

**Lifelong
Learning
Program
2021**



**The OAR mission in a globalized
vineyard**

THE OAR MISSION IN A GLOBALIZED VINEYARD

Globalization is creating various changes in all aspects of life. It has even transformed how we live out our faith and do our mission today. Many would agree that the vineyard sown by the first disciples was completely different compared to what the OAR missionaries are now trying to evangelize. If one is to take his gaze away from today's technological advancement, its innovations in trade, the banking system, and social media, he will still notice that the values and principles of each person today are practically the same. This is a clear sign that almost every person in the world is now a part of the "*world society*"¹. And the physical and social boundaries that challenged the mission of the Church, such as geographical distance, language, cultural and political barriers, etc. are now gradually disappearing.

Globalization as it facilitates the advancement of technology and influx of vast unfiltered pieces of information to every mind has made human life fast-paced, complicated, confusing, tiring, and inter-dependent. It is very obvious that globalization is leading the world towards some sort of relativism and at the same time subconsciously motivated each individual towards the Truth. Today, every human soul seems to have "*lost the sense of history*"² and is on his own in their quest for what is True. But with the limitless variety of things and demands that globalization is offering, the human person, instead of growing is becoming lost and depressed, as globalization is claimed to be the major cause of the increasing number of mental illness and depression cases in the world.³ Instead of taking these

¹ Yolanda Kemp Spies, *Global Diplomacy and International Society*, Palgrave Macmillan 2019, Cham Swiss (p. 27 E-Book).

² *Fratelli Tutti* 13.

³ Globalization and mental disorders Overview with relation to depression, Published online by Cambridge University Press: 02 January 2018 (<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/the->

as a negative reality, missionaries/preachers should see this as an opportunity because it manifests that today's society is now in search of meaning that they can only find in Christ.

The world is seemingly taking its journey in becoming one; is more than in any time in history, in need of the Gospel. Just as "*Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever*" (Hb 13,8), the Church's mission remains the same; *to proclaim the Gospel to all nations* (Mk 16,15). This makes us certain that the command that Christ has given us is always unchanging and ever relevant. And with this, the Church's task is to become inclusive and make the Gospel more appealing and accessible to all. Those who proclaim the Good News should leave their authoritative, lecture-oriented, dry, and closed-minded way of proclamation and catechism; to a more intimate, timely, existential, and joyful approach. Just as Christ truly enjoys talking with his people; "*every preacher should strive to communicate that same enjoyment to his listeners.*"⁴

The mission of the Church has anticipated and somehow facilitated the spread of globalization in our society today. Setting aside today's trade and financial mechanism in which globalization is claimed to be experienced and said to have started, globalization as a phenomenon was also born or if not, fast-forwarded by the missionary endeavors of the Church.

Although it is not widely acknowledged, the command of Christ to spread the Gospel to all nations is one of the major movements that facilitated globalization in the early times. The call of Christ to spread the good news is one of the major driving force that affected globalization in the world in the aspect of values; The eradication of borders, the respect towards the belief of others, equal rights of men and women, and the more profound understanding of the word "neighbor" (Mt 22,39) and the call to love them and many others that shaped the heart of the globalized world that we are experiencing today. The first missionaries are the first ones to cross boundaries with a legitimate purpose: not for land, power, trade, or survival but because of love.

If we will only focus on the values and principles that the globalized society share, we may easily say that even with all the confusions caused by globalization, today's world society possesses now a "*culture transformed by Christ*"⁵, we now live in a world that is closer to the Gospel than any time in history. Women's rights, religious freedom, and toleration, equality, human dignity, etc. are now realities and

[british-journal-of-psychiatry/article/globalisation-and-mental-disorders/27CDD2B3AB289E5828430C773D6BC131](https://www.british-journal-of-psychiatry/article/globalisation-and-mental-disorders/27CDD2B3AB289E5828430C773D6BC131)).

⁴ *Evangelii Gaudium* 141.

⁵ D. A. Carson, *Christ, and Culture Revisited*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 2140 Oak Industrial Drive N.E., Grand Rapids, Michigan 49505 /P.O. Box 163, Cambridge CB3 9PU U.K (p. 39 E-Book).

positive goals that the global society is aspiring for. History will tell us that these realities are not present before and during the time of Christ or if not, upheld only by a group of minorities.

With this perspective, it is clear that the Mission of Christ somehow affected, if not promoted globalization and at the same time made globalization a Trojan horse of the Gospel for the world. We should never see globalization as a fruit of the advancement of technology, politics, trade, and commerce. We should see it as a fruit of the innate aspiration of human beings to be as one and also as the effect of truths and faith being proclaimed, a clear fruit of Christ's mission. It was never greed or man's love for money and profit that had driven globalization, it came from the call within to love our neighbor and of the Christian values being shared and accepted by every society in the world.⁶ This greatly opened/cultivated exclusivity in man's nature, fast-forwarded globalization that now in every society; there is more love, everyone is your neighbor and "*today the whole body of Christ does speak in the language of all peoples*"⁷.

Although we know that almost all religions and forms of faith have driven their members to do a mission or promote their doctrine, Christ's command of going "*into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation*" is the most concrete, impelling, and popular, as it is a Christian way of life. Thus, globalization is something that our Master had foreseen to take place. And with all these, we can easily say that today's globalized society is somehow a fruit of the Gospel proclaimed and incarnated in the peoples' cultures.⁸ If we will take away all the advancement, technology, media, and anything that are accidental, the world will remain globalized as long as its societies hold unto its values and principles oriented towards communion, peace, and the love of the other.

Globalization had not only enlightened the world towards the values and principles that it treasures today, but it has also enlightened the Church. Globalization has transformed the Church and helped her re-interpret the message of Christ and discover its real meaning. Just recently, the Holy Father released a *Motu Proprio* stating that from now on the ministries of Lector and Acolyte are to be open to women, in a stable and institutionalized form, through a specific mandate.⁹ This is not just one incident where we can see the Church grow to fully embrace the will of Christ and to have a dialogue with the globalized world, *both*

⁶ Jeffrey D. Sachs, *The Ages of Globalization*, Columbia University Press, New York, Chichester, West Sussex, 2020 (p. 233 E-Book).

