

**THE HOLY GHOST FATHERS AND THE STRUGGLE
FOR SURVIVAL IN POST-CIVIL WAR
IGBOLAND, 1970-1983**

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Abstract

The expatriate missionaries of the Holy Ghost Congregation treaded like a “Colossus”, the Catholic terrain, in what was formerly known as Eastern Nigeria. They, therefore, left a huge legacy when they were unexpectedly repatriated in February 1970 by the Federal Government of Nigeria. The Nigerian Federal Military Government (FMG) in the war with Biafra, intended to use blockades and hunger to decimate and subdue the Biafrans; the missionaries were, nonetheless, supportive to the Biafrans, especially with the daunting humanitarian services which they coordinated with the outside world. The FMG found this unacceptable and thus found reasons to expel the missionaries. Sustaining the deported missionaries’ legacies in Igboland was a huge task riddled with seemingly great challenges and little hope for the young and very few indigenous members they had recruited into the Congregation before their departure. Fifty years after, the absence of published literature on how that young Igbo missionary group abruptly abandoned in 1970 managed to survive, necessitated this research. The method adopted in this work is more or less thematic narrative and critiquing.

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The result of the research reveals that rather than the expected disintegration of the indigenous group of Igbo missionaries, the group in a combination of courageous resistance, selflessness, team spirit and goodwill, had by the end of 1983, set itself on a sound road to becoming a great missionary group.

Keywords: Missionary, Struggle, Courage, Survival, Holy Ghost Fathers, Igboland

Introduction

Between 1885 and 1970, expatriate Catholic missionaries of the Holy Ghost Congregation, otherwise called the Holy Ghost Fathers, crisscrossed the territories east of the River Niger and distinguished themselves with their missionary activities, pushing Catholicism into prominence there. Their successes in planting and spreading the Catholic faith; in spreading Western education and Western medical care; in agricultural and economic improvement and empowerment; especially their humanitarian activities in that region during the Nigeria civil war, all of which translated into social and economic transformation, gave them away as great missionaries. Ironically, the civil war which climaxed their popularity also initiated the twilight of their missionary activities in the area, albeit, somewhat temporarily. In February 1970, the Federal Government of Nigeria charged the expatriate Catholic missionaries working in the former Eastern Region to court for illegal entry into Nigeria; found them guilty, and expelled them from Nigeria; allowing only four of them who worked around Enugu that fell to the Nigerian side in the early days of the war, to stay (Eke, 2006, 204). The expulsion left the missionary baton of the Holy Ghost Congregation in Igboland to a nascent indigenous group of fifteen clergies and a Brother.

For the abrupt nature of the expulsion which more or less, left the young Igbo indigenous membership of the Holy Ghost Congregation 'orphaned' in early 1970, and the general devastation the civil war left the indigenous membership and the entire Igboland in at the time, many onlookers naturally, expected

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to see the indigenous group disband, pondering how it could survive the shock of the expulsion of its expatriate leaders, guardians, and benefactors. The expectation informed the quest for this work intended to review the situation and the struggles faced by the indigenous Holy Ghost missionaries to survive as a missionary group in the post-civil war Igboland. Hovey (29/1/2016) observed “that it takes courage to go on in the darkness, and that tomorrow becomes possible because we feel a responsibility to others....” This sense of responsibility and courage were evidently the motivation that drove the membership body of the Holy Ghost Congregation in the immediate post-civil war Igboland on the path of struggle for survival. From this perspective, the “Courageous Resistance Theory” championed in Thalhammer, Et al. (2007), provides an anchor for analysing the factors that motivated this struggle to survive in the face of an extinction threat. The Theory argues that in difficult times and moments of injustice, courageous resistance becomes the power of ordinary people. Under such circumstances, some individuals, groups and institutions courageously try to surmount the difficulties, resist oppression, maltreatment and ill will whether against themselves or others. Such was the case of the indigenous members of the Holy Ghost Congregation in Igboland during the period under review.

