

**MEAE OBSERVATIONES  
EX NECESSITATE IMPORTABUNT  
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SIGNIFICATIONEM.**

**A Study of the vota of Nigerian Bishops  
for the Second Vatican Council**

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In recent years, the history of the Catholic Church in Nigeria has increasingly captured the attention of scholars. A glance at the topics of monographs and articles demonstrates the breadth of fields studied and the significant research already undertaken<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Only in recent years many studies on Nigerian Catholic Church have been published, cf. A.C. ANUKA, *Mmanwu and Mission among the Igbo People of Nigeria*, Zurich 2018; N.H. CHIGERE, *Foreign Missionary Background and Indigenous Evangelization in Igboland*, London 2001; I. DIM, *Reception of Vatican II in Nigeria/Igbo Church with Reference to Awka Diocese*, New York 2004; S. MGBEMENA, *Archbishop Charles Heerey's Contributions towards the Evangelization of Igboland and Human Development*, "Aku: An African Journal of Contemporary Research" 2 (2021), 1, 262-272; A. NJOKU, M.N. EZEH, *History of Catholic*

One issue that has emerged as a focus of inquiry is the *vota* submitted by Nigerian bishops to the Holy See in preparation for the Second Vatican Council<sup>3</sup>. As is widely known, shortly after Pope John XXIII announced the Council in January 1959, an antepreparatory phase began, involving extensive consultation<sup>4</sup>. Responses from bishops, religious leaders, and institutions worldwide helped to shape the Council's agenda. Nigerian prelates actively participated in this process, as has been recognized by existing scholarship<sup>5</sup>.

However, much of the research conducted so far has primarily focused on the content of the *vota*, often neglecting the broader ecclesiastical context that influenced the bishops to address specific issues. This paper seeks to fill that gap. It will not only enumerate the key topics raised in the *vota* of Nigerian bishops but also attempt to explore and present the broader context that shaped their concerns.

### Nigerian Bishops in 1959–1962

Between January 1959 and October 1962, during the antepreparatory phase of the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church in Nigeria was organized

*Church in Owerri Ecclesiastical Province 1912–2012*, Owerri 2012; P. ODETOYINBO, *The Catholic Archdiocese of Ibadan: A Historical Survey 1884–2008*, Ibadan 2008; A.S. OKWU, *Igbo Culture and the Christian Missions 1857–1957*, New York 2010; F. ROZARIO, *You Filled Our Cup: The Role of the SMA in the History of the Catholic Church in Nigeria*, Ibadan 2005; A.C. UNEGBU, *The Institution of the Seminary and the Training of Catholic Priests in South-Eastern Nigeria, 1885–1970*, Zurich 2018.

<sup>3</sup> *Acta et Documenta Oecumenico Vaticano II Apparando*, Series I (*Antepreparatoria*), vol. II, p. V (Africa), Città del Vaticano 1960, 339–357.

<sup>4</sup> É. FOULLOUX, *The Antepreparatory Phase. The Slow Emergence from Inertia (January, 1959–October, 1962)*, in *History of Vatican II*, vol. I, ed. G. ALBERIGO, J.A. KOMONCHAK, Maryknoll 1995, 55–166; A. MELLONI, *Per un approccio storico-critico ai consilia et vota della fase antepreparatoria del Vaticano II*, “Rivista de Storia e Letteratura Religiosa” 26 (1990), 556–576.

<sup>5</sup> A. NJOKU, M. LAMBERIGTS, *Vatican II: The Vota of the Anglo-Phone West African Bishops Concerning the Sacred Liturgy*, “Questions Liturgiques” 81 (2000), 89–121; IDEM, *West African Bishops in Vatican II – A Prophetic Voice (1959–1960)*, “Bulletin of Ecumenical Theology” 13 (2001), 41–69; C.O. NNABUGWU, *Native African Bishops: Emerging Voices on the Eve of Vatican II (1959–1960)*, “Journal of Religion in Africa” 55 (2025), 1, 1–31.

into three ecclesiastical provinces: Lagos, Onitsha, and Kaduna, each led by an archbishop. In addition, there were six Apostolic Prefectures<sup>6</sup>.

By October 1962, the episcopate in Nigeria consisted of seventeen expatriate prelates, including Apostolic Prefects, and five indigenous bishops, three of whom served as auxiliaries. The table below outlines the ecclesiastical structure of the Nigerian Church at the time of the Council's opening. Bishops who submitted their *vota* to the Holy See are marked with an asterisk.

Diocese:	Date of erection (elevation):	Metropolitan See:	Bishops between 1959–1962:	Nationality:
Lagos	April 18, 1950	Archdiocese of Lagos	Leo Hale Taylor SMA, archbishop (1950–1965)	American (British-Irish origins)
			John Kwao Amuzu Aggey, auxiliary bishop (1957–1965)	Nigerian
Ondo	April 18, 1950	Archdiocese of Lagos	William Richard Field SMA*, bishop (1958–1976)	Irish
Benin	April 18, 1950	Archdiocese of Lagos	Patrick Joseph Kelly SMA*, bishop (1950–1973)	Irish
Ibadan	April 28, 1958	Archdiocese of Lagos	Richard Finn SMA <sup>7</sup> , bishop (1958–1974)	Irish
Onitsha	April 18, 1950	Archdiocese of Onitsha	Charles Heerey CSSp*, archbishop (1950–1967)	Irish
			John of the Cross Anyogu*, auxiliary bishop (1957–1962)	Nigerian
Calabar	April 18, 1950	Archdiocese of Onitsha	James Moynagh SPS*, bishop (1950–1970)	Irish
			Dominic Ignatius Ekandem*, auxiliary bishop (1953–1963)	Nigerian
Owerri	April 18, 1950	Archdiocese of Onitsha	Joseph Brendan Whelan CSSp*, bishop (1950–1970)	Irish
Ogoja	January 1, 1955	Archdiocese of Onitsha	Thomas McGettrick SPS*, bishop (1955–1973)	Irish
Umuahia	June 23, 1958	Archdiocese of Onitsha	Anthony Gogo Nwedo CSSp*, bishop (1959–1990)	Nigerian

<sup>6</sup> ROZARIO, *You Filled Our Cup*, 33–39.

<sup>7</sup> Richard Finn sent a letter (dated September 8, 1959) to the Holy See in which he informs that due to an illness he can't present his *vota*. – *Acta et Documenta*, 342.

Port Harcourt	May 16, 1961	Archdiocese of Onitsha	Godfrey Mary Paul Okoye CSSp, bishop (1961-1970)	Nigerian
Kaduna	July 16, 1959	Archdiocese of Kaduna	John Joseph McCarthy SMA*, archbishop (1959-1975)	Irish
Jos	June 29, 1953	Archdiocese of Kaduna	John Joseph Reddington SMA*, bishop (1953-1974)	Irish
Oturkpo (Makurdi) <sup>8</sup>	April 2, 1959	Archdiocese of Kaduna	James Hagan CSSp*, bishop (1959-1966)	British
Oyo	March 3, 1949	Prefecture Apostolic	Owen McCoy MAfr*, prefect (1949-1963)	British
Yola	July 14, 1950	Prefecture Apostolic	Patrick Joseph Dalton OSA, prefect (1950-1962)	Irish
Sokoto	June 29, 1953	Prefecture Apostolic	Edward Thaddeus Lawton OP, prefect (1954-1964)	American
Maiduguri	June 29, 1953	Prefecture Apostolic	James Timothy Kieran Cotter OSA, prefect (1962-1966)	Irish
Kabba (Lokoja) <sup>9</sup>	February 21, 1955	Prefecture Apostolic	Auguste Delisle CSSp, prefect (1955-1964)	Canadian
Ilorin	January 20, 1960	Prefecture Apostolic	William Mahony SMA, prefect (1960-1969)	Irish

The majority of Nigerian bishops during this period were European missionaries, predominantly Irish. Six of them – Leo Hale Taylor, William Richard Field, Patrick Joseph Kelly, Richard Finn, John Joseph McCarthy, and John Joseph Reddington – were members of the Society of the Missionaries of Africa (SMA), founded in 1856 by Bishop Melchior de Marion de Bresillac. The SMA's primary focus was on establishing an indigenous Church while fostering education and healthcare development<sup>10</sup>.

