REDISCOVERING THE PASTORAL ZEAL OF OUR FATHERS IN FAITH: THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE PASTORAL STRATEGIES OF LEON ALEXANDRE LEJEUNE (1900-1905) FOR NIGERIAN CHURCH TODAY

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Abstract
A fundamental question prompted the writing of this article. Seeing the negative attitudinal changes in the society which are progressively creeping into the Church and into the life of the ministers of the gospel, seeing how some pastoral agents are gradually becoming indolent and contented with the general attitude of levity in serious issues, seeing how some pastoral agents are today lacking in zeal in discharging their duty, I am obliged to ask: what could be done so that pastoral agents remain once again focused on the God-given mission of catching souls for Christ? To answer this question, I took a historical dive into the life of the early missionaries who evangelized the region formerly known as Lower Niger. I singled out a personality, Fr. Leon-Alexandre Lejeune and studied his five years of mission as the Prefect of the Lower Niger Prefecture from 1900-1905. My findings show that this man left no stone unturned in his effort to spread the Good News. He left great legacy for pastoral agents of his time and for posterity. I placed his achievement side by side with the current day missionary attitudes. This juxtaposition helped me to come to the conclusion that pastoral agents of today need to emulate the pastoral zeal of our fathers in faith.

Introduction
The missionary adventure and the evangelization of the Lower Niger was inaugurated on 6th January 1886 with the first official celebration of the Eucharist by Fr. Joseph Lutz, the French Spiritan

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missionary from Alsace who arrived the region in December 1885. He laid the foundation of the mission. He was able to establish three mission stations: Onitsha, Nsugbe and Aguleri. He headed the mission for its first ten years. It was surely the most difficult moment in the life of the prefecture. He died on December 17 1895, ten years after their arrival to Onitsha. He liberated slaves, established the Christian village and began the school apostolate and healthcare services.

At his death Fr. Joseph Reiling, another French Spiritan missionary from Alsace was appointed to replace him in September 1896, almost ten months after his death. From his appointment till his resignation in 1898, Fr. Joseph never set foot in Niger because of ill-health. With his resignation, Fr. Rene Pawlas, another Frenchman became the prefect. His short tenure of office lasted for two years and he died in March 1900.

The next five years (1900-1905) was very crucial to the life of the mission. The mission fell into the hand of a man who transformed the Lower Niger mission putting the region indelibly in missionary map. He is Fr. Leon Alexandre Lejeune, a Frenchman, from Normandy. He had ambitious pastoral programmes and revolutionary ideas on how to capitalize on the school apostolate to the advantage of all concerned. He set the parameters within which his successors (Shanahan and Heery) operated. He was a missionary in Gabon for fifteen years before being posted to Niger. He was popularly known as “Father Gabon.”

Today, the Catholic Church in Nigeria has grown to a great height. We have more than 5,000 indigenous priests and consecrated men and women. The missionaries that evangelized us were few in number and had more physical difficulties than the pastoral agents of today. However, one could easily notice that compared to them the pastoral zeal today seems to be waning and the desire for easy apostolate and attachment to material comfort seem to be a motivating factor in the life of many pastoral agents. There is therefore, need to rediscover the missionary spirit and reinvent it in our pastoral activities today. We need pastoral models and we could find such in our early missionaries like Lutz, Lejeune, Shanahan etc.

In this essay, I wish to propose Fr. Leon Alexandre Lejeune as a model of missionary zeal that today’s pastors need to imitate. I will proceed in three times: in the first place, I will examine the missionary activities of Fr. Lejeune in the Lower Niger; in the second place I will
draw up the legacies of his mission and finally I will dwell on the implications of these legacies for the Church in Nigeria today.

1. The Missionary Activities of Fr. Leon Alexandre Lejeune

Fr. Leon Alexandre Lejeune was already a missionary in Gabon where he has spent 15 years before being appointed as the prefect of the Lower Niger mission. His experience in Gabon made him a natural choice of his superiors for the Lower Niger mission. The bishop of Gabon, Roy who happened also to be the superior for the region which covers up to Lower Niger knew his “weaknesses (a bit too independent-minded) and also his virtues (capable, zealous, energetic, good in languages, used to the tropics).”

Lejeune who arrived at Onitsha on the 4th September 1900 was presented to the Christians on Sunday 9th September 1900. That very day he greeted the people and immediately informed them that he has come for the progress and development of the people. He laid serious emphasis on the importance of hard work and self-help on the part of the Christians especially those who have been depending on the mission.

At his arrival he had only four priests, two brothers and four sisters, among who was Sr. Calixte McSharry, a young lady of 24 years who died on the 6th September 1900, just two days after Lejeune’s arrival, having spent only two weeks in the mission land.

Shortly after taking over the mission in September 1900 Lejeune summoned all his missionaries to a plenary meeting in which they analysed their mission so far and came up with new orientations. His observations bothered on the healthcare of the missionaries, on the financial difficulties and on the dependence of the Christians on missionary charity.

Based on the following observations he took certain decisions: the mission houses should be constructed with baked brick, well ventilated, protected from the sun and be storied so that the missionary will have a good accommodation and in this way avoid falling sick all the time.

