

THE CHRISTIAN MISSIONS AND THE TRAINING FOR POLITICAL LEADERSHIP IN EASTERN NIGERIA

Introduction

African historiography owes much of its creation to scholars with secular tendencies and it is not surprising that they place more emphasis on the political and cultural effects of religion than on the nature of religious change. In Nigeria, the failure to pay adequate tribute outside the confines of religious studies to the enormous contributions of the Christian missions to nation building has been described as a deficient cultural nationalism.¹ The impact of mission education on the political landscape of Eastern Nigeria in particular has remained an important factor in the region's socio-cultural history. In the discussion that follows, we shall be looking at the various stances of the Christian denominations with regard to the political training and political participation of their adherents in Eastern Nigeria.

Throughout the colonial period, the Protestant missions maintained a comfortable lead over their Catholic counterparts in the provision of political leadership in the country. In 1955, Father J. Jordan, the Education Adviser to the Catholic Missions, was at pains to note that the Premier, his Deputy, and eleven out of the twelve cabinet ministers, in other words the entire Government of the then Eastern Region, were Protestant.² The paper shall attempt, among other things, to analyse the causes of this disparity which accorded the Catholics the status of a numerical giant and a political dwarf, and accounted, in part, for the brand of cultural nationalism which tended to depreciate the role of religion in the nation-building mechanism of the polity.

Post-Primary Education and National Consciousness

The imbalance which existed in the exercise of political control among the products of the mission schools is essentially the outcome

of the different approaches which the Christian denominations gave to secondary education in Nigeria. Among the missionary societies which came to Africa in the nineteenth century, there was a general awareness that education, especially at the secondary level, was necessary for all aspects of nation-building in the continent. Their plan was, in the words of the Secretary General of the Church Missionary Society (CMS), to train a body of natives "who may form an intelligent and influential class of society and become founders of a kingdom which shall render incalculable benefits to Africa..."³ It was the Protestant Missions which took the lead in translating this general principle into practice not only in Eastern Nigeria, but also throughout the country, a move which brought their adherents into intimate contact with the political struggle for independence.

Long before British rule was established in Nigeria, the Protestant Missions had begun to prepare their African members for leadership, especially in the local churches envisaged in the country. Realising the relevance of higher education to nation-building, they sent their African parsons and senior teachers to colleges in England and America, and to Fourah Bay in Sierra Leone, that powerhouse of Protestantism in West Africa. The elevation in 1864 of Ajayi Crowther to the position of Bishop in the Anglican Church to lead an all-African staff on the Niger, was the high water mark of the pioneering indigenisation efforts of the Protestant Missions.⁴ It was the products of this Protestant initiative which eventually spearheaded the establishment of Protestant grammar schools in Nigeria, and saw education as an instrument of emancipation from perpetual servitude. It was against this background that Eyo Ita, the first Premier of Eastern Nigeria, launched his National Education Movement in the 1930s. "Education," he said, "will not Europeanise the African, but on the contrary will Africanise him....It must now become a powerful dynamic force to liberate the people, soul and body, and it must do that at a rate never dreamt of before."⁵

Before Protestant secondary schools were established in Eastern Nigeria, adherents of the Protestant denominations were availing themselves of higher education in Calabar and other parts

of the country, especially in Lagos. Of these institutions, the Hope Waddell Institute, founded in 1895 in Calabar by the Presbyterian Mission, played a crucial role in placing political, economic and social advantages squarely in Protestant hands. The Institute had both grammar and industrial sections, and was massively colonised by Igbo students and teachers.

When secondary schools were finally established at the rate advocated by the nationalists, it was again the Protestants who took the lead. By 1922 the Methodists had founded a grammar school at Izuakoli, and in 1925, the CMS founded the Dennis Memorial Grammar School (DMGS) at Onitsha. This latter school quickly became a centre for excellence through which many members of the political class in the region passed. In 1929, a government college was established at Umuahia and both its managing staff and student body were predominantly Protestant. This was followed in 1932 with the establishment by the CMS of Enitona High School, Port Harcourt. Soon afterwards, other Protestant grammar schools sprang up at Okrika, Nkwere and other parts of the Eastern Region.