Four Nigerian bishops – Charles Heerey, Joseph Brendan Whelan, Anthony Gogo Nwedo, and James Hagan – belonged to the Congregation of the Holy Ghost Fathers (CSSp). This congregation, founded in Paris in 1703, began missionary work under the Holy See in 1765 and expanded its

<sup>8</sup> In 1960 the name of diocese was changed from Oturkpo to Makurdi.

<sup>9</sup> In 1964 the prefecture of Kabba was elevated to diocese, and in 1965 the name of the diocese was changed from Kabba to Lokoja.

<sup>10</sup> J. TODD, *African Mission. A Historical Study of the Society of African Missions*, London 1962, 173; I. LYNCH, *Beyond Faith and Adventure, Irish Missionaries in Nigeria*, Wicklow 2006, 40-52.

efforts to West and East Africa by 1845, including Nigeria. Their mission in Nigeria gained particular prominence under Bishop Joseph Shanahan who first was a Prefect of Lower Niger (1905-1920) and then a Vicar Apostolic of Southern Nigeria (1920-1931), with an emphasis on pastoral care, education, youth outreach, and cultural integration<sup>11</sup>.

Two Nigerian bishops – James Moynagh and Thomas McGettrick – were members of St. Patrick's Missionary Society (SPS), established in Ireland in 1932 by Patrick J. Whitney<sup>12</sup>. The society was dedicated to spreading the Gospel, beginning in Nigeria, and addressing societal challenges such as poverty, disease, famine, and displacement. In addition to evangelization, the society promoted lay participation in the Church and was instrumental in establishing parishes, schools, teacher training colleges, and hospitals. A particularly notable achievement was the foundation of the Missionary Society of St. Paul, the first indigenous African missionary society. This society played a pivotal role in evangelizing northern Nigeria, particularly among the Gwari people, despite facing challenges from the predominantly Muslim Hausa and Fulani communities<sup>13</sup>.

The first indigenous bishop ordained in Nigeria was Dominic Ignatius Ekandem, who later became a cardinal<sup>14</sup>. Hailing from Akwa Ibom State, he encountered Catholicism during his school years and was baptized at the age of nine. Despite his father's adherence to an African traditional religion, Ekandem chose to enter the seminary. He was ordained a priest in 1947, and six years later, in 1953, he was appointed auxiliary bishop of Calabar.

## Composition of the vota

John XXIII's first institutional decision regarding the council was the establishment of the Antepreparatory Commission on Pentecost, 17 May 1959. The commission was tasked with collecting suggestions and *vota* from the

<sup>11</sup> LYNCH, *Beyond Faith and Adventure*, 87-97.

<sup>12</sup> Ibidem, 145-152.

<sup>13</sup> Ibidem, 186.

<sup>14</sup> M. EDEM, *Dominic Ignatius Ekandem 1917-1995. The Prince Who Became a Cardinal. The Vanguard of Catholicism in Nigeria*, Milton Keynes 2016, 116-117.

world's bishops, Roman congregations, Catholic faculties of theology and canon law, as well as religious orders and congregations, to shape the council's agenda.

According to the *vota* records, a letter was sent by the Antepreparatory Commission to the Nigerian bishops on 18 June 1959. Seven bishops responded promptly, submitting their *vota* in August or September of that year. However, others failed to respond. Consequently, on 21 March 1960, the Holy See issued a follow-up letter urging the remaining bishops to submit their suggestions for the council.

The reasons for the delay varied. Some prelates admitted they were outside Nigeria at the time, while others explained that they required additional time to consult with clergy and laypeople. As a result, five more bishops submitted their *vota* in April 1960. However, eight bishops never responded, and the reasons for their silence remain unknown.

The *vota* submitted by the bishops summarized their experiences within their local Churches, offering valuable insights into the perspectives of the missionaries, the challenges they faced, and the solutions they proposed. Among the suggestions, five main issues emerged: marriage, liturgy, Marian devotion, aid to mission lands, and education.

## Marriage

Charles Heerey, in his *vota* stated that the sacrament of marriage be more closely linked to the Eucharistic sacrifice and be integrated into the rite of Mass<sup>15</sup>.

Dominic Ekandem, in his *vota* stated that in many regions in Africa, many men who are not Christians have multiple wives. Some of these wives want to become Christians but they cannot leave their husbands, and because of

<sup>15</sup> *Ut Sacramentum Matrimonii arctius cum Eucharistiae Sacrificio connectatur et Missae ritui integretur, e. g. post lectam epistolam. Ut benedictio nuptiarum revideatur et transferatur in finem canonis. – Acta et Documenta, 349-350.*

which, they cannot be baptized. Ekandem suggested discussing this problem in the Ecumenical Council for the good of the Church<sup>16</sup>.

Patrick Joseph Kelly suggested a compromise regarding the issue of baptizing women in Africa who are unable to dissolve their marriages to non-Christian husbands. For him, if it is not possible to dissolve these marriages, the first and rightful wife if she wants to be baptized or is already baptized, the constitution should not be applied. This could allow many non-Christians to be baptized who might otherwise never have the opportunity<sup>17</sup>.

Thomas McGettrick highlighted the challenge of identifying when a marriage is legally valid, especially in societies with diverse customs or none at all. Many non-Christians and ethnic communities do not view marriage as a permanent bond. He suggested clarifying the definition of lawful marriage or providing guidelines for missionaries to navigate through such a complex issue<sup>18</sup>.

John Reddington proposed a thorough examination, revision, clarification and broadening of the Pauline privilege aiming to expand its scope as much as feasible<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> *In multis regionibus in Africa saepe viri infideles plures uxores habent. Saepe hae mulieres inter Catechumenos optimos nostros dinumerantur, sed non possunt solutionem a viris suis infidelibus accipere etiamsi solutionem toto corde desiderant et totis viribus quaerant et non licet nobis eas baptizare. Nobis videtur ut discussio de hac quaestione in Concilio Oecumenico fiat in bonum Ecclesiae. – ibidem, 354.*

<sup>17</sup> *Petit ut secundum can. 1125 Constitutio Romani Pontificis S. Pii V applicetur sine necessitate ulla interpellationis in terris Missionum dummodo obtineatur ratio principalis constitutionis, nempe ut durissimum sit polygamo se separare ab uxore qua cum vivit et quae cum ipso baptizatur. Si petitio concedi non potest ut supra saltem petitur ut concedatur cum hac restrictione: sed si sine interpellatione prima et legitima uxor sponte declaret se velle baptizari aut iam baptizata sit non est locus application constitutionis. Cum applicatione Constitutionis Romani Pontificis sine ulla restrictione multi pagani baptizarentur qui secus vix umquam baptizari possint. – ibidem, 339.*

<sup>18</sup> *Fere impossibile est, propter varias consuetudines vel istorum defectum, scire tempus quo matrimonium legitimum efficitur. Plures infideles et coetus ethnici, ut apparet, matrimonium esse unionem stabilem non putant. Quare, conatur ut clarius definiatur matrimonium legitimum, vel dentur praesumptiones ad missionarios dirigendos in hac re difficili. – ibidem, 345-347.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ut extensio privilegii paulini exploretur, in integrum redigatur, clarificetur et, in quantum potest, ut extendatur. – ibidem, 342.*

In an African society that practiced polygamy and repudiation of married women, the Catholic teaching and tradition of Christian marriage fell like a big challenge, which received a gradual, steady and progressive acceptance<sup>20</sup>. In his 1967 seminal work, Adrian Hastings, a professor of religious studies, examines the differing models of marriage within pagan and Christian traditions, especially on their manifestations in mission lands. Highlighting on the significant differences, he stated:

We have pagan patterns of marriage including polygamy, the consideration of women as a possession rather than a person, wife-beating, divorce and so on, and we have a Christian pattern presenting fellowship, complementary mutual service, love, the mirror of Christ and his Church. The former provide the greatest abiding barrier to the growth of an effectively Christian society in mission lands<sup>21</sup>.

The historical context to the Nigerian bishops' *vota* on marriage for the Second Vatican Council, could be traced back to 1855, when Bishop John Colenso of Natal, the leader of the Anglican missionaries in South Africa, initiated the historic debate on the position of polygamists who wished to become Christians. He expressed a strong objection to the common practice of separating husbands and wives when one converts to Christianity. This practice for him goes against the teachings of Jesus and creates unnecessary obstacles to accepting the Gospel. It is putting new ideas into old frameworks and creating unnecessary stumbling blocks<sup>22</sup>. This made Henry Venn, the chief secretary of the CMS, to produce a memorandum in 1856, in which he fully supported the position taken by the West African missionaries. He stated that a state of polygamy is unlawful within the Church of Christ. Therefore, a polygamist cannot be lawfully admitted by baptism into the Church of Christ<sup>23</sup>. Polygamy is the practice whereby a person is married to more than one spouse at the same time, as opposed to monogamy, where

<sup>20</sup> NJOKU, EZE, *History of Catholic Church in Owerri Ecclesiastical Province*, 64.