The Holy Ghost Congregation is an international Catholic missionary Religious order. A group of its members in a certain geographical area, like in a country or region, is given ecclesiastical administrative jurisdiction regarded as a ‘circumscription’, and in the period under study, was conferred the status of a Foundation, a District, or a Province depending on its size and membership. In this paper, the ‘Holy Ghost Congregation’ will often be simply referred to as the ‘Congregation’ while the territorial and membership group will often be referred to as the ‘group’, the ‘District’ or the ‘Province’. Igboland as employed here refers to all Igbo sub-groups east of the River Niger, including the Ikwere Igbo of Rivers State (Afigbo, 1981, 8). The 1970 starting point for this

paper was adopted because it was the year the indigenous members of the Congregation in Igboland assumed charge of their young group with the exit of their expatriate colleagues while the 1983 terminal date was chosen because the group was, in October, 1983, officially named the Province of Nigeria and was restructured to accommodate a possible Pan-Nigeria membership.

Overview of the situation of the Holy Ghost Congregation in Igboland before 1970

On December 5, 1885, four French Holy Ghost missionaries led by Father (Fr.) Joseph Lutz, arrived Onitsha. With the approval of Obi Anazonwu of Onitsha, they acquired a land at Onitsha Wharf where they began their mission in the Lower Niger (Okafor, 2013, 42). For over eight decades, the missionary activity in the predominantly Igbo area, east of the River Niger, engineered a steady rise in the spread of Catholicism. By 1960, the former Prefecture had already five dioceses, namely; Calabar, Ogoja, Onitsha, Owerri, and Umuahia. The last three were in Igboland under the direction of the Holy Ghost missionaries. According to the “1960 Sacred Returns” (CSSP Archives Onitsha, 1960), the three Dioceses had then, 97 parishes, numerous sub-stations; 1808 Catholic schools; 1,035,314 Catholics and 267,686 catechumens. By 1970, the Prefecture of 1885 had begotten eight dioceses, with the five (Enugu, Port Harcourt, Onitsha, Owerri, and Umuahia) in the Igboland, chiefly staffed by Holy Ghost missionaries. Many more parishes had also been created. This is remarkable if one recalls that eighty-five years back (1885), this whole area had no Catholic or Catholic structures, and Christianity was then in its infancy in the region.

Besides the legacy of successfully establishing, and in the main, staffing minor and major seminaries for the local Church in Igboland, including the Bigard Memorial Seminary, Enugu (the regional major seminary); All Hallows Seminary, Onitsha; St. Peter Claver Minor Seminary, Okpala for Owerri; Immaculate Conception Seminary, Ahiaeke for Umuahia; Sacred

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Heart Seminary, Port Harcourt; and partly St. John's Minor Seminary, Nsukka for Enugu (Ozigbo, June 1998, 10-12), these missionaries also fostered religious missionary vocations. To encourage and welcome indigenous vocations into its missionary fold, the Congregation opened its junior seminary, the Holy Ghost Juniorate, at Ihiala in 1953, followed by an intermediate seminary (the Novitiate) at Awo-Omamma in 1958. A new wing of the Novitiate at Awo-Omamma became the Philosophy house in 1959, and in 1961, theological studies were also started there at Awo-Omamma but was later moved to Isieniu, Nsukka in January 1965 (Eke, 2006, 182-188).

With its doors open to vocations from Igboland, three former diocesan priests (Fathers [Frs.] Anthony Gogo Nwedo, Godfrey M.P. Okoye, and Moses Orakwudo) joined the Congregation in early 1950s. 1965 saw the first set of indigenous members of the Congregation, trained completely in its seminaries in Igboland, ordained priests; including Frs. Isaac Eze, Francis Okonkwo, Dennis Ononuju, and Augustine Onyeneke. At the dawn of 1970, the Igbo indigenous professed membership of the Congregation had recorded fifty-two persons including two (2) Bishops, fourteen (14) priests (of which one, Fr. Paulinus Ezike, was late), one Brother, and thirty-five (35) senior seminarians (Okafor, 2019, 67). It should be noted that of these, the actual missionary functions (as indicated immediately below) could only be dispensed by the 13 priests as the Bishops were charged with their dioceses and the seminarians were still in training.

