

CHAPTER 18

THE PROCESS OF CANONIZATION IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND REASONS FOR ABSENCE OF CANONIZED SAINTS OF AFEMAI DESCENT

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Introduction

"Remember those, O Lord, who in your peace have died, yet may not gain love's high reward till love is purified!"¹ This stanza of a hymn from the Stan Brook Abbey Hymnal is one that is deeply appreciated, especially when the glories of departed brethren, marked with the sign of faith, are pondered upon. The thoughts of the four last things: Death, Judgment, Hell and Heaven are reassurances of another life in the hereafter.² This is an aspect of the teachings and practice of the Catholic Faith, which has existed in Afemai land for more than a century.³ With the celebration of the 20th anniversary of the Diocese of Auchi, it is appropriate to ruminate on the glories of men and women: Priests, Religious and lay faithful who worked unstintingly in the land of Afemai. This work examines the lives of some of the departed Afemai Catholic natives, whose evangelization and pastoral activities have contributed to the development of the Catholic Faith in Afemai and in the creation of the Catholic Diocese of Auchi. This chapter also uncovers the lapse in the work titled *How Saints Are Made:*

Beatification, Canonization and Sainthood, where Sylvester Aderinkola presented a detailed understanding of the history and procedures of canonization. One thing amongst others missing in the work is the answer to the question as regards why Africans and Nigerians in particular are ill-informed about canonization and the need to live in the hope of being canonized someday.⁴

In his book titled, “*We Will Remember Them*”, Peter McCawille chronicled the list of deceased Priests and Religious, in the Midwestern Nigeria, which today comprises the Dioceses of Auchi, Lokoja, Issele-Uku, Uromi, and the Archdiocese of Benin City, from 1884 to 2011. In this encouraging and ground-breaking piece, the list of deceased Afemai priests and Religious are found. These include Rev. Frs. Lawrence Adoga Attah, Paul Akhagbosu, Thomas Mary Osilama Obozuwa, Louis Thomas Igemokhai Areleme, John Uba Ofei, Joseph A. Erameh and Leonard Osimhekkena Ayonote. Besides the priests, McCawille also chronicled a list of female Religious, which include: Sr. Mary Theresa Ugbodaga, E.H.J.; Sr. Kate Amunc, S.N.D., and Sr. Josephine Etafo, S.N.D.⁵ Even though McCawille, in his book, excludes the lay faithful, Fr. James Higgins in his book, *Kindling the Fire*, discussed priests, religious, and the lay faithful who assisted priests in their evangelization and pastoral activities. These priests and religious, alongside devout lay faithful, worked assiduously to establish the Faith. Some of these lay faithful include the following persons: Chief John Ikhimeagie, Sir Felix Umole, Mr. Coleman Ofuakho, Sir Edward Agabi, Catechist Francis Kasimu Odamah, Pa. Anaedevbha (of Iviogbepui), Pa. Joachim Aigbodio Akpala and Pa. Omoike White. This chapter is dedicated to them for their patience, time, talent, and treasures in the evangelization of Afemai land and its people. McCawille titled his book, *We will remember them*. But how shall they be remembered? They shall be remembered just the same way known saints are remembered: St. Nicholas of Tolentine, St. Ignatius of Loyola, St. Theresa of Avila, and so on. While those canonized saints are extolled, it is also a reassurance that there are many who have gone but were buried without the prospect of beatification and canonization.

This chapter posits that there are some of them that could be referred to as the un-canonized saints of Afemai descent. Some of them were priests, religious, catechists, and lay faithful. To incorporate them into the cult of the saints according to the canonicity of the Catholic Church, they must undergo beatification and canonization. It is possible for these departed Afemai Catholic faithful to be beautified and canonized. Many people may doubt this claim. But this chapter provides hope of the possibility of canonization. Hope is here expressed that these holy men and women did not work or die in vain. "Sweet was their pain, yet deep; till perfect love was born, their lone night-watch they gladly kept."⁶ How they are remembered would be a great encouragement to those who are alive. The saints pray for our wellbeing and salvation. They are sources of encouragement to those who are alive to live good lives with hope that they too shall be canonized.⁷

In this paper, therefore, there is need to reflect on beatification and canonization, and to reconsider the modus operandi of burial in general as Catholics. The emphasis would be on burying deceased loved ones with the hope and aim of canonizing them, as it is practiced in the Western World. Canonization is an integral part of Catholic tradition. It is also possible for it to happen to the departed Catholic faithful of Afemai land.