The great importance of these Protestant establishments lay in the fact that they were largely administered by native parson politicians who had great sympathy for the nationalist cause. Accordingly, the generation of educated Nigerians which these institutions produced were among those who spearheaded the drive towards self-rule in the country. They closely associated themselves with such nationalist organisations as the Nigerian Union of Students, the Nigerian National Council (later known as the NCNC), the Igbo Union, and a number of other political clubs and associations.⁶

The Catholic Mission in Eastern Nigeria had a belated response to the political and social changes taking place in Nigeria from the 1930 onwards. Speaking in retrospect, Bishop J.B. Whelan, an Irish missionary who considerably influenced educational policy in Eastern Nigeria, observed that:

One must recall that the conquering power in Nigeria was Protestant. The Church which followed the flag was Anglican or creation of a Protestant government. Consequently the first educated elite was

Protestant in religion or in sympathy. This naturally bred a sense of inferiority in Catholics. Within the past twenty years Catholic high schools have been established in increasing numbers, and Catholics in government high schools receive regular attention.⁷

One point which is not expressly stated in this observation, but which is implicitly understood, is the belatedness with which the Catholics pursued secondary education in Nigeria. It was chiefly this omission, rather than the alleged Protestant advantages, that account for much of the sustained Protestant political hegemony. It is true that the Protestants drew considerable gains from their affinity to the colonial government. That close relationship enabled them, first and foremost, to secure a comfortable lead of over forty years in Nigeria, and placed considerable educational resources at their disposal. But the speed and thoroughness with which the Catholics took firm hold on primary education in the East adequately demonstrated that the Protestant lead did not possess an inexpugnable permanence.

By all account, the tardy growth of Catholic secondary education was largely a self-imposed inhibition. There was in Catholic educational policy an unduly long emphasis on elementary and vocational schools. This derived primarily from the constitutional tradition of the Holy Ghost Congregation which originally had practically no place for secondary education. As late as 1926, only very few Missions of the congregation around the world were offering secondary education to their pupils. In that year, for instance, there were about 1,200 primary schools with over 45,000 pupils in Nigeria, but like the greater majority of the society's missions, Nigeria did not possess a single secondary school.⁸ Since the school was essentially used as a medium of evangelization, the primary school, through which the masses found allegiance to the Church, was considered as deserving an overriding priority over the secondary school, which could only be open to a privileged few. This strategy was doggedly adhered to until political and social realities in the individual mission lands made a change of policy inevitable.

In the case of Eastern Nigeria, the need for a shift in Catholic

policy on post-primary education began to be felt in the 1920s as a result of some major educational developments in the region. As stated earlier, in 1925, the CMS established the DMGS at Onitsha, the stronghold and headquarters of Igbo Catholicism. The following year, the colonial government, in an effort to ensure a more effective control over the Voluntary Agency schools, issued an Education Ordinance in which considerable emphasis was laid on secondary education. In the face of these developments, the Catholic authorities began, for the first time, to give serious thought to the possibility of having Catholic high schools in Eastern Nigeria. They pointed out to their Superior General in Paris, that

"education has taken such proportions in Nigeria that it is now necessary to think of entrusting it to better hands.... High schools are absolutely necessary; the Protestants have a dozen of them, and we do not possess any.... To neglect education in Nigeria is to lose Catholic influence completely, and that in a matter of a few years."⁹

In a measure which underscored the depth of Catholic involvement with primary education, the reaction of the authorities to the 1926 Education Code was the establishment not of a secondary school, but of a training college for teachers of higher elementary schools. The St. Charles Training College was established at Onitsha in 1928 to ensure adequate supply of qualified teachers to the network of primary schools already established throughout Eastern Nigeria. Catholic commitment to primary education was such that nothing short of a catastrophe was strong enough to weaken it. An event which approached the thresholds of such a catastrophe was the reorganisation in 1930 of the educational system in Nigeria.

According to E.R.J. Hussey, the Director of Education from 1929 to 1936, the eight-year primary school system which had existed in Nigeria till 1929, had the serious defect of concentrating attention on the Standard VI Examination which fetched pupils a certificate that had become worthless for employment purposes. To reduce the number of pupils who would emerge from the primary schools with this certificate, to eliminate the spirit of competition among parents and pupils, and to prevent poor village schools from

stretching beyond their means, he proposed in 1929 a reorganisation of the Nigerian education system.¹⁰ In the new system, three distinct phases of education were envisaged. The first phase was to offer a six-year primary education made up of a two-year Infant Section, and a four-year primary section. The aim of this phase was to provide a simple and general education for the majority of the masses, an education for life which was to make the improvement and conservation of local environment and tradition its *raison d'être*. The second phase contemplated an intermediate stage of six years duration to be given in Lower and Higher Middle Schools. This was an entirely new element in the whole experiment and the one that would generate the greatest controversy from Catholic point of view. A third and final stage of education was to be given in vocational schools or higher colleges whose objective was the production of qualified medical and engineering assistants, as well as teachers of Higher Middle Schools, and staff of other vocations. These proposals were published in 1930 in a memorandum on educational policy in Nigeria.