<sup>21</sup> A. HASTINGS, *Church and Mission in Modern Africa*, New York 1967, 162.

<sup>22</sup> J. COLENZO, *Ten Weeks in Natal. A Journal of a First Visitation among the Colonists and the Zulu Kafis of Natal*, Cambridge 1885, 140.

<sup>23</sup> A. HASTINGS, *Christian Marriage in Africa*, London 1973, 12.

a person has only one spouse at a time<sup>24</sup>. The major type of polygamy seen as the most distinctive feature of Sub-Sahara African marriage is polygyny in which men have multiple wives (cowives)<sup>25</sup>. Advantages in a polygynous situation included such as opportunities for sharing work and childcare (allowing more time for economic activities), and for older wives to exercise authority over junior cowives<sup>26</sup>. It became one of the principal issues that the missionaries had to tackle<sup>27</sup>.

In the early years of the colonial era, the British colonial administration enacted laws to harmonize the marriage practice of the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria, with what was obtainable in the metropolis. Thus, the marriage proclamation of 1900 recognized as legal, a marriage celebrated in any licensed place of worship, by a recognized minister, provided the celebration was public, in the presence of two or more witnesses besides the officiating minister and in accordance with the rites observed in such a Church<sup>28</sup>. Furthermore, the proclamation ordered the official registration of all marriages celebrated, in accordance with the new law. It conferred the right of inheritance to married women, within the provisions of the civil law, in accordance with the common law of England, and also recognized monogamous marriage and authorized civil divorce. Subsequent marriage enactments did not deviate much from the provisions of the 1900 marriage proclamations<sup>29</sup>.

In 1860, John Colenso, reaffirmed his stand and with growing conviction stated that the missionary societies made a serious mistake in their approach to native converts who practiced polygamy. For him, a wrong course has been taken in dealing with converts who had multiple wives at the time of

<sup>24</sup> M.K ZEITZEN, *Polygamy. A Cross-Cultural Analysis*, New York 2020, 3.

<sup>25</sup> K. WAMBUI, *The Phenomenon of Outside Wives. Some Reflections on its Possible Influence on Fertility, in Nuptiality in Sub-Saharan Africa*, ed. C. BLEDSOE, G. PISON, Oxford 1994, 194-214.

<sup>26</sup> S. ZULU, *Feminism and African Womanhood*, in *Sisterhood, Feminism and Power*, ed. O. NNA-EMEKA, Trenton 1998, 51-64.

<sup>27</sup> D. FALEN, *Polygyny and Christian Marriage in Africa. The Case of Benin*, "African Studies Review" 51 (2008), 2, 53.

<sup>28</sup> *Proclamations, Orders and Rules, enacted during the years 1900 and 1901, in force in southern Nigeria on the 31 December, 1901, compiled under the authority of the government*, London 1902. Cf. NJOKU, EZE, *History of Catholic Church in Owerri Ecclesiastical Province*, 64.

<sup>29</sup> NJOKU, EZE, *History of Catholic Church in Owerri Ecclesiastical Province*, 64-65.

their conversion<sup>30</sup>. To this, the Anglican bishops of Africa in 1908, stated in their resolutions following the Lambeth Conference of 1888, that persons living in polygamy be not admitted to baptism, but they should be accepted as candidates and kept under Christian instruction until such time as they shall be in a position to accept the law of Christ. And the wives of polygamists may be admitted in some cases to baptism, but it must be left to the local authorities of the Church to decide under what circumstances they may be baptized, because even if polygamy is not sinful, it is certainly un-Christian and expresses a view of society incompatible with the Christian way of life<sup>31</sup>. Towards the close of the nineteenth century, several different Churches and missionary bodies in West Africa resolved that in some circumstances, men continuing in polygamy could and should be baptized, when the existing unions had been ascertained to be legal, when their termination would clearly cause injustice or suffering to the parties or their children, and when the law of monogamy was in itself recognized<sup>32</sup>. At the World Missionary Conference held at Edinburgh in 1910, while there was an attitude of some tolerance expressed for polygamy from parts of Asia, particularly China and India, there was next to none for polygamy in Africa. In that continent, stated Hastings, missionaries characterized it as an unmitigated evil:

Our correspondents in Africa, view with unanimous intolerance, conditions of life which are not only unchristian, but are at variance with the instinctive feelings of natural morality. With them there can be no question of polygamy. It is simply one of the gross evils of heathen society which, like habitual murder or slavery, must at all costs be ended<sup>33</sup>.

The Christian law on polygamy may be said to be the greatest obstacle to the acceptance of the faith because every mission in Africa refuses admission to the Church to any man who is actually living with more than one wife<sup>34</sup>. Many scholars have agreed that the desire for sustaining polygyny was a li-

<sup>30</sup> E. HILLMAN, *Polygamy Reconsidered. African Plural Marriage and the Christian Churches*, New York 1975, 32.

<sup>31</sup> HASTINGS, *Christian Marriage in Africa*, 14, IDEM, *Church and Mission in Modern Africa*, 171.

<sup>32</sup> HASTINGS, *Christian Marriage in Africa*, 15.

<sup>33</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>34</sup> Ibidem.

miting factor in African conversion to mainstream Christianity, especially in contrast to the success of Islam, which, in condoning polygyny, has been depicted as more harmonious with traditional culture<sup>35</sup>. Among the early missionaries, the heated debate has been on whether a woman could convert without her polygynous husband and whether she could remain married to him. When missionaries encountered polygynous marriages, many tended to recognize only the first of a man's partners; all others were named concubines<sup>36</sup>. In many congregations, if a polygynous man wished to attend church, he would be forced to break up his family, separating himself from his assumed illegitimate wives and children<sup>37</sup>. It should be noted that in West Africa, the Anglican practice from the beginning was to baptize all wives of polygamists who showed signs of true conversion, while in South Africa, they are not admitted even to the catechumenate without the authorization of the bishop in each case<sup>38</sup>. The Lutheran Church in Liberia, permitted the admission into baptism and communion, of polygamous husbands and their wives, although normally they may not hold official positions of leadership in the ecclesiastical organization<sup>39</sup>.

The Presbyterian Church in the French Cameroons formerly held a position of admitting the wives of polygamists in some circumstances, but in 1930s moved away from this and finally declared in 1940 that there was no way consistent with Christian teaching than to outlaw polygamy entirely from the Christian Church. The Methodist Church in Ghana admitted the wives of polygamists to baptism until 1951 and then ceased to do so<sup>40</sup>. And in Nigeria, where in 1885, 30 percent of married men were polygynous, recent figures show an increase despite high rates of conversion to Christianity<sup>41</sup>. This is because although in principle the teaching of Christianity on monogamy is accepted, a number of Christians after being legally married as Christians, take to polygamy on account of childlessness or because of

<sup>35</sup> FALEN, *Polygyny and Christian Marriage in Africa*, 53.

<sup>36</sup> R. GRAY, *Black Christians and White Missionaries*, New Haven 1990, 47.

<sup>37</sup> HASTINGS, *Church and Mission in Modern Africa*, 171.

<sup>38</sup> HILLMAN, *Polygamy Reconsidered*, 34.

<sup>39</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>40</sup> HASTINGS, *Christian Marriage in Africa*, 17.

<sup>41</sup> FALEN, *Polygyny and Christian Marriage in Africa*, 57.

the failure of a male offspring to succeed them after death and inherit their properties and perpetuate their names and family lineages<sup>42</sup>.

To lack someone close who keeps the departed in their personal immortality is the worst misfortune and punishment that any person could suffer. To die without getting married and without children is to be completely cut off from the human society... And in a society that stresses the importance of large families, a woman naturally sees her own personal self-fulfillment through childbearing; and the mother of several children is greatly respected by her relatives and neighbors. Children are the glory of marriage, and the more there are of them the greater the glory<sup>43</sup>.

