


Analysing the impact of the Catholic Church on societal building in Nkomoro, Ebonyi State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The Catholic Church is regarded as the world's most popular Christian church, with billions of adherents who are found across all the continents of the earth. They have continuously expanded their areas of Christian influence, developing societies as part of their mission. This research, therefore, analyzed the impact of the Catholic Church on societal building within the Nkomoro District in Ebonyi State, Nigeria. The study used primary data from interviews collected in Nkomoro as well as archival sources from the National Archives and other publications to document how the Catholic Church has grown in Nkomoro and how it has influenced the lives of the people. The study reveals the multidimensional impact of the church, and that remains significant as the church is promoting peacebuilding and societal transformation in the area. State the contribution of the study to scholarship. The study will contribute to the body of knowledge in the area of church history and community development.

Keywords: The Roman Catholic Church, Catechist, Societal Building, Nkomoro, Priest.

INTRODUCTION

The process of societal building is multi-dimensional. Every society survives on the support it receives from different groups. This group includes private and government agencies. Faith-based groups are one of the private groups that enhance societal building. It should be noted that the Catholic Church has developed a strong record of promoting societal building in different parts of the world. They base their societal building activities on the teachings of the church and the holy scriptures.

The Catholic Church's central administration is the Holy See. Jesus Christ is the founder of the Catholic Church, according to the sacred tradition of the church. The Catholic Church has influenced the culture, belief, values and norms of the Nkomoro community in particular and Igboland in general. The Catholic Church has been considered to be the first established standard Church in Nkomoro. It has the greatest percentage of the community's Christian population as members. It is the most organised Christian institution in the Nkomoro community.

The Catholic Church has played a critical or vital role in the societal building of the Nkomoro community, covering the political, social, religious, and economic sectors of the society. The people of

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Nkomoro, from time immemorial, have welcomed and supported the activities of the Church to ensure that the community gets the best forms of development from all available institutions.

However, the church is recently facing challenges of negligence and abandonment by Nigerian youths. Accordingly, issues like what role the church played in undermining the traditional culture of killing twins, as well as managing illiteracy and education, remain topical societal problems that the church has tried to manage over the years. It is the dynamics of the relations between these problems and societal building that this study will concentrate on principally.

The work of evangelization and planting of faith, especially in a foreign land, is not an easy task. A lot of sacrifices, suffering, persecution, misunderstanding, community, personnel, money, time, patience, endurance and initiative are involved. Missionaries normally encounter lots and lots of difficulties, oppositions and hindrances in the course of propagating the faith. The early Holy Ghost missionaries who brought the catholic faith to Igboland in general and Nkomoro in particular were not an exception to this. The first problem these early missionaries encountered was that they were refused passage upriver to Lokoja, which was their original destination.¹ African weather and tropical diseases were other factors that contributed adversely towards the missionary activities in Igboland in general and Nkomoro in particular. The same applies to culture, food and language.² Besides these, tropical diseases of West Africa, like malaria and sleeping sickness, were another major setback to the work of the missionaries.

Furthermore, the catholic missionaries received a lot of opposition and antagonism. On 24th June 1976, the then king of Nkomoro community, HRH Ezeogo Nwanchonu Nnoko, withdrew freedom of worship from worshippers, which automatically mandated the whole community into their traditional practice called Udenyi. All the citizens of the community were forced to practise African Traditional Religion. This period was a very difficult one for both the catholic missionaries and the worshippers in the community.³ Also, the council of elders and the king practise African Traditional Religion, which made the progress of the church challenging. The initial land, which was given to the church to establish their meeting point, was recovered from them by the king and his council of elders. This means that the reign of Nwanchonu Nnoko as the traditional ruler of the Nkomoro community was hazardous to the progress of the Catholic Church.

