

# GLOWING EMBERS

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Our latest edition of Glowing Embers illustrates the multi-cultural aspects of our various collections and those who seek to explore them. They represent a cross-section of sources: from personal oral stories, newspaper cuttings, personal correspondence, community journals and photographs. Nothing is seen as too banal to be included. This is why we continue to reach out and encourage Spiritans to record their personal and mission stories. Human interest stories are the most attractive accounts to read.



Fr Brendan Cogavin C.S.Sp.

We hope that you will enjoy this year's presentations. A conference intervention about Cultural Preservation and the major role of the passing on of the charisms and mission of religious communities emphasises the importance of this as part of the heritage of the whole human community. A young Irish intern shares with us the results of his assistance to a family wishing to trace parts of their family history - a little-known great-great-uncle, a German Spiritan in Rockwell College.

A newly-qualified Spiritan archivist from Tanzania, who spent last year with us, learning the trade and preparing a history of his own circumscription, shares his experience with us. We also have the research journey of a Nigerian sister, delving into the formation and spirituality of her Spiritan founder and another story about Bishop Whelan and the Freedom of the City of Limerick. We also have a moving and vivid account of a drowning tragedy and survival story, recorded in 2003 and transcribed here.

We hope that you will be inspired by these accounts to value your own stories and record them in whatever form you feel comfortable with. The many Covid experiences are worthy of being recorded for posterity.

**Fr Brendan Cogavin**

# The Bearded Patriarch of the Rockwell Bandroom

Mark Bluett, Summer Intern, 2023



Fr Müller and Band

The gift of research enquiries is the opportunity they give to find out more about an individual's story that would otherwise be lost to time in the Archives. One such story is that of **Fr Johannes Nepomuk Müller, 1873-1938**.

During the Covid lockdown, an enquiry was received from a Mr Doug Oleson, USA, wondering if the Archive could be of some help in following up on the history of his great-great-grand uncle – Fr Müller C.S.Sp., brother to his great-great-grandfather Joseph Mueller (who had changed the spelling of the surname after arriving in America). He didn't have much information about the German branch of the family tree and wanted to reconnect with the present-day Müller family in Germany

Working remotely, with no access to the archive, we were only able to send on the entry from Irish Spiritans Remembered.

*'Fr Müller was a student in Rockwell from 1873-78 followed by five years as prefect during which he taught German and music. Having returned to France to complete his senior studies he was ordained in 1888 and in 1898 Fr Müller was back in Rockwell where his presence marked a new era for music beginning with the production of 'Gilbert and Sullivan' which was then taking the music world by storm. Fr Müller was known to create a storm himself quite regularly as he conducted his orchestra, but all seemed to take it as part of the performance. Fr Müller seemed set for being a permanent feature of life in Rockwell but in 1930 a serious illness forced him to return home to Germany with the intention of preparing for the heavenly choir. He got a new lease of life however, he started an orchestra at Knechtsteden and taught music to the scholastics and brothers.'* Irish Spiritans Remembered Vol I



ISR and Rockwell annual covers

Once back in Kimmage with full access to the archive we were able to find an obituary, in the Rockwell Annual of 1938, which gave a further insight into Fr Müller. We were also in a position to send on scans of photos of him; thrilling his descendants as they had never seen photos of him.

*'for the Rockwell boys whose college years extends back beyond 1928 the revered memory of the bearded patriarch of the bandroom is still an inspiration .....*

*'.....It consisted in a simple dietary regime, liberal use of cold water internally and externally – early morning walks in bare feet through the dewy grass, for example – and herbal medicines. .... He gathered the Zinnkraut*



or horse-tail weed, dried it, brewed it .....We saw him at the same places at the same times every day, moving noiselessly along to his spiritual exercises or to his work in the bandroom, seldom speaking but always with the same gentle smile at his lips and fatherly interest in his eyes. In the bandroom, down in the crypt, one saw him at his best. He was equally at home playing brass, reed or strings and never more in his element than when beating out the rhythm for his beloved orchestra with his baton and his deep-throated "Ree-raw! Ree-raw!" .....

.....Recalled to Germany in 1929 he saw the beloved fatherland – Catholic Germany – the Germany he loved so tenderly and which we all love – gradually forced beneath the yoke of the new "ideology" of Nazism..... His letters back to Ireland were magnificent – the beautiful script, the cultured style, the wide sweep of the matter. A few lines on the politico-religious situation – a fiery denunciation of the latest anti-Catholic calumny, perhaps, or a piquant revelation, or a prayer. Then a running commentary of reminiscences on our last orchestral programme ..... then a delightful spray of questions and enquiries. "Old men get very inquisitive," he would say. But his was not the curiosity of age. It was rather that he kept ever fresh and green the vigorous interests of youth. '

**From Obituary, Rockwell Annual 1938.**

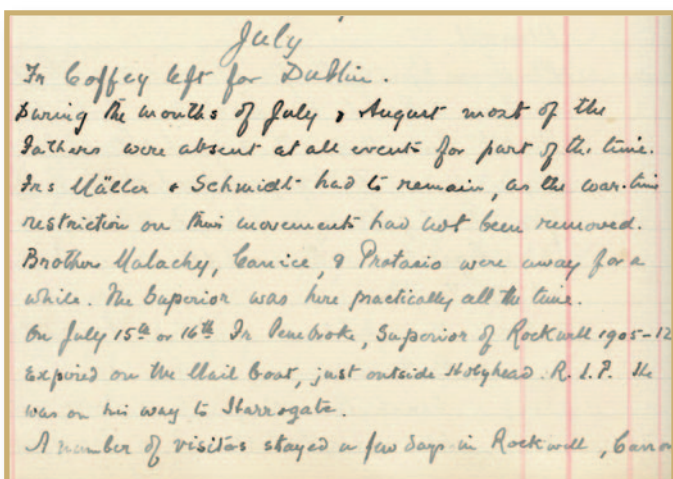
The Rockwell College journals for the period 1908 to 1921 not only give an insight into college life from the time but also are an important record of social history. We were also able to find some interesting mentions of Fr Müller in the Rockwell College journals from 1908-1921.

