following note: "This is the most flourishing mission in British, if not in the whole of West Africa. Many problems still unsolved, sisters, secular movements...the success of Onitsha is largely ascribed to the schools." It was the final vindication of what Shanahan has fought for.

thinking was to develop Church-sponsored education completely independent of government involvement. Shanahan's experience of Irish education under British administration had no such negative aspects. This friction continued for most of Shanahan's life in Southern Nigeria. The Spiritans working in the area around Calabar, Frs. Lena, Siner, Krafft and Biechy, signed a document of complaint against Shanahan's policies in 1911. In May 1914 this group forwarded their objections to their Generalate, bypassing Shanahan. The main issue was not the desirability of mission-sponsored education, but the acceptance of government grants-in-aid with concomitant government rights of inspection and examination orientation. Shanahan favoured full cooperation with government. Yet the degree of resistance to Shanahan is apparent in the fact that only 17 of the 102 Catholic schools in the vicariate followed the government curriculum (see Colman Cooke, “The Roman Catholic Mission in Calabar 1903-1960”, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1977, pp. 71-73). Shanahan's policies were finally vindicated by the Education Act of 1926 which imposed strict standards on all schools. It had a totally devastating effect around Calabar where the Catholics lost most of their schools, from 411 in 1926 to 99 in 1928. (see ibid., p. 86).


8 Quoted in Colman Cooke, Mary Charles Walker, the Nun of Calabar (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1980), p.126. Hinsley as Apostolic Visitor
Mixed Motives on all Sides

Undoubtedly Shanahan was shrewd in his assessment of the Igbo people, both as he found them and as he foresees they would develop in the future. They were exceptionally talented, ambitious and dynamic. They appear to have mastered the use of iron for centuries before the colonial period, and to have developed a unique pictorial form of writing independent of European influence.\(^9\)

They were also a pragmatic people. If they accepted Western education readily, it was because they were quick to see the use of it for their own purposes. Augustine Okwu claims that the main utility the Igbo saw in western education was the relief it provided to population pressure on the land, a deeply significant consideration in any agricultural economy, but most particularly for an ethnic group inhabiting the most densely populated area on the African continent. So great a factor was the land in Igbo society that it was personified in the most dominant deity of traditional life and worship as Ala (Ani), the earth goddess.\(^10\)

Both Lejeune and Shanahan realised the major obstacles to conversion that existed for elders in Igbo society. A complex cultural structure of status and leadership existed which involved, among other elements, the taking of titles. Most important of these were the "Ozo" title for men (and the parallel title "Ekwe" title for women). These titles involved the investment of considerable funds from the initiate. Titles involved considerable secular and religious cultic responsibilities and functions in the practice of traditional religion. It was not possible to dissociate

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\(^{10}\) A.S.O. Okwu, *op. cit.*, pp. 45-60.
the religious and secular elements, and so the renunciation of the cultic elements by a titled person generally involved a loss of status and leadership. In only a few cases, due to the extraordinary strength of the characters involved, did some of the early titled converts succeed in retaining their social status after conversion to Catholicism. This was the background to the advice that both Lejeune and Shanahan got to concentrate their efforts on converting the young, before they got involved in the complexities of social structure and status that made the conversion of the elders next to impossible.\textsuperscript{11}

Shanahan was quite realistic in his assessment of the mixed motives which made mission education acceptable to the Igbo. It can undoubtedly be argued that Shanahan and his Spiritan colleagues used education to manipulate a large section of the Igbo towards their mission’s long-term plan for evangelisation and conversion. It can equally well be argued that the Igbo manipulated the Spiritan missionaries away from traditional approaches to evangelisation, towards methods which fulfilled the material aspirations and ambitions of the people.\textsuperscript{12}

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\textsuperscript{12} P.B. Clarke, \textit{op.cit.}, 105. The controversy about the effectiveness of education in the pursuit of the goals of mission on the Niger was also a feature of SMA missions on the other side of the river. For years the SMA superior Carlo Zappa resisted imitating what was happening on the east bank, only to be forced to concede in 1911, in the light of government policy. Zappa’s reasoned: \textit{I believed as still I do, that in encouraging them to be instructed we are pushing our young people towards the European business houses and towards Government employment …. For this reason I have always thought the school method involves a misunderstanding of our mission which is simply an apostolic affair; we would virtually be committing a crime against the souls of these children, if we were to be the first means of leading them into this dangerous situation, without being actually forced to do so.} Letter of Mgr. Zappa to Mgr. Pellet (Superior General), 12\textsuperscript{th}. February 1911, quoted in Colman Cooke, “The Roman Catholic Mission in Calabar 1903-1960” (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1977), p. 74.
\end{flushright}
It has been credibly argued that Islam failed to make any significant impact on Igboland precisely because it presented itself as a purely religious doctrine with nothing material to offer to the believer.13 Some of the more perspicacious British colonial administrators had come to the same conclusion. Leslie Probyn, High Commissioner of Southern Nigeria wrote in 1906: "new ideas (including Christianity) are acceptable only when Africans see that they are obviously useful".14 While the motivation for accepting Western education among the Igbo in the early 1900s was largely as a path to a better life, economically and socially, from 1920 onwards a dramatic new motive would surface, destined to change the face of Africa forever. A new generation of educated Africans, both in Nigeria and elsewhere, would begin to question the whole basis of colonial domination. In the hands of this emerging elite, Western forms of education would become effective tools of political liberation.

Shanahan's predecessor, Leon Lejeune, even though largely responsible for the movement towards education as a tool for mission strategy, was deeply concerned that it would have a purely secular effect.15 Shanahan and many of his colleagues had no trouble living with the mixed motivation of the Igbo villages, because their own motivations were also very mixed.

Thus we find, with the demise of the rule of the Royal Niger Company and the start of formal colonial rule on the Niger in 1900, a curious combination of interlocking interests emerged which Lejeune and Shanahan would use to the great advantage of their missionary project.

i) Firstly, there was the colonial government and commercial interest which saw African education as a pacifying force capable of producing the administrative and commercial officials to forward colonial plans for

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economic and political development. Thus, from 1902 onward, financial incentives were put in place to encourage indigenous education, and it was these incentives which Lejeune saw as providing the way forward for a new strategy.

ii) Secondly, there was the Catholic mission interest, which saw the opportunity to promote educational development, using the incentive of employment opportunities now becoming available. The Catholic mission decision to maintain English as the main language of instruction proved vital in the long-term, by contrast with the longer-established Protestant schools’ system which insisted on the local vernacular as medium.

iii) Thirdly, there was the Igbo interest, which in the earlier days saw the Catholic missions and schools as allies against the more violent aspects of colonial expansion. Eventually the number and competence of the Catholic schools ensured that Catholic adherents would have an influence on government and commercial life quite out of proportion to their numbers in the population.

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Shanahan's basic strategy for educational expansion under the aegis of the Spiritan mission is best described by Edward Leen, who went to Nigeria with Shanahan in November 1920, and stayed for two years as director of Shanahan's program for catechists, and by John Jordan, who was Catholic education secretary of the area under Shanahan's successor. The original schools were focused around the parish centres, most of which Shanahan inherited from his predecessors. In these schools the first teachers of the bush-schools were picked from the most promising students. After receiving basic catechesis and teaching methods, these students were sent to newly founded bush-schools as their first teachers. After about three years working in these outlying schools, the most promising teachers were recalled to major centres at Onitsha and Calabar for further training. Each school became a centre from which further rudimentary bush-schools were started. Thus the process developed into a chain reaction, as villages began to compete with each other to have their own school.

The schools at the parish centres became administrative centres for the surrounding bush-schools. The teacher of each bush-school had to report monthly to the central parish school for salary, check of attendance records and for spiritual animation. The central schools were normally of sufficiently high standards to receive government aid and became the model against which the bush-schools measured their progress and development. Bush-school teachers were brought annually to the central school for a religious retreat.

17 Edward Leen, op. cit., 145-157. See also Edward Leen, Catechetical Instruction in Southern Nigeria The Irish Ecclesiastical Record, XX, (1922), 123-137. See also John Jordan, op. cit., pp. 74-90, 150.

18 John Jordan points out that nearly all the central schools received government funds. Government money represented only a small proportion of the total budgets of the Catholic schools, but it allowed a small number of schools to be well equipped and act as a standard of excellence for all the others. The concentration required to improve results in these schools in order
A major feature of Shanahan's strategy was that none of these teachers had a purely secular teaching function. They were simultaneously teachers and catechists. The bush-school served both as an educational and Church centre. The teachers had clearly defined religious functions in their respective villages. As the system developed, the central school-cum-mission became the residence of the chief catechist who had a supervisory role for the bush schools and their teachers. They travelled widely, examining the catechetical work of the teacher-catechists and negotiating with villages wishing to start their own school.

A New Role for the Catechist

Shanahan's approach meant a completely new role for the lay catechist in the missionary expansion of the Church. Previously seen as an assistant to the priest, accompanying and facilitating the work of the missionary, now the catechist was given a high degree of autonomy, with a proper lay ministry to perform. Edward Leen saw the function of these lay catechists as a temporary expedient until the number of clerical vocations became sufficient. He wrote in 1922: "The dearth of priests has necessitated the inauguration of a system which has been found on trial to work extremely well, though it will always remain merely an expedient until vocations for the pagan mission multiply". 19 Why a system "which has been found to work extremely well' should remain merely a temporary expedient is not clarified in Leen's article.

Shanahan, on the other hand, appears to have been free of such presuppositions, and saw the function of the teacher-catechist as a proper ministry and vocation within the church, having its own purpose in Church ministry, independently of the number of clerical vocations. In this, Shanahan appears to be far in advance of his contemporaries, being prepared to find a clear
position within the Church for lay ministry. Even among the lay missionaries he brought from Ireland after 1920, he only thought of giving them the structure of a religious congregation when the limitations of their isolated status within the mission, and the insecurity of ensuring their succession became apparent.

**Day-to-Day Function of the Teacher-Catechist**

John Jordan described the typical daily timetable of the teacher-catechist in a bush school. From morning until 2.00 p.m. he/she taught class in the school. Later in the afternoon there were interviews with local leaders, care of the sick, baptisms in danger of death, education of the adult catechumenate.\(^{20}\) Such was the growing enthusiasm from local leaders for the development of local bush schools that no village was ever forced to accept a school. The Spiritans found little difficulty in getting each village to accept financial responsibility for the development of their schools.

There were understandable weaknesses in such a system which, once initiated, took on a momentum of its own. It was impossible to keep any credible professional teacher-training program operating. The training college opened at Onitsha in 1913, and transferred to Igbariam in 1914, had to be closed in 1918 due to staffing problems. Thus the standard of competence of many teachers left much to be desired. It would take strict government regulations in the 1920s to put some brake on the uncontrolled expansion, and demand improved standards of teacher-training and competence.

**Over-stretched Mission Staff**

It is clear that the educational emphasis in mission strategy diverted the attention of many missionaries away from distinctly ecclesiastical and cultic concerns. The overall management of the

system became more and more demanding on the time of missionaries. In 1922 Leen informs us that there were twenty two priests available in the vicariate for ministry, which showed very little increase in a decade, and yet the work load had increased enormously. We find more and more concern being expressed from the Spiritan Generalate in Paris about the neglect of direct evangelisation by the missionaries in pursuit of Shanahan's goals. Yet Shanahan, when defining pastoral priorities in the vicariate was unrepentant, stating that the priest's first duty to the apostolate was the training of young teachers.\(^{21}\)

Curiously enough, in spite of the enormous effort to produce a vast network of bush-schools, and a smaller network of well-established central schools, Shanahan appears to have done relatively little to build up any substantial follow-up by way of a secondary school network. It would be left to his successor Charles Heerey to add the top to the pyramid base, by way of secondary schools and colleges, from the 1930s onwards.

The concentration on a vast network of primary schools, without much emphasis on the next stage, had a curious implication for the development of indigenous clergy. Without some secondary school system it was impossible to have a feed into a senior seminary program, which in retrospect was the obvious solution to Shanahan's desperate need for clergy. It was only in 1924 that the first minor seminary was opened: St. Paul's Seminary Igbariam.\(^{22}\)

**Girls' Education**

During the first fifteen years of the Shanahan strategy the whole emphasis was on the development of boys' education. Whether this corresponded to the felt needs and priorities of Igbo society,

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\(^{21}\) See *ibid.*, p. 151.

or to the mission's (and colonial administration's) perception of those priorities is a matter of debate. However, Shanahan became aware from 1920 of a major gap in his system, that of girls' education. His long-term objective was the formation of Christian families as the root of the Church within Igbo society. This required a major effort in the 1920s to redress the balance. He used the time of his sick leave in Ireland (1919-1920) to establish contacts with willing lady volunteers, to form the nucleus of this new effort, parallel to the previous effort with boys' schools. For some years he had been trying to get a female religious congregation to come to his vicariate for this purpose, without success. The Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny, who served in the vicariate up to 1916, were too restricted in their community life-style for Shanahan's plans, and finally left the vicariate with unhappy feelings on both sides. Prolonged negotiations with the Irish Sisters of Charity proved fruitless, with the exception of the extraordinary case of Sister Mary Charles Walker. It is in this context we should understand his recruitment drive for lay volunteers from 1920 onwards. Many of these volunteers would eventually form the nucleus of the new Congregations of the Holy Rosary Sisters and the Medical Missionaries of Mary.

23 Traditional Igbo society had quite a highly empowered role for women, especially in the economic control of the market-place, from which men were largely excluded. Some recent indigenous commentators maintain that the missionary effort to bring equality of access to formal education for women actually resulted in a diminution of the power of women in Igbo society. See Ifi Amadiume, op. cit., pp. 119-35.

24 Shanahan's efforts from 1914 to attract the Irish Sisters of Charity (I.S.C.) to Southern Nigeria is well documented in Colman Cooke, Mary Charles Walker, the Nun of Calabar, pp. 32-74.

25 The Missionary Sisters of the Holy Rosary were founded in 1924. They opened their first school in Nigeria in 1928. The apostolate of the vicariate would benefit enormously from Shanahan's foresight as the ministry of the sisters in education and medical work expanded in the following decades. By 1954 there were 150 schools opened by the Holy Rosary Sisters, catering for 22000 girls. See Mother Mary Stanislaus, ``Christianity through the Holy Rosary Sisters' Schools in Nigeria'' in The Capuchin Annual, 1954, pp. 329-34.
In a letter of 9 November 1923 to a prospective aspirant Shanahan laid down his plans very clearly: "In Africa the sisters will have to create a Catholic womanhood in a country where it does not exist. This object will be attained chiefly through schools...later on the children will grow up to become co-founders of Catholic families with Catholic young men of our Catholic schools...1011 girls' schools have to be set up!" A contemporary critique might note that the implication was the imposition of a Western model of the role of women in the family and society.

**Catechetical Method**

Edward Leen tells us of the critical role he played at Shanahan's side in the years 1920-1922 in developing a form of catechesis, suitable to the expanding teacher-catechist system. This seems to have closely corresponded to the principles of spirituality which Shanahan brought with him (as did Leen) from his early Spiritan formation. Leen expressed the intimate professional relationship between them as follows: "The Vicar Apostolic, Dr. Shanahan, and the writer of this article, examining together for more than twelve months, almost continually, and daily collating experiences, grew towards the end to have a clear synoptic view of Christianity set out (in the article)".

Leen was highly critical of all the catechisms then in use in the vicariate. He maintained that because of the variable educational standard of teacher-catechists one cannot presume that any lacunae of a catechism will be compensated for by adequate commentary. Nor, in the circumstances, can one assume

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28 Edward Leen *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, XX, (1922), 135.
Christian values percolating from family, or from society in general, to the individual. The precise correct formulation of doctrine in catechisms became all the more important in such circumstances.

Leen stressed the importance of communicating the correct emphases in Christian doctrine beginning, not with the commandments or moral living, but with the life of grace and the divinisation of the human in relationship with the divine, which the life of grace implies. He gave the following mode of proceeding for catechetical instruction:

1. Knowledge of the divine life available to the human through the gratuitous gift of God.
2. Stimulation of desire to possess that divine life.
3. Provoke a love of the means of reaching this 'divinised' state and preserving it intact. Only in this latter context may the commandments be discussed in a balanced way.

He stressed that: "the ten commandments occupy an unduly large space, and a space altogether disproportionate to their relative importance...as if Our Lord had not simplified them by reducing them to two, and as if Mount Calvary did not now interpose between our vision and Mount Sinai".  

At no stage in the article does Leen indicate any particular effort to present the Christian message in a distinctly African context, but it must be remembered that the article was written for the benefit of an Irish, rather than an African audience. The emphasis given by Leen is valuable and valid in any balanced presentation of the Christian message.

**The Rate of Expansion of Catholic Education (1900-1932)**

It might be useful at this stage to have a look at the actual numerical significance of the rate of expansion of Catholic primary education in Southern Nigeria in the period in question.

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29 See *ibid.*, 129
to get some idea of the scale of success in numerical terms, and also the enormous problems created for Shanahan by its very success. The following table is drawn from a variety of sources, which sometimes differ in detail, perhaps because of confusion between a 'church' and a 'school', as both were so closely linked in Shanahan's strategy.\textsuperscript{30}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of Catholic Schools</th>
<th>Enrolment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1899</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1902</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1903</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1100</td>
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<td>1906</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2057</td>
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<td>1908</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2793</td>
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<td>1909</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>2591</td>
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<tr>
<td>1912</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>6578</td>
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<tr>
<td>1915</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>13158</td>
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<td>1918</td>
<td>355</td>
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<td>1925</td>
<td>1200</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>1365</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>1403</td>
<td>37275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>1386</td>
<td>30390</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While there are some anomalies in the figures due to changing education codes emanating from government, the over-all trend is one of explosive growth right from 1899. The plotting of these figures on a graph more clearly demonstrates the exponential nature of the increase, and the enormous pastoral problems produced by the fact that there was very little increase in the

number of clergy available to Shanahan for managing this unstable expansion.31

From the statistics (above) one can also see that there was a take-off point about the year 1915. Being the second year of World War I, there was very little to be done by way of increase of missionary personnel. At the end of the war in 1918 Shanahan was entrusted by the Holy See with a pastoral visitation of The Cameroons, which had been deprived completely of pastoral ministry during the war by the loss of German missionary personnel. It was during this visitation which lasted into 1919 that Shanahan suffered serious illness which necessitated his return to Ireland. In the late summer he underwent a serious liver operation.

A New Phase (1919-1930)

A period in Ireland which lasted through his consecration as bishop and Vicar Apostolic at Maynooth College on 6th. June 1920, until his return to Nigeria on 22nd November of the same year, marked the start of a distinctly new phase of Shanahan’s life and strategy. The eight years from 1919 was devoted to a burst of creative energy as Shanahan grasped at every straw in an attempt to cope with the pastoral problems posed by the run-away

31 A few figures will illustrate the problem. In 1906 Shanahan had 12 priests, 9 brothers and 10 religious sisters in the Vicariate: a total of 31 personnel, together with 33 teacher-catechists. In 1922 Leen tells us there were 22 priests in the vicariate available for ministry. By 1925 there were 29 priests, 3 brothers and 1 religious sister, a number of lay volunteers, and 1537 teacher-catechists In this period from 1906 to 1925 the number of priests increased from 12 to 29, but baptised Catholics had increased from 1,178 to 47,515 and catechumens from 850 to 114,006, schools from 11 to 1190. In addition, the tensions of the war years had introduced fission among the Spiritans themselves, as the Alsatians declared themselves for Germany. As a result, in the first two years of World War I. Shanahan lost 7 priests and 2 brothers from the mission. See Celestine A. Obi (ed.), op.cit., pp. 166f. See also Colman Cooke. The Roman Catholic Mission in Calabar 1903-1960, pp. 64-84.
expansion of the Church in the vicariate.\textsuperscript{32} Of these eight years (1919-1927) he was to spend four years and three months in Europe (mostly in Ireland), which would cause much unfavourable comment among his colleagues in the vicariate, but would eventually lead to the formation of new missionary societies and be an enduring part of Shanahan's legacy.\textsuperscript{33}

I have not come across any source which links Shanahan's strategy with the contents of the missionary Apostolic letters and encyclicals of his time. Yet an examination of his actions indicate that he was greatly influenced by these documents. Up to his return to Ireland in 1919 Shanahan appears to have been limited in his own mind to finding priests from his own Spiritan

\textsuperscript{32} In the history of Catholic missions there are few more intriguing narratives than the story of Mary Charles Walker, the Nun of Calabar. It was a sign of Shanahan's desperation for staff and his willingness to consider the totally unconventional that the story began at all, though it was not to end too happily for all concerned. Mary Charles Walker was an English-born member of the Irish Sisters of Charity (I.S.C.), born the same year as Shanahan (1871). In September 1919 she was introduced to Shanahan as he was negotiating with the superiors of the I.S.C. to open a foundation in Southern Nigeria. When these negotiations broke down M.C. Walker continued to express interest and eventually succeeded in getting a rescript from the Holy See transferring her obedience from the superiors of the I.S.C. to Bishop Shanahan. She arrived in Calabar on 3rd. October 1923 and was accepted by Shanahan as a full member of the apostolic team of the vicariate for whom the vicariate took full responsibility. Canonically she remained a member of the I.S.C. She played an important role in girls' Catholic education in Calabar and Shanahan planned that she would found an indigenous congregation of Sisters. This latter plan never got off the ground. To resolve the anomaly of her position in the vicariate, Shanahan wished that she would join the newly founded Holy Rosary Sisters, which she was unwilling to do. Eventually her work, and the foundation of indigenous Sisters, was taken on by the Society of the Holy Child Jesus after 1930. Her arrangements with Shanahan were personal, and it appears that his successor Bishop Heerey was unwilling to allow the anomaly to continue after he took over the vicariate. Mary Charles Walker left the vicariate in 1934. See Colman Cooke, \textit{Mary Charles Walker, The Nun of Calabar}, pp. 133-166.

\textsuperscript{33} The periods which Shanahan spent outside the vicariate from 1919 to 1927: August 1919 - November 1920, May 1922 - May 1924, June 1926 - August 1927. It should be mentioned that all departures were in part connected with Shanahan's deteriorating health.
congregation to solve his pastoral and management difficulties. The Apostolic letter of Pope Benedict XV, *Maximum Illud*, was published on 30\(^{th}\) November 1919. Among its important recommendations was that missionary superiors should accept help into their domains from wherever it was offered, irrespective of Congregational interests. The Pope also demanded that diocesan bishops be willing to release their clergy for missionary work.\(^3^4\)

Within two months of the letter being published we find Shanahan in consultation with Mgr. McCaffrey, President of Maynooth College, the main seminary for the Irish Church, leading to an address to the Maynooth students and a meeting with Cardinal Logue and a number of other Irish bishops in January 1920. It had become the practice of some Irish dioceses to send their newly-ordained to parishes of the Irish Catholic diaspora in the United States and Australia, before giving them permanent appointments in their home dioceses. Shanahan proposed to Cardinal Logue to allow these priests to volunteer alternatively for periods up to five years of pastoral work in his vicariate, promising them a sound pastoral training.

**The Maynooth Secular Initiative**

This was the start of a long and fruitful interface between Shanahan and Maynooth which would lead to missionary

\(^{3^4}\) "how reprehensible would be the conduct of one (a vicar apostolic) who should look upon that portion of the Lord’s field which has been assigned to him, as his own property, which no one else should dare touch .... The head of a Catholic mission, for whom God’s glory and the salvation of souls are nearest to his heart, calls in assistants, if need be, from everywhere to help him in his holy task, not caring whether they belong to another nation or to a different religious order so long as Christ is preached.’’ And again to diocesan bishops: ‘‘You will do a deed most consonant with your love for your religion if, among your clergy and in your diocesan seminary, you carefully nurse the seeds of apostleship which you may discover in them.’’ See Raymond Hickey, ed., *Modern Missionary Documents and Africa* (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1982), pp. 34, 43f.
developments beyond his wildest dreams. The College was the setting for Shanahan's episcopal ordination in June 1920. His meeting with the students earlier that year had already borne fruit in the persons of his first volunteers for the vicariate Frs. Whitney and Ronayne, who assisted as chaplains to the new bishop during the ceremony, and left with him for Nigeria in November 1920.  

In the form conceived by Shanahan in 1920 the initiative with the Irish secular priests could be no more than a stop-gap measure. Its main advantage was that it provided a basic minimum of sacramental ministry in a mission that would otherwise be largely neglected, at a time when Shanahan perceived a vast popular movement towards the Catholic Church which, if wasted, would not be repeated.

There were inherent weaknesses in the strategy, some of them immediately obvious, and some of a more long-term nature. Immediately obvious was the short-term nature of the Secular's commitment which militated against language proficiency and acculturation.36 In the normal course they would be preparing to return to their dioceses just when they were becoming proficient in their mission work. Such short-term commitments also tended to discourage long-term pastoral or developmental initiatives due to doubt about follow-up. The Seculars inevitably came to be seen as auxiliaries to the Spiritans, partly due to the strong sense of proprietorship which the 'jus commissionis' gave to the Spiritans, or indeed to any similar societies in similar situations, and partly due to the difficulty of giving high responsibilities to one who could be withdrawn at short notice by his home diocese. Even though this argument was used, it had only limited validity


36 Typical of this problem was the controversy which enveloped Fr. T. Ronayne, Mary Martin and Mary Charles Walker. Within months of his arrival in Nigeria Ronayne was entrusted with a delicate issue of tightening up on abuses within the Calabar Church. This led eventually to major confrontation, suspensions and eventually excommunications in the following years, which might have been avoided by a more experienced person. (c.f. Colman Cooke, The Roman Catholic Mission in Calabar 1903-1960, pp. 108-120.)
as the individual Spiritans could just as easily be withdrawn. In addition tension was bound to arise in imposing Spiritan community life on the secular volunteers in subordinate roles in the missions. It also seems that there was little or no missiological training or induction course for the secular priest volunteers.

Of more long term significance was the possibility that some of the seculars might, during the period of their short-term commitment, feel called to a more long-term, or even permanent missionary vocation. This is what eventually happened in a number of cases.

By the middle of the decade it became obvious that the tensions within the mission called for a radical review of the arrangements under which the initiative had been undertaken in the first place. Augustine Okwu proposes the thesis that from the start in 1920 the secular priests had territorial ambitions in the vicariate and that Shanahan secretly sympathised with these ambitions. He quotes as evidence the precedent of the formation of the Maynooth Mission to China by Fr. John Blowick in 1916. Within a few years they had their own vicariate of Han Yang in central China. Okwu argues that Shanahan, being aware of this precedent, must have foreseen the likelihood of a similar development in Nigeria.37

However there were elements which made the Nigerian initiative unique, as originally conceived, though it would evolve in ways very similar to the Maynooth Mission to China ultimately. From the start the Maynooth Mission to China was physically separated from Maynooth itself and structured as a separate society. In its initial years Shanahan's initiative remained closely tied to Maynooth and established no structures in Ireland to support a separate society. It seems a more appropriate judgment to conclude that the eventual evolution towards a separate society of Irish secular missionary priests in Nigeria

grew out of the experience in the first few years of the inadequacy of the initial experiment.

