

THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH TO EDUCATION IN
MAKENI

Paper presented

at

The Tertiary Education Commission Book Fair

by

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on

26th March, 2011

at

University of Makeni, Fatima Campus, Makeni City

Introduction

When I started working on this material, my hope was to present a brief exposition of the contribution of the Catholic Church to education, in Makeni, which includes not only the activities of Priests and Religious but also the ministry of the Lay Faithful. It was part of my hope also to deal in brief the beginnings of the Church in Makeni particularly as this history is related to the history of the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone. This draft indicates very well that this can be done, at least by an insider.

In any case there are few basic clarifications I would like to make before proceeding:

- that the type of education we shall be discussing is the integral type that encompasses all facets of life.
- that I shall limit my exposition only to Makeni.
- that the approach is neither chronological nor statistical; it is strictly moral.

A brief historical background

Under the leadership of Fr. Augustus Fermo Azzolini, a new set of missionaries entered the region of Makeni on Saturday the 8th of July 1950.¹ These were Xaverian Priests founded by Blessed Conforti who chose for his members the motto: “*Caritas Christi Urget Nos*”.²

Before this time, the Holy Ghost Missionaries had already pitched their tent in Makeni. They engaged themselves in various pastoral activities until on

¹ Cf. GHIZZO Amedeo, *Augustus Azzolini: Da Roccabianca a Makeni*, Monte Università, Parma – Italy 2008, pg. 116.

² On the 30th March, 1865 Guido Maria Conforti was born at Casalora di Ravadese (a village few miles from the town of Parma, in the diocese of Parma in Italy). He founded the Xaverian Institute for the Foreign Missions in 1895, after obtaining the consent of *Propaganda Fide* (currently the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples) and his Bishop. Cf. CAMERA Guglielmo, *Profile of Blessed Guido Maria Conforti*, Postilazione Saveriana, Italy 2010.

the 8th of May 1951 when they handed over the territory to the newly arrived Xaverian Missionaries.

Despite the fact that there were missionaries before the coming of the Xaverians to Makeni, the ecclesial dimension still needed some formidable catechism. The uniqueness of Jesus Christ and his missionary mandate was not properly understood and established. Upon their arrival these new Missionaries were very urgent to learn, teach and establish strong Catholicity. They divided themselves into two groups: Frs. Stephani and Olivani went to Lunsar while Frs. Azzolini and Calza entered the Makeni region.

Frs. Azzolini and Calza, who were in charge of Makeni, started the fortification of the establishment of the Church by the use of the pastoral approach. With this form of evangelization, they were very quick to identify the following: that there was the need of a direct contact with the already existing Christian Families; there was the task of promoting Christian Marriages; the sanitary situation also needed attention; there were also the youth to be catechized, and many more. This approach of availability and openness made a colossal difference towards the relationship between the inhabitants and the Missionaries.

Another great event that contributed greatly to the establishment of a new presence in Makeni was the death of the Bishop of Freetown, Monsignor Ambrose Kelly, on the 12th of February, 1952.³ This sad event gave a frantic push to the Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith, in Rome, to propose to the Pope for the creation of a new Apostolic Prefecture.⁴

On the 3th of April 1952, Pope Pius XII declared Makeni an Apostolic Prefecture with Fr. Azzolini as Care-taker.⁵ This position was carefully handled

³ Cf. CAGLIONI Gerardo, *Sierra Leone: Quattro Secoli Di Evangelizzazione*, Editrice Missionaria Italiana, Italy 2002.

⁴ Up to this date in history the region of Makeni was still under the Diocese of Freetown and Bo.

⁵ Cf. GHIZZO Amedeo, *Augustus Azzolini: Da Roccabianca a Makeni*, Monte Università, Parma – Italy 2008, pg. 130-132.

until on the 19th of July 1952 when he was officially appointed Apostolic Prefect of Makeni.

Monsignor Azzolini,⁶ being a man of fervent sense of responsibility for the spiritual and material welfare of the people of God entrusted to him, did not close the Apostolic Territory of Makeni only to the Xaverian Missionaries. When he realized the limitations of his Confreres, as were dictated by the situation, he did not hesitate to call on some other missionary groups (male and female) for collaboration.