Canonization: Meaning, Process and Actualization

Canonization is the declaration of a departed Catholic faithful as a saint, where a saint is "a disciple who has lived a life of exemplary fidelity to the Lord".⁸ Canonization is "the definitive sentence by which the Pope declares a particular dead person to have already entered into heavenly glory and ordains for the new 'saints' a public cult throughout the Church."⁹ Prior to the thirteenth century, people were declared saints by popular acclamation. By popular acclamation, the local Christian community was motivated to venerate a person, who had either suffered death in persecution or was outstanding in holiness, that none could doubt his eternal destiny.¹⁰ As the Church grew and developed, this

action equally developed and was formalized by the great Pope Gregory IX, and was later supported by Pope Sixtus V, who entrusted the ultimate task to the Sacred Congregation of Rites with the role of processing candidates for canonization.¹¹

The process of canonization is long and carefully carried out.¹² However, Pope John Paul II, in 1983, gave a simplified lift to the process, and to be handled by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. Canonization, as a process, usually begins from five years after the death of the one to be canonized.¹³ The period of waiting is usually to discern the personal sanctity of the would-be saint among the people. The Pope has the supreme authority to begin the process of canonization before the usual five years, but this is in rare cases. For example, Pope John Paul II wasted no time for the process of Mother Teresa of Calcutta, and Benedict the XVI also did not delay in calling for the process of the canonization of his predecessor, Pope John Paul II. It is because the reputation of their sanctity among the people of God was not in dispute, and it needed no further justification. This means canonization is initiated when the sanctity of the person in question deserves it.

The process of canonization is in four phases, which are: the stage of the **Servant** of God, the stage of the **Venerable**, the stage of the **Blessed**, and the stage of **Canonization**. The process begins with a petitioner approaching the diocesan bishop for the cause of beatification and canonization to Rome (note: the petitioner could be any body convinced of the personal sanctity of the candidate in question). A ‘postulator of Faith’ in the diocese is named to stand, to investigate and to answer every objection. Rome receives the petition and places a *nihil obstat*.¹⁴

The first stage, as listed above, is the declaration of a deceased as a *servant of God*. This happens after the *nihil obstat* (nothing stands in the way) is placed on the deceased by the Holy See; that is, after reception of the petition. Prior to this stage, much information is

collected regarding the devoutness and life of virtue lived by the deceased in question. This stage of gathering information is conducted by the diocesan bishop (who constitutes a Diocesan Tribunal). If the deceased was a learned person and had written works whether public or private, they are also gathered as sources of knowing the deceased. This also includes audio messages if there be any. This process, of course, could take so many years. But once it is concluded, the results called the *acta* are transmitted to the Holy See, the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints. The Cardinals, Archbishops, and Bishops, who constitute this congregation also consider the *Acta* of the candidate and vote either in favour or against, depending on the available evidence of the life of the candidate. If their recommendation is in favour, a Decree of Heroic Virtues is transmitted to the Holy Father, who upon his consideration declares the candidate a **Venerable**.¹⁵

The stage of the Venerable attracts a miracle. That is, a miracle is proposed in support of the cause so petitioned. This is done in the diocese of the candidate for the cause. The miracle must be supervised by the scientific and theological bodies. The scientific body is to determine that the miracle lacks natural explanation. This must be well documented, that is, taking note of the disease, the treatment and the miracles wrought. The theological body is to determine that the miracle is truly attributable to God and that it was through the candidate's intercession. Once this is confirmed, the Congregation for the Causes of Saints receives it in Rome. The miracle is repeated as documented, the scientific and theological perspective. Upon confirmation, the Congregation commits it to the College of Cardinals, who after positive consideration delivers it to the Pope. It is worthy to note that in cases of martyrdom, the case of miracle is waived aside because martyrdom is perceived as a miracle of grace at work.¹⁶ With the Pope's approval, the candidate, the Venerable is beatified and declared **Blessed**.

