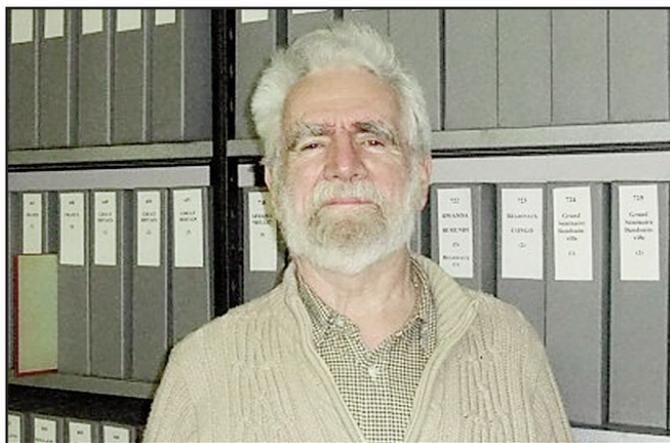




# The apostolate of the White Fathers between the two World Wars



At the Chapter of 1920, Bishop Livinhac was ailing. Having been re-elected twice he was Superior General for life and although he wanted to resign, neither the Chapter nor the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith would agree. When he died in November 1922 the first Assistant, Father Paul Voillard, automatically became Vicar General. At the following Chapter in 1926, he was elected unanimously to succeed Livinhac. As Superior General, he saw himself as the guardian of an inherited tradition rather than as an innovator.

“ I have nothing to change in the direction of the Society and its works, ” he wrote in his first circular letter. “ It would be more than rash for me to want to give the Society a different direction. ” His duty, as he saw it, was to maintain the Society in the form and spirit it had inherited from Lavigerie and Livinhac. The constitution and rules had been refined and settled. Everyone followed a common detailed



Father Paul Voillard

timetable for spiritual exercises, work, meals and recreation. During his visit to East Africa, Voillard reproved the Fathers in one mission for having supper at 7.30 and not at the time for the rest of the Society at 7.00 pm. The habit was worn as normal dress identifying the Society's members and expressing their uniform life style. There was a unity and single-mindedness in the direction of the Society and no doubt in the minds of the members of its purpose: to preach the Gospel openly in Africa, win disciples for Christ, and establish the local Church. Even in North Africa, this was the long term aim, although the time had not yet come. To see how the Society was to develop between the two World Wars, we must look to the pastoral work being undertaken in the many missionary areas entrusted to the Society, and to the development of its resources in Europe and North America.

## The pre-war situation

It had taken many years for the permanent missions to be established in sub-Saharan Africa. The first attempts to found missions in West Africa in 1876 and 1881 by parties crossing the Sahara had ended in tragedy when the two groups of young Fathers were massacred a few days after departure. A secure route via Senegal was followed only in 1894. The first caravan to East and Central Africa had reached there in 1878 but nearly all the early attempts at foundations proved abortive. Those founded and soon abandoned include Uhaya, (the first mission to the west of Lake Victoria), the foundations at Tabora and Kipalapala, at Ukuni in the Utemi of Mirambo, at Rumongé and Mulwewa in Burundi, at Ujiji in Uha, at Ndaburu in Ugogo, at Mranda south west of Lake Victoria, at Kwamouth, Masanze, and Mkapakwe in the Congo, at Mponda in Nyasaland. From Buganda, the missionaries twice had to seek refuge in Bukumbi south of Lake Victoria. Only there was a significant Christian community maintained and built up in the absences of the missionaries. But in the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first years of the twentieth the political situation

changed with the gradual extension of colonial administration. The slave trade was ended with the numerous local wars which it had fostered. Mission posts could be founded on a permanent basis.

Even so, death and illness limited the work of the first missionaries. The Cardinal had warned the first missionaries to East and Central Africa that they would be buried in the foundations of the Church they would build. Disease, particularly malaria and the concomitant black-water fever, caused a heavy loss of life. Between the years 1878 and 1889, of the sixty-one Fathers and Brothers who arrived eleven were recalled to North Africa for health reasons or to assume other duties and of the fifty who remained, thirty died within a few months or in less than five years, a further seven of their confreres died within ten years, leaving only thirteen to acclimatise and acquire the elements of the local languages. The diaries record that even among them, frequent attacks of dysentery and malaria reduced their strength and activity. New missionaries continued to arrive, however, and in 1907 the use of quinine as a prophylactic – taking it regularly in small quantities to prevent malaria – reduced early deaths among the missionaries.