The position of the Catholic Church and a proper clarification on marriage related issues becomes necessary for the forthcoming ecumenical council as stated in the *vota* of Nigerian missionary bishops, because throughout the first half of the twentieth century, people had different opinions about polygamy<sup>44</sup>. Some believed that it was a sin comparable with adultery, others saw it as a valid form of marriage, especially in cultures where it was common. They thought it created obligations that could not be disregarded, but still prevented someone from being baptized into Christianity. Then there were some who agreed with the second group except that they would not hold polygamy a necessary impediment to baptism<sup>45</sup>. The Catholic Church in Uganda was always strict regarding marriage, but Protestant churches tended to be more tolerant; to be married as a Catholic meant having one true Church marriage, whereas Protestant churches would often legitimate customary marriages and the children born of them<sup>46</sup>.

In many missions, although the official policy denounced polygyny, multiple wives were recognized if the man had married them before he received his Christian calling<sup>47</sup>. Some missionaries were also sometimes willing to

<sup>42</sup> E.O EGBOH, *Polygamy in Iboland (South-Eastern Nigeria) with Special Reference to Polygamy Practice Among Christian Ibos*, "Civilisations" 22 (1972), 3, 436.

<sup>43</sup> J. MBITI, *African Religion and Philosophy*, London 1969, 134-142.

<sup>44</sup> A. HASTINGS, *The Church in Africa 1450-1950*, Oxford 1994, 317-319.

<sup>45</sup> IDEM, *Christian Marriage in Africa*, 18.

<sup>46</sup> FALEN, *Polygyny and Christian Marriage in Africa. The Case of Benin*, 54.

<sup>47</sup> C. GROVES, *The Planting of Christianity in Africa 1914-1954*, London 1958, 220.

bend the rules rather than expel a woman from a family. George Hartmann, a Cape Province missionary wrote, *feel that by our narrow approach of the problem influenced by European theories, a tremendous harm is done to African people. I myself shall never ask a man to dismiss his wives. It is cruel, immoral and has nothing to do with Christ at all... I have done it once in my life and never again*<sup>48</sup>.

Despite these inconsistencies, however, early missionaries to Africa usually required and encouraged monogamy and fidelity, and this position has largely shaped the association of Christianity with monogamy. Thus, the prevailing missionary view contended that monogamy, as an imitation of the marriage between Christ and the Church, was indispensable to accepting God<sup>49</sup>. In their advocacy of monogamy, Christian missions were not, of course, acting within a vacuum. Colonial government often cooperated with missions in establishing legal codes pertaining to civil marriage and inheritance, all of which strongly favored or enforced monogamous Christian unions<sup>50</sup>.

## Liturgy

Patrick Joseph Kelly, advocated for permission to be given to recite certain prayers of Mass in the vernacular language while the priest continues in Latin, specifically from the start of the Mass to the preface, and again from the Our Father to the end. It argues that this approach enables active participation for illiterate congregants who otherwise may only participate by reciting the Rosary, which is seen as insufficient engagement in the Mass<sup>51</sup>.

<sup>48</sup> FALEN, *Polygyny and Christian Marriage in Africa*, 54.

<sup>49</sup> B. KWAME, *Christianity in Africa. The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*, Edinburgh 1995, 184.

<sup>50</sup> FALEN, *Polygyny and Christian Marriage in Africa*, 55.

<sup>51</sup> *Petit ut permittatur congregationi recitare, elata voce, sive cum catechista ductore sive non, orationes Missae in lingua vernacula dum sacerdos easdem orationes recitat latine ab initio Missae ad Praefationem inclusive et rursus a Pater Noster usque ad finem. In congregatione ubi fere omnes sunt illitterati nulla alia via existit qua partem activam in Sancto Sacrificio Missae sumere possint nisi recitent Rosarium Virginis Mariae et recitare Rosarium vix dici potest participatio in Missa – Acta et Documenta*, 339.

John Reddington was of the view that the vernacular be used by the priest up to the Canon and that the breviary be recited also in the vernacular<sup>52</sup>.

John McCarthy suggested the use of the local language in missionary territories to enhance the understanding and devotion of the faithful, enabling them to participate more fully in sacred activities<sup>53</sup>.

Charles Heerey, proposed the use of vernacular in the proclamation of the Word during Mass. He recommended also administering the sacrament of extreme unction in the vernacular, including the Papal blessing without repetition of prayers, and conducting all sacramental blessings in the vernacular, with local ordinaries having the opportunity to draft blessing formulas tailored to the needs and customs of their faithful, subject to approval by the Holy See<sup>54</sup>.

James Hagan wished, for the greater use of the common language in celebrating the sacraments, conferring blessings, and funeral rites<sup>55</sup>.

John Cross Anyogu recommended that the faithful should be allowed to use approved vernacular versions, even aloud, during the *Missa lecta*<sup>56</sup>.

Eugene McCoy while acknowledging the difficulty of achieving uniformity, he emphasized the historical prevalence of Latin and expresses a desire for greater consistency in the use of the vernacular across different regions<sup>57</sup>.

<sup>52</sup> *Ut in Missa, lingua vernacula a sacerdote utatur usque ad Canonem. Ut breviarium lingua vernacula recitetur.* – ibidem, 342.

<sup>53</sup> *Quo fideles in terra missionaria, melius intellegentes quae agantur, maiore cum studio actionibus sacris intersint, suadendum videtur ut praesertim in iis quae sequuntur regionis linguae usus sit: in lectionibus (...) in salutationibus fidelium et sacerdotum ad invicem et orationibus pro invicem, in hymnis et canticis populi.* – ibidem, 343-345.

<sup>54</sup> *Ut permittatur lectio Epistolae et Evangelii in lingua vernacula ab alio dum sacerdos ea in Missa legit. (...) Ut Sacramentum Extremae Unctionis administretur lingua vernacula, et ut compleatur Benedictione Papali, quae sine ulla iteratione quarumcumque orationum Extremae Unctionis administrationi finem imponat. (...) Ut sacramentalia omnia prouti sunt benedictiones ad utilitatem fidelium vel catechumenorum destinatae, lingua vernacula fiant. Ut Ordinariis locorum detur oportunitas respectu habito ad necessitates et consuetudines suorum fidelium, redigendi benedictionum formulas, quae S. Sedi comprobandi gratia submittantur.* – ibidem, 349-350.

<sup>55</sup> *Usus amplior linguae vulgaris in Sacramentis conficiendis, et in Benedictionibus conferendis, et in obsequiis.* – ibidem, 350-351.

<sup>56</sup> *Ut in Missa lecta fidelibus permittatur uti versionibus approbatis in lingua vernacula etiam elata voce.* – ibidem, 355.

<sup>57</sup> *Quamquam multae concessionis iam permissae sint pro universa Ecclesia, concessionis ampliores per indulta in casibus particularibus saepe obtinentur. Hoc confusionem in mente fidelium seminare*

It was observed that Charles Heerey and John Anyogu in their suggestions for the use of vernacular in liturgy, maintained that the use of Latin should be absolutely retained. They believed that Latin allows the Catholics of the Church in Nigeria to feel in their thoughts a stronger link to Rome and close union with the main spring of Christianity<sup>58</sup>. Described as a man of solemnity in liturgical ceremonies, Heerey was determined to preserve Latin as the language of Catholic liturgy<sup>59</sup>. For him, he believed that it was fundamental to retain Latin as a heritage that fell to his lot, in particular in all that concerned education and seminary<sup>60</sup>. The togetherness and correspondence seen in the *vota* of Charles Heerey and John Anyogu had its background in Ireland during their studies. Anyogu did his philosophy at Dublin. It was during his studies that he met Charles Heerey as a senior seminarian, who later on became his archbishop<sup>61</sup>.

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Before the arrival of the two French Catholic missions on the Niger in 1885, the CMS Anglicans had dominated the Lower Niger, with their Protestant primary schools and their keen involvement in the translation of the Bible into various local languages<sup>62</sup>. As expressed by their secretary, F. N Eden, the CMS believed that the teaching in the mission schools would be of the simplest kind – the chief aim of which being to teach the children in the vernacular, so that they may be able to study their Bible when translated for them in the mother tongue<sup>63</sup>. With this view, the CMS enunciated a widely-held Protestant attitude – a concern for the language of the people. This stance was implemented by the translation and study of the Bible in

*potest. Si concessio in principio latissima fuisset, necessitas indultum postulandi diminueretur. Hoc, nullo dubio, difficile erit sed olim lingua latina in usu ubique fuit. Hodie lingua vernacula magis utitur in uno loco quam in alio. Si uniformitas possibilis esset, bonum fuerit.* – ibidem, 356-357.

