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# Dominic Ignatius Ekandem

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**Dominic Ignatius Ekandem**  
**1917 to 1995**  
**Catholic Church**

Dominic Ignatius Ekandem was born into the Royal family of Chief (*Okuku*) and hailed Ekandem from the patrilineal group of Nnung Adia Nkpo. He was born on June 23, 1917, in Obio Ibiono village in the present Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria, a year before the First World War ended and the year of the beginning of the Russian Revolution. Obio Ibiono was small, remote and rural, and so far from the center of activities in Nigeria at that time, that not even *Obong* (Chief) Ekandem, Dominic Ekandem's father, knew that there was a World War going on, or what the Russian Revolution was about, if he had even heard of it. On June 23, 1917, what was important to him was that he had a second baby son, born to him by his second wife. Ekandem's mother was Nnwa Ibong Umana Essien. She was the second daughter of Ibong Umana Essien of Ibiono Ibom clan, the same clan as her husband *Obong* Ekandem. In the clan, each family had its own deity apart from the supreme deity, Abasi. The deity of Nnung Adia Nkpo was *Ekandem*, and this was the origin of Ekandem's name. In addition to the village deity, the common deity to all Ibibios is *Idiong*.

*Obong* Ekandem, Dominic's father, was not only a village head, he was also the custodian of the royal shrine and the Chief Priest of the village as well as acting as the judge and arbitrator in quarrels and disputes within the village. He was also one of the eminent kingmakers of the Ibiono Ibom clan and the only chief entitled to bestow the royal crown on the king. No paramount ruler of Ibiono can be recognized except by being crowned by the *Okuku* of Obio Ibiono, who at that time was Chief Ekandem. As Chief Priest, Chief Ekandem would pray to the deities and offer sacrifices for himself, his family, and the village, especially during the new yam festivals. Young Dominic participated in these rituals and began to be initiated into the services of the supernatural deities. Recalling the experience, Dominic said:

Early in my life my father associated me with pagan worship. I often carried the victims (fowl, or goat, water and mashed yam) to be offered in sacrifice to the gods, invoked to bless and protect us and help us to grow as virtuous children and useful citizens. I often shared the remains of the food of the gods with my other brothers and felt very hopeful of future good results.[1]

There is a common saying among the Ibibios that it is only the child whom the father loves who is initiated into the worship of *Idiong*. Dominic Ekandem was born into royalty and consequently to induction into the

eneration of *Idiong*. By the time he was born, his father Etuk Ubo Ekandem was the *Obong* of Obio Ibiono, a rank that came with power, respect and dignity. As the chief priest, he worshipped and made animal sacrifices to the gods, which the members of his family were expected to partake in eating. As a royal chief, *Obong* Ekandem had thirty-two wives in accordance with the traditional practice of his time. Failure to have such a great number of wives was construed as a sign either of weakness, illness or abject poverty. Strength, virility and relative wealth were among the qualities necessary for selection as an *Okuku* of Obio Ibiono.

When the young Ekandem was born, his father nicknamed him Tom (derived from TomTom) because of his attractive appearance. Tom developed a very close tie with his mother, always playing around his mother's hut. Early in his life and development Tom, or Dominic as he came to be known, enjoyed the care of both father and mother, both of whom were descended from royalty. However, he did not have his mother's care for long, as she died when he was only eleven years old. Dominic's mother was a leader in her own right. She was a hardworking farmer and a petty trader with a proven reputation for honesty and fairness: qualities that helped her as a female leader of the village.

Dominic's father, Chief Ekandem, was friendly not only with the white colonial masters, but also with slave traders. He was an authority in decision-making between his people and the colonialists and an intermediary between his people and the Colonial District Officer (CDO). As a result of his steadfastness and commitment to duty, he was appointed a warrant chief. This added to his status and caused the CDO to entrust him with the care and administration of prisoners in the Ibiono Ibom area. Dominic said that his father's authority and position as a chief, as well as the number of his wives and children (about thirty), and his work as a court clerk, messenger and interpreter, conferred special status upon him. He earned enormous respect, admiration and prestige. He evidently had some understanding of English, since he acted as an interpreter, despite his lack of a formal western education. As a chief, he had a big compound to accommodate his wives and children and several large farms where they and his servants worked to produce crops to feed the entire household.

