

Fr. Michael Ogunyinka Oral History Interview

January 6th, 2025

Interviewee: Father Michael Ogunyinka

Interviewer: Chinaza Asiegbu

Location of Interview: Our Lady & St Joseph's Catholic Church, Islington

Biographical Note

Fr. Michael Ogunyinka is a Catholic priest and Chaplain of the Nigerian Catholic Chaplaincy in England and Wales. Originally from Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria, he was educated and formed in Catholic missionary institutions and seminary training in Ibadan before being ordained in 2008. He served for approximately fourteen years in the Diocese of Ijebu-Ode before relocating to the United Kingdom in 2022, where he now ministers to Nigerian Catholic communities in the diaspora.

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Technical Note

This interview was recorded in-person using a voice recorder and subsequently transcribed from an MP3 audio file. The transcript has been condensed and lightly edited for clarity and readability. It preserves the content and meaning of the original recording while removing minor repetitions and adjusting formatting for archival use.

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Chinaza Asiegbu: Hello, my name is Chinaza Asiegbu and I'm conducting an oral history interview for the Nigerian Stories Archive today. The date is January 6th, 2025 and I'm with Father Michael Ogunyinka. Well, thank you for doing this so impromptu. So I just wanted to

learn more about when you got to London, like what year you came to London, and how your experiences have been since being here. Or if you grew up here.

Fr. Michael Ogunyinka: No, no, no. I was born and grew up in Nigeria. I came to the UK in 2022. I came here on a mission. I was appointed by the Nigerian Catholic bishops to come and join the chaplains here to see to the pastoral affairs of the Nigerian people here who are Catholics. That's what I'm doing here and since then, I think I've been enjoying my stay here. Even though it's challenging, you know, very tasking, but at the same time, the work is going on well by the grace of God. You just need to tune in with what is going on in your area here and then when you're confused, you ask questions and then you forge ahead head at your hazards.

CA: Yes, I have this. There's also a similar mission in where I'm from in New Jersey. Yeah, Father Christopher came from Nigeria. Oh, yeah. Maybe a different church. Like, it's a Catholic mission, but maybe a different.

MO: You know, we have different chaplaincies. Okay. The one we have here is in England and Wales.

CA: Okay, yeah.

MO: So we have one also in Italy. Oh, okay. Yes, where you are coming from the United States of America, but I was born in a different location, but the same mission.

CA: So you grew up in Nigeria primarily. Did you always grow up in the same location?

MO: Here.

CA: In Nigeria. Where were you born in Nigeria?

MO: I didn't get the point.

CA: Where were you born in Nigeria?

MO: Nigeria? Yes, I was born in Ibadan, Oyo State, but my parents are from Ogun State. But all my school, my life, everything was spent in Ibadan. Like my primary school in Ibadan, secondary school in Ibadan, my seminary schooling in Ibadan, ordination in Ibadan but from Ogun State and also I applied to my native diocese for my mission because if you are going to a priesthood we have two types of priesthood either a religious body or Diocesan body. So I belong to Diocesan body, so as a Diocesan you have to decide which of the dioceses you want to work with. Like I come from Ejobode diocese we have Lagos Archdiocese, Ibadan Archdiocese, Warri diocese, Port Harcourt Diocese, Onitsa Archdiocese so, but I applied to my native diocese which is Ijebu Ode so after my ordination I went back to Ijebu Ode for my my priestly life so I've been in Ijebu Ode before I came to UK.

CA: Oh wow okay so how long were you there?

MO: Yeah I spent in Ijebu Ode I spent uh I spent 14 years okay before I came here almost two years more than two years ago so but now by God's grace this year I will be 17 years in priesthood.

CA: In priestly. Oh wow, praise God.

MO: God. Yeah hallelujah so out of that 17 actually I spent uh 14 in Ijebu Ode then three here.

CA: Okay, wow. So what brought you to the priesthood?

MO: I was sharing my experience with someone last year, why I opted for priesthood. In my parish, then in Ibadan, that we had then, there were white fathers, called SME fathers. The Society of African Mission, SME. They are Catholic priests. So I grew up with them. And when I saw their way of life, you know, how they were always there for people, taking care of people, sponsoring people in education, assisting the old people, the aged, the vulnerable, the destitute, even the sick people, without making noise. And look at them, if white people can do this for my people, you know, just imagine, they're coming from Ireland at that time, from Dublin.

CA: Oh from Ireland?

