Irish Spiritan Missionary Enterprise in Igboland — A Critical Assessment.¹

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Introduction
It is hardly news anymore that the Catholic Church in recent times has had to look more and more towards the Churches of the South for its missionary personnel. The Churches in Africa are increasingly producing a significant percentage of these new missionaries from the South. Just as the Irish Catholic Church accounted for a significant percentage of Europe’s missionary personnel in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Igbo Catholic Church is a significant contributor to this pool of missionaries from Africa. In this article I offer a critical assessment of the mission of the Irish Spiritans in Igboland, with a view to understanding this new missionary force from Africa. Such assessment is helpful if we are to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past.

One recurrent criticism against the European missionaries who brought Christianity to Africa was that they planted a western form of Christianity in Africa. The missionaries, it is charged, were generally dismissive of African cultures and made little effort to incarnate the faith in these cultures. African Churches have been engaged in trying to reverse this error. This is why inculturation, which is used to describe that process by which the Good News is incarnated in a particular culture, could be described as the major theological concept that has preoccupied African theologians since

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the 1970s and up to the present. The Irish Spiritans in Igboland share in this charge of cultural insensitivity made against their European compatriots elsewhere in Africa. The Church they left in Igboland was largely an Irish Church. It should not have been.

Missionary apologists have often defended the poor record of European missionaries in incarnating the faith in their host cultures by arguing that the missionaries were products of their time; that they knew no better; that they did their best under the prevailing missionary theory and practice of the late 19th and mid-20th centuries. I disagree. I argue that the Irish Spiritans in Igboland had enough material in the official missionary statements of the Church during this period, and in their Spiritan heritage, to have engaged in a more culturally-sensitive missionary apostolate in Igboland. I point to their Irish Catholic background as being a dominant influence in their missionary apostolate in Igboland, and as the reason they failed in this area.

Who Were the Irish Spiritans?
To understand the mission theology of the Irish Spiritans in Igboland, one needs to understand who the Irish Spiritans were. For this reason I examine briefly the socio-political and religious environment of Ireland at the turn of the 20th century. My emphasis is more on the religious history, for the question that I seek to answer is, “What was the faith environment from which the Irish Spiritans came to Igboland?”

The history of Ireland has always been connected with that of England, its more powerful neighbour to the east. The first contact between Ireland and England dates back to the 12th century. Land was always an important factor in this contact. With a traditional economy heavily dependent on agriculture and a population that was overwhelmingly agrarian and a short supply of arable land for the great majority, it comes as no surprise that one of the key issues in Ireland should be the control of land.

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3 See Mike Cronin, *A History of Ireland* (New York: Palgrave Publishers, 2001), 9-15. This situation is similar in many respects to the situation that the Irish Spiritans met in Igboland in the 20th century. Land was of such importance in
Scholars of Irish history are unanimous that the Great Famine (1845-1849) is a watershed in the history of Ireland and in the formation of the post-famine Irish consciousness. "The famine of 1845-9," writes J. C. Beckett, "is a major dividing-line in the history of modern Ireland. Politically, economically and socially, the period that followed it appears sharply distinct from the period that preceded it." Furthermore, he states: "The historical importance of the Great Famine lies not only in the physical results that followed from it—the decline in population, the transfer of property, the changes in agriculture—but in the attitude to the government and to the ruling class that it engendered in the great majority of the people."4 In the same vein, Cronin speaks of the legacy of the famine as one that had long-lasting effects that would go on to shape the future of Ireland.5 The famine helped to change especially the shape of Irish Catholicism.

Between 1791 and 1841 the population of Ireland grew from 4.5 million to 8.1 million.6 The overwhelming majority of this population was Catholic.7 Much of Ireland was rural and poor, and much of this population explosion occurred among the rural poor. A perennial problem for the Catholic Church in Ireland in the pre-famine period was the deteriorating ratio of priest to Catholic population, made worse by the many clergy lost to the Penal laws. This posed a great challenge for structured parish ministry. Also, with their little patches of potato farms and many mouths to feed, survival was a constant struggle for this great mass of Ireland’s

Igboland that the most important deity among the traditional Igbo was a land deity, Ala. However, in Igboland unlike in Ireland, land was traditionally a communal property. That was why it was often the source of inter-village or inter-town conflict.

5 Cronin, History of Ireland, 144.
6 Louise Fuller, Irish Catholicism Since 1950: The Undoing of a Culture (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2002), xxvi.
7 According to the report of an official government commission, in 1835, Catholics numbered 6,436,000 or 80.9 per cent of the Irish population (ibid. xxiii).
“subsistence economy.” Under such circumstances, regular attendance at Mass and other features of organized Catholicism suffered. The result was a Catholicism oriented very much to the home and which drew much from folk religion and tradition; a peasant religion that “found expression in patterns, pilgrimages, holy wells, stations and wakes.”

The bishops and the clergy were often uncomfortable with this form of popular piety, often suspecting it of superstitious and pagan overtones, and they sought to bring Irish Catholicism in line with the Tridentine tradition, which prevailed in the universal Church at this time. Shortage of priests and inadequate physical structures hampered their efforts. But by the time of the famine, significant improvement had been recorded in the area of Church structures.

The famine took care of the problem of priest shortage, or at least lessened its severity, as the combined effects of death, disease, and emigration, which followed the famine, decimated the population of Ireland, especially the rural poor. Ironically, the post-famine period also witnessed a significant improvement in the economic fortunes of the remnant population. After the famine the Irish society became more homogenous and more prosperous, and also more orthodox in the practice of their faith and closer in mentality to their clergy.

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8 Mass attendance in this period was much higher in the urban than in the rural areas. In the former, it was as high as 100 per cent in some places and as low as 30 per cent in others. See David Miller, “Irish Catholicism and the Great Famine,” *Journal of Social History* 9, no. 1 (1975): 81-98. Patrick Corish agrees with Miller’s observations but thinks his figures a little exaggerated and reverses them downwards. See his *The Irish Catholic Experience* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1985), 166-67.


10 According to the *Catholic Directory*, as many as 900 Churches were built or restored in the 30 years preceding 1844. See Fuller, *Irish Catholicism*, xxv.

11 Fuller, *Irish Catholicism*, xxvii.
Reformational Catholicism to take full hold in Ireland. The Great Famine helped to change this, providing a more conducive environment for the flowering of Irish Catholicism along Tridventine lines. This evolution reached its highpoint in the mid-19th century but continued until the Second Vatican Council. According to Thomas McGrath, “the period 1875 to Vatican II in 1962 witnessed the triumphant expression of the Tridentine ideal in Ireland.”