Some critics have suggested that Hussey's reorganisation of the Nigerian education system was a product of some questionable motives. David Abernethy, for instance, suggested that the ulterior motive of the curriculum changes was, among other things, "to limit the employment opportunities of educated Southern Nigerians" and thereby impose "definite limits on further upward mobility within the colonial framework."¹¹ There is some evidence to support this view. Before Hussey's directorship, Sir Hugh Clifford, the Governor of Nigeria from 1919 to 1926, had accused British expatriates of being fearful of educating Africans to the point of "lowering the prestige of the European officials."¹² Indeed, the Governor's charge is applicable to Hussey's educational plan in a number of ways. In the first place, the programme for elementary schools was designed, as Hussey repeatedly emphasised, to give large numbers of pupils a simple education that was fit only for work "on their father's farms."¹³ Secondly, a new West African School Certificate which was considered inferior to the coveted Oxford and Cambridge Certificates was to be awarded to the finalists of the new Middle

Schools. Thirdly, the diplomas from the Higher College at Yaba was officially declared inferior to similar degrees and diplomas obtained from British institutions. These measures were designed, according to Abernethy, "to consolidate the British position within Nigeria."¹⁴

The timing of the controversial Hussey reforms also seemed to vindicate these charges. The late 1920s and early 1930s were a period described by Lord Lugard, the first Governor General of Nigeria, as a "psychological moment."¹⁵ He was referring to the first signs of organised opposition to British rule in Nigeria which culminated in the embarrassing "Women Riot" of late 1929 in Eastern Nigeria. Although the women, massively supported by their husbands, took to violent protests ostensibly to register their anger over colonial tax practices, there were no doubts in the minds of the colonial administrators that the protests signalled a deep-rooted rebellion against British rule in general. Nothing could have influenced the educational and political decisions of a new Director of Education and a new Governor General, such as Hussey and Donald Cameron, respectively were in 1930, than measures to keep their subjects servile and amenable. To achieve that objective, they readily grasped at the adoptionist theories of the 1920s, which advocated the education of Africans "along their own lines." This involved, in the case of Hussey's educational programmes, giving the masses a simple education that would leave them contented with aspiring towards rural activities.

This restrictive stance in government education policy met with unexpectedly strong opposition not only from the emerging nationalist organisations, but also from Christian leaders within and outside Nigeria. Some Catholic officials accused British law-makers of wanting to push the Africans back to illiteracy and paganism under the guise of preventing detribalization.¹⁶ Bishop Hinsley, the Apostolic Delegate to British Africa, in an interview with the *Nigerian Daily Times*, spoke of a deliberate plan to educate the African "as part merely of a machine for production of wealth for the benefit of others",¹⁷

However, Catholic opposition to the education reforms had a

reason far more fundamental than the actual or fancied discrimination of Africans. The central issue in Hussey's reorganisation of the school system was the forcible elimination of Standard Six as the crowning point in the educational quest of the masses, a measure which made nonsense of the entire Catholic educational set-up. The authorities were compelled, in order to avert disaster, to give new purpose to their strongest missionary strategy. This need, more than any other consideration, was responsible for the foundation of the first Catholic secondary school in Eastern Nigeria.

While discussions on Hussey's proposed reforms were still going on in 1929, the Educational Council of the Vicariate of Southern Nigeria resolved not to send Catholic pupils to the newly established government Middle Schools, but rather to start Catholic "Lower Middle Schools in January in all the major stations."¹⁸ In what was undoubtedly the moment of conception for Christ The King College (CKC), Onitsha, it was further decided that at least one "Higher Middle School" should be started "later" for the Vicariate. That memorable event took place on 2 February, 1933. With a staff of three European and two African teachers, and a student population of only thirty, CKC was established in one of the dormitories of St. Charles' Teacher Training College. Later in the year the new college moved to a permanent site with about sixty students. It quickly developed into a centre for academic and sportive excellence, prompting the government Inspector of Schools afterwards to be highly impressed by "the promise shown for good in educational and social influence in the school."¹⁹

Throughout its history, the CKC, lived up to expectations. Most of the first Catholic elite in Eastern Nigeria, including the pioneer indigenous priests and Bishops, were former students of the college. Indeed, the establishment of the college was the first successful attempt by the Catholics towards achieving political and social parity with the Protestants.