Chief Ekandem wanted his son to have a good education and training, and so he sent him to live with teachers who had a good reputation for learning and discipline. In the early 1920s, he lived with teachers in various villages including Odu Abak, Midim, and Ikot Ofun, before returning to his home village to formally start school in 1924. Chief Ekandem was a disciplinarian and he wanted to bring his children up with strict discipline as well as love and protection. Dominic's first guardian was

the one who made the biggest impression: Mr Akpan Philip Inwang. Chief Ekandem placed Dominic in his custody, and he took Dominic to school in the nearby town of Itu. Being mentored by different guardians in various places meant that Dominic did not mix very closely with people at home, but it stood him in good stead for “CKC (Christ the King College) Onitsha, where he was educated among almost complete strangers.”[2]

An important point to note here is that the present Assumptions Catholic Church in Obio Ibiono owes a lot to Philip Inwang, who could arguably be called the patriarch of Obio Ibiono Catholic Church. Prior to the arrival of Catholicism in 1921 with Fr. Biechy, who offered the first Holy Mass, Obio Ibiono was dominated by the Qua Iboe Church. Qua Iboe was the name adopted by the mix of the Presbyterian Missionary Society and the indigenous African Church, which appealed very much to the people of the area. As the village chief, Chief Ekandem had introduced the Qua Iboe Church into the village. Although he was not a convert, he allowed his children to attend the church programs, although they did not attend as members since they were not baptized. However, a quarrel broke out between Chief Ekandem and the Qua Iboe Church when they learned that he planned to have himself and his sons initiated into the pagan cult of Ubio Ekong. This was meant for warriors who proved their mettle by presenting the skull of an opponent they had defeated in combat. Chief Ekandem was adamant and withdrew his children from the church. He proceeded with the initiation ceremonies and, to further spite the Qua Iboe Church, he went to Anua Catholic Mission, negotiated with the resident priest and introduced the Catholic denomination into his village. Dominic Ekandem later recalled, “Thus my father was responsible for my conversion: first as a Protestant and later as a Catholic. I doubt if he himself knew the difference between the two.”[3]

In 1928, Dominic completed his Standard I education at St. Peter’s Primary School at Ikot Mbang and then transferred to St. Joseph’s Primary School at Anua to continue his education. Early in the 1920s, Fr. Biechy had begun his missionary advance into the then remote and little-known land of Obio Ibiono. As was his habit, Chief Ekandem struck up a friendship with the Irish missionaries and Fr. Biechy was partly responsible for the furthering Dominic’s education. Some years later, when he was a bishop, Dominic recollected:

The friendly relationship between my father and the missionaries appeared to have prepared the way for my vocation. When the time came, some years afterwards, and I manifested my desire to study for the priesthood, I had no difficulty in obtaining my father’s consent even though he was still a pagan.[4]

This was in spite of the fact that Dominic's priesthood came at a cost to his father.

In 1928, when Dominic was only eleven years old, he suffered a great tragedy. He had hardly settled down to his studies in Anua when his mother died, Dominic having been brought home the day before by his father. After the mourning and burial, Dominic went back to school, struggling not to let the death of his mother affect his education. He was able to turn the pain of his tragedy into a determination to pursue academic excellence. His only regret later was that his mother was not baptized before she died.

In 1932 Dominic passed his First School-Leaving Certificate of Education, also known as Standard Six Examination. His performance enabled him to continue his further education.

Dominic's upbringing at St. Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Anua, not only provided him with an education but also contributed to his spiritual formation. This caused him to reconsider his initiation into the cults and African Traditional Religion and led to his conversion to a new religion. On June 23, 1925, at the age of eight, Dominic was baptized by Rev. Fr. J. Hanson and was given the name Dominic. From then on he no longer went by the names Tom or Udo: only Dominic. To baptize means to immerse or plunge and Dominic took the plunge and became immersed as a new creature in Christ. In 1926, at St. Peter's Parish, Ibiono, he received his first Holy Communion. It is somewhat surprising that Chief Ekandem not only gave consent to the Christianization of his children but positively encouraged them to embrace the Catholic faith, which he held in high esteem. In 1928 Dominic was confirmed and adopted the name Ignatius.

Priesthood beckoned and Dominic answered the call in 1933. He entered the seminary in Onitsha to study for the Sacred Priesthood. His environment was unfamiliar and he was not among his tribesmen, but he found himself among friends. He later reminisced:

I was the only student from my tribe in the Junior Seminary at Onitsha when I started off, but fortunately, I found myself among sincerely genuine friends, companions, devoted brothers and deeply religious Seminarians. The thought of giving up and running home quickly deserted me. Nobody attempted to quarrel with me. I noticed no discrimination. Small and young as I was, nobody attempted to enslave or boss over me.[5]

The priests and teachers were equally supportive and helpful during those difficult days away from home. Rev. Fr. Leo William Broolly, who doubled as the Principal of CKC and the Rector of the Seminary, took care of Dominic in a fatherly way. The seminary turned out to be a happy home and congenial

environment for him. It was his experience in the seminary that gave him the idea for a national seminary of Nigeria later on.

