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The Collapse Of The SVD Togo Mission (1914-1921)

The Aim of the Study

This case-study researches into the collapse of the Togo Mission of the Divine Word Missionaries and focuses on three periods: the Anglo-French occupation (1914-1917); Expulsion and Internment (1917-1918) and the definitive loss of the Togo Mission (1918-1921). The Togo Mission was already the subject of substantial historiographic contributions (Witte 1925; Tauren 1931; Bornemann 1975 and 1981; Skweres 1993; Alt 2002). This investigation, however, is based mainly on archival sources from the SVD Generalate Archive in Rome (abbreviated as *AG SVD*) and traces the unfolding of events within the international efforts to save the mission. It also shows the self-understanding of Togo missionaries in terms of their national, moral and spiritual awareness at a time of entering into a new missionary situation.

Prelude: a Thriving Mission

The Togo Mission of the Divine Word Missionaries thrived until the threshold of the Great War (1914-1918) leading to its decline, which eventually culminated in its total suppression in 1918. The missionaries were expelled and it was only possible for them to return 56 years later, in 1974. Leaving the Togo mission was all the more painful since the decline was preceded by a very successful era of missionary involvement. Throughout the 26 years of the Togo Mission's existence (1892-1914), 76 fathers, 33 brothers and 52 sisters worked in the *model colony* of Togo despite the pestilential tropical climate.¹

¹ Overall, 22 missionaries died in Togo: 7 fathers, 5 Brothers and 10 SSpS Sisters. A letter dated April 1918 from the secretary of state of the Imperial Colonial Office, Dr. Wilhelm Solf (1911-

They firmly planted the Christian message on African soil, and by 1913 had extended their presence into the interior as far as the northernmost town of Alédjo (370 km from the coast). It was the second “pagan mission” of the Divine Word Society and encompassed a quite undeveloped area which was part of the extensive West African territory assigned to the African Mission Society of Lyons (further abbreviated as SMA). Its territory with an estimated population of 940.000 (1909), measured 87,000 km² with a rather short coast line of 50 km and penetrated 560 km north into the interior: At the start of the mission in 1892, the population was estimated to be one million (Bornemann 1981, 398). During the next 20 years (1892-1912), the energetic missionary leaders, Frs. Johann Schäfer, Matthias Dier, Hermann Bücking and Nicolaus Schönig founded 11 main stations and 160 outstations cared for by 43 priests and 12 brothers. In 1914, the missionaries administered 13 churches with two splendid gothic cathedrals, Sacred Heart in Lomé and Holy Spirit in Kpalimé. Alongside the ordinary sacramental ministry and catechesis, they focused on schools and on the formation of Christian families. With the assistance of 228 native teachers and catechists, the SVD’s operated 180 elementary schools and two high schools.² The efficient system of private missionary schools, which included 8,000 pupils out of a total of 17,000 Catholics, ensured a solid religious formation.

The missionaries promoted the Christian model of family, and this inevitably led to clashes with the traditional polygamous family system which guaranteed prosperity and influence. Regular visits to family homes (two hours each day) strengthened the catechesis and led to the solemnization of a good number of Christian marriages (1,235 by 1913). By that time, 23 Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters (SSpS) worked in 5 main stations, seeing to the formation of future mothers of families. The well thought out missionary strategy of avoiding conflicts, concentrating on the most important places and on the methodical extension of the mission’s foundation resulted in the flowering of the SVD mission in Togo. One exemplary case proving the success of this strategy could be perceived in the missionary career of Fr. Vincenz Hackl, SVD. He was one of the many Togo missionaries who, after arriving in Togo, made a short stop in Lomé and then went to Kpalimé. Fr. Theodor Kost gave him a course on the local language while he was giving German classes at the boys’ school. Towards the end of September, he was assigned to Lomé to teach at the boys’ school and train catechists at the outlying posts. At Easter in 1911 he was moved to Kpandu in the interior of the country where he remained until

-1918) to the Superior General of the Divine Word Society clearly shows that Togo had a special place among the German Colonies and was exemplary because of its completely German character, its self-sufficiency and no shortage of work.

² Sources/AG SVD 903 [p].

his expulsion from Togo. In Kpandu, he cared for 12 chapels with a significant number of Christians and sacramental ministry, including baptisms, confirmations, confessions and first communion classes. In places where the roads were good he could reach the villages by bicycle and motorbike. Contact with the Christians was very important since they lived in a pagan environment and were exposed to many temptations. In May of 1914, he fell ill with malaria and after three attacks of malaria, he had to leave for treatment to Europe. On July 28, he set sail along with Fr. Peter Sausen and on August 1 in the morning, they arrived in Monrovia. There, the Captain got a telegraph to search for a neutral harbor due to the outbreak of the Great War. They arrived at the harbor of Perambuco in Brasil on August 6, 1914 (Markert 20-21).

1. The Period of the Anglo-French Occupation (1914-1917)

At the very outbreak of the First World War, the Germans in Togo were defenseless and without an army of their own. The armed police forces had no idea about the war. Geographical factors such as the lack of natural borders also favored invaders. The elongated *German Protectorate* was small and easily accessible, both from the English *Gold Coast* and the French *Dahomey*. Furthermore, the good network of roads put Germans at a disadvantage. Aware of the situation, the Acting German Governor, Hans Georg von Döring, appealed to the *Berlin Act* to establish Togo's neutral status, but the English refused to accept this. So Döring mobilized all 400 men in the police force and assembled them in Kamina on August 8, 1914. He planned to direct operations from there. Yet the next day, the English took over Lomé without any resistance and occupied the southern part of the country 120 km into the interior. They solemnly proclaimed that they would protect the Society of the Divine Word and its mission property in Togo. The mission's main codex, *Chronik von Lomé* (1909-1917) – a 42 page manuscript – was sent to the SVD General Archives in Rome from Sankt Augustin in Germany in 1984. It is currently located in the '*Archivio del Fondatore*' (AF SVD 41513/2).

The French seized Aného on August 8, 1914 and some days later crossed the Mono river and took Sagada, while the English moved forward along the Kpalimé railway line. The combat on two fronts lasted several days. The Germans managed to hold their strategic radio station in Kamina but eventually capitulated on August 27. Döring had ordered the destruction of the wireless station before the arrival of the French and British on August 26. Under the supervision of native Togolese, the Germans were taken as prisoners of war to the train station in Atakpame and then transported to Lomé. On August 30, they were put on the cargo steamer *Obuasi*. Some Germans were allowed to

remain in Togo under police supervision until March 1915 in order to continue to do business in their companies. From that point on, the Catholic and Protestant missionaries were the only German nationals who remained in Togo.

On August 30, 1914, the eleven Catholic superiors of mission congregations in Germany raised a cry of distress in defense of the neutral character of the mission territories in line with the *Congo Acts* and issued a special declaration.³ They called on the colonial powers not to transfer the war to Africa, since mission activity is not a political action but the proclamation of the Christian message. Despite this, England then illegally transferred the war onto African soil in violation of the *Congo Acts* (Article 11, see *General Act*).⁴ By violating the *Congo Acts*, England, known as the pioneer of European culture and the supporter of the anti-slavery movement, cast doubt upon the authority of the white race, undermining the very basis of its colonial status and putting an end to the enormous progress of missionary work. The Christian nations at war questioned one another's authority in full view of the Africans, leading to rebellion among the natives and to the overthrow of the rule of the whites and the destruction of the missionary work. Moreover, this useless bloodshed on African soil had no effect whatsoever on the outcome of the war in Europe.

1.1. Missionaries under British Occupation

To understand the difficult situation of the SVD missionaries under the Anglo-French occupation, one has to keep in mind the fundamentally different approaches of the two powers towards colonial rule. France emphasized close economic, political, and cultural ties with Paris, pursuing the policy of assimilation, of transforming the Africans into Frenchmen, especially by means of the education system. The schools could not operate without government permission. They had to employ government-certified teachers and follow a government curriculum, and French was the only language of instruction. The 1905 Law on the Separation between the State and the Churches limited the activities of mission schools and the state became the main provider of education at

³ Sources/AG SVD 903 [b].

⁴ Article 11: "In case a Power exercising rights of sovereignty or Protectorate in the countries mentioned in Article 1, and placed under the free trade system, shall be involved in a war, then the High Signatory Parties to the present Act, and those who shall hereafter adopt it, bind themselves to lend their good offices in order that the territories belonging to this Power and comprised in the Conventional free trade zone shall, by the common consent of this Power and of the other belligerent or belligerents, be placed during the war under the rule of neutrality, and considered as belonging to a non-belligerent State, the belligerents thenceforth abstaining from extending hostilities to the territories thus neutralized, and from using them as a base for warlike operations."

great cost to the government. The English approach was the opposite, primarily commercial. It aimed at exploiting the resources. The British were interested in containing the costs of their colonies and enlisted the help of the mission societies to provide education cheaply on their behalf. Missions had considerable freedom in how they ran schools, recruited teachers, taught religion, and adjusted teaching contents to local conditions. Overall, the educational system was decentralized. Furthermore, the first grades of primary school instruction was in the local vernacular, with English as a subject (Cogneau and Moradi). England had no interest in assimilating Africans into its Empire.

