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Pope Francis' Centenary Exhortation Letter for *'Maximum Illud'*: Possibilities for Social Transformation in Sub-Saharan Africa

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Pope Francis rejuvenates and strengthens the evangelizing activity of the Church in his exhortation letter[1] commemorating the centenary of Benedict XV's Apostolic Letter 'Maximum Illud.'[2] Some of the Church's documents Francis dwelt on to give impetus to the Catholic and universal dimension of mission include Benedict XV, Apostolic Letter *Maximum Illud*; Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*; Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*; Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* and his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*. After a careful reflection on the content of 'Maximum *Illud*', Francis believes a new enthusiasm is urgently needed to "resume the missionary transformation" that will "undoubtedly create consequences for all ecclesial structures, pastoral methodologies and prospects for evangelisation."[3] Further analysis reveals that Francis is concerned as he did in *Evangelii Gaudium* to ensure that the baptised members of the Church exist in the world as 'missionary disciples' to continue the mission that flows from the love of the Trinity for human salvation.[4]

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[1]Francis, "Letter for the Centenary of Maximum Illud: On the Activity of Missionaries in the World," in *The Church of Christ on the Mission in the World: Extraordinary Missionary Month, October 2019* (Ibadan: St Paul Publications, 2019), 5-9.
[2]Benedict XV, "Apostolic Letter *Maximum Illud*: On the Propagation of the faith Throughout the World," in *The Church of Christ on the Mission in the World: Extraordinary Missionary Month, October 2019* (Ibadan: St Paul Publications, 2019), 17-39.
[3]Bernardo Cervellera, "*Maximum Illud*, the mission ad gentes to renew the Church 'on the right' and 'on the left'," http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Maximum-Illud,-the-mission-ad-gentes-to-renew-the-Church-'on-the-right'-and-'on-the-left'-48453.html (accessed 26.07.2020).
[4]Ibid.

In the past five years, Francis' priority seems to be focused on a "revolutionary vision of the Church and human society."[5] This is Francis' own 'missionary option' that is capable of transforming everything both in the Church and society. Discerning the real possibilities in Francis' letter for social transformation in sub-Saharan Africa is the focus of this article. However, before further discussion of the thrust of this article, a little glimpse into the major writings of Pope Francis and the overview of the contribution of the Church to the happenings in the human society is necessary.

An Overview of Major Writings of Pope Francis and Catholic Social Thought

George Weigel describes Pope Francis as a revolutionary in the sense that Francis proposes the "re-energizing return" of the Church "to the pentecostal fervor and evangelical passion from which the Church was born two millennia ago..."[6] In this sense, Francis has communicated certain insights of faith in *Lumen Fidei* (The Light of Faith, 2013); *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel, 2013); *Misericordiae Vultus* (The Face of Mercy, 2015); and *Amoris Laetitia* (The Joy of Love, 2016).[7] The first is an encyclical that discusses the centrality of faith and its transmission without losing sight of the significance of reason. How faith works to redeem the world features in *Lumen Fidei*. The second is an apostolic exhortation which has been described as 'Pope's Francis' manifesto'. It encourages and challenges Christians to open up to a new enthusiasm for evangelisation bearing in mind that complacency could thwart the fulfillment of 'Christ's great mission'. *Misericordiae Vultus* is referred to as the papal bull for the extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy. It simply explains the pressing significance of contemplating Mercy. *Laudato Si* is the landmark

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[5]Edward Pentin, "'Evangelii Gaudium' — A Key to Understanding Francis' Papacy," in *National Catholic Register*, https://www.ncregister.com/daily-news/evangelii-gaudium-a-key-to-understanding-francis-papacy (accessed 26.07.2020).

[6]Pope Francis, *The Complete Encyclicals, Bulls, and Apostolic Exhortations*, vol. 1 (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2016), ii.

