

The Mustard Seed: the 150-Year Milestone of Evangelization in Tanzania (1868 – 2018)

Bernardino M. Ligomeka, OFMCap

Graduate of Theology
Jordan University College

Preamble

Jesus Christ is the source, fountain, and summit of all missions (LG 3). If one were to view history through the prism of the past 150 years of evangelization in Tanzania, one would have to admit that the events that transpired during this time frame resonate admirably with Jesus' declaration that the Kingdom of God is like the grain of a mustard seed. Without doubt, it is truly "the smallest of all the seeds, but once it falls into the ground, it grows into a big tree to such an extent that the birds of the air find shelter in it" (Matt 13:31-32; Mark 4:31-32; Luke 13:19).

Can we say that this is true of the work of evangelization in Tanzania throughout this period of one and a half centuries? Right from the year 1868 when the pioneering missionaries – Antoin Horner, Edward Baur, Celestine Consol, Felician Gruncien and others – arrived from Zanzibar and set their feet upon the land of Tanganyika the seed has survived all kinds of weather both day and night.¹ Today, that seed has grown rapidly and is still continuing to bear abundant fruit, a hundredfold's worth (cf. Mark 4:20). On the 16th of June 1863, those who were to become the first Christians on the island of Zanzibar and subsequently on the mainland of Tanganyika,² would have exclaimed in unison with the Prophet Isaiah: "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good tidings, who publishes peace, who brings good news,

¹ J. BAUR, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa: An African History 62 – 1992*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications 1994, 226.

² C.E. SAHLBERG, *Historia ya Kanisa Tanzania 1600 – 1985*, Nairobi: Scripture Mission 1987, 15.

who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns!'" (Isa 52:7).

Several prominent authors have dedicated themselves zealously to writing the history of the Church and the mission of evangelization in Tanzania, and they have laboured tirelessly at this task. Consequently there is sufficient literature at anyone's disposal who wishes to venture into the minute details of the beginning, growth, and development of the work of evangelization in this land. My concern in this article is not centred on reproducing a systematic presentation of the history of evangelization, but rather, to give a critical theological assessment and evaluation of the evangelization mission. I will be looking into the past so as to draw lessons from there that would equip us in surveying the present as we strive to shape the future of the evangelization mission.

The terms "Church" and "evangelization" in this article are consistently linked together, in which the term 'evangelization' means the process of proclaiming and spreading the faith and the term 'Church' implies the agent/institution for evangelization.

1. We Shall Go to Them

One of the greatest concerns of Christianity is self-propagation and evangelization.³ Evangelization *ad gentes* is directed to all peoples of all places of all times and proceeds ultimately from Christ's command in the *Great Commission*: "Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations, baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you, and know that I am with you up to the end of time" (Matt 28:19-20). It is the choice to be truly and sincerely obedient to this great commission that enables us to speak of an inner driving force that motivates Christian men and women to cultivate the zeal and courage necessary to undertake missionary work at any one point of time in history.

In the times of old, having heard of the concern of the Lord God, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?", the Prophet Isaiah

³ L. MALISHI, *A History of the Catholic Church in Tanzania*, Peramiho: Benedictine Publications Ndanda 1990, 10.

courageously responded positively to take up the mission: “Here am I! Send me” (Isa 6:8). Franz Pfanner’s motto: “We shall go to them” becomes relevant and significant when we attempt to interpret and analyze the boldness that motivated the pioneering missionaries.⁴ They dared to reach out into unknown lands so as to touch and transform the lives of the people they were to encounter. Unlike their colonial and trading countrymen who had preceded them, the missionaries’ zeal was springing from the love of Christ whose command to make him known near and far was a directive they had freely accepted and were eager to articulate.

2. Where are the “They” to whom we shall go? – The Missionaries’ Strategic Positioning

2.1 The Holy Ghost Fathers

It is worth highlighting the fact that in the 19th century Zanzibar had the busiest slave market in the world. It accounted for an annual turn-over of 60,000 slaves;⁵ and Sahlberg records that between 1862 and 1867, the total number of slaves from East Africa that were sold to be transported overseas was 97,203.⁶ This shocking and pathetic situation gives us a clue as to why the work of evangelization had to begin with a Christian community of ransomed slaves. However, due to the lack of land for the expansion of the facilities and the high cost of living in the city, Fr. Horner made long journeys of exploration in the Sultan’s boat and eventually decided on settling at Bagamoyo.

Bagamoyo was the coastal port where the slaves from the interior were loaded on dhows and shipped to Zanzibar for sale. Baur notes that the name ‘Bagamoyo’ aptly expressed what the poor captives were feeling at this moment of their journey: ‘the place to leave one’s heart behind.’ The missionary settlement was to give at least some of them new hope.⁷ Therefore, the mission’s strategic positioning was not by mere chance but, rather, carried

⁴ The founder of the congregation named the Missionaries of Marianhill in 1909 at KwaZulu Natal in South Africa.

⁵ J. BAUR, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa*, 226.

⁶ C.E. SAHLBERG, *Historia ya Kanisa Tanzania*, 5.

⁷ J. BAUR, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa*, 226-227.

a theological significance for the goal of the mission of evangelization: the goal was to set captives free and give them new hope by proclaiming to them the acceptable year of the Lord (Luke 4:18-19).

