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**THE HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE AND PROPHETIC  
RESONANCE OF THE APOSTOLIC LETTER *MAXIMUM ILLUD*  
ON THE CENTENARY OF ITS PUBLICATION**

*The study addresses the historical significance and prophetic resonance of the Apostolic Letter “Maximum illud” on the centenary of its publication. It emphasizes the role of the world and mission context for the genesis of the comprehensive program of the reform within the Catholic mission in the aftermath of the Great War. It discusses the multicausal and inductive approach in drafting this document. The display of the historical significance of “Maximum illud” encompasses four missionary aspects: centralization; depoliticization and universalism; de-Europeanization and indigenization; and its mission theological shift. “Maximum illud” opposed colonialism and Europeanism within the mission work in favor of the universality of the church. The great aim of Benedict’s encyclical was the creation of an autonomous native church where the Catholics of the overseas territories could feel at home. The prophetic relevance of “Maximum illud” lies in its anticipation of future developments in mission work.*

***Introduction***

A year after the disastrous First World War (1914-1918) ended, on 30 November 1919, Pope Benedict XV launched an enthusiastic and courageous missionary appeal in his Apostolic Letter *Maximum illud*.<sup>1</sup> Deeply concerned about the mission work, the Pope addressed

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<sup>1</sup> Although *Maximum illud* as an Apostolic Letter is not listed among the twelve encyclicals of Pope Benedict XV, it is generally called an encyclical since it addresses the whole church, and therefore this author also uses

mission superiors, missionaries and all Catholics, alerting them to erroneous attitudes and practices of Catholic missionaries. Apart from encouragement to increase missionary efforts, he pointed out the methods to adopt in order to live up to the new missionary challenges of the post-war period. The Pontiff regretted the fact that the efforts of the missionary church had fallen into disarray and chaos in the aftermath of the Great War, which he called the “suicide of civilized Europe.”<sup>2</sup>

His response was a comprehensive, practice-oriented reform program of mission reorganization. The papal pronouncement ushered in a new phase in Catholic missionary activity by insisting with bishops that they promote vocations among the indigenous population and separate themselves from their image of representatives of Western governments. Benedict XV reprimanded the “indiscreet zeal” of bishops guilty of promoting the political and economic interests of their homelands. Concurrently, he stressed the international and supernatural character of Catholic mission and confirmed the call already made for indigenous clergy as the absolute need of the moment, marking that way as a new turning point in mission praxis.<sup>3</sup>

In conjunction with the centenary of the promulgation of *Maximum illud*, Pope Francis has called for October 2019 to be celebrated as an “Extraordinary Missionary Month.” He recalled the figure of Pope Benedict XV to highlight his highly significant contribution to mission, as he sought genuinely to give an impetus to the missionary task of proclaiming the Gospel. He recognized the need for a more evangelical approach to missionary work in the world, so that it would be purified of any colonial overtones and kept far away from the nationalistic and expansionistic aims that had proved so disastrous. In his letter, Pope Francis stressed:

May the approaching centenary of that letter serve as an incentive to combat the recurring temptation lurking be-

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the term encyclical. See *A Compilation of All Pope Benedict XV's Encyclicals*, St. Athanasius Press 2016. The original Latin version is found in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 11 (Rome 1919), 440-455. For the English translation of the encyclical, see: Benedict XV, *Maximum illud*. Apostolic Letter on the Propagation of the Faith throughout the World, 30 November 1919. Translated by Thomas J. M. Burke, SJ, Washington, DC: National Catholic Welfare Office 1919. The Latin text of *Maximum illud* appeared also in: *Nuntius SVD*, January 1920, 375-380.

<sup>2</sup> Benedict XV, *Lenten Letter to Cardinal-Vicar Pompili*, 4 March 1916: *New York Times* (6 March 1916) 1.

<sup>3</sup> J. W. O'Malley, *A History of the Popes: From Peter to the Present*, Plymouth: Sheed & Ward 2010, 274.

neath every form of ecclesial introversion, self-referential retreat into comfort zones, pastoral pessimism and sterile nostalgia for the past. Instead, may we be open to the joyful newness of the Gospel.<sup>4</sup>

On the centenary of the memorable Apostolic Letter *Maximum illud* this study aims at highlighting the historical significance of *Maximum illud* and at capturing its prophetic resonance as it was the first mission document which studied missions in their totality with a panoramic vision. This study draws much on the author's dissertation<sup>5</sup> about the encyclical, but also goes beyond its previous conclusions in so far as it includes the most recent research findings on the subject.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Letter of the Holy Father Francis for the centenary of the promulgation of the Apostolic Letter "Maximum illud" on the activity of missionaries in the World, XXIX Sunday of Ordinary Time, Memorial of Saint John Paul II, World Mission Sunday, Vatican, 22 October 2017. *Extraordinary Mission Month: L'Osservatore Romano*, No. 43 (Friday, 27 October 2017), 6-7. The Prefect of Propaganda Fide, Card. Fernando Filoni, announced the importance of the commemoration of the document in October 2017: "The starting point is to celebrate the centenary of Benedict XV's encyclical *Maximum illud*, the first of the missionary encyclicals of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is a fundamental text to understanding evangelization today: at that time the Pope called for the first time the whole community of the faithful to feel responsible for the mission, and at the same time recognized the values present in world religions, abandoning every idea of conquest and talking rather about places and peoples to which the proclamation of the Gospel can be brought." P. Affatato, *Interview with Card. Filoni*, "Vatican Insider," 19 October 2017.

<sup>5</sup> A. Miotk, *Das Missionsverständnis im historischen Wandel am Beispiel der Enzyklika „Maximum illud“* (Veröffentlichungen des Missionspriesterseminars St. Augustin, 51), Nettetal: Steyler Verlag 1999, 265 pp. The study was accomplished under the guidance of dissertation advisor Prof. Dr. habil. Karl Josef Rivinius SVD at the Philosophisch-Theologische Hochschule SVD St. Augustin in Germany.

<sup>6</sup> In the meantime there appeared another dissertation explicitly dedicated to this document: Valentine U. Iheanacho, *Maximum Illud and Benedict XV's Missionary Thinking: Prospects of a Local Church in Mission Territories*, Saarbrücken: Scholars' Press 2015, 440 pp. (defended at the Gregorian University in Rome). In addition there appeared some substantial articles on *Maximum illud* regarding its implementation in the African context: Roger B. Onomo Etaba, *Maximum illud de Benoît XV et l'œuvre missionnaire au Cameroun (1890–1935): entre anticipations, applications et contradictions: Présence Africaine*, Nouvelle série, No. 172 (2005) 125-145. And in the Chinese context: Rolf Gerhard Tiedemann, *The Papacy, Foreign Missionaries, and Chinese Catholics. Conflict and Accommodation between Maximum Illud and Ad Sinarum*, in: B. Hoster/D. Kuhlmann/Z. Wesolowski, SVD (eds.), *Rooted in Hope/In der Hoffnung verwurzelt*. Festschrift in Honor of Roman Malek SVD on the Occasion of His

It is argued that *Maximum illud* gained its timeless and historical importance from the intrinsic combination of due historical contextualization of mission malaise<sup>7</sup> and genuine biblical inspiration.<sup>8</sup> The significance of this document resides in the fact that all subsequent missionary encyclicals quote *Maximum illud*<sup>9</sup> and that it carried enduring consequences for mission practice. Nevertheless, due assessment of the document occurred only over time.<sup>10</sup>

### 1. “*Maximum Illud*” against the World Context

The historical significance of *Maximum illud* is closely intertwined with the Great War which exposed the shortcomings of Catholic mission work. Europe was divided in two competing and potentially hostile alliances, with Germany and Austria-Hungary in one and France, Great Britain and Russia in the other. The spark for the tragic war came from the most unstable region of Europe—the Balkans. It caused a domino effect which produced the first global war, expected to finish by Christmas [1914] but eventually dragged on over four years.

The interaction of various states’ rational decisions turned out to be irrational and brought about an appalling outcome for humanity with millions of victims.<sup>11</sup> The Great War was virtually unprecedented due to the slaughter, carnage, and destruction it caused. Austrian writer Stefan Zweig jotted down in his diary on 11 November 1918:

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65<sup>th</sup> Birthday (Monumenta Serica Monograph Series LXVIII/Vol. 1), 383-410. Another contribution: M. Martinelli, La lettera apostolica “Maximum illud” di Benedetto XV e il rinnovamento missionario del ventesimo secolo: *Ius missionale*, vol. 10 (2016) 173-201.

<sup>7</sup> Addressing the historical contexts helps to avoid reductionist interpretations. The clarification of the contexts in which the historical document is intertwined makes the text more readable and instructive.

<sup>8</sup> First of all, it should be noted that *Maximum illud* contains only quotations from Sacred Scripture, while there is lacking in it any quotation from the previous magisterium. The result is a freshness that other pontifical documents do not have. L. Cappelletti, La lettera apostolica *Maximum illud* di Benedetto XV. *Missionario*, cioè padre: *30 Giorni*, No. 10 (October 2001).

<sup>9</sup> Missionary Encyclicals before Vatican II: *Omnis Terra* 12 (1978) 297.

<sup>10</sup> Miotk, *Das Missionsverständnis*, 16.

<sup>11</sup> The total number of the known deaths of the First World War has been placed at about 10 million men, including about 20 million wounded. *The Encyclopedia of World History*, Cambridge: James Clarke & Co 2001, 666.