[7]Ibid., vii–viii. The four documents and introductory comments can be found in this volume. My short explanations are from this volume.

encyclical that offers to the human society the Church's urgent challenge for responsibility for the future of the planet earth as God's creation and the home for humans. Lastly, The Joy of Love (*Amoris Laetitia*) is an apostolic exhortation after the synods on the family. With examples, the exhortation describes and encourages the nurture of love in family life.

Apart from these five major writings of Pope Francis in the preceding paragraph, there are Catholic social teachings that were issued to address specific problems in human society. Though there have been occasional "sharp debate between Rome, local Churches, and theologians"[8] regarding how official doctrines can be applied to "poverty and politics, markets and economic growth, political pluralism and many other issues,"[9] Pope Francis' election and his "model of the Church as a field hospital has made the direction of social teaching to take a clearer turn to a preferential option for the poor as well as an emphasis on the traditional teaching on mercy."[10] In a nutshell, the social teachings of the Church are very valuable and should help to bring about an "authentic commitment to building a more just and peaceful world."[11] The hope which I believe Francis bears also in his heart is that catholic social thought will reawaken social and political responsibility such that the Church will be the presence of Christ in all concrete human contexts.

Few of the social documents include *Rerum Novarum*: The Condition of Labor (Leo XIII, 1891); *Mater et Magistra*: Christianity and Social Progress (John XXIII, 1961); *Pacem in Terris* (John XXIII, 1963); *Gaudium et Spes*: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Second Vatican Council, 1965); *Populorum Progressio*: On the Development of Peoples (Paul VI, 1967); Justice in the World (Synod of Bishops, 1971); *Evangelii Nuntiandi*: Evangelisation in the Modern World (Paul

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[8]David J. O'Brien and Thomas A. Shannon, eds, *Catholic Social Thought: Encyclicals and Documents from Pope Leo XIII to Pope Francis,* 3rd revd ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2016), ix.
[9]David J. O'Brien and Thomas A. Shannon, eds, *Catholic Social Thought: Encyclicals and Documents from Pope Leo XIII to Pope Francis,* 3rd revd ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2016), ix.
[10]Ibid.
[11]Ibid., 8.

VI, 1975); *Laborem Exercens*: On Human Work (John Paul II, 1981); *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*: On Social Concern, (John Paul II, 1987); *Caritas in Veritate*: On Integral Human Development in Charity and Truth (Benedict XVI, 2009); and *Laudato Si*: On Care for Our Common Home (Francis, 2015). At this juncture, the opening statement in *Gaudium et Spes* that: 'the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men (and women) of our time, especially those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well'[12] suffices to buttress the church's solidarity with the human condition.

The Positive Developments in the Church in Africa at the time of Pope Francis' Letter

When Pope Francis called for the centenary celebration of Maximum Illud, the Catholic Church in Africa was already familiar with missionary activity and organised Christian communities of Lay faithful. The Church in Africa can boast of indigenous leadership, Priests, and Bishops. It can boast of a robust priestly training in seminaries and the flourishing of religious life. As at the time of the centenary celebration of Maximum Illud, the Church in Africa has communities of professed Sisters, brothers, and religious houses of formation. There are committed Catechists and lay teachers of the Faith. There are schools owned and managed by male and female religious; hospital and healthcare centres owned and managed by personnel of the Church; and many charity and development projects in many dioceses in Africa.

During the centenary celebration of *Maximum Illud*, the Church in Africa is enjoying growth in African theology; the understanding of inculturation is discussed seriously and ecumenism and interreligious dialogue, particularly with Islam, have become a major issue of relevance. Other notable concerns are the New Religious Movements (NRM), the growing influence of Islam, the challenges and prospects of the Catholic Priesthood, and issues of justice, peace, and leadership. Against the background of the centenary of *Maximum Illud*, there is so much that the Catholic

[12]Second Vatican Council, "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*," in *The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery, revd ed. (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1988), 903–911, at 903.

