

Xaverian Mission Schools in Sierra Leone – An assessment

(by Matugas Buhawe Fr. Vivinio, sx)

Introduction.

There are four Dioceses in Sierra Leone – Freetown, Bo, Kenema and Makeni. They constitute the local Church. Each Diocese is under the umbrella of the Catholic Mission. The Catholic Mission is the juridical body in the Local Church and the Legal body in the Sierra Leone government. Aside from the Catholic Church, there are other Christian Churches and Denominations and Islamic Institutions as well working in Sierra Leone. All these institutions have established many schools in the country. They worked with the Government in the service of the people. All the schools established by the aforementioned institutions are categorized by the Government as “Mission Schools”.

In the Catholic Mission, each Diocese administers hundreds of Primary and Secondary schools. These schools are called Mission Schools under the umbrella of the Catholic Mission. Basically, all the Parishes in all the four Dioceses in the country have many schools attached to them. These Schools both Primary and Secondary are called Government Assisted Schools. This means that the proprietorship/ownership/administrations of these schools are the Catholic Missions through the Diocese whom the bishop is the Chief Proprietor, while the salaries of the teachers and the approval of the schools and other legal amenities come from the government.

The Xaverian Mission of Sierra Leone.

When the late Bishop Azzolini became an Apostolic Prefect of Makeni in 1952, he prioritized three objectives for the Mission Apostolate. They were Education, Foundation of Churches, Works of Charity¹. Henceforth, the past Xaverian fathers employed building of schools, creation of Christian communities and build churches and works of charity as their methods and means of evangelization in order to enter into the local realities. Through building of schools, the Catholic Mission helped concretely the moral, social and economic development of the local people. Bishop Azzolini said, “education is the future of the Church and the Future Christianity in Sierra Leone”². After 10 years (1952-1962), when the Apostolic Prefecture of Makeni elevated to Diocese, the Catholic Mission in the north were able to build 40 Primary schools and 2 Secondary schools³. The Commissioner of Makeni praised the Catholic Mission’s performance⁴.

On those years in terms of Schools the Xaverian Fathers have direct link and contact with the government. We have to remember that the provinces of the country were under British Protectorate⁵. The system of governance was not exactly the same as of today. The mission schools established by the Xaverian Missionaries contribute to the development of the country. In fact, many government leaders in Sierra Leone today here and abroad were educated by the Catholic Mission. From then on until at present, the Catholic Mission Schools take a big portion in our apostolate.

From 1962-72, the Catholic Mission of the Diocese of Makeni were able to establish three big secondary schools in the north. Namely: St. Francis Junior and Secondary School in Makeni, Kolentin Junior and Senior Secondary School in Kambia, Kabala Junior and Senior Secondary School in

¹ Gerardo Caglioni, *Sierra Leone 1605-2005. Four Centuries of Evangelization* (Makeni 2005) 45-53

² Ibidem

³ Ibidem (cf data attachments)

⁴ Ibidem

⁵ Ibidem,

Joe Alie. *History of Sierra Leone*

Koinadugu. They were the first secondary school of the north. Until today these three big Secondary Schools are the backbones of the Diocese. There was also creation of Makeni Teachers College which is now the Ernest Bai Koroma University⁶. The various Primary Schools established in the entire Diocese on the 1950`s onwards: Makeni, Lunsar, Kamalu, Mange Bureh, Magburaka, Koinadugu, Portloko, Yele, Bumban, Lungi, Yonibana. Many of these schools are now under the care of the local priests in the Diocese. On the year 2005 was the creation of the University of Makeni– the highest Tertiary learning institution established in the north through the effort of the Ret. Bishop George Biguzzi and the late President Ernst Bai Koroma.

In our mission in Sierra Leone at present with regards to the school apostolate we are following the same path that the previous Fathers handed over to us. Today, we are running four Parishes under the Diocese of Makeni. Namely: St. Conforti Parish – Makeni, St. Peter and Paul – Fadugu, Holy Martyrs of Uganda Parish – Kabala, Mary Queen of the Apostles – Mongo Bendugu. Each of these Parishes has Nursery Schools, Primary Schools and Secondary Schools. As our Parish ministry and apostolate are concerned, we Xaverians become also administrators of the schools. In our Regional Statutes we affirmed that Education through the schools is a tool for evangelization. It is because under the Catholic Mission Schools we can incorporate the Christian values, the prayers and teachings. It is an avenue for first proclamation hence majority of the children studied in the Catholic Mission schools are Muslims and from different tribes aside from the humanitarian cause. All these schools are owned by the Diocese of Makeni. We the Xaverians cannot get rid of them. The administration of the schools takes the large portion of our Parish works.