<sup>58</sup> V. NWOSU, *The Catholic Church in Onitsha. People, Places and Events 1885-1985*, Onitsha 1985, 52.

<sup>59</sup> V. OKEKE, *Our Heritage. Lenten Pastoral*, Enugu 2005, 12.

<sup>60</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>61</sup> M. ENEASATO, *The Advent and Growth of Catholic Church in Enugu Diocese*, Enugu 1985, 16.

<sup>62</sup> B. SUNDKLER, C. STEED, *A History of the Church in Africa*, Cambridge 2000, 248.

<sup>63</sup> Ibidem, 147.

the vernacular<sup>64</sup>. Protestants in Igboland therefore developed a system of elementary schools, where the youngsters spent several years learning to read and write and to understand and appreciate certain passages of the Bible<sup>65</sup>. Thus, during this phase, the Bible and catechetical books were translated into some African languages<sup>66</sup>.

When the early Catholic missionaries came to Onitsha and began missionary work in 1886, it was not easy for them to communicate with the people because of language and cultural differences. Through the school which they established as early as 1886, some people were able to speak the English language, recite some catechisms, and say some prayers<sup>67</sup>. It was among these people that the missionaries picked their first set of native interpreters who also assisted the missionaries in the work of evangelization, by not only interpreting to the people what the missionaries said, but also teaching them prayers, catechism and Catholic doctrines<sup>68</sup>.

The Irish missionaries involved a growing number of indigenous hands to anchor their missionary endeavors as guides as they ventured into the hinterland. And since the outstations had no priests, they helped to bridge the cultural and language gap between the European missionaries and the local population. These served as catechists, as teachers, as interpreters, as translators of catechetical texts<sup>69</sup>.

The local church of the village, grew around the catechists. Thus, as interpreters and the translators, they served as maps, as compasses and teachers of the foreign missionaries in the language, culture and values of their people<sup>70</sup>. The indigenous translators made the prime catechetical texts brought by the missionaries accessible to the wider population.

<sup>64</sup> Ibidem, 250.

<sup>65</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>66</sup> F.A. OBORJI, *Catholic Mission in Africa 1910-2010*, in *A Century of Catholic Mission. Roman Catholic Missiology, 1910 to the Present*, ed. S. BEVANS, Cornwall 2015, 14.

<sup>67</sup> NJOKU, EZE, *History of Catholic Church in Owerri Ecclesiastical Province*, 89.

<sup>68</sup> C. EKE, *In the Footsteps of our Founders. A History of the Spiritan Province of Nigeria 1953-2002*, Onitsha 2006, 167.

<sup>69</sup> NJOKU, EZE, *History of Catholic Church in Owerri Ecclesiastical Province*, 4.

<sup>70</sup> Ibidem.

In the twentieth century, there developed a liturgical movement which encouraged a greater degree of critical involvement of the people in the worship of the Church. Patrick Kelly took the lead by encouraging the people to pray and sing in the vernacular especially before and after the Mass, while he said the Masses in Latin<sup>71</sup>. With this, national languages played a greater part in acts of devotion and Latin came to be more and more of a specialized language<sup>72</sup>. Emphasizing on the need for the understanding and the use of African languages, Diedrich Westermann, a professor in African studies, during the international conference at Le Zoute Belgium in September, 1926 stated:

How many missionaries in Africa are able to preach to a rural community without an interpreter? Missionaries must know the language and mentality of the people... if you know the language, you will understand the African. If you want to bring promise of a new life to the African, we are simply obliged to know his old life. The only way to the African mind is through a mastery of African speech<sup>73</sup>.

Realizing this essential use of vernacular in understanding the people, the missionaries started adapting both to the people and to the terrain; and speaking the local languages, they were familiar with the native customs and culture<sup>74</sup>. Patrick Kelly was said to have known about seven indigenous languages in the vicariate. The people were delighted when he began responding to them in Urhobo<sup>75</sup>. During his pastoral visits, he made use of the people's languages in conducting exams for candidates preparing for the reception of the sacrament of confirmation. He was able to ask questions and to understand the responses, following the numbered questions in the catechism book<sup>76</sup>.

Nigerian missionary bishops therefore deemed it necessary to include the use of vernacular in their *vota* because quite early in the missionary enter-

<sup>71</sup> O'SHEA, *Bishop Kelly of Western Nigeria*, 47.

<sup>72</sup> M. ELVINS, *Towards a People's Liturgy. The Importance of Language*, Leominster 1994, 36.

<sup>73</sup> E. SMITH, *The Christian Mission in Africa*, Edinburgh 1926, 46.

<sup>74</sup> M. O'SHEA, *Bishop Kelly of Western Nigeria*, Cork 2006, 44.

<sup>75</sup> Ibidem, 46-53.

<sup>76</sup> Ibidem, 148-149.

prise, the missionaries through the reduction of indigenous languages into useable orthographies, the translation of numerous catechetical texts into native tongues, and the translation of the Bible into various local dialects, have deduced through such pastoral experience that using indigenous languages in catechetical teachings enhanced active participation of the people<sup>77</sup>. Secondly, by the 1950s, bi-lingual traditions were tolerated in some countries like Poland, Yugoslavia, Austria, France, Germany, Italy, and America without any reference to Africa<sup>78</sup>.

### Marian devotion

William Richard Field, in his *vota* said that it is now appropriate to introduce and discuss the belief that Mary is the Mediatrix of All Graces, with the intention of formalizing it as a fundamental tenet of religious faith<sup>79</sup>.

Charles Heerey, was of the view that the doctrine of the Blessed Virgin Mary Mediatrix of All Graces be defined<sup>80</sup>.

Joseph Whelan stated that it is timely to affirm the belief that the Blessed Virgin Mary is the Mediator of all Graces because it is now widely preached and accepted as an essential aspect of the faith<sup>81</sup>.

Anthony Nwedo suggested that it is a proper time now, to define the doctrine of Mary the Mediatrix of all Graces<sup>82</sup>.

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<sup>77</sup> NJOKU, EZE, *History of Catholic Church in Owerri Ecclesiastical Province*, 19; SUNDKLER, STEED, *A History of the Church in Africa*, 248.

<sup>78</sup> ELVINS, *Towards a People's Liturgy*, 37.

<sup>79</sup> *Mihi videtur nunc opportunum esse tempus ad introducendum et disputandum quod Maria est Mediatrix Omnium Gratiarum, in prospectu ad hoc faciendum articulum Nostrae Sanctae Fidei*. – *Acta et Documenta*, 347-348.

<sup>80</sup> *Ut definiatur doctrina de B. M. V. Mediatrix Omnium Gratiarum*. – *ibidem*, 349-350.

<sup>81</sup> *Declarare opportunum est doctrinam quae tenet Beatam Virginem Mariam mediatricem esse omnium gratiarum ad fidem pertinere, cum ubique et praedicatur et creditur*. – *ibidem*, 351-352.

<sup>82</sup> *Ut tempus nunc opportunum sit definiendi doctrinam de Maria Mediatrix omnium Gratiarum*. – *ibidem*, 352-353.

The historical context of the *vota* on Mariology, particularly on the doctrine of the Blessed Virgin Mary as the Mediatrix of all Graces began with the Belgian Carmelite mystic, Mother Magdalen of Jesus, who had an interior locution regarding Mary's mediation. She recounts: *Once during prayer, I came to realize that God intensely desired this glorification of Mary*<sup>83</sup>. In 1906, she met the visiting Cardinal Joseph Mercier and revealed to him the message. This prompted the cardinal to make the first formal request to Pope Pius X for the dogmatic definition of Mary's universal mediation of grace<sup>84</sup>. By April 1915, Mercier formally announced through a pastoral letter, his desire for a definition of Mary's universal mediation<sup>85</sup>. He organized petitions by the episcopacy, clergy, and religious of Belgium and the theological faculty of the Louvain to ask Pope Benedict XV for the dogmatic definition of Mary as Mediatrix. In a letter to the pope, on 18 May, 1920, Mercier stated: *From the beginning of my episcopacy, I felt pushed by an interior force to ask heaven and those who represent the divine Authority on earth for the public recognition of the universal Mediation of Mary*<sup>86</sup>. Later that year in November, he approved the statutes of the Association of Servants of Mary Mediatrix to spread the devotion of Mary as universal Mediatrix of the human race<sup>87</sup>.