'there were notes as usual but no singing class as Fr Müller was away installing a harmonium in Clerihan. Fr H Mockler PP Clerihan and Fr O'Donnell of New Zealand dined with the community.'

**Rockwell College Journal, 24th October 1909**

'Fr Superior, Fr Müller (2nd assistant) and Fr Naughton left here for Clareville to assist at some meeting or commission. It seems to be a secret one as no mention was made about the questions to be treated. Fr Brennan, according to Constitution 14 and 119 is superior for time being.'

**Rockwell Journal, 2 January 1911**



July  
Fr Coffey left for Dublin.  
During the months of July & August most of the Fathers were absent at all events for part of the time. Frs Müller & Schmidt had to remain, as the war-time restriction on their movements had not been removed. Brother Malachy, Ganice, & Protasio were away for a while. The Superior was here practically all the time.  
On July 15<sup>th</sup> or 16<sup>th</sup> Fr Pembroke, Superior of Rockwell 1905-12 expired on the Mail Boat, just outside Holyhead. R.I.P. He was on his way to Starogata.  
A number of visitors stayed a few days in Rockwell, Gann

Rockwell journal entry

'Frs Müller & Schmidt had to remain, as the wartime restrictions on their movements had not been removed'.  
**Rockwell College Journal, July 1 1919.**

From our records it was clear that Fr Müller had returned to Germany in ill health but seemed to have made a recovery that even he hadn't expected. So in an attempt to find out more of Fr Müller's last days or years we contacted Belinda Peters, the German Spiritan archivist at Knechtsteden.

She provided us with an extract from their *Mortuarium* containing a short *curriculum vitae* of all confreres of the German province (reference: Josef Theodor RATH; *Mortuarium der Deutschen Provinz der Kongregation vom Heiligen Geist 1857-1975*, Knechtsteden 1976, p. 138.) as well as an article from the missionary magazine "Echo" (magazine of the German Province at that time) on the occasion of Father Müller's death (reference: *Echo aus den Missionen. Monatsschrift der Missionare vom Heiligen Geist, Schwäbische Kunde - Trauer und Trost. P. Johannes Nepomuk Müller C.S.Sp.*, 39 Jhg., Heft 6, Knechtsteden 1938, p. 328-336.

The references given at the end of the curriculum vitae (*Mortuarium*) led us to a note concerning Müller in the *Bulletin General de la Congregation (B.G.)* the official bulletin of the Congregation.

Of course nearly all the information available was in German – a daily reminder that foreign languages are a quotidian challenge for any researcher.

'In 1930 he came to Knechtsteden to retire. He had been very ill. But he recovered and built up his third orchestra. In the summer of 1932 he performed with success on West German Radio. This was his great joy. He taught until the last days of his life. When he was not teaching, he was praying for the church and the people, for it was with deep pain that he witnessed what was going on in Hitler's thousand-year Reich. He died of cardiac asthma.' *B.G. XXXVIII (1937-38) 712. E. XXXIX (1938) 328.*

Last summer Doug Oleson made the trip to Germany and visited Knechtsteden to see his great great grand uncle's grave and paid his respects to the 'bearded patriarch' who hasn't been forgotten.



# Charism and Creativity Conference

Ronan Doheny Archivist, Association of Church Archives Ireland (ACAI)

The 'Charism and Creativity Conference' took place last year in Vatican City. The international conference was organized by the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life, Societies of Apostolic Life and the Pontifical Council for Culture to discuss the future of the cultural heritage of religious communities. The four sessions in the conference examined: the theoretical underpinning of cultural heritage, its cataloguing, its management and lastly, the re-use and re-purposing of the disused real estate heritage of Communities of Consecrated Life.

Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi of the Pontifical Council argued in a pre-conference interview that the cultural heritage of religious communities can become an antidote to the uncertainty in our times by 'offering identity'. He stresses that, for the cultural heritage of religious orders, we need innovative, shared projects. The first objective of the conference was to urge religious communities to know and appreciate the patrimony they have inherited and to consider it as a common patrimony of the Church with consequent duties regarding responsibilities (and also new possibilities) relating to its safeguarding. He encourages religious communities to view cultural heritage not as a 'burden' but as an opportunity for a new apostolate at the service of the community.

The conference sought to promote a reflection on how the cultural heritage of religious communities is managed and to encourage the formation of professional 'teams', including experts such as archivists, who could become a point of contact between the realities of religious orders and other ecclesial structures responsible for the protection of ecclesiastical cultural heritage.

In an article promoting the conference, Luigi Bartolomei of Future for Religious Heritage wrote 'the intermittency of the presence of religious orders always puts their



Charism & Creativity book cover

cultural heritage at risk of abandonment, degradation or removal.' Bartolomei explains that the conference has sprung from a new point of view on cultural heritage within the Church which endorses a more open view treating cultural heritage as a common good. He also argues that, 'cultural heritage can become a new bridge for intercultural dialogue, and provide new material for planning the Church's own activities, as well as promoting its pastoral and missionary goals.' Similarly, Carlo Birrozzi of the Italian Central Institute for Cataloguing and Documentation endorses the more open point of view. He underlines the importance of open access policies and suggests dialogue and collaboration between local communities and the Church.