Constraints. At present time, the Catholic Mission are having problems and great difficulties to administer our Mission Schools. It is because of the change created by the government. In the past, missionaries have full control over all of the schools because the salaries of teachers were passed through the missionaries. But now, the fathers *have no hands* to any monetary funds from government whatsoever. On the other hand, the Government are very slow in approving teachers. Many teachers are not qualified to be approved. In the catholic mission we have hundreds of teachers who are not approved by the government. They are not receiving salary from the government. They are considered volunteer community teachers. They rely on the little help and contribution from the parents. On part of the Catholic Mission, there are no funds as well to sustain all these community teachers. This makes administrative works in our part Xaverians complicated. The same is true with the Diocesan Priests. They are also trying hard and cope with the current situations. Aside from the fact that we run the schools as non-Sierra Leoneans with all the legal considerations and amenities on it. It makes work more tough on our part.

Some Side Comments -

1. Big part of the Xaverian Mission in Sierra Leone, since 1950`s up until now, is on the field of education. I ask the question if the Catholic Mission Schools are still a tools or instruments for evangelization based on the present context of Sierra Leone? Considering the constraints in school administrations in the part of the government and also the difficulties that our missionaries encountered? I asked these questions because the Xaverians continue to build schools, especially in the villages, or to renovate the old schools. Thanks be to God we have still this kind of help. However, majority of our schools have less Christians, starting from the teachers, then down to the pupils. If we look at the figures, the gap is too high, not proportionate - the number of Catholic Mission schools with

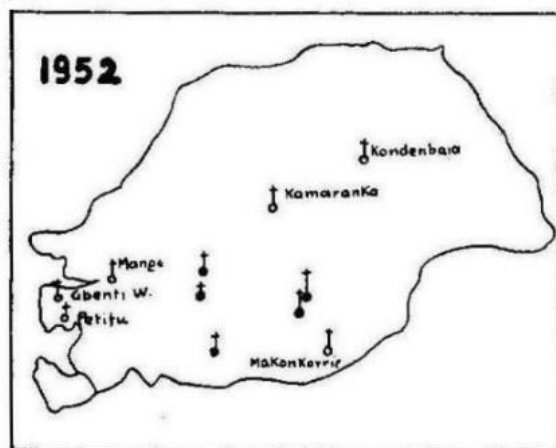
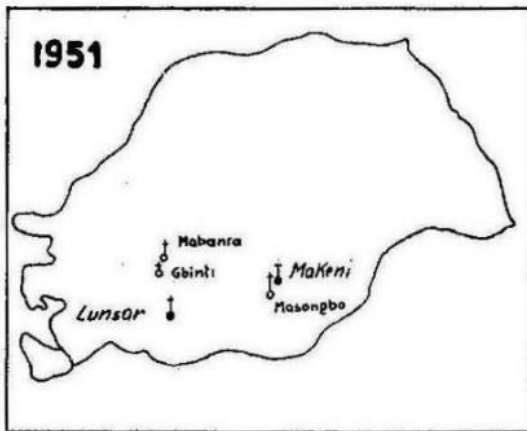
⁶ Ibidem

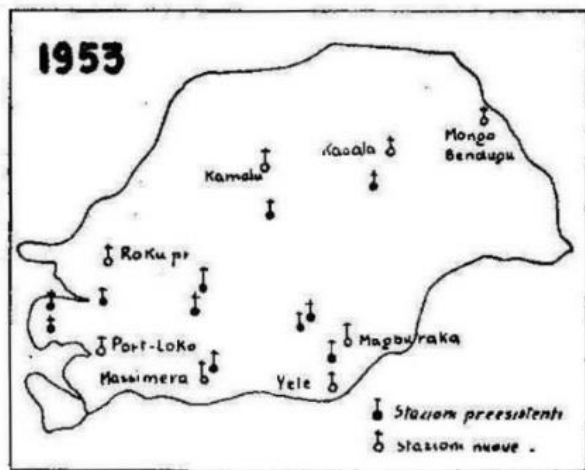
the number of Christians we have now at present. To me, it looks like that the work of evangelization in terms of church membership and baptism do not take much roots.

2. The *Salone society* has changed a lot since from the 50`s to the 90`s until the present. The Xaverian Fathers who are approaching the mission works and activities are also encountering drastic changes. The funding from abroad received from the past 50 years is no longer the same as today. The help abroad is decreasing exponentially. Usually the funds come from Italy, now Italian fathers are decreasing in number and very soon none will remain. Now most of the missionaries are non-Italians. The Catholic Mission Schools are under the Diocese of Makeni. It means they are under the Local Church. Therefore, the administrations of the Mission Schools will continue even without the Xaverians. However, since we work through the Diocese then we work in the schools. In this case, as Xaverians in Sierra Leone we have to find ways in order to sustain and support our schools.