Church in Africa can consolidate and envision for mission and missionary activity. As highlighted, there is still much to emphasize and to plan for to strengthen the 'fruitful missionary enterprise' in Africa. This article discusses real possibilities in the Exhortation letter of Pope Francis for the Centenary of '*Maximum Illud*'. The emphasis will be on certain initiatives and values that are both attainable and sustainable for social transformation within the Church's missionary activity in Africa. First of all, there is a strong tone for possibilities in Francis' letter.

The Strong Tone of Possibilities

Pope Francis highlights the need for "a missionary option capable of transforming everything."[13] He stresses the need for the customs and the ways of doing things in the church to be evangelised. Even the times and schedules, language and structures are not excluded from the things to be transformed for evangelisation. For Francis, this is a mission for today's world and it is for every baptised man and woman. His letter implies that the missionary apostolate is still very urgent.

No doubt, the 'missionary option' enunciated in Francis' letter conveys the serious exhortation of his message and it is farsighted and prophetic about the missionary apostolate.[14] Francis' exhortation is directed to every baptised Catholic. however, according to Benedict XV in *Maximum Illud*, there are men and women "entrusted with a catholic mission" who also should seek out helpers of any nationality to open schools, orphanages, hospitals, hostels, and other charitable institutions.[15] These men and women are "the formally-trained missionaries" who should include in their missionary apostolate the transformation of human society. The trained missionaries are the ones to take Francis' exhortation to heart. They are the ones who are unafraid "to undertake"[16] evangelisation (and I add Catechesis) of today's world more

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[13]Francis, "Letter for the Centenary of *Maximum Illud*," 7.
[14]See Francis, "Message for the World Mission Day 2019: Baptized and Sent: The Church of Christ on Mission in the World," in *The Church of Christ on the Mission in the World: Extraordinary Missionary Month, October 2019* (Ibadan: St Paul Publications, 2019), 11–16, at 11.
[15]See Benedict XV, "Apostolic Letter *Maximum Illud*," no. 23
[16]Francis, "Letter for the Centenary of *Maximum Illud*," 7.

effectively and efficiently. For this reason, the Church in Africa should continuously expand the transformation of human society in its missionary apostolate.

Thus far, so much is already being done about the spiritual, pastoral, and intellectual development of the Church in Africa as stated in the introduction and background of this article. As good and noble as the initiatives for evangelisation are in Africa, the transformation of the human society is a prerequisite in evangelisation and Catechesis. This is never to be compromised.

What is not to be Compromised

Discerning from Francis' exhortation, evangelisation and catechesis are twin missionary activities not to be compromised. Evangelisation and Catechesis, as we learnt in our catechism class, is a divine project. During formation for the missionary priesthood, we were taught that evangelisation and catechesis is an essential part of mission. For this reason, evangelisation and catechesis are "a task far beyond the feeble reach of human reasoning."[17] It is the spiritual work of opening the way to heaven.[18] This is already a clear framework of what evangelisation and catechesis should be in Africa. To further buttress this view, evangelisation and catechesis extends not the human realm, but Christ's; "it is the acquisition of citizens for a heavenly fatherland, and not for an earthly one."[19] Reflecting on this view, evangelisation and catechesis (as missionary activities) belong to the spiritual plane. That is, only spiritual values and influences should be accommodated. In this regard, it is not solely spiritual because Francis stresses that today's missionary activity should address troubling situations, tragedies of war, and the tendency to accentuate differences and incite conflicts.[20] Francis even added works of Christian charity and practical works of cooperation and solidarity between Churches.[21] To this extent, Francis' letter also gives credence to schools, orphanages, hospitals, hostels, and other charitable institutions

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[17]Benedict XV, "Apostolic Letter *Maximum Illud*," no. 26.
[18]See Ibid.
[19]See Ibid.
[20]See Francis, "Letter for the Centenary of *Maximum Illud*," 7.
[21]See Ibid., 8.

built and managed by the Catholic Church in Africa for the transformation of human society.