The 1940s and 1950s saw rapid development of Catholic secondary schools. By 1955, there were ten full-fledged Catholic secondary schools in the East, and four incomplete ones. According

to the Annual Report of the Eastern Nigeria Ministry of Education for 1956, five out of the seven secondary schools opened that year were Catholic, and seventeen of the twenty-nine new Grade Two and Grade Three Teacher Training Colleges were also under Catholic auspices.²⁰ The greatest single factor in this extensive build-up of Catholic secondary education was the desire to catch up with Protestant dominance of the political and social life of the region. Protestant reaction to this, in their opinion, aggressively unfair competition, produced some very sad and unfortunate results. Among other things, it polarised political conceptions and sensibilities along denominational lines, and systematically prepared the grounds for the state take-over of schools. To this we shall return in a moment, but for now it would be useful to have a closer look at the attitudes of the Christian Missions to the whole question of politics in colonial Nigeria.

The Christian Missions and Nationalist Agitation

As has been seen so far, the emphasis which the Catholic leaders placed on primary education in Eastern Nigeria was a logical corollary to a policy which laid strong emphasis on the school as a means of proselytization. In this strategy there was need, first and foremost, to catch up with Protestant numerical superiority in the region. As long as the primary school held good prospects for the realisation of this objective, some other major issues that form constituent parts of formal education, such as nation building and the advancement of an indigenous leadership of the Church, were given only perfunctory attention. Accordingly, politics rated very lowly in Catholic educational institutions. This problem was compounded by a general lack of initiative which was discernible among Catholic pupils and students. A crucial factor in the lack of interest in politics by the beneficiaries of Catholic educational institutions was the extraordinary paternistic influence which the Catholic missionaries had on their adherents in general. For this reason it was relatively easy to initiate and sustain restrictions on political activities.

For their part, the Protestants were politically oriented right

from the start. As has been seen, their secondary grammar schools were, to a large extent, administered by parson politicians who saw the combination of religion and politics as belonging to a normal and healthy execution of their evangelical mission. Accordingly, their pupils and students were more politically-minded than their Catholic counterparts.

Generally speaking, Nigerian political agitation in the colonial era was an expression of popular longing for self-government, and the nationalist movement which spearheaded the struggle for independence was largely a product of the Protestant African Missions. This Protestant connection of the Nigerian nationalists stood firmly in the way of co-operation with the Catholic authorities. Given the unrelenting Catholic antipathy towards Protestantism and Islam throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the unwillingness of Catholic authorities to ally themselves with the political aspirations of Moslems and Protestants would appear less confounding.

The feeling of insecurity on the part of the Catholic expatriates was also a factor of major significance in their disposition towards the nationalists. A central element in the nationalist struggle was the desire to see the direction of every aspect of education in the hands of Nigerians. The demand implicitly challenged the very presence in Nigeria of the expatriate missionaries who had built their entire missionary career around the school and had volunteered for life for the missions. Furthermore, Catholic general antipathy towards the vernacular also brought the relationship between the Christian Missions on a collision course. The native language has always been a major issue in any nationalist struggle, and Catholic restrictive attitude towards its use and development in Igboland was viewed with anger by the Protestant nationalists.²¹

The greatest battle for self-government in Nigeria was fought between 1940 and 1950. It was a decade of seething tensions and unprecedented political activities, during which nationalist newspapers, trade unions, tribal associations, progressive societies, and diverse political organisations directed public opinion throughout the country.²² By the end of the decade, it had become

sufficiently clear to the colonial government that a re-think of its position on self-government was advisable, if not inevitable. Accordingly, it began to give Nigerians a greater share in the government than was hitherto the case, especially in the regional Education Departments. Furthermore, in 1951 Pope Pius XII, in what was undoubtedly an accommodating response to the political changes in the Missions, issued a missionary encyclical, "Evangelii Praecones," in which he, among other things, called the attention of the missionaries to the educational contributions which they ought to make towards the political maturity of the mission lands.²³

Despite these revolutionary signals from London and Rome, the Catholic Missions in Eastern Nigeria remained largely at odds with the nationalist movement for the greater part of the 1950s. As D.B. Abernethy aptly put it; there was a strong unwillingness among the Irish priests "to accept the fact that the colonial era was ending."²⁴ After the region had attained self-rule, for instance, the few Protestant expatriate missionaries still in Nigeria quickly adjusted themselves to the political realities at hand and refrained from making public utterances over sensitive issues, such as the Regional Government's stand on education. They allowed indigenous leaders of their Missions to present official decisions to the public.²⁵ The Irish Catholic missionaries, for their part, were seen announcing communiques and granting interviews, to the utter displeasure of the nationalists. One Rev. M. D. Opara is reported as saying:

I must warn the Government that it must be cautious against some of our people who try to assist these foreign people to keep us under bondage forever. We must be free not only from British rule but also from the Church rule too.²⁶

What is of great significance in the above statement is that the speaker was himself a church minister. Frustrated by repeated discrimination and marginalization by the white European leaders of the CMS, he had resigned his post as a mission teacher in 1941 and shortly afterwards founded his own independent Zion Church. On becoming a member of the Eastern House of Assembly, he championed the cause of decolonization and utilized every

opportunity to verbally attack colonial Medical Officers, District Officers and European Missionaries.²⁷ The reluctance of the Catholic expatriates in Eastern Nigeria to "Africanise" their Mission, and their refusal to come to terms with the political realities in the region greatly stimulated nationalist resentment and anger such as expressed above.

