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The Missionary  
and his Mission:  
*Fr Carlo Zappa SMA (1861-1917)*

Prefect of the Upper Niger Prefecture

Ifeanyi Sylvester Ogboh

EDUSC



To my parents,  
Sylvester and Bernadette Ogboh  
with love and gratitude

and

Pierre Trichet SMA  
for all the encouragement



## ABBREVIATIONS

ACSSPC	Archive Society of Saint Peter Claver
AMA	Archives Missions Africaines
ANDA	Archives of the Congregation Notre Dame des Apôtres
APF	Historical Archive of the Sacred Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples
APL	Collection of Augustin Planque letters in the SMA archives
CMS	Church Missionary Society
DGDC	<i>Diccionario General de Derecho Canónico</i> , Aranzadi – Universidad de Navarra, Pamplona 2012, 7 vol.
Ep.	Epistle
MEP	Missions Étrangères de Paris
PL	Patrologia Latina (Migne)
RNC	Royal Niger Company
SCPF	Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith (now Sacred Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples)
SMA	Société Missions Africaines





## FOREWORD

Through his detailed research, Reverend Father Ifeanyi Sylvester Ogboh succeeds in summoning from the spiritual past of his country, one of the most fascinating characters in the missionary history of Nigeria: **Rev. Fr. Carlo Zappa (SMA)**, *Prefect of the Upper Niger Prefecture* (1861-1917).

The author exhibited the patience and courage of a true researcher in analysing all sources currently available on the subject of Fr. Zappa. In particular, he cites the archives of the Society of African Missions (SMA), of which Fr. Zappa was a member, those of *Propaganda Fide* (now called the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples), the Vatican congregation that coordinates the missionary activity of the various institutes, and the archives of the Missionary Sisters of St Peter Claver.

This book, *The Missionary and His Mission: Fr Carlo Zappa (SMA)*, did not overlook the principal missionary magazines of the era, amongst which: *Écho des Missions Africaines*, *Annales de la Propagation de la foi* and *Les Missions catholiques*. Fr. Zappa wrote and described his life and mission in these very publications. Ogboh's task faced and conquered many challenges: the large quantity of available materials, the variety of subjects treated and the diverse languages in which they were written: Italian, French, English, Latin and Igbo.

*The Missionary and His Mission: Fr Carlo Zappa (SMA)* presents us with the figure of a man, of a priest, and of "an outstanding missionary even in those days of many exceptional men and women", as someone recently wrote. In addition to the human aspect of the character, the author

rightly emphasizes the missionary method of Fr. Zappa, his concerns and his priorities.

First, we find the importance that Fr. Zappa placed on the acquisition of the local language, not as a mere instrument of expression, but as a means of cultural penetration. Through the local language, he met people without the use of an interpreter; understood words, silences and gestures. Furthermore, he demanded the same linguistic abilities from priests who belonged to the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of which he was the apostolic prefect.

This knowledge, as the author affirms, armed Fr Zappa to begin the publication of a number of writings in Igbo language, not only his famous dictionary, but also a guide to learning the language, a catechism, the Gospels, canticles, and common prayers, etc. All of these enabled him, amongst other things, to create a common Christian language for the entire prefecture.

A second priority highlighted by the author is the importance given to the laity. Zappa placed the catechist and his family at the centre of his concerns. The entire family of the catechist became the key focus of evangelization in each village.

As a geographer and cartographer, Zappa deployed his knowledge, not only in mapping out the territory, but also in dividing his prefecture into a number of districts. At the head of each district, he placed his best missionaries, who were assigned to implement the practice and vision of the mutually agreed mission. Indeed, another important aspect of the leadership style which Fr. Zappa impressed on his prefecture involved synodal reunions and annual meetings, which deliberated on the difficulties and problems, as well as the direction which the mission should take.

Fr. Zappa, as faithfully captured in the book, did not copy the methods of others. Rather, he took time to reflect and decide what best suited his territory at every particular moment. Nonetheless, he was ready to change strategy if reality demanded it, or if things had evolved in a different direction.

Rather than translate the whole Bible, Zappa produced liturgical and catechistic material in the local language for the immediate use of Christians. He preferred, from the outset, to invest more in schools for catechists rather than in basic education. Later, encouraged by the Holy Ghost Fathers—a congregation that worked on the opposite bank of the Niger River—he changed his approach and encouraged people to go to school.

