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## **St. Patrick's Society in Southern Nigeria: History, Mission and Human Development (1950– 2000)<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Abstract**

The St. Patrick's Society (SPS) is a society of diocesan priests from Ireland founded for the evangelization of Southern Nigeria in 1932. They arrived in Nigeria as Irish missionaries to teach the Catholic faith and strengthen human development in the "old Calabar." Their success or failure has not been critically examined by scholars. We have few historical documentations on their activities within the ecclesiastical circles. There is a need to identify the protagonists of this missionary society, their involvement in developmental projects, spreading of the Catholic faith in the *Okopusem* area, and legacies among the indigenous clergy. The entanglement of missionary activities and colonial objectives in Nigeria is another area of concern among scholars. These objectives situate this study in a multidisciplinary context. We followed historical and theological methods to study the presence of Irish missionaries in *Akwa Cross* communities. We used survey method to assess the influence of the St. Patrick Fathers in the study area from 1950-2000.

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From a phenomenological method, we investigated African and European exchanges for socio-cultural transformation. The study found the Christian faith to be relevant in transformation and integration of social realities across borders, noted the strengths of the St. Patrick's Society (SPS) in the development of healthcare and education system in the area, and concluded that the Irish missionaries made significant contributions towards human development in southern Nigeria. This paper, therefore, advocates for strategic mission approach by the dioceses in *Okopusem* area within and beyond, particularly in European communities, maintaining that paternalism should be transformed into partnership in Europe and Africa exchanges.

**Keywords:** Mission, Culture, Irish, *Okopusem*, Human Development, St. Patrick Fathers

### **Introduction**

The encounter of Europe and Africa is often documented and valued from the prism of colonialism and missionary activities for the implantation of Christianity. Colonial administrators and missionaries are fundamental in the study of Europe and Africa exchanges. Colonialism had widely been considered as one of the negative experiences in history which had left indelible marks in human development in Africa. According to Godwin Okaneme: "The African continent spent up to two centuries under subjugation and near unfiltered colonial rule. It will be belabouring the obvious to state that colonialism in Africa affected many different spheres of the totality of the African culture and way of life" (2019:38). This observation calls for a deeper examination of some basic human experiences associated with colonialism, like the emergence of the Catholic Church in southern Nigeria.

The Missionary Society of St. Patrick or St. Patrick's Society (SPS) is an Irish missionary congregation of diocesan priests who main foundational goal was implantation of the Catholic faith in southern Nigeria. The society has the fortune of being present in southern Nigeria during the colonial period and after the independence of Nigeria from the United Kingdom. Their present in the territory represents the continuity of the presence of Europeans in African communities in the post-independence era. Their activities ante and post colonialism open a vista on the profundity of the exchanges between Africa and Europe.

This study approaches the question of missionary activities and colonial administration as a separate sphere of historical engagement for human development in

Africa. While not being neglectful of interaction between the colonialists and missionaries, the paper focuses on the activities of the St. Patrick Fathers from 1950 to 2000 in order to delineate Europe and Africa exchanges as opportunities for mutual enrichment; assesses the contributions of the Irish missionaries for human development and planting of Catholicism in *Okopusem* area of southern Nigeria. From the history of the SPS in the territory, and we examine their contributions toward human development, in order to establish the relevance of faith for integral human development.

### **The Objectives of the Study**

The primary objective of this study is to document the origin and presence of St. Patrick Fathers in Southern Nigeria, precisely in the Efik speaking part of the Archdiocese of Calabar, Uyo Diocese and Ikot Ekpene Diocese all in south-south Nigeria, collectively designated as *Okopusem* territory. This documentation looks at their presence, interface with the local community and culture to document the relationship that existed between European and African Catholics during the period under investigation. This streamlines the colonial and post-colonial African and European exchanges from theological and ecclesiological perspectives. The specific objectives of this study include identification of the members of the St. Patrick Missionary Society who contributed significantly to the planting of the Catholic faith in the *Okopusem* territory, and evaluation of their contributions and assessment of their influence in human development.

### **The Method of the Study**

The study uses mixed method of qualitative and quantitative approaches for the assessment and evaluation, while adopting descriptive and phenomenological methods to deepen the history of the St. Patrick's Society. From qualitative approach, the discussions with key stakeholders elicit primary data through purposive interview and focus group discussion (FGD) with the priests and faithful, especially those who were opportune to have personal interaction with the St. Patrick Fathers. The historical method of research gathers historical data and subject the same to critical analysis through phenomenological studies. The data from the field is subjected to theological method of enquiry. This mixed method facilitates the documentation of the presence of Europeans in Southern Nigeria, generates data for a better understanding of human development, underlining the relevance of Christian faith for authentic trans-border exchanges.

## History and Presence of the St. Patrick's Society

This research is focused on establishing the role of the St. Patrick Fathers in promoting religious and human development in the southern part of Nigeria, precisely in some parts of Cross River State and the whole of Akwa Ibom State. This conceptual framework seeks to clarify few fundamental concepts and to generate literature on the history, presence and activities of the St. Patrick Fathers in Africa.

There was a felt need of deepening Christianity in Nigeria as part of Euro-Africa exchanges. Many European missionaries from various denominations have been present in the country. The history of Catholic mission in Nigeria could be divided into two segments. The initial attempt by the Portuguese in 15<sup>th</sup> century which was not successful, and the 18th century mission which led to the emergence of the present Christianity in the country. Etim argues that the French missionaries of the Society for African Missions in the 19th century rooted the Catholic faith in the country, and being joined by *Congregatio Sancti Spiritus* (Holy Ghost Fathers), they were the touch bearers of the evangelization of the Eastern and Lower Niger territory (Etim, 2021:20-21).