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He was convinced that the major causes of death and ill-health in the prefecture were the depressing housing conditions and poor self-care posture among the missionaries themselves. He argued simply that sick and dying missionaries could not preach the gospel. He condemned the practice of building missionary residence with local perishable materials (like red mud and roofs covered by palm branches).3

He was able to enforce his decision to build with bricks for the Royal Niger Company, the British colonial representative at Onitsha already had a brick factory at Obosi and many government centres were beginning to construct with brick in cities like Lagos and Calabar. Besides, Lejeune, was himself a jack of all trade and master of all. He learnt to fabricate bricks and got those around him to join in doing so. He led by example. Within four months of his arrival “Onitsha saw heaps of packed bricks, zinc sheets, tiles in their thousands.” He was himself building and supervising the work. At the same time he was training new carpenters and bricklayers, equipping them with new skills to earn their living. He set up the building for sisters convent in Onitsha and from there he moved down to Aguleri and then to Calabar, to Ossomari and Oguta. After the sisters’ convent at Onitsha, he built the Fathers’ house, a one storey building having a total of ten rooms. To this was added another two buildings, one a farm house and the other a store. It has to be noted that the labour for all the buildings were supplied by the Christian community:

The boarders moulded the bricks, non-boarding school children collected the sand and stones for the foundation as well as bringing the bricks to the building site, while the apprentices felled the trees, cut, sawed and squared the wood. Thus, Father Lejeune and his missionary team taught the people new trades to enable them become self-sufficient.4

Coming to the financial life of the Prefecture, he was able to notice that the monopoly of trade exercised by the Royal Niger Company had milked the mission dry through its exorbitant charges. He equally noticed

3 Eke and others, In the Footsteps of Our Founders, 98.
that the number of missionaries who become sick in the prefecture and had to be transported back to France for medical cure was also eating deep into the finance of the mission. He also observed that the way the mission has exercised the apostolate of charity by buying back slaves, gathering orphans and the sick and taking care of all these was not in any way helping the financial state of the mission. On this very point he was very categorical:

I have refused to accept in the Mission any more motherless babies, and I forbid the acceptance of the same in my absence; I already have a large number on our hands whom we feed with powdered milk. I have decided that the 22 old women who are taking refuge in the Mission should do a bit of work as a kind of little compensation for their upkeep by the mission…I have asked all the boarders and the 110 non-boarders to do some bit of manual labour regularly, and this has already yielded good result…5

As could be seen from this letter, “Lejeune insisted that the limited financial resources of the mission should no longer be concentrated on redeeming slaves and sponsoring Christian village…He recommended to his Superior General, projects like hospitals, orphanages, boarding schools and overseas campaigns for funds.”6

To this end he pleaded that his report be published in France to raise awareness and attract the sympathy of supporters of mission. He proposed that one of the priests with him should undertake a missionary fund campaign to the United States of America and that effort be made to disseminate the cause of the Lower Niger mission. He equally pleaded for an awareness campaign to be carried out in Ireland to ensure the sending of Irish missionaries to the Prefecture.

Coming to the pastoral and structural organization of the Prefecture, he did many missionary explorations within the first few months of his arrival moving from Onitsha to Brass, to Calabar and going up North along Benue up to Ibi. Having made all these difficult journeys, he was able to have a clear picture of his Prefecture. By November 1900

5Ibid., 64.
6Eke and others, In the Footsteps of Our Founders, 99.
his report to Propaganda Fidei\textsuperscript{7} shows how he had mastered the territory. He described the people and their way of life and made proposal for bringing lasting changes in the people’s life especially with regard to slavery. Following his discoveries from his tours he decided to engage in an aggressive evangelization of the entire territory. He intended doing this by using the indigenous catechists. He therefore, dispatched the catechists at Onitsha to other towns where Church stations have been opened. He believed that the indigenous catechists would be of much help in the work of reaching out to all the corners of the territory.

Few months after initiating this evangelization of the hinterland, he received on July 20 1901 an interesting request from the colonial administration which now enjoys a cordial relation with the missionary. The administration wanted him to send Fr. Bubendorf to act as chaplain to the British military expedition to destroy the great oracle of Arochukwu. The Colonel Montanaro, in charge of the mission wanted a combination of both military and spiritual attack. It has to be noted that the Aro deity was known for its powers and background information reveals that the servants of this deity were in fact great slave dealers, one of the greatest in Igboland. Under the guise of the dictates of the deity people who came to consult the oracle were most often taken and sold and their relations were simply told that god has eaten them. Fr Lejeune and his colleagues had really identified the Aro deity as a big obstacle to evangelization and had prayed and waited for an opportunity to have it destroyed. So when he received the request he regarded the expedition as “another Catholic mission which will have the honour of giving the death blow to this great fetish.”\textsuperscript{8}

Fr. Lejene and Fr. Bubendorf gave their support to the expedition and “a three-prolonged attack from Onitsha, Oguta and Ikorafliong, all converging and closing in upon Arochukwu—was very successfully carried out.”\textsuperscript{9} With the Arochukwu oracle destroyed, the road for the evangelization of the hinterland became open. Consequently Lejeune

\textsuperscript{7}Annales Apostoliques, no. 12 (February 1901), 273-274, in Obi and others, “A hundred Years of the Church in Eastern Nigeria, 1885-1985,” 66.

\textsuperscript{8}Holy Ghost Congregation’s Archives in France, B/192/02, “Lejeune to the Propagation of Faith” (October 1, 1901).

\textsuperscript{9}Holy Ghost Congregation’s Archives in France, B/192/04, “Lejeune to the Propagation of Faith,” in Celestine Obi, 73.
would embark on a very ambitious missionary expedition in all the territories within the Lower Niger mission.

One of his major initiatives was his attempt to establish Catholic mission at Calabar. He laid the foundation for what eventually became Calabar-Ogoja and Benue Districts. By the time Lejeune took office, the colonization has already made Calabar the Capital of the Southern Protectorate having as High commissioner Sir Raph Moor, who happened to be a Catholic. The political climate was therefore favourable for a Catholic mission outreach in a region already dominated by the Presbyterian missionaries since 1846.