As years of pastoral activities went by a new set of Missionaries – this time a female group – finally entered the territory of Makeni on the 11th of January 1956 after so much time of expectation. These were The St. Joseph of Cluny Sisters led by Mother Leo. This group of female missionaries entered the town of Makeni when most of the needed structures were under construction. Upon their arrival a house was rented for them as their convent.⁷ After ten months of orientation, adaptation and preparation the St. Joseph of Cluny Sisters started a school with 80 girls of which three were Catholics.⁸ Their convent was later finished and inaugurated on the 8th of December 1956.

The spirit of collaboration and active participation was not only extended to foreign missionary groups. Monsignor Azzolini, in 1955, built the Pastoral Centre for the training of Pastoral Personnel. He also embarked on the formation of the Diocesan Clergy. Already in 1951 he had thought of the formation of the Diocesan but this dream was never actualized until on the 11th of February, 1956 when he officially opened a small Junior Seminary with five Seminarians. A few weeks later, in the same month, in the same Pastoral Centre, the St. Augustine Teachers College was opened.⁹ These works of the Church in Makeni which considered strongly the formation and the fortification

⁶ When Fr. Azzolini was made Apostolic Prefecture he acquired a new title called *Monsignor*.

⁷ According to local sources the house belonged to a Lebanese man by the name of Haroun.

⁸ Cf. GHIZZO Amedeo, *Augustus Azzolini: Da Roccabianca a Makeni*, Monte Università, Parma – Italy 2008, pg. 168.

⁹ Cf. Ghizzo Amedeo, *Augustus Azzolini: Da Roccabianca a Makeni*, Monte Università, Parma – Italy 2008.

of the Diocesan Clergy, the Christian Families and Teachers for the schools, gave a very big signal to the secure new beginnings that provoked a strong sense of hope.

On Schools/Institutions:

There were two primary schools in the territory of Makeni when the First Xaverian Missionaries arrived : one in Makeni and one in Lunsar.¹⁰ At the beginning of his task as Apostolic Prefect in Makeni, Monsignor Azzolini wrote a letter to the then Superior General, Fr. Giovanni Gazza, explaining why his priority was strongly laid on schools. Monsignor Azzolini was strongly convinced that school administration was a correct way forward at the time. He is even believed to have said that “...schools are the first seeds of our Christians...”¹¹

Bishop George Biguzzi, the present Bishop of the Diocese of Makeni, took canonical possession of the Diocese on the 6th January, 1987. Since then the Church in Makeni has been experiencing a peaceful and steady growth in the orb of education.

The paramount importance of education in people’s lives and its ever-growing influence on the social progress of the age are matters to which the Church in Makeni has given careful consideration. In fact, the education of youth, and indeed a certain on-going education of adults, have been rendered both easier and more necessary by the circumstances of our times.

As they become more conscious of their own dignity and responsibility, people are keen to take an increasingly active role in social life and especially in the economic and political spheres. The wonderful progress in technical skills and scientific enquiry and the new means of social communication give people the opportunity of enjoying more leisure and of availing themselves of their

¹⁰ Ibid. 260-262.

¹¹ Cf. *Sierra Leone: Ricominciare Dopo 50 Anni – 50 Anni di Presenza Saveriana in Sierra Leone, in Commix n.113 (Lug. / ago./ 2000), pg. 16).*

birthright of culture of mind and spirit and of finding fulfillment in closer relations with other groups and nations. Accordingly, the Church has made efforts everywhere in Makeni to ensure a continuing development of education. The fundamental rights which people, and especially children and parents, have in regard to education are being affirmed and made a matter of public record. As the number of pupils is rapidly increasing, schools are being established far and wide, and other scholastic institutions are being opened. Methods of education instruction are being developed by new experiments, and great efforts are being made to provide these services for all, although many children and young people are still without even elementary education, and many others are deprived of a suitable education that inculcates simultaneously truth and charity.