The planting the Catholic faith in the southern Nigeria has a long history. It started from the Episcopal Council of Baltimore which initiated the idea of introducing Christianity to West Africa. Those who responded to this initiative included Baron who originated from Ireland but was the Vicar General of Philadelphia in the United States. Irish clergymen were associated with the initiative of planting the Catholic faith in West Africa (Etim, 2021:21) from the very beginning. Etim narrates the presence of Irish missionaries in the territory thus:

Father Shanahan by providence owes his decision for the mission venture in the Lower Niger to the appeal made by Father Francis Xavier Lichtenberger. At then working in Southern Nigeria, he was in Europe on leave and extended his visit to Ireland at the directive of Father Lejeune in October 1901 to request for personnel for Nigeria. In the course of the trip, he gave lecture to some young students in the Rockwell College, where Father Shanahan was serving as Dean of Discipline, motivating them on the great harvest in Africa... (38).

Etim describes this move to seek help from Ireland as a “deliberate master plan” for the future evangelization of the Lower Niger territory. Joseph Shanahan (1871-1943), an Irish, although ordained for a French missionary congregation was the best match for the mission in the Lower Niger because of his involvement in the Irish education system, and his ability to deal with the British administration. These made it possible for

Shanahan to streamline his mission strategies to include prioritizing education in place of forming Christian villages. In order to plan the faith in the territory education for human development was identified as a *conditio sine qua non*. The Irish education system encouraged by the British colonial administration (Etim, 2021:41-42) became an integral part of Catholicism in the Lower Niger.

The generosity of Irishmen to response to the appeal of Shanahan is, therefore, the flourishing the Catholic faith in the Calabar region of Nigeria. The wisdom of Fr. Patrick Whitney (1894-1912) to found a special congregation of diocesan priests to evangelize the territory is a lasting legacy of the pastoral solicitude of Shanahan for the Calabar mission. There were challenges to his decision to allow a new missionary congregation and he stood his grounds, affirming this to be a permanent solution for the evangelization of the territory. He adopted the school system and formation in Christian communities as a missionary strategy. Etim summarizes the history of the engagement of Europeans in the Lower Niger for the purpose of planting the Catholic faith thus:

The engagement of the Irish diocesan volunteer priests to assist in the Mission by Shanahan prepared a solid base for the future of Calabar mission. In 1934 the Vicariate gave birth to two Prefectures; the Prefecture of the Benue and the Prefecture of Calabar. The Prefecture of Benue had the components of some parts of the Northern fringes of the Vicariate together with Igala, Idoma, Tiv, Wukari and Yola missions in the north. This was assigned to the pastoral care of the German Spiritans. The Prefecture of Calabar consisted of the old administrative Provinces of Calabar and Ogoja. This was placed under the pastoral care of the newly founded St Patrick Missionary Society which was formed from the ranks of the Irish diocesan clergy. Invariably, the destiny of continuity for the mission in Calabar was tied to the Irish missionaries like an umbilical cord to the womb of a mother to be fed and groomed to maturity (76-77).

The establishment of the St. Patrick's Society has an interesting history of enthusiasm and conflicts among missionary societies and volunteer diocesan priests. The intrigues that resulted in the founding of the St. Patrick's Society as narrated by Etim and corroborated by Kiggins reveals opposition between national interest of the French Spiritans and their Irish counterparts. Bishop Shanahan, a Spiritan initiated the idea but could not see it to a logical conclusion due to the complexity of personal, congregational and national interests. Kiggins argues that in the mission territory, the

challenge of relating with the churches of other European missionaries was more challenging than the paganism of the people (1991:80-81). Patrick Whitney needed the assistance of Arthur Hinsley born of Scottish father and Irish mother to use his connection in Rome to bring about the society that “permanently evangelize the territory of Calabar” into fruition, after the tussle of the Holy Ghost Congregation with Shanahan and the intrigues of the Holy Rosary Congregation (Etim, 2021:112-115; Kiggins 1991:85-87).

The Society existed on a trial basis through the years 1930 and 1931 without formal members. Its constitution and request for permission was presented by Bishop Matthew Cullen on 11<sup>th</sup> February, 1932 and endorsed by Rome to effect a formal establishment. Consequently, Patrick Whitney, Francis Hickey and Francis Whitney, took the oath of temporary membership in the presence of Bishop Matthew Cullen on St. Patrick day. 17<sup>th</sup> February, 1932. Hence St. Patrick Society was canonically established with three pioneer members, as a Society of secular Priests under the authority of a diocesan bishop” (Etim, 2021:119).

With the establishment of the St. Patrick’s Society specifically for the Southern Nigeria mission, there was a platform for Irish missionaries to engage structurally in the evangelization of the territory, enabling Maynooth ordained priests to spread their pastoral zeal in Nigeria. The first set of priests who used the platform of St. Patrick’s Society as canvassed by Patrick Whitney to arrive in Calabar were: James Moynagh, Ciaran Ryan, Cornelius Plunkert, Tom McGettrick, and Patrick Costelloe (Etim, 2021:120; Kiggins, 1991:91). Providentially, James Moynagh will eventually become the first bishop of Calabar.

### **Mission of the St. Patrick Fathers and School System**

The Irish mission in the Lower Niger was strategically constructed around education system. The Irish missionaries concentrated on education system but used the same for the edification of the locales on the Catholic faith, thus making the faith accessible to the indigenes and preparing them to be missionaries to themselves. A peculiar contribution of the Irishmen to the planting of the Catholic faith in the Calabar mission was the formation of the local clergy. According to Etim, the move for priestly ministry of the indigenes started in 1912 when a curious young man, John Cross Anyogu (1898-1967) asked Shanahan if it was possible for Africans to become priests. This was the beginning of Africans studying for the sacred priesthood in the Lower

Niger region. This led to the harvest of indigenous priests, and the first seminarian from the Calabar mission was Dominic Ekandem (1917-1995), who will later become a Cardinal of the Roman Church (Etim, 2021: 64-65). This is how the Church came to fruition in the "Akwa Cross" region of Nigeria, intrinsically connected to the missionary ingenuity of the churchmen from Ireland. It was not only the Irishmen that responded to the appeal of Shanahan but Irishwomen also responded generously by making themselves available for teaching and caring for the vulnerable members of the society.