In 1938, after the Junior Seminary course, Dominic was sent to do probation (field work) in Calabar, so as to have field experience for the priesthood. He taught for three years at Sacred Heart College in Calabar and was also involved in liturgical services. In 1941, he began his Senior Seminary training. His family background was a stumbling block in the way of his becoming ordained, but his father's sacrifice and a dispensation from Pope Pius XII succeeded in securing his ordination as a priest on December 7, 1947. He was ordained by Archbishop Charles Henry of Onitsha in Ifuho Church, which later became his Cathedral Church.

Dominic's path to ordination was an uphill climb. In the view of the expatriate missionaries, the son of a chief and priest of African Traditional Religion (with thirty-two wives) could not be ordained as a Roman Catholic priest. If he was going to teach the truth and convince people to follow the message of Christ and that of the Church, he must first of all convince his father. It was a difficult but not impossible task, and Dominic set out to do it. One of the greatest achievements of his life, he believed, was getting his father baptized in the Catholic Church. This took place in 1945, in Anua. Chief Ekandem was treated no differently from the other people being baptized. There was no special regard for his age or position, as "we are all equal in the presence of God." Chief Ekandem submitted to the sacrament not only for the salvation of his soul but also due to the honor and respect he had for his son: it was believed that it would be improper for the son of a pagan to become a priest. Only after he had taken just one of his remaining twenty-eight wives as his "legal" wife, was Chief Ekandem baptized and named Paul. The old man died a committed Catholic in 1955, barely a year after seeing his son consecrated as the first African Catholic bishop in Nigeria and, indeed, in Anglophone West Africa. Chief Ekandem paid a high price for his son to become a priest. In addition to Chief Ekandem's sacrifice for his son, a letter of dispensation was required from Rome. This only came two years after Chief Ekandem's baptism, in 1947. Chief Ekandem had nevertheless remained hopeful that Dominic would become a priest.

After ordination, Rev. Fr. Dominic Ekandem blessed his father and spent a few months in Ifuho Mission. Subsequently he was appointed to assist Rev. Fr. Murray, who was sent to start a new parish in Afaha Obong. The grounding Ekandem had received at home through the guardianship of Philip and others, his time at the Junior Seminary, probation and his time at the Senior Seminary all combined to provide the tools he needed to be a successful assistant, well fit to work with Rev. Fr. Murray. Looking back on his life and work as assistant priest in Afaha Obong, he reminisced:

I was very fortunate to have Rev. Fr. Joe Murray, now a missionary in Kenya, as my superior. Having realized that I was, by the grace of God, a priest like himself, he overlooked all other differences between us and started to prepare me by word and example for the task ahead. He ordered. I obeyed. We agreed not to disagree.[6]

The working conditions in Afaha Obong were, to say the least, not the best, but both Fr. Murray and Fr. Ekandem bore it well. Fr. Murray, expressing his appreciation for Ekandem, maintained that: "All Nigerian Catholics of goodwill accept or reject a priest for what he is – a good priest, another Christ, or a bad priest, a false Christ – not because of his color, race or tribe, notions which would destroy the unity and universality of the Church." [7]

Ekandem was initiated into pastoral ministry and evangelization through the long-lasting education he received from Murray, who was an inspiring teacher. They had a "harmony comparable to that resulting from the combination of white and black on the keyboard of a harmonium or piano." Murray and Ekandem provided pastoral and missionary care to the people of Afaha Obong which had outstations at Nto Edino, Nko, Urua Akpan, Okon, Ukana, Urua Iyang, Midim and Obong. Murray led the way in pastoral and evangelical visits to the outstations. This was known as "trekking" and he bore its hardships with great sacrifice and equanimity. Over the years, Ekandem came to appreciate the value of trekking, especially as an opportunity to make contact between priests and parishioners and to discuss and share in people's problems. It was while living and working with missionaries like Murray that Ekandem cultivated the spirit and skills that enabled him to be successful in his pastoral ministry.

In the early days of 1952, Bishop Moynagh appointed Ekandem as parish priest of Abak. As a pastor, certain aspects of the life of the parish were of special interest and concern to Ekandem. First was the welfare of the members of his parish. He made visits and went trekking to ensure that through contact, consultation, discussion and encouragement a caring community could be established. His second particular concern was evangelization. For Ekandem, it was not enough for the faithful to know their catechism and support the Church: they must also evangelize and win converts. He preached and encouraged evangelization through personal contact, both in groups and through individual home visits and connections. He came to realize that the task was made lighter and more fruitful when he worked with and through pious societies in the Church. He therefore organized the laity of his parish into various pious societies under the patronage of particular saints. He entrusted them with specific responsibilities and duties while trekking or making pastoral visits: one of

these duties was the construction of rest houses for teachers and priests. He drastically reduced the confusion and difficulties which often attended pastoral visits by making the pious societies maintain these rest houses and provide food and cooking utensils for the use of visiting priests and teachers. This meant that the priests and teachers could travel lightly and accomplish more pastorally. The Legion of Mary was one of the pious societies established by Ekandem at Afaha Obong mission station. The Legion was introduced into Africa by Bishop Moynagh at Ifuho in 1932 as the first *Presidium* of the Legion in the continent. Evangelization was a mission shared by all the societies and as a result, the Church grew.