The more intensive the political agitation in the country became, the more irascible the Catholic White Fathers became towards any of their subjects caught meddling in politics. As one former Catholic teacher put it, while the Protestants were busy forming associations and organising political rallies, the Catholic teachers and students were forbidden to read Zik's newspapers. Any one caught contravening this order was severely dealt with.²⁸

One of the very few missionaries who realised that this attitude was not to the best interest of the Catholic Church in Nigeria was Father J. Jordan. Of all the expatriate priests in Eastern Nigeria during the years of heightened political tension, he was, perhaps, the most articulate defender of the broad objectives of the nationalist movement. Using his office as the Education Adviser to the Catholic Ordinaries of Nigeria, he endeavoured, in numerous written entreaties, to induce a change of heart in his fellow missionaries. In one such appeal, he resolutely defended a native priest who was victimised because of his alleged political leanings. At the end of it, he added:

Many European Fathers...are too retrograde in their political outlook and do not realise the way Nigeria is moving. Father Z's views are actually the prevalent ones among the native clergy and among educated Africans. There is nothing extreme about them. They really boil down to this: that the Africans should be prepared and prepared well with all possible speed to take over the running of their own country.²⁹

By underlining the way Africans ought to be "prepared", Father Jordan was stressing the fact that the failure to provide a sound training in political leadership to the Catholic youth was very detrimental to Catholic cause and influence in Nigeria. Elsewhere he was quick to note that the Protestants had already attained

dangerous degree of control at the top, both in and out of Education."³⁰ It was this consideration, more than anything else, which forced the Catholic authorities to replace their prohibitive attitude towards politics with a participatory option. Gradually, Catholic adherents were encouraged to be actively involved in the nationalist movement, especially within the NCNC, the most influential political party in the Eastern Region. As Bishop J.B. Whelan put it, "it seemed a lesser evil to campaign for non-Catholics rather than risk losing all influence in the Nationalist Party."³¹ To guarantee adequate training for leadership, Catholic post-primary education was improved and expanded in the 1950s with unprecedented rapidity. The results were so reassuring that Father J. Grant noted in 1953 that "Catholic interest in education and its contributions has left it in a position where it just cannot be ignored."³² This view was vindicated in the late 1950s during the showdown with the regional government over education policy.

Religious Affiliation and the Struggle for Political Hegemony

Catholic educational expansion in the 1940s and 1950s, especially in the post-primary sector, was particularly disturbing to the Anglican Mission, the most important rival to the RCM in Eastern Nigeria. During its "Teachers' Week" held in 1950 at St. Paul's College, Awka, the deliberations of the participants were devoted entirely to "The Roman Catholic Threat." A paper read at that seminar has emerged as one of the most famous documents of the missionary era. Written by E.O. Enemo and entitled, "What are we Anglicans Doing?", it was designed strictly for private circulation among members of the Anglican community. But it fell into Catholic hands and within days almost every Catholic teacher in Eastern Nigeria had received a copy. In his paper, Mr. Enemo extolled the virtues of Catholicism and praised the excellence and achievements of Catholic educational institutions in Eastern Nigeria. He went to such extremes merely to awaken his compatriots to the grave dangers which Catholic expansionism posed to the Anglican Church in Eastern Nigeria. At the beginning of the sixteen-page document, he has the following to say:

No one who remembers the ascendancy which was ours twenty years ago in primary schools, in medical services, in normal colleges, in numbers in the training of our agents and clergy, in the influence wielded by the products of our institution...can now behold us playing an role [sic] without shedding substantial tears. The teachers in the almost insignificant field are alarmed, students in colleges know it, ignorant Christians in the villages bewail it that we are fast becoming a minority group, and it requires actual experience to appreciate the woes of a man who belongs to a minority group in any society.³³

Although the Catholics received Enemo's paper with some legitimate pride because of the good things it said about Catholicism in general, the purpose of the paper and its implications were not lost on them. On the eve of self-rule in Eastern Nigeria, the Protestants were forming a common front to oppose the spread of Catholicism in the region. It is not surprising, therefore, that when self-government finally came, the Protestant-dominated government placed education at the centre stage of its politics. For the first time, the Catholic authorities were confronted with the bitter realities emanating from their belated attention to post-primary education and from their untoward attitude towards the nationalist struggle. In other words, they realised how closely education was linked to political influence in Nigeria.