This leads me to another aspect highlighted in *The Missionary and His Mission: Fr Carlo Zappa (SMA)*. In a period in which relations between missionary institutions were certainly not of prime concern, Fr. Zappa studied and created a dynamic collaboration with the missionary institute on the opposite bank of the Niger River. Due to his deep friendship with Fr Joseph Shanahan, a member and apostolic prefect of the Holy Ghost Fathers, Zappa organized regular meetings between the missionaries of the two congregations. The reason behind this was very simple and rational: working among people who spoke the same language and having experienced similar pastoral problems, both congregations had to provide a common response.

The author underlined the important work undertaken by Fr. Zappa to assist the poorest of his prefecture. This is evident in his great contribution, including financial investment, in favour of the emancipation of slaves, the cure of lepers and of those people lacking assistance.

The greatest achievement of Fr. Zappa was the creation of a local clergy. From Zappa's prefecture came Nigeria's first Catholic priest, Fr Paul Emechete, who was ordained in January 6, 1920. Fr Zappa did not live to witness this crowning of his life's work, having passed away in 1917, exhausted by fatigue.

Fr. Ogboh might have ended his research for his book at this point. He could have merely satisfied himself with narrating the life, missionary method and priorities of Fr. Zappa. He did not do so. Rather, the author went further. Ogboh depicted Fr Zappa's apostolic activity from various points of view, developing in a detailed manner, several aspects that aids our better understanding of the object of his book.

*The Missionary and His Mission: Fr Carlo Zappa (SMA)* is divided into the following chapters:

- An overview of the Lower Niger in the 1800s
- The SMA mission prior to the arrival of Carlo Zappa
- The figure of Carlo Zappa
- Correspondence between Carlo Zappa and Propaganda Fide
- Understanding Zappa's reports

In addition, the impressive bibliography demonstrates the breadth and seriousness of the work undertaken in this book. A series of six appendices supplies us with, amongst other things, a chronology of the events which interest Zappa. The author also provides a transcription of the four Latin reports that Zappa sent to the *Propaganda Fide*, regarding the situation of his apostolic prefecture.

For all this, we should be grateful to Fr. Ogboh who, through his research, allows us to peer into an important page in the evangelization story of Nigeria. In so doing, the author grants us the opportunity to admire the character of one of its great protagonists, Fr. Carlo Zappa.

**Rev. Fr. Renzo Mandirola, SMA**

*Comunità SMA-NSA, Feriole, Rome*

*January 25, 2020*

Feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles

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## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Carlo Zappa (1861-1917), a missionary priest of the Society of African Missions (SMA), was the Prefect of the Upper Niger Prefecture from 1894 to 1911. In 1911, the Prefecture was divided in two parts: the Prefectures of Western and Eastern Nigeria. He served as the prefect of the Western Nigeria Prefecture from 1911 till his death in 1917. The purpose of this book is to present and analyse the correspondence between Carlo Zappa and the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith (SCPF).

This book studies the relation of the SCPF with a concrete mission in order to achieve two objectives: firstly, present the nature of the relations of the SCPF with a particular mission during this period and, secondly, deduce the guiding missionary principles of Carlo Zappa with regards the development of the missions. For this reason, this study limits itself to the lifetime of Carlo Zappa.

## STATUS QUO OF BIBLIOGRAPHY AND SOURCES

The Catholic missions took a firm hold in the African continent in the 19th century. Being a relatively recent event, there is relatively little literature on the subject. Literature on the missions in Africa can be classified into two groups. First there is what we could call general literature. These are often well-researched books that provide a good synthesis of the missions in Africa but whose broad scope runs the risk of generalising. Hence, they categorise disparate groups, factors,

issues, peoples or periods within the same class. For this first group, the author has found Jean COMBY, *Duemila Anni di Evangelizzazione*, Simon DELACROIX, *Histoire universelle des missions catholiques*, Adrian HASTINGS, *The Church in Africa (1450-1950)*, John BAUR, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa*, and the two volumes of Patrick GANTLY, *Histoire de la Société des Missions Africaines (SMA) 1856-1907*, particularly of great use in order to understand the historical context. The second group consists of what we would call “commemorative literature”. These are publications on the history of a particular mission or the biography of a particular person, written to commemorate a particular anniversary. While these provide details not found in general literature, they lack academic rigor and are more likely to contain factual errors.