Ekandem also gave special attention to the issue of Christian marriage. He encouraged as many couples as possible to undergo the Sacrament of Marriage. He made it a point of duty to see that Christian couples received adequate preparation prior to their wedding. He established marriage preparation quarters in the central station of the parish for would-be couples, mostly women, who came for a period of about three months. The future brides were instructed in home economics and in the Christian faith, especially as it pertained to motherhood and being a wife. The marriage quarters served as a school of Christian doctrine with a special emphasis on Christian marriage and family life. Instruction was provided by expert teachers with relevant experience. Ekandem helped couples resolve the problems preventing them from getting married such as the incomplete payment of a dowry. He would contact the parents and plead for the wedding to go ahead. Ekandem succeeded in getting many marriages blessed and solemnized, thereby increasing the number of Christian families in the parish and in the vicariate. Bishop Moynagh commended his efforts in this regard.

The third issue that concerned Ekandem was the spirituality of the laity, especially with regard to the Sacrament of Penance, corporal works of mercy, and generosity to the Church as demonstrated through Sunday collections. To encourage the spirituality of his parishioners, he introduced the First Friday and First Sunday devotions and made them important activities of the parish. In his pastoral ministry he also gave special attention to the training of catechists and teachers. There were few priests, and pastoral needs were great so the assistance of catechists and teachers was indispensable in spreading the Word. In Ekandem's assessment, the catechists were the greatest and most important group of pastoral agents and leaders, after the priests. These catechists and teachers were generally men of intelligence, industry and integrity, who taught not only in words but also through their exemplary Christian lifestyles.

Ekandem had always admired the quality of "taking the initiative,"

which he found in most missionaries he associated with. He took on this virtue and utilized it in his pastoral ministry. This led to another issue that caught his especial attention. When serving as a priest in Abak, he saw to the development of a junior seminary for the vicariate of Calabar. He was convinced that it was an essential part of his duty to recruit and train candidates for the priesthood. As early as 1948, the seminary started out of Holy Family College, where a special group of students who showed interest in the priesthood were “set aside” and lodged in a separate cottage within the college compound. Fr. Michael Hays, the principal of the college, was dissatisfied with this arrangement and he spoke out against it until Ekandem completely separated the seminarians from those pursuing secular education. With the approval of Bishop Moynagh, Ekandem put up some structures at Afaha Obong. By the end of 1952 the seminary was firmly established there – a place where, according to Ekandem, the Catholics had shown great faith, commitment and a positive disposition towards the Church. Thus, Queen of Apostle Junior Seminary was born, and Ekandem was the seminary’s first rector. Through donations, Ekandem was able to mobilize the resources to build and sustain the seminary.

Ekandem achieved all this in the first six years of his pastoral ministry. He worked with committed men and women, and his ministry was successful. He also had the support and encouragement of a man of God in Bishop J. Moynagh who was consecrated Bishop and Vicar Apostolic of Calabar in the year Ekandem was ordained.

In 1950, Rome made Calabar a diocese and made His Lordship the Most Rev. J. Moynagh its first bishop. He set out to organize and built this vast diocese. He built schools, hospitals and development centers. He opened convents, established parishes and trained leaders for both the Church and the state. The continent of Africa owes its first contact with the Legion of Mary to Bishop Moynagh. He was a man of vision, foresight, high intelligence, and intellect: a great shepherd. He also labored relentlessly for the indigenous priests. He sent many of them, including Ekandem, on special visits abroad.

In 1954 Moynagh gave modern Anglo-West Africa its first indigenous Catholic bishop: His Lordship the Most Rev. Bishop D. I. Ekandem. That year, the diocese of Ikot Ekpene was created and Ekandem appointed to administer it. Earlier, in 1953, Moynagh had acted on his vision for the good of the church in Africa, and had asked Rome to appoint Ekandem as his auxiliary bishop. He wanted to emphasize that the church in Nigeria must grow with its own indigenous bishops. Rome agreed, and so Ekandem was the first indigenous Catholic bishop in Nigeria, and in West Africa.

