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Maximum Illud and the African Church: Yesterday and Tomorrow[1]

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Introduction[2]

One of the remarkable features of the postbellum Catholic Church from 1919 upwards was a vibrant display of an inner vitality when the missions beyond the shores of Europe were accorded a prime of place and attention. The summer of 1914 began gloomily because of World War I. It ushered the western world into unknown territories, with portents of mutual slaughter on a scale hitherto unknown. That same mournful year and the new epoch that came with it, equally inaugurated an era that witnessed the expansion and growth of Christianity in which, for the first time, Christianity truly became a global religion.[3]

Towards the twilight of the nineteenth century, Pope Leo XIII in his missionary encyclical issued in 1888 wrote: "The care of propagating the Christian Faith devolves upon the Roman Pontiffs" (*Sancta Dei Civitas*, no. 20).[4] From the purview of the mission territories and their place within the general scheme of papal policies, one must assess the popes and their missionary commitment through the institution of the papacy. This must be done based on the historical importance of the pope at any given epoch and, to a great extent, also depends on the higher standpoint of historical continuity in the realisation of the overall purpose of the Church's universal mission.[5]

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[1]An edited version of the 2020 Annual St Paul Lecture of the Missionaries of St Paul of Nigeria, at the National Missionary Seminary of St Paul, Abuja, on January 18, 2020.

[2]A significant part of this presentation has already been published. See Valentine U. Iheanacho, "Maxim7.5
um Illud and its Relevance in Contemporary Mission," *Tripod* XXXIX, no. 194 (Autumn 2019): 82-93.

[3]Kenneth S. Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity – Advance Through Storm AD. 1914 and After*, Vol. VII (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1947), 5.

[4]http://w2.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_03121880_sancta-dei-civitas.html (accessed: May 1, 2019).

[5]George F. La Piana, "From Leo XIII to Benedict XV," *The American Journal of Theology* 21, no. 2 (April 1917): 175.

Therefore, to assess the relevance of *Maximum Illud*, it is important to do so through the prism of the missionary pronouncements and commitments of subsequent popes after Benedict XV. As it were, he set the pace and also provided the rudder for his successors to navigate through the labyrinths of different contemporary circumstances in the execution of their missionary obligation to the Church.

The Thoughts of Benedict XV on the Missions

Before the ascension on the throne by Benedict XV, the papacy under Pius X had various other concerns because of the turbulence that characterised the political landscape of Europe during his pontificate. Chief among the turbulent situations was the diplomatic row that ensued between the Vatican and the French government over the latter's anticlerical policies which culminated in the severing of diplomatic ties in 1905. Although the pontificate of Pius X may be described as a "religious pontificate", predicated upon his motto, "Instaurare omnia in Christo" (To restore all things in Christ) in contradistinction to Pope Leo XIII (often and unfairly called "the political pope"), yet Catholic missions outside Europe did not so much feature prominently during the pontificate of Pius X.

On the contrary, Pope Benedict XV, his immediate successor, did not allow himself and his pontificate to be consumed by the challenges and problems of the First World War (1914-18). Seeking avenues and means to disseminate the Christian message, Benedict XV revived papal concerns for the missions. The missionary revival launched by Benedict XV was almost reminiscent of a similar revival in the second half of the nineteenth century. That was a period when the Church saw the birth of numerous missionary congregations alongside the multiform participations by the lay faithful with spiritual support through prayers as well as financial contributions for the maintenance of missionaries and their various projects in mission territories.

Pope Benedict XV in 1919 published *Maximum Illud*. Last year marked the centenary of its publication. Naturally, Pope Benedict

XV's thoughts were focused on the universal mission of the Church after the ruins of the First World War that ended in an armistice. His concerns went far beyond the shoring up of funds for the missions. He addressed the thorny question of the day concerning missionary personnel and the place of indigenous or local clergy within the framework of the missionary activities of the Church. His anxieties were expressed with paternal preoccupations about the future survival of the missions outside Europe after the missionaries might have gone or might have even stopped coming altogether. He also worried about the missionary methods in use at that time which he considered inadequate given the vast multitude that was still beyond the influence of the Christian Gospel. In terms of method, he proposed "the adoption of an extensive missionary method as a veritable strategy, in clear opposition to an intensive strategy where missionaries tended to concentrate their energies and resources on small flocks of converts in given mission territories."[6] As far as he was concerned, missionaries and their small flocks were never to become "tiny islands surrounded by a large population of people who were outside the embrace of the Gospel of Christ."[7]