On Shanahan's return to the vicariate after two years absence in May 1924 he found a situation of considerable discord and disorganisation among his own Spiritan colleagues. His long absence was resented. His vicar general Fr. Dan Walsh resigned and Shanahan was accused of "weakness, indecision and procrastination." A year later Shanahan, with his health again deteriorating, requested that a coadjutor be appointed, but the Spiritan Superior General, Mgr. Le Roy wished to see the division of the vicariate established as a priority. He proposed a division of all areas east of the Port Harcourt - Makurdi railway as a separate jurisdiction to be entrusted to the American Spiritan province.

In March 1926 Shanahan offered his resignation and left Nigeria in June to attend the Spiritan General Chapter in Paris. While in Paris he attended a specialist who recommended that he should not return to the tropics, but in his audience with Pope


39 Shanahan appears to have had little confidence in the American Spiritans, two of whom were already working in the vicariate at this stage. He wrote in November 1924: "The Americans have a long way to go before they come up to us. I think that from what I have seen of them that they are not made for the conversion of Africa. If only they settled down to hardship, mortification, unselfishness, obedience and humility, all would be well" (Shanahan to Crehan, 24th. November 1924, quoted in *ibid.* p. 109, fn 38). There is a certain irony in these comments when seen against the background of the documentation collected by Edmund Hogan which showed, that in the nineteenth century, Augustine Planque (superior general of the S.M.A.), Francis Libermann (co-founder of the Spiritans) and top officials of Propaganda Fide shared a common jaundiced opinion of the potential of the Irish for foreign missions. See Edmund Hogan, "The Congregation of the Holy Ghost and the Evolution of the Modern Irish Missionary Movement" *The Catholic Historical Review*, LXX, 1 (January 1984), 2 fn 5.

40 Cooke is under the impression that Shanahan intended not to return to Nigeria, but this seems doubtful. His actions in the following month were not those of one who considered himself retired from the vicariate.
Pius XI, just one month later, he was instructed to return to Nigeria and pick his own successor as coadjutor.\(^{41}\)

During this state of flux the Maynooth Secular priests moved to stabilise their situation. Up to this point their only arrangements were made personally with Shanahan, against the advice of many of the Spiritans. With Shanahan's retirement seeming imminent, their position was very unclear. Their proposal was to establish their own missionary society and seek the withdrawal of the Spiritans from the vicariate in favour of the new society. Such a proposal was unacceptable to the Spiritan Generalate. It was complicated by Shanahan's sickness and by the fact that in February 1927, Charles Heerey, an Irish Spiritan was announced as Shanahan's coadjutor, with right of succession.

What stands out about Shanahan during this period is that he was faced with a conflict of interest situation between his position as a Spiritan, maintaining loyally the interests of his own religious congregation, and his position as vicar apostolic of Southern Nigeria, responsible for the best possible pastoral care for the people of his vicariate. In resolving this issue in his own mind Shanahan appears to have been greatly influenced by the teaching of the encyclical letter *Rerum Ecclesiae* of Pope Pius XI which was published in February 1926, which demanded that missionary congregations rid themselves of possessive and exclusive tendencies over territories entrusted to them which conflicted with the pastoral wellbeing of the peoples of the territory.\(^{42}\) It seems that Shanahan finally came to the conclusion

\(^{41}\) The letter of his specialist (*Archives of the Irish Spiritan Province*: unfilled letters in box 'Shanahan Papers'): is very definite in its recommendations. Dr. Bourdier diagnosed a partially detached retina in the left eye and a slight infection of the optic nerve in the right eye. "In consequence I take the view without hesitation that you resign yourself to staying in Europe or in a temperate climate, and I advise you to have your eyes looked at least once a month, at least for some time."

\(^{42}\) "In those territories which the apostolic see has entrusted to your zeal to be won for Christ the Lord, it sometimes happens, since they are often very extensive, that the number of missionaries each of you has from his own religious institute is far less than what is needed .... do not hesitate to summon to your own aid as your co-workers missionaries who are not of your own
that his duty as vicar general demanded that he support the proposal of the diocesan priests.\textsuperscript{43}

But it was the visit of Mgr. Hinsley, previously mentioned, as apostolic visitor to the British colonies in Africa, which finally resolved the issue.\textsuperscript{44} It was he who met Fr. Whitney in Rome in November 1929 and encouraged the formation of the new society. St. Patrick's Missionary Society was formally established on 5th. February, 1930, after a meeting at Maynooth between Fr. Whitney, and Bishop Shanahan. The following month an agreement was reached whereby Calabar, Ogoja and the Ibibio mainland would be entrusted to the new society.\textsuperscript{45} The fruits of the new arrangement became immediately apparent as Shanahan received seven new Irish diocesan priests the same year, who were all appointed to the newly arranged area, which became a separate vicariate in 1934.

It became apparent from 1928 that Shanahan was no longer able to manage the vicariate. The tragedy was that he had not been allowed to resign in the full glory of his achievements in religious family, whether they be priests or belong to lay institutes.\textsuperscript{43} See Raymond Hickey, ed., \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 69-70.

\textsuperscript{44} A.S.O. Okwu, \textit{"The Beginning of the Maynooth Movement in Southern Nigeria and the Rise of St. Patrick’s Missionary Society 1920-1930"}, 26-29, mentions that neither the Irish Spiritan Province nor their Generalate had ever approved the Maynooth experiment and the developments in 1925 were quoted as evidence of the lack of wisdom of Shanahan’s original initiative. He quotes archival correspondence to prove the point. Later the Spiritan Generalate challenged Shanahan to justify his support for the new society. Shanahan replied respectfully but unrepentantly: "I, however, think that I am well known in Rome that my report cannot be interpreted as hostile to my missionary colleagues of the Congregation.... Your Grace said that Ireland is firmly and definitely committed to the missions and will as such supply all the personnel we want. Well! In that case I shall have to wait. However, if the Congregation cannot for whatever reason, give me the personnel which I need, I am obliged ‘sub gravi’ to search elsewhere for this personnel." (Letter of Shanahan to the Superior General of 6th November 1928, quoted in \textit{ibid.}, pp. 39-40).

\textsuperscript{45} See above, p. 3.

1926. His last few years were to prove ones of extraordinary suffering for him as many of his working relationships dissolved in rancour and dissension. In 1929 an official visitor from the Spiritan Generalate visited the vicariate and reported Shanahan's rule as "burdensome, autocratic, personalised and often in defiance of the congregation's constitutions". In the same year Mgr. Hinsley, while giving great credit to the achievements of the vicariate of Southern Nigeria up to 1929, was highly critical of Shanahan's administration as he found it. The Shanahan Era was clearly coming to an end. In December 1930 Shanahan had the satisfaction of ordaining his first Igbo priest, Fr. John Anyogu, at Onitsha on the 8th. December, the 45th. anniversary of Joseph Lutz's arrival and the 25th. anniversary of the death of Leon Lejeune. Two months later he again submitted his resignation, which was promptly accepted. Charles Heerey succeeded him as vicar apostolic on 21st. May, 1931. What should have been the final lifting of the burden from Joseph Shanahan's shoulders was postponed for some months more by the serious illness of Heerey. Shanahan finally left the vicariate early in 1932.

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48 Various other recorded correspondence shows that these comments were not isolated. As Shanahan's health deteriorated, so did his ability to work harmoniously with others. Mother Amadeus of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus (S.H.C.J.) who planned to come to work in the vicariate commented in 1930: "All Mgr. Hinsley said of him is true..... he is certainly holy but there is a decided 'kink' which makes it difficult to get on with him. You never quite know where you are and I have a feeling that he feels we were forced on him by Mgr. Hinsley". (Colman Cooke, Mary Charles Walker, 130). Hinsley's opinion comes out clearly in his dealings with Mother Amadeus: "Everything must be ready before Shanahan's arrival in Rome so that he cannot change his mind. Shanahan is broken in body and mind and will be asked to resign."(ibid, p. 130)
Assessment of the Shanahan Years

Adrian Hastings writing in 1979, reviewed the overall impact of various strategies used by different missionary societies throughout Africa in the work of evangelisation. The French, Germans, Dutch and Swiss excelled in the quality of their mastery of local languages, study of culture and the excellence of the training given to indigenous priests and catechists. The Irish and the Canadians were remarkable in their emphasis on education. Yet he says:

Buganda, Igboland, Chaggaland, Rwanda and Burundi all experienced mass conversion and an emerging Christian social atmosphere. . . . the dynamics of such movements and the methods of the missionaires varied considerably: the schools race in Igboland between the Irish Holy Ghost Fathers and the British CMS presents a very different picture from the White Father evangelisation of Ufipa with its lengthy catechumenate and the relative absence of schooling. . . . Yet in many ways the patterns of religion which tended to emerge after some years, with its sacramentals and angels, its relative absence of priests and of regular sacraments, its profound dependence on catechists, was a common one.49

With the rise of nationalism throughout Africa it became obvious that, for ideological reasons, newly emerging states would not allow a monopoly of Church control of education to continue. The prospect of nationalisation of Church schools created tensions in Church-State relations though-out Nigeria from the 1950’s until it finally happened in 1970, immediately after the Biafran War. Superficially the event might be regarded as a disaster for early mission efforts. Perhaps a more balanced judgment would be to see the mission school system as an agent which served both Church and State well for over half a century,

simultaneously creating the intellectual and administrative elite which underpinned nationalist aspirations towards self-determination, while at the same time ensuring that Christian influence would percolate into every level of civil society.

It might legitimately be asked whether the different strategies adopted by different religious Congregations and denominations, as regards education, produced patterns of very uneven development throughout Nigeria, leading to eventual domination of civil service and commercial life throughout the country by one particular ethnic group. This would eventually be a contributing factor to the inter-ethnic jealousy and resentment which culminated in violent purges and civil war.

What emerges eventually is a vibrant and creative Church, self-supporting at all levels of ministry, with a strong missionary outreach. It is not necessary to assume that the original evangelisers were better or more zealous than their peers elsewhere, but a strategy was found which resonated with the genius of a people, and released their potential to develop a uniquely successful incarnation of the Christian message in a relatively short period of time. Leon Lejeune and Joseph Shanahan have a specially important role in finding that strategy and putting it into effect. Felix Ekechi sums it up as follows: "What seems remarkable about the Holy Ghost Fathers, from my own point of view, is not that they were ordinarily zealous evangelists, but that they were able, in spite of heavy odds to become strong and influential within a short period of time".  

Allow me to finish with a comprehensive summary of Shanahan’s impact on mission history in Nigeria by a distinguished Nigerian historian, not otherwise noted for his admiration of foreign missionaries:

Indeed the success that attended the efforts of the only European missionary who based his evangelistic methods upon close understanding of Ibo religion indicates what

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might have been achieved by other missionaries. Bishop Shanahan of the Society of the Holy Ghost Fathers was perhaps the greatest evangelist the Ibo have ever seen. This brave Irish priest who arrived in Onitsha in 1902 went from village to village on foot, ate the people's food, shared the same shelter with them and spoke to them in a language they could understand. Deeply impressed by the religious instinct of the Ibo, he saw that what Ibo religion wanted was not destruction but transformation. Hence he made them understand Mass in terms of spirit worship and the supreme being in terms of Tshuku (or Chukwu). Shanahan's understanding of the Ibo religion undoubtedly contributed to the stupendous outstripping of the Protestant missions by the Catholics in the Ibo country, in spite of the fact that the former preceded the latter by forty years.51

AN EXCURSUS ON THE WRITING OF CHINUA ACHEBE

In the immediate aftermath of independence in the early 1960s, the general trend of studies by Igbo authors tended to be highly critical of the effects of missions, both Protestant and Roman Catholic, on the social and cultural fabric of traditional African society. Such an analysis was immortalised in the classic trilogy of Igbo author Chinua Achebe: Things Fall Apart (1958), No Longer at Ease (1960) and Arrow of God (1964).52 In this framework Africa is seen as emerging from a prolonged period of humiliation as a result of the colonial experience, and in many cases Christian missions were seen as part of that experience and agents of the cultural humiliation.

In the first novel of the trilogy Achebe portrays and interprets life in Igboland in the last half of the nineteenth century, using the main character Okonkwo to represent the model of a traditionally

successful Igbo male whose pride eventually results in his banishment from his village for sins against Ani, the earth goddess. In his exile he hears reports of the destabilisation of society by the twin forces of Christian missionary expansion and the economic changes brought about by trade. Okonkwo's world of kinship falls apart with the conversion of his son Nwoye to Christianity. On his return from exile he fails to stir his fellow kinsmen to war and eventually his alienation is completed by his own suicide.

Achebe interprets the power of the traditional earth goddess Ani in terms of a powerful female spiritual principle which controls and dominates the materialistic male principle of acquisitiveness. Thus Ani was the binding force which kept things together in traditional society. For Achebe, colonial trade allied with western education released the male principle of acquisitiveness in Igbo society with devastating results.

The remaining novels of the trilogy explore the consequences of this disintegration in future generations of Igbo society. Ezeulu, the hero of *The Arrow of God* is an intellectual traditional priest who is confident he can deal with the new system of government, only to be ultimately destroyed by it. In *No longer at Ease* Achebe explores his perceptions of modern Nigeria through the character of Obi Okonkwo, a grandson of the hero of the first novel. In him we see the full implications of the release of acquisitiveness in Igbo society as the initially idealistic Obi is corrupted by bribery and nepotism leading to his final downfall.

Yet Achebe is too profound a writer to ignore the obvious benefits that came to Igbo society through its interaction with both European trade and missionary activity. He admits a degree of historical inevitability in the consequent evolution. He is also too honest to pretend that traditional society had pristine perfection. The very issues that most disturbed the consciences of Shanahan and his missionary colleagues appear also in Achebe's novels as disturbing questions of conscience e.g. incidents of the casting away of twin babies as abominations on the land.

But there was a young lad who had been captivated. His name was Nwoye, Okonkwo's first son. It was not the mad logic of the Trinity that captivated him. He did not
understand it. It was the poetry of the religion, something felt in the marrow. The hymn about brothers in darkness and in fear seemed to answer a vague but persistent question that haunted his young soul -- the question of the twins crying in the bush and the question of Ikemefuna who was killed. He felt a relief within as the hymn poured into his parched soul. The words of the hymn were like the drops of frozen rain melting on the dry plate of the panting earth. Nwoye's callow mind was greatly puzzled.  

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53 See ibid. p. 122.
THE SHANAHAN LEGACY: THE MYTH AND THE REALITY

By

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The missionary legacy of Bishop Joseph Shanahan has become the focus of intense literary activity in recent times. The centenary celebration in 2002 of his arrival at Onitsha in 1902 was the occasion for academic conferences and workshops throughout the old Onitsha ecclesiastical province. About the same time the Evangelisation strategy of Shanahan was chosen as theme of a conference organized in Paris as part of the celebrations marking the 300-year existence of the Spiritan congregation. The leading essay of that conference entitled “Bishop Joseph Shanahan and the Evangelisation of Nigeria” by Patrick Roe is published in this volume.

Undoubtedly, Shanahan numbers among the greatest missionary leaders of the twentieth century. He was viewed by even his contemporaries as a saint and it is appropriate that the process of his beatification is currently underway. To gain a broader understanding of Shanahan’s missionary legacy, it has become expedient to address some misconceptions surrounding his missionary strategy and his missionary career in general. Viewed against this background, Patrick Roe’s interesting article is a welcome development in the mission historiography of South Eastern Nigeria which we intend to expatiate upon in the pages that follow.

The secret to Shanahan’s extraordinary missionary success lies definitely in his use of education as a medium of proselytisation. Perhaps, no other mission leader in Africa championed the cause of education the way he did. Nonetheless, it must be said that it was Father Léon Lejeune who first
discovered the potential of education in the work of evangelisation in the Lower Niger Mission. However, the very few important publications that emerged from this mission and written by Shanahan’s countrymen succeeded in propagating the popular but erroneous view that it was Shanahan that launched the Catholic education policy in the Spiritan mission in Nigeria.¹ This fashionable ‘myth,’ as Patrick Roe aptly described it,² has generally overshadowed the efforts of the mainly Alsatian and French pioneers. To fully understand and appreciate Shanahan’s legendary mission strategy, it is paramount to view it against the background of the seminal ideas and efforts of his immediate predecessor and mentor, Father Léon Lejeune. This master strategist has remained virtually unknown and unsung.³

The French veteran missionary who became Prefect Apostolic of the Lower Niger Mission in 1900 was, in the words of Shanahan himself, the only missionary in Africa “who was capable of achieving the impossible.”⁴ The mission he inherited had the unenviable standing as the white man’s grave. After fifteen years of heroic efforts it had not expanded beyond the immediate confines of Onitsha. To rescue the mission from the impending collapse, Lejeune embarked on a two-pronged revolutionary strategy: the reduction of the mortality rate among the European missionaries through the provision of solid and

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² See page 3 of this volume.


⁴ Quoted in John Jordan, Bishop Shanahan of Southern Nigeria, p. 20.
healthy dwelling places and the rethinking of the missionary strategy hitherto employed by his predecessors. It was the latter that led to the coming of Shanahan and the Irish missionaries to the Lower Niger Mission.

Father Lejeune was greatly obsessed with the idea of bringing about in the mission he inherited an “evangelization properly so-called.” This meant in effect the abandonment of the traditional and officially accepted method of evangelization which involved the purchase of slaves and the establishment of Christian villages populated by these rejects of society. He wanted to bring about an evangelization which would encompass the entire Igbo society—the slave and the free-born. However, throughout the humanitarian world of the time, large sums of money were donated expressly for anti-slavery purposes and mission authorities in Rome and Paris were ill-prepared to flout donor intentions. But Lejeune was undaunted in his efforts to convince them that “education in Africa is the surest means of converting the races [and] has in fact become the only means.” Shanahan was properly groomed in this school of thought and did not wait for official approval for his novel education crusade. Accordingly, he did not hesitate to utilize anti-slavery funds for school projects even at the risk of being accused of financial misappropriation.

Patrick Roe’s view that Lejeune’s foresight, especially his call for Irish missionaries, deserves more credit than it has hitherto received is very significant. In less than five years Lejeune had succeeded in resuscitating a collapsing mission by courageously bringing its methods and ideals in line with contemporary changes. Shanahan had closely followed and

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5 Spiritan Archives at Chevilly (SAC), 191/B/III, “Lejeune to Ledochowski, Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda Fide.”


7 See J. Jordan, Bishop Shanahan of Southern Nigeria, pp. 89-94.
Nicholas Omenka

imbibed the ideas and plans of his great master. It was under him that the triumph of the school apostolate blossomed. But he never failed to give credit to Lejeune who master-minded, directly or indirectly, most of the epoch-making changes he brought about in the mission. After five years of serious efforts to establish a Catholic Training Institute, he made a tentative start in 1910. In a report to the Mother House, he tried to allay the fears of his enraged Superior General by saying that “The question of a High School dates from the time of Rev. Father Lejeune; I have done no more than executing the plan very well conceived and commenced by him.” Had Lejeune not been succeeded by Shanahan, the radically new direction he gave to the mission would surely have died with him, given the anti-education sentiments among mission leaders in Europe and within the mission itself.

Father Jordan has written that the perceived opposition of the French missionaries to Shanahan’s education policy was due to their bitter memories of the école laïque in France. Against this background, Patrick Roe has made reference to a document produced by Shanahan’s French confrères in Calabar which apparently appears to be opposed to education. It may be true that the bitter memories of the école laïque in France exerted some element of mistrust in the approach of French missionaries to education in the colonies. But in the Niger Mission, their reluctance to march along the education path with the pace dictated by Shanahan and the Irish missionaries was based on their experiences and factors emanating locally from the mission. To fully understand the position of the French Fathers, it is essential therefore to have a critical look at the content of the document in question.

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9 Bishop Shanahan of Southern Nigeria, p. 30.
10 See note 6 of his essay in this volume, p. 3.
Shanahan had demanded the Fathers in Calabar and Anua to provide a brief write-up on the question of schools in the mission. In April 1914, they came up with such a document and forwarded a copy to the Superior General in Paris.\footnote{11 SAC:191/B/V, “Note by the Fathers of Calabar and Anua on the Niger Schools,” Calabar, 26 April, 1914.} They enumerated their ideas under three main headings, a) advantages of schools, b) disadvantages of schools and c) conclusion. Under the first heading, they appraised the school in much the same positive light as did Shanahan and all the advocates of the school apostolate before him. Special mention was made of the positive effect of education on the Christian life of the youth, the training of catechists and teachers, the prestige and honour accorded the Christian religion in the eyes of the government and the indigenes, and, above all, the considerable financial assistance coming from the government for education purposes.

With regard to the disadvantages of the school, they noted that preoccupation with profane subjects made enormous demands on the time and energy of the missionary to the detriment of his spiritual exercises and his involvement in pastoral ministry. They were at pains to point out that the grants from the government were indeed a danger in the sense that the conditions required for receiving them were progressively becoming stricter all the time. This often led to a waning of emphasis on religious instruction and the disposition of the indigenes towards Christianity.

Furthermore, they expressed concern that if care was not taken, the administration of the mission would be directed solely on the basis of education funds and noted that some discontented Fathers had complained in writing to the government that money meant for schools had been utilized for the provision of residential buildings for the Fathers. Having expressed these concerns, the signatories to the document were quick to point out that the disadvantages of the school could be remedied and they
came up with a number of solutions. Because of the underlying significance of these projected solutions to our understanding of the cultural differences between the French and Irish missionaries, we shall quote them in full:

We are of the opinion that one should adopt, develop, and perfect the school, because we believe that its disadvantages can be remedied. We take the liberty of suggesting a few [of these] remedies:

a) That the Fathers become teachers only in very rare cases.
b) That Catechism classes be run by the Fathers in the schools of their stations.
c) That these Catechism classes be prepared and organized, and that they should never, under any pretext, be changed to a history class or to any other profane subject.
d) That the teaching profession be confined to the Brothers or to certificated natives....
e) That Catechism examinations be carried out in all the grades, and that prizes and certificates be awarded to successful pupils.
f) That special religious instructions be given to our native teachers.

Signed: Fathers L. Léna, F. Sinner, J. Krafft, P. Biéchy.¹²

Today it would appear extremely bizarre that most of these essential duties in Christian ministry were projected as “suggestions.” Items a) and b) were even regarded as unacceptable by the Irish missionaries. The whole discussion on the supposedly negative attitude of the French missionaries to the

school apostolate ought to be focused not on the memories of the *école laïque* but rather on the reasons why most of these suggestions were acceptable to the French and not to the Irish.

It was a French Prefect Apostolic, Father Lejeune, who began the process of replacing the French and Alsatian missionaries with Irish ones. His argument was that the education which the former had received in France and Germany and the language handicap which came along with them to an English colony were not conducive to the fierce education contest prevalent on the Niger. When Shanahan succeeded Lejeune, he echoed this view of his master in more concrete terms:

> What we need here most are confrères who know English. If one arrives here without being able to say *yes* [in English], then it is a great damage to the Mission....Usually the young priests do not have the slightest idea of the basic requirements of a primary school. They would teach rhetoric and philosophy very well, but it becomes a different story when it comes to teaching A.B.C. or *Our Father*. But the fact is that the school is the most important thing out here.\(^{13}\)

This radical move towards the school apostolate permanently poisoned the relationship between the mainly French and Alsatian missionaries and their Irish confrères. Without essentially being opposed to education, the former realised that the manner it was pursued in the Niger Mission would mean either the termination of their missionary careers or their being reduced to second-class missionaries in a mission they had built up with so much suffering and sacrifice. Understandably they opposed any policy shift which placed an overriding priority on the school, preferring instead to carry along on equal footing the traditional evangelical method. This stance brought them in a

\(^{13}\) SAC:192/B/IV, “Shanahan to Superior General,” 14 April, 1907.
collusion course not only with Shanahan, but also with Lejeune, the architect of the school apostolate. The church records show that Rome and Paris were seriously contemplating raising the Prefecture of the Lower Niger Mission to the status of a Vicariate in 1905. But Bishop Gorman of Sierra Leone warned of a “clique” that would undermine Lejeune’s authority if made a bishop.\textsuperscript{14} The fact that no bishop was appointed after Lejeune’s untimely death in 1905 until 1920 was an indication that Rome was not unmindful of the national intrigues in the Mission.\textsuperscript{15}

Shanahan inherited not only the school, but also the antagonism which its introduction left in its wake. On a visit to the archives of the German Province of the Spiritans in Knechtsteden, Germany, in 1980, I was stunned by the open remark of one of the Fathers to the effect that Shanahan was a racist. Shanahan’s dispassionate preference for English-speaking missionaries in an English colony has continued till this day to be interpreted as racial discrimination by those affected by that policy. But it must be said that of all the mission leaders in Nigeria, he was the one who had the friendliest rapport with the Alsatian Fathers and who stood resolutely behind them during the trying moments occasioned by the First World War.

While Heerey’s efforts to alleviate the predicaments of the Benue German missionaries were frustrated by the pro-Islam British Administration in the North during the Second World War, Shanahan successfully dealt with a far more serious case involving the Alsatian Fathers during the First World War. Three Fathers—Treich, Muller and Groetz—had angered the British authorities by refusing to sign a declaration that they were French

\textsuperscript{14} SAC:200/A/II, “Gorman to Le Roy,” Sierra Leone, 16 June, 1905.

\textsuperscript{15} In a letter to the Superior General, Lejeune painted a grim picture not only of the national squabbles in his own mission, but also across the Niger where the French SMA mission was headed by an Italian. There it was the Germans (Alsatians) against the Italians.; see SAC:192/B/III, “Lejeune to Superior General,” Old Calabar, 20 June, 1903.
Arrested and imprisoned in Lagos, they were eventually released and returned to Onitsha, thanks to the intervention of Shanahan. Even the "misery" of having to report to the police each day by 8 a.m. was removed on account of pressure from Shanahan. He noted, however, that the Alsatians were in the habit of criticizing the British and admonished them to be more prudent in order not to be regarded as enemies of the British.