This happened seven years after Ekandem's ordination. He was preaching at Essene Parish Church for teachers in the Calabar diocese when a priest arrived with a letter for him from Bishop Moynagh. He finished preaching, then took the letter and excused himself. Once out of sight, he opened the letter and read its contents. He was visibly agitated but managed to maintain his composure. He returned to his audience and told them that he had been asked to report to Calabar upon receipt of the letter. He did not tell them why, but reassured them that there was no cause for anxiety. He assured them that all would be well and that it was all for good. And all was well. In the letter, Moynagh informed Ekandem that Pope Pius XII had appointed him to the office of bishop, and that he would be the Auxiliary Bishop of Calabar. About two weeks before the consecration, Ekandem withdrew to an undisclosed mission house for a period of quiet prayer, reflection and rest. He needed prayerful silence and solitude to grasp the full meaning and implication of his new responsibility.

Coinciding with the 50th anniversary of the Catholic Church in Calabar, Ekandem was consecrated as bishop on May 23, 1954. Moynagh's efforts had paid off with the elevation of Ekandem to the bishopric, the youngest in the Catholic Church and a shining example and inspiration to all other Nigerian priests.

The consecration of Ekandem as the auxiliary bishop of Calabar was a milestone for the Catholic Church in Nigeria. The event was designed to coincide with the Golden Jubilee of the advent of Roman Catholicism in Calabar, and was held at the Sacred Heart Cathedral Church, Calabar. Since it was the first time in the modern era that an African bishop was being consecrated in West Africa, it was an international event, which drew people from all walks of life, from both Africa and Europe. Apart from Ekandem himself, the two happiest men on that occasion were his father, Chief Paul Ekandem, and Bishop James Moynagh, who had brought it about.

Ekandem saw his episcopal elevation as a cross, and he so he chose the cross with a crown of thorns as his episcopal insignia and his motto was *in the Cross is Salvation*. After the various rounds of receptions and celebrations, he settled back down to his pastoral ministry. He exercised it in three principal capacities: as auxiliary bishop of Calabar diocese, as the vicar general of Calabar diocese, and as the father-in-charge of St. Joseph's parish, Anua. For the next nine years, Anua was his home and pastoral base until in 1963 he became bishop of that ministry.

How did he perform as a bishop? The indigenization process that was taking place at the political level in 1950s Nigeria did not bypass the church. Speaking about the night of his ordination to the priesthood, Ekandem commented: "In College I used to wonder what I would be...

sometimes, I thought I'd like to be a doctor to heal my people's ills... sometimes a lawyer to plead their cause... or maybe an architect to plan and build for them... now I am all these: I am a Priest." [8] He was a priest who saw his life and ministry as a means through which God would uplift his people in their spiritual and temporal welfare. He believed and insisted on catholicity in its entirety:

Those who have chosen to be Catholics want nothing but Catholicism in its entirety. We Nigerians do not like adulteration, whether of food or of drinks. Hence, the sincere Catholics do not want and do not need a watered-down Catholicism either by ignoring healthy principles or in the name of adaptation. Nigeria needs the Faith, the whole Faith and nothing but the Faith. [9]

He believed that the Church was a sort of commonwealth, belonging equally to all, since in the theological and traditional language of the Church, she is described as universal. The Church belongs to every nation equally and therefore, although she could be described as a national church, she would be without national vices, corruption or limitations. For Ekandem, the Church in Nigeria must be every inch Catholic and rigorously so. On the other hand, it must be Nigerian. In his view, it was up to Catholic leaders - theologians and philosophers - to bring about necessary and useful adaptations in order to make the Church relevant to Nigeria and Nigerians. To promote the incarnation of the Church in Nigeria, Ekandem urged and invited Nigerian philosophers and theologians to bring their scholarship to bear upon the Nigerian situation.

Ekandem believed that the viability and self-reliance of the incarnated church depended upon indigenous priests whose training must be given a national tone. In a letter dated August 27, 1956, he wrote to the Apostolic Delegate, the Most Rev. J. R. Knox, appealing for a common Majority Seminary for Nigerian students. These are some of the reasons he gave:

1. Languages and customs of another tribe can easily be picked up by students in a common institute. Such knowledge would prove most useful to priests, who at different periods of their ministry are bound to meet men from almost every tribe in Nigeria.
2. It will help to lessen strife and misunderstandings among Nigerian tribes.
3. The cry of every true and selfless Nigerian today is "one Nigeria." The training of her priests in a common institute will help to create and stabilize that union.
4. Where priests and vocations are few, frequent communications

between the various Dioceses may bring encouragement and perhaps relief. It may even be more economical to do so.[10] After a delay caused by the Nigerian civil war, the National Seminary of St. Paul ultimately took off. As of March 2015, the Seminary has produced 267 priests, three of whom have become bishops. Priests of the order of the Missionary Society of St. Paul are serving as missionaries in eighteen countries in Africa, Europe, North America and the Caribbean.