By 1914, a stable platform seemed to have been finally in place. Then the situation was upset by the outbreak of the First World War. German East Africa was ravaged by the military campaigns. The older missionaries in German East Africa (the region to which the biggest number had been sent) were interned or severely restricted in their movements. The younger French, German and Belgian missionaries in all the African missions were conscripted into their respective armies. Lack of personnel affected the missions in West and North Africa also. In the Sahara only one mission post, Ghardaia, remained. In Europe, recruitment into the Society came to an almost complete stop.

## The effects of the First World War

The War was a humanitarian disaster for the population of German East Africa (which included Rwanda and Burundi) and had dire effects on its neighbours. Even in peacetime, the traditional methods of food

production barely met human needs. The loss of farmers by recruitment into the armies, the massive conscription into the carrier corps, the pillage and destruction of crops and stores by the soldiers and porters, the flight of populations from villages in the path of advancing armies, all combined to cause famine. During the final years of the war, in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) survivors sought wild food in the forests. Every mission in Tabora, stretching between the borders of Burundi and Kenya, experienced famine. In 1919, in Burundi, the missionaries reported corpses on all the roads. There was hunger in the eastern Congo. Hunger was not restricted to sub-Saharan Africa. From different causes, it reached the Gold Coast and in 1921, a severe famine in Algeria caused great hardship among the poor.

Famine engendered not only starvation but disease. Dysentery, meningitis, typhoid and smallpox were widespread in the East African region in the post-war years while medical services were almost non-existent. There were outbreaks of bubonic plague in Uganda and Nyasaland (now Malawi). In 1919, no part of Africa was spared the lethal onslaught of Spanish flu which killed more people than the war itself. It is believed that there were nearly two million victims in sub-Saharan Africa, ten per cent of the population in many parts. Meanwhile poverty reached unparalleled levels. Cash crops could not be transported or sold for cloth. People reverted to traditional garments made from animal skins and tree bark. A phrase common in many of the oral histories of the time was “ there came a darkness. ” The extraordinary resilience of the African population would lead to recovery, but the process took several years.

## 1919

At the end of the war, the Fathers and Brothers who had been called up for military service could return. That is, most of them: sixty had been killed and twenty-nine severely injured. Also, the unsettling consequence of the war had contributed to forty-two leaving the Society. Still, there was a re-establishment of “ normal ” missionary activity.

In 1920, the Society comprised 636 Fathers and 226 Brothers – a total of 862. The majority of the members of the Society were engaged

in direct pastoral work in Africa. Other functions, teaching in schools or seminaries, promotion and fund raising in Europe and North America, administration by the superiors, were regarded as subsidiary to this primary task. It was expressed in all the communities throughout the Society when they gathered for evening prayers and recited the prayer to Our Lady, Queen of Africa. There was a zealous urgency in their appeals for her intercession to bring salvation “ to the Moslems and other infidels of Africa. ”

The principles of pastoral action had been laid down in the beginning of the Society: to learn the languages of the people, absorb the local culture, share the life of the people as far as possible, preach the Gospel, Christianise society, and train the future servants of the Church ( Diocesan priests, Sisters, Brothers and Catechists) who would eventually replace the missionaries themselves. During the next twenty years, there would be a steady increase of missionary personnel as young men and women in Europe were called to meet God in Africa. As Fr Remy McCoy wrote, “ we would need a little experience to discover that there was nowhere God had not been. He had been at work for a very long time preparing the soil for sowing of the seed of his Word. The extraordinarily rapid spread of Christianity in Africa in the decades that followed can only be explained by the previous preparation by God’s grace. ”

## North Africa

The first missions were established in North Africa and they have always had a priority in the mind of the Society. Livinhac, in spite of his love for the apostolate in Uganda, called them “ the most important of our missions. ” Lavigerie expected the first missionaries in Kabylia to live in extreme poverty – in ruined *gourbis* (huts), dark, smoky, without windows or furniture, the kitchen being simply a hole in the floor in which the simplest food could be prepared. After six months they were expected to speak among themselves only in a dialect of Tamazight. Meanwhile the baptism of Moslems was strictly forbidden without the Cardinal’s personal authorisation. His aim was to prepare society as a whole to accept Christianity rather than to baptise

individual Christians who would find it difficult or impossible to live in a Moslem village. The first missionaries made such an impression on the people that Mohammed bin Ali, a marabout, wrote to Lavigerie in 1873, “ We have not found men like these on the face of the earth. God has generously given mercy to their hearts, sweetness to their language. ”

In 1920 there were eight missions in Kabylia. Two more were founded in 1920 and 1921. For the next twenty years the number of personnel stabilised at around forty. All the same, after the first years of youthful idealism, Lavigerie’s expectations had proved too idealistic to maintain and both accommodation and diet were improved.



