

MUTARE DIOCESE'S HISTORY OF EVANGELIZATION

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Introduction

The nineteenth century and twentieth centuries have witnessed a tremendous exodus of Christian missionaries from the western world into Zimbabwe. Christianity particularly the Catholic Church has been presented to the African in foreign garbs such that Africans have perceived their own culture as archaic or primitive. However, many and varied religious missionary groups came to Zimbabwe to “indigenize the Church hence there has been an ongoing ecclesial development in spheres of self-sustaining, self-ministering and self-propagating among the Manyika Catholic Church”.¹ This essay seeks to give a brief history of the evangelization of the now known suffragan of Mutare under the reign of his Lordship Rt. Rev Bishop Paul Horan O.Carm. The scope of this history of evangelization commence from the first German Marianhill missionaries who worked from 1908-1930 and established the first mission in Mutare at Triashill mission. Mutare was then erected as a Prefecture Apostolic and confided to the Irish Carmelites on the 2nd of February 1953. Donald Lamont was appointed as Vicariate Prefecture on 6 February 1953 and later became a bishop of the Diocese in 1957. In 1957, the known Prefecture Apostolic of Mutare became a diocese. Bishop Lamont worked in Mutare since it was a prefecture and resigned in 1981. He was succeeded by Alexio Muchabaiwa from 5 November 1981 who reigned until the resignation of 28 May 2016. It is worth noting that it is with the same effect that Bishop Paul Horan resumed office and was appointed the successor as the Bishop of Mutare.

Description of Mutare Diocese

It is estimated that presently this diocese covers an area of 32 202 square kilometres with a catholic population of around 119 500 from the total population of 1 675 000. According to ecclesial jurisdiction the diocese of Mutare is divided into four Deaneries namely Makoni, Marange, Mutare and Chimanimani. It is in this area that the Manyika-Shona people

have settled since the 18th century AD. The dialects in this diocese are Chimanyika, Chindau, Chisena and urban inter-ethnic mixing.

The Call for Missionaries in Black Africa by then Rhodesia

After the aftermath of the second world war, there was a shortage of Catholic priests working in Black Africa particularly Zimbabwe. Bishop of Salisbury, namely his Lordship Chichester invited missionary groups to work by then Rhodesia modern day Zimbabwe. Many groups accepted this invitation including the Irish Carmelites. Prior to their arrival many religious groups worked in this region including the Jesuits, the Marian Hills Missionaries (1896-1929), the Missionary Sisters of the Precious Blood (1910-1977) and the Dominican Sisters (1926-1976; 1990-2019). In the time Carmelites arrived several missions were established that include Triashill, Monte Casino, St Benedict and St Barbaras, St Killians and Mount Mellary. Three Carmelites first came in 1946 namely, Luke Flynn, Donald Lamont and A. Coorbert followed by seven more Carmelites between 1947-1949. Many missions were entrusted to the Carmelites. By 1953, the Carmelites began to build missions and the first mission was Teresa of Avila. Fr. Tone Clare recalls in an interview that “we arrived safely in our new home”. Both New York province and Australia worked in missions.²

In Contrast, the building of missions was done under unfavourable conditions. Some places were inaccessible because they were no roads. The means of transport by then was motorbikes and cattle-carts. In rain seasons the roads would become impossible to travel because of the absence of bridges. Despite the inaccessibility of some areas because of poor road networking in the 1950s there was establishment of 9 new missions that included Avila, St Antony, Saint Simon Stock Rusape, St Joseph Sakubva, Regina Coeli, St Andrew Corsini, St Columbus Honde Valley and St Therese which served as a teacher training school.³

Education and Hospitals

In the 1960s three more missions were established that include St Michaels Tanda. Furthermore, the missionaries felt it was not enough to offer religious instruction to adults alone. As a result, schools were established like Kriste Mambo High school and Mount Carmel to become

the working arms of the mission stations in evangelization. They were considered by the missionaries the most effective means of evangelization. The approach was even approved by Rome, and missiologists of the first half of the twentieth century. Consequently, the Carmelites worked hand in hand with the local people to build schools, and this was in the form of moulding bricks by the local. On the other hand, the missionaries would provide other materials including the responsibility to ensure that they were teachers to tutor the pupils⁴ “Local catholic men who had received education were initially employed as teachers. Their roles were indistinguishable since they were catechists too”.⁵

