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Maximum Illud and the Emergence of the Catholic Church in Nigeria: An Appraisal

Cosmas O. Nwosuh

When, on 30 November 1919, Pope Benedict XV, (1914-1922) published his Apostolic Letter, *Maximum Illud*, it was hailed "as the greatest pontifical pronouncement on missions in the modern era".[1] Rather than diminishing its importance, the passage of time has raised it to the status of the "Magna Carta of modern Catholic missiology" because "all subsequent missionary documents of the popes have been built on the principles enunciated in [it]."[2]Its key principles include the promotion of native clergy; missionaries' renunciation of all spirit of nationalism; missionaries' need to have a thorough command of the language of the natives; recognition of the objective importance of positive elements in the cultures of mission lands; rejection of every form of narrow provincialism; openness to assistance from missionaries of different countries and different congregations; adequate training for prospective missionaries; and cultivation of a life of virtue and personal sanctity by missionaries. The document recommended three mission institutes to the financial support of the faithful: the Society for the Propagation of Faith whose principal role is the financial support of missions; the Society of Holy Childhood whose task is to see that baptism be administered to the dying children of pagans; and the Work of St. Peter which provides for the education of and the upkeep of indigenous clergy.[3] To many missionaries of the period, some of these "principles", especially the call for native clergy and renunciation of nationalistic spirit, appeared sensational, radical, and revolutionary. Therefore, in some mission territories, "a

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[1]Walter H. Peters, *The Life of Benedict XV* (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1959), 249.

[2]Pope Benedict XV, *Maximum IIlud*, in *Modern Missionary Documents and Africa Issued by Popes and Roman Synods*, collected, introduced, and edited by Raymond Hickey (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1982), 9. [Hereafter cited as, Hickey, *Modern Missionary Documents*.]

[3]Peters, *The Life of Benedict XV*, 251.

veritable insurrection took place against [the document] and every effort was made to prevent its being put into effect."[4]

Mission-Fields of Nigeria

Some of the mission territories of the period included those in the nascent country of Nigeria. They were four. First was the Apostolic Vicariate of the Bight of Benin. Established in 1870, it had the burgeoning city of Lagos as its headquarters and was under the leadership of SMA Bishop Ferdinand Terrien (1877-1929). There was the Apostolic Vicariate of Western Nigeria with its headquarters at Asaba and headed by SMA Bishop Thomas Brodrick (1882-1933). The third was the Apostolic Prefecture of Eastern Nigeria with its headquarters at Shendam. The SMA Msgr. Oswald Waller (1866-1939) was its pastoral leader. The fourth and final mission jurisdiction was the Vicariate of Southern Nigeria, erected only in 1920. It was led by a Spiritan (CSSp) in Onitsha, Bishop Joseph Ignatius Shanahan (1871-1943).

At the publication of *Maximum Illud* (1919), these territories were areas of primary evangelisation and were served by the priests of the Society of African Missions (SMA) and the Congregation of the Holy Spirit (CSSp.) They had arrived at this emergent British colony in February 1862 and December 1885 respectively. Until the 1930s, the two congregations practically "owned", controlled, and evangelized the four mission-fields, with the SMA having the lion share: three! "There was a friendly rivalry between the two congregations which shared a similar origin, inspiration, and Gallic 'character'".[5]

It was from this hopeful background that, on 16 April 1920, Pope Benedict XV elevated the Apostolic Prefecture of the Lower Niger to the status of a Vicariate with Fr. Shanahan as its Vicar. On 6 June 1920, he was consecrated bishop. Then, almost a year to the first anniversary of his landmark apostolic letter, 19 September 1920, Benedict XV had an audience with Bishop Shanahan. What transpired between the pope and the prelate especially about the

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[4]Carlo Falconi, *The Popes in the Twentieth Century: From Pius X to John XXIII*, trans. Muriel Grindrod (Boston, Toronto: Little Brown and Company, 1967), 145.