The war took revenge on those who wanted it: emperors, kings, diplomats, capitalists—the whole world is going to ruin. Still, the superpowers are not destroyed, but they destroy themselves. We are facing a turning point comparable to the French Revolution, except that it all grows to even larger proportions. We must learn a new life, otherwise it cannot go on.<sup>12</sup>

The world conflict dissolved the old European order and at the same time generated new disasters for the future. The three European empires, Austria-Hungary, Russia and Germany, collapsed and Europe entered a period of great uncertainty.<sup>13</sup> The war generated a social upheaval with far-reaching changes in society, culture and mentality. In this crisis of traditional values, the old bourgeoisie with its liberal philosophy was replaced by new forms of social and political organization. The people's faith in the elite was shaken. The decisive factor became industrialization which produced masses of easily influenced people on the outskirts of the big cities. The Great War provided indeed fuel for the post-war extremism of Nazism and communism. At the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, the Holy See was against the humiliation of Germany and was aware of the fact that the Peace Agreement was not based on Christian Principles.<sup>14</sup> So, not surprisingly, the Treaty of Versailles released the demons stirring hatred among nations and finally led to the disaster of World War II.

## 2. *The Mission Context*

Pope Pius X, affected by the tragic news of the outbreak of the war, died in its first month on 20 August 1914, leaving the Catholic Church with impotent and insignificant diplomacy in Europe. His successor, Benedict XV, was a very carefully calculated choice of the

<sup>12</sup> S. Zweig, *Tagebücher*, Frankfurt a. M. 1993, 338.

<sup>13</sup> On the ruins of the first Empire were created numerous new nation-states with weak democracy and strong nationalism that led gradually to authoritarian regimes. The Russian October Revolution of 1917 was the cause that Russia—the heartland of Orthodoxy—was replaced by an atheist regime which officially denied the existence of God. The establishment of the Third International was an important step to ignite a world Communist Revolution. Furthermore, the entrance of the United States into the war in 1917 entailed a progressive polarization of the world scene for the whole 20<sup>th</sup> century. Germany went through a socialist revolutionary radicalization, which brought about the abdication of Emperor Wilhelm II and the creation of the Weimar Republic.

<sup>14</sup> J. Pollard, *The Papacy in the Age of Totalitarianism 1914–1958*. Oxford History of the Christian Church, Oxford: University Press 2014, 75.

cardinals to give the church a stronger position on the onset of the world conflict.<sup>15</sup> The turbulent times of the World War strongly affected missionary work and caused uncertainty among the missionary superiors and the missionaries themselves. In fact, the war cut off the flow of missionaries from Europe. Due to the mobilization and expulsion of missionaries, the mission territories were affected noticeably by lack of personnel. For example, 5,000 French missionaries were drafted into the army.<sup>16</sup> “In the summer of 1915, more than 200 Paris Missionaries, as compared to 200 White Fathers and the same number of Lazarists were recalled. The German missionaries were expelled from the former German colonies.”<sup>17</sup>

The German overseas missionaries were exempted from mobilization. Only in Germany (along with Austria) were 6,000 missionaries drafted into the army. The warfare spread also to overseas territories and brought about changes especially in Asia and Africa, encouraging independence movements in Europe’s colonies. It had changed alarmingly the consciousness of the missioned peoples across the ocean, especially in the old and superior cultures of China and Japan.<sup>18</sup> Many Indians and Africans were fighting on the European fronts. Just from the French colonies in Africa 200,000 Africans went to Europe to fight in the ranks of the French army.

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<sup>15</sup> Giacomo della Chiesa initiated persistent action for peace, but his many initiatives had little leverage in front of Realpolitik and were defeated by the forces of total war.

<sup>16</sup> The French preponderance in the mission territories is indicated by the numbers. For instance: “A full two-thirds of all European priests, Brothers, and Sisters working in Catholic missions were French—making for a total of more than 50,000 French religious workers abroad by 1900.” V. U. Iheanacho, *Benedict XV and the Rethinking of Catholic Missionary Strategy* (Tripod “Winter,” 36), No. 183, Holy Spirit Study Centre – Publications 2016.

<sup>17</sup> F. G. Preckler, *History of the Church in Asia. A Historical Survey* (Collana Missiologica, 24), Rome: Urbaniana University Press 2017, 191. The blow to the mission was caused by the expulsion mainly of the German missionaries. Alfons Väh’s statistics from 1918 indicate that by the end of the war 200 German missionaries were expelled from the missions (plus 76 Brothers and 249 Sisters). Counting the imprisoned and interned missionaries, there were in total 318 priests, 296 mission Brothers and 326 Sisters removed from German missions. But, by the end of 1921, in total about 250 German missionaries could move to new mission fields in Korea, Japan, China, South Africa and Latin America. Miotk, *Das Missionsverständnis*, 35, 65.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

The war exposed the collapse of solidarity among the European countries. Africans saw Europeans fighting against each other.<sup>19</sup> They returned back to Africa with new ideas and deeper awareness of their own individuality.<sup>20</sup> These active, stronger nationalistic movements in the aftermath of the war raised the ever stronger demand of Asia for Asia and of Africa for Africa.<sup>21</sup> The war denounced also a deep dependence of mission territories on the European base. For material and personnel mission activity was almost totally dependent on the help from Europe. European colonialism could be beneficial to missionary activity because colonial powers favored those missionaries who inculcated a respect for white, European cultural superiority and authority among the indigenous people.<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, European colonialism had frequently obstructed the effectiveness of the missionary efforts of the church. It impacted mostly the approach to the formation of indigenous clergy. One third of the local clergy was not sufficiently prepared to take over church offices and were considered unfit to perform such functions. Such a situation required decisive action and new solutions.

After the war, the politicians faced an extremely difficult task. It was necessary to create a completely new order after the devastating thunderstorm of the Great War. To serve this end, the meeting of politicians and diplomats at the Peace Conference in Paris concluded with the signing of the Treaty of Versailles on 28 June 1919. Ger-

<sup>19</sup> “The fact that the western countries, which represented Christianity overseas, fought against one another gave the natives a negative impression, which in turn became the obvious reason for the latter to reject the religion. The Church replied to this new challenge by calling for healthier relationships between the European countries and the missions, trying to free them from the weight of imperialism and colonialism.” J. Baumgartner, *La expansión de las misiones católicas desde León XIII hasta la Segunda Guerra Mundial*, in: H. Jedin/K. Reppen (eds.), *Manual de la Historia de la Iglesia*, tomo VIII, Barcelona: Ed. Herder 1984, 748.

<sup>20</sup> The European participation in the destructive war had undermined their claims of moral superiority over the people under missionary jurisdiction. Like Pius X, Benedict in *Maximum illud* challenged the Eurocentric pre-war approach towards the people in the mission territories, which from time to time degenerated into racism. Frank J. Coppa, *The Papacy in the Modern World. A Political History*, London: Reaktion Books 2014, 138.

<sup>21</sup> As G. Barraclough noted, at the start of the Great War (1914), there were radical anti-Western and revolutionary groups in most Asian and Arabic countries, though less in Tropical Africa, which were ready to avail themselves of the conflicts between the European Powers by supporting one of the warring parties. G. Barraclough, *Tendenzen der Geschichte im 20. Jahrhundert*, München 1971, 163.

<sup>22</sup> Pollard, *The Papacy in the Age of Totalitarianism 1914–1958*, 113.

many was subjected mainly to the dictates of the Big Four: USA, Britain, France and Italy. Its colonies were divided between the great powers that asserted that Germans were incapable of running colonies and unworthy of their civilizing task. Germany's counter-arguments remained unheard, despite the fact that 1,500,000 new Christians were in danger of losing their spiritual protectors and of relapsing into paganism. Eventually, the most important of the former German colonies were entrusted to France and Britain in the form of mandates of the League of Nations, which seemed to be an important achievement in combatting nationalism.<sup>23</sup>

In defense of the German missions in Paris, Pope Benedict XV sent a well-known diplomat, Mons. Bonaventura Ceretti, secretary of the Congregation of Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs. He managed to obtain a modification of article 438<sup>24</sup> of the so-called Balfour Note, which ensured that the missions run by German Catholic personnel would remain Catholic. Thus, the Treaty of Versailles deprived the German missions of their rights, thus violating explicitly the existing international treaties.<sup>25</sup>

### ***3. Benedict XV's Universal Mission Vision***

*Maximum illud* was the great merit of Benedict XV, who though misunderstood and forgotten for decades,<sup>26</sup> received over time due recognition as a great figure of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>27</sup> He was able to cap-

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<sup>23</sup> After the war the Paris Conference was a sort of *vendetta* by France and Britain against Germany, so "the Catholic missions under the supervision of German missionaries paid a heavy penalty as did Germany, which suffered enormous losses as the price of defeat by the allies in 1918. Catholic missionaries of German origin who had been engaged in missionary activities in Kenya and Rwanda-Burundi before the war were never allowed to return to their previous missions after the war." Iheanacho, *Benedict XV and the Rethinking*.

<sup>24</sup> The article 438 of the mission question at the Peace Conference in Paris is discussed in the recently published article by K. J. Rivinius, *Die Missionsfrage auf der Konferenz in Versailles (1919)*, Part I: *Verbum SVD* 59 (2018) 281-304 and Part II: *Verbum SVD* 59 (2018) 379-401.

<sup>25</sup> Miotk, *Das Missionsverständnis*, 46-66.