The school system is an essential factor in Europe and Africa exchanges in the Lower Niger. Before the era of St. Patrick Fathers, the local chiefs who sought to relate with the Europeans did not do that so much on the excellency of the faith but on the potential benefits of education for human development. According to Udoidem: "For our uplift depends on our adopting the white man's attitude in life – to be energetic and industrious in business, prudent and thrifty in finance, inventive and organizing in thinking and to be noble and reliable in character. However, we must not copy his foibles" (2007:249). The Europe and Africa exchanges as far as the school system is concerned was not a balanced relationship as Africans were at the receiving end. This will lead to the abandonment of the local language for English and consequent disruption of cultural appetite for African thought and culture. Many Africans intellectual are still wrestling with this phenomenon, opening a vista of dialogue on such claims as: "African theology eats Western theology" (Harries 2025); "How really Post Colonial are "Post Colonial" Studies in Nigeria?" (Ushie, 2024). The St. Patrick Fathers cemented the school system in the Akwa Cross region.

The goal of Christian mission in "pagan Africa" was to use the Christian faith to spread the ideals of European civilization. Without this impetus, the Christian missionary activities are meaningless. This is why it is difficult to separate Europeanization from Christianization in Africa. The simplest tool used for this process was the school system.

The education sector was a major priority in the evangelisation strategy of Moynagh being a faithful continuation in the path already established by Bishop Shanahan. The colleges of St. Patrick and Holy Family among the chain of Secondary Schools founded by Moynagh were the cradle that provided the initial moral, spiritual and intellectual molding of his future successor Brian Usanga who attended both schools (Etim, 2021:129).

The school system was the approach for human development and building of communities in Southern Nigeria by the Irish missionaries. The schools provided

personnel for the community of faith and civil community. Without education, the principle of standardization of moral and legal system crumbles. Community development is driven by moral and legal integrity. This is the foundation of justice and equity which flourishes as peace and development. The Irish education system was meant for inculcation of the ideals of literacy and catechesis, the essentials of human development, making faith and spirituality integral part of healthcare delivery (Essien, 2023: 91-96).

### **Assessment of the Mission of the St. Patrick Fathers in Okopusem area**

We have to offer an assessment of the missionary activities of the St. Patrick Fathers in *Okopusem* territory of southern Nigeria, precisely in Efik, Ibibio, Annang and Oro language areas of Cross River State and Akwa Ibom State. These languages cluster is what is refer to as *Okopusem* as there is tendency for them to understand themselves without systematic learning process. This assessment focuses on the period between 1950 and 2000 and it is a product of phenomenological and empirical research. The St. Patrick Fathers have contributed significantly to the *Catholization* of the territory from the early 19th century. The period under review could be described as the “flowering and fruiting” of their mission.

They laboured in the territory to bring the love of Christ to the people and foster the growth of Catholicism in the area. They were committed to the Irish missionary strategy of education for providing human development and strengthening of the faith. “The goal of Moynagh was to fall in line with the trend by producing Nigeria born clergy and bishops who in the future will interact and negotiate with their kins in the political arena when the colonial policy matures fully, to avoid any missing link and ensure continuity” (Etim, 2021:191). This approach indicates an important aspect in Europe and Africa exchanges. Colonialism was not a permanent situation in the mind of the missionaries. A time will come when Africans will assume responsibility for their welfare and homeland. It was, therefore, a matter of speculation when the natives will be matured enough to assume political leadership of their homeland. Archbishop David James Matthew (1902-1975), who was then the Apostolic Delegate to the British Eastern and Western Africa was working with the colonial office to evolve “slow, systematic and piecemeal transfer of power” and it was speculated that it may take the natives “probably thirty years for native population to learn the ways of democracy and most importantly to create a body of responsible and trustworthy native politicians” (Etim: 2021:190). Obong Victor Attah, governor of Akwa Ibom State (1999-2007) is the first maturation of this ideal.

The St. Partrick Fathers witnessed both the colonial and post-colonial development of the territory. The Calabar mission became a diocese in 1950 after forty years of labour by the Irishmen. The fruition of this labour was irreversibly documented in 1953 with the priestly ordination of the first indigenous priests: Isidore Peter Umana (1927?-1990) and Emmanuel Afangideh (1921-1981) and this was followed by the ordination of Brian Davis Usanga (1928-2005) in 1956 (Etim, 2021:189). The most significant ecclesial indices of maturation of the Calabar mission under the Irish missionaries was the acceptance of the request of Bishop James Moynagh (1903-1985) for an indigenous auxiliary bishop which saw Dominic Ekandem, who was ordained a priest in 1947 becoming the youngest bishop at the age of 37 and the first Catholic bishop in the whole of Anglophone West Africa in 1954. The 1950s were really the apex of the missionary activities of St. Patrick's Society in the *Okopusem* territory.

The growth of the Church in the area necessitated an expansion drive of Bishop of Moynagh. By 1960 he wanted the Calabar mission to grow into dioceses as follows: Calabar and Eket: Annang Province including Abak and Uyo Province. This impetus led to the creation of Ikot Ekpene Diocese in 1963 and Uyo Diocese in 1989. The Calabar mission within the period under review developed into three dioceses, with enough local clergy, capable of sustaining and propagating the faith (Etim, 2021:190). We have selected certain parameters for assessing the success of the mission of the St. Patrick's Society in the territory. These include:

### 1. Presence and Impact

The following table indicates some of the members of the St. Patrick's Society who were present in the *Okopusem* area.