We have largely based the research on archival sources. This enables us get closer to the protagonists in question. We have used material from four general archives in Rome: The Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith (SCPF), the Society of African Missions (SMA), the Missionary Society of St Peter Claver (SSPC), and the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles. The documents from the archives of the SCPF constitute the primary sources of this research.

The other archives’ documents are secondary sources. From these secondary source archives, three series of documents particularly stand out: (1) Zappa’s many letters to the foundress of the Society of St Peter Claver, (2) the annual reports to the Work for the Propagation of the Faith, and (3) the annual reports to the Work of the Holy Childhood. They are almost all in French. There is very little specific literature in English. Hence the author has had the onerous task of translating the more relevant documents to English. Although a few books are now being published from the archive sources, only a small fraction of the material in the archives has been published thus far.

We have faced the difficulties inherent in archival work. There are cases where some documents were catalogued in a different section or were simply missing. In some other cases, the archive is still under construction and only has a partially finished catalogue.

We have also used many articles written by Zappa and his collaborators which were published in missionary magazines during the period: in particular, *Les Missions Catholiques* and *Annales (de la Propagation de la Foi)*. They have proved to be a most valuable and often precise source of information for this research.<sup>1</sup>

## CHAPTERS OF THIS BOOK

The work is divided in two parts, each part containing three chapters. The first part provides a background required to appreciate the correspondence. Hence it is written in narrative form and is largely descriptive. It situates the state of the mission before the arrival of Carlo Zappa from two perspectives. **Chapter One** presents a history of the mission territory, the peoples, their culture and the concomitant factors that came into play in the area in the 19th century. These factors include the explorations into the interior, the arrival of Protestant missions and the colonial drive that picked up steam towards the end of the nineteenth century. This may be considered a presentation of the *object* of the mission. **Chapter Two** presents the mission territory from the point of view of the *instrument* of the mission: the missionaries. While placing the missionary endeavour of the SMA within its historical context, it provides a brief history of the SMA up till the arrival of Carlo Zappa. Here, we will study the circumstances preceding the erection of the Upper Niger Prefecture in 1884, the spirituality of the missionaries and their key aims and methods. In doing this, it also presents a short history of the SMA and its underlying spirituality. **Chapter Three** provides us with a short biography of Carlo Zappa.

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<sup>1</sup>Some of the articles that appear in these magazines are signed by the writers while others are not. There are a number of long accounts of life in the missions, written and signed by the missionary in question, which were serialised in these magazines—and in other local missionary magazines. As we consider such serialized accounts to be published works in their own right, where they occur in this work, we shall cite them with the authors name and the article title. In other cases, we shall simply cite the reference in the magazine.

The second part of this dissertation, consisting of three chapters, is dedicated to the correspondence between Carlo Zappa and the SCPF. It is written in a more analytical manner since it presents and develops the ideas in the reports presented, placing everything in its historical context.

**Chapter Four** explains the inner workings of the SCPF and presents the corpus of correspondence to be studied. It provides a first analysis of the correspondence. It not only reflects the work of a particular missionary but also the work of the SCPF and its concern for the missions, as shown in the case of a single mission. **Chapter Five** looks at information obtained from secondary sources which shed light on the correspondence already studied in the previous chapter in order to understand the missionary policy and achievements of Carlo Zappa. **Chapter Six** compares this missionary policy with those of some prominent African missionaries of the 19th century in order better to determine Zappa's role in missionary history.

I would like to thank my research director, Luis Martinez Ferrer for the support without which this research would not have been possible. I thank Father Lorenzo Mandirola (the former Coordinator of Research on SMA History and Spirituality) who encouraged me to undertake this research. My gratitude also extends to Father Pierre Trichet (archivist of the SMA) for his generous dedication and advice, Sister Irini Chenouda (archivist of the Congregation of Our Lady of Apostles) and Sister Urszula Lorek (archivist of the Society of St Peter Claver) who allowed me to delve deeply into their archives and readily made archive documents available. I would like to thank the chief archivist and all members of staff of the Historical Archive of the Sacred Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples without whose professionalism and dedication this work would never have come to light. I thank Deogratias Nyamutale, Father Peter Damian-Grint and Father Jeffrey Langan for their insightful suggestions and advice.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this work to my mother who passed on before this work was being finished: we love you but God loves you more.