The stage of the **BLESSED** allows the candidate to be addressed and venerated in private and public worships, especially in their local or regional dioceses. This stage requires two miracles before

beatification. The process for the second miracle is the same as the first. “The miracles must be instantaneous cure. There must be no medical explanation or medical interference, and they must be complete. It can take as long as ten years to be certain that a sufferer claiming a miracle is indeed permanently cured.”¹⁷ After this, the Congregation sends to the Holy Father a Decree of Miracle, which when accepted by the Holy Father makes canonization proper a possibility.

The final stage is **Canonization**. At this stage, the Pope issues a Bull of Canonization, which declares the candidate a saint and recommends them to be venerated anywhere and anytime. It is worthy to note that the Pope lacks the power to make a person a saint but after all the due processes, the Pope exercises his authority and declares a person a saint. That means the person is with God and his or her exemplary lifestyle can be imitated. Such saints are inserted into the calendar of their region or in the universal Church’s calendar. In this regard, the saints could be celebrated at Masses either as memorial or optional memorial.

The stages of beatification and canonization mentioned above and with the number of pious people we know, suggest therefore that there are many who are forgotten and un-canonized but are with God in heaven by virtue of their heroic and virtuous lives on earth. These men and women are no less saints than those who are declared saints. It is true that on All Saints Day, we celebrate canonized and non-canonized saints of the Church. However, for the promotion of a cause that the living would be encouraged in holy living, it is expedient to extol the departed, marked with the sign of faith. Canonization is a declaration of the glories of the saints and an assurance of reward for holy living. The reward of heaven awaits all virtuous people. The great questions is: “why the lack of local members for beatification and canonization?” The only candidate on the canonization train in Nigeria is Blessed Michael Iwene Tansi. It is possible that if he had lived on this shore/clime, his memory would not have been recalled.

Reasons for the absence of canonized saints of Afemai descent

It is impossible and implausible to assert that saints are absent from Afemai land after one hundred years. There are priests, religious, and lay faithful who kept the beatitude in view of beatific vision. Today, these persons enjoy this crown of glory above but unknown to us. While there are laid down rules or guidelines for the beatification and canonization of departed Christians, this chapter emphasizes the unenthusiastic mentality that has been manifested in advancing the cause of departed beloved ones towards beatification and canonization. This unwillingness is reflective in the manner burial is conducted in Afemai land. The deceased Afemai priests and religious mentioned above were buried without anticipating their beatification and canonization. They were buried and perhaps only remembered passively or locally, and their heroic virtues are forgotten forever. The priests and Religious seem to enjoy better regard in the manner they are buried vis-à-vis the lay faithful. The priests and Religious are buried with tomb stone and with epitaph while most lay faithful are buried without epitaph; leaving their graves deserted and unrecognized after some years. Even though the Diocese of Auchi since its creation and erection has made considerable effort in the manner she goes about the burial of Priests, there is still much to be desired especially in regard to beatification and canonization. The following reasons are advanced for the absence of canonized saints in Afemai land after one hundred years:

- a) **Lack of Records:** There are fewer or no records of the departed faithful, who left us ten years ago. The biographies on funeral programme, are readily deposited in the waste bin, whereas they can be used as documentary evidence of the life of the departed faithful. Many graves are left without epitaph and even when there is, it is poorly done such that it wears out within a short time and the departed is easily forgotten.
- b) **Nature of Graves:** Unlike in the advanced societies, the African society now have less regard for the tomb of the departed faithful. Graves are no longer treated with the respect

they deserve. One lesson from the beatification and canonization of already known saints is that they were preserved, having discovered that they lived a life of sanctity. Once discovered, the graves are adorned in hope of beatification and canonization. This is hardly the case in Africa. Many tombs are uncared for. There is evidence of how the flesh of some diseased persons are exhumed when people try to dig new spaces at the cemetery. It is evidence that someone had been buried there. But because the tombs are unmarked with gravestones and epitaph, those who dig are unaware that someone was buried on that spot. Often, such bodies are unidentifiable by those who are alive.