⁷ *OFSA, Exposition of Psalm 147, 19*, translated by M. Boulding, *The Works of Saint Augustine III*, 20 (Hyde Park, N.Y., 2004 (p. 464 E-Book)).

⁸ *Redemptoris Missio* 52.

⁹ Internet (<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2021-01/pope-francis-opens-ministries-lector-acolyte-women.html>).

*opening its doors to create something new.*¹⁰ We can now see the formerly tyrant Church of the middle ages being transformed into a humble and loving mother that embraces all cultures and souls.

*“Humanity has always been globalized,”*¹¹ as every man naturally aims to understand, be understood, and be relevant. Globalization is already taking place in the very beginning, but today’s global society has only been realized in this recent century. The journey towards globalization was hard, long, and painful. Globalization, as it moves and takes shape in history, has affected a lot of tenured wounds to humanity. With this, Missioners, engaged in a continuous dialogue with today’s globalized but wounded society, should be very careful, docile, and creative in doing their role; missioners should know that they are not only preachers but also healers at the same time. Missioners should know how to take advantage of the opportunities that are now present in the globalized vineyard.

OAR MISSION CHALLENGES IN SIERRA LEONE

Poverty, Illiteracy, and Corruption

Poverty, illiteracy, and corruption always go together. Sierra Leone is ranked as the 10th poorest country in the world¹² even if it is famous for its vast deposit of diamonds. *Experts believe that four primary factors contribute to Sierra Leone’s overwhelming levels of poverty: government corruption, a lack of an established education system, absence of civil rights, and poor infrastructure.*¹³

Even though the world is now globalized, Sierra Leone remains to be poor. Although this is not true, many believe that globalization makes rich countries richer and poor countries poorer. What is real is that the world society now being interconnected has made a great forward direction in eliminating poverty, but some countries are still left behind and couldn’t catch up and one of which is Sierra Leone. Aside from its main cities, Sierra Leone has no electricity, a stable water system, and even a reliable banking system.¹⁴ This is one of the countries that will manifest a clear picture of a globalized stone age; where even without electricity people still manage to be active in the social media network, houses here have more cellphones than bulbs in their houses.

¹⁰ Chibueze Udeani, *Dialogue- Inculturation as Dialogue Igbo Culture and the Message of Christ*, Amsterdam - New York, NY 2007 (Acknowledgement Page By, Rodopi B.V., E-Book).

¹¹ The Ages of Globalisation, Geography, Technology and Institutions Jeffrey D. Sachs Columbia University Press, New York, 2020 (p. 35, E-book).

¹² Internet, (<https://www.gfmag.com/global-data/economic-data/the-poorest-countries-in-the-world>).

¹³ Internet, (<https://borgenproject.org/poverty-in-sierra-leone/>).

¹⁴ Internet, (<https://sierralii.org/content/why-can%E2%80%99t-our-%E2%80%98bankers%E2%80%99-be-bankers>).

In other cultures, hard work, honesty, and dedication are the path in going above and attaining success in life; but with the absence or lack of choice in terms of livelihood, many Sierra Leonians consider politics and corruption as their only way out.¹⁵ Aside from this, corruption seems to be tolerated. There is a growing culture of being uninvolved¹⁶ in the country. Because of extreme poverty, even after witnessing an act of corruption people just tend to be silent, mind their own business, and focus on how they survive for a day or two.

During a school meeting, right after a school principal was caught stealing school funds; one OAR missionary asked the co-teachers why do they remain silent even though they saw and knew that this has been happening for a long time. One teacher answered that it is because when it is now their time to hold the position and do the corruption, they too will be spared any charge. The trauma of poverty seems to have altered their morals, and that not using one's power to their selfish advantage is foolish. Aside from their famous bond of silence¹⁷, their culture of opportunism which many of them believe to be the only way out of poverty and corruption perpetuates corruption in the country.

Illiteracy and the trauma of poverty are the main factors that lead them into embracing opportunism. Since 2018 the Sierra Leone government has been committed in its focus in uplifting the quality of education in the country and has been dedicating most of the budget to support free education in the country. The Recollects are administering around 100 schools that are subsidized by the government, and it seems that the government's action of increasing the financial funding of the schools have multiplied the number of corruption cases in the school; just last year 2020, OAR missionaries assigned in school administration together with its local board sacked two principals from a different school who have been misappropriating government school fund and for falsifying documents, aside from these there are a lot of small-scale unreported corruptions happening around the schools that the OAR administer.

The government all-out efforts of supporting the schools to eradicate corruption have given rise to corruption itself. This is continuously happening because those who did the act have not given due punishment for their actions, this is so because of the bond of silence, culture of un-involvement, and the laxity of law in the country especially in the rural areas.

¹⁵ Rev. Fr. Louis Koroma, *The Mission of God in Sierra Leone In The 21st Century A Challenge For Pastoral Agents*, Diocese Of Makeni, Sierra Leone, West Africa, Printed by Skill Press SNC, July 2020. P. 279.

¹⁶ Riddell, B. (2005) 'Sierra Leone: Urban-Elite Bias, Atrocity and Debt ' *Review of African Political Economy* vol. 32 no. 103, p. 126. (<https://www.e-ir.info/2011/07/28/factors-of-persistent-poverty-in-sierra-leone/>).

¹⁷ Rev. Fr. Louis Koroma, *The Mission of God...* 276.

The Co-Dependency of Missioners and the Patriarchal Oriented Churches

The OAR missioners are among the most recent missionaries that arrived in Sierra Leone. But still, even we arrived late, we can easily say that our mission's territories are still under-developed. Our local parishes have been very dependent on the missioners to be the sole actors of evangelization. For growth to take place, OAR missioners should empower its local parishes by making it more "*mission-oriented, to make ordinary pastoral activity on every level more inclusive and open*".¹⁸ but it is known by experience that this kind of process and transformation is very hard to realize especially within a patriarchal and exclusive society. And this reality makes our Missionary encounter very difficult even today.

