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## **An Assessment of the Intervention of the Catholic Church in the Educational Development of Idah Local Government Area of Kogi State, 1943-2022**

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### **Abstract**

This study examined the intervention of Catholic Church in the educational development of Idah Local Government Area of Kogi State, 1943-2022. It utilized the qualitative research where primary and secondary sources were used. The primary source comprises of interviews with Catholic Priests and school administrators especially the schools under survey. The secondary sources comprise of books, journals, dissertations, projects and internet sources. With the use of socio-historical, analytical and descriptive tools, the study showed that the Catholic Church has contributed to primary educational development by building schools and employing well qualified teachers for the sake of teaching in the schools. The study also revealed that the Catholic Church has also contributed to the development of secondary education by building, funding and employing teachers in secondary schools. The study concludes that the Catholic Church through the establishment of primary and secondary schools intervened positively in the education of Idah by admitting students from within and outside Idah on one hand and also creating employment opportunities on the other hand.

**Keywords:** Catholic Church, Idah, Schools, Educational institutions

### **Introduction**

The beliefs of the Catholic Church can be regarded as that which is aimed at constructing a just and wholesome society and making people live genuine community lives within any society they find themselves in around the world in the face of modern problems (Hume 2). The Catholic Church is a denomination that aims to provide a world, free of discrimination and promotes the social advancement of its members and



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other people in society. (Hume 2-3). This is why individuals register in her establishments, particularly schools, and from many denominations and faiths. The purpose of the Catholic Church's involvement in educational development is to enable people to be educated, to have a decent life, and to achieve political freedom. This explains why the Catholic Church is rarely found without Catholic schools and other Catholic educational organisations.

The year 1891 is significant in Catholic Church history because it marks the beginning of the Church's social intervention. This intervention was driven by the industrial revolution, which gave rise to labour exploitation in some parts of Europe. This also prompted the Roman Pontiff, Pope Leo XIII, to produce an official treatise known as *Rerum Novarum*, which literally translates to mean 'On Workers' Conditions'. (Leo XIII quoted in Akighe and Akighe 93). This treatise condemned the exploitative tendencies of employers and advocated for just wages for workers (Leo XIII quoted in Akighe and Akighe 93).

The Catholic Church, globally, had made frantic efforts to ensure educational development as part of the response to the social intervention of the Roman Pontiff, Pope Leo XIII (Akighe and Akighe 93).

The Catholic Church, being one of the largest Christian denominations, has gained widespread support across the country's geopolitical zones. This could be due to her universal manner of operation and the consensus decisions made by the Catholic Bishop Conference of Nigeria, which usually includes educational intervention as one of its topics for debate.

The Catholic Church in Kogi State, through its two dioceses, the Catholic Diocese of Idah and the Lokoja Diocese, has made exceptional contributions to educational advancement. This is seen in her numerous educational institutions located over the state. This study focusses on the Catholic Church's influence in educational growth in the Idah Local Government Area. The Idah Local Government Area was chosen because it is the seat of the Bishop of the Idah Diocese, and it also contains a reasonable number of Catholic schools within the Catholic diocese.

Idah Local Government Area in Kogi State has faced obstacles in terms of educational development, including limited access to quality education, inadequate infrastructure, and low literacy rates. Despite government efforts, these difficulties persist, especially in rural and neglected areas. The Catholic Church, well-known for her historical role in education around the world, has played an important role in providing schools, moral instruction, and community development. However, there has been insufficient scholarly attention to assessing the size, character, and impact of the Church's intervention in the region. This study aims to investigate how the Catholic Church has influenced educational advancement in Idah, solving information gaps.

This study has multiple significance, one of which is that it will bring to light the various educational institutions founded by the Catholic Church in Idah. This study also provides an encouragement for the Catholic Church by recognising her



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accomplishments while also demonstrating how their achievements in the development of educational institutions can be built upon. Finally, this study will demonstrate the Catholic Church's collaboration with the government on educational reforms in Idah.

### **The Catholic Diocese of Idah and the Development of Primary Education Schools in Idah, 1940-1979**

The Catholic Church has been committed to the development of educational facilities (primary schools) in Idah Local Government. St. Boniface School in Idah, was the first Catholic school created and accredited in the year 1943 (Okwoli 72). Okwoli further states that, between 1943 and 1954, Catholic Pupils came from Dekina, Anyigba, Ibaji, Ankpa, Odolu and Akpanya to Idah to complete their primary education (62) at St. Boniface. These students' movement from various parts of Igalaland to Idah enhanced Idah's population. Despite the fact that other primary schools were created in Idah at the time after completing primary three, such students would return to Idah to enrol in primary four, continuing and completing their basic education in primary six. Achimugu addressed this idea by stating that, in 1943, St. Boniface Primary School Idah was promoted to Senior Primary School and became qualified to give the First Leaving School Certificate (31). According to Achimugu, from 1943 to 1954, St. Boniface Primary School Idah was the only Catholic Primary School in Idah that awarded the First School Leaving Certificate (FSLC). After finishing junior primary school, students from Catholic schools around Igalaland travelled to Idah to complete their senior primary school education (SPSE) and get their FSLC. (31). In the view of Achimugu, there is no need to deny the fact that the development of Primary education from the 1940s in Idah led to the migration of people to Idah, and educational development since it was only in Idah that the FSLC could be earned (31-32). This contributed in no little way to the literacy and educational development of Idah and other parts of Igalaland. In the words of P.E. Okwoli,

