

**THE THREAT OF PENTOCATHOLICISM TO THE CATHOLIC PRIESTHOOD:
TRIBUTE TO MONSIGNOR RAPHAEL CHUKWUBUNNA ANASIUDU¹ - AN
OLD SCHOOL PRIEST**

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ABSTRACT

The history of the Catholic priesthood in Nigeria began a little less than a century ago with the ordination of the first Nigerian priest, Rev. Fr. Paul Obodochina Emechete (1884-1948), who was ordained on January 6, 1920 at Asaba by Bishop Thomas Brodrick, SMA. From its earliest beginning to the present the Catholic priesthood has been embraced by young men from all walks of life and from virtually all areas of the Nigerian territory. One of such men is Msgr. Raphael Chukwubunna Anasiudu, former Secretary General of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN). Of the one hundred years of Catholic priesthood in Nigeria, Msgr. Anasiudu has been part of this history for fifty years. The occasion of the Golden Jubilee of his sacerdotal life and his eightieth birthday provides an auspicious opportunity to reflect on the changing face of the Catholic priesthood in Nigeria. This paper sets out to examine the factors that account for this change and the implication of this change for the future of this sacerdotal ministry in Nigeria.

Key Words: Catholic, Priesthood, Pentecostalism, Pentocatholicism, Old School, Anasiudu.

INTRODUCTION

In his recent encyclical on the environment, *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis wrote extensively on the damage inflicted on the ecosystem by a certain kind of contemporary lifestyle, driven by the principles and norms of techno-science and techno-economics. This lifestyle, which he describes as a *culture of more*, has set off a process of *rapidification*,³ which not only has unbalanced the delicate equilibrium in the ecosystem but has also led to the disappearance of certain life forms while at the same time placing many more at risk of extinction. The underlying argument in Pope Francis' *Laudato Si* is that certain ways of thinking and acting, i.e., certain lifestyles are antithetical to the continuation and prolongation of life on earth. This thesis can be analogically applied to the theme of our discourse – the Priesthood. As will be expounded in this essay, it could be held that there are certain ways of living

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³ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si, On the Care for our Common Home*, 2015

which gravely endanger the Catholic Priesthood in the church in Nigeria. Like some endangered animal and plant species, it appears that the catholic priesthood might, if care not taken, also become an endangered specie.

The twin celebration of the golden jubilee of the priestly ordination and the eightieth birthday of Very Rev. Monsignor Raphael Chukwubunna Anasiudu provide an auspicious occasion to pause for a moment to take a good look at that way of life, which he embraced half a century ago. As our ancestor and father in the priestly lineage, which he pioneered in Igboukwu, in Aguata Local Government Area of Anambra, State, I believe that it would be of great interest to him to want to take a close look at the long line of heirs that have followed or tried to follow his steps in the priestly life. And so, as we roll out the drums, dress up in colorful priestly vestments, lay out the dinner tables, in short as we celebrate (something we do very well and too frequently), we must at the same time put on our thinking cap (something we do not do very often and with great rigor and vigor), so that our celebration of this servant of God may be fruitful and meaningful.

A BRIEF INSIGHT INTO THE PERSON OF MSGR. ANASIUDU

Born on the 24th day of October, 1936 to the Catholic family of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph and Susanna Anasiudu, Monsignor Anasiudu is a second generation Catholic. His father, Mr. Joseph Anasiudu is listed as one of the pioneers of Catholicism in Igboukwu. And so, the son of a pioneer⁴, Msgr. Anasiudu will himself become a pioneer by laying a firm foundation of a priestly lineage in Igboukwu when on April 25, 1965 he was ordained as the first Catholic priest of Igboukwu by the then Bishop of Warri, Bishop Lucas Nwezeapu of blessed memory.⁵

Although Msgr. Anasiudu enjoys the privilege of being the pioneer priest of the church in Igboukwu, he, by no means, enjoys such privilege when it comes to the Catholic priesthood in the church in Nigeria or even of the church in Awka diocese, his home diocese. Msgr. Anasiudu was ordained a little more than forty-five years after the first Nigerian priest, Rev. Fr. Paul Obodochina Emechete (1884-1948), was ordained at Asaba on January 6, 1920 by Bishop Thomas Brodrick, SMA.⁶ Bishop

⁴ The Catholic Church came to be established in Igboukwu in 1912 through the efforts of Chief Ezenwosu Udo (Ejekam) of Ezigbo village, Igboukwu. Chief Ezenwosu's move to bring Catholicism in Igboukwu was to counter the growing influence of his rival, Chief Ezudgbune of Ngo village, Igboukwu, who had earlier invited the Christian Missionary Society (CMS) to establish their church in his domain. To realize this project of establishing the Catholic Church in Igboukwu, eight young men were chosen from the four kindred families that make up Ezigbo village to go to Nnobi town and learn about the Catholic faith and return back to Igboukwu and teach it to others. . The eight men included the father of Msgr. Anasiudu, Mr. Joseph Umeokafor Eze Anasiudu. Others include Simon Ijezie, James Ofodum, Okeke Unegbu, Michael Okafor, and Peter Okafor. These eight men will constitute the foundation members of the church in Igboukwu, cf. John N. P. Okonkwo, *The History of the Catholic Church in Igboukwu*, 2014. See also *Awka Diocese at 25: A Historical Review*, Revs Frs. Ikem Oliobi, T. I. Onwuasoanya, W. N. Ofojebe (Eds.).

