

Society of Missionaries of Africa – History Series n° 10

**A PILGRIMAGE  
FROM CHAPTER TO CHAPTER**

**The History of the General Chapters**

**of the Society of  
Missionaries of Africa**

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Volume II

**From the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> General Chapter**

**(1906-1936)**

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## Introduction

In a previous volume of the historical series on the history of the Society of Missionaries of Africa, the first General Chapter of the Society from 1874 to the 12<sup>th</sup> Chapter, held in 1900, were presented. This volume continues the study by presenting the succeeding Chapters from 1906 until the one that was held just before the Second World War in 1936.

This work therefore covers a period of a little over thirty-five years, during which time five General Chapters of the Missionaries of Africa were held in 1906, 1912, 1920, 1926 and 1936.

This major third of a century was marked by a significant development of the White Fathers Missionary Institute, as much in its workforce as by its increase in missionary foundations. Concurrently, during this same period, the world experienced major events such as the First World War, the founding of the League of Nations, the emergence of the Soviet empire and the Communist system, etc. As for Africa, it remained under the powerful control of the countries colonising it, even if there were signs of forward movement and political questioning beginning to appear among a number of Africans. The purpose of this study is not to write a complete history of the period. It is simply intended, as was the previous volume on the Chapters, to bring forward some factors to enlighten the history of the Society by means of the significant structures of its life and functioning, that is to say, the regular holding of its General Chapters.

This booklet is the tenth in the History Series. The Series was begun several years ago. There was a gap of several months, due in part to unforeseen circumstances and events. However, at the same time, this gap came about because the members of the History Research Team were fully committed to giving priority to the publication of a General History of a broad section in the life of the Society. This work has now been completed with the publication of the three books that deal, in chronological sequence, with the history of the Society from the time of its foundation until the approach of the Second World War. These three volumes are already, or soon will be, available for confreres' use in French and English. Now that this stage has been completed, the History Series would like to resume a more regular pace of publishing, within the same perspective of bringing out lesser-known documents laden with lessons from our distant or recent past. History indeed endures as a constantly topical point of reflection and inspiration for the Society and the world. Do we not say that those who do not know where they come from do not know where they are heading?

Jean-Claude Ceillier, MAfr.

# I

## From the 1900 General Chapter to the one of 1906

The 1900 General Chapter ended on the 28<sup>th</sup> April at *Maison-Carrée*, near Algiers. Six years later, almost to the day, the following Chapter of 1906 opened. It was the 13<sup>th</sup> in the history of the Society. What happened of note during the interval?

Let us begin with a parenthesis on the methodology. General studies of any depths on the Society until recently were greatly lacking for this period at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Admittedly, in 1925, Father Mercui had published a pamphlet entitled *La Société des Missionnaires d'Afrique de 1868 à 1908 - Notes historiques*, but in all, it only has about fifty pages and is particularly concise for the final years of the period indicated in the title. In the Missionary of Africa Archives there are also some chronological tables composed by one or other missionary, but they limit themselves to providing the dates of some facts considered important. This is not really enough to reveal the life of an institute. Happily, Father Aylward Shorter's book *Cross and Flag in Africa* came to fill this empty space. Its French translation has just come out in Éditions Karthala under the title, *Les Pères Blancs au temps de la conquête coloniale (1892-1914)*. Its plan is not strictly chronological, but it provides quite an enlightening general view of the Society's life and its apostolic commitments. Therefore, it is this work that one would need to consult if one wished to study the period spoken of here in greater depth.

Now, without wishing to go back on the chronological traces of this short period, it is nevertheless necessary to assess the situation at the time the 1906 Chapter was in preparation. In order to remain in the context of the General Chapters concerning us here, we have two documents to hand. One is the Financial Report, and the other the General Report drafted by the Superior General addressed to the Cardinal Prefect of the Propaganda Fide Congregation at Rome. It was customary to do this on the occasion of a General Chapter. We do not know if this General Report was presented to the Capitulants themselves. Its contents, however, prove to be very informative, to the extent that it lays out in an unadorned style a quite complete panorama of the state of the Society and its undertakings. Let us pause for a moment in discovery of the major ideas of this document.

### **Report on the Society for Propaganda Fide (April 1906)**

Let us note first of all that the version of this document which we have in the Archives at the Generalate in Rome is an incomplete text. Although drafted with care and presenting a precisely worked-out plan, it is clear that some blanks to be completed in the text or simply by the absence of a conclusion, that this is certainly not the final document as such. It is nevertheless sufficiently precise and detailed to be considered as a reference text. It is classified in the A. G. MAfr. (Archives Générales des Missionnaires d'Afrique), reference 'Chapitres Généraux', casier 360.

The title of this report is as follows: *Rapport sur l'état de la Société des Pères Blancs et de ses Œuvres en Avril 1906. (Report on the state of the Society of White Fathers and its Works in April 1906)*. The text has ten 21x27 pages, written on the left-hand page only, handwritten, drafted in a fine regular script and practically without crossing out. The document is not signed, but in view of its addressee, we can assume that it would be signed by the Superior

General. After an introductory page, the writer presents each circumscription. He then deals with the behavioural tendencies of the neophytes, the behavioural tendencies of the missionaries, and finally with the financial resources.

**Introduction** – in the Introduction, the author of the report firstly recalls the origins of the Society. He then continues:

*'At the present time, in April 1906, the Society numbers 470 priests and 79 Brother Coadjutors with Perpetual Oath and 134 Brother Coadjutors with only Temporary Oath. The Society takes in members of all nationalities; however, to maintain the spirit of unity among all its members, up to now, it has had only one Novitiate comprising two sections: one for Brother Clerics with 40 novices, one for Brother Coadjutors with ... (blank).'*

The introduction finishes with the presentation of the Society's organisation in circumscriptions, which at the same time prefaces the plan of the report:

*"Although it still has only one Novitiate, the Society is divided into provinces and vice-provinces. The provinces at this time are six in number and the vice-provinces two: the province of the Mother House to which are attached the two vice-provinces of Germany and of Jerusalem, and the provinces of France, Kabylia, Sahara and the Soudan, Nyanza, and Tanganika.'*

The term 'provinces' used in the document should be properly understood. They are not canonically erected Provinces, but a dividing into implantation and activity regions that simply facilitates its organisation more, without splitting up the unified central governing authority. The actual founding of Provinces would only be made several decades later at the 1936 Chapter. The text then presents each province with its implantations and its principal undertakings. Obviously, the most important of this grouping is the Province of the Mother House.

- a) **The Province of the Mother House** – the Report attributes ten entities to it, each made up of houses and territories: 1) The Mother House itself at Maison-Carrée, with its Generalate Services, the Novitiate, the Sanatorium or Residence for elderly and sick missionaries. 2) In second place, the chaplaincy to the White Sisters of *St Charles*; 3) In third place, the Scholasticate at *Carthage*, about which the report gives the following details:

*'The Carthage Scholasticate, where the last three years of theology are done and which numbers at the moment 85 scholastics, not counting twelve who are doing their year's military service at Tunis. The parish of the Cathedral is attached to the Scholasticate. Two of the missionaries at its service (one of whom is Father Delattre, well-known to archaeological experts) devote their spare time to important Carthaginian archaeology works. The Scholasticate has a country house in the heights of Gamart for holidays and a sanatorium at Bou-Kriss in the neighbourhood of Carthage.'*

4) The fourth grouping of this province is made up of what the text calls 'the little scholasticates', which today would correspond to the first phase of major seminary. The report adds that philosophy and the first year of theology are studied there, required subjects for standard admission to the Novitiate. The document mentions six of them: Binson for the French, Antwerp for the Belgians, Boxtel for the Dutch, Quebec for the Canadians; the last centre is at Trier and, in fact, was part of the vice-province of Germany. In all, for 1906, there were almost 80 students.

There is a two-sided comment to be made in relation to this list. Firstly, it demonstrates a genuine internationality, at least within the confines of Western Europe and North America. On the other hand, these various houses were founded in a relatively short time span. Binson was in 1895 (in a former priory, near Chatillon-sur-Marne, Paris region); Boxtel and Antwerp in 1892; Trier in 1894 and Quebec in 1900. It would be interesting to bring detail to the circumstances of the founding of each of these houses.

5) Still within the same province, the text goes on to mention the *Procure de Rome*, where the Procurator and missionaries, scholastics or already priests following courses in the Roman universities, resided.

6) After this comes the agricultural orphanage of *St Joseph de Thibar*, in the north of Tunis, concerning which the report gives the following details:

*'(At St Joseph de Thibar), orphans taken in by missions in Muslim countries are brought up and trained for farming work and various trades. For this work, there are 12 Fathers and 31 Brother Coadjutors employed. The Sainte-Famille village for young married Arab converts is three hundred yards from the orphanage, with its own church and its Sisters' House.'*

7) Mention is then made of quite an unexpected foundation in Buenos-Aires, *Argentina*, (1898). It was at the request of the Vatican, to launch the work of the Propagation of the Faith there. Four missionaries are therefore present in this South American community.

8) The Procure at *Mombasa* comes in eighth place. The occupants are charged with the material requirements for the missionaries upcountry, but also for relations with the English and German authorities of the coastal area.

9) The report then mentions the *Vice-Province of Jerusalem*, with its junior and major seminaries for Greek Melkite clergy. This grouping represents a community of 17 missionary priests and 6 Brothers, along with lay auxiliaries. They provide the training for 110 junior and 32 major seminarians. According to these numbers alone, we can appreciate the importance this work represented in the apostolic commitments of the Society; this would very probably explain its title of vice-province, given its singular geographical site.

10) The last item of the province is the *Vice Province of Germany*. This is how it is presented in the report: *'The importance of our missions in the East African German Colony has made the creation of this vice-province necessary.'* It comprised three houses: Trier, the residence of the vice-provincial and the first cycle; Haigerloch, the Apostolic School for the youngest candidates and the Luxemburg house at Marienthal, where the German-speaking Brothers' Postulancy was. As a whole, these three communities represent sixteen Fathers and twenty-two Brothers. We note the high numbers for a single German vice-province, which gives an idea of the investment in personnel achieved by the Society for vocation and the training of candidates.

It has to be admitted how difficult it is to uncover the logic and the coherence of this combination in a single province, houses and undertakings so different one from another as much in their purpose as in their geographical situation. This is all the more so when some houses would seem to be well-suited in the second province presented in the report, of which we are now going to speak. Probably the explanation is in the concern of the Superior General and his Council to maintain direct control on certain foundations reckoned too weak or too important to be governed by subordinate heads.

**b) The Province of France** – A remark could be made here concerning the title of this circumscription. Indeed, in the documents of the Chapter itself, *Province of Europe* and not *France* is used for the same territory; this inaccuracy is repeated in several documents of the

period. In fact, if we consider the residence of the provincial, we can indeed speak of the province of France, which, besides, is the only country in this grouping to have three communities, but at the same time, it is genuinely European in virtue of the diversity of countries it covers.

The text of the report counts off all the houses precisely: *'It comprises our houses in France, Belgium and Holland, with the exception of the above-mentioned little scholasticates...'* This province is made up of seven houses and communities. There is the Paris Procure with three Fathers; the Marseilles Procure, dealing with travel, has a staff of three Fathers and three Brothers. The Lille Procure has a public chapel and a community of four Fathers; the Antwerp Procure, annexed to the Scholasticate, also has a public chapel and five resident Fathers; the Boxtel Procure and Brothers' Postulancy, both annexed to the Scholasticate, have a staff of six Fathers; the Autreppe Sanatorium (Belgium) has a dozen sick missionaries. Finally, the Apostolic School and the Brothers' Postulancy at St Laurent d'Olt, France, have 7 Fathers, 3 Brothers and 28 pupils.

It should be made clear what exactly these two scholasticates of Antwerp and Boxtel represented, notably in relation to Carthage which seems to be *the* Scholasticate. In reality, without questioning the value of a single and international scholasticate, in these two foundations there is the concern to offer a formation framework which respect the particularities of these two countries in relation to the authorities. This applied at least to the Belgians, who were very punctilious in having their national identity taken into account in missionary appointments in their territories. This goes to show the problems in developing a genuine internationality...

**c) *The Province of Kabylia*** - The report explains that here it is about the grouping of *stations*, i.e., the mission posts, in the dioceses of Algeria amounting in all to eleven. The personnel numbers 41 Fathers, including the provincial and 14 Brothers. The text then explains that the mission in Muslim territory can only be carried out by undertakings such as teaching and the care of the sick. Missionaries thus provide the running of ten schools, regrouping over 530 pupils. In this particular context, there are nevertheless some conversions and the report mentions 784 baptised and 167 catechumens. It is known that in the decades ahead, if fact, there would always be a community of Christian Kabyles in the east of Algeria.

**d) *The Province of Sahara and the Soudan*** - The geographical demarcation is defined as: 'It takes in the Prefecture Apostolic of Gardaïa (sic; by contrast, in the 1906-1907 *Rapports Annuels* the same place is spelt Ghardaïa) and the Vicariate of Sahara-Soudan (which will be designated Soudan Français). A difficult Mission without conversions, the Prefecture Apostolic of Gardaïa numbers three posts (the Report does not name them, but they are Gardaïa, Ouargla and El-Goléa) and fourteen missionaries. Through lack of conversions, the Fathers nevertheless won the trust and friendship of the people. This was therefore an apostolate of presence and service... In spite of this note of confidence, the Report concludes this brief presentation by a short phrase that raises in fact quite a few questions: *'It seems wiser to us to multiply the stations among the better prepared peoples of central Africa.'*

The Vicariate Apostolic of the Soudan (the text adds *Région du Niger*) for its part is set up in a region already penetrated by Islam, but where the majority of the population remain pagan. Founded in 1895, this mission numbers ten posts, 39 missionary priests and six Brothers. We will add the names of these posts, which the Report does not mention (besides, in reality, if we refer to the earlier quoted volume on the *Rapports Annuels*, there are eleven posts, not ten): Ségou, Banankourou, Kati, Koupéla, Ouagadougou, Kita, Kayes, Dinguira, Patyan, and Navaro. Essentially, these are establishments situated in the present-day countries of Mali and

Burkina Faso. The text then mentions some hundreds of baptised Christians, but above all the presence of 59 catechists, which is quite remarkable. In this territory, the situation is not easy, as the Report adds:

*'What is happening in France at this time has a decided effect in this colony and more or less hinders the Mission. Schools in particular are suffering more...'*

This remark refers to the openly anti-clerical policy then exercised by the French government and which was directly or indirectly passed on by means of the administrative authorities in the colony. The Report, however, ends on an optimistic note by adding that the movement of conversions remained active, especially in the Mossi posts. Finally, it explains that it has not been possible to provide a Provincial for this province and that the Prefect and Vicar Apostolic fulfil the relevant duties.

**e) The Province of Tanganika** – This time we are in Equatorial Africa with a first province that comprises three Vicariates Apostolic, Nyassa, Upper Congo, and Tanganika. The Report immediately adds that it is only a province in name; it has no provincial and that the Vicars Apostolic fulfil the relevant duties. However, the Superior General had a long visit made to these territories in 1905-1906, by a delegated missionary and his report was awaited. This was the journey made by *Father Malet*, whose report is in the Society's Archives at Rome. It is not possible in the context of this study to present this long report. Let us just say that it constitutes a first-hand document to understand from within the life and apostolic work of the missionaries in these regions at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

*The Vicariate of Nyassa*, situated in British territory, numbered 10 posts, 29 priests, 7 Brothers, 700 neophytes, around 7,000 catechumens and 90 catechists. The report does not give details of the places of mission, but here are the names of the main posts: Kilubula, Kayambe, Kilonga, and Kachebere... We recall that the Vicariate covered a vast region situated to the west of Lake Malawi, taking in a large part of present-day Malawi and Zimbabwe; (cf. Atlas des Missions, 1933, volume I, plate 14).

*The Vicariate of Upper Congo* was in Belgian territory; it extended to the west of Lake Tanganika and numbered 23 missionary priests, 7 Brothers, 44 catechists and 8 mission posts. The report adds that there is a native major seminary, though not yet open long enough to provide priest; a catechists' school and 35 primary schools, including some for girls and are therefore run by Sisters. We can provide some other information not mentioned in the text. Firstly, the names of the main posts: Mpala, Baudoinville, Lusaka, Lukulu, and Vieux-Kasongo... In addition, the *Rapports Annuels* for 1906 mention the return of the Vicar Apostolic and the solemn reception given to him by the Governor and the authorities. The text continues

*'At Léopoldville, the ecclesiastical Superiors of the missions of the Congo gathered under the chairmanship of Bishop Roelens. The nine heads of mission deliberated at length and steps were taken to lead a joint uniform action in relations with the Government as well as towards certain administrative points. The interpretation of the Convention agreed between the Holy See and the Government no doubt occupied a great part of the sessions...'* (*Rapports Annuels*, volume 2, p. 192).

These few lines serve to indicate how much in a few years the political context in some regions changed and how the mission is performing from then on in a framework of dependence or at last cohabitation; this situation was taken into account by the Holy See without delay: we are already fully in the colonial era.