MO: Yeah, the White people from Ireland, and you see I see them taking good care of African people, particularly the vulnerable people. And I told myself, what am I doing for my people? Even though my intention then was to finish my secondary school and be a lawyer, that was when I started having that call that it's not enough to be a lawyer, but what are you going to do for people when it comes to spiritual aspects? That's where I received my call and then I met one of them, like a coach, like my spiritual director and discussed with him. I told him and he said go and pray about it. And when I got out of secondary school, I told him. I said Father I'm convinced I want to be a priest like him. He said, why? I said, number one, I think I need to bring the gospel to people And then, you know, we have many people in government, but few people in the ministry. Maybe among a few people in the ministry of the gospel, then to use my life to serve God and to serve humanity. That's what came to my mind. And thank God, they were able to nurture my faith and my vocation. Eventually, I became a priest in 2008, and since then, I've been enjoying my priesthood.

MO: Okay, that's good.

CA: For me, you know, this life is good but at the same time, like, by quarter to nine, I will be in the church there to give them the final blessing, the charismatic. One of the things I want to share with everyone about this life is, for me, there's nothing in this life. Just live a normal life

because I've been living the life, the history of some people, great people in the world then. The question is, where are they today?

MO: Yes.

CA: No matter who you are, very handsome, very beautiful, very cute, it's just a matter of time. The time will come, all those beauty will disappear. Then, when the final day comes, the grave is your last, you understand, where do you remain, you know what you call remain, the corpse so your name changes from so and so person to remains or the corpse and then you lay outside the grave, life continues outside that So for me when I say I'm alive now, I use my life to serve God I'm not saying you cannot serve God when you marry, I'm not saying that but depends on your choice so my choice is let me be a priest and then be there for people yes you just called me now impromptu now.

CA: Yes. Impromptu and you already.

MO: Yes, for example if I'm a married man now.

CA: You would not be...

MO: My wife would be skeptical about what is going on there?. I will say don't worry. Even call me, baby come, what's the problem? What are you people discussing? When you called me I said no problem, that's the kind of life I want to live. A simple life.

CA: A simple life.

MO: Which I think I am.

CA: Yeah, you're doing. So growing up, you were mentioning how there weren't as many Nigerian priests in the Catholic Church that you could see, like it was mostly priests from Ireland, is that how?

MO: Yeah, then we had a few Nigerian priests when I was growing up. There were very, very few.

CA: What time period was that? Like when were you born?

MO: Talking about, you know let me say, I'm talking about when I was born till around 1995, 96, 97.

CA: Okay, so when were you born?

MO: I was born in 1977.

CA: 1977, okay.

MO: This year I will be born on the 48 by God's grace.

CA: Oh, praise God. So, even then there weren't a lot of Nigerian priests?

MO: No, there were just a few. Okay. There were a few people.

CA: I didn't expect that. I would think that there were more Nigerian priests at that point.

MO: No, but now we have more Nigerian priests. More now compared to when I was talking to you. When I was growing up, we had. Just a few of them. Not even many

CA: Really?

MO: But then we had many expatriates, white priests, even bishops there. Many of them from Ireland, from Italy, you know, you know, coming to evangelize people, you know. So, like my parish then, we had close to around eight or nine who were resident priests there,. but there were, there were many. So, my parish then happened to be the headquarters of the SME fathers in Africa. So when they were ordained in Ireland, they will bring them down to my parish, St. Louis, Ibadan From there, they are posted to different African countries. So sometimes they can bring about 30 at the same time. So from there, you go to Uganda, you go to Tanzania, you go to Ghana.

CA: So they won't stay in the same place.

MO: No, only few will stay In so many types of people in Ibadan. But now, I think we only have one left in the whole Ibadan now.

CA: Because there's no need anymore.

MO: You know, they are aging, everybody's aging and there is no vocation boom in Ireland like before but now just reverse order, now we have a vocation boom in Nigeria.

CA: Going outwards.

MO: So we are the one going there to re-evangelize them okay initially they came to evangelize us but now we are going back there to re-evangelize them.

CA: Imagine that.

MO: That's how our ministry is, yeah.

CA: It's amazing how god works yeah right he plants the seed here and then the reverse is needed. Wow. So in the seventies and the eighties, were there a lot of people Catholic then still? Like there's still, because I'm wondering, because I know that Catholicism came to Nigeria, was it in the late 1800s?

MO: Yeah, I think the first time Catholics came to Nigeria was around 18, 1814, if I'm not mistaken.

CA: Oh, okay. That's early.