Toward mid-November of 1914, the English occupants issued an order to expel all Germans, including the missionaries, to England. The local population protested quickly against such a proceeding. Fr. Anton Witte, the Pro-Vicar, turned to an English friend – a Major – who successfully intervened with the Governor of the Gold Coast and temporarily annulled the order of expulsion. The German Missionaries in the English zone could continue to work undisturbed since the Governor of the Gold Coast supported them.⁵ They easily received the necessary permits to visit the outlying stations.⁶

However, without proper documentation available, the report from Europe on the Togo-Mission for 1915 was pretty pessimistic. Its author, the newly appointed Apostolic Vicar, Fr. Franz Wolf, SVD (March 16, 1914), would never reach his Togo Mission. His report highlighted the much interrupted progress of the mission and the deteriorating quality of missionary service.⁷ Nevertheless, as Bro. Jacobus Basten (for his biography see Bornemann) wrote: “we should sing a *Te Deum* to God in thanksgiving for his goodness to us in comparison with the other missions, which were completely destroyed by the war. No one here has had to suffer any real shortage – at least under the

⁵ Fr. Heinrich Demond to the Superior General: “Since Togo became English, we suffer less here from the effects of the war. All runs its usual course as before the war. Nevertheless, for our trips into the interior (bush) we need a special permit. Also, the work in the Christian villages is more difficult since there are no more teachers who could keep the Christians together” Sources/AG SVD 27 [o].

⁶ Fr. Joseph Lambert to the Superior General: “We are three members in Togo. Trips without a travel permit are forbidden and those permits will be issued every two months. So we stay here although the presence of our Fathers will be very much needed elsewhere. The region seems to be sad and the city does not function well. Woga is in the best state even if the influence of the teachers has almost totally disappeared and the region is under the influence of a Fetish man. A priest who goes there could be arrested” Sources/AG SVD 27 [v].

⁷ Fr. Eduard Breitkopf to the Superior General: “There is almost no visible sign left from the agitation of the first days of the war. Some are now ashamed of the mischief they caused. Most of the people look to the future with trepidation. During the last two and a half years, something has broken down and I do not think it is possible to expect a better future. Now, many people are dying without baptism. The lack of catechists is depriving people of regular catechesis and of the sacraments. All are longing for peace that they hope it will not be too long a wait” Sources/AG SVD 27 [j].

British administration, which made possible our freedom move and allowed us to work.”⁸ The material state of the mission was acceptable even without the benefit of ration cards. Bro. Jacobus was even able to see the positive side of the war, since it was a challenge to those affected by an unhealthy optimism. It showed that the missionary methods of the last 10 years needed to be reformed. Christianity, competing with other influences, was in fact almost a utopia since it seemed to be bereft of real sacrifice. Mission activity needed a solid apostolic foundation.⁹

The responsibility for the support of the Togo Mission during the war rested primarily on the Pro-Vicar, Fr. Anton Witte, SVD, who received support from the Mother House in Steyl. He successfully asked local Christians for contributions. The income from the workshops provided considerable help. No one had to starve. The interned missionaries were released and could resume their normal activities, although with some restraints.

The fathers in Aného remained under house arrest for several months, but all the catechism classes and the schools in Lomé continued to be well attended. There were, however, some impediments under the English occupation: the schools only remained open for a while. The overall number of schools in the mission plummeted from 198 to 61. The number of teachers fell from 228 to 81. The number of pupils sank from 6,366 to 2,002 and the number of catechumens declined from 5,221 to 1,873. The total number of Christians increased slightly by one thousand. The report for 1916 was not very different from that of the previous year.

1.2. Missionaries under French Occupation

By contrast, in the French-occupied zone, the missionaries were greatly hindered in their activities. All of the schools were closed in the Aného Region. The fathers were interned in the main mission stations and were forbidden to visit the outstations. In the cities of Atakpamé and Alédjo, the missionaries were allowed to stay after the French entered, but they were regarded

⁸ Sources/AG SVD 27 [z]. Fr. Fritz Bornemann in the omnibus volume of 17 biographies of missionary brothers: *Missionsbrüder draussen und daheim*, Fritz Bornemann (ed.), Analecta SVD-34, pp. 17-62.

⁹ Bro. Jacobus has left also a valuable resource for posterity: his memoirs based on his personal experiences in Togo. They are an important source about the Togo Mission, mainly because the fifth part contains short biographies and characteristics of the mission personal: fathers and brothers who laid the ground work for the existence and development of the mission. He was interested in the big problems of the mission: language study, the schools, relations with the government and with the Protestant missionaries. See: Sources/Basten.

as prisoners of war and were interned in one house. Some decided to leave the country. Among the first missionaries who returned to Europe were: Bro. Adam Plonka, who had been interned in Atakampé and brought to French Dahomey, where he was interned under very difficult conditions in several prison camps in Cotonou, Sawe, Parakou and Kandi. In May 1915, under pressure from the German government, he was sent to Mediouna, 20 km from Casablanca in Morocco, and finally brought to France as an estate worker. He was released on July 28, 1917. Suspected of having delivered information to the Germans, Fr. Michael Theisen, the superior of Kpandu, was also imprisoned by the English in 1914 and sent to England. Once released, he arrived at Steyl on February 5, 1915 together with Fr. Fritz Vormann. Fr. Vormann had been surprised by the war in Las Palmas but thinking the war would only be a short episode, he set out for Fernando Po to take care of the Togolese living there. The French initially imprisoned him, but then after taking an oath, he was freed and with an English Pass he eventually found his way via Barcelona to Steyl (Müller 1958, 254-255).

Treatment of the missionaries varied among officials. Among the five commandants, two were good Catholics and one was a devout Protestant, consequently the fate of the individual missions varied considerably. The treatment of the prisoners of war was much worse. Frs. Karl Wolf and Paul Münch were brought as quasi prisoners to French-occupied Dahomey. They were released three months later due to the efforts of Bishop François Steinmetz of Dahomey (1906-1934), but, they could not leave the bishop's house in Ouidah without special permission, even to visit the sick. Beginning in December of 1914, they began to slip out into the city surreptitiously, hoping not to be seen by the commandant.

Whether or not the missionaries could continue their usual contacts with the Catholics outside the church walls after Mass depended entirely on the mood of the official in charge. To go out to administer the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick required special permission from the commandant who lived three kilometers away. Every visit to a sick person had to be settled case by case. Similar situations prevailed in Togo-City, Porto Seguro, Alédjo and Atakpamé. As one missionary wrote: "among the French, life is arduous and it is almost impossible to work successfully, while the English are treating us, at best, as an evil to be tolerated. With infinite effort, we have been trying to steer the mission work through all the pitfalls of the French Rule."¹⁰ Unlike the English, the French closed all schools in their occupation zone, although the missionaries did enjoy certain freedom. In Alédjo, Frs. Lorscheid and Dorn performed an excellent mission service and were very popular with the people.

¹⁰ Fr. Christian Lorscheid to Superior General. Sources/AG SVD 27 [h].

They could continue to conduct the three schools in the area but after only three weeks the schools were closed and on March 25, 1917 they were ordered to leave the mission. Even the lay catechists were not able to continue their pastoral work. The mission was abandoned for ten years. In the large district of Atakpamé, in July 1915, all the schools of the *German mission* were closed by the occupying French. The students were ordered to enroll in schools under French administration. The benefits of financial help from Europe dried up and the only revenues came from the trade school, the mission farms and, with the considerable help of native Christians, in the form of an annual collection. Only in July 1916, after the recall of the French Commandant to the front, did the situation improve (Thauren 16). The missionaries noted that, in general, the English were more benevolent than the French. Despite the disruptions of war, the Togolese Catholics remained faithful to their religion.