Also, many other types of foundation that would relief hunger, destitution, and physical suffering among Africans would be within the scope of the Pope's exhortation. The goal, however, is to do all these without losing focus on the spread of the faith. Nevertheless, the thrust Francis gives to issues of social justice in his letter would require integrating certain values of development studies, policy, and practice.[22] Consequently, this would entail continually penetrating robustly all areas and issues weighing on the citizens and members of the Church in Africa. How this is possible begins with a clear manifestation of the passion of the Church in Africa to ensure the implementation of laws and values against the persistent and perennial problems in Africa.

The Persistent and Perennial Problems in Africa

There are positive happenings in the Church in Africa as I stated in the beginning. However, all is still not well regarding the political and social space on the continent. With more than 800 major languages spoken, according to Vincent B. Khapoya, in his *The African Experience: An Introduction*,[23] the attainment of living standards expected of the people is still a tall order. Thus, there are pressing concerns to be addressed by political and civil leaders. Many Africans are still bothered and seem to be at their wit's end.

There might be various shades to the discussion and assessment of the growth and development in Africa, but permit me to say that, considering the physical, political, and demographic constitution of the continent, much more is still expected. Sub-Saharan Africa is still plagued with problems of poor governance and reckless corruption, ethnic conflicts, violence and tensions, tribalism and

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[22]See Jonathan D. Smith, "Positioning Missionaries in Development Studies, Policy, and Practice," *World Development* 90, 63–76, http://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/106036/1/Positioning%20Missionaries%20in%20Development%20Studies_Smith%20JD_AAV.pdf (accessed 17.12.2019).

[23]Vincent B. Khapoya, *The African Experience: An Introduction*, 4th ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2016).

nepotism, poor infrastructure, hunger, and poverty. For instance, in Nigeria, these problems have reached a peak such that the culture of impunity seems to be prevalent. Despite the many enlightenment programs on the print, electronic and social media for good governance, for social justice, for structural development and other reformative proposals and recommendations about the deplorable state of Nigeria, not much seems to have changed. Nigerian Bishops embarked on a protest march to express their frustration over the state of insecurity in Nigeria, yet not much result came out of it. What should be done that has not been done? What can the Church in Nigeria and indeed in Africa do differently? These are the challenges implied in Francis' letter.[24]

Thus far, Africa is still in need of strong development studies, policy, and practice for social transformation. The scope of social transformation has to be improved and missionary activity SHOULD promote more effectively the civilisation and wellbeing of all Africans. In Jonathan D. Smith's article, "Positioning Missionaries in Development Studies, Policy, and Practice,"[25] impartiality, cultural accommodation, and professionalism stand out as strong values missionary activity should include for effective social transformation. These values do not have strong roots in Africa. This could be the reason many Africans look up to God and spiritual activities for the reassurance of development and social transformation.

Based on his analysis, Khapoya believes there is much to discuss about Africa in terms of the poor material development suffered since pre-colonial history. Should Africans continue to blame Europe and America for her woes and failures? Did anything go wrong with the "civilising mission," as Khapoya puts it, of European colonisation? In fact, "what did the Europeans expect a civilised African to be like once they were done with their mission?" This is a fundamental question of Khapoya that is worth thinking about. Taking this question further, I would like to ask Catholic priests, religious and baptised faithful in Sub-Saharan Africa what they

[24]See Francis, "Letter for the Centenary of *Maximum Illud*," 7.

[25]*Supra*, note 20.

expect a civilised African to be like as they practice their faith? What kind of Christians should Africans be like? These questions open up the depth of thought that should be impressed in the minds of the current African leaders, and the generality of Africans who feel a lot of time has been wasted without the enforcement of strong constitutional provisions and policies enacted by African leaders.