Until February 1970, the administrative functions, heads of institutions, Rectors of seminaries, principals of schools, pastors of most of the existing parishes, among other responsibilities in the Catholic Church in Igboland, were, to a large extent, in the hands of the expatriate Holy Ghost missionaries. The expatriate missionaries were the core of Catholic Church personnel in Igboland until 1970. The 1968 edition of its *Official Directory*, had three hundred and five (305) Holy Ghost missionaries (Bishops, priests and Brothers) working

in this region by January 1968 (Congregation of the Holy Ghost, January 1968, 186-231). Also, before 1970, apart from the occasional financial allocations from the Vatican and from the *Cor Unum* (common fund) of the Holy Ghost Congregation's general headquarters in Rome, much of the funds used to support the missions of the Catholic Church in Igboland, was raised by the Irish Holy Ghost missionaries who went to their country or elsewhere and campaigned for funds. Thus, until 1970, the funding, training, and direction of the indigenous membership of the Congregation, as well as the Catholic Church in Igboland and its activities, were more or less the affairs of the expatriate Holy Ghost missionaries.

The peak of the missionary activities of the Congregation in Igboland before 1970, came during the Nigerian civil war. Its war-time evangelization brought home to the people the real content of the Gospel and endeared the missionaries to the people. Their war-time activity spanned through three fronts: "(a) Pastoral Care; (b) Social Welfare Scheme; and (c) Relation with the civil authorities" (Nwosu, 1985, 360). The Nigerian government expected that the blockades against Biafra, with hunger and diseases would consequentially lead to much death and demoralization on the Biafran side, and thus compel it to surrender. During the war, however, the Holy Ghost missionaries remained with their parishioners, even when they ran into the bush to hide themselves. They remained in the parishes until the parishioners fled their towns and villages, making sure that they had the pastoral care that was possible. The missionaries attended to refugee camps that were set up for Catholics and non-Catholics. They provided the people with medical services, food, clothing and shelter (Nwosu, 1985, 358), and amidst risks and pains, they organised help for the people from some Western countries and relief agencies during the blockades over Biafra. Moreover, they relentlessly brought the attention of the Church and the world to the genocide being committed in Biafra by Nigeria (Byrne, 1997). These activities, to the chagrin of the

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Nigerian government, sustained the moral of Biafrans and helped to prolong the Biafra's survival.

The situation of the Holy Ghost Congregation in Igboland in early 1970

The invaluable contribution of the Holy Ghost missionaries to life and development in Igboland before 1970, notwithstanding, their civil war-time activities in the region, especially their humanitarian support to Biafrans in the course of the war attracted the rage of the Federal Military Government of Nigeria which felt that the missionaries contributed to Biafra's long lasting in a war that could have ended in a matter of weeks with the "Police Action" of May 1967. An account of the expelled missionaries given in a "CSSP Newsletter", (Congregazione dello Spirito Santo, February 18, 1970), reported that the bitterness against these missionaries made the government to round them up from mid-January to mid-February, 1970 and detained them along with other European missionaries. They were subsequently arraigned in the Magistrate court in Port Harcourt; starting with the first batch arraigned on January 27, 1970, and many charges brought up against them, particularly technical charges of "illegal entry into the territories of Nigeria" and engaging in "unlawful employment". They were tried and declared guilty, and were finally expelled from the country by the Federal Government of Nigeria. This episode smacks of sticky church-state relations; an example of occasions where some governments, at times, perceive missionaries as opposition groups or threat. Government's claim that the missionaries entered Nigeria illegally was a hoax since most of the expelled missionaries were already working in Eastern Nigeria before the civil war. Moreover, that Biafra existed a country, albeit, temporarily, is undeniable. Missionaries are moral agents and civil right defenders, and this helps greatly in nation building. The denigration of this fact by any government often spells doom for the country, but when accepted and respected, a country experiences a leap in development. This was typical in

Communist Poland of the late 1970s and 1980s (Bird and Maneli, 1982, 29-51); and in the Brazilian Catholic-Church and State relations from 1960s through 1990s (Cleary, 1997, 253-272).