In addition, not only did the missionaries minister to the spiritual needs of the people in the diocese of Mutare. They engaged themselves in the physical health of the people. In the first days of missionary activity among the Manyika people, there was very minimum, if not, no medical, no medical service for rural people by the government. Hence, the missions were the first agency to bring Western medical facilities to the rural folk.⁶ The Manyika people had their own understanding of the causes and treatment of an illness. Beyond the physical cause of an illness, “the Manyika believed that there was a superhuman force behind. Sometimes this was diagnosed as ngozi (avenging spirit) or mudzimu (spirit ancestor)”.⁷ Given that conception, they built hospitals at Mount Melleray, St Barbara’s Triashill. St Andrew’s Marange, St Michael’s Tanda, Regina Coeli and St Peter’s Chisumbanje. It is at these same hospitals that nursing colleges were established. Fr, McGrath concurring with the same sentiments makes a distinction between the Carmelite society’s missionary aim and social service: “establishing medical missions was for us part of the social service we offered. Our aim was to establish a local church. But for a local church to be established, its members have to be healthy”.⁸

Political Unrest

However, things changed, in the 1970s because it was a time of political unrest. The unilateral declaration of independence by Rhodesia in 1965 led to sanctions between Rhodesia and the European. In addition, there was civil unrest and that led to the war of liberation. The missionaries in

Mutare find themselves in the middle of these tensions. Some Carmelites were shot because they failed to report the presence of freedom fighters in their missions. They were alleged to help the freedom fighters to fight against the whites since they provided medical provisions for those wounded. To the extent that some missionaries because of fear of their lives they returned to their respective countries of origin.⁹

Revitalization of the Church in Mutare

Nevertheless, when Zimbabwe gained independence the missionaries came back although the numbers were depleted because of the liberation struggle. In 1983 priests from the Killaloe diocese came to evangelize again. It is with this ambition that the Carmelites started to recruit the native clergy both for the diocese and for the Order. The first two Carmelite to be ordained post-Independence in 1994 were Conrad Mutizamhepo and Constantine Masarira. Seven diocesan priests including Fr Thomas Saina and Fr. Chikwara were ordained post-independence. This shows that there was an increase of the clergy in the local Church. Since then the Diocese priests and Carmelites have been growing.¹⁰

It is also worth noting that, the missionaries' number have decreased since the diocese has experienced a tremendous growth in the number of local clergies ordained after independence and has become self-sustaining. It is estimated that by 2016 that they were 59 priests both religious and diocesan (Catholic Directory). In addition, the diocese has witnessed an in-flux number of sisters that have been consecrated to religious life, a sum of 129 in the year of 2017. Apart from the given data, the parishes in the diocese sum up to 28 which shows an enormous success of the missionary work in Manicaland. In addition, numerous and a countable number of schools and hospitals have been built too, to cater for the welfare of the masses in Mutare diocese.

Given that it is plausible to conclude that the missionaries did a tremendous work to the evangelization of the diocese of Mutare. Although they encountered difficulties during the course of their missionary activity. Presently, it has a catholic population of around 119 500 from the total population of 1 675 000 which reflect the impact of evangelization in Mutare.

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- ¹ Mariseni Leigh. *The Achievements of Irish Carmelites In Mutare Diocese From 1946-1996*. Catholic University of Zimbabwe: Chishawasha Seminary. 31 March 2014. P. 6
- ² Tindal P.E.N., *A history of Central Africa, Rhodesia*: Longman, 1983. P. 41
- ³ Gallagher L., *The Catholic Church in Manicaland 1896-1996*, Mutare Diocese. 2003. P. 23
- ⁴ Chipato J, Mapanzure M., “*Come follow Me*”: Rujeko, Mutare Diocese Periodical, 1951-1993. P. 19
- ⁵ Mariseni Leigh. P. 18
- ⁶ Peadan W., *Missionary Attitudes to Shona Culture 1890-1923*. Salisbury: Rhodesian Printers, 1927. P. 18
- ⁷ Peadan W., *Missionary Attitudes to Shona Culture 1890-1923*. Salisbury: Rhodesian Printers, 1927. P. 15
- ⁸ McGrath J., *Interview at the Priory*. Mutare, 8 December 2013
- ⁹ Tindal P.E.N. P. 41
- ¹⁰ McGrath J., *Interview at the Priory*. Mutare, 8 December 2013. P. 65