The Propaganda Fide in its implementation of the stipulations outlined in *Maximum Illud*, through a series of instructions to vicars and prefects apostolic as well as to superiors of missionary institutes, demanded to know, for instance: "What is the portion of your vicariate which is not yet reached by the Gospel, and what percentage of the population that is still outside the influence of the Christian message."[8] This extensive approach as a missionary method was a re-echo of the memo previously sent to Propaganda Fide by Msgr. Jean-Baptiste de Guébriant. He asked the Propaganda Fide to hold the heads of missions accountable by enquiring from them the progress of their various mission circumscriptions in respect of the number of Catholics to the entire population of the areas in which their missions were located. It was also a recall of the operative principle initially espoused by the American priest, Msgr. Joseph Freri who coined the slogan: "to

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[6]Valentine Iheanacho, "Missions through the prism of Maximum Illud," *Our Mission* 20, no. 1 (2019): 3.

[7]Ibid.: 3.

[8]Ibid.: 3.

cover maximum ground with the minimum number."[9] In a letter dated May 20, 1923, Propaganda Fide further directed missionary institutes to ensure that their members designated for the missions must get the right preparations through the study of missiology (then a nascent academic discipline) and the acquisition of proper language skills in preparation for the missionary apostolate. It also demanded that the formation of the local clergy in mission territories must be given the utmost priority in every missionary consideration.[10]

Sustaining the Tempo

After the brief pontificate of Benedict XV, the implementation of *Maximum Illud* fell on the shoulders of Pope Pius XI (1922-1939). Both pontiffs share the title "Popes of the Missions". In the first instance, as a measure of continuity, the new pope left Cardinal Willem van Rossum in his post as the prefect of Propaganda Fide. It was a wise and opportune decision on the part of Pius XI because, with van Rossum at the helm, the missionary visions of Benedict XV were guaranteed to live on. It was a vision with which the Dutch cardinal was closely associated. As a matter of fact, on account of his inestimable contributions in the repositioning of Propaganda Fide in the light of contemporary missionary demands and challenges, Joseph Drehmanns, the first biographer of van Rossum, called him "the second founder" of Propaganda Fide.[11] Also in recognition of his work concerning the implementation of *Maximum Illud* and his sagacity in the direction of Propaganda Fide, Claude Prudhomme reiterated the views of Drehmanns in this affirmation:

> The fourteen years that the Dutch Cardinal van Rossum was at the head of the Congregation of Propaganda Fide (1918-1932), the dicastery in charge of the missions, were characterised by an exceptional concentration of

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[9]Joseph Freri, "Native Clergy for Mission Countries," *Catholic Missions* XI (New York: Society for the Propagation of the Faith, 1917), 4.

[10]*Acta Apostolicae Sedis* XV (1923): 369-373. See also, Valentine U. Iheanacho, *Maximum Illud and Benedict XV's Missionary Thinking: Prospects of a Local Church in Mission Territories* (Starbrücken: Scholar's Press, 2015), 297.

[11]Joseph M. Drehmanns, *Kardinal van Rossum: Korte Levensschets* (Roermond-Masseik: Romen, 1935), 86.

> affirmations and important decisions. They are probably unparalleled in the history of the congregation.[12]

Cardinal van Rossum in many ways was the executing arm of the missionary policies of Benedict XV and Pius XI. He was the loyal collaborator of both pontiffs in their missionary visions. And more particularly, about the relationship between Pius XI and van Rossum, the Dutch cardinal as head of the Propaganda Fide, "found in Pius XI a willing sharer" of his grand missionary vision[13] which he had in common with the previous pontificate of Benedict XV. Upon his election to the pontificate, Pius XI promptly gathered the missionary impetus of Benedict XV and gave it further momentum by stressing the importance of the Propaganda Fide which under the able-leadership of van Rossum evolved to become one of the most influential Vatican dicasteries. The episcopal ordinations of indigenous clergy in mission areas were given added impetus under Pius XI in 1926 with the ordination of six Chinese bishops in Rome. Such policy continued uninterrupted, albeit with slow progress at times. It eventually "led to greater internationalization and internal diversity within the Catholic world episcopate."[14] According to Karim Schelkens and others, this "internationalization and internal diversity" had their "effects on the presence of bishops from all parts of the world during Vatican II."[15]