⁵ Fr. John Arinze Anasiudu, "Biography of Very Rev. Msgr. R. C. Anasiudu" edited and updated by Fr. Malachi Chukwuma Maduewesi; in *50th Golden Jubilee Celebration Brochure of Very Rev. Fr.. Raphael Chukwubunna Anasiudu*, Sunday, 12 April, 2015.

⁶ Cf. Cosmas Nwosuh, *Cardinal Dominic Ekandem and the Growth of the Catholic Church in Nigeria*, (Iperemo: Ambassador Publications, 2012), 20.

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Ferdinand Terrien, SMA, ordained the second generation of priests for the church in Nigeria nine years later in Lagos. These were Rev. Frs. Stephen F. Adewuyi, Lawrence Layode, and Julius Oyeboade Oni.⁷ A year later, on December 8, 1930, Bishop Shanahan would ordain Fr. Anyogu in Onitsha.⁸ It is evident, then, that Msgr. Anasiudu does not even fall among the third or fourth generation of Catholic priests of the church in Nigeria. Yet, there is something remarkable about his priesthood in the history of the Catholic priesthood, not only of the church in Nigeria but the entire Catholic world. Msgr. Anasiudu was ordained at the threshold of history, a moment the Catholic Church was experiencing a *aggiornamento*. And so, Msgr. Anasiudu is a priest of two epochs. Formed and trained as a seminarian in the spirit of the Council of Trent and the First Vatican Council, he will, however, be ordained and minister as a priest in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council. It will be right, therefore, to describe him as a priest of transition.

What Sort of Priest is Msgr. Anasiudu?

Though not belonging to the class of priests who were ordained and who ministered during the Pre-Vatican II era, Msgr. Anasiudu, nevertheless, can be described, using a popular Nigerian slang, as an *Old School*. He is an *Old School* not only because he has gracefully advanced in age, but because he belongs to a class of Catholic priests whose notions, values, formation, and lifestyles are remarkably different from that of many young priests of today. In fact, he does not only belong to the class of *Old School* priests, but could also be said to belong to the class of an endangered species of the Catholic priesthood. Ordained in an epoch when the Catholic priesthood was a phenomenon largely unknown and barely understood, among both the Christian faithful and non-Christians alike, Catholic priests were seen as rare and strange breed of human beings. A lot of mystique and myths oftentimes surrounded the personality of Catholic priests. Many thought them as belonging to both the human and spirit worlds (*nmadu na nmuo*). For long, many were under the impression that Catholic priests did not engage in the mundane routines (e.g. toileting!) which ordinary mortals engage in.

Unlike what could today be seen among many contemporary priests who guzzle down bottles of larger beer in public, Catholics priests of Msgr. Anasiudu's generation will not be caught dead drinking even a glass of water in public not to mention eating in public. I recall a recent incident that illustrates this. At one of the annual meetings of Igboukwu Priests and Religious Association, hosted by my elder brother, Fr. Cosmas Nwosuh, MSP and myself, Msgr. Anasiudu was present. At the end of the general discussions, when it was time for the meal and drinks to be served, one of the young priest causally remarked that the Monsignor should be served his meals right there among other priests. An older priest looked at him questioningly and asked him how he could even consider serving the Monsignor "in public"! And yet, this was a gathering of fellow priests and religious men and women. Monsignor had to be accompanied into a private section of the house where

⁷ Cf. Nwosuh, *Cardinal Dominic Ekandem*, 21

⁸ Cf. Nwosuh, *Cardinal Dominic Ekandem*, 21

his meal and drink was served him. For many, this might seem rather exaggerated and even obtuse but a contextual reading of the situation will place this rather strange way of acting in a proper and better light. One can also better appreciate this seemingly reclusive lifestyle of *Old School* Catholic priests like Msgr. Anasiudu, by understanding the two currents of thoughts that fed and shaped this form of lifestyle that shuns certain public life.