In his message to the participants in the Conference, Pope Francis considers each of the four themes of the conference. He argues that like 'the wise steward' the Church

must 'safeguard and carefully administer her goods in light of her mission of evangelization, with special care for the needy'. He argues that the ecclesiastical goods of these religious orders are 'in the service of the humanum and in the mission of the Church' and emphasises that they must be considered 'with a view to the common good'. His Holiness points out how rich and varied the value of these cultural goods can be and that religious orders are 'custodians of a very relevant part of the cultural heritage of the Church and of humanity: archives, books, historical and liturgical works, and the buildings themselves.

The Holy Father reminds us that 'the issues involved in managing cultural heritage' must be considered 'in terms of its economic sustainability and the contribution it can make to evangelization and the deepening of faith. 'Cultural goods' must be considered within their relationships with 'history, spirituality and traditions proper to the specific Communities, in practice with their "charism".' Pope Francis calls these 'testimonial goods' which preserve the charism 'to proclaim it anew, to rethink it and actualize it.' He optimistically argues that 'the need and, at times, the burden of preservation, can become an opportunity to renew, to rethink one's charism, to re-compose it in the current socio-cultural context and to plan it for the future.'

Pope Francis recognises the importance to identify the 'specific elements for understanding these goods' and define their 'historical, spiritual, theological, ecclesiastical and juridical characteristics.' He promotes the 'cataloguing of assets in their entirety and variety (archives, books, movable and immovable art), as a primary act of

**Pope Francis recognises the importance to identify the 'specific elements for understanding these goods' and define their 'historical, spiritual, theological, ecclesiastical and juridical characteristics.'**

knowledge and therefore of study, of juridical protection, of scientific conservation, and of recognizing pastoral value.' He argues the many virtues of cataloguing, writing that it 'is necessary for reasons of service to culture, management transparency, and prudence, considering the many natural and human dangers to which these fragile treasures are exposed.' He praises the use of technological tools to collect data and images; making them viewable publicly or confidentially.

His Holiness argues that the problem of the re-use of disused real estate of religious communities should not be tackled through 'hasty' decisions but as part of 'an overall vision and far-sighted planning, and possibly through the use of proven professional

expertise.' He argues that the disposal of heritage must be carried out with 'great prudence and shrewdness' as it 'is a particularly sensitive and complex issue' which can attract 'unscrupulous individuals and be a cause of scandal for the faithful'. He also recognises the need 'to create institutional structures to accompany communities that are less well equipped.' He argues that through the use of real estate the Church can bear good witness and announce the possibility of an economy of culture, solidarity and acceptance.'

It is likely that the Pontifical Council for Culture will produce a document from the fruits of this conference. Hopefully this document will encourage religious archives to be more open to

researchers. Not only in the spirit of cultural exchange but also evangelisation. In this way archives can become places of encounter for the modern with religion.

They noted that this task is all the more urgent today as religious orders face decline in numbers resulting in higher risks of abandonment and degradation of their immense cultural heritage.

Consecrated men and women are called "to reflect together on the value of their assets in today's society, their ultimate destination, and their intimate connection with the charism of their religious order and with the prophetic dimension of that charism," said Cardinal de Aviz.

## Archival Findings Personal Experience

Fr Adolf Msoka, C.S.Sp.

I can still recall my appointment two years ago, by the then Provincial superior, Fr Philip Massawe C.S.Sp. when he asked me to go to Ireland to do Archival studies. The idea I had in my mind that archives had something to do with history. When I arrived in Ireland, I was well received by the confrères in Kimmage Manor, at Whitehall Road, Dublin. Before I commenced my studies at University College Dublin (UCD) in September 2022, Fr Brendan Cogavin C.S.Sp. first introduced me to the Spiritan Heritage and Archives Centre. Brendan is the manager of the Centre. There are other staff working there include: Margaret Bluett archivist, Dolorés Stewart photographic designer and Seamus Maguire, researcher.

I was extremely impressed by the way the archives were organized using mobile-shelves and file-cabinets. I also noticed that collections are catalogued. In addition to this the archive possesses the banners which portray various missionary activities carried on by the Irish confreres overseas in Sierra Leone, Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana, Tanzania, Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique, Angola, The Gambia, Ethiopia, Brazil, Vietnam, India, Pakistan, Philippines and Australia.

Looking through and studying these archives, I have learnt that stories give us a sense of history about human persons either individually or collectively: about religious practices, social aspects, cultural values, political situations and the way various cultures can interact and give a meaning to life. This is why archives become important in the life of any institution as they provide evidence of activities and tell us more about individuals and the institution itself.

I am currently working on the history of the Holy Ghost missionaries in East Africa particularly their early arrival back in 1860 to the East African coast of Zanzibar and then later on to Bagamoyo in 1868. This took place during the era of slavery. Then from the coast they moved inland towards the interior to the land of the unknown, 'Kilima-Ndjaru' at Kilema in 1890. Most of these pioneer missionaries were from France, Germany, the Netherlands and America. I am particularly interested in the missionary approach that they adopted in order to attain their mission. This had three stages:

*'The first stage was the heroic*



*pioneering of penetrating into the country, of getting into friendly touch with the chiefs, of prospecting with a view to the selection of strategic positions in which to found central stations. There is the further stage of educating the young people, of enticing them to come to the catechism class and the school, and thereby laying the foundations of Catholic family life. Finally, there must be created from the best of these Catholic families a reliable body of native teachers, catechists and local clergy'.<sup>1</sup>*

What I can say about archives is that they are neither a library nor a museum as many of us might think. Chinua Achebe once wrote, 'Until the lions have their own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter.' I purposely quoted him to invite each one of us to do something special, to write a personal life-history about missionary life that will one day end up as part of our Provincial Archives. Consequently, I am delighted and grateful to have been granted this opportunity this moment in my life time as a Spiritan to do archival studies.

