

Unpopular Essays

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seeds of the gospel, some of which are present in many traditional African religions". Infact, the christian message has already given an indication of what concessions it is willing to make. "Their harmful elements (of witchcraft) could be discarded and those elements not contrary to the faith and morals retained" in the catholic church.

The Rome conference of the SECAM bears a remarkable resemblance to Pope Urban's "Congregatio de Propaganda Fide". Apart from the fact that they were both made up of some of the church's top notches, they shared the same mission...that of winning more souls for Christ.

The only distinction between the works of the two assemblies is that where "the Congregation of Paganda" stood a fair chance of success, the SECAM is faced with a "mission impossible". The problems of the christian message has been further complicated by advancements in science and technology which are steadily eroding all religions. It is not that the theological issues that were once settled by the catholic church now receive non-catholic solutions, it is just that the issues are no longer raised.

But the SECAM, of course, reserves its right to try. Franz Fanon said that "each generation must, out of relative obscurity, identify its mission, fulfil it or betray it." St. Paul and his celebrated letters universalised the christian message. Rev. Usanga and the SECAM are welcome to try to indigenise it. They will only be trying to fulfil what they have identified as their historic mission.

The Saga Of The Catholic Church

QUO VADIS DOMINE?

when it first came to us, the christian message was a political idea. It

QUO vadis Domine? The expression itself, which is a desperate plea to God for direction, is said to have its origins in the early days of the Roman Empire. At the height of persecution, the founding fathers of "THE CHURCH" were said to have uttered it in exasperation.

That was a long, long time ago. The empire eventually came into the grasp of the persecuted and "THE CHURCH" became coterminous with the state.

Then came the decline; nation — states emerged in Europe, a firm line was eventually drawn between belief and the practical demands of day-to-day living as represented by the state. And "THE CHURCH" was split into the Catholic, the Protestant and the Orthodox Churches.

It goes without saying that the dismembered CHURCH found its most worthy progeny in the Catholic Church. There could be no denying the extraordinary fervour with which the church in question has pursued the missionary task of ensuring that the christian message does not pass away. In the process, it has embarrassed many a secular authority by the thoroughness with which it regulates the lives of its members, and controlled, through them, many facets of public affairs.

So it was that when John Kennedy, a catholic, was campaigning for the presidency of the U.S.A., a television interviewer was constrained to ask him an embarrassing question. Should he find the interests of his church at conflict with those of the state, where would he vote? Kennedy promised to place the state first, and he is on record as the FIRST catholic president of the United States in 1961!!

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The job of brewing life-time catholics is as old as the church itself. Since Martin Luther led the way in priestly desertion, the history of the catholic church has been a chronicle of declining fortunes. The vatican admits that about 6,500 nuns out of a world total of 1,175,000 abandoned boat in 1970 alone. In the same year, 10,000 priests requested to leave (and a good number simply walked away). The Dutch Pastoral Council added to the confu-

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sion by openly calling for a policy of optional celibacy.

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A desperate disease, they say, deserves a des-

perate remedy. In 1633, Pope Urban VIII put together, a committee of cardinals for the purpose of mapping out a strategy for spreading and consolidating the faith. The committee was called "Congregatio de Propaganda Fide" (which translates simply, "The committee of Propaganda") and it inaugurated the inexorable efforts at capturing more souls for Christ. The exercise has been accordingly identi-

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fied as "propaganda". Having suffered irreversible reverses in Europe and other parts of the Western world, the only remarkable thing about the "propaganda exercise" today is that it is still continuing.

Recently, an association of bishops of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM), with the indefatigable Rev. Brian Usanga as the secretary of its resolution committee, got together in Rome. The intention, according to their resolution, was "to pool our pastoral experience so as to better combine our efforts for the evangelization of the peoples of Africa and Madagascar today, in faith and charity".

At this stage, it will be salutary to recall that

educated the African people to see life on earth only as a transient, brief stage of existence. The hereafter was supposed to be more satisfying, more permanent. Paradoxically while the colonial peoples learnt to look up-wards and disregard mundane wealth, the colonialists (who were the original bearers of the message) were

busy digging away at the wealth.

As an instrument of colonialism, christianity led a movement for the utter destruction of all traditional religions because they (traditional religions) tended to stress the mundane at the expense of the hereafter. Now the christian message is in trouble, it will (according to SECAM) permit itself the contradiction of entering "into meaningful dialogue with African traditional religion, for christianity builds on the

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Permanent Secretary