

Fall 10-1-2023

Stalwarts of Spiritan African Mission – Bishop Joseph Shanahan, C.S.Sp. (1871-1943)

Charles A. Ebelebe CSSp

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Recommended Citation

Ebelebe, C. A. (2023). Stalwarts of Spiritan African Mission – Bishop Joseph Shanahan, C.S.Sp. (1871-1943). *Spiritan Horizons*, 20 (20). Retrieved from <https://dsc.duq.edu/spiritan-horizons/vol20/iss20/8>

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Charles Achunike Ebelebe, CSSp is a Spiritan priest of the Province of Nigeria South-East. He did his initial formation studies in the seminaries of the Spiritans in Nigeria and his graduate studies in theology at Marquette University, Milwaukee, USA from where he received his PhD in Religious Studies. He has worked as a missionary among the Borana of southern Ethiopia and currently teaches theology at the Spiritan International School of Theology (SIST), Enugu, Nigeria. His research interests include Mission studies, Inculturation theology, and the Early Church.

STALWARTS OF SPIRITAN AFRICAN MISSION – BISHOP JOSEPH SHANAHAN, C.S.SP. (1871-1943)

INTRODUCTION

Within a year of founding the Society of the Holy Heart of Mary,¹ that is, 1843, the Venerable Francis Mary-Paul Libermann (1802-1852), sent his first batch of missionaries to Africa, Cape Palmas, to be precise. They were ten in number, seven priests and three brothers. This “was to be the beginning of a long and fruitful love affair between his society and black Africa.”² Only the leader of the group, Fr Bessieux and Brother Gregory survived this mission but at a new location, in Gabon.³ On the shoulders of these two survivors was built the extraordinary missionary legacy that the Spiritans has left in Africa. Of this legacy, in terms of numerical strength, the Catholic Church in Igboland⁴ occupies pride of place.

Although the foundation for this mission was laid by French Spiritans led by Fr Joseph Lutz and following him, Fr Leon Lejeune, it was Bishop Joseph Shanahan who is most credited with the success story of this mission.

The cause for his canonization was officially opened on November 15, 1997. This article pays tribute to Bishop Shanahan and introduces him to a wider audience. At their last General Chapter in Bagamoyo, Tanzania, the Spiritans elected their first African Superior General in the person of Fr Alain Mayama CSSp. So, a black man now occupies the office once occupied by Fr Libermann. Libermann’s work for the Blacks has come full circle. Who would have believed it when Libermann and his sons first struck out into the deep of the dark continent in 1843!

1. This Society merged in 1848 with the older Congregation of the Holy Spirit, which was founded in 1703 by Claude François Poullart des Places (1679-1709), to become the Congregation of the Holy Spirit, under the protection of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, also called Holy Ghost Fathers and Brothers or Spiritans.
2. Seán P Farragher, Edward Barron 1801-1854: *Unsung Hero of the Mission to Africa*. Dublin: ColourBooks Ltd, 2004, 94.
3. Farragher, 170-173.
4. Onitsha, in Igboland, was the first place that the Spiritans landed in Nigeria. Although it is not politically correct, Igboland is often used to refer to all the area that Shanahan and his men worked in in Nigeria.

FAMILY ROOTS, EDUCATION, AND CALL TO THE RELIGIOUS, MISSIONARY LIFE

Joseph Ignatius Shanahan was born on June 4, 1871, in the valley of Glankeen, Co Tipperary, Ireland; the fourth in a family of eleven, seven boys and four girls.⁵ His parents were Daniel and Margaret Shanahan. His father was a herdsman and of humble means. He tended cattle for a wealthy landowner named John Dwyer O’Ryan. O’Ryan never married; he took a keen interest in the Shanahan family, “almost regarding the children as his own.”⁶ Joseph’s family had lived in Templeberry before moving to Tipperary. They moved back to Templeberry soon after Joseph was born and Joseph spent his growing up years in the small town of Gortnalaura. Of Daniel Shanahan, Joseph’s father, biographer, Fr. Desmond Forristal writes: “Dan Shanahan is remembered as a tall, well-built man, loyal to his faith and his country, commanding in appearance and not easily frightened.”⁷ Forristal might as well have been speaking of Joseph, his son.