Two major events accentuated this grim reality and induced the Catholic authorities to make some fundamental political decisions. The first concerned government response to Catholic efforts in 1955 to found a Catholic university in Eastern Nigeria. Serious preparations for the establishment of the University began soon after the foundation of the University College at Ibadan in 1948, when it was noticed that the institution had a strong Protestant bias right from the start. By 1955, there were in the College a divinity school for Protestant theology, and 250 Protestant students, as opposed to only 60 Catholics. This prompted the Catholic authorities to intensify efforts to have their own university in the East. Despite some positive initial responses and assurances from Dr. Azikiwe, the Eastern Premier,³⁴ the Catholic Education Adviser had some misgivings about Protestant reception of a Catholic

university. "I have reason to believe," he said, "that his executive council with its Protestant ethos will not support him in this view."³⁵ As it indeed turned out, the most immediate cause of the failure to establish a Catholic university in Eastern Nigeria was the consolidated opposition organised and sustained by the Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN), members of which included the Premier's cabinet. The project was never approved.

The second event which spurred the Catholics on to political action was the Universal Primary Education scheme (UPE) which was proposed by the Eyo Ita government in 1953 and implemented in 1957 by the Azikiwe administration. The central issue in Catholic objection to the scheme was the ban on the establishment of new primary schools by the Voluntary Agencies and the limitation of the number of Infant I pupils to be admitted to the existing ones. Both provisions meant that Catholic pupils could be sent to schools run by Protestants. The fact that the NCNC launched the UPE programme without consulting the Voluntary Agencies was seen by the Catholics as further proof that the Protestant dominated government was not sincere about its ulterior motives. Even though all the Voluntary Agencies were equally affected by the new policy, the Protestants gave an unflinching support to the government. This was in consonance with a resolution of the Eastern Education Advisory Committee of the CCN to support government measures that might help contain Catholic expansionism in Eastern Nigeria.³⁶

Catholic response to these developments was swift and decisive. For many decades, the Mission had looked upon the political leanings of its adherents with great displeasure. Had the regional government not singled out education as a weapon to check Catholic expansion, the authorities would perhaps not have changed their stand on politics for more decades to come. But having built their entire missionary strategy around the school, the Catholic authorities saw the use being made of education by the government as posing an existential problem. This called for a radical turn around.

Accordingly, in December 1956, the Catholics formed a new association known as the "Eastern Nigeria Catholic Council"

(ENCC). Conceived as a foil to the CCN, it was more of a political organisation than a religious body, and its aim was to enhance Catholic influence in government and to promote Catholic education in the region. The motivating force behind the ENCC was Father Godfrey Okoye, the future bishop of Port Harcourt and Enugu, who was from 1953 to 1958 the Parish Priest of Ihiala. Mr. G. E. Okeke, the only Catholic minister in Azikiwe's cabinet then, was his parishioner, and this facilitated the formation of a Catholic pressure group to cater for Catholic educational influence in and out of government.

To make it possible for members of the ENCC to attain leading positions within the NCNC, the Catholic authorities, especially in the Onitsha district, had to relax their strict rule on native titles, especially the ozo title. In traditional Igbo society, the ozo title was a political institution that held sway even after the introduction of the Western brand of politics. This was particularly the case in the Onitsha district, which produced the first educated elite in Igboland. Only titled men could be community leaders, and only they were privileged to make public representations of popular opinion. Because of the ban by the Catholics on the ozo title, they found it extremely difficult to win votes in their constituencies. This bottleneck was removed when Catholics were allowed to embrace the ozo title, on the condition that they did not go through the native religious ceremonies. The ENCC developed into an influential Catholic pressure group and many of them became members of the Knights of St. Mulumba, another action group of enlightened lay Catholics founded by Fr. Anselm Abraham Ojefua in 1953.³⁷ Thanks to these two organisations, the Eastern Nigerian Regional Government was not able to take over mission schools until after the civil war in 1970.

Protestant response to these Catholic organisations was the formation in 1957 of a body known as the "Convention of Protestant Citizens" to give the already existing national front, the CCN, a regional character. With this a serious rift now emerged within the NCNC, especially during the general election of 1957. The Catholics went as far as presenting independent candidates some of whom

made it through to the House of Assembly.