In a bid to justify this research, this study will provide insight into the activities and the role of the Catholic Church in the societal building of Ezzaland while focusing on the Nkomoro community. It will bring to the fore what the Roman Catholic Church has done to make life more meaningful for the people of the Nkomoro community. This work is set to reflect or enlighten the people of the Nkomoro community and the world in general on the role of the Catholic Church in the societal building of Nkomoro.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative research methodology that used a narrative historical method. The researchers consulted extensive journals and chapters of edited books to develop the study. This study was made possible through the conduct of oral interviews with people's responses to questions on topical issues relating to the study. The researcher used a random sampling method to select the people to be interviewed.

Research Setting

The research setting where data was collected from is Nkomoro that is located in Ezza North Local Government area of Ebonyi State. The ancient town of Nkomoro is situated in the northern part of Ezza Ogboji town in its southern part, all in Ezza North Local Government area of Ebonyi State. To her northwest lies Umuezeoka and Umuezeokaoha. Inyere town is found in her southeast. Inyere, Umuezeoka and

¹ U.D. Anyanwu, *Christianity in Igbo and Nigerian Society* (Uzopietro Publishers, 2013).

² Jeremiah Nwanga, interview Nkomoro, 25/11/2020.

³ Romanus Ujebe, interview Nkomoro, 27/11/2020.

Umuezeokoha towns are divided by the Akadoro River, which runs through Nkomoro in her southern part down to her northern border with Umuoghara and Oriuzor in Northeast of Ezza North. The forest reserve covered and separated Nkomoro from Umuezeoka. There is also a river, though not too big, in the community known as Udenyi. This river is located in the eastern part of Nkomoro. It is a stagnant sacred river; the villagers are not allowed to catch fish from the river.

DISCUSSION

The History of the Catholic Church in Nkomoro

Several attempts have been made by a number of religious orders and missionary societies to establish the catholic faith in Nigeria since the fifteenth century, with varying degrees of success. The Portuguese priests of the diocese of Lisbon made the first attempt during the age of exploration. The king of Portugal was interested in the conversion of West Africa, which was assigned to him through a papal bull of demarcation. Even though the conversion of his territory to the catholic faith was not the primary aim of the Portuguese expedition in the fifteenth century, it formed a very special mission dear to the heart of the king. The beginning of catholic church in Igboland is one that is really marked by a unique history. The catholic church was not there at the beginning of the Igbo people. It came to be at a particular point in time, hence a historical and timely event in the lives of the Igbo people.⁴

Father Joseph Lutz, a French Alsatian priest, a man of energy, enterprise and intelligence who was still then the superior at Rio Pongé, left the mother house in Paris in the company of newly professed Father Home and brothers Hermes and Jean-Grotto on September 19, 1885. They had a well-defined objective, namely, to plant the catholic faith in Igboland, south-eastern Nigeria.⁵ Akasa was the first place they touched in the hope that they would take a boat from there to Lokoja. However, on arriving at Akasa on November 20th, one Captain Christian, an agent of the Royal Niger Company, refused them passage upriver to Lokoja, which was their targeted destination, on the grounds that they were unknown and had no recommendation letter of any kind from the director in London.⁶

The missionaries, though disappointed with the turn of events, proceeded to Brass, arriving the next day, 21st November. They introduced themselves to the English company agent, Mr. Charles Townsend, a member of Christian mission societies [Anglican] who, fortunately, had made acquaintance with Bishop Le Pierre Barre in Gabon. Townsend welcomed them into his house and offered to take them up the Niger in his own steamer. The two priests left for Onitsha with Townsend on 25th November, leaving behind the two brothers to look after the remainder of their 70 trunks of luggage, which they were unable to take with them. They arrived at Onitsha on 5th December 1885. Townsend must have convinced them that Onitsha would be a more fertile soil for their missionary work than Igbebe Lokoja, which was their original destination.⁷ The warm welcome accorded to them instilled the confidence that made them trust his suggestion as a sincere one. They therefore settled in Onitsha, where they started founding catholic churches in other parts of Igboland, resulting in the founding of Catholic churches in Abakaliki, which in turn led to the establishment of catholic church in Nkomoro.