In 1921, a new phase was opened by the initiative of Cardinal Mercier. He sought and obtained Roman approval for a Mass and office of Mary, Mediatrix of all Graces, and urged his fellow bishops throughout the world to request them for their dioceses; 450 sent favorable replies. Thereon, Pius XI set up three commissions – Belgian, Spanish and Roman – to study the possibility of a dogma on Mary's universal mediation<sup>88</sup>. May 31 was the assigned feast day in the liturgical calendar, serving as a good introduction to June, the month of the Sacred Heart. Cardinal Mercier wrote to all bishops

<sup>83</sup> R. JESUS, *Mary Mediatrix of All Graces. A Journey of Suffering and Holiness*, Mandaluyong 2015, 45-46.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibidem*, 46.

<sup>85</sup> His pastoral letter with the title, *To Jesus Through Mary*, was addressed to the clergy and laity of the Archdiocese of Malines.

<sup>86</sup> G. DODD, *The Virgin Mary, Mediatrix of All Grace. History and Theology of the Movement for a Dogmatic Definition from 1896 to 1964*, New Bedford 2012, 76.

<sup>87</sup> JESUS, *Mary Mediatrix of All Graces*, 46.

<sup>88</sup> M. O'CARROLL, *Theotokos. A Theological Encyclopedia of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, Delaware 1982, 242.

around the world to ask them to request permission to celebrate the feast<sup>89</sup>. In 1950, the first International Mariological Congress, held in Rome, approved this *votum*, which was submitted to Pius XII:

Since the principal, personal attributes of the Blessed Virgin Mary have been already defined, it is the wish of the faithful that it should also be dogmatically defined that the Blessed Virgin Mary was intimately associated with Christ the Savior in effecting human salvation, and, accordingly, she is a true collaborator in the work of redemption, spiritual Mother of all men, intercessor and dispenser of graces, in a word universal Mediatrix of God and men<sup>90</sup>.

Within this period, devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary was widespread in the Nigerian Church, particularly through the Marian association called Legion of Mary. As the first presidium in the continent of Africa, it came to Nigeria through the efforts of the early missionaries of the 1930's who worked at Calabar areas of South-eastern Nigeria<sup>91</sup>. It began through the initiative of James Moynagh, who used the association for conversion as well as to stop pagan practices within the area<sup>92</sup>. The Legion of Mary as an association is widely spread in Nigeria and they assist in conversions, solidification, exhortation and edification of fellow Christians. The teaching of catechism is one of their major early apostolates in the parishes, outstations and in other neutral areas in the villages dedicated for this purpose<sup>93</sup>. As voluntary assignments, they visit fallen and sick Christians, as well as train and prepare candidates for various sacraments, children and adults alike. In his report during the first general congress of Legion of Mary, Bishop Whelan of Owerri diocese stated:

We have organized the Legion of Mary to collaborate with the clergy in the work of teaching. The faithful are cooperating generously in the work of

<sup>89</sup> JESUS, *Mary Mediatrix of All Graces*, 47.

<sup>90</sup> O'CARROLL, *Theotokos*, 242.

<sup>91</sup> E. ODEY, *Catholic Dioceses of Calabar Ecclesiastical Province Yesterday and Today*, Ikot Ekpene 2014, 99.

<sup>92</sup> CHIGERE, *Foreign Missionary Background*, 508.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibidem*.

conversion by joining the Legion of Mary and the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine. A multitude of lapsed Catholics have been reclaimed by the Legion. We owe a deep debt of gratitude to the excellent contribution which the Legion makes in the work of evangelization<sup>94</sup>.

Their cooperation in indigenous lay evangelization significantly contributed to the spread of Marian piety in Nigeria<sup>95</sup>. With the Marian Congress of 1954 celebrated in Lagos, the Church in Nigeria recorded public manifestations and faith expressions of the people. This Francis Arinze described as the biggest manifestations of Catholic faith in our first century of Christianity<sup>96</sup>. On the growth of the people's devotional attachment to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Patrick Kelly, in December 1954, accredited the great increase in his diocese to the Marian Congress<sup>97</sup>. In 1956, Joseph Whelan of Owerri acknowledged in his diocese, the presence of 370 Legion of Mary Praesidia with 6,223 members, and other associations such as the Children of Mary (*Umu Mary*)<sup>98</sup>.

Between 1950 and the announcement of the Second Vatican Council by John XXIII in 1959, theological interest was centered first on Mary's part in the Redemption, and then on her relationship with the Church. The two themes met in competition at the Lourdes Congress<sup>99</sup>. Yet in the pre-Council consultation of the world's episcopate, 382 bishops, demanded for a proper explanation of Mary's mediation, while about 280 bishops, of which 4 were Nigerian missionary bishops requested for a dogmatic definition of Mary as Mediatrix and about 100 bishops made no dogmatic statement<sup>100</sup>.

<sup>94</sup> OKWU, *Igbo Culture and the Christian Missions*, 272.

<sup>95</sup> CHIGERE, *Foreign Missionary Background*, 508.

<sup>96</sup> F. ARINZE, *Answering God's Call*, London 1983, 109.

<sup>97</sup> O'SHEA, *Bishop Kelly of Western Nigeria*, 222.

<sup>98</sup> OKWU, *Igbo Culture and the Christian Missions*, 272.

<sup>99</sup> In 1958, 3rd International Mariological and 10<sup>th</sup> Marian Congress was celebrated in Lourdes with the theme: *Maria et Ecclesia*.

<sup>100</sup> O'CARROLL, *Theotokos*, 242, H. GRAEF, *Mary. A History of Doctrine and Devotion*, Notre Dame 2009, 407.

## Aid to mission lands

James Moynagh laid emphasis on the support and encouragement provided to mission workers through requests for assistance. He identified the encyclical letters from various Pontiffs, notably highlighting the importance of the encyclical letter *Fidei Donum* by Pope Pius XII for African missions, and then suggested the necessity of a coordinated church administration to effectively distribute resources and skilled personnel to areas requiring assistance, stressing the urgency of answering the call for missionary work<sup>101</sup>.

Thomas McGettrick, having identified as obstacle, the severe shortage of priests in many missionary areas, believed that progress could be made if priests from regions where their services are less urgently required could be transferred to these missionary dioceses. He then suggested that established religious orders and congregations, both active and contemplative, should found bases in missionary territories. This would allow their members to play a key role in spreading the faith and performing charitable works, as well as providing spiritual support through prayer and good example<sup>102</sup>.

William Richard Field recognized the widespread concern, including among laypeople, about the unequal distribution of priests worldwide, especially in missionary areas and equally acknowledged the complexity of the problem and the lack of clear solutions. Despite this uncertainty, they propose that the issue be addressed in future council discussions<sup>103</sup>.

<sup>101</sup> *Omnes laborantes in missionibus roborati et confirmati sunt et petitionibus auxilii et litteris encyclicis Augustissimorum Pontificum in hoc xx saeculo, sed praesertim (quantum ad has missiones Africanas) in Enc. Fidei Donum Sanctissimi Patris Nostri felicitis memoriae Pii XII. Nos in missionibus Africanis admirati sumus in eodem documento claritatem expositionis status Ecclesiae temporibus nostris. Valde notabile autem erat huius documenti urgens loquendi genus. Constat enim, in missione Ecclesiae Verbum Salutis praedicandi omnibus hominibus, opus esse celeritate urgenti. – Acta et Documenta, 340-341.*

<sup>102</sup> *In pluribus dicionibus missionalibus magnum obstaculum progressui Ecclesiae est extrema penuria sacerdotum. Magnum proficeret Ecclesiae si sacerdotes, tum saeculares tum religiosi, e locis ubi eorum administratio non iam urgens est in dioeceses missionales transferri possint. Praesertim, antiqua et valde dotata Ordines et Congregationes sive virorum sive mulierum urgeantur domos constituere in dioecesibus missionalibus ubi sodales magnam partem haberent in spargenda fide vera et in peragendis aliis operibus caritatis. – ibidem, 345-347.*

<sup>103</sup> *Partitio inaequalis sacerdotum per mundum – mundum Catholicum, mundum Missionum – frequenter disserta est etiam a laicis. Agnosco illam quaestionem plenam esse difficultatum et neque*

Dominic Ekandem in his *vota*, highlighted the challenge in the missions regarding the education and discipline of students in major and minor seminaries due to a shortage of priests. And as a way of addressing the issue, he suggested assigning priests from religious orders and congregations who possess academic degrees to provide adequate care and support for seminarians<sup>104</sup>.