<sup>1</sup> Reginald F. Walker, C.S.Sp, M.A 'The Holy Ghost Fathers in Africa, a century of missionary effort, Senior House of studies Blackrock College', (Dublin 1933) p. 75.





# Sea Drama

Fr Brendan Cogavin C.S.Sp.

Fr Ray Barry, provincial archivist 2002-2005, undertook an ‘oral history’ project taping confreres recounting stories from their missionary life. One such story is Fr Norman Fitzgerald’s which has been transcribed below in his own words. The story details a sea drama he lived through during the Christmas holidays of 1963. Tragedy struck when he and two other St Paul’s staff got into difficulties when fishing off the Sierra Leone coast. The boatman, Foday Mansaray and Fr Tim O’Connor were drowned. Ellis McKinnon, a US Peace Corps teacher and Fr Norman survived after three days in the open sea.

“So, well just before Christmas then it was about the 20th or the 21st or something like that, we had got the use of a boat and an engine. So, we went out fishing, we had a rod, and I remember actually we even got a barracuda. However, when we were trying to come in there was a kind of a grey quarter and when the waves were coming in, now one big wave came in after us and it came right over the back and it kind of swamped the boat. And we were near enough to the shore at the time.

But unfortunately, Tim O’Connor wasn’t able to swim, and I don’t think Ellis was able to swim either. Now before we know where we were, the boat was upturned, and we were all in the water. Now I should have like really had the sense to go to the land at the time. I was going to swim to the land, which wasn’t that far away. But on second thoughts, I kind of said to myself, you know, these fellas will probably drift out and I mean, I might never be able to find them because by the time I got, it was kind

of dark in the evening, you know darkness comes down in the tropics so fast. So, I said, God I had better stay with them like you know, so I went back to the boat and stayed with them. And we all held on to the boat.

Now darkness descended and we looked longingly at the shore, and we could see some lights on the shore, and we could the silhouette of the palm trees and everything else against a kind of a twilight and then there was no twilight, there was total darkness. So, there we were in the water, all of us and we must have been about nine or ten hours in the water and in the nighttime it got cold.

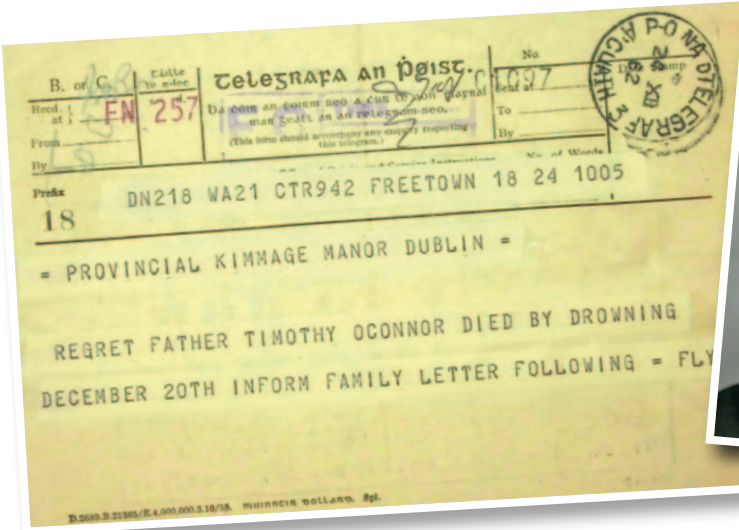
So, the boatman panicked, and he started to try and swipe everybody off the boat, and he went wild. So, at any rate, he came to me, and we tangled and both of us went off from the boat and we fought, and we sunk. And all I could see were stars and I remember thinking of my mother and father at home and my brothers and sisters. And I say, God almighty, God

this is the one thing, like the pain they would have and all that like you know. I thought it was the end anyway. But next thing was your man’s grip on my throat loosened and he drowned. Well, he actually came up, but you know he just wasn’t able anymore and he just went off and that was it.

So, I got back to the boat, I could see the silhouette of the boat and I got back and when I got back there was only one person there and that was Ellis. So, I said where’s Tim, so he said, well I had been holding on to Tim actually because Tim was on my side of the boat, Ellis was on the other side. But apparently Ellis was on the far side of the boat, Tim had slipped off, he wasn’t able to hold on he was so cold. And that was Tim, so there were only two of us left, and eh well prior to that actually you know as things were getting bad and Tim was getting colder, and I was holding him on and all the rest. I gave him absolution and he gave me absolution and we really thought it was all up anyway.

So, well the two of us then were on the boat, the dawn came we were twelve hours hanging on to the boat so towards the afternoon I said to Ellis I don’t know about you but I’m not going to last in the water like that we’ll have to get this boat up. Now Ellis unfortunately couldn’t swim, that’s right, I think I remember that. So, I went under the boat, and I saw that the engine that we had had turned downwards. When the boat turned over the engine had turned right down. It was hanging downwards. And it was screwed on to the back of the boat. I got on to it, but you see everything had fallen out the back of the boat, the screws and everything else, so I just swung the thing over and back and back and forward and all the rest of it. I broke the engine off the boat and next thing was the engine went and God, it nearly pulled me down with it.