The elaborate scope given to the teaching of Catechism by European missionaries in the remedial proposals quoted above certainly took the mastery of the vernacular by the Fathers for granted. But here the Irish Fathers defaulted abysmally, thus strengthening the argument of the French Fathers that their exclusive preoccupation with the school was to be held accountable. Until the 1940s, the few vernacular literature available in both Igbo and Efik were produced by the French Fathers. They were the only group of missionaries in Nigeria who managed to communicate freely with those they ministered to in their indigenous languages. A Kiltegan missionary who worked in the Calabar mission has written about one of them in the following words:

Fr. Stiegler was one of those intrepid missionaries from Alsace-Lorraine who lived frugally, close to the people, spoke the language fluently, and constantly touring his immense parish. Like his French compatriots, he was

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16 The political fortunes of the region of Alsace-Lorraine, presently in France, have fluctuated since the Middle Ages. It was wrestled from France by Bismarck after the Franco-Prussian War in 1871 and reverted to France after the First World War. The citizens of this region, who are German speaking, have always clung to their German roots in spite of their forced French nationality.

highly organised in his pastoral work, keeping diaries and up-to-date records.\textsuperscript{18}

Whereas the Irish tended to achieve their missionary goal through an absolute dependence on the school apostolate, the French took the school to be merely ancillary to the traditional evangelical method which had religious instruction and the administration of the sacraments as its primary focus. An official report on the mission in 1909, most certainly written by Shanahan himself, gave a clear insight into the kind of dependence on the school which the French missionaries were worried about. “If we had no schools,” it said, “we would have a fairly easy life, with little work, little worry, and plenty of free time.”\textsuperscript{19}

One important area where Shanahan differed radically from Lejeune was the use of the vernacular in pastoral work. Prior to his coming to the Lower Niger Mission in 1900, Father Lejeune had already distinguished himself as a great missionary in Lambarene, Gabon. His greatest achievements were recorded in the area of catechetics.\textsuperscript{20} He published a number of important works in the vernacular, including a catechism and a dictionary in the Fang language.\textsuperscript{21} On coming to Nigeria, he was distressed to notice that the Fathers were not inclined to learn the Igbo language, preferring instead to rely exclusively on the Catechists as interpreters and for the teaching of catechism.\textsuperscript{22} He

\textsuperscript{18} Kevin Longworth SPS, James Moynagh, First Bishop of Calabar (n.p.:n.d.), p.4f.

\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Bulletin de la Congrégation}, 25 (1909-1910), 357.

\textsuperscript{20} His expertise and originality in this field are evident in the pages of his long article, “Les Catéchistes de l’Ogowe,” \textit{Les Missions Catholiques}, 28 (1896), 556-557; 570-574; 584-587; 597-599; 603-606; 619-621.


\textsuperscript{22} SAC:192/B/II, “Lejeune to Le Roy,” 18 September, 1900.
immediately commissioned and supervised the production of an Igbo Catechism. This task was accomplished in 1903 by Father Charles Vogler whose *Katechisma Nk’Okwukwe Nzuko Katolik N’Asusu Igbo* was in use throughout Shanahan’s tenure of office and has remained with minor modifications the official Igbo Catechism till this day.

Shanahan also endeavoured to promote the production of Christian literature in the vernacular. But he undermined his own efforts in this direction by placing too much premium on the use of English. In an effort to revitalize religious activities in his new Vicariate, he directed in 1924 that Vogler’s Igbo Catechism be translated into English for use in non-Igbo districts.²³ It is on record that Shanahan did not shy away from measures that jeopardized with the development of the native languages. In 1908, for instance, he vehemently challenged the provision in the draft education code which had made the vernacular compulsory for all schools. He described the provision as a deliberate act designed to “kill” Catholic schools.²⁴ Hitherto only the Protestant missions were employing the native dialects in their schools as medium of instruction and had produced numerous Christian literature in the vernacular.²⁵ The use of the English language in Catholic schools accounted for much of their attraction and success, and any attempt to develop the local languages was received with suspicion and opposition by Catholic authorities. In 1929 the CatholicOrdinaries of Nigeria rejected the “Union Igbo” not because of its inherent weaknesses, but because the use of “a new scientific language,” as they called it, “would be a

²³ See SAC:191/B/III, “Circular no. 10, Promulgation of Directions relative to the Administration of the Sacraments in the Vicariate of Southern Nigeria and some other Matters of General Importance,” August, 1924.


hindrance to the propagation of Catholic Faith and Teaching." It did not come to anybody as a surprise that the resolution to reject the Union Igbo was proposed by Bishop Heerey, Shanahan’s Coadjutor and eventual successor. He represented a new generation of missionaries whose disposition towards the vernacular was not as sympathetic as those of the French pioneers.

The mission which Shanahan headed was described by every Church dignitary of his day as a model to be recommended to other missions in Africa. But, with regard to the important issue of the vernacular, Father J. Soul, a Visitor of his own congregation in 1929, referred to this model mission as the most backward. Neither Shanahan nor his successor left the mission with any version of the Bible in the vernacular. This is most tragic considering that Shanahan was the one mission leader who fought hardest to win approval for the school apostolate in Eastern Nigeria. But while this successful method of evangelization made some use of the vernacular, it was not prepared to go all out to discover and promote the inherent cultural values in a people’s language. In the words of Professor D. Westermann, “any educational work which does not take into consideration the inseparable unity between African language and African thinking is based on false principles.” A prominent Igbo scholar has captured Westermann’s point in words that reverberate the melancholy which is associated with popular longing for a genuine inculturation in the African Church:

Thanks to Bishop Shanahan and his many practices and reforms, much of Igboland is today Christian. He succeeded in what he had set out to do: namely, to change the people and the culture, from their traditional religion to the religion of Christ....[His] success has been at a substantial cost to our native psyche. It has left us Christians with an unfulfillable hankering after the religion of our fathers. Thus, while faith points us in the direction of Calvary, pietas urges us to our ancestral shrines.... We pray to God as if to Oparannu, or Otamiri. To the extent that we do so, we find that our faith, like the dignity of the African immigrant of one of Soyinka’s early poems, is not integral to our being, but rather ‘sewn into the lining’ of our Sunday clothes.

Bishop Shanahan submitted his resignation to the Pope and to the Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda Fide on 16 November 1926 at the age of only 55 years. As reason for his desire to resign his post, he specifically mentioned his failing sight. The bishop whose motto was “Lord that I may see” had completely lost the vision of his left eye and was on the verge of losing the right one as well. He was an indefatigable writer who would sit up all night behind a candle light or a smoky bush lamp producing volumes of letters and reports. After 24 years in the mission, these efforts had taken their toll on a part of his system where it hurt most—his sight. He therefore thought it “prudent” to resign as Apostolic Vicar.”

However, he had discussed the issue of resignation with his Superior General in Paris, Mgr. Le Roy, who advised him to ask

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for a Coadjutor instead. It is obvious from Shanahan’s letter of resignation that he wanted to stay on as head of the mission with the assistance of a Coadjutor. In his own words, this arrangement would make it possible for him to make frequent and long sojourns in Europe to enable him accomplish three objectives which were of grave concern to him, namely, to secure adequate treatment for his failing sight, to recruit more secular priests for work in his mission, and to put a definitive touch to the foundation and development of the congregation of the Holy Rosary Sisters. Rome granted him his heart desire and Heerey became Coadjutor in 1927. This was to prove a pyrrhic victory, one that would end his missionary career on a sad note.

In 1929, two high-ranking Church officials were in Nigeria to make independent inspections of the missions. Mgr. Arthur Hinsley, Visitor Apostolic to British African colonies since 1927, was in Nigeria as representative of the Pope for the inspection of Catholic missions, especially as it concerned the important question of education. Father Joseph Soul was sent as Visitor by the Spiritan Superior General in Paris to ascertain the condition of the congregation’s mission in Nigeria headed by Shanahan. The decision of the Vicar to travel to Europe at this very crucial moment was an error of judgement and the worst mistake of his entire missionary career. There was widespread disaffection among various circles of the mission staff over some of Shanahan’s major policies. When the Visitors came, the Vicar was not there to defend himself and these policies. Consequently, both reports of the Church officials were made from the perspectives of his detractors and these were anything but positive.

Father Soul’s report contains a few contradictions that clearly show that it was not entirely based on objective findings. For instance, he started by praising Shanahan’s administration whereby the latter governed his mission staff with “great

31 Ibid.
magnanimity,” allowing them freedom in almost everything. Yet, in the same breath, he described the same administration as “autocratic” and “difficult,” especially when it concerned education strategy and evangelisation. Furthermore, he went on to say that Shanahan has a Mission Council which has not met since 1918. One could describe Shanahan’s administration as difficult in the sense that he was in the habit of changing generally accepted decisions after they have been made, but to say that his Mission council had, by 1929, not met since 1918 can best be described as an unfortunate misrepresentation. In fact it is on record that Shanahan presided over two mission council meetings in 1927, one on 16 August and the other on 10 October to ratify the decisions of the first. As main topic of discussion was the vexing question of secular priests in the mission. This was at the centre of all the ill-feelings against Shanahan’s administration.

It was the declared policy of the Spiritan Congregation that the use of secular priests in its missions should be a temporary arrangement. Such priests were to be looked upon only as auxiliaries. This policy was reiterated in June 1927 by the General Council of the congregation in response to an earlier proposition on the matter by Bishop Shanahan. Over the years, members of the Spiritan Congregation had looked with disfavour and anger the presence of the secular priests in the mission for various reasons.

The temporary nature of the services of the secular priests was considered detrimental to the ordered growth of the mission in the long term. In the view of the majority of the Spiritan members of the mission, the engagement of volunteers who stayed for only 2 to 5 years was depriving the mission of the

33 SAC:554/B/06, “Mission Council of Nigeria, Meeting of 16 August, 1927.”
34 SAC:554/B/06: “General Council, Meeting of 14 June, 1927.”
services of their members who would normally have been sent to the mission for life. The Superior General of the congregation had in fact stated that the coming of the secular priests had indeed enabled him to send missionaries to other missions.  

The Spiritans were resentful of the presence of the secular priests among them for fear that the latter could become strong enough to nurse some territorial ambition at their expense. This thinking was not totally unfounded because of past experience elsewhere in the world and the same did not take long to happen in Nigeria. In 1932 the secular priests were organized into a new missionary society, the St. Patrick’s Society, which wasted no time in devising a plan to dismember Shanahan’s Vicariate and secure the choicest part which would have included big centres like Enugu, Owerri and Emekukwu.

Another area of friction concerned the leadership of a community of priests. The official ruling of the Spiritan congregation was specific on this, namely, that a secular priest should not be a superior in mixed communities of Spiritans and seculars. Shanahan placed the good of his mission above the extraneous prerogatives of his congregation, and did not hesitate to make a competent secular priest the leader of a mission.

This flouting of official regulation was viewed as disloyalty to the congregation not only by his Spiritan confreres in Nigeria, but also by his superiors in Paris. An unsigned report to the Mother House shortly after Father Soul’ visit revealed that the Visitor made strong objections to “the inconvenient arrangement which places a secular priest at the head of a community where there are members of the congregation.” It is therefore not surprising that this issue loomed large in the Visitor’s final report to the Superior General. He had frowned at the fact that three very important missions—Calabar, Eke and Emekukwu—were

35 SAC:554/B/06, “Ronayne to Byrne,” Calabar, 8 August, 1926.

36 SAC:554/B/05, “Le Vicariat de la Nigéria Méridionale.”
headed by secular priests. “I believe,” he reported, “that one ought to praise the efforts of Mgr. Shanahan for procuring the assistance of secular priests, and thereby relieving our missionaries who are overworked. But I have heard it said that at the moment when this recruitment is gathering momentum, Mgr Shanahan has come out with the extraordinary and impossible idea of doing all the work of the Vicariate with secular priests and by-passing the Mother House.”

The lack of consultation in the whole process of procuring the services of the secular priests certainly lay at the root of resentment against Shanahan and his administration. Father Ronayne, the secular priest who would latter be at the centre of the unfortunate controversy, admitted that the real hostility against the seculars lay “in what was considered to be the carrying out of policies not having the approval of the Mission.” Today with the advantage of hindsight, it becomes clear how farsighted, and outstandingly realistic and courageous Shanahan really was. At a time when mission jurisdiction was a jealously guarded prerogative, the Vicar had the courage to ignore the climate of opinion and focused exclusively on the welfare of the mission entrusted to his care. In his own words, “No matter what happens, I won’t have shirked a duty because of the hardship it entails and of the tongues it will set a-wagging....” Had he been around when the two Visitors were in his mission territory, their reports would certainly have taken a different tone. He would have been able to defend the charges brought against him and perhaps convince the very officials who in their reports praised the excellence that was evident in his mission of the veracity of the wisdom of Pericles which says: “If

38 SAC:554/B/06, “Ronayne to Byrne,” Calabar, 8 August, 1926.
Athens shall appear great to you, consider that her glories were purchased by valiant men, by men who learned their duty.”

It is generally believed that Shanahan considered the ordination of John Anyogu in December 1930 as his Nunc dimittis, the completion of his life-work, and that he “intended to resign the following year”.40 This is another “myth” that has obscured the truth for decades. The second resignation of Shanahan in 1931 was not a voluntary decision but rather the outcome of a covert demand from Rome. All the evidence that history affords shows that Shanahan intended to remain Apostolic Vicar for life after the Pope refused to accept his first resignation in 1926. But in 1931 he was asked to step down following the recommendation of Mgr. Arthur Hinsley.

The report submitted to the Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda Fide by the Apostolic Visitor was unusually prejudicial, to say the least. Among other things, it claimed that the ever increasing material and spiritual exigencies of the mission demanded a change of leadership, and that the majority of Shanahan’s confreres were convinced that his manner of administration and his frequent absence from the Vicariate were retarding the progress of the mission.41 The Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda Fide to whom the report was made had the right as the authority overseeing the Catholic missions around the world to write directly to Shanahan asking for his resignation. But that he chose rather to ask the Spiritan Superior General to discretely demand Shanahan’s resignation without reference to Propaganda Fide could be seen as a foul play.

To begin with, Hinsley’s report relied heavily on the evidence supplied by disgruntled elements in the mission. Furthermore, it had the appearance of a personal vendetta against what the papal Visitor must have regarded as a slight on his authority when

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40 Desmon Forristal, The Second Burial, p. 228.

Shanahan decided to travel out of the country in spite of his presence in the mission. Even while Shanahan was still the constituted authority, Hinsley arrogated it to himself to grant permission to Heerey to travel abroad without any reference to the Vicar or to his Mother House. It is very unlikely that Shanahan realised in March 1931, when he submitted his second resignation, that it was Hinsley and the Prefect of Propaganda Fide, and not his Superior General, that demanded his resignation. But the latter did not lose sight of the great injustice done to a dedicated mission leader and came out vehemently in his defence.\(^{42}\)

The defence of Shanahan by the Mother House of his congregation was made most probably before Rome accepted Shanahan’s forced resignation.\(^{43}\) The underlying idea was not to plead a volte-face, but to stress the point that the already executed order was a gross injustice. It began by pointing out that the sudden demand for Shanahan’s resignation shortly after he had been asked to appoint a coadjutor was out of character. We recall that in his first resignation letter, the Vicar had stated unequivocally that he be relieved of his duty or given a coadjutor to enable him be on hand in Europe from time to time to pursue objectives that were of vital importance to the growth of the mission he headed. His request was granted by the Pope. Yet, the charge of frequent absence from his mission was brought against him in Hinsley’s report.

Furthermore, the Superior General bemoaned the curious irregularity that was evident in the actions of both Propaganda Fide and the Apostolic Visitor in flouting ecclesiastical and religious domains. The division of the Vicariate without

\(^{42}\) See SAC:191/B/III, “Note relative à la Nigeria.”

\(^{43}\) The note says that the letter to Shanahan demanding his resignation had hardly been posted when information from him arrived stating that Mgr. Hinsley had approved by telegram the departure of Bishop Heerey to the United States.
appropriate consultation with the congregation and the issue of the Apostolic Visitor granting a serving coadjutor permission to leave his mission on a prolonged absence were particularly denounced.

Because of the sensitive nature of the unsigned and undated defence note, surreptitiously entitled “Note relative à la Nigeria,” great effort was made to conceal the identity of its author. But internal evidence unmistakably reveals that it was the Superior General’s response to Rome’s controversial instruction to him. It complained, for instance, that because of the obligation to cover up Mgr Hinsley and Propaganda Fide, and the fact that Hinsley had nothing but admiration and praise for the work done in Nigeria, it would be an odious task to defend the “unjustifiable” demand for Shanahan’s resignation before the “appropriate members of the Congregation.” No official in the Mother House could have written this except the person to whom Rome’s letter was addressed.

The Superior General’s letter to Shanahan requiring him to resubmit his resignation has not survived, but one can make a fair guess as to its content from Shanahan’s letter to the Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda Fide. In it, he claimed that his renewed demand to be relieved of his office had “the full support of his mission council as well as those of his religious family and of the Very Reverend Superior General.”44 This does not represent the whole truth because as we have seen above, the council of “his religious family” had no idea of what was going on. Curiously, the letter dwelt almost exclusively on the progress made in the mission and on the fact that the new phase which it had entered into demanded a change of leadership to better cater for the spiritual and material growth of the mission. These are familiar words from Hinsley’s report and Propaganda’s letter to the Superior General. The latter’s revelation that his letter to Shanahan was written with the “desired discretion” had indeed

produced the desired effect. Poor Shanahan had no idea that the words and ideas he used in his resignation letter were in fact dictated by the recipients.

If the treatment of Shanahan by Rome was unjustifiable, the attitude of Bishop Heerey towards his former boss was simply unfathomable. When the Pope accepted his resignation in May 1931, Shanahan had naturally hoped to spend the rest of his days in the mission he had dedicated most of his life to. But Heerey would have none of that for fear that his authority would be compromised by the presence of a missionary hero. The suffering and agony which Shanahan had to endure as a result of this cruel treatment have been well documented elsewhere. But worthy of note here is the nobility of heart with which Shanahan endured this ordeal in the interest of the mission. Throughout his long years in exile, he never showed resentment, in word or action, towards Heerey or any of the personalities that caused him great pain. Today, all his detractors acknowledge him as a saint. Heerey himself was to live with bad conscience for the rest of his life. Father Jordan in his memoirs recalls graphically, Heerey’s reception of the news of Shanahan’s death:

In late December, 1943, a telegram to Bishop Heerey announced the death on Christmas morning, of Bishop Shanahan. Holding the telegram in his hand, Bishop Heerey apprised us of the contents in a few words. They were, “Poor Bishop Shanahan is dead”. As he spoke his eyes flashed around the table to see how each one was taking it. I remained almost impassive. Nobody spoke more than a few words. But to this day I wondered why Heerey made not the slightest effort to accommodate Shanahan in his heroic and completely unselfish retirement....I always felt that though Heerey obviously admired Shanahan very much, he felt many twinges of conscience at the way he had been treated. Even

45 See Desmond Forristal, The Second Burial, pp. 236-301.
on his deathbed, close to Onitsha he said to some Holy Rosary Sisters, “Here am I dying, surrounded by every care and attention, while poor Bishop Shanahan died unnoticed and lonely in a foreign land.\textsuperscript{46}

After the Nigerian civil war in 1970 the state took over all mission schools and for the first time, the fate of Shanahan’s spiritual legacy, the Catholic schools, looked very gloomy. If he were alive, what could he have done to prevent such a calamity from happening? In the late 1950s a group of bishops led by Joseph Whelan of Owerri unsuccessfully campaigned for the Africanization of the proprietorship and management of mission schools after a deal with government. But Heerey could not let go the priceless legacy bequeathed to him by Shanahan, a stand that almost cost him his office as the Archbishop of Onitsha.

Infuriated by Heerey’s refusal to make a deal with the government, the Apostolic Delegate, Archbishop Pignedoli, ordered him to resign within thirty days. Father Jordan has described this as a “dramatic incident of ecclesiastical history.”\textsuperscript{47} What made this drama all the more remarkable was the fact that it was to Shanahan’s ghost that Heerey appealed for deliverance. By his own account, Heerey claimed that the long dead Shanahan appeared to him during this ordeal in order “to sympathise and assure me.”\textsuperscript{48} Father Jordan recorded the incident in his memoirs with the interpretation that Shanahan appeared to encourage Heerey in his resolve to retain control of Catholic schools. True of false, there is no doubt that Shanahan’s ghost hangs over Catholic affairs in Eastern Nigeria. Ironically, the very Mother House which could not save his office was able to


\textsuperscript{47} Ibid, p.93.

\textsuperscript{48} Quoted in Desmond Forristal, \textit{The Second Burial}, p. 304f.
save that of Heerey by appealing to Rome with the necessity of salvaging the Shanahan legacy as bait. In a thought-provoking and unusually frank letter to Heerey, Bishop Whelan wrote:

I understand that the question of your retirement has been indefinitely deferred. I should like you to know that it was I who pressed the Apostolic Delegate to make the proposal of retirement to you. I did so in the belief that African Leadership was necessary in our fight for the schools in Eastern Nigeria.49

Forty-four years after independence, the fight in Nigeria over mission schools still rages on. Many Nigerians look back with nostalgia to the excellence that was characteristic of mission education and are forcefully clamouring for a return of mission schools to the churches. It is essential, however, to look beyond the past glories in order to effectively address the limited objectives that are discernible in mission education. As we have seen in this essay, mission schools as championed by Shanahan and his group of missionaries were not entirely centres for the exercise of native culture. Had the reverse been the case, perhaps it would have been a lot easier to achieve a true religious transformation of society. Against this background, one wonders if it would not have been wiser if the alternative voices such as those expressed by Bishop Whelan and the French/Alsatian Fathers had been given some hearing.

REQUIEM FOR ECHO THEOLOGY:
GLOBALISATION AND THE END OF THE MISSIONARY ERA¹

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1. Introduction:

There is little doubt that we have come to the end of the missionary era, especially one which moved like a huge wave, in the 19th and 20th centuries, from the North to the South and from the West to the East.² This end is evident in the creation of indigenous/local churches in these previous mission territories, which stands as a tribute to the missionaries whose primary mission was to “plant” the church. It is also evident in the achievement of autonomy in the administration of these local churches, an index in itself of the active agency of the peoples to whom the missionaries took the gospel in appropriating the message and cultivating the necessary acumen to take care of their own churches. This end is also evident in the growing number of indigenous theologians whose theological voice is becoming differentiated and unique vis-à-vis their own particular context and home base.

The end of the missionary era is also evident in the ongoing critical revision of the theology exported by the foreign missionaries to territories previously referred to as “mission lands.” During the active days of the missionary enterprise, the

¹ This is a slightly revised version of a paper presented at an International Theological Conference organized by the Centre for Multi-religious Studies, University of Aarhus, Denmark, on Theology Meets Multi-religiosity, May 13th –15th 2002.

² Elliot Kendall captures this new dawn in his work, End of An Era: Africa and the Missionary, (London: SPCK, 1978). Like Elliot we refer here to the end of a specific historical phase in the church’s ongoing missionary activity.
theology that obtained in the mission lands was essentially *echo theology*, namely, *a repetition* of what theologians in the West thought out and gave as *the* interpretations of sacred texts, *the* understanding of the constitutions, synodal and conciliar documents of the various Christian churches. The churches “in the missions” remained, at best, passive apprentices, consumers rather than producers of theological knowledge, the situation was heightened by the fact that, in general, in the earlier days of the 19th and 20th century missionary enterprise, the people in the missions were considerably unaware of the histories of the churches they embraced, ill-informed about their roots, branches, organisational structure and inner dynamics. Needless to say they were also far removed from participation in the policymaking bodies of the churches to which they converted and therefore had little or no voice in the way the churches were organised.

The earlier view of these local churches, sustained by foreign missionaries, as “satellite outposts” of the mother churches, as “church colonies”, as “infant churches” must these days, in the face of numerous structural and ideological developments and adjustments, be heavily qualified and nuanced.

This paper seeks to explore briefly the main historical landmarks in the evolution of the current critical self-awareness in the former mission territories, which has resulted in an important shift in the way and manner in which the theological enterprise is carried out in these contexts. This shift is not merely that of degree but one that has bearing on the quality and character of the theological enterprise in these parts of the church. Prior to this shift in the theological enterprise, what obtained in these territories is what we refer to as *Echo Theology*. It is our view that, besides other factors, the phenomenon of globalisation considerably contributed to, and indeed accelerated

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3 By “Church” we refer in general to the various denominations that make up the Christian church, including the Catholic Church and the various Protestant denominations—Anglicans, Presbyterians, Methodists, et cetera—that resulted from the reformation event and its aftermath. We consider the African independent churches, also referred to as ‘the African Initiated Churches’ (AICs) as part of the complex and variegated reception of various peoples in Africa of the Christian missionary enterprise.
this shift in theological awareness in the former mission territories and is largely responsible for the steep decline of the dominance of echo theology.

The African missionary context is our particular focus in this paper. In the concluding part of this paper, an attempt is made to explore the challenges facing the concrete realisation of the promise of an indigenous theological voice in Africa.

2. Short Note on Globalisation as used in this Text
2.1 A preliminary Caveat

Our reference to globalisation already needs heavy qualifications because globalisation has acquired very bad publicity. Once mention is made of “globalisation” the minds of people tend to go immediately to IMF, WTO, G5, G8, the big divide between the rich and the poor, the protests and riots that feature regularly in our streets by people who want to indicate their refusal to accept the present world economic order which seems to encourage the widening gap between the haves and the have-nots, the crippling debt which has further shackled especially the peoples of the third world. We must hasten to add that in view of the scandalous inequality fostered by the present economic order, this wide-ranging critique of “globalisation” is considerably justified and the solidarity with the marginalized of the world manifested in the protests are heart-warming even if they remain at present token gestures.

With this type of odious negative connotation associated with the phenomenon of globalisation, it is understandable that many would hardly see any good in it and few would give “globalisation” the benefit of the doubt as a phenomenon latent with something good and positive even on the moral plane. In the popular imagination, globalisation is morally bankrupt, an ill wind that blows no one any good. Since I belong to “the third World,” and therefore belong to that disadvantaged group for whom “the sane world” marches the streets and risks the anger of the ever present, well-equipped law enforcement agents, to praise globalisation under any guise could be tantamount to heresy, to
betrayal of the many who fight “against it.” Having said this, it is important to underline that globalisation does have a positive face, especially what I would like to refer to as “its hermeneutical gift.”

2.2 The Hermeneutical Gift of Globalisation

Globalisation is, at heart, accelerated interaction between people, speedy access to information, the breaking down of walls that divided communities and solidified boundaries giving us an illusion of isolation and enclaves. With globalisation there are very few hiding places from one another. We realise even more than ever before the presence of the other, we are enabled to feel more the reality of the situation of the other. Seen in this light the phenomenon of globalisation is the critical factor that has made the protest groups I referred to earlier to show more solidarity with the victims of oppression, the victims of unjust debt burden and the victims of economic exploitation.