MO: The first priest that came to my diocese was in 1864. Even when I was growing up, we had many Catholics. And today we have more Catholics because of the population. So Catholics have been there all this while. So then we had many Catholics, and today we have more Catholics.

CA: Yeah, because I was interested that if it came so early, it took so much time before people started entering into the priesthood as well. So there was a time where...

MO: You are right, even when the missionaries came, initially when they came, they were not accepted. Because number one of the color, because the Irish are white. Yes. They are not like oyibo you, but like you. When I say we are white, they are white. Right. So when people saw them for the first time, what are these people, are they ghosts, are they witches, you know, these kinds of mentalities. So they were sceptical about them. But when they were trying to accept them and they now brought their own religion, that's the way we don't marry. What? So our people again were so afraid. How would you say, grown up like you, full men like you, you don't marry. Which means if our children join you, you may influence them for not getting married. So they were rejected. So that was what killed Catholicism at the first instance.

CA: In the 1800s.

MO: Later on, the Anglicans came from the UK and England. They came with their wives and they were not white. Oyibo were people like you. This is also better. These are people who came with their wives. So later on, Catholics did not come back.

CA: Okay, because they were now more comfortable with the idea.

MO: Yes, so they were understanding their behaviour. So that's what really happened at the initial stage. And that also affected people going to priesthood. Even though many people, let me say a few people, accepted Catholicism at that time. But don't forget that when Anglicans came, Anglicans is just like church and state relationship. The Anglicans from England came to conquer Nigeria. They came with their government officials. These government officials would be leading the people while we would be serving spiritually.

CA: Oh, okay. So it was a two-part deal.

MO: So that was what happened. So they were all English people. But while the government officials were into governance, the clergy among them were into the spiritual aspect. So when Catholics came, the Anglicans dominated the region in Nigeria. But you have to find your way.

So Catholics started searching for space. So eventually when they got the space, don't forget they were celibate priests. People were so afraid that even though they were doing very well, they were instructing their boys not to join them because that was what happened. So it affected priests to the base. But now, if you observe very well, it's not only Catholic people who are priests now that are married and celibate. We have some other religions who are celibate. We have some who are Hindus who are celibate. We have some even in African traditions who are celibate. So celibate is not pertinent to Catholicism.

CA: Was there a struggle between traditional religions when they came?

MO: Initially there was. There was a struggle between them, you know, it's just like you are coming to our territory with another religion that is opposing our own religion. Definitely you will be opposed, you will be challenged So they experienced such, you know, at the beginning. Even up till now, it's still going on.

CA: Really.

MO: You know, for example now, if you are telling me that for you to become a good lady in the future, you have to offer sacrifices to God and I'm saying I don't just need to pray to Jesus so the traditional people will feel offended.

CA: Yes.

MO: They are demarcating them, you understand. So definitely you experience such a Opposition and you know challenge on the way, but it's today but in all these are the things that make the Christianity, you know, even stronger If you are not challenged, you have to be in one place but once you are challenged, that challenge will lead you to another level of your own life. So that's how the church has been. Even Christianity started from, you know, what do you call it, what is one term in English now? Volatile area, you know. Look at how Paul was killed, Peter was killed, even other disciples were killed, because they were ministering in a violent area, and that's what makes the history strive. So if you are not challenged now, you will not build up yourself. So the challenge is now to build up Christianity.

CA: But they're still able to co-exist, kind of, because you're saying now they're co-existing because I think in the beginning, when the priests were first coming, there was a lot of struggle and tension. Because maybe people were afraid that they were going to just come and vanquish them, like kind of entirely, like erase all the traditions.

MO: You see, anywhere you go as a religious man, whether Christian or traditional people, the first thing to do is to protect your religion, which I think, to some extent, the traditional people have been doing better, they are in their own realm. But when another higher religion came in, and don't forget, when these people came, they came with a lot of benefits. Education, social

amenities, these are the things that the traditional people cannot give to you. They were collecting. Okay, you are sick now, go and bring goats. For sacrifices, go and bring this now. But when Christianity came, Christianity was giving people.

CA: medical care.

MO: So normally they felt challenged about what was going on. So if we allow this to continue, they may extinct our religion. So that's how the challenges came up. But in all, early Christianity was not so easy with people. Let me give you an example. One old man was telling me a story about the place he worked with, the old man was telling me the story about a place about seven years ago now. So when he was a little boy, he was on an altar server serving the priest of the altar. He said one day they were going for mass. That was in 1938.