*The principal
of St Joseph’s
College,
Beauvais,
France,
accepted
Shanahan
into this
diocesan
secondary
school run
by the
Spiritans.*

Education

Joseph started his formal education in the village school at Gortnaogoon, on the outskirts of his village of Templeberry. His father valued education but lacked the means to see his children through higher education. The desire to serve God in the priestly, missionary life came early to him. Lack of funds would have frustrated this desire but for his maternal uncle, Patrick Walsh, who was a Spiritan Brother (he took the name, Adelm, at profession) working in France. On completing his primary education at Gortnaogoon, through the intervention of his uncle Adelm and the goodwill of Fr Amet Limbour, the principal of St Joseph’s College, Beauvais, France, accepted Shanahan into this diocesan secondary school run by the Spiritans. This was 1886

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5. Angela J Ruddy, “Bishop Joseph Shanahan and the Evangelization of Nigeria” in *Spiritans Anniversary Lectures 1703-2003*, Compiled by The Anniversaries Commission. Dublin, Paraclete Press, 2004, 18. John Jordan in his *Bishop Joseph Shanahan of Southern Nigeria* gives Shanahan’s date of birth as June 6 and the children of the family as ten in number. Ruddy cites Shanahan’s birth certificate as evidence for her date. That makes her date more reliable. The discrepancy in the number of children stems probably from the fact that one of the girls died at infancy, so while some authors count her, others do not. I believe she should be counted.
 6. Edith Dynan, *A Man for Everybody: The Story of Bishop Joseph Shanahan*. Dublin, Veritas Publications, 2001, 10.
 7. Desmond Forristal, *The Second Burial of Bishop Shanahan*. Dublin, Veritas Publications, 1990, 11.

Shanahan was then fifteen years of age. The young Joseph was to spend eleven good years in France before he saw his family again.

Shanahan ... was ordained priest by Bishop Émile Allgeyer in the Blackrock College chapel on April 22, 1900.

and Shanahan was then fifteen years of age. The young Joseph was to spend eleven good years in France before he saw his family again. In 1889 he transferred to the Holy Ghost juniorate, Cellule, France, where he completed his secondary education. Soon after arriving at Cellule, Joseph formally applied and in 1890 was received into the Holy Ghost Congregation. His journey to the Spiritan, missionary life had begun in earnest.

Spiritan formation

Shanahan spent longer years at Cellule than he would have liked. He was already twenty-four years old by the time he eventually transferred from there to Langonnet, Brittany to begin his studies in philosophy. He did his theological studies at Chevilly, in the outskirts of Paris. His theological studies also did not go as smoothly as Shanahan would have liked. In his first year he had to go for relief duty in Merville, in the northern part of France, to teach English at the Spiritan secondary school there. He was to combine this with his studies in theology under the direction of one of the priests on the staff of the school. Needless to say, Shanahan was not too pleased with this development. Returning to Chevilly after about six months in Merville, Shanahan's theological studies were again disrupted, this time by a directive from Rome that the congregation discontinue the practice of doing the novitiate after priestly ordination. Shanahan and his classmates were therefore asked to suspend their theological studies for their novitiate. The year passed uneventfully and just when Shanahan was hoping to now settle down and complete his studies for the priesthood, he was asked to return home to Ireland to be a prefect at Rockwell College. The joy of seeing his home and family again after eleven years of absence made this a welcome development for Shanahan.

Ordination and first years in Ireland

At Rockwell, Shanahan combined his prefecting duties with his theological studies, which he eventually concluded successfully and was ordained priest by Bishop Émile Allgeyer in the Blackrock College chapel on April 22, 1900. Shanahan referred to this as the happiest day of his life.⁸ Shanahan did not receive his desired mission appointment after his ordination. His one desire was to go to Africa, but he was instead appointed to Rockwell to continue his teaching duties as well as become the Dean of Discipline. Shanahan did not relish this appointment, but he accepted it in good faith and went about his

8. *Ibid.*, 38.

duties with determination and dedication. In the second year of his stay at Rockwell, Shanahan received the good news that he has been appointed to the Southern Nigerian mission. At last, his desire to go to Africa as a missionary had materialized. The journey started on October 9, 1902, a few months into his 32nd birthday.