THE TRADITIONAL CONCEPT OF THE PRIESTHOOD

One of these currents comes from traditional African setting. Still fresh from and, indeed, still very close to the African traditional religion and culture, it is not unlikely that both the Christian converts and those who still pledged allegiance to the indigenous religion and culture, viewed the Catholic priests from categories drawn from the local milieu. One of such categories is the masquerade who once had a revered and unique role in the traditional Igbo society. Masquerades were, in fact, considered to be spirits rather than humans. For that reason, masquerades cannot be seen performing those simple human activities or actions that ordinary human beings do. Until very recently, Catholic priests were seen from that same prism. And so, one can understand why Catholic priests can't or shouldn't be seen eating or drinking in public, after all, who has ever seen a masquerade eat or drink?

The second category, which consciously or unconsciously shaped the way Catholic priests were viewed and held, comes from the category of priests of local deities, especially the very powerful ones. Priests of local deities were held in very high esteem but also feared. Though not considered spirits like masquerades, priests of local deities, nevertheless, have very strict rules of public comportment. In fact, not even titled men, *ndi nze na ozo*, are allowed to eat and drink in public. Certainly, in the light of today's mentality and culture, this will be dismissed as obscurantist. But what lies beneath this strict rule of public conduct? It is, in summary, the dignity and honor that these offices bear as symbols of public authority. Imagine the Queen of England eating ice cream while casually taking a walk on the streets of London or the Chief Justice of any Supreme Court, guzzling bottles of beer in a public bar or at a public function. Therefore, far more than the external gesture of observing certain form of public comportment, the Catholic priesthood, like some other public figures, both traditional and modern, was seen and held as symbols of authority. Holders of such offices are, therefore, expected to act with certain decorum in both public and private. This is, indeed, the basis of what is commonly known as priestly decorum.

It is this public decorum, or priestly decorum, as it is usually referred to among the older clergy that the traditional seminary formation will instill in the lives of candidates for the Catholic priesthood. This second current of thought, in synergy with the first current, shaped the image of those priests that the younger generation of priests will refer to as *Old School*. But far more than just instilling priestly decorum in this fast *dying* generation of *Old School* priests, the seminary formation, which they received, impressed in *Old School* priests like Msgr. Anasiudu, the rich traditional ideals of Catholic priesthood. Perhaps, it may be more appropriate to speak of the values, which *Old School* priests like Msgr. Anasiudu *imbibed* during their seminary

formation, for it is, indeed, one thing for the seminary formators to seek to instill certain values and entirely another thing for candidates in formation to imbibe these values.

PRIESTLY VALUES AMONG OLD SCHOOL PRIESTS

One such important values of the priesthood that Monsignor imbibed and lived out these past five decades of his sacerdotal life is the sacrificial character of the priestly life. The priesthood is a life of total sacrifice. It is a sacrifice not only in the basic sense of giving up family, marriage, properties, career opportunities, etc. to follow Christ, but more importantly a daily pouring out of one's life as libation (2 Tim 4: 6; Philp. 2:17). It is a sacrifice in which one dedicates oneself totally and joyfully to the service of God's people even under the most difficult and sometimes hostile conditions. A priest who is properly schooled and who has well ingrained this ideal is ever willing to work even in the remotest and poorest parish and outstation. He is ever eager to construct from scratch and from very meager resources new communities of God's people. And so, he is imbued with a missionary spirit and zeal. He is, therefore, not content with simply managing the parish to which he has been assigned, but he is eager to open up new outstations and mass centers and also make concerted efforts to visit them regularly and celebrate the sacraments for them.

Old School priests like Msgr. Anasiudu, are usually driven by certain concerns and motivations because their vocabularies are different. The word "comfort" does not exist in their lexicon. The priesthood is not, for them, associated with a life of comfort but of sacrifice. The reason is very simple. Their motivations for entering the priesthood are different. For Msgr. Anasiudu and his *Old School* colleagues, one does not enter the priesthood to be comfortable. Rather, the priesthood is a life of continuous self-giving, which is offered as a libation to Christ and his Church. And so, for him and for others like him who belong to this *Old School*, their primary anxiety is not to be posted to the must "luxuriant and buoyant" urban parish. They are remotely anxious about what kind of car will be given to them at their ordination or at their priestly anniversaries, even their first priestly anniversary! They are least concerned about becoming well connected to financial heavy weights in and outside their parish. They are even less worried about finding favor with the diocesan consultors and the Bishop himself, so that their chances of being sent for further studies in Europe or America will be brighter. Never mind that, upon finishing their studies, if they ever do, they will manufacture a million and one reason to stay back and build a small financial fortune for themselves and possibly for their immediate family members. If one, therefore, is to examine very closely the attitude, speech, and comportment of *Old School* priests like Msgr. Anasiudu, one will find anything but a sense of entitlement. The reason is very simple. For them, the priesthood is an undeserved privilege and not a right. The priesthood is a gift of grace and not an entitlement to which one lay claims. For Msgr. Anasiudu and his *Old School* colleagues, the priesthood is not an opportunistic calling that affords one to carve out a comfortable niche in society.