When a foreign visitor arrives in rural Sierra Leone; whether they are an NGO or missionaries, the first ones that will welcome and greet them are the cultural leaders which are men, and the women will come next but quickly as they do the food preparation and welcome dance. The mission dialogue has always been done with men elders, and what the missionaries would hear, see, and know are just a portion of the real face of the local society; the sentiments and opinions of men. And as a consequence, missionaries will be building exclusive churches from the town to one village and another. Missionaries and their activities will be placed in a box; A church and missionary programs for the concerns of local men.

Missionaries would at first think that the church is growing as the number of villages chapel grows; but the reality is that the Church and the faith are trapped in the hands of the first men who have received it, in the hands of the first men elders who are monopolizing the material livelihood programs of the church. This is one major reason why the number of converts never grows outside of the families of the first men who welcomed the missioners. With this stagnancy, missionaries will try to expand by going to another village gaining the same result.

For a very long time, the missionaries were blindly trapped in the exclusive box that men leaders have created. As a consequence, missionaries are just seeing one side of the African society: their greediness, treachery, laziness towards the faith, close-mindedness and unreliability, *have been a freedom and growth barrier for others*¹⁹ and of the Church. This dark side of the African society places the missioners into another box, which can be called an NGO box; as a consequence of numerous failures and heartaches, missionaries cease to truly reach out and evangelize.

Missionaries will just choose to leave the mission or just finish their assignment without tension and acquiring praises by kissing the arse of men church leaders by

¹⁸ *Evangelii Gaudium* 27.

¹⁹ Dieter Neubert, *Frontiers of globalization: Inequality Socio-Cultural Differentiation and Social Structures in Africa Beyond Class* (p. 207, E-Book).

offering them dole-out projects or buildings. While the missionaries continue to stay in their tension-less NGO box, without any goals in the evangelization aspect, the true church, and its mission suffers and fails to reach and heal the vulnerable ones in the society. For a very long time foreign missionaries have been trapped and unable to break free from this co-dependency.

OAR Missionaries should always be reminded that they should always be in "contact" with the homes and the lives of its people, and do not become a useless structure out of touch with people or a self-absorbed group made up of a chosen few."²⁰ They should be very vigilant on the controlling tactics of the few and at the same time knows how to motivate and give preference to those who are least in the society.

The one who takes advantage of "*the little ones*" is not of the same value as the "*little ones*" with its benefactor.²¹ Although missionaries should need to treat everyone in the church equally, missionaries should give more time to reaching those who are still outside the roof of the Church. With this, missionaries will gain a complete view of what is truly happening in the parish and not just the opinion of the few. They should also know how to uplift the morale and empower the least in the church and here in Africa, they are the women and the children.

Gender In-equality

Sierra Leone is a predominantly Muslim country and patriarchal, as a consequence, most of their traditions are rooted in Islam. But nowadays, because of globalization, one can easily tell that most of them have been soft in their ancestral ideologies and in practicing their traditions. It is not hard to notice that women in Sierra Leone are dis-advantaged, and treated as "*second-class citizens*"²². In rural villages especially, girls are the least to receive the opportunity to go to school. Schooling is primarily given to boys even basic education. In every house, women are expected to do the largest part of the work²³ and even pre-arranged in marriage when they reach the appropriate age.

It is normal in a patriarchal country such as Sierra Leone, to see men as the only ones active in the local church community, if not, they work for their leadership with very few women that were called "*Mami Queens*."²⁴ Aside from these personalities, seldom will you see women or girls being active in Church apostolate. Even though women constitute the majority of attendance in every church

²⁰ *Evangelii Gaudium* 28.

²¹ *Christ and Culture*, H. Richard Niebuhr, Harper and Row Publishers, Inc N.Y 1951, p. 237.

²² Rev. Fr. Louis Koroma, *The Mission of God*... 314.

²³ *Frontiers of Globalization: Inequality Socio-Cultural Differentiation and Social Structures in Africa Beyond Class*, Dieter Neubert. Palgrave McMillan, Swiss 2019. P. 202.

²⁴ *Queen Mothers or Honorary Woman Chief- could be a successful merchant or a 1st wife of a notable, sister of a respected man*. Ibid 201.

activities²⁵, Sierra Leonian women are just passive in terms of leadership and participation in missionary activities. In the past, even in the OAR Missions, local volunteers are composed of men.

Among all the tribes that the OAR mission served, the “*Limba Women*”²⁶ are the first ones who became active in the Church. One main reason is that many of the *limbas* had already embraced the Christian Wesleyan faith and a bit open-minded in terms of faith. It is only recently that “*temne women*”²⁷ became active in our mission areas in Kamalo. Women are starting to find their role and place in society and the church’s mission.

In these recent years, the internet had been made available for all people and places in Sierra Leone. Social media and the unlimited information that the web greatly promoted equality to society, people especially the young ones are now made aware of the potential and value of every person in the society. With this, globalization had fast-forwarded our mission, as women now tend to explore their potentials.

On a certain occasion during a rite of Christian initiation, an OAR missionary asked his catechumens why they want to become Christian. One young girl answered with a simple answer: “because I want to become what I like.” At first glance, we would notice the absence of a faith-related answer; but the answer is so pure that we would easily realize that the young girl’s answers reveal their long-repressed sentiments and their inner longing for freedom and equality, and they have also seen the Church as their main door in attaining that reality. And with this, the Church with its missionaries holds a great responsibility not only in terms of faith but also in transforming socio-cultural values of the country wherein the Church grows.

The Mothers of the Church

With the guidance and grace of the Holy Spirit, the OAR missionaries found their way out of the box of exclusivity and of being an NGO, with the great help of women who have just started to become active in their life of faith. It turns out that even though a Sierra Leone family is patriarchal, the mother, especially when she is earning her part in the family and empowered by her faith and all, has a say when it comes to her children’s life of faith and all she supports.