<sup>26</sup> S. Paventi, *Il quarantennio della prima Enciclica Missionaria: Clero e Missioni*, no. 2 (Marzo-Aprile 1959) 121.

<sup>27</sup> John Pollard is also very familiar with the research on the papacy and knows the sources in the Vatican Archives. His biography of Benedict XV is one of the most significant in any language: *Benedict XV: The Unknown Pope and the Pursuit of Peace*, London 1999 (2<sup>nd</sup> ed: London: Burns & Oates 2005), 256 pp.



ture the most important features of his time and became an important interlocutor on the international scene with concrete proposals going beyond partisan divisions. Benedict XV was endowed with clarity of mind and strength of will as well as with a sense of foresight and respect for others—perhaps precisely because of it, he did not have too high an estimate of himself.<sup>28</sup> He united in one person two important qualities for his time: diplomatic capacity for possible and pastoral experiences. The new mission approach in *Maximum illud* was credited greatly to Benedict's personality equipped with solid knowledge of politics and diplomacy. He wasn't just a "parochial Italian ecclesiastic," but an experienced diplomat with a deep sense of concrete reality that helped him to choose the right person to guide the mission reform, namely Card. Willem van Rossum who headed the Congregation of *Propaganda Fide* as its Prefect for fourteen years until his death in 1932.<sup>29</sup> Rossum's appointment was probably due to his origin from a neutral country and *de facto* he opted for a neutral position in politics and ordered all missionaries to remain aloof from politics.

Both Benedict XV and van Rossum were open to the overlapping changes in the vast world and listened carefully to the burning problems in the mission territories, being in direct contact with many promoters of mission reform. They caught the important ideas and inspirations to transform the mission situation by working out concrete strategies of action in line with the needs of the time.<sup>30</sup> Benedict XV was a far-sighted innovator of mission who understood the historical momentum of the World War, which brought along irreversible transformations, changing the relationship between the nations and

<sup>28</sup> Cappelletti, *La lettera apostolica Maximum illud*.

<sup>29</sup> Cardinal van Rossum, Dutch Redemptorist present in Rome since 1894, was a collaborator of Gasparri in the codification of the Canon Law since 1904. Then, he was appointed as the Prefect of *Propaganda Fide* in March 1918. He had been able to enter into the views of the Pope and the State Secretary Gasparri, deeply realist by following up on the missionary encyclical project being drafted since 1917 under the influence of China's missionary situation. He was actively involved in the reorganization of the missions upset by the war. J. Metzler, in: *Sacrae Congregationis de Propagande Fide memoria rerum*, vol. III/2, Rome–Fribourg–Vienne 1976, 307.

<sup>30</sup> "After the Great War, Benedict was equally prompt in indicating that precisely the missionary world had to change course, abandon the colonial ideology in which it had settled and promote autonomy, independence, ecclesiastical self-government in all non-European areas. The new peoples were knocking at the door of history and it was time to give them the space they demanded." G. Romanato, *Il Catolicesimo nell'età del colonialismo: L'Osservatore Romano*, 22 Maggio 2018.

continents.<sup>31</sup> He also had the courage to go decisively against the current. His *Maximum illud* met the urgent need to work out first the new requirements of mission and then focus on the consistent implementation of the renewal program of missionary practice.<sup>32</sup> The following exposition focuses specifically on the historical significance of *Maximum illud*, spelling out two main aspects of the document: its genesis and the main principles of the program of mission reform which it set out.

#### **4. The Multicausal Genesis and Inductive Method in Drafting “Maximum illud”**

The genesis of *Maximum illud* is based on the inductive approach, labeled here as the principle of historicity. This methodological choice in drafting the document unravels the multicausal genesis of the document. Indeed, the papal mission pronouncement was prompted by various circumstances. Some historians are inclined to speak exclusively about the Chinese origins of the document and state that it addressed directly the China Mission.<sup>33</sup> The inductive method of drafting *Maximum illud* resulted in its genesis transcending the Chinese context. The encyclical undoubtedly ranges among the laudable examples of magisterial teaching which take seriously into account the historical setting of the events and phenomena. The contextualization of the mission situation helped to work out a more concrete, credible and real policy for mission change. So we can say this program did not turn out to be a closed system of unchangeable truths, norms and guidelines but makes use of the inductive method

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Also in this case, we must mention the tenacity and farsightedness with which the Holy See carried on its policy of disengagement from European interests and the promotion of local churches, regardless of the very strong resistance that it had encountered from the old powers of the continent. But it must also be said that no less resistance, even if less known, did this policy meet in the very circles of those missionaries who were not all ready to abandon the policy that we could call “missionary colonialism,” because of the many bonds which tied many missionaries to their home countries.

<sup>33</sup> C. Soetens, Pie XI et les missions. Influences et circonstances majeures (1922–1926), in: *Actes du colloque de Rome (15-18 mars 1989) organisé par l'École française de Rome en collaboration avec l'Université de Lille III – Greco n° 2 du CNRS, l'Università degli studi di Milano, l'Università degli studi di Roma – La Sapienza, la Biblioteca Ambrosiana (Publications de l'École Française de Rome, 223), 1996, 722-723.*

to diagnose time-related dynamics and provide credible and well-timed answers.<sup>34</sup>

*Maximum illud* drew on many sources during the three years of its preparation initiated in 1917 by Cardinal Domenico Serafini.<sup>35</sup> The document was influenced indirectly by the developing missiology, especially in Germany. It aimed at correcting the errors of mission practice. An important source of its inspiration was the rapidly growing missionary movement in Italy under the guidance of both Paolo Manna, the pioneer of the modern Italian missionary movement, and Maria Guido Conforti, archbishop of Ravenna, who promoted a missionary spirit among the clergy. Conforti gave a great support to Paolo Manna during the foundation of the Pontifical Missionary Union of the Clergy in 1916 and served as its first president.<sup>36</sup> Also Fr. Giuseppe Allamano, the founder of the Consolata Missionaries in 1901, was among the important figures of the mission movement who solicited the publication of a papal document on missions for eight years before its publication.

While *Maximum illud* did not specifically refer to the missionary situation in China, eventually it was mainly the problem of missionary work in China which impacted decisively the drafting of the encyclical. E. Young convincingly proved that more than two-thirds of the document was a direct comment on the situation in China.<sup>37</sup> The content of *Maximum illud* was inspired by such figures as: Joseph Gabet (1808–1853)<sup>38</sup>—French Vincentian missionary in China; the

<sup>34</sup> In line with the thought of Vincent of Lérins (d. 450), the Second Vatican Council distinguished between truth and its historically conditioned formulations, truth-content and context, in sum, propositions and sentences. Eduardo J. Echeverría, *Eternal Truths and “Pastoral” Changes*, <https://www.thecatholicthing.org/2018/07/18/eternal-truths-and-pastoral-changes/>. The Bible, in effect, does not present itself as a direct revelation of timeless truths but as the written testimony to a series of interventions in which God reveals himself in human history. Consequently, the biblical writings cannot be correctly understood without an examination of the historical circumstances that shaped them (synchronic approaches should accept the conclusions of the diachronic).

<sup>35</sup> J. Gadille, *Le strategie missionarie delle Chiese*, in: J.-M. Mayeur (ed.), *Storia del Cristianesimo*, Vol. 12: *Guerre mondiali e totalitarismi (1914–1958)*, Roma: Edizioni Borla 1997, 236.

<sup>36</sup> Conforti, Guido Maria, in: Gerald H. Anderson, *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions* (BDCM), New York: Macmillan 1998, 148.

<sup>37</sup> E. P. Young, *Ecclesiastical Colony: China’s Catholic Church and the French Religious Protectorate*, New York: Oxford University Press 2013, 212.

<sup>38</sup> “His memorandum presented to the Holy See and *Propaganda Fide*, entitled ‘Renseignements sur l’état des missions en Chine,’ which he soon af-

Canon, Léon Joly (1847–1909), who never left Europe but published an incisive analysis of defects in Catholic missions, in which he put the question: Why after hundreds of years of missions have so few Chinese converted to Christianity? Joly's answer was simple: the mission has failed because Christianity was seen as "the foreign religion." His two-volume work<sup>39</sup> focused primarily on the causes and factors that accounted for the failure of Catholic missions in Asia and influenced Vincent Lebbe and Card. Pietro Gasparri, Vatican Secretary of State (1914–1930).

Other crucial inspirers of the encyclical were: Mgr. Jean Baptiste de Guébriant from the Paris Foreign Mission Society (MEP), who as missionary bishop in China (1910) promoted the indigenous church<sup>40</sup> and carried out the apostolic visitation in China between September 1919 and March 1920 in order to prepare the General Synod of the Vicariates of China. Then, as argues Albert Monshan Wu,<sup>41</sup> the encyclical advanced explicitly the arguments of two Vincentian missionaries in China: Anthony Cotta (1872–1957), who spoke boldly in

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terward published in *Coup d'œil sur l'état des missions de Chine présenté au Saint Père le pape Pie IX* (1848), got a mixed reception. Apart from the very realistic description of the missionary situation in China, his unambiguous demand for a Chinese clergy caused offense." Gabet, Joseph, in: BDCC – Biographical Dictionary of Chinese Christianity website: <http://bdcconline.net/en/stories/gabet-joseph>.