2.2 The Missionaries of Africa (White Fathers)

The Missionaries of Africa were a missionary society founded in 1868 by Cardinal Lavigerie, Archbishop of Carthage and Algiers and Primate of Africa. Keen as his interest was in the social issues of his time, Lavigerie urged the Pope and his native France to rise to the occasion and play their part in suppressing the slave trade and all forms of slavery in East and Central Africa. He then conceived a plan for the Catholic Church to form an organization that would end the slave trade and serve the evangelization of Africa.

By early June of 1878, the missionaries were in Bagamoyo from where the long journey to the interior started. Hence the mission to the Great Lakes had begun. They reached Tabora on 1 October, 1878, and made camp at Kwihara.⁸ The strategic positioning of the mission enabled these missionaries to spread themselves out and evangelize the surrounding areas including the neighbouring Buganda Kingdom (present Uganda).⁹ Therefore, on account of the work of these missionaries, Tanzania can today feel the pride to have been the hub of evangelization for Uganda, Kenya, Rwanda, Burundi, and even Zambia-Malawi.

2.3 The Benedictines

Invigorated by the spirit of St. Benedict, Father Andreas Amrhein lived by his conviction that monastic life should combine an active and pastoral life. With the approval of the *Sacred Congregatio de Propaganda Fidei* (13th November 1877) and the Imperial Government of Germany, he sent 15 missionaries to Tanzania, who arrived in Dar es Salaam on 28 January 1888.¹⁰ They were entrusted with the Apostolic Prefecture of Southern

⁸ L. MALISHI, *A History of the Catholic Church in Tanzania*, 16-17.

⁹ J. BAUR, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa*, 233.

¹⁰ L. MALISHI, *A History of the Catholic Church in Tanzania*, 20.

Zanzibar, i.e., the area that covers the southern part of modern Tanzania up to Lake Nyasa. Pugu, which was to be destroyed later as we shall see, situated 10 miles from Dar es Salaam, became their first mission. As reported by Abbot Lambert Doerr, OSB, the principal intention of the Benedictines was not to establish mission stations per se, but to establish monasteries. The goal was that by providing a living example of their spirit and convictions, their prayer, their manual work, and their modern means of farming, the monks would spread Christianity to the people surrounding their monasteries.¹¹ Through their strategy we could see that those Christian communities surrounding the monasteries were to gradually develop; and the monasteries were to become centres for people's holistic growth, i.e., spiritual and physical.

Analysing the approaches of all these pioneering missionaries, we note the employment of three distinct evangelizing strategies. The Holy Ghost Fathers employed the establishment of 'Christian communities' from which the faith was taught and transmitted. From these Christian communities, the indigenous were sent out into other settlement areas that would be subsequently evangelized. The Missionaries of Africa adopted the strategy of establishing a mission centre from where they could move and go to evangelize the people within their particular localities. The Benedictines, for their part, positioned their monasteries within the society, so much so that the monastery resembled the leaven in the Gospels (Matt 13:33; Luke 13:21), and thus could proceed to transform the entire society from within.

The assessment of all these strategies, distinct as they were from each other, brings to our understanding the concept of evangelization as a dynamism but with only a single overriding goal: to gather all peoples together so that there should be only one flock, under one shepherd (John 10:16).

¹¹ L. DOERR, "Historia Fupi: Wamisionari WaBenediktini Kusini mwa Tanzania hadi Vita Kuu ya Kwanza ya Dunia" in P.G. RUPPER, ed., *Pugu Hadi Peramiho: Miaka 100 ya Wamisionari WaBenediktini katika Tanzania – Historia na Masimulizi*, Peramiho: Benedictine Publications Ndanda 1988, 9.

3. What shall we do Among "Them"? The Hundredfold Fruit of the 150 – Year Tree of Evangelization

3.1 Christianize Them

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...” (Matt 28:19) was the focus and purpose of the pioneering missionaries. Prior to 1868, it could be said that there were people in Tanzania who lived upright lives according to their conscience but, through no fault of their own, had not yet received the good news of our Lord Jesus Christ (*LG* 16). Because their lives gave witness to the fact that they would strive to continue to live with moral integrity, and that if they knew about the Catholic Church, they would desire her sacraments and communion with Jesus Christ through his Church, one could say that they enjoyed the disposition of catechumens – or what some might prefer to call “anonymous Christians” – who were to be evangelized and brought into the faith through Baptism.

This evangelizing mission was taken seriously to such an extent that, as Carl-Erik Sahlberg’s 1914 statistics indicate, the numbers of the baptized grew much faster than expected of an infant Church. He records the total number to be at around 61,000 baptized Catholics in comparison with the total number of 23,000 baptized of all the Protestants calculated together.¹² These statistics present a vivid picture of how the pioneering missionaries were so zealously committed to the *Great Commission*.

Today, the Tanzanian Catholic Church enjoys a continuous growth in numbers: each year we witness an ever-growing record of neophytes being added to the existing numbers. This is a cause for great joy for the Tanzanian Church as we clock 150 years of evangelization. At the same time, however, the concrete situation on the ground is a signal that calls us to reflect more deeply and make a critical analysis of the effectiveness of our commitment as Christians and contemporary agents of evangelization. The tragic day-by-day increasing ratio of ‘nominal Catholics’ in contrast to

¹² C.E. SAHLBERG, *Historia ya Kanisa Tanzania*, 40.

‘practicing Catholics’ demands an immediate assessment that may require a change of approach in our manner of evangelizing.

I recall one of the old missionaries who once jokingly said: “In our times we had few priests and many lay catechists, but we had many committed Christians. Today, we have many priests and few lay catechists, but few dedicated Christians, too.” Though jokingly uttered, this statement reflects the prevailing sad situation within which the priests, while faithfully committed to their role as leaders, have tended to monopolize the mission of evangelization. Consequently, this phenomenon has tended to sideline the crucial role of the laity in the evangelization mission.