²⁵ Rev. Fr. Louis Joroma, *The Mission of God*... 314.

²⁶ Limba Women- *Women belonging to the Limba Tribe the third largest ethnic group in Sierra Leone. They represent 8.4% of Sierra Leone’s total population (592,190 members). They are based in the north of the country across seven provinces, comprising about 8% of the national population. (Wikipedia).*

²⁷ Temne Women- *Women belonging to the Temne Tribe, the second largest ethnic group in Sierra Leone, are predominantly found in the Northern Province of Sierra Leone.*

OAR missionaries are naturally gifted in working with women elders. The building force of almost every parish in the countries outside Sierra Leone is mostly composed of women elders. With this, missionary candidates in the seminary have gained the skill to work well with women. Subconsciously, when missionaries are assigned to a new assignment, the first thing that they would do is to find mother figures who will work with them in building the church and to make the place where they are assigned a home.

The reaching out to women started with a simple incident-when the missionaries invited all the church women to cook together whenever there is a church occasion. Previously what was done was that there is an in-charge family to do the cooking at home for the celebration, and the man of the house will get the fund for food and later hand it on to her wife. The previous process is changed because some men will not hand over all the food funds to their wife. So with this, it will turn out that the food prepared on feast days for everyone in the church would be unsatisfactory or would be short to cater to all the visitors. This corruption was discovered when the women and the missionaries started to have a real talk with the missionaries.

From simple cookout on special days and in a small amount of time, the women in Kamalo parish started to have confidence and a significant role in the church. Just like Mary, they have become the light and protector of the parish church, their strong presence transformed the church from an exclusive religion into an inclusive faith. From the moment that the women showed dedication in the church, the number of the daily Mass-goers increased from 7 to a maximum of 70, the converts increased up to five hundred percent, the parish has now true holy hour devotions to the blessed sacrament on Fridays and the holy rosary every day in honor to na we Mami of the good body (*Virgen Dela Salud*).

Moreover, the women have also been the key in reviving the forgotten sacrament of marriage in Sierra Leone church. Being docile to the preaching of the missionaries, the catholic women have become a strong voice in encouraging the youth and live-in couples to receive the sacrament of marriage. Another improvement that can be attributed to the women is the increase in the number of youth in the parish. Currently, the number of young members has greatly increased. It turns out that the woman in the family controls the timetable of her children and in the past this time table is consists of house chores, not giving ample time for the kids to attend catechism or evening prayers in the church.

For a long time, the missionaries are praying the rosary in the evening with the same handful of kids who are already starting to grow as time goes on, and only a very few kids who came from the same catholic family will be added to the prayer group. But with the collaboration of the women, the numbers grew greatly; as they have now added church's activities in their kids time table and reprimand other kids

on the street to stop playing and attend prayer after the angelus prayer bell had rung. With this now happening, even the children from Muslim families are attending the evening prayers and church activities, since their catholic playmates would attend it.

The number of children converts from Muslim families has also increased. Since the parish church has now promoted church marriages, the parish has now acquired an easy process on the aspect of conversion; the catholic married women and sometimes with their husbands stand as the godparents of converts to guide them towards the faith. Many Muslim parents are have been entrusting their kids to Catholic women to be baptized and be guided. Unlike in other countries and churches, the relationship between a god-parent and a child is different. In Sierra Leone, the relationship between the god-mother and the god-child is not just platonic, the women's godparent and the child have a real faith relationship and bond, the god-mother truly becomes a second mother and the child will be treated like their own.

In the parish you will see Catholic mothers who have acquired autonomy from their husbands take care of even more than ten people; some are their children, some are their god-children, some are adopted from different Muslim families and some are even lodgers,²⁸ and all of them will be carried and guided by the mother to her faith.

There are numerous improvements in the OAR missions that the local Catholic women have been initiated into. Just recently, OAR missionaries introduced the SARF to St. Paul Parish, which now has 12 members and the majority of them are women. Without doubt, the African women's inclusivity, concern for the common good, missionary spirit, and love for the faith, has brought life and hope to the stagnant OAR mission in Africa. And with this, the missionaries are trying their best to bring confidence and empowerment to women.

Globalization made it also possible for imported goods to reach even the farthest of places. More and more women are now leaving their pickax and hoe and started engaging themselves in various trading business for a more stable income, Just this year, the OAR missionaries, together with ARCORES International, have constructed a school canteen building for women to help them acquire "*autonomy*"²⁹ in their homes and community. This project was a huge success as the number of women vendors in the school increased. It had even reached the point that they now assigned themselves in groups and take turns in selling in the canteen, to avoid congestion. In addition to this, some of the Muslim women traders have

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

now brought their children into the church under the guidance of Catholic women elders.

The OAR missionaries together with ARCORES have realized the importance and potentials of African women in the creation of a better society. The ARCORES team continues to be docile as they move forward in their women's empowerment agenda. Although many local men have not understood the essence of the agenda and have criticized the intentions of the women empowerment projects and branded it as partial, the majority of the locals have appreciated these new projects and started now to see the potential and value of women as a human person and much more a mission collaborator in the church.

Without any fear, the ARCORES team have also established a formative boarding school for girls; the beneficiaries are orphans and from poor families who cannot send their children to school. The program's goal is to give chance to less fortunate girls by giving them housing and supporting their basic and school needs. All of these happen with a formative program under a headmistress and an OAR spiritual director. The ARCORES team being docile knows that dole-out financial support given to their families or even by giving them housing as they attend school is not enough or could be useless, given the culture that they have. n. Even it is a very expensive and difficult task, the team collaborated in giving the girls dignified housing and formation under a headmistress—a formations directed towards the heart and the mind.