CA: Wow.

MO: An old man. The man was at the age of 98, 99. So he was the one telling me the story. So when he was a little boy, he was with the priest for mass. When they got to a T junction and they saw, you know, a calabash on the road, they put, you know, bean cake, egg, boiled egg, that kind of thing there, as a sacrifice. And this priest happened to be a white man, he said, oh, he said in Yoruba, you can't waste food, you are just wasting food. And they went there, and they brought the food inside their car, and they were eating the egg while driving.

CA: Oh my goodness.

MO: They were shocked. They said, no, father, no. They said, no, you are just wasting food, nothing will happen. And in fact, nothing happened. That's all. So now, let me give you a practical example. When the missionaries came to Nigeria, let me say Africa in general, but let me be particular to Nigeria and my area. The traditional people, you know, were not happy and said we don't know what to do for them. Rather we kill them one by one, they will leave. Now they gave them, in quotes, the sacred lands that are meant for gods. You know, when people die, they will throw them there, into the forest, you know, where, you know, maybe somebody was an evil person and confessed he died, or she died. They will throw them into an evil forest. They don't give those missionaries evil forests. Go and build your church there.

CA: That land?

MO: Because for them, when they enter this evil forest now, the spirit will kill them. But eventually, they give them those evil forests now. They started clearing the place, building their houses now, everything now, just now, nothing happened. So consider, they have been hostile with these people from the beginning. But you know, God has a way of doing things. So people would say, ah, but we thought that giving these people, we killed them, but they didn't die.

CA: They were growing.

MO: They were changing, progressing. That's what made many people then join Christianity. Like the man I was telling you his story, that was one of the things that made his own parents to join Catholicism. We thought that these people would die upon entering the evil forest, but they since didn't die, which means their own religion is more powerful than the one on the ground. Because if you are saying that evil spirits in this evil forest will kill these people and they didn't die, which means they are superior to you, so many people now joined them. You know, so a lot of stories that surrounded the early Christian life, but in all, we give thanks to God.

CA: Amen. Do you know how your own family joined the faith? Is it connected? I guess for some people it might be many generations.

MO: I may not be able to give you a comprehensive answer but my great-grandfather started from Anglican because the Anglicans came to my village. Don't forget I told at the beginning that Catholics came before but they were not supported and they left. So when they left, the Anglicans came, I'm talking about years, more than 100 years, I'm not talking about 2 years.

CA: Yeah, that's what I was thinking.

MO: No, no, no, no, no. So for those years, they have dominated the land. Understand? So those who became Christian then were Anglicans. So my grandparents happened to be Anglicans. There was a dispute among them and my grandfather felt bad that I can't be in this community and be treated like this. So he decided to leave Anglican and to go and join Catholics. But unfortunately the Catholic church is in another village. They had to trek for almost 2 hours.

CA: Oh, every single time.

MO: Every Sunday. And because he was a very powerful man, he was wealthy and he controlled many people. So he had a large family, close to around 45 wives. So he was a big man. So his whole family and friends and those who supported him were going there every Sunday in procession.

CA: Wow, imagine yeah.

MO: So they're going there and as they were going, they were also joining him. He was able to influence people. And you know how people influence others. One day he said, we have numbers now. So what is stopping us from bringing priests down? Yeah, so he appealed to the Catholic church. Instead of all of us coming every Sunday, why can't you come and establish a church here, where we can begin to grow and build? They said, oh, that's a nice idea. And you know what, people said, okay, you know your people now, give us a land. And because we married a big man who provided a big land for them, that's how the church started. Then my immediate grandmother happened to be in the first set of choir in 1917. So that's how

Catholicism came to my own village, going up, going up, going up to where I am today. I'm the second priest in my village from that lineage.

CA: And that's a proud lineage.

MO: The first one that came after my uncle, I'm the second person from the same lineage.

CA: Wow, and did your uncle inspire you at all?

MO: Yeah, he did, though he's late now. He died about, I think, about 4 or 5 years ago, about the age of 71. It was one of the oldest priests in my diocese, and that's before he died. Yeah, he really inspired me. He did very well because he had a doctorate in canon law. So, he did that one to, you know, to guide us, you know. This is what the church is saying, this particular area. But by and large, he did very well before he died. So rest in peace, but he really inspired me. He inspired me.

CA: May his soul rest in peace.

MO: Amen.

CA: Yeah. So now, I'm also now interested in, so there are some Anglicans and there's some, because I always wondered why there's some people who are Anglican, there's some people who are Catholics. Even now, like, with people who I meet, families that I meet.