2. The Period of Expulsion and Internment (1917-1918)

2.1. The Expulsion of the Togo Missionaries

In 1916, the English press began a defamatory campaign against the continued presence of the German missionaries in Togo. The Gold Coast's native-run newspaper, solidly under the influence of the English, attempted to incite the native population against the German Missionaries. They spread libelous accusations and native spies tailed the missionaries trying to sniff out the smallest suspicion of disloyalty to the French or English occupiers (Thauren 17). The hostile natives of the English Gold Coast petitioned the Governor and Commandants to "liberate the Togolese faithful from the German yoke." The events of the war in Europe seemed to point to the *worst case* scenario. Fr. Anton Baun from Gblede wrote to the Superior General (Bla district): "At the beginning of war, when on one Sunday the Christians wanted to come together for Holy Mass, the pagans rose up in opposition. They came to the schoolyard, removed the bell and forced the Christians to lead them to the English. Only after long attempts at persuasion did they give up on their original intention" (Müller 1958, 246). Since the beginning of 1917, there were rumors that all German missionaries and Sisters would be deported. English newspapers in the neighboring Gold Coast thundered against the *German spies*. Shortly after the celebration of the silver jubilee of the Togo Mission (on Aug. 29, 1917), the axe fell.¹¹

¹¹ Fr. Eduard Ihle to Superior General. Sources/AG SVD 27 [k] Fr. Eduard Ihle later reported how his heart had bled at the harsh trials which the missionaries underwent. At the time of his leav-

On Oct. 11, 1917, Fr. Henricus Leven, SVD, reported on the darkest day in the annals of the history of the Togo mission.¹² It all happened like a bolt of lightning from the sky. On that day, the Pro-Vicar, Fr. Anton Witte, received an urgent summons to the office of the English commandant who unhappily informed him of the executive order just received from London. It decreed that all missionaries under 45 years of age had to leave Togo and that those in Lomé would have to board the ship within two hours. Their destination – England. The trade steamer had been waiting for them since the early hours of the morning. Within the hour, an officer was to begin checking all their documents and luggage. From that moment on, the missionaries were regarded as prisoners of war. The missionaries from the interior were to be brought to the coast over the next few days. Within fifteen minutes, the news of the fate of the missionaries had spread like wildfire. Within a few hours, the Togolese Catholics would be deprived of their shepherds.

The people hurriedly gathered to bid their missionaries farewell and to receive their last blessing.¹³ The missionaries were granted a 45 minute reprieve. After a brief farewell service in the church and one last blessing, the native Catholics accompanied the missionaries, who were not even allowed to bring their breviaries, to the harbor. “As we boarded the ship, officers asked us whether we had any dynamite or gunpowder in our luggage. It was really a sorrowful and dramatic parting from our second homeland.”¹⁴

The scenes of farewell were repeated a number of times. The 53 missionaries were expelled in seven groups within three months (from Oct. 11, 1917 to Jan. 10, 1918). The Fathers from Kpalimé, Agu, Kpandu, Bla and Ho were first interned for four days in Kpalimé. The native Catholics gave them money and forced the local commandant to allow a farewell service on Saturday, Oct. 20, 1917. The people, crying and lamenting, saw the missionaries off to the train

ing Togo, he did not fully comprehend what had really happened. Only after some weeks did he understand the gravity of the event.

¹² Fr. Henricus Leven, the Togo Missionary (1911-1917) left a very detailed typescript of 34 pages regarding his experiences of the expulsion from Togo and internment in England. His account, written in very descriptive style, reflects the emotions that accompanied the missionaries into the unknown future. In 1920, Fr. Leven was reassigned to Dutch Indonesia (1920) where he was made a Bishop in 1933. See Sources/AG SVD 903 [a].

¹³ “The departure from Togo was so quick that I could not bid farewell properly to my Asahuan people. That was a heavy sacrifice.” Fr. Heinrich Etscheid to Superior General. Sources/AG SVD 27 [p].

¹⁴ Henricus Leven, *Bericht über die Fortführung*, p. 4. Sources/AG SVD 903 [a]. For Fr. Leven the deportation was the kiss of death. During the voyage he and the other 19 white missionaries were guarded by native Togolese soldiers. The monotony of the voyage was interrupted by the spray caused by numberless dolphins splashing the water. Sailing northwards, the climate rapidly changed from hot to cold so that many suffered from the cold. A new threat emerged with the danger of a torpedo attack by German U-Boats.

station. Overall, 44 missionaries, including 32 Fathers and 12 Brothers were taken away to England as prisoners of war during the months of October and November 1917. Due to their illness, Fathers Heise and Kockers were allowed to depart earlier. Apart from the Sisters, six Fathers and three Brothers were allowed to remain in Togo – but not for long. By mid-December, even the old missionaries and the Sisters had to leave Togo.¹⁵ Together with Pro-Vicar Fr. Witte, who remained to arrange last-minute mission affairs, the last three missionaries left Togo on January 10, 1918. Both England and France opposed the return of the German missionaries. A 1917 report on the Togo Mission relayed the information that with the expulsion of the German missionaries, 22,128 Catholics and 1,236 catechumens were left without pastoral care (Müller 1968, 90). Following their release from internment, the Togo missionaries in Germany were assigned to Sankt Wendel as their residence where they remained under the authority of their Regional Superior.

2.2. Internment in England

The first and biggest group of Togo missionaries, nine Fathers and eight Brothers, reached Plymouth on Nov. 10, 1917. They had sailed for England aboard a freighter which had cabins for 30 passengers, three to a cabin. The following day they once again set foot on European soil, some after many years in Togo. In his report, Fr. Leven commented on the gloomy show, with the nations competing for a paradise world, but were now tearing each other apart in blind rage. As the missionaries were being transported from the train

¹⁵ Overall, 53 SVD missionaries set sail from Togo on seven different ships:

- 1) 11 October 1917 (17) nine fathers: Hubert Ehlert, Matthias Hack, August Gehring, Eduard Ihle, Henricus Leven, Bernhard Bode, Johann Etscheid, Gerhard Heffels, Franz Tetzlaff and eight brothers: Clementinus /Josef Bach/, Constantin /Johann Weyer/, Willibrord /Gottfried Adolphi/, Leopold /Joseph Schacht/, Xaverius /Paul Walker/, Theophorus /Jakob Kleemann/, Eufriidus /Joseph Eife/, Leodardus /Ferdinand Borkenhagen/;
- 2) 25 October 1917 (12) eleven fathers: Franz Mertens, Heinrich Schröder, Karl Wolf, Josef Ettl, Heinrich Demond, Christian Lorscheid, Eduard Hundler, Albert Florian, Karl Stenzel, Franz Dorn, Joseph Lambert and one brother: Damasus /Wilhelm Schneider/;
- 3) 26 October 1917 (5) four fathers: Johann Klaffl, Franz Eickmann, Ernst Möhlis, Eduard Breitkopf and one brother: Alkuin /Adolf Kirchner/;
- 4) 4 November 1917 (10) eight fathers: Paul Münch, Bernhard Glanemann, Johann Surrey, Anton Baun, Paul Arndt, Hermann Helling, Theodor Koch, Hetmann Feldmann and two brothers: Arnulf /Arnold Rademacher/ and Reinhold /Ludwig Schmalz/;
- 5) 15 December 1917 (3) one father: Josef Berning and two brothers: Johannes / Franz Hopfer /and Jakobus /Heinrich Basten/;
- 6) 9 January 1918 (3) two fathers: Heinrich Heering, Johann Porten and one brother: Norbertus /Gerhard Nienhaus/;
- 7) 0 January 1918 (3) three fathers: Anton Witte, Ferdinand Lauer and Karl Stangier.

station, they encountered people giving vent to their hostile emotions toward German prisoners, even though they were priests. On Nov. 11, these 19 prisoners, accompanied by 11 guards, were on their way to London. Their destination was the mass prison camp at the Alexandra Palace.¹⁶

Almost all of the missionaries first passed through the Alexandra Palace in North London, a famous festival and entertainment complex, in which up to 3,000 internees slept in rows on plank bunk beds in the Great Hall and in two other large halls. The Victorian Alexandra Palace, built in 1873, was requisitioned to serve as an internment camp from 1915 to 1919. From 1914 to 1918, Alexandra Palace was at first a home to thousands of Belgians fleeing the German invasion. Later, it was transformed into an internment camp for non-naturalized German, Austrian and Hungarian men in Britain who were considered a danger to the UK's war effort. At any one time there were about 3,000 people interned at the Alexandra Palace. By the end of the war, 17,000 men had passed through the camp (Janet).¹⁷

The big hall with its glass roof was divided into five naves, and had a very large organ. Since pipe organs need to be used to keep them from deteriorating, a musician gave concerts to the prisoners from time to time. The palace had been occupied first by Belgian refugees but was later converted into an internment camp, mainly for resident Germans married to English women, who were allowed to visit them. At the time of the missionaries' arrival, the camp held about 3,000 prisoners of war. Gradually, other Togo missionaries joined the first group. A commandant helped by his staff was heading the camp. The camp's administration relied on the principle of self-government, so it was divided into three battalions of 1,000 men each. Each battalion was divided into companies headed by under-captains elected by their countrymen and responsible for order and cleanliness. The prisoners were subjected to a formal count twice a day. Every three weeks there was a so-called *medical inspection*, during which a doctor practically ran through the barracks and *thoroughly* inspected all 1,000 men in under ten minutes.¹⁸ On weekends and in the evenings there were concerts or other cultural events. The camp offered classes in different branches of science. On Sundays, the big theater hall was kept free for religious services. For daily Mass, those involved had to find the needed space to celebrate in any free corner. After one month of internment, instead of being released, the Togo missionaries were shipped to the Isle of Man. In London, that place was considered the worst – the *road to Hell*. On Dec. 12 at 9. P.M. they set off for hell, first to the King's Cross train station and then

¹⁶ Henricus Leven, *Bericht über die Fortführung*, p. 17. Sources/AG SVD 903 [a].