No doubt, the expatriates' missionary who worked in Igboland before 1970, left huge legacies that posed great challenges to their indigenous successors. Their expulsion, therefore, left a gloomy picture for the nascent indigenous membership. To say the least, the group was devastated.

In terms of personnel, the expulsion of the expatriate Holy Ghost missionaries in February 1970, left barely twelve (eleven priests and a Brother) indigenous members of the Congregation on the ground to fill the vacuum created by the exit of about three hundred missionaries in the five dioceses in Igboland (Frs. Ononuju and Okonkwo were on outside mission; and another two, Frs. Augustine Onyeneke and Philip Aguh were on further studies outside the country). In spite of this, immediate personnel demands to sustain the administration and local activities of group included providing at least, three principal District officials (the District Superior, the District Bursar, and the District Secretary); providing the management and academic staff for the group's junior seminary at Ihiala, the Novitiate at Awo-Omamma, and the senior seminaries for Philosophy at Nsukka, and for Theology at Awo-Omamma; as well as for its own schools existing in some Dioceses which included St. Joseph's College, Awka-Etiti; St. John's College, Alor; among others (CSSP Archives Onitsha, Box 2). Added to these was the onus to provide personnel for parishes in some dioceses that were signed to the Holy Ghost Congregation, including three parishes in Onitsha Archdiocese, two in Owerri Diocese; and one in Port Harcourt Diocese (Eke, 2006, 206). There were also requests for missionary personnel for various missions, especially the missions in Igboland which, with the expulsion of the expatriate missionaries, was left with only about ninety-five (95) diocesan clergy (Okafor, 2019, 76).

The expatriate Holy Ghost missionaries who worked in Igboland before 1970 did not train enough local clergy and

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missionaries that would replace them before they were expelled from Nigeria. Some critics suggest that the missionaries unnecessarily took a “long period” to begin a seminary or even to produce the first local priest of Igboland, east of the Niger. Bishop Shanahan officially opened the first seminary in Igboland at Igbariam in July 19, 1924 (Eke, 1985, 305). John Cross Anyogu was ordained in 1930 as its first priest (Eke, 1985, 308). Ozigbo argues that “One of the devastating proofs of Bishop Shanahan’s lack of apostolic imagination was his myopia as regards the need and place of the local clergy in his prefecture of the Lower Niger.” (Ozigbo, June 1998, 6). On the contrary, scholars like Mbefo, believe that the so called undue delay was rather as a cautious approach to a very serious issue on the side of the early missionaries in Igboland. He argues that, “Other indices, including psychological considerations, are available for a more balanced evaluation of Shanahan’s plan for a local clergy.” (Mbefo, 1999, 50-51).

One would agree with the cautious approach theory on the side of missionaries concerning local clergy. No doubt, the missionaries over-judged the ineptitude of Igbo aspirants to the priesthood. For instance, Father Denis Kennedy, considering the traditional and family backgrounds of these aspirants, wondered if they could sustain celibate life and resist the temptation to divert the mission funds to their relations and friends when left without supervision after ordination (Eke, 1985, 307). However rash their judgement may be, it is better to have few local priests who are firmly grounded than ordain many priests that are ill-equipped or not committed. Moreover, being relatively new, Christianity needed to be meaningfully grasped before aspirants could be ordained Catholic priests. Also perpetual celibacy was alien to the psyche of traditional Igbo society. The fact that out of the 60 persons admitted in the seminary of the old Lower Niger mission between 1924 and 1950, only 23 reached the priesthood (Eke, 2006, 128), raises a question on the quality of many who aspired to be priests then. It should also be noted that the Church prefers that a reasonable number of local clergy be achieved

before recruiting local vocations into missionary Congregations. This accounted for the late acceptance of local vocations into the Holy Ghost Congregation.

Concerning the situation of finance and property, most of the compounds and property of the Holy Ghost Congregation in the region were damaged and looted by the Nigerian troops during the civil war. Brother Linus Ugwu (like some others), who, at the fall of Biafra in 1970, was asked to stay around with some senior seminarians to monitor the properties of the Congregation at the District Headquarters then at Ihiala, recalled that at the surrender of the Biafran side:

The Nigerian troops who moved into Ihiala, marched into the District house and Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital opposite it. In our headquarters, they ransacked everywhere, removed whatever valuables they felt like, and commandeered all the vehicles packed in the compound, claiming that they were the properties of the Federal Government. (Interview, 16/03/2016).