Lejeune dispatched Frs Joseph Bubendorf and Francis-Xavier Lichtenberger to prospect for mission site between Akassa and Cross River. At Calabar Sir Raph Moor received them well and put a boat at their disposal. On their first Sunday in Calabar they had about 50 Catholics for mass. On the second Sunday the number rose to 105. They were mostly government employees or the employees of European companies coming from many coastal cities of Africa. There was also a large community of Igbo speakers, mostly ex-servile class.

The High Commissioner, the European merchants, and the Efik chiefs pledged both moral and material support for the establishment of any Catholic mission station in Calabar. Because of lack of personnel Lejeune could only respond to this request in 1903. In June 1903, Lejeune arrived in person to Calabar accompanied by Sr Theonite, the Superior of the Cluny sisters at Onitsha and stayed for three months establishing the necessary contact with the local and government authorities. His major joker was school apostolate. This was really desired in a community that has a lot of Western influence. He handed the mission to Fr. Patrick MacDermott who embarked on aggressive school policy. By the end of 1904, the two schools established in Calabar had a total of 420 pupils and the Church had gained about 210 new converts.

Sr Theonite also started a convent school for girls which had a tremendous result leading to some girls leaving the Presbyterian school for the convent school. The doctors at the government hospital, St Margaret’s Hospital requested Lejeune to send nuns to the hospital which had opened since 1894. The government promised handsome grant for the accommodation and maintenance of the nuns. Lejeune used the opportunity to make a project proposal for the building of a convent. By
September 26 1904 the convent had been built and ceremoniously opened. It was a project financed not by the Church but also by the colonial government and the Whites and Blacks of Calabar.

Apart from extending the mission to Calabar, Lejeune also made attempt to bring the gospel to Benue region of the territory. Attempts were made to establish a mission at Dekina in October 1903. It did not succeed because of a number of factors: non-acceptance of the whites because of the violence suffered from the colonial whites, lack of interest in education because of not being close to the coast where business with the whites makes education attractive. The mission house was burnt by the villagers in January 1904 and re-established in March the same year. By August 1905 the mission was finally closed and the Spiritans did not return to Benue until the late 1920s.

Lejeune adapted the strategy of targeting the village chiefs. The famous saying of Jesus: “strike the shepherd and the sheep will scatter” (Mt 26,31) was correctly employed by Lejeune. Unlike his predecessors who founded the Church on the rejects of the society, Lejeune preferred to target the freeborn and nobles without forgetting the slaves and outcasts. It was also during his mission in October 1900, that a Catholic convert was made the King of Onitsha in the person of Samuel Okolo Okosi whose influence brought so many notable Onitsha indigenes to the Church.

Among the biggest scoop for Father Lejeune and his missionary team was the conversion of Chiefs Alfred, Charles, Daniel, Benedict and Augustine of Nbimbi (probably Nembe). These were the greatest slave-owners in the area and were assured it was not necessary to free their slaves but to simply christianise them, thus constituting them into a type of Christian village. Father Lejeune also counted among his distinguished converts, the king of Buguma, a very important trading centre blessed with many oil wells.\(^\text{10}\)

Fr Lejeune believed that “once the head has been won, the whole body will follow.” The appointment of Okosi as King of Onitsha was well used by Lejeune to popularize the Lower Niger mission. He wrote to

\(^{10}\)Obi and others, “A hundred Years of the Church in Eastern Nigeria, 1885-1985,” 76-77.
Propaganda Fidei describing the merits of the new king. He spoke of his refusal to be honoured as divine, his refusal to sacrifice to his ancestors, to kill a goat for the river Niger, to kill his twin sons and to worship the royal idol which was traditionally placed above the king’s throne, and he installed a crucifix on the right side of his throne.\footnote{Holy Ghost Congregation’s Archive in France, B/192/02, “Lejeune’s report to Ledochowsk” (November 15, 1900).} This was very important to Lejeune that he even demanded for a papal recognition for the King. In response, the Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda Fidei announced that the pope has accepted to give a statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary to the new King. In appreciation, King Samuel wrote back to the pope thanking him and telling him of the great influence his kingship has had on the conversion of the region and the willingness of the people to accept the Christian faith and to help missionaries. He then asked the pope to send more missionaries to the Lower Niger.\footnote{Annales Apostoliques, no. 6 (June, 1902), 139ff.}

Lejeune also encouraged local customs that are not against the faith. For example a formidable contingent of Catholics including priest, brothers and sisters attended the Ofala festival of Samuel Okosi on 8\textsuperscript{th} October 1901.\footnote{Journal (October 8, 1901) in C. Obi, 79.} Another remarkable project undertaken during his period for the promotion of the people’s culture was the attempt to put Igbo language into writing. This was done by the publication of an English-Igbo-French Dictionary by Fr. Ganot and the production of a manual of Catholic Doctrine called, “Katikism nk’okwukwe katolic n’asusu Igbo” which appeared in 1904. The missionaries also drew up the list of mortal and venial sins in Igbo known as “Ndia buga nnukwu njo” and “ndia buga obele njo”. This was to help them in confession. The list was later integrated into the catechism book and is still in use today. We can see how the missionaries worked hard to master every pastoral challenge that came their way.

Another area where Lejeune showed himself a great pastor was in the area of education. During the time of Fr. Lutz some schools were set up: a primary school and an educational industrial school were set up at Onitsha Wharf in 1893 and 1897 respectively. Lejeune would later push this initiative to a great height. “Apart from teaching the children the 3Rs and singing, the children were educated to do manual labour in order to
acquire self-help.” Lejeune exploited the good relationship between the government and the Church to advance the cause of education. He was willing to follow government directives and policies. While the CMS schools were merely concentrating on teaching the children how to read the Bible in the native language, the Catholic schools were already teaching English language to their pupils. “When Raph Moor, the governor of Southern Nigeria, wanted such subjects as English, Mathematics, Book-keeping, Accountancy, Carpentry and Secretarial Studies to be included in the school curriculum, Father Lejeune promptly implemented the government proposals.” The governor was pleased and accepted to grant some aids to the Church for the development of schools. Lejeune used the opportunity to open more schools while at the same time making sure that the standard was maintained in all the schools.