<sup>39</sup> L. Joly, *Le christianisme et l'Extrême Orient: Missions Catholiques de l'Inde, de l'Indo-Chine, de la Chine, de la Corée*, Paris 1907; The visitation of the Vicar Apostolic of Canton, J.-B. de Guébriant, in China was a key event, as it advanced the joint action of the Secretary of State and *Propaganda Fide* Secretariat for China. In terms of missionary methods, it opened "a new and more concerted period of work" and it marked the beginning of a Roman investigation system in the missions that would become habitual during the first phase of the pontificate of Pius XI. Young, *Ecclesiastical Colony*, 147.

<sup>40</sup> He was one of six missionary bishops selected by Card. van Rossum to answer a questionnaire on the situation of the Church in China. And several directives of *Maximum illud* echo points made by de Guébriant: "... for instance, choosing heads of mission with good leadership skills, improving the language proficiency of missionaries, forming a native clergy on a par with foreign missionaries, and freeing the Catholic Church in China of its foreign character. Van Rossum also followed up on two other recommendations made by de Guébriant: sending an apostolic visitor to tour all the China missions, and naming a permanent representative of the Holy See in Peking (Beijing)." Guébriant, Jean-Baptiste Budes de, in: BDCM, 267-268.

<sup>41</sup> A. Monshan Wu, *From Christ to Confucius. German Missionaries, Chinese Christians and the Globalization of Christianity, 1860–1950*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press 2016, 125.

favor of giving greater responsibility to the Chinese priests to prepare some for the episcopacy,<sup>42</sup> and his lifelong friend Vincent Lebbe (1877–1940), “who was convinced that missionaries should become Chinese in dress, language, attitude, and even loyalty in order to win Chinese People to Christ.”<sup>43</sup> In the encyclical, the Pope did make concessions to the responses in the bishops’ questionnaire which recognized that the quality of indigenous priests was still inferior.<sup>44</sup> *Maximum illud* claimed that the local clergy was not to be trained merely to perform the humbler duties of the ministry, acting as the assistants of foreign priests. “On the contrary, they must take up God’s work as equals, so that someday they will be able to enter upon the spiritual leadership of their people.”<sup>45</sup>

In his dissertation Fr. Iheanacho indicates, in a broader sense, three factors which provided the international setting for Benedict’s encyclical: the French Protectorate, the Tientsin crisis and the First World War.<sup>46</sup> The experience in China served as springboard for drafting the document. The abuses of the French Protectorate gave rise to opposition from a group of like-minded missionaries and some local Chinese clergy led by Vincent Lebbe and Antoine Cotta in the district of Tientsin in Northern China. Lebbe insisted that the progress of the missions and the Catholic cause in China could be furthered by no one else than Chinese Catholics themselves, under the leadership and guidance of Chinese indigenous clergy with Chinese indigenous bishops playing prominent roles in their own affairs.<sup>47</sup> Based on the evidence Iheanacho concludes that despite various rele-

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<sup>42</sup> Cotta followed up with a thirty-page memoir (started on 29 December 1916 and finished on 6 January 1917) to Cardinal Domenico Serafini, OSB, Prefect of *Propaganda Fide*, in which he argued for the establishment of a Chinese episcopacy and a church truly “acclimatized” to China. “The document served as a principal source of inspiration and information for the missionary encyclical *Maximum illud* (...) and paved the way for Pope Pius XI to ordain six Chinese bishops in 1926.” Cotta, Anthony, in: BDCM, 154.

<sup>43</sup> Lebbe, Frédéric-Vincent, in: BDCM, 388.

<sup>44</sup> In July 1918, the Prefect of *Propaganda Fide*, Willem van Rossum, sent a questionnaire to six Chinese bishops, asking them to produce detailed responses on indigenous clergy. Among the bishops was Augustin Henninghaus SVD who offered the most positive evaluation of the contribution of the Chinese clergy. But, none of the bishops was in favor of ordaining Chinese bishops, and Bishop Jean de Vienne called the idea “utopian.” Monshan Wu, *From Christ to Confucius*, 124.

<sup>45</sup> *Maximum illud*, No. 15.

<sup>46</sup> Iheanacho, *Benedict XV and the Rethinking*.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

vant inspirers of *Maximum illud*, the two memoirs of Cotta rather than those of Lebbe may have been used by drafters of *Maximum illud*, even if others are inclined to say that Lebbe, leader of the Tientsien Movement, and his undated memoirs as well as his reply to Vincentian Bishop Paul-Marie Reynaud in 1917 provided the basis for the writing of the Apostolic Letter. But the evidence from the documents shows the contrary, that the two memoirs of Cotta are closer to the literary expressions of *Maximum illud*. A similar closeness is discernible between *Maximum illud* and the response of Mgr. de Guébriant to the questionnaire in the middle of 1919, through which the Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith inquired about the state of the mission in China.<sup>48</sup>

Despite the many inspirers in China, one should keep in mind the key figure of Card. van Rossum in drafting the encyclical.<sup>49</sup> He elaborated the traditional methodology through analysis based on the reports from China and became the main architect of the new synthesis, which was based on a thorough knowledge of the missionary situation and guided by deep missionary enthusiasm. The primary goal of the missionary policy of the Prefect of *Propaganda Fide* was to overcome national motives and connections as the key element in missionary activity and to build up indigenous churches with indigenous clergy. His appointment proved to be also relevant for implementation of the Catholic missionary policies with a panoramic vision and specific clear norms and directives.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Several authors ascribe to him the authorship of *Maximum illud*, and probably he largely drafted the document: "To find out who is the real author of a document, who initiated, drafted or edited it, one has to trace the original file which illustrates its origin. In the archives of the Vatican, this is not always an easy task. As mentioned above, we have still not been able to locate the original drafts of the important missionary documents 'Maximum illud' (Benedict XV, 1919) and 'Rerum Ecclesiae' (Pius XI, 1926), although there is much circumstantial evidence to attribute both documents, at least partially, to Card. Van Rossum." Smit stated that "the drafts of both documents, written by Van Rossum, are kept in the Archives of Propaganda Fide. However, we have not been able to locate the drafts (and thus the proof of this premise) in these or other Vatican Archives yet." J. O. Smit, *Wilhelmus Marinus kardinaal Van Rossum. Een groot mens en wijs bestuurder*, Roermond, 1955. Vefie Poels/Hans de Valk, A Stranger in the Sacred College of Cardinals: Contextual and Heuristic Problems in Investigating Cardinal van Rossum: *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome. Italie et Méditerranée modernes et contemporaines!*, 128-1 (2016) No. 40.

<sup>50</sup> Iheanacho, *Benedict XV and the Rethinking*.

*Maximum illud* was the fruit of a thorough understanding of the historical situation, based on the inductive method of diagnosing the mission reality. This historically practice-oriented strategy worked out a comprehensive vision with a new mission theological approach favoring the principle of historicity over static theological apriority. This included a theological understanding of God, who set up a tent among the people and in their history, who incarnated and revealed himself there in his work. This incarnational understanding had implications for the theological thinking which favored the emergence of a lifelike and up-to-date theology. The principle of historicity serves to provide a proper assessment and understanding of theological content and has a paradigm value. This approach, sensitive to historical reality, to the historical conditions of the missionary mandate, gives a proper perspective for formulating answers to the challenges of the times in the work of evangelization.

### 5. *The Historical Significance of the Encyclical*

The historical significance of *Maximum illud* encompasses four major aspects as important contributions to mission reform: (1) centralization of mission work; (2) depoliticizing of the nationalism affecting missions and the thorough formation of future missionaries; (3) *de-Europeanization* of mission and the formation of native clergy which assumes the right of the native church to self-determination; (4) the mission-theological shift and the convincing form of exposition.

First as a preliminary observation the encyclical takes its name from *Intitulatio*, the first words of the document *Maximum illud sanctissimumque munus*, that means: the Greatest and Most Holy Task and is introduced by the Savior's words: Go into the whole world and preach the Gospel to all creation (Mark 16:15). Pope Benedict XV defined the missions as a "permanent task" of the Catholic Church. Then he presents the main stages of evangelization each with a leading representative: St. Patrick, St. Willibrord, St. Boniface, St. Ansgar, Sts. Cyril and Methodius, William Rubruck, Bartholomew de Las Casas, up to the greatest of them, St. Francis Xavier.

Benedict XV points out the need to intensify missionary activity, especially due to the amazing number of one billion non-believers living in darkness and in the shadow of death.<sup>51</sup> In the encyclical, the

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<sup>51</sup> Leo XIII in his mission encyclical *Sancta Dei Civitas* of 1880 spoke about the church which is not contained within the limits of any state and tends to the spread of the Kingdom of Christ upon earth, since the salvation of

Pontiff addresses three different groups: missionary superiors, missionaries, and the entire community of the Catholic faithful. The primary concern of the mission superiors should be the extensive approach to evangelization, that is, *to cover the maximum ground with the minimum number*. According to *Maximum illud*, the mission superiors, “the souls of the mission,” are primarily to commit themselves to love the mission and to be devoted to it by every means: speech, action, and writing,<sup>52</sup> working hard all the time to create new missionary posts and houses.<sup>53</sup> In addition to that, in order to fulfill this objective, the mission superiors should work on increasing the number of their collaborators—other missionary institutions—while focusing on consecrated people who might work in schools, orphanages, and so on.<sup>54</sup>

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souls is at stake. This mission is also civilizing: “But it is incredibly beneficial to those who are called out of the filth of vice and the shadow of death; and who, being made partakers of eternal life, are also brought out of barbarism and a state of savage manners into the fullness of civilized life.” English version on the official website of the Holy See (No. 10). [http://w2.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_l-xiii\\_enc\\_03121880\\_sancta-dei-civitas.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_03121880_sancta-dei-civitas.html). According to the statistics there were 1.8 billion people all over the world in 1920 whereas the current world population amounts to 7.6 billion (July 2018) according to the United Nations estimates. Within this population live 1 billion and 299 million Catholics (17 % of the world population in 2016).