[5]Raymond Hickey, *A History of the Diocese of Yola, 1940-1990* (Yola: np, 1990), 17.

landmark missionary document? The little information we have of their interaction seems to suggest that the Apostolic letter was not part of their conversation. As Shanahan recalled of the audience:

> I presented to His Holiness a summary of the Sacred Returns of Nigeria for the years 1910-'15-'20. He read them with intense interest and genuine satisfaction, delighted to know that in the wilds of Africa under the equatorial sun the Kingdom of God was spreading among the poor Africans. The Holy Father repeatedly blessed the missionaries who, regardless of fevers, privations and death have left home and country to battle for Almighty God and co-operate with him in the salvation of souls. He also blessed my Christians and catechumens with affectionate emotion. 'In this world,' he said, 'I shall never see them nor speak to them, but I wish you to convey my blessing to them in each one of your 700 school-churches. I give it with all the earnestness and affection a father's heart alone can conceive.' He was delighted that Ireland, for which he has an extraordinary affection, is making such efforts to go to the rescue of millions of pagans who have not yet heard of the Name of Our Lord. I besought our Holy Father to give a special blessing to many friends and benefactors of S. Nigeria and its missionaries. These benefactors, by their generosity to the missionaries are, in the eyes of God, leading a real missionary life. On that account, I recommended them very earnestly to the Holy Father, who gave them a special blessing associating them with the blessing given to the missionaries and their neophytes.[6]

In any case, it is immaterial whether Benedict XV and Shanahan discussed his famous document. By 1920, the realities on the various mission grounds in Nigeria suggest that the labourers there; be they priests, prefects, and prelates, were already carrying out some of the key principles of *Maximum Illud*. The missionaries, as it were, had anticipated many of the principles. Therefore it would have been superfluous and a stupendous waste of time and energy

[6]John P. Jordan, *Bishop Shanahan of Southern Nigeria* (Dublin: Elo Press, 1971), 193-

for a veritable insurrection to have taken place against the papal document. Resistance to its implementation would have been an exercise in futility. Let us consider first, the issue of mastery of native language.

The Principle of Mastering Local Languages

According to Pope Benedict:

> One of the chief items in the missionary's equipment is clearly the language of the people to whose salvation he is destined to devote himself. He should not rest satisfied with a superficial knowledge, but should be thorough enough for fluent and elegant command.[7]

On this, missionaries to the mission-fields of Nigeria would have agreed with the Pope. They understood that knowledge of the native language of the people was among the most effective means of evangelization. Long before the advent of MI, SMA missionaries to West Africa were instructed thus:

> It is of the most vital importance that every missionary as soon as he arrives in a station, should set about learning the peoples' language. It is the first duty in conscience for a missionary, since no solid good will be done unless the principal elements of Christian doctrine are taught in the native language.[8]

Such was the case of the two conscientious, diligent, and indefatigable missionary-explorers in the Vicariate of Benin, Frs. John-Baptist Chausse and Theodore Holley. Their fluency in Yoruba and their appreciation of the culture won them the respect of the natives, endeared them to the Oyo monarch, and opened doors for the evangelization of that ancient kingdom. As Chausse informed his Superior about the royal visit in February 1884:

> We spoke directly, without an interpreter - which was no small recommendation in his eyes. And we did not forget

[7]Hickey, *Modern Missionary Documents*, 39.

[8]Patrick Gantly, *Mission to Africa: The Story of the Society of African Missions (S.M.A.) 1856-1907*, 2 vols, vol. 2, (Rome: SMA, 1992),137.

