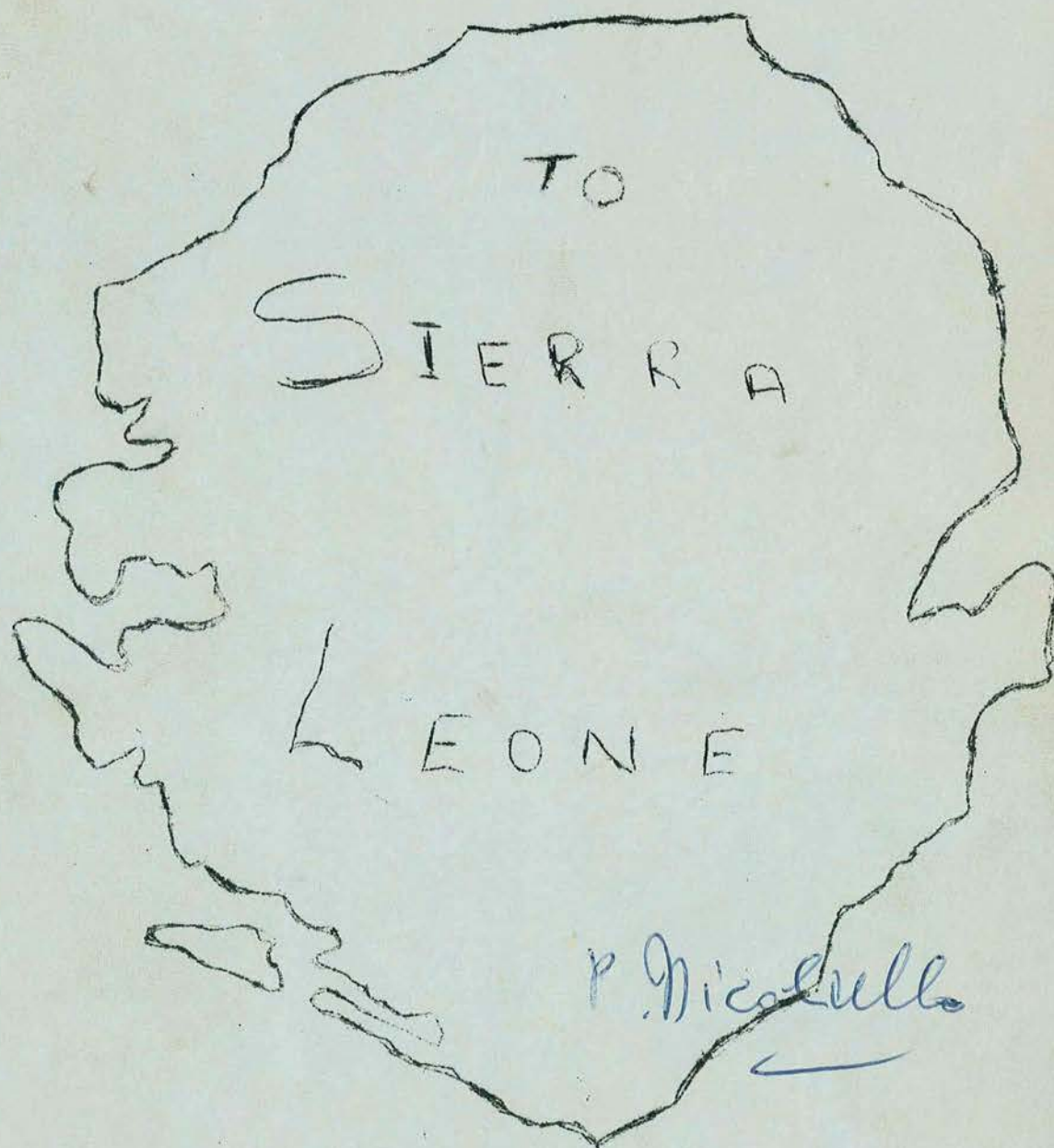
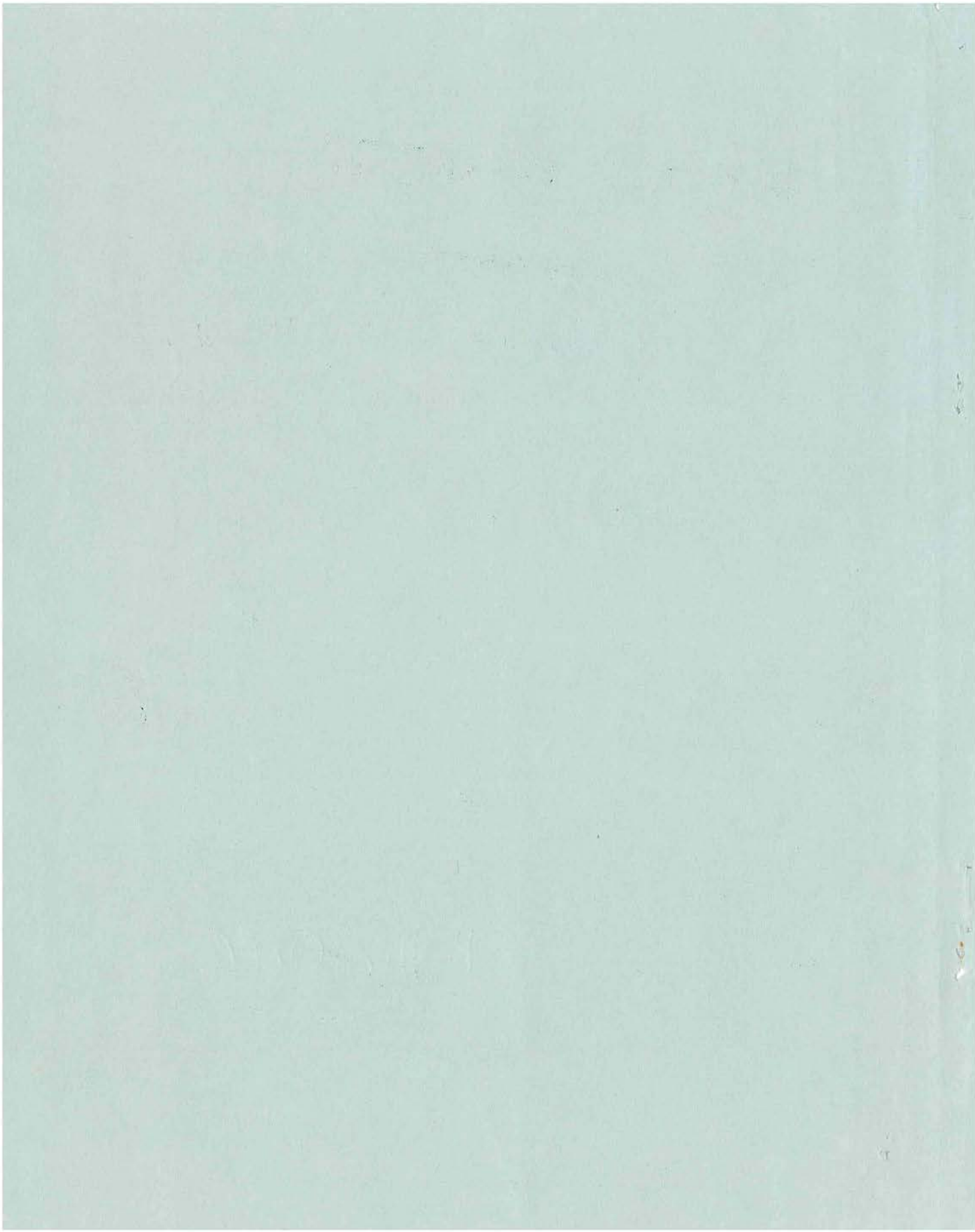


CHRISTIANITY





CHRISTIANITY TO SIERRA LEONE

PART ONE

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND.