At the beginning of the program, the boarding school received 12 girls, most of them are not able to read and all of them are not able to write; some are even malnourished but with the motherly dedication of the headmistress and their academic tutors these girls are now all in physically nourished and are now regularly pronouncing the readings during the daily mass of the parish and on school masses. If this program will continue to be successful, these girls could be leaders in their country in the future or if that is too much to ask, these girls are surely going to become good and confident mothers of their own family.

SIERRA LEONE AS A GLOBALISED VINEYARD

The first Catholic missionaries arrived in Sierra Leone in the year the 1400s with the evangelization mainly among the Temne tribes. The mission cannot and did not grow and was kept at bay because of pirate raids and slave trades.³⁰ The mission only gained a slow momentum in the 1800s. It was so slow that even until now it is still considered as a mission area but a fast-growing vineyard and globalization could be one of its reason.

³⁰ Internet, (<https://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/sierra-leone-catholic-church>).

In the northern part of Sierra Leone where the Recollects are assigned, the number of converts and catechumens have increased tremendously within these past four years. It was within this period when there was that Ebola pandemic. During this period, too, cellular networks were established, reaching even to the far-plung rural areas making internet connections available. I was also at this time when roads, bridges, hi-ways, and electricity became operational (normally) in the north.

As global pieces of information and values had now become accessible to all, the locals have seen the difference in terms of their situation and of their lives compared to people in other countries or their relatives in the cities who have embraced the “uptown values” or way of life. Some might have seen movies; wherein a man loves only one woman, or a movie about a successful woman, or on how one could attain his or her dreams with perseverance. This influx of pieces of information has in one way or another subconsciously promoted the gospel in their hearts.

The Augustinian Recollects in Sierra Leone are working in the vineyard dominated by men and the Islamic way of life. OAR parishes are composed of Temne, limba, and Loko tribes—all of them are still practicing or if not in touch with “African traditional religion.”³¹ This so-called religion does not have written doctrines of law, but a series of social practices and values that characterizes or dictates their way of life.

Every Recollect missionary who arrives in the vineyard is considered an outsider. He is an “aputo Father” foreign priest, in whom, even with his ministerial task and responsibilities or even after his welcoming ceremonies he will always be considered as an outsider. Only time and experience will allow him to be considered as a real elder of the community.

Missionary as An *Aputo*

Newly arrived missionaries always say that the community’s bond of silence is unbreakable; that is because he is still outside the community. At this stage, missionaries will feel that the local people need them to be more like an NGO agent than a missionary of Christ. The local people with the trauma of poverty will just take materially whatever they can get from the missionaries--role-playing, acting and speaking as if they are ready to listen and embrace what the missionary is offering them spiritually. At this early stage, the missionary’s effort towards dialogue seems meaningless. Although heard and respected, no heart seems to listen. Corrections, promotions of the sacraments, especially marriage and confessions, are always downplayed by the locals. They will never allow an *Aputo*

³¹ Chibueze Udeani, *Inculturation as Dialogue Igbo Culture and the Message of Christ*, Editions, Amsterdam - New York, NY 2007 (p. 2 Ebooks).

or a white man or any outsider to instantly change their ways of life and much more hear their sins or community affairs.

The practice of the Recollects of rotating the friars every three years or six have created in the past a very superficial mission. The low number of marriages, communicants, the low number of daily churchgoers, and even the huge expenses of mission houses on untrue and individual charities will state that as a fact. For quite some time we are just adding the number of “*the baptized whose lives do not reflect the demands of baptism.*”³² Most missionaries in Africa are challenged in terms of relevance.³³ Missionaries often ask the question of how are they going to be relevant to the people or what can we give to them for them to accept us. Perhaps we have constructed so many schools, water wells, and chapels to bring us and Jesus close to them but sadly there were still no communicants and catholic married couples in sight. Almost all of the Recollect missionaries are from developed countries and if not, from the Philippines which is a growing country; they have been trained to see quick results from their labor and if this attitude persist in the African context, then this would have less positive result.

Time is important, as well as docility to the Master of the vineyard. A missionary should be actively patient. Missionaries should not rush their integration to the local community by giving in to what the local people want and at the same time just be passive in terms of ministry. Missionaries need to be always hopeful, docile and at the same time active, not seeing results would also mean that we are doing the wrong thing. “We should not passively and calmly wait in our church buildings”;³⁴ we should act “from a pastoral ministry of mere conservation to a decided missionary pastoral ministry”.³⁵

Missionaries as Black Fathers or “*Mi On Father*”

Missionary dialogue is a continuous process and does not happen only one time and end when the community allowed the missionaries to build and establish a church. It is more of a journey with many heartaches, conflict, and sometimes violence. There is no dialogue without conflict, and these conflicts whether big or small are maybe the best qualifying factor in considering a place as mission territory. The missionary, even though ignored in the aspect of evangelization by the local community, must not be afraid of conflict and confrontation. Missionaries should always remain steadfast, vigilant in prayer, and rooted in their missionary goal. These tensions and conflicts with the local community are signs of progress

³² Benedict XVI, “Homily at Mass for the Conclusion of the Synod of Bishops (28 October 2012)”: AAS 104 (2012), 890. As Cited in *Evangelii Gaudium* (p. 14).

³³ Chibueze Udeani, *Inculturation...* 197 E-Book.

³⁴ Fifth General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops, *Aparecida Document*, 29 June 2007, 548 As Cited in *Evangelii Gaudium* p. 15.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

and true dialogue; and if endured by the missionary while not becoming a puppet of the self-oriented members of the local community, will be the very key to being accepted as an elder or a respected member of the local community.

The local community, knowing that the missionaries do not anymore buy their lies and truly came for the business of faith and evangelization, will slowly give up, bestow respect, and truly open themselves to what the missionaries truly bring. At this stage the missionaries now hear and know what is happening in the local community. They are even invited to resolve conflicts that are happening within the members of local the community. Missionaries at this stage are called by the local community as “Black Fathers”, all though these missionaries are not dark-colored, they are called as such because they are now respected members of the local community and also it means that the missionary is not anymore gullible.