## CHAPTER 1

### OVERVIEW OF THE LOWER NIGER IN THE 1800S

#### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

Boahen classifies the trends that marked 19th century Africa into four broad categories:<sup>1</sup>

1. Demographic trends: Rapid population growth and migrations
2. Religious trends: Islamic revolutions and the reprisal of Christian missions
3. Economic trends: An increase in trade of raw materials with Europe and the European penetration to the interior of Africa
4. Political trends: Political centralisation, modernisation and colonisation

Early Christian missionaries, through their political activism, succeeded in gradually abolishing both the slave trade and human sacrifice. By setting up schools and hospitals, they also catalysed human development in the interior and facilitated the integration of African indigenes

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<sup>1</sup>BOAHEN, Albert Adu, "New Trends and Processes in Africa in the 19th Century", in Jacob Festus AJAYI (ed.), *General History of Africa: Africa in the 19th century until the 1880s*, vol. VI, UNESCO, Paris 1989, pp. 40-63.

into the mode of government of the European colonizer without always being identified with the colonizer.

The political changes that occurred were a result of the economic changes. However, these trends occurred in various degrees in different parts of the continent.

In Southern Nigeria, the decline of the Benin and Oyo empires led to a political decentralization of the region in the first half of the 19th century. However, a new process of centralisation began in the second half of the century following the British conquest of the interior, culminating in the creation of the Southern Nigeria Protectorate in 1900. The Protectorate guaranteed the British trade monopoly. Southern Nigeria never experienced the Islamic revolution that occurred in the north at the beginning of the 19th century.<sup>2</sup> This revolution created a somewhat homogeneous system of government under a Muslim Sultan and several emirs. The north had a homogenous Muslim government, unfavourable to Christianity and tolerating pagans as second-class citizens; whereas the mostly pagan south was made up of a myriad of tribal communities, without a central government.

In this chapter, we intend to describe the general situation of the area comprising the Upper Niger Prefecture, highlighting the changes that affected this region during the 19th century. The region consisted of several tribes with a wide variety of languages. However, we shall focus on the so-called Delta Igbo people because they were the people to whom Fr Carlo Zappa's missionary efforts first proved successful and it was in their territory where he set up the greater part of his missionary stations.

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<sup>2</sup>The Islamic revolution in the north, led by Uthman Dan Fodio, placed the greater part of the north of Nigeria under the Sokoto caliphate.

## 1.2 GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE REGION OF THE LOWER NIGER IN THE 1800S

### 1.2.1 *Geography of the Region*

The Upper Niger Prefecture, even after the definition of its borders in 1894, was a vast territory of about 600,000 square kilometres.<sup>3</sup> It stretched from the Bight of Biafra (latitude 3°North) up to and beyond Lake Chad (latitude 15°N). The landscape is generally flat except in the North Eastern part, where it is elevated. As one goes from the south to the north, the landscape transforms from mangrove forest to tropical rain forest and then savannah. The northernmost fringes have the Sahel vegetation, typical of the southern part of the Sahara Desert. There are over a hundred different tribes in the whole area.

With only a handful of missionaries at his disposal (coupled with the initial low survival rate of Europeans in the interior), Carlo Zappa concentrated his work in the southern part of the territory, next to the right bank of the River Niger that lies above its delta.

In this small territory:

there are at least nine languages. Starting from the south, one finds the Idio, the Sobo, the Jakri, the Kwale, the Ibo, the Ishan, the Coucouroucou, the Igbera, the North and the West are peopled with the Yoruba. Many of these languages, like the Coucouroucou, are divided into an infinite number of dialects.<sup>4</sup>

From Asaba, the principal town next to the riverbank, Zappa first evangelised the Igbo tribes, exclusively, up till the year 1898 when he founded the first mission station outside Igbo territory. Since a good number of his foundations are located in Igbo territory, we will focus on a description of this people and their culture.

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<sup>3</sup>The Upper Niger Prefecture was erected in 1884 but its Northern border was not clearly defined until 1894.