The Carthaginians, 500 B.C.

Sierra Leone comes into the history of the world some five centuries before Christ. In fact the first attempt to explore the West coast of Africa was made by a certain Hanno, a Carthaginian, who led an expedition of thousands of artisans, farmers and traders to establish colonies along the West coasts where it would be most profitable.

According to their legendary reports, when they reached the Equator saw a land with mountains filled with fire running down like streams. Historians think that the reference is to Sierra Leone, where lightning and thunderstorms present such a scenery at certain times of the year.

They, however, were soon to return on their steps, having found no suitable place for settlement or for trade.

2000 years of silence (500 B.C. to 1462 A.C.).

With the destruction of Carthage, no one seems to have ventured to sail again down the West coasts for 2000 years.

The Romans, who colonised most of North Africa, gradually concentrated their efforts towards the North of Europe (Gallia, Germania, Britannia). With the migration of peoples and invasion of Rome, the task to penetrate into the African Continent fell to Islam.

The Arabs, like fire spread all over North Africa and created an active commerce 'Trans-Saharah-Trade' with the big African empires of Ghana, Mali, Songhai etc.

The Greek who from early times traded with Egypt and in East Africa, never appeared in West Africa. Thus neither the Romans nor the Greek ever set foot in Sierra Leone, and even the missionaries of Islam only reached Sierra Leone in the XVIII century, hindered by the dense tropical forests.

The Portuguese 1462

For centuries Europeans were anxious to be connected directly with the fabulous riches and commodities like spices, sugar, silk, precious stones, ivory etc. beyond the Mediterranean, as far as India and China. But they were bound to trade through the Arabs, as middle men. The problem became more and more acute as the religious enmity continued to grow. Finally when Constantinople was occupied by the Turks in 1453 the main route to the East was closed.

Why not try a way by sea, how that maritime scientific improvements (like the invention of the caravel, the Compass, the astrolable etc.) were making possible long sea voyages? Several European countries (Portugal, Spain, Holland, England, France etc.) imbued with nationalistic feelings, were interested in such enterprises, wishing to spread also their supremacy, ideas and culture overseas, besides looking for riches.

The two nations who took the lead were Portugal and Spain owing to their geographical position. Both intended to reach the far East through different ways: the Portuguese rounding the Cape of Good Hope, the Spanish by sailing westwards on the supposition of the rotundity of the earth. In the process Portugal discovered West Africa and Spain the Americas.

Pedro da Cintra (a Portuguese Governor of Santiago in the Isles of Cape Verde) was the first to voyage to a land he himself called Sierra Leone. Sierfa'saw'owing to the shape of the mountains, 'Leone' for its appearance rugged and rough like the mane of a lion. Other historians maintain that the name was given on account of the "roaring" of the thunderstorms on those mountains.

The influence of the Portuguese soon declined on account of the rivalry of other nations. The rivalry was accentuated by the growing profit in the slave trade 'triangular trade' from Europe to Africa, then to America and back to Europe.

The British gradually prevailed in the trade and at the same time it was they who eventually took the initiative to abolish it and to settle the liberated slaves at Freetown.

In 1808 the settlement of the liberated slaves and the whole peninsula of Sierra Leone were proclaimed 'Crown Colony' under the direct authority of the British government. Sierra Leone became the "mother" of the Colonies in West Africa.

At the end of the XIX century, due to the scramble of European Countries for Africa, the boundaries of the protectorate were defined between french and british territories.

Resentment was aroused against the British and all foreigners over the 'hut tax' imposed by governor Cardew and fought by the chiefs and people led by Bai Bureh. In 1924 Colony and protectorate were united under one constitution. Independence was obtained in 1961, with Sir Milton Margai as Prime Minister. In 1971 Sierra Leone was declared a Republic with Siaka Stevens as first President.

PART TWO

CHRISTIANITY IN WEST AFRICA AND SIERRA LEONE

1st Period

1500 - 1750: First negative attempt

The Portuguese were the first missionaries in West Africa. In every expedition to explore and to trade there were also missionaries ready to implant the Cross and start evangelizing.

The missionary activity received great impulse when Henry 'the Navigator' son of King John of Portugal was made in 1417 'Great Master of the Order of the Knights of Christ' with the main purpose of bringing Africa to Christ. Anyone wishing to dedicate one's life to evangelization, whether religious or lay people, were to belong to the Order and undergo severe training. They were to be both mariners and missionaries.

At his school were formed great navigators like Christopher Columbus who discovered America, Diaz who rounded the Cape of Good Hope and Vasco da Gama who reached India.

The Franciscans were the first in the Canary Islands where the Ceuta diocese was established and its Bishop put in charge for the whole of Africa, in 1404. They reached the Islands of Cape Verde in 1432, where the Diocese of Santiago was set up. In 1462, the Pope Pius II exhorted them to pass over on to the African Continent in Guinea, which they did and Father Bolano was chosen as Prefect Apostolic of Guinea and Islands.

With the death of Henry in 1460, rivalry for trade and profit sets in. To bring peace between Portugal and Spain, the Pope traced a demarcation line along the middle of the Atlantic, assigning the East of that line to Portugal and the West to Spain.

FATHER BALDHASSAR BARREIRA, a Jesuit, was the first missionary in Sierra Leone on July 13th, 1605.

Other portuguese missionaries for certain evangelized Sierra Leone during the whole of the 16th century. About them nothing is known.

was A legend says that a medal with christian symbols was sent to a Temne King Bai Farama in 1580, found two centuries later being worn by the reigning Temne Sovereign King Naimbama.

Mention is also made of a letter of Bai Farama to the King of Portugal Philip to send more missionaries, promising to build a fort for them at Cape Sierra Leone.

It is known that gradually other missionaries joined the Franciscans reaching the Golden Coasts, Lagos, Benin, Angola, Luanda and even Goa in India.

We even have historical records of native clergy and of Bishop Henry son of the King of Congo, created in 1548 by Pope Leo X. In Congo there was a flourishing mission, when besides the Franciscans also the Dominicans, Agostinians arrived and finally the Jesuits in 1546. St Francis Xavier in his journey to India touched on the Ivory Coasts where the Fort Xavier was built in his memory, probably in 1941.

It was exactly one of the four first Jesuits in Congo, Fr. Balthassar Barreira, to receive order from his Superior General, Fr. Acquaviva, to found a Jesuit mission in the Cape Verde Islands. But the Father soon felt the call of the Continent and on July 13th, 1605 he landed in Sierra Leone at a place called Pagono. He had been working for 25 years in Congo and now was 70. He writes: 'I found my fellow country men who for 10, 20, 30 years had not been receiving the Sacraments'.