When I got that anyway I came up for air and I said to Ellis, thumbs up to Ellis and I said God we may be able to get it up. The two of us then we got on one side, and we tried to right it up and then we bailed out the water with our hands and I don't know which of us got into the boat anyway but one of us got in and then we bailed out the rest and the other got in. But it was dark by that time.

That was the second day, so we spent the night wet, cold, miserable, and hungry and thirsty in the water. The next day the sun came up and half-filled the boat with water and we went in under the water during the day to save us from being burned. In the evening then we bailed out the boat. That was the second night.

Well, we lasted all that day then and we lasted a third night but then after the third night around midday we saw, and as a matter of fact, one night we saw a ship in the distance and we roared and shouted and everything else you know to see the lights that went on, no way at all. Well, we saw a plane anyhow up so there was a small piece of kind of cloth. It was a funny plastic kind of thing and we started waving this like you know well the funny thing I'll just go off cos I might forget about it again but the fellas in the plane said that this almost reflected the light, it was a kind of a funny kind of a plastic thing, it reflected the light and it was that that attracted them to something in the water. And they came down and they saw the boat then. So, they dropped a canister of water down to us and we moved over. By this time, we'd broken a small bit off the boat, and we were able to row a bit. So, we got over to the can of water and I took a swig out of it, but my throat was all contracted and I couldn't swallow anything, so it was like drinking a fire and I couldn't drink a thing like you know. So, at any rate the plane landed on the beach, we weren't far

off the beach at the time, but I would say prior to that we were seeing hallucinations. Cos, I remember we were often rowing frantically to palm trees and to islands and everything else and sometimes we saw boats and sometimes we saw things in the water but when we got there was nothing ha, ha, ha.

I was talking to Ellis afterwards. We were very afraid of one another. I never took Ellis out of my sight, and he told me he did the same with me, because in those kinds of situation you'd fight to the death you know. So, at any rate we saw the shore now, we weren't sure was it a shore or not at the time because both of us were seeing all kinds of things. And I remember one of the things that I saw was strangely enough an oil rig, I thought we were going under an oil rig. And I was shouting up at the fellas up on the oil rig and I suppose I must have been reading or seeing an oil rig or something out at sea. But at any rate we started rowing in and you see the thing was there were very big breakers on the beach and we'd never be able to get in on our own, so the fellas landed, there were two of them, there was a pilot and there was a Peace Corps representative from Monrovia, and they went into a nearby village. And they got all the villagers out and some of the men folk came out, three or four of them came out in the water and they swam out and they caught a hold of the boat and pulled it through the surf and brought us on to the beach. So they carried us out of the boat anyway and they put us lying down under the wings of the plane and you know we were pretty exhausted at the time, but I remember then we got into the plane and the pilot said to me he says 'Ah Father,' he says, 'you want a couple of prayers now that we get off this beach ha, ha, ha, ha.' I remember right enough like he was going and going and going cos it was kind of soft sand you know, and he got going and up into the air. And I

remember looking down and admiring how beautiful the sea looked and how beautiful the sand and you know it was very picturesque looking. But then we landed in Monrovia and they had an ambulance there and they put the two of us into the ambulance anyway and we went out to a Firestone hospital, it was some big distance outside Monrovia and when we got there I remember the first thing we got was a bath and I'll never forget the experience of being washed and cleaned and getting nice clothes on and being put into a nice bed. I had some bad burns, cos to tell you the truth I had some holes in a shirt I had and there were big blisters coming out through the holes. You know any kind of exposure like you know cos I hadn't the best skin like and I was kind of fair but they looked after us extremely well in the hospital, they were very nice to us and all that Well then Bros and Joe Begg, they flew down to Monrovia and they came to the hospital and they met us and I don't remember what we said but they told me that my parents had been informed that everything was o.k. and this and that and so we went back....

I stayed in the mission in Monrovia for about a week and I remember at the time I had a tremendous appetite; God I could eat. I don't know whether it was the starvation for a couple of days and all that and they were terribly nice, the S.M.A.s were there, and well one or two reporters came in and we gave them the story of what happened etc., and I met the Peace Corps crowd there.

So, I was flown back to Freetown, stayed a couple of days in Freetown and I went back up to Pujehun and well of course the loss of Tim O'Connor was, you know, it was really a terrible pain at the time besides everything else like you know. So you see this was Christmas, so I didn't go home until about June or so after that and, Ray Barry who is here with me, he replaced Tim O'Connor and he came to Pujehun and I just remember at the time that I was building and we had classrooms going up and this and that but you know I was very lonely and very low in spirits and low in everything else. I kind of survived until the summer and I went home in summer."

[Recorded 2003]



# Freedom of the City of Limerick

Dr Séamus Maguire

**B**ishop Joseph Whelan C.S.Sp (1909-1990) enjoyed an illustrious academic and missionary career. He had been ordained in 1937 and received an honours doctorate in theology from the Gregorian University in Rome the following year. He was appointed to Nigeria in 1942 where he worked as an educationalist and journalist. He was consecrated bishop in Onitsha in 1948. During the Nigerian Civil War (1967-70), he became an iconic international figure who helped promote the cause of famine relief to the starving Biafrans. Though deceptively frail in appearance he proved to be a very dynamic leader who remained steadfast at his post as bishop of Owerri tending to the pastoral and material needs of his congregation until the conclusion of the civil war. However the last ten days that he spent in Nigeria was as a political prisoner, crowded along with many other priests into unsanitary jail cells until finally, he and 100 hundred other Holy Ghost missionaries were summarily and permanently expelled by the federal authorities from the country. He subsequently returned to Ireland in February 1970 and was



Rt. Rev. Joseph, Bishop of Owerri, receiving the Freedom of Limerick, with him are Mr. T. F. McDermott, City Manager (*left*) and the Mayor, Ald. Stephen Coughlan, T.D.

