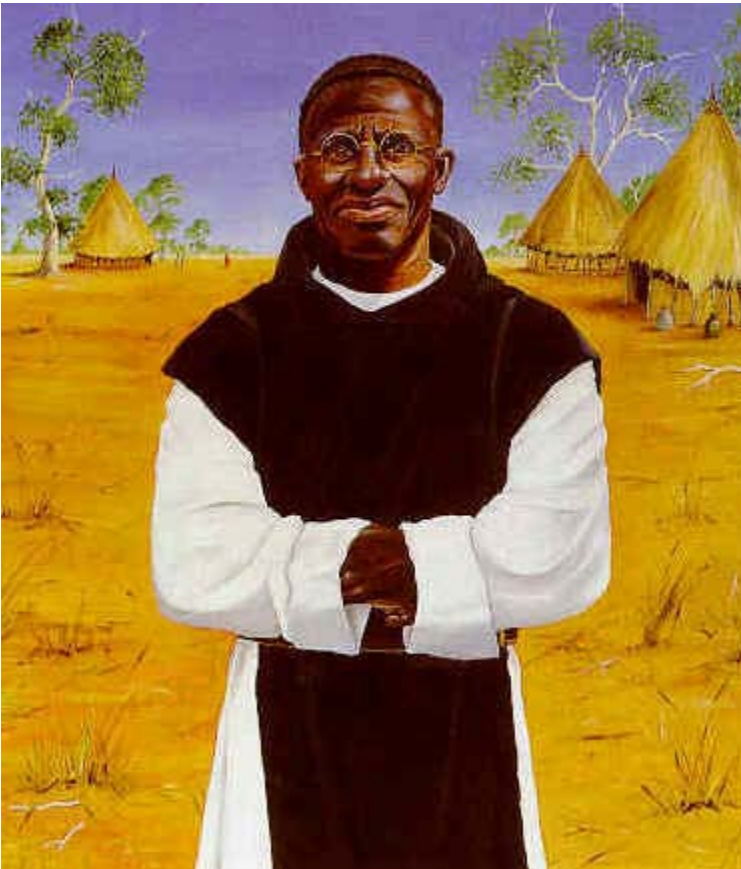


## **BLESSED CYPRIAN MICHAEL IWENE TANSI (1903-1964)**



Iwene Tansi was born in Aguleri near Onitsha, Nigeria, in 1903. He was baptised when he was 9 years old with the Christian name, Michael. His baptism affected him deeply even at such a young age and he shocked his non-Christian parents by daring to destroy his own personal idol, traditionally given to every male child at birth.

At the age of 22, after several years of working as catechist and school teacher, he entered the seminary and was ordained a priest for the Onitsha diocese in 1937, when he was 34. As parish priest he worked zealously in Eastern Nigeria for 13 years, selflessly serving the religious and material needs of his people.

He had to travel on foot to visit his widely scattered parishes, would spend whole days hearing confessions and was always available to the people in their needs, day and night. He was particularly eager to give young people a good preparation for marriage and to counteract the tradition of "trial marriages" which prevailed among the pagans at that time. The large Christian populations of many Igbo villages are a present witness to his zeal.

However, in spite of all he was doing, he felt the call to serve God in a more direct way in a life of contemplation and prayer and, if possible to bring the contemplative monastic life to Nigeria. In 1950 his Bishop was able to free him to try his vocation at Mount Saint Bernard Abbey, near Nottingham, England, and to be trained in view of founding a contemplative monastery in the diocese of Onitsha. His new name in the monastery was Father Cyprian. The complete change of lifestyle, particularly living under obedience when he had been a leader of people, the change of climate, food and most of all the culture shock were severe tests, but he was convinced that this is where God wanted him to be. Father Mark Ulogu, who later became Abbot of Bamenda, joined him a year later.

In 1962 Mount Saint Bernard decided to make the foundation in Africa, but for various reasons it was made in the neighbouring country of Cameroon, near Bamenda, rather than in Nigeria. Although he was appointed as Novice Master of the foundation, Father Cyprian was too sick to go. He died on January 20, 1964, a few months after the departure of the founders.

The reputation for holiness that he had left in Nigeria before going to Mount Saint Bernard never ceased to grow. After his death, many people claimed to have received favours through

**his intercession. The process for his beatification was opened in the diocese of Nottingham, then transferred in 1986 to the Archdiocese of Onitsha, whose Archbishop was the present Cardinal Francis Arinze, who had been among the first children baptised by Father Tansi when the latter was a young parish priest. On March 22, 1998, at Onitsha, during a trip to Nigeria made for that very purpose, Pope John Paul II beatified Father Cyprian Michael Tansi, proclaiming him to be a model of priestly zeal and prayer.**

***Further references:***

Fr. Gregory Wareing, *A New Life of Father Cyprian Michael Iwene Tansi* (Coalville, Leicester LE6 3UL: Mt. St. Bernard Abbey. 1994). Father Gregory was Blessed Cyprian's Novice Master.

Veronica Onyedika Chidi Umegakwe, *Footprints of Father Tansi: The Tomb is not his Goal* (Awhum, Nigeria: Our Lady of Calvary Monastery, 1993). The life of Blessed Cyprian is here presented in a five act play by the chief coordinator of the Father Tansi Lay Contemplative Prayer Movement.

Elisabeth Isichei, *Entirely for God. The life of Cyprian Michael Iwene Tansi* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Studies Series 43, 1980 and 2000).

Dom John Moakler, "Some Thoughts about Blessed Cyprian Tansi" in *Hallel 25* (2000), pp.79-93.

See also the [Web Page on Blessed Cyprian Tansi](http://www.afrikaworld.net/tansi/index.html), developed and managed by Father Chidi Denis Isizoh, secretary of Cardinal Arinze at the Pontifical Council for Dialogue with non Christian Religions [www.afrikaworld.net/tansi/index.html](http://www.afrikaworld.net/tansi/index.html)

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**For an example of his spiritual teaching, reflecting his own spiritual experience**

***Excerpt from a Retreat  
preached by Father Cyprian Tansi in August 1962***

"We do very little good when we embark on our own. We do much good when we allow God to direct us and direct our enterprises. The apostles, you remember, went out fishing, laboured the whole night and got nothing. They were on their own, the Lord came and told them to cast the net and they would find. They did so and were not able to draw up the net, so great was the number of fish caught. When they worked by themselves, they took nothing. When they worked in the company of our Lord, they were full. So with us. We must learn to avoid worrying ourselves about things, learn to do away with anxieties of all sorts.

"When you have something to do, an assignment to perform, remembering that we are not doing our work, but God's work, we must first go to our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, place our plans before Him and ask for his advice and assistance. We must examine before him how he would like us to produce, whether he would like us to do one thing or the other. If any doubt, consult your spiritual director for advice. You should never undertake to do anything unless you are sure that God wants it done in the way you are planning. Above all things you should never do your own will: you should do only what the superiors want to be done. You should never force the superiors to yield to your will by any stratagem.

"And while doing whatever you have to do, you should do it at a pace and speed that will allow

you time continually to turn to God for guidance. Your conversation with God should be continual. Remember that you cannot achieve this spiritual disposition in a day. You need time, practice and patience. All that I request you now is to examine and to see whether what you are told is the truth. If it is, then make a resolution to continue to make effort in this direction without minding whether you succeed or fail."

- Michael I. Tansi, o.c.s.o., *Irrational Love: Incarnation and Redemption, an Incomprehensible Love* (Onitsha, Nigeria: Archdiocesan Secretariat, 1989), p.35.

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