INFLUENCES ON BISHOP SHANAHAN

Bishop Shanahan's family was a great influence in his life. He took after his father not only in physique but in hard work, dedication to duty, and his love for education. Bishop Shanahan acknowledged his debt to his father for his valuing of education as could be seen in the following statement from him:

*But I say,
'Educate,
educate'.*

You people study education problems in books and at universities. I learnt its value from my father. When the neighbors used to sit around the fire at night discussing the social questions of the time, I often heard him say: "Davitt says, 'Agitate, agitate.' But I say, 'Educate, educate.'" He believed in education as the most potent of all means to the improvement of a people. As we sat around the table in the evenings doing our homework, he would pass around studying our efforts, encouraging, correcting, and at the end of the week there would be an examination with a prize for the best.⁹

*God's life
is revealed
to us in
the hearts
and lives
of our
mothers – aye,
of our
sisters too.*

Joseph's parents were the strongest influence in his faith formation. He grew up in a warm and loving Catholic family. As observed by Forristal, "If the strength of Bishop Shanahan's faith came from his father, then its tenderness must surely have come from his mother."¹⁰ On the influence of his mother and sisters on his faith-life Bishop Shanahan writes:

What a book a mother's heart is for each of us to read and ponder over and meditate on and imitate and live in our own lives. God's life is revealed to us in the hearts and lives of our mothers – aye, of our sisters too.¹¹

Growing up, his parish church would also have been an obvi-

9. *Ibid.*, 12.

10. *Ibid.*, 12.

11. *Ibid.*, 12-13.

... *there is no doubt that Shanahan's long years in France were an important element in his later success in Africa.*

ous influence on young Joseph. The eleven years that Shanahan spent in France from his youth into his adulthood were significant in the making of Shanahan, the man. Such an experience prepared him early in life for the missionary vocation, which he seemed to have developed an attraction for as a young boy. Being separated from his family and homeland at the age of fifteen, never to see them again until he was twenty-six, inserted into a new culture and country, and having to struggle with learning a new language, meant that Shanahan had an early introduction to the missionary life. It was especially significant that Shanahan should have had this introduction in France because it would stand him in good stead when he eventually found himself in the Southern Nigerian mission where the French would become his coworkers. Forristal wrote of these years,

... there is no doubt that Shanahan's long years in France were an important element in his later success in Africa. He was able to relate to the French missionaries in Nigeria in a way that would not otherwise have been possible.¹²

Fr. Myles Fay agreed with Forristal on the importance of Shanahan's years in France for his future mission in Nigeria: "This long formation in France as a young man was providential in preparing him for his role as superior and bishop among missionaries who were mostly French and for his dealings with the superior general and council."¹³

THE MAN, BISHOP SHANAHAN

Shanahan took after his father in physical structure – tall, broad-shouldered, strong. From some group pictures from his years at Celule, Forristal had this description of him: "It is easy to pick [Shanahan] out, even in a large group. The strong build, the jutting brows, the firm lips, the determined set of the jaw, the reserved and almost sullen glance of the eyes, all bespeak a young man who was, if not actually headstrong, certainly not somebody who could be easily pushed around."¹⁴ He had an imposing appearance. In his physique he fitted the Igbo image of a leader. The Igbo have a popular aphorism: *abu*

12. *Ibid.*, 21.

13. Fay, Myles L., "Bishop Shanahan (1871-1943): Protector of the Oppressed and Liberator of Slaves." *Spiritan Papers*, 1985, 19. <https://dsc.duq.edu/spiritan-papers/vol19/iss19/4> Accessed 2 May 2023.

14. Forristal, 21.

*Shanahan
successfully
sat for the first
and second
part of the
Baccalaureate
exam in a foreign
language after
only a few years
in France.*

dimkpa, abu ogwogwo imi ya, which transliterates roughly as, “when you see an able-bodied man, you see his big nose.” For the Igbo, the title of Onye-isi, which they called Shanahan, fitted him well; he looked the part.

By way of temperament Shanahan was both outgoing and reserved. He made friends easily, but he did not go out of his way to do so. The early years of sojourning in a foreign land must have equipped him with the capacity to handle loneliness and aloneness.