Within the same parameter of *Maximum Illud* is the reinsertion of the missions at the very heart of all successive papal considerations. From Benedict onwards, the Holy See became ever more determined to assert papal exclusive authority over the missions. It also meant that mission progressively came to be understood as an

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[12]Claude Prudhomme, "Le Cardinal van Rossum et la politique missionnaire du Saint-Siège sous Benôit et Pie XI (1918-1932)" in *Life with a Mission – Cardinal Willem Marinus van Rossum C.Ss.R 1854-193, ed*. Vefie Poels, et al. (Nijmegen: Trajecta, 2011), 123; Iheanacho, *Maximum Illud and Benedict XV's Missionary Thinking*, 225.

[13]Kenneth S. Latourette, *Christianity in a Revolutionary Age: A History of Christianity in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries – The Roman Catholic, Protestant and Eastern Churches*, Vol. IV (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1961), 45.

[14]Karim Schelkens, et al., *Aggiornamento?: Catholicism from Gregory XVI to Benedict XVI* (Leiden, Boston: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2013), 96.

[15]Schelkens, et al., *Aggiornamento?*, 96.

essential part of what the entire Church is and does. Mission was no longer relegated to the margin. It is helpful also to recall that before *Maximum Illud*, mission theology had no proper place in theological treatises.[16] That reinsertion within the centre of ecclesiastical orbit made the Vatican the clear leader in directing the missions of the Church outside Europe. As opined by Raymond Hickey, the growth of the Catholic Church in mission territories after the publication of *Maximum Illud* and up to the Second Vatican Council, was "largely due to a vigorous missionary outreach inspired and animated by successive popes."[17] It can be positively affirmed that it was a consistent policy personally directed by the popes until the convocation of Vatican II in 1959. The Council sought to make the missionary outreach a major concern incumbent upon every member of the Church and more particularly upon the bishops since the Council placed a lot of emphasis on episcopal collegiality with the pope.[18]

The four great missionary encyclicals issued by Benedict XV and his two immediate successors left nobody in doubt in terms of whose main responsibility it was about the missions. After the publication of *Maximum Illud* (1919) came *Rerum Ecclesiae* by Pius XI in 1926, to be followed by *Evangelii Praecones* (1951) and *Fidei Donum* (1957) of Pius XII. With the Popes effectively leading the way, and the Propaganda Fide as their missionary executive arm (the Vatican missionary dicastery), especially in the missions in Africa, extended its influence through missionary congregations that were operative on the continent.[19] More often than not, it made its presence felt and also extended its sphere of influence through what Pope Pius XII once referred to as "indirect missionary means." Those means included schools, the press, medical care, and social work.[20] It is not surprising that African Catholics as heirs of the missionary labour of

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[16]Andrzeji Miotk, "The Historical Significance and Prophetic Resonance of Maximum Illud on the Centenary of its Publication," *Verbum SVD* 60, no. 1-2 (2019): 27, 35.

[17]Raymond Hickey, ed., *Modern Missionary Documents and Africa* (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1982), 3.

[18]Hickey, ed., *Modern Missionary Documents*, 3.

[19]Karl Müller, "The main principles of centralized government for the missions," *Concilium* 13 (New York, Glen Rock: Paulist Press, 1966), 14.

[20]Ibid., 15.

those years were of the younger generation[21] – and the population within the same younger generation even presently tends to increase proportionally yearly.

The centralisation of the direction of the missions in the able hands of the three "Missionary Popes": Benedict XV, Pius XI, and Pius XII, brought as a consequence, the internationalisation of Catholic missionary force which before 1919 was almost the exclusive reserve of the French Church. Acknowledging this fact does not in any shape or form belittle the gratitude that the universal Church owes to the French Church for its great missionary contributions. The French Church, especially from the second half of the nineteenth century, gave birth to many missionary congregations that were solely dedicated to the missions beyond the shores of Europe. While it may be true to assume that Pius XI directed most of his missionary attention to Asia and, particularly to China, a similar assertion can be made about Pius XII about Africa. However, it must never be glossed over the establishment of an Apostolic Delegation to South Africa in 1922, which to a great extent, showed the attention of Pius XI and Cardinal van Rossum towards a country that was then regarded as the privileged domain of protestant missionaries, especially those of the reformed churches.[22] Also important was the establishment of diplomatic ties between the Holy See and Liberia in 1927.