- c) **The Impatience of Petitioners:** The project and process of beatification and canonization is a difficult one. It was stated above that anyone could petition a cause of canonization. Many are tempted to withdraw in the process when there is delay in the outcome of the petition to Rome. The thought of this delay and long years of seeming silence can discourage anyone from coming forward to petition.
- d) **Lack of Hope:** Many Catholics in Nigeria lack the conviction of becoming saints. They consider sainthood as an impossible reality. For them, it is something we should speak less of so that others do not laugh us to scorn. The truth remains that in advanced countries almost everyone who makes effort in the Christian life believes he could be celebrated as saint one day. Lack of hope makes us treat others the same way we perceive ourselves. We bury them without hope of beatification and canonization.
- e) **Lack of Funds:** There is no doubt that the process of beatification and canonization is financially demanding. The much of documentations and transportations, which petitioners and those concerned would have to make, could also thwart the

effort expected for the cause of canonization. An average Nigerian does not commit resources into a cause without monetary and immediate profit. Since there is no immediate and financial profit from the cause of canonization, many would-be-petitioners disregard such venture.

Departed Priests, Religious and Lay Faithful of Afemai Descent: Worthy to be remembered

It is a holy thing to remember and pray for the dead. It is therefore pertinent to remember the Priests, Religious and Lay Faithful, who carried out evangelization activities to ensure that the faith was properly received. They include amongst others: Rev. Frs. Lawrence Adoga Attah, Paul Akhagbosu, Thomas Mary Osilama Obozuwa, Louis Thomas Igemokhai Areleme, John Uba Ofei, Joseph A. Erameh, Leonard Osimhekkena Ayonote.¹⁸ Other priests absent in McCawille's book include: Peter Odion Ayala, Isaac Osese Bossey, John Awaebe, Christopher Odia and Ambrose Alumiasunya. Besides the priests, McCawille also chronicled a list of Female Religious. Some of them include: Sr. Mary Theresa Ugbodaga, EHJ; Kate Amune, SND and Josephine Etafo, SND.¹⁹ There were also lay faithful who fought the good fight and ran the race. Some of them include the following persons: Chief John Ikhimeagie, Sir Felix Umole, Mr. Coleman Ofuakho, Sir Edward Agabi, Catechist Inamino, Catechist Dominic Elogie, Mr. Itepu, Catechist Francis Kasimu Odamah, Pa. Joachim Akpala, Pa. S.V. Omoike (Papa White) and others. These priests, Religious and lay faithful of Afemai descent mentioned above lived good and heroic lives; and they expressed profound faith in God, and love of God and neighbour.

A brief discuss on some of them would suffice here:

a. **Msgr. Joseph Erameh**, a native of Anegbette, was born in the year 1898. He embraced the Catholic Faith and was baptized in the year 1915. He worked in the civil service before he embraced the vocation to the Sacred Priesthood in 1927 at St. Martin's Seminary,

Ivianokpodi now Ss. Peter and Paul, Bodija Ibadan. He was ordained on December 20, 1936 at Asaba. Msgr. Joseph Erameh was the second indigenous Catholic priest in Nigeria after Fr. Paul Emechete who was ordained on January 6, 1920 (McCawille 7). Msgr. Joseph Erameh, as a spiritual colossus travelled through many villages and towns exercising the ministry he lovingly embraced. He was very zealous for the house of the Lord. He retired from active priestly ministry in July 1984, but he continued to administer the Sacrament of Confession to the people of God and occasionally concelebrated at Masses. He died on July 31, 1986.

b. Rev. Fr. Laurence Balogun was born on August 15, 1930. He was a native of Ososo. After his seminary training, he was ordained priest on July 5, 1964. Very Rev. Fr. Laurence Balogun was a well-read priest, who exemplified such priestly qualities in almost every area of his life. He worked in many parishes in Edo and Delta region formerly known as Bendel State, with much discomfort. But he overcame all the battles and temptations. He later retired in a humble abode at St. John the Apostle Parish Igarra. He was a spiritual and loving priest. He died on August 28, 2017.

c. Rev. Fr. Lawrence Adoga Attah, born on March 15, 1931. He was a native of Ososo in Akoko-Edo Local Government Area of Edo State. He was ordained at Agenebode on June 25, 1966. After much training in the seminary and post seminary formation, he poured his life out as a libation for the salvation of others in different places. He spent greater part of his life in the academia (the then College of Education, Abraka), in educating human persons. In the words of McCawille, Fr. Attah was “energetic and steadfast” in his priestly ministry. His pastoral zeal was worth commending and emulating. He died on March 16, 2011.