About Shanahan’s mental capacity Forristal wrote:

Shanahan was intelligent rather than intellectual. He had no great gift for abstract thought, but he had remarkable intuition. In theology and spirituality, he worked more by feeling than by reasoning. Many years were to pass before he came to trust the soundness of his instincts, which could reach so quickly to the heart of the matter.¹⁵

Maybe this distinction between ‘intelligent’ and ‘intellectual’ is Forristal’s way of saying that Shanahan was more a man of science than a man of arts, because there is no record of Shanahan failing any exams. In fact, he successfully sat for the first and second parts of the Baccalaureate exam in a foreign language after only a few years in France.

Forristal informs us that as a prefect at Rockwell College, Shanahan taught “mathematics, Greek, Latin and of course French, which he now spoke more fluently than English.”¹⁶ These are not easy subjects for an intellectually-challenged teacher to handle. Shanahan’s self-deprecation may have contributed to the image of him as not being gifted intellectually. In his letter to the Superior General applying for temporary vows Shanahan writes:

I beg of you, My Lord, how great is my desire to go to Africa and die beside my brothers. You do not believe, I hope, that a few months spent in the company of the heroes of Homer and the theories of Euclid have made a professor of me. You know, My Lord, that I am here not

15. *Ibid.*, 26-27.

16. *Ibid.*, 36.

by choice but by duty.¹⁷

Shanahan saw himself as a man of action rather than a man of intellect, but it does not mean that he was intellectually-challenged. I conclude this section with a few testimonials from those who knew Bishop Shanahan well.

*He was a
born leader
of men.*

Blessed Fr Cyprian Iwene Tansi, who was admitted into the seminary at Igbariam by Bishop Shanahan, said of him:

He was to us in those days the last word in goodness and courage, a kind and tender father to whom one could go when one was in difficulty. The general impression of the Igbos who knew him – Catholics, Protestants and pagans – was that he was a man of God, a sincere and courageous leader who would shirk at no difficulty to attain his good purpose; a man worthy of all respect and veneration. His giant-like build, his long flowing beard, the special ring and vibration of his voice as he spoke – all these added to make him an object of reverence and admiration for the Igbo people of his time. He loved them and was really loved in return.¹⁸

*He loved
them
and was
really loved
in return.*

Francis Cardinal Arinze, who inherited the See of Onitsha whose first bishop Shanahan was, describes Bishop Shanahan as,

A man of rich and attractive character, highly gifted with drive, vision and go-ahead ideas. Bishop Shanahan has rightly been described as the missionary who perhaps has left the deepest imprint upon the African mission field in the first half of this century.¹⁹

Fr. Edward Leen, who had worked with Bishop Shanahan for two years in Nigeria had this to say of him:

He saw all things in terms of God and of God's out-

17. *Ibid.*, 37.

18. Dynan, 91.

19. Francis Arinze, "The Great Apostle of Southern Nigeria" *The Furrow*, Vol. 22, 6, June, 1971. 316. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27679363> Accessed 30 April 2023.

*He was
more than a
Bishop, more
than a
missionary,
more than
an outstanding
Irishman.
He was
a giant among
men.*

*Shanahan had
worked closely
with Lejeune
since he arrived
in the mission,
so Lejeune indi-
cated to Rome
his preference for
Shanahan.*

pouring of himself. Every aspect of life was for him sacramental ... He endured and felt injury but never resentment ... His greatness lay in greatness of soul, heroic faith, dauntless courage, vision, and personality ... He was a born leader of men ... He was more than a Bishop, more than a missionary, more than an outstanding Irishman. He was a giant among men.²⁰

BISHOP SHANAHAN, THE GREAT LEADER

As has already been observed, Shanahan was physically an imposing man. As a young man he towered above his peers in stature. In addition to commanding respect by his appearance, even more important was the respect he commanded by his presence and his charisma. There was something about him that inspired trust and confidence. Those who had the privilege of meeting him in person testify to his having an awe-inspiring presence. Some of the traits of a leader with which Shanahan was blessed included intuition, vision, and courage. These qualities were on display early in his priestly ministry when as sports prefect at Rockwell College he took the decision to charter a train for the school's rugby team rather than miss an important match. That action put the school in the red, while saving it from a national embarrassment. That decision was not an easy one for Shanahan to take but he took it anyway and was prepared for the consequences. Some say that his transfer from Rockwell to the Southern Nigerian mission the very next year was not unconnected with the rugby match incident. If so, then Shanahan would certainly consider it a *felix culpa*, for his one burning desire had been to go to Africa as a missionary.