On arrival at Onitsha, they immediately began the construction of their own house. Father, in a very fast way, went on with the work of building the mission house. The official opening of the mission took place on Easter Sunday, 25 April 1886, with a public holy mass.⁸ Having established a base, the missionaries settled down for real work. Making converts and planting the seed of catholic faith in Igboland in general and in Nkomoro in particular was not an easy task. Several issues came to play, namely money, manpower, energy, personnel and time.

⁴ Edwin Chukwudi Ezeokeke, "The Identity of the Catholic Church in Igboland, Nigeria" (Lublin, 2018).

⁵ Lazarus Nwali, Interview in Nkomoro

⁶ Emefie Ikenga Metuh and Christopher I Ejizu, *Hundred Years of Catholicism in Eastern Nigeria, 1885-1985: The Nnewi Story; (a Historico-Missiological Analysis)* (Asele Inst., 1985).

⁷ James Anyigor Interview in Nkomoro, 2020

⁸ Anyanwu, *Christianity in Igbo and Nigerian Society*, 169.

The Diocese of Ogoja is one of the oldest dioceses in the Calabar Ecclesiastical Province at that time. Evangelization started in the province on December 5, 1885, when Fr. Lutz [a long-bearded man], a dynamic Holy Ghost Father from France, arrived in Onitsha. He worked among the local people until he died in 1895. Fr. Lejeune succeeded him. After him came Fr. Joseph Shanahan, who became Bishop in 1920 and a great apostle of southern Nigeria and the Cameroons. Under him, the catholic faith expanded throughout Calabar, Ogoja and other parts of the Cross River area, Tiv land, now Benue State and Cameroons.⁹ His activities led to the creation of the Catholic Diocese of Abakaliki, where the Nkomoro church currently falls under.

The parish St Mary's Nkomoro was carved out of St Kizitos Parish Izzo Imoha by his lordship Most Rev Dr Micheal N. Okoro, Catholic Bishop of Abakaliki Diocese in September 2012. The parish, before its creation, was one of the five zones that made up the mother parish, St Kizitos Izzo Imoha. During the period of Rev.Fr. Romchristo Nworie, as the parish priest of St.Kizitos Izo Imoha, he started championing the cause for the creation of another parish from St Kizitos. Consequent upon the arrival of a priest, the parish was officially inaugurated on the 7th day of October 2012.¹⁰

Upon arrival, the pioneer parish priest set out to see how the parish and the structure in it could be improved. He swung into action to change the face of the only existing structure, the uncompleted bungalow meant for the use of the priest. He did his best to put the house into temporary use to allow him have a little convenience in doing the work. Fr Romchristo was still calling capable hands to join him to find out how best to complete the work at Father's house and also to move the parish forward, when he was posted out of the parish. His posting gave way to the wonderful and fast-achieving hand of Rev Fr Timothy Nwanja. Amongst the things he embarked on was providing a place of convenience for the worship of God since the parish did not have a church building. Thus, there was an urgent need to make a temporary place of worship. Once this was completed, there was a unanimous agreement of the parish to have another father's house constructed since the older, uncompleted bungalow could easily be converted for another purpose, save for the use of the priest. The people voted for a decked storey-building, and work started for the actualization of this plan.