“Catholicism of the Irish Kind”

In Ireland the Tridentine ideal, aided by the peculiar circumstances of 19th century Ireland, took on a unique character, and produced what continental Catholic intellectuals have characterized as “le catholicisme du type irlandais.” Ó Ríordáin identifies some of the characteristics and the factors that went into the making of this type of Irish Catholicism. He considers it a pity that “Catholicism of the Irish kind” has remained the public face of Irish Catholicism right into the late 20th century, even though it was neither really Irish nor Catholic. For him, this type of Catholicism owed much to the cultural influence of Anglo-Saxon Puritanism, an influence made possible by the political destruction of Ireland and the decline of the Irish language and culture. Ó Ríordáin contends that the

12 McGrath, “The Tridentine Evolution of Modern Irish Catholicism, 1563-1962; a Re-examination of the ‘Devotional Revolution’ Thesis,” in Irish Church History Today, ed. Réamonn Ó Muirí (Armagh: Cumann Seanchais Ard Mhacha, 1990), 97. As the title suggests, in this article McGrath challenges Emett Larkin’s influential “devotional revolution” thesis by which the eminent historian of Irish Catholicism held that a devotional revolution spearheaded by Paul Cardinal Cullen, the archbishop of Dublin and Papal Legate, happened in Ireland between 1850-1875, which turned the Irish into practicing Catholics of the sacramental and devotional type. See Larkin’s The Historical Dimensions of Irish Catholicism (Washington DC: Catholic University of American Press, 1984), 57-58. The substance of this thesis had previously been published as “The Devotional Revolution in Ireland, 1850-75,” American Historical Review 77, no. 3 (1972): 625-52. Larkin’s thesis is persuasive, but McGrath’s reading of the situation seems to me more accurate.

austerity often associated with Irish Catholicism owes more to this source and not to Jansenism, as is often postulated.

English was the medium for the dissemination of this Anglo-Saxon puritanical culture. The works of English spiritual and devotional writers, such as James Butler (1741-1791), Richard Challoner (1691-1781), and George Hay (1729-1811) were very popular in 18th century Ireland, and they helped shape a spirituality whose general strain could be described as “severe and anxious.”

Besides Britain, the Continent was another source of 18th century Irish spirituality. From Belgium, France, Italy, and elsewhere many new devotions—processions, novenas, missions, Benediction, stations of the cross, confraternities, devotions to the Sacred Heart and to the Immaculate Heart—and their supporting sacramentals—scapulars, medals, holy pictures—were imported into Ireland mostly through the many religious orders and societies from the Continent that were establishing in Ireland at this time. These devotional spiritual practices came to be identified with Catholicism of the Irish kind.

Another source of this Catholicism was the reforms initiated in the mid-19th century by Paul Cullen, the archbishop of Armagh, and later Dublin, and Papal Legate. Especially significant in this regard was the national Synod in Thurles in 1850, the first such Synod in Ireland since the 12th century. The decrees of this and subsequent synods as well as the “Missions” preached mostly by members of the many religious orders throughout the parishes in Ireland, helped to mould the Irish people into “a thoroughly sacramental and Mass-going church.”

Catholicism of the Irish kind was the type of Catholicism that the Irish Spiritans brought to Igboland. All the devotional spiritual practices mentioned above, and more besides, are popular in Igboland; so are the sacraments and the sacramentals. The Igbo, of course, have added their own local genius to many of these, sometimes approaching them from the perspective of their

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traditional religion. I agree with Ó Ríordáin that there is nothing necessarily wrong with Catholicism of the Irish kind, but as he feared for the Irish, I fear that this type of Catholicism is not connecting with the Igbo at their depth. The emphasis is much on externals and on activities. My hope is that inculturation can change this. With these initial remarks I now examine some of the important aspects of the Irish Spiritan missionary enterprise in Igboland.

The Goal and Motivation of the Irish Spiritan Mission in Igboland

The Irish Spiritans in Igboland brought with them the prevailing understanding of the goal of mission, as outlined in the official missionary documents of the pre-Vatican II period.¹⁶ Their primary missionary goal was to plant the Church and to increase the number of its members in Igboland. The priest was the primary agent of evangelization and his task was to proclaim the message of salvation and to provide the means of salvation—the sacraments—to those who accept this message. But, as the Irish Spiritans in general never mastered the Igbo language, and so were hampered in their proclamation of the Gospel message, this aspect of their work was quickly entrusted to the local catechists, and they concentrated mostly on administering the sacraments. This was especially the case in the era of expansion and consolidation when there was an explosion in the numbers of those seeking admittance into the Church. This gave the Irish mission theology in Igboland a highly sacramental flavour.¹⁷ Bishop Shanahan’s “Circular No. 10”¹⁸ is to be understood against this background.

¹⁶ See Benedict XV’s Maximum illud (1919), 1; and Pius XI’s Rerum ecclesiae (1926), 6.
¹⁷ This was the case with the Catholic Church in Ireland that most of the Irish Spiritans knew. Thomas Kiggins writes of Pat Whitney, one of the first two Irish diocesan priests to volunteer for temporary assignment in Nigeria and who went on to found the St. Patrick’s Missionary Society (Kiltegans), that “he had no doubt that ‘the saving of Nigeria’ centred on the priest, on the Mass, the sacraments and the parish structures which he had known in Ireland from his
The primary missionary motivation of the Irish Spiritans in Igbonland was the salvation of souls, who otherwise were doomed to perdition. The more the number of souls in question the greater the motivation to reach them. The density of the population in the Igbo hinterland was a big motivation in the push to reach them. This push to bring salvation to the Igbo was conceived in military terms; the missionaries were engaged in battle with the Devil and all his forces of darkness, who were exercising dominion over Igbonland and its people. Shanahan, for one, saw his mission as a campaign to dislodge the Devil from his citadel in Igbonland. From his retirement home in Kimmage he muses on the good old days: “There is nothing in this world like the vision of a great group of adults being baptized out in the open in the midst of a country where the Devil has such a grip of everything. In Ireland he owns nothing ... in Africa nearly everything.” Accordingly, he

earliest days” [Maynooth Mission to Africa: The Story of St. Patrick’s, Kiltegan (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1991), 40].