Shanahan's leadership qualities

Shanahan's leadership qualities came in very handy in his leadership of the Vicariate of Southern Nigeria. Credit must be given to Fr. Léon Lejeune, his predecessor, for recognizing these leadership qualities in Shanahan and for recommending him as his replacement. In terms of missionary experience Shanahan was the least qualified to head the mission among the three candidates slated as possible replacements. But Shanahan had worked closely with Lejeune since he arrived in the mission, so Lejeune indicated to Rome his preference for Shanahan. That was how an Irish man only five years ordained and only three years in the mission came to

20. Dynan, 90.

head a French mission with veteran French missionaries.

BISHOP SHANAHAN, THE FATHER FOUNDER

One of the perennial problems of the Southern Nigerian mission was the shortage of personnel. As Prefect Apostolic and as Bishop, Shanahan was preoccupied with trying to find workers for his vast Vicariate. It was this situation that prompted him to decide to found a religious congregation for women. The first religious women who worked in the Southern Nigerian mission were the Sisters of St Joseph of Cluny. They joined the mission soon after it was opened by the French Holy Ghost Fathers and Brothers. Their apostolate was mostly with the womenfolk. But their number was never more than a handful. The problem of how to cater to the needs of the womenfolk in the mission became acute as Bishop Shanahan's efforts to attract some congregations of sisters to the Southern Nigerian mission bore no fruit. Dynan informs us that it was this failure to obtain sisters for his mission that led Bishop Shanahan to think of founding a sisters' congregation in Ireland for the Nigerian mission. During an *ad limina* visit to Rome he sought and obtained the pope's blessing for this project and later got the permission of Bishop Patrick Finegan of Kilmore Diocese to open the sisters' first house in his diocese. In this way the Missionary Sisters of the Holy Rosary, (Holy Rosary Sisters), were born. Their first house was in Killeshandra, and the first group of professed Sisters arrived in the Southern Nigerian mission in 1928.²¹ This first congregation of sisters for Nigeria has now given birth to many indigenous congregations of priests, sisters and brothers with membership running in the thousands.

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BISHOP SHANAHAN'S CONCEPT OF MISSION

For Bishop Shanahan mission meant availability for the work of God, which he entrusted to us through the instrumentality of our religious superior. It meant doing the will of God as represented by the superior. Bishop Shanahan's journey to the priesthood prepared him early for this understanding of mission. Once the desire to go to Africa as a missionary took hold of Shanahan, he could not wait to be ordained and be sent out. Unfortunately, things did not always go as smoothly and as quickly as he would have liked them to go during his formation years, but from these situations he learned patience and surrender to the will of God as expressed in the will

21. Dynan, 79-80.

of his superior.

This spirit of missionary availability and self-surrender remained with Shanahan all through his life and gave him a certain equanimity of being, especially in the challenges he faced while in active missionary service and in retirement. Abandonment to the will of God was an integral part of Fr Libermann's understanding of mission. Bishop Shanahan internalized this Libermannian concept of mission and lived it in his life.

Mission as collaborative ministry

Bishop Shanahan conceived of mission as collaborative ministry between the ordained clergy, the religious, and the lay faithful. One could say that it was the realities of mission that birthed this concept of mission in Shanahan but once birthed, he embraced it wholeheartedly and implemented it fully in his mission. It was this concept of collaboration in mission that led him to the founding of the Missionary Sisters of the Holy Rosary as well as to the extensive use of teacher-catechists in the evangelization work in the Southern Nigerian Vicariate. He paid glowing tribute to these great collaborators in the mission of Christ in these words:

These teachers in the old days were wonderful fellows. They were the real apostles of the people. There would be no church in the country today if they had not done their work so well. They never spared themselves and every one of them was a catechist as well as a teacher.²²

Fr. Patrick Roe CSSp sees Bishop Shanahan as being "far in advance of his contemporaries" in conceiving of the teacher-catechists as collaborators in mission and not merely as expedients in the absence of priests.²³ It is however doubtful that Bishop Shanahan would have arrived at such a concept of mission if he had sufficient priests for the needs of his Vicariate. Moreover, Pope Pius XI had in *Rerum Ecclesiae* (1926), spoken of "the importance of multiplying the number of catechists" to help missionaries in their work.²⁴

22. Jordan, John, *Bishop Shanahan of Southern Nigeria*. Dublin: Clonmore, 1971. 29.

23. Roe, Patrick, "Bishop Shanahan (1871-1943) and the Evangelisation of Nigeria" in *Spiritual Anniversary Lectures 1703-2003*, Compiled by The Anniversaries Commission. Dublin: The Paraclete Press, 2004. 57.