Ekandem's philosophy of education was founded on the mission given to the Church by Christ to "teach all nations" and directed by Vatican II. In a sermon on April 11, 1971, in Port-Harcourt, he held that education consists essentially in preparing a person for what they must be and what they must do here below, in order to obtain the sublime end for which they were created. The Church is in favor not only of character training and religious formation but also of the study of secular subjects because education brings fulfillment and appreciation of the beauty of God's creation. Ekandem emphasized that Catholics should support and promote education everywhere. Parents have the primary rights and are primarily responsible for the education of their children: those rights and responsibilities come to the family from the Creator and they can neither be surrendered nor infringed by any power on Earth. However, the state also has definite duties towards education: parental and state efforts must be complementary. The Church must not be uninvolved in general education but also accept its grave obligation to see to the moral and religious education of all her children – boys and girls – equally.

Modeling his life and work on his mentor, Moynagh, Ekandem further developed existing secondary schools like Holy Family College, Abak, St. Frances, Ikot Ataku, Regina Coeli, Essene, St. Vincent, Oti Oron, St. Columbus, Ikwen, Cornelia Connelly, Uyo, St. Augustine, Urua Inyang, and Holy Child Teachers' Training College, Ifuho. Ekandem consolidated these and also established Holy Trinity School, Mbiakong, St. Kizito, Adiasim, and Adiaha Obong Secondary School, Uyo. He also established Loreto Girls Juniorate at Afaha Obong for nurturing and training indigenous woman in vocational and religious work as a counterpart to Queen of Apostles Seminary, which he had founded earlier.

In 1954, Bishop Ekandem led the founding of the Federation of Catholic Teachers' Association. The purpose was to enhance the quality of teaching and improve the welfare and well-being of teachers. It was to unite teachers in a spirit of charity so that they

would improve themselves and help one another as architects and builders of a Christian Nation. Ekandem surmounted all obstacles to establish the Association.

In the area of health and social services, Ekandem encouraged the building of health units in villages which were far away from hospitals. Dispensaries and maternity units were built throughout his diocese. In addition to this, he was the proprietor of two hospitals: St. Mary's hospital, Urua Akpan, Ikot Ekpene; and Mercy Hospital, Abak. It is pertinent to mention that these hospitals and health units were very useful during the civil war. Not only did they provide healthcare, but they also served as refugee centers. In economic and social services Ekandem made the joys, hopes, grief and anxieties of the poor his own, in accordance with the statement of Vatican II.

He built a civic center in Ikot Ekpene with departments for domestic science, marriage guidance, vocational training, adult education, typing training, agriculture, industry and manufacturing; a cooperative unit and a place for children with special needs. After the civil war, he founded the Holy Child Children's Home for orphans and the destitute.

He promoted African culture in two ways: by positively encouraging and promoting the good elements in the culture and condemning the bad. He encouraged the revival of culture in the seminary and sponsored research into African names in Christian initiations. This resulted in a book: *Annang, Efik, Ibibio Personal Names – A Cultural Study 1974.*" [11]

It deserves mentioning that when Ekandem became the Bishop of Ikot Ekpene in 1963, he faced the challenges of the new Diocese stoically and successfully. His participation in the Second Vatican Council in 1965 was the experience of a lifetime. According to Ekandem it was a transformative event and he believed that there was hardly anybody who was in Rome for the Council who went home unaffected.

By the time Ekandem returned to Nigeria, the politico-military event which was to have impact on all aspects of Nigerian life was smoldering. As the crisis, which had started on January 15, 1966, was moving towards breaking point, the Catholic bishops of Nigeria urged caution and moderation. However, it seems the bishops were not able to work together in unison and so their episcopal efforts for peace and a joint statement were ineffectual. Some Catholic bishops' delegations were sent to the Federal and regional centers. However,

the eminent delegation sent to Ojukwu in Enugu, (including Ekandem) met a brick wall, as Ojukwu was poised for war. Ekandem was disheartened that Ojukwu, who was a Catholic, did not listen to his “spiritual fathers.” Incidentally, Ekandem was out of the country when the shooting war broke out on July 6, 1967 and he could only return home through Cameroon. Apparently, some Biafran soldiers watched him closely when he returned. The war taxed his charity, generosity and kindness to their limits, but he never gave up on his amity.

Happily, the war came to an end and rehabilitation, reconciliation and reconstruction began in earnest. Ekandem remained passionately committed to his flock and to all those who were in need throughout the crisis of the civil war. With other clergymen he worked tenaciously for peace, which unfortunately did not come about until the war had run its full course. The treatment of south-eastern seminarians in Igboland after the civil war disconcerted Ekandem and the other bishops from his area. This led to the establishment of Bigard Memorial Seminary in Ikot Ekpene on December 5, 1976. Ekandem commanded the respect of his clergymen because of the way he treated them, and also because he had seniority by virtue of his age and his vocational status. After the civil war, Ekandem became the Apostolic Administrator of Port-Harcourt diocese. He held this position from 1970 to 1973.