S/N	Name	Duration	Place	Contribution
1.	Brendan Bolger (1924-1955)	1951-1955	Urua Inyang	Pastoral ministry and teaching at Teacher Training College. He is buried in Anua
2.	Gerry Brandy (1931-1994)	1959-1967	Ikot Nseyen	Teaching in Teacher Training College
3.	Vincent Brady (1916-2000)	1950-1967	Calabar	Vicar General to Bishop Moynagh
4.	Eugene Bree (1933-2015)	1950-1973	Afaha Obong	Teacher in the Seminary
5.	Thomas Joachim Jude Browne (1929-2021)	1968	Calabar	Pastoral and teaching
6.	James Alphonsus	1965-1967	Afaha Obong	Rector of the Seminary

	(Alphie) Byrne (1926-2021)			
7.	Jim Byrne (1915-1981)	1961	Calabar	Pastoral
8.	Catch (Carthage) Cantwell (1913-1981)	1950-1956	Calabar	Pastoral
9.	Pat Clifford (1922-1978)	1950-1966	Calabar	Pastoral
10.	Sean Casey (1923-1952)	1950-1952	Calabar	Pastoral. He was drawn in Afikpo and is buried in Anua
11.	Julian Connolly (1933-1986)	1964-1967	Calabar	Pastoral
12.	Stan Connolly (1930-2018)	1956-1962	Abak	Started a Pipe Band at Holy Family College, Abak
13.	Paddy Costelloe (1905-1988)		Calabar, Ikot Ekpene, Urua Inyang, Abak, Ukana Iba	Principal of St. Augustine TTC, Central Annang Secondary School and Holy Family College, Abak, and parish priest of Ukana Iba in 1966.
14.	Kerrie Creedon (1911-1977)		Essene	Pastoral
15.	Anthony (Tony) Cronin (1940-2017)	1966-1970	Ikot Ekpene Diocese	Pastoral
16.	Dermot (Jeremiah) Curran (1931-2011)	1959-1967; 1975-1998	Calabar, Ikot Ekpene	Secretary to Bishop Moynagh. Formator in the Seminary as teacher of Philosophy
17.	Sean (John Joseph) Deegan (1923-1983)	1947-1983	Ndon Ebom, Ediene, Itak, Anua, Oti-Oron, Ikot Edibon	Pastoral. He is buried in Ndon Ebom
18.	Daniel Dolan (1921-2015)	1945-2012	Uyo and Calabar	Pastoral. He was Vicar General to Bishop Brian Usanga. He left Uyo to Ikot Ansa when Uyo Diocese was erected
19.	Joseph Dollard (1921-1993)	1946-1967	Calabar	Bishop Secretary and establishment of St. Theresa Printing Press
20.	William Dowling	1949-1953;	Essene	The first principal of Regina

	(1925-2014)	1957-1972		Coeli College.
21.	Paddy Doyle (1916-1984)	1942-1968	Calabar and Ikot Ekpene	Pastoral
22.	Paddy Finnerty (1926-2003)	1952-1968	Calabar	Pastoral
23.	Tom Fitzgerald (1912-1989)	1938-1989	Calabar, Anua	Pastoral, Teaching, Administrator of Catholic Schools, Vicar General of Calabar. He is buried in Anua.
24.	Edmund (Ned) Fitzgibbon (1925- 2010)	1950	Calabar	Football manager (won Governor's Cup in 1954, first Secretary General of Catholic Secretariat, Lagos, later Bishop of Port Harcourt.
25.	John Flanagan (1925-2018)	1950-1969	Essene, Oron, Urua Akpan, Emman Uruan	Built Father's House and fine church at Emman Uruan. Fishing at Ikot Offiong. He left because of civil war.
26.	Padraig Flanagan (1938-2023)	1963	Ikot Ekpene	Coordinator of relief during the war, set up three centres to provide food and relief for those displaced by war. His most notably contribution was the building of St. Joseph Major Seminary, Ikot Ekpene.
27.	Leo Flynn (1937- 2022)	1962-1968	Calabar	Pastoral
28.	Leonard Forristal (1934-2016)	1961-1968; 1970	Calabar	Teaching in various schools, foster ecumenical relationship and wrote a book on Annang Churches in Nigeria.
29.	Augustine Frawley (1937 – 2017)	19963-1969	Ikot Ekpne	Pastoral
30.	Thomas Gallagher (1923-2003)	1955	Uyo	Assistant Education Secretary
31.	Michael Golden (1933-2012)	1959	Calabar	Teacher, development project and promotion of natural family planning
32.	Tom Grealy (1922-	1946-1966	Calabar, Essene,	Built the first architect designed

	2011)		Urua Akpan	church in Urua Akpan
33.	Christy Griffen (1926-1985)	1951-1963	Uyo	Pastoral
34.	Joseph Dominic Griffen (1932 – 1990)	1951-1968	Essene, Ikot Edibon, Ikot Ene, Use Abat, Okobo, Oban	Pastoral
35.	Eamon Hanify (1923-1984)	1948-1962	Calabar, Asong, Ndon Ebom, Ifuho, Urua Akpan	Pastoral
36.	Padraig Hannelly (1922-1991)	1948-1968	Calabar	Suffered imprisonment in Calabar for a short time.
37.	Vincent Hannigan (1917-2001)	1945-2001	Oron, Uyo	Vicar General of Uyo, Family Apostolate, introduction of family planning. Founded St. Vincent Secondary School, Oti-Oro. Buried in Anua.
38.	Maurice Hayes (1915-1996)	1944-1960	Calabar, Abak	Teacher and principal at Holy Family College, Abak
39.	Noel Hayes (1935-2016)	1960 - 1970	Ikwen and Ikot Ansa	Brilliant science teacher at St. Columbanus Secondary School, Ikwen and St. Patrick College, Ikot Ansa.
40.	John Lalor (1938-2021)	1964-1977	Ikot Ekpene	Teacher at Queen of Apostle Seminary, Afaha Obong, Principal of Goretti Girls Juniorate, Eriam and Secretary to Bishop Dominic Ekandem.
41.	James Lane (1916-1989)	1950-1995	Asong	Pastoral
42.	Jack Lavin (1911-1971)	1938 - 1971	Calabar	Secretary to Prefect, Monsignor James Moynagh. His entire missionary life was in Calabar.
43.	Kevin Longworth (1921-2010)	1948-1955; 1962-1973	Calabar	He described Calabar as his first love and was installed Chief of the Efik in 2008.
44.	Tom Lucey (1925-1991)	1953-1962	Ikot Ansa	Inspector of Schools