The financial worries were further heightened by the decision of the Federal Government of Nigeria to give a parallel twenty pounds to every easterner for whatever amount of the defunct Biafran currency the person may have surrendered to the Government. Suffice it to say that by the early months of 1970, after the expulsion of the expatriate Holy Ghost missionaries from Igboland, the actual situation of the indigenous membership of the Congregation was one of acute lack of personnel for their institutions, missions, schools, and houses, and that there were urgent reconstruction and rehabilitation needs that required huge sums of money, but there was no fund to carry on. To many, it was a hopeless situation.

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The Struggle for survival and for a foothold, 1970-1983

Under the natural tendency of demoralisation in a situation like this, some of the few indigenous members of the Congregation thought that the group should disband while some others felt that their survival was a challenge worth embracing. To reach an accord, Father James Okoye said that:

Father Isaac Eze who was living with the Irish Superior and to whom the District Superior handed over at the end of the war, was in Urualla, but had to come down to Ihiala after the handover, where a meeting was convoked, and there, the members decided to continue. (Interview, 15/01/2015).

With this resolve, what was left was to confront the challenges for survival. Nonetheless, one of the priests, Father Godwin Orji left to join the diocesan clergy of Enugu Diocese. This, in any case, was a move he initiated before the end of the war.

Addressing the Administrative issues

Evidently, an establishment without a sound administration is simply like a ship without a trained captain which is at the mercy of the winds and waves of life. Father Michael J. Frawley, the last Irish Superior of the District of Nigeria East (as that ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Congregation was then called), as a matter of convenience, handed over the leadership of the indigenous group of the Holy Ghost Congregation to Father Isaac Eze, who was close to him at that critical moment when it dawned on him that the expatriate missionaries were on their way out (C.S.Sp. General Archives, 8th February, 1970). This left a question on the legitimacy of Father Eze's administration. The practice in the Congregation required a Principal Superior to be appointed by the General Council in Rome after upholding his election in an Assembly of the

circumscription, or after the General Council would have done official consultation of the members of the particular circumscription over a choice. The later applied to smaller groups like the then District of Nigeria East. Since Father Eze's administration was a child of necessity, it was important to legitimise it or replace it. Thus, the General Council made a consultation of the members of the District of Nigeria East later in 1970, and Father Philip Aguh emerged as the preferred choice for the District Superior. His appointment became effective on January 5, 1971 (Eke, 2006, 212). The resolution of administrative legitimacy equally paved way for the constitution of subsequent administrations that were done after every three years. Father Aguh then appointed Father Aloysius Obi, C.S.Sp., as District Bursar and Father Raymond Arazu, C.S.Sp., as District Secretary.

Facing the personnel and formation problems

For the District, the immediate personnel challenge that occupied its attention required providing personnel for such areas that would guarantee its continuity and a foothold or home base for the nascent group. Under the circumstances, supplying personnel in response to mission engagement requests was way beyond a secondary concern. However, the complexity of the personnel challenge was gradually unbundled. In what seemed to be a calculated blow, soon after the war, the government of Ukpabi Asika in East Central State, with the governments of other states in former Eastern Region (Rivers and South Eastern States), announced the takeover of mission schools by the government, claiming that the missions were incapable of running the schools at that period. This claim seems far from being credible, rather it seemed a punitive measure against the missions for their alleged roles during the war. This development, though not a palatable one, removed the hitherto burden of searching for personnel to manage the schools from the District administration. It therefore, focused attention on the provision of personnel for other needs.