¹⁷ See also: Henricus Leven to Superior General. Sources/AG SVD 27 [s].

¹⁸ Henricus Leven, *Bericht über die Fortführung*, p. 20. Sources/AG SVD 903 [a].

by bus to Liverpool, where they were once again abused by the crowds. They traveled to Liverpool by overnight train and arrived at 6:30 in the morning. In Liverpool, they were put in prison for six hours and only at about noon did they board ship for the Isle of Man.¹⁹ After six hours at sea, the town of Douglas, the capital of the Isle of Man, gradually emerged from the fog.

Most of the missionaries were put in the Knockaloe Internment Camp, close to the west coast of the Isle of Man, which lay in the Irish Sea between Great Britain (146 km) and Ireland (259 km). The Knockaloe Internment Camp was by far the biggest internment camp in the British Isles. Where once there had been a village of 100 people, there arose a complex of wooden sheds holding a maximum of 22,769 internees by July 1916, and significantly boosting the island's permanent population of about 40,000. The prisoners of war, mostly Germans, were put into a camp of nine hectares encircled by barbed wire fences. The camp was divided into 23 compounds, each containing four units with rows of wooden barracks. Each unit ran its own hospital and entertainment theater. The camp was overseen by 3,000 guards, brought over from England. During the period of the war, nearly 200 people died at the camp and were buried at a church, which lay near the camp. By September of 1915, the camp had grown so large that a railway line (1.9 km) was laid to Douglas, the island capital. The camp was eventually closed in 1919 and turned back into a farm. A second, smaller, former holiday camp in the island's capital city of Douglas held another 5,000 internees (Chappell).

Once ashore, they were marched 20 minutes from the harbor to the train station where the local, narrow gauge train was already waiting for them. As soon as all were aboard the train, it pulled out. But since darkness had fallen, they could not see the city. After half an hour's journey, they arrived at the train station of Peel and were marched to the gate of the camp, which opened to receive them and then closed behind them for six months. In the camp office, each received his prison number: Fr. Leven became # 30756 and was assigned to one of the barracks.

There were actually three separate camps. Each camp was divided into 5-7 compounds with 100 men per compound.²⁰ The compounds were separated from another by a fence with double barbed wire entanglements. Within the fences were barracks, each with bunks for 90 prisoners. Each barrack had a kitchen, a laundry, lavatories as well as a bigger hall for manual work that also served as a space for entertainment and for school purposes. They missionaries were placed in Camp No. II. Fr. Leven and Brother Xavier²¹ were

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 25.

²⁰ Sources/AG SVD 903 (1917-1955): *Bericht über die Fortführung*, p. 26.

²¹ „Only the mission brothers were left in the internment camp much longer until the end of the year. They were not allowed to go to Switzerland. Brothers Damasus and Alkuin were suffering,

assigned to compound No. 3 and the others to compound No. 5. The reception was the same as in London, but it was bit colder. Now they were in the *infamous* Hell but soon discovered that this place was not really much worse than London. The food was more or less sufficient and life in the barracks allowed a certain freedom of movement. It was even possible to find a quiet corner for study and prayer.²² Almost everything functioned as it had in London. The Catholic chaplain was a good man, Fr. Thom Crookall, Dean of the town of Douglas, who managed to obtain many privileges for the priests such as permission to celebrate daily Mass either in the school room or in the entertainment hall.²³ He touched the prisoners by his spirit of charity bereft of any national prejudice. The Archbishop managed to obtain from the Home Office the promise that we would be released by a certain date. When we came to the camp we were able to take over some of the pastoral care but we remained too confined to be able to function effectively. It was much easier to obtain greater freedom for sports than it was for religious activities. Some of the ordinary prisoners used their internment to embark on a period of spiritual renewal but the majority of them remained indifferent to religion. The prisoners' *joie-de-vivre* and their interest in work gradually drained away. Unfortunately, this lingering melancholy resulted in debilitating mental health problems for many prisoners, popularly called *barbed wire sickness*. The prisoner who sank to that wretched state was ripe for repatriation to his home country.²⁴

At Christmas there was more food and more tobacco. There was also the religious joy. The choir added luster to the celebrations, even though the majority of the prisoners did not care for religious practices. One could see how those provided with cigarettes felt more patient and happier while those who lacked them were rendered irritable and restless. There were complaints about the food, so the prisoners were given salted herrings which they could prepare for themselves. The guards were susceptible to monetary bribes, and they smuggled much food into the camp *black-market* style. During the first two

especially from boredom and inaction. In the morning they had common prayers and the Mass. (...). On Pentecost, Trinity and Corpus Christi they solemnly celebrated a service lasting many hours and on the Feast of the Sacred Heart together they made their act of consecration to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Then they were brought to Spalding (Lincolnshire in England: Fulney Park, Low Fulney). Formerly a large dispersed camp, and now a market garden, they remained there for 11 weeks. That was the most difficult time." Fr. Hermann Feldmann to Superior General. Sources/AG SVD 27 [t].

²² Henricus Leven, *Bericht über die Fortführung*, p. 26. Sources/AG SVD 903 [a].

²³ "Here most of the prisoners are Catholics. From 6 to 8 a.m. each morning we have school space at our disposal. We only have Mass once a week but the Dean brings us Holy Communion every day. On Saturday evening and Sunday afternoon we have free space for Services. On Saturday we pray the Rosary together and on Sunday we all listen to a reading from a book. The rest of the time we spend sitting in on some of the classes at the school. I am following the Electro-technical lessons." Bro. Willibrord Adolphi to Superior General. Sources/AG SVD 27 [f].

²⁴ Henricus Leven, *Bericht über die Fortführung*, p. 27. Sources/AG SVD 903 [a].

months, the imprisoned missionaries suffered most from shortages of food and from the island's cold, damp weather after their years in the tropics. Thanks to parcels from Steyl, their situation was alleviated somewhat. The Isle of Man was famous for the fact that no one had ever been able to escape from it. But that spring, during morning parade and count one day, the officers discovered five prisoners missing. It turned out that, led by an Austrian Captain, they had schemed to *organize* a boat and escape from the island. They hoped to cross the sea to Ireland within 12 hours. Unfortunately, the English soldier whom they had bribed was unreliable. He took their money but did not deliver the boat. So they were forced to hide out on the Island but eventually they were found and recaptured by the guards after two weeks.²⁵

On the day after the Feast of St. Joseph (March 20), the first big group of SVD missionaries was released²⁶ and could leave the Island even though they belonged to the second group that left Togo. On March 26, 1918, the next big group arrived in Germany.²⁷ Still left behind from the first Togo group to be interned, Fr. Leven lodged a formal complaint to the Commandant who promised that he would be in the next transport. But, on Easter Tuesday all the remaining priests departed without Frs. Ehlert, Gehring and Leven, so Leven once again lodged a complaint with the Home Office. Finally, after six weeks, the day of liberation arrived. They would leave the camp early in the morning of May 7, 1918. Before that, they first celebrated their last Mass on the Isle of Man at 3:00 a.m. All their luggage was minutely examined, though some were spared by offering a *tip*. Then they were transported from Peel Station to Douglas and by ship to Liverpool. Finally, they arrived by train at the small town of Spalding on the East Coast and they had to wait for 8 days, subjected to embarrassing checks. Finally, on the Wednesday before Pentecost they reached the Dutch Coast. In Rotterdam by noon they were welcomed by the Ladies of the German Embassy along with Prince Heinrich and envoys of the Red Cross. From Rotterdam, they went by train with pounding hearts to once again set foot on their homeland and to meet their dear relatives after years of separation.²⁸

²⁵ Ibid., p. 29.

²⁶ There were Frs. Witte, Heering, Berning, Lauer, Münch, Tetzlaff, Heffels, Porten and Bro. Norbertus and Jacobus.

²⁷ They were Frs. Witte, Demond, Dorn, Ettel, Stenzel, Florian, Lambert, Hundler, Schroeder, Wolf and Lorscheid.

²⁸ Henricus Leven, *Bericht über die Fortführung*, p. 33-34. Sources/AG SVD 903 [a].