It would seem that the Onitsha Vicariate held periodic Provincial Chapters at which matters of pastoral importance were discussed and decisions arrived at these Chapters promulgated by the Vicar Apostolic as law in the vicariate. The tenth such assembly was held at Onitsha in August 1924 and its decisions published as Circular No. 10. The document speaks of the decisions as being a product of “the quasi unanimous consensus of the Fathers,” which seems to suggest that only priests attended these Chapters or that only priests voted on the decisions. See Spiritan General Archives, Chevilly-Larue, France (hereafter CSSp Gen. Archives), 1111.1b3.

The need to reach the proverbial one billion un-baptized peoples of the world was a recurrent theme in the official missionary documents of this period. See Maximum illud, 1; Rerum ecclesiae, 6.

conceives of Ireland as a crusading nation, sent to bring the divine life to the pagan world.  

The presence of competition in the form of Protestant missionaries, especially of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) added an urgency to this campaign that otherwise may not have been there. In fact, one can safely say that next to the schools, the presence of Protestant competition was the single most important factor in the Irish Spiritans’ missionary success in Igboiland. The Irish Spiritans’ missionary motivation in Igboiland was inspired by the Counter-Reformation and also the drive to assure salvation for the Igbo. Again and again in their correspondence the danger posed to the salvation of the Igbo by the Protestant missionary drive is given by the leaders of the Irish mission in Igboiland as the one reason why it is urgent to supply men and money to the Igbo mission to enable the Catholics win the battle for the Igbo soul.

The School in the Service of Evangelization

Much has been written about the role of the schools in the evangelization of Igboiland. While all are agreed as to its pre- eminent position as the single most important factor in the evangelization story of Igboiland, there are disagreements as to who initiated it and why it was so successful. Until recently, and thanks especially to Jordan’s influential biography of Shanahan, which first appeared in 1949, the prevailing opinion has been that the choice of the school as the primary means of evangelization in Igboiland was the brainchild of Bishop Shanahan. This was

21 Jordan, Bishop Shanahan, 177.

22 John Daly, a veteran of the Igbo mission, shares this view. See his “Iboland: the Background to the Vocation Explosion,” AFER 15, no. 3 (1973): 259-266. Angela Ruddy, a Holy Rosary Sister and vice-postulator for the cause of Bishop Shanahan’s beatification, has recently defended this view. See her “Bishop Joseph Shanahan and the Evangelisation of Nigeria” in Spiritan Anniversary Lectures, 1703-2003 (Dublin: Paraclete Press, 2004). According to Ruddy, it was no coincidence that Lejeune began to speak more forcefully in favour of evangelization through the school only after Shanahan joined the mission in 1902. The sources, however, reveal that Lejeune had begun to concentrate on schools as an evangelization strategy before Shanahan’s arrival at Onitsha. In
regarded as a stroke of genius on Shanahan’s part and as his main claim to fame. Much is riding on this so one can understand the discomfort of those who subscribe to this view when it is called into question, as it has been, first by P. B. Clarke, then by Augustine Okwu, and more recently by I. R. A. Ozigbo. Subsequent research by Igbo scholars has generally identified with the view that Lejeune, and not Shanahan, should be credited with being the originator in the Igbo mission of the method of evangelization through the schools.

While I am persuaded by the Lejeune school of thought, I submit that there is nothing original, either to Lejeune or to Shanahan, in the method of evangelization through the schools. It belongs to both the Catholic and Spiritan evangelization ethos. Libermann had accorded an important place to schools in his missionary methodology, and insisted on it when some of his missionaries protested that they “did not go to the Missions to become school teachers.” “Civilization” was an important component of Libermann’s concept of evangelization, and the fact, it was to help him implement that vision that he requested Shanahan for the Igbo mission. See CSSp Gen. Archives, 10II.1, and Missionary Annals, August 1948, 11.


school was his primary civilizing agent. The school was important for two other reasons: it was the breeding ground for catechists and local clergy, two essential elements in Libermann’s program of missionary evangelization. These were precisely two areas in which the schools served the Irish Spiritan missionary apostolate in Igboland particularly well.

**The Irish Spiritans and the Igbo Language**

Generally speaking the Irish Spiritans never mastered the Igbo language. They interacted with the people and did their preaching mostly through interpreters. The Irish Spiritans who could confidently preach to the people in Igbo were too few as to be statistically insignificant. Their excuse was that the Igbo language was too difficult to learn. Most Igbo, especially the elite, did not accept this excuse. This was why their failure to master the language always featured in the criticism of them by the early Igbo indigenous clergy, who saw in this failure a certain colonial attitude and disrespect for the Igbo culture. The critics charged the Irish Spiritans with superior colonial mentality and disinterestedness.

I do not think the difficulty of the language is enough to explain this general failure of the Irish Spiritans to master the Igbo language. Missionaries have mastered more difficult languages. In general the Catholic missionaries to Asia spoke the various Asian languages—Chinese, Japanese, Mandarin, etc. I think there is substance in the criticism, which sees the inability of the Irish Spiritans to master the Igbo language as symptomatic of their lack of respect for the Igbo culture. People’s effort to master a foreign language can be said to be directly proportional to how much they value or esteem the language in question. In general missionaries to Asia made more effort to master the indigenous languages because these languages were esteemed as ancient and as carriers of respected civilizations. They also had a respected body of literature. This was not so in the case of Igbo, whose speakers were conceived of as having no civilization worth mentioning let alone respecting.

Another reason for the Irish Spiritans’ failure to master the Igbo language was the Igbo themselves. The Irish Spiritans
discovered quickly the Igbo love for novelty and the mystique of the English language for the Igbo. It is the symbol of the white man and it added to his mystique. The fact that the Irish Spiritans spoke in a foreign tongue gave them a higher status in the eyes of the ordinary Igbo.\textsuperscript{27} Their own sons and daughters who acquired this foreign tongue also enjoyed a higher status in their eyes. It is because they discovered this Igbo attraction for English that the Irish Spiritans emphasized its teaching and learning in their schools to the almost total neglect of Igbo. This was an important selling point of their schools in contrast to the Church Missionary Society, who used Igbo as a medium of instruction in their schools. In fact, one can argue that English language played a significant role in giving the Catholic Church the upper hand against the Church Missionary Society in their missionary rivalry in Igboland.\textsuperscript{28} This historical fact helps to explain why the Igbo language has continued to struggle against the English language among the Igbo up till the present day. It is a struggle that the Igbo language is losing, and some will say, have already lost. The Irish Spiritans must take a share of the blame for such a calamity.