24. Pius XI, "*Rerum Ecclesiae*: On Promoting the Sacred Missions" in *The*

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Mission as a warfare

Bishop Shanahan also conceived of mission as a warfare and himself as a soldier of Christ. The goal of this military campaign was the salvation of souls who were held captive by the Devil and his cohorts. Shanahan “saw his mission as a campaign to dislodge the Devil from his citadel in Igboland.”²⁵ He wrote in one of his letters:

In Christ, with Christ, through the power of Christ, the missionary has power to overthrow the devil, to oust him out of his usurped kingdom, to knock his throne and put him to flight, while at the same time, taking his poor unfortunate slaves by the hand and bringing them to Christ, to freedom and heaven.²⁶

Commenting on this Fr. Tony Geoghegan wrote that Shanahan “frequently speaks of missionary activity in terms of warfare, not against people nor human cultures nor religions, but against the spiritual powers of darkness that keep people in a state of slavery.”²⁷

**BISHOP SHANAHAN’S SIGNATURE ACHIEVEMENT
IN THE SOUTHERN NIGERIA MISSION**

Evangelization through the schools

Bishop Shanahan’s signature achievement as leader of the Vicariate of Southern Nigeria was the strategy of evangelization through schools. There has been a debate over who originated this strategy in the Vicariate of Southern Nigeria, whether it was Leon Lejeune or Joseph Shanahan. I do not intend to get into the details of this debate here. It was well covered in my 2009 book, *Africa and the New Face of Mission*, and I refer you to it for that discussion. My conclusion then remains valid.

I am inclined to agree with those who credit Lejeune, and not Shanahan with being the originator of the school

Popes and the Missions: Four Encyclical Letters, London, Sword Publications. 36.

25. Ebelebe, Charles, *Africa and the New Face of Mission: A Critical Assessment of the Legacy of the Irish Spiritans among the Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria*. Lanham, University Press of America, 2009. 96.

26. Brigid Ryan, *Bishop Shanahan and his Missionary Family* Vol. II. Kildare, Leinster Leader Ltd, 1977. 23.

27. Geoghegan, Tony, *Missionary Spirituality of Bishop Shanahan*. Killeshandra, Missionary Sisters of the Holy Rosary, 1978. 22.

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in 1928.*

apostolate in Igboland... Acknowledging that Lejeune originated the school apostolate in Igboland in no way minimizes Shanahan's singular contribution to its success. He was of one mind with Lejeune on this policy of evangelization through the schools and pursued it with single-minded devotion. It is possible that this policy would have been abandoned but for Shanahan's strong conviction and defense of it.²⁸

The policy of evangelization through the schools came under attack from some of the missionaries working with Shanahan, who preferred the traditional approach of spreading the faith through evangelism or traditional preaching. Father Carlo Zappa, who was head of the neighboring mission on the other side of the Niger preferred this approach. In praise of Bishop Shanahan's role in the success of school policy, Historian C.A. Imokhai wrote:

*He refused
to endorse
Fr. Zappa's
practice of
buying slaves
to be trained
and liberated
as Catholics.*

Bishop Shanahan of the Prefecture of the Lower Niger founded schools among the non-Catholic population of Eastern Nigeria. He refused to endorse Fr. Zappa's practice of buying slaves to be trained and liberated as Catholics. Rather, even against the advice of his superiors, Bishop Shanahan put all his available funds into the building of schools and the support of teachers for the non-Catholic indigenous people of the territory, instead of using the money for the purchase of slaves who would become Catholics. He considered the building of schools for the indigenous of the utmost importance to the mission because it would ultimately contribute more to the establishment of the church in the area entrusted to him.²⁹