> to say . . . that if we know Nago (Yoruba) it is because our mother was born in Yorubaland. Which in the idiom of the country means that we love them. And the King would exclaim: 'Yes, you love the black men, I can see that. . . nobody but God would snatch you from the protecting hand of the Alaafin.[9]

In the Prefecture of the Lower Niger, it was not just Shanahan's ability to speak Igbo that won converts to Catholicism, but his respect for the people and their leaders coupled with genuine reverence for all that was good and wholesome in the Igbo religion, including their shrines and sacred places.[10] As Prefect, he made provision for new arrivals to learn the language of the people to whom they were assigned. Similarly, in the Prefecture of Western Nigeria, Msgr. Carlo Zappa (1861-1917) made the study of Igbo language a fundamental part of his mission policy. Zappa compiled a French-Igbo, Igbo-French dictionary, with the help of the catechist whom he took home with him to France and Italy on leave in 1907.[11] The Prefecture of Eastern Nigeria (Shendam mission) had one of the most outstanding missionary linguists to have served in Nigeria: Fr. Eugène Sirlinger (1887-1978). Of him it was said:

> [Fr.] Sirlinger proved adept at learning languages, not just Goemai and Hausa but the languages of the areas in which he was to spend some time. He translated the catechism in Goemai, Hausa, Angas, Gworok, Birom, and Eggon. The Sunday Gospels and Epistles were translated into Hausa, as were the Lives of the Saints and Catholic hymns. He also

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[9]Cf., Patrick Gantly, *Mission to Africa* , vol. I, 377-388; Richard A. Olaniyan, *In the Service of the Lord: The Catholic Church in Oyo Diocese 1884-1994* (Ile-Ife: Obafemi Awolowo University Press Ltd, 1994), 3.

[10]Desmond Forristal, *The Second Burial of Bishop Shanahan* (Dublin: Veritas Publications, 1990), 93-94.

[11]John M. Todd, *African Mission: A Historical Study of the Society of African Missions Whose Priests have Worked on the Coast of West Africa and Inland, in Liberia, the Ivory Coast, Ghana, Togoland, Dahomey and Nigeria and in Egypt, Since 1856* (London : Burns & Oates, 1962), 127; Alexander D. Nzemeke, *The Diocese of Isele-Uku, 1888-1988: Missionary Period and Post-Missionary Setting* (np: np, 1988), 12. "An index of the level of mastery of the Igbo language by the missionaries was not so much to be seen in their ability to carry on a conversation with the local people as in their ability to transcribe philosophical and theological concepts couched in Latin and Greek terminologies into Igbo." Nzemeke, *The Diocese of Isele-Uku,* 12-13.

> compiled a Goemai Grammar, a dictionary and the lives of the Saints in that language. In addition the Sunday Gospels were translated into Birom. These books were a wonderful service not just for Church use but also helped in preserving the local languages in the written word.[12]

Not all missionaries in the Nigerian missions distinguished themselves in the mastery of the language of the people they served. Not all excelled like Frs. Chausse, Sirlinger, and so many others.[13] Naturally, some were better and more talented learners than others; just as some missionary Societies were better in the field of apostolic technique and mission strategies. As studies have shown, "from the very start French and continental missionaries appreciated the importance of learning local languages -- the Irish rarely did."[14] Perhaps, this, *inter alia*, helps to explain why "generally speaking, the Irish Spiritans never mastered the Igbo language."[15] Nevertheless, "the tillers of the Lord's vineyard" in Nigeria, especially the pioneer generation, knew the value of knowledge of local languages in evangelization. They too discovered, like missionaries elsewhere, that "no language had been found in which it was impossible to communicate the Gospel."[16] Benedict XV's landmark letter only confirmed what they already knew and largely practiced.