Rome officially announced the elevation of Dominic Ekandem to the cardinalate at noon on April 27, 1976. The news was communicated to the new cardinal the following day in a congratulatory letter from Monsignor D. Causero, the acting Apostolic Pro-Nuncio in Nigeria. Thus, Ekandem became the first Nigerian bishop to be made a cardinal. Cardinals of the Holy Roman Catholic Church constitute the senate or supreme council of the Church for the Holy Father, the Pope, and assist him as his chief counselors and helpers in governing the Church. From 1917, when the Code of Canon Law was promulgated, to be made a cardinal a person had to be a priest and, according to Canon 232, he had to be one of “outstanding learning, piety, judgment and ability.” There is no fixed number for cardinals, but it is the prerogative of the Pope to select those on whom he wants to confer the dignity of a cardinal. When a pope dies or resigns, cardinals have the privilege of electing his replacement.

Cardinal Ekandem’s response to his appointment was both humble and instructive:

For me this is a moment made possible only by Almighty God, our Heavenly Father through our Holy Father Pope Paul. I give thanks to

God for the great honor bestowed on my country. For myself, I can only repeat that I am a Catholic Priest. This is what is really important. Whatever honor may be attached to that priesthood in my humble person, I accept it on the solemn understanding that I was ordained a priest of God to minister to the people, and if necessary, to die for the people.[12]

He called for prayers and characteristically declared “nine days of fasting and prayer with jubilation.” All Nigerians appreciated this great honor done to a worthy compatriot.

Those of us in government were overjoyed and we congratulated the new cardinal, celebrating with him and describing him as a great Nigerian who made us proud. The entry of a Nigerian into the highest governing body of the Church confirmed and consolidated Ekandem’s belief in the catholicity of the Church while maintaining and sustaining its relevance for Nigeria. His Eminence Dominic Cardinal Ekandem had always been both a particular and a universal person. His elevation was an encouragement to continue being both rigorously African and rigorously Catholic. He fulfilled both roles. As an experienced priest, missionary and patriot, Ekandem counseled young missionaries to be happy with their place in the priesthood of Christ, and not to waste time worrying or arguing over money and material wealth. He adjured them to go out to their mission fields as ambassadors of Christ, bearing in mind that as Nigerians, they were also ambassadors of their homeland, Nigeria.

Ekandem was the president of the National Episcopal Conference of Nigeria for six years, beginning in 1973. His successor, Archbishop Arinze, had this to say about his leadership: “Dominic Cardinal Ekandem was gentle, friendly, quiet, dependable, persevering and disciplined. He was encouraging in his leadership style.”[13]

Ekandem was elected the first president of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) in his absence on August 27, 1976, and he nurtured that institution. His peers in the Catholic Bishops Conference were universally positive and commendatory in their opinions on his leadership style and his achievements. Although they had periods of disagreement, he managed to resolve them.

Two events concerning Rome, apart from Vatican II, had a tremendous impact on Ekandem. On August 6, 1978, Pope Paul VI died. As was customary for a cardinal, Ekandem joined the conclave to select the new pope. Not only was he among the electorate, he was also a possible candidate, as are all cardinals. It was historic for Ekandem, and for Nigeria. The second event was the visit of Pope John Paul II to Nigeria in February, 1982. As the most senior clergyman, Ekandem had a pivotal role to play in

the Pope's visit. In his welcome address, Ekandem expressed his confidence and faith in the anticipated blessings of the Pontiff:

Your coming is a great consolation for us, your flock. It satisfies the longing desire of all, since we know you have come to bless us, our nation, our people, our government, rulers in their various categories, missionaries, their collaborators, and all those who have been waiting with anxious expectation for your august arrival. All will be spiritually enriched in many ways.[14]

In his homily, the Pope referred to the first encounter of early missionaries with Nigeria and the generous and open-minded reception given to them.

With the creation of the new Federal Capital Territory of Abuja in 1976, Ekandem spearheaded the establishment of Abuja as a separate ecclesiastical jurisdiction. To his surprise, he was appointed to the new ecclesiastical territory in 1989. A man of foresight, he immediately relocated to Suleja. That was three years before the Federal Government officially moved to Abuja. With the appointment, Ekandem graciously cut his umbilical cord with Ikot Ekpene. Bishop Etukudoh was subsequently appointed to be the Bishop of Ikot Ekpene in 1988, resolving the problem of succession. Ekandem laid the foundation of the See of Abuja and remained in charge of the archdiocese of Abuja until he retired in 1992. Three years later in Garki, Abuja, on November 24, 1995, Dominic Cardinal Ekandem died. He was buried on December 2, 1995.