MO: If you go to the history of the church, we only have one church. Even up to now, we only have one church. Maybe at your own leisure time, you can just browse the history of the churches of the world, Catholicism and other things. We only have one church, which is the Catholic Church. And you know that time, the Catholic Church grew up in the midst of the Roman world, so the King of England has always been a very powerful and wealthy man from history, who happened to be Catholic, but that's the only church in the world, the Catholic Church. So the King of England, called King Henry VIII, was very powerful. He was what they call the financier of the Catholic Church. He had money, so he supported the church with money, subsidies, and other things. Unfortunately, all the children he had were not male. They were all female. So, he said, okay, he planned to marry another wife who can give him a male child to become the successor to the throne. But the church said, no, you can't do that. One man, one woman. Don't forget, you are vowed to the church during your wedding. But if you go ahead, you seek to be a communicant. All the honour given to the king will be reduced because you are no longer a communicant. Eventually, he went ahead to marry another wife in order to have a male child. So based on that, I don't want to use the word deposed, but it was, I don't want to use the word one time now, it was not a deposed from the church, but it was...

CA: Was it excommunicated?

MO: No, it was not excommunicated, it was still part of the church, but it was stripped off.

CA: Oh, he was demoted.

MO: No, no, no, he was demoted to some extent, so he fell back. support the church with the money and that sort of thing, in anger, he said, henceforth, I want to cut off from the Catholic Church. I will establish my own church now. He then established his own church, called the Church of England. Anywhere I have territory, anybody under me must, you know?

CA: Became a part of this new church.

MO: So if you don't check Anglican liturgy, if you enter an Anglican church, you will think you are entering a Catholic church.

CA: That's how I feel.

MO: So he maintained everything, even the creed. Are you Catholic?

CA: Yes.

MO: So everything from the creed, the glory, everything, he still maintained it now. So, that's what was there, but this church now, the one under me will be my church, Church of England, where I'm ruling. That's how it was cut off from the Catholic Church. Many centuries later, one of his great-great-grandchildren, who now succeeded him in the future, called King James, Based on the history I read, my grandfather who started the Anglican Church, left the Catholic Church. Why are we still using Catholic, Catholic way of life, Catholic this and that? So in order to differentiate fully from the Catholic Church and Catholic Bible now, He now picked some of the chapters of the Bible, books of the Bible, he left some, he picked some, so the one he now picked now, he compiled it, he now named it King James' version, my own version, so this version will be for the England. And don't forget that England was supposed to be one of the richest countries at that time, even till now. So he was able to pump money into the printing because he was giving it to people free of charge. And at that time printing was just coming in and printing was very expensive. Even the church cannot even produce that now But because he had money, he now financed the printing of the Bible. Named it King James' version, my version, giving people free, what people cannot afford, because it was free, he was able to give people free of charge. That's how that version spread, more than the Catholic original Bible. But now, we have some pastors now that are not going to Bible studies, deep Bible studies. Now they have realized that the Bible they have is not even complete. Because King James was the one that took part of the Bible, merged them together and called it his own version. So now, people are starting to buy the Catholic Bible now. Where we have all these Tobit, Judith, Sirach, all those things. So he was the one that caused that confusion by taking power because for him he didn't want to have anything to do with the Catholic Church. But many years later,

when people started having the guts to fight for their rights, when King James declared his own territory as Anglican Church, those bishops and priests who refused to follow him were killed. Many people were beheaded. You have a Church of English Martyrs, what do they mean? It's about those who were killed for their faith? There's a place that somebody told me, I've not been there before, where they killed almost 26 priests in a day. They were beheaded.

CA: Imagine.

MO: Some were thrown to wild animals, you know. How can you fault my orders? So many who fought for this faith we are having today. So that was why in fear, some people just said, let us follow him, because don't forget that he was the king of all England, and that was a very powerful territory at that time. But after many years, when people started to call for their rights, those who were still Catholic in soul, they were passing the.

CA: History to their children.

MO: In case things change now, we are still Catholics. Freedom to religion, that's when some Catholics started coming back from Ireland, from Poland, to re-evangelize those who still have faith in the Church. That's when I started picking it up again. Unfortunately now, Anglicanism is now folding up. Many of the Christians are now coming back to Catholicism. Though they came with their family, with their wives, but. It should be still.