d. Rev. Fr. Thomas Mary Osilama Obozuwa was from Ivhiukhua-Agenebode. He was born on December 30, 1930. He was ordained to the Sacred Celibate Priesthood on June 25, 1966. He was a

workaholic: a ‘scholar and a saint’. He was very successful in almost every endeavour. He travelled through rough and rugged places working in the vineyard of the Lord. He is said to have managed twelve schools in Delta State now Issele-Uku Diocese for five years. Fr. Obozuwa had many priestly qualities that endeared him to both ecclesiastical authorities, priests, religious and lay faithful. Besides walking at various parishes in the now Issele-Uku, Benin, Auchi and Uromi dioceses, he also functioned by appointment as Vicar-General of the then Benin Diocese and later as the Dean of Afemai Deanery. He had an unquenchable zeal for the things of God, and he was a prayerful man. He died on May 26, 1997.

e. **Rev. Fr. Louis Thomas Igemokhai Areleme**, a native of Afashio, was born on February 29, 1936. He was ordained to the Sacred Priesthood on the 21st of December 1968 at Holy Rosary Catholic Church, Uzairue. He was among the priests who ministered in a post-civil war Nigeria. He worked at different places, and traversed roads that were almost inaccessible, either with bicycles or cars. Fr. Tom-Tom, as he was fondly called, was a humble priest; he retired from active ministry and died afterwards on May 29, 2003.

f. **Rev. Fr. Joseph Omesa**, a native of Iraokhor, was born on July 15, 1948. He attended Sacred Heart Primary School, Agenebode; St. John’s Grammar School, Fugar and Edo Boys College, Benin City. After his seminary training at Ss. Peter and Paul, Bodija Ibadan, he was ordained priest on December 8, 1974. Fr. Joseph Omesa was a ready instrument and offered himself whole and entire for the service of the Church. He died on September 5, 2015.

g. **Rev. Fr. John Uba Ofei** was an Igarra-born indigene. He was born on July 6, 1952. He was ordained a priest at his hometown, Igarra on April 9, 1978. His pastoral work saw him through many parishes in Benin Diocese. His great talent was also made manifest at the Catholic Secretariat, Abuja. Apart from being a priest, Fr. Ofei was a renowned author and so a member of the Nigerian Authors’

Association. He was a priest with many talents. He died after a successful brain hemorrhage surgery on June 28, 2013. He would be remembered for his zeal for the kingdom of God.

h. Rev. Fr. Peter Odion Ayala: He was a native of Ososo, and he was born on the 6th of July 1967. He was one of the fruits of the evangelization of the early missionaries, who also became an evangelizer to his people. He attended Ss. Peter and Paul Major Seminary, Bodija Ibadan, and was ordained priest on June 28, 1997. He was a quiet, intelligent, and devout man. He formed the female Congregation of the Most Holy Trinity for the evangelization of the people. He worked religiously in the Archdiocese of Benin City and in the Diocese of Auchi (created 2002). His last place of service was St. Thomas Moore, Sobe, where he was found dead in the early hours before Mass on Sunday, August 25, 2013. He would be remembered for his heroic virtue of humility and obedience.

i. Rev. Fr. Leonard Osimhekhena Ayonote: He was a native of Afashio-Uzairue. He was born into the family Ayonote on June 3, 1981. He attended Our Lady of Fatima College, Auchi in 1998. In the year 2000 he began his seminary training at the prestigious All Saints Major Seminary, Uhiele-Ekpoma. While in the Seminary, Leo Smile as he was fondly called by his peers (because of his contagious smiles), distinguished himself morally, intellectually, and pastorally. He was ordained a Deacon on January 6, 2008, and the same year on August 2, he was ordained to the Sacred Celibate Priesthood at Immaculate Conception Cathedral. He worked at the Cathedral as a curate, and later reassigned to St. Jude Afuze where he was a curate until his death. He died August 28, 2009 in a car accident. He was twenty-eight years old (28yrs). He was a priest for a year and three weeks.

j. Sr. Mary Theresa Ugbodaga, E.H.J: She was born on January 17, 1922 in Kano, to the family of Mr. and Mrs. Casmir Apakhume Ugbodaga. She was a native of Agenebode. She attended a