Father François Letort, visiting families

Small communities of about a hundred Christians had been formed in several posts. Most of the Christians had originated from among the poorest but the Fathers provided them with an education which enabled many to enter the professions or salaried government employment in the coastal towns. The mission schools admitted Moslems also. Although proselytisation was out of the question in the classroom, ethical teaching was given based on stories from the Old Testament and traditional Kabyle legends. A Berber nationalist wrote of his school experience. The Fathers would speak to us of moral values....their teaching opened my spirit deeply. The language medium in the schools was French and some hoped that the adoption of French language and culture would prepare the way for conversion. In

fact, the republican motto *liberté, égalité, and fraternité* caused them to aspire for national independence.

Smallpox, typhus and cholera were endemic and tuberculosis, in an age before anti-biotics, decimated families. The Fathers had limited medical training, but they did have access to European medicines. They removed rotten teeth and treated ophthalmia (inflammation of the eyes) and wounds hygienically. Medical work gave access to people in their homes. The missionaries' charity and care for the sick transformed the early hostile perceptions of the Fathers. At a meeting with Father Marchal in 1933, the Superior General of the White Sisters complained that each Mission superior had a different priority for the apostolate. For some it was medical work, for others schools, for others the pastoral care of a small group of Christians in the hope of attracting new adherents. For a few, their concern was the deep study of the Arab or Kabyle language and culture. These last, however, were a minority. On their arrival, most missionaries received no formal language instruction. Soon educational and medical duties absorbed too much of their time for them to become expert linguists.

In the Sahara there were posts at Guardaia, Laghouat, Ouargla, El Golea, Ain Sefra and Géryville (now El Bayadh). Although the language and physical geography was very different, the educational and medical needs of people were similar. The same questions arose concerning the nature of the apostolate. The early principles of Lavigerie had less and less influence. Robert Foca, a brilliant linguist, thought the time had come to preach the Gospel openly. Mgr Nouet, Prefect Apostolic of the Sahara from 1919-1941 believed the time had come to baptise.

To improve language skills, Father Marchal, who was elected first assistant at the Chapter of 1926, proposed to the delegates to found a study centre for Arabic and Islamic culture. Le Foyer d'Études (later IBLA - Institut des Belles Lettres Arabes) was designed to be both a centre for research and a place for the instruction of newcomers to the North African apostolate. For some years, only a few missionaries were sent to study there and only for a limited time. Voillard adhered to the instruction of the Cardinal that missionaries should acquire a



The staff at IBLA

working knowledge within half a year. The Society's Treasurer refused to pay the salaries of the Tunisian teachers. The fear was expressed that a newcomer highly trained in the language would humiliate the older Fathers in his community. On the other hand, Fr. André Demeerseman, who was appointed to IBLA in 1928, thought six years was needed to acquire a sufficient knowledge of Arabic but there was never any likelihood of that happening.

It is clear that Marchal's ideas were at variance with those of the Superior General, Fr Voillard. What discussions and different points of view were expressed during meetings of the General Council is not known. The minutes are brief and record only conclusions. However Bishop Birraux who became Superior General in 1936 was much more supportive of Marchal's ideas. From 1939 all newcomers to North Africa had to spend two or three years at IBLA to learn Arabic. Stress was laid on relations with Muslims. The Cardinal's principle of great caution in baptising was restored. After a meeting at Bou-Noh in 1937, the same principles were applied to Kabylia which caused the Christians there to complain of neglect. Marchal backed up his ideas with well thought out theological ideas. What he called the Invisible Church anticipated the ecclesial theology of the Second Vatican Council. His reassessment of the objectives and methods in the Moslem apostolate has formed the template of the Moslem apostolate up to the present time.

