



NIGERIA

AREA - 368,000 SQUARE MILES

REGIONAL CAPITALS :—

NORTH—KADUNA ; WEST—IBADAN ;
EAST—ENUGU ; CAMEROONS—BUEA.

FEDERAL CAPITAL—LAGOS



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The newest Holy Child Mission, SHARON-IZZU, is 7 miles from Abakaliki.

**THERE ARE 34 MILLION PEOPLE
IN THIS COUNTRY**

: 15 1/2 MILLION
PAGANS

: 1 3/4 MILLION
PROTESTANTS

**PRIESTS
729**

: 15 MILLION
MUSLIMS

: 2 MILLION
CATHOLICS

**BROTHERS
62**

**SISTERS
488**

**THIS MEANS 32 MILLION PEOPLE STILL
TO BE BROUGHT INTO THE CHURCH**

FROM IBO SACRIFICE TO THE HOLY SACRIFICE OF THE MASS

by Father Francis Arinze

PART II (Conclusion)

In the last article an insight was given into Ibo sacrifice. Here the consideration is on the method of the catechesis of the Holy Mass for the Ibos. The following lines are an attempt to make use of the Ibo background simply as a starting point in introducing the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass to my people.

The first question, then, concerns the ends of sacrifice. Most of the dense population of Iboland (see the map on page 16), even though they are pagan, are already convinced of the necessity of sacrifice because of sin, or of petition and thanksgiving. This genuine religious conviction lends itself as a stepping-stone when one wants to bring home to these deeply religious people the necessity of the great Christian Sacrifice.

The Ibo idea of sin, however, needs some correction. Sin should be considered as a wilful offence against God, and not as an offence against the spirits and the ancestors. The Ibo criterion of what constitutes sin or an abomination also needs revision. Personal moral faults are to be distinguished from abnormal occurrences such as the birth of twins. This distinction has to be learned before the Ibos will be in a position to understand the propitiatory character of the Holy Mass.

But the fourth end of sacrifice – adoration – is something for which the Iboman has been prepared in very small measure by his traditional religion. Adoration is the primary, intrinsic end of sacrifice

considered in itself; it is the acknowledgment of God's supreme excellence and our humble subjection. This the Iboman must learn first if he is to lift his eyes to the supreme act of adoration which is the Mass and have some realization of its tremendous meaning. Christ, as Man, could and did adore the Eternal Father, especially on Calvary. The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is the Sacrifice of Calvary sacramentally perpetuated till the end of time. And when the light of this revelation bursts upon the Iboman he knows great joy.

Since propitiation can be offered to God alone, since from Him alone flow all riches of nature and grace, and since He alone can and should be adored, it follows that sacrifice can be offered to God alone. *This point strikes at the root defect in Ibo sacrifices:* utilitarianism dictates most of them. Therefore very little or no sacrifice is offered directly to God; most of them are offered to the spirits and ancestors instead. As a result, adoration and praise figure very little in Ibo sacrifices.

To help the Ibos overcome these weak points, it is necessary to insist on the primacy of worship, praise, and adoration. And to do this it will help to make use of the high Ibo idea of God. This Great Spirit is the Creator of all things. He is omnipotent. He is omniscient. No Iboman disputes these points. Therefore one can now insist: This Great Spirit must be worshipped, praised, adored. Sacri-



Father Francis Arinze offering Solemn High Mass in his home town, Eziowelle, Nigeria.

fice must be offered to Him. He Himself has put into our hands the type of sacrifice that He wants. To look for any other sacrifice is to be badly mistaken.

Moreover, sacrifice can be offered to this Great Spirit alone. No worship of any type is to be offered to the evil spirits, the devils, for they are our arch-enemies. In honour of Our Blessed Lady, the Angels and the Saints, the Church offers indeed the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, but always to God Who has crowned them.

The priesthood is essential to Ibo traditional religion. It was seen, however, that there is no concept of one priest who can offer all types of sacrifice. The priests in Ibo religion are of four different groups: the "eze-alusi" is the priest of a definite good spirit; the "dibia" offers all sacrifices to the evil spirits; the pater-familias offers all the sacrifices to the ancestors; and the priest from Nri alone has the power to offer expiatory sacrifices to remove abominations.

In explaining the Mass, then, it is essential to bring before the Ibos the unity of the Christian priesthood. *Christ is the priest.* The visible priest at the altar is Christ's minister, Christ's instrument. This fact should be amply

developed for the Iboman because it is a brand new concept to him. Christ is both God and Man. He is priest as man. On Calvary He offered the sacrifice of Himself. He remains the principal priest at Holy Mass, but here He uses the ministry of His priests who have been given the indelible character of this high office through a visible rite: the imposition of the Bishop's hands and the saying of the significant and effective words.

In the Christian religion, therefore, all priests are priests because they are the instruments of Christ Who is THE priest.

There are not many Christian sacrifices. There is only one.

There are not many Christian priesthoods. There is only one. And the Christian priest is "another Christ" in a sense which is not metaphorical.

The necessity of vocation and high moral perfection for the priest is easily understood by the Ibos. The aspects harder for them to understand are the unity and instrumentality of the Christian priesthood.

The victim in Ibo sacrifices, it was seen, varies from the least to the greatest offering possible for man to make. In olden days human sacrifice was not unknown when a great public good was at stake.

This helps the Iboman to see the great worth of the Victim in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. The Iboman knows already that a human victim is the greatest man can offer. In the Christian Sacrifice we have a Victim of infinite worth, for Christ is both God and Man.

The victim in Ibo traditional sacrifices is regarded as a gift and sometimes as a substitute for the person who makes the offering. The first concept - gift - needs only elevation to draw attention to the infinite worth of our Gift in the Eucharistic Sacrifice. The second concept - substitute - needs some orientation and completion so that it may include our oneness with Christ. Christ, Who suffered for us, is not a stranger but our Brother, the Head of the new humanity with whom God forms a new Covenant.

This last point introduces the doctrine of the whole Church being victim with Christ. It demands that the faithful live the Mass in their daily lives. This is far, far more than Ibo traditional sacrifice demands.

Now it remains for us to look at the sacrificial rite. How can one make use of the Ibo sacrificial background to teach the rite of Holy Mass?

The Ibos' love of ceremonies is certainly a very positive element which will help them to follow the Eucharistic celebration. Clear explanations of the Mass ceremonies hold the Ibos spellbound. Their sense of community worship is also of great help. But the Christian community has to be presented in all its fullness: the parish, the diocese, the whole Church: triumphant, suffering and militant.

In Ibo ritual there is a danger that too much emphasis be placed on externals: the victim, the scru-

pulous execution of rites, etc. Hence, to get into the heart of the Eucharistic celebration as far as possible, the Ibos need to make far more effort to "see interiorly." Religion must be built on firm personal convictions. Exterior acts of religion presuppose interior ones if they are to remain genuine religious acts.

The Christian atmosphere of the liberty of the children of God will dispel the servile type of fear which figures so much in the traditional beliefs of my people. Fear, of course, is a true religious sentiment, for the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. But the fear which befits Christians towards God is a filial fear ruled by love.

The transcendence of the Sacred Table over anything that man could ever have thought of by himself should be emphasized. It is no longer just an attempt to enter into communion with the object of worship. There we receive Christ Himself, God and Man. This sacrificial banquet unites us to Christ and consequently to one another. This sacrament of unity, therefore, demands fraternal charity.

Such is the broad outline which could be followed in a catechesis of Holy Mass for the Ibos of Nigeria. The prudent use of existing stepping-stones to introduce Christian truth in mission lands cannot help but prove fruitful.

A pagan shrine in Eziowelle Town.