The Temne King Bai Farama received him well and was baptised 'Philip' in honour of the King of Portugal and Spain, 'Leonis' in honour of his kingdom. His sons became the Father's faithful companions. Many subjects were also converted and the fame of Fr. Barreira spread even abroad. Probably the Jesuits chose as their centre Mount Auriol and from there they sent missionaries wherever there was a station for the slave trade. The support of the local kings continued for a long time, till 1667 when Philip II died and the new King Naimbanna I abandoned the faith. 'A very sad thing, when the catholic religion had deeply influenced the life of the Temne people.... every one could speak Portuguese'. Fr. Barreira was also in the island of Tombo and probably reached Port Loko. He returned to Santiago where he died in 1612.

Meantime the Franciscans from Santiago continued to send missionaries to the continent and to Sierra Leone. There are historical records of Fr. Paolo da Lordello, capuchin, who built a small fort, tried to bring to their religious duties his fellow country men, converted some kings and travelled extensively. There are also records of Fr. Sebastian of St. Vincent who at the end of the 17th century returned to Portugal to plead for new missionaries, but the government lost interest and the organization of the church in Sierra Leone ceased for about a century and a half.

Sporadic visits of missionaries are still to be found in the annals of the Capuchins (Fr. Serafino da Leon built two churches dedicated to St. Anthony, one in the island of Tombo the other in Old Port Loko. Fr. Augustine Da Ronda and Fr. Ignatius were buried at Tombo), but then there is complete silence. Of the two "St. Anthony" churches there have remained no trace.

Signor Joseph Before the Jesuits left there appears in the religious history of Sierra Leone the luminous figures of two christians. One was a certain "Signor Joseph", born in West Africa, and educated in England and Portugal where he was baptised. Inspired by missionary zeal, he chose Sierra Leone

as field of action and at first settled with the Jesuits on Mount Auriol. Then with the permission of King Nainbanna I he built a village in the region of Kissy, meant to be a model of christian living. It was a large village, with an open square in the centre, large well-built huts, paths lined with shells and groves of lime and paw-paw trees with a cfucifix in each grove. The villagers were his converts. They worked in the garden around the settlement, growing pine apples and keeping bees. The centre of the village life was Signor Joseph's oratory or chapel, where he daily taught young and old to read the prayer books. He was greatly loved and a tradition says that he died in the Banana Islands, during an apostolic visit, and was buried in the graveyard of Dublin village.

CHICABA: According to a tradition, she was a daughter of the King of the Gallinas tribe. In 1700 she was brought to Spain where she entered a convent. There she lived a dedicated life and died in 1748 with all the signs of holiness. The cause of her beatification was in fact introduced and she is still honoured under the title of venerable Teresa Juliana of St. Dominic.

Some causes of decline of christian religion at this time:

1. Antagonism among slave traders.
2. Rivalries, political, religious and commercial among European nations.
3. Suppression of the Jesuits in Europe.
4. Zeal of the missionaries of Islam who at this time began to enter Sierra Leone.
5. Bad example of expatriates.

2nd Period

About 1850 - 1950: Resumption of missionary work

1823 - The Sisters of Cluny - were the first missionary sisters ever to appear in West Africa, invited to Gambia in 1822 by the british governor sir Charles McCarthy. In 1823 the foundress Mother Anne Marie Javouhey, accompanied by one of her sisters and an African girl called Florence, arrived in Freetown to start medical and religious work.

She wrote her first impression on Sierra Leone as follows: "I am in good health... the country has a charming aspect... The majority are zealous protestants; they sing hymns evening and morning, they build beautiful churches. There are also many catholics. How much good could be done here, but what little means there is to do it! I hope to organise the hospital, which is in great need of attention.... I have made straw pillows for all, tomorrow I will make mattresses and then sheets. Florence and myself do all this work, she works as much as I do...I neglect nothing to alleviate suffering and misery... The governor was so kind to ask for the sisters. How happy we are to be able to do so much in helping so many unfortunates. How I love my vocation! How I thank God for having called me to this work!

She soon caught yellow fever and was compelled to return to France in 1824. The seed, however had been sown. In 1866 her sisters returned to Sierra Leone to stay. In 1956 they came to Makeni.

One can easily spot in the foundress the traits of a saint. She always tried to do the will of God and give all she had and could do. She writes to France to arrange for another superior to manage the newly founded congregation should God want her to remain her whole life in Sierra Leone. She tried to develop the whole man by founding also an agricultural project for young men and even a congregation of priests realising that medical, educational and social work are not sufficient to uplift men without the true faith.

She is thankful for her vocation and service and is respectful of people and places and appreciative of other people's work. As a true evangelical servant, she discovered no enemies around her.

It is well to remember here that Sierra Leone was the first Protestantism's mission field in Africa. The liberated slaves brought with them the kind of christianity they had known. Then, since Sierra Leone was in British hands, a first attempt to send missionaries was made by the protestant missionary society of Scotland and England in 1797. In 1804 the C.M.S. made another attempt first among the Susu and then in the peninsula, establishing flourishing christian communities, mainly on high healthy places. Several educational institutions were set up, one of which was to become the Fouray Bay University, the first for the whole of Africa, winning for Freetown the title of 'Athens of West Africa'.

In 1811 arrived also the Methodists and other christian denominations. They had full support from the governors, but the death toll was high and often discouraging.

1842 American missionaries With the abolition of the slave trade, an American movement was started to foster an honest trade with African states. Liberia was thus colonised to be a country of free people.

Pope Gregory XVI took the opportunity of inviting the American Hierarchy to follow on the steps of the colonisers by carrying out evangelising work in Africa. Msgr. Barron from Philadelphia came to Liberia, with Fr. Kelly and a lay man, to answer the appeal. To help in the work he asked for members of a young french congregation, which was later called 'the Holy Ghost Fathers'. Of 15 missionaries who came, only 2 remained after a few months; the rest died or were to be repatriated. An attempt to open a mission in Sierra Leone failed. The Bishop gave up all and the American mission came to an end.

The evangelization of West Africa fell to the Holy Ghost Fathers, but it was not they to restart work in Sierra Leone, it was:

Mgr. Marion de Bresillac .After working in India as a Bishop, he asked the Pope to transfer him to West Africa, whose condition he had seen on his journey to India. The Holy Ghost Father not only consented, but exhorted him to found a congregation of priests to work for Africa. This he did in 1856, starting the 'Society of African Missions' at Lyons.

In 1858 Rome entrusted to his congregation the Vicariate Apostolic of Sierra Leone, and he himself was nominated Vicar Apostolic.

The first group arrived in Freetown in January 1859, they were: Fr. Raymond aged 36, Fr. Bresson 47, Brother Eugene 29. They were welcomed in the French and Spanish consulates. On May, 14th the Bishop with Fr. Riocreux and Brother Gratien entered the port of Freetown. Before disembarking the Bishop was informed that an epidemic of yellow fever was raging throughout the district. Europeans were dying like flies. The captain of the 'Danae' was unwilling to allow the missionaries to go ashore. "Bishop", he said, "you are going to a certain death and I shall answer for your life." "I am in my diocese" the Bishop answered, "and shall I not share the fortune of my children?"