<sup>4</sup>STRUB, Eugene, *Le Vicariat apostolique de la Nigeria occidentale, depuis sa fondation jusqu'à nos jours*, 1928, Unpublished manuscript in AMA 14/804.04, 1928, 15794, p. 3 (Translation mine). The spellings of the tribes, peoples and places, which may vary in the sources, have been maintained as they appear in the text.

Asaba is on a plateau that is sufficiently elevated not to get flooded and sufficiently low for one to easily board ship. It comes as no surprise that the missionaries and the European traders would base their operations there. Strub describes the surrounding territory:

50 kilometres upstream, a bit in the interior, is Ignelé: 100 kilometres downstream on the shore of the river is Assai, and 65 kilometres to the West, Agbor: if one draws 2 lines from Ignelé and Assai to Agbor, this town would be the apex of an obtuse triangle with the Niger at the base and an area of 4875 km<sup>2</sup> [...] It is a plateau in the northern part with Umunede as the highest point. The southwestern part is flat and marshy, furrowed with creeks and covered with thick forests, from which the indigenes carve out, with superhuman efforts, fairly large arable neighbourhoods. The plateau lacks water and some villages go searching for more than six kilometres during the dry season.<sup>5</sup>

### 1.2.2 *The People and the Social Structure*

The Delta Igbo people lived in agrarian communities and practised subsistence farming. Each town consisted of a settlement with scattered houses. They were generally vulnerable since they did not have a strong centralised government. Their trade relations with the external world were scarce. For this reason, when the first schools were set up, unlike the Africans at the coast, the indigenes of the interior had fewer reasons to send their children to the schools. This situation changed when Europeans successfully navigated up the River Niger.

It is said that some of the Igbos originally from the east bank of the Niger River had migrated westwards to this territory in the 13th century AD. In order to counteract this, some of the Benin people started migrating eastwards. This explains why there are various oral traditions tracing the roots of the peoples of this area to Igbo land or to the ancient Benin kingdom. In any case, the people of this area seem to share customs with both ethnic groups. And as one moves from East to West through the region, there seems to be a gradual change in the cultural continuum clearly influenced by both cultures.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>STRUB, *Le Vicariat apostolique de la Nigeria*, p. 4 (Translation mine).

<sup>6</sup>Cf. STRUB, *Le Vicariat apostolique de la Nigeria*, p. 5.



For example, a typical Igbo town was governed by a council of elders whereas the Benin political structure had a king. Thus, communities in this region combined the two political systems.

The land of the Igbos is highly populated. One finds towns of 10, 15 and 20 thousand inhabitants not so far from each other. A principal road, going north to south, traverses each village. Generally, there are no inhabitants on this road so one can go from one village to the other without seeing [...] the inhabitants. [...] The town is divided into various great villages, each one with a special name. These great villages are subdivided into small hamlets, which are composed of various groups of families [...] Almost all the cities are independent. There are, however, some exceptions. Certain villages are subject to a sovereign. The kings of these regions can be considered as the mayors of the community. Sometimes there are even several in the same town, in which case each of them is head of a subdivision with absolute power regarding local issues. But if there is a conflict where the general interest is engaged, the oldest summons the others and the question is discussed in common.<sup>7</sup>

The society was usually organised in groups according to one's age or profession. There were social groups like the native doctors (*ndi-dibia*), the bailiffs (*ndi-obu*), the deputy chiefs (*eme muio*), the war-chiefs (*okpa allo*) the kings (*ndi-eze*) and the queens (*ommou*). The power of the king—as we have already mentioned—was limited, while the queen was the head of the women in the village.<sup>8</sup>

Don C. Ohadike<sup>9</sup> describes kinship as based on lineages, which may be thought of as concentric circles. The smallest social group was the *uno*, “comprising husband, wife and children.” The next group was the *ebo*, included the grandparents, grandchildren, daughter or son in law. The *idumu* was composed of kinsmen of the extended family. The next circle was the *ogbe*, comprising people who probably shared a distant common ancestor. Several of these made up the *obodo* (small town).

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<sup>7</sup>FRIEDRICH, Martin, *Journal d'un missionnaire de Haut-Niger* in “Les Missions Catholiques” XXXIII (Lyon 1901), p. 417 (Translation mine).