Nationalism: From White to Black

Maximum Illud came in the heydays of colonialism; at a period in African history when places that were once established as European commercial outposts were surreptitiously turned into *spheres of influence*; then through gunboat diplomacy transformed into *protectorates*, and finally converted slyly into *colonies*. This

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[12]Edward O'Connor, *SMA Missionaries of Northern Nigeria, 1907-1934* (Ibadan: Intec Printers Ltd, 2007), 30.
[13]Walbert Bühlmann, *The Missions on Trial: A Moral for the Future from the Archives of Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979), 96-99.
[14]Edmund M. Hogan, *The Irish Missionary Movement: A Historical Survey, 1830-1980* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1992), 163.
[15]Charles A. Ebelebe, *Africa and the New Face of Mission: A Critical Assessment of the Legacy of the Irish Spiritans among the Igbo of Southern Nigeria* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2009. Reprinted with permission in Nigeria by San Press Ltd, Enugu), 100.
[16]Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions [The Pelican History of the Church, Volume VI]*, revd. ed. (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1986), 215.

Scramble for Africa, as history dubbed it, raised a lot of nationalistic dust and patriotic spirit. The bone of contention – the peoples, lands, and resources of Africa – was settled at the Berlin Conference (November 1884-February 1885), over which the "Iron Chancellor", Otto von Bismarck, presided.
Interestingly, the region from which modern Nigeria emerged was contentious between the two dominant colonial powers of the day: France and Britain. Fired by the forces of imperialism, mercantilism, and nationalism, merchants and explorers from both countries competed for trade with the natives and sought to extend the hegemony of their countries over the lands and peoples of the region. Sometimes on their initiatives, these imperialists signed deceptively contractual agreements with local kings and chiefs, despite their governments' sometimes lukewarm attitude to their imperial projects.

As children of their age, many missionaries, especially the French, were neither immune nor impervious to the nationalism of the age. They readily contributed, whenever, wherever and however necessary, their quota to the colonial enterprise by cooperating with the merchants and explorers from whom they received valuable assistance and exchanged useful information. It was conventional therefore to find among such missionaries "an anxiety not so much to extend the kingdom of God as to increase the power of the missionary's own country."[17] Thus, it was understandable why some of the French missionaries were sadly disappointed when eventually the region came under British imperial rule. In fact,

> No less a personality than Bishop Alexander LeRoy, the Superior General of the Holy Ghost Fathers (1896-1926), (*sic*) was said to have publicly criticised the French Government for "abandoning" the French Niger Company by whose courtesy many French missionaries came to the Niger. It was such expressions of territorial ambition by French missionaries that brought them into conflict with the British colonial authorities.[18]

[17]Hickey, *Modern Missionary Documents*, 37.

[18]Casmir Iheanyi Eke, *In the Footsteps of Our Founder: A History of the Spiritan Province of Nigeria, 1953-2002* (Onitsha: Spiritan Publications, 2006), 77-78. "It was not only the Spiritians, the French members of the Society of African Missions had some axe to grind with the British in Western Nigeria when they gave active support to a French explorer, Viard who signed treaties in Abeokuta with some Egba chiefs in 1888. Thereafter a serious campaign was carried out by the British to introduce English speaking missionaries to British West Africa."

The severe reduction in the number of French missionaries from the Nigerian mission-fields drastically diminished the spirit of nationalism in that emergent country because of the Irish "complete lack of colonial impulses." Thus at the time of the publication of MI, the issue had become seemingly a thing of the past. But it was not to be so. By the period of the emergence of the Catholic Church in the '50s and '60s a new form of nationalism had appeared on the scene: Black or African nationalism. The extreme form of this nationalism "regarded the Church as an imported foreign religion and the missionaries as agents of their colonial masters." This type of nationalism perturbed the Popes, especially Pius XII during whose pontificate it emerged. There were reasons to be concerned but better reasons to be hopeful. By the emergence of Black Nationalism, there was already on the ground a burgeoning structure of indigenous leadership. The prelates, vicars, and prefects in the Nigerian mission-fields had ensured that the Church would survive their departure, in case of any eventuality. Thereby, they met another key principle of *Maximum Illud*.