These exploited people have always been there, have for decades been exploited. But the difference is that now we know; now we really see them and we are no longer the same. We are transformed by that painful knowledge, by what our new eyes behold and we can no longer remain on the fence after knowing so much, after seeing and experiencing so much of the other. The information highway, which has been created by the phenomenon of globalisation, has made us “a village,” made us aware of our relatedness, our connectedness, our interdependence, and our mutually entwined destinies. The knowledge brought about by the phenomenon of globalisation has robbed us of our comfortable innocence, has removed the screen from our eyes and has made us experience concretely the dissonance in our world order and brought us out on the streets. The information we now have access to, thanks to a variety of media (print, electronic, internet etc.) and indeed of alter-native media (as opposed to mono-polistic, even nationalistic and nation-centric, media), has saved us from being used by our own politicians, has made us more critical in our judgements, more nuanced in our
appreciation of what is happening in the world around us. It has given us new and more efficient tools for our hermeneutical navigations and evaluations. This is the hermeneutical gift of globalisation. And it has enormous impact on the gradual demise of echo theology. The knowledge explosion made possible by globalisation has an ambivalent character and has capacity both to empower and to disorient, to eat into our peace, to create restlessness. It is a knowledge that shakes up our prejudices, our fundamental assumptions and re-configures our perceptions of reality. There is a burden attached to knowledge, a consciousness-baggage, which forces the bearers to re-position themselves.⁴

Through its phenomenal improvement of communication tools available to the world, we see the phenomenon of globalisation as offering to the world a critically important hermeneutical gift, a heightened self-awareness, a deeper penetration of issues and a clearer distillation of interlocking arguments, a vastly improved critical appreciation of the other, the cultural other, the political other, the religious other and the social other.

Globalisation offers us a mirror even of ourselves. And it is not just the plain mirror; it is fitted with magnifying properties. We can zoom in on aspects of our history, our culture, our religion and our economic condition. Globalisation has heightened our capacity to compare and to contrast. And the results are ambivalent, unsettling as well as en-wholing. For the knowledge we now have and our ability to access even more store of knowledge has given us a new confidence that was considerably lacking prior to the flowering and explosion of the phenomenon of globalisation in our times.

Some authors see the missionary and colonial enterprise as “the first globalisation.” This may well be true especially seen from the European perspective, where that outreach, that

⁴ In a telling poem cryptically titled, Knowing Robs Us, Chinua Achebe captures this ability of knowledge to deny, [to rob] those who possess it the bliss, the peace, the relaxation, which ignorance, which “not knowing,” can generously confer on its own victims.
encounter with others fired the European imagination and made them see themselves, and their environment, and their place in history in new lights and enabled them to march around the world with extra bounce in their steps. But seen from the perspective of the rest of the world to whom the intrepid European traders, treasure hunters, missionaries and colonialists went that movement was essentially a one-way traffic. The new thing about globalisation phenomenon in our times is that the days of the one-way traffic are increasingly numbered. There is greater interaction and greater mixing on both sides of the divide. We now know each other’s backyard more than was the case before when Europe had that monopoly. The long drawn out monologue is finally ending. Now we increasingly have dialogue, and some would say even “polylogue”. The communication scene and the character of communication dynamics have profoundly changed. Globalisation has changed the knowledge game, that is, the dynamics of the generation, production, dissemination and conservation of knowledge, and therefore necessitated the re-shuffling of the power game and the economic game, both of which depend vastly on the intricate handling of the knowledge game. Globalisation has tremendously affected “the religious market place,” and the configuration of our faith loyalties.

With reference to the demise of echo theology, much credit must be given to the knowledge explosion created by the phenomenon of globalisation. Much of the history of the various Christian churches is in the open. The structural and organisational dynamics of the churches can no longer operate in secrecy nor can the activity of the administration and policy-making bodies of the churches escape critical scrutiny due to the heightened capacity of its faithful to penetrate its network, to access its proceedings. With specific reference to the arena of theological discourse the possibility of monopoly of interpretations and the development of monolithic theological views seem to have been permanently jeopardised by the incredible array of information tools and techniques resulting from the phenomenon of globalisation.

This extended teasing out of the hermeneutical gift of globalisation is aimed at enabling us, even if temporarily, to
overcome the tendency towards fixation on the political and economic awareness and abuse of the dynamics of globalisation. In this paper it is essentially this hermeneutical gift that we have in mind when we use the term globalisation. While we cannot deny the fact that there is more and more a collapsing of the original meaning of globalisation into its effects, so that the effects of globalisation are treated as globalisation as such, we would like to insist that globalisation be distinguished from its abuse, the advantages taken of it by the economic opportunists and political demagogues of our world. We shall subsequently examine the historical circumstances, which made echo theology to flourish for so long and highlight the factors that are eventually congregating to sing its requiem.

3. The Rise of Echo Theology: Brief Historical Explanation

The grounds for the planting and flourishing of echo theology was considerably well-laid out by both the socio-cultural circumstances of the groups we refer to as “the mission lands”\(^5\) and by conscious design on the part of the missionaries who went out to evangelise them. If we concentrate on the situation in the mission lands for the moment, it will be seen that the local people were in many ways ill-equipped for dialogue with the foreign missionaries at the time of their encounter with Christianity in the late 19\(^{th}\) and 20\(^{th}\) centuries. This stemmed in large measure from the literacy and orality (as opposed to illiteracy/ignorance) divide between the Europeans, who made up the bulk of the

\(^5\) In this paper I would further limit myself to the African missionary scene and indeed to Nigeria and Catholic missionary enterprise with which I am much more familiar. However, evidence from the experience of other “missionary sites” seems to indicate that there were dense similarities between them and the African scene, in spite of a number of significant differences. The similarities make it possible to apply some of our findings to other contexts, of course with due caution that respect, the nuances of experiential and contextual differentials.
missionaries, and the people in the mission lands. It was more an opposition between the oral and the scribal tradition.

The Orality/Literacy Divide:

From a cultural perspective, most of the mission lands had poorly developed written languages and were in the main immersed in orality. Recent researches have indicated that various forms of writing were already in use in various parts of Africa prior to the arrival of the Europeans. What needs to be underlined, however, is that most of these written languages, at different stages in their evolution, were often not widespread in their usage, were certainly poorly developed in their syllabic capacities and their power of outreach and multiplication and their essentially cultic usage locked-in their spread and development. An example is the use of Nsibidi and Aniocha systems of writing among the Igbo of Nigeria. This long immersion in orality meant that their history, their theology, their philosophy, their values, their technological knowledge, a good part of their artistic heritage et cetera were stored in numerous oral stores, such as in their languages, in their names, in their proverbs, in their songs, in their ballads, and in their folklore. This rich heritage of knowledge was transmitted orally from one generation to another. Sometimes the collective memory was entrusted to village bards to conserve and transmit.

6 With very few exceptions such as Japan, China and parts of India, the rest of the mission lands were considerably behind Europe in the “advances in literacy,” by which we refer to the ratio of the spread of the active use of written scripts in communication in the society.


To have an entry into this vast and amazingly rich store of knowledge, accumulated over centuries among the peoples, one needed to have mastery or at least a good grasp of the language of the people, for language constitutes the prime canal and indeed womb of local wisdom. Besides the verbal language, good socialisation in the culture is imperative to penetrate the numerous nuances in detail and depth to this store of knowledge given off through body language and gestures and silences as well as those etched on artefacts, on the visible arts, on the ceremonies, on the rhythms of nature as perceived and interpreted by the people, as well as knowledge folded into the modes of social interaction and behaviour, and located in and transmitted through the agency of the numerous traditional schools and institutions such as age grades, marriage ceremonies, title-taking, rites of initiation and rites of passage.

The lack of well-developed systems of writing meant that this vast knowledge available in these "mission lands" depended heavily on orality for their storage and transmission. In a way therefore the local knowledge could be said to be "locked in orality," fixated, even if dynamically, within their cultural ambience and was therefore difficult to share with outsiders who lacked the linguistic and cultural codes needed to penetrate the local logic. On account of the limitations embedded in the nature of the oral storage and transmission technique, these territories seem, in general, to have had a cultural handicap to dialogue with people outside their borders. This scribal limitation can be metaphorically referred to as a circumstantial "dumbness" of the local intellectual heritage, which prevented it from effectively making its own wisdom heard across the generations.

Secondly, at the time of the advent of the foreign, mainly European missionaries to the mission lands from the late 18th

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9 For a closer examination of these limitations see for example, D. C. Rubin, Memory in Oral Traditions. The Cognitive Psychology of Epic, Ballads, and Counting-out Rhymes, New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1995, esp. pp. 122-145. In spite of Rubin’s interesting research detailing the in-built internal and external structure and texture of oral traditions, which enable remembering, the superiority of the stability of writing and the relative ease of its transmission over oral forms is hardly in dispute.
century onwards, most of the indigenous peoples they met were not yet able to cope with the literary demands and infrastructure of interacting with a literate group, such as was represented by the foreign missionaries who came to their shores and who were immersed for far longer into the writing tradition and who were used to employing the writing documentation technique to store and transmit their knowledge, their ideas, their history, their theology, their philosophy, their arts and their technological insights. Coming from cultures which seem to have made the most use of the development, introduction and spread of writing, European missionaries were used to referring to written texts and to citing written authorities rather than to having recourse to the knowledge ‘carried around physically’ by elders to anchor their reflections. The fact that both Christianity and Islam belong to “religions of the book,” both depending considerably on written sacred texts (the Bible and the Koran) further made reading and writing have such a hallowed place in these traditions when compared to “oral religions.” Writing gave their knowledge heritage a visibility, stability and reproducibility that are rather unfortunately veiled in the case of the knowledge accumulated among oral peoples. Writing tremendously “expanded” the storage capacity of their cultural memory. This increased storage or bank of knowledge, accumulated over the centuries as a sort of knowledge capital and which was fairly easy to access by those initiated into the art of reading and writing, seems to have exercised and fired their thinking, acting therefore as a reproductive trigger, a launching pad for the development, complexification and sophistication of thought and for more complex reflection. Writing gave the generations immersed in it, a certain degree of certainty about what was known and by so doing mapped out new territories of knowledge yet to be traversed and to conquer. Writing measured available knowledge as well as served as a self-critical and self-correcting stable.

Writing as a cultural tool gave the groups and generations who appropriated its use an extended ability to dialogue even from across “the other world”, the world of the dead ancestors, for, on account of the dynamic aliveness of what is written, the dead were not silenced, they still spoke! And they did so in an
amazingly exact way that could not be matched in the oral style of documentation. In this way the relay race of handing over the baton of accumulated knowledge from one generation to the other was in the case of cultures immersed in the writing tradition speeded up much more than was the case with their counterparts in other cultures who were dependent on oral sources and canals. The inability of the oral populations to penetrate the logic of the written texts, further affected their ability to dialogue with the outsiders and deeply affected the efficiency of the voicing of their own wisdom and intuitions in the encounter between the two groups.

Furthermore the socio-political context of the encounter between the European missionaries and the people in the mission lands was rather complex and considerably lopsided. The psychological atmosphere of the missionary encounter was loaded rather heavily in favour of the foreign missionaries. The social and political baggage of the European missionaries was in many ways intimidating. From the late 18th century, the slave trade was just “ending”, European traders were much more visible on the shores and hinterlands of Africa and other parts of what eventually came to be the missionary outposts, and the force-propelled campaigns by various European powers to colonise parts of the world were gaining momentum side by side with the missionary enterprise. The resistance of the local peoples to the colonial affront was in many places short-lived due to the superior force of the colonial forces among other factors. Missionary enterprise was therefore occurring in the African continent at a time when the continent was at low ebb, socially and politically. From “the same quarters” they had two or even three groups of people following on each other's heels, the traders, the colonialists and the missionaries. The three groups had seemingly different motivations for coming to “the mission” or “the colony,” both territories often collapsing into the same geo-social space. The traders and the colonialists did not hide their ambition to exploit the lands as much as possible economically and indeed were interested in taking over full control of the political administration of the territories they came to. The missionaries professed their desire “to save the souls of
the people” and “to bring them into civilisation.” The interest of the missionaries in the “bodily well-being” of the people in the mission lands was geared towards ultimately “gaining their souls.” The theology of the time maintained a strong duality between the body and the soul and prized the soul over the body.

There is a paradoxical convergence, however, of the attitudes of these different foreign groups, the traders, the colonialists and the missionaries, towards the local population, their hosts, willing or unwilling. For different reasons neither of the groups was really interested in dialogue with the people they found in Africa. They were, in general, convinced that Africans were uncivilised, had no history, no culture, and no religion and were as good as damned.

This shared perception was largely invoked to justify colonialism and to justify the missionary enterprise. For it argued for exploiting the riches found in these foreign lands, it gave the moral backup for forcefully taking away the freedom of determination from the people who were supposed to be their hosts, the owners of the land. The ‘civilising logic’ argued that the colonised people were incapable of doing things right, incapable of organising themselves in a meaningful way and therefore needed to be saved from wasting away. The inflexible conviction of the revealed religion, borne by the missionaries, to the effect that all those outside it were doomed to damnation, since it was “the only way, the final truth and the way to salvation,” justified the missionary enterprise, for without conversion, following the uncompromising logic of the revealed religion at the time, Africans and other such people who were yet to convert to Christianity, were surely going to hell. They needed to be converted so that they could also benefit from heaven.

This psychological pre-disposition of both the missionaries and the colonialists did not prepare them to listen, to see and possibly share or harvest what wisdom the people they met on the grounds had to offer, even if in potency. The missionaries in particular came to teach with underlying assumptions that faithfully echo the banking concept of education, the passive
receptacle model richly sketched by Paulo Freire. In the perception of the missionaries, the religions found on the grounds were evil, satanic and to be uprooted without delay. As a people used to the writing technique, they assumed that since the people were illiterate (that is, could neither read nor write the language of the foreigners) they were also, ipso facto, without education and had to be taught, literally everything, from giving them “a respectable language” to utter their experiences, to teaching them how to eat, what to eat, what to wear and how to dress. In the same vein, the missionaries of course also taught other immaterial but mortally important matters such as who God was and how the people in the missions had to relate to this true God, about whom they were presumed to know nothing. They had no “texts” and therefore had to be given texts especially the most valuable texts of all from the viewpoint of the missionaries, namely, the bible and the catechisms.

In general the context of the first encounters of people in the mission lands with western written texts was traumatic. These included the numerous political and economic treaties that victorious colonial forces extracted from the chiefs they defeated. On the religious plane, the unquestionable authority of sacred texts such as the bible and the catechism to which the missionaries referred to in order to spiritually anchor or to give moral support and authority to literally whatever they embarked upon in the mission is another classic example of the nature and authority of the pioneer texts encountered by the colonized/missionized. These kinds of texts did not encourage dialogue. They bore final/truth statements, to be obeyed rather than to be argued with. In their capacities as the leaders of the mission churches as well as the visible representatives of both Rome and the older churches, the missionaries themselves seemed to hold the final interpretations of the meaning of such texts. The role of the people was simply to obey. Critical reception/appraisal of such “sacred” texts carried with it the idea of rebellion, heresy and even apostasy! The seemingly irrational or illogical dimensions of the sacred texts brought by the

missionaries were classified as “mysterious,” as those aspects belonging to the differential logic of God, in Igbo language, *ihe ndi kariri uche mmadu nghota*, [“Things beyond human comprehension”], and therefore beyond question, since they highlight the severe limitations of the human intellect and underline the superiority of God’s intelligence.

Whether in the colonial context or in the missionary context, the dogmatic or dictatorial approach to being introduced to written texts did not allow for creative interaction with the texts and their contents. Did dialogue not assume the possibility of insight, of something to add, even of reservations on the part of the dialogue partners? In this case the colonized student? The very idea of critical feedback from the students ran counter to the basic assumptions of both the colonial and the missionary enterprise in Africa, namely, the assumption or presumption of absence of civilization, absence of history, absence of culture worthy of the name from which resources or knowledge base, such critical feedback would naturally emanate. There was virtually no doubt whatsoever about who had the knowledge and who did not. The entire equation of the assumptions that undergirded the relationship between the two, the colonial/missionary and the colonized/missionized, did not give room for “upstarts.” Textbooks used in colonial and missionary schools were in most cases not expected to be critically approached/received. They were in general held to contain unassailable truths, authority and expertise. Teachers taught and students just had to listen obediently without critical interruption. Consequently, cramming, committing to memory, rote knowledge, carbon copy repetition became the abilities that marked out the “bright” student. For the “bright” student was the one who echoed as perfectly as possible what the teachers taught, what the textbooks said.

Yet, it was actually in this process of giving texts to the local population that the first sketchy attempt at dialogue was made. This attempt at dialogue lay principally in effort to bridge the language barrier on both sides of the linguistic divide, in the conscious study of the local languages and in the efforts to reduce some of the hitherto densely oral languages to writing so that
they could be used for translations and other evangelistic purposes.

"The turn to the language of the people" which the missionaries made was essentially limited to language as tool for translations of church catechetical related texts and for enhanced liturgical and pastoral communication rather than language as tool for further studying the inner logic of the people's culture and knowledge heritage, including their theology. The colonial anthropologists, however, made use of the language of the colonial people in the latter sense of trying to understand their way of life. This use was, however, unavoidably channelled towards fortifying the colonial project since most of the colonial anthropologists were recruited by the colonial establishments with a clear task to develop intelligence reports, to make the social and political structures of the colonized people more understandable in such a way that the colonial establishment could develop more effective strategies for administration of the territories under the areas of their spheres of influence. The interpretation of the data the colonial anthropologists found was therefore sifted through this grid and was also oriented towards achieving the primary aim of scripting and rubbing in the superiority/inferiority divide between the colonizer and the colonized. As is well known, this sharp superiority/inferiority divide constituted the basic foundation, on which the colonial project stood and thrived.

The role of the select group of local interpreters, itself ambivalent in many respects,\(^{11}\) was at the service of this need for a bridge to overcome the linguistic barrier, which threatened to impede the project of the missionaries. Using the interpreters it must be said that many pioneer missionaries tried dialogue with the elders, the custodians of the culture and theology of the people they came to evangelise.

But this experiment was short-lived, partly because it was discomforting and yielded very little fruit towards the primary

reason for the presence of the missionaries, namely, conversion and “winning souls over.” Most indigenous adults were not convinced by some of the reasons offered to them by the missionaries to part ways with their traditional beliefs and their Gods. But the missionaries could not be beaten and the lure of the extra-doctrinal baggage, which they had, such as schools and their dream promises, the hospitals and social outreaches, seemed irresistible. It can be said that these extra-doctrinal and social baggage of the missionaries more than the doctrinal message of the missionaries as such, constituted the clinching factor in “conversion” rather than the force of the doctrines the missionaries propagated, some of which were declared meaningless and nonsensical by most indigenous elders with whom they tried to dialogue.  

The attraction of the schools, especially, was difficult to resist. In many places the lure of the school was great. It held a potentiality, which the locals were quick to identify and warm up to. In spite of the ambiguous nature of this potentiality, it seemed to answer their deep questions about their future role in their own colonized societies. It held the keys to preparing their children in a better way to meet the challenges, which lay clearly before the various communities, subjugated by the colonial enterprise. In Achebe’s *Arrow of God* Ezeulu’s rationalization of sending his son Oduche, to the white man’s religion in spite of its apparent contradictions, Ezeulu being the chief priest of the deity *Ulu*, points to this anxiety to weather a crossroad. Oduche was essentially sent as an apprentice, to go, learn the new ways and come back to his father Ezeulu. Achebe wrote:

At first Oduche did not want to go to church. But Ezeulu called him to his *obi* and spoke to him as a man would speak to his best friend and the boy went forth with pride in his heart. He had never heard his father speak to anyone as an equal. ‘The World is changing,’ he told him. ‘I do not like it.

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12 See for example Chinua Achebe’ s recreation of one such dialogue on doctrinal questions in his sociological novel *Things Fall Apart* (London, Heinemann, 1958), pp. 126-128.
But I am like the bird Eneke-nti-oba. When his friends asked him why he was always on the wing he replied: “Men of today have learnt to shoot without missing and so I have learnt to fly without perching.” I want one of my sons to join these people and be my eye there. If there is nothing in it you will come back. But if there is something there you will bring home my share. The world is like a Mask dancing. If you want to see it well you do not stand in one place. My spirit tells me that those who do not befriend the white man today will be saying had we known tomorrow.’ Oduche’s mother, Ugoye, was not happy that her son should be chosen for sacrifice to the white man. She tried to reason with her husband, but he was impatient with her. ‘How does it concern you what I do with my sons? You say you do not want Oduche to follow strange ways. Do you not know that in a great man’s household there must be people who follow all kinds of strange ways? There must be good people and bad people, honest workers and thieves, peace-makers and destroyers; that is the mark of a great obi. In such a place, whatever music you beat on your drum there is somebody who can dance to it.’

It was however, paradoxically, through the schools that dialogue with the elders, the adult population in the mission territories was again postponed almost indefinitely and monologue was rather firmly introduced by the missionaries, aligning themselves to a segment of the local population, namely children, who were impressionable and easy to form according to the mind and aspirations of the missionaries. It is no secret that some missionaries, especially through the agency of the schools, aimed at creating “small, carbon copy Europeans”14, little incarnations as it were of the missionaries’ idea of civilised men and women. It was in the schools that the people were re-named,

14 Frantz Fanon has characterized products of this kind of formation vividly in his work Black Skin, White Masks, transl. C. Markmann (London: Paladin, 1972).
almost re-created and re-invented. It was in the schools that the people were given new tongues, new tastes, new dreams, new aspirations, new ideologies outside their own and recruited into the project of the missionaries as ambassadors of a new way of thinking, a new civilization. In the schools they were socialized away from their culture and set often in opposition to it.\textsuperscript{15}

As these products of the missionaries (some would even say, \textit{clones} of the missionaries) graduated, they spearheaded the project of echoing missionary theology as faithfully as they could. Some of them, who became members of the clergy and religious, went about this echoing with great zeal, characteristic of enthusiastic converts, keeping alive the powerful aura of their mentors. In very broad outlines, this is the genesis and rise of echo theology in the mission lands. There was an assumption that the people had no theology worthy of the name, had no knowledge heritage that was worth presenting in the classrooms of the mission schools and in any case had no language that could carry the weight of a new and vastly superior civilisation.

It is not easy to exaggerate the psychological inferiority which this structure and the dominant atmosphere of this relation had on the recipients, caught between their need to upgrade themselves and the crippling disadvantages they had, to enter into critical dialogue, and possibly, more meaningfully sift through, negotiate and bargain for what, in the loaded baggage of the foreigners, would be beneficial for them and their context.

The colonial context was tilted generously in favour of the European missionaries, who leaned heavily on the protective colonial apparatus to support their project. The relations between the missionaries and the colonial establishments differed from place to place, according to who was the particular colonial power, which religion or Christian denomination they backed or favoured, and home socio-political situation of the particular missionaries. It was also affected by the degree of alignment

\textsuperscript{15} See for example, C. C. Agu, \textit{Secularization in Igboland} (Frankfurt, 1989), pp. 257ff.
between particular missionary groups and the colonial powers operating in “their spheres of influence.” The web of relations between the two groups was extremely complex in its dynamics and details. However the picture that has emerged consistently in recent times is that the colonial context generally favoured the 19th and 20th centuries' missionary enterprise, in many overt and subtle ways.

As long as the status quo remained intact, as long as monopoly reigned in the Godtalk “between” the missionaries and people in the mission lands, as long as the sacred texts and values of the foreigners went unchallenged, especially in its interpretation, echo theology thrived. But this scenario would not remain so forever. The period of theological apprenticeship also invariably had to run out. The end of this period was brought about by many factors within and outside the missionary establishment.

4. Factors contributing to the Decline of Echo Theology

The critical shift away from echoing missionary theology in the mission lands occurred with the shift from being mere consumers of theological knowledge to becoming producers of theological knowledge. But this did not happen automatically. It occurred in overlapping stages, namely, the linguistic, the cultural and the economic frontiers.

4.1 The Linguistic Frontier

The first threshold that was crossed was the linguistic threshold. In spite of its ambivalence, one of the most important contributions of the missionary and colonial schools was their systematic equipment of generations of pupils/children in the mission lands with the language of either the colonialists or that of the missionaries, (more often than not, both were the same) and enabled them to trespass the frontiers dividing orality and literacy.
The schools produced "the bridge people." These new generations of schoolmen and women in the missions had a double advantage, even if this was lopsided in the earlier stages/periods. By "earlier stages" here we telescope the decades of production of pioneer English speaking /French speaking/ Spanish speaking et cetera Africans, who gained fluency progressively in the foreign tongue and almost as progressively, seemed to lose their own native languages. There is the lingering paradox that often the more immersed one was in the western style education, the more they were distanced from their own vernacular and indeed culture.

In the first instance, they had a relatively good entry into the store of knowledge of the foreigners, had access to their texts in view of their newly acquired linguistic prowess. They could enter into dialogue, unlike their forebears, without the need for interpreters and such linguistic mediators and filters of meaning. With the advent of this bridge people from the schools, the age of the few and privileged linguistic middlemen (interpreters) was effectively on the decline if not over.

4.2 The Cultural Frontier

The second important break was on the cultural frontier. This was a more difficult and a more elastic, ongoing process. Part of the reason lay in the huge price that had to be paid to acquire western style education. The pioneer recipients had to undergo, willy-nilly, a cultural transformation, a weaning in western social values, tastes, mentality, ideas of right and wrong et cetera. This was etched firmly on the texts used in the schools as well as on the socialisation infrastructure and environment created and sustained in the western style schools. Most of the pupils who had to study history, geography, science, technology, through western prisms came out full of adulation for their western

The school, in many cases, eroded the respect that the children in the missions traditionally had for their elders. The mission schools not only made the children look down on their "pagan" elders because it effectively told them the elders were illiterate, old fashioned, given to fetish and superstitions, it made the children the \textit{elders} in the new society it was simultaneously forging. The school turned the tables and gave the children the mantle of authority in the community. The school gave them certificates, which proclaimed that these children were "wiser" than their own elders who did not go to school. Acquiring the ability to read and write, becoming "white", "European" had many economic and social rewards attached to it. Under the new establishment and ethos generated in the mission lands by the combined forces of the colonial and missionary enterprise, the certificates had unprecedented economic potency and turned the class that hitherto were children into veritable breadwinners of families. In the same vein, "illiterate" elders became progressively redundant, circumvented by the colonial and missionary authorities, they also gradually lost their honoured places in their societies to their more and more estranged children.

The school enabled the creation of new social classes and divisions in the communities in the mission lands, along the lines of superiority and inferiority, based essentially on levels of possession of literacy. The school also provided a breeding ground for the acculturation of the students along western modes. This acculturation significantly marked a difference in tastes, in mannerisms and values, sometimes at variance with the provisions in the local cultures and traditions. These incentives,
re-enforcement, rewards, empowerment and prestige factors not only prolonged but also made it generally difficult to cross the next critical threshold, the cultural threshold. But the battle on the cultural front has been lucky even if long drawn out. The first “lucky break” occurred during the movements for political independence.

4.3 The Impact of the Decolonisation Dynamics: Agency of the Independence-seeking Nationalist Movements in Africa

The nationalists, most of whom had been educated in mission schools and some of whom had even had the luck and rare privilege to study overseas in the very land of the white people, came back full of mixed experiences. They were frontiers men and women in the revival of their own local culture. The mixed experiences they had in various forms along the path of their academic and social formation had prepared them to see things differently and to begin critical self-revision of the knowledge they had received in the classrooms, especially concerning their home cultures and values.