Moreover, in failing to learn the Igbo language, the Irish Spiritans were ignoring a direct and repeated instruction on missionary methodology by the popes since Benedict XV. In

\textsuperscript{27} Ogbu Kalu has also pointed to the fact that the missionaries' being European (white) worked in their favour in the campaign to win Igbo hearts and minds. See his \textit{The Embattled Gods: Christianization of Igboland, 1841-1991} (Trenton, NJ; Asmara, Eritrea: Africa World Press, 2004), 83, 195, 320.

\textsuperscript{28} This certainly was the case in Eke, the pioneer Catholic outpost in the then Enugu division, where the story was told of the powerful Chief Onyeama of Eke, who had invited the CMS to establish a school in his domain, but on learning that Igbo was the medium of instruction, sent them packing, and invited the Catholics instead. Thereafter, he did all he could to prevent the CMS from establishing in any of his vast areas of influence. Thus did this northern culture area of Igboland become heavily Catholic. For more on the history of the Catholic Church in Eke in particular and in Enugu diocese in general see \textit{The Advent and Growth of the Catholic Church in Enugu Diocese: A History Written to Mark the First Centenary of Catholicism in Nigeria, East of the Niger}, eds. M. O. Eneasato and others (Onitsha, Nigeria: Jet Publishers, 1985).
Maximum illud, Benedict XV had called on missionaries to strive to master the language of the people among whom they worked.\textsuperscript{29}

The Irish Spiritans and Igbo Culture

Besides their inability to learn the Igbo language the other major criticism against the Irish Spiritans in Igboland was that they did not understand the Igbo culture and so saw little of value in it and consequently made no attempt to adapt it to the Gospel message. Again, they had enough resources in the official teaching of the Church and in their own Spiritan heritage to have done better. Libermann, for instance, had useful insights for his missionaries on this subject.\textsuperscript{30} In a letter of 1845 to Fr. Bessieux in Guinea, he writes: "Adjust yourself to the customs and habits of all and don’t try to make them adopt your tastes and habits. Those who are laboring for the salvation of men must know how to bow and bend to everything. Without this they will either be broken themselves or break others."\textsuperscript{31} In another letter of 1847 Libermann instructs his missionaries stationed in Dakar and Gabon to "become black with the blacks," an expression that has come to assume the status of a missionary maxim.\textsuperscript{32} The Vatican too had been saying the right things here even before Vatican II. For instance, in an address to the Pontifical Missionary Society in 1944 Pope Pius XII stated that

\textsuperscript{29} See Maximum illud, 20 and Rerum ecclesiae, 23. See also Pius XII’s Evangelii praecones (1951), 21. Libermann, even before the popes, had recognized the importance to the mission of the missionary’s mastering the language of his host community. Accordingly, he recommended that his missionaries spend a full year acquiring this important tool. The time stipulated for language learning for the Spiritan missionaries in Igboland was six months, and often less time than this was actually spent on the task, with the missionaries abandoning the effort once they had enough rudiments of the language to enable them hear confessions.

\textsuperscript{30} Libermann, of course, predated the term “inculturation” by more than a century. The concept, however, is as old as Christianity.


the missionary’s task was not to transplant European civilization and culture to foreign soil but rather, “to teach and form them [the natives] so that they are ready to accept willingly and in a practical manner the principles of Christian life and morality . . . ,” principles, which “fit into any culture, provided it be good and sound . . . .”

The Irish Spiritans in Igboland did not reflect these insights in their attitude to Igbo culture. There is enough evidence in the records to sustain the charge against them of being anti-cultural agents. Positive statements on Igbo culture from the Irish Spiritan missionaries in Igboland are hard to come by. Even Shanahan who was said to have understood the soul of the Igbo had many uncharitable things to say about Igbo culture. In his annual report to Propaganda Fide of 1905 Shanahan writes of his plan to push into the interior of the Igbo country now that they have established solid bases along the Niger. Of their prospects in the Igbo heartland he writes: “Real difficulties await us in this new field: difficulties of transport, . . . . We will be face to face with fetishism, infanticide,

33 Evangelii praecones, 60.
34 Augustine Okwu argues that the disparagement of Igbo culture started when the Irish Spiritans took over the Igbo mission from the French Alsatians. He writes: “. . . the French Spiritans [respecting Libermann’s instructions on missionary adaptation] refrained from any open confrontation with Igbo social and religious customs that were later despised by their successors, the Irish Holy Ghost Fathers.” He gives a few examples to back up this claim: The French priests and their followers taking an active part in the ofala of the Obi of Onitsha and their purchase of a horse for Chief Idigo, their most prominent member, to sacrifice for acquiring the prestigious ozuo title. See his “The Weak Foundations of Missionary Evangelization in Precolonial Africa: The Case of the Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria 1857-1900,” Missiology: An International Review 8, no. 1 (1980): 37-38. It is true that the anticultural tone of the Spiritan mission in Igboland increased over time, but it did not begin with the Irish. Okwu might be reading too much into the French Spiritans’ apparent tolerant attitude towards Igbo culture. Their actions might have been dictated by prudence – they were but recent arrivals and their situation was still precarious – than respect or appreciation for Igbo culture. The missionaries had as yet not acquired the “master” status, which colonialism was soon to bestow on them, and so they tended to tread more carefully.

See Jordan, Bishop Shanahan, 108, 112; Dynan, Man for Everybody, 36.
the methodical destruction of the elderly. ... We know that the Igbos are not averse to a meal of human flesh."