The Native Clergy Principle

Pope Benedict XV was not the first to call for native clergy. The call went as far back as the early decades of the sixteenth century when the Gospel message seemingly began to take roots in the defunct Kingdom of Congo. With some young men from the realm being sent to study in Portugal, the reigning pontiff, Leo X (1513-1521), in the Brief, *Exponi nobis* of June 12, 1518, ordered vicars of episcopal ranks, "to train and ordain to the sacred priesthood suitable candidates from amongst the native [African] Christians and converts and to give those native priests full power to celebrate Mass and administer all the Sacraments to the faithful."[19]Over the centuries the papal injunction was reiterated by other Roman authorities. For instance, in its 1695 directive, the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of Faith instructed all missionary orders and congregations to foster vocations among the indigenous population they evangelized. However, for various reasons, the instruction was honoured more in the breach than in practice. It was

[19]Martin J. Bane, *The Popes and Western Africa: An Outline of Mission History 1460's-1960's* (Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 1968), 11; Savino Palermo, (ed.), *Africa Pontificia: Sue de Africae Evangelizatione ex Documentis Pontificiis*, 2 Vols, vol. 1 (Roma: Edizioni Dehniane, 1993), 71.

from this background that Benedict XV bemoaned "the countries where the Catholic faith has been preached for several centuries, but where you will find no indigenous clergy, except of an inferior kind . . . nations who for many centuries have come under the salutary influence of the Gospel and the Church, and have yet been able to yield neither bishops to rule them, nor priests to direct them."[20]

Fortunately, this was not the fate of the Church in Nigeria. *Ab initio*, it seemed clear to its labourers that one of their principal pre-occupations was "to raise and train a clergy from amidst the nations among which they dwell".[21] Thus, envisioning a local Church under indigenous leadership, both missionary orders took practical steps towards the realisation of their dream. In 1908, SMA missionaries under Msgr. Zappa, established the first Seminary in Nigeria in Ivianokpodi, in present-day Auchi Diocese. Through many twists and turns, it became Saints Peter and Paul Major Seminary, Bodija, Ibadan. In the Vicariate of Southern Nigeria, the Spiritans under Bishop Shanahan established St. Paul Seminary, Onitsha, in 1924. It too, like its western counterpart, went through many twists and turns to become Bigard Memorial Seminary, Enugu.[22] For a long time in their illustrious histories, both institutions trained the indigenous clergy for the local Churches in Nigeria and the West African sub-region.

But the onset of indigenisation of the leadership structure of the local Church in Nigeria preceded the establishment of the seminary institution. Within six weeks of the publication of *Maximum Illud*, the Vicariate of Western Nigeria gave Nigeria its first native priest: Rev. Fr. Paul Obodechina Emechete (1888-1948). He became a priest without any formal Seminary training since there were no

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[20]Hickey, *Modern Missionary Documents*, 36.

[21]Ibid., 35. "The [SMA] Society has emphasized the need of native priests from the beginning of its existence." Todd, *African Mission*, 173.

[22]Cf. SS. Peter and Paul Major Seminary, Bodija, Ibadan, *[Brochure of the] 20th Edition of All Nigeria Major Seminaries Games* (Bodija: np, 2016), 29-31; 39.We must observe that Ivanokpodi and Igbariam were both postulancies/minor seminaries, which then were moved to Benin City (St Paul's) and Onitsha as proper Minor Seminaries. The Major Seminaries in Enugu and Bodija came later. They reflected the CSSp. and SMA missionary roots.

facilities of this kind then available.[23] The trail he blazed was quickly followed by Frs. Stephen Adewuyi, from the royal family of Oyo; Lawrence Layode, from the Bashorun family in Oyo; and Joseph Oni, a native of the ancient city of Ibadan. They were ordained priests on August 14, 1929, at Holy Cross Cathedral, Lagos, by the same Bishop Thomas Brodrick who gave Nigeria her first priest, after having received their training at the SMA established Seminary in Ouidah, Dahomey.[24]