45.	Henry McCarney (1928-2014)	1965-1967	Afaha Obong	Teacher at the Seminary and the Choir flourished under him.
46.	Maurice Healy (1929-1982)	1954-1965	Anua	Pastoral
47.	Ben Hughes	1945-1971	Anua and Ifuho	Established Agricultural School
48.	Laurence Kearney (1923-2013)	1956-1967	Ikot Ansa	Teacher at St. Patrick
49.	Patrick Kelly (1934-2020)	1959-1965	Calabar	Great interest in the languages of the people.
50.	Mossie Kerin (1927-1988)	1954-1968	Calabar	Pastoral
51.	Patsy Kivlehan (1906-1978)	1938-1964	Ifuho, Edem Ekpat and Ikot Nseyen	He was devoted to Mary to the extend that the local people nick named him "Udoh Mary".
52.	Pat Lafley (1922-1989)	1947-1960	Anua, Uyo, Essene, Asong, Edem Ekpat	Pastoral
53.	Francis McElhatton (1946-2020)	1975	Ikot Ekpene	Brief stay - Pastoral
54.	John McGuinness	1950-1956; 1962-1983	Ikot Ansa, Abak	Teacher at St. Patrick College, Principal of Holy Family and Vicar General of Ikot Ekpene Diocese
55.	Phonsie McKenna (1924-1954)	1950-1954	Anua, Essene	Pastoral. Died of cerebral malaria in Ireland while on leave.
56.	John McLaughlin (1947-2015)	1971-1978	Edem Ekpat, Ikot Edibon, Use Abat, Asong, Eket	He Built the Father's House at Eket
57.	Liam McWey (1923-1985)	1949-1985	Anua	Longest serving parish priest of Anua, and died there of heart attack. He is buried there.
58.	Matt Magrath (1906-1964)	1932-50; 1957- 1964	Calabar, Ikot Ekpene, Essene	Built the first permanent church in the Prefecture of Calabar at Ifuho, the Construction of Calabar Cathedral and a church in Essene. He was in Ikot Ekpene when the Diocese was erected in 1963.

59.	Tom Mahoney (1913-1960)	1939-1960	Calabar	Died on a road accident near Ikot Ekpene and is buried in Anua.
60.	Patrick Moore (1921-2016)	1948-1967	Calabar	Pastoral
61.	Frank Morris (1924-1980)	1947-1967	Calabar	Bishop's Secretary and editor of Catholic Life Magazine.
62.	James Moynagh (1903-1985)	1934-1969	Calabar	Bishop of Calabar, vision and leadership, and reading the sign of time.
63.	Bill Mullaly (1916-1990)	1943-1965	Ikot Ansa	Teacher and principal at St. Patrick College. He left Calabar mission to Minna.
64.	Joe Murray (1920-2001)	1946-1950	Calabar	Dominic Ekandem was his curate in 1947.
65.	Dermot O'Connell (1935-2018)	1961-1963	Calabar	Pastoral
66.	Sean O'Dowd (1937-2024)	1963-1989	Anua, Uyo, Ikot Ansa	Teacher
67.	Denis O'Hara (1930-1997)	1956-1970	Ikot Ansa	Pastoral
68.	Padraig O'Malley (1931-2017)	1957-1968	Calabar	Teacher and weekend pastor
69.	Tom O'Reilly (1921-1973)	1948-1954	Calabar and Edem Ekpai	Promoter of Legion of Mary
70.	Oliver O'Sullivan (1921-1986)	1948-1966	Calabar	Secretary to Bishop Moynagh. Instrumental to the establishing of Printing Press for the publication of Catholic Life Magazine. He was a principal of St. Patrick College.
71.	Joe Petit (1928-2005)	1954-1987	Ndon Ebom, Essene, Ibiono	Pastoral
72.	Paddy Prendergast (1925-2005)	1951-1955	Calabar	Pastoral
73.	Paddy Quigley (1921-2005)	1951-1965	Calabar	Pastoral
74.	Owen Reid (1928-2004)	1954-1967	Calabar	Successful science teacher in many schools.
75.	Seamus Rehill	1956-1963	Calabar	Pastoral

	(1930-2022)			
76.	Alfie Rushe (1926-1994)	1952-1967	Calabar, Adiabo	Volunteered to serve the Army from 1954-1959. He was instrumental for the Catholic Life becoming a national magazine, and the was crushed when he was evacuated in 1967.
77.	Charle Ryan (1938-2016)	1971-1998	Uyo	Teacher and university professor. He built Father's House at Aka Offot.
78.	Peter Ryan (1924-2006)	1950-1966	Oron, Use Abat, Etinan	He was fluent in Efik language.
79.	Tom Ryan (1936-2007)	1962-1968; 1971-1992	Anua, Oron. Eman Uruan, Adiabo, Ikot Ansa	Pastoral
80.	Sean Rynn (1938-2023)	1965-1970	Ikot Ekpene	Fine teacher and much-loved pastor
81.	Patrick Scanlan (1929-2013)	1954-1968	Oron, Essene, Anua, Ikot Ekpene and Ikot Edibon	Pastoral
82.	Jim Sharkey (1934-2019)	1959-2013	Uyo, Ibiono	Pastoral and development of projects. He introduced Development Education and Leadership Skill (DELES) to Nigeria. Nick named "Udo Ibiono" because of his cultural assimilation.
83.	Reggie Smyth (1923-1991)	1949-1967	Calabar	Education Secretary
84.	Willie Stack (1944-2019)	1975-1983	Ikot Ene, Ikot Okure, Calabar	He was the last Society priest to minister at Sacred Heart Cathedral Calabar.
85.	Pat Walsh (1919-1973)	1946-1970	Calabar	Pastoral