The African Hour

It is now beyond doubt that the centre of gravity of Catholicism has shifted considerably towards former mission areas, that is, the so-called "young churches" of the global south. The face of Catholicism over the past fifty years has undergone so great a change such that it is impossible to ignore the fact that the young churches collectively called the "Third Church", "is the Church of the future as well as the future of the Church."[23] One of the reasons for this remarkable

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[21]Walbert Bühlmann, "The African Church: The Council of Jerusalem to Vatican II," *Concilium* 13 (New York, Glen Rock: Paulist Press, 1966), 47.

[22]Latourette, *Christianity in a Revolutionary Age*, 44.

[23]As cited by Valentine U. Iheanacho, "Maximum Illud and the Church of Today," *The Catholic Ambassador* (October 2019), 24.

change, according to Stephen Bevans, is traceable to the breakthrough in missionary thinking as articulated in *Maximum Illud*.[24] However, before the appearance of Benedict XV's Apostolic Letter, it is pertinent to acknowledge that the Vatican's attention towards Africa came towards the end of the nineteenth century especially with the pontificate of Leo XIII. A milestone was reached in this regard with the reform of the Roman Curia in 1908 by Pius X. That reform signaled a major turning point for the missions since it removed certain territories from the Propaganda Fide and redirected its focus primarily to mission territories in Africa and Far East Asia.[25]

After the pontificates of Benedict XV and Pius XI, papal mission pendulum appeared to have swung considerably towards Africa and in favour of the continent, with Pius XII. He was the first pope to use the concept, *plantatio ecclesiae* (implantation of the church) in the papal proclamation on the missions. He first used it in his allocution to Pontifical Mission Societies on June 24, 1944.[26] He used it again in his letter, *Cupimus Imprimis* of January 18, 1952, addressed to the persecuted Church in China under the Communist government. With particular reference to the missions in Africa, all in all across board, Pius XII created about 37 new vicariates and 35 prefectures in mission territories. His support for the missions in Africa may lead to the affirmation that the hour of Africa finally dawned with the pontificate of Pius XII where there was a notable increase of the Catholic population especially in the sub-Saharan part of the continent. Such phenomenal increase was not lost to the Pope who gave his support to African indigenous clergy with the elevation of many to the episcopate, beginning with the episcopal ordinations

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[24]Stephen Bevans, *Maximum Illud: Challenges then, Challenges for the Church today* (paper presented at the Gregorian University, Rome, November 21 -23, 2019).

[25]Pedro Iacobelli, "The Vatican's Shift of its Missionary Policy in the Twentieth Century: The Mission of Augustinian Fathers of the Assumption," *Asian Cultural Studies* 36 (March 2010): 92.

[26]Stuart C. Bate, *Missiology Notes* (Cedara: Unpublished, 1995), 51; https://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/it/speeches/1944/documents/hf_p-xii_spe_19440624_opere-missionarie.html (accessed: October 23, 2019); http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/it/apost_letters/documents/hf_p-xii_apl_19520118_cupimus-imprimis.html(accessed: October 24, 2019).

on October 19, 1939, of 12 bishops, representing all the continents of the world.[27] The first two African bishops in contemporary times were among those 12 bishops, personally ordained by the Pope himself in St Peter's Basilica in Rome. The Africans were Bishops Joseph Kiwanuka (Uganda) and Ignatius Ramarosandratana (Madagascar).

Unfortunately, and sad to note, the initial tempo and enthusiasm about a native episcopate appeared to have lost considerable steam after 1939 because Africa did not get another son of hers elevated to the episcopate until 1950. Given the dragging of feet by the Vatican, Mgr Joseph Faye, the first Senegalese priest to be appointed prefect apostolic in 1939 had to resign in 1946 owing to the lack of goodwill and cooperation from the white members of the Congregation of the Holy Ghost. It did not matter that Msgr. Faye himself was also a member of the same missionary congregation. For the period of seven years that he served as Prefect Apostolic in Casamance, Msgr. Faye knew no respite as those years "proved to be an extremely difficult and painful period of his life."[28]

The painful experiences of Msgr. Faye could be interpreted as symptomatic of a transition from a Missionary Church to a Local Church. Bishop Kiwanuka, on one occasion, adduced the reason for the loss of that initial enthusiasm for the further creation of an African native episcopate. He believed that the interval between their first episcopal ordinations in 1939 and other episcopal ordinations in 1950 was an "interim period, a time set by Rome to prove by experience whether it was safe and opportune to make local bishops in the mission territories."[29] Nevertheless, once the tempo gathered momentum again, it became almost unstoppable so that with the publication of *Fidei Donum*, Africa, as it were, became the central focus of pontifical missionary attention. Given

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[27]Latourette, *Christianity in a Revolutionary Age*, 61.