The following year saw the first ordination in the Vicariate of Southern Nigeria: that of a native son of Onitsha. It seemed fitting that the seat of the Vicariate should produce the first Igbo priest east of the Niger River. The candidate was Rev. John of the Cross Anyogu, (1898-1967).[25]The ordaining prelate was Joseph Shanahan. The date was December 8, 1930. It was the forty-fifth anniversary of the landing of Fr. Lutz and his three heroic pioneer companions at Onitsha. It was the twenty-fifth anniversary of Fr. Lejeune's death and Shanahan's taking over the pastoral leadership of the Vicariate in 1905.[26] On these anniversaries, the ordination of *a son-of-the-soil*, seemingly demonstrated that the labours of the missionary pioneers were not in vain! These ordinations, although long in coming, marked important milestones in the development of Roman Catholicism in Nigeria. Therefore, it is to their credit that the priests and prelates in the Nigerian missions had begun addressing the issue of native clergy before *Maximum Illud*. They had the foresight and resolve. Besides, the generosity of mission-supporting agencies like the Society for the Propagation of Faith, the Society of Holy Childhood, and the Work of St. Peter, whom Benedict had recommended to the generosity of the faithful, helped them to turn their vision into reality. Therefore, the issue of native

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[23]Born in the village of Ezi in the present diocese of Isele-Uku, young Paul was baptised in 1899 by Fr. Michael Scherrer (1869-1940). Paul, along with fifteen others, was first trained as a catechist. Cf. Peter McCawille, *We Will Remember Them: Biographies of all deceased Rev. Fathers, Sisters and Brothers Who Worked in the 'Mid-West' Nigeria (Dioceses of Benin, Lokoja, Warri, Isele-Uku, Auchi, and Uromi) from 1884-2011* (Ibadan: OLREC Graphics & Prints, 2011), 24-25. See also, Peter Meze Idigo, *Our Memories of Rev. Father Michael Cyprian Tansi* (Onitsha: Tabansi Press, 1977), 33-38.

[24]Olaniyan, *In the Service of the Lord,* 11-12; Patrick O'Neill, *The Catholic Faith in Ibadan Diocese, 1884-1974* (Ibadan: Daystar Press, 1981), 21.

[25]Born on 11 March 1898, John Cross was the first of eleven children born to Christian parents of Onitsha.

[26]Jordan, *Bishop Shanahan of Southern Nigeria*, 255.

clergy was already a *fait accompli* in the Nigerian missions by the time Popes Pius XI (1922-1939) and Pius XII (1939-1958), restated the matter in their different encyclicals.[27]

Collaboration with other Missionary Congregations

However, long before the emergence of a body of indigenous clergy, the pastors and prefects in the mission fields of Nigeria had to deal with the shortage of personnel. This was a common and chronic problem. For solutions, they turned to some form of collaboration. For instance, when Shanahan could not get the much-needed personnel from his own Spiritan Congregation, he turned to the Irish diocesan bishops. At a meeting in Maynooth College, he persuaded them to permit their priests to volunteer for a five-year mission experience in Nigeria. In this Shanahan, consciously or unconsciously, echoed Benedict XV's appeal to (the) diocesan bishops to help "remedy the scarcity of missionaries". In his own words,

> You will do a deed most consonant with your love for your religion if, among your clergy and in your diocesan seminary, you carefully nurse the seeds of apostleship which you may discover in them. Do not be misled by appearances or moved by earthly reasons, as though the gift to the foreign missions were the loss to your diocese. Instead of one priest you might send abroad, God will raise several priests to do useful work at home.[28]

From the ranks of the diocesan Volunteers, Bishop Shanahan raised, arose the Maynooth mission to Africa. The initiative led to the foundation of St. Patrick's Foreign Missionary Society (Kiltegan Fathers).[29] Canonically erected on 17 March 1932, the Kiltegan Fathers were entrusted with the pastoral charge of the Prefecture of Calabar which Rome had carved out of the Vicariate of Southern Nigeria on 9 July 1934. The other new jurisdiction, the Prefecture of Benue, colloquially known as *Munchi country*, Rome assigned to

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[27]Cf. Pope Pius XI, *Rerum Ecclesia* (1926); Pope Pius XII, *Evangelii Praecones* (1951) and *Fidei Donum* (1957).