Africa still in need of 'Civilising Mission'

At the beginning of independence in the early 1950s, the first generation of African leaders made attempts to experiment with a one-party system. African governments sought to control the economies of their countries. The prodding (whether for good or bad) from international institutions like the World Bank and IMF, and from other major aid donors to African countries, put pressure on African leaders to embark on free-market economies and other initiatives.[26] African nationalism thrived also. When African leaders take their case to the world stage, they believe that they are heard. Today, there is hope too as African Union (henceforth AU) can boast of sustaining respect for the traditional institutions and customs of African nations. The AU strives to implement 'norms, values, and historical experience" that would equip the African people to transform the African society.[27]

Some countries in Africa such as Ghana, Botswana, South Africa, and Namibia are living up to the standards of democracy and culture.[28] These countries are already doing well; however, they can improve. Through them, other African countries, hopefully, can be influenced by the mentality for sound African society. Africans need to work hard to grow administrative styles suitable for good governance in Africa. The same determination should be applied for economic sustainability for the future. The time for African leaders to put their house in order is now. Yet, Africa is still bedevilled with critical problems of governance and accountability. The leaders are to blame. Even so, all Africans share in the blame too because they think of their diversity and population as a problem.

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[26]See Khapoya, *The African Experience*, xiv.
[27]Cf Ibid., xv.
[28]Ibid., xiv.

There are a lot of missionary activities going on in Sub-Saharan Africa. As a Nigerian and a missionary, I know that missionary activities take cognisance of cultural sensitivity and social transformation. This is also evidently portrayed in Clarke and Donnelly's article "Learning from Missionaries."[29] There are a lot of priests (including bishops) and religious moving in and out of Africa. The religious landscape of Africa is beaming with a range of beliefs and rituals drawn from established Churches in Europe and America. There are 'home-grown' Catholic communities with certain identifiable features of their culture. Nevertheless, how are African Christians transforming themselves and their communities? How are the missionary activities in Africa 'civilising' the African worldviews and traditions? How are religious symbols and ritual practices improving the integrity of African people? And how will the next generation of Africans be guided by Africans who are transformed?

Sub-Saharan Africa can boast of educated, enlightened, and dynamic Christians. Therefore, in terms of missionary activity and environment, Africa is no longer a primitive continent, steeped in superstition and judged to be pagan. Albeit there are spiritual and minimal socio-economic and political developments to appreciate, the mentality of the generality of Sub-Saharan Africans is still a concern. Yet, this concern and the poverty level, which has not dramatically changed, pose challenging situations for missionary activity. Thus, Catholic priests, religious and baptised faithful and, missionaries in particular, still cannot look the other way because those they minister to are really in need of social transformation.

One of the critical lessons learnt from lectures in missiology is that the context of mission is of paramount importance. That is, missionary activities should incorporate the problems of individuals and communities in "context-appropriate" ways. In other words, missionary activity is of necessity very context-specific.[30] For this reason, Catholic priests and religious who

[29]M. Clarke and J. Donnelly, "Learning from Missionaries" in *Engaging the World: Christian Communities in Contemporary Global Societies*, ed. A. Adogame, J. McLean and A. Jeremiah (Oxford: Regnum, 2014), 161-183.

[30]See Hazel O. Ayanga, "Contextual Challenges to African Women in Mission," *International Review of Mission* 106, no. 2 (2017): 295–306, https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/irom.12187 (accessed 17.12.2019).

embark on missionary activity have also the tools of critical analysis and understanding[31] to imagine and present to Africans the kind of social transformation desired. The big and fine churches and the teeming population of dynamic African Christians is not yet evidence of social transformation. Evidence of social transformation will reflect in the attitude, mentality, and the environment African live and work. For instance, take a look at Nigerians and the infrastructure at most of the airports, hospitals, markets, government buildings, public offices, public spaces, and religious buildings. Good roads and stable electricity can only be imagined. In Nigeria, much is still desired in terms of individual and social transformation. The challenge to the Church in Africa is to integrate well 'a missionary option capable of transforming everything.'

Transformative Mission in Africa: Opportunities and Challenges

'A missionary option capable of transforming everything', as espoused by Francis, excludes nothing that affects the African person, from the historical and cultural to the economic and political. Hence, the context of missionary activity in Africa has to change and open up more to opportunities and challenges in a tremendous manner. Catholic priests, religious, baptised faithful and, in particular missionaries, must continue to evolve ways of transforming the Africans and their communities. True, Africans and their communities have been transformed in some ways as a result of wholesome missionary activity. However, it is equally true that the transformation in Africa is gradual; it is a transformative process that would require a fairly long time for completion.[32] For example, Nigeria has been blessed with a lot of missionary activities.