It has to be said that even though the Irish Spiritans’ missionary sojourn in Igboland predated the relatively recent and continuing preoccupation of the African Church with the issue of

36 CSSp Gen. Archives, 1111.2a4. By infanticide Shanahan must be referring to the Igbo practice of killing twins, which they considered an abnormality and as harbingers of misfortune. As to what he means by “the methodical destruction of the elderly,” one can only guess, for the Igbo cherished their elderly people as they did their children. He was probably referring to the practice in some Igbo communities of killing old women accused of witchcraft. As condemnable as this practice was, it hardly amounted to a “methodical destruction of the elderly.” As to the Igbo being cannibals, that was true of some Igbo communities but not of others. But that is simply a phase in human evolution and Shanahan can certainly not claim that there were no cannibals in Irish history. I am not suggesting that this statement is enough evidence that Shanahan was entirely condemnatory of Igbo culture but it shows that his attitude was by no means entirely positive, as Seán Farragher, for instance, seems to suggest by this statement: “That Bishop Shanahan was to treat with respect the local religious traditions of Nigeria must have been due to the attitude imbibed as he grew up in Tipperary.” See his Bishop Joseph Shanahan. Farragher may have got this impression from reading Jordan, who painted an overly positive image of Shanahan in regard to Igbo culture in his Bishop Shanahan of Southern Nigeria. Jordan writes, for instance, that Shanahan, out of deference to Igbo traditional sensibilities “never spoke in condemnation of paganism or anything pagan, whether as regards custom or law or ritual” (55). Jordan also quotes Shanahan as describing the Igbo as possessed of “the most wonderful qualities of any people in the world ...” (108). He furnishes many other positive notes (See pp. 21, 112, 142). I doubt that anyone who reads the quote above from Shanahan’s letter to the Prefect of Propaganda Fide will think so highly of the Igbo. There is no doubt that Shanahan was a great lover of the Igbo, who in turn loved and adored him, but it was not necessary to rid him of all negative foibles against the Igbo, as Jordan seems to do, to underscore that fact. Kalu, who describes this book as “propagandist,” suggests that Shanahan’s purported deference to Igbo culture may have been a calculated missionary strategy to win over the Igbo in the face of Protestant rivalry. The essence of this strategy, according to him, was to initiate as many people as possible into Catholicism and leave their conversion for later. See Embattled Gods, 195, 203. This points to the sacramentalism that I spoke of earlier. One hopes, however, that Kalu does not suggest that this kind of provisional evangelism, or the scramble for numbers, was peculiar to the Catholic missionaries.
inculturation, they could have done a better job of laying the foundations of a truly Igbo Church. They did not have to establish an Irish Church in Igboland, but that is very much what they did. It is however not their fault that the Igbo indigenous hierarchy, clergy, theologians, and laity have let this Church remain more or less Irish more than three decades since their exit. The blame for this situation lies squarely with the Igbo themselves, and with the Roman Magisterium, for not being committed fully to the inculturation project.

**Irish Spiritans and Indigenous Clergy**

One constant theme of the popes in the official statements on mission in the pre-Vatican II period was the call on heads of missions to establish a local clergy. In *Maximum illud* Benedict XV had complained that the Catholic Church had been present in certain regions of the world for centuries—Asia, to be precise—and yet cannot boast of a properly trained native clergy. He called for a change of method, insisting that “the main care of those who rule the missions should be to raise and train a clergy from amidst the nations among which they dwell, for on this are founded the best hopes for the Church of the future” (12). And as we saw, all his successors repeated this call for an indigenous clergy. Even though Trent had instructed bishops to set up seminaries in their dioceses, this instruction did not seem to have been implemented in most mission territories. The popes instructed mission heads to follow through on this mandate.

In comparison to the parts of Asia that Benedict XV was referring to, indigenous clergy was established in Igboland early. The first Igbo priest, John Anyogu, was ordained in 1933 barely 48 years after the arrival of the Spiritans in Igboland. But it could have happened quicker. In fact, Òzigbo describes the beginnings of the seminary in Igboland as “slow and painful.” According to him, Fr. Lejeune had planned to open a seminary in Onitsha but that the project was aborted by his premature death in 1905. Bishop
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Shanahan, he writes, “froze the project for nearly 20 years” before eventually opening St. Paul’s seminary at Igbariam in July 1924. It is indeed true that a local clergy could have been raised in Igboland earlier than it was. Despite the obstacle placed by the requirement of priestly celibacy on a culture that placed high premium on progeny, potential candidates for the priesthood began to appear early enough. Shanahan sought advice with regard to two such interested candidates in his report to the Mother House of November 27, 1912.

Two of our children [students], of excellent Christian parents, have asked of us to become priests. Their parents have also made the same request, and are ready to pay 500 francs for each for us to place them in a school in Ireland or

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37 Ozigbo, *Igbo Catholicism*, 17. This late attention to raising a local clergy was not restricted to Catholic missionaries only. Other authors have written on this issue include Okwu, “Mission of the Irish Holy Ghost Fathers,” 593-403; Felix K. Ekechi, *Tradition and Transformation in Eastern Nigeria: A Sociopolitical History of Owerri and its Hinterland, 1902-1947* (Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press, 1989), 127-141. Both Okwu and Ekechi point to racism as an important factor in the Irish Spiritan reluctance to institute a local clergy. This problem was more pronounced among the Catholics than among the Protestants, especially the CMS, their main rivals, whose missionary evangelism from the beginning had a strong black agency in the form of ex-slaves of Igbo extraction from Sierra Leone. However, Ogbu Kalu observes that across the board, expatriate missionary bodies paid “scant attention to indigenous ministerial formation” (*Embattled Gods*, 320). The Igbo mystique of the European (whites), which made them more preferable than local agents, at least initially, may have been a factor in this. This notwithstanding, Kalu contends that the vast field of operation and the shortage of expatriate personnel, meant that local agents, men and women, were engaged as evangelizers from the very beginning. Elsewhere, Kalu explains this reluctance to indigenize in the context of decolonization and nationalist politics, and as an instance of the missionary refusal to devolve power. See his “Passive Revolution and its Saboteurs: African Christian Initiative in the Era of Decolonization, 1955-75,” in *Missions, Nationalism, and the End of Empire*, ed. Brian Stanley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2003), 250 260.
Shanahan did not provide the names of these students, so one cannot say if John Anyogu, the pioneer Igbo priest, was one of them. One can also only guess as to why it took another twelve years before a structure was put in place for the training of these promising candidates for the priesthood. I was not able to verify from the archives the response of the Mother House to Shanahan’s request. But given the volume of correspondence on the personnel needs of the Igbo mission, it would be difficult to understand why the Mother House would be averse to such an obvious solution to the problem. In fact, it is difficult to understand why Shanahan devoted so much time and energy, not to mention ink and paper, in search of personnel for the Igbo mission when he could have concentrated his efforts early on raising a local clergy. It would appear instead that raising a local clergy was his last option. Archbishop Charles Heerey, Shanahan’s successor, continued on the same line and must have driven the authorities in Ireland and Rome to distraction with his incessant cry for personnel, all the while neglecting a more ready solution that an aggressive and vigorous campaign to raise a local clergy could have provided.