MSGR. ANASIUDU'S PRIESTLY LIFESTYLE

Looking at the lifestyle of Msgr. Anasiudu it is quite easy to see that he clearly understands and believes that the priesthood is a gift of grace given for the service of Christ and of his Church and not an opportunity for self-enrichment. Anyone who is even vaguely familiar with him will attest to his simplicity, modesty and humility. These are qualities that are essential to the priesthood. To a great degree, these three qualities are intimately connected. The nature of the priesthood demands a simple and modest lifestyle. As one chosen for the ministry of service, a priest should be distinguished by his humility. Like his Master Jesus, who came to serve and not to be served (Mt 20:28 parallel), a priest must live and act like a humble servant. Simplicity and modesty are themselves expressions of humility. And so, simplicity and modesty are distinctive qualities that characterize the lifestyle of a humble priest. These qualities are crucial in helping a priest remain focused on the primary mission for which he was ordained and not become caught up with pursuits which have little or no bearing on his primary mission as a priest.

When a lifestyle of simplicity and modesty is thrown overboard a priest becomes entangled in a web of material pursuit. His attention shifts from preaching the Gospel and ministering to the spiritual and even material needs of the flock of Christ, to ministering to his own insatiable desires. His concern would no longer be the spiritual wellbeing of his flock but his own material wellbeing. He becomes less and less concerned with building up the faith and moral of his parishioners as he increasingly becomes more engrossed with building up his bank account balances. His passion and zeal for his priestly duties takes a back seat as his ardent passion for the latest toys: smartphones, electronic and technological gadgets, cars and houses, etc. dominate the horizons of his mental space. Increasingly, he becomes an expert in everything else but his priestly duties. Caught up in the cycle of mundane activities, he hardly has time to refresh and improve his knowledge on recent teachings of the Church even though he can access these teachings from his latest expensive smartphone. And so, as years wear on, he slowly and steadily slips into deeper ignorance which he tries to mask with inflexible exercise of power and an air of clerical superiority. Having abandoned intellectual self-improvement, he not only becomes incapable of detecting and correcting errors in matters of faith, but becomes himself a purveyor of errors. The homily which ought to be a medium for spiritual formation and nourishment becomes an ecclesiastical version of "A Night of a Thousand Laugh". The liturgy is mangled and turned into a quasi-magical ritual. Having thrown overboard the virtues of simplicity and modesty, the priest begins to feel and also make others feel the weight of his importance, not minding the fact that he has to ingratiate himself with the rich in order to maintain his lavish lifestyle.

This seemingly exaggerated picture which, nonetheless, fittingly describes the lifestyle of many young contemporary priests does not in any way fit the image and character of Msgr. Anasiudu. This is another reason why he is an *Old School* priest. Were it possible for his car to speak like Balaam's mule, his car would have protested vehemently when Msgr. Anasiudu parks his beside any of the cars of some

recently ordained priests. I can bet that Msgr. Anasiudu will be shell shocked to learn of the large sum that is sitting coolly in the bank accounts of many young priests whose parents weren't even yet married when he entered the seminary. I am certain that Msgr. Anasiudu would have wondered many times if he still belongs to the same Catholic priesthood with others priests who have erected big mansions in their father's compound whereas, he has to content himself with a single room in his brother's house.

But is it that he was not smart enough or that there were no opportunities for him to secure these comforts of life for himself? Certainly not! As the first Secretary-General of the Catholic Secretariat, Msgr. Anasiudu was in a vantage position to feather his nest. After his return to his home diocese, he had been assigned to important parishes where he could have made a little fortune for himself. There is no question as to his intellectual capability. In fact, he was among the first batch of young priests who were sent to University of Nigeria, Nsukka for their post-ordination studies, that is, further studies. There he studied History and Journalism.⁹ Therefore, he could have pulled the right strings that could have paved the way for him to pursue higher studies abroad and thereafter, permanently establish himself in the rich American or European society. Msgr. Anasiudu wasn't lacking in sagacity and opportunities. He had these and more but choose to remain a simple, modest and humble local priest. He opted for the ideals and virtues of the priesthood over and above personal interests.

If Msgr. Anasiudu is said to be an *Old School* and to belong to an endangered species of Catholic priests, it is even more because of his identity as a Catholic priest. In other words, there is no ambiguity as to his true identity as a Catholic priest. In sharp contrast to what obtains among so many contemporary young and not so young priests, one can discern from both his preaching and liturgical celebration of the Eucharist, that he is firmly rooted in the Catholic tradition. Many traditional lay faithful who have been nurtured and weaned in the Catholic tradition are often left in a state of perplexity and bewilderment when they listen to the homilies or attend the liturgical celebration of some young "modern" priests. They often wonder if they are listening to a clone of T. B. Joshua, Pastor Adeboye, Pastor Oyedepo, Pastor Oyakhilome, or any of those "mega pastors". Many can attest to the perplexity and sense of frustration of many traditional Catholics, who wonder if the Mass they had just attended was a catholic version of a Pentecostal fellowship jamboree. Although one cannot but feel certain consternation yet one must not be totally surprised at these aberrations.