As part of their campaign for local support in their fight for independence, they preached cultural revival. They pointed to the need to critically sift through the social, cultural and epistemological baggage of both the missionaries and the colonialists and to consciously “boycott all boycottables.” They gave symbolic but very powerful examples of what they expected the people to do, by dropping the foreign names they had acquired and taking on their own indigenous names. Taking back their indigenous names was a deeply symbolic act. It meant reclaiming one’s identity, it pointed to the quest for authenticity, the realization of the need to name oneself, to shed foreign labels and the foreign projects, which are incarnated in the act of naming. Independence, self-determination, self-naming were all tied-in with this gesture as was recovery of neglected customs, traditions, values and knowledge tracts and canals.

Another symbolic cultural example given by the independence-seeking nationalists was taking linguistic and other
cultural artefacts and products seriously in the public domain, such as speaking to the people in their mother tongues and wearing traditional dresses. By this exercise they placed an important value on these and invited the people they were leading to do the same. This revalorisation of their core cultural symbols was another language, another way of symbolically subverting the foreign colonial and missionary symbols. Some of these nationalists even had the temerity to pick holes in the quality of the school systems brought by the missionaries. The fact that the nationalists were able to criticize the mission schools at a time when the school mystique and indeed magic, still held their people spellbound and beclouded serious mass critical evaluation on the part of the local population is remarkable. It showed courage and deep penetration of the wider implications of Western style knowledge quite early in their own induction into Western style education.¹⁷ A segment of the nationalists went a step further to consciously proclaim a new religion, a national religion as a protest to what they saw as indoctrination of their people by the Christian missionaries.¹⁸

A good number of these nationalists were popular and their message was warmly received by their people, often to the worry and discomfort of both the missionaries and the colonialists. The great majority of the nationalists were themselves products of mission schools. On account of this fact, some missionaries saw these nationalists as ungrateful and as biting the fingers that fed them. Their independence campaign slogans and rhetoric were so sharply critical of both the colonial and missionary establishment that they were often accused of being atheistic and inclined


towards “the evil of communism,” on account of the socialist bent of their message. The era of active decolonisation coincided considerably with both the end of the Second World War and the commencement of the cold war, with the West pitted against what used to be known as the Soviet Union. The scare of communism was so widespread in the West that any inclination towards socialism was interpreted as leaning towards their great enemy, the Soviet Union. The persecution which the Christian church suffered in the Soviet Union at this time made the Soviet Union appear like the messengers of Satan in the eyes of many well-meaning church men and women in the West. Embracing socialism at that time was seen in the West as treachery and betrayal and by the church as a “sin.” The socialist leaning of most of the nationalists as they campaigned for independence seemed to raise the fears of the time and to attract bad press in both the colonial and missionary circles for the radical nationalists. Most colonial administrators saw them as raucous upstarts.

While the missionaries could only lick their wounds, the colonial authorities, who had enormous dictatorial powers at their disposal, expressed their dissatisfaction more forcefully. For example, the imprisonment of outstanding and outspoken nationalists was common as was the banning of newspapers, the main organ through which nationalists disseminated their ideas. With particular reference to Nigerian nationalists, Olusanya has written:

The Newspapers, particularly the West African Pilot, played a significant role during this period in whipping up political consciousness. They carried out a sustained campaign against the very moral basis of the colonial administration in virulent language. They focused attention on the various ills attendant upon a colonial situation, highlighting news of racial discrimination in the U.S., Britain, and in South Africa, and were thus able to build up an image of an oppressive, heartless and uncaring administration and of arrogant race-conscious white men. In contrast they painted a rosy picture of freedom. The hostility of the newspapers to the colonial
administration was so noticeable that an English journalist after a visit to Nigeria in 1945 wrote of 'a revolutionary native press which quite seriously threatens the stability of the empire.\textsuperscript{19}

Sometimes the colonial administrators were more diplomatic in their tactics of repression such as attempting to woo and convert some of the nationalists who proved willing or prone to corruption, by offering attractive baits, including powerful/lucrative positions in the establishment. These "break-ins" weakened the nationalists, now and again, but in general their resolve eventually won the day with the winning of independence in many of the former colonial territories. It is instructive to realise that the end of the colonial enterprise also signalled and greatly foreshadowed the end of the missionary enterprise in many places.

The success of the nationalists in their struggle for independence greatly enhanced the indigenisation of the leadership of the mainline Christian religious blocks such as the Catholics and the Protestants. The Protestant denominations were far in advance of the Catholics in the indigenisation process. Vatican II Council (1962-1965) aided the turn of events in the Catholic Church. This same council had ripple effects on the other Christian churches because of its ecumenical agenda. The African Independent Churches (also referred to as African Initiated Churches AICs) had already branched out on their own along side the nationalist struggle. But the achievement of political independence in the territories formerly known as mission lands, greatly enhanced the growth of the African Independent Churches and widely increased the scope and range of their activities.

What is important for us here is that with independence the local population took charge of the governmental apparatus. They were in a position, at least theoretically, to dictate the texts to be used in their schools, to revise the curriculum, to re-organise the way their countries were to be run, to begin the process of re-empowering their people, giving them back their self-worth and their self-confidence. The cultural revival project, kick-started by the nationalists, could now get fully under way. The cultural revival had a densely religious dimension too. It involved also the recouping of cherished but neglected values. It meant the rediscovery of traditional thought canals and the trajectories of ancient wisdom.

In many ways, the logic of independence meant that the destiny of the people lay in their own hands. It went beyond mere political independence. It was the recovery of indigenous viewing outposts and of standpoints, the recovery of their land seen as home, anchor, the source of identity and as maternal space, and the place of origins and roots. Independence logic gave greater voice to the customs and values greatly muffled under the colonial yoke.

Taking control of education was, therefore, an important step in this second phase of crossing the cultural threshold. As we have indicated, this has rather been the most difficult and the longest drawn out phase also because of the structures inherited from the colonial legacy, including the legal, the constitutional, the economic structures as well as the linguistic superimposition’s brought about by the colonial affront. These colonial structures could not be re-structured over night and their lingering effects continue to be felt years after the official dismantling of colonialism in situ. But at least there was a new topos on which the local politicians could begin their enormously challenging work of reconstruction of their society if they so desired.
4.4 The Impact of Vatican II (1962 –1965): Opening the Windows from within the House

An important ecclesial factor, especially in the Catholic Church, was the event of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and the theological results of the epoch making event. Cultural and theological pluralism was vastly encouraged as was the ecumenical movements. This official backing from “the mother of all Christian churches” was a catalyst for extra efforts in “looking inwards” for theological sources, impulses and contexts. From within the Catholic Church, Vatican II can therefore be regarded as the radical turn of events and the official impulse towards the demise of echo theology. Through its support, indigenous clergy and religious have begun to burrow more deeply and more confidently into their cultural and religious heritage to offer something new to the church family, other than what came from the missionaries. The church not only gave from its riches but also began consciously to cultivate and receive from the riches it found in other cultures and traditions.

Indeed a huge part of the ongoing process could be seen as critical revision of received missionary theology. This ongoing revision has marked the beginning of the end of echo theology. Local theologians are writing, using their unique local sources, speaking from their own unique experiences, engaging in interpretations that are not common even in areas that prior to this revision activity seemed closed such as interpretation of sacred scripture. There is, for example, an entirely new school of thought developing rapidly among scripture scholars especially of the two-thirds world engaged in cultural exegesis, cultivating new and unique ways of encountering the scripture and interpreting its message through the lenses of different socio-cultural experiences. Ongoing critical deconstruction of received theology, as “planted” by the missionaries, is a major feature of the dying throes of echo theology.
4.5 The Role of Globalisation

It is, however, to the accentuated phenomenon of globalisation in our times that we owe the amplification of this exercise, namely, the development of deeper critical theological analysis, the formation of varied theological communities across frontiers and the rapid sharing of experiences and theological insights. It is thanks to globalisation and the great access it has given to us that we can now more than ever before interact both physically and virtually (via the elastic and incredibly flexible resources of multi-media, the internet et al), to visit one another, to visit our holy shrines and sacred places, to see people behind the texts we read, to meet with members of the hierarchies of our church, who prior to the communication capacities made available by globalisation were off-limits and shrouded in myths and mysteries. Globalisation has enabled the speedy erosion of myths of places, myths surrounding personalities, myths enfolding certain civilisations and cultures and put a revealing crack on the veil that once firmly hid the mysterious caves of human motivations. In this age of heightened communications and overflowing naiveté seems permanently jeopardised. Globalisation has deeply undermined monologue, including theological monologue.

4.6 A Lingering Barrier: Crossing the Economic Threshold

As we indicated, the mission lands were formerly handicapped to really voice out their own unique thoughts by numerous barriers, including the barriers of literacy as well as linguistic, cultural and socio-political barriers. Of course, one cannot forget the ubiquitous economic barrier. In a profound way, from point of view of the two-thirds world, the economic barrier seems to be the next critical threshold to be crossed, the last frontier, which promises to offer the greatest resistance, since economy is the strongest base of the human power game. The logic of a lopsided economic scale, through which a group is enabled to set up its
theological infrastructure and disseminate its theological ideas, tilted and still leans heavily in favour of the West.

But here and there, some of these barriers have now been effectively crossed and the process of overcoming others is ongoing. The awakening of a critical self-consciousness is always a good sign of impending change. What used to be “mission churches” are now increasingly finding their voice and speaking with unusual courage, clarity and penetrating depth of wisdom, making extensive use of their own cultural resources and the insights from their own religious heritage. Beyond merely receiving from the theological markets, they are beginning to actively give out of their own rich heritage to the global theological community. Beyond echoing and amplifying the theological thoughts of others, they are beginning to speak from their own theological traditions. Their theological speech deserves to be listened to for it is the requiem song for echo theology.

5. New Frontiers: New Challenges

The requiem song for echo theology is therefore also a song of birth for an indigenous theology. I hope I have not given the impression that the theological voice from Africa has been achieved! There is an enormous work yet to be done to come to that dream position. The next paragraphs are devoted to sketching the road map of the emergence of this indigenous theology arising from the ashes of echo theology.

5.1 Impediments of Yesteryears

One of the great achievements of the pioneer African theologians has been clearing the way for the emergence of indigenous approaches to doing theology or rather a critical recovery of the indigenous theological genius of their people. They have achieved this primarily by embarking on a long sustained apologetics on behalf of their own indigenous theological heritage. This apologetic approach cannot be faulted
simplistically if one takes into account the long and sustained denigration of this rich indigenous cultural and theological resource. Their prime achievement therefore has been to give back dignity, relevance, voice and self-confidence to their indigenous theological heritage. This is a major achievement that deserves full acknowledgement by all those coming after them who are so to say the beneficiaries of their long battle for recognition and for theological self-assertion.

However the downside of this endeavour was that it turned attention firmly on a European/Western audience rather than to the people. The languages employed in these exercises were overwhelmingly European languages, whether this was French or English, Portuguese or Spanish, Italian or German Languages. Their own vernacular languages/mother tongues rarely featured in a significant way in these efforts. Since language chooses its own audience it will be seen that invariably an external audience constituted the primary public of these pioneer indigenous professional theologians in Africa. To the question: “for whom were they writing?” The bulk of the answer has to be “for a densely western audience.”

Secondly, the texts, sources and concepts, both philosophical and theological, explored were mainly European.\(^{20}\) Yes, here and there, one saw reference to indigenous capsules of knowledge such as reference to proverbs or names, but these did not occupy “centre stage,” but were used as peripheral footnotes to the “main concepts,” namely, the philosophical and theological concepts developed by European thinkers. In this way African indigenous theologians were playing “away matches,” playing in other people’s conceptual fields, playing with the philosophical and theological assumptions and rules of the game generated by others. Their philosophical and theological outputs were therefore

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\(^{20}\) In dealing with local sources of theology, the local sources of philosophy is a critical component, for, good philosophical grounding is a prime requirement for good theological analysis, in much the same way as good grounding in the laws of logic is critical for legal practice. The philosophy that forms the background from which theology is carried out is therefore deeply implicated in any serious critical evaluation of the trajectories and patterns of development of that theology.
It is a tribute to their genius that they were in many ways successful in this difficult task of meandering through a myriad of obstacles and pre-conceptions.

Again their basic departure is understandable since their principal aim was to explain themselves to their detractors, to say to their critics, “I am!” “I do have something worthwhile to offer,” “We also have rich theological heritage.” Is it going too far to say that they were also trying to deal with their own dose of inferiority complex? That they were also trying to be accepted in “the club”? That they were also trying to ‘register their presence’ and their identity? The socio-political context of the times in which they worked made it difficult to approach the matter otherwise. For example, they lacked the necessary institutional infrastructure to anchor their theological base. They had to pass through Western theological professors. They had to pass the examinations set by these foreign professors, some of who had little knowledge of the contextual realities or indigenous theological heritage of Africa. Nor were some of the European Professors sympathetic with this kind of attempt to explore African philosophical and theological heritage, seen mostly as “exotic,” “untested,” “undocumented” and “imagined.” Succeeding in such circumstances meant unavoidable compromises, in the choice of subject matter for research, in the use of indigenous sources for the research, in the choice of language for articulating the research and in the allotment of space and emphasis for elaborating the local context of African students of philosophy and theology. It is small wonder that a cursory examination of the dissertations submitted by these pioneer African theologians indicate a tradition of dealing with the local context in the last few pages of the conclusion of their texts!

The post-doctoral defence productivity did not exactly fare better since local theological journals were few and far between. To publish in Western theological journals presented its own hurdles and compromises, since one had to deal with themes that were in vogue in Western Theological circles, one had to use methods and sources that the editors of the journals and their
readers were considerably familiar with. So-called African themes were often treated in an exotic manner by a group of Western scholars often referred to as “Africanists,” namely people who are “experts” on “African Affairs” (on African Theology, for example), a group who invariably understand the needs and expectations of their Western audiences as far as “African affairs” are concerned. These impediments adversely affected the forward and qualitative advance of African pioneer indigenous Theologians.

5.2 Appropriating the Riches of the Indigenous Theological Heritage: An institutional Approach

A close examination of progressive trends in African theology indicates that they lean heavily on a rich indigenous theological heritage. It is no secret that what we have seen so far is merely the tip of the iceberg of this promising heritage. We have pointed some impediments that lay in the way of pioneer African theologians, in the new dispensation, which prevented them from digging deeper into this store and harvesting its rich nodes of theological knowledge.

Now that this pioneer era is over, there is need to take concrete institutional steps to overcome these earlier shortcomings and give fuller attention to scientific exploration of the rich indigenous theological heritage. The importance of an institutional approach is necessary to move the awareness and development of the indigenous theological resources from being the present preserve of a few progressive individual African theologians literally swimming against the current, to enabling the formation of a critical mass who would build on their enduring leads as well as open up and chart new ones. Rather than the breaking out of a few, the institutional approach would hopefully lead to the emergence of much needed critical mass.

Another importance of the institutional approach is that it would enable the recovering of lost initiative during “the period of theological apprenticeship.” It will create the fora for setting the theological agenda locally rather than merely following the
theological trends dictated by circumstances in other contexts. This would hopefully deepen relevance of chosen theological themes for research.

This institutional approach is on several levels. There is for example the issue of the language of teaching theology. It is now the rule rather than the exception that theological institutions in Africa are staffed, in large measure, by indigenous theologians. Is there any more excuse about using indigenous languages for teaching and learning theology? Is there any more excuse for using or at least experimenting with writing theological essays, scientific theses, dissertations, and articles using the indigenous languages? Is there any more excuse for not having theological journals that accept and indeed focus on encouraging the use of indigenous languages to write theology?

The use of the vernacular, the mother tongues in seriously writing theology will mean two important things. One, it will mean finally turning to the home audience, writing theology primarily for one’s context. Secondly, it will mean unavoidably encountering and critically engaging the indigenous theological concepts. The first advantage, namely, turning to the home audience, will create a new critical input into theological discourse by the home audience presently cut off from actively participating because of the alienating jargons of the foreign theological concepts currently employed even by indigenous scholars. The second advantage, namely, the critical engagement of indigenous theological concepts and texts, will unavoidably lead to the expansion of the literary base of our presently densely oral theological heritage. It will lead to critical preservation of the genius of a long line of unnamed theologians, whose rich capsules of thought populate our oral theological heritage.

The challenge of turning to the local audience by using the vernacular in teaching, in learning and in writing theology has the capacity to make more people, especially the so-called lay people, get interested in theology and indeed contribute to theological discussions. It will also help local theologians to cure themselves of a certain artificiality in the language they use in conveying theological Truths, or better, theological insights.
Implicated in this linguistic turn to the local audience is the increased effort to translate prime texts into the vernacular, especially those texts that issue from the magisterium. This kind of exercise will greatly improve the quality of reception of such texts and documents or exhortations or encyclicals. For the very act of translation would already subject such texts to the crucible of local idioms and cultural concepts in order to make meaning to the users of the receptor language, namely, the vernacular. Expanding the base of reception would also enhance the critical input and indeed lighten the work of publicising the spirit of the texts to the local audience, for the existence of the texts in their own language, in their own idioms, would greatly help them to appreciate at a deeper level the message or concerns or questions addressed in the texts and how they impinge on their lives.

There is also the challenge of using local sources for theology and philosophy. This is really the way to critical encounter of the philosophical foundations, assumptions and paradigms embedded in the received theology of yesterday. This kind of challenge concretely means opening up and fleshing out the various indigenous capsules of theological knowledge embodied in such knowledge stores as proverbs, songs, music, folklore, names, as well as those etched on religious arts and artefacts. This kind of challenge has the capacity to lead to the generation of new theological texts, texts that possibly will have refreshingly new and rich angles of vision, of perception and of re-encountering God. These theological proverbs could become themes for dissertations, explored exegetically, for example. There is also no reason why these local theological capsules of knowledge cannot be used to creatively encounter received theological concepts.

Conclusion:

Using a historical entry point, this paper has endeavoured to call attention to the demise of echo theology heightened by, among other factors, the phenomenon of globalisation in our times. This phenomenon presents challenges to both indigenous Theologians and their foreign counterparts, albeit along different ways. The
major challenge to indigenous theologians in Africa is one of deeper appropriation of the theological opportunity, possibly along the lines I have sketched in the preceding paragraphs. The aim is to give an institutional backup to this promising development in order to create a critical mass beyond the present progressive but scattered individual efforts of a handful of local theologians.

The challenge to foreign theologians, particularly in the West, is one of creative listening to discern the new theological voices emerging from Africa. In particular, the paper calls on theologians in the homes of the veteran missionaries, who struggled to establish these mission churches, to listen to the message coming from the mission lands and especially from their theologians, for they are indeed writing back! They are beginning to articulate their religious feelings and their responses to the works, attitudes, and theological and ideological departures of the veteran missionaries who laboured in their lands. Through a growing corpus of literature, they are articulating their own theological responses to their unique socio-cultural and political circumstances. They are beginning to cast a critical eye on the theological heritage they have received. They are beginning to listen in a more discerning way to their own traditional religious and theological heritages, heritages which the pioneer converts among them had hurriedly abandoned and scorned as part of the price and test of their conversion. They are trying to make sense of the missionary event to which they were subjected.

Their ideas are churned at the crossroads of contrasting experiences and are therefore full of unusual insights. Their reflections can be a mirror for the mainline churches, mirror of the religious attitudes of the West, past and present. Western scholars engaged in critically reviewing their own religious history ought to pay heed to the reactions and indeed revisions of the same coming from the former mission lands. The theological reflections, from the previous mission churches, can be an important source for taking onboard the critical views arising from contrast experiences as well as for harvesting unusual perspectives of interpretation of the inexhaustible traditions of the Christian church. Paying attention to what they are saying will
add an important missing component to the desired dialogue of civilisations and cultures, dialogue of theologies, and of dialogue between theologians living and working in different contexts and in different socio-cultural and political milieus.

Echo theology is dying. The days of monopoly of the construction and transmission of theological knowledge, from the West to the East and from the North to the South, are numbered. Globalisation has assured and is accelerating its demise. Attention to the unique theological creativity and rich genius coming from the theologians in the previous mission churches may help us to prepare a fitting requiem to echo theology and begin the critical process of engaging and appropriating the multivalency of the multi-culturality of our globalised world.
THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE IMAGE OF GOD IN EXODUS 3:14: GERMAN, ENGLISH AND IGBO BIBLE TRANSLATIONS

By

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Introduction

My interest in examining the images of God in texts was kindled through the lectures of Professor Mary Elsbernd (a visiting professor from Loyola University Chicago, USA) in the autumn semester of 1997/98 academic year in the Theology Faculty of the Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium.

These lectures emphasised that any worldview and theology presupposes a particular image of God. They also argued that the critical examination of any theological or philosophical system ought to involve a careful analysis of its notion of the transcendent. These lectures indicated that though the one word GOD is often used in religious contexts to express the transcendental existence of a supreme being, this word could be used in various contexts, with various hermeneutical implications. For instance, the Judeo-Christian scripture presents us with various notions or images of God. The first pages of Genesis present us with the image of God as a creator.¹ The story

¹ John Paul II’s 1981 social encyclical, Laborem exercens uses the image of God as a creator (worker) to argue that the creation of human beings in the image of God (the worker) implies that work ought to constitute a fundamental aspect of being a person. “Made in the image and likeness of God himself and thereupon put into the visible universe to subdue the earth, from his very beginning man is called to undertake the duty of working.” [JOHN PAUL II, Laborem exercens, no. 1. For the Latin original of this text see: Acta Apostolicae Sedis, 73 (1981) 577-647. The English translations of this document are found in: C. CARLEN (ed.), The Papal Encyclicals 1740-
of the journey of the Israelites through the wilderness, presents a mixed picture of God as vengeful\(^2\) and merciful\(^3\). The ministry of the prophet Hosea presents God as patient and tolerant. Prophet Amos presents social justice as an essential image of God.

Each of these images creates a picture of the divine, which in turn shapes the outlook of those who appropriate them – affecting their views of the cosmos, the self and the other. In terms of religious groups, a particular emphasised image of God influences their teachings and belief systems, their notion of what is right and wrong and how their assemblies ought to be organised.

While different parts of the Judeo-Christian scripture present various images of God, this essay aims to argue that the translations of the one verse of Exodus 3:14 in three different languages – German, English and Igbo – reflect three images of God, which also have three different implications for our ideas about the existence of God, the manner of his relationship with the world and implications for ethics, theology and the human community. While this essay occupies itself with the image of God in Ex 3:14, its discussions will also raise our thoughts to the problems associated with translations in general and translations of translations.

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\(^{1}\) Examples of this include the various punishments meted to the Israelites for their stubbornness and the death of Moses.

\(^{2}\) Example includes the story of the bronze serpent.
The General Background of Exodus 3:14

The biblical verse, which is the object of this essay, forms a part of the book of Exodus, which narrates the deliverance and liberation of the people of Israel from Egyptian captivity. Chapter three of this book introduces us to the beginning of the long encounter between Moses and God, which is in fact, the prologue to the liberation of the Israelites from Egyptian slavery. This first encounter (between Moses and God) was presented in the extraordinary phenomenon of a burning bush (without the leaves being burnt). This scene took place on mount Horeb. It contains the mission of Moses as the divine agent in the liberation of his people and defines the character and name of God. It is within this context that the discussion of Ex 3:14 is located.

This biblical verse has in itself attracted a considerable attention among scholars especially with reference to the translations of the Hebrew words 'ehyeh ašer 'ehyeh into other languages. Some relevant questions, which have trailed these discussions, are: what is the real meaning of 'ehyeh ašer 'ehyeh? To what extent did the Septuagint and other translations retain or distort the Hebrew sense of these words? What are the possibilities of moving from translated texts to appreciating the message and content of original texts?

In the next sections of this essay, we shall confront some of these questions and examine how they play themselves out in the German, English and Igbo Bible translations. The choice of these languages is on the basis of my reasonable acquaintance with them and also on how they reflect the problematic of this discussion.

'Ehyeh ašer 'ehyeh

'Ehyeh ašer 'ehyeh are the Hebrew words of Ex 3:14. The major issue in this discussion is the translations of 'ehyeh and their likely implications. The Septuagint translates 'ehyeh as ‘being’ –
Ego eimi ho on ("I am the one who is"). James Plastaras however argues that the Septuagint’s translation of 'ehyeh in terms of being (I am) is misleading when considered from the perspective of Semitic philosophy. This view springs from the idea that Hebrew language “does not have a copulative verb ‘to be.’ Where we ordinarily use the verb ‘to be’, the Hebrews would have used no verb at all.” He nevertheless insists that whenever the word 'ehyeh was used in Hebrew it usually expresses a dynamic rather than an essential sense of existence. Plastaras argues that the Septuagint and Latin translations changed the meaning of the Hebrew text by translating 'ehyeh in terms of essential being rather than as active presence. He sees this substitution of meaning as a result of the difference between the Hebrew and Greek (Western) categories of thought. For him, “it is difficult to translate Exodus 3:14 into Western languages, because in the process we inevitably impose upon the Hebrew text categories of being and essence which were quite foreign to the Hebrew mind.” This is one of the issues surrounding Ex 3:14 in biblical debates.

The discussions of this essay see the German, English and Igbo Bible translations of this biblical verse as being split between the legacies of the Hebrew text on the one hand and the translations of the Septuagint and the Latin on the other. Beyond the words used in these translations, this essay argues that these words create images, which influence our conceptualisation of God, his relationship with the world and their implications for theology.

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6 Ibid., p. 94.
The German Translation of Exodus 3:14

The *Eiheitsübersetzung* of the German Bible translates Ex 3:14 as: "*ich bin der, ‘ich bin da.’" ‘Ich’ is the English equivalent of ‘I’. ‘Bin’ is the first person of the verb ‘to be’. ‘Der’ (in this case) stands for the definite article ‘the’ (masculine). ‘Da’ means ‘here or there’. The German translation of this biblical verse could be rendered in English as “I am he (or the one) who exists (lives or is) there or here.” The qualification *da* (‘here or there’) makes the existence of God as revealed in this biblical verse to assume a concrete dimension (to exist here or there). Our general knowledge suggests that God is a spirit. Spirits cannot be located or limited to a particular place. Then how do we understand the German presentation of God in Ex 3:14 as the one who exists there or here? My interpretation is that this translation broadens God’s existence from the abstract to the concrete, expands it to consist not only of transcendence but also of immanence. This translation indicates that though God as a spirit cannot be located here or there in a physical state, his existence has a concrete implication for human life. Concreteness entails being felt. In other words, God’s revelation of his name in this biblical passage (according to the German translation) is in terms of being felt. It entails being involved. *Ich bin da* means I am there for you, to listen, to help, to cheer up and to encourage. We encounter a similar image when one tells a friend: “I will be there for you.” This idea of ‘being there’ goes beyond a mere physical presence to embrace a readiness to be involved in working for the good of the other.