## West Africa

After the failure of the two groups of Fathers to cross the Sahara to Timbuktu, it was safe for a group of missionaries to penetrate West Africa via Senegal in 1894. By 1921, when the vicariate of Soudan was divided into the vicariates of Bamako and Ouagadougou, there were fourteen posts, seven in each.



Traditional ritual  
in Mali,  
West Africa

Bamako was thinly populated, extending over an area of a million and a quarter square kilometres. Fewer missionaries were sent there than to East Africa and the health problems were greater, especially due to the prevalence of yellow fever. (Of the first hundred and four Fathers and Brothers sent there, only twenty-nine survived for a reasonably long life). The population was estimated to be 2.7 million of whom just over two thousand were baptised Christians. The Bambara who constituted the largest group, were attached to their traditional family life in villages often consisting of one extended family. Education had little attraction and few went off to the towns seeking work. The elders put pressure on the young, even using physical violence or poison, to prevent them becoming Christians. The chiefs felt their authority was threatened; many treated their subjects as slaves, imposing heavy work on them. Monogamy also was an alien institution. It proved difficult to find suitable candidates to be catechists. Bishop Sauvant founded a catechist school but most of the pupils were young catechumens. In addition, more than elsewhere, the missions came in conflict with the Colonial government which was reluctant to co-operate in the school system or support the freedom of girls to choose their marriage partners. Many were promised in childhood to a polygamist friend of their fathers. Bamako remained one of the most difficult missions and visible progress remained slow in spite of the devotion of the Fathers and Brothers.

To the east, Ougadougou was the capital of the tightly structured Mossi Empire. The first Vicar Apostolic was Joanny Thévenoud (1921-1949), a charismatic personality who was nicknamed the Richelieu of West Africa. He founded local congregations for Brothers and Sisters. Material and economic development was an important part of his pastoral care. He founded mills, forges, workshops of all kinds and a printing press. He was particularly active in securing the freedom of girls to marry. He worked on a case by case basis taking advantage of his good relations with colonial officers. This was appreciated by the young men also and attracted many to become Christians. With the assistance of a Doctor of Law, Sister Marie-André du Sacre Coeur, a White Sister, after a long campaign, the Mandel Decree fixed fourteen years as the minimum age for women to be married and required consent for validity.

## The Upper Congo

The Upper Congo throughout this period was dominated by Bishop Roelens, who had been in charge since 1892. In 1919 there were already eleven brick built missions, each with a network of chapel-schools staffed by catechists, some of whom had been trained at his combined catechist school and junior seminary at Lusaka. Fathers visited out-stations regularly on bicycles. Before baptism, a catechumen had to show that he or she was generous to the poor and deprived, led family prayers, avoided pagan and immoral practices, and regularly attended Mass and the Sacraments. Twenty thousand neophytes had been baptised.

A particular characteristic of Roelens' Vicariate was the Church's involvement in economic development. Roelens himself had skills as a smith, carpenter and bricklayer. The son of a gardener, he introduced a great variety of fruit trees. Ploughing with oxen was pioneered and trials were made to rear pigs, sheep and horses. Competitions were held to encourage the improved breeding of goats. He organised agri-

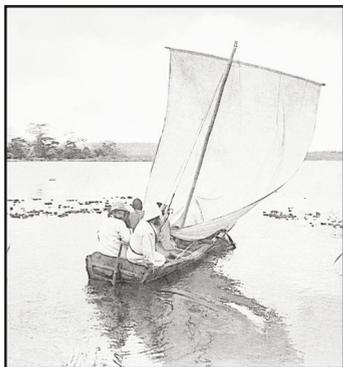


Bishop Victor Roelens

cultural co-operatives and credit unions. Thousands of artisans were trained as bricklayers, carpenters, smiths, tilers, gardeners and shoemakers. Of course, he did not do all this work alone. Dozens of Fathers, Brothers and Sisters, African and European, catechists and teachers played their part under his leadership and direction. He always attributed to them the progress the Vicariate made.

In 1919, schools were becoming more popular with 19,000 pupils, almost half of whom were girls. Roelens hoped to extend education to the whole population raising both its intellectual and moral level. Education lasted for four years and was conducted in the local language. He insisted on respect for the pupils - no corporal punishment was permitted. Each school had a hectare of land for agricultural training. The aim was to produce a literate peasantry, not to produce an élite. This coincided with government policy and the Congo came to be regarded as having the best primary school system in Central and East Africa. Its weakness was the failure to produce a more highly educated class, except for the clergy. There was a lack of lay leadership not only in the Church but of political leaders when independence was suddenly thrust on the Congo in 1960.