<sup>52</sup> *Maximum illud*, No. 9.

<sup>53</sup> “(...) The preaching of the gospel can be brought more immediately and more effectively to everyone in an area if more mission stations and posts are established as soon as it is possible to do so. Then, when the time comes to divide the mission, these will be ready to serve as centers for new Vicariates and Prefectures.” *Maximum illud*, No. 11.

<sup>54</sup> P. Iacobelli, The Vatican’s Shift of Its Missionary Policy in the Twentieth Century: The Mission of the Augustinian Fathers of the Assumption in Manchuria: *Asian Cultural Studies*, Vol. 36 (March 2010) 93. The third and last recipient of the encyclical are all believers who are called to become more involved in the mission. The missionary duty is justified by the universalism of Christian love (the commandment of the love of pagans), and from this follows the postulate of applying the tactics of goodness. Benedict XV recommends three forms of missionary cooperation in line with Leo XIII: prayer, that is, engaging the lay people in the apostolate of prayer; supporting vocations including sending only the best to the missions; material support of the missionary work within the framework of Pontifical Missionary Works: of the Propagating of the Faith, of the Holy Childhood and of St. Peter the Apostle. At the end, the pope indicates the need for the missionary formation of the diocesan clergy. The establishment of all the dioceses of the Missionary Union of the Clergy is to serve this purpose. *Maximum illud*, Nos. 31-40.



### 5.1. Centralization of Mission Work

*Maximum illud* laid the foundation for the centralization of mission work with concrete practical measures.<sup>55</sup> Card. van Rossum embarked on the reform with Rome clearly at the command center. He drew severe criticism from the colonial powers which saw their influence in ecclesiastical affairs decreasing. France protested in particular, but likewise the governments of Holland and Belgium had problems with the new Vatican missionary policy.

The transfer of the headquarters of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith from Lyon to Rome had an impact on the universalization of this Society and found its expression in the composition of its Council consisting of representatives of various countries (and not only French), whose task was to allocate financial resources fairly, according to the respective needs of the missions.

The universalism of the mission enterprise was reflected in the Universal Mission Exhibition of the Holy Year 1925 at the Vatican. It illustrated the transnational dimension of the missionary work and incorporated the Catholic oversea missions in a global discourse. It positioned the church and her mission in her relation to the modern world as well as to progress and science. The Christian attitude opposed those who contested the essential unity of the entire humanity.

The encyclical called for increasing the number of regional seminaries in mission territories and the need for co-operation between vicariates and the missionary congregations. The regional seminaries “for both individual regions and groups of dioceses”<sup>56</sup> were to improve the quality of formation and to emancipate the local Christian communities from Western powers. In China, within six years their number increased from twelve in 1933 to twenty-two.<sup>57</sup>

Another aspect of the reform was the creation of apostolic delegations in Japan, Formosa and in Korea, a delegation extended to Australia, Oceania and Malaysia which acted as mediator in a world marked by colonization and addressed the issues with local officials

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<sup>55</sup> “He reorganized studies at the college of *Propaganda Fide* to provide training for future missionaries, including the provision of language teaching; he founded the Ethiopian College in 1919 for the training of clergy for that country; and encouraged the spread of missionary support societies, such as the Missionary Union of the Clergy.” Pollard, *The Papacy in the Age of Totalitarianism 1914–1958*, 115-116.

<sup>56</sup> *Maximum illud*, No. 17.

<sup>57</sup> Miotk, *Das Missionsverständnis*, 194.

without the intervention of Western powers.<sup>58</sup> The new Vatican diplomacy diversified its relations to oppose more efficiently the colonial politics of the European states.<sup>59</sup>

The national synod in Shanghai in May 1924 was a clear example of implementing the new missionary directives in China. The synod forbade European missionaries from interfering in the local Chinese politics and ordered them to respect Chinese secular authorities. It rejected any ties with Western Imperialism. "Henceforth, the buildings of missionary congregations could no longer indicate their countries of origin; instead, missionaries had to mark the entrances of mission stations with Chinese names."<sup>60</sup> Under Benedict XV, the Holy See was more determined than ever to work for the realization of its age-old mission policies, stated already at the time of the institution of the *Propaganda Fide* Congregation in 1622, especially by affirming the papal exclusive authority over the missions to neutral-

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<sup>58</sup> In the work in favor of universalizing missions were included such means of communication as radio, film, and the press. The Congregation *Propaganda Fide* established the first missionary news agency *Agenzia Fides* in 1927, which counted 75 correspondents around the world. In the implementation of *Maximum illud* the national councils played a crucial role in carrying out the reforms in the spirit of the encyclical: for China (Shanghai: 1924), for Japan (Tokyo: 1924), for South Africa (Kimberley: 1924), for South Korea (Seoul: 1931), for Indochina (Hanoi: 1934), for Australia and New Zealand (Sydney: 1937), for Brazil (Rio de Janeiro: 1939). These assemblies were attended by local clergy to take important decisions for the local church and to deepen the awareness of the universal church. Miotk, *Das Missionsverständnis*, 173-180.

<sup>59</sup> C. Martin, De «Maximum illud» (1919) à «Rerum Ecclesiae» (1926): la stratégie missionnaire romaine après la première guerre mondiale, in: G. Vidal/M. Spindler/A. Lenoble-Bart (eds.), *L'Allemagne missionnaire d'une guerre à l'autre (1914-1939). Effondrement et résilience*, Paris: Karthala 2017, 30. Under Benedict XV the Vatican escaped from the international isolation and its diplomatic standing at the end of Benedict's pontificate had been transformed compared to the year of his election. The number of states the Vatican had political relations with had risen from 17 to 27. The Holy See had become a new force in international affairs and reasserted its moral authority. Already in May 1917, the Vatican separated the regions of the Middle East (from Armenia to Ethiopia) from the Congregation of Propaganda Fide and founded the Congregation for the Oriental Churches as well as the Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome (1917). The Vatican took initiatives to improve relations with the Soviet Union to protect the Catholic minority staying there. Pollard, *The Papacy in the Age of Totalitarianism 1914-1958*, 101,103.

<sup>60</sup> Monshan Wu, *From Christ to Confucius*, 129.

ize the influence of other political interests and by bringing the missions squarely under the direct control of the Holy See.<sup>61</sup>

### 5.2. Depoliticalization and Universalism of Catholic Mission

The crucial point of papal mission reform of *Maximum illud* was the depoliticalization of mission work in line with the illuminating Instruction of the Roman Sacred Congregation of *Propaganda Fide* from 1659.<sup>62</sup> *Maximum illud* affirmed with much more determination the freedom of the Catholic missions from the politics of the colonial powers that considered themselves protectors of the missions, but in reality used the missions for their own ends. After the experiences of the Great War, Benedict's encyclical called nationalism a disgraceful plague (*pestis teterrima apostolatus*) that infects the apostolate.

It would be tragic indeed if any of our missionaries forgot the dignity of their office so completely as to busy themselves with the interests of their terrestrial homeland instead of with those of their homeland in heaven. It would be a tragedy indeed if an apostolic man were to spend himself in attempts to increase and exalt the prestige of the native land he once left behind him. Such behavior would infect his apostolate like a plague. It would destroy in him, the representative of the Gospel, the sinews of his love for souls and it would destroy his reputation with the populace.<sup>63</sup>

Pope Benedict XV distinguished clearly between the authentic missionary issues and the political interests of colonial states in the name of Christianity. The universalism of the Good News means that

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<sup>61</sup> Iheanacho, *Maximum illud and Benedict XV's Missionary Thinking*, 111-112.

<sup>62</sup> The missionaries on the way to China and Indochina were reminded: "Do not regard it as your task, and do not bring any pressure to bear on the people, to change their manners, rites, customs, unless they are evidently contrary to religion and sound morals. What is more absurd than to bring France, Spain, Italy or another part of Europe to China? You are not introducing these nations, but the faith, which neither rejects nor injures the rites or customs of a people, as long as they are not evil, but on the contrary wants to preserve them in all their vigor ... For this reason, never compare the customs of those people with European customs, but rather accustom yourself to them with the greatest diligence." Quoted after Matteo Nicolini-Zani, *Christian Monks on Chinese Soil: A History of Monastic Missions to China*, Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press 2016; *Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide* (Collectanea 10/300), Rome 1907, 103.

<sup>63</sup> *Maximum illud*, No. 19.

it knows no boundaries and identifies with any culture and nation. The Apostolic Letter insisted on the catholicity of the church, and called for more inclusiveness and universality (people from all nations and races) in its leadership.

The document named two major obstacles which inhibited the progress of the mission work, and unfortunately retarded the transition from missions to full-fledged local churches.<sup>64</sup> These were nationalism and religious congregationalism because of the undue attachment of the missionaries either to their missionary congregation or to their country of origin.