After one month the tragedy started. Fr. Riocreux was stricken on Ascension day, three days later Fr. Bresson died and Brother Gratien followed on Whit Sunday. The Bishop taken ill on Pentecost day refused to leave his post, but he saved Brother Eugene by sending him back to France.

After June 14th only the Bishop and Fr. Raymond remained, both very sick. It was matter of a few days. On June 25th the Bishop vomited coagulated blood, the sure symptom of yellow fever and approaching death.

He at once asked for Extreme Unction and expressed the desire to see Fr. Raymond. He was told that the Father was not well enough to be brought in. On hearing this, he got more sad and breathed softly: "Thy will be done!...." but it is hard for me to die without Extreme Unction."

Struck by this remark, the Doctor decided to inform Fr. Raymond, who soon rose from his bed and was taken to his Bishop. As he entered the room, they first religiously embraced each other. Then the Bishop said aloud "If you recover inform Rome of what has happened." Then the three witnesses, the French Consul, an Irishman named Quin and M. Bremond left the room for a while. When recalled they assisted at the administration of Extreme Unction by Fr. Raymond to his Bishop. After it, a last word and a last embrace for the supreme departure ended this most painful scene. Father and son silently separated. From that moment the Bishop became more agitated, but remained conscious to the end. At one O' clock p.m. he raised his eyes to heaven and said: "Faith, Hope, Charity, thank you". After 20 minutes he rendered his soul to God.

He was clad in his pontifical garments and buried the following day, June 26th, at 9 a.m. The Governor with his staff and a detachment of troops, the various consular agents of the town and the notables of the city without distinction of religion, accompanied the Bishop to his last resting place, where a minister of the protestant church recited a short prayer and spoke a few words of consolation to the bereaved catholic community.

Fr. Raymond, deeply impressed by the death of his Bishop became more and more convinced of his end. At midnight on June 27th, he suddenly rose from his bed, went to church and consumed the Blessed Sacrament, to the great edification of all. On June 28th he died.

After exactly four centuries of sorrowful though glorious attempts since Fr. Bolano set foot on the African continent, the last lamp was extinguished.

1863 THE HOLY GHOST FATHERS

Took over and carried on the good work till the present day with constant and often heroic courage.

Edward Blanchet was the first Bishop to resume work. He saw his first two and only missionaries in Sierra Leone dying at 27 years of age. The average term in the beginning was about 8 years. The Bishop died in 1896. In 1897 the Sierra Leone vicariate was separated from French Guinea and in 1903 from Liberia.

Bishop J. Brown	(1903 +)
Bishop J.O'Gorman	(1903 - 1931).
Bishop Wilson	(1933 - 1936).
Bishop Kelly	(1936 - 1952).

.. Fr. Edward Hamelberg was the first Sierra Leonean priest, ordained in 1929. In 1942 he became Principal of Bo Teachers' College.

In 1950 the diocese of Freetown and Bo was erected Archbishop T. Brosnahan (1953 - 1980).

Archbishop Joseph Ganda (1980.....). He was ordained in 1961 (second priest in Sierra Leone) and Bishop of Kenema in 1971.

3rd Period

1950 - 1980 The Xaverians in Africa

Who are the Xaverians? - It is a congregation of religious priests and brothers founded in Italy in 1895 by Archbishop Guido M. Conforti, with the aim of dedicating their lives to evangelization.

They are called Xaverians after their Patron St. Francis Xavier, a great missionary of the XVI century, one of the first to round the Cape of Good Hope and reach India and Japan. He was about to enter China when he died on a small island off its coasts. The Xaverians who took from him the name and apostolic inspiration, chose as their first field of action China to take up where St. Francis had left off.

Work in Africa - It was only after the second world war that the Xaverians, expelled from China, began to consider taking up work in Africa, since it could not be in an Italian speaking territory as there was none, we tried then an English speaking one. Negotiations were long and difficult since Italy had fought against England during the war. It helped greatly to get the entry to have gone to Great Britain to learn the language, mentality and customs. Finally permission was granted in 1950. Rome in consultation with the existing missionaries in Sierra Leone assigned to the Xaverians the Northern Province with centre at Makeni.

1950: The Xaverians at Makeni

The first four pioneers arrived at Freetown by sea on July 8th, 1950, welcomed by the Holy Ghost Fathers who had been in the country for about a century. They were: Fr. Augustus Azzolini, Fr. Pietro Calza, Fr. Attilio Stefani, Fr. Camillo Olivani.

After a few days, Bishop Kelly of Freetown and Bo (the only catholic in Sierra Leone at the time) assigned Fr. Azzolini and Fr. Calza to Makeni while Fr. Stefani and Olivani at Lunsar. It was exactly on the evening of 11th July that the two Fathers arrived at Makeni after a whole day in the train, which reached and stopped at Makeni, while the other two Fathers reached Lunsar by lorry in the afternoon.

Before the arrival of the Xaverians in Makeni there had been at work for a couple of years 3 Holy Ghost Fathers: Fr. S. Morrissey, Gilroy and Mellet. Of the three only Fr. Mellet, was there to welcome the two Italian Fathers. His companions had returned to the South, due mainly to ill health. Fr. Mellet a zealous pioneer, after a long active life in Nigeria, at 63 was assigned to Sierra Leone to open up evangelization in the Temne environment.

He knew he had to start with a small school which had been in the hands of the A.W.C. and now passed to the district

administration, which in turn promised to pass it to the Catholic Mission. Fr. Mellet arrived and chose as his first lodging place a house at 15 Compound Street with Mr. Joseph Kamara's family. On the wall of a room of the said house one can still see a blackboard used by the Fathers for instructions to some friends. Most of the people of the big family were gradually baptized.

At the same time he began to build a new school on the present site of the mission which he acquired. The school was to accommodate the children of the above said denomination. When the building was completed, the Father had to face one first big disappointment. The A.W.C. and the District Officers arranged to pass the school to the Anglicans. So he had to recruit his own children for the empty building. Providentially he found in the Italian Fathers newly arrived a keen interest in the school and eagerness to follow up his initiatives.

In November, 1950 Fr. Augustus Azzolini was already in charge of the new school with some 150 pupils, while Fr. Calza tried to visit and develop the small groups of people which Fr. Mellet in the year 1949 had set up in charge of a teacher or catechist got from the South. Such places were near like Masongbo or as far as Kabala, Kondembaia, Kamalo, Yele, Makonkori.

How were the new Fathers lodged? Fr. Mellet had prepared a small class-room for them, divided into two cubicles separated by a blanket. The Mass was said in the school. Fr. Mellet himself had left Compound Street and built for himself a hut in the heart of the forest at Teko Road. A native kitchen was used for cooking.

At this point we can follow very interesting day-to-day records written by Fr. Azzolini.

1951: January first - Fr. Azzolini said Mass for quite a large crowd of people in the school. Fr. Calza went to say Mass at Magburaka.

5th- Bishop Kelly ordered that a house be built for the Xaverians at Makeni. Fr. Mc Donald, Holy Ghost Father resident at Lunsar, came to Makeni every week end to look after the building. We began to collect sand.

9th- Fr. Calza went to Masongbo to say Mass and see to the little school.

15th- The new scholastic year began with 200 pupils. Fr. Mc Donald began the construction of the house.