[28]E. A. Foster, "A Mission in Transition: Race, Politics, and the Decolonization of the Catholic Church in Senegal" in *In God's Empire: French Missionaries in a Modern World*, ed. Owen White and J. P. Daughton (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 258.

[29]R. D. Robert, "The Development of the local clergy in Africa," in *Native Clergy in the Young Churches and the Pontifical Work of St Peter the Apostle* (Rome: Pontifical Missionary Union, 1976), 89.

the unprecedented papal attention to the missions in Africa, Archbishop Mihayo with a good measure of exaggeration wrote in 1968 that Africa constituted "the heart of the missionary Church."[30] It was in that regard that the continent got its first Cardinal in 1960 when Pope John XXIII elevated Archbishop Lauren Rugambwa of Dar-es-Salaam (Tanzania) to the Cardinalate.

Among the epoch-making events in the history of the African Church is to be included the elevation of Bishop Prosper Dodds in 1955 of Senegal to the rank of a resident bishop. He became the first African from the amorphous vicariate of the Two Guineas created in 1842 to be numbered among members of the Catholic hierarchy to head a diocese. It was no small feat because, before his elevation, all other African bishops were either vicars apostolic or auxiliary bishops.[31] Another important event was the West Africa's first Eucharistic Congress that took place in 1951 in Kumasi, Ghana (former Gold Coast). It was during that occasion, on February 24, 1951, that the voice of a Pope was heard for the first time in Africa through radio transmission.[32]

Quo Vadis?

Historically, the foundation of the Local Churches in Africa took place between 1880 and 1960, a period that coincided with both colonisation and independence of Africa. Situated in a continent that is constantly in flux, the young churches on the continent came of age in the post-Vatican II period, with some modicum of maturity. In the estimation of Professor Francis Oborji, the period from Vatican II to the First Synod of African Bishops in 1994, can be described as the fourth phase in the history of the Church in Africa.[33] It was a period of dynamic missionary commitments in which the Universal Church began to benefit from previous missionary investments made in Africa. The young churches in Africa issued

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[30]As cited by Hickey, ed., *Modern Missionary Documents and Africa*, 4.

[31]Martin J. Bane, *The Popes and Western Africa: An Outline of Mission History 1460's-1960s* (New York: Alba House, 1968), 66.

[32]Ibid., 63-64.

[33]Francis A. Oborji, "Catholic Mission in Africa 1910-2010," in *A Century of Catholic Mission: Roman Catholic Missiology 1910 to the Present*, ed. Stephen B. Bevans (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2013), 15.

forth from Vatican II's missionary theology of local churches as mission agents in their respective territories. It brought about the acceleration and consolidation of local hierarchies, effectuated through the replacement of the old *ius commisionis* mission system with the juridical mission system of *mandatum*.[34]

Although the new system underscored mission as the co-responsibility between local churches and sister-churches beyond geographical confines, it, nonetheless, placed the burden of evangelisation and ecclesial development squarely upon the shoulders of local bishops.[35] It is because of this fact that one appreciates the initial steps towards the establishment of SECAM by young African bishops during the Second Vatican Council. It was initially intended to serve as a body that would allow the young bishops from the continent to speak with one voice. Presently composed of eight regional episcopal conferences, SECAM has evolved as a continental ecclesial structure whose aim is to "preserve and foster communion, collaboration and joint action among all Episcopal Conferences of Africa and the Islands."[36]

The fourth phase also witnessed the emergence of African theology through which theologians of African descent sought to express and interpret the Christian message as well as theological concepts through African cultural media of expressions. The fourth phase was a period that saw the emergence of two main theological currents as African theologians struggled to relate the Christian message to the socio-cultural, religious, political, and economic realities of the continent. The two discernible theological currents were (1) inculturation and (2) liberation. In both currents, Christology has received the most attention as the preferred theological theme in rendering meaningful the Christ-question to the African context.