Nationalism often manifested itself in exclusiveness, which tended to make a particular mission territory the exclusive preserve of certain missionaries of one nationality. The nationalism in Catholic missions prior to the Great War was largely felt within the French-dominated enterprises. It also resulted from the preponderance of French mission congregations over others. For instance, towards the end of the nineteenth century, as J. P. Daughton has estimated, twenty-eight of the forty-four Catholic missionary congregations working in the world were French.<sup>65</sup> “A telling example was China where of the 700 Catholic missionaries at work in 1885, more than 500 were French nationals. Missionaries of other European nationalities that included Italians, Spaniards, Portuguese, Germans, Dutch, as well as Austrians and Belgians, did not amount to 200.”<sup>66</sup> The very nationalistic stance of France showed in the frustrating attempts to hold back the establishing of the presence of a papal nuncio in Beijing. The Holy See not only undertook diplomatic steps, but saw that every involvement of missionaries in colonialism and nationalism served the victorious powers as a pretext to diminish the status of possession of the Catholic mission.

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<sup>64</sup> “From my standpoint, the missionary activity under Pope Leo XIII and Pope Pius X had a great importance due to the fact that they spread new Christian communities around the world. Nevertheless, those communities were still dependent on the colonial system, thus they were objects of prejudices and public attacks from nationalistic groups. In the end, the task which the pontiffs had not succeeded in carrying out was the formation of a high-level native clergy which could maintain the administration of the local churches and at the same time free the new communities of the harassment by nationalistic groups.” Cited after Iacobelli, *The Vatican’s Shift of Its Missionary Policy in the Twentieth Century*, 92.

<sup>65</sup> J. P. Daughton, *An Empire Divided: Religion, Republicanism, and the Making of French Colonialism, 1880–1914*, Oxford 2006, 38.

<sup>66</sup> P. M. Elia, *L’istituzione della Gerarchia Episcopale e dell’inter-nunziatura in Cina: *Studia Missionalia**, vol. II (1946) 26.

The colonial powers essentially made use of the missions to pursue their own policies. They supported missionaries as cultural pioneers in the field of education and formation. The missionaries themselves believed in the mission of European Christian civilization, as many were deeply penetrated by the spirit of European ethnocentrism expressed in exaggerated national feelings and generally prevailing cultural optimism. The feelings of racial superiority, as well as Roman centralism and the uniformity of its institutions, had a highly isolating effect and favored the creation of foreign enclaves among the “wild heathens.” The missionaries were to bring salvation and culture to these barbarians, because for Europeans the primitive and morally corrupt culture of the heathen had no value. In missionary activity, the focus had been shifted to the conversion of individual souls, that is, to the statistical increase in the number of baptized Christians. The Apostolic Letter was unequivocal about it, affirming Catholic universalism.<sup>67</sup>

In *Maximum illud* Benedict XV reminded missionaries that their goal was essentially a spiritual one, which must be carried out in a selfless way,<sup>68</sup> calling for them to respect native culture and foster native clergy and hierarchy, rather than having them permanently under European control and domination.<sup>69</sup> He urged all Catholics to participate in mission. The church through her universal vocation presents herself as the force for preservation in the international order, therefore the church should have the upper hand in the missions, whatever the colonial position. Pope Benedict pursued in his document a universal project which addressed also the relations among the political authorities, reiterating the right of the church to be free from any sort of interference by the state. The affirmation of the supra-nationality of the church served as a barrier against the subordination of mission to colonial expansion. This meant purification of the mission model from any compromise with most general political engagement. The mission had been integrated with the universal legislation. Benedict XVI re-launched the universal civilization

<sup>67</sup> “We have been deeply saddened by some recent accounts of missionary life, accounts that displayed more zeal for the profit of some particular nation than for the growth of the kingdom of God (...) it is perfectly obvious to anyone watching him [the missionary] that he represents a Faith that is alien to no nation on earth, since it embraces all men who worship God in spirit and in truth (Colossians 3:12).” *Maximum illud*, No. 20.

<sup>68</sup> J. Kroeger, MM, Papal Mission Wisdom: Five Mission Encyclicals 1919–1959, in: Stephen B. Bevans, *A Century of Catholic Mission. Roman Catholic Missiology 1910 to the Present* (Regnum Edinburgh Centenary Series, 15), Oxford: Regnum Books International 2013, 94.

<sup>69</sup> Coppa, *The Papacy in the Modern World*, 138.

for which the church was a witness. The renewal envisioned also the role the church was to play in the international arena, stressing juridical humanism. He advocated the spiritual testimony of a missionary church in the complex geopolitical context.<sup>70</sup>

The second obstacle for the progress of mission was the religious corporatism in the Catholic missions. It manifested itself in form of rivalry among the missionary congregations themselves, and their unwillingness to prepare a local clergy capable of assuming ecclesiastical responsibility for their local churches.<sup>71</sup> This congregationalism did not favor collaboration among Catholic missionaries working for the same goal. The document condemned the exclusivism of the mission congregations and called for collaboration at the service of the same mission. Benedict XV personally had predilection for international missionary societies, such as the White Fathers, whose post-war General Chapter of 1920 endorsed the teachings of Benedict XV.<sup>72</sup>

Benedict XV entrusted to the missionaries their exclusively religious task and asked for the purification of goals and methods. His encyclical was a cornerstone document of the new missiology and mission practice since it was not only a pure declaration of intent but was carried on in the consistent effort of succeeding popes to implement the program of reform in mission practice.<sup>73</sup>

The crucial instrument of the reform was a proper preparation of the missionaries for missionary work. In this regard, the encyclical emphasized not only the need for good theological preparation, but also good preparation in non-theological disciplines such as ethnology, linguistics and medicine.<sup>74</sup> “Furthermore, the pontiff reminds

<sup>70</sup> Martinelli, *La lettera apostolica “Maximum illud” di Benedetto XV*, 186, 193, 201.

<sup>71</sup> The missions of the nineteenth century gave the impression that they were the privilege and monopoly of the religious congregations, which in turn took care of the numerical increase in vocations to their congregations, neglecting the education of the local clergy. An alternative solution was the institutes of diocesan clergy, which restricted their recruitment only to the nationality of their country of origin, losing the flexibility of missionary orders, for example in the French colonies. The corporate spirit of missionary orders and institutes was visible and often prevailed over the interests of the Church, going often hand in hand with colonialism.

<sup>72</sup> A. Shorter, *African Recruits and Missionary Conscripts. The White Fathers and the Great War (1914–1922)*, London 2007, 171, 173.

<sup>73</sup> A. Monticone, *Il Pontificato di Benedetto XV (Il Grande Libro dei Papi, Vol. II)*, San Paolo Edizioni 2004, 736.

<sup>74</sup> A practical expression of the new model of missionary preparation was the recommendation to introduce a new discipline, called Missiology, in

them about the importance of well prepared missionary corpus where a deep knowledge of the local language was mandatory in order to support further missionary achievements.”<sup>75</sup> The missionary is not only supposed to defend the faith, *eager and ready to brave the most grueling hardships*, but also to gain a respected authority through his education, especially in countries where science is highly valued. Benedict XV pointed out that the romantic missionary model had come to an end as missionary leaders should be alert, attentive, efficient, filled with charity and deeply interested in everyone and everything.<sup>76</sup> He marked an epochal passage from the time of heroic mission to mission based on reflective and scientific formation.

Thus, on the ruins of the Great War, *Maximum illud* offered a Christian program of universal character that implied a new mission strategy.<sup>77</sup> It responded to the felt urgency of missionaries within the mission apostolate to act in complete autonomy compared to the burdens imposed by the colonial system, to ensure the spiritual function of evangelization. The document, which placed itself against the current, spelled out clearly the supranational character of mission and the abandonment of a nationalist spirit. In this sense, it laid the foundation for a more general dynamic of religious decolonization which would be based on the two pillars of *plantatio ecclesiae* and of inculturation.<sup>78</sup>

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the Pontifical College for Propagating the Faith *Urbanianum* in Rome. Priority of place in this preparation was to take good command of the local language and to the extent that it is possible to speak fluently and correctly and make the Gospel understandable for the people of the mission country. The instruction on the construction of local seminaries of 1923 stated that the clergy should receive a triple formation (scientific, practical and psychological). Martinelli, La lettera apostolica “Maximum illud” di Benedetto XV, 190.

<sup>75</sup> Iacobelli, *The Vatican’s Shift of Its Missionary Policy*, 94.

<sup>76</sup> *Maximum illud*, Nos. 9-10.

<sup>77</sup> This change occurred within the tension between the understanding of mission and the new world situation, between experience and the horizon of new expectations. The experiences of the past laid the basis for the answers to the challenges of the time. Indeed, *Maximum illud* was both an accurate diagnosis of the dramatic situation of the world mission and the lessons learned from the past. Miotk, *Das Missionsverständnis*, 154.

<sup>78</sup> Martinelli, La lettera apostolica “Maximum illud” di Benedetto XV, 176, 183.

### 5.3. *De-Europeanization and Indigenization*

During the papacy of Benedict XV and of Pius XI one can notice a deep and ample change in the overseas missionary activity with a new approach to the native Christian communities; it was closer to their interests and aims, pointing towards the creation of an autonomous native church independent of foreign states or churches.<sup>79</sup> The special concern of each mission superior was to be to secure well-trained and well-prepared local priests, “the greatest hope of the new churches.”<sup>80</sup> Giuseppe Butturini, professor of mission history at the University of Padua, argued in his interview<sup>81</sup> that *Maximum illud* didn’t say any new things, compared to the missionary tradition of the church. The question of establishing the local churches and to form a native clergy was a perennial problem.