*The Vicariate of Tanganika* – This is the third and last Vicariate of this province. It extends from the east of Lake Tanganika and is under German dominion. It numbers 48 missionaries including 16 Brothers, and 65 catechists. The Report adds that there are 10 stations the main one of which is Karema. We could add the names of some other posts: Utinta, Kirando, Kala, Zimba, Urwira, and Mwazye. The Vicar Apostolic was Bishop Lechaptois. It is also in the Ufipa region.

**f) *The Province of Nyanza*** - The Report to Propaganda continues its overview by presenting Nyanza, the sixth and last province of the Society. It comprises three Vicariates. As in the preceding one, there is no provincial on the spot, but the province was visited by a visitor delegated by the Superior General.

*The Vicariate of Unyanyembe* – This is in German territory, in the region to the north of the Vicariate of Tanganika, i.e., the centre and north region of present-day Tanzania. It numbers 16 Fathers and 10 Brothers, assisted by 183 catechists. There are over 11,000 catechumens and over 5,000 baptised Christians. The Vicariate has 13 mission posts. There again, the Report does not provide details, but we can recall here the names of some of these missions: Tabora, Ushirumbo, Mugeru, and Ndala. This therefore is in present-day central and north Tanzania.

*The Vicariate of Southern Nyanza* - The Report reiterates that it is German territory. It juxtaposes the preceding Vicariate on the north and consists of 13 stations, 46 priests, 10 missionary Brothers and 183 catechists. Just as for the foregoing Vicariates, the text adds to this the number of neophytes, catechumens, and schools run by the mission. Let us detail the names of the main missions. Besides, in reading the *Rapports Annuels*, we find there are not 13 but over 15, divided into three districts: Bukoba (Marienberg, Bwanja, Katoké, Rubia and its seminary), Muanza (Muanza, Kamoga, Ururi...), and Ruanda (Issavi, Nyunsdo, Kabgaye...).

*The Vicariate of Northern Nyanza* – This is the last Vicariate of this province, and the most important:

*‘It is, of all our Vicariates, where our Holy Religion has made the most progress. The number of neophytes reaches 91,182 and that of catechumens 152,153. There are 85 missionaries: 75 priests without counting the Vicar Apostolic and 11 Brothers. They are spread over 22 stations and assisted by 965 catechists.’*

Indeed, in this centre and north region of Uganda, the mission experienced a rapid growth in quarter-century of presence. Let us recall the names of the main missions: Rubaga, Kisubi, Entebbé, Sésé, Bukalasa, Bukumi, Hoima, etc.

The detailed presentation of these mission territories such as they are presented in 1906 appeared worthwhile as long as, in its major confines at least, this sectioning would remain as such for a certain number of years to come. Therefore, after this rapid presentation, the Report continues, quite briefly moreover, with three other headings: the behavioural tendencies of the neophytes, that of the missionaries, and resources.

**h) *Behavioural tendencies of the neophytes*** - This passage firstly explains how much the faith of the new Christians ‘in the countries of the Blacks’ is deep, as is demonstrated, for example, by regular reception of the sacraments. Nevertheless, in all the missions there are less fervent Christians and even some apostates who become Muslims, revert to paganism or become Protestants. To what is this Christian fervour due? Clearly, it relies on the grace of

God, but also on the attention paid to their formation during the four-year catechumenate: this point is explicitly underlined.

*i) Behavioural tendencies of the Missionaries* – The text mentions firstly the care taken in the selection of candidates to missionary life and their formation. Despite these efforts, in some missions there are missionaries who disappoint and cause problems. The Report adds that during the six-year period, and for the first time, there were two cases of apostasy among missionary priests, one in Tunisia, and the other in Soudan. Happily, these cases remain exceptions: *‘The vast majority of missionary priests and Brothers maintain the spirit of their vocation and show themselves to be pious, zealous, obedient, charitable, in a word, faithful to their commitment.’*

*j) Resources* – This last part of the Report is astonishingly brief if we take account of the importance of the subject. The Society managed to make ends meet without falling into debt. The resources are of three categories: land attached to houses or missions that are owned by the Society and put to good use; the assistance provided by Catholic Works of which the Report mentions four: Propagation of the Faith, Holy Childhood, Antislavery Fund and St Peter Claver. Various sewing circles, in particular Paris Saint-Louis also provide vestments, sacred vessels and altar linen. This listing is interesting in so far as it gives us an insight into the works already in place and with which the missionaries undoubtedly maintain close ties. The first source of revenue is from gifts received through the various Procurators. Note here that the appealers are not mentioned as such. Thus ends this section. Nevertheless, the capitulants had another document concerning finances available to them: *Rapport sur l'état des finances au 20 avril 1906, (Financial Report on the 20<sup>th</sup> April 1906)*, about which we will now need to say a word.

### **Financial Report on the 20<sup>th</sup> April 1906**

This is a document intended for Capitulants and not for the roman authorities. It consists of eight broadsheets, covered in perfectly legible, large and regular writing. The text is continuous, without subheadings, but the plan is easy to follow and the presentation of the financial situation sufficiently clear to be understood by non-specialists.

The text begins by a recall of the situation at the time of the preceding Chapter of 1900 and enumerates the property owned by the Society at that time: securities, properties, some plots of land and buildings. This was all in France and North Africa. The document concludes:

*‘In all, it represented approximately one and a half million (francs of the time); in the same period, annual running expenses at the General Treasury amounted to around one million francs. Today, (1906) these figures have not changed substantially...’*

The Report continues to explain the activity in financial transactions, sale of buildings, etc. The text then lists the sources of revenue: the Société el-Harrach, collections, interest on deposits, reimbursement of debts, allowances from mission-aid agencies. The text goes on, ‘such that in total, annual expenses amount to about 700,000 francs, income to 8 or 900,000’. However, the text underlines, this positive balance should not deceive; the situation remains constantly insecure due to the uncertain nature of most of the income.

It is not easy to convert these amounts to current monetary values, but we can emphasise how much such a probably tight management and an active policy of fundraising enabled having balanced accounting, preventing the Society from living beyond its means consistently for all the six years under consideration. The Report continues by providing information about the value of buildings owned by the Society in North Africa and Europe. In this respect, it also

gives some interesting news related to the implantation policy of the Society: the transfer of the Belgian Procure from Malines to Anvers (late 1901); the purchase of the house of Bou-Kris (near Carthage) in 1902. Also noted are the setting up of Haigerloch (Germany), the opening of the Autreppe Sanatorium (Belgium); the founding of the Quebec Procure in 1901, and finally the transfer of the Zanzibar Procure to Mombasa in 1904.

In concluding, the Report mentions the financial situation of the Vicariates: their running expenses are around 600,000 francs, with a reserve amounting to a million francs. The Report concludes, *'securities and the funds of the General Treasury and Vicariates are divided into various deposit accounts, as much as possible outside France. The majority are at Antwerp to deal with drafts drawn off by the Equator.'*

This report therefore would have enabled the Capitulants to grasp better the financial running of the Society, even if some technical aspects of the management of goods and the organisation of the accounting was over the heads of most of them. It should be noted finally that the annual budget for 1906 seems less high (700,000 F) than what the report calls the 'running of the General Treasury' in 1900 (one million). However, in fact, it is not the same data, especially if one includes or not the funds of the Vicariates Apostolic, etc. Therefore, the collection of these preparatory documents enable today's reader to have an overall view of what the Society was experiencing when the 13<sup>th</sup> General chapter of its history opened at Maison-Carrée.

## II

### The 13<sup>th</sup> General Chapter - 1906

#### A) The Chapter preparation

As for the preceding Chapters, the 1906 one was officially announced and convened by a Circular Letter of the Superior General, Bishop Livinhac. It was dated the 28<sup>th</sup> March 1905 and bears the number 58 in the printed collections of the letters of Livinhac. He fixed the opening date on Monday of Quasimodo, i.e., the 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1906 and instructs the election procedures for Delegates, following the norms established by the Constitutions. The letter goes on to give some details, for example, in reiterating that Vicars Apostolic are ex officio members of the Chapter, but are not obliged to take part in it, and in pointing out that the mission of the Sahara, the Soudan (West Africa) and Jerusalem will each have their Delegate. The letter concludes in recommending community prayer for the success of this upcoming Chapter.

#### B) Opening Session

The Chapter began at Maison Carré on the 23<sup>rd</sup> April. It was to last until the 11<sup>th</sup> May - 19 days - and comprised 29 Capitulants, counting the Superior General. The Opening Session took place in the afternoon, the morning having been spent in recollection. The two youngest Fathers, Proberger and Ch. Guérin, were temporarily designated as secretaries and the roll of Capitulants was called. There were three groups: the ex officio members obliged to attend; the ex officio not obliged to attend (the Vicars Apostolic) and finally the delegated members. In the first group, there were eight names: Livinhac, Voillard, Girault, Mercui, Michel, Louail, Baldit and Burtin. In the second group, there were eight names, but only four attended: Roelens, Gerboin, Bazin and Hirth; Toulotte, Lechaptois, Streicher and Dupont sent apologies. The third group comprised all the delegated members, i.e. those elected in virtue of their region in Africa, their European province or their mission. Here is the list of those circumscriptions and the names of the Fathers elected to the Chapter. Brothers were not represented:

Province of the Mother House	: Maillot, Gabory
Province of Europe	: Jamet, Huc
Province of Kabylia	: Rouquet, Caussegal
Sahara	: Guérin
Jerusalem	: Federlen
North Nyanza	: Gorju, Bec
Tanganika	: Avon
South Nyanza	: Brard
Upper Congo	: Van Aker
Unyanyembe	: Sweens
Nyassa	: Guillemé
Soudan	: Ménoret
Germany	: Froberger

The order of regions in the above list is exactly as found in the official minutes of the Chapter and we can wonder if there is an explanation for this rather unexpected order, for example, by following the chronological order of foundation, or the number of missionaries present, or is it simply due to the whim of the secretaries?

Once the mandates were confirmed, the assembly elected two secretaries, two scrutineers and a timekeeper. Father Michel, Assistant General, then read the list of Fathers eligible to be elected Superior General according to the Constitution and the list of those Fathers eligible to be elected Assistants General, in view of election to the General Council planned for the following session. Father Burtin, Procurator of the Society at Rome, then announced that he had received from the Holy See authorisation for the Chapter to seek confirmation of the election of the Superior General by telegram, ‘a favour already granted to the Holy Spirit Fathers.’

### **C) Election of the General Council**

The following day, a Mass brought all the Capitulants together. It was said by Bishop Livinhac, Superior General, alone. The Capitulants received Communion at it, with the exception of the Vicars Apostolic, who had received from Livinhac exceptional permission to say their own Masses for the intentions of the Chapter. It needs to be remembered, in order to understand this way of doing, that the Constitutions then in force demanded that at the opening of the Chapter a single Mass described as Capitular should be said and presided by the outgoing Superior General. It should be remembered that at this beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the practice of concelebration had no longer been the practice for a long time in the Church of the Latin Rite.

The second session of the Chapter began immediately after the Mass. Livinhac solemnly reminded everyone of the duty of secrecy concerning the Chapter’s deliberations and then insisted on the need to think carefully about the election of the Superior General. Here is how the minutes report this speech, visibly intended to avoid votes in his own name:

*‘The Capitulants must name the one they reckon the most worthy and capable of safeguarding the spiritual and temporal interests of the Society in such troubled times as it is going through. In his opinion, what is needed is not an old and weak man, but a young and active missionary.’*

Note the mention of such troubled times. Here, we could explain this alarmist vision of the situation with Livinhac’s well-known pessimism. However, this would be rather brusque to stop at this explanation alone. We are in 1906; the Society, in virtue of its strong implantation in Algeria, remains very sensitive to the political situation in France. The country is applying a very anticlerical, even anti-religious policy. The future of Congregations and their enterprises are seriously threatened.

Livinhac then begged forgiveness for all his shortcomings during his mandate as Superior General that is coming to an end, in particular for pain he certainly inflicted on many by not replying to letters from missionaries. All then prayed on their knees, and proceeded to the first ballot to elect the Superior General. The result is final: Livinhac 23 votes, Voillard 3 votes, Bazin and Guillemé one vote each. The text concludes: *‘As a consequence of this vote, Bishop Livinhac, re-elected Superior General for the third time, becomes Superior General for life.’* (p. 175)

This last remark requires explanation. Livinhac was elected Superior General for the first time in 1889, but the Founder was still alive and remained the true Superior General, Livinhac

being only in fact the Vicar General. His first real mandate and full exercise of his functions began at the 1894 General Chapter, where he was elected for six years. He was then re-elected in 1900, and following on the decision then taken according to which a third successive election would lead to a mandate for life, Bishop Livinhac in effect became Superior General for life from this 1906 Chapter.

Was this a vote of deference on the part of the Capitulants or fear of appearing to disavow the outgoing Superior General? This is very improbable. Indeed, Livinhac enjoyed high esteem, if not outright veneration among the missionaries. His wealth of experience, but also his reputation for holiness and his spiritual and human qualities drew everyone's confidence. He would thus be in charge of the Society from 1890, the date of his arrival at Algiers after his election the year before until his death in 1922, in all, over thirty years. The rule of mandate for life was nevertheless suppressed by request from Rome itself, at the first Chapter that followed his death, in 1926.

The ballots for the four Assistants General followed immediately and Fathers *Voillard*, *Mercui*, *Girault* and *Michel* were elected on the first round of voting. A final ballot designated Voillard as First Assistant General. Father Burtin, who had already telegraphed the Superior General's election to Rome, then communicated to the Assembly the cordial and warm greetings of Cardinal Rampolla, at that time Cardinal Protector of the Society. It was on this encouraging note that the second session of the Chapter concluded and the work on the issues foreseen on the agenda could begin.

## **D) - First General Sessions -**

The first **sitting**, to use the term of the minutes themselves, immediately addressed the subject that would come back almost throughout the whole Chapter, *the revision of the Constitutions*. The reason for this was given by the recorder of the dossier, Father Mercui, who gave a historical reminder to the Capitulants:

*'The approval given to our (Constitutions), by the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda in 1895, for a period of 10 years and ad experimentum has come to an end. Final approval remains to be obtained. Should we seek this approval, desirable in itself, immediately? In addition, what do we do to obtain it sooner or later? Such are the questions that this report examines.'* (Minutes, p. 177)

The Assembly replied that there was no urgency and that time may run out by going to the end of such a revision; however, final approval must be prepared and we must therefore get down to the job of this revision. Father Burtin then gave a reminder of the work already accomplished in 1895 on these issues; a text was distributed to prepare the task. In the next session, the Assembly decided on several orientations for this substantial work:

- Detailed prescriptions as well as moral and spiritual considerations would be removed from the text of the Constitutions to place them in the Directory. (Nevertheless, this point was to be taken up again the next day. Father Burtin pointed out that spiritual considerations on the meaning of our vocation are at the right place in the Constitutions and were put there by the Founder himself. The Assembly agreed and reversed its vote! Then articles touching on the same subject were grouped together; overlong articles were split and care was taken to remove repetitions and cross-references. All the articles relating to the life and work of the Brother Coadjutors were regrouped. At the end of the Chapter, a missionary was to be put in charge of drafting a pro-project on the basis of what would be stipulated

during the Chapter. After the rereading and approval by the Council of this new text, it was to be printed and implemented *ad experimentum* until the following Chapter.

- Finally, the commission appointed for the Constitutions would be charged at the same time with drafting a plan for the **Directory**. This raft of decisions taken at the opening of the Chapter shows the seriousness with which the members of the Assembly considered this matter of the Constitutions.

***Creation of four committees*** – This was the second point addressed, the following day, and four committees were constituted:

- Committee of Heads of Mission
- Committee for the revision of the Constitutions
- Committee for discipline
- Committee for apostolic works.

It was then thought to add a committee for finances, but the idea was ultimately rejected, as financial matters could be taken into account by the committees on discipline and apostolic works. The capitulants then took a decision that showed concern for leaving discussions wide open: ‘The members of the Chapter are invited to present separate papers on proposition to be examined by the various committees; moreover, they will be free to present themselves to them and make a *viva voce* report.

***The status of the Assistants General*** – This question came third in the discussions, after the Constitutions and the organisation of the Committees. It concerned defining certain passages in the Constitutions and it was thus decided that Assistants General should reside at the Mother House, that they cannot take on other important responsibilities, notably those of Treasurer General or Superior of the Scholasticate, that the Council may decide by general accord, even without a vote, etc.

## **E) - The Chapter at work (26 April - 10 May)**

After the 8<sup>th</sup> session (or plenary session) that took place on the 26<sup>th</sup> April, we could say that the Chapter entered into its regular work phase, once the major points of method were in place. This however did not prevent the Assembly from refining its work method: for example, by asking for more time to think before voting, that it was important to maintain silence when a Capitulant was speaking, etc.

### ***Which were the most important matters addressed?***

Indeed, which were the subjects addressed in the course of the fortnight that followed? Before replying, we must remember that the Chapter very often tackled several subjects head-on and that there was not, in the main, a well-organised list of subjects addressed in order, one after the other. This obviously depended on the work method, as often some texts were sent for study and therefore one had to move on to something else. In addition, there were unscheduled issues that arose because of one or other speech, often at the start of the day or the session. This sometimes incurred an extended debate. Finally, it should be remembered that many debates and discussions were on the updating of the Constitutions, and arose in a way from one or another committee! In short, one has the feeling of a succession of discussions sometimes hard to unravel, without as such preventing the Chapter from a genuine and efficient work.