More than elsewhere in colonial Africa, there were close relations between the Church and State. Most of the Fathers and Brothers were of Belgian nationality – a situation demanded initially by King Leopold and agreed to by Lavigerie who then presented a *fait accompli* to the General Council – much to their consternation. Almost the whole educational system was in the hands of the Church but paid for largely by the government. This did not prevent Roelens speaking out against abuses – excessive taxation, *corvées*, forced labour and land grabbing by settlers. Nevertheless, close association with the colonial rulers was to create problems in the first years of independence.



Missionaries on safari  
in the Congo

Roelens founded in Belgium an Association of the Superiors of Missionary Con-

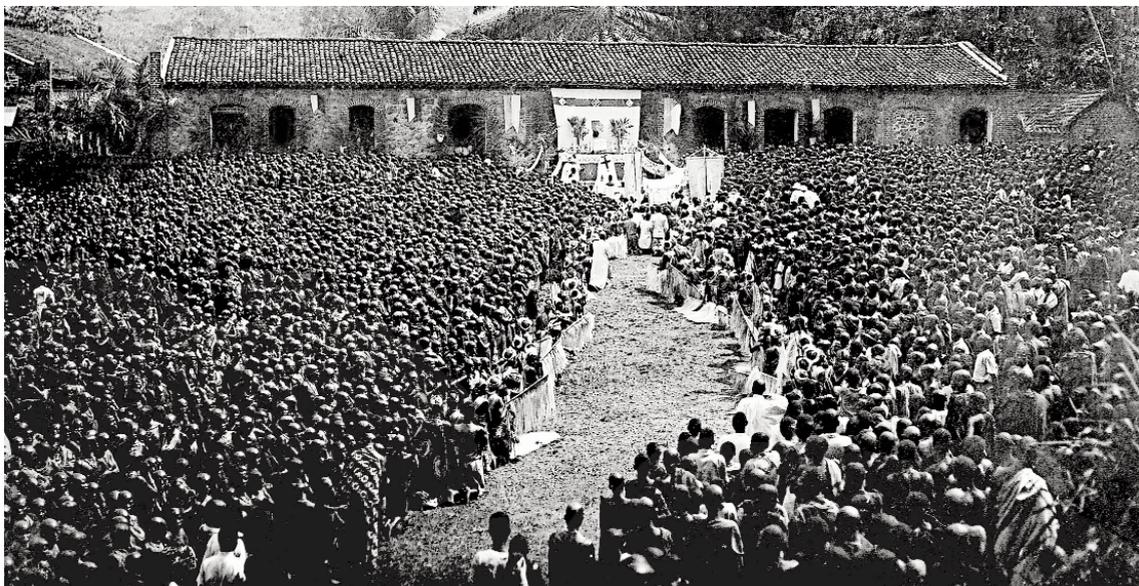
gregations working in the Congo. He initiated the first meeting of Congolese bishops in 1932 and was always a prominent personality in a succession of General Chapters of the Society. His five hundred page Instructions gave detailed advice on all aspects of pastoral activity in the Vicariate.

By the time he resigned at the age of eighty-two, he had established sixteen mission posts, six hospitals, sixteen dispensaries (with extensive mother and childcare facilities) and seven hundred schools. He has been criticised for being authoritarian and sometimes harsh on his missionaries but he had a profound love for his people. Thousands of them caused pandemonium at his funeral, crying and weeping.

## Mass conversion

The response to the preaching of the Gospel varied from region to region. These years saw mass movements of people into the Church in Buganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Bukoba, and Ufipa. Divine grace often works through natural qualities and experience suggests that favourable social factors positively influence the reception of the Gospel. The contrary is also true. Among cattle keeping people the acceptance of Christianity has been slower than among agricultural people. Cattle keepers are often nomadic and do not create settlements. Because survival is more difficult, they are conservative of their traditional values. In any case, the form of Christianity brought by the missionaries had taken shape in Europe among farming communities and was more acceptable among similar cultures in Africa.