<sup>8</sup>Cf. FRIEDRICH, *Journal d'un missionnaire de Haut-Niger*, p. 418. The spellings of the tribes, peoples and places, which may vary in the sources, have been maintained as they appear in the text.

<sup>9</sup>Cf. OHADIKE, Don, *A Social History of the Western Igbo People*, Ohio University Press, Ohio 1994, pp. 69-70.

The male child was highly regarded. The boy practically pertained to the father whom he revered and accompanied to work. He was not obliged to aid the mother, who was often accompanied by her daughters. However, he could do some tasks to please his mother. Just after adolescence, the young man would construct a house beside that of his father and could take a wife, after the father would have paid the customary “bride price” to the parents of the girl. This increased the father’s influence in the village since it was based on the number of descendants he had. The older a man was, the more he was revered by the community.

The girl child was usually betrothed at an early age by her parents and was married as soon as she was of age. Polygamy was widespread. The number of wives and children one had, was a measure of one’s affluence. However, when the husband died, the wife was practically abandoned. Unlike men, old women were not revered and depended on the assistance of their children.

Being an agrarian society, there was a lot of farm work just before and during the rainy season. In the dry season, with less work in the farms, the people visited friends and organised festivals. There were also feasts at the birth of a child, marriages and burials of aged persons.

Slaves were an integral part of the society. They were obtained through “warring, kidnapping, in settlement of debts, payment of protection tribute, community purges, straightforward purchase on the market, and straightforward gift.”<sup>10</sup> The slaves in the interior provided manpower in the farms and were a means of commercial exchange, but, in general, they were not harshly treated. However, they were always the victims for human sacrifices to the gods. Fr Martin Friedrich comments that the slave was:

like an unpaid domestic. He worked three out of four days for his master, from whom he receives his food. But he has at his discretion each fourth day [...] he is free to marry anyone of his condition but the children of that union belong to the master.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>DAGET, Serge, “The abolition of the slave trade”, in Jacob Festus AJAYI (ed.), *General History of Africa: Africa in the 19<sup>th</sup> century until the 1880s*, vol. VI, UNESCO, Paris 1989, p. 76.

<sup>11</sup>FRIEDRICH, *Journal d’un missionnaire de Haut-Niger*, p. 416 (Translation mine).

The married female slave depended on her slave husband for sustenance. She could not earn a living outside the home and received nothing from her master to take care of the children. The progeny from the matrimonial union belonged to their master.

Slavery in the interior, when compared with that at the coast was “more benign and integrative.”<sup>12</sup> First of all, the slaves at the coast were not only slaves purchased from the interior but also condemned criminals or prisoners of war. Prisoners of war were easy to obtain because of the highly decentralised and independent nature of the towns in the interior, which led to almost constant wars. On a few occasions the slaves sold on the coast were actually free persons who had been captured and sold. For example, the Nupe conducted raids of the Kukuruku people, who lived in fear of them, to make them slaves.<sup>13</sup> Falola says that the value of a slave increased the more times he had been sold and the further he was away from home since it was less likely that he would escape.<sup>14</sup>

### 1.2.3 Religion

In general, religions exist within a cultural context and mould it. In fact, religion is an essential element of culture because it defines one’s worldview, perceptions and values.<sup>15</sup> The traditional religion practised in the area was inextricably linked to the way of life of the people.

There was a hierarchy of gods. The Great Spirit was at the top of the hierarchy. He made everything in the world.<sup>16</sup> He had no images or physical representations. He was the source of all power and justice, life

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<sup>12</sup>Cf. FALOLA, Toyin, HEATON, Matthew, *A History of Nigeria*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2008, p. 40.

<sup>13</sup>Cf. GANTLY, Patrick, *Mission to West Africa: the story of the Society of African Mission (SMA), 1856-1907*, vol. II, SMA Publications, Rome 1992, p. 246.

<sup>14</sup>Cf. FALOLA, HEATON, *A History of Nigeria*, p. 41.

<sup>15</sup>Cf. RATZINGER, Joseph, *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 2004, p. 59.