In the face of a formidable Catholic opposition, the government made significant concessions in its UPE programme, and when the NCNC was finally returned to power in 1957, six out of the fourteen ministers appointed to the new cabinet were Catholic. One of them, G.E. Okeke, was even made the Minister of Education. The Catholics had used their numerical strength to achieve political concessions and in the 1960s were on the verge of also achieving political superiority. But that tantalising possibility was suddenly eclipsed by the military intervention in Nigerian politics.

Protestant political ascendancy in Eastern Nigeria has remained intact in spite of military rule. During the era of the East Central State, when the whole of Igboland was under one central administration, the conduct of politics took on most of the hallmarks of the Eyo Ita and Azikiwe regimes with regard to Protestant-Catholic relationship. The Protestants used their political superiority, especially in the Ministry of Education and State School Board, to pursue discriminating policies. In 1974, for instance, a circular letter from the State School Board says, among other things:

I am directed to warn that admission from unrecognised institutions like Seminaries, convents, typing institutions, etc. are not allowed. Principals should be careful not to contravene this regulation.³⁸

The Catholic populace was appalled to see their seminaries and convent secondary schools equated to a typing institution, and when in 1975 Col. Anthony Ochefu, the then Military Governor of East Central State and a Catholic, reversed the order, the Protestants called for his removal. They alleged that he was too friendly disposed to the Catholic Church and that Bishop Okoye was virtually ruling the East Central State.

Conclusion

One central point which has emerged from this study is the difference between political training and participation in politics. The Christian Missions did not establish law schools, nor did they form political clubs and parties. But mission schools, especially at

the post-primary level, adequately equipped the pupils and students with all the skills and consciousness needed for political action. The Catholic Missions may have made a belated start in this direction, they nonetheless contributed enormously to the political development of the Nigerian nation by their impressive involvement in secondary education. However, by denying their adherents active participation in politics, they created social disparity which has continued to have political implications long after the missionary era came to an end. The nationalists, who were products of the missions schools, were made to view the missionaries and the religion they represented as foes rather than collaborators in the pursuit of their political aspirations.

The political outlook of Catholic leaders has undergone remarkable transformation in recent times. In the face of a prolonged and brutal military rule, the once passive participants in the national debate and who were often conspicuously silent on many political issues that affect even the life of the Church, have emerged as among the most vocal and most active players in the political arena. These days, Church leaders not only courageously and forcefully defend the rights of the citizens, they also call upon their followers to become actively engaged in politics.

Political consciousness need not be discriminatory or belligerent. The often denigrating stance in Catholic-Protestant relationship is a legacy of the denominational bitterness and antagonism which preceded political agitation in Nigeria. The political and cultural realities in present day Nigeria demand a strong and unified Christian front. The natural "parties" which emerged in the missionary era have served their purpose, but still they can be channelled into other terrains in a unified front. That this is possible and desirable has been adequately demonstrated by the activities of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) in the face of the threat posed by Moslems and their Sharia movement. The fact remains that it was the Christian Missions who, at great costs in men and materials, systematically prepared and equipped the nationalists for the struggle for independence. Perhaps, the last word should be spoken in this regard by a prominent Nigerian

nationalist himself, Sir Denis Osadebay, who was a foundation member of the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (N.C.N.C) and a one-time Premier of the Midwest region:

The direct good from missionary service in Africa outweighs any by-product...and when partnership between the African and the British grows to its full strength and splendour, neither the old nor the young African will have anything but praise and thanks for the missionaries who have given their lives and belongings to help to reclaim a race....

If the Colonial Governments now take up education they are taking it up from where the missionary stopped. If African tribes can now meet to discuss their national aspirations, they ought to thank the missionaries for preaching goodwill. When African historians come to write their own account of the adventure for Africa with imperialism, they will write of the missionaries as the greatest friends the African had.³⁹

NOTES

1. See J. D. Y. Peel, "Between Crowther and Ajayi: The Religious Origins of the Modern Yoruba Intelligentsia," in Toyin Falola, ed. *African Historiography: Essays in Honour of Jacob Ade Ajayi* (Longman, 1993), p. 64f.
2. See Onitsha Archdiocesan Archives (OAA), J. Jordan, "Background Note to Nigeria, with Special Reference to Catholic Education," 31 May, 1955, p. 6.
3. "H. Venn to Robin," 22 January 1857, quoted in J.F.A. Ajayi, "Nineteenth Century Origins of Nigerian Nationalism," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria (JHSN)*, vol. II (1961), p.199.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 202.
5. Eyo Ita, "A Decade of National Education Movement," quoted in J.F.A. Ajayi, "The Development of Secondary Grammar School Education in Nigeria," *JHSN*, vol.2 (1963), p. 532.
6. See J. S. Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), pp. 351-267.
7. J.B.Whelan, "Our School: Victory in Nigeria," *World Mission*, 8 (1957), 25.
8. See "Education Statistics," in *Bulletin de la Congregation des PERES du Saint-Esprit* (hereafter referred to as Bulletin) 32 (1925-26).
9. *Bulletin*, 32 (1925-26), 580.