Why were Shanahan and Heerey and the generality of their Irish confreres not sufficiently interested in raising a local clergy in Igboland in spite of the fact that the vicariate had a perennial need

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38 CSSp Gen. Archives, 1111.3.6.
39 Jordan writes, “The call for priests recurred in every letter, article, and speech that came from [Shanahan] between 1913 and 1930” (Bishop Shanahan, 227). Request for prayers that God may send more missionaries to his mission recurred in Shanahan’s personal letters to his daughters, the Holy Rosary Sisters. See Brigid, Bishop Shanahan, 71, 85, 94-95. Jordan records that Shanahan met with Benedict XV once and with Pius XI at least twice (see ibid., 183, 199, 216). The severe shortage of personnel in the southern Nigeria mission always topped the agenda of each meeting. Yet there was no record of any mention, either from Shanahan or from the Popes, both of whom were strong advocates of a local clergy in the missions, of the possibility of raising a local clergy in Igboland early, to ameliorate this need.
for priests and in spite of papal injunctions to heads of missions to make the establishment of a strong local clergy their primary responsibility? There are no easy answers but a few suggest themselves, nationalism being one of them. After Shanahan became the head of the vicariate and with the successful replacement of the erstwhile Alsatian Spiritans by the Irish and the phenomenal growth of the vicariate, a lot of Irish pride got bound up with the Igbo mission. The Igbo mission began to be seen more and more as synonymous with the Irish and as their claim to fame in the modern missionary enterprise.  

Shanahan for one was highly enamoured of the Igbo mission and the Irish role in it. In a letter of May 22, 1908 to Fr. Rielchenbach at the Generalate, he speaks of the trials of a missionary in Africa, a “clime of broiling sun and seething passions, of intermittent hope and despondency…” But he adds: “Yet, in spite of all, there’s no place like Africa and in Africa there’s no place like the Niger! … We all feel proud of the Niger and wish to place it at the tip top rung of the Mission ladder, provided we can get men and money, but, rather men than money.” And on September 20, 1912, he writes to Fr. Neville at the Generalate thanking him for the promise of new missionaries for his mission, concluding with this line: “How we do pray that Kimmage may be up to the expectations of Ireland’s apostolic fame.” In a letter of August 18, 1935 to Fr. Lena at the Generalate, Heerey describes the Igbo mission as “the best part of the missionary world,” having recorded “23,000 Baptisms again this year…. And he had no doubts that he and his

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40 From about the 1920s when the intensive drive into the Igbo heartland through the schools had begun to bring in the harvest in significant numbers, the Igbo mission began to count more and more in the eyes of the Spiritan Congregation in general and of the Irish Spiritan Province in particular. Even though the Congregation had difficulty in providing adequate number of personnel for the mission, they resisted any attempts by the Vatican to bring in other missionary orders into the territory. The Irish Province on its part resisted an attempt by the Congregation to divide the mission between them and the American Province of the Spiritans (see Kiggins, *Maynooth Mission*, 37, 47-49).

41 CSSp Gen. Archives, 1111.3.5.

42 Ibid., 1111.3.6.
priests “could quadruple that number with more priests.” That was why he was beside himself at the recent news he got that two Irish priests destined for the Igbo mission by the Irish Provincial had been reassigned to Angola by the Generalate. He thunders: “For God’s sake send us Irish priests and send others to Angola.”

This situation changed in succeeding decades as vocations to the priesthood boomed in Ireland. And this brings us to another possible reason why the Irish Spiritans may not have been keen or in a hurry to raise a local clergy in Igboland namely, a popular destination for the growing number of new priests graduating from Kimmage. From the 1950s onwards the Spiritan theologate at Kimmage had record ordinations and the Irish Spiritan authorities and their confreres in Igboland felt it was only a question of time before Ireland could adequately staff the Igbo mission. It is understandable then why raising a local clergy would not be an immediate priority. There is no reason to believe that the Irish Spiritans had any immediate plans to reduce the Irish Spiritan presence in Igboland in the 1960s even with the gradual growth in the number of the local clergy. This led to restiveness in the rank of the local clergy and to a charge of religious colonialism against the Irish Spiritans. From this period onwards the relationship between the two groups began to deteriorate to the point of becoming scandalous. It certainly must not have felt like it to the Irish

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43 Ibid., 1111.7b3.
44 By the 1920s the Irish Province was beginning to record increasing numbers of ordinations and one could see the Irish Spiritan administration wanting to give its growing number of young priests “the benefit of reaping a harvest in areas where the back breaking work of preparation had already been done” (Kiggins, Maynooth Mission, 49). With this kind of thinking, one can see why raising a local clergy will not be a priority for the Irish Spiritans in Igboland.
45 There are pages and pages of entry on this problem in the journal of the District Superior of the Spiritans in Nigeria, Fr. O’Sullivan. This problem was most probably not peculiar to the Igbo Catholic Church. This was the period of the independence movement in many African states and many African priests were burning with nationalist fervour. No wonder Pope John XXIII, in Princeps pastorum, (1959), 11. felt the need to warn the local clergy of the dangers of excessive nationalism. Such tensions between the local clergy and foreign missionaries may also explain why the pope felt the need to repeat and to
Spiritans but the civil war (1967-1970), which resulted in their mass expulsion from Igboland was a *felix culpa* both for them and for the Igbo Catholic Church, for the increasingly acrimonious relationship between them and the local clergy was draining the mission of much needed energy and initiative and eroding their long years of hard and meritorious work in Igboland.

**The Irish Spiritans and Vatican II**

In general, one can say that the renewal inaugurated by the Second Vatican Council did not fully take hold in the Catholic Church in Igboland in the years immediately following the Council. And there is little reason to believe that the renewal has ever taken hold. A number of reasons account for this, not least the situation in the Igbo Catholic Church at the time of the Council. The Council happened in the shadow of a newly independent Nigerian state, an independence that prominent Igbo elites played a significant role in bringing to birth. These elites were basking in nationalistic fervour in the immediate post-independence years and Nigerianization was their watchword. The calls for Nigerianization was initially directed at the machinery of government but soon enough it was extended to the sphere of religion, helped by a growing indigenous clergy dissatisfied with their lot under the Irish Spiritan administrative hegemony in Igboland. Charles Ileerey, as the archbishop of Onitsha, was the head of the Catholic Church in Igboland and he attended the Council in that capacity. But by this time calls for him to cede his see to an indigenous priest have stopped being subtle. Many prominent Igbo Catholic laymen and the local clergy thought that the time was more than ripe for an emphasize his predecessor’s call for collaboration between the two groups (see *Evangelii praecones*, 29; *Princeps pastorum*, 5). Fr. David O’Connor, one of the veterans of the Igbo mission whom I interviewed in Kimmage during the research for my dissertation, interprets the problem statistically. His thinking is that there is usually no problems between the foreign and the local clergy when the latter makes up only 25% of the clergy personnel in any local church, nor is there any when their number reaches 60% and above. The problem, he says, is during the in-between period. That seems to have been the case in Igboland.
Igbo priest to head the Igbo Catholic Church, in the spirit of Africanization, which they felt was lagging behind in Nigeria than in other African countries. Bishop Okoye, himself a Spiritan and one of the two Igbo Spiritan bishops at the time, was speaking the minds of most Igbo elites when he told the Superior of the Nigerian Spiritans, Fr. O’Sullivan that:

Igbo Catholic laymen and clergy are very conscious of the fact that in other independent African States, missionary archbishops have resigned their places to Africans; that these Archbishops are the leaders of the Hierarchy in their own country; that Nigeria, which is the leading African State politically and internationally and the most stable democratically, should also take the lead in the ecclesiastical arena, and yet is far behind the others.\(^{46}\)

Bishop Okoye also pointed out that the Nigerian bishops were especially conscious of this fact at the recent Vatican II Council in Rome; that “at meetings of Archbishops of African countries, it is not Archbishop Ikeerey who attends, but Bishop Nwedo [the other Igbo Spiritan bishop].”\(^{47}\) It is quite understandable how this anomalous situation at the Council contributed to why the renewal inaugurated by the Council never took root in Igboland. The head of the Catholic Church in Igboland, who should have been the driving force of the Council reforms, was, as it were, at the Council without the mandate of his indigenous clergy, a key element in the implementation of any such reforms, and who considered him a sit-tight missionary archbishop. In the period immediately following the Council, the biggest question on the minds of most of the Igbo clergy and their main subject of discussion was not how to renew the Igbo Catholic Church but how to shake off what they considered a new colonialism – an Irish “religious colonialism.”\(^{48}\)

Little wonder then that the Council all but passed them by.

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\(^{46}\) O’Sullivan journal entry for May 14, 1965 (CSSp Gen. Archives, 1111.5a2.4).

\(^{47}\) CSSp Gen. Archives. 1111.5a2.4.

\(^{48}\) Ibid.
This general atmosphere of disquiet and mistrust among the local clergy caused considerable discomfort among the Irish Spiritans and produced a defensive attitude in most of them. Some of them accused the Superior, Fr. O’Sullivan, of bias in favour of the Nigerian priests as regards the tensions between the two groups. (This was in response to remarks he had made on the subject during their chapter). They attributed this bias to his 14 years in the Bigard Seminary. They accused him of favouring weakness in handling the Nigerian priests, "whereas firmness and strength is the only thing that commands their respect." They also accused him of adopting too soft a line with the Bishops, saying that they missed his predecessor, Fr Carron, who did battle with the bishops on their behalf. These priests evidently saw the agitation among the local clergy as an irritation and as a test of strength. Fr. O’Sullivan was more conciliatory and appealed for "affective charity, understanding, and appreciation of the role of the African priest in the work of wedding Christian thought and morality to African thought and traditions." He warned that relations with the local clergy would remain strained if the Irish Spiritans adopted the view that colleges and parishes would deteriorate as soon as the local clergy took them over.  

The last but by no means the least of the extraneous factors that prevented the implementation of the reforms of Vatican II in the Igbo Church was the civil war. When the civil war came, everyone, Irish, Igbo, clergy or lay, buried their differences and faced squarely the struggle for survival. It was hardly the environment for implementing beautiful proposals on making the Council reforms take root in Igboland, such as the one put forward by Fr. O’Sullivan to all the four bishops in Igboland. In that proposal Fr. O’Sullivan was of the view that "in order to ensure assimilation of the Council decrees by all the priests, general recommendations will not suffice." He therefore suggested to the bishops that "six theological conferences be held each year for two and half years, one conference devoted to one decree, which will be

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19 CSSp Gen. Archives, 1111.5a2-4.
read in the two months preceding the conference, and studied in
detail by one Father from each theological competence area who
will read a paper on the Decree to the meeting.” This is contained
in his journal entry for January 24, 1966; he reported that the
bishops welcomed his proposal. The journal did not say that any
part of this proposal was implemented. But it seems unlikely as the
civil war overtook everyone and everything a few months later.
One can only mourn such a missed opportunity, for there is no
doubt that such a proposal, fully implemented, would have done the
Igbo Catholic Church a wealth of good.

One final possible reason why the Council reforms never
really took hold in Igboland needs to be mentioned namely, the
influence of the Spiritan Generalate in Rome, which was headed at
this time by no other than Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre of Vatican
II fame. Bishop Whelan of Owerri who was at the Council reported
that following the Council, French Spiritan Bishops sought to get
English Spiritan bishops who attended the Council to sign a
petition to the pope to call a Chapter and remove from office the
Superior General, Archbishop Lefebvre, and to implement the
Council decisions. Whelan reported that at the Council Lefebvre
had made himself “most unpopular in his intervention on religious
liberty, tracing the schema to philosophers like Locke and Kant – a
schema passed by an overwhelming majority later.” Neither
Whelan nor Heerey signed the petition, nor did most of the
English-speaking Spiritan bishops sign. The Vatican also had
helped kill the plan. Whelan reported that Propaganda Fide would
not go along with the plan; they felt that it was the turn of the
Spiritans to be embarrassed by their superior general, who had
already embarrassed Rome twice—as Apostolic Delegate when he
opposed the appointments of African bishops and as bishop of
Tubre when he antagonized the rest of the French hierarchy by
taking a public stand in favour of La Cité Catholique. One can
understand how it would be difficult to implement the Council
reforms in Igboland with such a Superior General in office.

" O’Sullivan journal. entry for November 11, 1965 (CSSp Gen Archives,
1111.5a2 4).
**Portrait of Igbo Catholic Missionaries**

Having offered a critical assessment of the Irish Spiritan missionary enterprise in Igboland, I wish now to paint a portrait of a contemporary Igbo Catholic missionary. My intention is to highlight where and how such a missionary might differ from his or her Irish forebears. However, it is difficult to paint a single portrait of a contemporary Igbo Catholic missionary. This is because our understanding of mission, which will inform such a portrait, has broadened to include people and activities that before Vatican II would not normally be considered missionary. If the Church is missionary by nature then all are called to mission, and all are missionaries. The view of missionary work that I propose for the Igbo Church has the advantage of engaging all the resources of the Church in mission.\(^5^1\) On account of this the portrait I paint in the next few paragraphs is deliberately broad to include all categories of Igbo missionaries, even though it may in places apply more directly to priests and members of religious institutes, the so-called professional missionaries or missionaries for life. The sketch is necessarily preliminary, and it is idealistic.