February 7th - Fr. Gosson, Education Secretary of the Holy Ghost Fathers, came to visit our schools and to advise on the opening of new schools.

12th - At last we heard that our luggage had arrived.

13th - The Inspector of School Mr. Gembah visited our school, leaving a very encouraging report.

16th - Thieves have tried to steal material for the construc-

- March 18th - Palm Sunday: first procession around the school.
We could not perform the services of the Holy Week, for lack of space, vestments etc.
- 26th - Fr. Calza became very sick for several days.
- April 9th - Bishop Kelly visited Makeni for the first time.
He transferred Fr. Mellet to Punjehun and Fr. Azzolini took charge of Makeni station.
- May 15th - Fr. Calza went to Kamalo, in the Loko district.
- 22nd - We move into the new house. Fr. Stefani came from Lunsar to build a little kitchen.
- 27th - Corpus Christi : first time procession of the Blessed Sacrament in Makeni.
- June 8th - Thieves tried to enter into the new house.
- July 7th - Fr. Calza visited for some days Kabala, Kondembaia, Alikalia. Returned with many requests for the opening of new schools.
- August 3rd - Fr. Azzolini ^{opened} a small boarding with 3 boys, with the purpose of giving them some formation, better preparation for the Bo Teachers' College and for the priesthood.
- 5th - We carried the Blessed Sacrament from the school to the house, where week-days Mass was celebrated.
- 8th - Fr. Calza visited Yeban and Makonkori.
- October 7th - Procession of the statue of our Lady of Fatima. To her the mission is dedicated.
- Dec. 8th - First group of Baptism for 12 boys, of whom only two were Temne.
- 25th - First midnight Mass at Makeni, celebrated in the school. NB. Negotiations went on during the last months with authorities to open better schools at Masongbo, Kondembaia, Makonkori, Mange etc.

1952:

- Jan. 1st - Arrival of 3 more Italian Fathers: Fr. N. Vaccari (Religious Sup.), Fr. Paul Zanon, Fr. Peter Noaro.
- Feb. 2nd - Bishop Kelly dies. Makeni was erected a Prefecture Apostolic independent of Freetown and Bo.
- July 19th - Fr. Azzolini was nominated Prefect Apostolic with the title of Monsignor. At a meeting the prefecture was divided into 6 quasi-Parishes: Makeni in charge of Monsignor Azzolini, Kabala of Fr. Calza; Mange of Fr. Olivani; Port Loko of Fr. Stefani; Lunsar of Fr. Zanon; Magburaka of Fr. Noaro.
- Dec. 8th - Inauguration of the Prefecture. About 2000 people came to celebrate from the various mission stations.

The Catholics were about 300.

- 1953 At the beginning of the year: arrival of 2 more Xaverians: Fr. Olivio Stragliati and J. Menoncin.
- Dec. 13th - Inauguration of the Our Lady of Fatima 'Pro-Cathedral', built by Fr. Stefani who wanted it 'simple and serene'.
- By the end of the year arrival of 3 more Fathers: Fr. Pietro Villani, Fr. Vito Pignatelli, Fr. Castignola.
- Parish Priests of Makeni: 1950 Fr. Azzolini; 1955 Fr. Giuseppe Rabito; 1959 Fr. Rocco Serra; 1962 Fr. Adelino Pellizzari; 1968 Fr. Giuseppe Ruggeri; 1970 Fr. D.A. Nicolliello; 1976 Fr. Michael Davitti; 1979 Fr. D.A. Nicolliello.
- In 1962 - Makeni was created a Diocese and Monsignor Azzolini its first Bishop. By then there were about 30 Xaverians, in 1980 about 40. From 1971 with the erection of the Kenema Diocese entrusted to Bishop Joseph Ganda, there were 3 dioceses in Sierra Leone.

Religious Work

Catholics - When the Xaverians started separate work in 1952 there were in the Northern Province about 300 Catholics, most of them from the South and the East. These grew to about 2000 in 1960; 5000 in 1970; 8000 in 1980.

Mission Stations - Several major Mission Stations or Parishes (in charge of a resident priest) were opened in the main centres of the Northern Province.:

- In 1950: Makeni (Fr. Azzolini P.P.) - Lunsar (Fr. Stefani PP.)
- In 1953: Magburaka (Fr. P. Noaro) - Kabala (Fr. P. Calza) - Port Loko (Fr. O. Stragliati) - Mange Bureh (Fr. C. Olivani).
- In 1954: Lungi (Fr. C. Olivani) - Yele (Fr. P. Noaro)
- In 1957: Kamalo (Fr. J. Sperandio)
- In 1960: Kambia (Fr. C. Olivani)
- In 1962: Yonibana (Fr. P. Noaro)
- In 1967: Kamabai (Fr. J. Rabito)

Churches - were gradually built in all those centres, after managing for sometime in private houses or schools or chapels, or barries, The first was the Cathedral in Makeni by Fr. A. Stefani, inaugurated on December 13th, 1953.

In Yele 1961 by Fr. Noaro; in Magburaka in 1969 by Mr. Romano; in Kabala in 1972 by Fathers Bramati and Rossini; in Lunsar by Fr. A. Stefani in 1965. In Kamabai in 1978 by Fr. Pisani; in Yonibana 1979 by Fr. Noaro; In Port Loko 1980 by Fr. J. Milan.

Junior Seminary - (for the preparation of suitable candidates to the priesthood) was thought of by Fr. A. Azzolini as early as 1951 and started with 3 pupils. In 1960 Fr. D. A. Nicolliello was in charge of a few seminarians living with the St. Francis Secondary boarders lodged in the big Seminary built in the mission compound by Fr. Noaro, Brother J. Zonta and Fr. Castignola in 1956 - 1957.

In 1962^{it} started with a better set up in Kambia under the guidance of Fr. C. Olivani. In 1968 was moved to the premises of St. Francis Secondary School in Makeni. For Philosophy and Theology the seminarians were sent to Ghana, Nigeria and more recently to Liberia.

The first native priest, Fr. Sheku Kanneh, was ordained in 1978 followed by Fr. Gabriel Koroma and Fr. Joseph Bangura, in 1980.

A Temne Prayer Book with Holy Mass was prepared by Fr. D.A. Nicolliello helped by a team (Mr. R. Serry, Mr. Anthony Kamara, Mr. Andrew Kamara, Mr. J. Gbla, Mr. R. Kanu) and printed in Rome by the solidarity of St. Peter Claver in 1974.

Prayer and Hymn Book in English was first prepared in 1971; a new edition in 20,000 copies was prepared by Fr. D.A. Nicolliello in 1977; and again a more recent one in 1980 printed at Bergamo, in Italy.

Parish Organizations - The ^{parishes} carry out a great deal of apostolic work with the involvement of lay people organised in groups:

Legion of Mary - For purely religious activities, to encourage the practice of the faith through example and visitations. It started in Makeni in 1966.

St. Vincent de Paul - Mainly to organise works of charity, with distributions, visitations, medical care. Started in Makeni in 1966.

Christian Family Movement - To encourage christian marriage as wanted by God and taught by the church. Started in Makeni in 1972.

Knights of the Altar - for service in the church and special formation.

Choir - Started in 1972.

Parish Pastoral Council - An organising and advising body, made up of 12 members elected annually by adult parishoners.