This being so, in rereading the minutes, it is easy to highlight the most important issues and we can set out the following list:

**1) Holding several mandates concurrently:** The Assembly decided that the Superior General, the Provincial, the Father Visitor or the Vicar Apostolic cannot under any circumstances be appointed local Superior, even if events lead them to exercise this duty temporarily. This matter was settled without problems.

**2) The government of the various circumscriptions** that make up the Society was a more complex issue. Moreover, the text speaks of circumscriptions, which remains rather vague... Father Froberger (Minutes p. 186) proposed identifying three types of ‘circumscriptions’: missions under a Vicar Apostolic, member de la Society, missions under a foreign bishop (as those of Kabylia), and houses established in Europe.

He then proposed a proper form of representative for the authority of the Superior General for each category. In the context of this debate, Bishop Roelens then made a speech concerning the houses established in Europe, transcribed thus by the Minutes, and that deserve to be quoted here as they are quite relevant:

*‘Bishop Roelens is of the opinion that we will be led to create national Provinces, which, if we do not prepare them, we may expect to see, in particular for Belgium, recruitment of prospects completely closed down.’*

**3) Unity and Diversity** – Indeed, several times, the need to foresee autonomy for some circumscriptions was raised. Some would thus be able to have a novitiate and a Scholasticate. At the same time, on several occasions, it was emphasised in discussions how much a development towards Provinces that were too autonomous would have a negative effect on the unity of the Society for a genuine service for all the mission, for the financing of works, etc., (cf. p. 193). In the same vein, it was also hoped that there would be a real unity of spirit in the formation of candidates. A proposition was tabled:

*‘The Chapter unanimously decides without discussion that a Director General of Studies, under the authority of the General Council of the Society, will be charged with seeing to it that a spirit of overall union, which should be perpetuated throughout the Society, is maintained in the various formation houses belonging to our Institute ’ (Minutes p. 192).*

**4) The number of participants at Chapters** - It is interesting to note how, from 1906, the capitulants pose a question that would come back Chapter after Chapter until our own time, concerning the ideal number of participants at General Chapters. Indeed, a balance has to be found between a genuine representation of the Society and a number of participants that remains reasonable and not too heavy! Cf. pp. 195 - 199). Therefore, the Assembly tried to see if they were to remove the Heads of Mission, the former heads of one or other responsibility, and how best to distribute the places for elected members, etc. The stakes were high, because ultimately, which was explicitly mentioned, it was about knowing if one clearly maintained the decision-making majority to elected members in this major authority of the Society.

Finally, still concerning Chapter, we note that a proposition would ask, what is more without result, if elections to the General Council should not rather be moved to the end of the Chapter to have the time to prepare for it (p. 210 des Minutes).

**5) Use of cash donations** - The minutes mention missionaries who dispose as they wish of money they have collected for the mission, bursars who administer one or other part of the mission without any consultation, etc. From this came the proposition:

*'All donations that do not come from the family of the missionary, or from friends that he had before entering the Society, are owned by the Mission. They are accountable to the Heads of Mission; they must be delivered to them and points concerning loans and borrowing will also be settled'* (Minutes, p. 219).

**6) The risk of authoritarianism from Vicars Apostolic** – the Chapter took account of the ill-feeling of some missionaries confronted with the occasionally authoritarian and nonnegotiable attitudes of some Vicars Apostolic. Indeed, no authority is empowered to speak to them of what may be deficient in their way of governing and, very often, no missionary would dare to do so. It was proposed for the Superior General to take a lead from all that was heard during the Chapter to inform the Vicars on what could create ill-feeling among the missionaries, words that would be for the benefit of all. It was thus suggested for Vicars Apostolic to have a council to assist them (Minutes p. 220).

**7) The Status and life of the Brothers** - The Chapter was aware that there seemed to be ill-feeling among the Brothers. The level of required admittance standards was raised; to know if it would be better for them to do their novitiate with the clerics or not; of their temporary Oath; to remind the Fathers to treat them with respect as real confreres, etc. Either the formation is too demanding or it is entrusted to young inexperienced missionaries (p. 218). We can even find a quite surprising remark:

*'Fourth Vow: we request the role and assignments of the Brother Coadjutors to be more broadly defined. The Chapter removes this Vow, considering articles 26 and 101 of the Constitutions define sufficiently well the role of the Brothers in the Society'* (Minutes p. 207-208).

**8) Concerning the apostolate** - Many points already mentioned beforehand indirectly concerning the apostolate. The Capitular Assembly would nevertheless come back on some issues and take decisions very directly concerning this apostolic work and they are worth mentioning.

- Some Fathers asked for *Formation Centres* for young missionary priests in the missions for additional formation and language study: the Assembly found it worthwhile, but too difficult to implement (p. 210).

- There was unanimity to remain faithful to the traditional rule of a four-year *catechumenate*.

- It is forbidden for missionaries to exercise a personal salaried profession. Besides, a Father should not spend all his time with the material side, with running a farm, etc. It should be left to the Brothers.

- In the accompaniment of Christians and catechumens, the abuse of distributing overmuch *medals and statues of all sorts, etc.*, has to be abolished. It tends to awaken or maintain superstitions and a taste for talismans (Minutes p. 215). Moreover, Bishop Livinhac spoke to confirm, *'It would be dangerous to spread among peoples inclined to fetishism all sorts of devotions that were gradually spread throughout Europe'* (p. 215).

- Let the *missionaries of Kabylia* be just as stable as those of Central Africa, and not take the habit of moving them too soon or changing their responsibilities. (Note: do doubt they have to be called upon more easily for various duties and services because they are close by).

- Provisions should be obtained locally (cotton, coffee, etc.)

- As soon as possible, school should be opened to teach the official language of the European authorities. *'It is shameful... well-disposed government officials rightly complain they cannot obtain from the missionaries the junior native agents they need...'* (p. 215)

- Missionaries allow themselves time off in up and coming European centres; on the pretext of holidays... the Chapter reprimands and forbids it!

- Finally, and to conclude on a rather picturesque note, the Chapter complained of the untidiness of some houses and adds, '*Apart from necessary watchdogs, dogs, monkeys and parrots are unremittingly excluded from our houses. They should be shot, added the Most Reverend Superior General.*' (p. 223).

**9) Confreres in difficulty** - We would like a retreat house for confreres who are tired or in trouble. As is understood from the context, and as confirmed by the text below, these are confreres who in one way or another, experience a period of great difficulty and must withdraw at least temporarily, from the mission.

How to help them:

*'A request is made in view of obtaining the setting up of a retreat house for missionaries who are tired or who have become troublesome in the Missions. They would be able to re-immers themselves in prayer, penance, and manual work in a spirit of piety, charity and zeal. On this desire, the Superior General has said that indeed the Superiors of the Society are embarrassed by several of these missionaries. By setting up a house of this nature, it would be a service to the Society and the missionaries, some of whom could then resume their work on the missions. Missionaries would not be obliged to go to this house, but then they would have to find a Congregation to accept them, or to join a diocese. The Chapter unanimously decides there is a need to follow up such a useful plan'* (p. 212).

**10) – Some more points in addition:** They are mentioned together here and this listing may seem somewhat dissimilar, but some of these points are important and each one in its own way enables us to grasp what the fathers and brothers were experiencing and how they wanted to live their mission to the utmost. There was not to be more than one alcohol still per Vicariate. In the Directory, rules for alcohol and tobacco have to be separate; a house for the Society should be opened in Switzerland; there should be regularity and seriousness about sending reports for the Chronique Trimestrielle; a course in pedagogy and public-speaking should be introduced to the Scholasticate; every missionary should write twice a year to the Superior General, etc.

**CONCLUSION** - The 30<sup>th</sup> and last General Assembly of the thirteenth General Chapter was held on the 11<sup>th</sup> May 1906. Six months later, the Superior General published the Chapter decisions in a circular letter dated the 19<sup>th</sup> November. He added that this long delay was due to the fact that he had to submit some of these decisions to the S.C of Propaganda at Rome.

One can be surprised by the style and content of this letter. Indeed, it catalogues, without too much perspective, quite a dry series of decisions, some of which appear somewhat futile beside other more important matters. Ultimately, it is not in any way to discredit the work of the capitulants and the seriousness of the commitments of the Society at this period to estimate this General Chapter as ordinary. It was a management Chapter, without great inspiration, no doubt, but it was not the vocation of a General Chapter at this period to review one or other aspect of mission theology and formulate a renewed vision. The Constitutions, the Directory and the teachings received from the Founder remained fundamental references and a Chapter was more called upon to formulate adjustments than to lead a reflection in depth. In this context, the 13<sup>th</sup> General Chapter fulfilled its role, concerned to advance the mission by its efforts in organising it and also taking care to remind the missionaries of the demands of day-to-day fidelity.

### III

## The 14<sup>th</sup> General Chapter: 1912

It must be said from the outset that this Chapter was very similar to the previous one. The description of the Society is not really different in substance, and in the Chapter agenda, there is a mixture of important and secondary issues that appear out of order today in such an Assembly. Just as for the Chapter of 1906, two reports were prepared, the first intended for the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda, of which we do not know if it was also presented firstly to the Capitulants, and the second on the financial situation.

It was therefore a Chapter very close to the preceding one. Two important differences, however, should be emphasised: the Assembly in this one is no longer centred on the revision of the Constitutions; by contrast, it takes over the revision of the Directory, which had finally been drafted.

### A) The Report addressed to Propaganda

Once again, it resembles the document sent in the same circumstances six years before. In a short introduction, the text recalls the date of the foundation, but adds a major detail: 'The Society was finally approved by the Holy See by decree of the 15<sup>th</sup> February 1908.' The text continues, '*At the present moment, (1<sup>st</sup> January 1912) it numbers 602 missionaries and 226 Brother Coadjutors, of whom 149 have made a Perpetual Oath, the other having only temporary commitments.*'

It then recalls that although international in its recruiting, the Society forms all its candidates in a single novitiate, with a section for Clerics and one for Brothers. This very early mention in the Report and the accompanying commentary indicates once again the intention actively to promote a unity among the missionaries that surpasses national divisions. Then, six years earlier, the text moved directly to the presentation of the implantations of the Society. This time, however, it is no longer a question of Provinces, but Regions, and the Report adds that there are eight, with a Regional Superior for each one. It is to be noted that the name of the major zones of implantation of the Society and the title of those in charge still remains rather vague, as though they were not keen to pursue too actively a dividing into out-and-out Provinces.

**1) Region of the Mother House** - Its Superior is the Superior General himself. Then the houses and communities that form part of it are enumerated. First come the Mother House and its annexes (the Novitiate with its 30+28 novices, Sanatorium), all in Maison Carrée situated at 14 km from Algiers, the document adds. Afterwards, there is the chaplaincy to the Sisters of St Charles, then the Scholasticate (curiously, it is not said that it is situated in another country), comprising 75 pupils, i.e., adds the Report, 26 fewer than the last Chapter. Recruitment had become difficult in France since the separation of the Church and State. Added are Tunisia with the Cathedral parish, the archaeological digs of Father Delattre, and the country house at Gamart.

Still in the same Region, the Report continues to mention the small scholasticates, i.e., the middle seminaries of which there are five: Binson, Antwerp, Boxtel, Quebec, and Trier. The text adds however that they prefer, where possible, to encourage candidates to finish the study

cycle preceding the novitiate in their own seminary. Each of the little scholasticates numbered 4 and 6 Fathers on the staff, no doubt also responsible for recruiting. In passing, this represents a heavy investment in personnel.

Then comes a series of other establishments: the Procure at Rome and the community of student Fathers; the St Joseph orphanage at Thibar; the agricultural training centre for orphans. Next to it, there is the Christian village of Ste-Famille; a community of four confreres in Argentina; the Jerusalem *Section* with 129 seminarians and 26 missionaries; and finally, the Germany *Section*, where the text adds,

*'The importance of our Missions in German East Africa has made the creation of this Section necessary at the head of which there is a Regional Vice-Superior. There are four houses: Trier, which is a Scholasticate... Altkirch, an Apostolic School... Haigerloch for the junior classes... Marienthal in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, for the German-speaking Brother Coadjutors...'*

In fact, in the course of the preceding years, Germany had truly taken its place in the great European contest of the carving-up of Africa. Let us recall what its situation was at the time of the previous Chapter. Thus, from 1883, it occupied present-day Namibia, which became South West Africa, then Togo and Cameroon the following year; then Tanganika and Rwanda-Burundi in 1885. One understands the importance for the Society to be able to send at least some German missionaries to these regions, otherwise the authorities would consider the missions as purely foreign implantations and thus unstable.

**2) The Region of France** – The listing of implantations did not develop much from the foregoing Chapter. Here is the list of them provided by the Report: the Procures at Paris, Marseilles, Lille, and Antwerp; the sanatorium at Autreppe; the postulancy at Gits in Belgium and the Procure at Boxtel in the Netherlands; the postulancy of Fribourg and the Apostolic School at St Laurent d'Olt.

**3) The Region of Algeria** – It consisted of eleven posts in the dioceses of Algiers and Constantine, and three posts in the Prefecture Apostolic of Ghardaia. The text adds that these missions in Muslim territory are works of *preparation*, (sic) with an important role held by schools and medical care.

**4) The Region of the Soudan** – The text adds that it covers exactly the confines of the Vicariate Apostolic of the same name and that in fact it is purely and simply the French Soudan. In this vast region, there are 42 missionary priests and 3 Brothers spread over 9 stations. French laws restrain the establishing of mission schools.

**5) The Region of Nyassa (British Territory)** – It corresponds to the Vicariate of the same name. There are 12 stations and 56 missionaries (46+10), plus 342 catechists. In addition, there is an MSOLA community of 9 Sisters as well as a catechists' school. There again, the Report gives these numbers without any commentary.

**6) The Region of Tanganika** - (Note that the spelling of this country seems to have changed: the Y has disappeared.) This region covers two Vicariates Apostolic: Tanganika and Upper-Congo

A) *The Vicariate Apostolic of Tanganika*: in German territory, on the right shore of the Lake, directed by Bishop Lechaptois, with 60 missionaries (48+12). There are 11 posts, notably Karema with a catechists' school and the seminary, of which the Report seems to say that it develops a study level according to need: two are beginning philosophy. B) *Vicariate*

*Apostolic of Upper-Congo*: the whole western shore of the Lake, 38 priests and 12 Brothers, 15 Sisters, none stations. There are minor and major seminaries (three pupils).

**7) The Region of Southern Nyanza** - German territory comprising two Vicariates: Southern Nyanza itself and Unyanyambe. *A) Vicariate apostolic of l'Unyanyambe*: it extends to the north of the one of Tanganika numbers 14 posts (Ushirumbo, Tabora...), 53 missionaries (35+8), and the Vicar is Bishop Gerboin. There are 19 Sisters. Then, as usual, there are catechists, schools, minor seminary but no major seminary. *B) Vicariate of Southern Nyanza*: (the region already described for the 1906 Chapter...). The Vicar seems to be Bishop Sweets, but it is not clear. There are 23 mission posts, including Rubia, with a minor and major seminary, the last numbering 60 pupils.

**8) The Region of Northern Nyanza** – We are in British territory; the Region covers the territory of the Vicariate Apostolic. A Region open to Christianity from its beginnings, it was directed by Bishop Streicher, with 108 priests, 12 Brothers, 24 Sisters and over 1,000 catechists. There are 27 mission posts, a special school for sons of chiefs. Moreover, the Vicariate also includes a minor and major seminary, the last-mentioned with 16 pupils, of whom two sub deacons, ordained in December 1911. The Report concludes this listing with a mention of the Procure of Mombasa, which does not seem to belong to any particular jurisdiction!

#### **Behavioural tendencies of the neophytes and missionaries**

After this very schematic presentation, the report continues with some lines on the behavioural tendencies of new Christians and missionaries. Sometimes word for word, the same text and reflection are found as in the 1906 Report, which is nonetheless surprising. The text tells us that for Christians, everything goes as normal, in spite of the presence of some scabby (sic) sheep. For the missionaries, we recall how much admissions are exacting: everything is fine except there were a few defections. There are three priests but the Report does not mention Brothers.

**Resources (financial)** – ‘Our works have had a truly extraordinary development and consequently have cost and still cost enormous sums. Up to now, however, Divine Providence has provided us with the resources necessary to make ends meet.’ The text continues, as in 1906, with a list of works that assist: Propagation of the Faith, Holy Childhood, Antislavery Fund and St Peter Claver, various sewing circles. To this were added the revenue from farmed land and income collected by various Procurators.