CA: Wow, good. And so, in Nigeria now, with the Anglicans and the Catholics, with colonialism you said that because in the UK it was still Anglican, it was one, the government and the church would come together. So it would be like religion, spiritual ministry, and then also government. But was the Catholic Church, when the Catholic Church came, were they also coming with government or no, it was just faith?

MO: You know, when Catholics were coming to Nigeria, they only came with one mission, to evangelize people. But when Anglicans were coming, they came with two agendas. To rule the people, and also to guide them spiritually. The slave masters there were Anglicans. They also had connections with the government. They were working hand in hand. Their priests were white like them. So when we were telling them, okay, you see, we came to pray for you, to preach the word of God to you. At the same time, some of them were still working for the slave masters. Because, just like, just for example, my elder brother is working with the government and I'm a reverend. My elder brother who works with the government now also has a banana plantation in England or a sugarcane plantation and needed some people there. You know, there's a way I will still cajole people. I will say follow and support them. That was what was happening then.

CA: So they were taking people out of Nigeria?

MO: Yes. They were taking people that time. During the slave trade. You know it's particularly in the West that was why we had the first black bishop happen to be from the West. Ajayi Crowther. Have you heard about him? Bishop Ajayi Crowther before?

CA: No

MO: No? Where were you born?

CA: In the United States.

MO: You're born there? Oh so you cannot know him. If you google it now, he was the first black Nigerian bishop. The first Nigerian African bishop. He was Bishop Ajayi Crowther. He was taken into captivity and later when he got freedom, he came back and now became a reverend also in America. The opportunity to preach for us now is to what the Bible says. I've read the Bible. The Bible is very very good. It talks about salvation of people, but you are here, you are not allowed to do anything. So he was convinced about religion. So when he got his release, he now became the Reverend. And he was ordained and eventually he became Bishop. So he became the first Black Bishop in the Anglican Church. Bishop Ajayi Crowther. So that's what really happened. Those early Anglicans came, they came with two missions, you know, they were two groups. One group is for the government, the other one is for religion. But they were working hand in hand. They are from the same place, so they have the same mission, even though they are trying to differentiate their mission, but they all have the same target.

CA: Yes.

MO: Do you understand? But they were trying to support the government, that's the reason with the government, to fight the government, to be peaceful, because they were their people. How will you come to me and take my people into exile, and start telling me to be peaceful with you? So that's what really happened. But when the Catholic came, it changed the whole dynamics and said you can't come like this. Christ called us to evangelize and take people into captivity. But later on, things changed. I forgot the exact date but it was in 1819. I forget now, but when they stopped the slave trade issue, that's how the whole thing stopped. But today we thank God for what is going on in this society.

CA: Because now it's freedom, yeah.

MO: Now we have freedom of religion.

CA: Yeah, so by the time the Catholic Church came back the Anglican Church and the government, they had already but they had already done they had already colonized the area yeah at the time they came back.

MO: Yes yes. But all of them are working in different territories in Nigeria, they do what they call partitioning. Partitioning. Like, let me use Nigeria as a case study now. When they did that partitioning in Nigeria, they... Okay, you don't know Nigeria too much. Do you go to Nigeria?

CA: Yes, so like the North, you're talking about the North and then there's the South. The South East, South West, the Middle Belt.

MO: Let me put it this way. Let's say Nigeria is divided into two, we have the North and South. The Northern part is almost Muslim. In the South, majorly, we have South West and South East. The colonial masters who happened to be the English people, were living near the coastal region of Lagos, because of the water. That time there was no plane. They come through the ship. Many of them were living in Lagos. They settled in Lagos. So because they were Anglicans, they didn't want other religions and Catholicism to die. See the Catholic Church is coming now, Catholicism may be against them. So you Catholics go to the East, to the South East while we will stay so that we don't have any clash. We don't want any clash to happen between us. That's why we have Catholics more in the South East and Anglicans more in the South West. So they did the partitioning because they wanted to be close to the coastal region, the water. So once they are coming easily, they just go to the house. But when the other people are coming now, once they get to Lagos now, they are going to the East. That's why they partitioned the whole thing. Said you go to the East, we stay in the West.

CA: But they're still able to colonize the East as well.

MO: Yeah, they colonized the whole place. They were still in charge as a government before we got independent in 1960. So before 1960, they were the ones governing Nigeria. When it comes to the governance, when it comes to the spiritual aspects, they allow people to function on their own, but still have influence. But if you're not an Anglican, you will not get work from the government.

CA: Oh, I didn't know that.