Fr. Matugas Buhawe Vivinio, sx
Freetown – Sierra L.

Attachment: Schools Map in history (by Fr. Caglioni)





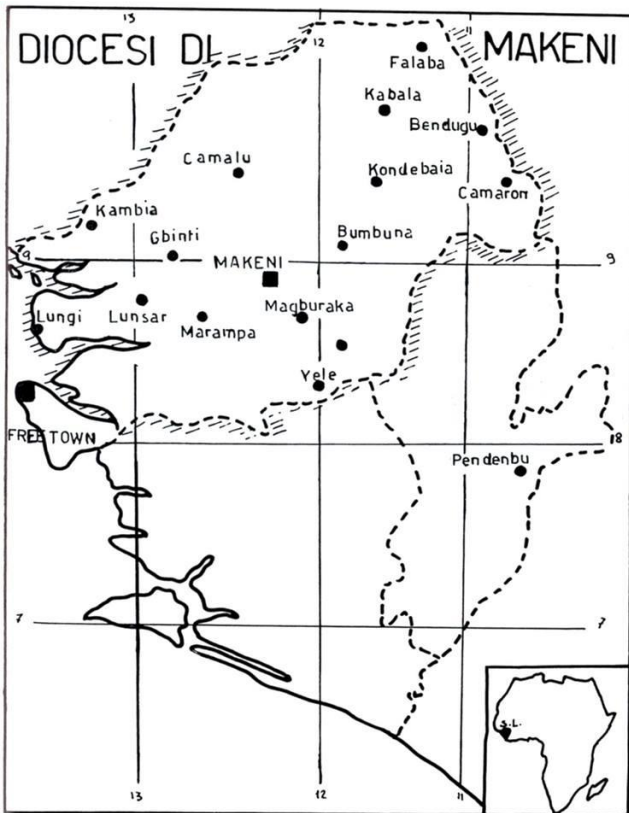
**SIERRA LEONE
PREFETTURA APOSTOLICA
DI MAKENI**

Dati statistici per l'esercizio 30
giugno 1959 - 30 giugno 1960:

Missionari saveriani	17
Coadiutori saveriani	8
Religiose missionarie	8
Catechisti	20
Maestri	180
Residenze missionarie	7
Case religiose	4
Chiese	2
Cappelle	9
Ospedali	1
con letti	20
Orfanotrofi	2
con degenti	35
Dispensari farmaceutici	2
Consultazioni	31.200
Collegi	2
Scuole	47
con alunni	5.607
Battesimi di adulti	358
Battesimi di infanti	120
Cresime	335
Confessioni	15.659
Comunioni	35.719
Matrimoni	13
Estreme unzioni	5
Funerali	12
Cattolici al 30 giugno 1959	1.854
Catecumeni al 30 giugno 1960:	4.000

dal 3 aprile 1952 al Gen. 1961

Missionari Sacerdoti Saveriani	n. 2	n. 20
Missionari Fratelli Coadiutori Saveriani	n. —	n. 4
Missionarie (Suore)	n. —	n. 8
Missionari Maestri Religiosi	n. —	n. 5
Stazioni Missionarie Centrali	n. 2	n. 7
Stazioni Missionarie Secondarie	n. 3	n. 22
Cattolici	n. 300	n. 2014
Catecumeni	n. 100	n. 4000
Catechisti	n. —	n. 20
Scuole Elementari o Primarie	n. 2	n. 40
Maestri Elementari	n. 10	n. 162
Scolari Scuole Elementari	n. 320	n. 5290
Scuole Superiori o Secondarie	n. —	n. 2
Maestri Superiori	n. —	n. 10
Studenti Scuole Secondarie	n. —	n. 192
Chiese	n. 1	n. 3
Cappelle	n. 1	n. 7
Case per Missionari	n. 2	n. 8
Ospedali	n. —	n. 1
Medici Laureati (della Società Saver.)	n. —	n. 2
Ammalati ricoverati o degenti	n. —	n. 250
Dispensari	n. —	n. 3
Ammalati visitati e curati (1952-1961)	n. —	n. 160.000
Collegi	n. —	n. 3
Collegiali	n. —	n. 165
Istituti Religiosi	n. —	n. 3
1) Congr. delle Suore di S. Giuseppe di Cluny		n. 4 membri
2) Congr. Mission. d. Clarisse del SS.mo Sacramento		n. 4 »
3) Congr. dei Fratelli dell'Immacolata Concezione		n. 5 »
Seminario	n. —	n. 1
Seminaristi	n. —	n. 11
Legio Mariae	n. —	Praes. n. 4
Associazioni Cattoliche	n. —	n. 5
Famiglie Cattoliche	n. 28	n. 125



1962 - when Makeni was elevated into a Diocese