THE THREAT OF PENTECOSTALISM TO CATHOLIC PRIESTHOOD

Sadly but increasingly, Priests like Msgr. Anasiudu have long ceased to be models for many seminarians and young priests. Enthralled by the celebrity status of these mega-pastors, and of course, the attendant pecuniary benefits that flow from having a large followership, many seminarians and young priests have adopted these mega-

⁹ Fr. John Arinze Anasiudu, "Biography of Very Rev. Msgr. R. C. Anasiudu"

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pastors as spiritual mentors. They are not satisfied with merely copying their delivery style in their preaching, which admittedly may sometimes be quite impressive; but they go on to imitate their theatrics and worse still their poisoned theology, if one can, indeed, call it theology. Thus, so many seminarians and young priests have jettisoned their rich Catholic spirituality for a cheap shallow and questionable spirituality. Since gullible, ignorant and superficially minded persons are not always lacking, even within the Catholic Church, these priests are never lacking in followership. There is, alarmingly, a growing pentecostalization within the Catholic Church and among the Catholic clergy, thereby giving rise to a new brand of Catholics and catholic priests, who may aptly be described as Pentocatholics and Pentocatholic priests respectively.

A growing but worrisome phenomenon which highlights the emergence of Pentocatholic priests within the Catholic Church is private ministries. This phenomenon further underscores the fact that Msgr. Anasiudu really belongs to the *Old School* and a dying breed of ordained ministers of God. While there are priests, some barely a year old in the priesthood, who boast of flourishing private ministries, it is highly improbable that Msgr. Anasiudu ever toyed with the idea of establishing one. Msgr. Anasiudu belongs to the *Old School* which understands the Catholic priesthood and its mission, not as a private ministry but a public or better still an ecclesial ministry exercised for and on behalf of the church. He clearly understands that even when a priest is graced with unique charisms, they are not meant to be deployed towards creating a personal fiefdom that thrives on personality cult. The establishment of private ministries, most of which are dedicated to healing, is an idea that would leave *Old School* priests like Msgr. Anasiudu perplexed. One would ordinarily expect that with the upsurge in the number of young priests desirous of undertaking the healing ministry, there ought to have been a corresponding increase and development of a more robust hospital apostolate within the church in Nigeria, after all it is in hospitals that those who need healing (both physical and emotional) are found. But the reverse is the case. The hospital apostolate in Nigeria remains one of the most neglected apostolates in our local church. Although most of the healing ministries would claim that they are more involved in spiritual healing, that is, healing of spiritual ailments purportedly caused by demons, we do know, however, that these private healing ministries do often claim to heal all manners of psychophysical illnesses.

A cursory look at the phenomenon of private healing ministries within the Catholic Church would immediately reveal that this phenomenon is the direct influence of the deregulation and privatization process that is endemic in and characteristic of Pentecostalism. It appears that just as we have several individuals establishing their own Pentecostal "churches" and miracle centers, some young priests set up their own mini-churches under the guise of healing ministries. And so it may well be that the Catholic hierarchy in Nigeria is unwittingly ordaining crypto-Pentecostal pastors as Catholic priests. Incidentally, this deregulation and privatization phenomenon has also caught up with the lay faithful. Today there are several prayer houses or

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prayer ministries established and operated by lay Catholics. Often operating under the name and goodwill of the Catholic Church, like business franchises, they attract hapless and gullible members of the Catholic Church. But it does not take much to discern that what goes on in these prayer centers is anything but Catholic or at best pseudo-Catholic. This, indeed, calls for serious reflection and a well-articulated response. If this phenomenon is left unchecked, the prediction of Rev. Fr. Anthony Akinwale, OP, may well come to pass. He predicts the eclipse of Catholicism in Nigeria within a couple of decades.¹⁰ The ferment for this disintegration is found among the crypto-Pentecostal pastors who dress up in the white suntan of Catholic priests and in these crypto-Pentecostal sects that masquerade as prayer centers.