Even though there are a considerable number of exceptions, the immediate effect is that in most parts of the country, many of the laity have taken a passive role that has entirely left the work of evangelization to the priests and the religious. Therefore, this jubilee is an opportune occasion for all the faithful, clergy and laity, to wake up and realize our fundamental call to cooperate fully, each according to his/her own capacity and state, in the establishing of God’s kingdom.

3.2 The Mission of Ransoming

As previously mentioned, by the time the pioneering missionaries, the CSSp, arrived, Zanzibar had already become an internationally notorious commercial town because of its famous “black gold”, i.e., the buying and selling of human beings.¹³

Considering this situation, the Holy Ghost Fathers and Brothers ventured into the labour of ransoming as many slaves as they could afford. Once ransomed, the ex-slaves were resettled in a Christian village away from the social mainstream.¹⁴ It is from among these

¹³ Black gold usually refers to the kind of oil that vehicle and machine producers crave because of all the money it can earn for the one selling it. The author’s point, however, is clear. Rather than respecting Africans as human beings, traders reduced them to a commodity that can be bought and sold at a high price. (Editor’s note)

¹⁴ These were villages set up by missionaries in the initial stages of evangelization with an intention to protect the neophytes from a hostile environment and to train them to a more convinced Christian life. Baur reports that this approach was spearheaded by the Jesuits among the Indios of

ex-slaves that the nucleus of a Christian community came into being.¹⁵ Carl Erik Sahlberg records that at the end of three years of evangelizing, the Holy Ghost Fathers in Zanzibar were taking care of 110 orphans. These children, all of whom converted to Christianity, were from among the slaves. By the time the Fathers extended their evangelizing mission to Bagamoyo in 1868, nearly 324 ex-slaves accompanied them.¹⁶

In 1890, Pope Leo XIII followed the example of Popes Eugene IV (1435), Paul III (1537), Gregory XIV (1591), Urban VIII (1639), Benedict XIV (1741), and Gregory XVI (1839), published an encyclical *Catholicae Ecclesiae* which repeated with clarity and insistence the condemnation of the slave system. The fact that Popes had been condemning the system for more than 455 years – even before the Europeans knew that there were continents in the New World – would have instilled more zeal in these missionaries to dedicate themselves wholeheartedly to this mission of ransoming. Apart from repeating the condemnation of the slave system, the encyclical walked in the same path travelled by the previous Popes by encouraging Catholics to undertake the work of evangelization and conversion of the Africans.

This evangelizing mission amongst the *anawim of Yahweh* would not have been an easy mission. However, everyone could agree that it was a noble mission for a just cause. By rendering Jesus present in virtue of the Eucharistic celebration, it was an evangelizing mission through which the 'Word' became flesh and chose his dwelling place within the existential situation of the people. The effort to ransom was essentially making visible the true contours of the mission of the Church: the Church was to help those who were desperately in need because the desperately needy resemble the poor and suffering Founder of the Church, Jesus himself.

The act of ransoming from physical slavery bears witness to the act of Jesus Christ when by pouring out his blood he ransoms us from the slavery of sin. In 1 Corinthians 6:20, the Apostle Paul

Paraguay, during the 17th and 18th centuries (J. BAUR, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa*, 230).

¹⁵ L. MALISHI, *A History of the Catholic Church in Tanzania*, 14-15.

¹⁶ C.E. SAHLBERG, *Historia ya Kanisa Tanzania*, 15.

reminds us: “You were bought with a price.” Just as these ex-slaves experienced and witnessed what it meant to be under slavery and what it meant to be freed by means of a paid ransom, Christ’s action of ransoming invigorates the person with the breath of that freedom from the chains and scourges of oppression, the freedom that by the breath of the Holy Spirit laces together the bonds of brotherhood with Jesus.

No wonder that it was possible to settle together as a community of Christian villages where freedom did not imply laxity, but, rather, a commitment to a noble cause. They learned the art of reading and writing, building, tailoring, carpentry, farming, together with other legitimate arts and trades. It is noteworthy to mention that as a vivid symbol of their transformation and orientation towards productivity, these ex-slave Christians in Bagamoyo cultivated the first coffee plantation in East Africa. Thus, their Christianity, which can easily stand forth as a model for our contemporary Church, corresponded handsomely to St. Paul’s exhortation that calls for productive work in order to inculcate a desire for interpersonal responsibility in a spirit of solidarity, for self-reliance within one’s realm of responsibility and a communal interdependence, that is to say, a desire for the mutual sharing that typifies the brotherhood and sisterhood characteristic of a world that has been transformed into the Family of God (cf. 2 Thes 3:7-12).

4. Concretizing the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy

Drawing from Jesus’ depiction of the Last Judgment in Matthew 25:31-46, the Church’s tradition has developed and recognized the works of mercy as binding for each and every Christian. Before proceeding on how the pioneering missionaries as well as the present Church of Tanzania has concretized them, it is essential just to remind ourselves of these works of mercy, which are as follows:

The Corporal Works of Mercy	The Spiritual Works of Mercy
to feed the hungry	to counsel the doubtful
to give drink to the thirsty	to instruct the ignorant

to clothe the naked	to admonish the sinner
to shelter the homeless	to comfort the sorrowful
to visit the sick	to forgive all injuries
to visit the imprisoned	to bear wrongs patiently
to bury the dead	to pray for the living and the dead

Right from her beginnings in Tanzania, the Catholic Church has considered it to be her holy and moral obligation to practice the works of mercy and to give her unflagging energy to exhort others to put these works of mercy into action.