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[34]Ibid., 15.

[35]Ibid.

[36]As cited by Polycarp Pengo, "Missionaries to Yourselves: The Legacy of Vatican II and the Identity of the Church in Africa" in *Paul VI and the Church in Africa* (Brescia: Istituto Paolo VI, 2015), 5.

With the advent of the fifth phase after the Second Synod of African Bishops in 2009, there came to the fore challenges and prospects for the Church in Africa concerning social issues. According to Oborji, if the first synod gave the African Church "opportunity for self-definition and self-awareness of its evangelising mission," the second synod offered an avenue for "self-critical examination to articulate in terms of scope and strategies of its mission in the promotion of justice, reconciliation and peace in Africa of today."[37] Although the pastoral needs of the Church as elsewhere around the globe can never be exhausted, two major pressing pastoral concerns of the Church in Africa today, among others are: (1) to build a self-reliant local church and (2) to help Africans to rid themselves of primordial ethnocentrism. As Pope Benedict XVI wrote in *Africae Munus*, "Reconciliation is a way of life and mission of the Church" (no. 34).[38] In the African context, a self-reliant church goes beyond finance. It also implies the liberation of the people of the continent from the ills of primitive ethnicity, together with religious and cultural hatred, as well as conflicts that have continued to bedevil many African countries.

In 2000 and 2001, *The Economist* published two separate editorials on Africa and its many problems. The first editorial entitled *Hopeless Africa* was published on 11 May 2000. It X-rayed Africa's myriad problems and challenges, with the conclusion that most of Africa's problems and challenges owed less to acts of God than to acts of man. In other words, Africa's problems were man-made.[39] The second editorial of February 22, 2001 was entitled, *Africa's elusive dawn*. It chronicled Africa's debt burden and underdevelopment despite the continent's abundant resources. Not so much has changed on the continent since the publication of those two editorials because Africa, on many fronts, remains a poor continent. There are equally some projections and estimates that

[37]Oborji, "Catholic Mission in Africa 1910-2010", 21.

[38]http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20111119_africae-munus.html(accessed: December 18, 2019).

[39]https://www.economist.com/node/333429(accessed: 27 March 2018); https://www.economist.com/node/512943 (accessed: 27 March 2018).

portray Africa as a young continent whose youthful populations, regrettably, are hampered by limited opportunities. For instance, the 2012 report on *African Economic Outlook*, prepared for the African Development Bank (ADB), the UN Development Programme (UNDP), and the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), put the population of African young people in the age bracket of 15 and 24, to be around 200 million. Sadly and unfortunately, the same young people in that age bracket account today for about 60% of unemployment in Africa.[40] This is the reality in which the Church finds itself in today's Africa.

In another projection, the United Nations, in its recent forecast on Africa, estimates that the population of Africa will be around 4.4 billion people by the turn of the next century. In real terms, it means that Africa will account for about 39 percent of the world population by 2100. Of that projected 4.4 billion people, ***48 percent will be young people aged 14 and under***, making Africa indeed a young continent[41] that will position it as the future of both humanity and the Church. Numerical strength in itself is not sufficient to position the African Church to be an influential Church to be reckoned with, beyond its comfort zone of ultra-conservatism. It is projected that a quarter of the world's Catholics may come from Africa by 2030,[42] about ten years from now. In fact, as of 2015, the population of African Catholics was estimated to be a little more than 222 million.[43] The continent already produces a large percentage of Catholic priests worldwide. Bigard Memorial Seminary, Enugu, is the largest seminary in the world in terms of the number of seminarians in formation. Our own Missionary Society of St Paul is widely recognised today as a major contribution

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[40]https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/may-2013/africa%E2%80%99s-youth-%E2%80%9Cticking-time-bomb%E2%80%9D-or-opportunity (accessed: December 18, 2019). See also, Iheanacho, "Maximum Illud and the Church of Today", 24-25.

[41]https://www.populationconnection.org/article/the-young-continent/ (accessed: December 18, 2019).

[42]Joseph M. Ngulu, "The Church in Africa during the Twentieth Century and the Meaning of the Pontificate of Paul VI: General Historical Lines" in Paul VI and the Church in Africa (Brescia: Istituto Paolo VI, 2015), 29.

[43]https://international.la-croix.com/news/the-evolution-of-catholicism-in-africa/5210(accessed: December 18, 2019).

to the missionary work of the Universal Church by the African Church.