<sup>16</sup>Cf. METUH, Emezie Ikenga, *God and Man in African Religion: A Case Study of the Igbo of Nigeria*, Snaap, Indiana 1999, p. 60.

and death. The lower gods were associated with particular aspects of nature: the land, fire, rain, agriculture, fertility, lightning etc. Each had its cults, priests and shrines. They had the power to bless or curse the people. Then there were ancestral spirits: spirits of relations who, even after death, still maintained a certain relation with the living. They were recalled in family gatherings and, sometimes, had to be appeased. Finally, there were the evil spirits that harmed people. People used charms and talismans to protect themselves from these.

This led to a particular view of man in relation to his society:

The general conception of man was that he was a compound of immaterial and material substance. The immaterial part of man (the soul) survived him after death, while the material part (the body) disintegrated after death. Death therefore did not end life; it was an extension of life. The dead remained members of society and there was believed to be a community of the dead alongside the community of the living, and there was a symbiotic relationship between the two communities. Human society was an unbroken family made up of the dead, the living and the yet unborn.<sup>17</sup>

In daily life, there was a constant reference to these ancestral spirits. The names of the gods and ancestral spirits varied from one tribe to another. Also, within the same tribe, some gods were added to the pantheon due to interaction with other tribes. There were images of the gods and ancestral spirits everywhere.

One can also divide the gods into two categories: domestic gods and public gods. The former pertained to the particular person while the latter pertained to the community. According to Fr. Martin Friedrich, the public gods varied from town to town but the domestic gods were more or less the same, like the *chi* (personal god, like a guardian angel), *anyasi* (god of long life), *ikenga* (god of riches), *amadioha* (god of lightning), *fejioku* (god of yams), *agbala* (goddess of the land) and the numerous ancestral spirits. However, as already mentioned, they also believed in one Creator (*Chineke*) or high god (*Chukwu*),<sup>18</sup> even though it was in a

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<sup>17</sup>OPOKU, Asare, "Religion in Africa During the colonial era" in Albert Adu BOAHEN (ed.), *General History of Africa: African under Colonial Domination (1880-1935)*, vol. VII, UNESCO, Paris 1985 p. 509.

<sup>18</sup>Cf. ISICHEI, Elizabeth Allo, *A History of the Igbo People*, Macmillan, London 1976, p. 25.

deist sense.<sup>19</sup> This belief was one that the Christian missionaries were quick to latch onto.

Sacrifice constituted one of the central aspects of the religion. Leaving food before the shrine of the domestic god and performing rites in honour of the ancestral spirits were common. Animals were offered to obtain a good harvest or to appease the god of the community. However, the most notorious sacrifices were human sacrifices.

The victims were almost always slaves. The sacrifices were offered to appease the gods if a disaster had befallen the community—famine, pestilence—or a taboo had been broken. They were also offered on the death or ascension of a chief or a king. On the death of a king, between four and six slaves were sacrificed while at the death of a chief between one and four slaves were sacrificed.<sup>20</sup>

#### 1.2.4 *The Slave Trade and the Abolition Movement*

The initiative to end the slave trade was mainly a Western initiative. English Evangelicals using political means *effectively* pushed for the end of the trans-Atlantic slave trade through political advocacy. Although many had spoken up against it in different ways in the past,<sup>21</sup> the process had been slow and generally lacked the support of government. In Africa, the effective process of slavery eradication only started towards the end of the 18th century.

The demand for slaves from the Niger had increased between 1500 and 1800. The most notorious slave ports in the 19th century were Lagos,

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<sup>19</sup>Cf. FRIEDRICH, *Journal d'un missionnaire de Haut-Niger*, pp. 427-429.

<sup>20</sup>Cf. FRIEDRICH, *Journal d'un missionnaire de Haut-Niger*, p. 416.

<sup>21</sup>For example, the condemnation of slavery in America by the Dominicans and the Capuchins in the 16th century. One may also mention the papal bull *Sublimis Deus* (Pope Paul III, 1537) and the encyclical letter *In Supremo Apostolatus* (Pope Gregory XVI, 1839) which both highlight the inherent dignity of every man and the evil of slavery. Cf. FRANCISCO JOSÉ DE JACA (ed.), *Resolución sobre la libertad de los negros y sus originarios en el estado de paganos y después ya cristianos. La primera condena de la esclavitud en el pensamiento hispano*, Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Madrid 2003; ÉPIPHANE DE MOIRANS (ed.), *La liberté des esclaves, ou Defense juridique de la liberté naturelle des esclaves*, Société d'histoire de la Martinique, Fort-de-France 1995.

