

Background: Biafra's Struggle For Statehood

By PATRICK RILEY
NC News Service

Rome — The war between the self-proclaimed Republic of Biafra and the rest of the Nigerian Federation may not be a religious war, but the defeat of Biafra could bring oppression and other evils to Christianity there, according to a high official of the Catholic Church in Biafra.

"The ordinary Christian in Biafra finds it inexplicable that the Christians of Biafra are getting little or no support from the Western world," said the clergyman, who insists that he must go nameless.

"They cannot understand that even when Soviet Russia supplied warplanes and technicians to Nigeria the Western world did and said nothing about it."

Nigeria's Eastern Region, encompassing some 45,000 square miles and 14 million people, declared itself the independent Republic of Biafra on May 30.

Since midsummer it has been engaged in a war with the Nigerian Federation, whose troops have taken the Biafran capital of Enugu and other cities.

The 1967 yearbook of the Nigerian Federation describes the Eastern Region as "a Roman Catholic stronghold."

The churchman referred to the frequent declarations by Nigerian government leaders and even religious leaders that this war is not a religious war.

"It is perfectly true that there are many causes to this war besides religious issues," he said. "But that does not mean that the defeat of Biafra would not have serious consequences for Catholic and other Christian churches in Biafra. World War II had such effects in Poland, Lithuania, Hungary and elsewhere.

"Everybody knows that the North has embarked on an aggressive policy of spreading Islam, and ensuring their domination of the country. If they win, they can push ahead with their policy of dominating and Islamizing."

The present federal government in Lagos is widely held to be under the domination of the Northern Region of Nigeria, mainly populated by Moslems. Soldiers from the North are garrisoned in the federal territory of Lagos and the Western region, in which the federal territory lies. One of the reasons Biafra alleges for its loss of faith in the federation was the refusal of the federal government to abide by its agreement to post all troops back to their region of origin.

The churchman then referred to a statement by Gen. Yakubu Gowon, head of the federal military government, that no Biafra will come to Christianity in the East.

"It is true he is a Methodist, but he himself knows that only in the Middle Belt of the Northern Region are any Christian religions allowed to evangelize freely." (The Middle Belt is a heavily forested part of the Northern Region inhabited mostly by non-Moslem tribes such as the TIVS.)

He said that the people of Biafra, three-quarters of whom are of the Ibo tribe, fear the Northerners will attempt to exterminate them or at least render them powerless by massacring their thriving intellectual class.

"The people of Biafra simply cannot let themselves be exterminated. If the war goes badly for them and the West refuses help, the only power they

can turn to is communist China."

Reds May Muscle In

Referring to the Biafran leader, Gen. Odumegwu Ojukwu, he said: "It can be stated categorically that Ojukwu has no leanings toward communism in any shape or form. But a number of Biafrans have been educated in communist countries, such as Czechoslovakia, East Germany and Russia. The danger is that, if things go badly, they will stage a coup, install a communist government and call in the Chinese. The Chinese have lost their foothold in Ghana and elsewhere in Africa, and would be happy to find a new foothold in Biafra."

He argued that the present military government of the federation "has no claim to legitimacy other than its de facto acceptance by the people of the Lagos area and the North, and of some parts of the West and Midwest."

To sustain this argument, he pointed out that the present military government of the federation ousted a previous military government, which itself had taken over from a civilian government in January of 1966.

"The army coup of January, 1966, was not a coup of the whole Army, but just some of officers and men. The federal ministers who invited Ironsi (Maj. Gen. Aguiyi Ironsi, who was killed during the second coup five months later) to take over had no constitutional right to hand the country over to anybody."

"From that moment, the link with the constitutional government was broken."

The coup that toppled the civilian government and resulted in Ironsi's assumption of power was engineered mainly by Ibo officers. Although Ironsi was an Ibo, he was not part of the plot and is almost universally reported to have been on the death list of the plotters.

Genocide Reported

The second coup five months later was engineered mainly by Northern officers. It was followed by the exodus of Ibos — including many government officials — from Lagos and a series of massacres of Ibos living in

the Northern Region. Reliable reports put the number of Ibos dead in the Northern Massacre at 30,000. In the autumn of 1966 about one million Ibos fled the Northern Region for the Eastern Region, which has declared itself independent.