Being now a part of the local society, the “*mission fathers*” takes a next-level role of being a father and a guide, starting from just being an NGO and dispenser of the sacraments, or a source of income the missionaries now take a crucial role in the local society of both Muslims and Catholics. From the state of just giving out, the missionaries who have reached this stage now start to receive. They are now invited to outside church community gatherings, visited for advice, receive gifts, even from other denominations without the requirement of doing something in return, etc. And in this stage, the church and Catholic community that the missionaries tend are even seen and received by the local Muslims as their sister mosque and the Catholics as their brothers and sister in faith.

Last year during the days of the *Eid Al-Adha*, the Chief Imam with the Muslim community of Kamalo has invited and provided St. Paul Parish two cows, which would be slaughtered and offered according to Islam rites and was shared after by the Catholic members and priests after the celebration. With this, we can say, that at this stage the missionaries are also seen and respected like an Imam in the local society and the church is also seen like a mosque. Setting aside relativism, this manifests that the Catholic faith, because of the immersion of the missionaries in the local society, is now seen not as a foreign faith but a faith, a way of life that is treasured and owned by the African society and their culture.

It is not only the “*mission fathers*” that the local society has accepted, but most especially the Christian way of life. At this level, missionaries can now hear true and real confessions, promote the sacraments, make corrections, suggestions and accompany the community in terms of moral and spiritual issues, etc. Now the mission grows from just a mere mission encounter to true dialogue. At this stage, missionaries can now proceed towards inculturation.

Even before the Recollects arrived in Sierra Leone, Catholicism has already been embraced and practiced by the local society. Just by reading the things that have

been said; it is a certainty that the Gospel has already been proclaimed and accepted though not yet fully in-cultured to the local society. The reality of polygamy and broken families in Christian families, low number of communicants, the insipid practice of faith, etc, show that our mission in Africa still needs a lot of work in the aspect of inculturation, both in “substance and accidents”³⁶ of the Gospel.

Inculturation of the Gospel Values

Every person who has visited Africa will quickly say that it is colorful and is culturally rich. Africans are very famous for their very welcoming smiles and warm welcoming dances, delicious food, and friendly and loving people. But most foreigners who have stayed in Africa see a different and dark side, with the widespread corruption the society, their own experiences of thievery, dishonesty from the people, etc. And these negative opinions about their cultures have somehow destroyed their image in the global society. Although both opinions are true, the latter description of Africa was just a consequence of the poverty, abuses, and confusion that they have endured in the past. A person that has truly immersed himself into the African culture will attest that Africans are good, always welcoming, humble, forgiving, compassionate, etc. It was the slapdash attitude of their colonizers and even missionaries that made them untrusting, wounded, and confused about their true identity. It was somehow embedded in their cultural subconscious that anything Western is better than local. It seemed that they have lost confidence in their own identity.

The first missionaries in Africa “*made little effort to study and learn the cultures of the people as a technique for conversion.*” And with this, “...acceptance of Christianity meant to despise or total rejection of one’s culture.”³⁷ But, certainly, no one can truly leave and reject one’s culture and belief overnight; what happens is that Christian converts resorts into embracing a two-sided way of life—he lives a different life in front of the missionaries and the like and different life in front of his or her local society. And by doing so, he or she becomes unconfident in the totality of his own culture and at the same time a Christian who has not truly embraced the gospel. He or she now becomes a so-called “*Chrismus*,” a fake Christian and a fake Muslim; who have intermingled in his life the irreconcilable aspect of the two faith traditions.

As agents of inculturation, missionaries ought to be docile to the Spirit and patient in the inculturation of the gospel to the wounded African culture. The new generation of missionaries to Africa and that includes the Recollects has received another task. We ought not only to be agents of inculturation but also healers for them to find their true identity as African Christians.

³⁶ Rev. Fr. Louis Koroma, *The Mission...* 177.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 210.

Missionaries should learn to patiently immerse themselves in the local society, re-orient the community towards the real meaning of the gospel, and help them celebrate the gospel in their own culture without destroying and undermining the very teachings of the gospel itself. This is not easy and will not happen every night. The Christian way of life has now found itself almost welded and at the same time clashes with the local culture. A Christian who has three wives cannot just leave his other two families easily and of course, the missionaries cannot just revoke the man's membership from the faith. In this situation, patience and trust in God's grace are greatly needed. The missionaries should not stop or get tired of preaching what is right and give in and tolerate this kind of double-sided life of faith. Missionaries should never drive away from the people who have this kind of life but instead be closer to them.

Polygamy among Christians is very common in Africa, but it doesn't mean that the church in Africa and her missionaries are allowing polygamy. The bond of silence among locals has proliferated this kind of trend in the mission, many of them even receive communion not because of ignorance but to hide their status and blend in, with a notion that these practices are tolerated in Africa. The OAR missionary's immersion into the local peoples' lives has made them knowledgeable about this kind of underground trend. Polygamy, sacrilege, live-in relationships, and the like are still a great challenge for the OAR missionaries and have always been a part of the content of their preachings even until today. And as they do so, the missionaries always make it clear that the church gladly embraces every sinner but does not tolerate the sin. With this, the local African society is gradually realizing that the church is always firm in her teachings and that no one even a majority cannot just alter the very substance of the Christian culture and the sacraments.

The Gospel as it grows in the missions continues to clash with the African tradition. But despite this, the Holy Spirit continues to make its presence more and more profound. An example of this profound and healing presence of the Spirit in the missions is the story of an old man a baptized catholic from one of the OAR Chapel Community in Kamalo who is known to have two wives; while others who have been known practicing polygamy leave their Christian faith, this man regardless of his status and the stigma continued to go to church and always crave to once again receive Holy Communion. Although for some he was a hopeless case and should be advised to leave the faith, the missionaries continued to welcome him. Until eventually, one of his wives died because of old age, and who happens to be a Muslim, months after the funeral the old man immediately marries the remaining wife in the church and embraced monogamy, finally he received the sacrament of the Eucharist with tears in his eyes. The story is not unique, but very common in Africa. Time, perseverance, patience, and God's grace always heal the wounds

brought by the clashing of two cultures. This kind of life story happening in the Church endows the African society an enlightening notion that Christ is ever patient, loving, and present in their culture.