There are enviable networks and collaboration within the Catholic Church in Nigeria. There are catholic institutions such as schools and hospitals, catechetical and pastoral/spiritual centres for retreats and self-development; and besides, the Catholic Church is a

[31]Cf Ibid.
[32]See Ibid.

big employer of labour in Nigeria. Other Christian denominations in Nigeria have contributed positively to spiritual and human development in Nigeria. Overall, commendable initiatives of the Catholic Church and other Christian denominations in Africa have facilitated certain desired transformation to be achieved. But how is the result? How have missionary activities in Nigeria and Sub-Saharan Africa engendered quality change of attitude and thinking in the African people? A piece of advice for Catholic priests (Bishops and Reverend Fathers) is not to put in so much energy and time just in erecting church buildings and creating new parish communities. Rather, care and attention should be given to the in-depth transformation of African mentality. Besides, more emphasis and priority should be accorded to African customary beliefs and practices for social transformation. There should be more conscious enlightenment about African traditional cultures often undervalued for social transformation.[33]

Furthermore, there should be strong disapproval of whatever that makes the African person slavishly docile and submissive. Africans should be reminded often also that all that is African is not entirely good, and all that is European or American or foreign is not lovely and rich for the transformation of the African society. Thus I re-present J. Merle Davis's view that "the culture of the African is in danger of being submerged by European civilisation."[34] In their manner of writing and talking, some Africans undermine the best of African materials and developments simply because of the technological advancement of most developed countries. To this extent, it becomes heart-wrenching to observe that great applause is given when someone speaks like an American or British or speaks any of the languages of Europe. Africa must not entirely import the lifestyle, customs, and culture of Europe and America. For this reason, Catholic priests, religious and baptised faithful and, missionaries, in particular, can make a positive impact in this

[33]See C. G. Baëta, "Introductory Review: Facts and Problems," in *Christianity in Tropical Africa: Studies Presented and Discussed at the Seventh International African Seminar, University of Ghana, April 1965*, ed. C. G. Baëta, e-book ed. (London: Routledge, 2018), https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351042826 (accessed 18.12.2019).
[34]J. Merle Davis, "The Changing Position of Mission in Africa," in *Modern Industry and the African: An Enquiry into the Effect of the Copper Mines of Central Africa upon Native Society and the Work of the Christian Missions*, J. Merle Davis, e-book ed. (London: Routledge, 2019), https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429025549 (accessed 18.12.2019).

regard. In this light, let's recall an earlier point from Merle Davis: "African society requires a complete reconstruction in which the missionary (I add all Christians) must help the Native to make a multitude of readjustments."[35] Davis' view is both an opportunity and a challenge to facilitate the emergence of an African imaginative sense.

On a different note, the practice of the faith in Africa is not as it is in Europe. Europe and America are not the exemplary faces of the faith of the Catholic Church. This, however, does not diminish the positive intervention of Europe and America in the life of Africa. Agreeing with Richard Gray, a better perspective on missionary activity in Africa was engendered by the dominant influence of the Sacred Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples (*Propaganda Fide*). According to Gray, *Propaganda Fide* "sharply distinguishes nineteenth-century Catholic missionary activity in Africa from that of earlier centuries."[36]

As mentioned earlier, Catholic priests, religious and baptised faithful and, missionaries, in particular, cannot afford to turn their faces away from the predicament of Africans. They have a particular responsibility to factor in their ministry the social needs, the changing conditions, and demands of Africa as a field of missionary activity. Accordingly, Merle Davis' statement is worth pondering: "the task of modern African missions is not only to create a new social and spiritual order." On the contrary, "the modern missionary is dealing with an African who is demonstrating his great latent and actual capacities and increasingly commands respect."[37] To this effect, understanding African spirituality[38] as it is the case in most catholic formation houses/seminaries is peculiar to the African religious life. Even African migrants carry their culture

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[35]Ibid.