In this point, Benedict XV was merely repeating what *Propaganda Fide* had insisted on from the beginning of its existence.<sup>82</sup> Francesco Ingoli, the far-seeing secretary of *Propaganda Fide* (1622–1649), regarded as particularly urgent the formation of a native clergy on an equal basis with the foreign missionaries and therefore he hoped to free the missions from colonial power and from direction by European religious superiors with the aim to have them become autonomous. In Asia, the religious orders were reluctant to admit non-Europeans into the priesthood due to the race problem.<sup>83</sup> *Propaganda Fide* pursued the aim to free missionary activities from the grip of colonialism, setting it on a spiritual level away from politics and racial prejudices.

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<sup>79</sup> Iacobelli, *The Vatican’s Shift of Its Missionary Policy*, 93.

<sup>80</sup> *Maximum illud*, No. 14.

<sup>81</sup> G. Valente, Ha fatto bene il Mestiere di Papa (Intervista con prof. Giuseppe Butturini): *30 Giorni* (2001), No. 11.

<sup>82</sup> H. de la Costa, The Development of the Native Clergy in the Philippines: *Theological Studies*, Vol. 8 (June 1947) 219. The importance of the formation of indigenous clergy was raised in the Instruction of 1659 and repeated several times, especially in the encyclical of Leo XIII *Ad Extremas* (1893) on Seminaries for native clergy in the Orient: “The preservation of the Christian faith among the Hindus will be precarious and its propagation uncertain as long as there is not a native clergy properly trained for priestly duties, not only to be of assistance to foreign priests, but also to be in rightful charge of the administration of the Christian Church in their cities (...).” English version on the official website of the Holy See [http://w2.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_l-xiii\\_enc\\_24061893\\_ad-extremas.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_24061893_ad-extremas.html)

<sup>83</sup> J. Glazik, The Springtime of the Missions in the Early Modern Period, in: H. Jedin, *Church History*, Vol. V: *Reformation and Counter Reformation*, London: Burns & Oates 1980, 612.



In 1630, the Congregation issued an important decree: It is absolutely necessary that the most suitable among Indians be promoted to the Sacred orders, even to the priesthood (...) since only the native clergy could inculcate Christianity effectively.<sup>84</sup> However, the common mentality tended to exclude the natives. The Spanish and Portuguese were condemned by the Propaganda Fide for failing to ordain native priests, or for restricting non-Europeans to menial roles. Ingoli complained that the small number of non-Europeans ordained in the East and West Indies were only allowed to study enough to be able to serve as chaplains in the parishes. But behind this reluctance, there was also a jurisdictional conflict and the elaboration of alternative ecclesiastical structures in the absence of clergy. The few ordained Indians were not allowed to study the sciences, but only the minimum necessary to be able to serve as associates in parishes where the pastors needed them because they did not speak the language. Nor should it be said that they were unfit, because it was not true.<sup>85</sup>

In 1846, Gregory XVI's<sup>86</sup> *Neminem profecto* had repeated similar things, indicating that the purpose of missionary activity was the promotion of the local church conducted by its native episcopate. Despite the missionary successes of the pontificates of Leo XIII and Pius X, especially in Africa and Oceania, missionary activity moved on the traditional paths of colonialism.

*Maximum illud* became a major point of reference for other documents on the missions. The encyclical was a sort of guidebook for the Congregation of *Propaganda Fide* and for over half a century the

<sup>84</sup> L. Mezzadri/F. Onnis, *The Vincentians: A General History of the Congregation of the Mission: Vol. 6: The Eighteenth Century to 1789*, Hyde Park, NY: New City Press 2012. In order to remedy the situation Ingoli prepared the famous Decree of 22 November 1630, which ever since has served as a signpost for the modern mission policy of the church. The decree commanded the bishops of India to guarantee by all means that qualified Indians after careful preparation and examination of their intellectual and moral qualities should be promoted to Holy Orders, including priesthood. The reasons given for this were as follows: the constant practice of the church since the time of the Apostles and the bishops of the primitive church; the great authority the native priests possess with their racial brethren; the better knowledge they have of the language, customs and disposition of their fellow countrymen.

<sup>85</sup> T. Albers, *Conflict and Conversion. Catholicism in Southeast Asia 1500–1700*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2013, 43.

<sup>86</sup> G. Valente, *Ha fatto bene il Mestiere di Papa*. “Pope Gregory XVI (1831–1846) is generally regarded as the father of contemporary Catholic Mission for his enthusiastic support and energetic direction in the rebirth of missionary organization in the Church.” Iheanacho, *Maximum illud and Benedict XV's Missionary Thinking*, 56.

many directives of the Congregation bore the imprint of the policies that were clearly expressed in the encyclical. “With *Maximum illud* as his guide, all efforts were directed toward the establishment of a self-governing local Chinese church, with its own well-trained clergy, Sisters and laity.”<sup>87</sup>

The document highlighted three legal principles: the preservation of one’s own nature; the right to self-determination in the civil and religious sense; the notion of mission as pure proclamation of the Gospel without identification with any culture or political orientation. The missionaries ceased to be carriers of true civilization and the indigenous cultures were no obstacles for the proclamation of the Gospel, as far as they did not deny the Gospel.<sup>88</sup>

The Great War marked the end of Eurocentrism and the onset of a period of emancipation from colonialism in Asia and Africa. It was a push towards the reorganization of mission away from political and religious forms of colonialization. *Maximum illud* considered as deplorable the attitude of missionaries forgetting their dignity and being preoccupied with the expansion of their home country: “We must never forget that the missionary is an envoy not of his country but of God.”<sup>89</sup> It reiterated the necessity to disengage the mission from any political burden.<sup>90</sup>

The Apostolic Letter addressed the formation of native clergy: “(...) to facilitate the elevation to the episcopacy of local clergy in order to lead their local churches, Benedict XV in ‘Maximum illud,’ in strong terms disapproved of every form of superficial priestly formation that was then operative in many mission areas.”<sup>91</sup>

In fact, *Maximum illud* created division among the bishops in China and polarized the mission field into two camps: the pro-indigenization “Lebbe faction” and the “French faction” that read the Vatican’s actions as an attempt to undercut the French Protectorate’s influence.<sup>92</sup> After publication of *Maximum illud*, the Vatican sent to China an Apostolic Delegate of great force of character, Monsignor Celso Costantini, future cardinal prefect of *Propaganda Fide*. The

<sup>87</sup> St. B. Bevans/R. P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books 2004, 246.

<sup>88</sup> Miotk, *Das Missionsverständnis*, 152.

<sup>89</sup> *Maximum illud*, No. 20.

<sup>90</sup> Chr. Dickes (dir.)/D. R. Laffont (ed.), *Dictionnaire du Vatican et du Saint-Siège* (Collection «Bouquins»), Paris: Robert Laffont 2013, 258.

<sup>91</sup> Iheanacho, *Benedict XV and the Rethinking*.

<sup>92</sup> Monshan Wu, *From Christ to Confucius*, 126.

Holy See would have preferred to have an Apostolic Nuncio in Beijing, but France, jealous of its politico-ecclesiastical protectorate, prevented it, claiming to the weak Chinese government that the diplomats proposed by the Holy See for the desired nunciature were pro-German.<sup>93</sup> Costantini saw to the nomination of the first Chinese bishops (consecrated in St. Peter's Basilica by Pius XI in 1926) and eradicated many signs of what Chinese society saw as the foreignness of Catholicism.<sup>94</sup> Among friends, Costantini would joke: "Either with the missionaries against *Maximum illud* or with *Maximum illud* against the missionaries." More seriously, it was a matter of avoiding confusion between the Christian message and the interests of the Western powers.<sup>95</sup> In *Rerum Ecclesiae* (1926) Pius XI followed quite closely the thought of his predecessor in *Maximum illud*, though some points were developed in greater detail. In short, Benedict's successor, Pius XI, regarded the planting of the visible organization of the church and the erection of seminaries as the first duty of missionaries.

That papal document was revolutionary in its strong emphasis on the formation of a local or indigenous clergy in mission territories. From the end of the First World War up to the eve of the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), the increase in the number of local clergy in Asian and African mission countries was truly phenomenal and the quality of their formation was equally remarkable. It would not have been possible without the initial impetus given by Pope Benedict XV as the pacesetter. It was a momentum that was sustained with vigor by Popes Pius XI and Pius XII.<sup>96</sup> The encyclical took into consideration the increasing demands for self-determination of the

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<sup>93</sup> "In China missionary activity was subordinate to the French protectorate, according to the dictates of an agreement Paris had wrenched from Beijing in 1858. As a result, the majority of Chinese people viewed Catholicism as 'the French religion.' Benedict XV became convinced of the need to go ahead with making the Church in China Chinese and of establishing diplomatic relations directly with the Chinese government." J.-P. Wiest, Sino-Vatican Relations under Pope Benedict XVI: From Promising Beginnings to Overt Confrontation, in: C. Chu (ed.), *Catholicism in China, 1900–Present. The Development of the Chinese Church*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2014, 191.

<sup>94</sup> Pius XI is remembered as the first pope who fostered the indigenous hierarchy by "personally consecrating Chinese, Indian, and Japanese bishops." Kroeger, *Papal Mission Wisdom: Five Mission Encyclicals 1919–1959*, 96.

<sup>95</sup> A. Riccardi, «In te, Domine, speravi; non confundar in aeternum»: *30 Giorni*, No. 4 (2005).