Teaching Training Course at St. Agnes Teacher's College, Maryland, before she was admitted into the Religious Life in the Congregation of the Sisters of the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus. Her first Profession of Vows was on July 16, 1953. Sr. Theresa was very zealous, and manifested her zeal in her religious assignments. As a young sister, she was active and was prayerful. She will be remembered for her zeal, neatness, and prayerfulness.²⁰ She retired from active service but did other works within her Community in Sapele until her death on January 17, 1996 at the age of seventy-three.²¹

k. Kate Amune, SND: Sr. Kate Amune was born on January 18, 1970 to the family of Mr. and Mrs. Emmanuel Amune of Igarra. She attended Comprehensive High School, Igarra. On 7th of October, 1990, she was admitted into Notre Dame De Namur and made her religious profession on October 9, 1993 at St. Patrick's Catholic Church, Kulende in Ilorin. Kate attended Federal College of Education, Okene for her Teaching Training Programme, and graduated in 1998. She enjoyed teaching French at her place of work in Kwara State until her death on February 15, 1999. She was a multi-talented Sister. She was the first Nigerian Notre Dame Sister to die.²²

l. Josephine Etafo, SND: She was born on January 23, 1968; a native of Eme-Ora in Edo State. She was admitted into the congregation of Sisters of Notre Dame on January 8, 1994 and made her first Religious Profession in 1997, at St. Philips Jattu-Uzairue. She worked in different places including the new Formation House in Fugar. She died in a car accident on April 14, 2000 as a student of Federal College of Education, Kontagora.

m. Chief John Erua Ikhimeagie: He was a lay man from Iviebuwa and lived all his life in Agenebode. The date of his birth was undocumented. He died in late 1960, before the independence of Nigeria. Chief John Ikhimeagie was a pious and devout man. He was the first Head man of the default Sacred Heart Parish, Agenebode. His son, John Ikhimeagie, became a catechist and worked at Agenebode

also. Chief John Erua Ikhimeagie was ardent and zealous in the promotion of the Catholic Faith. Like many others, he walked many distances, sometimes alongside priest or alone for the spread of the gospel.

n. Sir. Felix Adeubunyi Umole: He was born in 1884. He hailed from Ivioghe but lived in Agenebode. He was an exemplary Christian, who never compromised his Christian Faith. Sir Felix practiced and taught the Catholic Faith to others. He reconciled many in their marriages and brought them to the priests for the sacraments. He worked in the now Delta State as a Catechist in many Churches. Later, he was trained by the early missionaries as a Nurse. He did not only spread the gospel, but he also assisted the Church financially. Due to his doggedness and religiosity, he was granted the honorary Papal Knight of St. Gregory in 1975. He was a good lay ally of the Faith to Fr. Piotin. Sir Felix died after a happy old age on February 27, 1997.²³

o. Mr. Coleman Ofuakho was an indefatigable man, who poured out his life as vine for libation. He was born in 1908 and became the first sacristan in the old Agenebode parish. He later became catechist at Upland, which is now St. Philomena, Upland-Agenebode. He worked tirelessly until a happy old age before he was retired by Fr. Okutete in 1981. He died in 1993.²⁴

p. Sir. Edward Agabi, He was born December 25, 1932, a native of Fugar. Sir Edward Agabi was very versatile and industrious. He was a carpenter, a bricklayer, a painter, and a farmer. Also, he was the Head man of St. Theresa Catholic Church, Fugar. As a builder, he worked tirelessly with Fr. Gbuji, now Bishop Gbuji, to build the former St. Theresa Church, Fugar. For his contributions to the growth of the Church in the then Archdiocese of Benin City in the reign of Archbishop Patrick Ebosele Ekpu, he was conferred with the award of Papal Knight by Pope John Paul II in 1992. Sir Agabi was a prayerful and generous man. He saw his prayer answered when his son, Isaac

Agabi was ordained a Catholic priest on August 28, 2010. Sir Edward Agabi died on August 8, 2018.

q. Catechist Francis Kasimu Odamah: He was born in 1936. He was a native of Ọkpẹkpẹ. He was baptized and confirmed by Bishop P.J. Kelly. He received a very good training and was commissioned a Catechist in the year 1966. He was a great local evangelizer, who taught many; converted many, and built many churches at different villages around Ivie land. He was a good singer and couched scriptures into many songs which are today remembered so easily. Catechist Odamah's zeal for the spread of the gospel has remained a second to none. He died on May 31, 2011.