This translation presents God’s existence in terms of an affective presence. The German image of God as ‘*der ich bin da*’ corresponds very fittingly to the general theme of the book. The content of Moses’ encounter with the divine in this episode is to let the Israelites realise that God feels their agony, that he is touched by their condition and is committed to working for their

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deliverance and by so doing manifest his existence and power. “Go gather the elders of Israel together and tell them, ‘Yahweh the God of your ancestors, has appeared to me – the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob – and has indeed visited you and seen what is being done to you in Egypt, and has said: I shall bring you out of the misery of Egypt to the country of the Canannites...to a land flowing with milk and honey.” (Ex 3, 16-17). This fits to an earlier statement in the same chapter. “Yahweh then said, ‘I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying for help on account of their taskmasters. Yes, I am well aware of their sufferings. And I have come down to rescue them from the clutches of the Egyptians and bring them up out of that country, to a country rich and broad, to a country flowing with milk and honey.” (Ex 3, 7-8)

Paul Zulehner and Josef Brandner argue that the divine revelation in Exodus 3 is aimed at demonstrating God’s sympathy with the human condition, especially with the weak, the poor and the oppressed. Read from this angle therefore, the German translation of Ex 3:14 tries to present this image of sympathy. It also links itself with other parts of the Bible, which emphasise affectivity and loving relationship as cardinal to the character of God.

The English Translation of Exodus 3:14

The King James Version translates Ex 3:14 as “I am that I am.” The Jerusalem Bible translation renders it as “I am he who is.” The New American Bible translates it as “I am who am.” The New English Bible translates it as “I am; that is who I am.” The Revised English Bible renders it as “I am that I am.” In these versions, ‘ehyeh ašer ehyeh is presented in terms of essential existence. God is ‘he who is.’ His existence in these translations is not presented in relation to concreteness or active presence. He

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just exists. The image here is that of God living in unapproachable light, who remains untouched by the sufferings of his creatures. It reflects also Thomas Aquinas' conceptualisation of God as the sovereign will and being itself (*ens qua ens*).

There is the element of abstract metaphysics involved in the English translations. This tendency arises from the fact that the various English translations draw from the legacies of the Septuagint, which translates *'ehyeh* with the Greek expression *ho on* - the existing one.\(^9\) From this translation, Christian philosophers extracted "an assertion that the divine essence includes its existence, that God is self-subsistent, not existent by the creation of another, that God exists necessarily, not contingently as other beings do."\(^10\) This ideology, which springs from the Septuagint translation, radiates through the English translations thus making them off-shoots of this hellenisation of the Hebrew expression.

Nahum M. Sarna argues that the English translation of *'ehyeh ašer 'ehyeh* in terms of 'essential being' could still be in order since names (including God's name) are "intended to connote character and nature, the totality of the intricate, interwoven, manifold forces that make up the whole personality of the bearer of the name."\(^11\) Sarna further argues that *'ehyeh ašer 'ehyeh* could mean any of the following "I am that I am" or "I am who I am" or I will be what I will be" since "God's pronouncement of His own name indicates that the Divine personality can be known only to the extent that God chooses to reveal His self, and it can be truly characterised only in terms of itself, and not by analogy with something else."\(^12\) There is another interpretation, which reads Ex 3:14 in terms of God's rebuking of Moses, his refusal to


\(^10\) Ibid., pp. 21-22.


\(^12\) Ibid.
answer him at all and a refusal to commit himself. In this sense 'ehyeh ašer 'ehyeh is translated as "I will be whatever I mean to be." This interpretation could be challenged from the general background of the entire Exodus story. For Plastaras, God's answer to Moses' question concerning his name was meant to be mysterious because it was both a revelation of himself and at the same time a refusal to reveal himself fully. This interpretation comes close to that of Gowan in the sense that both conceive Ex 3:14 in part as indicating some level of refusal of God to reveal himself. However, beyond Gowan, Plastaras expands his interpretation to also imply God's promise for a continued revelation of himself in the course of history. This latter opening, brings this interpretation closer to the Exodus story in terms of "wait and see what I will do.'

The Igbo Translation of Exodus 3:14

The Igbo translation of this verse is rendered as "abum onye m bu." Here, we encounter another thrust of meaning in the unfolding translations of Ex 3:14. Though this Igbo expression is influenced by the English text, it creates its own image of God with its accompanying questions. It presents God's existence in terms of immutability – 'abum onye m bu.' I am always the same. I do not change (semper idem). In this translation, the imagination is switched from the contemplation of God in terms of affectivity and active presence (German translation), and essential existence (English translations) to the contemplation of God in terms of imperial power and immutability.

This translation presents the notion of God as a changeless and unchangeable reality. While this notion could still be justified theologically and biblically, the question is, how does this notion

13 D. E. GOWAN, op. cit., p. 83.
14 J. PLASTARAS, op. cit., p. 100.
15 Ibid.
reflect the original Hebrew words of 'ehyeh ašer 'ehyeh? I would think that 'abum onye di ndu ebebe' could be a better representation of the English translation and be in line with the Septuagint. On the other hand, 'abum onye nonyere gi (mgbe ọbụla)' could be nearer to the German translation and reflect more the original Hebrew meaning of the biblical verse. The Hebrew word 'ehyeh comes close to the Igbo expression 'anọm ya,' which refers more to an active presence than to essential being. If it is argued that the Septuagint translated the Hebrew 'active presence' with 'essential being' due to differences in the categories of thought, one would not expect such a problem between the Hebrew and the Igbo given the fact that both languages share features of concreteness. I think that the problem with the Igbo translation of this biblical verse is that it was more of a transliteration of the English expression 'I am who I am' rather than working with the Hebrew original. In this translation process, the Igbo text transforms Ex 3:14 further from essentialism to immutability thus increasing the gap of meaning between the Igbo and Hebrew texts. Sarna tries to rescue this absolutism and immutability from a negative connotation by arguing that it could help to provide inflexible reliability of Moses and the Israelites that God's promise of redemption will be realised. In this sense, immutability becomes a sign of strength and security.

While Saran's position tries to present a positive character of immutability in terms of the re-assurance to deliver, it is nevertheless necessary to point out that the divine name in Ex 3:14 translated as 'abum onye m bu' has the capability of transforming God into a monad. In this sense, the image of God creates a culture more of monologue than dialogue, more of dictations than conversations and prompts a situation where only one person or a group of persons are correct at all times and must never be questioned. This image of God has the danger to influence the expression of ecclesiastical authority in despotic terms. 'Abum onye m bu' as an image of God can also lead to a

16 N. M. SARNA, op. cit., p. 52.
static theology and ecclesiology, where repetition of old formulations is extolled (even when they lose meaning) to the detriment of creating new possibilities of expressing the faith.

The Implications of the Three Translations

One of the things that may strike someone who is acquainted with the German, English and Igbo Bible translations is how the one verse of Ex 3:14 presents three diverse images of God.\(^\text{17}\) In these three languages we see 'ehyeh ašer 'ehyeh translated differently either in terms of dynamic, active existence, or essential existence or immutable existence. The German translation presents God in terms of affective and active presence. It characterises the existence of God in terms of relationality with his creatures. This view of God as existing affectively and concretely could be interpreted as being one of the bases for German political theology and social involvement.\(^\text{18}\) This view shares some of the insights of process thinking of Alfred North

\(^{17}\) This feature is not just restricted to Ex 3:14 but is also associated with the problems of translations in general.

\(^{18}\) The number of Christian aid organisations in Germany outnumber any such organisations in other European countries. Among these organisations, Diakonischeswerk, Brot für die Welt and Johanniter are affiliated to German Lutheran Church while Missio (Aachen and Munich), Misereor, Caritas International, Adveniat, Renovabis, Kirche in Not, Kolpingwerk, Kindermissionswerk and Malteser are affiliated to the German Catholic Church. Anyone familiar with the German Church can recall the Sternsinger Aktion in which children move about on the feast of Epiphany (or any chosen day close to it) to raise money to help the Churches in Africa, Asia and Latin America. These organisations and activities in various ways express that faith in God ought to be made concrete in the life of people especially those who suffer. This is the implication of the German translation of God’s revelation in Exodus 3:14. It carries an implication of concern and loving relationship between the creator and creatures.
Whitehead. He proposes (among other things) the notion of God in terms of tender love operating in the world.¹⁹

This image serves a strong basis for Christian social involvement. John Paul II’s *Redemptor hominis* shares a similar view. In this encyclical, he argues that the revelation of God in terms of relationality has a compelling implication for the Church’s social mission. He is of the opinion that God’s revelation through the incarnation and paschal mystery of Jesus Christ implies that God has united himself with every individual, concrete person.²⁰ Therefore, “what follows from this is that each human life is supernatural, each human life is constituted through a dialogue in which God is redemptively present.”²¹ John Paul further argues that since Christ has united himself to the human person through the Incarnation and Redemption, the Church, which is Christ’s visible presence in the world, ought to be strongly united with each human person.²² From this Christological perspective, all the major conclusions of the encyclical are drawn. Firstly, the Church cannot remain insensitive to the welfare of the human person or indifferent to what threatens it.²³ The social mission of the Church for the well being of the human person is not a subordinate activity, rather an

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²² *Redemptor hominis*, no. 18.

²³ *Redemptor hominis*, no. 13.
indispensable part of her apostolate, 'an exercise of its supernatural mission founded upon its Christological doctrine.'

The English translation presents God in abstract terms, whose existence has little or no implication for humanity. This notion of God is seen more in the tradition of Thomas Aquinas, who conceives God in terms of being in itself (ens qua ens). The theological outlook of the Roman Catholic Church was, for many years, conditioned by this perspective of the divine — who exists eternally in unapproachable light. This notion of the divine corresponds also to the dualism, which creates a chasm between the sacred and the profane, with clear-cut margins. This translation tilts more towards deistic conception of God — "the belief in a single god who does not act to influence events."

This theological outlook made it difficult for the official Roman Church to be involved in the struggle for people's social well being for many years until the beginning of the tradition of social teachings in the late nineteenth century. This aloofness to social

24 There is a shift here, from the natural law arguments — which used to characterise some earlier ecclesiastical writings, - to an argument based on God's supernatural plan. "Because of God's act in Jesus Christ the Church must respect the dignity of persons, defend their rights as human beings, and summon people to involve themselves in political action so that these rights will be respected." (emphasis, mine) [Cf. G. BAUM, Loc. Cit.] In John XXIII, the social mission of the Church underwent changes in its basis, namely from natural law arguments to personalistic arguments and sociological analysis. In John Paul II, it underwent still, a further shift. In the light of the present encyclical, to work for a better human world flows directly from God's act of redemption accomplished in Christ. Verstraeten comments therefore, that "the emphasis shifts clearly from a natural law and/or a sociological understanding to a theological conception, which was also present earlier, but now is placed completely in the center.” [J. VERSTRAETEN, Solidarity and Subsidiarity, in D. A. BOILEAU (ed.), Principles of Catholic Social Teaching, (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1998), 133-147. p. 141.]

25 Ibid.

well being or insensitivity to concrete human realities merited the Church many criticisms in history.\textsuperscript{27}

The Igbo translation – *abum onye m bu* – creates a triumphalistic and imperialistic notion of God, giving God the attributes of Caesar.\textsuperscript{28} The idea of *abum onye m bu* readily calls to mind Julius Caesar’s claim to be as constant as the northern star. It bears the marks of Aristotle’s conception of God as the unmoved mover, who is untouched by the sufferings of his creatures. When theology and the Church take off from the foundation of God as *abum onye m bu* then theology itself becomes un-progressive and ecclesiastical authority expresses itself exclusively as a police force, which guards the ‘deposit of faith’ from additions or subtractions.

Alfons Deissler’s study shows that the German translation of Ex 3:14 is more faithful to the Hebrew Bible. He demonstrates this by an analysis of *'ehyeh ašer 'ehyeh*. He argues that *hayah* (the root of *'ehyeh*) connotes a dynamic rather than a static mode of existence. He contrasts between the German words *sein* and *werden* and maintains that the Hebrew word *hayah* relates more to *werden* than to *sein*. *Worden* means ‘to become’. *Sein* means ‘to be’. (He also accepts that *hajah* could be used to mean *da-sein*

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\item John Paul II’s *Redemptor hominis* was an attempt to reclaim the positions lost due to such criticisms. One notes the striking points in some of his statements. “We are not dealing with the ‘abstract’ man, but with the real, ‘concrete’ historical man. We are dealing with each man, for each one is included in the mystery of the Redemption and with each one Christ has united himself forever through this mystery.” [See *Redemptor hominis*, no. 13]. Scholars like G. H. Williams argue that the insistence of the use of ‘each and concrete’ man is not accidental in the encyclical. He argues that “the pope’s recurrent and insistent emphasis upon ‘each’, ‘concrete’, ‘historical’, man or human being was intended to promulgate in plenitude a Christian doctrine of man as a unique person and to get away from the ‘abstract’ man of Marxist theory and the abstract ‘humanity’ of the French revolution and its sequels in the twentieth century.” [G. H. WILLIAMS, *The Mind of John Paul II. Origins of his Thought and Action*, (New York: The Seabury Press, 1981), p. 267.]
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as opposed to mere *sein*). These two words refer to two different modes of existence. In this case *sein* connotes essential existence (*esse*), while *werden* or *da-sein* stands for dynamic presence. He notes that the use of *sein* (*ipsum esse*) to translate the *hayah* of Ex 3:14 is linked to the Septuagint (which was influenced by Greek philosophical categories). He insists that this translation (describing God in terms of abstract existence) is both foreign to Hebrew thought and leads to the wrong direction in understanding Exodus 3:14.  

This view is re-echoed in the commentary of Martin Buber on the book of Exodus.  

A theology built on the image of God as “*der ich bin da*”, will be a theology with a ‘human face.’ It will be a theology, which listens to people, aims to enter into their experiences and attempts to join in their struggles for liberation. It will be a theology, which makes the joys and sorrows of the people its own. This theology will aim at creating relationality rather than absoluteness. It will be characterised by involvement and commitment. It will aim at what Elochukwu Uzukwu describes as “the listening Church.”  

A theology built on the image of God as “*I am he who is*” will be characterised by aloofness and indifference to concrete realities. It will be speculative and less practical. It will be more deductive, imposing general rules on particular issues. It will be largely, an abstract theology. It will be concerned more with the maintenance of its own system even when they lose relevance. Its point of departure will always be the preservation of its own status quo rather than the living experiences of the people. A theology built on this image of God turns the people more into objects rather than subjects. A theology built on the image of God as “*abum onye m bu*” will be anti progressive. It will be static.

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Any attempt to articulate new forms of expressing the faith will be seen as a deviation. It creates absoluteness rather relationality. Its basic *modus operandi* will consist of intimidations, threats, sanctions and brandishing authority. Its basic aim will be conformism and paying little attention to the living experiences of people. Its argumentional tool will always consist of ‘as it was in the beginning’. Even if the authority figures in this theological setting would still like to define their role in terms of shepherding, their operations usually lack all the qualities of tenderness, love and care, which characterise the image of a shepherd especially as seen in the book of prophet Isaiah 40:11. “...like a shepherd feeding his flock, gathering lambs in his arms, holding them against his breast and leading to their rest the mother ewes.”

Abstract image without connection to the challenges and dynamics of human life has the tendency to turn into itself, get stuck in immutability and end up as a self-defending system. In this case the abstract image of the English translation has a relationship with the Igbo translation of Ex 3:14 in terms of immutability – a relationship, which shows how deep the English Bible influenced the Igbo translation and how Aristotelianism and Thomism are closely related.

Among the translations of the three languages, I do not seem to hide my attraction to the German. In the first instance, it helps to recover the original meaning of *'ehyeh ašer 'ehyeh* for the contemporary reader. Secondly, its implication of affectivity appeals to my ethical orientation and helps to argue for theological approaches and the establishment of structures of ecclesiastical authority, which identify with concrete human situations.

**Three Different Theological Directions**

The translations of Ex 3:14 in German, English and Igbo could act as a key in analysing the theological presuppositions in the areas where these languages are spoken and in fact characterise a
large part of their theological outlook. However, these translations also indicate three different theological currents, which go beyond the boundaries of these languages.

The image of God as 'Ich bin da' represents those theological systems, which aim at relating faith to concrete human experiences and conditions. Such theological systems can be identified in the German political theology, Latin American Liberation theology, South African Black theology, Indian Dalit theology, existential Thomism, the 'new theology' of the French Dominican and Jesuit school, feminist theologies and other contextual theologies. This theological model could also be associated with the general insight of pope John XXIII. It could also be located in the later part of the pontificate pope Paul VI (especially as seen in such documents as Octogesima adveniens and Evangelii nuntiandi) and the early part of pope John Paul II’s pontificate (especially as seen in Redemptor hominis).

God as 'I am he who is' signifies those theological systems, which conceive faith as essentially contemplative. This could be seen in the scholastic definition of theology as 'faith seeking understanding'. This theological current could be identified in the

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32 The term ‘New Theology’ was first used by Garrigou-Lagrange in his article: La nouvelle théologie où va-t-elle? Published in 1946 to describe the Thomistic school of French Dominicans and Jesuits. These clergymen were forced by the anticlerical government of the time to leave France. In 1905 they established their centre in Le Saulchoir near Tournai, Belgium but they still maintained contacts with the Jesuit School at Fourvière near Lyon in France. Prominent among these Dominicans were Marie-Dominique Chenu, Henri Bouillard, Henri de Lubac, Jean Daniélou, etc. This brand of Thomism is referred to as Transcendental Thomism (especially in Germany and Poland), dynamic Thomism (especially in France) or new theology (La Nouvelle Théologie). Though Pius XII condemned this school in his Humani generis, the major ideas of this school came to constitute the cornerstone of the reforms of the Second Vatican Council. [For more reading on Pius XII’s criticisms of ‘the new theology’ see: PIUS XII, Humani generis, nos. 5-8. For the Latin Original text see: Acta Apostolicae Sedis, 42 (1950) 561-578. For the English translation, see: C. CARLEN, op. cit. See also J. AURICCHIO, The Future of Theology, (New York: Society of St. Paul, 1970), p. 317.]
theologies, which spring from traditional and transcendental Thomism. Pope Pius XII could be located within this tradition.

‘Abum onye mbu’ as the character of God, stands for those theological systems, which are fundamentally conservative and whose interpretations of revelation and natural law are more or less static. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger and the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith represent this orientation. Cardinal Alfredo Ottaviani (of the Holy Office, before and during the Second Vatican Council), whose Episcopal coat of arms is semper idem is also another eloquent representative of this tradition. Pius IX’s Quanta cura and Syllabus of Errors (1864) and Pius X’s Lamentabili sane (1907) belong to this tendency. The later part of the pontificate of Pope John Paul II is increasingly bearing this mark. This is seen in the theme of the jubilee year 2000 “Jesus, the same yesterday, today and forever”. It is also seen in some documents emanating from

33 The German press has categorised Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger into two phases known as first and second Ratzinger. The first Ratzinger represents the theological orientations of Ratzinger as a progressive professor and theologian. The second Ratzinger stands for this activities and pronouncements as the Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

34 Professor Georges de Schrijver juxtaposed the views of Gustavo Gutiérrez and Cardinal Ratzinger in his study of Exodus. He concludes that both have fundamentally different orientations in their understandings of Exodus. Ratzinger’s interpretation is closed and conservative as opposed to Gutiérrez’s progressive interpretation. [See G. DE SCHRIJVER, New Focus on Liberation Theologies. Indebtedness and Remission of Debt, in P. KANYANDAGO (ed.), Marginalised Africa. An International Perspective, (Nairobi: Paulines Publications, 2002), 28-51.]

35 Granted that this theme has a biblical root, its choice for the jubilee year celebration 2000 indicates the theological mindset of the Vatican at this time. One would have expected a more prophetic, progressive or a social justice theme, especially given the present reality that a greater number of Catholic faithful live in abject poverty, oppressed, exploited, marginalized and deprived of hope and voice. One would have expected a theme, which reflects the dynamic character of religion in encouraging struggle for a more just and human society. One would have expected a theme, which illustrates that Christianity still has relevance in the daily life and anxieties of people,
the Vatican Congregations lately. Examples include *Dominus Jesus* (issued by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on 6th August, 2000) and *Redemptionis Sacramentum* (issued by the Congregation for Divine Worship on 25th March 2004).

**Conclusion**

Words create images. They shape and re-shape human consciousness. They influence our imaginations and ideas of life. At times there is a circular relationship between our ideas and words. In some instances words create ideas, at other instances our ideas create words. In any case, there is a profound and intricate link between the two. In this essay, I have tried to argue that the words used in translating Ex 3:14 in three different languages produce three different ideas about God, which could influence various theological visions. One may ask the question whether it was actually the words, which created the images of God in these languages or the already held images of God in these languages, which created the words used in the translations. Whatever the answer may be, this article has tried to show that there is a relationship between the two. Ex 3:14 is not the only passage in the Bible, which discusses the character of God. It however has a significance because it is one of the passages where God reveals his Name. While arguing that the words used in these translations are very crucial in understanding the dominant theological directions in these various languages, this essay also indicates that a cross-lingual analysis of texts and translations could broaden our theological reflections, enrich our views and challenge our assumptions.

especially given the background that Christianity is loosing a fast grip on the consciousness of the Western mind.
FROM POWER CHRISTIANITY TO CHRISTIANITY THAT EMPOWERS: TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF EMPOWERMENT IN THE NIGERIAN CONTEXT

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The Question Behind my Research

Life in fullness (uju ndu in Igbo language) is central to the cosmological vision of many African communities. Elements that constitute fullness of life include health, wealth, fertility and longevity. In contemporary Africa, these elements are the preserve of a few. Sickness, poverty, unemployment plague many people and communities! Insecurity to life and property are the lot of all. In the search for answers to these problems, religion, more specifically Christianity, is pressed into service. The question then becomes, how well Christianity serves this purpose and how one can contribute, from a systematic theological perspective, to the improvement of this response.

Starting Point of Analysis and Reflection

Popular Christianity in the Nigerian context is the starting point of my analysis and reflection. Popular Christianity is used in the broad sense to describe the dominant scheme of symbolization that cuts across denominations and that has also influenced the practices of the mainline Churches even if not their official

1 A Dissertation presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the requirements for the Doctor’s Degree (Ph.D) in Theology (S.T.D) and defended on May 4, 2004 at the Promotion Hall, of the Katholieke Universiteit, Leuven, Belgium.
theologies. This choice of starting point is because popular Christianity is a site of creativity and struggle over meaning and representation. Although the dominant images and visions of popular Christianity are trans-national and mass-mediated, they can still be seen as documentation of the process of inculturation or reception of Christianity mainly from below. Through popular Christianity therefore, one hopes to feel the religious pulse of the people.

Another reason for this choice is that through popular Christianity one hopes to enter the laboratory of Christian development in which people creatively receive and experiment with Christian symbols and images.

**Popular Christianity in Nigeria designated as ‘Power Christianity’**

There are two main types of popular Christianity in the Nigerian context – the *Aladura* and the Pentecostal types. These are however, in the words of Ogbu U. Kalu, “Estranged Bedfellows” united by their pneumatic emphasis. In my view, what cuts across these types is the focus on spiritual power and the emphasis on a particular understanding of divine power. This the basis of the designation, ‘Power Christianity.’ To ground this designation, I trace the emergence of Pentecostalism in the North American context out of the revival movements that goes back to Puritans. This history shows a shift from *sola gratia* (grace alone) to an emphasis on the power of the Holy Spirit. From the point of view of the AICs (African Initiatives in Christianity) this emphasis on spiritual power is in response to the transformation of the traditional cosmological scheme in such a way that the spirit world became demonized. However, drawing from what Kwame Anthony Appiah calls the ‘intentional stance’ of traditional African cosmologies, negative experiences continued to be conceptualised in terms of the intervention of evil spirits, ancestral spirits, witchcraft, curses, etc. Because human beings do not have the resources to respond adequately to these spirit
beings, they are invited to mobilise the power of God in the cosmic fight.

Thus, in what I have designated as Power Christianity, negative experiences – poverty, sickness, unemployment, etc – are conceptualised in terms of the interference of spirit agents and beings who are seen as pitched in battle against God and God’s people. An adequate response to this interference includes the mobilization of divine power (Holy Ghost fire!) to dislodge the offending spirits. The “power-full” and anointed (wo)man of God is the expert that leads the cosmic assault on the enemies of God.

**Power Christianity as ‘African’ Christianity**

In spite of the transformation of the traditional African cosmological scheme that lies behind Power Christianity, I claim that it is ‘African Christianity.’ It represents a concerted effort to take seriously the traditional cosmology in which there is intense traffic between the human and the spirit worlds. In this framework, it is therefore not enough to give organic, socio-psychological or political and economic causes of the problems that people go through. There is always the fear that there are spiritual causes that have to be dealt with before there can be a true solution to the problem. Secondly, the “power-full” (wo)men of God function analogously to the diviners, the *nganga, dibia* or *babalawo* in the traditional religious system. Power Christianity upholds wholeness – health, wealth, fertility and longevity – as the concern of religion. This means a healthy this-worldly emphasis that opens up to the otherworld. Finally, Power Christianity re-imagines community such that all ‘believers’ are brothers and sisters and relate to one another within the familial framework. This is very helpful and supportive in urban centres where people are challenged to forge new forms of relationships and support systems.
Beyond Power Christianity

Notwithstanding the positive elements outlined above, there is need to dialectically move beyond Power Christianity so that it can contribute more fully to the quest for wholeness. In order to do this, one needs to articulate a framework of conceptualising negative experiences that valorises socio-economic and political processes that is open to the implication of cosmic agents. In the discourse of Power Christianity, only the cosmic dimension is highlighted. Corruption for example, is explained in terms of the interference of territorial spirits of the hunting type which predispose people to prey on one another. In line with this analysis, the response to corruption is exorcism and deliverance prayers.

The second source of difficulty is Power Christianity’s theology, that is, its God-talk, which emphasises the vision of an interventionist God. In this vision, mobilisation of divine power to perform miracles is the way to deal with evil. This leaves one with the challenge of conceptualising divine action in a way that overcomes the militaristic scheme of power encounter, one that valorises other forms of human agency in addition to prayer and ritual action.

Towards a Socio-Cosmic Framework of Analysis

In response to Power Christianity’s conceptualisation of negative experiences in terms of the interference of cosmic agents, I tried to articulate a socio-cosmic vision. This tries to present a scheme in which negative experiences are interpreted as due to a conjunction of cosmic as well as natural, socio-economic and political processes. This requires a demonstration of the possibility of mutuality between the social and the cosmic, that is, human and social processes affect the spirit world and vice versa.