10. See E.R.J. Hussey, "Some Aspects of Education in Nigeria," in *Some Aspects of Education in Tropical Africa: Joseph Payne Lectures for 1935* (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), pp.7-21.
11. D.B.Abernethy, *The Political Dilemma of Popular Education: An African Case* (Stanford: The University Press, 1969), p. 94.
12. Quoted in F. K. Ekechi, *Missionary Enterprise and Rivalry in Igboland, 1857-1914* (London: Frank Case, 1972), p.181.
13. Quoted in D.B. Abernethy, *The Political Dilemma*, p. 94.
14. *Ibid.*
15. F.D. Lugard, "British Policy in Nigeria," *Africa*, 10 (1937), 386.
16. See G. A. Lutterbeck, "Das Schulwesen in den Britischen Kolonien Afrikas," *Die Katholische Missionen*, 60 (1932), 309.
17. Spiritan Archives Paris (SAP): 554/VI, "Bishop Hinsley in Conference with Nigerian Bishops: A Statement of Policy," 1929.
18. SAP:554/I, "Minutes of the Fathers' Meeting held at the Annual Retreat," Ihiala, 11 November, 1929.
19. Quoted in *The Irish Independent*, Thursday, 7 January, 1954, p.6.
20. D.B. Abernethy, *Church and State in Nigerian Education* (Ibadan, 1967), p.27, note 36.
21. See N. I. Omenka, "The Role of the Catholic Mission in the Development of Vernacular Literature in Eastern Nigeria," *Journal of Religion in Africa*, XVI, 2 (1986), 121-137.
22. For more information on the course of the National Movement in the 1940s, see T. Hodgkins, "Background to Nigerian Nationalism, 3: The Coming of Zik and the NCNC," *West Africa*, 18 August, 1951, pp. 751-752.
23. See "Evangelii Praecones," *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, 43 (1951), 14f.
24. *The Political Dilemma*, p. 166.
25. See S.O. Igwe, *Education in Eastern Nigeria: Development and Management* (Ibadan: Evans Brothers, 1987), p. 209f.
26. Quoted in D.B.Abernethy, *The Political Dilemma*, p. 178.
27. See Felix K. Ekechi, "The Legacy of M.D. Opara," *International Bulletin of Mission Research*, vol. 27, no.2 (April, 2003), p.82f..
28. Nnamdi Azikiwe, popularly known as Zik, was the father of Nigerian democracy who, from the 1930s, relentlessly fought the British in the columns of his newspapers. He became the first Nigerian president at independence in 1960.
29. "J. Jordan to Superior General," 18 March, 1954, quoted in E. Isichei, *Entirely for God: The life of Michael Iwene Tansi* (London: Macmillan, 1980), p.13.
30. J. Jordan, "Catholic Education and Catholicism in Nigeria," *African Ecclesiastical Review*, 2 (1960), 61f.
31. J. B. Whelan, "Our Schools: Victory in Nigeria," p. 22f.
32. J. Grant, "Education in Nigeria and the Mission Effort," *The African Angelus*, 7 (1953), p.6.

38 Nicholas Ibeawuchi Omenka

33. E.O.Enemo, "What are We Anglicans Doing?", A Lecture Presented to the Teachers' Week at Awka, August, 1950, p.5.
34. For more details, see N. I. Omenka, *The School in the Service of Evangelization: The Catholic Educational Impact in Eastern Nigeria, 1886-1950* (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1989), p. 306 - 307.
35. OAA: J. Jordan, "Background Notes...", p. 9.
36. CCN, Eastern Education Advisory Committee, "Minutes of the Annual Meeting held at Aba, 11 November, 1955, quoted in S.O.Igwe, op. cit. p.166.
37. For more information on the foundation and constitution of the Knights of St. Mulumba, see Olisa Awogu, *Anselm Abraham Ojefua, Priest and Monk: A Steward of Creation* (Onitsha: Africana-FEP Publishers, 1992), pp.33-48.
38. State School Board, Enugu, "Circular Letter No. SSB/SC240/Vol.II/226," 5 November, 1974.
39. D. Osadebay, "Easter Reflection: The Missionary in West Africa," in *West Africa*, 5 April, 1947, p. 289f.