Dominic Cardinal Ekandem has been variously described as a pastor without equal, a true conservative nationalist, and a shepherd among shepherds, whose unquestioning obedience to constituted authority led some clergymen to nickname him, "Rome has spoken; no more arguments."

Edidiong Ekefre encapsulated the qualities of Ekandem in this eulogy:

His goodness and virtues have been interred with his bones.

He was a *primus per excellence*

He was the first residential Bishop of Ikot Ekpene Diocese

He was the first Apostolic Administrator of Port-Harcourt

He was the first Cardinal in English-speaking West Africa

He was the first President of the Association of Episcopal Conference of Anglophone West Africa

He was the first Superior and Bishop of Abuja

He was the first President of Christian Association of Nigeria

He was the first Nigerian Cardinal to qualify as a candidate for the Papacy

He was an originator *par excellence*

He was the founder of the Catholic Women's Organization  
He was the originator of the Catholic Teachers' Association  
The originator of the Association of Catholic Graduates, *Lux Catholica*  
The originator of the Missionary Society of St. Paul, Abuja  
He was the originator of many schools, hospitals and hospice homes.  
In life, Ekandem was what he wanted to be, as a priest in the sacred service of God, and in the spiritual and temporal service of humanity.[15]

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## Notes

1. Cosmas K. O. Nwosuh, *Cardinal Dominic Ekandem and the Growth of the Catholic Church in Nigeria*, (Iperu Remo: Ambassador Publishing of the Missionary Society of St. Paul, 2012), 16.
2. Conflation of an interview with Dr. Gabriel Ekandem, (of the University of Uyo) and Ekandem, D. Cardinal, *The Church in the Rise of Nigeria*, (Aba: Cynako Int. Press, 1974).
3. Conflation of an interview with Dr. Gabriel Ekandem, (of the University of Uyo) and Cosmas K. O. Nwosuh, *Cardinal Dominic Ekandem and the Growth of the Catholic Church in Nigeria*, (Iperu Remo: Ambassador Publishing of the Missionary Society of St. Paul, 2012).
4. Edidiong Ekefre, *A Testament of Light – The Life and Times of Dominic Cardinal Ekandem*, (Ikeja: May Five Media Ltd, 2013), and Cosmas K. O. Nwosuh, *Cardinal Dominic Ekandem and the Growth of the Catholic Church in Nigeria*, (Iperu Remo: Ambassador Publishing of the Missionary Society of St. Paul, 2012), 18.
5. Fr. U. E. Umoren, *His Eminence Dominic Cardinal Ekandem, 1917-1976: First Nigerian Cardinal*, (Aba: Cynako International Press, 1976), 23. See also Nwosu, V.A., "The Growth of the Catholic Church in Onitsha Ecclesiastical province" in Makozi A.O. and Afolabi Ojo G. J (eds.) *The History of the Catholic Church in Nigeria*.
6. See Ekandem, Dominic Cardinal, *True Spiritual Leadership, A Vital Contribution to Nation-Building*, (Ikot Ekene: De Paul Printing Press, 1976) and particularly, Fr. U. E. Umoren, *His Eminence Dominic Cardinal Ekandem, 1917-1976*, (Aba: Cynako International Press, 1976), 23.
7. See Akpan Godwin, *Memoirs of a Pioneer Missionary*, (Iperu Remo: Ambassador Publishing of the Missionary Society of St. Paul, 2001). See also, Fr. U. E. Umoren, *His Eminence Dominic Cardinal Ekandem*, 23.

8. Fr. U. E. Umoren, *His Eminence Dominic Cardinal Ekandem, 1917-1976*, 23. See also Conolly Dermt, "Making Nigeria Great: Dominic Cardinal Ekandem (1917- 1997)" in *Africa*. July-Aug 1996, 14-16.
9. Edidiong Ekefre, *A Testament of Light – The Life and Times of Dominic Cardinal Ekandem*, (Ikeja: May Five Media Ltd, 2013), and Umoren,34.
10. See Ekandem, Dominic Cardinal. *True Spiritual Leadership*. Also, Fr. U. E. Umoren,35.
11. Umoren, 41.
12. See Ekandem, *True Spiritual Leadership*, and Edidiong Ekefre, *A Testament of Light – The Life and Times of Dominic Cardinal Ekandem*.
13. Nwosuh, 365.
14. See Edidiong Ekefre, *A Testament of Light – The Life and Times of Dominic Cardinal Ekandem*, and Nwosuh, 367.
15. See Umoren, and Nwosuh, 367.

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- Program for the Federal Mass of His Eminence Dominic Cardinal Ekandem the Archbishop of Abuja (1917- 1995) at our Lady Queen of Nigeria Roman Catholic Cathedral, Abuja, December 2, 1995.
- Interview conducted with Dr. Gabriel Ekandem, University of Uyo, March 2, 2015.