The members and strength of the pious societies talk more about the spiritual life of the people. The Lord had also blessed the parish with two indigenous priests, namely Rev Fr Polycap Nworie and Romchristo Nworie. The people of God in St. Mary's parish Nkomoro, are sincerely grateful to God for the growth recorded in the young parish and the much expected in the nearest time.¹¹

Issues of Conflict Between the Catholic Church and the Community

The introduction of Christianity to Abakaliki and the Catholic Church to Nkomoro introduced one more faith into the religious menu of the Abakaliki people. For the Nkomoro natives, like other African counterparts who worshipped multiple gods, the addition of one more religion to their pantheons would not have been a problem. The problem, however, was with the church, which preached mutual exclusiveness and condemned in totality the African traditional religions and all that they held dear. During Sunday services and other church gatherings, the missions and their followers roundly condemned the Nkomoro custom and traditional religious beliefs. They regarded the worship of Nkomoro gods, such as *Udenyi*, *Nkomoro*, as nothing but mere idol worship.

The Christians preached the existence of only one God who alone must be worshipped and condemned ancestor worship, which was one of the avowed traditions of the people. The Christian condemned the ancestors who were hitherto venerated as dead, gone and powerless men who could never affect issues in life again or come back again to life. This became a point of inevitable conflict. Since the Christian religion refused to adhere to the principles of life and let live and allow the Nkomoro gods to rest, the Nkomoro practitioners of the African traditional religions decided to fight back to preserve the belief of

⁹ O. Edem, *Catholic Church in Ogoja*, vol. 1 (Christus, n.d.).

¹⁰ Micheal Okoro, *A Testimony of Divine Providence*, 2015.

¹¹ Usulor John, Interview Nkomoro, 15/10/2020.

their forefathers. In 1956, for example, the native worshippers in Nkomoro Ezza demolished a Confraternity of Christian Doctrine [CCD] centre located near their community playground.¹² In retaliation, James Anyigor, who was a catechist and the one who built the CCD centre decided to invade the village shrine in the middle of the night. He and his fellow catholic faithful, James Alaka, destroyed and cast into the nearby river such deities as *Udenyi*, *Nworie Uburu* and *Enyali Afor*. This brought instability and worshippers in the village and eventually landed Lazarus Nwali into Achiegu police station, where he spent six months.

However, those who were determined to go to church and to be Christians usually overcome the resistance after a period of suffering. Such a long-drawn battle ensued between the traditional worshippers and the Catholics of Nkomoro over ritual circumcision. For the centrality of the tradition in the area as a passport to adulthood and social significance, the practice of ritual circumcision constituted a problem for the Christian converts. The confusion brought by the meeting of Catholicism and ritual circumcision was such that some who were baptized Catholic eventually abandoned the catholic faith in favor of the tradition, and some who were avowed supporters of ritual circumcision later abandoned it and embraced the catholic doctrine. Some who were unable to decide which one to follow continued to pander to both sides. Those who abandoned the tradition in favor of the Christian faith suffered persecution. Many boys and girls of marriageable age who, on account of their Christian faith, refused to subject themselves to circumcision rites were driven out of their homes by their parents. On other occasions, those who refused to participate in the tradition were denied farmlands and completely treated as social outcasts.

Similarly, in Onueke Ezza, which is close to Nkomoro community, in the 1980s, about ten or more persons driven away by their parents found refuge weekly in the parish house at Sacred Heart Parish, while many Christians were dragged to the police, and some ended up in court.¹³ At other times, because of the threats issued by the traditional worshippers, it was the church which dragged them to the police in order to stop them from disturbing their services or harming their members.

The Role of the Catholic Church in Societal Development

The Catholic Mission was not the first to arrive in Nigeria as a whole and Nkomoro in particular, but their coming introduced an enlightened concern for the physical welfare of the people. Other churches which predated the Catholic faith also showed some care for the people, for instance, in building schools. Nonetheless, the catholic missionaries took physical concern to new heights. According to Pa James Anyigor, the catholic church impacted the Nkomoro community in so many ways, which include: socio-political impact, economic impact and religious impact.