**Table: 1** Fieldwork, 2025 and Retrieved [www.spms.org/fullness-of-life](http://www.spms.org/fullness-of-life), February 10, 2025

The above table gives name, age, location of the St. Patrick Fathers who worked in the territory between 1950-2000. Their location, function, etc may not be exhaustive. The presence of the Catholic faith in the territory is due principally to their pastoral zeal and commitment to the formation of the local clergy. Frs. James Kelleher and Patrick Cocoran are the last set of the St. Patrick Fathers to serve in the territory.

On the impact and influence of St. Patrick Fathers in the territory, only 2.2 % percent of the respondents considered them to be acceptable, indicating not being satisfied with their presence and influence in the territory. The rest of the respondents ranging from good to excellent indicated positive consideration of their presence and impact both in ecclesiastical and civil matters. In a focus group discussion, it was established that the presence of the St. Patrick Fathers is indelible in the history of Catholicism in the territory, a positive history for that matter.

## **2. Theological Contributions**

Theology is fundamentally “faith seeking understanding” (Migliore, 2004). Theological contributions are necessary for the planting of faith among the people because the proclaimed word must be understood. The St. Patrick Fathers made significant theological contributions for the planting Catholicism in the territory. They were primarily teachers of faith, and thus theologians as the fundamental motif of their engagement in Africa was the furtherance of Christian and Catholic ideas of God. From the assessment conducted in January – March 2025 among the priests and faithful in the territory the majority considered them to have made serious theological contributions in the area, implying that they were able to clarify the Christian faith and made it reasonable and acceptable to the people. Their success in this direction led to “church growth” as many were baptized and professed the faith, and transmitted the same faith to their children.

## **3. Human Development**

Many Africans embraced Christian faith proclaimed by the missionaries not so much for the admiration of divinity nor for the theological depth but in quest for human development. This was accomplished through educational strategy of the Irish missionaries. The school system was synonymous with human development. The St. Patrick Fathers extended the possibility of education to both male and female, promoting strong family system and encouraging parents to accept education of their children as a Christian responsibility. Fr. Vincent Hannigan devoted his entire life to this apostolate of female education in the territory. Girls education opened a new vista of acceptability, admiration and respect for the Irish missionaries in the territory (Etim,

2021:71). Among the pioneer educated females was Rosa Ekandem, the sister of Dominic Ekandem. The opening of residential marriage training programme in parishes provided education for girls that were above the school age, giving them rudimentary knowledge in finance and home management for sustainable development. The training was beneficial to the girls as they became good wives and mothers, educating their children both religiously and scientifically for greater productivity. This was appreciated more than the traditional *mbobo* (fattening home) for girls education.

The survey indicates that the St. Patrick Fathers contributed significantly to human development in the territory. Their introduction of female education was a hallmark of human development brought by the missionaries. This is an aspect of Europe and Africa exchanges that benefitted Africans, improved services of the missionaries and provided the colonial masters with intelligible workforce. More than 84.8 % of the respondents affirmed the contributions of the Irish missionaries towards human development through the provision of education and healthcare in the territory.

#### **4. Cultural Integration**

Some of the St. Patrick Fathers were successfully integrated culturally in the territory, and some found it difficult and many actually were withdrawn from the mission because of their inability to integrate culturally according to Thomas Kiggins (1991:184). Jim Sharkey is a good example of a successful integration. "Jim immersed himself in the life and culture of the people he served. He learnt their language, studied their traditions, ate their food and enjoyed their company. He was fluent in the Ibibio language and was able to preach in the language without the aids of notes" ([www.spms.org/fullness-of-life](http://www.spms.org/fullness-of-life) Retrieved 12/02/25). From the field survey, only 8.7% of the respondents considered this to have been excellent and the majority of the respondents stand at the "median of good". This indicates that the effort of St. Patrick Fathers to assimilate the local culture was satisfying, but they could have been more integrated. Even though there were few individuals who proved themselves in the knowledge and assimilation of the local culture, this cannot be attributed to the Society as the whole. Here we have to redefine the dynamics of cultural integration in Africa and Europe exchanges by incorporating the mutuality of teaching and learning, and not approaching Europe and Africa relationship from paternalism. There are a lot in African cultures that can enrich the cultural experience of Europeans.

We tested cultural integration through the appreciation of the local food and cuisine. The highest percentage of the respondents consider their appreciation of the local cuisine to have been good with 50%. There is a little tension as 8.7 % judged their cultural assimilation and knowledge to have been satisfactory and 6.5 % think that their

appreciation of the local cuisine was excellent. Cultural knowledge and assimilation is the only test parameters rated poorly by the respondents. Europe still have to learn a lot about African cultural heritage, even though the world is fast becoming a global village and there are a lot of transborder cultural elements in the world today. There is need for centres for African and European cultural studies both in European and African universities to strengthen cultural integration.