In spite of the great success recorded by Lejeune, it has to be said that he also made enemies who considered him as being high-handed and over strict with people. Such an understanding led to the catechists’ revolt in 1903. The catechists at Holy Trinity Onitsha in conjunction with the simple Christians wrote a protest letter against Lejeune and the letter was signed by up to seventy people. The letter was sent to the Spiritan headquarters in Paris, France. Apart from this, there were so many other letters sent to France against Lejeune. The people also staged a protest with placards. One placard read: “Lejeune must go! Remove that whip!” One of the private letters read:

…since one year and a half, the Christians are dropping their faith through bad example of Mr. Lejeune who has no patience or courage…We hope he will be sent away, he is not a “Father” but a man who never has mercy even upon his dog and who always thinks he is right in everything he does.

In his reaction to this revolt, Lejeune explained that having tried the method used by his predecessors and having found it inefficient, he

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15 Ibid., 86.
had decided to introduce some changes. One of the changes was to send the catechists from Onitsha to the neighbouring towns since there were many at the Wharf mission and it was costing much to pay them. Secondly, most of the catechists who led the revolt were converts from Protestantism and therefore still retained some of their old attitudes. Besides four of them were sent away because they neglected their duty. All these pushed the simple Christians to join in the revolt going as far as involving the students in the boarding school.

After the revolt, Lejeune stood his ground and it did not take much time for many people to realize that he was right. As already stated, one of Lejeune’s weak points is his inflexible character but it must be said that he was a man who loved the Church and carried out his reforms with no desire for personal glory. He may have made some mistakes but he laid a very solid foundation for the Church in Lower Niger. To summarize the contribution of Lejeune to the Prefecture of Lower Niger, Ozigbo had this to say:

One can only speculate what the Prefecture might have become if Lejeune had enjoyed just half the years available to his two immediate successors (Shanahan had 26 years from 1905-1931 and Bishop Heery had 36 from 1931-1967) in the Prefecture…The warm cooperation with the colonial government, the purposeful use of the school as an instrument for evangelization and the policy of reliance on more local personnel and resources were initiated by him…. He had begun to press for a vicariate for the Prefecture. Had he lived longer, the vicariate would have been created much earlier than 1920.\(^\text{17}\)

In April 1905 Lejeune, very ill had to leave for France. He was diagnosed of cancer of the thyroid. He knew the game was up. Before leaving for France he made a journey of about 200 mile, all alone to go and say goodbye to the missionaries at Dekina, namely Shanahan and Heery. “I have come to say goodbye \textit{mes amis}. I am leaving Africa next week. I will never see it again…I am going home to die. Would to heaven

they had left me here to die in Africa. However, it is God’s will. I do not complain.”

Commenting on this occasion, Shanahan noted:

Never will I forget my last night with Father Lejeune in Africa. To me he has always been the picture of the perfectly dauntless soldier of Christ, the ideal missionary. Big and gruff of voice, but with a heart of gold and the straight-forwardness of a child, utterly fearless, utterly selfless, a giant in soul and body. Nothing was more typical of the man than this last gesture of affection for us, his fellow-workers, coming over two hundred miles unaccompanied, just to say goodbye to us. It shows the kind of man he was.

On September 5, 1905 this great hero and father of faith took the final bow at the age of 44 (1860-1905). In only five years of mission he had been able to lay a solid foundation for the biggest Church in Africa today.

2. **Legacies of the Missionary Activities of Leon Alexandre Lejeune for the Church in the Lower Niger**

Lejeune, through his work as the Prefect of the Prefecture of the Lower Niger laid the solid foundation upon which the Catholic Church in Nigeria is built. The evangelization of the Northern Nigeria and the solidification of the faith in the Western Nigeria through the missionaries and the migrant people of Lower Niger could not have been possible without the work of Lejeune. He left great legacies for the Church especially in the following areas: Care for pastoral agents, accurate management of resources, encouragement of Christians to take part in the projects of the Church, empowerment of Christian to develop self-reliant occupations, Promotion of culture through School and evangelization, collaboration with the State and witnessing to the faith.

In the first place, Lejeune was quick to observe early enough in his ministry that he needed to take a very good care of those working with him so that they can give the maximum in their work. He spotted the first

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19 Journal (October 4, 1905) in C. Obi, 103.
difficulty in this area in the lodging of the pastoral agents. The missionaries were often sick. The cause according to him was that they were badly housed. For this reason he embarked on a very ambitious housing project. He introduced the building of mission houses with bricks and insisted on the buildings being well ventilated and storeyed. Considering their meagre resources and the lack of experts to undertake such construction we must appreciate the courage of this man of God.

By this very option, Lejeune was not just building for the missionaries, he was showing the future generation of pastoral agents that we should first of all care for those who are doing God’s work. In this he left a legacy for the leaders of our Church, teaching them that their first pre-occupation should be the wellbeing of those working with them.

Besides this caring aspect, Lejeune through the new style of building introduced a new architecture in the region. Instead of building with mud and palm fronds our people learnt to build with bricks and zinc. Today most Fathers’ houses in our region are upstairs. Certain people even think that parish houses must be upstairs. It was thanks to the initiative of Lejeune that such mentality has come to stay among our people.