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The nineteenth century period coincided with the abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, the colonization of Africa and the independence of many African countries. Following the Edinburgh Conference – the first World Missionary Conference in 1910, and throughout the initial years after this conference, numerous missionary organizations were established in France, particularly aimed at the conversion of Africans to Christianity<sup>105</sup>. Consequently, Portugal was virtually replaced by France in the missions in Africa. It was also during this period that the Congregation of *Propaganda Fide* issued the *ius commissionis*, by which mission territories were allocated to particular missionary institutes to evangelize and administer<sup>106</sup>. In principle, the Pope himself, represented by *Propaganda Fide*, had the primary responsibility for evangelization<sup>107</sup>. It was within this period that the extensive borders of the Vicariate of southern Nigeria and the paucity of Holy Ghost Fathers of the Irish province, who had gradually taken over from the French Spiritans,

*clariter discernere aliquod responsum et solutionem de hac re; attamen, haec quaestio fortasse disse-  
renda sit in futuro Concilio. – ibidem, 347-348.*

<sup>104</sup> *In locis Missionum, propter paucitatem Sacerdotum, saepe non est possibile curam sufficientem ad educationem et disciplinam alumnorum in Seminariis Maioribus et Minoribus. Quaeritur ut Sacerdotes ex Ordinibus et Congregationibus Religiosis qui habent gradus Academicos ad hoc opus speciale destinentur. – ibidem, 354.*

<sup>105</sup> OBOREJI, *Catholic Mission in Africa*, 13.

<sup>106</sup> *Ius Commissionis* is a Latin term that translates to right of commission or authority of commission. It typically refers to the legal authority given to someone to act on behalf of another, usually in a specific capacity or for a particular purpose. In ecclesiastical context, it may refer to the authority granted by a superior to a subordinate to carry out certain tasks or duties within the Church – cf. F. OBOREJI, *Trends in African Theology since Vatican II. Missiological Orientations*, Rome 1998, 53.

<sup>107</sup> J.M. ELA, *African Cry*, New York 1986, 11.

the supply of mission personnel to the entire area since 1905 when Shanahan was appointed prefect, created a major problem of scarcity of priests for Bishop Shanahan and his missionary confreres. There were other reasons for the inability of the Irish Spiritans to meet the needs of the new vicariate<sup>108</sup>.

The burden of providing the vast English-speaking Spiritan mission areas with missionaries was bound to overwhelm the small Irish province which besides being responsible for evangelization in those areas, was also preoccupied with running schools and colleges in Ireland and Trinidad, for raising funds, and for maintaining scholasticates. The running of these schools and higher institutes seriously undermined the province's responsibility for the supply of priests to the mission<sup>109</sup>.

Bishop Shanahan had tried to meet the need by founding a special missionary society of women religious – the Holy Rosary Sisters, and by imploring the help of some Irish secular priests from Maynooth<sup>110</sup>. The period between 1935 and 1950 was marked with some of the following phenomena: great demand for the erection of new parishes, expansion of primary schools and promotion of higher education, and growth of indigenous clergy and religious<sup>111</sup>.

With the benefits of western education becoming more and more obvious to the people, and being convinced that actual residence of a priest in a town would increase opportunity for education as well as other temporal and spiritual benefits associated with the Church, the people of various towns increased their request for resident priests. Continued scarcity of priests, however, limited the number of such requests which could be granted<sup>112</sup>. Towns consequently vied with one another for resident priests, often resorting to various ways to put pressure on the missionaries to consent. Such incessant requests from towns for resident priests encouraged the missionaries to open more central missions with resident priests.

<sup>108</sup> Nwosu, *The Catholic Church in Onitsha*, 46.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibidem*, 47.

The positive response of the people to the faith was so overwhelming to the missionaries that by the end of the 1920s, Bishop Shanahan was regularly visiting Ireland, campaigning for volunteers to help in the southern Nigerian mission both from within the ranks of the Holy Ghost Fathers and among diocesan priests from various dioceses in Ireland<sup>113</sup>.

The creation of new parish centers with resident priests facilitated the expansion of schools, especially central schools, just as much as the latter contributed towards the opening of parishes<sup>114</sup>. Every new parish virtually had at least one school which was often situated where the priest lived. To have such a central school was one of the attractions of having a resident priest. To deny a town of such, was easily seen as a calculated attempt to prolong that town's subordination to another town. This was a frequent cause of protest<sup>115</sup>. The creation of parishes did not only help the expansion of primary schools, it also contributed in promoting higher education. The increase in the number of schools with elementary level of education, created the need for more trained teachers as well as produced pupils suitable for training<sup>116</sup>.

As indicated in the *vota* of the Nigerian missionary bishops, the Pope Pius XII addressing this scarcity of priests in his encyclical letter *Fidei Donum*, made a passionate appeal to the bishops of the world to bring the gift of faith – *fidei donum*, which the Church had received, to all the world but specifically to the continent of Africa<sup>117</sup>. This call had been made before by Pope Benedict XV in his apostolic letter *Maximum illud* and by Pope Pius XI in the encyclical letter *Rerum ecclesiae*, but the novelty brought by *Fidei donum* is that, for the first time, a Roman Pontiff was making an appeal for missionary aid for a specific continent<sup>118</sup>. The Pope acknowledged that the

<sup>113</sup> Njoku, Eze, *History of Catholic Church in Owerri Ecclesiastical Province*, 5.

<sup>114</sup> Nwosu, *The Catholic Church in Onitsha*, 49.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibidem*, 50.

<sup>117</sup> Pius XII, *Fidei donum* (21 April 1957), "Acta Apostolicae Sedis" (=AAS) 49 (1957), 225-248. Cf. A. Obel, *The Agreement for Temporary Service of a Diocesan Priest outside his Diocese of Incardination according to Canon 271 of the 1983 Code of Canon Law*, Canada 2017, 62.

<sup>118</sup> Benedict XV, *Maximum Illud* (30 November 1919), AAS 11 (1919), 440-455; Pius XI, *Rerum Ecclesiae* (28 February 1926), in *The Papal Encyclicals*, vol. 3, ed. C. Carlen, Raleigh 1981, 281-291.

increase in the number of native clergy in Africa could not match the enormous growth in the number of the Catholic faithful, and so assistance by foreign missionaries was needed<sup>119</sup>.

### Education of children

Anthony Nwedo was of the view that given the growing involvement of the state in education across different regions, it is necessary to develop guidelines regarding the role of children in non-Catholic schools and need to also establish directives on co-education in such non-Catholic schools<sup>120</sup>.

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The construction of colonial roads and railways in the Protectorate of southern Nigeria, opened up easier access to the hinterland and paved the way for missionaries to advance towards the establishment of schools<sup>121</sup>. In 1903, the colonial administration introduced a new program of education in the Protectorate. It offered to assist education, by means of grants, in exchange for greater government control and supervision. The colonial government needed to provide sufficient personnel, with good knowledge of English, to work as clerks, messengers, interpreters, station masters, agents and guards in the public and private sectors<sup>122</sup>. Catholic and Protestant missionaries were already engaged in providing rudimentary western style of education in the region. The colonial administration solicited with them to cooperate in the development of formal education for the local population. It invited the missionaries to open more schools and teacher training institutes, to be subsidized by the government allocation. The local population quickly perceived education as the key organ of economic and social transformation

<sup>119</sup> PIUS XII, *Fidei donum*, 234.

<sup>120</sup> *Ut formulentur directivae de positione puerorum in scholis acatholicis, data hodierna crescente incur-sione Rerum Publicarum in educatione variis in regionibus. Ut detur directivum de co-educatione (scilicet, puerorum una cum puellis) in talibus scholis acatholicis. – Acta et Documenta*, 352-353.

<sup>121</sup> SUNDKLER, STEED, *A History of the Church in Africa*, 251.

<sup>122</sup> NJOKU, EZE, *History of Catholic Church in Owerri Ecclesiastical Province*, 39.

and scrambled for establishment of schools in their area<sup>123</sup>. Missionary agents in Nigeria, Catholic and Protestants, enjoyed a good rapport with the colonial government in matters of education. Bishop Shanahan was appointed a member of the government board of education in 1906, a position he used to push forward for the development of primary education<sup>124</sup>.