The advent of Christianity in Nkomoro led to a critical re-ordering of political power in the area. The most noticeable is the wresting of power from the traditional wielders and steadying the hands of the followers of the new way. Before the coming of Christianity and thus modernity, the elders, traditional title holders and age grade ruled the Nkomoro community. However, with the rise of the educated class brought about by the missionary and catholic schools, the power base shifted from the traditional to the modern system. U.C Anyanwu's observation of the situation in Ezza generally rings true of all the communities in Ezza. According to him, these reorganizations, especially those of the 1950s and 1960s, tend to emphasize: The role and importance of Nkomoro elders and titled men, and to highlight the importance of the educated elite. Their education made them more relevant in the new dispensation. The British largely consulted with these elites. Most of them were already councilors. The elites, because of their importance, then became models of achievements because they were entrenched in Ezza in general and Nkomoro in particular and because of the benefit attached to their position.¹⁴

¹² Jeremiah Nwanga, interview Nkomoro, 25/11/2020

¹³ Romanus Ujebe, interview Nkomoro, 27/11/2020

¹⁴ U.C Anyanwu, Interview Nkomoro, 15/10/2020.

However, because of the dwindling influence of the traditional title-holders engendered by the rise of the educated class, many in the community began to shift emphasis from acquiring those titles and instead put their money into the education of their children. In the community, stories have been told about men who diverted money and materials which they had earmarked for the acquisition of traditional titles to the training of their children. The foregoing, however, in no way suggests the total eradication of traditional title ship or the power its holder weilds, but the frequency and zeal with which it was previously pursued and the sweeping influence it once had is no more there. More so, whatever power was left then was only expressed in the fringe. Today, communities, including Nkomoro, even consider the acquisition of a Western education as one of the requirements they look for in choosing their traditional rulers.

The collapse of the power of traditional institutions led to other important changes in society. Christianity's sweeping influence touched almost every aspect of the people's beliefs and traditional practices. One of those important areas was the social status of twins. In the Abakaliki area, which also comprises the Nkomoro community, one man whose efforts in this area will not be easily forgotten is Rev. Fr Raymond Ifeanyichukwu Ezeonu, an indigenous catholic priest who lived between 1943 and 2003. In seeking to discuss the social impact of Catholicism in Nkomoro, the writer is obliged to look at the impact of the church on this area by a focused attention on the revolutionary work of the said indigenous catholic priest who learnt from the European missionaries and did so much for the preservation of the lives of twins and the mothers throughout Abakaliki and Nkomoro in particular. He fought for the end of killing twins and was highly generous to the poor, needy and helpless in the society. The killing of twins appeared to have been most perverse in Igboland, Nkomoro inclusive, compared to other regions of the non-Christian precolonial Nigeria. In almost every part of Igboland, the Christian missionaries encountered infanticide associated with twin children. In the Yoruba language, twins are called Ibeji.¹⁵ The firstborn twin is usually named Taiwo, and the second is named Kehinde. In Yoruba religion, twins are believed to be under the protection of Shango, the god of thunder and lightning.¹⁶ The twins were well catered for and treated with honor. The communities, in which they were born, for example, honored twins with a monthly feast. The Yoruba also believed that twins had supernatural powers which could increase their parents' wealth.¹⁷ However, the Igbo people, including Nkomoro, on the other hand, had a different regard for twins. For instance, the Aro people, who were custodians of the famous notorious Ibini Ukpabi, believed that twins were disgusting to Chukwu Ukpabi and would proceed to kill them.¹⁸

Following this badly flawed worldview, the arrival of twin children was regarded as an abomination, a desecration of the land and a thing that must be gotten rid of. Parents who stubbornly held their twins were reduced to worthless outcasts and subsequently ostracized from the community. From the moment of the 'distasteful' birth, the unlucky parents of the twins were usually kept at arm's length by both their friends and kith and kin. Nkomoro did not differ in any way from other Igbo clans in the culpability of the slaying of twins in the pre-Christian era. Every area where the study took place had practiced to some degree the killing of twins. There were terrible traditions in the community that included but were not limited to slavery and the slave trade, the Osu caste system, human sacrifice, the killing of twins, etc. These were some of the more conscience-rendering challenges encountered by the catholic missionaries in their evangelization area. The community was also full of danger and threats to the life of the average African, as occasioned by its record of slavery and murder, bloodshed and tribal wars, human sacrifice and twins killing superstition and idolatry, coupled with filth and diseases.