Secondly, Lejeune began the tradition of accurate management of resources. At his arrival he noticed that the meagre resources received from foreign missionary aids were not so well managed. Much was spent on charity especially in buying back slaves and running the Christian village. He equally observed that some of the pastoral agents were careless about their health thereby leading the mission to spend much on their healthcare both on the local and international levels. Besides, he observed that relying solely on the Royal Niger Company for the purchase and transport of materials needed for the mission was costing a lot. He felt that there could be a better way out. Instead of giving to the people in charity, he decided to encourage the people to give what they have for the progress of the mission. In doing this he was able to save some money which he directed to other projects. Besides managing what was officially given, he was equally good in generating fund. He did this by consistently giving a regular report on the progress of the mission and its projects both to his superiors and to the Cardinal prefect of Propaganda Fidei. He persistently demanded for aids and pressurized his superiors to commission one of the
missionaries to look for donors both in Europe and in the United States of America.

Thirdly, Lejeune was quick in encouraging the Christians to see the Church as their own affair. It was not just the missionary thing. He convinced them to take part in the works going on in the Church. He was not discouraged by what other white men may consider as the poverty of the people. He sought for the riches in them and he found them. The result was that he taught our people to care both for the Church projects and for Church personnel. I remember reading in the missionary journal a report of an encounter between an Igbo elder at Onitsha and a missionary. The missionary has been distributing gifts to people in order to attract them to become Christians. An elder confronted him one day urging him to change his strategy, saying: “It is wrong for you to distribute gifts to the people. Do you not know that our people do not value things that do not cost them money.” The missionary learnt fast the lesson as one could see from the report which reads further: “Father Vogler came back from the bush today. As a good bursar that he is, he gave nothing to the people, rather he came back having behind him a lineup of goats.” The support that priests and religious enjoy today from our people would not have been possible if pastors like Lejeune did not have the will to encourage the people to give the little they had. By participating in such a way, he gave the people a sense of belonging. They were therefore able to see the Church as their own Church.

Fourthly, he empowered the Christians by teaching them self-reliant trades. He began by involving them in the making of bricks for the mission buildings. Next he made them work as brick layers and carpenter. In the schools, the children were taught craft work and in this way he made them realize that education is supposed to have both theoretical and practical dimensions.

Furthermore, Lejeune promoted the culture of our people through schools and evangelization. In the first place, he paid serious attention to formal education of children. He knew the value of education for the formation of faith and character and he did everything possible to open schools and to attract children from both rich and poor families to embrace formal education. Again we know that culture pass through languages.

20 Spiritan Archives, chevilly-la rue, file no 0480/70 Ref 1111.12a 3.1.
Lejeune did not neglect to promote the language of the people. It was during his period that Igbo grammar book and dictionary as well as Igbo catechisms were published. Besides, he did not distance himself from the traditional practices of the people he was evangelizing. By being closely attached to the King of Onitsha, for example, he was able to understand a lot about the people’s cultural practices and to isolate the good ones from the bad ones. It was with this understanding that Christians and missionaries were able to attend the ofala ceremony of the king of Onitsha.

On another note, Fr. Lejeune knew that the Church and State, being the key players in the development of people must work hand in hand. He did his possible best to encourage a cordial relationship between the government and the Church. In his report to Propaganda Fidei in 1903, he emphasized the cordial relationship between the Church and the government: “We now march along with the Government who gives us the example… and we are going to show that we are Catholic, evangelizing and planting our Faith everywhere…It is necessary that we should be honourably represented everywhere…”

For him, the Church should not withdraw from engaging in activities with the Government since the latter has the power to help the Church in realizing a lot of things. We saw this in the invasion of the Aro deity which was carried out both on the military and spiritual levels. Lejeune’s attitude made the British Colonial Government to be favorably disposed towards the missionaries and this helped to advance the work of evangelization. Through this relationship the government even helped to fight some evils that the missionaries were condemning. For example, in a bid to help the missionaries in their fight against the forces of darkness, Sir Ralph Moor promulgated an edict against various inhuman practices existing among the local population. This edict again corroborated missionary efforts to stamp out paganism and plant the banner of Christianity.

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21 C.S.E. B/192/A/04, Father Lejeune’s Report from Lokoja, Northern Nigeria, October 20 1903, presented to the members of the Central Council of Propagation of the Faith in Paris in C. Obi, 97.

22 The edict forbade human sacrifice and the Oraji which consisted in serving a suspected person a potion of sasswood poison. It was a sure way of eliminating one’s enemies and rivals. Cf. Obi and others, “A hundred Years of the Church in Eastern Nigeria, 1885-1985,” 98.
By opening up to the civil society, Lejeune was able to teach the Christians that politics is not evil and that Christians could participate in the political life of the society. The Church–State relation still continues to be operative in almost all the states of the Lower Niger today.

Besides, the catechists’ revolt of 1903 was surely a crisis moment for Lejeune but he stood his ground. In that incident we see that missionary work is not all rosy. It could sometimes be very trying. By his calm manner of handling the crisis he left a big legacy for all future leaders of the Church. In spite of many sacrifices and good will for the people, the people could still respond with ingratitude demanding that the pastoral agent be removed from among them even when he had never sought for personal advantages. Lejeune shows that such reactions should not discourage a pastor or even make him to stop working hard and selflessly for the people.