Mr Edward Ekedigwe was posted to St. Boniface School, Idah in 1940 as the headmaster. Through his efforts, the school was given approval by the Government of Northern Nigeria to award a certificate of Primary School Education in 1943. This was a very big achievement in those days. He was assisted by Cyprian Okika. Most of the educated Catholics in Igalaland between 1943 and 1952 passed through their hands. Mr. Okika was transferred to Akpanya in 1952 to begin the Senior Primary School there (62).

The above quote by Okwoli implies that prior to 1976, primary schools established by the colonial administration in collaboration with Catholic Missionaries resulted in educational intervention in Idah by providing an avenue for the education of not only Idah's sons and daughters, but also people from neighbouring areas. The migration of Igbo teachers to the area allowed them gain job experience while also requiring them



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to pay their fair share to scholastic growth and development through the Catholic elementary school.

The establishment of Holy Rosary Primary School by the Catholic Church is also worthy of note. It was the first Girls' Primary School in Idah and immediately it was established in 1953, Sister Regina was recruited as the Headmistress of the school while four 'Igbo' female teachers namely, Theresa Okuta, Catherine Nwachukwu, Bessie Igbo and Theresa Mortune were recruited as the teachers. The school enrolment was over a hundred girls in the year of its establishment (Okwoli 62) As P.E. Okwoli remarked:

Slowly but steadily, the parents in Idah began sending their girls to school. But the parents in Idah and all over Igalaland at this stage would not hear of their daughters being sent to Post-Primary Schools. No. women's education must stop at the Primary School level. In 1956, the Sisters recruited girls from other parts of Igalaland into the Holy Rosary Primary School. The girls came from Ejule, Anyigba, Akpanya, Ankpa, Imane and Ibaji. This was possible because that same year, Holy Rosary Primary School was approved as a boarding school by the Government of Northern Nigeria. The first set of boarders from Kabba, Okene and Lokoja were admitted in 1956 also. Gradually, the classes began to fill so that in 1959, three more classroom blocks were added (62).

From the above submission, it is pertinent to note that the establishment of Holy Rosary Primary School made students to be admitted from Igalaland and beyond to the school. The establishment of the institution also acted as a motivating factor in the development of Girl Child Education in Igalaland.

Following the takeover of voluntary agency schools, the Catholic Church slowed down in the establishment of primary schools until 1978, when the mission discovered that government was not measuring up to standard in managing public primary schools including the ones handed over to the government by the mission (Achimugu 31). This stimulated the experiment by Catholic Church to start Catholic Nursery/Primary Schools. The first to be established was Holy Family Nursery/Primary School, Idah which was established in 1979 (Achimugu 31). The First Headmistress was Rev. Sister Christian Ikegwu and the experiment under her was successful and so made the Catholic Diocese to encourage all Parishes under her to establish more nursery and Primary Schools. This school just like the two aforementioned primary schools admitted both boys and girls.

### **A Survey of Catholic Secondary Schools in Idah, 1954-2016**

Saint Peter's College Idah, was the first catholic secondary school that was established in the Diocese of Idah 1963. The school was established by Rev. Father Ahmand Larose, who served as the institution's first principal from 1963 to 1968. The college motto is "*Age Quod Agis*," a Latin word that translates to "Doing the right thing at the right time." (Jonathan 1). The mission statement of the College reads: To produce indigenous citizens who will become scientifically oriented in their life career; to be God-fearing, humble, academically seasoned to become "salts" of the nation' (Jonathan 1).



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According to L. Achimugu, St. Peters College Idah was the first boys' secondary school in Idah (31). However, Holy Rosary College which is the first female secondary school in Idah was established by the Catholic Church in 1954. (Achimugu 31) and just like St Peters College admitted students from Idah, its surrounding and distant areas. Since the establishment of these educational institutions, they have played host to lots of staff and students that comprised people within and outside Idah by being two secondary schools established by the Catholic Church during colonial period that is still existing and maintaining high standards till date (Achimugu 31).