Having gracefully retired from active priestly ministry after half a century of committed service as a priest of the Roman Catholic Church, there is no doubt that Msgr. Anasiudu will be filled with a deep sense of satisfaction and gratitude to God Almighty who graciously granted him the privilege of participating in the priesthood of His only begotten Son. Accompanying, most possibly, this sense of gratitude may be the feeling of anxiety; anxiety about the future of this ministry to which he so dedicated himself. This anxiety may not so much be about the availability of young men willing to embrace the sacerdotal ministry. For now and most hopefully in the foreseeable future there are and, hopefully, will still be many young men willing to enter into the priesthood. For instance, in Msgr. Anasiudu's hometown, Igboukwu, a small town that numbers about three-quarter of million people; Msgr. Anasiudu stands as the head of a priestly lineage that numbers a little above a hundred (100) priests. And so, thanks to the courageous and generous response of Msgr. Anasiudu to God's divine call some fifty years ago, the church in Nigeria still has many young men who dare to respond to the call to the priestly vocation as he did. And so, his anxiety may not be about numbers, rather his worry might be of a different kind. As a true and dedicated priest of the Catholic tradition, he will be no doubt concerned about the quality of the priestly life and ministry of these men who, particularly in more recent time, followed his footsteps in the Catholic priestly ministry. Msgr. Anasiudu's Golden Jubilee celebration and eightieth birthday anniversary may, therefore, be indeed one of mixed emotions. On one hand he will be filled with great joy and gratitude for God's immense blessings during his fifty years of priestly ministry and eighty years of fulfilled earthly life. But on the other hand, there might be a sense of pain and sorrow for the burgeoning number of crypto-Pentecostal pastors who wear the priestly garb and who distort the true identity and ministry of the Catholic priesthood.

And so, his fiftieth anniversary celebration and his eightieth birthday entail both a joyful celebration and a sober reflection. It is an occasion to pause and ask very salient questions about the future of the Catholic priesthood in the Nigeria Church. It calls for a critical appraisal of the present seminary/priestly formation which may

¹⁰ Cf. *Understanding Pentecostalism in Nigeria*, paper presented at the Provincial Workshop on Pentecostalism, "The Challenge of Pentecostalism in Nigeria: A Dominican Response", held at St. Thomas Aquinas Priory, Samonda, Ibadan, Monday October 17 to Friday, 21, 2016.

not be unconnected with the dark ominous storm that is gathering over our local church. Without courageously undertaking this self-appraisal, the church in Nigeria risks an eclipse of Catholic priests of the kind and caliber of Msgr. Anasiudu. If the present threats remain unaddressed, we may witness, in years to come, an eventual substitution of authentic Catholic priests with crypto-Pentecostal pastors in the guise of Catholic priests. Perhaps to many this may sound far-fetched or alarmist but for anyone with a discerning mind and who is attentive to the present situation, he/she does not need much convincing as to the gravity of the situation. He/she knows that this is no mere doomsday prophecy.

THE SOCIO-RELIGIOUS CONTEXT OF PRIESTLY FORMATION IN NIGERIA

We cannot, however, begin to address the problem without first undertaking an anatomy of the problem or threat. This will necessarily require understanding the nature and even scope of the problem. The danger of a complete loss of the essence of the Catholic priesthood through the combined influences of Pentecostalism and materialism and some other factors not immediately or directly connected to these two are, indeed, real. If priests like Msgr. Anasiudu, are said to be *Old School*, it is largely because of the context of their priestly formation which is remarkably different from the context which many young priests are formed. This context has two dimensions: the ecclesial dimension which has to do with the internal context of the priestly formation and the secular sociological dimension which pertains to the external context of the priestly formation. Let us examine these dimensions beginning with the latter.

Nigeria, right from its constitution as a single State, has always been a religiously diverse society. This diversity is even more evident within the Christian fold. And so, besides Catholicism, there are the Anglicans and other mainline protestant churches and indigenous African churches, each sometimes having particular strongholds or areas of geographical spread or influence. There was, however, a great degree of insularity and sometimes, hostility among these different Christian traditions. This rigid line of separation was, indeed, palpable and, thus, did ensure that there was little or no exchange between different religious traditions especially between Catholics and Anglicans/Protestants. In fact, in certain parts of the country, especially in Eastern Nigeria, where Catholicism has its strongest foothold, it was inconceivable for Catholics and Anglicans to mingle. The socio-religious context in which Msgr. Anasiudu and so many other priests up to the late 70s and early 80s were formed and ministered as Catholic priests was not only one that was characterized by religious insulation, but more importantly one that was almost completely devoid of the Pentecostal influence.

The explosive spread of Pentecostalism in Nigeria¹¹ and as well as the rest of Africa,