Another factor that contributed to the success of the policy of evangelization through schools in the Southern Nigeria mission was the enabling environment provided by the colonial government. The policy of grants-in-aid through which the government paid the fees of qualified teachers both in government and private schools was a

28. Ebelebe, 98.

29. C. A. Imokhai, "The Evolution of the Catholic Church in Nigeria," in *The History of the Catholic Church in Nigeria* Eds. A. O. Makozi and G. J. Afolabi Ojo. Lagos, Macmillan Nigeria Publishers, 1982. 11.

huge boon to Catholic schools. In addition, the competition from the Protestants provided the spur to action and a note of urgency in the scramble for the soul of the Igbo. Perhaps the most important factor contributing to the success of the policy of evangelization through schools was the Igbo as a people. They are described as progressive, competitive, ambitious, and adaptable. All these qualities made the Igbo to embrace the school and all that it represented.

His stroke of genius was in how well he managed his limited priest-personnel and his army of teacher-catechists. The latter did the actual groundwork while the former provided coordination and support.

After all these contributing factors have been accounted for in discussing the success of the school apostolate in Igboland, credit must be given to Bishop Shanahan for reading the Igbo correctly and for providing the vision and leadership that took full advantage of the enabling environment for the success achieved by this method of evangelization in Igboland. All the factors mentioned above existed both for the Catholics and for the Protestants, especially the Church Missionary Society (CMS) or the Anglicans. It was the visionary leadership of Bishop Shanahan that gave the Catholics the clear edge. Shanahan knew to strike when the iron was hot. He also knew how and where to deploy his limited manpower and allowed them room to operate; to take initiatives. He did not micromanage. His stroke of genius was in how well he managed his limited priest-personnel and his army of teacher-catechists. The latter did the actual groundwork while the former provided coordination and support. In 1906, soon after Shanahan took over leadership of the mission, there were 24 Catholic schools with an enrolment of 2,057 students; when he retired in 1932, the number of schools stood at 1,386 with an enrolment of 30,390 students, an average of 53 new schools every year.³⁰

The following testimonial by the retired archbishop of Owerri, Archbishop Anthony J. V. Obinna, is a good note on which to conclude this section on the importance of education in the legacy of Bishop Shanahan and the Spiritans in Southern Nigeria, nay West Africa:

Catholic schools, primary, secondary, technical and Teacher Training were in many ways the showpiece of the Holy Ghost Fathers. Next to drawing West Africans into the Church-Family of God in Christ, school and college education are the next best value that we received from the missionaries.³¹

30. Roe, 61.

31. Anthony J. V. Obinna, "The Spiritan Missionary Legacy in West Africa: An Autobiographic Appreciation," in *The Missionary Legacy of the Spiritans*

With the appointment of Fr Joseph Shanahan as head of the mission, the mission experienced a burst of energy and growth that was little short of miraculous.

CONCLUSION

The Congregation of the Holy Spirit has a special connection to Africa. They have probably committed more missionary personnel to this continent than any other missionary group in the Church. In Africa the Church in South-Eastern Nigeria, in terms of numerical strength, if no other, is the flagship of the Spiritan legacy in Africa.

The first Spiritans to work in this mission were from the region of Alsace, France, with Fr Joseph Lutz being the pioneer leader of the mission. The mission struggled in the initial years but began to stabilize from the period of the next substantive leader of the mission, Fr Leon Lejeune.

With the appointment of Fr Joseph Shanahan as head of the mission, the mission experienced a burst of energy and growth that was little short of miraculous. The Vicariate in 1905, had 2,000 Catholics. When Shanahan left twenty-seven years later, in 1932, there were more than 100,000 Catholics and 120,000 catechumens.

The area covered by Shanahan's Southern Nigeria Vicariate is now home to seventeen dioceses and over two million Catholics, excluding those of Western Cameroon. This is the legacy of Bishop Joseph Shanahan, a stalwart of the African mission of the Spiritans. It is the Lord's doing and it is marvelous in our eyes (Ps 118:23). Bishop Shanahan is rightly called "the Apostle of Southern Nigeria."

*Charles Achunike Ebelebe, CSSp,
Spiritan International
School of Theology (SIST),
Enugu, Nigeria.*