## 5. Church Growth and Catechesis

The St. Patrick Fathers were able to raise up the locals who became protagonists of translating the Christian literature into the local languages. One of such personality was Etubom Maurica Efanga Archibong. "As an erudite educator and also talented in music, he played a significant role in the early attempts by the missionaries to translate the Scriptures and the William Moran's Catechism into the Efik language. He was equally involved in the composition and translation of Catholic Sacred Music into the Efik language" (Etim, 2021:133-134). This definitely contributed to the growth of the Church in the territory and enhanced the catechetical formation. This was the engine of the church growth in the area – the formation of the local clergy who are capable of continuing with the catechetical mission of the Church in the post-colonial period. This led to the consecration of Brian Usanga as auxiliary bishop to James Moynagh on December 4, 1965, positioning him to become the first Nigerian Secretary-General of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, Lagos. Such feat by *Okopusem* indigene is a testimony of the contributions of the St. Patrick Fathers to the growth of the Church. This contribution flourishes in the 1970 when many indigenous clergymen and laymen participated through their direction in the work of catechesis, planting of the station churches and building of the new Christian communities.

Before the arrival of the St. Patrick Fathers, there were many Christian denominations in the area, competing for the loyalty of the people. David Kiggins affirms that the presence of non-Catholic denominations was more challenging than the pagan practice of the local people. It was not easy to get those who were already Christian to change their faith in preference for the Catholic faith. There were obstacles also from those who were already baptized in the Catholic Church to remain faithful to the Church. There was tension of division in Ikot Ekpene area with the emergence of the group which described itself as Udo Catholic, that is, the second son of the Catholic Church, and the emergence of the Holy Face Church, a splinter group among the Catholics in Ikot Ekpene (Kiggins, 1991:199-200). In spite of these challenges, the St. Patrick Fathers succeeded in planting the Roman Catholic faith in the territory, overcoming the menaces of the splinter groups. It is, therefore, understandable why

73.9 % of the respondents scored them excellent in their contribution to the growth of the Catholic Church. The Catholicism in *Okopusem* is owed to the Irish missionaries, and the building of the Sacred Heart Cathedral in Calabar, St. Ann Cathedral in Ifuho and Christ the King Cathedral in Uyo are eloquent testimonies of their sacrifices for the growth of the Roman Catholic Church. Through their catechesis and pastoral watchfulness, there has been minimal problem of the abandonment of the faith, especially among the clergy. Therefore, the Catholic faith in the Calabar mission was founded on the solid and exemplary ministries of the St. Patrick Fathers.

## **6. Strengthening of Institutions and infrastructural development**

The St. Patrick Fathers contributed to the strengthening of institutions and infrastructural development in the territory through a robust school administration system. This led to the sustainability of educational policies both in the public and missionary schools. They also impacted significantly on the administration of the temporary goods of the Church by strengthening the administrative organs of the Church. As the Vicar General of Uyo Diocese, Vincent Hannigan was instrumental to the many policies of Uyo Diocese as a new territory. The role of Charles P. Ryan in developing Sacred Heart Parish, Aka Offot and providing leadership in the

Department of Religious Studies of University of Uyo, Uyo are very significant. The St. Patrick Fathers worked hard to strengthen the institution of marriage and to tame sexual liberalism of the 1960s-1970s which was devastating Europe, and eroding the fabric Christianity (MacCulloch, 2009:985-990). They did not want the disaster of Europe to happen in their mission territory. Hannigan and Dolan focused on the Catholic ideal of family, empowering the women to embrace feminism rooted in ontological equality and functional diversity of the sexes, which was very much in harmony with African cultural anthropology. The rate of divorce in the territory during the active ministry of the St. Patrick Fathers was insignificant precisely because of the appreciation of marriage as an institution of covenant of love by the people.

The respondents were satisfied with the contribution of the St. Patrick Fathers toward infrastructural development and consolidation of institutions in the territory. There is no respondent that will not give them above the median in this aspect. Their effort in the building of rectories, churches, hospitals and schools are considered important for the development of the territory. The Africa and Europe exchanges have social amenities, emergence of institutions and infrastructural development as the fulcrum. Many Africans embraced Christianity, precisely for infrastructural development and betterment of human society. The activities of the St. Patrick Fathers were typical realizations of these exchanges as driven by the Christian faith. This is an

area, where British colonial administrators left nothing behind for the people, as there is no important school, hospital, even industry in the territory that is a remnant of the goodness of colonial administration. Religion, therefore, is capable of establishing lasting exchanges between Europe and Africa than politics, even though in human society, religion can easily be subsumed by politics. There is need, therefore, to rediscover the ideals of Christian faith and tradition in human development and apply the same for rapid development of persons and communities.

## 7. Ecumenical Relationship

The St. Patrick Fathers fostered ecumenical relationship in the territory by encouraging friendship and mutual respects among the churches. For instance, Fr. Leonard Forristal (1937-2016) who laboured as a teacher and pastor in Ikot Ekpene wrote on the **Annang Churches in Nigeria**, promoting inter-faith relationship and was in communication with the Presbyterian pastors in Ikot Ekpene even when he had left the country ([www.spms.org/fullness-of-life](http://www.spms.org/fullness-of-life) Retrieved February 2025). Despite this, there is not much legacy of inter-faith relationship by the Irish missionaries with the Protestants ministers in the territory. The St. Patrick Fathers were not very strong in ecumenical relationship understandably from the national tensions among the Europeans in the mission fields.

This ecumenical apathy among the European missionaries has not been overcome by the local clergy. The only official platform of relations among Christians is the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) which is more or less a religious pressure group, interfacing with the government for Christian welfare than an organ for fostering unified and common Christian engagement in faith (doctrine) or work (charity) in the territory. The inability of the local clergy to change the narrative reveals the lasting imprint of the Irish missionaries on the ecclesiastical consciousness of the local priests. This problem is more disheartening with the spread of the Pentecostal movements in the 1970s. The problem of *sheep stealing* often turns Christian proclamation into apologetic, as the emerging new congregations think that the destruction of Catholicism will be the foundation of their survival. To this end, a common Christian engagement for human development is a necessity in the territory.