In an article *My Experience with the Swiss Missionaries*, the late Msgr. Callistus Mdoi of Mahenge Diocese indicated how the missionaries have been the main resource for the indigenous people. The people came to the mission not only for spiritual matters but also for education, health services, work, food (in times of scarcity), to mail letters, to open savings accounts, and so forth. They provided all these services as a resolute commitment to work for the salvation and uplift of the whole person: spiritually, physically and socially.¹⁷ Today, the Tanzanian Church can feel grateful that she has perpetuated and brought into concrete realization the works of mercy established by Jesus Christ, introduced to this land by the missionaries. We are witnesses of the transformative power of these works and how they have exerted an impact on our contemporary society.

5. Evangelize Africa with Africans:¹⁸ The Establishment and Recruitment of Co-Workers

Truly, the Holy Spirit blows wherever He wills; and He works in ways known to himself alone. St. Peter was a witness to the

¹⁷ C. MDAL, “My Experience with the Swiss Missionaries”, in M. HALLER-DIRR, ed., *75...: 75 Years Baldegg Sisters, Capuchin Brothers in Tanzania*, Lucerne: Swiss Capuchin Province 1997, 32.

¹⁸ This is the most popular motto used by St. Daniel Comboni (10th March 1831 – 10th October 1881), an Italian Roman Catholic bishop who served in the missions in Africa (mainly Sudan). He founded the Religious Congregation of the Comboni Missionaries of the Heart of Jesus (*Missionarii Comboniani Cordis Iesu*, MCCJ) in Central Africa (1867), commonly referred to as Comboni Missionaries. He saw that for the evangelization mission to be successful in Africa, the indigenous were to be fully involved. The editor

mysterious ways of the Holy Spirit as he recounted before the Jerusalem Council the events that had taken place during his evangelization amongst the Gentiles (cf. Acts 10:44-48; 11:1-18). Through the Spirit-filled word of the Gospel, Jesus had the capacity to transform the lives of the ‘pagans’ so that they became instruments of the Gospel. This is the same Spirit by whom Jesus touched and inspired the early missionaries to inaugurate the mission in the land of what I would prefer to term as that of the ‘Neo-Gentiles,’ i.e., those who had not yet received the message of the good news (Gospel) of our Lord Jesus Christ. Just as St. Paul did, the early missionaries brought and planted the seed of the Word in this land. Then the next concern was: Who was to be the ‘Apollos’ to water and tend that seed for its perpetuation? (cf. 1 Cor 3:6). That concern pointed to the fact that there was a crucial need for co-workers to labour in the vineyard.

A situation similar to the one that prevailed in the Primitive Church resurfaced. Just as the elders of the Primitive Church had to be on their guard against presuming that they held a monopoly on the Holy Spirit, the early missionaries had to be alert to any tendency towards the same short-sighted manner of viewing the evangelical reality. The indispensable need for co-workers, on the one hand, and the disturbing tendency to doubt the working and promptings of the Holy Spirit, on the other hand, were provoking tension and conflict. However, the decision that seemed risky to some of incorporating the indigenous had to be made forthrightly and put into action without compromise. During his homily on the occasion of the Eucharistic celebration in honour of the national centenary of the priesthood in Tanzania, Bishop Method Kilaini expressed his gratitude to Bishop John Joseph Hirth for promoting the idea of Africans becoming priests in spite of the opposition that he met from his fellow missionaries.¹⁹

notes that this conviction coheres quite splendidly with that of St. Francis Xavier in India who lived always with the motto, “Evangelize India with Indians.” St. Francis Xavier is the patron saint of missionaries.

¹⁹ S. PELAJI, *Church Celebrates 100 Years of Tanzanian Catholic Priests*, Vatican Radio: (20 Aug 2017), http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2017/08/20/church_celebrates_100_years_of_tanzanian_catholic_priests/1331824 [accessed 15 Feb 2018].

The incorporation of the laity as co-workers in the evangelization mission seemed not to have been as rough a road as compared to the incorporation of the local people into the clerical state. As early as 1875, there were already lay people serving as catechists and teachers. They were the ones who assisted in the planting and nurturing of God's Word amongst their fellows.

One name to be mentioned is that of Philip Mzouako, who hailed from Morogoro and received instruction from the Holy Ghost Fathers. He became the first African Brother on the mainland.²⁰ On the female side, the Sisters who were part of the pioneering personnel belonged to the Congregation of the Daughters of Mary. Their mission was to enable girls of 'humble origin' – former slaves – to join religious life and become missionaries to the homeland of their ancestors.²¹ If today we were to assess the success of evangelization in terms of numbers, we would all have to take notice that Catholic Sisters far outnumber Catholic Fathers and Brothers in all corners of the country.

As far as the clergy are concerned, we may apply Nathanael's quizzical attitude about Nazareth in John 1:46, "Can something good come out of Nazareth?" to the same kind of attitude towards our country, "Can anything good come from Tanganyika?" This assessment seemed to have prevailed for nearly half a century. To reach the level at which an indigenous Tanzanian could gain and win the trust of the missionaries and assure them that God was calling them to be clerics was never an easy task, let alone the subsequent labours to form and ordain those first indigenous priests.