¹¹ For more details on the spread of Pentecostalism in Nigeria and Africa, see Paul Gifford, *Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa*, (Oxford: Oxford Press, 2016); Pauline Aweto Eze, *The Changing Landscape of Christianity in Africa* (Nairobi: Paulines, 2012); Kenneth Enang, *The Nigeria Catholics and the Independent Churches: A Call to Authentic Faith* (Nairobi: Paulines, 2012); Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford Press, 2008); Traditions and Compromises: Essays on the Challenge of

beginning from the mid-80s will not only redraw the religious map of Christianity in Nigeria but will also introduce a portent but dangerous element in the external context in which Catholic priests are formed in Nigeria and Africa as a whole. In sharp contrast to the quasi-iron-clad walls that insulated one Christian tradition from others, the Pentecostal tidal wave will sweep through each religious traditions leaving behind its debilitating effects in each of these Christian traditions. Within Catholicism itself, the emergence of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal Movement (CCRM), though having its own distinct origin and impetus, will largely serve as an easy conduit for Pentecostal influence within the Catholic Church. This is largely owing to its close affinity to Pentecostalism, particularly in terms of its features and mode of worship. Thus, many Charismatics were easily predisposed to share fellowships with non-Catholics, i.e. Pentecostals. The long drawn battle between early Charismatic members and the hierarchy of the Church over several questions of doctrine is largely the result of the Pentecostal influence on Catholic Charismatics. After a lot of purification, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal Movement will eventually find a somewhat reluctant welcome in the womb of the Catholic Church. Those who have drunk deep in the wells of Pentecostalism will remain dissenters, many of them either joining other Pentecostal churches or establishing rival Charismatic groups within or outside the Church, e.g., the Catholic Charismatic Revival Movement (The Watchman Charismatics). A significant event in the history of the Charismatic Movement is the establishment of Charismatic groups within different Seminaries and Religious houses of formation in Nigeria. I am unaware of any study that details the impact of this movement on the formation of future priests in Nigeria. But what cannot be disputed is that the early pioneers of healing ministries within the Catholic Church were directly or indirectly connected with the Charismatic Movement which as I said earlier shared close affinity with Pentecostalism. One of the earliest pioneers of a private healing ministry is Rev. Fr. Prof. Emmanuel Edeh, CSSP, whose Holy Ghost ministry swept like a forest wild fire across the country.

From the late 90s onwards, a new brand of Pentecostalism with far more pernicious or debilitating effects will sweep across Nigeria and the rest of Africa like a tsunami. The emergence of personality cult mega-Pentecostal “churches” will further complicate and muddy the socio-religious context in which future Catholic priests are formed. This brand of Pentecostalism which is propelled on the wings of spiritual materialism and material spirituality will prove an irresistible force not only to the hapless economically deprived common man on the streets but also to business executives, university professors and top government officials, many of whom will effortlessly assume the role of pastors in these mega “churches”. Taking great advantage of the growing and powerful influence of the electronic media and Internet and computer technology, these sleekly dressed pastors who, often, have perfected the art of public speaking did sooner than later capture the hearts and minds of millions of people including seminarians and young priests. Fed on the

Pentecostalism, A. Akinwale & J. Kenny (eds.), (Ibadan: Michael Dempsey Center for Religious and Social Research, 2004).

daily diet of the gospel of prosperity, i.e. spiritual materialism and material spirituality, many Catholic seminarians and young priests will become hooked on like drug addicts to these mega-pastors. Completely overawed by the success of these mega-pastors, particularly in terms of the huge numbers of "clients" who filled their miracle arenas, many seminarians and young priests will consciously or unconsciously enroll themselves as faithful disciples of these mega-pastors. And so their lecture halls will shift from the seminary lecture halls to the television rooms where these "anointed men of God" are "powerfully" preaching the word of God and performing miracles. Their spiritual directors and mentors ceased to be those assigned to their respective seminaries and houses of religious formation but rather those "anointed men of God". Expectedly, the idea of Catholic priesthood and ministry espoused and lived by priests like Msgr. Anasiudu will cease to hold any attraction for them.

And so one can notice two different socio-religious contexts in which candidates for the Catholic priesthood were then formed and now being formed. Priests like Msgr. Anasiudu were formed in a socio-religious context that largely insulated them from influences of other religious traditions. It is possible, therefore, to refer to *Old School* priests like Msgr. Anasiudu as *Berlin Wall priests*. Today, however, candidates for the Catholic priesthood do not enjoy similar insulation. The advances in modern technology have created a socio-religious context *sans frontier*. But for all its benefits, this technological advancement has impacted negatively on the formation of future Catholic priests. Modern technology has in a certain respect facilitated the emergence of *priests and seminarians sans frontier*. *Priests and seminarians sans frontiers* appear to be oblivious of the peculiarities or uniqueness of different Christian traditions and as such, are much easily predisposed to borrow, often in an indiscriminate manner, from other Christian traditions particularly Pentecostalism. A similar phenomenon obtains among the lay faithful. Increasingly, there is a growing number of *Catholics sans frontier*. Although, these claim to be Catholics they are quite comfortable moving in and out of one Pentecostal church or the other, while at the same time participating often in the sacramental life of the church. But worse still the effective use of modern technology by Pentecostal mega-pastors has created a new species of Catholic priests and seminarians, namely, *crypto-Pentecostal pastors and seminarians*. That makes priests like Msgr. Anasiudu, not only *Old School* but an endangered species.