The Catholic Church addressed most of these challenges through the introduction of education to the community. Through education, these myths that had held the people captive were dispelled. The first school they established was the Christ the King Primary School in 1949, which was later changed to Community

¹⁵ James Adewumi, "Twins in West African Culture and Society of the Iron Age," *Artifacts Journal*, 2014.

¹⁶ Adewumi, "Twins in West African Culture and Society of the Iron Age."

¹⁷ Adewumi, "Twins in West African Culture and Society of the Iron Age."

¹⁸ Onukwe Ofoelue, "Arochukwu Twins before Mary Slessor," 2016.

Primary School, Onuafor Nkomoro, after the missionaries had left. John Usulor, who obtained his first school leaving certificate in the school, said that the catholic missionaries did well in teaching the children of the community. He also stated:

The method which the missionaries used to teach was very good, and we were taught very well. Most of the prominent men in the community now were all products of the first catholic school in the community. The medical care which was offered by the catholic missionaries also helped the community. The missionaries didn't establish a hospital, but always embarked on a medical outreach, which always took place twice a week. They gave private health care to the aged and pregnant women. Their medical attention to the community reduced the rate at which diseases affected us previously.¹⁹

The coming of Christianity altered the centrality of agriculture in the area. The introduction of European culture, especially the European educational system championed by the catholic missionaries, has robbed agriculture of its dominant place in Abakaliki's economy, generally, and Nkomoro in particular. Western education provided an opportunity for those who acquired it to engage in other economic activities other than farming. Such other economic opportunities available to the western-educated Nkomoro people included working as interpreters to both missionaries and colonial government officials, working as clerical officers and teachers in both missionary and government schools, working as catechists, court clerks, court messengers, etc. All these avenues held for the young, educated minds better attractions than the back-breaking farm work of their fathers and traditional society. This, in consequence, caused the problem of rural-urban drift in the Abakaliki area, where young educated people abandoned their rural communities, including Nkomoro and trooped to the township in search of white-collar jobs. This spelt immense doom for rural agriculture since it robbed the farms of the hands that usually worked it, and therefore made farm work difficult and expensive. Those whose children or wards had become fond of western ways began to find it hard to do their farm work and were only augmented by hiring the few available laborers to help at high prices.

Apart from the above impact, which can be termed negative, the introduction of education by the missionaries brought another means of attaining social respect in the Nkomoro community. When the church first brought its education, the new way was looked at with suspicion, with the result that people in Nkomoro refused to send their children to school. When they later decided to allow their wards to go to school, it was those wards or children who were adjudged weak and lazy to take care of cattle and farm work that were allowed to go. Those children who were disobedient to their parents were also allowed to go to school as a form of punishment. Nkomoro people in the early times did not allow their prized or beloved children to go to school. However, later events began to show them that those who went to school were, after all, better off. They began to see the value of school as a means of upward social mobility. Those who went to school soon acquired new economic importance with their employment in the government, commercial firms and churches. That way, they gained access to colonial currencies and led an improved lifestyle that surprised their parents, elders, the villagers and their uneducated mates who were left to tend cows. The people's later awareness of the importance of the education provided by the churches somewhat impacted negatively on the churches. It made many Nkomoro people release their children to become members of the church, even though they did not believe in the doctrine and teaching of the church. Thus, many of those who were educated in the church schools were, contrary to the thinking of many church administrators, not Christian at all but only pretended to be for the sake of acquiring education and improving their social and economic status.