In his article entitled *Our Hope is Rooted in What God has Done and Will Do*, one of the first indigenous Capuchin priests in Tanzania, the Rev. Prof. William Ngowi, OFMCap, dedicated a section to the discussion of "Doubt Regarding the Holy Spirit". Reflecting within the Capuchin context of the 1960's, he suggests that in the situation of the time, the missionaries were considered to have undergone a "kenosis," i.e. a self-emptying; a humble, poor self-abasement by their decision to come to an unknown continent,

²⁰ C.E. SAHLBERG, *Historia ya Kanisa Tanzania*, 17.

²¹ J. BAUR, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa*, 226.

i.e., Africa. On the contrary, the African Religious Brother was rightly considered as being “promoted and exalted,” becoming richer, better educated, and more influential among his peers by joining the Capuchin Order.

Ngowi suggests that this is why there were some doubts in those days as to whether the poor Africans could effectively and peacefully live as Capuchins at all. This sad episode, as he notes, was actually rooted in the socio-historical situation of the time, a backlash, so to speak, against the Holy Spirit, who eventually always wins.²² This contextual analysis of the Capuchins regarding the early stages of recruitment could not be much different from that of the milieu of other early missionaries.

A critical assessment of this scenario leads us to conclude that the source of this tendency to doubt the Holy Spirit was dualistic in nature. The first fear could be traced to the short-sighted attitude of the missionaries themselves who harboured reservations about approving an indigenous Tanzanian to undergo a process of “kenosis” and transformation so as to become a priest. On the other hand, the indigenous people themselves had a mere skin-deep understanding of the clerical state as a special privilege of a secular or social nature, not necessarily as a vocation of a religious character. The one becoming a priest was considered to be joining the company of the white missionaries who were on a par with the colonialists and enjoyed the same rights and privileges as the colonialists. Therefore, malicious rumours spread concerning those who were applying for the priesthood at that time. This has happened even in our contemporary society where one can find this socio-secular conception of priesthood still persisting.

Today, the meaning of 150 years of evangelization as well as the 101 years of priesthood of the indigenous in Tanzania, has not yet completely crystallized in the minds of some: there are still some who seem to doubt the Holy Spirit. It is a sad phenomenon that still exists: several individuals view priesthood as an institution that solely enables one to acquire social prestige alongside

²² W. NGOWI, “Our Hope is Rooted in What God has Done and Will Do”, in M. HALLER-DIRR, ed., *75...: 75 Years Baldegg Sisters, Capuchin Brothers in Tanzania*, Lucerne: Swiss Capuchin Province 1997, 113.

economic security. This secular-materialistic approach often overrules the underlying spirit of priesthood which is service to the point of giving up one’s life: “not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matt 20:28).

The failure to grasp this essential element of service that flows from the *kenosis* has negative repercussions because it hinders the mission of evangelization in our contemporary society. The spirit of self-emptying (*kenosis*), very crucial for the priest, seems to have been overtaken and replaced by the desire for self-satisfaction and self-fulfilment. As a consequence, the required priest’s dedication to dare and take up the evangelization mission in the outskirts and rural areas (commonly referred in a joking manner as *porini* meaning ‘in the bush’) is compromised and never received with joy. This might be one of the reasons behind the usual Swahili saying *Mapadre walikuwa zamani* – “Priests were those in the olden times”.

However, this situation does not lead us to despair or to the thought that the work of evangelization is heading towards a disaster that sooner or later will lead to its cessation. Not at all! We confidently thank God who, as the Lord of the harvest, has continuously sent “labourers into his harvest” for the past 101 years (Matt 9:38; Luke 10:2); he “never ceases to gather a people to himself.”²³ It was a humble beginning on the 15th of August, 1917, when only the first four indigenous priests were ordained: Fathers Celestine Kipanda, Angelo Mwirabure, Oscar Kyakaraba, and Willibard Mupapi. The Tanzanian Catholic Church today can gratefully boast of having a great number of priests. According to the statistics of August 2017, the Church enjoys the gift of more than 3,316 priests serving in various regions of the country.²⁴ Most of these work in difficult and challenging conditions.

Presently, there are still places where the basic social services like good roads, running water, electricity, and viable health facilities, not to mention other essential social services are still

²³ The Epiiclesis of the Eucharistic Prayer III.

²⁴ S. PELAJI, *Church Celebrates 100 Years of Tanzanian Catholic Priests*, Vatican Radio: (20 Aug 2017), http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2017/08/20/church_celebrates_100_years_of_tanzanian_catholic_priests/1331824 [accessed 15 Feb 2018].

a dream in the minds of the inhabitants. Those are the places where the Church has dared to reach and touch the lives of the people. The late Msgr. Callistus Mdai quoted one of the country's top-ranking leaders who, having visited Taweta, one of the peripheral parishes in the diocese of Mahenge, showed great appreciation. He exclaimed: "So you [missionaries] are the only ones who have come all the way out here to be with the people!"²⁵

This is truly the situation in many parts of our country. The mission of evangelization has brought the Catholic Church to places where government services are not yet in place. Suffice it to mention Gunyoda Parish in Mbulu, Ndongosi Parish in Songea, Sali Parish in Mahenge, Singisa Parish in Morogoro, Kiseriani Parish in Arusha, and Chipongolo Parish in Dodoma as a few concrete examples. This shows how the involvement of indigenous co-workers has and is still contributing to the mission of evangelizing. These challenging, difficult, and unfriendly conditions in the mission field gives us pause so that we may reflect thoughtfully on the situation of the Church throughout the ages.