The last but not the least, Lejeune was a man of great faith. Throughout his five years stay in the lower Niger he left an example of a man who believes that with God all things are possible. When we go through his great achievements: the building of upstairs, the founding of clinics and schools, the formation of catechists, the expansion of the mission from Onitsha to Calabar and from Onitsha to the Northern Nigeria going from Lokoja to Dekina, his accepting to join in the expedition against the Aro deity and the Awka deity, we cannot but say that he had given a very good testimony of faith. When he eventually became sick, he accepted his sickness with sincere resignation to the will of God. He showed no bitterness and looked up to God. When leaving Fr. Shanahan and Fr Heery at Dekina he just intoned the Salve Regina after which he said: “Goodbye friends, we meet in heaven.” In this simple statement we see the depth of his faith. He was described as:

A brave, saintly and resourceful missionary...lived a self-effacing life. For him what mattered was the mission and progress in the Lord’s vineyard. His assessment of the situation was very accurate and very incisive. He not only consolidated the work of his predecessors and took fresh strides but also laid
the foundation for the monumental achievement of Bishop Shanahan and companions who took over as from 1905.\footnote{Obi and others, “A hundred Years of the Church in Eastern Nigeria, 1885-1985,” 97-98.}

3. The Pastoral Implications of Lejeune’s Legacies for Pastoral Agents and Church Leaders Today

Having seen the manner in which Fr. Leon Alexander Lejeune carried out his apostolate as the Prefect of the Prefecture of Lower Niger and the pastoral legacies he has left behind, let us now evaluate the pastoral activities of the pastoral agents today in the light of what we have exposed so far.

3.1. Care for Pastoral Agents

Fr. Lejeune strove to make sure that those doing the missionary work with him were maintained in good health. He provided them with the necessary things needed for them to keep soul and body together. He paid special attention to their lodging and personal upkeep. Today, it has become normal for dioceses to take good care of their priests, providing them with good housing, adequate feeding with financial support for their daily needs. In some dioceses, the people of God take care of the pastoral agents and their upkeep. Some dioceses have health care insurance scheme for their workers. In the Onitsha ecclesiastical province, it is the practice for priests and religious to go for annual medical check-up which is financed by the dioceses.

In spite of these progresses, a lot still needs to be done in the area of caring for the wellbeing of pastoral agents. Take for example the question of creating nonviable parishes. The objective of creating a parish should be the salvation of souls. The question to be asked while accepting to create such parish is: are there souls to be saved in such a place? If yes, then a parish could be created. However, this first question should be followed by another very important question: Is the diocese ready to take care of the pastoral agent that will work in the place? Not asking this second question and constantly talking about the salvation of soul as if the person bringing the message of salvation is already offered as holocaust has really sent some priests to an early grave. Lejeune maintained that only healthy and happy pastoral agents can effectively spread the gospel.
Before a parish is created, those asking for and those accepting the demand should be ready to support financially the work of evangelization by making sure that the minister has a place to rest his head and some oil for his stomach at the end of the daily work. This could be done by asking richer parishes to partner with the small ones. Not doing this makes some priests live like bourgeois while some others are obliged to live like proletarian. Fr. Lejeune had the courage to build a two storey building for priests at Aguleri in his time to make sure that the priests could do their work in joy and in good health. We should not lose sight of such policy.

It is wrong to presume that a priest sent to nonviable parish could always sort himself out. Some could, but many could not for we are not all equally gifted. For the interest of the weak, it would be good for every diocese to develop a policy of solidarity that will ensure that all pastoral agents have an almost the same standard of living. During my missionary sojourn in Chad Republic from the year 2000 to 2004 I was personally impressed by the way this Church took care of everybody, priests, religious and catechists. The Church in Chad was not rich but it was organized in a way that everybody’s good will is maintained for the progress of the ministry. Every rectory or convent has an account at the diocesan secretariat and at the end of every month everybody receives a salary, part of which is paid directory into the rectory account for the upkeep of the fathers or sisters while the remaining is paid into the personal account of each priest. In this way there is no rivalry or backbiting in a bid to secure a better parish since whatever is got in any parish in the form of offertory is paid back to the secretariat. The secretariat undertakes the parish projects like the church, the rectory etc. I know we are not Chadians and we cannot function like them but we can have well known and applied policy of solidarity in support of pastoral agents.

3.2. Accurate Management of Resources

Fr. Lejeune managed the meagre resources of the mission with a high sense of economy which minimized any waste. He was slow in spending and quick in raising and saving funds. Thanks to his managerial acumen, he was able to achieve much with less. Today the problem of resources still continues in all the local Churches. Many dioceses have trained priests who manage the resources of the diocese in an impeccable
manner with the diocesan finance committee. Many dioceses today are not only good in spending funds, they also generate a lot of resources. Some dioceses have serious business investments like banks, filling stations, hospitals, schools, student hostels, youth centres and farms.

However, we still witness in some places gross mismanagement of funds with little or no business investments. Some Church institutions especially the parishes rely mainly of the spontaneous raising of funds on Sunday masses. There is a feeling that the people could always be called upon to donate. This leads to a sort of exploitation of the people’s sentiments. In addition, some priests refuse to have finance committee in their parishes and institutions leading to mismanagement of funds. Sometimes money collected for a particular project is diverted to another thing or even totally wasted on personal needs of the pastoral agent involved.

I think that the time has come for every pastoral agency to become self-reliant by investing on projects that could sustain the institutions instead of hoping that our people will continue to support the Church. We can borrow a leaf from the Western world where some parishes no longer rely much on prompt donations from the faithful. The parish where I lived during my study years in France had about 98 flats in Paris and the pastoral agents in the parish continue to buy new flats. With such investment the Church can take care of herself even if the people stop participating in the financial life of the parish.

Proper management of Church funds implies also avoiding unnecessary wastages like spending money on superfluous projects. It has become fashionable for every new parish priest in some dioceses to build a new structure since structures have become the criteria for measuring a good and hardworking priest, such that a priest who fails to build a structure is categorized as a bad priest even if he cares seriously for the souls entrusted to him. Some priests in a bid to register their presence go as far as pulling down rectories that have not even done a decade. I denounce such dwarf initiative as wasteful. Lejeune would have invested such money in a money yielding project for the parish.