Church Financial Resources - From Sunday collections; Monthly Dues (an extra offering by wages earners); offerings from abroad. Occasional Sales and Festivals.

Educational Work

Primary Schools - The Xaverian Fathers found only a school in Lunsar started in 1933 and one in Makeni in 1949 by Fr. Mellet. The Protestants had in the Northern Province 30 primary schools but there was no secondary school or Teachers' College.

In 1965 there were 90 Catholic Primary Schools, with about 10,000 pupils and 300 teachers.

In

1951 Gbinty Dibia and Mabanta by Fr. Stefani. Masongbo was started by Fr. Mellet in a private house. Fr. Stefani started the building, finished by Fr. Vaccari in 1952. In 1961 Fr. Nicolliello negotiated the other ground where Fr. R. Rolli build the church in 1963.

1952 Mange Bureh by Fr. Olivani. Kondembaia and Makonkori by Fr. Noaro. Kabala by Fr. Calza. Kamaramaka by Fr. Vaccari. Gbinty Wala by Fr. Stefani.

Kamalo: Fr. Mellet appointed a teacher in 1950 (paid One pound monthly, half by the mission, half by the fees). Fr. Zanon lived there for a few month in 1952 in the rent house hut and later in a small house built for him in the present compound of the mission. This house was later demolished.

In 1953 Fr. Noaro built one building of the school (the present church), but there was no resident priest till 1957 when Fr. Sperandio built the beautiful house, dispensary and another school building. In 1968 was opened Kamakwie.

1954 In 1952 - 1953 Port Loko was served from Lunsar by Fathers Stefani and Olivani. In 1954 the house was obtained (a former military prison) and Fr. Stragliati was the first resident priest. This was the only mission which had light and running water. In 1959 the first school was built by Fr. Nicolliello and Mr. Marinoni (an Italian who built Sklenker Secondary). First Head Master was Mr. R. Serry. Places for schools were also secured at: Mondo Bendugu, Masimera, Yele, Yeben, Rokper, Findonia.

Secondary Schools - It took a long time to have permission to open a secondary school at Makeni, because of our nearness to Magburaka where in 1950 the Government had set up a Government Central School (up to form III) changed into a secondary school in 1955.

St. Francis - Finally permission was granted for St. Francis, which was opened in February 1958 in the new seminary in the mission compound at Teko Road. Its first Principal was Fr. Rocco Serra and first teachers: Fr. J. Collini and Mr. R. Kanu. In 1960 the school moved to the present site off Lunsar Road.

run by the Dutch Brothers (Congregation of the Immaculate Conception of Maastricht). The boarding department remained still at Teko Road in charge of Fr. Nicolliello from 1960 - 62, who was also a lecturer in the school for Latin, Italian and Religious Knowledge. The school made a name for itself for the study of languages English, French, German, Italian, Latin.

1961 The Dutch Brothers took charge also of Kabala Secondary School, which had already been started by Fr. J. Milan.

1962 St. Joseph Secondary School in Makeni was opened by the Cluny Sisters who had come to Makeni in 1956 and started St. Joseph's Primary School.

Kolenten in Kambia.

1965 Guadalupe in Lunsar opened by Mexican Sisters as a vocational School.

In 1965 five secondary schools out of 12 in the Northern Province were run by the catholic church, with about 1000 students out of 1.300 of other schools combined.

Makali - 1970

Bumbuna - 1977

Lunsar - 1979 a vocational school by the Italian Josephite Fathers.

Port Loko - 1980

Teachers' Certificate College - Most of our teachers up to 1965 were trained in the South and mainly in Bo. Negotiations were started in 1950 to have a T.C. College at Makeni, but permission was granted only in 1964. At the time there was only the Magburaka Teachers' College in the Northern Province. St. Augustine opened with about 20 students at Teko Road in the Seminary. Our Lady of Fatima moved to Makama and the primary school at Teko became 'Practising'. The number of students soon became hundreds. In 1976 the College became Makeni Teachers' College. In 1980 moved to a splendid new site in the Ropolong area the new Magburaka Road. Fr. Rolli was the first Principal and responsible for the steady growth of the Institution.

Social and Medical Work

Clinics - As soon as a mission station started with a school, also a small clinic was operated for school children and gradually for everyone.

The first one, on a bigger scale, started at Mange Bureh under the direction of Fr. Olivani and later of two qualified Xaverian Brothers: Rigon and Massari.

When the Sisters of Cluny came to Makeni in 1956, the Loreto Clinic was opened in the sisters compound at Teko Road, run by the able and popular sister Columba, who died tragically in a fire accident in the Convent in 1968. The clinic was then transferred to a worthy place at Station Road, with the addition also of a maternity Ward. Gradually the clinic had several nurses at its disposal, who also went out weekly to out stations.

Hospitals - Thanks to the presence of 3 Xaverian Doctors (Fr. Sylvester Volta, Brother Gello Giorgi and Brother Lio Stocco) a large general hospital was opened in Lunsar in 1960, and later passed in the professional hands of the Spanish Brothers of 'St. John of God'. In 1980 Spanish Sisters joined in the work.

Fr. S. Volta was the first Director of the said hospital. Notable was his work in visiting all our school children with an X-Ray set to screen for T.B.

Brother Giorgi visited periodically all our clinics and was also in-charge of the Makeni Government Hospital and in the staff of Connaught Hospital for some time.

Brother Stocco visited all our school children to look for Leprosy cases, and was for several years Director of the Makeni Leprosy Hospital, which came to be referred to as 'Stocco Hospital'. He died in Makeni in 1975, with the whole town sorrowing.

C. R. S. - An all encompassing charitable institution was organised for the whole of Sierra Leone by Fr. Rocco Serra in 1960 - 1963. It supplied food for the school children, with meals in the school compounds, medicines for clinics and hospitals, food for preschool children and for mothers, clothing for poor and needy people, libraries to schools and colleges, food and assistance towards a:

Leprosy Campaign - which later developed into a separate organization with the co-operation of other christian bodies in the country. Mobile units began to operate all over to treat the patients in their own environments, while at Makeni a Hospital was set up for serious cases under the direction of Doctor Stocco.

Primary Health Care - Recently another nation wide programme has been started to involve all local authorities and people in the problem of hygiene and general health.

Society of St. Vincent de Paul - Organizers in our Parishes spiritual and material help to the poor and most needy people. A feeding centre for about 30 people, with cooked food every day, is run at Makeni. The said Society operates also at Diocesan, National and International Levels. Mr. Joseph Golo-Musa is holding the post of International President for Africa bestowed on him by the Headquarters in Paris.

A poliomyelitic centre for about 100 boys is run by Fr. Olivani in Kambia. The assisted attend the primary and secondary schools there.

Attitude of the Church in very recent years: 1950-80.

(Attention to man and his local culture)

Important events have taken place in African history these very recent years including the end of colonialism, independence, social and political settlements.

The relationship between the church and the new states has been generally good. Church authorities, both foreign and indigenous, have helped to create a national conscience. The Government have found in the church structures (educational, medical, social) a great asset towards order and expert assistance.

Efforts have been made to Africanize the church, with local clergy (first African Cardinal 'Ruganbua' in 1959), with African elements in the liturgy, with magazines like 'Afer' and 'Revue du Clergy' to promote reflection and discussion on the transmission of the christian message in Africa today.