[36]Richard Gray, "Problems of Historical Perspective: The Planting of Christianity in Africa in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," in *Christianity in Tropical Africa: Studies Presented and Discussed at the Seventh International African Seminar, University of Ghana, April 1965*, ed. C. G. Baëta, e-book ed. (London: Routledge, 2018), https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351042826 (accessed 18.12.2019).

[37]Davis, "The Changing Position of Mission in Africa" (accessed).

[38]See Amuluche-Greg Nnamani, "The Flow of African Spirituality into World Christianity: A Case for Pneumatology and Migration," *Mission Studies*, 32, no. 3 (2015): 331–352.

and spirituality to wherever they settle.[39] According to Amuluche-Greg Nnamani, African spiritual heritage still wells up into Christian practice. Prayer traditions like incantations, melodious choruses, and appeal to spirits, typical of African Traditional Religions are still felt in their Christian practice.[40] As noble and inspiring as the African spiritual heritage may be, the Catholic Church in Africa has to continually trim these features to be in rhythm with authentic Christian spirituality and doctrine. Assuredly, Catholic priests, religious and all baptised faithful should focus on the spiritual. Nevertheless, there is a need for a critical reflective attitude to worship, education, and Catechetical instruction that is geared towards impartiality, cultural accommodation, and professionalism. For example, Nigerians should be reminded often that prayer alone will not transform the country; that frequenting the Church and subjecting oneself to all-night vigils and numerous prayer sessions will not lift them out of poverty. Prayer alone and Church attendance will not bring about good roads, good governance, stable electricity, Housing, Water Supply, and accountability.

Part of missionary activity should be to continue to enlighten and proffer probable solutions to Africans on the issues bothering them. More so, part of missionary activity should also be to aid Africans to be informed on political affairs, global and national power structures, symptoms of poverty, and the need for political participation. When a government "over trumpets" its achievements, part of the missionary activity is to be reliable witnesses to the truthfulness of the government's achievements. Indeed, missionary activity should be broadened to emphasise social transformation initiative. The following section highlights how this can be do done.

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[39]Cf J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, "Migration, Diaspora Mission, and Religious Others in World Christianity: An African Perspective," *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 39, no. 4 (October 2015): 189–192 at 189, https://doi.org/10.1177/239693931503900406 (accessed 17.12.19).

[40]See Nnamani, "The Flow of African Spirituality," 331-352.

Social Transformation Initiatives

Jonathan Smith states that there is a turn to religion in development studies in the past fifteen years.[41] This statement is very uplifting because, implicitly, it challenges the Church in Africa to continue to put social transformation at the heart of her missionary activities. Thus, the Church should make more effort to do the following: (1) position itself to enlighten, empower and proffer more probable innovative solutions to Africans on the issues bothering them; (2) aid Africans to be more informed and enlightened about political affairs, global and national power structures, symptoms of poverty, and the need for political participation; (3) manifest more publicly the willingness to be imprisoned and to die so that justice and truth will flourish in the African Society. Since Catholic priests, religious and baptised faithful and, missionaries in particular, already occupy the religious space, that space, strictly speaking, is a shared space for both missionary activities and social transformation. Separating the two is considered an outdated assumption.[42] So what kind of framework can help in this regard?

The framework is to consider how missionary activities are reflected in social transformation. That is, faith and belief can be related to values of social transformation. Challenges of faith and belief can become challenges of social transformation. Consider this: "the 21st century has been a time of 'ambiguity, plurality, struggle and uncertainty' in transition between the certainty of the past and the uncertainty of the future."[43] For this reason, common terms such as post-secular, postmodern, and post-development should continue to be used for challenges of faith and belief concerning social transformation. This would make social transformation no longer solely a concept within secularism. This could be the reason Jürgen Habermas observed that concepts and agents of religion and secularism interact.[44] Implicitly, a religious space cannot disregard social transformation because it is profoundly connected to the

[41]See Smith, "Positioning Missionaries in Development Studies, Policy, and Practice" (accessed).
[42]Ibid.
[43]Ibid.
[44]Jürgen Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere," *European Journal of Philosophy* 14, no. 1 (2006): 1-25, https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/j.1468-0378.2006.00241.x (accessed 22.12.2019).

spiritual. Besides, secularism, modernity, and development are gaining roots in the minds of Africans. Thus, missionary activities in Africa should continue to have cogent responses to matters of secularism, modernity, and development.