**Commentary**: This report remains interesting by confirming that the geography of the Vicariates had hardly changed, but by contrast, it shows clearly how the European powers had divided up these vast regions. Two other points are worth underlining: the impressive numbers of missionaries on the one hand and on the other the emergence of seminaries, minor and major. A final page was added in appendix, giving the development of the personnel of the Society between 1901 and 1911, and which we reproduce below:

*Number of missionary priests between 1901 and 1911:*

	<b>Entries to Novitiate</b>	<b>Entries into the Society</b>	<b>Reduction through deaths</b>	<i>Departures from the Society</i>
<b>1901</b>	69	35	5	2
<b>1902</b>	58	44	9	2
<b>1903</b>	61	47	9	3
<b>1904</b>	54	40	7	2
<b>1905</b>	43	52	10	2
<b>1906</b>	44	42	15	6
<b>1907</b>	57	40	9	5
<b>1908</b>	48	33	8	7
<b>1909</b>	41	29	10	7
<b>1910</b>	34	30	10	3
<b>1911</b>	31	44	3	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>540</b>	<b>436</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>44</b>

*Number of missionary Brother Coadjutors between 1901 and 1911*

	<b>Entries to Novitiate</b>	<b>Entries into the Society</b>	<b>Reduction through deaths</b>	<i>Departures from the Society</i>
<b>1901</b>	18	16	2	5
<b>1902</b>	20	13	4	4
<b>1903</b>	18	15	0	1
<b>1904</b>	20	20	5	1
<b>1905</b>	16	11	2	5
<b>1906</b>	10	7	4	11
<b>1907</b>	26	16	4	8
<b>1908</b>	17	8	3	4
<b>1909</b>	19	19	5	5
<b>1910</b>	14	13	1	10
<b>1911</b>	19	14	5	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>152</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>58</b>

(A remark needs to be made in relation to the two tables above.)

In the Archives of the Society there are quite a number of documents that give the numbers of Missionaries in the Society by categories of Missionary or for a given period. Now, it is not a rare occurrence to observe some differences between these documents, concerning, for example, the number of novices, the number of Missionaries having taken their Oath or any other category of classification. Indeed, there are always differences possible according to the way the count is made, the period of the year in question, the appointments taken into account or not, etc. It is good to bear this in mind to avoid dismissing the value of a given statistic just because it conflicts with another document.)

## **B) - Financial Report**

As in 1906, a financial report was presented to the capitulants. in first place, the situation of the immovable goods of the Society was presented. The Report dos not mention the changed occurring in the course of the six-year period, namely, purchases of plots of land and buildings at Altkirch, Gits in Belgium and Bouchout near Antwerp to open a Scholasticate.

Then there was a long explanation on how confronting the French laws on Congregation were done: sale of the Society of Agricultural Orphanages as well as the houses owned in Kabylia; nevertheless, Association were formed to buy them back which enabled us to retain them for use and to continue to guarantee some profit from them. For the same reasons, steps were taken for our houses in Europe, so that the State could not just confiscate them purely and simply. In relation to movable property, the issue was addressed in the Report thus:

*'Under this heading are understood the titles, bonds and assets. Together with deposits from the missions and some individuals, this part of the patrimony of the Society amounts to several millions. It is therefore understandable that its management requires a series of correspondence, writings, etc. that occupy several missionaries...'*

*'A circular communicated some years ago to all the houses concerned made known the measures taken relative to the treasury, because of the dangers created by the fiscal requirements. All that was kept at the Mother House was the Mass stipend service and the budgets of France and Algeria. All the rest, with the Generalate Accounts of the Society and the Mission, were centred on Autreppe. Besides, this concentration does not prevent a part of the assets or funds from being deposited in our houses that offer security and ease of access: Paris, Trier, Boxtel, Quebec, and Carthage...'*

The report continues by providing other information about collections, donations, etc. it concludes with a series of figures indicating the expenses of the Society amount to a million francs. Then the text explains how the Society established the rule to deduct one sixth of the allowances and donations made to the missions; at the same time, it provides, according to need, extraordinary allowances to some missions.

In conclusion, we can say that this report reveals the efforts of those in charge for a likely-to-succeed management and no doubt the high degree of competence of the managers. The weight of French law and fiscal regulations was also revealed in relation to Congregations and the threat it represented. The Society guaranteed its finances with a system of investments that produces the main source of its income, but the text adds that this is always at risk. Finally, it is indicated that the major point of expense is the formation of candidates, and the General Council deducts donations to cover the Generalate running expenses and all the charges that are more directly its concern.

## **C) The process and works of the Chapter**

**A) Election of the General Council** - The Chapter opened on the 15<sup>th</sup> April 1912, and the first session immediately showed up confusion in the way the rules for the election of deputies and their substitutes were understood. Nevertheless, wisely, the Assembly decided to consider all votes valid and thus acknowledged the validity of the Capitular Assembly. Right away, the process for the elections of the Assistants General was implemented. There was, in fact, no election for Superior General to plan, since Bishop Livinhac, Chairman of the Chapter and outgoing Superior, remained in office as Superior General for life, as decided by the 1906 Chapter.

The following day, the 16<sup>th</sup> April, the second session effectively proceeded with the designation of four Assistants General. Fathers Paul Voillard and Pierre Michel, outgoing Assistants, were re-elected at the first ballot. Father Henri Marchal was elected at the second ballot and Father Ludovic Girault completed the team. The new one of the group was therefore Father Henri Marchal, of whom it could already be said that he was to have a determining influence for several mandates as a member of the General Council.

**B) Ongoing Work** – The series of tasks lasted until the 1<sup>st</sup> May, i.e., two weeks and there were nineteen plenary assemblies. After some discussions concerning the way to distribute elected delegates and the problems faced, the ambiguities were removed and moved to the setting up of working committees. There were five of them: 1) circumscriptions, houses and practice of zeal; 2) the common life, material life and interior life; 3) recruitment and formation, the Oath, departures and dismissals, prayer for the deceased; 4) revenue; 5) and finally the Government of the Society.

In addition, each committee on its agenda was also given some chapters of the Constitutions to read for possible corrections or modifications to foresee. The distribution of subjects for study by committee may be surprising, either by the putting together of very different issues or by the fact that some topics were not mentioned. The same surprise is registered by the modern reader of the minutes of this Chapter by observing that the first subject addressed, in the fourth General Assembly is the pronunciation of Latin: should a uniform pronunciation be imposed on all confreres? Further, in the same line, there was a debate on the obligatory character of prayer for the dead, whether it was compulsory or not; another of the shifting of a quarter of an hour for such an exercise of piety, or a request for permission to do one's daily meditation while walking. It could be said that these issues today seemed far from justifying such attention from a General Chapter.

These observations enable us in fact to recall according to what criteria the Capitulants at that time established the order of priority decisions to take and thus to recall the role of a General Chapter. Indeed, the strict observance of prescriptions concerning liturgical practice and some devotions in common was then considered as essential to apostolic life and personal fidelity. It was the same for prescriptions concerning timetables and the organisation of community life. These strict rules, observed for the sake of the virtue of obedience and piety constituted a freely accepted context of life, lived in community and which could not be dispensed with except at the risk of laxity or self-will. The spirituality of the time was structured like this and the Constitutions and the Directory, invested with quasi-divine authority (one spoke of the Holy Rule) formulated the series of these prescriptions and constituted a rule of life, simply called the Rule.

If we keep this perspective in mind, thus avoiding the risk of anachronism, we will understand better that these Chapters found it of the highest importance to study some points that today would appear secondary or even uninteresting. A further explanation precisely concerns the 1912 General Chapter itself. A great part of the work, indeed, consisted in an attentive rereading of the directory for which the plan had been decided in the previous Chapter. The **DIRECTORY**: this word describes a book that reviews, in as close a reading as possible, the text of the Constitutions and provides a detailed commentary, fixing the criteria for its implementation. The Directory thus gives numerous meticulous details to explain the spirit of the Constitutions, show the extension of some of their articles and codify what it lays down as a rule in a quite general manner. The draft text proposed to the Capitulants for approval was written by Father Mercui, and it was already a deeply thought out text, containing the essentials of the major points of missionary life. These were: spiritual life, community life, the apostolate and its methods, the government of the Society, recruitment and vocations and then finances and material life.

The Capitulants were not intended to review from top to bottom the whole of this text of the Directory. most of their speeches dealt more with bringing details to the text, omissions to rectify and slants to introduce, etc. this being so, the 1912 Chapter accomplished a profound work of reflection on various issues, important and secondary, and we are now going to present the main points.

### **C) Questions addressed and decisions taken -**

The historian has three documents which present a synthesis of the most important decisions during this 14<sup>th</sup> General Chapter. On the one hand, the final report presented by the secretaries to the Capitulars themselves before they left, on the other hand the circular letters addressed by the Superior General to all missionaries to inform them of the work and decisions taken. Indeed, it should not be forgotten that it was not customary at this time to publish Capitular Documents, which is a practice that did not exist in the Society until the 1967 Chapter. The Superior General communicated the decisions taken at the Chapter through one or several circular letters that had the force of law. Here is a summary of the essential of works and decisions.

**1) Perfecting the text of the Directory** - Without repeating what has already been said, we recall that the essential work of this General Chapter brought final clarification to the Directory of the Constitutions. Here is how the Superior General, Bishop Livinhac, was to explain the work achieved when presenting the finally published new directory in 1915:

*"The last Chapter devoted a large part of its long session to the scrutiny of the Directory project sent to you in instalments. At the end of this exacting examination it commissioned the Council with the final draft and gave it precise indications to this end. We began work on it immediately (...). It was only in the course of 1914 that it could be sent to the printers. In September, it was ready to be dispatched. Unfortunately, the awful War which devastated Europe and had its backlash throughout the world, caused communications to be cut between the Mother House and a third of our houses and missions. We have therefore not been able, my dear Confreres, to send the Directory except to a small number of you. The others will receive it as soon as we can send it to you.*

*(...) I do not wish to omit an event as important as this for our Society, of which this Directory completes the organisation, without telling you with what respect you ought to receive it...' Circular Letter of Bishop Livinhac n° 110, dated 8 May 1915.)*

Moreover, the letter continues by underlining the importance of the preliminary chapter, which explains the spirit and range of application of the Directory. It also invites confreres to note the number of quotations of the Founder himself, which for Bishop Livinhac clearly demonstrates the roots of these rules in the tradition of the Society. The book was published in 1914 and had over 550 pages. Notable in particular is an important chapter devoted to the apostolate, which goes into many details concerning the organisation of the catechumenate, the practice of the sacraments, pious associations, schools, etc. All that this book contains for the perfect missionary constitutes, in fact, the organised and detailed implementation of what was already being carried out in the Society over several years. The Chapter itself, as has been said, reiterated some points we shall return to, but most of the rules formulated in this work were already in force or at least recognised as normative for missionaries. In this way, by reading this Directory, we have a fairly complete picture of the organisation of life and apostolic work in the Society at this time and in this sense, it constitutes an important testimony to a part of our history.

**2) Vocations and formation** - By the third plenary session working committees were formed, and one of them was to study, among other things, recruitment and formation. The following day, this committee proposed a discussion on the languages studied at the novitiate and this issue was to come back several times during the Chapter. The minutes of this session present the stakes and the debate very aptly, as the following quotation shows, a bit long, but extremely interesting, it seems to us:

*'The Committee on Recruitment proposes, in the interests of the Missions, a reform in the study of African languages at the Novitiate. Knowledge of English and German is imperative*

*in our missions, where one or other of these languages is spoken by the countries' masters; they should be taught in our schools and seminaries. It is therefore requested to abolish the teaching of Kiswahili and at least to shorten the time devoted to Arabic in order to enable the study of English and German.*

A debate ensued about the consequences of such and such a solution adopted:

*'In opposition to the abolition of this difficult language of Arabic is that it is useful and required for the confreres at Jerusalem, in the Sahara, in Kabylia and in the Soudan. We may project Morocco being offered to the Society. Finally, some knowledge of spoken Arabic is useful for the Novices and Scholastics (...). By adopting English and German, we fear specialising the Aspirants too much, creating division and thus harm the spirit of the Society; or again in taking on too much, not to achieve any result. On the other hand, the adoption of a single language would not suffice. It is also proposed to replace the study of Arabic with the study of Holy Scripture; in consequence, for the last six months of the Scholasticate, Holy Scripture would give place to a course in catechetical pastoral activity and pedagogy. These proposals are still under study...' (Chapter Minutes, p. 259)*

We recall that, indeed, traditionally, Arabic and Kiswahili were studied at the Novitiate established at Maison Carrée. Now, European conquest in Africa in some territories introduced new languages, English and German. After renewed discussion, it was finally decided to maintain the status quo at the Novitiate, suggesting instead planning time at the end of the Scholasticate for the study of new languages. However, the Capitulants noticed that the programmes tended to load up increasingly and that soon or later they would have to foresee the lengthening of the Scholasticate by a year.

It was not the first issue relative to formation that was addressed. In the 11<sup>th</sup> session, the Capitulants underlined, for example, that it was important that *'in our houses of formation, the Scholasticate in particular, one avoids giving preference to aspirants' choices for going to one mission or another.'* The text adds that the Superior and Professor Directors should pay attention to avoid letting their personal preferences in this domain show. Again in relation to the Scholasticate, another debate addressed the opportunity of founding new ones (Minutes, p. 274). However, this suggestion caused quite a spirited reaction:

*'These creations (of new scholasticates) cannot be done without very serious motives enforcing it as a moral necessity, to safeguard the unity of the Society. In addition, in the case of creating new Scholasticates, vigilance will have to be exercised that the formation takes its inspiration in all areas from the Constitutions, the Directory and the spirit of the Society...'*

In reality, this type of reaction, which is also present concerning other issues, shows the deep desire of some members of the Society to avoid any new organisation that would give rise to the emergence of excessively disparate groups, notably Scholasticates and Provinces. Besides, this fear is condemned, this time again, by Bishop Roellens, who responded that the organisation in national Provinces was an inevitable evolution that all large Religious Congregations were experiencing.

**3) Finance and Treasury Offices** – The matter of finance and its management were not far from the concerns of the Capitular Assembly, which is not surprising when we remember how much the lack of financial means affected the first decades of the Society's history. Firstly, the Assembly proposed that all that concerned the office of the Bursar General and the Treasurer General, since these two functions were well separated one from the other, should

not be mentioned in the future Directory, but should be published apart; in this way, the book would not be overloaded.

Two proposals were then made in relation to the ordinary management of expenses. It was hoped that community bursars would only address the Bursar General with the agreement of the local Superior, at least for important projects. On the other hand, it was hoped that bursars of Vicariate Apostolic would send every year to the Bursar General not only their budget forecast, which was already being done, but also the balance of accounts of their finances.

This issue went together with the general matter of relations between the finances of the Vicariates Apostolic and the Treasury General of the Society. It was not the first time the matter was raised, because, inevitably, there were sensitive points in this area that could raise tension. The Chapter, here, did not in fact come across any real difficulty. All that was mentioned was the issue of the deductions made by the Treasury General on donations to Vicariates, deductions, moreover, that were not questioned. Some Capitulants proposed for the calculation of this deduction, that the percentage used up to now in the deduction tied to the number of Missionaries in the Vicariate should replace it. The proposal was denied as it put the Vicariates that have a lot of personnel and few donations at a disadvantage.

**4) Apostolate** - Matters concerning the apostolate strictly speaking were not systematically dealt with in the discussions, nor presented in an organised way in the final resolutions. It was more a collection of proposals or developments divided up in function of the work of the committees or according to a division of topic that besides did not avoid cutting across one another. For instance, the issue of the limit to days on pastoral visits arose in these texts both from the apostolate and community life. This being so, the points concerning the apostolate essentially refer to the following questions. These are often in continuity with the choice already formulated or mentioned in the previous Chapters.

In the first place, the crucial importance of schools as the means in an initial apostolic approach was reiterated; these were primary schools, but also schools of more advanced level as soon as possible. In addition, the Chapter, aware that in some missionaries there were more or less admitted fears of being faced with educated people added, 'The fear that some of these young people would not become corrupt is not a good enough reason to refrain from doing so' (15<sup>th</sup> session, p. 283). This all referred to boys' schools and the Chapter added that girls' schools should not be run by missionaries; they could intervene when required, but not tarry.

Another much emphasised priority in the discussions was vocations, that of catechists as much as that of future priests. as soon as possible, it was recommended to found a school to train catechists as well as Christian primary school teachers. A junior seminary was also to be founded, which, however, in the beginning, could be joined to the school for catechists. The Assembly was aware that the pastoral strategy for priestly vocations had to be encouraged anew, as visibly not everyone was convinced of it. In the 16<sup>th</sup> session, it returned to the subject and added:

*'In order to encourage and stir up Missionaries to educate pupils for junior seminaries, the Committee requests the expression of a commitment in favour of the work of Native Clergy. The Chapter believes its duty is even to insist on this vital activity for the needs of the Apostolate; Rome never ceases to draw the attention of the Heads of Mission to it'* (Minutes, p. 286).

The catechumenate naturally remains at the core of the apostolate, but the supposedly intangible rule of four years no longer appeared so untouchable, as the following resolution shows:

*'The Chapter maintains the four-year rule in theory, but the Vicars Apostolic remain the judges of modifications and exceptions to bring to it.'* We know in fact that some Vicars Apostolic in Equatorial Africa had explained how the relentless increase in candidates for baptism made the management of these huge groups spread over four years increasingly difficult, with the need to subdivide them, multiplying sessions, etc. In order to take account of this situation, a heavy burden indeed to manage, that the Chapter accepted in principle to sometimes enable a reduction in the length of the catechumenate. Nevertheless, there was nothing to indicate that the missionaries gave less importance to a serious and prolonged teaching, as is shown by the insistence on this point in the remaining work. Finally, we note that many other points were also addressed, for example, the pastoral approach to marriage, visiting the sick, organisation of parish visits, etc.