6. The Blood of the Missionary Martyrs, the Seed of Christianity in Tanzania

St. Luke, the author of the Acts of the Apostles, narrates the aftermath of the stoning of Stephen and the ensuing persecution of the Church with the arrests that Saul was sent to make. Luke concludes his narrative with the words: "Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word" (Acts 8:4). The hostile environment that surrounded the early Church, i.e., the persecutions that were intended to suppress and completely wipe out Christianity, were, on the contrary, opportunities for the growth, the spread, and the expansion of the Church. Living at the time of the Church Fathers, the North African Tertullian summed up his reflections on martyrdom with the maxim: "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of Christianity."

The Tanzanian Church, too, has not been denied such a privilege. The hostile conditions that weighed upon the missionaries as well as the personal suffering visited upon them to

²⁵ C. MDAI, "My Experience with the Swiss Missionaries", 32.

the point of shedding their blood led to the spread of the mission of evangelization into the interior parts of mainland Tanzania.

6.1 The German Occupation and the Subsequent Arab Resistance

The arrival of the Benedictines in Tanzania was a consequence of the conflicting situation that prevailed between the Germans and the French. The Germans were suspicious of the relationship between the Holy Ghost Fathers and the White Fathers with France, which was the missionaries' home of origin. The German's decision to evict these two French missionary congregations from their territory paved a way for the third missionary congregation in the country, the Benedictines.²⁶ Therefore, the hostile situation against the French was an occasion for the Lord to send more labourers into the field (cf. Matt 9:38; Luke 10:2).

In the last months of 1888, there was a protest against the German colonial rule which started at Pangani in the Tanga region. This protest spread to the south wreaking havoc on the German establishments and commercial outposts. On January 13, 1889, the Arab insurgents and their supporters descended upon Pugu, invaded the monastery and brutally murdered three missionaries. The survivors went back to Germany only to return in November of the same year with a new strategy and a surge of zeal for missionary work and expansion.²⁷ Lukas Malishi records that after the Benedictines returned, they opted for Dar es Salaam instead of Pugu.

Within a short period of time, they opened many missions in the south: Lindi, Lukuledi, Nyangao, Peramiho, Kigonsera, and Tosamanga to mention only a few. This panorama of events reveals how the incident of the attacks and killings at Pugu was a blessing in disguise. Because the innocents shed their blood, the Benedictines extended their mission of evangelizing to the south and hence occasioned the coming of new Catholic missionaries: the Capuchin Friars who were to restore and rebuild Pugu in 1923.²⁸

²⁶ J. BAUR, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa*, 227.

²⁷ L. DOERR, "Historia Fupi", 10-11.

²⁸ L. MALISHI, *A History of the Catholic Church in Tanzania*, 20.

6.2 The Majimaji Resistance/Rising

The Majimaji resistance, directed against German colonialists, was another blow to the Christian mission, especially that of the Benedictines.²⁹ The Benedictines were targeted because they seemed to be affiliated to the German colonialists. This tragedy saw the ransacking and burning of several missions. The brutal killings of Bishop Cassian Spiss, two brothers, two sisters in Mikukuyumbu in Umitumbi, Fr. Leuthner of Kigonsera, Sr. Walburga at Nyangao, and a few African catechists, was a shocking atrocity for these agents of evangelization.³⁰ However, instead of bringing the mission of evangelization to its extinction, this tragedy brought an extraordinary revival to the work of evangelization. The missions were rebuilt; and many schools, dispensaries, and clinics were opened. To facilitate operations, the southern sector was created as a separate unit from the vicariate of Dar es Salaam on November 12, 1913 under Fr. Willibrord Lay as Prefect Apostolic. Lindi became its headquarters.³¹

Therefore, when we bring into consideration the constellation of all these events and their aftermaths, we might concur with Tertullian in affirming that the “blood of the martyrs [the pioneering Christians] has been the seed of Christianity” in Tanzania. All the hostile attacks that were directed towards the extinction of the work of evangelization, on the contrary, brought an irrefutably positive impact instead of the kind of adverse impact that those with malicious motives may have anticipated. History has proven time and time again that when persecutions seem to be relentless, the holy Church of Christ grows and spreads. Truly, the prophecy and the promise of Christ on behalf of his Church has brought to light his fidelity to his word. The powers of hell have

²⁹ The resistance, though political, also had a religious influence. According to John Baur, the so-called prophet Kinjikitile proclaimed a messianic message, announcing the golden age. According to him, after the expulsion of the foreigners the ancestors would return, wild animals would be tamed and prosperity would rule everywhere. The drinking of the miraculous medicine, *Maji maji* (super-water), would render the fighters immune to European bullets (J. BAUR, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa*, 253).

³⁰ L. DOERR, “Historia Fupi”, 14.

³¹ L. MALISHI, *A History of the Catholic Church in Tanzania*, 21.

repeatedly failed to prevail against the mission of evangelization (Matt 16:18). The Holy Spirit continues his mission of guiding and protecting (John 14:26; Acts 1:8).