According to Zekeri, since the establishment of this noble institution, it has recorded certain achievements worthy of documentation which are:

- i. The institution coming first in the science completion organized by Chemical Society of Nigeria (CSN) Kogi State Chapter and also coming 3<sup>rd</sup> at the national competition in Lagos in 2019
- ii. Saint Peter also came 2<sup>nd</sup> in Nigeria Society of Engineers (NSE) state competition organized in August, 2019.
- iii. PZ Cussons Chemistry Challenge Competition June, 2019 Stage 1 and 3 at Abuja, Saint Peters came the overall best.
- iv. In August 2019, Saint Peter was represented at the Cowpeadia TV. Quiz Competition in Lagos and eliminated during the 2<sup>nd</sup> round.
- v. Saint Peter represented the State in Kano for a competition organized by the Science Teachers Association in November 2019 where the student representative took ill and could not continue with the competition (2)

In 1982, the Saint Kizito Seminary Idah was established as one of the Catholic secondary educational institutions by Late Bishop Ephraim Silas Obot who was the first Bishop of Idah Diocese (Okwoli 93). The sole aim of establishing the institution is to train Catholics who intend to become priests and the doctrine of the Catholicism. In line with the aim of the school, in an event that its graduates do not end up becoming priests, and such graduates would with the aid of the teachings received, work in other field of human endeavours (Oral Communication with Rev. Fr. Albert Shaibu). For Father Alber Shaibu Musa, the institution was established because of the long distance that people have to transport to Saint James Minor Seminary in Makurdi and so, it was established to accommodate Catholics who intend to become Priests. Oral Communication with Father Alber Shaibu Musa). Albert Shaibu Musa further commented that, the first set of the school comprised of 41 persons but only 21 were able to graduate mainly due to financial constraint (Oral interview, Father Albert Shaibu). The first set of the school have Priests such as Father Kizito Okeke, Father James Ojo, Father Innocent Oyibo, Father Godwin Onu, Father Sabastine Musa, Father Anthony Eseke, and Father Albert Shaibu.

According to Rev. Father John Abuh, Students of Saint Kizito Seminary receive secondary education coupled with moral, social and spiritual formation. This holistic education is given to the students to prepare them for their future lives either as priests





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or good and dedicated lay faithful (54). The implication of this is that, not all persons that come to the school become Priests despite the fact that the primary aim of establishing the school is to train Catholic Priests. In the words of Rev. Father William Okolo, 82% of Idah Diocesan Priests were students of the Seminary and others who though did not become Priests have distinguished themselves in the practice of the Christian Faith and Christian lives in general (1) They are also contributing to the growth of the Church and human society in general as they live out mature Christian life in and through their respective professions. One unique thing about this school is that despite the fact that it admits students who are baptized Catholics, students are drawn from different Local Government Areas of Kogi State and also from different states of Nigeria after they must have passed aptitude test and oral interview in examination venues held in Idah, Anyigba and Ankpa respectively (Oral interview, William Okolo)

In addition, the College of Mary Immaculate Secondary School was added to the growing list of the secondary schools established by the Catholic Church in Idah Diocese in 2016 (Oral interview, Isaac Mario Akor). The school was established under the Bishop, Most Rev. Dr. Anthony Adaji (MSP) and put under the supervision of The Catholic Women Organization (CWO) (Oral Communication with Lady Knight Francisca Ameh). The first Principal of the school was Late Knight Atanu Ibrahim Benson from 2016 to 2019 while Lady Knight Francisca Ameh was the Principal of the school from 2019 to 2022 (Lady Knight Francisca Ameh). Rev. Sis. Monica Igata has been the Principal of the School from 2022 till date (Oral Communication with Mr. Isaac Mario Akor). The school was established to support the provision of secondary education and inculcation of good morals to both young boys and girls (Oral interview, Isaac Mario Akor). The institution admits both Catholics and non-Catholics and has continued to contribute tremendously to the educational development of Idah and also as avenue for employment opportunities for the Idah people in terms of recruitment of academic and non-academic staff (Oral interview, Isaac Mario Akor). The secondary school since its establishment has participated in Catholic Secondary Schools' activities within Idah Denary in particular and Idah Diocese as a whole.

## Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it is undeniable that the Catholic Church in Idah has made significant contributions to educational intervention through the establishment of elementary and secondary schools. As a result of the founding of these schools, job opportunities were established for academic and non-academic workers. These schools have a significant impact on human development. Though the government's takeover of schools frustrated the Catholic Church's efforts, realising that the government had developed nonchalant attitudes towards the management of these schools, they devised a policy that eventually forced the Catholic Church to collaborate with them in the management and administration of the schools, bringing greater effectiveness and efficiency to the schools. This study concludes that the Catholic Church through the establishment of primary and secondary schools intervened



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positively in the education of Idah by admitting students from within and outside Idah on one hand and also creating employment opportunities on the other hand.

### Recommendations

Based on the analysis and conclusion of this study, the following recommendations are hereby made:

- i. The Catholic Church should be more involved in the infrastructural development of her primary schools and ensure proper partnership with the government in funding her educational institutions
- ii. The Catholic Church should consolidate on her educational establishments by establishing a university or a higher institution of learning in Idah as this would bring the much needed growth and development as seen elsewhere that has a university.
- iii. The government at all levels should not hesitate to return schools earlier established by the Catholic Church to her as was done by the Government of Governor Rotimi Akerodolu of Ondo State. This if done would bring sanity, discipline and academic excellence to some of the schools built by the Catholic Church and taken over by the government.

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