**5) Launch of the Petit Echo.** In 2009, the Petit Echo celebrated its 1,000<sup>th</sup> issue. In this issue, an article by Fr. Michel Carbonneau, Secretary General, recalled the origin of this family bulletin created in 1912. He quoted the editorial of the first issue which explained, 'One of the wishes of the last Chapter was to send some short news items about the Society to Missionaries from time to time. In response to this desire, *'The Petit Echo of the African Missions'* will be published from now on.'

The link between the 1912 Chapter and the appearing of the Petit Echo is thus clearly established and the first issue, in fact, is dated December 1912. One could therefore ask why there is no mention of this decision in the Minutes of the discussions of the General Chapter or in the two Circulars that Bishop Livinhac used to communicate the decisions of this Chapter to the Society (16<sup>th</sup> May and 24<sup>th</sup> October 1912). Was this just a notion suggested by the Chapter whose final decision was entrusted to the General Council? Whatever the case, the Petit Echo certainly corresponded to a need and an expectation, because, since its founding a century ago, it has never ceased to appear.

This is where we reach the end of our 1912 Chapter journey. We could speak of a Chapter of continuity, a Chapter of management also, in the good sense of the term, of an increasingly numerous missionary community attached to its internationality and attentive to developing its apostolic muscle tone. This Chapter, like the previous one, did not really develop an in-depth reflection on the colonial context that was henceforward to weigh on the entire African continent, even if one felt on several occasions how this reality was very palpable and taken into account in its diversity and sometimes its deviations. The time had not yet come, however, for a debate on the substance. It would have been an anachronism to reproach a General Chapter for this in 1912, even if in the European world some brave voices were being raised against the principle of colonial domination.

The interval between Chapters was still fixed at six years and the Capitulants could well believe that in leaving Maison Carrée, that the next Chapter would be held in that same place in 1918. No one was to know, however, of the tragic circumstances of the First World War that would compel the postponement of the next Chapter until 1920.

## IV

### 15<sup>th</sup> General Chapter: 1920

For four years, the First World War, which broke out in August 1914, was to wreak havoc in the lives of millions, not only in Europe, but also on other continents. Nations directly involved in the conflict mobilised their populations very early on, in particular men who found themselves for the most part sent into combat in various regions of the world. The Society was also involved, as we shall recall below, not only in Europe but in Africa itself. It will be all the more so by this war opposing nations, several of whose members were Missionaries of Africa. We note here that Fr. Aylward Shorter, MAfr, has written an important book on the Society of Missionaries of Africa during the First World War: *'African Recruits and Missionary Conscripts, The White Fathers and the Great War (1914-1922)'*. In its pages are to be found thoroughly developed information of great value for this period. It was therefore only at the end of this time of tragic upheavals that the 15<sup>th</sup> Chapter could be held.

#### A) A Chapter postponed and at risk

During the four years of the War, Bishop Livinhac, Superior General, tried as best he could to maintain contact from Algiers with all the communities and all the missionaries. These efforts were often upset by breakdowns in postal services between countries and by censorship in countries at war. In May 1917, still at the height of the War, he sent a circular to the Regional Superiors and Vicars Apostolic of the Society to notify them that the next General Chapter was postponed sine die. He mentioned several reasons to justify his decision, notably the extreme difficulty of travelling, the absence of many missionaries who had been called up. Finally, he added another reason he formulated thus:

*'Besides, the events already occurring and those that prudence obliges us to foresee will undoubtedly bring deep-down changes to the situation of our Missions, changes with which the next Chapter will have to concern itself'*, (Circular Letter to Regionals, 1<sup>st</sup> May 1917).

What could have been those deep-down modifications to which Bishop Livinhac was referring in foreseeing the end of the conflict? Perhaps it was the possible redistribution of colonial territories among the Europe powers in Africa with consequences on the situation of the missions and the missionaries. More directly, however, the Superior General had another concern in mind: the future of German Missionaries of Africa in the Society. The following letter bears testimony to this. It is addressed to one of the Assistants at the start of 1919, he himself numbering the questions raised:

- 1) *Is there hope that the Powers currently masters of regions where there are Vicariates Apostolic confided to our Society would, without difficulty, admit Missionaries of German origin? If there is no hope, where do we employ our German missionaries?*
- 2) *Contrary to the exclusive purpose of our Institute, should they be left to be accepted by colleges, parishes, or given to missions in their country, or place themselves at the service of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith for mission to the Blacks of the United States or to the savages of South America?*
- 3) *As French youth are very embittered against Germans, whoever they may be, it would be very hard for charity to prevail...*' (Archives, Livinhac Collection, document 006091)

In addition, Livinhac was to take two steps before the Chapter to have replies to these sombre questions. Firstly, he wrote to Propaganda at Rome to explain the situation and offer solutions he thought appropriate. At the same time, he commissioned Fr. Théodore Frey, who was a German national from Alsace (until the end of the War) and Regional Superior in Germany for the whole of the War, to write an in-depth report for him on the matter. Indeed, for him the upcoming Chapter represented a serious risk of confirming a split in the Society.

However, from either side he received a response that meant his worries were exaggerated. At the end of the War, in the main International Congregations, German missionaries resumed their place as before and in mission territories in Africa, the authorities receiving them without problems. This serious issue was taken up again by the Chapter itself during the eighth General Assembly (20<sup>th</sup> April 1920) and after a prolonged debate, two decisions with very large majorities were taken. The Society was to continue to be present and to recruit in Germany for the African mission as before, and the General Council would erect a Province in this country as soon as possible. Thus, not only did the Capitular Assembly consider the sufferings and psychological wounds due to the War could and should be overcome, but Germany should be reassured in its vocation to take part in the mission in the spirit of the Society.

## **B) Preparation and opening of the Chapter**

Apart from this difficult dossier that we have just mentioned, the preparatory procedures and opening of the 15<sup>th</sup> General Chapter were identical to those of the preceding Chapter. On the 12<sup>th</sup> May 1919, a circular addressed to Vicars Apostolic and Regional Superiors officially announced the convocation to the General Chapter on the 25<sup>th</sup> April 1920. Bishop Livinhac also added that the number of deputies to elect had been increased to sixteen missionaries, in conformity with n° 34 of the Constitutions and he gave details of the distribution of these elected confreres according to the various circumscriptions.

At the same time, a report on the general situation of the Society was prepared, intended for the Congregation of Propaganda at the Holy See. The War received very little mention in this text, although it had sorely tried the Society, as though they were concerned, a few months after the end of hostilities, to indicate above all the signs of hope and the resumption of normal life and activities. In this way, the report clearly shows that during the War, recruitment was practically nil, but in October 1919, entry to novitiate numbered 82 candidates. On the 1<sup>st</sup> April 1920, the Society numbered 857 missionaries, i.e., 629 priests and 228 Brothers. Up till then, there had been only one novitiate, in order to accentuate the unity of the Society, but in 1919, a second novitiate was opened at Marienthal in Luxembourg, more particularly intended for German novices prevented from travelling to North Africa.

The report then indicates that the Society is divided into nine regions, each one under the responsibility of a Regional Superior. The region called Mother House comprises the novitiate already mentioned, the Mother House itself and the sanatorium. Then comes the establishments the documents call the little scholasticates, i.e., the secondary level seminaries of which there are four: Le Colombier near Angers in France, Bouchout near Antwerp in Belgium, Boxtel in the Netherlands and Quebec in Canada. Aspirants of other countries are invited to begin their major seminary in their own diocese, in order to enter directly into the novitiate. Finally, the report mentions the Procure at Rome, the domain at Thibar and the seminary of St. Anne's at Jerusalem, establishments that all depend directly on the General Council.

Then came the usual presentation of other Regions, with their residences or their mission posts, the number of missionaries, their works, etc. The region called Germany was named in the first place, with its four posts at Marienthal, Trier, Rietberg and Haigerloch. The seminary

of Altkirch in Alsace was henceforward named for the Region called France, whereas in the previous Chapter it was part of Germany. Then came the region of France, which will be spoken of below. The mission territories in Africa itself were, for their part, divided into six regions: Algeria, Soudan (this was West Africa and not the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan), Nyassa, Tanganika, Nyanza Central and Uganda. The last part of the Report mentions the behavioural tendencies of the neophytes, then those of the Missionaries, without besides the slightest mention of the consequences of the War on the minds and lives of the Fathers and Brothers. In all, this report reiterates in many points the report drafted in the same circumstances for the 1912 Chapter. This similarity is not due, as one could understand it, to taking the line of least resistance. It more probably explains that the writing of such a report was seen as a rather formal exercise, without finding it necessary to develop fundamental issues on missionary strategy or on the development of pastoral method. thus, for example, there is no mention at all of pastoral activity in favour of African vocations, which nevertheless played an increasingly important role in the reality of the missionaries' activities, as we can see in the course of the discussions of the Chapter itself.

### **C) The work of the Capitular Assembly**

**A) Opening and preliminaries** - The 15<sup>th</sup> General Chapter opened at the Mother House on Wednesday the 14<sup>th</sup> April. After Mass said by the Superior General alone, (it was the rule and concelebration was not in use in the Church at this time), the first meeting called preparatory was devoted to the call of the Capitulants and to checking the validity of their mandate. There were 36 present, but the absence of Father Burtin, Procurator General, was noticed. He had been detained at Rome to follow up the dossier for the beatification of the Uganda Martyrs. Father Mercui, for his part, sent apologies in writing, reckoning that his non-election to the Council at the last Chapter indicated a lack of confidence of the missionaries in his regard. The Assembly then adopted a motion requesting Father Mercui to rejoin the Chapter, notifying him by telegram, the minutes add.

Another issue was then addressed concerning Bishop Livinhac in his office as Superior General. Indeed, during this Chapter, there was no need for an election for the Superior General, since Bishop Livinhac was Superior for life, and in fact it did not take place. Nevertheless, before the Chapter, Livinhac had made representation at the Congregation for Propaganda to be relieved of his responsibility, pleading his age and especially his increasingly fragile state of health. He therefore asked to be relieved, or at least to allow the Chapter to elect five Assistants General, with the First Assistant foreseen to replace him ipso facto if he were to die. Bishop Livinhac himself informed the Assembly of his representation and at the same time let them know the reply received from Rome by telegram: the dual request was denied. Some days later, at the Plenary Assembly on the 20<sup>th</sup> April, a more detailed letter from Father Burtin finally arrived at Algiers, which was communicated to the Capitulants. The Cardinal Prefect, explained Burtin, justified his reply saying that the appointment of a fifth Assistant would be contrary to the Constitutions and that Bishop Livinhac should rather choose for himself a private secretary to relieve his official burden to the maximum. In addition, if the Lord were to call him to Himself prematurely, *'Propaganda would find no problem in authorising the Assistant General to remain as Vicar General of the Society until the 1926 Chapter'* (Minutes of the 1920 Chapter, preparatory session).

The following day, the 15<sup>th</sup> April, at the first official General Assembly, and in line with the custom of the time, they begin with the election of the General Council, which only concerned the four Assistants General. On the first ballot, Fathers Voillard and Marchal were elected, very soon joined by Fathers Michel and Constantin. The meeting concluded with the election of Father Voillard as First Assistant General. In the afternoon, the Assembly formed five working committees that were given the following subjects to study:

- Committee 1: studies, the apostolate, the clergy and native Auxiliaries;
- Committee 2: our Constitutions and the new Code of Canon Law; the Chapter, the exercise of authority, administration.
- Committee 3: Formation Houses
- Committee 4: management of material life

With the preambles thus set up, the Chapter could enter into its work as such. It was to last from the 16<sup>th</sup> till the 27<sup>th</sup> April and would hold 18 Assemblies.

## **B) Main Issues addressed**

**1) – The apostolate** – the issue of major seminaries and the clergy held an important place in the discussions concerning the apostolate. Firstly, the Chapter put forward a motion in favour of the creation of joint regional major seminaries for several Vicariates where it was needed, a proposal actively supported by Bishop Roelens and Bishop Sweens. Linked with this matter, the more sensitive issue of relations between missionaries and ‘native clergy’ was raised (at the 16<sup>th</sup> General Assembly). Should they live in the same communities or form separate communities for diocesan priests? Several Vicariates already had a degree of experience in this matter, notably in Kivu, Uganda and Nyanza. Some Vicars Apostolic expressed their viewpoint on the issue, notably Roelens, Streicher, and again Gorju. What was at stake concerned accompaniment in the formation of young clergy, but also difficulties due to cultural differences. One speaker defended the general point of view, reckoning that ‘*their minds cannot be adapted to this condition,*’ (however, it was not added what had to change in the minds of the priests concerned!) Another, however, recalled that they were speaking not of seminarians but of priests, who had therefore completed the whole cycle of their formation. Finally, a long speech by Father Voillard, speaking on behalf of the Superior General, showed that the situations were different and the assessments likewise; it would therefore be better at that point to allow each Vicariate to decide on it and leave to the General Council the responsibility of following up situations and intervening if required. After this prolonged period of experience, the next General Chapter would be able to legislate on the matter. The Chapter approved these proposals and voted accordingly.

Several subjects concerning the missionaries themselves and community life were also addressed in the discussions. In this way, the problem of appointing missionaries to some regions under British control, since non-British subjects had to have a residence permit from the Colonial Office was raised. However, there was hope that this rule would be relaxed. This situation, however, did not prevent the Chapter from emphasising the increasing importance of English for the mission and its study should be seriously considered for the novitiate. ‘*In a show of hands, the Chapter conceded the learning of English, whose usefulness was universal in the Society.*’

Still in relation to mission, the Assembly then addressed a matter, which, it seemed, drew the undivided attention of the capitulants: that of the retarded state of mission in territories under French rule. It concerned regions that at the time were called the Soudan. The dossier was presented by Bishop Nouet and Bishop Lemaitre. The comparison with the mission in Central Africa indeed made French-speaking West Africa appear retarded, due largely to the reluctance and sometimes open hostility of the colonial authorities to the missions. However, conditions were observably in the process of changing.

Here are the main passages of this debate, quoted according to actual minutes of the Chapter. The very first consideration should be noted in particular as it gives the full scope of the developments that were to follow.

*'The contribution of the Colonies in the War created a substantial movement of opinion in their favour (in favour of the Colonies, Author's Note); Ministries and various associations on their side took considerable interest in them. On the other hand, we know that our Society has obtained marvellous results in the missions on the Equator and desires to do likewise in territories submitted to France. (...) Doubtless we cannot be reproached for having acted in a weak matter in the past, when we were under the yoke of persecutive laws and up against the irritation and unworthy interpretations of some civil servants of the Colonial Administration. However, at present, we expect to benefit from the benevolence of the Government to develop without delay the works that concern the intellectual and economic progress of the colonies. Acting otherwise would be to clash with the powers that be and public opinion. The timing would be unfortunate as it has been decided to intensify recruitment for the Society in France'* (Minutes, p. 336)

A little further on, two reflections are seen to complete the exposé on the situation:

*'Fr. Dubernet adds that on account of colonial Islamic policy, a considerable obstacle to our endeavours in the Soudan, the Government is beating retreat. This has earned us personal status in favour of Catholics and it is a further reason to act...'*

*'Bishop Roelens also pointed out that if we wish to be prudent, we need to keep spaces wide open in French colonies; if any political upheaval should prevent the entry of French missionaries to the Vicariates of Equatorial Africa, they would find an open field for their apostolic activities.'*

The debate concluded by a quasi-unanimous vote in favour of an effort to intensify the mission of the Society in French territories, according to modalities that were left to the decision of the General Council. This debate threw an interesting light on the tardiness of evangelisation in French West Africa in this first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It also marked a reality that would progressively be strengthened in the decades to come, i.e., the impact of the War on the inhabitants of the colonies, their aspirations and the attitude of the authorities towards them. Jerusalem, also traditionally highly placed in the Society's mission was mentioned, but this time in proposing a reduction in the number of missionaries.

*'Before the War, St. Anne's absorbed a staff of around twenty Fathers and Brothers. It seems that this number can be reduced without hardship. Junior seminary courses, can, at least in part, be taught by Greek Melkite priests from the Major Seminary.'*

Other points concerning the apostolate were also addressed, often to confirm or add to orientations already in progress. In this way, the Chapter once again confirmed the rule of the four-year catechumenate and requested Vicars Apostolic and Regionals to oversee its implementation. Equally restated was the importance of language study and it was even proposed that knowledge of at least one local language should be obligatory for a missionary to be appointed Vicar Apostolic or Regional. More experienced missionaries should also apply themselves to writing down what they knew of the habits and customs of the people so as to help younger ones know the environment better. Finally, the Chapter spoke of some abuses that appeared to do serious damage to the missionary spirit and the example given to the people. In this way, business practices and excessive game hunting by some was vigorously condemned, but also foodstuffs and other luxury expenses on tobacco, liqueurs, coffee, etc, as well as carelessness in dress, etc. In these discussions, it was clear that there was a desire to warn, without condemning everything as such, lacking discernment. Often, an appeal to fidelity to the norms established by the Directory was made the point of reference.