7. Evangelization in the Transformation of Political Structures

One feature of any mission of evangelization is that it cannot divorce itself from politics because evangelization takes place within a society that by definition has a political dimension. From the Church’s beginnings, evangelization has usually influenced the political system just as politics has also affected evangelization. In the third chapter of his book *The Constitutional Road to Independence in Tanzania*, Albert de Jong explains in detail how the mission of evangelizing has influenced the political system, and has assisted in forming the political leadership of Tanzania up to the attainment of independence.³² Even in post-independence, the Church has always played a crucial role of being the conscience of society in order to ensure fair political governance. The third chapter of the recent Lenten message issued by the Episcopal Conference entitled, *Mimi ni Mlinzi wa Ndugu Yangu?* (“Am I my brother’s keeper?”) is tangible evidence of the Church’s role in forming consciences in the field of politics.³³

8. The Evangelization Mission in the Face of Inculturation

The fact that the Church is dynamic, “always in need of renewal” (LG 15), reminds us that the work of evangelization has not reached its completion. The continual changes in our societies present various new challenges for the Church to face and address. This means that the work of evangelization must allow itself to be invigorated anew by the Holy Spirit to meet such challenges.

³² A. De JONG, *Mission and Politics in Eastern Africa: Dutch Missionaries and African Nationalism in Kenya, Tanzania and Malawi 1945–1965*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications 2000, 115-203.

³³ TANZANIA EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE, *Ujumbe wa Kwaresma 2018: Basi Enendeni, Mkawafanye Mataifa Yote Kuwa Wanafunzi Wangu*, Dar es Salaam: TEC 2018, 11-13.

In an article *Kanisa la Wamisionari kuwa Kanisa la Mahalia*, Walbert Buhlmann, OFMCap, a missiologist who worked in Tanzania between 1950 and 1953, presents how the Church in Tanzania has drastically grown and expanded in terms of the increased number of Christians, indigenous clergy (priests, bishops, and one cardinal) and religious, as well as the various physical structures required for Church life. This is a great source of pride. However, he observed that economic self-reliance and self-sustenance have proceeded at a snail's pace resulting in a continuing dependence on foreign resources. Even the aspect of inculturation (*utamaduni na utamadunisho*) leaves much to be desired.³⁴ There is a need for renewed effort so that we should not only have the "Church in Tanzania" but actually have a true "Tanzanian Church".

As much as we appreciate the unflagging evangelizing efforts of the early missionaries in establishing the Church that was to become self-sufficient in the future, for their part, they were limited in their attempts to reconcile the cultural gaps. Due to their inability to detach themselves from the cultural habits and mindsets of their homes of origin, the mission lands tended to become extensions of what was happening in the countries they came from. Consequently, the Church in Tanzania was deemed as a foreign religion, a religion of the white man, not in touch with the existential situation of the indigenous. In that context, syncretism seemed to become the order of the day; a person could be a Christian as well as a practitioner of the traditional religions. In many cases, Christianity became shallow, only skin-deep. This is the reason why for the past half a century, inculturation/adaptation has been one of the most prominent notions for the various churches in Africa in the effort of building a Church that is truly African.³⁵

However, this notion of inculturation has proven to be problematic when it comes to its application in concrete situations.

³⁴ W. BUHLMANN, "Kanisa la Wamisionari kuwa Kanisa la Mahalia", in M. HALLER-DIRR, ed., *75...: 75 Years Baldegg Sisters, Capuchin Brothers in Tanzania*, Lucerne: Swiss Capuchin Province 1997, 153.

³⁵ E. MONTEIRO, *Church and Culture: Communion in Pluralism*, Delhi: ISPCK 2004, 148-149.

The basic misapprehension lies in the desire to shift almost the entire body of elements of the local traditional practices into the Christian worship.³⁶ It is true that the general principle for inculturation is to have a mutual dialogue between the Gospel and the indigenous culture, but the fact remains that it is the Gospel has to penetrate and transform the culture, not the other way around (SC 37-38).

Indeed, the *theandric*, that is to say, the Divine-human nature of the liturgy entails the need to awaken in people's consciousness the entry of Christ into human history. He is the incarnate God who comes to transform history and endow it with a salvific influx of grace (cf. SC 5). Inculturation implies allowing Christ to enter into and illumine our specific cultures, to transform them so that we may find in them the essential truths of salvation (cf. LG 16). Hence, if we really appreciate Vatican II's resolution to open the door for Christianity to interact with local cultures, we will perceive the need for a prudent critique as to which elements are to enter into the Christian liturgy. There are some practices that are culturally significant but liturgically and theologically meaningless. Therefore, an intelligent assessment on the part of Tanzanian theologians (cf. SC 19) to lead and direct the entire people of God into selecting and adapting the right means and methods is obligatory.

9. The Prevalent Challenges of Evangelization in Today's Tanzania

The Tanzanian Church today is faced with several challenges that are theological, social, economic, moral, and/or spiritual in nature. Theologically, one of the persistent challenges has been syncretism, i.e., the mixture of Christian belief with the traditional indigenous beliefs. The end result is that we end up having individuals who are Christians in daylight and 'pagans' during the night. Alongside syncretism, religious exploitation, which is the consequence of shallowness in faith and the product of the "gospel of prosperity," is another challenge. There are so many fluctuating

³⁶ D.N. POWER, *Worship: Culture and Theology*, Washington, D.C.: The Pastoral Press 1990, 68-70.

Christians who are easily “led astray by all sorts of strange doctrines” (Heb 13:9). These are the Christians who usually strive to remain in their comfort zones and are never ready to associate themselves with the Crucified Lord.