Some elements in the Igbo traditional cosmology provide the grounds for such claim. For example, the fact that the spirits are ambivalent and that human communities have the right to disown
some spirits when these become dysfunctional (*arusi kpaka ike, e gosi ya osisi e ji tu ya* – when the spirit becomes dysfunctional, it is shown the wood out of which it was carved) show that members of a community are not pawns in the chessboards of the spirits. Another consideration is the fact that in the traditional cosmology, the universe is moral. The actions posited by human beings can institute a process whose effect is trans-generational. While it is possible to give a socio-structural explanation of this presence of the past, from the point of view of the traditional cosmology of the Igbo, this phenomenon draws attention to an anthropology in which human beings are nodal points in a relational network that extends to the past and to the future. Thus actions of one’s forebears can shape the context of life of the present, not only socio-structurally but also from the cosmic perspective. Negative experiences indicate a disharmony in the cosmic process and in the traditional context; diviners and other experts are able to detect and to restore the broken order. These considerations are behind the socio-cosmic scheme.

One of the implications of this scheme is that there is memory in the cosmos/nature. Human actions affect the cosmos. Cosmic processes also exercise formative causation on human beings and communities. In order to develop this vision, I drew from the reflection of Rupert Sheldrake on morphic fields. But the main aim is to establish a relationship of mutual influence between human beings and communities on the one hand and cosmic processes on the other.

**God as Lord of the Dance!**

The socio-cosmic framework of analysis implies that negative experiences are not necessarily the result of the interference of spirit beings that must be dislodged through power encounter. They can be seen as the outcome of socio-cosmic disharmony that requires the restoration of socio-cosmic balance. In line with this scheme, it is possible to relativize the vision of God as full of ‘power and might’ capable of intervening and overpowering all
evil spirits. Instead, I propose a vision of divine interaction articulated with the metaphor of dance. The choice of this metaphor is because of the pre-eminence of the drum and dance in traditional African therapeutic practices and also because it provides the underlying vision of Trinitarian *perichoresis* (mutuality, reciprocity, moving around).

Dance provides a number of elements that one can appropriate in the effort to reflect on God’s relationship with creation. First, God is the lord of the dance. Everything came into existence and continues to exist in and through the power communicated by God’s primeval movement. God is therefore both transcendent and immanent. Dance is communal and this draws attention immediately to the fact that God is community of Father, Son and Holy Spirit engaged in a mutual movement of dance. Dance is a power, movement, energy and rhythm which does not compel but lures and coaxes (*onye amaghi agba o kwewe n’isi* – if one does not know the dance step, one joins by nodding one’s head). Dance generates a field and the rhythm beaten out project a vision of weaving and interweaving in a complex process of creation and recreation. Dance also allows for synergism between God and creation. Those who join and embody the dance contribute to the regulation and propagation of the dance. In this way, one retrieves an element in traditional African anthropology in which humanity is seen as high priest of creation with the task of maintaining the socio-cosmic harmony in creation.

**Embodying the Divine Dance, Empowerment and Social Transformation**

The metaphor of dance helps to attain a view of divine action that allows for human participation. The embodiment by human beings of the rhythm of the divine dance as shown in the mutuality and reciprocity of the persons of the Trinity leads to socio-cosmic harmony. Socio-cosmic disharmony is the outcome of human beings’ introduction of counter-rhythm marked by domination, conquest and violence.
The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, colonialism and missionary evangelization exacerbated the disharmonious elements in traditional African context. These events also brought about a transformation of the African mindscape and the landscape and ‘invented’ traditions and socio-political structures (for example, ethnicity and the nation state with arbitrary boundaries) that continue to create problems. They plugged the continent on to the world-wide capitalist network which because of its new profile is now described as globalisation driven by a neo-liberal ideology. This system is undergirded by a vision of the human being as a *homo economicus* (economic man). A model is presented in which society is organised as the adjunct of the market, one in which the market is secular providence and the most efficient distributor of resources. The goal of social organisation is the provision of space for free competition and maximisation of profit which free trade is supposed to enhance.

For some regions of the world, the outcome of this regime of global socio-economic and political organisation includes social dislocation and disruption, political and economic mismanagement and violence as local elite mobilise local and global resources in their pursuit of their hegemony. This is the context in which the expression “*a na-enwe obodo enwe*” (there are people who own the community), popularised by the Igbo musician Oliver de Coque, acquires a new layer of meaning. Instead of celebrating excellence and the fact that those who distinguish themselves contribute in shaping society, the expression now draws attention to the division of society into patrons (*nnukwu mmonwu* – the big masquerades) and clients (*oti mkpu* – praise singers). The former can unilaterally bring about either positive or negative consequences on other social actors, while the latter have to seek alliance with such patrons in order to be able to get even their due. One can therefore say that the society lacks ‘social closure’ in so far as some individuals or collectives can be literally said to own the community. This line of analysis shades light on both intra- and inter-national processes and it is in this context that one looks for a metaphor to articulate the task of social transformation.
My choice of metaphor is empowerment, primarily because it is in continuity with the emphasis on power in Power Christianity. This emphasis is symptomatic of the recognition of the powerlessness of individuals to deal with the social realities and the tendency to invoke a higher power to take over. Empowerment is an ambiguous concept but it is used in the sense of acting on the action of people in order to dispose them to act in one way rather than another and enhance the capability of people. In concrete, this implies putting in place social structures and processes that are informed by appropriate values in order to dispose people towards certain modes of action. In line with the metaphor of divine dance, empowerment demands the enthronement of fields of action that will dispose others towards solidarity and reciprocity in order to bring about a transformation, for example, of ethnic politics, the present form of globalisation driven by neo-liberalism. Such transformation will ensure greater socio-cosmic harmony than is presently the case.

**Church as Empowering Family of God**

How can the Church contribute to the above vision? How can the Church be empowered for social transformation? It is by becoming more and more an empowering family of God that understands its mission in terms of being the instrument for building up the big family of God. This big family of God consists of different families joined together in a veritable bond of communion.

The use of the family metaphor to reflect on the mystery of the Church has its positive and negative aspects. Like every metaphor designating a group, family tends to encourage the drawing of boundaries with people at the various sides of the divide. Identity of a group is always articulated against the backdrop of those that are excluded. In order to overcome the tendency of every process of identification to polarization, I draw attention to an understanding of identity as revealed in the perichoretic relationship between the persons of the trinity. Drawing from the
traditional Igbo (West African) understanding of person as ‘coherent pluralism,’ difference-in-unity, I try to articulate a vision in which the identity and difference are related not by exclusion but by mutuality with that which is other to it. This is the basis of the claim that ultimate reality is family – God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit – whose unity is due to the perichoretic relationship between them.

The inherent difficulty of dealing with difference, the struggle over resources, the prevalent forms of socialisation, the history of and painful memories of the relationship between groups and peoples make it difficult for people to accept difference as possible source of enrichment. In the Nigerian context, one has to reckon with the struggle between Muslims and Christians and with the ethnicisation of politics and religion. It is within this context that the Church is called upon to be a family of God dedicated to enabling all to realise their common belongingness in the one big family of God. I argue that in order to carry out this mission, the Church has to become an empowering prophetic family of God. As prophets, Christians are supposed to be those who, out of their experience of God, are motivated to bear witness to the God of their experience. Such experience of God can be mediated through rituals whose mechanism for re-telling the foundational narrative of Christianity pays attention to the task of reconciliation, of facilitating the unity of the scattered children of God. In this way, the Church provides a field of action that acts on the action of its members to contribute to the transformation of the social capital present in a community in order to enhance people’s quality of life.

Structure of the Dissertation

The dissertation is divided into four chapters. In the first chapter, “Power Christianity in the Nigerian Context,” I try to justify the designation, “Power Christianity,” to show the new emphasis it introduces into Christianity, its continuity and discontinuity with the traditional Igbo cosmology and to articulate the socio-cosmic
scheme of analysis. The second chapter titled “The God of Power and Might: The God who Empowers” traces the God-talk of Power Christianity to the breakdown of the medieval synthesis between *potentia dei ordinata* (God’s power considered as God has ordained it in creation) and *potentia dei absoluta* (God’s power considered absolutely). I propose that taking Jesus as the hermeneutics of God leads to a different conception of divine action, one that is informed by the kenosis of God in Jesus and divine activity as situated creativity. This is the basis of the metaphor of dance. The third chapter, “Embodying God’s Dance: Power, Empowerment and Social Change” sketches the Nigerian context as the confluence of both local and global processes. It is in this context that the divine dance is to be embodied. The chapter also tries to build up the concept of empowerment as capability enhancement through the enthronement of a field of action that acts on the action of people disposing them towards solidarity. Chapter Four focuses on ecclesiology, how the Church can be the empowering family of God and the implications of this for the understanding of the trinity.

**Possible Contribution to Theological Scholarship**

Inculturation and liberation have been the twin concepts used to articulate the project for theology in Africa. While the first is concerned about cultural identity and Africa’s contribution to the world, the latter is more focused on the socio-economic and political problems. More recently, reconstruction has been proposed. This dissertation tries to build up a concept through an exploration of popular Christianity. The outcome is empowerment which holds together the concerns of inculturation and liberation theologians. With the former, there is interest in drawing from the cultural resources, the values and schemes of reflection that have developed over the ages in traditional African communities. With the latter, it is also interested in the transformation of society and thus pays attention to the structural changes and processes that have been introduced through culture
contact. It also has an eye on how to transform the structural processes that act on people’s action in order to contribute to the search for fullness of life.

Popular Christianity is not interested in the construction of coherent worldview but in the immediate solution of problems through the mobilisation of divine power. This dissertation tries to sketch the worldview behind its practices, point out its shortcomings and attempts to propose an alternative worldview. Some elements of the alternative worldview offered are the socio-cosmic scheme and the metaphor of dance for reflecting on divine action.

Finally, the Special Synod of Bishops for Africa showed preference for the metaphor of Church as God’s family. This metaphor has its strengths and weaknesses. It is my hope that this dissertation draws out the richness of this metaphor, it implications for Trinitarian reflection and for social life in a globalised world.
FEATURES

ENHANCEMENT OF HUMAN DIGNITY IN A GLOBALIZED WORLD: ASPECTS OF THE SOCIAL TEACHINGS OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH¹

By
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There is a saying, that those who refuse to learn from the lessons of history are bound to repeat their dreadful mistakes. However, it has remained quite a puzzle, that right down history, mankind has always faced the problem of how to precisely learn from history. The natural inclination of man tends toward conveniently forgetting history or deliberately refusing to learn anything from it. Even more problematic is the fact that history does not repeat itself in exactly the same way. To recognize the lessons of history and learn lessons from it, takes a lot of vigilance, intelligence and hindsight. The handwriting of history may be on the wall, but its colour, texture, shape, context, and content, keeps changing with time. Consequently, being able to learn from the lessons of history is not easy, since it has to take one with a lot of mental discipline to do so. Given, that a majority of people prefer to lapse into mental laziness, only a few tend to learn from history.

Be that as it may, we have no alternative but to seek to learn from the lessons of history if we must develop and survive within a world that is technologically moving faster than we ever thought. The church, within the world, has, recognized the danger of not adjusting with changing times and has had to shift grounds, given the lessons of history. I will try to illustrate this point, using the human rights Tradition in the Catholic Church shortly. For now, let me take a look at globalisation and human dignity.

The Challenge of Globalisation

We live today in what is called a globalised world. Globalisation has its challenges. Many books have been written about the emerging global landscape, but too few about the moral and spiritual issues involved. Yet, if we have to enhance human dignity, we cannot ignore the spiritual and moral issues raised by globalisation. It is only through the enhancement of human dignity and improving the chances of peace that we can avoid Samuel Huntington’s prediction of a clash of civilizations. The global world of today creates anxiety, anxiety creates fear, fear leads to anger, anger breeds violence, and violence – when combined with weapons of mass destruction – becomes a deadly reality.

The greatest single antidote to misunderstandings, or conflicts and violence is conversation with each other. Globalisation facilitates our identifying those who agree with us, and the screening out the voices of dissent. Today in Kaduna metropolis, this reality, unfortunately, has come, it seems, to stay. It is a situation in which Christians live on one side and Muslims on the other. The task of appreciating the dignity of difference which I shall come to later, and living together in peace has been made more difficult. Yet, Jesus came to preach love and peace. This is a challenge to all of us. We must, one and all, work for peace. It is one of the greatest challenges in the 21st century and particularly within the Church.

The economics and politics of globalisation have an inescapable moral dimension. Their aim must be to enhance, not to compromise human dignity. Today’s markets serve those who pay. What of those who cannot pay? Politics is about the balance of power, but what of those who have no power? Economic systems create problems that cannot be solved by economics alone. Politics raises questions that cannot be answered by political calculations alone. There is no escape from the wider issues of morality, and if we ignore them, history suggests that
they will return in the form of anger, resentment and a burning sense of injustice, which will make our already fragile world more precarious.

In a world of globalisation, a great responsibility lies with the religious communities. Religious communities, against all expectations, have emerged in the 21st century as key forces in a global age. Through Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, the Philippines, Korea and China, there has been a sweeping revival of evangelical Protestantism. An Islamic upsurge has affected every Muslim country from North Africa to South-East Asia and Muslim communities elsewhere. The Catholic Church numbering some 800 million people and still counting, was active in the fall of communism in East central Europe in 1989. So alarmed at this were the Chinese that an official publication in 1992 warned, 'if China does not want such a scene to be repeated in its land, it must strangle the baby while it is still in the manger.' This goes to show the role which religion can play in transforming a society.

In conflict zones throughout the world – Northern Ireland, the Balkans, Chechnya, Tajikistan, the Middle East, Sudan, Sri Lanka, India, Kashmir, East Timor, Liberia, Sierra Leon, Nigeria etc, all are at the cutting edge of confrontation, reminding us of Jonathan Swift's acid observation that we have 'just enough religion to make us hate one another but not enough to make us love one another.' This is the challenge confronting all religious leaders today. Here, our denominational differences have been so overemphasized that cooperation with one another has been stalled.

On the one hand, globalisation is bringing us closer together than ever before, interweaving our lives, internationally, nationally and locally in very complex and inextricable ways. On the other hand, a new Tribalism – a regression to older and more fractious loyalty – is driving us ever angrily apart - even within the church, so much so that some church leaders are afraid of appointing credible people to positions to which they are competent for fear of being accused of tribalism.
Religion can be a source of discord. It can also be a form of conflict resolution. We are familiar with the former; the second is far too little tried. Yet it is here, if anywhere, that hope must lie if we are to create a human solidarity strong enough to bear the strains that lie ahead. The great faiths must become an active force for peace and for the justice and compassion on which peace ultimately depends. Religion is no longer marginal to international politics. After a long period of eclipse, religion has re-emerged with immense and sometimes destructive force.

It is in the light of this that on 28th August 2000, more than 2000 religious leaders gathered in the United Nations Building in New York to talk about peace in the world. This is why too, the United Nations declared the year 2001 as the International Year of Dialogue between Civilizations.

Religion and tribalism can lead us to the path of peace. But they can equally, and with high combustibility, lead us to hatred and under development. The choice is ours. Politicians have power, but religions have something stronger: they have influence. Religion changes lives. We must all take risks for peace building. Religious leaders must be taken on board in the struggle towards the reconstruction of society.

In the twentieth century alone, more than 100 million people lost their lives in the course of wars. Our interconnectedness as human beings places us on a terrain where peace and development should be our watch-word. “Blessed are the peace makers, for they shall be called children of God” (Mtt. 5:9).

**What is wrong with globalisation?**

Here are some revealing facts. The benefits of globalisation are not spread evenly. This is a matter of concern to all of us. Inequalities have been heightened. The average North American consumes five times more than a Mexican, ten times more than a Chinese, 30 times more than an Indian. There are 1.3 billion people – 22 per cent of the world’s population – living below the poverty line; 841 million are malnourished; 880 million are
without access to medical care. One billion lack adequate shelter; 1.3 billion have no access to safe drinking water; 2.6 billion go without sanitation. Among the children of the world, 113 million – two-thirds of them girls – go without schooling; 150 million are malnourished; 30,000 die each day from preventable disease.

In eighteen countries, all African, life expectancy is less than 50 years. In Sierra Leone it is a mere 37 years. Infant mortality rates are higher than one in ten in 35 countries, mostly in Africa but including Bangladesh, Bolivia, Haiti, Laos, Nepal, Pakistan and Yemen. More than 80 counties have seen per capita incomes drop in the past ten years. By the end of the millennium, the top fifth of the world’s population had 85 per cent of the world’s GDP while the bottom fifth had just 1 per cent. The assets of the world’s three richest billionaires were more than the combined wealth of the 600 million inhabitants of the least-developed countries. The enormous wealth of the few contrasts starkly with the misery of the many and jars our sense of equity and justice.

Within the developed countries themselves, the gains of globalisation have been highly selective. In the United States in the past 20 years, 97 per cent of the increase in income has gone to the top 20 per cent of families, while the bottom fifth have seen a 44 per cent reduction in earnings. By 1996 Britain had the highest proportion in Europe of children living in poverty, with 300,000 of them worse off in absolute terms than they had been 20 years before. Jobs have become less secure. (Jonathan Sacks).

1.1 The Dignity of Difference

Throughout history until very recently, most people for most of their lives were surrounded by others with whom they shared a faith, a tradition, a way of life, a set of rituals and narratives of memory and hope (Sacks 2002). Such circumstances led to the belief that our truth was the only truth; our way the only way. People saw themselves as bound together. People were hardly considered as ‘outsiders.’ In our world today, we live in the conscious presence of difference. This conscious presence of
difference, has given rise to the emergence of the politics of identity. It is precisely because of this that religion has also emerged, after a long period of eclipse, to become so powerful a phenomenon in today’s world. Its emergence is prefixed on the fact that it is one of the great answers to the question of identity. The danger here is that identity can unite, but it can also divide. The process of creating an ‘Us’ involves creating a ‘Them’ – those who are not like us.’ We must understand that unity creates diversity. This is an inescapable truth. The glory of the created world is its astonishing multiplicity: the thousands of different languages, the hundreds of faiths, the millions of cultures, the sheer variety of the imaginative expressions of the human spirit, in most of which, if we listen carefully, we will hear the voice of God telling us that there is ‘dignity in difference’ (Sacks 2002). We have to adjust to this, accept our differences, and work as a team for the common good.

Because we are different tribes, in the world, we have something unique to offer and contribute to each other. There is a primordial instinct which goes back to humanity’s tribal past and which makes us see difference as a threat. That instinct is massively dysfunctional, especially, considering the fact that our several destinies are interlinked. When differences lead to hatred of the ‘other,’ both sides are weakened. When it leads to love and the mutual enrichment of the ‘other,’ both sides are strengthened and enriched. We will continue, as a people, to create repeated motions without movement for as long as we attempt to meet the challenges of today with the concepts of yesterday. What we need among other things is an inescapable paradigm shift – we must be willing to listen to others, be opened to their stories, pains and humiliations. This could lead us to a discovery – that their image of us is anything but our image of ourselves. We will make progress, only when we learn that God loves difference, and so must we. We need to develop models of collaboration – especially in our ministry as we grapple with modern realities.
2. Human Rights Tradition in the Catholic Church

On July 4\(^{th}\) 1776, the United States of America, a former British colony, proclaimed its independence and based its independence on a fundamental freedom and equality of all people. This revolt against colonial power and the French revolution of July 14\(^{th}\) 1789, which was against absolutism, were the beginnings of a gradual development of what came to be a constitutional state in the western world. In the process of this development, we have had what is called *classical human rights* (these are rights against a powerful state). They involve a claim to the inviolability of one's personal life and body; right to political influence, equality before the law, freedom of conscience and of speech. These rights were formulated around the 18\(^{th}\) century. In the 20\(^{th}\) century, *social human rights* were formulated and these include, right to work, health, association etc. Most recently, we have *solidarity rights* – the right to peace, development, survival and an uncontaminated environment.

Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891) was a commitment to social human rights. In the 19\(^{th}\) century the Catholic Church was so obsessed by classical human rights that the term received negative connotations.

The feudal theories that gave rise to the French revolution presupposed a fixed order in which every individual has his or her place – the Clergy (those that pray) the fighters (nobility) and the peasants and craftsmen. This feudal theory underwent fundamental metamorphosis with the French revolution, which gave birth to new ones which lay emphasis on the natural rights of each individual (J. Locke). The French philosopher J. J. Rousseau captured this in his book "The Social Contract" when he said, "Man was born free, and everywhere he is in chains." This for him is a contradiction. The solution lies in a society in which free consensus and contracts make people equal *vis-à-vis* the law. This appeal to freedom, equality and the common good irrespective of class, culture, sex or religion became a challenge to the ancient hierarchical order.
On the eve of the French Revolution, the Roman Catholic Church still clung to the feudal concepts in some western countries. The Roman Catholic Church was a political and religious power at the same time. The democratic revolutions, and the political doctrine of human rights at the end of the eighteenth century were frowned upon by the Church as theological heresy and political treason. From the point of view of higher Church executives who were mainly recruited from the nobility, these changes gave them a traumatic shock. The Pope’s secular power eventually came to an end in 1870 during the Franco-German War.

There were reactions to these developments by the Roman Catholic Church hierarchy. As early as 1791, Pope Pius VI described this freedom of opinion and rights as a blatant revolt against the rights of God the creator. In his encyclical letter Mirari Vos (1832), Pope Gregory XVI called the revolt a revolt against God, a new slavery, and an old heresy ... In Quanta Cura and Syllabus Errorum (1864), Pope Pius IX took the same position as Pope Gregory XVI.

As these developments continued, a new view on Church State relationship came into play in the nineteenth century. It was formulated in the doctrine of societas perfecta that the Church is a ‘perfect society’ without claiming moral or religious irreproachability. The Church is seen then as a society completely independent of other societies and has its justification in itself. This doctrine implied that the state is also a ‘perfect society,’ with its own objectives and its own justification.

This means that the Church adapted to nineteenth century circumstances. In the feudal concept, secular and ecclesiastical power were not imputed to separated domains, but church and state were seen as two powers within one single social entity, the highest and final authority falling to the Church.

The Popes of the nineteenth century stoutly defended the “inalienable rights of the Church” against modern liberal and later also fascist states. The development of an internal statute book (the Codex of 1917) is but a logical consequence of the Church’s self-image as a perfect society.
The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) was a radical reversal of what the Church thought of parliamentary democracy and political liberties. This reversal was chiefly due to the lessons the Church learned when fascism ruled Europe and what colonial power and dictatorial regimes subjected human beings to. The Catholic Church woke up to the realization that the concept of humanity created as the *imago Dei* (image of God) can only be realized in a democratically constitutional state than in an authoritarian regime. However, the Church did not cease to be authoritarian within her internal constructs. In Vatican II’s pictorial constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, the rights to revolt against an unjust authority is affirmed. It acknowledges freedom of religion and freedom of conscience. It stands to reason that within the Church, the faithful should claim the fundamental rights which the modern constitutional state tries to guarantee for all human beings.

However, we must agree that the Catholic Church is burdened by undigested history for it has hermetically screened off its structures against the entry of civil ideas about human and political rights based on the argument of its being an autonomous society alongside civil society with its code (Canon Law) and governmental structures. In a word, the Catholic Church was, and to some extent is afraid of losing its specificity – for, arguably, good reasons.

2.1 The Law: A Shield?

The history of the Catholic Church has been such that the rule of law stood by itself. No questions were asked about why the legislator had made it or which theological roots it had. This was why Canon Law was seen (and is still seen by some) as an ill-loved discipline, which hardly elicits any spontaneous interest. Whereas the canonist was expected to concentrate on the text and particularly on its historical roots, the real theological knots remained outside the canonist’s competence. Again, the Second Vatican Council introduced a shift, namely, that rules of Law
required a sound theological basis. The 1983 Code is built on this principle.

Present Canon Law (1983 Code of Canon Law) has been predominantly influenced by Roman and Western continental Law traditions. Theologically speaking, there is no radical option in the Gospel for the Roman or Western continental system of Law. Theologically speaking too, it is hard to see that one idea of Law should be considered superior or inferior. The Anglo-American Law tradition is not further from God than the Roman and Western continental ones.

There is a massive presence of vague law norms in Canon Law that makes it so difficult to interpret it using clean, clear and comprehensible vocabulary. Perhaps, the presence of these vague laws can be attributed to the presence within the Church of the separation of powers. For example, Canon 135/1 states that governing power is divided into legislative, executive and judicial powers. But governing powers are distinguished, but not separated. There is a technical distinction between them, but in actual fact, they are all in the hands of one central figure: the bishop within his diocese and the Pope within the universal church.

The main characteristic of the separation of powers is based on the idea of balance and control for the purpose of an impartial and independent administration of justice. This appears to be mission in the Church. There is no independent judge to pore over legal texts in cases of concrete disputes between actors within the Church. Since the judiciary is not independent within the Church, there can be no control since the judge cannot assume the capacity of supreme judge whose judgement can be considered conclusive because his judgement can be considered null and void by the executive arm – and, as is always added, “for pastoral reasons.”

The presence of these open Law norms in Canon Law may be due to the specific character of a religious community or secondary, the absence of a separation of powers excuses the legislator from making sharply defined Laws. On the contrary, in his capacity as executive, he profits by rules of law that are
shrouded in vagueness. This does not mean that the entire system with its vague norms is an instrument in the hands of a hierarchical authority holding all powers in a single hand. The presence of these open laws can in fact be put to use by the lay faithful within the Church – at the micro level. I will come to this shortly. Let me just say that roughly speaking, the Code of Canon Law (CCL) can be approached on three levels – the macro, meso and micro levels.

The macro level has to do with the Pope who has complete, immediate and universal power within the Church and can freely exercise this power at all times (Can. 331). Canon 333/1 grants the Pope legal precedence over all particular churches and groupings of churches. This means that he can interfere anywhere in a decisive manner. When the Pope takes action, there can be no appeal nor recourse against that action or decree (Can. 333/3). It means therefore that if you happen not to be a Pope, any decision taken on you stands and you have to accept it in good faith since the Holy Spirit gave a stamp of approval. You will then be left with the pleasure or displeasure of agonizing till thy kingdom come.

The meso level of Canon Law is from the Bishop’s position. He is the interpreter of the universal law and he has quite a lot of strings in his bow. He has the power to issue particular laws in his diocese. Canon 135/2 states that a lower legislator cannot issue a law, which is contrary to a law enacted by a higher authority. Even over universal laws, the Bishop is not completely powerless – as the chief executive, he has many routes open to him. Canon 87/1 points to the fact that as often as the bishop judges that a dispensation will contribute to the spiritual good of the faithful, he can dispense from both universal and particular disciplinary Laws. It must be noted that even if dispensation should be impossible, the bishop is still not helpless. He can resort to go-slow tactics – what I sometimes call “Vatican diplomatic initiative.” If for example, the Vatican says experts who are Protestants in technical subjects like Latin, Greek, Hebrew can teach in Catholic Major Seminaries, the Bishop can decide to adopt attitude of sluggishness in complying with that –
even if the need is intense. So, at the macro level, there is a strategy in four levels: interpretation of Law, particular laws, dispensation and go-slow tactics. This is quite a good protective package for a Bishop. However, if truth may be told, the extent of the application of these norms depends entirely on the personality of the Bishop.

