

CKC Onitsha –Our Noble Antecedents

A Synopsis

We owe it to our ancestors
To preserve entire those rights,
Which they have delivered to our care:
We owe it to our posterity,
not to suffer their dearest
inheritance to be destroyed.

~~ The Letters of Junius, No. 20, 8/8/1769

The Early History of C.K.C Onitsha

By Chief E.P.O. Ofodile, Class of '39

Christ the King College, (CKC) Onitsha was founded on 2 February 1933, by the [Most Rev. Charles Heerey](#), C.S.Sp, the Archbishop of Onitsha. At the outset the college shared premises with St. Charles Teacher Training College, Onitsha it quickly became obvious that the shared arrangement was not convenient for the young CKC students.

The mission authorities were eager for a new and permanent site. One Sunday in 1934, Rev. Fr. Cornelius Liddane, the Parish Priest at Adazi drove to Awka with Rev. Fr. Thomas and Rev. Fr. Fox. Once there, Fr. Liddane requested to see the Chiefs and elders of Awka to ask for a grant of the angular land between the Achalla Road, Awka and the Enugu-Onitsha highway, up to where now there is an AGIP Petrol Station. When they met the Chief and Elders the following Tuesday, they also met with a brick wall of antagonists against the Catholic Church – the resistance was made up mostly of Anglicans and fallen Christians. The throng of resisters “suffocated” the Elders and Chiefs and told the Fathers to go elsewhere. The Fathers were able to return to Onitsha to report to their superiors and were eventually able to get land from the Modebe Family on Oguta Road at Onitsha, which became the current site of CKC.

In 1935, an entrance examination was organized for CKC Onitsha. Two hundred and one (201) pupils took the entrance examination and ninety (90) students were admitted into CKC. It was planned that the school was to formally reopen at the new site on 16th January 1936, but the buildings were not ready until a week later. Hitherto, there were no entrance examinations; students were admitted based on their passing Standard Six.

The college started in its permanent campus with the [main block](#) which accommodated the classrooms, the Principal’s Office and the Chapel. There were two dormitories – one for the secular boys and the other for the [All Hallows Seminary](#) boys. The curriculum ran from Class III to Class VI, which took four years to prepare students for the senior Cambridge. After 1936, the Class III was converted into a Prep Class and the curriculum became a five-year programme.

CKC Onitsha was under the management of the Congregation of Holy Ghost Fathers. The first Principal of the college was [Fr. W. Leo Brolly](#), who was ably assisted by Fr. J. Keane, Fr. Bock, Fr. Kirsten and the science master, Fr. Ragan. In the early part of 1938, Fr. Brolly left (retired) and some Marist Brothers arrived to take charge of CKC. They stayed at the college for one year and later shifted base to St. Charles and Fr. M. Flanagan who was at St. Charles arrived as the new principal, bringing along such vocational courses as photography, book binding, building and survey. From then on CKC Onitsha flourished.

The Noble Legacy of C.K.C Onitsha Continues

By Oseloka Obaze, Class of '73

Christ the King College (CKC) Onitsha's excellence, place and niche as a premier academic institution were established very early. By 1937, its fourth year of existence, CKC Onitsha had come of its own. The goal of the Catholic missionaries to establish a legacy by providing qualitative education beyond the grassroots was clearly not fortuitous. The vision to provide able leadership for the secular and religious society was already yielding discernible dividends.

Indeed, CKC Onitsha's renowned academic excellence spread fast. "By 1937, the excellence was largely demonstrated as it became first in position among all the schools that took the Cambridge Senior Certificate Examination."¹ That seminal and enviable performance led CKC's founder, Archbishop Charles Heerey to report to his superiors on Rome, in September 1937 and specifically to [Cardinal Fumasini-Biondi](#), the Prefect of the Propaganda Fide at the Vatican, the following: "Our secondary school has become a famous educational establishment. The successes in public examinations have been the highest in all Nigeria including the various Government and Protestant Colleges..."

The legacy and legend of CKC as *primus inter pares* would continue for decades despite the academic and [infrastructural setbacks](#) it suffered during the Nigerian civil war between 1967 and 1970. The school's post-war fate was no better, since the institution was appropriated by the East Central State Government in 1972 and temporarily renamed Heerey High School. The [school only reverted](#) to the Catholic Mission on 1 January 2009. Furthermore, CKC's claim to fame and leadership has not gone uncontested by other equally good schools; the difference has been that whereas CKC produced well-rounded students who were good in academics, sports as socials, the other good schools were generally either good in sports or very good in academics, but never in the mix as CKC. These contestations and unbridled rivalry from other legacy schools, has only brought out the best out of CKC students and alumni. The role and high visibility of CKC Onitsha alumni also affirmed the elite status of the school.