**A couple of months after his return home it was decided by Limerick City Council to award the bishop the freedom of the city of Limerick. This was the highest honour that they had the authority to bestow upon one of the city's favourite sons.**

accorded a hero's welcome on his arrival at Dublin airport by a mixed party of well wishers which included family, friends, interested members of the public, fellow clerics, politicians, journalists, leading members of the aid organisation Concern and other dignitaries.

A couple of months after his return home it was decided by Limerick City Council to award the bishop the freedom of the city of Limerick.

This was the highest honour that they had the authority to bestow upon one of the city's favourite sons. On the day that the ceremony took place (2 April) he was met by the Mayor of Limerick, Alderman Steve Coughlan T.D., the city manager T.F. McDermott and other councillors at St Patrick's School and was driven by motorcade to St John's Square. At St John's Cathedral Bishop Whelan inspected a military guard of honour under the command of Lt.



Michael Budd from the 12th Battalion while the Army Pipe band played *Faith of Our Fathers*. Bishop Whelan then entered St John's Cathedral and presided at a mass which was concelebrated with the Bishop of Limerick Rev Henry Murphy DD and twenty other priests who had also been expelled from Nigeria. At the elevation military honours were rendered by military officers drawn from Sarsfield Barracks under the command of Comdt. Gus Ahearne. The Limerick city council meeting and award ceremony followed on from this in the grounds of the Cathedral before a distinguished audience which included (those already mentioned and) the Assistant Town Clerk Thomas Collery, the Bishop of Gambia Rev Michael Moloney, the abbot of Glenstal Abbey Augustine O'Sullivan O.S.B., the Chairman of Limerick County Council B. Danaher, the Chairman of Limerick Health Authority J.C. Barrett, the Chairman of Regional Development Organisation M. Considine, Brendan Corish T.D., Desmond O'Malley T.D., Col T. MacDonald OC of 3rd Brigade, Chief Superintendent P. MacLoughlin, the Limerick County Manager D. Dudley, Canon McCann representing Dr Wyse Jackson and the provincial of the Holy Ghost

**In an upbeat and positive address he thanked them for considering him worthy of such a prestigious accolade (the 45th freeman of the city of Limerick). He cited the significant response shown by the Limerick people and media (Limerick Leader, Limerick Chronicle) to appeals that he and others had made for assistance to the starving in Nigeria.**

**He concluded by stating that the church was not just the clergy but also the laity who he maintained played an equally important role. He likened the Irish people to the Ibos (of former Biafra) and believed that the Irish church was reproducing itself in Nigeria and that it would emerge from its current trials strengthened and more self assured.**

Congregation, Fr Dinan. Bishop Whelan then gave a speech to the assembled dignitaries.

In an upbeat and positive address he thanked them for considering him worthy of such a prestigious accolade (the 45th freeman of the city of Limerick). He cited the significant response shown by the Limerick people and media (*Limerick Leader*, *Limerick Chronicle*) to appeals that he and others had made for assistance to the starving in Nigeria. He specifically stressed the nobility and generosity of the response made by younger people which he, noted was often overlooked by the older generation. However on a much graver note he emphasised that: 'it has been often repeated that our mercy planes carried arms and that our trucks ferried ammunition: that the missionaries themselves during the war and even now indulge in pro Biafra propaganda'. In response to this he indicated that 'he defied anyone to produce any concrete evidence to support the arms accusation'. He consolidated his rebuttal by insisting that 'our personnel at Sao Tomé even refused to handle food owned by the then Biafran Government' because it was outside their relief programme. He then countered with the question: 'Is it then likely that they would handle arms?' In support of these assertions he stated that 'when I came home a year and a half ago, I said at a press conference that I would answer any questions on relief; I would not speak on politics' and he stressed that 'this was always the line that we strove to follow'. He therefore repudiated accusations of involvement by the missionaries in anything other than humanitarian aid to the starving civilian population of the Biafran enclave. And he was adamant that

their relief endeavours did not prolong the war. The blame for this he insisted lay with the countries and arms dealers who cynically supplied both sides. In fact he commended the current Nigerian head of state General Gowon, 'for his magnanimous efforts to bring about reconciliation' and exhorted all of the Nigerian people 'to follow his example by forgiving and forgetting and doing everything possible to live together as brothers and sisters in peace'. He urged the church and public to accept the current situation and to work only through official (Lagos based) channels to bring relief to those still suffering in Nigeria.

He concluded by stating that the church was not just the clergy but also the laity who he maintained played an equally important role. He likened the Irish people to the Ibos (of former Biafra) and believed that the Irish church was reproducing itself in Nigeria and that it would emerge from its current trials strengthened and more self assured. He finished up by indicating that if the people accepted the ideas of renewed faith and social reform ('the church needs you; society needs you') they could affect a peaceful revolution in both church and state. He concluded this heartfelt public appeal by stating that if such a course was followed they could jointly 'achieve an adapted church and a more Christian society'. Following the award ceremony, he and over 500 others attended a reception given in his honour at the assembly hall at St Michael's C.B.S., Sexton Street, Limerick, a school which he had attended in his youth.