There is no space for more than one example. A combination of factors in Burundi favoured the work of the missionaries. It was a small country, densely populated where new ideas could be easily communicated by word of mouth. Mutual interdependence for food production and security favoured a communal response to the message of the Gospel. Some local witnesses attribute the movement in part to high moral standards, others to a traditionally high concept of God. Customary respect for monogamy and the right of young adults to marry freely corresponded with Christian teaching. The influence of Islam was minuscule. The eruption of the outside world, bringing



The feast of Corpus Christi in Burundi

political and economic changes, challenged traditional beliefs and values.

Once the country had settled down after the rigours and destruction wrought during the First World War, colonial rule represented peace and order and set limits to the arbitrary powers of the chiefs. The Colonial government generally protected and favoured the Church, helping its educational and medical work. In the eyes of chiefs, the missionaries were identified with progress, modernity and the future. As traditional ritual leaders, their example inspired imitation. Favourable social factors do not rule out religious reasons for conversion. The fundamental questions of human existence raised by illness and health, justice and oppression, communal peace and hostility, material progress and poverty, all cut across physical and spiritual experience. In the end, the mass movement represented tens of thousands of personal decisions made by individuals.

In 1919, there were 10,117 neophytes and 1,500 catechumens. In 1938, the number of Christians was 291,000 and catechumens 84,000. By then there were twenty-three missions compared with five twenty years earlier and sixty-eight Fathers and Brothers compared to fifteen. The Society had responded to the people's needs by sending more missionaries.

## East and Central Africa

All over East and Central Africa pastoral methods were developing in a similar way. Each mission post was responsible for a vast area, with numerous villages and settlements with tens of thousands of potential Christians. The solution was to set up outstations in ever increasing distances from the central missions. Catechists were trained in special schools or in parishes to explain Christian doctrine to catechumens and children and to lead services of the Word on Sundays. They visited the sick and buried the dead. Everywhere the indispensable value of good catechists was recognised. As new means of transport were adopted by the Fathers, first the bicycle and later motor cycles, outstations were founded at ever greater distances from the central missions.

In 1919, the priority of most Vicars Apostolic in East and Central Africa was mass conversion through the foundation of as many missions as possible, each having a network of outstations. There the catechists taught the children not only religion but also basic literacy. Experience showed that a youngster who could read his catechism at home had not only a greater facility in the repetition of the words (there was much rote learning) but also a better understanding of their meaning. Most village catechists were able to teach literacy and numeracy only to the level of standard one or two but this was sufficient to attract large numbers of pupils who understood that these skills provided the key to all modern areas of learning and technology.

In most of the countries, rival denominations were not permitted to found schools in the same village. To set up as many as possible was a pre-emptive means of taking spiritual possession of an area. However, the Colonial governments were sceptical of the value of what they termed bush schools and were anxious to involve missionary resources in full primary and secondary education. They needed educated Africans to replace expensive Europeans in the lower ranks of the colonial civil service. Their resources were scarce and subsidising mission schools was a cheap alternative to founding government schools.

The Protestant missions quickly saw the advantage of educating the future leadership and responded by co-operating with the administration.

Catholic Bishops, originating from France and the Netherlands were more sceptical. Schools, schools, schools: that's all we hear about these days were the complaints in one annual report. In their home countries, Catholic schools had met with many difficulties and they were suspicious of accepting subsidies with the consequence of a measure of government control. Many of their existing schools had poor programmes, weak teaching, inadequate buildings and materials. In any case, they preferred to attract large numbers of catechumens through village schools than to appoint Fathers to teach at a higher level. In Rome, Pope Pius XI was concerned that future leadership positions would be monopolised by Protestants and that Catholics would lack an educated laity. He sent Bishop Arthur Hinsley to instruct the bishops to build and staff schools throughout the British colonies. Northern Rhodesia, Nyasaland, Tanganyika, Uganda included vicariates staffed by White Father missionaries. In the face of Episcopal opposition, Hinsley appealed to the Society's traditional obedience to the Pope. He convinced most of the Bishops that the next stage of evangelisation must necessarily include deeper involvement in education and that they should reassess and redefine their school programmes. His advice was reinforced by the Superior General, Paul Voillard, touring East and Central Africa at that time as well. Two bishops remained resistant to change. Voillard sent Bishop Larue of Bangweolo back to Europe for a prolonged period of leave and placed Fr van Sambeek in charge of the Vicariate in the meantime. At Bukoba, Bishop Sweens had outlived his value and was simply obliged to resign.