3.3. **Encouraging Christians to See the Church as Their Own**

Another legacy that Lejeune left for the Church was his insistence that people must contribute in running the Church. Today it has become a
way of life for our Christians to support the Church. They can go hungry to make their priests eat. They can live in thatch houses to make sure their priests live in upstairs, they can travel miles on foot to make sure their priest has a car. The Catholic Women Organizations all over Nigeria are known for their practice of contributing for the feeding of priests. In Onitsha ecclesiastical province there is the practice of women contributing on regular basis for the feeding of junior seminarians and the priests in the parishes. In some places, like in developing estates in the suburbs of some cities, it is the Christians themselves that go to negotiate for land for building of Church and rectory. Sometimes, they tax themselves to build the necessary structures before going to the bishop to request for a priest.

The generosity of Christians is well known today and many pastoral agents have done well in not only exhorting people to give to the Church but also in allowing them to participate in making vital decisions touching the life of the Church. This is a welcome initiative. However, for this practice to continue, the people need to understand the spiritual motivation in giving to God and the Church. Sometimes, the faithful tend to politicize their participation in the Church. We see little groups coming up to request to become a parish with a resident priest because they want to be on their own and have positions in the Church which they could not possibly have if they remain in a big parish. This has led to the creation of many parishes which should not have been. Such parish creation ends up being a heavy burden on the people when their priests make some legitimate demands on them. Sometimes the pioneers of such demand for a new parish lose their zeal or the financial powers thereby placing the priests and the simple village parishioners in a very tight corner.

Besides, in spite of the generosity of the faithful, the pastoral agents still need to be sensitive to the feelings and the financial conditions of the people. There is often the tendency to capitalize on the fact that the people should support their Church to exploit the gullibility of the simple Christians. We see this when the pastoral agent tortures the people using biblical passages to frighten them to give above their means. Such expression like: “if you do not pay your tithe, things will be tight for you” or “if you are suffering then check your offering” or again, if things are difficult for you then it might be that you are cheating God by not giving him enough. Or still the idea of telling people that if they sow enough seed they are sure to reap even where they have not sown.
3.4. Empowerment of Christians to Develop Self-reliant Occupations

Fr. Lejeune was so much interested in making the people not to be dependent on the Church. He wanted them to be able to learn trades that will help them become self-reliant. Today many local Churches have embraced fully this option by setting up skill acquisition centres. In the diocese of Umuahia we have a big one. Some dioceses finance the formation of young men in acquiring basic skills, for example, the Archdiocese of Onitsha sent some youth to Germany last year to specialize in automobile mechanics. There are a lot of initiatives going on both at diocesan and parish levels.

However, many have not woken up to the understanding that apart from announcing the gospel and administering the sacraments and the affairs of the Church, that the Church has also another urgent mission, that of renewing the face of the earth through development of people. In the Pentecostal Churches of Nigeria, the pastoral agents often organize business retreats for their followers in view of bettering their economic life. Like Lejeune, they realize that when the people are better off, the Church will spend less on charity. Some pastoral agents are yet to understand the command of Jesus to his disciples concerning the flock: “You yourselves, give them something to eat” (Lk 9,13). We often tend to concentrate on the spiritual life of the faithful while neglecting their economic life which is a major key to a sound spiritual life. We know that a healthy mind dwells in a healthy body. The two must go together.

It is therefore important that those at the helm of affairs in the Church whether at the diocesan or parish level integrate into their pastoral programme ways of making the faithful financially buoyant and independent. It will not be enough to tell people to bring their problems to God by coming to crusades and prayer meetings. These are important but not sufficient. We should do more by creating avenues for formations and funds for empowering those who have acquired some skills. Every parish no matter how small or poor can begin doing something in this direction.

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3.5. Promotion of Culture through Education and Evangelization

Lejeune was quick in noticing that our people have good as well as objectively bad cultural practices just like any other people. Coming from another culture, he tried to promote the positive values of our people through education and evangelization. Today these values have received a great promotion through the Church. Every diocese in the country makes formal education and promotion of the people’s culture a foremost priority. There are schools owned and run by the dioceses and parishes. The religious Institutions are also owning and running a lot of schools. These schools are known for their exceptional performance both in academic and attitudinal spheres of life.

However, some of the Church owned schools are today criticized for their lack of consideration for poor parents who could not afford the costly school fees charged by the mission schools. Some of these schools were built with the contribution of every member of the parish, the rich and the poor alike. Lejeune did not run a free school but he had a system of offering education to both the rich and the poor by making the children do manual labour which could compensate for the expenses of running the school. His primary interest was not the money but the enlightenment that he wishes to offer to the people.

Surely, this method can no longer work out today but we should try other methods. Since mission owned schools offer quality moral and intellectual formation, profit making should not become a priority in such schools. They should aim at providing as many people as possible the opportunity to acquire good education. This could be done by creating scholarships for children of poor parentage especially those whose parents are doing their best in the life of the parish. Each school can reserve between 10-15% of its admission to the children of the poor who should be admitted after an examination. This would become an effective means of evangelization and will give a sense of belonging to all parishioners who often labour to have such mission school in their parishes. We can no longer continue to complain that we need a lot of money to run a school. The Church is principally a soul winning organization and must not lose sight of this evangelizing mission.
3.6. **Collaboration with the State**

The cordial relationship which exists between the Church and State in some parts of Nigeria today owes a lot to Lejeune’s method of evangelization. Today some governments prefer to partner with the Catholic Church in many developmental projects. They do this because of the high trust they put in the Church. The Church has lived up to the expectation. The former governor of Anambra State, Mr Peter Obi pushed this collaboration to a great height by using the Church in his healthcare and school projects. His level of satisfaction with this collaboration led him to return to the Church all the schools that were formally owned by the Church but forcefully taken over by the government. This collaboration owes a lot to the personality of the bishops who try to get involved in the life of the State.