2.3. The Efforts for Release of the Togo Missionaries

With the internment of SVD missionaries, the superiors of the Congregation took urgent steps to obtain their release. The correspondence in the General Archives contains a rich epistolary exchange with policymakers and personalities of influence. The routine correspondence with the Imperial Colonial Office (*Reichskolonialamt*) in Berlin, headed by secretary Solf had an informative character but also aimed at influencing the English Government. On Oct. 22, 1917, the Superior General, Fr. Nikolaus Blum, asked the Colonial Office to intervene in the fate of the Togo missionaries, 32 fathers and 12 brothers, so that after being released they could stay *ad interim* in the Society's mother house in Steyl, Holland.²⁹

Two months later (on Dec. 17, 1917), Fr. Blum submitted the full list of fathers and brothers imprisoned in England and repeated his urgent request for action in their favor because after many years in the tropics, England's cold weather and their stay in the uninhabitable Alexandra Palace in London was a serious hazard to their health. On that same day, he also sent a letter to Cardinal Francis Bourne (1861–1935), Archbishop of Westminster, asking him to intervene in favor of the missionaries and to enable the fathers to return to Steyl and the brothers to Switzerland.³⁰ In letter to Cardinal Bourne from Jan. 1, 1918, he informed and pleaded: "Yesterday I learned from a well-informed source that those few missionaries, too, would be removed from Togo. I am so sorry to hear it, for this removal would mean the ruin of the recent, but very flourishing mission, since the two neighboring missions of Dahomey and Gold Coast with their small number of missionaries are unable to also take on missionary work in Togo. Therefore, if I may ask, may it please your Eminence to intercede with the British Government so that the missionaries will be allowed to remain in their mission for the good of their poor neophytes and of the Catholic Faith."³¹ The Superior General learned from the Sisters who had arrived in

²⁹ Henricus Leven, *Bericht über die Fortführung*. Sources/AG SVD 903 [a]. Fr. Leven suggested to the Superior General, along with all other superiors of the religious orders, to convince the Holy Father to set up a kind of 'union' so that the interned religious orders could all stay together in one religious house in Holland. That would make it easier for them be faithful to their religious vocation and to fulfill their religious obligations. It would also keep the brothers content since they could share their parcels – the food at camp was always miserable. The Colonial Office pointed out that the Togo missionaries were not listed under the category of those who could serve out their internment in Holland (German-English Agreement from 1914). The British government, however, promised to consider releasing the Togo Missionaries back to Germany.

³⁰ Blum to Card. Bourne. Sources/AG SVD 903 [d]. Since other prisoners were already in Holland, Fr. Blum requested once again that the fathers be allowed to serve their internment in Holland, at the Mother House in Steyl.

³¹ Blum to Card. Bourne. Sources/AG SVD 903 [d].

Steyl from Togo that Cardinal Bourne was very unfavorable to the Germans. He would prefer to keep the missionaries at the prison camp as chaplains. So Fr. Blum addressed a letter to Cardinal Felix Hartmann of Cologne on Feb. 7, 1918, asking him to intervene with Cardinal Bourne in order to gain support for the release of German missionaries. It seems that Fr. Blum was aware that Berlin could do little on behalf of the missionaries, but he hoped that “the Holy Father will be successful in helping the 38 fathers and 15 brothers interned on the Isle of Man.”³² He notified the Colonial Office of his letter to *Propaganda Fide* (dated 19.12.1917) requesting the Pope’s intervention and sent the list of all interned missionaries to Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli, the Nuncio in Monaco.³³ Cardinal Bourne also suggested to Fr. Blum that he pressure the Nuncio in Monaco to urge the Holy See to intervene with the British government. He recommended stressing the negative effects on their health (humanitarian motive) and that he should ask that they be allowed to serve their internment in a neutral country. Fr. Blum also wrote to Nuncio Pacelli on Jan. 25, 1918 to inform him that he had heard rumors that the Holy See was planning to hand over the missions run by German missionaries in East Asia to English and French missionaries. He asked that the German missionaries be allowed to stay in these territories. On Feb. 20, Pacelli assured Fr. Blum that the Holy See would intervene on behalf of the SVD Togo missionaries. He also informed him of the assurances of the Foreign Minister of England, Balfour, that the necessary steps would be taken to free SVD missionaries in due time, but that unfortunately the mission brothers could not be moved to Switzerland.³⁴

The Superior General also asked the Foreign Office in Vienna to intervene in favor of two missionary brothers who were Austrian citizens (Bros. Alcuin Kirchner and Johannes Hopfer). The Austrian Foreign Office informed him that they had taken suitable steps. On March 3, 1918, Fr. Blum wrote to the German Consulate in Amsterdam asking that the SVD missionaries released in England be allowed to travel directly to Steyl and not via Goch, in Germany, since they would receive necessary care at the mother house in Steyl. However, his request was rejected the very same day. So the Generalate’s efforts turned out to be unsuccessful. On Feb. 18, the first two expelled missionaries arrived in Germany (Fr. Berning and Bro. Jacobus). On March 26, the superior of the Mission, Fr. Witte, followed along with 10 other missionaries. A further 14 fathers and Bro. Theodorus crossed the German border on April 12. On April 24, 1918, four fathers still remained in the internment camp in England: Frs. Feldmann, Ehlert, Gehring and Leven, as well as 12 brothers and 12 sisters. On

³² Blum to Colonial Office. Sources/AG SVD 903 [f].

³³ Blum to Pacelli. Sources/AG SVD 903 [h].

³⁴ Pacelli to Blum. Sources/AG SVD 903 [o].

May 18, three more fathers arrived, including Fr. Leven. The last to arrive was Fr. Feldmann, who stayed back voluntarily to take care of the 11 brothers and 12 sisters who were released at the end of May. The last nine brothers were released from English captivity on Feb. 23, 1919 (Müller 1958, 277).

Unfortunately, the Dutch authorities refused permission for the German missionaries to enter Holland. Thus, they would not be able to stop at their Mother House in Steyl and would have to travel immediately to Germany. Even after their release, the missionaries' suffering was not over; they were once again vilified by the antireligious press.

2.4. The Togo Missionaries and their Self-Understanding

The extensive correspondence of the 53 expelled Togo missionaries with their Superior General gives an insight into the missionaries' self-understanding during the days of their misfortune. Based on these sources, their self-awareness can be presented as follows.

2.4.1. Reaction to the Togo Misfortune

The letters of the Togo Missionaries reveal the depth of their feelings at the loss of the mission that was so dear to their hearts. However, they still entertained the hope of returning one day to Togo: "We are in good spirits hoping that we will see better times. Here we talk about Togo every day. Together with Fr. Lorscheider, we often go in spirit to Alédjo and try to guess what it must look like there now. He hopes that, despite the big losses, God will make everything turn out for the better."³⁵ For Fr. Henricus Leven, the farewell from Togo was probably the most difficult experience of his life. He wrote: "I do not have any stronger longing than to return once more to Togo."³⁶ Fr. Eickmann's strong love for the mission which he so dearly missed caused him to dream day and night about Togo. While staying at his family home in Germany, Fr. Gehring still stuck to his daily schedule from the Togo mission.³⁷ Like St. Paul, he had given birth to the new Christians in Togo and therefore the Society should make every effort to regain the Togo Mission. He suggested to the Superior General that he make an appeal to English Catholics to help exert pressure on their government.³⁸ "Patience must remain our daily exercise."³⁹

³⁵ Franciscus Dorn to Superior General. Sources/AG SVD 27 [l].

³⁶ Henricus Leven to Superior General. Sources/AG SVD 27 [q].

³⁷ August Gehring to Superior General. Sources/AG SVD 27 [g].

³⁸ Franz Eickmann to Superior General. Sources/AG SVD 27 [m].

³⁹ Hermann Hellingge to Superior General. Sources/AG SVD 27 [u].

The recurring question was: how long will it be until the missionaries would once again be able return to Togo? Togo missionary Fr. Franz Tetzlaff was given a new assignment to the United States in 1920. He accepted work there in a spirit of sacrifice for the lost Togo Mission so that the Society would get it back.⁴⁰ The missionaries trusted that God would not abandon the Togo Mission! The mere fact of being allowed to stay in Togo for part of the war was already cause for gratitude. Despite the calamity, there prevailed a spirit of deep faith and trust: “The tragic messages about the fate of our missions filled my heart with sorrow, but I consoled myself by telling myself: God knows why he allowed this to happen to us. Hopefully, things will soon return to normal.”⁴¹ Missionaries sensed the historical hour of God’s test: “We are in God’s Hand and God knows why precisely this test has come upon us. It is often difficult to pray: Lord your will be done.”⁴² Long-time missionary Bro. Johannes saw the situation in Togo as an example of God’s Holy Will and of punishment for his own sins.⁴³ For Fr. Wolf, it was God’s scourge that the nations punished one another mutually. He believed that after the war they would turn once more to God.⁴⁴ Others believed that from all these adversities, rich blessings would be poured out upon the Togo mission in the future.⁴⁵

2.4.2. Prospects for the Future

The missionaries kept up to date with the reports on the Togo mission and gradually saw their prospects of returning to Togo fade away. Following the signing of the Treaty of Versailles (June 28, 1919), Bro. Alcuin alluded to the words of Bishop Franz Wolf: “The prospects of our ever returning to Togo are really very, very bad. It might take years before we would be allowed to go over there again.”⁴⁶ For General Councilor, Fr. Hermann auf der Heide, the outlook was hopeless. After their internment, many Togo missionaries took time to recover at their family homes. They were also scattered among the Society’s European houses, disappointed by the futile peace expectations. Most of them helped with pastoral work at the request of local parish priests. They used this opportunity to speak about their Togo mission and raise some money. Until the Treaty of Versailles, Fr. Lorscheid was still strongly optimistic about the fate of the Togo Mission. But the news dashed his hopes. He understood

⁴⁰ Franz Tetzlaff to Superior General. Sources/AG SVD 27 [n].