For her part the Church, in order to fulfill the mandate she received from her divine founder to announce the mystery of salvation to all and to renew all things in Christ, is committed to promoting people's welfare through their entire lives, including their lives on earth insofar as it is related to their heavenly vocation; she has therefore a part to play in the development and extension of education. Therefore, due weight has been given to the advances in psychological, pedagogical and intellectual sciences. Children and young people have been helped to develop harmoniously their physical, moral and intellectual qualities. They have been trained to acquire a more perfect sense of responsibility in the proper development of their own lives by constant effort and in the pursuit of liberty, overcoming obstacles with unwavering courage and perseverance. They have also received a positive and prudent sex education. Moreover they have been taught to take part in the life of society, that having been duly trained in essential and useful skills, they may be able to participate actively in the life of society in its various aspects. They have been prepared to be opened to dialogue with others and willingly devote themselves to the promotion of the common good.

It is a common belief that true education should always aim to give people a formation which is directed towards their final end and the good of that society to which they belong and in which, as adults, they will have their share of duties to perform. Similarly, the Church has always affirmed that children, young people and old people have the right to be stimulated to make sound moral judgments based on a well formed conscience and to put them into practice with a sense of personal commitment, and to know and love God perfectly.

Accordingly the Church always asks all those who are involved in civil administration or in education to ensure that young people are never deprived of this sacred right. The Church therefore urges her sons and daughters to give their services generously in the whole field of education, especially with the aim of extending more rapidly the benefits of suitable education and instruction throughout the world.

Education is, in a very special way the concern of the Church, not only because the Church must be recognized as a human society capable of imparting education, but especially because she has the duty of proclaiming the way of salvation to all, of revealing the life of Christ to those who believe, and of assisting them with unremitting care so that they may be able to attain to the fullness of that life. In the exercise of her functions in education, the Church has always been appreciative of every means that may be of service, but relies especially on those which are essentially her own. The Church also values highly those other educational media which belong to our common inheritance and which make a valuable contribution to the development of character and to people's formation.

Acknowledging her grave obligation to see to the moral and religious education of all people, the Church has given special attention and help to the great number of people who are being taught in non-catholic schools. This is done by the living example of those who teach and have charge of these people

and by the apostolic action of their fellow students, but especially by the efforts of those priests, religious and lay faithful who teach them Christian Doctrine in a manner suited to their age and background and who provide them with spiritual help by means of various activities adapted to the requirements of time and circumstance.

The Church likewise continuously devotes considerable care to higher-level of education, especially in the University (UNIMAK). Indeed in all the institutions under her control the Church endeavors systematically to ensure that the treatment of the individual disciplines is in consonant with their own principles, their own methods, and with a true liberty, of scientific enquiry. Her object is that a progressively deeper understanding of them may be achieved, and by a careful attention to the current problems of this changing times and to the research being undertaken, the convergence of faith and reason in the one truth may be seen more clearly. This method follows the tradition of the Doctors of the Church and especially St. Thomas Aquinas. Thus, the Christian outlook should acquire, as it were, a process of the promotion of higher culture. The graduates of these institutes should be outstanding in learning, ready to undertake the more responsible duties of society, and to be witnesses in the world to the true faith. Although Catholic institutions may vary in kind from place to place, all schools which are in a way dependent on the Church are regularly asked to conform as far as possible to this prototype.

Conclusion

In concluding this presentation I would like to map out some truths and facts that have become challenges for the orb of education in Makeni.

The social changes in the years since the war have been enormous. The Church has experienced changes in work patterns, in residential stability, in style of housing, in sexual mores, in dress, in manners, in language, in music, in entertainment, and - perhaps most important of all – in family arrangements.

While schools have responded, albeit sluggishly, to technological changes with various additions to curriculum and narrowly prescribed methods of instruction, they have largely ignored massive social changes. When they have responded they have done so in piecemeal fashion, addressing isolated bits of the problem.

At the present time it is obvious that the Church's main educational purpose is to teach all students to learn to care for other human beings, and all must find an ultimate concern in some centre of care: care for self, for intimate others, for associates and acquaintances, for distant others, for animals, for plants and the physical environment, for objects and instruments, and for ideas. Within each of these centres, we can find many themes on which to build courses, topical seminars, projects, reading lists and dialogue.