Notwithstanding this collaboration, it has to be remarked that many pastoral agents are not politically active within the limit permitted by the Church. Many do not get involved in the political life around them. Collaborating with the State should not end with executing projects for the government. The Church should, through the pastoral agents be seriously involved in the activities that have a lot of influence on the life of their flock. They should not turn down invitations to participate in vital meetings in the local government headquarters, towns and villages.

Since the Second Vatican Council the Church has played an active role in restoring peace and order and in ensuring that the correct people are put in the correct places. This is important because when the wrong people are in power the effects are felt by everybody including the Church. The pastoral agents should be able to bring together the key political figures in their area and be able to instil Christian orientations in them. Calling them together to solve financial problems of the Church is not enough. They should be equipped with the Social Teachings of the Church. This could be done by organizing seminars for them at the parish, diocesan and even national levels. Christian, especially Catholic politicians should be taught by the pastoral agents to have proper Catholic front in their political life.

3.7. **Witnessing to the Faith**

The Church in Nigeria is not an old Church. However, it has left great landmarks which are witness of the faith of the people and their
leaders. There have been great crisis and persecutions especially in the Northern part of the country. In spite of these persecutions, the faith continues to flourish. This is seen in the number of young people who yearly opt for the consecrated life in the difficult zones of the nation. Like Lejeune and his missionaries, our people continue to posit acts of faith. The recent ravages of Boko Haram in the North East is supposed to have wiped out Christianity from the entire zone and yet there are still Christians there who continue to resist and who courageously bear the discrimination encouraged by the government in place.

Apart from persecution, there are also financial problems that could discourage anyone from taking any initiative. Some dioceses are financially very poor and yet one cannot but marvel at the courage with which their bishops embark on enduring projects like schools, Churches, hospitals, skill acquisition centres, pastoral centres etc.

Besides, the Church is continuously getting involved in charity works and litigations for justice through the Justice Development and Peace Commissions of the dioceses.

Notwithstanding these areas of positive witnesses to the faith, a lot of areas still need to be looked into. First and foremost is the question of catechesis which was of paramount importance to the missionaries. The advent of Pentecostalism has brought a lot of confusion in the Catholic way of life that was handed on by the missionaries. We are mixing up a lot of things and banalizing the Catholic character of our faith. Catholics are gradually losing their identity and consistently imitating the new found Churches. The result is that many pastoral agents tend to follow the Pentecostal approaches to prayer and liturgical celebrations leading to disordered invention especially in the Eucharistic celebrations. This was what the Council of Trent fought against centuries ago.

Besides the theological aberration, there is also a return to many African Traditional Religious practices which evidently portray a great lack of faith. We see this in some of the priests who are involved in the healing ministries. People are told to make sacrifices, to bury sacramental as charms were buried in the former times, and to use holy water and olive oils as drugs.

Sequel to this is the practice of merchandizing blessings. Pastors who should teach the faithful disfigure them by introducing into them a mentality that looks at prayer as magic. We see this during fundraising in
the Churches. The preacher tries to make people believe that God blesses people in a mathematical proportion following the amount of money that they have given to God. Some go as far as categorizing God’s blessings in monetary worth: “If you give this you get that.” This reminds me of Martin Luther’s fight against indulgence. Luther kept asking: “If the merits of Christ and that of the saints can release souls from purgatory, why must this merit be bought? Can’t God in his mercy apply these merits to the souls who are in dire need of redemption?” In my own manner, I keep saying, if the man of God knows that he has power to obtain every blessing from God because God has given him the privilege, why then must the blessing be paid for since they are coming from God, our Father. Lejeune would not do this because it is a sure sign of making the house of God a robbers’ den (Lk 19,46). Jesus was explicit on this simony when he said: “You received without charge give without charge (Mt 10,8).

Furthermore, the lifestyle of some pastoral agents today with regard to suffering shows a clear sign of lack of faith. Lejeune and his co-missionaries burnt themselves out preaching and teaching, and lived like the ministers of God in a simple life style. Their life itself was a full message of evangelization. They worked day and night and most died young. Today we cannot live like them because life has become better in many aspects and this has to touch everybody even the ministers of the Gospel. However, the quest for material comfort that we notice in some pastoral agents today is very scandalous. Some pastoral agents have no time for teaching the people of God, no time for reading the teachings of the Church. The greater part of their time is spent on leisure and on business and business strategies. We should go back to the beginning and see how true witnesses of the Gospel who preceded us centred their life on the love of God and his people.

**Conclusion**

The waning of pastoral zeal among the pastoral agents today has prompted this write-up. We tried to answer a pertinent question: how could the seeming waning of pastoral zeal in the Church today be rekindled? Our attempt to provide a reasonable answer to this question led us to go back to the history of mission in our Church. In doing this, we spotted an exemplary figure among the early missionaries who left indelible pastoral marks in the sand of missionary history in the person of
Fr. Leon-Alexandre Lejeune. We tried to study his missionary accomplishment in the Lower Niger mission from 1900 to 1905.

Our discoveries were remarkable. Within a short time this man was able to put the Lower Niger mission in the world missionary map by his dogged pastoral strategies. From this finding, we were able to bring out some legacies which should inspire the pastoral agents of today in their ministries and apostolates.

Sequel to this, we tried to see the implications of these legacies for the Church in Nigeria today by applying each of the legacies to the present day pastoral work. With this we are able to arrive at a conclusion: the pastoral agents in today’s Nigerian Church should not forget to emulate the spirit that animated the missionaries that handed over the work of the mission to us. They had only one motivation: to serve God and humanity without looking for any personal interest. We should re-centre our pastoral activities today around this noble objective.