It may seem surprising that in the course of this General Chapter, there was practically no reference to the particular conditions relative to the apostolate in Islamic countries. The issue was only addressed once, as though in passing. Indeed, in the General Assembly (the ninth, on the 21<sup>st</sup> April) the difficult situation of priests in south Oran, neighbouring the apostolic prefecture of Ghardaia, and the abandoning of a part of these territories to another

Congregation was foreseen. A number of objections were then made and one of the arguments put forward against this plan was that of our tradition.

*'This abandoning would mean that we are not interested in the Arab mission in these surroundings, which would be going against the whole history of our Society, or admit that this mission will never succeed; the author of this Report reckons this to be absolutely false'* (Minutes p. 335).

Despite this appeal to a tradition recognised by all, no reflection was raised on the particularities of this mission in Islamic countries, nor on the preparation of missionaries to live there. We would have to wait until the next Chapter for this question to avoid being brought up so briefly.

## **2) Organisation and government of the Society -**

An important question would obviously be addressed in this Chapter: that of the possible upgrading of the norms of the Constitutions under the new Code of Canon Law, promulgated in 1917. The issue had been prepared and Father Michel made an accurate report to the Assembly stating, point by point, the changes to make to the Constitutions. Some points were subject to discussion, such as the obligation of making an eight-day retreat before the Oath, or the choice of a routine confessor for the communities, etc. The Preparatory Committee did good work and the Chapter did not linger much on these matters.

This 1920 Chapter was no exception to the tradition for emphasising a few other issues already discussed in previous Chapters, which seemed at the time genuinely difficult to resolve once and for all. Two issues in particular that fall into this category should be mentioned: that of the creation of the Provinces and the running of General Chapters.

In discussions regarding the possible erection of Provinces in Europe, the first country named was Germany. We saw in the preceding pages how the Assembly had actually decided to make this country a Province. The question was not simple in the context of the time, and we need to review here some aspects of these discussions that took place during the eighth General Assembly on the 20<sup>th</sup> April 1920.

The Chapter heard, as has been said, the report of Father Théodore Frey. The latter advocated maintaining the Society in Germany by developing the following arguments: the reputation of the Society is well established in the country, the benefactors are generous, and the White Fathers enjoy the consideration of the clergy and the faithful. The candidates themselves had made great sacrifices to respond to our call and in his encyclical on the Missions the Holy Father clearly stated that the question of nationality does not count in the field of the apostolate (Encyclical *Maximum Illud*, 1919, Pope Benedict XV). the author of the Report also wished to pay homage to the fidelity of his German confreres with regard to our fraternal ideal and missionary spirit:

*'German confreres have proved to have a real spirit of charity, of attachment to the Society and to its Superiors, of regularity and sacrifice.'*

No doubt touched by this testimony, and convinced that everything had to be done to avoid a split in the Society, Father

Voillard spoke just before the vote, which we know would be favourable to maintaining unity.

*'After some words from Reverend Father Voillard requesting everyone, in his own sphere, to apply himself to forgetting the past, in order to obtain pacification so as to see only the apostolate, we will proceed to a secret ballot...'*

The Capitulants then reviewed other countries where the Society had experienced some development. The case of Belgium was the first to be mentioned and Bishop Roelens explained that it had the personnel, the houses and the necessary resources to be erected into a Province. Father Voillard however raised the issue of the difficulties between the Flemish and Walloons, but his object was not really taken on board and the Assembly passed a motion that remained, it has to be said, very prudent. *'The Chapter creates the Belgian Province, leaving to the Council the care of constituting, at the proper time and when required, the required organisation.'*

The case of Holland was more simple. Although this country did not have the required elements to constitute a Province (recruitment houses, formation centres), it was the country that had the greatest number of Society members outside France. The Chapter therefore decided to erect a Dutch Province and once again entrusted the General Council with the follow-up of this decision.

The last country to be reviewed by the Chapter in view of making it a Province was France. To understand the discussions concerning France, the paradoxical situation of the government and the Society has to be restated. The Superior General and his Council were based in Algeria, but for obvious reasons, the first place for the development of the Society was naturally France in terms of vocations, donations and financial aid, links with the institutions of the Church, and more generally, logistics.

It therefore appeared quite logical to appoint a real Superior for this country, let us say, a Provincial. However, there was precisely a degree of fear among the missionaries and even more among the Superiors to seeing France become too autonomous, thereby diluting the unity of the Society. Despite reservations from Father Voillard, the Assembly finally voted for the creation of a Province of France, in which houses directly intended for recruitment would be opened in the course of time.

In fact, the title of 'Province' of France is misleading, as in this Province there are also the houses of Paris, Marseilles, Saint Laurent d'Olt, Lille and Altkirch, in addition to those of Antwerp, Autreppe and Gits in Belgium, Boxtel in the Netherlands, St Moritz in Switzerland and Bishop's Waltham in England. Finally, before closing this section of the Chapter's work, it has to be restated that the great discussion on the erection of Provinces remained rather virtual. The Chapter had no intention whatsoever of actually creating genuine Provinces in the canonical meaning of the term, i.e., with formation houses, a person-in-charge who would be a Major Superior, etc. It was more about dividing it up to facilitate local or regional government, while the Mother House continued to exercise the general direction of the collection of houses and establishments in Europe.

The discussions on the composition and functioning of General Chapters are in a way, easier to understand. indeed, there are recurrent issues in this area, and besides that one finds again in recent General Chapters: ensuring proper representation without excessively increasing the number of Capitulants; keeping the priority to the elected members without however excluding the possible ex officio members whose experience can contribute much. Another issue was to place the elections of the Superior General and his Assistant at the most appropriate time in the running of the Chapter, etc. Precisely on this last point, some still propose, as in 1912, that the elections should be pushed forward into, or even at the end of, the Chapter. However, at 30 votes to 6, the Assembly voted to maintain the status quo: the elections would continue to take place from the first General Assembly. A proposal asking for the Chapter agenda to be communicated to the Capitulants in advance was also denied. (This

agenda is made by the Council based on the requests and proposals sent by the delegates). The request was refused and the Capitulants were to learn of this agenda on arrival at the Mother House.

### 3) Community life and personal property

It was not the mentality of the time, generally speaking, to develop the reflection in the course of a General Chapter on what we would call today attentiveness to the situations and particular needs of individuals. Nevertheless, in one or other discussion, some reflections or proposals concerning this type of issue were noted. It was also stressed that too frequent changes of appointment (the texts speak of *moves*) should be avoided to the maximum, because they expose missionaries to discouragement (Minutes p. 341). Another consideration emphasised taking account of differences in attitudes according to nationalities, with the following wish:

*'Our Society, as an international Apostolic Society, asks whether it would be timely not to go into details when it comes to the regulation of secondary points and in the establishment of less important customs and practices, in order to be able to adapt more easily to different environments'* (Minutes, p. 339).

Nevertheless, such a proposal no doubt appeared lax to some Capitulants and above all was opposed to the conviction that fidelity to the Rule and the Directory did not leave room for subjective interpretations. In fact, the Minutes continue: *'As the Committee found the question vague, the Chapter did not take it into consideration.'*

The issue of the Brother Coadjutors was addressed under a dual aspect: the tasks confided to them and fraternal relations with the Fathers. We recall that a Father has to be responsible for the Brothers and there is an authority in exercise to order for tasks to be done, even if these tasks do not enter into the sphere of the Brother's speciality. Father Voillard then reminded the Fathers to see to it to leave a degree of initiative to the Brothers, and take an interest as well in what they are doing. He adds this remark, surprising today, and which reflects the mentality of the period,

*'We must show genuine kindness to the Brothers, so that they do not feel treated as outsiders; but do not assign them either the same consideration as to Priests'* (Minutes of the Chapter, p. 342).

The Chapter then addressed the case of some missionaries in personal difficulties and who had to leave the mission, although they were not affected by age or infirmity. The remainder of the text leaves no ambiguity about the situations brought out, since the Chapter foresees creating for them *'...a special house, under a rule and with special surveillance, i.e., a house of penance, so to say.'* It may seem surprising to read such a proposal, but if this is mentioned in full Capitular Assembly, there was a real problem to face. As the rest of the text leads us to understand it, it was in fact about Fathers and Brothers, explicitly adding, besides, that there were not many of them. They lived in unacceptable situations with adults or children, or whose temperament made them too difficult to live with in community and that visibly they could not extricate themselves from these situations by themselves. The discussion, moreover, was pursued with restraint and without crushing the persons concerned:

*'The issue has always preoccupied the Council and we found no solution so far preferable to that envisaged. The one (the solution) that causes the least inconvenience is to set it up at the Mother House. These Fathers, besides, few in number, could find work, and be in full view of Superiors, without the opprobrium that this house is a prison.'*

The discussion ended with a renewed appeal to Vicars Apostolic and Regionals to watch over respect for rules of prudence, while recommending avoiding haste in sending away difficult

Missionaries. On a less complicated note, the Chapter also spoke of confreres who were sick or simply tired out. It wished in this way to distinguish the Sanatorium reserved to the sick and another house to welcome tired out missionaries. It was obvious that the Sanatorium, near the Mother House was too small and that other solutions had to be sought, without it needing specific decisions in follow-up.

**Conclusion** – This 1920 Chapter closed on Wednesday the 28<sup>th</sup> April, and as was customary before leaving, the Capitulants renewed the Act of Consecration of the Society to Our Lady by reciting the prayer composed at the 1894 Chapter. Some days later, on the 13<sup>th</sup> May, Bishop Livinhac sent a circular letter to all the members of the Society to give them a report on the quality time experienced by the Assembly (Circulaire n° 127). He related how during the Chapter the biography of the Founder written by Baunard was read at meals, adding,

*‘It was fitting, in fact, that our highly revered Father was, as much as possible, among us in spirit to inspire the representatives of the Society – to whom it owes its existence. With this in mind, we placed one of his finest portraits in the Chapter Hall.’*

In addition, he went on to detail in which spiritual climate he had intended to place the Chapter:

*‘I proposed to the Capitulants to consecrate the Chapter to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, through the intercession of Mary Immaculate, our Mother and Patroness, pointing out that this was the intention in placing at the right and left of Cardinal Lavignerie’s portrait the picture of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and that of the Sacred Heart of Mary. (...) This Chapter, coming after the upheaval of the Great War, seemed to me decidedly one of the most important held since the beginning of the Society. I felt that we would have great need of Divine Assistance and this consecration seemed to me the best means to ensure ourselves of it...’*

He then introduced the presentation of the decisions taken by the Chapter by reminding them that this Assembly is the principal power of the Institute and that everyone, Major Superiors and Missionaries, must accept them as the authentic expression of God’s Will. a particular mention was made of the Directory. Livinhac reminded them that he was present at the previous Chapter that had proposed some amendments. The present Chapter fully approved of the final draft and from then on everyone was invited to read it attentively and to conform to it.

We can conclude, at the end of this journey, that the 1920 Chapter was held in a rather classic context, both in the issues addressed and in the style of the discussions and mentalities that were revealed in them. It would be too easy to reproach this Assembly for its lack of awareness of new trends in ideas that were emerging in several western countries as well as in Africa itself. However, the context in which the majority of Missionaries lived should not be forgotten. The means of information at this time remained limited, slow and costly, especially in Mission countries. Fathers and Brothers only rarely returned to their home countries and had few means to know and understand the developments that were experienced there. Doubtless it was difficult, in these conditions, for a General Chapter to reflect a thorough knowledge of the changes in progress in the world and to take inspiration from them for the discussions. Moreover, this situation would hardly develop in the years ahead, as can be observed in the course of the following Capitular Assembly.

## V

### 16<sup>th</sup> General Chapter: 1926

#### A) Between two Chapters

At the start of the previous Chapter, we noted how much the report of its activity prepared for the Congregation of Propaganda Fide for the 1920 Chapter practically passed over in silence the impact of the 1914-1918 War on the Society. In fact, not only was this impact profound, but the General Council had taken good account of its importance. This is what the beginning of another report, written some years later, leads us to believe. Published as a Supplement to *Rapports Annuels*, 1930, here is an extract:

*'The Great War of 1914-1918 will count among the memorable testing times of the Society: it stopped its recruiting, it decimated its Missionaries. At the end of 1914, there were 658 Fathers and 242 Brothers; at the end of 1919, these figures were reduced, the first to 631, the second to 215. In the Missions, apostolic works were in part suspended due to the mobilisation of a great number of Missionaries as nurses, interpreters or even combatants. Once the peace was signed, the normal run of affairs gradually resumed...'* (Supplement to *Rapports Annuels* n° 25.)

The text of the Supplement continues by indicating how, for 1921, applications to join the Society multiplied while its apostolic activities were developing significantly, notably by the increase in the number of Vicariates Apostolic entrusted to the Society. Indeed, their number climbed from eleven to seventeen in a decade (1920-1930), principally by the dividing of already existing Vicariates. Therefore, development in apostolic activities, founding of new posts and the increase in missionary personnel caused this 1920 Chapter to stand out from the one that followed in 1926. This development of the Society would coincide with the pontificate of a new Pope, Pius XI (1922-1939), who so actively supported the Church's missionary apostolate. Moreover, another important event, even if of another order, was to mark the society's history for this period: the death of Bishop Livinhac.

**Death of Bishop Léon Livinhac** - It is probably difficult for Missionaries of the Society today to grasp what the death of Bishop Leo Livinhac in 1922 represented for their forebears. He was an emblematic figure, both by his long companionship with the Founder, for his participation in the first caravan to Equatorial Africa in 1878, and by the reputation of holiness he had gained in the Society. Finally, as Superior General, he exercised a mandate of exceptional length, since he governed the Society for practically thirty years from the death of the Cardinal in 1892 until his own death on the 11<sup>th</sup> November 1922 at the Mother House, *Maison Carrée*.

The *Petit Echo* of August 1922 even then informed the confreres that the Superior General, aged 77, was suffering an increasingly steep decline in his health and that his doctors were seriously concerned for his condition. In fact, Bishop Livinhac was to continue to slowly lose his strength. Subsequently, we were to learn that from 1921 he had practically transferred the main government of the Society to the hands of his Assistants, notably the Vicar General, Father Voillard. We recall that the previous Chapter had foreseen the eventuality of this death

and that Father Voillard would effectively, with the agreement of the Holy See, become head of the Society by right, until the holding of the next General Chapter planned for 1926.

**The Uganda Martyrs** – The official recognition by the Church of the Uganda Martyrs was another even of great importance for the mission and the Missionaries marking this period between two Chapters. For confreres, the Superior General revisited the whole history of the dossier submitted to the Holy See in view of the beatification of the Martyrs of this country in a circular letter of the 1<sup>st</sup> May 1909 (n° 83). In it, he recalled how, after many setbacks, the dossier was reactivated in 1906, thanks to the initiative of Cardinal Vivès, a member of the Roman Congregation of Rites. With the time taken to gather once again the required documents, the Congregation officially opened a dossier in February 1909 in the Martyrs' cause. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1910, (circular n° 88), he spoke of it again pointing out that the dossier was in progress and that Father Burtin, Procurator of the Society at Rome, had been officially informed that the process of beatification was taking its course.

Two years later, the long-awaited news was finally communicated to the Superior General. On the 14<sup>th</sup> August 1912, Pope Pius X signed the *'Decree of Introduction for the Cause of Beatification or Declaration of Martyrdom of twenty-two Venerable Servants of God; Charles Lwanga, etc.'*

Bishop Livinhac communicated the news in his circular letter of the following 8<sup>th</sup> September. In another letter a month later (25<sup>th</sup> October 1912), he laid down instructions for thanksgiving celebrations throughout the Society. It would nevertheless be eight years before the beatification of the Uganda Martyrs was officially proclaimed. Bishop Livinhac announced it in a letter of the 6<sup>th</sup> March 1920, with numerous details concerning the kindly attitude of the Holy Father; the entire letter was imbued with a deep joy. The celebration of the beatification was fixed for the 6<sup>th</sup> June 1920, Trinity Sunday, a few months therefore after the end of the Chapter of the same year. It is important to remember these dates, aware of the echo this place of honour given to the Uganda Martyrs would subsequently have in the Society and throughout the African continent. We recall that these twenty-two witnesses to the faith, evangelised amongst others by Father Livinhac and Father Lourdel were canonised by Pope Paul VI on the 18<sup>th</sup> October 1964.

## **B) Preparation of the 1926 General Chapter**

**1) 'The Society and its Works (1921-1931)'** – In order to enter into the dynamics of the 1926 Chapter, as for previous Chapters, there are several preparatory documents, more precisely, several reports. Before presenting them, we nonetheless have to refer to the Supplement to Rappports Annuels n° 25, already mentioned at the beginning of the present Chapter. It is a booklet of about fifty pages entitled *'The Society and its Works for the decade 1921-1931'*. This dossier, labelled *'Reserved to Missionaries'*, gives a global vision of the activities and implantations of the Society as they evolved in the course of the decade under review. The first chapter entitled, 'The Growth of the Missions' reviews the various Vicariates Apostolic run by the Society with the list of their respective posts. Chapter two is devoted to the works as such, various apostolates, seminaries, catechists, Sisters, etc. The third chapter is entirely given over to the North African mission and finally the last chapter presents the Society's Procures, recruitment houses and formation centres.