r. At St. Peter-in-Chains (now Holy Rosary Catholic Church, Afashio/Afowa, Uzairue), we remember the First Christian and Head man, Mr. Peter.²⁵ We also remember Catechist Enamino of Iraokhor, who resided at Afowa, and Catechist Dominic Elogie. It is worthy to note how Fr. James Higgins recounted an incident where on one of his pastoral visits to Uzairue, Bishop Kelly appreciated Catechist Dominic for his zeal and initiative to have baptized a dying member.²⁶ Also, Mr. Eragbhe, and Mr. Itepu. These men walked from village to village, and house to house, sometimes with priests. Such priests include Fr. Piotin, Fr. Shany, Fr. Green, Fr. Erameh, Fr. Thomas Areleme (Tom-Tom), Fr. Okutete and others. The story of evangelization in Edo State is incomplete without these personalities.

s. Rev. Fr. Isaac Osese Bossey: He was born on the 8th of September, 1954 to the Bossey's family in Ivioghe, Agenebode. Fr. Bossey was ordained priest on the 15th of March, 1980 by Most Rev. Dr. P.E. Ekpu. He was a workaholic, a repairer as his name, Osese, implies. He was very resourceful and successful. Apart from working at different parishes in Benin Archdiocese and Auchi Diocese and establishing outstations, Fr. Bossey established many schools and other ventures for the Church wherever he found himself. Notable amongst them are the Sacred Heart pure water in Agenebode, the Sacred Heart

College in Agenebode and the Domus Mariae College in Igarra, and Domus Mariae water factory. These were his personal contributions to the works of evangelization of the people he ministered to. Fr. Bossey was particularly devoted to the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, Divine Mercy prayer, and the Blessed Virgin Mary. He was truly a builder, a preacher, a youth animator, a church man, and a dogged evangelizer. He died on the 24th of December, 2019, and was buried at the priests' cemetery at Ivianokpodi.

t. **Rev. Fr. John Ikhuafe Awaebe:** He was born on the 5th of January, 1962 into the Awaebe's family in Ikabigbo. After his seminary training in Ss. Peter and Paul, Bodija Ibadan, he was ordained priest on the 31st of December, 1992 at Holy Cross Cathedral Benin City by Most Rev. Dr. P.E. Ekpu. His ordination and Christian faith brought light and interest in the Christian faith to the entire Ikabigbo community. Fr. John Awaebe served at different parishes in Benin Archdiocese and Auchi Diocese alike. Though very quiet and introverted, Fr. John was a goal getter and souls' winner. He was a lover of education and bagged a Ph.D degree in the field of Educational Psychology and Counselling from the Ambrose Ali University, Ekpoma. He was a good communicator, a Counsellor, a reader and a writer. Above all else, Fr. John Awaebe was dedicated, loyal, honest and peaceful. He suffered brain tumour, and later died on the 29th of October, 2021. He was buried at the priests' cemetery at Ivianokpodi.

u. **Rev. Fr. Christopher Odia:** He was born on October 14, 1980. He was a native of Ogbona, and ordained to the priesthood on October 20, 2012, at Immaculate Conception Cathedral, Auchi. He served as a curate at Sacred Heart, Agenebode, as the Administrator of St. Peter, Iviukhua, Holy Angels, Dagbala, and St. Michael, Ikabigbo. At Ikabigbo, Fr. Christopher was abducted on a Sunday morning by unknown gunmen, while he was preparing for Mass, at the Rectory. He was murdered by his abductors in the forest. The 41years old priest touched many lives with his exemplary and jovial lifestyle. He was obedient and dedicated to duty.

v. **Rev. Fr. Ambrose Alumiasunya:** He was born March 20, 1961. He was a native of Udaba, and was ordained priest September 9, 1989 in the then Catholic Diocese of Benin by Bishop Patrick Ekpu. He ministered in many parishes in Benin and in the Catholic Diocese of Auchi. In the Diocese of Auchi, Fr. Ambrose was the Administrator of the Cathedral, the Chaplain of the Diocesan Choir, the Coordinator of all Marian societies, the coordinator of Priests Annual Retreat and monthly Recollection. He was the Vicar General of the Diocese from 2019 till death. He was the parish priest of Holy Family parish, Igiode. His last place of assignment was St. Bonaventure, Okhashe from 2021 till death. He was diagnosed of kidney failure, and all the effort of the Diocese to restore him to health was unsuccessful. He died on Wednesday August 17, 2022. Fr. Ambrose was a spiritual and good Priest.