Finally, the micro level of the Law. This is viewed from the individual faithful’s angle. This has to do with the rights and duties of the individual faithful (Can. 208 – 223). These Canons have the possibilities of serving as liberating launching pads for positive church renewal – they are a Pandora’s box. The principle of equality in Canon 208 is no longer a mere ornament as soon as it becomes juridically relevant. The right and the duty to express one’s views (Can. 212/3) are there. As I said, it depends on the Bishop’s personality and in most cases, on the angle of approach. A good deal of room for creative activities does exist through these open Law norms which abound in the Code of Canon Law (CCL). The CCL, although conceived in an undemocratic manner, need not in its interpretation be a continuation of that process. The duties and rights of individual members of the Church should, in my opinion, serve as a benchmark for interpreting or approaching the CCL. The problem here may be based on the simple fact that more rights for the faithful means less power for the hierarchy. Some members of the hierarchy may not be willing to give such concessions.

If Papal primacy is found alongside the doctrine of the collegial structure of the Church’s ministry, if Vatican II talks of the people of God as a reflection of communio ecclesiology, there should be a spirit of understanding towards a realization of simultaneously two, at first sight, incompatible intentions.

In a sense, priests who are at the centre of this drama sometimes complicate issues and suffer some hard knocks that are in some cases self-inflicted as a result of uncontrolled behaviour. Canon 275 offers a motive for the creation of an association of priests, pleading for a bond of brotherhood, which can reinforce their bond as colleagues. This bond of brotherhood has been anything but a bond. From the U.S., Germany, France,
Africa, Asia, etc., there has been a complicated issue among priests: the risk of betrayal, rightly or wrongly, to the ecclesiastical authorities or executive. For example, in 1989, Bishop Joachim Meisner was transferred from East Berlin to Cologne. In Cologne, there were 815 priests of the diocese. The fact that none of them was deemed capable of becoming Bishop, spoke volumes. This seemed like a judgement on the priests of that Local Church. It required as someone put it, an ‘outsider’ to rule that diocese. The Priests had to accept the inevitable because *Roma Locuta, causa finita est*. (When Rome speaks, the case is closed). One of the reasons given for the action was that the Priests had internal conflicts and appointing any of them would only escalate the conflict. A much more serious reason was that the Church is Catholic and anyone from anywhere could be Bishop of any place. Eventually however, some of those Priests become Bishops, and were posted elsewhere. This is one of the “Catholic” nature of the Catholic Church.

Knowing that the church has not ceased to be authoritarian within her internal constructs and knowing that vague canonical laws are at the disposal of the Chief Executive to interpret at will, we especially priests, sometimes struggle but in vain, to obtain justice in an institution that has no court and to which we have pledged obedience at ordination till death do us part.

The only option under the circumstance is perhaps to avoid any action that will contain within itself, the seeds of your own destruction or that will bring you into collision with the Chief Executive since he holds the meat and the knife. This is a first necessary step towards having any meaningful dialogue with the Church’s hierarchy that may eventually trigger radical reforms within the church or a diocese in the spirit of collaboration as the case may be. If we must all work collaboratively towards a peaceful human Archdiocese, we must take the catholic social teachings to heart. I now turn my attention to that.
3. The Social Teaching of the Church
3.1 Dignity and Equality of the Human Person

All of humanity has been created in the image of God, and we are the clearest reflection of God that exists in this world. Because of this, we each have a basic dignity that comes not from any action on our own part but because of our very creation. Each individual is a person worthy of dignity and respect. One’s dignity is not related to one’s race, ethnicity, gender, age, nationality, physical ability, religion, economic status or any other potentially discriminatory factor. Rather, it is an inalienable right that has been granted to us by the very fact of our human nature. Thus, there is nothing that we can do to “earn” or “lose” our dignity; we are stamped with it at our creation. Human dignity is in this sense, then, inviolable and inalienable.

Human beings can only thrive and achieve their full dignity in community with other people. People see their individual dignity and equality expressed and confirmed in social situations and relations... how they are treated by society, by their community, and by each other. Catholic Social Teaching (CST) insists that each individual person is constituted not only by his/her own individual dignity but also by his/her responsibility towards his/her brothers and sisters... it insists on the responsibility of the human being toward the others.

It is a natural step from individual human dignity to the idea of human equality, for the equality of each person is grounded in the individual’s essential dignity. In our work throughout the world, we see a great amount of diversity... there are many differences in talents, personalities, and beliefs that exist, and we celebrate this diversity as a gift that serves to strengthen the entire human community. While each difference does exist, social, economic, and cultural discrimination in fundamental rights should not be tolerated or seen as a part of the “natural” diversity of creation.

Unfortunately, in today’s society, oppressive structures and institutions reinforce the belief that people are unequal, by favouring one gender, class, ethnic group, nation above another.
This inequality is easily seen in the unequal treatment and discrimination that many people experience today. For example, women and girls in many parts of the world are denied cultural benefits equal to those recognized for men; people with disabilities are often denied the ability to freely choose their own way of life. Such inequalities do not respect a person’s individual dignity and is a direct consequence of the oppression and discrimination found in the society today. Catholic Social Teaching calls each individual person to be seen as an equal... another “self” who has dignity and is worthy of respect.

### 3.2 Rights and Responsibilities

The concept of human dignity leads logically and directly in CST to ideas about human rights and duties. Each individual is a person who has been endowed with intelligence and freewill, and, as such, she/he has rights and responsibilities which together flow as a direct consequence from his/her human nature. Both human rights and responsibilities are the ideas by which the concept of human dignity is developed and given concrete social meaning. Fully realized human dignity is reliant on the respect of a combination of these rights and responsibilities that are grounded in human dignity.

#### 3.2.1 Rights

Catholic Social Teaching understands human rights as moral claims that each person is able to make on a variety of goods and necessities because of his or her human dignity. These rights are essential to the protection of human dignity and provide the minimum conditions necessary for living in a just society. They belong to all human beings regardless of any social or political structure, and cannot, under any circumstance be surrendered or given away. The individual’s rights are numerous and encompass
every aspect of one’s life. CST has generally classified a person’s rights into the following categories:

*The Right to Life and a Worthy Standard of Living:* The starting point of an individual’s rights are his/her personal rights. These are the rights to life and to bodily integrity, which includes the protection of life in all of its forms. It also includes the right to a worthy standard of living, including adequate food, clothing, shelter, rest, medical care, and access to the necessary social services, which provide these rights. Personal rights also ensure the freedom of each individual to choose the manner of life, which he/she wants to live.

*The Right to Worship God According to One’s Conscience:* CST also identifies, a person’s religious rights as a subset of his/her personal rights. Religious rights are paramount in CST. Every person has the right to individual religious beliefs... the religious freedom to seek God in a manner that is in accordance with his/her own conscience, and to express his/her faith in this same manner. It should not be possible for a society or government to dictate to its citizens their faith or belief... this is a personal choice that each individual has the right to make for him/herself.

*Right Pertaining to Moral and Cultural Values:* Culture and moral rights encompass a broad spectrum of rights. It includes the freedom of expression and the right to communicate and express oneself and one’s opinion. Cultural and moral rights also state that every person has the right to share in the benefits of culture, which would include, among other things, the right to an education, to technical and professional training, and, whenever possible, to the pursuit of higher education.

*Economic Rights:* In its history, CST has paid particular attention to the economic rights of individuals, and considers them to be an integral part of full human dignity. Individuals have a right to meaningful employment and also to work for a living wage that allows them to support their families in a manner that is consistent with human dignity. This right is
also joined by the right to safe and dignified working conditions and the right to organize labour unions.

*Political Rights:* CST also recognizes that the dignity of the human person involves the right to political freedom and participation.

*The Rights to Emigrate and Immigrate:* Every human being has the right to freedom of movement and residence within his/her own country, as well as the right to emigrate to other countries and take up residence there.

All of the above are fundamental rights that are indispensable to the protection of human dignity. The Bishops of the United States reiterated the paramount position human rights have in society when they stated that these rights "...are all essential to human dignity and to the integral development of both individual and society... (Economic Justice for All, 80). When rights are violated or denied, the dignity of the person or group is at risk. Serious denial of these rights wounds the entire human community and destroys solidarity among persons.

### 3.2.2 Responsibilities

These rights are intrinsically bound to corresponding responsibilities of all individuals. By our very nature, we have duties toward ourselves, one another, our families, local and other communities, and to the larger society. These responsibilities stem from our individual rights. For one individual to have rights, other individuals must respect and promote that person’s rights. CST states that “The possession of rights involves the duty of implementing those rights, for they are the expression of a human being’s personal dignity. And the possession of rights also involves their recognition and respect by other people” Peace on Earth (*Pacem in Terris*, 4.1).

In CST, responsibilities are seen as the source of rights. Some examples of the correlation between rights and responsibilities can also be seen in the following:
The right of life is connected with the individual’s duty to preserve one’s life and to live it in a manner that respects his/her own human dignity.

The rights to life would also include the responsibilities of preserving life in all manners and in all forms, including making every effort to work toward creating a society where capital punishment, abortion, and euthanasia are not seen as necessary options.

A person’s right to a decent standard to living carries with it the responsibility to seek out employment to provide for one’s self and one’s family, and to use one’s resources wisely and for the promotion of the common good.

The right to earn a living wage stems from an individual responsibility to support his/her family.

As we live out our life and rights, we cannot forget about other people and their rights as well. We have a responsibility not only to recognize them but to promote their rights and assist them in the same pursuit of a full life. This idea of personal responsibilities is clearly articulated throughout the summary of CST: for each individual person has the responsibility to promote the common good, to live life in a manner which promotes solidarity with the wider human community, to be a good steward of creation and its many resources, to implement the principle of Subsidiarity whenever possible, and to have an option for the poor.

### 3.3 Subsidiarity

The principle that authority should be exercised so that decisions are taken as close to the grass roots as is consistent with good government. It promotes the common good, and protects the rights of individuals and of smaller societies by enabling them to take part in the decision-making process.

The principle of Subsidiarity states that in order to protect the basic right of the individual, the government or any large
authoritative structure should not replace or destroy smaller communities and individual initiatives. Rather, the structure should help communities and individuals contribute more effectively to the common good and supplement their activity only when the demands of justice exceed their capabilities. Within CST, Subsidiarity is described in the following manner:

Just as it is gravely wrong to take from individuals what they can accomplish by their own initiative and industry and give it to the community, so also it is an injustice and at the same time a grave evil and disturbance of right order to assign a greater or higher association what lesser and subordinate organizations can do. For every social activity ought of its very nature to furnish help to the members of the social body and never destroy or absorb it (After forty years - Quadragesimo Anno).

CST seeks to encourage individual and communal initiatives, and places a great deal of emphasis on the development of different human associations and institutions at the local, national, and international levels. These diverse associations have a vital and unique role to play within society and the promotion of the common good. Families, neighbourhoods, voluntary and community groups offer a unique perspective to society, and they should foster and take an active part in them.

Subsidiarity is a decentralizing concept that seeks to promote and sustain a pluralism of power in society, lest all power be rooted in one place, such as the state. While the principle of Subsidiarity seeks the protection of local initiatives from excessive intervention by the state or other larger institutions, the principle also recognizes, though, that larger structures do have a legitimate role to play. When local structures or organizations prove to be inadequate or a group’s rights are being violated or lost, the larger society, including the state, has the responsibility to act to protect and guarantee these fundamental rights.
3.4 Solidarity

The principle that we are responsible for each other, willing to see others as another “self” and see to justice to others as no less serious than injustice to oneself. It is “a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say, to the good of all and of each individual because we are all really responsible for all” (Sollicitudo Rei Socialis, p. 38).

Solidarity is a call to recognize each individual person as a part of one human family regardless of ethnic, national racial, gender, economic, political, or ideological difference. CST believes that we all have a common origin having been created in the image of God, and all of us are instilled with an invaluable human dignity. We are called not only to recognize the dignity of each individual person in word only, but also to fully respect that person’s or group’s human dignity in our daily lives... by seeing and understanding others as our brothers and sisters for whom we have responsibility:

“We are one human family, whatever our national racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences. We are our brother’s and sister’s keepers. In a linked and limited world, our responsibilities to one another cross national and other boundaries. Violent conflict and the denial of dignity and rights to people anywhere on the globe diminish each of us.”(A Century of Social Teaching)

Solidarity means the willingness to regard injustices committed against another as no less serious than an injustice against oneself. Solidarity shows that being a person means being united to other people in mutual love (Economic Justice For All). Being united to others is not to be understood as vague feelings of compassion that one might have for a person in a particular situation, but rather a concrete commitment to accompanying others on their journey throughout their lives... whatever the circumstances or consequences of that accompaniment might be.
Solidarity is more crucial in today’s growing interdependent world than ever before, and we recognize that our responsibilities cross all economic, national, or regional boundaries. We live in a world of increasing interconnectedness. Television, newspapers, and radio broadcasts confront us everyday with the situations of people across the globe. Our increasing awareness of the world situation carries with it an increasing responsibility to the people who are forced by structures, groups and individuals to remain marginalized and in poverty. We can no longer use ignorance as an excuse for failure to act with and for those who are oppressed and vulnerable in another city, country, or continent.

CST understand solidarity as a virtue, i.e. a habitual attitude and way of acting which is uniquely suited to the growing interdependence of the world at the national and international levels of human society. The following excerpt from the 1987 encyclical of Pope John Paul II explains further that solidarity:

... is above all a question of interdependence, sensed as a system determining relationships in the contemporary world in its economic, cultural, political, and religious elements, and accepted as a moral category. When interdependence becomes recognized in the way the correlative response as a moral and social attitude, as a virtue, is solidarity. It then is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, near and far. On the contrary it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good, that is to say, to the good of all and of each individual because we are all really responsible for all. (On Social Concern - Sollicitudo Rei Socialis p. 38)

Solidarity is an attitude, a vision, and a specific human determination to accept responsibility for the welfare of others and to plan, act, and advocate in a variety of ways to fulfil the sense of responsibility.
3.5 Option for the Poor

Catholic Social Teaching’s call for a fundamental option for the poor stems from the principles of the common good and solidarity. The promotion of the common good calls for all social policies to be made with the welfare of the whole society in mind, while at the same time paying particular attention to promoting the dignity and rights of those people who are marginalized within society. CST states that as members of the human family, all people are called to respond to the needs of all people. But it also states that those members of society with the greatest needs require the greatest response and attention.

CST states that, in all economic, political, and social decisions, there should be a weighted concern given to the needs of the poor and marginalized. By assisting those who are most vulnerable, an option for the poor strengthen the entire community, for the deprivation and powerlessness of the poor wounds the whole community. Such wounds are healed only by a greater solidarity with the poor and marginalized. Any attack or threat to the dignity of one person or group harms the entire fabric of society. An option for the poor requires a commitment of oneself to being in solidarity with the poor and marginalized, to giving preference to the poorest and most vulnerable sectors of society and recognize their privileged claims on our time and resources, and to arousing the consciousness of oppressed groups and helping them become agents of their own development.

As individuals, we are called to make this fundamental option for those who are poor, oppressed, and marginalized. The poor have the single most urgent claim on the conscience of this agency. For many, the term “the poor” is a description of people who are economically deprived. This is first and foremost the poor of whom we speak, but the term is also broader. CST recognizes that poverty takes many forms and includes spiritual as well as material poverty. The use of the term “the poor” could also include all people who are oppressed as marginalized within their society, though they might not be “poor” monetarily. The New Dictionary of the Catholic Social Teaching provides a
definition of the poor that is particularly helpfully: the option for the poor

...extends also to those who are deprived of fundamental political, or cultural or religious right. It applies to women as a whole, since they are the victims of a long history of being treated as second-class humans, and even yet suffer discrimination as women. The term the ‘poor’ also applies to those who are the victims of racist attitudes or system.” (Dwyer, ed., *The New Dictionary of the Catholic Social Thought*, p. 757).

Truly having an option for the poor presupposes that one has examined his/her own culture and society and has recognized the patterns of oppression, exploitation and marginalization that permutes every aspect of public life. It also means having made a deliberate choice to enter in some degree into the world of those who are deprived to share in a significant way in their experience of being mistreated or bypassed. Most importantly, it requires the more fortunate to make a free choice to place the goods more generously at the service of others.

3.6 Common Good

The idea of the common good also emerges directly out of the social nature of the person, CST states that, as humans, we have been created for life in community, and we need other people and the larger society to exist and to thrive in our lives. We cannot, by ourselves, create all of the conditions, which would allow us to flourish. A certain social fabric must exist within society if each person is to have the opportunity to grow and develop fully as a person. *The common good is therefore understood as the total of all conditions necessary*... economic, political, material, and cultural... *which allow all people to realize their human dignity and reach their full human potential.* We need a wider support system, and this is what the common good is... the
provision of all conditions and goods necessary to sustain and support human dignity which we cannot by ourselves provide.

Both the state and the individual person play a unique role in the provision of the common good. The common good is best protected when the rights of the person are preserved and promoted, and it is the state, which should be responsible for the protection of our basic human rights. One of the state’s main contributions to the common good is its role of securing public order, which is a part of the common good. Public order is maintained through three specific goods… public peace, basic standards of justice, and public morality. The significance of distinguishing the common good from public order is that the whole society is responsible for creating the conditions necessary for the common good, while the state is specifically responsible for preserving the public order as its contribution to the common good. Also, another one of the state’s major contributions to the common good is its provision of access for every person to participate in the life of society.

The promotion of the common good is not just the concern of the state; the individual person is also obliged to make his/her own specific contribution to the common good. CST’s communal understanding of life means that the good of each person is intrinsically tied to the good of the entire community. As members of the same human family, we have a specific responsibility to live in relationship with others and to contribute our share to the common good of the community so that each person may flourish. Every economic, political, and social decision should be judged in light of whether it protects or undermines, the human dignity of others. This is not an optional duty. Rather, it is every person’s obligation based on the rights and duties that they have as members of the human family based on their creation’.

…The obligations of justice and love will only be fulfilled when each person contributes to the common good in accord with his or her abilities and in light of the needs of
3.7 Stewardship

All people have been created by God and are all part of the large community of creation. By our work, we are co-creators in the continuing development of the earth, and our commitment to the common good requires responsible stewardship of the earth and its resources. At its foundation, stewardship is based on the principle of responsibility and is intrinsically linked to the common good. For CST, true stewardship is a moral challenge, which "... calls us to examine how we use and share the goods of the earth, what we pass on to future generations, and how we live in harmony with God's creation." (US Catholic Bishop, *Renewing the Earth: An Invitation to Reflection and Action on Environment in Light of Catholic Social Teaching*). It demands that we adopt an ethic of responsibility toward creation and also accept the same responsibility toward all human persons. As such, we are called to respect and justly share the resources of the earth in a way that provides for the needs of all. But, stewardship also insists that the use of the resources of the universe cannot be separated from respect for the integrity of creation and a commitment to its preservation.

A vital part of living in harmony with God's creation is to understand our place within this wider sense of community. The Earth itself is a community that is characterized by a sense of interdependence. The environment, its resources, and all of humanity is connected in a delicate web of life that is interdependent on each other. The environmental degradation that is so overwhelming apparent in our societies today is not just about better resource management or issues of recycling (*The New Dictionary of Catholic Social Thought*, p. 193). Rather, it has at its root the failure to understand all of creation as interconnected, and it is this interdependence, which should be the foundation for any coherent worldview. Pope John Paul II
states that the vital sense of interdependence “keeps alive a sense of fraternity with all those good and beautiful things which Almighty God has created” (Pope John Paul II, *World Day of Peace Papal Message, 1990*).

Not only does the CST concept of stewardship demand that we adopt an ethic of responsibility toward Creation, it also insists that we accept the same sense of responsibility toward all human persons. As such, we are called to respect and justly share the resources of the earth in a way that provide for the needs of all. The resources of this world are reflected in the many goods found in society, and those goods are intended to be for the benefit of all persons. There is a universal purpose for all created goods, which exist to promote the dignity of all peoples. God had given to humans the fruit of the earth, and it is meant to sustain the entire human family “without excluding or favouring anyone” (Pope John Paul II, *World Day of Peace Papal Message, 1990*).

Unfortunately, this is not the norm in most societies today. Hundreds of thousands of people are deprived of the means of livelihood. “In moving toward an environmentally sustainable economy, we are obliged to work for a just economic system, which equitably shares the bounty of the earth, and of human enterprise with all peoples. Created things belong not to the few, but to the entire human family” (Pope John Paul II, *World Day of Peace Papal Message, 1990*). Use of the resources of the universe cannot be separated from the prospect for the integrity of creation and a commitment to its preservation.

**Conclusion:**

I will like to conclude with a story. It is a story that we probably already know, though it has different versions: A man found the egg of an eagle and put it in a nest of a barnyard hen. The eaglet was hatched with the brood of chicks and grew up with them. All its life, the eagle did what the barnyard chicks did, thinking it was a barnyard chicken. It scratched the earth for worms and insects,
clucked and cackled. And it would thrash his wings and fly a few feet into the air.

Years passed and the eagle grew very old. One day, it saw a magnificent bird above in the cloudless sky. It glided in graceful majesty among the powerful wind currents, with scarcely a beat of its strong golden wings. The old eagle looked up in awe. “Who’s that?” it asked. “That’s the eagle, the king of the birds,” said a neighbour, the chicken. “It belongs to the sky. We belong to the earth, we’re chickens.” So the eagle lived and died a chicken, for that’s what it thought it was.

Another version of the story has it that the eagle eventually realized who its was and its potentials. It then flew to meet its kind.

Unless the Church in the world wakes up, unless each diocese, parish and individuals within this Church wake up to the realization of the great heights to which we could fly, the Church and all of us in the modern world may just be living in a moribund civilization.

To do this, we need to constantly renew our faith in the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has been guiding the Church at every age, at every stage and in every place. The spirit has remained with the Church even in its darkest moments. The same Spirit is still with the Church today. Let us ask the Spirit to continue to direct us in all our efforts as collaborators in the Lord’s vineyard. With this faith, we should not be scared of the future.

There is a battle now that is raging for the control of souls, thanks to the arrival on the scene, of the Pentecostals and the rise of Islam. Faced with these challenges, can we afford to expend our energies on internal battles and squabbles within and between us. Even if it means that we want to criticize ourselves, let it be within the context of a united church/diocese that we all love, a church/diocese that we must all look at with deep faith, humility, charity and love.
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"When I feed the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why are they poor, they call me a communist."

This is one of the best-known sayings of a remarkable priest and bishop, Helder Camara of Brazil. He is the subject of a recent book by David Regan CSSp, an Irish Holy Ghost missionary and theologian. David spent most of his long missionary life in Brazil and met Dom Helder Camara several times. From this book, we can learn much about the life of Dom Helder, his family and friends, seminary training, and later on, his opponents and enemies, within and outside the Church. This is not a biography however. It is a reflection on the significance of Helder Camara's life.

**What is his Legacy to us Twenty-first Century Christians?**

Born in 1909, in Fortaleza, north-eastern Brazil, his mother was a primary school teacher and his father was a bookkeeper in a French business firm. Helder was ordained priest in 1931. In 1934, he was appointed Secretary for Education in his home state of Ceara, and in 1936, he went to Rio de Janeiro, where he was to spend the next twenty-eight years. In 1964, Helder Camara was appointed Archbishop of Olinda and Recife; there he remained until his retirement in 1986. He died in 1999.

Dom Helder was deeply moved by the scandal of hunger in a world of plenty. From 1968, he became known throughout the world as a preacher and propagandist for change. Central to his preaching was a demand for justice and the rights of the poor. He was very clear that his own vocation was to be a preacher of the Gospel, not a politician or political activist. However, he confronted people in the Church and outside it with an urgent moral imperative: poverty is not part of nature; it is caused by
human actions and failures to act. It is a challenge to religious faith and morality. If we want to be disciples of Jesus, we need to see reality clearly, and to hunger and thirst for justice. This hunger and thirst is essential to holiness.

To be holy, one must be on the alert for false peace. We need to question the whole notion of law, national and international, to see whether it is at the service of justice and dignity for all the peoples of the earth.

Law is a word ever more hollow in a world increasingly dominated by force, violence, fraud, injustice, avarice, in a word, by egoism. (From a speech delivered in Harvard University, 1974)

Here we catch a glimpse of the moral passion which filled the life of Dom Helder right into old age. He made holiness attractive and worth striving for. Not the holiness of "self-sanctification", but that which is rooted in the God who loves peace and knows that it is the fruit of justice for all God's sons and daughters.

For those who struggle to be authentic Christians, there is much to learn from Helder Camara's long life. The powerful insights into the full range of Christian faith did not come quickly or easily. At different stages in his life he was called to be converted anew. As a young priest in the 1930s he was committed to a militant style of Catholicism, politically close to fascism. The followers of this creed attached more importance to the value of order than to justice. Historically this way of thinking has helped to legitimise appalling injustice and institutional violence.

Helder Camara abandoned this particular spiritual home. Through prayer and meditation in the early morning hours, he came to a deeper sense of the mystery of God in his own life and in the lives of men and women everywhere, especially the poor. What is worth noting is the social character of each of his conversions: a new appreciation of the demands of Christian faith, new perceptions, leading to changes in his preaching, in relationships to his friends, fellow-workers, to political leaders
and civil society. In due time, he made new friends and new enemies.

Overall, Dom Helder had to undertake the slow labour of change in his own life and sometimes this was painful. For example, he learnt with experience the futility of merely improving the conditions of the poor. It was necessary to understand the causes of poverty and take appropriate action to undo unjust structures. In this project, he could not depend on help from government or from fellow-bishops.

What is very clear in the life of Dom Holder is the spiritual vitality, which enabled him to change, when he saw that his current course needed to be corrected. He took politics away from the sphere of the secular and made it integral to Christian thinking and action. David Regan notes that Dom Holder's pastoral thinking was always political, aimed at the transformation of society. It was not enough to change the hearts of individuals; it was necessary to change determining social structures. At each moment of conversion, he moved closer to the poor and commitment to their concerns.

Dom Helder Camara was largely responsible for the movement of the Church in Brazil from automatic support to all constituted authority, to champion the human rights of those denied dignity and justice. He did not just dream about a better society and a more Christ-like Church. He took practical steps to make its solidarity with the oppressed peoples of the world, and accept the loss of state financial support for Church schools.

How is Change to come about?

Dom Helder thought that violent force was evil and could never yield good fruit. In his simple way of life, in his actions and his words, he showed the power of active non-violence. We human beings are co-workers with God in God's great work of creation. We are responsible for the political and social structures produced by human beings through the centuries. Dom Helder hoped for a network of prophetic minorities to work for necessary
changes, to achieve justice and dignity for all people. In his own words:

The minorities will keep their own names, their own leaders, their own specific objectives. They will not be transformed into new political parties not into new religious sects. But they will be impetuous waters, stirred by the breath of the Spirit of God.

As we struggle to be Christians of our time in the Third Millennium and look for someone to inspire us, we might well choose the smiling Helder Camara, questioning world hunger and many other inhumanities, and proposing a non-violent way forward for the new era.

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