However, the recent appointment of Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle of Manila by Pope Francis on December 8, 2019, as the Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelisation of the Peoples, speaks volumes. Cardinal Tagle is the second Asian to head that important Dicastery. The first Asian Prefect of that congregation was Cardinal Ivan Diaz of India. No African up to date has been Prefect of that Mission Discastery that oversees practically all the Churches in Africa except for the Coptic and Ethiopian Churches. It may be indicative that although the African Church may have the numerical strength, without strategic planning in ecclesiastical politics, it may remain a Church without influence especially where it matters most. *La Croix* once acknowledged with dismay, although the Church may be thriving on the continent, sadly, "African Catholicism remains on the margins of global theological thinking."[44]

The above observation is particularly important in the light of the current restructuring of the Roman Curia by Pope Francis. In the new arrangement when finally completed, the Congregation for the Evangelisation of the Peoples will be placed before the powerful Congregation of Doctrine and Faith (CDF). The anticipated reform as set out in the upcoming apostolic constitution *Predicate Evangelium* (on the reform of the Roman Curia), combines into one the Congregation for the Evangelisation of the Peoples and the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelisation. It will be named the Dicastery for Evangelisation. Its placement before the CDF is intended to give the message that doctrine is at the service of mission, and not the reverse. It signals a major shift in setting out priorities for the Universal Church in recent times. As a concerned African Catholic, I would like to see an African one day as the Prefect of the new Dicastery for Evangelisation. I am not naive to expect that this may happen without a clear-cut strategy by African hierarchies.

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[44] https://international.la-croix.com/news/the-evolution-of-catholicism-in-africa/5210 ((accessed: December 18, 2019).y90j

Conclusion

The Catholic Church in today's Africa is a fruit of the generous planting done by missionaries. The same Local African Church is equally a direct beneficiary of the missionary policies that were enunciated in *Maximum Illud* - the *Magna Carta* of the Church's missionary activities. Pope Benedict XV wanted to see the emergence of Local Churches in mission territories that would be responsible for themselves, outwardly defined by their missionary outreach in terms of self-propagation, self-governing and self-sustaining.

To a large extent and on many fronts, the Church in Africa has made a lot of progress in self-governing and self-propagating. It is yet to achieve the status of a self-supporting local church because, in many ways, the African Church is still dependent on financial handouts from Europe and North America. Unfortunately, this is not unconnected with the weak economic prospects of the continent. Given the enormity of what remains to be done both within the Church and on the continent, in the words of the late Cameroonian theologian, Jean-Marc Ela, the African Church is not at liberty, to exhaust her Christian dynamism through "acts of worship" and "sacramentalism".[45]

Among other sister-churches, the Catholic Church in Africa needs to stand up and be counted not only in ecclesiastical politics at the international level but also through mature theological contributions with peculiar African hues that go beyond the over-laboured "theology of inculuration." In this regard, we celebrate the recognition accorded to Fr Paul Béré, SJ, from Burkina Faso. He was one of the recipients of the 2019 Ratzinger Award. Fr Béré is the first African theologian to receive such a highly coveted prize in theological research since the establishment of the Ratzinger Foundation in 2010.[46] We can only hope that this may just be only the beginning and not an isolated case.

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[45] Jean-Marc Ela, "The church – Sacrament of liberation," in *The African synod: Documents, reflections, perspectives*, ed. M. Browne (New York: Orbis Books, 1996), 135.

[46] https://jesuits.global/en/stories/567-fr-paul-bere-sj-the-first-african-theologian-to-receive-the-ratzinger-award (accessed: December 17, 2019).

My final thought is on fostering local vocation to the priesthood. It was a question that was very dear to the heart of Benedict XV and his successors. The lack of priestly vocation in the developed world is very worrisome. Missionaries who now come from Africa and Asia to Europe and North America must not only staff parishes. They must equally help to foster local vocations. It is good to acknowledge that it is quite an uphill task given the realities in those parts of the world. Nevertheless, it is not an insurmountable problem. Local vocations help to root the Church in a local community. The Church in Europe is increasingly becoming a Church of migrants, which does not augur well for the future. Hence, our African missionaries have a big role to play in helping the churches of the Global North to raise local vocations. The continents of the missionaries of yesterday must not be allowed to drift irrevocably towards total de-Christianisation.