⁴¹ Leopold Schacht to Superior General. Sources/AG SVD 27 [e].

⁴² Henricus Leven to Superior General. Sources/AG SVD 27 [r].

⁴³ Johannes Hopfer to Superior General. Sources/AG SVD 27 [d].

⁴⁴ Karl Wolf to Superior General. Sources/AG SVD 27 [w].

⁴⁵ Paul Arndt to Superior General. Sources/AG SVD 27 [x].

⁴⁶ Alcuin to Superior General. Sources/AG SVD 27 [b].

that the Allies would not pass up this favorable opportunity to annihilate the German missions, accusing the German missionaries of exaggerated national propaganda. "I have little hope despite the mission of the Nuncio in Paris. May God help us against the accusations. Once proud, *Germania* has now sunk very low."⁴⁷

2.4.3. New Assignments

Gradually, the expelled Togo missionaries found new assignments. In particular, the Lesser Sunda Islands mission (present Indonesia) was able to profit from the experiences of the Togo missionaries. Bishop Franz Wolf was the first Apostolic Vicar of the SVD mission in Papua New Guinea and Fr. Henricus Leven was made a Bishop in Indonesia (1933). Already in 1919, three Togo missionaries were assigned to Indonesia. The Generalate intentionally gave priority to this mission in need, so that in the end, 22 of the exiled Togo missionaries were assigned to the Dutch West Indies/Indonesia. Sixteen were sent to Europe, seven to Argentina, three to the USA, two to the Philippines and one to China. For the majority, Togo held a special place in their hearts and they longed to return to Togo. For Bro. Alcuin, giving up Togo was a big sacrifice. But, eventually, the missionaries' strong sense of the supernatural character of their vocation gave them the readiness to go to another mission: *Fiat Voluntas Tua* – God knows better. While thinking of new destinations, the missionaries tended to look for conditions similar to those of the Togo mission. Young Bro. Damasus Schneider, aged 22, asked to go to the Philippines since he was already accustomed to the tropics and familiar with English. Plus, he hoped to work there as he had done in Togo: as a painter, cook, sacristan, photographer, writer and farmer.⁴⁸ On the other hand, Fr. Mathias Hack wished to avoid the tropical climate and later worked in Austria. In addition to Togo, Fr. Karl Stangier included many other countries to which he would be ready to go: Liberia, USA (Negro mission), Sunda Islands (Indonesia), the Philippines, Brazil and China. He put China (difficult language) and Brazil (no more Pagans) at the very end. He supported the formation of native clergy as a priority without which all of Christianity would just *hang in the air*.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Christian Lorscheid to Superior General. Sources/AG SVD 27 [i]. Letter sent from Hendorf, where he had been filling in for the Parish Priest.

⁴⁸ Damasus to Superior General. Sources/AG SVD 27 [c].

⁴⁹ Karl Stangier to Superior General. Sources/AG SVD 27 [y].

3. The Loss of the Togo Mission and the Treaty of Versailles (1918-1921)

3.1. The SVD Togo Mission after the Expulsion of the German Missionaries

The Regional Superior of Togo Mission, Fr. Witte, was farsighted and made arrangements so that, once the priests had been expelled, lay people would be able to carry on with the leadership of the schools and religious services. He wrote: “Nous avons continué l'école jusqu'au 23 décembre avec les examens habituels. Dans chaque station importante, nous avons constitué depuis quelque temps une commission scolaire catholique qui prend en charge les écoles. L'avenir semble matériellement assuré, d'autant plus que les maîtres indigènes se sont engagés à rester à leur poste” (Müller 1968, 94). In order to keep up the schools, he had founded the *Roman Catholic School Committee*. A subscription and monthly collection was set up to meet the schools' expenses. The mission left behind a considerable sum so that the committee could afford to run the schools. The trade schools, however, had to be closed one after another due to lack of qualified instructors. The Superior got in touch with the Holy See not only to get help, but also to receive some instructions for the future. The Apostolic Vicars of the Gold Coast and of Dahomey promised to send some priests to help. The catechists and the elders of each community had assured the missionaries that they would themselves minister among their brothers and sisters. It is interesting to note that Pro-Vicar Fr. Anton Witte found it difficult to hand over jurisdiction for the mission to the neighboring Bishop François Steinmetz (French territory) and Bishop Ignace Hummel (English territory). His delegation of jurisdiction specifically excluded the issue of church property. He could not make up his mind to hand over the property even though Canon Law (309§3) resolved the situation clearly.

3.2. Rumors after the expulsion of the missionaries

The situation of the Togo Mission also appeared in the press. On April 4, 1918, *Reuters* news agency carried an article on the *German animosity*. This totally unfounded report claimed that the expulsion of the missionaries was unique in the history of the Roman Catholic Church in that it had been made necessary due to their strong nationalism: “the Father Superior of the Mission sold the supplies of sacramental wine and flour intended for the hosts in order to prevent the incoming French priests (SMA Missionaries) from being able to carry out their sacramental ministry.” This rumor was intended to illustrate the

extent to which the German missionaries were prepared to allow national animosity to override even the highest moral and religious considerations. This rumor spread rapidly and the antichristian newspaper, the *Globe*, added its own twist: “It has long been known that the German God and the German religion differ from those of the civilized world.” On August 17, 1918, Fr. Superior General Blum, SVD, wrote to the Foreign Office that the allegations which appeared in the *Globe* article are simply not true: “Our missionaries have left behind a large quantity of wine for the Holy Mass in both Lomé and Kpalimé. They even left bottles of wine in the outstations. They also left behind stocks of flour for the hosts so that the newly arrived French Fathers would not find themselves in difficulty.”⁵⁰

On May 18, 1918, Fr. Blum had asked bishop Hummel to report on the matter. He charged that the accusations leveled against the German SVDs were totally without foundation.

The Catholic press was largely silent about the expulsion of the Catholic missionaries. The *Revista di Studi Missionari* praised the unbiased stance of the British government towards the Catholic missionaries and said that the government favored all spiritual gains regardless of the missionaries’ nationality, and that it gave equal protection to all missions.

3.3. German Missions and the Treaty of Versailles

The question of the German Catholic Mission was discussed at the Versailles Conference and encapsulated in the Treaty of Versailles, which was signed at the historically significant *Hall of Mirrors* on June 28, 1919, exactly five years after the outbreak of the Great War (the assassination in Sarajevo on June 28, 1914 sparked the events that started a general war across Europe within six weeks). Germany was subjected to the dictates of the victorious powers (mainly “The Big Four” – USA, England, France and Italy). Thus, the Treaty did not create a constructive base for a permanent new world order (President Wilson’s idealistic vision was eventually dominated by the *realpolitik* of Lloyd George and Georges Clemenceau). The Germans felt humiliated at being forced to accept the Allies’ ultimatum. The Treaty left the young German Republic with a heavy financial burden. The trauma suffered at Versailles eventually led to the collapse of German parliamentary democracy and the seizing of power by the Nazi Régime (1933). This long-term effect of the Treaty of Versailles reflects the Latin adage *Invictis Victim Victuri* (the conquered will conquer the conquerors). (The essential points of the German

⁵⁰ Blum to the Colonial Office in Berlin. Sources/AG SVD 903 [i].

mission question at the Versailles Conference were studied in depth by Miotk 46-66).

During the War, the Allies had already divided the German colonies (Togo, German New Guinea, Western Samoa, Qingdao, Marianas, the Caroline Islands, and the Marshalls in 1914; German South-West Africa in 1915; Cameroun in 1916; German East Africa in 1918) and missionaries were expelled. They also had to leave other English territories in Africa and India, something which Josef Schmidt considered to be the annihilation of the German Missions by British politicians. The sense of indignation among German Christians was paired with uncertainty regarding the future of the German missions. England aimed at eliminating German missionaries from its territories forever, or at least for ten years, without ever being able to prove any disloyalty on the part of the German missionaries. Nevertheless, the fifth point of President Wilson's *Fourteen Points* offered a good prospect for the retention of the German missions.

Wilson's Plan demanded the right to self-determination of the nations and claimed restoring Germany its colonial rights. But the Versailles negotiations brought an essential reversal so that their hopes faded before the harsh conditions of Art. 119: "Germany renounces in favor of the principle Allies and associated Powers all the rights and titles over its overseas possessions." So the Germans were also denied *de jure* what they had lost *de facto* by the conquests of the others. The victorious powers asserted that the Germans were incapable of running colonies. They had proven unworthy of their civilizing task. The Germans countered by arguing that the Colonies were of vital importance for the German Reich and were needed for their markets and for the space they offered for settlement. Germany made the claim that it had always cared for the well-being of the colonies' native populations. It was not only the property and activity of German missionaries that were on the line but also that 1,500,000 new Christians were in danger of losing their spiritual leadership and of relapsing to their former condition. In this hour of the World Mission, the Christian missions will be robbed of indispensable helpers and Christianity will be severely handicapped in the completion of its great task.