"The massacres pointed to the fact that the North was determined to eliminate the East," the churchman said. "They also showed that Nigeria was not one country, for if it were the government would be able to safeguard life and property throughout the country, and any citizen should be able to live anywhere in the country. The North denied these rights."

"The federal government did not make a proper investigation of the massacres. It did not attempt to find who was responsible for the murders, much less punish those responsible."

The churchman called the press coverage of the war "inadequate and even absurd." Voice of America accounts of the progress of the war reported "only what was favorable to the federal government," he claimed.

He asserted that, except for brief forays into Biafra by correspondents of the British Broadcasting Corporation and Agence France Press, the war has been covered by correspondents staying in Lagos or brought on field trips by the federal government.

He said that Biafrans have been staging a counter-offensive to recapture their capital, Enugu. But he interpreted this as "of psychological importance mainly, since Enugu has little military significance."

As for the capture of Calabar, he said that Biafrans are confident they will wear the federals down, as they did on Bonney Island.

He summed up the military problem of Biafrans: "The federals are bound to make initial progress when they invade at a given point since the Biafrans cannot defend every inch of their perimeter. But Biafrans have every hope of pushing them out once they get in. They hope to resume the offensive."

Sermon Judged Political; Spanish Priest Fined \$422

Madrid — (RNS) — Spanish courts have fined a Basque priest for a sermon supporting separatist demonstrations and refused an appeal by another Basque priest who was fined in September.

Father Florentino Arrizabala, assistant at St. Euphemia Parish in Bermeo, near Bilbao, was fined the equivalent of \$422 for a sermon supporting Basque separatists whose demonstration was broken up by police in Bermeo's streets Oct. 1.

Fines ranging from \$16 to \$422 were imposed on 450 of the demonstrators.

The formal charge against Father Gabcagoeasco was "illegal propaganda." The chief argument in his appeal was that, under the 1953 Vatican-Spanish concordat, he could be tried only by an ecclesiastical tribunal.

Spain's Seminaries

Madrid — (NC) — About 80 per cent of Spain's minor seminaries have adopted the country's standard high school curriculum in addition to the specific training they provide for the priesthood.

In rejecting his appeal, the court said that his offense was of a political nature and that ecclesiastical courts could intervene only in cases where the offense was exclusively against Church discipline.

Young members of the Catholic clergy in the Basque provinces are considered leaders in the movement for separatism from Spain. At an earlier trial of Father Gabcagoeasco, more than 100 priests demonstrated outside the courthouse.

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Spain's

By MANUEL MIRA
(NC News Service)

Madrid, Spain — While attracting much publicity, more than 50 priests have joined the ranks of labor, in Spain, taking manual jobs and sharing life of the workers.

They are taxi drivers, bricklayers, miners, factory workers. But they also say Mass every working day.

However unobtrusive they want to be in carrying out their real purpose — to bring Christianity to the unbeliever and the infidel — these priest-workers made nationwide news when at least 10 of them were arrested during a strike and labor demonstrations in October.

It is too early to talk in terms of a "movement" of priest-workers in this country, such as one that flourished in France after World War II. But more and more priests in Madrid, Barcelona, and in industrial centers in Asturias, Galicia, Andalusia, are becoming "time-observers" (workers).

Many seminary students these priest-workers during vacations or week-ends.

The trend has attracted the watchful eye of the Spanish bishops. Some have established commissions of workers' priests. In its November meeting the Spanish Bishops Conference considered a draft statute under which priest-workers may continue and expand their ministry.

The priest themselves rarely met in Madrid to exchange views and plan their future work.

Unlike the hundreds of priests who divide their time between church and office or clergy, this new wave of priests prior to do manual labor in spite of the many hardships involved.

"Catholic Spain," says "is really a mission country in this respect, thousands of workers are entirely alienated from the Church. We know it."

He did not mean that among these workers is a high experience. "That's no lie. There is no outright rejection of the priest; on the contrary most workers welcome us brothers."

Much of the shyness of priest-workers — they refuse to give interviews or be photographed at their jobs — is due to the hesitancy of many workers to support this new trend toward pastoral work, lying low.

The priests, so to speak lying low.

But not in Oviedo, where Archbishop Vicente Enrique Tarazona, has given of recognition to the group by setting up a diocesan center.

In many instances, out opposition from management and business to workers demands on wages and working conditions also included, including alleged "intolerance of priests."

In some areas, the priest workers conduct their activity under a special underground



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