From 1906-12 the missions opened over forty new schools, and initiated teachers' training program. Its success was shown in 1912 when fifty new teachers graduated. From its inception, the Onitsha Catholic high school launched a modern program of industrial education, and such subjects as elementary algebra, geometry, book-keeping and foreign languages. Some missions raised objections to receiving government grants because of the accompanying clause about religious neutrality<sup>125</sup>. However, this restriction mattered little to Shanahan, who felt that the local chapel and catechumenate would provide the necessary religious knowledge and direction. Under his leadership, the schools and the local catechists launched an Igbo mass movement which continued to expand. The only impediment was the lack of staff. During a visit to Ireland in 1913, Shanahan appealed for additional missionaries. Although he received few immediate results, his efforts eventually led to the involvement of the Irish Black Rock College in Igbo higher education<sup>126</sup>.

On the political scene, the British colonial administration classified schools into three different categories. The first were the government schools, fully subsidized and controlled by the administration. The second were known as assisted schools. These could receive government financial aid for education, if they qualify for it and in exchange, they were subjected to the government control. The third category of schools, named unassisted schools, did not receive government subvention and were outside its control. Many of the catechist village schools came under the category of unassisted schools<sup>127</sup>. In 1916, the colonial government promulgated a new education code, which sought to curtail the proliferation of unassisted schools, by replacing the rigid

<sup>123</sup> *Ibidem*, 40.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibidem*, 44.

<sup>125</sup> SUNDKLER, STEED, *A History of the Church in Africa*, 251.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>127</sup> NJOKU, EZE, *History of Catholic Church in Owerri Ecclesiastical Province*, 47.

method of grant-in-aid of education, based on annual results, with a more flexible system. It was however, not until the mid-1920s that Britain embarked on a more aggressive government control of education in the entire British Tropical Africa<sup>128</sup>. This period of government control of education was ushered in by the publication of a memorandum titled: *Education Policy in British Tropical Africa*. The memorandum allotted the colonial government, the right to direct and supervise all schools. It accepted the co-existence of government and voluntary agency of schools and called for cooperation<sup>129</sup>.

In 1927, the Nigeran colonial government enacted a new education code in line with the principles laid down in the Education Policy in British Tropical Africa. The code demanded the registration of all teachers and gave the governor, the power to control the opening of schools and to close inefficient ones, on the advice of the director of education<sup>130</sup>. It made provisions for voluntary agencies to appoint supervisors to their schools, for greater efficiency. It reviewed the system of grant-in-aid of education, to enable more schools to benefit from government assistance and control. This new education policy of 1927 affected many mission schools, especially the catechist/village schools. The Catholic missionaries did not however, slacken in their zeal to raise the standard and provide quality education for the people<sup>131</sup>. The Nigerian bishops' interest in discussing the education of children in non-Catholic schools at the upcoming council arose due to the fact that while the Catholic Church had significantly expanded primary education in Eastern Nigeria, the establishment of post-primary institutions lagged behind until the 1940s and 1950s. It was the Protestant missions and the colonial government that initially spearheaded efforts in post-primary education<sup>132</sup>.

<sup>128</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>129</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>130</sup> Ibidem, 48.

<sup>131</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>132</sup> Ibidem, 54.

## Conclusions

Bishop Field in his *vota* stated:

In this particular world of missions, we are compelled to meet so many problems for which are needed immediate remedies – and these aspects are increasing everyday – that we are apt to forget the very problems of the Church in its totality; these are the reasons for which my observations are necessarily related to a local situation, more than a universal meaning<sup>133</sup>.

Indeed, the ecclesiastical situation in Nigeria before the Second Vatican Council influenced the priorities and concerns of Nigerian bishops in their preparations for the Council. The experience of Nigerian missionaries, their encounters with indigenous traditions and the socio-political realities of the country shaped the Nigerian bishops' perspectives on topics suggested for the Council<sup>134</sup>. Thus, the challenges and opportunities facing the Catholic Church in Nigeria informed the broader agenda of the council, while the council provided a platform for Nigerian bishops to address local issues within the context of the universal Church.

The study of Nigerian bishops' *vota* for the Second Vatican Council, sheds light on the dynamics of Catholicism in Nigeria during such a crucial period of the Church. The deliberations, decisions as well as diversity of perspectives among Nigerian bishops, were influenced by many factors, including theological convictions, pastoral concerns and geographical considerations. Their *vota* reflected a complex interplay of faith, culture and identity and by examining their *vota*, one gains valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities they faced in reconciling global Catholicism with the realities of Nigerian society.

<sup>133</sup> *In hac parte mundi missionum, occurrimus tantis problematibus attrahentibus immediatam curam – et haec videntur singulis diebus augescere – ut inclinati sumus ad oblivionem negotiorum maioris graviorisque momenti et generis pro Ecclesia in toto; quapropter meae observationes ex necessitate importabunt localem, fortasse, potius quam universalem significationem. – Acta et Documenta, 347. English translation by C.O. Nnabugeu, cf. <https://rdr.kuleuven.be/dataset.xhtml?persistentId=doi:10.48804/ZHTBQJ> (access: 12.01.2025)*

<sup>134</sup> NJOKU, LAMBERIGTS, *West African Bishops in Vatican II*, 44.

Hence, one of such major challenges was the difficulty in communicating with the people and need to give room for the use of local languages in liturgy. As stated in the *Lineamenta*, a publication of the Catholic Secretariate of Nigeria, *Language no doubt would be one of the major requests one could predict would be made of the Council Fathers especially by the missionaries in Africa and Nigeria, who daily battle with the daunting task and challenge of language barrier*<sup>135</sup>. Other challenges as identified included: the challenge of identifying when a marriage is legally valid, especially in societies with diverse customs or none at all and the status of a polygamous family among the Christians, the challenge of having a clear definition of the doctrine of Mary as Mediatrix of all graces, education of children in non-Catholic schools as a result of the 1927 education policy that affected many mission schools and the need for providing aid to missionary areas because of the severe shortage of priests<sup>136</sup>. In the *vota* of the bishops, there is also a deep faith in the power of the Council to create enabling environments and to initiate changes in the Church. This can be seen from the passionate nature of their submissions. It is as if they saw the Council as a great opportunity to air their views and bring out their reservations about the state of things in the Church with an abiding hope that it will be able to effect the desired changes.

<sup>135</sup> *Church in Nigeria, Family of God on Mission. Lineamenta for the First National Pastoral Congress*, Lagos 1999, 73.

<sup>136</sup> NJOKU, LAMBERIGTS, *West African Bishops in Vatican II*, 45-46.

***Meae observationes ex necessitate importabunt localem potius quam universalem significationem.***

**A Study of the *vota* of Nigerian Bishops for the Second Vatican Council**

*Meae observationes ex necessitate importabunt localem potius quam universalem significationem.*  
*Studio dei vota dei vescovi nigeriani per il Concilio Vaticano II*

*Meae observationes ex necessitate importabunt localem potius quam universalem significationem.*  
Analiza sugestii biskupów nigeryjskich na Sobór Watykański II

**Streszczenie:** W ramach przygotowań do Soboru Watykańskiego II biskupi z całego świata zostali poproszeni przez Stolicę Apostolską o nadesłanie propozycji tematów (tzw. *vota*), które ich zdaniem powinny być zostać poruszone na soborze. Wśród hierarchów, którzy nadesłali swoje sugestie byli także biskupi nigeryjscy, którzy w latach 50-tych i 60-tych XX wieku w zdecydowanej większości byli misjonarzami europejskiego (szczególnie irlandzkiego) pochodzenia. Wśród tematów przez nich poruszonych najistotniejsze były poligamia, liturgia w językach narodowych, pobożność maryjna, edukacja chrześcijańska i wsparcie dla działalności misyjnej. W artykule oprócz prezentacji zagadnień obecnych w votach, podjęta została próba ich kontekstualizacji.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Sobór Watykański II, historia Nigerii, misjologia, poligamia, liturgia

**Abstract:** In preparation for the Second Vatican Council, bishops from around the world were asked by the Holy See to submit proposals (the so-called *vota*) regarding topics that, in their view, ought to be addressed by the Council. Among those who submitted their suggestions were the Nigerian bishops, who in the 1950s and 1960s were, for the most part,

European missionaries, particularly of Irish origin. The issues they raised most prominently included polygamy, liturgy in vernacular languages, Marian devotion, Christian education, and support for missionary activity. In addition to presenting the themes found in the *vota*, the article also seeks to place them within their broader context.

**Keywords:** Second Vatican Council, history of Nigeria, missiology, polygamy, liturgy

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