This document provides much information on the Society's missions and activities. It is important to mention it here, even if its publication has no direct reference to the 1926 Chapter. This text is interesting for another reason. It is quite representative, in fact, of a certain pride taken in the work accomplished, in the spirit which inspired many missionary institutes of this period. There is a ready insistence on the considerable importance of the

works and prosperity of foundations and various activities as well as in the titles and subtitles of chapters or the table of contents, the progress of the Society and the growth of the Missions is explicitly mentioned. This approach would be surprising today, but it was the mentality of the times. All these promising results were readily put forward as the obvious sign of the Lord's blessing on the Society and its missionaries, without always sensing perhaps that there was a degree of self-satisfaction in this way of presenting the statistics.

**2) Circular Letter of convocation to the Chapter** - On the 15<sup>th</sup> April 1925, Father Voillard drafted a circular letter addressed to all the Missionaries officially announcing the holding of the next General Chapter, convened for the 15<sup>th</sup> April 1926 at the Mother House at Algiers.

In the first part the text presents the composition of the future Capitular Assembly. There will be sixteen ex officio members and therefore seventeen elected members; these last are divided as follows: one for each of the eleven Vicariates Apostolic, one for the missions of Algeria-Sahara, one for each of the three 'Vice-Provinces' of France, Germany and Belgium, and two for the circumscription of the Mother House.

The text then gives the list of the various communities constituting the circumscription of the Mother House and of the three Vice-Provinces. This list could surprise us as it sometimes regroups houses seen today as hard to imagine what would unite them at the level of the government of the Society. Here are the details. For the circumscription of the Mother House we have the Mother House at Algiers, the Ste-Marie Novitiate, the Sanatorium and chaplaincy at St Charles de Kouba. Then there are the three posts of Tunisia: Carthage, Saint Cyprien de Carthage and Thibar; two communities in Italy: Rome and Parella; one in England: Bishop's Waltham, and one in Canada: Quebec. It includes the seminaries of Kerlois (France), Autreppe (Belgium), and Saint Anne's (Jerusalem) Saint Paul at Kipalapala; the Procures of Daressalam (sic) and Mombasa, and finally, the Buenos Aires community.

The Vice-Province of France, for its part, numbered nine communities: three Procures at Paris, Lille and Marseilles, four Apostolic Schools (Saint Laurent d'Olt, Altkirch, Tournus and Saint-Maurice), and finally, two other communities at Pau and Guingamp.

The Belgian Vice-Province had four houses at Antwerp, Bouchout, Gits and Louvain in the country itself, to which were added, according to the text of the letter 'the stations of the Prefecture of Lac Albert, which the Council sees fit to join.' (This unexpected attachment was due to this Prefecture being temporarily deprived of a head).

Finally the Vice-Province of Germany also had four houses in the country itself, Trier, Haigerloch, Rietberg and Linz, to which were attached the community of Marienthal, Luxembourg, and the two houses of Saint Charles and Boxtel, in the Netherlands.

Two additions will enable us to understand this list better. First and foremost we are still under the regime of the Vice-Provinces; indeed, the Society still has no canonically erected Province or Region. This would be so for several years still, since the matter would be resolved at the following General Chapter. Moreover, we can be amazed at the mention of a community in Buenos Aires, Argentina. This house, which bore the official title of *Delegation of the Propagation of the Faith*, was founded in 1908 at the explicit request of the Holy See to make known and to develop the Works of the Propagation of the Faith in South America. It was to be closed down some years later.

After these details concerning the dividing up of communities for some electoral colleges, Father Voillard's letter continues in reiterating the rules established for the organisation of the votes, the designation of Deputies, the calendar to follow, etc. He then set out the prayers to be said in all communities when voting for the Deputies. A final paragraph at length adds that the holding of the 1926 Chapter will not prevent the Long Retreat from taking place at the

Mother House, as foreseen for the Missionaries concerned, i.e., those who had more than fifteen years on the mission and who had not yet done their Thirty-Day Retreat.

### **3) - Report to His Eminence the Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda.**

In conformity with the norms established by the Holy See for Congregations preparing a General Chapter, the Superior General prepared a report on the situation of the Society intended for the Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation of Propaganda Fide at Rome, Cardinal Van Rossum. In the introduction, Father Voillard reminded him how, after the death of Bishop Livinhac, on the 11<sup>th</sup> November 1922, the Holy See had appointed him ad interim, until the holding of the next Chapter.

#### A) The Development of the Institute and its works -

This first major section of the report is divided into four sections, the first of which is entitled *growth of Missions*. We learn that during the period 1920-1926, in parts of Africa entrusted to the Society, two new Vicariates were created. The Vicariate of Soudan was divided in two, Bamako entrusted to Bishop Sauvant and Ouagadougou under the direction of Bishop Thévenoud. Meanwhile, their unique predecessor Bishop Lemaître had been appointed Coadjutor then Archbishop of the See of Carthage. Likewise, the Vicariate of Kivu, up till then directed by Bishop Hirth, was divided in two, Ruanda (sic) with Bishop Classe and Urundi entrusted to Bishop Gorju. Bishop Hirth, old and sick, retired.

In this same period, two new Prefectures Apostolic were also erected: Lac Albert, taken from the territory of the Vicariate of Uganda, and Navrongo in the Gold Coast, up till then included in the Vicariate of Ouagadougou. The Report concludes this first part in recalling that the Society was thus responsible for 11 Vicariates and 3 Prefectures, plus the missions in North Africa that depended on the dioceses of Algiers, Constantine, and Carthage.

*The number of apostolic workers:* this is the title of the second section of this first part.

For these six years, the number of missionaries in the Society grew from 862 members to 1011, let us say, from 636 priests to 226 Brothers to 733 priests and 278 Brothers. The text recalls that during the 1914-1918 War, there were 48 priests and 10 Brothers killed in action. The Report goes on to mention the numbers in the Houses of Formation. There were 79 Novice Clerics and 72 Brother Novices, 139 scholastics at Carthage and 28 at the Trier Scholasticate. This listing concludes with a pious invocation of thanksgiving for all these vocations, immediately followed by a reminder of the Gospel text mentioning the abundance of the harvest and the small number of workers.

*Results obtained* were disclosed in the third section of this first part of the Report. The text then mentions in tens and hundreds of thousands the number of neophytes and catechumens, as well as statistics that mark a steep increase in both since the preceding Chapter. The 'remarkable development of the work of the native clergy' was then presented, with four already existing major seminaries (in Uganda, Upper-Congo, Nyanza and Ruanda). Included was the foundation by the General Council of an inter-Vicariates major seminary at Tabora for other Vicariates Apostolic. In the overall picture of territories entrusted to the Society there were 109 major seminarians, 705 junior seminarians and 46 native priests. On the side of Religious Sisters, only Uganda saw the founding of one Congregation, the Banabikira, which even then numbered 150 Sisters. However, encouraging plans were in progress in other Vicariates.

*The number of Houses in the Society* – This final section listed the communities situated in Europe and Canada for purposes of vocations, finances and logistics. The text thus explains that since the preceding Chapter, two houses were founded in France, Tournus and Guingamp; three in Belgium, Louvain and Namur, as well as a philosophy house at Autreppe for English aspirants. In Quebec, a postulancy was opened for Brothers in the diocese of Saint-Hyacinthe; in Italy, a house was founded at Parella, and finally two new Apostolic Schools were founded in Germany, one in the Rhine region and the other in Bavaria. It was therefore a broadly positive balance sheet. One could sense that the editor revealed this with a certain pride, which would also show through in the second part of this Report.

## B) Current Situation of the Institute -

**1) In relation to the morale** - This second and final part of the document is more taken up with a sort of report on the morale. The text firstly speaks of a *regular life* and the practice of *apostolic virtues* by the Missionaries. Father Voillard dwelt at length on the remarkable influence that Bishop Livinhac's government had through the lessons he taught and by his example. He did a great deal to encourage the Missionaries and helped them deepen their spiritual life. He added that the practise of the Ignatian Thirty-Day Retreat contributed greatly to the spiritual well-being of the Society; every year, 23-30 missionaries followed this Long Retreat.

The report continues to say that community life remains one of the characteristics of the Society and that all the Missionaries are very attached to it. Nevertheless, the text becomes less self-assured here. Whereas it shows the international character of the Capitular Assembly that was due to gather, (without mentioning however that the vast majority of the Assembly was French), it hints of a possible serious problem in the future.

*'Up to now, nationality issues have had little impact on the Society. We have the proof of this in the very composition of the present Chapter. The Capitular Assembly, in fact, numbers 4 Belgians, 2 Dutch, 1 Swiss, 1 Canadian and 1 German, whereas the Constitutions do not regulate for anything in this respect. However, it would be pointless to close our eyes to any of the realities that are arising. It is impossible not to recognise that one of the most universal consequences of the terrible 1914-1918 War was to cause an acute intensification in nationalist sentiment. As a result, public opinion, under the influence of this feeling, tends to ask, at least where the Society has few members, that the citizens of the same country, as far as possible, be grouped together for their formation or for the exercise of the apostolate. It seems that it would be prudent to some extent to consider this shift in public opinion in the future.'*

This remark is a clear and courageous statement in a text up to now marked by good results, progress and success than by challenges. It illustrates precisely, at its own level, what the history of our Society tells us throughout its development. Internationality was never a reality that was taken for granted. Missionaries of Africa in succeeding generations would continually renew their determination to keep this Gospel-based choice alive.

**2) In relation to material life** – This is the financial situation of the Society. The Report informs us that it is good in all areas as there have been no debts incurred. In mission territories, nevertheless, resources do not permit all the development in works that one would like. European moneys linked to colonial powers on the spot have variable and various exchange rates, further complicating the situation. On the other hand, the text explains that under the influence of new ideas, employing labour is becoming increasingly difficult. This passage deserves to be quoted as it addresses an issue that the texts still rarely treat at this

time, i.e., the evolution of mentalities and the socio-economic conditions of colonised countries.

*'We must also point out new difficulties arising from the staggering development caused in the habits, the kind of life, and the ideas of these primitive peoples, by the introduction of excessively rapid and intense habits and customs of civilized nations concerning comfort, well-being, freedom, etc.. Under the influence of these ideas and this action, the Black no longer wishes to work except at high rates; there are even some jobs for which we can no longer find workers, such as portage, for example.'*

**3) Relations with the colonial authorities** - The Report highlights that the situation is much improved over the past six years. In the territories under French control, in particular, the authorities are much more respectful vis-à-vis the missions than they were before the 1914-1918 War, readily acknowledging all the good done to the people by the Missionaries. In Belgian territories, collaboration is even more marked and missions receive substantial subsidies.

Furthermore, the Report concludes with some spiritual considerations and a fervent thanksgiving for the blessings on the Missions received from the Lord. Contrary to what had happened at the 1920 Chapter, this time the members of the General Chapter had full knowledge of this Report. Indeed, they were read during a session of the Chapter, and at the request of all the text was subsequently sent to all members of the Society.

**4) Report on recruitment and formation** – This is the second preparatory document intended for Capitulants which has reached us. Its full title is: *'The 1926 General Chapter: report on recruitment in the Society and on its formation houses.'* It was written by Father Henri Marchal, Assistant General, who adds as early as the introduction that the situation described in the document is that of the Society on the 1<sup>st</sup> January 1926. The text is not long, five typed pages, and the plan is of the simplest. A first part deals with *Recruitment* and lists the Formation Houses and the numbers of students. A second section entitled *The Running of Formation Houses* deals with the functioning of these communities and the spirit that prevails in them.

In 1926, Formation Houses were virtually the same as those mentioned in the Report to the Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda, quoted above, and we will not point out here any more than specific points. In addition, the text mentions the opening of a house in Pau, France, for the vocations apostolate, which will also accommodate some missionaries who need rest. It also states that the house purchased in Bavaria is located at Zaitskofen and provides services to the Apostolic School. Contacts were made in Spain, specifically in Pamplona, where Father Arrigui was well received, but they could not go forward for a plan to open a house without government approval. Finally, the text mentions the request made by several missionaries for the Society to emphasize seeking vocations in England and to make a foundation for itself in the United States.

In the second part, the Report addressed all matters concerning the internal running of Formation Houses. The buildings were both functional and modest. Moral training was provided with the utmost care by members of staff who are all dedicated Missionaries with experienced spirituality. The formation was provided with a prudent and firm zeal. The spirit was excellent and a real family spirit prevailed in the Houses, especially in relations between

staff members and the youth. However, after these reassuring statements, the report mentions a point which presents difficulties: younger generations do not always have the amenability and the spirit of obedience which inspired older generations, and the report continues

*'Postwar childhood and youth oppose the formative action of their masters with a wilful mentality, moral insensitivity, and an affected personality and independence that make the task uncomfortable and do not give them (masters) the desired satisfaction of success to form youth.'*

This is more evident in the Apostolic Schools, but these defects are usually corrected in the most advanced, notably in the Scholasticate. However, the Report continues, on their arrival in the Mission, some young Missionaries give an unfavourable impression and their elders complain of their excessive self-confidence and their lack of amenability. The Report concludes by raising the issue of studies. The Society must train Missionaries with degrees in religious studies, both for its own Formation house and seminaries in the Mission. For these reasons, we will continue to appoint young missionaries to studies in Rome.

At the Scholasticate, seminarians apply themselves, but they have a tendency to lack interest in so-called auxiliary studies, as well as the study of Scripture. In conclusion, and despite some reservations, *'recruitment and the running of Formation Houses has been the subject of special concern for the Council and the results during these six years were very satisfactory.'*

When this Report is read in detail, one cannot help but be surprised at the broad positive report it seems to express concerning the organisation of the Houses, the choice of teachers, regular activities, programmes, the value of the courses, the state of mind of the students, etc. The few reservations made are very quickly dealt with by saying that ultimately the results are very satisfactory. Without doubting everything presented on these pages one nevertheless remains with questions about an area as difficult as that of formation.

To name just a few points, we would have liked to see at least mentioned, for example, questions of spiritual direction, training in Ignatian spirituality, language courses, internationality, not to mention possibly openness to changes in Africa. Members of staff were aware of these issues, as demonstrated clearly in other documents, but it seems that such a Report should emphasise the positive, and possibly reassure Missionaries, perhaps worried that the formation of today was no longer what it was in their time!

**5) - Report on the administration of goods** – As the title indicates, this is about information concerning the Society's properties and the state of its finances. In the first part there is a long list of houses, Procuress or Formation Houses, in which work, repairs or improvements were necessary. New buildings are few, a house at Marienthal in Luxembourg, another at Linz, Germany, a mission station and a school in Kabylia. On the other hand, the text explains how measures have been taken to prevent the property used by the Society becoming the property of individuals, conflicts of interest having shown the dangers of this system. Regarding the finances of the Society, they are presented with the figures discussed briefly, and the assertion that with strict management, and despite fluctuations related to the diversity of currencies used, the finances of the Society remain sound and unencumbered by debt.

**6) Key Questions proposed** - Such is the title of a two-page document in the Archives, and has, as its title suggests, a list of topics to propose to the Chapter. The origin of the proposals is not indicated, nor the author mentioned, but it is likely that this list comes from the General Council itself. Was there any consultation with the missionaries for their suggestions? There is nothing to say so, and the custom at the time was to leave the initiative to the General Council to make a draft agenda. In any event, it is obvious that the Chapter will follow the proposals in this document almost step-by-step, notably through the major issues and topics distributed among the various working committees. All this work is now to be presented.

## C) The working of the 1926 General Chapter

This time again, the Chapter was to be relatively short: it lasted from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 23<sup>rd</sup> April, with the usual alternating of General Assemblies and committee meetings. Forty confreres took part in the discussions, including seven Vicars or Prefects Apostolic: their Lordships Birraux (Tanganika), Gorju (Urundi), Léonard (Tabora), Nouet (Ghardaia), Roelens (Upper-Congo), Sauvant (Bamako) and Thévenoud (Ouagadougou). After an opening session devoted to the roll-call of the members present and checking their mandate, they went directly into the next Assembly to elect the Superior General and his Councillors. In the first round, Father Voillard was elected Superior General by an overwhelming majority: he won 36 votes, against 2 to Bishop Birraux, one to Bishop Classe (not present) and one to Father Marchal. Then, fairly quickly, the team was completed with the election of the Assistants General: Fathers Constantine, Marchal, Jeuland and Meuleman. Father Marchal was elected First Assistant General.

The following day, the 15<sup>th</sup> April, the Assembly proceeded to form work committees, five in all:

- Committee on the Constitutions and the Directory
- Committee on Native Auxiliaries
- Committee on the Missions
- Committee on Material Questions
- Committee on the Press

1) The first important issue addressed by the Chapter, on presentation of a dossier by the first ad hoc committee, was **the regular recurrence of the General Chapter in the Society**. Many missionaries, indeed, believed that a Chapter meeting every six years was extremely burdensome, in money and travel, with long absences and all the problems this posed with, among others, the disruption to work teams in the Missions. However, the need for such a meeting at such close intervals was not clear; most major questions about the operation of the Society and apostolic work by now having received their responses. The issue was fairly quickly resolved, since as early as the 3<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly, it was decided by vote to extend the regular recurrence of Chapters from six to ten years. However, it was to refer the decision to the approval of the Propaganda in Rome, because it required an amendment to the Constitutions. Secondly, at the same time, it was requested that given the long period of ten years now foreseen, that in case of grave reason, the First Assistant General automatically replaces the Superior General until the following Chapter.