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In a similar vein, the dioceses in Igboland, wittingly or otherwise, took over the parishes that were hitherto, supposedly appropriated to the Holy Ghost Congregation, for instance, the Sacred Heart Parish, Odoakpu, Onitsha (Okoye J, Interview, 15/01/2015). Such parishes were originally intended to serve as home bases for the young District and the future Province. These steps were unwelcome but they reduced the pressure on the personnel needs of the nascent group. Thus, the key personnel preoccupation of the group between 1970 and 1983 narrowed down chiefly to its administration and its Formation houses. Father Philip Aguh having rounded-off his Licentiate in Theology in Rome, returned to become the District Superior from January 5, 1971.

Having set up the District Administration, the group moved to secure a home base and grounds for continuity before sending out members to outside missions. Fathers Denis Ononuju and Francis Okonkwo were thus recalled home from their missions in Sierra Leone, and for some home support, Father Ononuju with some others, were contracted to the dioceses of Enugu, Onitsha, Owerri and Port Harcourt for parish pastoral engagements. The Administration, however, considered Formation issues as the top priority in the plan for survival. 'Formation' in this sense refers to the different stages in the training of aspirants until they become priests or Reverend Brothers. For the sake of continuity, it was necessary to reopen the Holy Ghost Juniorate, Ihiala that dispersed in the heat of the civil war, and which was the nursery for future vocations into the group. It provided its students with secondary education as well. It had among its staff in 1968, four Irish priests including the Director, with different academic degrees and qualifications. The need to replace its staff was urgent. In the interim, Father Aloysius Obi was asked to be its Director in 1970, yet there was need to fill other gaps. What was more, the retention or recruitment of lay teachers were dependent on the available fund which was equally a serious challenge at the time.

However huge the situation seemed, moving the Juniorate on was a necessity. Thus, the students were recalled after the appointment of Father Obi, and funds were sourced from within and outside the country, no matter how little, in order to keep the place going. The past students waiting to go to the Novitiate constituted the new teachers as the Novitiate was yet to be reopened. Meanwhile, the District administration began a project of training personnel for the Junior Seminary. As the years rolled by, Fathers Aloysius Obi, Godfrey Odigbo, Lawrence Teteh, Casimir Eke, Ignatius Baaju Izuchi, Stanislaus Ogbonna, Emmanuel Agbakwuru, among others were sent on further studies in Nigeria that could prepare them to fit into the school system (Augustine Onyeneke, Interview, 07/09/2017). By the end of 1970s, the Juniorate, Ihiala had bounced back fully, and never lacked again the required personnel that needed to come from the Congregation.

The Novitiate was a most important stage, as no one could become a member of the Congregation without doing the Novitiate year. Father Mohan who directed the Novitiate for many years, was among the expatriates expelled from the country. When it became clear that he would not be allowed back to return to his work, Father Francis Okonkwo was sent to study Spirituality in Rome and he returned in 1971 to reopen the Novitiate as its Novice Master. To complement him, Father Anthony Ekwunife was also sent to Rome where he acquired an STL in Sacred Theology. He later replaced Father Okonkwo as Novice Master in 1975.

On the other hand, because of lack of trained formators for the Philosophy and Theology houses of studies of the District, the group sent its senior seminarians to Bigard Memorial Seminary, Ikot Ekpene and Enugu Campuses for Philosophy and Theology studies respectively. The study at Bigard alongside predominantly diocesan seminarians posed its own danger that the District Superior strongly warned that: “We have got to train personnel to run our Houses of Formation, otherwise we stand the danger of losing our identity with the Diocesan clergy.”

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(C.S.Sp. General Archives, 16/02/1971). This led the group into massive further training of its members. While Father Onyeneke who started his studies earlier on was allowed to complete his Ph.D. in Sociology, Fathers James Okoye and Luke Mbefo were approved to do doctoral studies in Scripture and Sacred Theology respectively. In October 1971, Father Arazu was requested to go and complete the doctoral studies in Theology that he was compelled to discontinue during the civil war (Arazu, 2016, 31). Some other members were sent at different times for different study programmes with the aim of providing personnel for the different formation needs of the group. Father Onyeneke returned in 1976 to reopen a School of Philosophy for the group at Isieniu. He was soon joined by Fathers Raymond Arazu, Leo Ezeji, and Luke Mbefo to constitute part of the academic staff.