[28]Hickey, *Modern Missionary Documents*, 43-44.

[29]For details see, Thomas Kiggins, *Maynooth Mission to Africa: The Story of St. Patrick's, Kiltegan* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1991).

the German Province of the Holy Ghost missionaries whom Shanahan had introduced into the Vicariate in 1929, after a period of negotiation with the colonial authorities.[30] Thus, Shanahan met another key injunction of *Maximum Illud* which praised those vicars who, *when they lacked a supply of men belonging to their order, never hesitated to call in and accept the assistance of other religious institutions not caring whether they belong to another nation*.[31]

Another important issue of concern of *Maximum Illud* was the place and *role of women religious* in the missions. For as urgent as the needs for priests were in the mission fields so too was the need for women religious. By design, before the advent of *Maximum Illud*, SMA missionaries had taken cognisance of the necessity of sisters in their missions. Thus, long before the idea of *collaborative ministry* was in vogue, they worked closely with the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles (OLA) in their various missions. The experience was markedly different in the Spiritan mission of Southern Vicariate. For a while, there was not a single female religious Congregation in the territory especially after the repatriation of French sisters at the outbreak of the First World War (1914-1918). Consequently, the vicar "had no effective way of winning African women to a true Christian life."[32] After a protracted and fruitless search for a female Congregation for the mission, Shanahan founded the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary (MSHR), on March 7, 1924, at Killeshandra. In February 1928, the first set of the Congregation arrived at the mission of Southern Nigeria. For Shanahan, it was a dream fulfilled! They were soon followed by other similar congregations, such as the Medical Missionaries of Mary; and the indigenous Handmaids of the Holy Child Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary Sisters.

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[30]At the end of WWI, "All the German colonies in Africa had been lost during the war, and the German priests were finding difficulty in gaining entrance to British and French colonies. Eventually, the British authorities agreed to allow some into Nigeria, on condition that they were properly vouched for. Shanahan's recommendation was more than sufficient. It was arranged that the first group would be sent out by the German province of the Holy Ghost Congregation before the end of the year and that they would work in the territory of the Munshi (*sic*) tribe, where no permanent missions had been set up." Cf. Forristal, *The Second Burial*, 224.

[31]Hickey, *Modern Missionary Documents*, 32.

[32]Jordan, *Bishop Shanahan of Southern Nigeria*, 185.

In the era when missionary congregations were much inclined to treat as their private fiefs the territories granted to them by Propaganda and guarded them with unseemly jealousy,[33] Shanahan proved to be different. He had no reason holding on to a territory if it was not staffed adequately.[34] For him, *cura animarum* was and should be the supreme law in pastoral ministry. Thus, to those who resented the new developments, especially those who accused him of betraying his Holy Ghost Order in welcoming the advent of the Kiltegan Missionaries and the subsequent division of the Vicariate, through the erection of the Prefecture of Calabar, he gave this reply:

> I have been praying and asking for prayers for many years past to obtain from God missionaries for Nigeria. Now God, in answer to prayer, is sending them - we need them by the thousand. Surely I am not going to refuse them whom God sends me, even though people don't agree with me. . . . I wonder how any missionary could feel any sentiment but that of intense happiness at seeing the advent of so many new missionaries among our poor Nigerians! . . . So long as those poor people can get to God and to heaven, it matters very little the name, the nationality, etc., of the missionary that opens the gate of heaven to them. Their salvation is what matters.[35]

In this reply, Bishop Shanahan echoed Pope Benedict XV, who said:

> The head of a Catholic mission, for whom God's glory and the salvation of souls are nearest to his heart, calls in assistants, if need be, from everywhere to help him in his holy task, not caring whether they belong to another nation or different religious order so long as Christ is preached. He makes use not only of men, but of nuns as well, for his schools, orphanages, hospitals, hostels, and other charitable institutions, which he knows are, with

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[33]François Renault, *Cardinal Lavigerie: Churchman, Prophet and Missionary* (London and Atlantic Highlands, NJ: The Athlone Press, 1994), 274.