Certain small independent christian bodies have been less fortunate with the new governments as they appeared not to co-operate towards national and social order and advancement, as some refused to vote, to pay taxes, to attend schools etc.

Notable has been the maturity of the African church in finding balance between faithfulness to Christ and the new states regimes. Several have paid with their deaths, e.g. in Congo, Burundi, Marxist States etc.

The church is clearly dedicated to the whole man, i.e. to his complete development, an attitude which proves every day that Religion is not the opium of the people... "which alienates man from a more humane world".

Another good feature of African Christianity is the involvement of lay people in the work and growth of the church.

IN MEMORY OF OUR MISSIONARIES DEAD

FR. GIOVANNI RESTAGNO - (1933 - 1966)

On Sunday 21st August, 1966, Fr. John was alone in the Parish of Magburaka to Manage with all the services. Fr. Calza, the Parish Priest, was absent.

He was happy to be on his own some time, to take full responsibility as a Priest, especially this Sunday when he could preach on the Samaritan, his favourite passage of the Gospel.

As he spoke, he appeared moved to tears, his eyes shone with unusual brightness. The people stared at him and listened attentively as they had never heard him like that.

"The Samaritan met an unfortunate man, badly wounded, held him in his arms delicately and bandaged his wounds. He covered him with a soft cloth, put him carefully on his horse and carried him to an inn where he could rest and recover. We also must be charitable and kind to each other, help each other, mainly in sadness, loneliness, grief and mourning".

It had rained the whole night and it continued to rain. The roads were flooded. The schools were closed. Many people were busy looking after their rice fields, thus the two morning Masses were not crowded. But Fr. John was kept busy just the same. After the second Mass he administered the sacrament of Baptism to the son of his good Philip Jones. At 6.30 p.m. he returned to church for the Rosary and Benediction for the few people scattered in the benches. Among them there was also a teacher, Munu, waiting outside the church to ask him for a favour: to take him with the car to Makonkorie to deliver an urgent message.

Fr. John was never able to refuse a favour to anyone. The time was 7 p.m. It was dark, the rain was persistent and heavy. He locked the church, went to the garage and took out his beautiful Renault, a present from his mother, who in every letter to him insists: "John, be cautious...this car is a present for you bought with the savings from my salary as a teacher. I know it will help you to do more good in your large field of work, but...one thing I recommend to you: be careful, John, be prudent".

A second friend Mr. Bockarie, now asked to join Mr. Munu, and the car was on the road to Makonkorie, about 30 miles from Magburaka. The road was bad, Fr. John hesitated for a moment... 'Really the Bishop has advised me to use a driver till I am more expert, but it is so late and dark; better not to disturb anyone, I'll try".

They reached their destination by 8 p.m. to find out that the teacher Gbegba whom they had wanted to see, had gone to his native village for holidays. A sense of frustration and anger seized them all. Nothing else to do than to return back.

The rain thickened. Not a soul was on the road. After a few miles the car slipped into a narrow bridge, without parapets, situated after a sudden and dangerous bend. The car slid to the right, hit a small pillar of cement, capsided into the floods of the river, banged on the rocks below and disappeared. Mr. Munu and Mr. Bockarie, almost in despair, miraculously managed to climb the escarpment by holding fast to shrubs and branches, emerging from the waters, but Fr. John was carried down stream.

Unable to render any immediate help, the two, terrified, began to run towards Magburaka. Every now and then, when passing in front of houses or through villages would shout "Fr. John", "Help". At 3 a.m. reached Magburaka after a run of six hours, entered the house of a friend and there they fell to the ground exhausted and in tears.

It was then that the most pitiful scenes of the tragedy began to take place. For two days the search was to go on. The Bishop the Fathers, the Sisters from near and far rushed to the spot. Many people volunteered to give a hand. Fr. Noaro, Parish Priest at Yele, was there with young men to cut a way through the thicket on the two sides of the river. Boys plunged here and there into the river to find the Father. Birds, snakes and other animals sneaked away as if in fear and moaning. "We must find him", everyone uttered. The Bishop was sitting alone on a trunk, ~~so~~ sobbing with his head in his hands.

The car was found, then Fr. John's shoes, then...nothing! It was Monday night, darkness fell, animals came back to populate the forest.

The news has spread all over Sierra Leone through the radio. The next morning a procession of cars arrived from all over. The search started again. In the afternoon, elderly men, the experts, joined in the work and continued to cut a deeper and deeper path on the edge of the forest. They were almost half a mile from the bridge when one old Temne man, came forward through the crowd. He produced a small trunk of palm tree and with an ample and magic gesture he threw it into the water. At first it disappeared under the water, then it was seen carried by the stream, then it stopped and began to whirl around to be finally swallowed down by the water.

"There is the corpse of the white man", said he in all confidence, startling everyone. The swimmers rushed to the spot. They plunged, one boy shouted: 'He is here'. Four of them pulled the body up, carefully....laid him on Fr. Noaro's arms, who in turn laid him delicately on the soft blanket carried by Sister Colum. Fr. Noaro with a helper cleaned the body of the mud, herbs and blood and covered it with a towel.

Just as Fr. John had so graphically described the Samaritan the previous Sunday, ~~so~~ he played the part.

He was never in full charge of a parish or a school, but certainly he was in touch with the greatest number of individual people. He would catch them like flies, attracted by his Christ-like countenance and approach. He had his own style of approach: simple, friendly and respectful, and at the same time an incisive and relentless Christian contact with visits, talks, medicines, small presents etc.

In 1974, after the sudden death of Dr. Stocco, the Bishop insisted on his going on holiday for as long as he needed. But he had hardly arrived home, when he began to make preparation for his return. He found benign doctors who admitted that he could still spend some time in Africa.

On May 4th, he went to spend the day with one of his brothers' family. He offered them a present, a beautiful picture of African life, which he himself wanted to hang from the wall. He then asked his niece, Bertina, to drive him to the house of Mr. Scotti who had a radio transmitter as he wished to speak to Sierra Leone.

The weather was unusually bad, with very heavy rain. They were on the way, when a military truck rushed into their little car and smashed it. Fr. Collini was killed instantly. For some time his face remained serene and as if smiling. 'God loves those He loves'. Fr. Collini liked to quote that saying with a Chinese addition: 'Look into the heart of a right person, you will find there a ray of joy'.

The Fathers and all his many friends in S.L. would have liked to keep Fr. Collini here alive or even dead. But his many friends in Italy, who could never manage to keep him alive, now feel a little consoled. We too are somehow consoled to know that just before dying, he wanted to talk to us. His unspoken words will for long be kept in our hearts.

John Bangura, the last man baptized by Fr. Collini at Magbura-ka, so reacted at the news of his death: 'I go to pray for Fr. Collini, for the Father who baptized me. I can pray also in Temne, he still understands me. Though he was a small man, he appears very big to me, like the sun which though small in our eyes, brings light to so many villages'.

FATHER GIAMBATTISTA COLLINI (1911-1974)

Fr. Collini is surely the Xaverian Father who travelled most most through the N.P. of Sierra Leone.

He soon seemed to have found that his vocation was to run after people rather than expect them to come to a class room, to a meeting or even to Sunday Church.