Furthermore, missionary activities in Africa can boast of doing a lot in healthcare, education, and other human developmental initiatives. Therefore, it is not reasonable to present as a complex mess missionary activity concerning social transformation. Not at all because catholic priests, religious, baptised faithful and, missionaries, in particular, are still involved in certain developmental projects in Africa. This view simply confirms the truth that missionary activities can also be compatible with outcomes of social transformation—the kinds that bring about positive social change.[45] Well, one can say that in some countries in Africa, missionary activities are not permitted and, in some cases, religious freedom may be restricted. In a very peculiar and difficult situation, there are restrictions of missionary activities to prevent proselytisation or the espousing of a political standpoint.[46] In any case, the zeal for missionary activity should be accompanied with an undertone of social transformation[47] even if the aim is the proclamation of Christ's transforming message.

Thus, sound social transformation should increasingly be linked to missionary activity. Idara Otu sees the intersection of Christianity with the African social context. He states that "The Church in Africa has shown remarkable commitment in responding to the existential context and plight of Africans by integrating social transformation, as a dimension of its evangelizing mission."[48] In the same vein, Otu believes that "the fruitfulness of this mission may vary amongst African nations."[49] He maintains that "it does not diminish the

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[45]See Smith, "Positioning Missionaries in Development Studies" (accessed).
See Ibid.

[46]Cf Philip Fountain, Robin Bush and R Michael Feener, "Religion and the Politics of Development," in *Religion and the Politics of Development*, ed. P. Fountain, R, Bush and M, Feener (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 11-34.

[47]Idara Otu, *Communion Ecclesiology and Social Transformation in African Catholicism: Between Vatican Council II and African Synod II* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, [48]2020), 241.

[49] Ibid.

significance of the Catholic Church's prophetic voice, pastoral presence, and transformative actions in the African continent."[50] Otu's concluding point (made as a warning to the Church in Africa) is to guard against pride "to the point of neglecting African social questions"[51] because "in many African societies, the Church is a credible and instrumental sign of hope for Africans amidst social maledictions."[52]

Conclusion

Pope Francis centenary exhortation letter for *Maximum Illud* puts before Christians possibilities for transformative initiatives in response to concerns for social justice and for working for a better world. Agreeing with Jonathan Smith that "the humanitarian impulse to help victims of war or natural disaster has a religious dimension, and it is intimately related to the technical operation of humanitarian assistance,"[53] there is a strong link between social transformation and missionary activity. As Pope Francis exhorts in his letter, any missionary activity that tilts towards offering solace and succour to the hungry and the destitute carries a religious dimension with an impulse for social transformation. Nonetheless, the general idea of religion shaping culture and history[54] makes it difficult for missionary activity not to incorporate social transformation. In this regard, what Catholic priests, religious, the baptised faithful and, missionaries, in particular, should discern is between a social transformation that is acceptable and unacceptable in missionary activity. On a final note, in as much as missionary activity is clearly for religious/spiritual practice, missionary activity should continue to involve activities of social transformation. Yet, no partisan approach must be encouraged. Besides, more research and reflection should be done to link missionary activity and doing social transformation because a deeper reflective picture of the integration of the values of missionary activity and the practice of social transformation could be deepened.

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[50]Ibid.
[51]Ibid., 246.
[52]Ibid., 241.
[53]Smith, "Positioning Missionaries in Development Studies" (accessed).
[54]Gordon Lynch, *The Sacred in the Modern World: A Cultural Sociological Approach* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).