Badagry, Porto Novo, Whydah, Epe, Bonny and Calabar, all on the West African coast. It is estimated that two million slaves were exported from the Bights of Benin and Biafra in the 19th century (accounting for 35 % of African slaves sold in this century).<sup>22</sup>

The Sierra Leone settlement was established in 1787 to repatriate slaves. This was followed by the legislation abolishing the slave trade in England in 1807, when most of Europe was embroiled in the Napoleonic wars.

To end the trans-Atlantic slave trade, the English government employed a “radical three-point plan of action”:

Domestic legislation making it illegal for nationals of the country concerned to engage in the traffic; bilateral treaties giving navies the reciprocal right to search and seize at sea merchant vessels of either contracting nation caught in the illegal trade; and collaboration through mixed commissions, empowered to adjudicate on captured slave ships and set free the slaves found on board.<sup>23</sup>

Other European countries were leisurely in enforcing these measures because the English plan infringed on the sovereignty of the other nations (who feared an English hegemony). Besides, in some cases, the measures hurt their trading interests. However, for economic or political reasons, legislation abolishing slave trade eventually became widespread: Denmark (1802), France (1830), Portugal (1842), Spain (1842), Brazil (1850) and Cuba (1866).<sup>24</sup>

But the tactics mentioned above did not address the slave trade from its source. It was not till the 1840s when the abolitionists started making treaties with local African rulers to suppress the slave trade. Naturally, this was resisted by kingdoms on the West African coast that depended on the slave trade like Dahomey, the coastal kingdoms and the Arochukwu. It was clear that for the process of suppression to succeed, a viable economic alternative was needed.

Thomas Fowell Buxton (1796-1845)—one of the ideologues of the Emancipation Movement—proposed the idea of an alternative and licit trade. This consisted in replacing the illicit trade in humans with licit

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<sup>22</sup>FALOLA, HEATON, *A History of Nigeria*, p. 53.

<sup>23</sup>DAGET, *The abolition of the slave trade*, p. 76.

<sup>24</sup>DAGET, *The abolition of the slave trade*, pp. 66-70.

trade in goods. It was called “The Gospel and the Plough.”<sup>25</sup> This could be achieved if the missionaries combined human development with preaching the Gospel, that is: that they teach the Africans some agricultural science or manual art in order to earn an honest living. The early Protestant missionaries adopted this policy wholeheartedly and sought to implement it in their mission stations. However, the implementation of cash crop farming, while eliminating the trans-Atlantic slave trade, increased slavery in the interior.<sup>26</sup> This was further exacerbated by the increase in demand for produce from slave labour in the West Indies (like sugar) and government subsidies for these goods.<sup>27</sup>

The production of palm oil was one of the more viable options proposed as an alternative to the slave trade. However, while there was an almost ten-fold increase in production of palm oil in the second half of the nineteenth century, as European traders gained access to the interior, this led to increased slavery in the interior since palm oil production is very labour intensive.<sup>28</sup>

It must be said that the early Christian missionaries—both Protestant and Catholic—engaged in buying child slaves from the slave markets. However, they were liberated and trained in the Christian way of life. The Work of the Holy Infancy sent an annual sum for the redemption of child slaves to the Catholic missions.<sup>29</sup> But this did not make the slave trade in the interior—which ended in the first half of the twentieth century—last any longer than it would have. The favourable public opinion towards the anti-slavery movements ensured that it received donations for the redemption of slaves well into the early part of the 20th century.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>SUNDKLER, Bengt, STEED, Christopher, *A History of the Church in Africa*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000, p. 224.

<sup>26</sup>DAGET, *The abolition of the slave trade*, p. 76.

<sup>27</sup>DAGET, *The abolition of the slave trade*, p. 69.

<sup>28</sup>FALOLA, HEATON, *A History of Nigeria*, pp. 80-81.

<sup>29</sup>JORDAN, John, *Bishop Shanahan of Southern Nigeria*, Clonmore and Reynolds, Dublin. p. 16. This practice continued till the late 1920s.

<sup>30</sup>MOODY, Paul, “The Growth of Catholic Missions in West and Central Africa”, in Joseph METZLER (ed.), *Sacrae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide Memoria Rerum*, vol. III/1, Herder Rome p. 252.