The superiors wanted him to go for further studies as he was an intelligent little and young fellow, but every time he tried teaching, his students (and I was one of them) would soon realize that he was not going to tie himself to a text book or to an accepted method of teaching, he wanted a good margin of freedom to indulge in cultural digression and in life's explorations.

Therefore, though a surprise for many, at 28 years of age, in 1939, he left for our missions in China. We know that he soon excelled in the knowledge of the language and that no one could tell in which of the two dioceses he was working and which was his mission station. He was her; there and everywhere, till the communists got hold of him and kept him in jail for some years. It was easy for them to find all sorts of accusations against him: he was an imperialistic spy, he fomented anarchic groups (like the Legion of Mary and the St. Vincent De Paul), made sick people die in the hospitals and wherever he visited them!

Anyway they admitted that he responded well to their re-education; they were particularly pleased when they launched an hygienic campaign in the filthy prison and Fr. Collini was able to catch 3,000 flies in one day. He deserved the expulsion from the country!

In 1953 he was in Italy to recuperate and to try to settle there, but the Italian communists did not like to hear about his Chinese experience. He only felt settled when in 1957 was allowed to come to Sierra Leone and start an apostolate in his own style.

As usual, he put himself at the disposal of the superiors with the little margin of freedom... the Bishop had no alternative but allowing him to be the good 'Cyrenean' here and there. Practically all the Fathers in turn requested the help of Fr. Collini, as he alone was able to carry out a certain type of Evangelization needed everywhere.

In 1959 he was at Kabala. In 1960 he was at Mange Buregh and then he went to Lungi. In 1967 he was at Lunsar, and in 1968 in Makeni. In 1969 he was in Magburaka. He was moving everywhere like an Angel or like 'the presence of God', wanted by children, the poor, the sick, and also the learned who were surprised by his culture and wealth of information.

Doctor Lio Stocco joined the Xaverians as a missionary brother at the age of 18. For some years he was a nurse for the Xaverian students and was very skilful as a dentist. Later, as a doctor, he went to China where he spent his mature years. For well known reasons, like other missionaries he had to leave that country and his many friends. After a period of rest, he started off again for the Far East and took up work in East Pakistan. But also there he was made to leave.

Finally, when one would think that it was time for him to enjoy a well deserved rest at home, he came to Sierra Leone. At once he adapted himself to a pioneering work visiting all our schools and many villages in the Northern Province to discover possible cases of leprosy. This was the beginning of a generous campaign destined to develop into a large organization which is gradually over-coming the terrible scourge of thousands of people.

He dedicated himself also to a daily routine of clinic work in the "Stocco Hospital" attending to the more serious cases of leprosy and also to attend to the most needy and poor people. More often than not he became the doctor of those who normally give themselves up to chance rather than to a doctor or hospital. For hopeless cases in fact one could have a last try at Dr. Stocco's hospital, as he always had something to offer, though just hope or one day more of life. He was ever ready to go to visit the poor in their huts or to take them home.

No one expelled him from Sierra Leone, but here he met with his most terrible enemy: bad health. For some years alarming hearts attacks had advised him to take it easy, but his cure consisted in spending himself more and more intensely for others. A month before he died he had a radiography taken in the Magburaka hospital, which himself found 'appealing'. "If it were of one of my patients I would just send him some home to prepare for imminent death". He would not, however, believe that such was his condition and he accelerated his work.

It was on the eve of his 'departure' that I saw him seated 'unusually' in front of my room about half an hour, possibly as a way of bidding last farewell. But he worked again till lunch next day, when...at his return from the last 'tour of charity' he sat at table with his confreres. After a few minutes he stood up, recommended them not to worry "It will pass". But this was the attack which killed him. In a short time he was dead on a chair. He had often said that he would not die in his bed.

This time he could not leave his friends of Sierra Leone unnoticed. His funeral service was a triumph. Everyone, young and old, rich and poor, learned and illiterate, people of all faiths and walks of life, gathered to proclaim that he had been a true friend of all and had done all things well after the example of the

Many were weeping, but not just because they had lost their doctor, but rather their Father, who together with medicine gave himself and his things. He lie at Makeni cemetery, where he had wished to be buried. Many people like to remember that day: 19th February, 1974.

FATHER PIETRO VILLANI (1920 - 1978)

Father Pietro Villani died at Parma in Italy after 25 years of work here. "But why wait so long before sending you back to Italy to recuperate"! It was my first reaction at seeing him in such a hopeless situation. He managed to whisper in all serenity: 'It was I who wished to remain'. Perhaps once again he hoped to get over it. Since he had already undergone five major operations, nothing could scare him any longer. But deep down in his conscience there was also the conviction that his life was to be spent entirely in that particular vineyard of the Lord.

I tried to mention facts, souvenirs, adventures, all things which he liked to recall with masterly skill, but there was no answer. He was fading away. He opened his eyes as for a fleeting remembrance of many beautiful days spent together, but he was no longer able to smile. "If I shall recover'!"

But he did not recover. It was the disease which does not spare anyone.

It is up to us now to remember his dear and unforgettable companionship. He is remembered by his poor, his lepers of Mange Bureh, Port Loko, Masongbo etc. whom he knew how to help, in all details, just as he was faithful to his own personal duties as a priest. He took an interest in the parents as well as in the children, making sure that they could attend school, had the necessities of life. Human warmth also helped to bring them into contact with God, the source of all goodness.

In spite of his occasional bursts of rage, especially when he was disturbed at his rest or when someone was trying to take advantage of him, all knew that he had a good heart. His teachers were ever ready to accept his wise advice, though at times given in a heated tone. To let everybody know that after all, at the bottom, he did not mean anything bad, he liked to be called with the harmless diminutive of 'Pierino' 'little and simple Peter'.

His absence will long be felt in the community of the Fathers, as he had a keen sense of humour, an exceptional skill in telling jokes and grace in listening to other people's talk.

One deed of kindness impressed me the last day we were together at Makeni. He had just returned from Italy and I was going on leave. I was looking for someone to take me to town to catch the bus for Freetown. It was raining cats and dogs. The Bishop first tried but his car was soon stranded by the storm. Father Michael was in bed to cure his first. bout of malaria.

I did not dare to give Fr. Villani, who was at rest, one last big trouble, when...his door opened: "Father I can drive you".

That is the real picture of Fr. Villani. He understood that it was not up to the Bishop or Fr. Michael to drive me, but it was up to him. His nature was reluctant, his body was weak, but it was his duty and on this account he was always ready to forget himself for the others.

I am told that at his funeral in Parma (24th August 1978) there was a spontaneous and loving surge of sympathy and participation. Bishop A. Azzolini, also present, only managed to say a few words mingled with tears.

There is indeed a history which is better expressed by commotion than by words. The Bishop and Fr. 'Pierrino', for six years religious Superior of the Xaverians in Sierra Leone, had for such a long time carried out together the same apostolic work usually with common understanding, at times with slightly different attitudes and views. But then, when stock is taken, one cannot fail to realise how each was helpful to the other and how worthy was the cause for which both spent all their energies.

NB: These short notes were requested by several people~~s~~ mainly teachers, wishing to know more about our local church.

Fr. D.A. Nicolliello s.x.