w. **Joachim Aigbodioh Akpala:** He was born in the year 1918 to the family of Akpala in Ayua-Uzairuc. He converted from Islam to Christianity and embraced the Catholic Faith with much passion. He was very industrious and saw his children through formal education to the highest level. He had a disciplined and a forthright personality, which earned him respect in the entire community of Ayua. Pa. Joachim was a self-trained Roman Catholic Catechist. Although unlettered, his memory was retentive hence, he could memorize the catechism of the Church and transfer the knowledge to catechumens and other faithful alike within his community. This holy man would trek from Ayua to Holy Rosary, Uzairue, for Sunday Mass and return to Ayua just to feed his people with the word of God. On occasions where the priest was absent, this holy man served as the pastor before the people. He loved the Church and served the Church with all he had. His role as a Church man was highly reflected at home. He was humble, prayerful and generous. Pa. Joachim died on the 21st December, 2021.

Recommendation and Conclusion: Diocese of Auchi in view

Having examined the course of canonization, whereby a deceased faithful is declared a saint, it is discovered that there are those who were never declared saints, but are believed to be enjoying beatific vision of God on account of their heroic lives on earth. The absence of such names in the cult of saints is not through any personal discredit but through lack of understanding and inability to follow laid down procedures as described above. Lack of cultural enlightenment has been unhelpful in this regard. Today, the invocations of the saints who have been publicly recognized remain veritable sources of inspiration and intercession for the living.

While the Diocese has made significant progress in the manner priests are buried since the creation of the diocese (including record keepings), this chapter recommends a special attention and close supervision of the manner the lay faithful are interred especially those with exceptional Christian lifestyle. A committee or commission may be set up to oversee the burial, records and processes of those who are perceived to have lived exceptional lifestyles. This shall bring further enlightenment and hope to the living. The need for record keeping should be a norm across all the parishes. Besides, the lay faithful, just like the clergy, should be encouraged to have cemeteries for the proper and sacred preservation of the remains of the faithful. Individuals are also encouraged to report any exceptional spiritual lifestyle of any faithful for urgent attention. May the departed, who have found rest in God, intercede for the living. Amen.

End Notes

¹The Benedictine Nuns of Stanbrook Abbey. *Stanbrook Abbey Hymnal*. Quoted in *The Divine Office* Vol.1 (London: Collins Publisher, 2006), 471.

² Michael, Schmaus. *Dogma 6: Justification and the Last Things* (London: Sheed and Ward Publication, 1977), viii.

³ The word *Afemai* literarily means ‘our people’. It encapsulates the entire Edo North senatorial districts. These include: The Etsakos, the Akoko-Edos and the Owans. This geographical and political land mass is ecclesiastically known as the Diocese of Auchi.

⁴Aderinkola, Sylvester. *How Saints Are Made: Beatification, Canonization and Sainthood*. (Ibadan: Bestway Nig. Ltd, 2010).

⁵ Pctcr, McCawillc. *We Will Remember Them* (Ibadan: OLREC Graphics, 2011), 67-84.

⁶ The Divine Office Vol. I, 471.

⁷*The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Ibadan: Paulines Publications, 1994), n. 442-443.

⁸ The Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 2156.

⁹ Elizabeth, Livingstone. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 88.

¹⁰ David, Farmer. *Oxford Dictionary of Saints, Fifth Edition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 7.

¹¹ Jenny, Schroedel. *The Everything Saints Book* (Massachusetts: F+W Publication, 2007), 4.

¹² Jenny, Schroedel. *The Everything Saints Book*, 1.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁴Aderinkola, Sylvester. *How Saints Are Made: Beatification, Canonization and Sainthood*. (Ibadan: Bestway Nig. Ltd, 2010). P. 82-83.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* p.76.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁸McCawille. *We Will Remember Them*, 3-8.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 67-84.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 68.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 73.

²² *Ibid.*, 84.

²³Sacred Heart Parish, Agenebode. *Centenary Harvest Magazine* (1998), 38.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 24.

²⁵ James, Higgins. *Kindling the Fire: S.M.A. Missionaries in Mid-West Nigeria 1884-2003* (Ibadan: Intec printers Ltd, 2003), 127.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 76.