<sup>96</sup> Iheanacho, *Benedict XV and the Rethinking*.

indigenous population, for territorial integrity and sovereignty as well as for cultural identity. Pope Benedict XV rejected the thesis on the inferiority and inequality of races and claimed the right to independence for the mission churches.<sup>97</sup>

#### 5.4. A Shift in Presentation and Mission Theology

Pope Benedict XV influenced foremost the uniform form of *Maximum illud*. Its style has nothing to do with a distanced and dry diplomatic approach, which one would associate with Giacomo della Chiesa, for many years in the diplomatic service. Just the opposite, his style reflected a deep and dynamic spirituality of apostolic zeal and the attitude of a determined reformer with the foresight of a strategist.<sup>98</sup>

The concept of mission in the Apostolic Letter clearly contrasts with the narrow understanding of mission and with the usual practice of the past, but in the past the missionary activity of the papacy left no space for personal reflection and a sense of missionary responsibility.

Against this background, the theological novelty of the encyclical is essentially expressed in the emphasis on the catholicity of the mission and the ecclesiastical character of the mission work. The encyclical constituted an ecclesiological turnabout compared to the teaching of Pius X. Mission activity was no longer conceived as a separate entity on the edge of ecclesiology but essentially as a basic function of the church.<sup>99</sup> For the first time, the encyclical recognized that the church is a mission church.<sup>100</sup> Thus, *Maximum illud* constitutes an im-

<sup>97</sup> K. J. Rivinius, *Collegium Sinicum: Eine Bildungsanstalt für chinesische Priester in Peking* (Studia Instituti Missiologici SVD, 103), Siegburg: Franz Schmitt Verlag 2015, 9.

<sup>98</sup> Miotk, *Das Missionsverständnis*, 101.

<sup>99</sup> And actually, at that time, mission theology had no proper place in the theological treatises. There was no pronounced mission theology but praxis-oriented mission reflections. Nevertheless, the emphasis on the catholicity of mission was important for the future development of mission theology. The church is now conceived as at the service of the whole world, based on *Caritas* as the center of Christian life. The change in the mission praxis of *Maximum illud* entailed a change in theological views. Miotk, *Das Missionsverständnis*, 148.

<sup>100</sup> Benedict XV incorporated the teaching on mission into the teaching on the church, where mission was an existential function of the church, and is rooted in the Church. P. Wanko, *Kirche – Mission – Missionen. Eine Untersuchung der ekklesiologischen und missiologischen Aussagen vom I. Vaticanum bis „Maximum illud“*, Münster 1968, 81. Bevans and Schroeder claim that *Maximum illud* did not provide a theological basis for mis-

portant caesura in the history of Catholic missions and a transitional stage for the formulation of the mature mission theology of the Second Vatican Council. The document was a fresh breath of mission enthusiasm with a deep sense of duty towards the mandate to evangelize.

It was foremost a praxis-oriented program which introduced a mission theological shift in the field of evangelization. The document reflected the acute deficiencies of mission work, which were already long discussed among some missionaries and in mission circles. But at the same time, the Apostolic Letter appeared not at a favorable time, and consequently wasn't exactly as well received as it deserved in the desolate post-war situation, dominated by different needs and problems. Only with time were the fundamental change of perspective and the prophetic foresights of *Maximum illud* recognized. Overall, the mission strategy of Benedict XV was designed to prepare the post-colonial future of the church in Africa, Asia, and Oceania.

### ***Conclusion: Prophetic Resonance***

The Apostolic Letter *Maximum illud* constituted a breakthrough momentum for the Catholic mission. In a somber period of world history, it ushered in a "new springtime" for the Catholic mission of salvation, with its theological shift, vigorous tone and fresh evangelical breath. This encyclical in its renewed missionary commitment is comparable to the recent encyclical *Redemptoris missio* of 1990.<sup>101</sup> When the world seemed to be stuck in a spirit of vengeance, Benedict XV, remembering past painful experiences, launched a manifesto of hope based on a global and universal worldview.

His mission program became with time the *Magna Carta* of modern mission work, specifically of the native church.<sup>102</sup> According to John Pollard, *Maximum illud* can be viewed as the most significant papal pronouncement on the missions until Paul VI's Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi* of 1976.<sup>103</sup> The Apostolic Letter turned

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sionary work, and the goals of mission continued to be winning of converts (*conversio animarum*) and the establishing of the local church (*plantatio ecclesiae*). Bevans/Schroeder, *Constants in Context*, 244.

<sup>101</sup> *Redemptoris missio*, No. 2.

<sup>102</sup> The document received a couple of complimentary titles: "L'ouverture symphonique" (André Retif), "the groundbreaking document of the new missiology" (Alberto Monticone), "Una svolta nella storia della diffusione dell'Evangelo" (Josef Metzler). Miotk, *Das Missionsverständnis*, 13.

<sup>103</sup> The Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii nuntiandi* (Evangelization in the Modern World), December 8, 1975, deepens the under-

out to be revolutionary in the church's missionary policy by its directness and a new tone. Against the backdrop of the colonial mission praxis its principles were revolutionary due to the urgent call for formation of indigenous clergy and hierarchy. *Maximum illud* wanted to break with the partisan praxis of missionary congregations defending their own and national narrow-minded interests.<sup>104</sup>

What is significantly new in *Maximum illud* lies in renouncing colonialism and Europeanism and in considering the peculiarity of peoples in the light of catholicity. Never before had a Pope so clearly laid out a vision for the centrality of mission in global Catholicism, asserting the universality and non-Eurocentric character of the Catholic Church by stating: "The Catholic Church is not an intruder in any country; nor is she alien to any people. It is only right, then, that those who exercise her sacred ministry should come from every nation."<sup>105</sup> Benedict XV purposely wanted to remove the binary situation between Europe and the rest of the world as the fate of the faith in Europe was intertwined with the state of the church all over the world. The Apostolic Letter emerged out of the Great War as a prophetic voice in the desert. *Maximum illud* advocated a major step forward in favor of the global, universal church. In this sense it was a pioneering document with predicative value indicating future developments as an "envisioned future."

#### ABSTRACTS

Diese Untersuchung geht der geschichtlichen Bedeutung und dem prophetischen Nachhall des Apostolischen Schreibens *Maximum illud* anlässlich der Hundertjahrfeier seines Erscheinens nach. Sie unterstreicht die Rolle der Welt und des Missionskontexts bei der Entstehung eines umfassenden Reformprogramms der katholischen Mission in der Folge des Ersten Weltkriegs und beschäftigt sich mit dem vielfältigen und induktiven Zugang im Entwurf des Dokuments. Der Aufweis der geschichtlichen Bedeutung von *Maximum illud* umfasst vier Aspekte: Zentralisierung, Entpolitisierung und Universalismus, Enteuropäisierung und Einheimischwerdung und die Verlagerung in der Missionstheologie. *Maximum illud* wandte sich gegen den Kolonialismus

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standing of evangelization. The exhortation, like *Maximum illud*, expresses how to evangelize or proclaim the message of the Gospel in the context of the present situation of society and of the world (re-defining the meaning of evangelization in context). The witness of life is emphasized as the best way of evangelizing, which also for Pope Benedict XV was essential for the progress of mission, with the missionary as a man of God in the very center.

<sup>104</sup> Gadille, *Le strategie missionarie delle Chiese*, 236.

<sup>105</sup> *Maximum illud*, No. 16.

und die Europäisierung in der Missionsarbeit und favorisierte die Universalität der Kirche. Das große Ziel der Enzyklika Benedikts XV. war die Schaffung einer eigenständigen einheimischen Kirche, in der sich die Katholiken der überseeischen Territorien zuhause fühlen könnten. Die prophetische Bedeutung von *Maximum illud* liegt in seiner Voraussicht auf zukünftige Entwicklungen in der Missionsarbeit.

Este estudio se dedica al significado histórico y la resonancia profética de la carta apostólica *Maximum illud* en el centenario de su publicación. Enfatiza el papel del mundo y del contexto de la misión en la elaboración de un programa global de reforma dentro de la misión católica en las postrimerías de la Primera Guerra Mundial. Discute su acercamiento multicausal e inductivo en la elaboración del documento. El significado histórico de *Maximum illud* se expone en cuatro aspectos: la centralización, la despolitización y el universalismo; la des-europeización e indigenización; y el cambio en la teología de la misión. *Maximum illud* se opone al colonialismo y europeísmo en el trabajo misionero y favorece la universalidad de la iglesia. La gran meta de la encíclica de Benedicto fue la creación de una iglesia nativa autónoma en la que los católicos de los territorios en ultramar pudieran sentirse en casa. La importancia profética de *Maximum illud* reside en la anticipación de los desarrollos futuros en el trabajo misionero.

Cette étude traite de la signification historique et de la résonance prophétique de la Lettre apostolique *Maximum illud* en ce centenaire de sa publication. Elle souligne le rôle du contexte mondial et missionnaire dans la genèse du programme global de réforme de la mission catholique après la Grande Guerre. Elle étudie l'approche plurielle et inductive qui a guidé la rédaction de ce document. La présentation de la signification historique de *Maximum illud* développe quatre aspects missionnaires: la centralisation; la dépolitisation et l'universalisme; la déeuropeanisation et l'indigénisation; et son tournant en théologie missionnaire. *Maximum illud* s'est élevée contre le colonialisme et l'eurocentrisme dans le travail missionnaire en faveur de l'universalité de l'Église. Le grand projet de l'encyclique de Benoît XV était la création d'une Église indigène autonome où les catholiques des territoires d'outre-mer se sentent chez eux. La pertinence prophétique de *Maximum illud* réside dans son anticipation des développements à venir dans la tâche missionnaire.