The measures taken improved the formation and personnel situation of the group that by 1976, it was elevated to the status of a Province, with the name, Province of Nigeria-East. This does not negate the fact that it was not always a smooth and rosy story for the formation houses and the members. For instance, records show that between 1970 and 1983, some professed seminarians left the Congregation to join different dioceses or to quit the journey to the priesthood completely, and some others being found wanting, were dismissed by the Province and Congregation. There was the withdrawal of one seminarian and the dismissal of another in 1974. Two were dismissed in 1976; four withdrew in 1977 and 1978, and so on. There was a total of seventeen withdrawals and dismissals between 1970 and 1983 (CSSP Archives Onitsha, Box 4, Files 2-6).

The stabilization of its formation houses up to the Philosophy level, appealed so much to the Congregation that it was seriously considered to make the Province and its institutions open to prospective members from other parts of Nigeria. On October 2, 1983, the General Council of the Congregation in Rome approved a change in the organizational structure and nomenclature of the Province. Its title became the Province of

Nigeria. By that date, the Province had an active membership of one Bishop (as Bishop Okoye had died), sixty-nine (69) priests, and five (5) Brothers (Okafor, 2019, 88). These were supported by about sixty (60) professed seminarians. The Province had equally, a reasonable number of qualified personnel to accompany its seminarians in various formation stages. The Province had thus survived disbandment. It could then change its mission focus to also accept mission engagements in the outside world. In fact, its members were already on outside missions in Zimbabwe, Zambia, England and Germany.

Resolving the issues of finances

The departure of its expatriate patrons brought urgent financial challenges that set the group on its toes seeking for ways and ventures to generate funds. Since Igboland was still groaning under the travails of war, thus with little hope of help from the region, the group's initial option was to appeal to the expelled expatriate confreres, the Generalate of the Congregation in Rome, and to donor agencies. Only a very few of the expelled confreres helped. Father Denis T. O'Keefe who was officially sent to the U.S.A. in 1966 to campaign for funds for the building of the then developing Holy Ghost Province of Nigeria, faithfully continued that after the war (Koren, 1996, 173). His campaign yielded sponsors for individual seminarians of the District. Later on, there were also some local appeals. Father James Okoye said that he was "going around to the Bishops, begging for permission to make appeals. Some consented while some declined..." (Interview, 15/01/2015).

The Generalate of the Congregation in Rome usually allocated funds from the *Cor Unum* (common fund), and at different times, approved monies in the form of grants or loans (without interest) for the development of projects in Nigeria-East. The same was true of the Irish Province of the Congregation which was the "Mother" Province of Nigeria-East. From Church donor agencies, there were subventions received from the Vatican through *Propaganda Fide*, Pontifical Work of St. Peter

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the Apostle, “Missio” in Aachen, and other donor agencies (C.S.Sp. General Archives, 31/01/1973). Though a good number of the requests for sponsorships made by the group from these bodies were turned down, their grants were quite helpful.

As the financial aid from the above groups could not go far in solving the major needs of the Province, it engaged different legitimate means of raising funds. Parishes and dioceses which engaged members of the District in varied works, paid some remunerations to the District on behalf of the members engaged. There was also the establishment of the Holy Ghost Vocation Movement started by Father Raymond Arazu at Ihiala Parish in 1973. In this Movement, people voluntarily contributed whatever they wished on weekly, monthly, or annual basis, and Holy Ghosts priests of the District were obliged to say Masses for them (Arazu, 2016, 76). Father Arazu pointed out that it was initially difficult for people to accept to make such contributions. However, when he emphasized the need for everyone to play a role in the spreading of the Gospel, and especially in the support of the mission of the Holy Ghost Congregation according to one’s ability, people felt a responsibility to the Gospel, and that even a very little contribution could make a difference. The initial total contributions were small, yet it made a difference. Gradually, the Movement spread, and the yield kept increasing, thus becoming very supportive. By the end of 1983, the Holy Ghost Vocation was existing, not only in the parishes where Holy Ghost missionaries were engaged in Igboland, but also in many other parishes approved by the Bishops of the dioceses.