CKC Onitsha continues to provide education, but there is more value to such catholic education. As [Cardinal Francis Arinze](#) observed in his 14 July 2001 address to CKC Onitsha alumni in the United States: "What then do we expect of the educated person? Surely we look for professional competence. We expect the person to be able to deliver the goods creditably in the person's calling: farmer, nurse, doctor; teacher, professor, scientist; shoe-maker, shop-keeper, industrialist; taxi-driver, engineer, pilot; footballer, film actor, journalist; diplomat, statesman, priest. But we look for much more. We 'want to know how education has helped the person to learn to observe, to see, to identify and to understand things and situations. Has education helped the person to grow, to learn and to be enriched by contact with others?"

Several decades after its establishment, testimonies about the elite status and standing of CKC Onitsha have continued, undiminished. This broadly acknowledged reality would earn the [CKC its moniker](#) "Amaka." As Dr. Charles Anyaeji, '65, would recall: "I hope you all know that the name "Amaka" came from one Mr. Blazius Anyanwu in 1961 [a year before I entered CKC]. Blazius came for the Higher School Programme from Bishop Shanahan College (BSC), Orlu. After taking his first Wednesday night beans and dodo dinner, Mr. Anyanwu was reported as having exclaimed "Hey! CKC Amaka!" [CKC is Fabulous!] So we were told and I can recall that he was still being teased with his exclamation in 1962. Incidentally, Mr. Anyanwu was huge in stature and a good sportsman! "

Nigeria's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, [Ambassador Joy Ogwu](#) speaking of CKC, underlined that "[Y]our Alma Mater is indeed a great school, with an invaluable legacy to protect." But no testimonial could be more ennobling than her affirmation, "that anyone who has been so privileged to include CKC Onitsha on his resume, needs no further certification to validate his *bona fides* and a citizen in good standing". Indeed, author [Chike Momah \(an Ex-Umuahian\)](#) identified CKC as "[one of triumvirates](#) of schools

that might have been the best thing that happened to the Eastern Nigerian school system at the time.” As he rightly noted, CKC Onitsha was “the most renowned, most prestigious Roman Catholic secondary school in Nigeria, in the three decades before the Nigeria-Biafra Civil War, 1967-1970.” The school essentially remains top notch, which explains why it has consistently been among the highest ranked Nigerian schools in [Africa’s Best 100 secondary Schools](#). Why does CKC rank this high?

The answer to the perennial question of why and how CKC Onitsha remains a top notch may vary, but one answer forthrightly provided by [Dr. Obi Nwasokwa, \[Ex-GSSA, Afikpo\]](#) sheds light on CKC Onitsha’s sustained niche. His take: “Before we knock CKC too much, there is this sobering fact to consider: Remember the list of Africa’s 100 best secondary schools? The last time (2 years ago) we looked at that list (from 2005), only 5 Nigerian schools made the list and CKC ranked highest of all Nigerian schools. I googled that list again this evening and have attached the 2009 list here. Again CKC ranked highest of any Nigerian secondary school at #36. The only other S.E. Nigerian School to show up (at a distant #75) is none other than Government College Umuahia. The venerable King’s College was #85 and St. Greg’s #99. Our GSSA did not make the list. Surprise. Surprise. Why does CKC rank this high? One potential clue may be found in the material Dr. Mkpuru published earlier today. CKC alumni in the US have been working visibly to rebuild their school for over 10 years. I know that our alumni have been at it too since perhaps the 80’s or even earlier than that but despite their efforts, the school continued on its downward spiral of decline and decay. The boarding houses in CKC apparently were never closed down. No buildings were completely abandoned the way ours were.”

For most CKC alumni, old and young, if there has been one guiding ethos, besides the time-honored motto of *goodness, discipline and knowledge*, it is the commitment to promoting and protecting the good name of the college and the high value imbued in them while in college. That commitment is encapsulated in the admonition by CKC’s Principal Emeritus [Fr. Nicholas Tagbo](#), who unfailingly urges his former charges to “Keep alight the flame which you received in C.K.C. Onitsha” and “Never do anything that might reflect badly on your school or family.”

Since its founding, CKC Onitsha has benefited from a succession of very visionary, capable, dedicated [principals](#), educationists and administrators consisting of clergy and laity, who were entrusted with running this legacy and elite academic institution and training callow youths under their charge for leadership and public service position. To them go the credit, gratitude and glory.

The alumni of the college reflect nothing but the rich harvest of talented products. However, the greatest attribute CKC Onitsha alumni brings to the table, is their unswerving ownership and love for the school. They have kept the CKC’s noble legacy going by giving back to the college. As [Steve Puthuff](#), the Guest Keynote Speaker CKC-AAA 2006 San Francisco Convention aptly reminded us: “The future belongs to those who see possibilities, before they become obvious. If our reach does not exceed our grasp, then what is a heaven for?”

[Floreat CKC Onitsha!](#) May the fame of our college last forever!!

¹ Nkem Hyginus M. V. Chigere, *Foreign Missionary Background and Indigenous Evangelization in Igboland*, 2001 p.299