Few Fathers, if any, were experts in anthropology but some had a great interest in gathering information on local culture. Knowing the language well and having been in an area for many years, they took advantage of the openness about traditional customs which are often concealed in more recent times. Hinsley encouraged the writing of monographs like those of Boesch in Unyamwezi and Robert in Ufipa and promised to get financial support for the publication of their studies.

## Brothers and Sisters

Most of what has been said above concerns the pastoral work of the Fathers. Little has been said about the work of the Brothers although

they constituted almost a third of the missionaries during this period. (There were 197 Brothers and 514 Fathers in Africa in 1936). With the most basic of resources, they built marvellous cathedrals, churches, convents and schools, training their workers in the crafts needed for their construction. They introduced modern farming techniques and built workshops where they taught not only skills but the Christian value of work. They gave an example of honesty, care and responsibility in material functions. Their obvious piety and dedication gave them a personal influence over their workers with whom they were in daily contact. They put into practice visibly the virtues preached by the Fathers in their Sunday sermons. In doing so, they were no less missionary than the Fathers.

This article is about the work of the White Fathers, but at least a brief mention should be made of those other members of the Lavigerie family, the White Sisters. Their teaching of girls in home craft skills was critical for the health of babies and of families. They educated girls to become nurses, teachers and to enter the professions. They staffed hospitals, dispensaries and maternity clinics. Their personal contacts drew many women to the Church. Their way of life attracted many girls to the religious life in the Orders they founded, liberating women in a patriarchal society. The sight of a young African sister cycling round the villages bring medical services was a revolution. Bishop Hinsley said of them “No government, no sects, can wield the heroic might of our vowed and consecrated sisterhood. Everywhere it is evident that a mission without Sisters lacks an essential of the apostolic work in Africa.”



Sister Anna Maria Huisman with some children

## The Society in Europe and North America

The Cardinal declared in 1890, “I shall keep no one among you who does not extend the same love for all the members of the Society

whatever nation they belong to.” Unlike many other religious congregations, our Society has never fragmented into separate, largely independent national provinces, each having its own territory for the apostolate. During their years of training, students have had their minds broadened and enriched by sharing their lives with fellow students originating from different cultures and languages. The adoption of French as a common language facilitated the exchange of ideas and the harmony of community life. Later, in the apostolate, an international outlook had obvious advantages. After being appointed to a mission, instead of trying to build up a duplicate of his home church with its limited national conventions and forms, the White Father missionary was open to inculturation and adaptation to the needs of his flock.

The Society’s international character was threatened between the wars by two factors. One was not new. King Leopold had wanted the Congo to be staffed by Belgian missionaries. Similarly, the German government demanded missionaries of that nationality in Deutsch Ost Afrika although that naturally ceased to be a factor after her loss of colonies in 1919. Yet for political reasons Germany remained a special case. Before 1914 a special arrangement had been made for German students to study philosophy and theology for three years in Germany before going to North Africa for the novitiate and their final year of theology at Carthage. After the war, in 1920, a separate novitiate was opened in Marienthal for both Brothers and Clerics. When the National Socialists came to power in 1933, missionaries were criticised for working among non-Aryan peoples while punitive tax laws and currency controls created further difficulties. To support German confreres, a German province was set up in 1936 to which were attached specific mission territories, Tukuyu in Tanganyika and Lwangwa in Northern Rhodesia.

As for Belgium, at the Chapter of 1920 Bishop Roelens campaigned for the erection of a separate Belgian province with its own novitiate and scholasticate in the belief that recruitment into the Society would be enhanced. He was opposed by the first Councillor Voillard, and the Chapter delegates made a temporising resolution, to leave a decision to the General Council. It was several years before a concession to Roelens was made and then due in part to pressure on places at Carthage. In 1929 the scholasticate at Heverlée received its first students. However, Belgians continued to go to Algiers for the novitiate.