There is no doubt that Africans love Christ, even Muslim Africans love Christ. Moreover, despite their culture and identity; despite their irreconcilable traditions, the heart of African society is not far from the gospel. Every African has the potential to become a fervent Christian. Most of the time it is only because of the missionary's fear to be immersed, and un-involvement in the African society and culture that these kinds of confusions, mediocrity towards the faith happen and sadly slowly becoming now a trend.

THE ESSENCE OF RECOLLECT IDENTITY IN THE MISSION

For more than twenty years, the Recollects have been working with the Diocese of Makeni in proclaiming the faith to Sierra Leonians. The Recollect missionaries have been known and admired to be very communitarian, pious, resilient, and very persevering. Some of the first Recollect missionaries who have arrived in Africa have also been commissioned to help and assist the growth of the Makeni Diocese because of their skills and diplomacy. Aside from these, the Recollects were much innovated the economic monitoring of the parishes and village chapels in the whole Diocese of Makeni which is being implemented until today.

From the very beginning of their missionary apostolate in Africa, the Recollects have been working hard to proclaim the Gospel to a society that loves Christ, but at the same time indifferent towards the life of faith that Christ offers. The missionary work in Africa is hard, especially in the early years, taking into consideration the distance, bad roads, lack of cell site, absence of electricity and water, sickness, differences in language and cultures, and the economic situation of the country. Aside from these, the Recollect's work and growth have always been interrupted by events like wars, ebola outbreaks, and now the Covid pandemic. But fortunately, these factors are now slowly being eradicated because of globalization and the development that it brings.

Today, It is undeniable that the Catholic faith is growing in Sierra Leone at a fast rate. But despite this progress, perhaps because all of the Recollect missionaries are foreigners, they continue to struggle with some challenges in the cultural aspect and continue to implement a trial and error process in discovering the best ways on how the locals would embrace and celebrate the faith as their own. Some would say that missionaries sent to Africa were unprepared or half-baked because African mission life is far more strenuous, uncertain, and different from another mission assignment of the Recollects. But this is only just partially true; for nothing can prepare a missionary for the actual challenges of any mission. But even though

sometimes clueless or like playing a ball game without knowing the rules, Recollect missionaries continue to rise above the challenges. Even without mastering the missionary skills-oriented specifically for Africa, OAR missionaries just simply need to embrace their Recollect identity in contrast with the missionary challenges of whatever place, today and in the future. The OAR missionaries' rootedness in contemplation, community life, apostolate, and Marian devotion has always been the best gifts that made them effective in the mission. It is evident that the OAR formation towards its identity was specially tailored by the Master of the vineyard and is ever effective to conquer the complex and ever-changing challenges of proclaiming the Gospel to all peoples and nations.

MISSION DYNAMICS OF OAR COMMUNITY LIFE

“Ombut Amant Kam Poti” (Pour Forth)

The Recollects have always been known and admired by other missionary congregations and even local priests in Africa for their dedication to prayer, but most especially for their community life (they call it brotherhood). Often you will see religious from other missionary congregations and local priests visiting and even staying at Recollect houses to digress themselves from the tensions of missionary work. They always commend the hospitality and the community life of the Recollect communities which is very inspiring and stressful relieving.

The scent of the Recollect missionaries does not only affect other missionaries in Africa but also the missionary vineyard itself. The patriarchal society of Sierra Leone denotes a very treacherous trend of distrust. One local priest stated that polygamy in society has made every Sierra Leonian untrusting and manipulative. The competition between the wives and the children for the father's attention and good graces made everyone in the family untrusting and sometimes deceitful. And this is true with regards to the experiences of the Recollect missionaries as to how the local elders and families would always try to divide the missionaries and capture the heart of the mission prior or “*boss*” in the community. But with their gift and constant communication, the Recollect missionaries always stay vigilant, united, and firm. These manifestations of one-heartedness and community life made the locals realize that the Recollect missionaries are different from other missionaries who were previously assigned alone in their community.

In the start of every missionary endeavor, the usual missionary dynamics of other missionary congregation focuses on the how to effectively spread the gospel and convert the locals of a missionary territory. Some would even divide themselves to cover as much of the territory. But for the Recollects, it is different. Their initial focus concerns mainly on how to strengthen the community life and maintain the spiritual life of each member assigned. *“For where two or three have gathered*

together in My name, I am in their midst”(Mt 18,20) For the Recollects, the mission begins in the community, “as they search for ways to grow in the love of God and how, in concrete ways, we can bring this love to others.”³⁸ The schedules, talks, meetings games, apostolate, and even small things done together by the community empower the interior life of every member of the community. It is like pouring forth love to a cup until it fills that eventually flows and spreads out.

“Amant Mala Malong” (Burst Forth)

One Secular Augustinian Recollect Fraternity pre-trial member urges others to imitate the Augustinian as a general model and make the way how they are to live in the community. He states that the missionaries are so united “*Kabutkin Amiringin*”, which means *one heart and one mind in life*, that is why they rise above all the challenges. He also adds that Christian families should learn and adapt that to be able to overcome the difficulties in front of them. Today, numerous local families in the mission now practice the share of common goods wherein the father and the wife merge all their earnings and commonly allot them for the family's needs.

What usually happened in the past was that the father would just give a part of his earnings for rice money and it's the mother's responsibility to make it sufficient for the whole family in a month. As an after-effect of this trend, the other members of the family individually look for their means to support their personal needs. It is so amazing to see that the culture of distrust and selfishness in the local society is gradually being healed simply by the missionaries' practice of community life.