The group was aware that it would not always depend on donations for its life and activities. Its meaningful growth would depend on self-reliant projects. One of such initiatives made was the Spiritan Farm, Isieke, Okija project initiated by Fathers Denis Ononuju and Philip Aguh in 1972 (Okoye J; Interview, 15/01/2015). Father Ononuju explained that Father Aguh and himself, felt that with the situation on the ground in the region at the time, “a well organised agricultural farm could make a lot of difference; not just in the life of the District, but also in the life of

the people” (Ononuju, D; Interview, 04/02/2017). With the approval of members, he secured from his village, Isieke Okija, a large expanse of land covering 376.26 acres (C.S.Sp. General Archives, Paris. Boite B. 043/74 .8.) for a multi-purpose agriculture. The Farm explored diverse activities including rice, maize, vegetable and crop productions, poultry, piggery, cattle ranch, and varied plantations. It soon attracted a grant of fifteen thousand (15,000) dollars from the Generalate of the Congregation, and a thirty thousand (30,000) Canadian dollar grant with a second instalment of the same amount being expected from the Province of Canada in 1974 (C.S.Sp. General Archives, 09/03/1974).

Other ventures included investment in landed property at different locations including Aba and Owerri; transport business; participation, the Spiritan Bookshop, among others. An investment in cement and block industry business was started with a loan of ten thousand (10,000) pounds each from the Generalate and the Irish Province of the Congregation (C.S.Sp. General Archives, 27/09/1974). Father Mike Onwuemelie who was a Provincial Bursar in this period, confirmed that:

Nwankwu also gave me the distributorship of his soft drink, Gina Drinks. I had another friend working with Coca Cola in Enugu who helped me to get distributorship for their drinks. And another man from Oba, Gerald Amazu, who was a distributor of Peugeot cars was giving us cars to sell. This was how I was able to raise money for the Formation Houses.... Those were terrible times and it was not easy. (Interview, 04/01/2016).

The transport, distributorship, cement and block businesses did not last long while the Spiritan Bookshop survived and has continued to make impact on the life of the Province. The various fund drive measures were able to gradually provide

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reasonable funds to off-set a good amount of the annual expenditure of the group, and to put it in a stable focus for a greater future. The table below gives some examples of the input of the members to annual incomes.

General expenditure of the Province and the input of the members at specified years

Items	Total Expenditure	Income from Members and works	Percentage of e income from me
1978 (₦)	235,276.35	79,453.95	33.8%
1983/84 (₦)	520,462.82	183,316.31	35.2%

Source: (Okafor, 2019, 223)

Conclusion

Without doubt, the abrupt nature of the expulsion of the expatriate Holy Ghost missionaries from Igboland and Nigeria in February 1970 left a situation of uncertainties regarding the existence of their young indigenous group in Igboland. Many saw no future for the group that was to some degree, left without direction and support. The speculators of its disbandment were rather proved wrong by the turn in events as revealed in this paper. Though there were rough times in its struggle for survival arising from acute shortage of personnel and fund, withdrawal and dismissal of members from the group, yet its once devastated members rallied together with a strong resolve; adopted due process and established purposeful leadership; provided succour and support for one another, and established the group on a good footing that by the end of 1983, looked sure of a great missionary future. Equally, the group which in 1970, had its financial links and structures seemingly crippled, was able, in a few years later, to work out and harness financial opportunities that gave hope for a meaningful level of its sustenance. This reveals the group as a band of selfless missionaries endowed with great team spirit, propelled by enormous courage, and aided by people's goodwill that derived from the remarkable legacies of their missionary

predecessors. Evidently, the resolve of the members to struggle for survival at that critical period came from a longing to uphold and bequeath that legacy they received from their expelled expatriate colleagues. Theirs, indeed, was a mark of courageous resistance to disbandment and possible extinction. The above judgement instructs that selflessness, courage, team spirit, and goodwill are great tools in missionary engagement and survival especially in very difficult situations. Also the experience of acute shortage of personnel after the expulsion of the expatriate missionaries is instructive of the need for missionaries, anywhere they find themselves, to begin to recruit and train local vocations as soon as possible, who could take over from them in case of any eventuality.

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