But the Allies' leaders pursued other aims, motivated mainly by the personal interests of their own countries. For Georges Clemenceau, the priority was not a better world but a secure France. Lloyd George was mainly concerned with the annexation of the German colonies and the elimination of German competition in trade. Clemenceau, with dexterity and harshness, simply wanted to weaken Germany as much as possible since its large population and industrial potential would always be a threat to France.

On March 25, 1919, Cardinal Hartmann intervened with the Holy See due to the great injustice being perpetrated. The Vatican took several steps on the

international stage. Consequently, the USA and France made some concessions in favor of the German missionaries. The mission question was considered in two articles of the Treaty of Versailles: Art. 122 and Art. 438. Their implementation deprived German missionaries of their rights. German organizations and the German government protested against the violation of the *Free Missions* in a memorandum to Pope Benedict XV. Significant as well was the voice of the German Superiors' Conference at Bad Soden Salmünster/Hesse on March 25-26, 1919. Their memorandum to the Pope, edited by Fr. Friedrich Schwager, called for a milder interpretation of the Versailles articles. Additional support arrived from the USA, from Switzerland and from Holland when 2,000 priests sent a telegram to Versailles pleading that nationality should not be a hindrance and that the German missionaries be allowed to remain in the mission territories. Cardinal Bourne from England defended the principle of *Free Missions*. What was striking was that there was a complete lack of support on the side of the French Catholics (especially of the *Society for the Propagation of the Faith* and of the *Missionary Childhood Association* of Lyons).

The fate of the German mission in China was only a prelude to the threat hanging over the thriving German missions in Africa. The Vatican worked actively in favor of the German missions at the Versailles Conference. Pope Benedict XV sent a distinguished diplomat, Mons. Bonaventura Cerretti (1872-1933), secretary of the Congregation for Extraordinary Affairs. The special significance of Art. 438 was a heavy blow to the German missions, depriving them of right to property and its administration. Mission property was to be administered by the local authorities along with a council composed of Christians whose members were also hostile to the German Catholic cause: Protestants, schismatics, Masons and Catholic renegades. Any earnings were to be used for the missions in general regardless of whether they were Catholic or non-Catholic. The fruit of a long-time Catholic missionary work would pass into the hands of heretics. For the Holy See, this policy was contrary to the principle of justice and resulted in a wave of protests and indignation. German Catholics realized that the Holy See was the only force able to defend the German missions. But in the Vatican, there also existed a sense of realism. Based on Canon Law, Vatican representatives attempted to convince the Allies to change Art. 438, allowing the missions to remain Catholic and allowing the Catholic missionaries to retain ownership of mission property. But the French and the English refused to allow any concessions whatsoever.

On May 26, 1919, Cardinal Bonaventura Cerretti arrived in Paris as the Pope's representative to the *Paris Peace Conference* and attempted, through American mediation, to work out a solution to the problem. The Holy See aimed at achieving the maximum in the hope of obtaining the minimum. Cardinal Cerretti visited all sides, going from hotel to hotel. The memorandum he

carried (the *Peace Note* of Pope Benedict XV), was on the whole received very positively. Cerretti learned that the wording of Art. 438 had originated with the English and he attempted to achieve some modification of the article but was not able to prevent the expulsion of the German missionaries. He therefore decided to focus on the issue of the mission property. At the session on June 12, 1919, the Paris Peace Conference discussed the mission question regarding the right of the Holy See to the mission property, something which had been denied by both Lloyd Gorge and Clemenceau. Meanwhile, Wilson was in favor of transferring it to non-German missionaries. The *Mandate* about the German colonies should contain a special clause claiming that the mission property was to be transferred to missionaries of the same confession. Card. Cerretti clued the Americans in on this course without knowing anything specific about the outcome of the Big Four's session. He managed to obtain the modification of Art. 438 with the so-called *Balfour Note*, which promised that the missions run by German Catholic personal would remain Catholic.

The changed wording of Art. 438, as quoted by the Cerretti's telegram to Gasparri on June 18, 1919, read: "In order to ensure the due execution of this undertaking, the Allied and Associated Governments will hand over such property to boards of trustees appointed by or approved by the Governments and composed of persons holding the faith of the Mission whose property is involved. The Allied and Associated Governments, while continuing to maintain full control as to the individuals by whom the Mission are conducted, will safeguard the interests of such Missions" (De Marco 76).

Card. Cerretti's mission did not have any special influence on the course and atmosphere of the Paris Peace Conference. But, the Holy See's presence, in the person of a distinguished diplomat, had a certain psychological effect since Vatican diplomacy had to confront European diplomacy, which was centered on nationalistic particularism. The concession by the Big Four was announced to the Holy See by the British Foreign Minister Balfour and not by Catholic France and Italy (which did not have official relations with the Holy See). Protests both in Germany and abroad did not bring about any change. Germany was humiliated at the loss of its colonies. In 1920, the German Imperial Colonial Office was dissolved but the restitution of the colonies remained on the agenda of German Foreign Politics for years to come. Card. Cerretti's efforts were appreciated in moral terms, though they remained without concrete results. England expelled German missionaries from India.

All in all, 400 missionary priests, along with brothers and sisters, made up a total of about 1,000 mission personal (one third of all German mission personal). In the summer of 1920, Msgr. Francis Kelly, head of the *American Church Extension Society*, went to London on behalf of the American Catholic Bishops to negotiate in favor of allowing the German missionaries to at least

return to English India. Supported by English Card. Bourne and also confirmed as the official negotiator of the Holy See, Kelly managed to broker an agreement that no further German missionaries would be expelled from India or other British colonies. In July of 1922, England gave all missionaries free access to all its colonies. In Dec. of 1924, the Government of the *Trustee Council* annulled Art. 438 so that all mission properties could be returned to the mission societies to which they belonged before the war. By the end of 1921, about 250 expelled German missionaries were able to return to the missions.

The Treaty of Versailles deprived the German missions of their rights in a clear violation of existing international treaties. Rome was powerless and remained powerless. The will of the winners was stronger and the wounds caused at that time still are not healed today. In 1958, it was sad to see that the number of missionaries in Togo was only slightly higher than their number in 1914.

3.4. Failed Attempts to Save the SVD Togo Mission

After the Great War, the missions administrated by Divine Word Missionaries was handed over to the jurisdiction of the French Missionaries of Lyons. In 1918, three SMA fathers (Society of African Missions) and as many sisters took over the work of 53 SVD missionaries in Togo. In two letters to the SVD Superior General, Bishop Hummel described the current situation in Togo: “not much can be done for the many Christians in Togo, however two fathers and three sisters are continually in Lomé and a third father is looking after the workshops. Another father visits the stations in the interior when it is possible. Last August we were together in Kpalimé, Kpandu, Bla and Agu. Thus, the Christians have at least some possibility to receive the sacraments. In the French territory of Togo, the situation is totally different; the government is not interested in the spiritual needs of the Christians and keeps everything for themselves.”⁵¹ Fr. Ludwig Gerd, SMA, reported three years later, in 1921, that ten SMA missionaries, including the Bishop, had to cover the whole of the old SVD Togo mission, which the fathers had kept in good condition. The former Togo missionaries now residing in Germany issued an appeal to the German Catholics to support the orphaned Togo Mission with its 22,000 new Christians. They appealed in particular to raise money for the maintenance of the catechists (350-400 marks annually for each). For this goal, they planned to set up “Catechist Foundations.” The expulsion of all the German missionary priests, brothers and sisters had been catastrophic for the Togo

⁵¹ Hummel to Blum. Sources/AG SVD 903 [n].

mission, and the few Irish and French missionaries from the Gold Coast and Dahomey could only care for a few of the many mission stations with their churches and schools. All the requests to end the hostilities and to return the Togo Mission to the Divine Word Missionaries were flatly refused by London and Paris. Fr. Superior General Nikolaus Blum assured the Regional Superior, Fr. Anton Witte, that he was doing everything possible to save the Togo mission. “Everyone: the Vatican, Erzberger and Mercier have promised to help but in fact the times are dark and uncertain, so all that remains for us to do is to pray much.”⁵²

The Conference of the Superiors of the German mission sending congregations in its 1919 appeal called on all Christian nations not to prevent the mission work and the work of world salvation. The moral obligation of the missionaries is compatible with strict loyalty to the existing governments. Mission work is too important to depend on politic vicissitudes. In any case, what affects the German Missionaries now could easily also happen to others in the future. The absolutely religious, non-political and non-national character of mission work should guarantee that the governments give free access to missionaries from different nationalities in their colonies (echoing the missionary Apostolic Letter *Maximum Illud*, 1919). “In today’s mission fields, native Christians are being deprived of pastoral care once assured by more than 1,000 German missionaries,” hence the appeal to restore their presence in the mission territories.⁵³ After meeting in Switzerland with Cardinal Van Rossum, Prefect of Propaganda Fide, Fr. Blum learned that there might be a slight prospect for the return of the SVD missionaries to Togo. Therefore, he sought the advice of Prelate Prof. Wilhelmus Hubertus Nolens,⁵⁴ asking him to either speak to the English envoy in Den Haag or to personally go to London. He also asked him if he knew any influential personalities there who could help. On Christmas Day of 1919, Bishop Wolf of Togo wrote to Card. Bourne: “Therefore, I cherish the hope that your Lordship will use all the influence in your power with the English Government for the holy interests at stake, namely, the spiritual welfare of so many immortal souls” (in Togo). He asked that the SVD missionaries be allowed to return at least to the larger parts of English occupied territory. He also pointed out that the Dutch and American missionaries of the

⁵² Blum to Witte. Sources/AG SVD 903 [j].