Igbo Catholic missionaries are likely to range in age anywhere from late twenties to late sixties, but they are much more likely to be on the younger side of that age bracket. They would not have known any of the Irish Spiritan missionaries in Igboland, and would have had all their missionary training in Igboland under a team of formators that is mostly, if not all, Igbo. They would have lived their entire faith life in a post-Vatican II Church, and their idea of Church and mission would have been informed by this Council. Their mission assignments would most likely be somewhere in the economically developing world—Africa, Asia,

\(^5^1\) Since the inception of the Church in Igboland Igbo Catholic lay faithful have been actively engaged in mission in various capacities both within and outside Igboland. Of this Mbefo writes: "From St. Dominic’s Yaba to Holy Rosary Abuja, Igbo traders are mainly responsible for the membership and financial support of the churches in other parts of Nigeria. Wherever their academicians and merchants go, Europe or America, Australia or Taiwan, they carry along with them the faith of Shanahan" ("Bishop Joseph Shanahan," 338).
Oceania, and South and Central America; and they likely would have been sent there by choice. They are likely to be working in any of a variety of missionary situations—first evangelization, pastoral and youth ministry, education, social work or a combination of any of these. They will most probably not be the only missionaries their hosts have seen. They would be building on the foundation laid by previous missionaries, most likely Europeans and Americans.

Compared to these predecessors, Igbo Catholic missionaries labour under some obvious advantages as well as disadvantages. Being themselves from the economically developing world, they are less likely to be accused of a colonial or imperialist agenda. They are likely to have more in common with their hosts than did their European and American predecessors. This should make it easier for them to understand their hosts and to adapt well to their new environments. Their greatest disadvantage is that they lack the support of a rich and powerful colonial empire, which their predecessors had. They therefore cannot count on the apparatus of state to advance their work. They are economically handicapped, and cannot replicate the magnificent religious, educational, and social structures with which their predecessors were intimately associated.

In this regard one can say that Igbo Catholic missionaries operate from a position of weakness in comparison to the European and American missionaries before them. Paradoxically, this position of weakness is also a source of strength. Their relative position of weakness should make Igbo Catholic missionaries humble. They should not impose their will on the people, since they ordinarily would have no powerful means, monetary or political, with which to push through such a will. This should make them better listeners and persons of dialogue, able to discern together with the people the needs of the mission. This way, they would not answer questions that no one was asking or address needs that do not exist. They will embark on projects that are sustainable, since the ideas and much of the costs would have been internally generated. Their missions would be built on the principle
of self-reliance. This same principle should make them to work towards making themselves redundant. The local Church should, as soon as possible, raise its own pastors. The mission is God’s mission, and they are only collaborators.

Coming from a country with more than 250 different languages, and having had to deal early with the difficulties of learning English as a second language, they should be able to learn and communicate rapidly in the people’s local language. This should help them engage in a culture-sensitive evangelization. Because no one speaks from nowhere, their experience of Church in Igboland would have been moulded their idea of Church—their initial working paper in their mission posts. As soon as they have acquired a working knowledge of the culture and language of the people, they should gradually but steadily wean themselves of the Igbo Church and begin the process of inculturating the gospel message into the host culture. The earlier they begin this process, the better, for experience has shown that once the wrong foundation has been laid, undoing the damage is difficult. The case of the Igbo Church is proof enough.

Igbo Catholic missionaries should engage in ecumenical mission. They should go beyond their recent Christian heritage of religious rivalry and antagonism to their traditional religious heritage to retrieve a more irenic religious ethic. They should collaborate with other fellow workers in the missionary apostolate, as well as with all people of good will who work towards the building up of the human family. It would be wonderful if at the end of their missionary sojourn they left their Churches with many more members than they found on their arrival, but they should be happy if they did not leave a large Church but left a peaceful and happy community.

Conclusion
The Irish Spiritan missionaries were part of the late 19th and early 20th century European missionary movement to Africa. They laboured in several parts of Anglophone Africa, but nowhere did they commit as much personnel, and nowhere did they record as
much success, as they did in Igboland. French Spiritans, mostly Alsatians, were the pioneer Catholic missionaries to Igboland, arriving on the shores of the River Niger in 1885. Political expediency informed their gradual replacement by the Irish Spiritans.

The Irish Spiritans were Catholic missionaries, and like their counterparts elsewhere, the mission theology they took to Igboland was the then prevailing mission theology of the Catholic Church. Also, as Spiritans, they would have been imbued with the charisms of their congregation, which has its own missionary character. It would seem, however, that their homeland, Ireland, not their Roman Catholic or Spiritan patrimony, was the dominant influence on the Irish Spiritan missionaries in Igboland. The Irish socio-political, cultural, and religious environment of the 19th and early 20th centuries affected the missionary enterprise of the Irish Spiritans in Igboland and gave it its Irish character.

The Irish Spiritans, consciously or unconsciously, sought to replicate in Igboland their experience of the Irish Catholic Church, a Church that was conservative, puritanical, highly sacramentalized, and clerical. This was essentially how it was elsewhere in the pre-Vatican II Catholic world; it was in essence the blossoming of the Counter-Reformation theology of Trent. This theology found a receptive home especially in the socio-political and religious environment of the Ireland of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This background helps to explain some of the missionary practices or methodologies of the Irish Spiritans in Igboland, for instance, their attraction to the school apostolate, their disinterest in raising a local clergy and reluctance to share power with same, their inability to learn the Igbo language, and their anti-cultural attitudes. The influence of their Irish background prevented the Irish Spiritans from implementing some of the forward-looking instructions on mission from Libermann, their father-founder, and the evolving insights from the papal magisterium on some of these mission themes. Igbo Catholic missionaries, who make up a significant percentage of the new missionaries from Africa, must avoid repeating the mistakes of their Irish forebears as they take the Good News of Christ to the nations. The portrait of Igbo Catholic missionaries that I offer here is my idea of how they should proceed.