**N.B. Kimmage Manor Archives has a copy of the text of the speech mentioned above.**

# Bishop Anthony Gogo Nwedo, C.S.Sp., The crown of the Holy Ghost Fathers' Missionary activities in Igboland, Nigeria/West Africa

Sr. Ifesinachi Beatrice Ogbonna, DMMM, PhD student at Pontifical University  
of St. Thomas Aquinas (ANGELICUM), Rome

Considering that Bishop Anthony Gogo Nwedo C.S.Sp., occupies a central place in the evolution of the Church in Igboland/Nigeria, had rich pastoral experiences and ideas that should be shared with a wider audience, that he was deeply connected with the Irish Holy Ghost Fathers and the Holy Ghost Fathers Congregation; and challenged by poverty of documentation which is one of the problems we Africans have, the Spiritan Archives at Kimmage Manor, Dublin, was the one place that I eagerly looked forward to visiting for my primary source research on his life, spirituality and evangelisation strategies in fulfilling his vision of preaching the Good News to the Poor – *Evangelizare Pauperibus misit me*.

He grew up to become, in many respects, not just one of the first products of the Holy Ghost Fathers' Missionary activity in Igboland/Nigeria, but also the climax: one of the first indigenous priests; one of the first three indigenous priests sent on further studies at University College, Dublin, in 1947; one of the first two that joined the Holy Ghost Fathers' Novitiate at Kilshane, County Tipperary at the end of their studies in 1950; the First Nigerian Spiritan; consecrated bishop in 1959 as the First Indigenous Residential Catholic Bishop in Nigeria/West Africa; and the First African Spiritan Bishop. He thus became the crown of the Holy Ghost Fathers' missionary efforts, sweat, tears, blood and patience in the face of apparent hopelessness; the fulfilment of the Spiritan primary missionary principle which, according to their Founder Francis Libermann, is the establishment of a local Church that is self-governing through the formation of native clergy and hierarchy. Umuahia Diocese became the pioneer indigenous Diocese run by

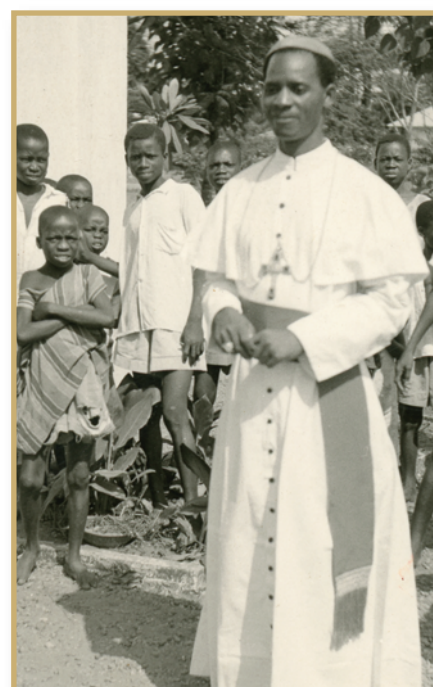
indigenous clergy, as all the native priests in Owerri Diocese were moved to Umuahia, under the leadership of an indigenous pioneer Bishop, with the help of some Missionary priests.

Bishop Nwedo was known to have devoted his life selflessly to the cause of preaching the gospel among the poor and winning souls for Christ; and founded two Religious Congregations for fostering holiness of life and the work of evangelisation. His role in the evolution of the Church in Igboland/Nigeria was pivotal. Juxtaposing the idea of Bishop Nwedo as the personification of Irish missionary zeal in West Africa with some popular images and phrases used by his fellow Nigerian Bishops to depict him, such as, father in the Faith, Patriarch of the Nigerian Church, Pathfinder, Trailblazer, Pace-setter, Father of the poor and orphans, Father Founder, a pioneer who did not let Africa down in the test of leadership qualities and the ability of indigenous clergy, I came to realise that this research is not just about Bishop Nwedo, but, in a special way, that it also concerns the fruitfulness of the Holy Ghost Fathers' missionary adventure in Nigeria, and also the phenomenal growth of the Catholic Church in Igboland/Nigeria/West Africa.

As a pioneer in different spheres therefore, my main objective and hope for visiting the Spiritan Archives was to obtain authentic information about the following: Bishop Nwedo's initial motivations to both the priesthood and the Religious life, the factors that inspired his spirituality and missionary vision, the heroic virtues he practiced, the difficulties he encountered as a pioneer in many areas and how he overcame them, and the mystery behind the incredible success he scored in evangelising the Diocese of

Umuahia which *ab initio*, was compared to a virgin forest full of brambles, a territory known to be Protestant dominated and a battlefield for the different denominations sects, and challenged by lack of personnel and meagre income. I hoped to obtain these information from reports and correspondence that were given or exchanged during: the periods of his formation in the seminary or as a young priest, his further studies in Dublin, his Novitiate at Kilshane, as well as during his Episcopal ministry.

My first visit to Kimmage Manor in July 2019 was holiday time for the Archives' staff. Thus, researchers could not be hosted. I was also informed that Bishop Nwedo's personal files would have been with the District/Province in Nigeria a long time ago. Yet, I had such a fulfilling experience for which I will ever remain grateful to Fr. Brian O'Toole of the blessed memory and other members of the staff. First, they took the pain to search out



Bishop Nwedo





Bishop Nwedo

some relevant materials and had them photocopied and kept safe for collection on the day of my arrival. Secondly, I had the great privilege of getting an eye-witness information by having an unstructured or non-directive interview with Fr. Michael Reynolds C.S.Sp., one of the priests who had lived in the same Community with and worked under Bishop Nwedo until after the Nigeria/Biafran War in 1970, when the Missionaries in Eastern Nigeria were expelled by the Nigerian government. The openness of that good senior priest and the humour that accompanied some of the information he revealed, made that encounter very special and fruitful. The corridors of Kimmage too, had their piece of information for me. Seeing Bishop Nwedo's photo gallery, so many of his pictures exhibited along the corridor, confirmed to me the words he used to express his gratitude for the warm welcome he received in Ireland after being made a bishop, that he felt himself to be an exhibit – a personification – of Irish missionary zeal in West Africa.