A second element of the socio-religious context which has grave impact and consequence for priestly formation in Nigeria is the growing specter of anti-intellectualism. The take-over of missionary and private schools by the military government in the late 70s set the stage for the collapse of education in Nigeria. But beyond destroying the fabrics and structures of the educational institution in the country, it did a more grievous damage by subtly and insidiously instilling a culture of anti-intellectualism. Once, Catholic priests like Msgr. Anasiudu were known and respected for their intellectual culture. Indeed, Catholic priests were often numbered among the most intellectually cultured men in the society. Msgr. Anasiudu belonged

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to that generation. In fact, his intellectual formation, which includes a Doctorate degree in Communication studies, adequately prepared him to assume the role of the Editor of the once famous national Catholic magazine, *Catholic Life*, a position he held for five years (1980-85). Subsequently, he was appointed Secretary General of the CBCN for three consecutive terms, from 1985-1994.¹² Sadly, one cannot boast of the same quality of intellectual culture among many new breed priests even though they have more and better opportunities for intellectual advancement than during the days of *Old School* priests like Msgr. Anasiudu. For many seminarians, academic study, particularly during the years of basic formation is a mere waste of time. They fail and refuse to see the relevance of their philosophical and theological studies for their future pastoral ministry. Rather than dedicate themselves to assiduous intellectual formation during their seminary years, many of these seminarians spend much of their time planning and mapping out strategies for establishing a prayer or healing ministry soon after ordination. The consequence of a lowering in the intellectual culture among Catholic priests is obvious. Even for some who decide to pursue higher studies, the motives for such higher academic pursuits are anything but academic or intellectual. A significant number of these priests end up never making use of the degrees obtained in promoting academic and intellectual studies. The degrees merely serve as decorative ornaments to be displayed on the shelf or aphrodisiacs to boost their ego.

But it is not only the seminarians and young priests that are stricken with the virus of anti-intellectualism. Worryingly, a number of bishops suffer from this malaise. Although there are local churches in Nigeria which have done well in promoting the continuous intellectual formation of their priests in different fields of study, there are, on the other hand, local churches which appear to be averse to ensuring the continuous intellectual formation of their clergy, even when there are ready opportunities. But it is important to stress that while it is important to have priests acquire degrees in different fields of learning, it is essential that they are first grounded in their own primary field, that is, theology and philosophy. Prior to branching out to any other field of study, it is crucial that every priest goes beyond the basic theological formation acquired at the seminary. Only then, will he make a much qualitative difference as a philosopher, psychologist, political scientist, communication expert, etc.

While we examine the external factors that might have contributed to the emergence of a new breed of priests, completely out of synch with *Old Schools* priests, it is equally important that we examine on some of the internal factors that may have also contributed to this phenomenon. Key among these is the internal formation process and ambient itself. The last decades have witnessed a burgeoning of vocation to the priesthood and consecrated life. Unlike the era of Msgr. Anasiudu,

¹² Msgr. Anasiudu was appointed as a staff of UNN in 1981 two years after completing his doctorate studies in University of Illinois. He, however, had to forgo this appointment in obedience to his bishop, Most Rev. Dr. Albert Kanayochukwu Obiefuna, who seconded him to the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria in Lagos, cf. Fr. John Arinze Anasiudu, "Biography of Very Rev. Msgr. R. C. Anasiudu".

where it was a rare thing for a young man to want to go into the seminary, today several young men, including professionals are very eager to embrace the priestly life and ministry. Our seminaries are therefore teeming with young men. But how much has this rise in the number of candidates to the priesthood been matched by a corresponding increase in resources, both human and otherwise, needed to ensure that these young men are given qualitative formation? This is a critical question the church in Nigeria must address. It is no secret that most, if not all, seminaries in Nigeria are both understaffed and underfunded. The problem of understaffing is becoming even more acute in recent times as more and more priests take up fulltime teaching appointments in universities and offer their services as part-time teachers in the seminaries. The reason for that choice is obvious. Is it then reasonable to expect that we form seminarians and priests of the caliber of Msgr. Anasiudu in seminaries that suffer from acute resource deprivation?

CONCLUSION

If there is any expression that can aptly capture the sentiments of Msgr. Anasiudu as he engage in a less active phase of his priestly ministry, it is the words of St. Paul: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day – and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing (2 Tim 4: 7-8)." Yes, of the eight decades of his earthly life, Msgr. Anasiudu had dedicated five of them to a life that he cherished; a life to which he has inspired hundreds of young men to embrace. There is no doubt, therefore, a sense of fulfillment as he hands over the baton for others to continue the race. But as he watches from his retirement home, I guess his sense of fulfillment will also be spiced with some anxiety. Like Paul, he certainly will be concerned and worried about the fate of that ministry to which he totally poured out his life. Will those who come after him keep the faith and tradition he too has received?