The economic impact of catholic church and its education is better appreciated when considered against the background of the fact that people could have been grossly incapacitated to participate in the modern world without the light of education brought by the missionaries. By introducing the people to the

¹⁹ John Usulor, Interview Nkomoro, 15/10/2020.

values of education, a new vista of life was introduced to the people by the church. They could afford to venture into other economic means other than their traditional means of livelihood. In the immediate period those who benefited from catholic schools became clerks, accountants and soon like workers in the colonial period and also received the enhanced status in the society just for acquiring the education brought by the catholic education is seen more also in the fact that, even though evangelization was the primary motive, their style of education was not only aimed at producing men for the church and church work alone but also for circular works that would benefit the people by enhancing their usefulness in other areas.

The coming of the catholic mission into the Nkomoro community impacted substantially on all aspects of the society, including the economic aspect. In the pre-Christian era, when the Nkomoro community remained traditional, Abakaliki economy, not excluding that of Nkomoro, rested on three legs of agriculture, commerce and local industry, out of which farming or agriculture remained, in the words of V.C. Uchendu, the people's staff of life. At the time, every member of the family, father, mother, and children were involved in farming to such an extent that Abakaliki became synonymous with farming, especially yam farming. Early European writers and visitors to the area who observed the pervasive agricultural economy of the people had commented on the centrality of agriculture to the Abakaliki, which Nkomoro community was not excluded. G.G Shute submitted that the Abakaliki tribes are all good farmers, especially the Ezza, of which Nkomoro is one of the communities.²⁰

Discussion Summary

The Catholic mission was not the first to arrive anywhere in Nigeria, but their coming introduced a heightened concern for the physical welfare of the people. Other churches which predated the catholic faith also showed some care for the people, for example, in the building of schools, but the catholic missionaries took physical concern to new heights. The handicaps of the missionaries, namely, inadequate resources, paucity of personnel, and unwelcoming attitudes of some of the natives, especially the elders of the community, challenged the mission. They were not rapidly welcomed, and every activity of theirs was viewed with suspicion because they were French missionaries working in Igboland, of which Nkomoro was not an exception, southern Nigeria, which was a British sphere of influence. During this time, there was Anglo-French political and commercial rivalry on the lower Niger. Incidentally, it was never an easy task for these catholic missionaries to plant the catholic faith in Igboland and Nkomoro in particular. Nevertheless, thanks be to God that they were very successful in their mission both in Igboland in general and Nkomoro in particular.

CONCLUSION

The arrival of the Roman Catholic mission in Nigeria, including Nkomoro, came with a lot of humanitarian innovations that benefited the people in profound ways. Although like other mission bodies, Catholicism's major mission in the country was to gain the souls of men by converting them from their traditional religion to the catholic Christianity, the mission could not ignore the physical challenges and realities of the people's daily lives. The mission came into the country at a time when the slave trade was still rife, a time when the people suffered and died from avoidable and curable maladies. It was also a time of palpable and hopeless ignorance in the lives of so many people in the land. These situations posed a threat and stood as great obstacles to the message brought by the mission. That being so, the missionaries saw clearly the inseparability of the spiritual mission from the social gospel that would meet the bodily needs of their hearers. Realizing how impossible it was to prove their care for the soul without a demonstration of the care for the body, the mission had to devise a mechanism for social care and humanitarian actions as part and parcel of their mission and also as a tool to achieve that mission. The missionaries in Nkomoro knew that if they went from town to town talking about God without showing any humanitarian care, their efforts would bring no result. In line with this mode of reasoning, the missionaries introduced multi-pronged humanitarian measures as part of

²⁰. G.G Shute, half yearly report[January to June] Abakaliki Division, 1919, NAE OG 132/1919

their Nkomoro mission. These measures included the fight of ignorance through the catholic mission schools; the regaining of people's freedom through slave buy-backs; the recovery of people's bodily health through medical care, the care for the elderly, mother and child, the widows, the disposed and the disaster-stricken.

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