During lunch to which I was invited, I also had the honour of listening to some other senior priests who worked in Umuahia Diocese under Bishop Nwedo. Though there was no time to take notes, the joy and interest that radiated on their faces when they heard that I am Bishop Nwedo's spiritual daughter, supported the words they spoke, that Bishop Nwedo was a good, holy and saintly Bishop who had love for God, and also love and respect for his fellow men, and worked humbly and selflessly as a team with his priests (foreign and local) for the good and salvation of his flock. The passion with which those senior priests shared their experiences of the Nigerian genocidal war made me to understand how Christ-like they were in their attitude, and how much they would have willingly sacrificed for their poor, marginalised and helpless black brothers and sisters in Nigeria. The simplicity, ease, joy and humour with which they narrated both the risky and the funny experiences was just mesmerising. In an instant, I understood why it was so easy for

those missionaries in their youthful age, to defy the fear of every danger, including death, to willingly and joyfully rush to Igboland and other parts of Africa, to replace their sick or dead confreres. Now, despite their age, they were happy to speak Igbo language and to join in singing some of the songs they could remember. The joy and laughter we shared on that blessed day turned the Kimmage Manor Refectory into a special kind of archives for me. The difference being that it now remains in my memory and is shared through my Dissertation.

As shortage of material to reflect upon, to critique, to en-flesh and to share, is always a handicap to scientific work, my second visit in July 2022, this time to the Archives, was necessitated by the need for more primary source materials. It was another fruitful visit despite the effects of Covid 19 on human relationships and the pain of deaths. It was sad to hear that some of the priests had also died. May God grant them eternal rest and reward their selfless service to humanity.

Indeed, I was so humbled to receive a very warm welcome with lovely smiles from the Archives' staff; and to see that the materials were already put out and arranged so well on a table, waiting for my arrival to commence the research. My heart was filled with joy when I discovered that Bishop Nwedo wrote so many articles and some letters that were published in the *Missionary Annals* and *Mission World*, especially about the Catholic Church in Igboland/Nigeria. His articles gave detailed important progressive information about. The Holy Ghost Fathers' missionary activities more than I have encountered or read in any book. The articles include: *The Church in Iboland*, *The Church in Nigeria*, *The Church in Owerri*, etc. It was also fulfilling to find many revealing and interesting articles written about him by his Spiritan brothers on such matters or events like, Bishop Nwedo's Consecration as the First Bishop of Umuahia, his appeal for more priests, his experience during the War, his first Ordination in his Diocese, his visit

*continued on page 12*

*continued from page 11*

to Armagh, etc. From these publications I also became convinced that Bishop Nwedo was well-loved, just as he also loved all his confreres wholeheartedly and was so proud of his Spiritan family.

I also found the articles on Venerable Francis Libermann, C.S.Sp., very useful. Bishop Nwedo was very proud to be one of his sons and addressed him as Pa Libermann. His spirit of availability to the Holy Spirit and the idea of holiness as an instrument for evangelisation, so much influenced Bishop Nwedo. Reading through some of the articles that narrated the experiences of some of the missionaries, I had the feeling that those articles were not really there for us to consult for the purpose of achieving academic success only, but for us to allow those Missionaries to speak to our hearts so that following their examples in faith, hope, charity, zeal, detachment, self-sacrifice, patience, and intimacy with God, we can be encouraged to overcome fear of the unknown and prejudice to take Christ to the people of our own time. I also experienced emotional moments when tears filled my eyes as I looked at the pictures of hundreds of young Holy Ghost Seminarians and priests who were being prepared for the missions in Africa and wonder at what the situation is like today when the once overpopulated Seminaries now look like ghost houses, empty. The joy that radiated on the faces of those young men which testified to their enthusiastic spirit for the missions to foreign lands, not counting the cost, raised some personal questions within me regarding what it is that I am doing to save souls and to promote genuine vocation in this present time when such numerous vocation is no more and the society has become more evil than ever.

I also had another golden opportunity and privileged experience of meeting another of the senior priests, Fr. Michael Moore, who also worked under Bishop Nwedo and knew our Congregation, the Daughters of Mary Mother of Mercy when it was still very young. He was so enthralled to meet Bishop Nwedo's spiritual daughter from the great Igbo tribe of Biafra. That meeting enriched my knowledge of the experiences of the Missionaries during the war against the Biafrans. It also meant a lot to my research because, when I asked him for one word that he would use to describe Bishop Nwedo since he knew him so well and I am researching into his life, he gave me three words: "A saintly, humble gentle man." God bless him. Finally, I would like to testify that there was more than enough materials for me to consult. I concentrated on the journals and had no time to check the books and other sources. My discoveries here has made me to realise how important it is that I also visit the Spiritan Archives of the Nigerian Province and also that of their Mother-House in France. I would therefore recommend all researchers that have to do with the Holy Ghost Fathers' Missions in Africa to take time to visit the Spiritan Kimmage Manor Archives. The Archives personnel were exceptionally generous with their availability to help and to sacrifice their time to make sure I achieved what I came for. They seemed to go out of their way to make me comfortable, to see that I did my research with concentration and under a conducive atmosphere. I also observed that they offered the same support to the other researchers. For these, the photocopies, the laughter we shared together, and for everything, I say thank you. May God bless and reward you all. Amen.



*Stewardship  
includes all aspects  
of the Province's  
heritage.  
Special attention  
will be given to  
libraries, archives  
and our  
spiritual  
patrimony.*