⁵³ Sources/AG SVD 903 [c].

⁵⁴ Blum to Nolens. Sources/AG SVD 903 [g]. Msgr. Wilhelmus Hubertus Nolens (1860-1931) was a Dutch politician and a Roman Catholic priest, member of the Dutch House of Representatives. Nolens was an influential politician in Dutch politics throughout the 1920s and 1930s as the Roman Catholic State Party was the largest party in Dutch parliament at the time. He was immensely popular among the miners in his native Limburg for they owed much of their improved working and living conditions to his support for social reforms.

Society of the Divine Word were free from any political actions and loyal to the English government. They will be well equipped because they are familiar with the English language, which is taught and obligatory in all our schools in Europe.

The missionaries loved Togo passionately and the Society regarded this mission to be of special importance. After the death of Fr. Superior General Nikolaus Blum, the Administrator General of the Society, Fr. Joannes Baptiste Bodems, did everything he could to keep the Togo Mission, especially by approaching the Society of African Missions (SMA).⁵⁵ On Jan. 9, 1920, Fr. Bodems also wrote to Cardinal Bourne, Archbishop of Westminster who he understood was the representative for missions in the British colonies and the occupied districts. He made the same plea – to make it possible for the SVD missionaries to return to Togo. He spoke in the name of all the exiled SVD missionaries (53 priests, 16 brothers and 29 sisters) as well as in the name of the 175 young priests ordained since 1914 who were in danger of losing their vocation (at that point the SVD had 1,000 students in 14 seminaries). Their lack would negatively influence the work of the missions in the light of the very active Protestants and Muslims. Cardinal Bourne replied on Jan. 20, 1920: “I fear that I can only intervene on your behalf at the direct request of the Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda Fide. If His Eminence wishes me to take any action, I am willing to do so. Your Reverence is under a misapprehension in regarding me as representative for the missions in the British Colonies and the occupied districts. I have at present no authority from the Holy See to act in such matters. I need not assure you of my sincere sympathy in the difficult position in which your missions are placed. Believe me. Your devoted servant in Christ.”⁵⁶

In a letter to the new Superior General of the Society of African Missions, Fr. Jean-Marie Chabert, SMA (1919-1933), Fr. Bodems recalled the friendly relationship between the two missionary congregations by mentioning some of the examples of mutual collaboration in Togo and on the Gold Coast. Unfortunately, with the passing of the years, misunderstandings and disagreements had briefly disturbed this earlier good relationship. One of the reasons for this misunderstanding occurred when the SVD Prefect Apostolic, Fr. Nikolaus Schönig, wrote in one magazine that the spiritual needs of the Togolese Catholics in the Gold Coast were not being sufficiently provided for. His opinion naturally offended the SMA missionaries of the Gold Coast. He acted in an

⁵⁵ The Society of African Missions (SMA) was founded on December 8, 1856 in Lyons, France. The initials „SMA” stand for the name in Latin: *Societas Missionum ad Afros*. The Founder, Bishop Melchior de Marion Brésillac, was a French clergyman who had a strong commitment to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the peoples of Africa.

⁵⁶ Card. Bourne to Bodems. Sources/AG SVD 903 [m].

ill-conceived way and should not have expressed himself in that way in public. Other SVD missionaries sincerely disapproved of this and said so several times in the presence of SMA missionaries. “But,” he wrote, “I think that since our two congregations and especially their missions had suffered so much due to the World War, we will do well to mutually stretch our out hands and work together for the glory of God and the salvation of souls in danger as we face common enemies, the Protestants and Islam” (in Sierra Leone, 20,000 men had become Muslims). Our big desire is to come back to Togo and we ask you to support our efforts and to assist our Christians in Togo, which is now somewhat easier under English occupation.”⁵⁷ He also asked for information on the difficulties related to the return of the SVDs to Togo and for suggestions as to how they might be overcome. Fr. Bodems wrote in the same vein to the Vicar Apostolic of the Gold Coast, Bishop Ignace Hummel, SMA, asking for his support.⁵⁸

On February 3, 1920, the Superior General of the Society of African Missions, Fr. Chabert, visited Steyl but was not able to promise anything. They hoped that the French government would authorize the return of the German missionaries to Togo. Just before leaving Steyl at the train station, Fr. Chabert said: “I want there to be no misunderstanding, your Togo Mission is a very big burden for our Society and therefore I hope that your missionaries will resume their work in Togo as soon as possible” (Müller 1958, 282). Bishop Hummel wrote to Fr. Bodems on April 3, 1920 that he had visited the Governor of the Gold Coast in Accra and presented the issue of the return of the German missionaries but that he was told as a final answer: *Non Possumus*. Given that reality, the Congregation of Propaganda Fide formally transferred the Togo Mission to the Society of African Missions on January 11, 1921, and appointed Fr. Jean-Marie Cessou, SMA, as the new Apostolic Administrator. After all, *Salus animarum suprema lex* – the salvation of souls is the supreme law, meaning that’s what really counts (ibid. 283).

Conclusion

This case-study of the collapse of the SVD Togo Mission shows the loss of a thriving Mission by the Divine Word Missionaries in the aftermath of the Great War (1914-1918), a loss which was driven by the rampant nationalism that also affected other overseas mission territories. The missionaries were allowed to stay in Togo until their final expulsion in 1917 when they ended up

⁵⁷ Bodems to Duret, Superieur Général SMA. Sources/AG SVD 903 [k].

⁵⁸ Bodems to Hummel. Sources/AG SVD 903 [l].

as prisoners of war at internment camps: transitory at first at the Alexandra Palace in London and then permanently on the Isle of Man. Their fate was the result of violations of previous international agreements which had guaranteed freedom to the Christian missions.

Even if the expelled German missionaries were pervaded by a deep spirit of patriotism, they were first and foremost religiously motivated men and knew how to distinguish between their religious mandate and any political involvement. Though there may have been individual cases of national prejudice, on the whole the missionaries were bereft of any nationalistic chauvinism. In the end, they wound up as victims of the political entanglements.

Their expulsion and internment, crowned by their successful release within a year, were due to the urgent actions of their Superior General, Fr. Nikolasus Blum. He was able to use all possible and relevant channels of action on the international scene. The Togo missionaries, though affected deeply by the loss of their dear Togo mission, accepted the course of events in a truly apostolic spirit and accepted new assignments, mainly to the Dutch East Indies.

Subsequent attempts to regain the Togo mission failed due to the vengeful policies of France and England, encapsulated in the Treaty of Versailles which deprived the missions of significant apostolic forces. More than 1,000 German missionaries, including 130 Divine Word Missionaries, were thus excluded from mission territories as victims of political calculations.

ABSTRACT

This case-study is a study of the three stages of “The Collapse of the SVD Togo Mission (1914-1921)”: the Anglo-French Occupation (1914-1917); the Expulsion and Internment of the SVD Missionaries (1917-1918) and the Definitive Loss of the SVD Togo Mission (1918-1921). The investigation, based on archival sources of the SVD Generalate Archives in Rome (AG SVD) traced the unfolding of events within the international efforts to save the mission in the thriving Protectorate of Togo. The collapse of the SVD Togo Mission driven by rampant nationalism was brought about by the expulsion of its 53 missionaries in seven groups within three months. Even if the expelled German missionaries were pervaded by a deep spirit of patriotism, they were first and foremost religiously motivated men. In the end, they wound up as victims of the political entanglements. The Treaty of Versailles deprived the missions of significant apostolic forces. More than 1,000 German missionaries, including 130 Divine Word Missionaries, were thus excluded from mission territories as victims of political calculations. The SVD missionaries were released from internment within the year due to the urgent actions of their Superior General, Fr. Nikolaus Blum. They accepted the course of events in a truly apostolic spirit and received new assignments, mainly to the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia).

Keywords: SVD Togo-Mission; colonialism; Great War 1914-1918; Expulsion and Internment; the Treaty of Versailles; the fate of missionaries

Słowa kluczowe: misja werbistowska w Togo; kolonializm; I wojna światowa 1914-1918; wydalenie i internowanie; Traktat wersalski; los misjonarzy

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*Vieux Comptoir – Misjonarze Oblaci Maryi Niepokalanej
– Labrèche, Aram, Ethier, Belleau, 1938 rok*



Vieux Comptoir – luty 1938