[34]Cooke, *Bishop James Moynagh of Calabar*, 23.

[35]Forristal, *The Second Burial*, 225.

> God's help endowed with an extraordinary power to extend our faith.[36]

It is no gainsaying that it was that same principle of *cura animarum* that governed Rome's subsequent establishment of more ecclesiastical jurisdictions in Nigeria leading to the emergence of the local Church in Nigeria. That emergence became a reality on April 18, 1950, with Pope Pius XII's establishment of the Catholic Hierarchy in British West Africa. On that occasion, the Pope erected the two metropolitan sees of Lagos and Onitsha and created new ecclesiastical jurisdictions in the country by elevating the status of some vicariates to dioceses; and prefectures to vicariates. Rome added a third metropolitan see, Kaduna, in 1959, the eve of Nigerian independence in 1960. By this time the Nigerian ecclesiastical scene had seen some significant changes.

Among these was the arrival of other missionary and religious Congregations, Orders, and Societies, besides the pioneering missionary duo of the Lyons and Spiritan missionaries. This feature began, as noted earlier, with the Kiltegan Fathers (1934); and with the arrival of the Augustinians in Jos Prefecture, (1938); the Society of the Missionaries of Africa, formerly known as the White Fathers (WF, M.Afri.) in Oyo (1943); and the Order of Preachers (OP) in Kaduna Prefecture (1953). The female component to the trend saw, besides the pioneering Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles (OLA) and the other groups noted above, the growing presence of indigenous female religious Congregations. Besides the Handmaids of the Holy Child Jesus (HHCJ; Calabar, 1931); Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (IHM, Onitsha, 1937); the Sisters of the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus (EHJ, Lagos, 1943), and the Sisters of Our Lady of Fatima (Jos, 1953). A third notable feature of the period of the emergence of the Catholic Church in Nigeria is the preponderance of indigenous vocations and an irreversible march towards the indigenization of the episcopate. By the time Nigeria became a republic in 1963, many of the ecclesiastical jurisdictions were already firmly under the leadership of indigenous shepherds.

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[36]Hickey, *Modern Missionary Documents*, 34.

Conclusion

Indisputably, a century of evangelisation (1862-1962) has produced much harvest! The success was due to a combination of factors. First and foremost is the invisible Lord of the harvest from whom all blessings flow. Then comes those countless generous and often unsung missionary heroes, men and women; clerics, religious men and women, and laity, who answered the call to missions afar. Their ingenuity, creativity, vision, and ardent faith enabled them to make the necessary sacrifices. A third positive factor is the generosity of the lay faithful embodied in such organisations like the Society for the Propagation of Faith, the Society of Holy Childhood, and the Work of St. Peter. Without the huge contribution made by our pastoral catechists and mission teachers and prayerful and pecuniary generosity of the Catholic faithful, missionary work would accomplish little.

The last and greatest factor is the papacy. The growth and final emergence of the Church in the Nigerian mission was largely due to the vigorous missionary outreach, inspired and animated by successive popes, of whom Pope Benedict XV was the pioneer because of his vision, expressed in the apostolic letter *Maximum Illud*. It paved the way for the Second Vatican Council in teaching that the Church is essentially missionary. The papacy also confirmed the various missionary initiatives of the early SMA and Spiritan missionaries in this portion of the Lord's vineyard located in modern Nigeria. It is now the moment to reap the harvest and for the Local Church to go forth to other nations and fulfil the missionary mandate, handed on to the Apostles after his glorious resurrection.