## Significance of the St. Patrick's Society for Sustainable Development Goals

The presence and impact of the St. Patrick Fathers in the territory is a window for assessing sustainable development goals (SDGs). The Europe and Africa exchanges from ecclesiastical and theological perspective through the history of the St. Patrick's Society reveals the potential of religion for the realization of human development and

cultural integration. Religious commitment can be a fundamental driver for sustainable development goals.

The essential components of the SDGs aimed at promoting peace, prosperity and environmental sustainability by 2030. The governance and partnership for development objective is foreshadowed in the engagement of the St. Patrick Fathers with the locals for strengthening of cooperation for integral human development. The fundamental of such cooperation is rooted in the education system which opens the horizons for exchanges of knowledge and technology. The education system inculcated by the St. Patrick Fathers had empowered both males and females, the clergy and laity to foster human dignity, equality of persons, justice and equity in the territory. The history of St. Patrick's Society reveals that volunteerism for transcendental purposes is indispensable for authentic civilization of love. "The hallmark of volunteerism is predicated on service rendered to the community" (Ukpong, 2023:197). It is this voluntary spending of intellectual and human capacity for the benefits of all that led the Irishmen to southern Nigeria for Christian and integral human development. Men and women are expected to offer their skills, talents and resources for the benefit of the less privileged, if the sustainable development goals must be realized. The St. Patrick Fathers are shining examples of Europe and Africa exchanges for sustainable human development.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

The St. Patrick's Missionary Society has an interesting historical development delineating Europe and Africa exchanges from the perspective of Christian missionary engagement. The society was born precisely for the evangelization of Southern Nigeria in 1932, and by 1950 it was solidly present in the *Okopusem* territory (Calabar mission) with the ecclesiastical structures taking shape in the area. The period between 1950 and 2000 is a significant period for evaluating the success of the society and serves as a good parameter for assessing the relationship between Europe and Africa. The St. Patrick Fathers collectively serve as a model of social integration between Europe and Africa, how religious motivation drives humanitarian exchanges across borders, and how Catholicism can serve as cultural modifiers across civilizations and cultures.

There is a tendency in the academic today to examine the impact of Christianity in Africa from negative perspective, seeing the missionary engagement in Africa as being a camouflage for colonialism and de-Africanization. The missionaries are often seen as agents of European cultural imperialism, who did not see anything good in Africa but appropriated the natural resources of Africa for the creation of wealth for Europe while impoverishing Africa. From the historical presence of the St. Patrick Fathers in the territory from 1950 to 2000 these fears may be very difficult to establish.

There is little or no evidence of collusion between the Society and colonial masters from their inception, and especially during the period between ante independence (1950-1960) and post-independence (1960-1970) which is pivotal for nationalism in Nigeria.

The St. Patrick Fathers were not seen often in the company of colonial masters beyond the standard and transparent practices of school administration where authorization from the colonial authority was indispensable. There is no evidence of unhealthy collaboration with the colonial officials which led to deforestation and siphoning of raw materials to Europe. They were not engaged in commercialization which was detrimental to the local economy. During the period under investigation, there is no evidence of gross disrespect for African cultural values in terms of artefacts, museum materials and historical constructs which were not not noticed in the pre-Christian Europe. The Christian maxim: love your neighbour as yourself, serves as a parameter for assessing the missionary activities of the St. Patrick Fathers. Is there any gospel they preached in the territory that they were not preaching in Ireland? Is there anything that they condemned in Africa but condoned in Ireland? Is there any initiative they made in Africa but will not allow same in Europe? These questions are crucial for assessing the Christian value of Europe and Africa exchanges from theological perspective, in order to construct a civilization of love. The love of God and neighbour as thought by Jesus is fundamental in every Christian enterprise. It is always better to err in excess than to err in defect in Christian moral principle enunciated by Thomas Aquinas. Were the St. Patrick Fathers loving themselves more than Africans? When we examine the antecedent of European missionary engagement in Africa, looking at somebody like Daniel Colombo whose maxim was *Africa or death*, were the European missionaries loving Africa genuinely or interested in the wealth of Africa? We have to reexamine the narratives of the European missionary engagement in Africa by African scholars.

In this paper, we have chosen certain parameters in assessing the exchanges of the St. Patrick Fathers in the territory. From this assessment, they have done excellently well in promoting Catholicism through the provision of education and infrastructures in the territory. Education was the key for the transformation of Europe, and this key was painstakingly inculcated among the *Okopusem* people. The role of St. Patrick College, Ikot Ansa, Holy Family College, Oku Abak, St. Vincent Secondary School, Oti-Oro among others in molding character and providing knowledge for the future leaders is undeniable. The primary and secondary schools established by the Irish missionaries provided solid foundation of literacy and modernization. The formation of the local clergy will not have been possible without the educational engagement of the Irish missionaries. The Church is doing well in the territory because of the vision of the St.

Patrick Fathers as envisioned by James Moynagh to form the local clergy who will be capable of interacting with their kins for the development of human society and the spread of the Kingdom of God.

From what the local Church has received from the Irish missionaries, it is proper to map direction for future research and assessment of the contributions of the Catholic priests from Africa for the European cultural and spiritual rejuvenation between 2000 and 2050. The Church in Africa in gratitude to the missionaries should not only sustain and deepen the faith but should also become missionary to the rest of the world, including Europe. This was the vision of Dominic Ekandem when he conceived the idea of the Missionary Society of St. Paul in 1950. The posterity will judge African Christians based on how they show love to Europe in gratitude for the faith received from the European missionaries. Therefore, from 2030 to 2050 there should a strategic missionary agenda for the dioceses in Calabar Ecclesiastical Province to engage in impactful mission *ad intra* (within) and *ad extra* (beyond), and in the spirit of Irish missionaries to transform socio-cultural realities. In conclusion, the Europe and Africa exchanges are ongoing and mutually enriching and liberating to the human spirit. This relationship should be constructed on partnership rather than on paternalism for the strengthening of authentic civilization and integral humanism especially in the age of Artificial Intelligence (AI).

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