MO: Because the seat of power was in Lagos. And because they were looking for ways to spread their religion, don't forget I said, both those in government and those in the church are from the same area, and they have the same mission targets. So now in order to spread their own religion, what they did was that if you are not Anglican, if you are not joining us, you don't have a post in government, you don't have a space. That's why if you come to the West today, those who are big men in the West, who are Christians are Anglicans.

CA: Okay. Because it's a legacy of that.

MO: God bless you. That's what they did. And if you go to the East today, those who are very powerful men there are Catholics.

CA: Yes, that makes sense.

MO: Don't worry, rule your area. So that's how Catholicism dominated the East, and Anglicanism dominated the West. So up to now, if I'm talking for example now, are we talking aboutHave you heard about Globacom in Nigeria? Glotelecom?

CA: No

MO: But you know MTN?

CA: Yes.

MO: So, the major telecommunication companies in Nigeria are MTN and Globacom. Globacom is owned by a big man called, I forgot the name, Yoruba man, that is Anglican. Obafemi Awolowo, Anglican. Late Adesanya, Anglican. All these powerful Yoruba guys who were Christians were Anglican. Because if you are not part of the church, you cannot have a position in the government. So once the church certifies he is part of us, they will give work. If they ask, which do you attend? Catholic church, they will not give work because the colonial masters were Anglicans. So they brought religion into their governance. So for you to be part of us, it's just like the Catholic Church now, there are some schools now if you want to attend you have to come with your baptismal card. So if you are not baptised, the church will not accept you. It's something of that approach. What the Catholic Church does now is that they don't want any other religion to infiltrate their faith and other things. So that's how they put that from there. Let us all be Catholic. That's also what they did that time but they went to the extreme by neglecting those who are not Anglican. So for you to be part of the government, that's what we call Anglican. That's how many Yoruba guys, men and women, even Fela and the Kutu, the family, all of them, Anglican. Anglican. Not that they were so interested in the Anglican church, or they loved the church, but because they wanted to have a say. To go to school, to be educated, to be learned. And the best way they could do that is to join the church. The church was about controlling those things, providing schools, building schools, hospitals. So if you are sick now, they take you to the hospital and they will ask you about your church.

CA: Really.

MO: So, if you don't belong to that particular group, they will not attend you.

Other: Chinaza, I hope you are enjoying it.

CA: I am.

MO: So that's the means they use at that point in time. So, you know, you don't want to die now, so you have to join the church.

CA: Wow. Even in healthcare.

MO: I'm talking about that time.

CA: So this is still like the early 1900s or before then?

MO: Yeah, before independence.

CA: Before independence, wow.

MO: So since you don't want to lose your child or your husband to concur to that demand. Okay, if that's the case now let me join you. Is it not to join worship now? That's how the Anglican church gained momentum that time.

CA: Mm-hmm okay and even with this is this the same as schooling too?

MO: There, yes.

CA: Because I know that a lot of great Nigerian like contemporary writers were also schooled in missionary school. Like Chinua Achebe and others.

MO: Yes, Chinua Achebe schooled in the East. That's what I said that the colonial masters partitioned the region. Because they were staying more in the West, they didn't really know what was going on in the East. So they left the East completely for the Catholics to give us reports of their region. While they themselves stayed here in the West, they monitored every activity in the West. When they come to the East, the people there will give them reports, but in the North, North had a Muslim population, they didn't want to tamper with people because they are so aggressive when it comes to religion. They didn't want war to interfere. But they appointed their own people there to govern the area. When it comes to religion, they left it with their religion. But in the West, they tampered with our religion. In the East, they tampered with their religion. But they left the Catholic people to monitor what was going on in the East. But for them, it was not developed. If we are talking about the whole of Nigeria now, the most developed area in Nigeria is the West. Because of the presence of the colonial masters. So that's what happened.

CA: Like it's the most urban city and things like that.

MO: So in the West, you cannot achieve a greater height without being Anglican. Be the religion of the master. Because the religion of the master is the religion of the people. Understand? If your master there is Anglican, you want to be Anglican. So if your master here in the East now is the Catholic Church, and is Catholic now, you cannot go to any other church. Understand? Either you lose your life or you lose your job. Well, I don't want to put it like that, let me tell you, it's your job. So that's how the Catholic Church was able to thrive in the East because they left them. But in the West, I'm talking about Nigeria, South West. So that's where

we have the seat of power, where the government sees everything that was going on around there.

CA: Did they also have missionary schools? Did the government control education or was it the church that controlled education in the South West?