In the meantime, there were developments in other countries. Junior seminaries had been founded at Sterksel in the Netherlands, at Widnau in Switzerland, at Parella in Italy. In Britain, the staff of the Priory, which was no longer needed to receive French seminarians, began to recruit nationally and in Ireland. No seminary was needed in Canada from where groups arrived in North Africa annually to enter the novitiate. In all those countries houses were founded for communities to undertake promotion and fund raising. Missionaries visited seminaries, schools and parishes, showing slides and films and preaching. The magazine *Afrikabote* had long existed in Germany. *Missions d'Afrique* circulated in France with special editions for Canada, Belgium and Switzerland. Leon Leloir took over the Belgian edition in 1934 and changed the name to *Grands Lacs*. In its new redesigned format it published well-informed and authoritative articles on a wide



The Canadien's boat !

range of African and missionary topics, illustrated with full page photographs, accompanied by news items and book reviews. Appealing to a more educated and affluent readership it attracted commercial advertisements. The editorship became a full time job and Leloir became a national figure giving regular talks on the radio.

Surprisingly, there was no attempt to extend promotion work in other countries. In the Argentine a community was based in Buenos Aires from 1898 until 1934. Its purpose was to raise funds for l'Oeuvre de la Propagation de la Foi. No attempt was made to look for vocations to the Society. In the United States a house was maintained in Cleveland for five years and then closed. Forays into US continued from Canada however. Although there were a few Polish members in the Society, an invitation by Cardinal Hlond of Poznan to his diocese was not accepted. From Pau, the French Basque Father Arrighi visited the north of Spain and proposed houses in Pamplona. There were Spanish speakers in the Society who had worked in the Argentine but the proposal came to nothing. The General Council lacked the commit-

ment to spend finance and personnel in new countries. Also, perhaps, it was reluctant to put too much strain on international character of the Society by introducing many new elements. In those days, national cultures were far more rigid and exclusive than they have developed since the Second World War.

In 1936 there were 148 novices under the care of Fr Betz, the novice master at Maison Carrée. He gave two daily conferences and was the spiritual director of the majority of his charges. He also taught Gregorian chant and went shopping for the novices. The Chapter of 1936 reviewed the implications of the growing numbers and decided on a division. At the time, the only canonical Province was Germany, which had a novitiate and scholasticate. France, Belgium, Canada and the Netherlands were Pro-Provinces and were to become Provinces, although this change did not take place until 1943. Separate novitiates were established in Belgium, Canada and the Netherlands and national scholasticates at s'Heerenberg and Eastview. After the Second World War, the Chapter of 1947 decided that while philosophy houses were, in principle, to be the concern of provinces, the scholasticates would be international. The experiment of attaching particular missions to one province was not recognised as a success and was not repeated.

## Conclusion

In the limited space available, it has not been possible to describe all the work of the Society. Notable omissions are the teaching in seminaries and the ecumenical relations developed in Jerusalem. For a description of those, the reader is referred elsewhere.

By 1939 most of the old vicariates had been divided. Ten new vicariates and one prefecture were created by the Holy See,<sup>1</sup> though geographically the area entrusted to the Society remained the same. At that time, detailed statistics were considered an important constituent of Annual Reports. They record a remarkable growth in the number of Christians – from three hundred thousand in 1919 to one and a half million twenty years later. The number of catechumens grew to four hundred thousand. The distribution was not even. More than one

Bishop regretted that in his vicariate, fishing was by rod and line while some of his confrères were netting vast numbers. Meanwhile the number of Fathers and Brothers in the Society passed the two thousand mark - more than double the number it had been in 1919<sup>2</sup>.

Statistics concern external factors and are not in themselves a measure of spiritual progress. But they do indicate that profound changes were taking place in the lives of many people. They conceal many personal life stories. Here is one. At the mission of Manga a catechumen asked Fr Mangin visit his old, blind mother. When he arrived at her house, she held out her bony arms to him and asked to be instructed in the way, which would lead to heaven. “I am old,” she said, “and I want to go and rest with God. Only you know the way that leads to heaven.” During that day and the next, the Father told her of the basic simple truths of Christianity and then he baptised her. When he had finished the prayers and anointing, she took his hand in hers to thank him and said, “When I am near to God I will tell him all the good that you have done.” She died the following day.

Fancis Nolan

---

<sup>1</sup> New vicariates were Ougadougou, Bobodioulasso, N'zérékoré, Lac Albert, Kivu, Urundi, Bukoba, Mwanza, Rwenzori, Masaka. Tukuyu became first a mission *sui juris*, then a prefecture.

<sup>2</sup> In 1920 the Society comprised 636 Fathers and 226 Brothers – a total of 862. In 1939 the total number was 2001, 1,493 Fathers and 508 Brothers.