Secularism is another great challenge which seems to be contaminating the consciences of most Tanzanians. This is a tendency by which religion is deemed to be an outdated phenomenon. In his presentation during the diocesan celebrations of the World Day for the Consecrated in Morogoro Diocese under the theme, *Umisionari: Toka Awali Hadi Sasa na Changamoto Zake* [“Missionary Work: From the Beginning up to the Present and its Challenges”], Fr. Pius Onyango, CSSp, concentrated much on the challenge of secularism. He pointed out that due to technology, the world has become a “village,” having a ‘global culture’ (*utamaduni mmoja wa ulimwengu nzima*). In this culture, religion becomes a distant second in the life of the people and there exists an aggressive desire for the promotion of secular affairs that eclipses the interest in matters concerning religion. Consequently, it is a ‘village’ in which most people have lost hope. The new evangelization calls us to address these challenges: how can we bring Christ to the culture of this ‘global village’ which is hostile to religion and inclined towards discouragement, disillusionment, disappointment and despair?³⁷

Summary

As we look behind us and appreciate the great work and sacrifices that typify the missionaries up to the present, we have good reason to celebrate the achievements of the mission of evangelization. Amidst all the challenges that have accompanied her throughout the decades, the Tanzanian Church has made tremendous steps forward. However, in the midst of all these foreseen and unforeseen challenges, our Lord Jesus now seems to be inviting the Tanzanian Church to learn from the past, and to find new ways of making known to our contemporaries his message, the salvific message of the Gospel. The diverse social groups of our

³⁷ P. ONYANGO, “Watawa na Utume Siku Hizi”, Presentation to the Religious, St. Ann Sec. School, Morogoro, 3 Feb 2018.

contemporary society need special forms of evangelization that can carry Jesus' message to them as he, Jesus, wishes.

New forms of evangelization have to touch the young and the poor of our society. The new evangelization has to attend to special groups of people who are often marginalized: the handicapped, the blind, the street children, the unemployed, vulnerable women, prisoners, HIV/AIDS victims, prostitutes, the drug addicts and all the other groups that find themselves on the margins. To such groups of people, the new evangelization has to bring the message of Jesus Christ in a way that will reawaken their hope. As the celebrations of the 150 years of evangelization in Tanzania reach a climax, it becomes an occasion for us like it did for Isaiah, who heard the concern of the Triune God and responded "Here I am! Send me" (Isa 6:8).

We are celebrating joyfully the faith that has been handed down to us through all these years. Now a question arises that demands a thoughtful reflection on our part: "When the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?" (Luke 18:8). In other words, will the coming generations be proud of us for handing down the faith to them? Will they themselves be living that faith with vigour? St Francis of Assisi's call for a continual renewal in the approach of evangelization befits our situation, when he says: "Brothers, up to now we have done so little. Let us begin afresh!" May this jubilee enkindle in us that same zeal to say: "Brothers and Sisters, up to now we have not gone far enough. Let us rise up and go with vigour until we meet them and commune with them where they live!"

Bibliography

- BAUR, J., *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa: An African History 62 – 1992*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications 1994.
- BUHLMANN, W., "Kanisa la Wamisionari kuwa Kanisa la Mahalia", in M. HALLER-DIRR, ed., *75...: 75 Years Baldegg Sisters, Capuchin Brothers in Tanzania*, Lucerne: Swiss Capuchin Province 1997, 152-153.
- De JONG, A., *Mission and Politics in Eastern Africa: Dutch Missionaries and African Nationalism in Kenya, Tanzania and Malawi 1945–1965*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications 2000.

- DOERR, L., “Historia Fupi: Wamisionari WaBenediktini Kusini mwa Tanzania hadi Vita Kuu ya Kwanza ya Dunia”, in P.G. RUPPER, ed., *Pugu Hadi Peramiho: Miaka 100 ya Wamisionari WaBenediktini katika Tanzania – Historia na Masimulizi*, Peramiho: Benedictine Publications Ndanda 1988, 9-33.
- MALISHI, L., *A History of the Catholic Church in Tanzania*, Peramiho: Benedictine Publications Ndanda 1990.
- MDAI, C., “My Experience with the Swiss Missionaries”, in M. HALLER-DIRR, ed., *75...: 75 Years Baldegg Sisters, Capuchin Brothers in Tanzania*, Lucerne: Swiss Capuchin Province 1997, 32-33.
- MONTEIRO, E., *Church and Culture: Communion in Pluralism*, Delhi: ISPCK 2004.
- NGOWI, W., “Our Hope is Rooted in What God has Done and Will Do”, in M. HALLER-DIRR, ed., *75...: 75 Years Baldegg Sisters, Capuchin Brothers in Tanzania*, Lucerne: Swiss Capuchin Province 1997, 112-114.
- ONYANGO, P., “Watawa na Utume Siku Hizi”, Presentation to the Religious, St. Ann Sec. School, Morogoro, 3 Feb 2018.
- PELAJI, S., *Church Celebrates 100 Years of Tanzanian Catholic Priests*, Vatican Radio: (20 Aug 2017), http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2017/08/20/church_celebrates_100_years_of_tanzanian_catholic_priests/1331824 [accessed 15 Feb 2018].
- POWER, D.N., *Worship: Culture and Theology*, Washington, D.C.: The Pastoral Press 1990.
- SAHLBERG, C.E., *Historia ya Kanisa Tanzania 1600 – 1985*, Nairobi: Scripture Mission 1987.
- SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *Lumen Gentium: The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* (21 Nov 1964), Nairobi: Paulines 2013.
- , *Sacrosanctum Concilium: The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* (4 Dec 1963), Nairobi: Paulines 2013.

TANZANIA EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE, *Ujumbe wa Kwaresma 2018: Basi Enendeni, Mkawafanye Mataifa Yote Kuwa Wanafunzi Wangu*, Dar es Salaam: TEC 2018.