MO: They had government school too, but initially, no government school. Initially, the colonial masters came for business. It was the missionary that brought schools. The first set of schools in Nigeria were in the West. So it was later on, the colonial masters came before the missionaries. So when they came, they came to exploit. They came for business, they were not for anything, education, no, no, no, no, no. But later on, as time went on, they felt that they should have some of their people to minister to them because they were Christians. That was why they brought their own missionaries to come and minister to them and also gain some people here who they ought to be using as their cook, their gardener or their own service motive so when they came now they saw their message the spread is okay come and join us come and join us.

CA: No problem.

MO: Now okay, because of that now, there is a lot of language barrier, they have to be able to train them to understand a little bit of English for easy communication. Understand? And because of that, these people now okay, some of them were so good, they're so careful now, but we can still bring our doctors to establish some small centres that when they're sick now, I will not be losing my cook, be losing my... that was how they were picking those strings gradually. So, you cannot enjoy those things without joining the church. That's what happened, but all those things are no longer here today.

CA: Yeah, and then now government schools. Was it after the civil war, the government schools?

MO: Started to open? No, no, no. Government schools also came later, but not too long. Government schools were built for people because, as I've said now, initially there was no government per se. Those people that came, they just came to exploit, to take slaves, so before they finally colonized us, take dominance of the whole thing, so when they came, they established their laws. In fact, they see Nigeria as annexed to the King's territory.

CA: A colony.

MO: Colony, good. So that is why they started appointing all these.....

CA: Like leaders.

MO: Not Prime Minister, I've forgotten what they call them. All these Lord Lugard and co. There's a name they call them. I've forgotten what they call them.

CA: Like heads?

MO: Those who head the

CA: Like different executives?

MO: Is it something? Not directorates.

CA: No, it's okay. But they are just like political leaders.

MO: Yes, they are political leaders. They govern the area and give the king the report. So that was what was going on for many years until we got our independence in 1960. So that ceased to be under British rule.

CA: So then education and things also changed.

MO: Yeah. Even before independence, things had started changing, we had high schools built by governments. When they took over in the 18th century, we had some schools built by the government in Lagos now around 1894. We have many schools built by the government. When they took over, the governors of the people used to build these schools. Because now, they have seen themselves as the government of this area, so they were providing what they call social amenities, schools, health centres, you know. But the whole people were still under colonial rule, understand? But where we now got independence in 1960, that's where we ceased to be under military rule. Sorry under British rule, we now had our own government. We changed from civilian to military.

CA: So when you were in school, did you go to an Anglican school? No, you didn't. No, no, no. No, because you're already Catholic. Your family is Catholic.

MO: When I was growing up, we had government schools and private schools. The school I went to was private but already taken over by the government.

CA: Okay, yeah.

MO: It was initially a private school, but in 1970-1973, we had the civil war that really affected the South East people. So it was after the war that the government said that all the schools in Nigeria now belong to the government. That's how they took over all the Catholic schools, Anglican schools, Methodist schools. Every school now, the military government that time said all the schools are unitary schools. To unify the whole thing, that's what it means, from unitary, meaning they want to unify all the schools, they don't call them unitary schools. That now all the schools now belong to the government, not to any private school.

CA: So there's no private schools?

MO: No, so it was recently after the return to civilian rule in 1999, when Obasanjo came in, that's when some governors started returning the school back to the original owners. That's how many governors in the South East returned Catholic schools back to them. The ones that belonged to Anglicans, back to Anglicans. The ones to Methodists, back to Methodists. So the government did the same thing in the South West. They returned the school back to the original owners, but not compulsorily. They asked the owners to apply for the return of the school. Some were given, some were denied. So, they looked at the location and then, they observed that this location, you know, there's no government school there.

CA: Oh, okay. It's too much then.

MO: So, they said, okay, please, we can't give this up because of the government. Yeah. So, they had to run the school now like a private school. Do it for government school so you can access children, not to pay school fees. So, the government appealed to it in this area.

CA: No, keep it government school. Okay. This has been really interesting to talk to you about everything. You have such a wealth of knowledge about everything that has happened.

MO: Yeah, we thank God. We thank God. You know, I, I, I try everyday to to read more about the history of Nigeria, and then to even read everything around me that's readable. Read and don't forget. Now, as a priest, you should be knowledgeable to some extent because it's impromptu.

CA: Yeah it's okay, no, thank you so much. I mean I thank God for this opportunity to talk to you because these are things that, this knowledge, are things we take for granted.