With this, the Holy Spirit has revealed that the best skill and techniques necessary to in-culture the Gospel have been flowing ever since in the blood of every Recollects. The witnessing and love within the community of the Recollect missionaries are bursting out to heal and be experienced by others. The missionaries ought to remain committed to living out their identity, letting the love and unity which are rooted in Christ effusively flow towards the local society, slowly letting the wounds of divisiveness that are eating up the local society be healed.

“Masak Te Rukang” (Gush Forth)

Amazingly, the mission of Christ that has always been carried out by the missionaries has become a *shared mission*—the love of the missionaries that poured forth and burst forth and flowed towards the heart of the locals, who in turn become missionaries.

As of today, the Recollects in both mission territories are focused on the promotion of the sacrament of marriage and family, believing in the power of grace

³⁸ Fr. Lauro Larlar, OAR, Homily on the Closing Mass of the XII Formands Convention (Recoletos filipinas.org).

and the reality that one's concept and adherence towards a community begins in the family. The missionaries are continuously promoting and accompanying every couple to receive the sacrament of marriage and embrace the Christian family values that the Gospel teaches. This missionary thrust is not just anymore being carried out by the Recollects themselves, but with the help of the community elders and SARF. They are in-charge in the promotion of a common economy and responsibility in Christian families. They are also in charge of the catechism for new members and soon-to-be-married couples and couples in facing or overcoming the stigma of being different from the rest of the society, as they take and embrace Christian family values.

A CHALLENGE OF RE-INCULTURATION

Globalization, as it continues to create trends and means to connect with the other, has also become the main cause of the gradual abandonment of African cultural identity side by side with *the colonizers and missionaries in the past that have to incur wounds to the African culture*.³⁹ Globalization had created new demands in all aspects of life. Human beings are now forced to adapt to a new culture to make way for the so-called world society. The eradication of boundaries that globalization promotes, also demands everyone to adopt new languages used by the majority of the world society, and because of this, the tribal dialects of Africans are slowly being forgotten.

One important matter in the aspect of inculturation is the language. In the past, only a few Catholic missionaries have tried to learn the languages. Just like how the education system works in Sierra Leone which is very Western, catechesis and other materials of evangelization were handed following the Western context. *It was not even the catholic church who have translated the bible but the protestants, which they did in their later arrival*.⁴⁰

It is the duty of the new generation of missionaries as ministers and elders of the local society to safeguard the cultural identity of the locals. Today, in the Recollect parishes in Sierra Leone which are composed of members from different tribes; “Krio” and English have become the medium of communication not only between the missionaries and catechists and the faithful; it is also used widely in trade and education in the society. As a consequence, tribal dialects like Temne and Limba are now slowly being forgotten especially by the young ones. This is very alarming since many of the kids today in the Recollect parishes, even though they can hear and understand are not able to speak their tribal dialects. Every missionary in Africa must not repeat the mistakes of the past missionaries and be sincere in their actions

³⁹ Chibueze Udeani, *Inculturation*... 115.

⁴⁰ Rev. Fr. Louis Koroma, *The Mission*... 211.

of dialogue and preserve the cultural identity of the Africans. They should not make the locals adapt but embrace and celebrate the Gospel as their own and in their own culture. Just as the past missionaries have done very little thing in preserving or even translating the Christian faith to them, as a recourse, the Recollects are now to focus on helping the people revive and embrace their tribal dialects.

OAR missionaries are now looking for lost catechism and prayer books written in tribal languages to be compiled, re-printed, and put into use. To revive the basic prayers untranslated in the past, the missionaries tapped the Christian elders in the parish to help teach by praying in their dialect. As we speak, the church community of St. Paul Kamalo prays the rosary at night every seven o'clock, completely in Temne dialect led by local children from around the parish. The Augustinians also made an effort to promote the gospel orally as the majority of the local population is not able to read. To realize this, OAR missioners promoted the re-enactment of the Nativity and the Way of the Cross in their language; these efforts were so successful that they are now being done every year for almost six years, these activities also became a highlight for everyone that locals who have migrated to other places would come home to participate.

THE RECOLLECTS AND GLOBALIZATION

With all this being said, the OAR missionary dialogue with the African culture greatly manifests the relevance and transforming effect of the Recollect identity in the globalized missionary vineyard. These revelations of the Master should inspire every Recollect community around the world to leave their comfort zones and make the mission an OAR way of life and not just an apostolate or a "*mere appendage to their life as if it were not part of their very identity.*"⁴¹ As missionary order and masters of community life, the Recollects ought to be healers of souls lost and confused within the perplexity and the pace of today's globalized world. Without a doubt, our mission endeavors in Africa have shown that the Recollects is not a diminishing religious congregation, but a growing congregation gifted with the tools necessary to proclaim the Good News and is intensely called by the Spirit to engage.

The globalized humanity is seemingly coming together as one, and yet at the same time grows more and more indifferent and away from each other. As social issues such as drug addiction, broken families, depression and the like continuously grow shows that today's society and families have forgotten the essence of the word community. Today, life coaches, psychologists, marriage counselors career mentors are thriving and seem to be stealing the roles of catholic clergy. The church is now being called to engage and heal the wounds of the globalized society and

⁴¹ *Evangelii Gaudium* 78.

*“contribute to the rebirth of a universal aspiration to the fraternity.”*⁴² As Globalization has eradicated within the society *“the sense of belonging to a single human family”*⁴³ and the *“shared roadmap”*⁴⁴ towards humanity’s Goal.

All of these aim to the conclusion that members of the Augustinian Recollect Order who are known lovers of community, should not doubt but instead continue to revitalize their missionary identity not only in documents but in concrete actions. The signs of the times reveal a very personal call to every Recollect community to engage themselves towards new encounters and dialogue with today’s lost world communities; to grow within, burst forth, and share the roadmap towards Christ.

JOSÉ PRUDENCIO CASTILLO, OAR
*Theologated of Miranila
Manila (Philippines)*

⁴² *Fratelli Tutti* 8.

⁴³ *Fratelli Tutti* 30.

⁴⁴ *Fratelli Tutti* 31.



Institute of Spirituality and History
General Curia