Let us say now that from this new provision concerning the regular recurrence of ten years of the General Chapters that it was approved by the Congregation of Propaganda Fide. From that date, Chapters only actually come together every ten years (except one year late in 1947, because of the just-ended Second World War II). This continued until 1967, when the General Chapter would return to a regular recurrence of six years.

2) Early in its agenda, the Chapter Assembly also discussed several questions concerning the **Formation Houses** of the Society. It thus decided that the Rectors of seminaries, junior and major, should discuss their work further. For this purpose, meetings between those in charge must be foreseen in order to promote unity in the methods and means used for the training of future missionaries. There is also talk of elementary rules of prudence to be used by staff members in receiving students for work meetings or spiritual counselling

3) The Press Committee, from the fourth General Meeting onwards, presented two questions to the Assembly. The first was about the internal **Annual Reports** in the Society. Normally each house prepared a report on its activities annually, reports that the Society published in full. The Chapter considered this to be too heavy and it was decided to maintain the Annual Report from each community, but it would be summarised at the level of Vicariates and Provinces, and only these reports from Vicariates and Provinces would be published at Society level.

4) The second issue addressed by the Press Committee was on a matter of quite a different order, what might be called **the memory of the Society**. Several speeches stressed that the original agents and witnesses of the origins of the Society and the beginnings of some foundations in several missions, had already disappeared or were very old. It was decided that each mission should be organised to write the history of its founding and first years. The Superior General himself intervened to suggest that a Missionary, at the Motherhouse, make a catalogue of all critical documents that are already there, and he then should contact the Heads of Mission to check and complete the documentation, if necessary.

What was the outcome of this decision? Only a detailed inventory of monographs actually written in the years that followed, mission by mission, would respond to the question, but the approach of the Chapter is already in itself meaningful. Let us note, however, that this project appears to limit its perspective to the history of the Missions only, not mentioning the development of the Society as a whole. It was not until the 1947 Chapter that the complete history of the Missions and the Society was to be programmed at Society level.

5) **Found an Arab college at Tunis?** The project was presented to the Assembly by Father Marchal on behalf of the Committee on Missions. We must say a word here about this Father Henri Marchal, who had just been re-elected a member of the General Council for the third time and elected First Assistant General.

*Father Henri Marchal* – Originally from the Diocese of Nancy, in eastern France, he joined the Society, already a deacon, the year after the Founder's death in 1893. He took his Missionary Oath in 1898 and was ordained a priest two years later, in 1900. He was then sent as a professor to the Scholasticate at Carthage, where, amongst other things, he taught Arabic. In the novitiate, he had already shown outstanding aptitudes and a great interest in the language. In 1905, he was appointed to the Sahara, the mission of his dreams for several years. At Ghardaia, his first posting, his colleagues were quick to note his aptitude for contact and his concern to reach out to the people, but above all the importance he attached to speaking the language well and knowing the doctrine of Islam itself and Muslim religious practices. Despite problems due to mistrust of the surrounding circumstances, Marchal continued to deepen the Arabic language, the customs and the faith of Islam. However, he also sees the difficulties his colleagues have to learn these skills, and he comes to reckon that the missionaries should be given special training regarding the Arabic language and knowledge of Islam. Fr David, one of his companions in the same post, bore testimony to what Father Marchal shared with them in this regard in 1907:

*'One day, Father Marchal shared with us his little cogitations, as he was used to saying. Regardless of their willingness to learn the language, the Missionaries' efforts will remain sterile until they have qualified teachers. Moreover, in his opinion, it is only at Tunis or Cairo that Fathers designated for the mission in North Africa would acquire sufficient science both in the language and in Muslim issues' (Souvenirs of Father David, in Notice p. 6)*

Regional Superior of Kabylia in 1909, Henri Marchal was elected Assistant General at the 1912 Chapter and continued in the exercise of this function, term after term, preferring to pay

particular attention to mission in a Muslim context. This is the Father who came to the 1926 Chapter, as has been said, on behalf of the Committee on Missions, with two projects to be submitted. The first concerned the establishment of a college that would accommodate all students, both Arab and European, at Tunis. The project, supported by Archbishop Lemaitre of Tunis, was presented as a throwback to college founded in Tunis in the lifetime of the Cardinal, and then subsequently closed. The secretary of the Committee added that at the time of writing, the only college in Tunis refused Tunisian children, and distinguished Tunisian would be strongly in favour of a foundation from the White Fathers. The Assembly quickly raised many objections. The colonial administration would certainly oppose such a project, which will make parents reluctant to enrol their children. Secondly, the cost of the staff would be very high, and added that *'the Fathers who would be appointed there would not prepare for the mission because they could not receive introduction there, either to the Arabic language or to Islamic customs'* (Minutes, 4<sup>th</sup> Session). The secretary then stated that the Committee, for its part, had unanimously voted against it; the Chapter Assembly did the same and the project was rejected.

## **6) Foundation of an Institute for the Study of Islam at Tunis**

The second proposal would experience a different fate, as it will give rise to an Institute that undergoes rapid growth and provides a valuable service to the mission, even until today. This was the foundation in Tunis of a study centre for Missionaries, dedicated to the Arabic language and Muslim religion. Given what has been said of Father Henri Marchal one can understand that this matter had been carefully prepared, and the secretary, supported by his committee, was able to present it with conviction. The subject is important enough, as also the decision, for us to give the full text of this discussion here, which also was not very long. Here's how Father Marchal justifies the project:

*'It is a fact that the Muslim issue concerns everyone, in the first place the Supreme Pontiff, who in his latest encyclical on the Missions draws attention to the Islamic question, so much so that he founded a Chair of Islamic Studies at the Oriental Institute at Rome. Secondly, the Catholic world expects something in this sense, especially from our Society, devoted from its beginnings to the evangelisation of the Muslim world.*

*Thirdly, the achieving of this apostolate is conditioned by the creation of a house for Islamic Studies. Indeed, we are faced with an ancient civilisation with which we must learn to get in touch with the ruling class and through it to reach all Muslim people. The establishment of this house of studies will not require, moreover, an increase in personnel in Muslim countries, because in the current situation, more staff would not give more results. a) The time has not come for a Generalate action facilitated by government assistance, b) Even if it were time, we could not profit from it, not having the trained staff at the moment.*

In addition to the issue being well-presented, the Assembly appears to have been aware of the importance of supporting and encouraging the presence and commitment of the Society in Islamic countries. In any event, the minutes do not record any discussion and simply conclude: *In a show of hands, the proposal is adopted.* We know that this decision gave birth, in 1928 to the Institute of culture and formation at Tunis which took the name IBLA (Institut des Belles Lettres Arabes) in 1931. Known later by the title La Manouba, this centre in 1960 became the Institut Pontifical d'Études Arabes (IPEA) and was transferred to Rome. Finally, in 1979, it became the Institut Pontifical d'Études Arabes et Islamiques (PISAI).

**7) Other topics** - Other matters covered by this Chapter should probably mention first the one concerning the presence of African diocesan priests in the Missionaries' communities. Opinions were expressed for and against, the minutes tell us, and finally it came down to the

following decision, which essentially repeats that of the preceding Chapter, namely that the presence of African priests is permitted with the approval of head of Mission and Regional. However, by adding the following clarification, it plainly shows the limits of openness among some missionaries: *It is recommended not to introduce them into communities where there would be indications of reluctance to receive them* (Minutes, 7<sup>th</sup> General Session, 20.04.26).

Another issue is discussed at some length, that of the special status of Kabylia; close to the Mother House, it is, it seems, too easily the place of short-term appointments or unexpected recalls of missionaries for other services. The Chapter took this situation to task and requested that it appoint someone in charge with authority and that staff would be more steady there.

Two other issues also concern the life and work of missionaries in the field. The Chapter restates the priority of language study for young missionaries, and asks for this purpose that a newcomer should not be appointed as a teacher in a junior or major seminary. Then came a question that often arose at the time: that of finding a balance between the number of days spent in the post for the benefit of community life, and days out on pastoral visiting tours. Moreover the question, as we remember during the discussions, was explicitly treated by the Constitutions and the Directory, but one can feel the tendency to increase the outings, and the Chapter is concerned about it. Finally, they remained at a total of 120 days allowed outside for each missionary, but the Chapter increases the long term outings from 8 to 15 days.

The Chapter, on its own behalf, reviewed the 1920 decision regarding the importance of visits to the missions performed by the Superior General and his Councillors. Concerning Brothers, two recommendations was accepted, one calling for Brothers to be trained for teaching in schools, the other to encourage Fathers who look after vocations to say that the Brothers in the Society are not exclusively devoted to manual work.

In the spirit of the times, finally, the Chapter also stopped to resolve points that seemed unimportant and yet were not, at that time, for the Delegates. This was the right for Missionaries to own a donkey or a horse, permission not to wear the burnous for meditation in the missions in West Africa, or permission to do only fifteen minutes of Spiritual Reading if there was a service of Stations of the Cross. However, it is also the same Assembly that is concerned for overworked colleagues and requested that the Vicars and Prefects Apostolic and the Regional Superiors be more attentive to this problem. This is to help the Missionaries to refer secondary tasks as much as possible to co-workers, and moreover not to open new mission posts without really having sufficient personnel, including the foreseeing of illness or unavoidable absences.

We cannot, in this study, include details of all the other points raised in the meetings and committees of this Chapter, but we may have knowledge of all these decisions by reading the Report provided some weeks later by the Superior General to all the Missionaries of Africa, as outlined below. What balance sheet can we make from this Assembly? Without underestimating the seriousness of the work provided, we cannot say that this Chapter was a major milestone in the history of the Society. It leans more towards continuity, sometimes repetitive, at a period, in the eyes of the Missionaries and their Superiors, when the institutions of government were well established, and where situations experienced in the missions were mostly well-controlled. Undoubtedly, there were developments, but they were perceived more in terms of adjustments to achieve objectives than in a perspective of self-examination. Were there signs then that should have been noticed concerning significant political or social changes? We remember the remarks made in this direction in the Pre-Capitular Report sent to Rome. Apparently, they were not included in the debates. However, we must beware of projecting onto the first quarter of the twentieth century the generalised

means of information and communication today, and the difficulty of updating for the Missionaries to keep abreast of events should not be underestimated. Even at a General Chapter, anticipating future developments for the African continent remained, in 1926, a challenge probably too difficult to overcome. By contrast, the next Chapter would already be aware, somehow, of the new realities that were to occur.

#### **D) Closing and Communication of decisions**

This 16<sup>th</sup> General Chapter completed its work on the 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1926. The day before, the Superior General, Father Voillard, sent a circular letter to all Missionaries to announce his own election and that of his Assistants. He added that following his letter would be found the Report addressed to Rome on the state of the Society, as previously stated. On the 12<sup>th</sup> July of that year, a new circular, numbered 2 in the Father Voillard collection of letters communicated to the whole Society the decisions taken at the Chapter. It stated that they would have to wait for Rome's response before releasing some of them and that the response of the Congregation of Propaganda would be found attached to the letter. From that time on, the Society was committed to a frequency of one major Assembly only every ten years, and the next Chapter would therefore be held in 1936.

# VI

## 17<sup>th</sup> General Chapter: 1936

*'My Lord Bishops,  
Reverend Fathers,*

*In a few days, it will be nine whole years since the last Chapter of the Society too place: it is, indeed, the 15<sup>th</sup> April, 1926 that it opened at the Mother House. Now, according to our Constitutions, the periodic cycle of Capitular Sessions is, at least since the last Chapter, of ten years, and therefore it is next year that the next meeting is to take place. The Council of the Society believes the time has come to take, without delay, all necessary steps for the preparation of this very important meeting. This is the intention of the present Circular.'*

This circular letter to all the missionaries of Africa by Father Paul Voillard, Superior General, is dated the 12<sup>th</sup> April, 1935 and it convenes the future Chapter, which will be the 17<sup>th</sup>, at the Mother House (Algiers), for the Sunday after Easter, in April 1936. It then gives the usual information about elections, information to which we will return.

The history of the Society during this interval of ten years is not the direct aim of this publication devoted specifically to the General Chapters as such. However, we cannot, in the precise context of the subject matter addressed here, avoid pausing here for a moment, to the extent that a General Chapter is expected to take into account changes, new situations and challenges that are presented in this interval. This is precisely one of the objectives of the report on the general state of affairs which is prepared by the Superior General before each Chapter. The rule was also followed in 1936, in the form of a rather developed document that we will now present, at least in its broad lines.

### **A) Report on the Society between 1926 and 1936**

It is a pamphlet of 62 pages in Petit Echo format whose title is '*The Society and its Works during the 1926-1936 decade - Ten-year Report read to the 1936 General Chapter - Reserved to Missionaries.*' It was divided into two large sections, the first on *The Society*, and the much more developed part entitled, *The Missions*.

**1 - The Society** - In twenty pages or so five major issues are successively addressed: recruitment, with a complete list of Formation Houses, then the statistics of the personnel, the situation of temporal goods, i.e., finances and equipment, the internal government of the Society, and finally relations with governments.

**1) - Recruitment** - With regard to recruitment, it was mainly done in Western Europe and Canada. The text adds that there were also some Missionaries from Poland and Algeria. Then the Report lists the communities of Missionaries, starting with those which, in North Africa, depended directly on the Mother House: in Algeria the Sanatorium for sick Brothers and Fathers, the two Novitiates, and the Chaplaincy to the White Sisters at St. Charles (Birmandreis). In Tunisia, there were two communities at Thibar, the seminary in Carthage and the Sanatorium at Bou-Kris. The Report then mentions some changes: service at the Basilica of Our Lady of Africa, in Algiers, was again entrusted to the Society in December 1930; the house, opened in Buenos Aires (Argentina) in 1898, was closed in 1934. A foundation was made in the USA in the city of Cleveland, in 1929, but after much difficulty

and little success it was closed in 1934 and replaced by a house opened in Montreal. We then find, in the same Report, the following table which gives a detailed list of communities, by country and type of house:

<i>Country</i>	<i>Apostolic Schools, Colleges</i>	<i>Philosophy Seminaries</i>	<i>Postulancy Brothers</i>	<i>Procures</i>
<b>France</b>	Altkirch	Kerlois	Condette	Guingamp
	Tournus			Paris
	St Laurent			Lille
				Marseilles
<b>Belgium</b>		Héverlé Scholasticate	Gits Novit.	Antwerp
		Bouchout		Namur
		Glimes		
<b>Holland</b>	Sterksel	Esch		Boxtel
<b>England</b>	Bishop's WP	Autreppe	St Boswell's	Heston
<b>Canada</b>		Everelle		Quebec
				Montreal
<b>Switzerland</b>	Widnau			
	St Maurice			
<b>Germany</b>	Haigerloch	Trier	Marienthal	
	Rietberg	Linz		
	Zaitschofen			
	Grosskrotenb.			
<b>Italy</b>	Catane (sic.)	Parella		

One observation is clear when comparing this list with what we know from previous years and the following decade, moreover, is the great mobility in the network of implantations. In the main countries involved in the search for vocations and fundraising, houses open, are kept for a few years, then the centres are moved and the houses are closed and another one opens elsewhere. Whatever the causes of these changes, fully justified in most cases, we can nevertheless question the inevitable negative effects of this relative instability, vis-à-vis the bishops or clergy, for example, not to mention other aspects such as the financial consequences, changes in leadership teams, etc..

At the same time, vocations are truly present and the Report notes for example that a special effort was made to promote the Brother's vocation: thus in 1936, the Society had three novitiates (Maison Carree, Gits in Belgium, Marienthal) and a total of 86 Novice Brothers. The Society also had many junior and major seminaries, often called Apostolic Schools, and totalling over 700 students. Not to extend these lists, we conclude by simply saying that in 1936 there were nearly 180 Novices and Scholastics divided into 400 international centres, in Algiers, Marienthal, Trier, Carthage and Thibar. The seminary in Carthage, indeed, opened in

the lifetime of the Founder, had to be split in September 1934, a new theology centre was opened at Thibar, Tunisia.

Finally, for young priests referred for more specialised studies, the Report mentions three communities, one each in Rome, Tunis, and Heston, London, where the Missionaries study programmes and teaching methods used in the British colonies.

**2) – The Personnel** - In this second chapter we find first of all the statistics. The Society had, on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1936, a workforce of 1,182 priests and 459 Brothers, a total of 1,641 missionaries. The breakdown by nationality is as follows:

	<b>Priests</b>	<b>Brothers Perp.Oath</b>	<b>Brothers Temp. Oath</b>
Germans	93	83	62
Americans	7	-----	3
British	31	3	2
Belgians	181	31	26
Canadians	93	6	13
French	574	43	22
Dutch	154	106	32
Italians	20	-----	2
Luxemburgers	10	7	4
Swiss	18	6	8
Ugandan	1	----	-----
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1182</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>174</b>

This table, presented here just as in the Report itself, is interesting in that it shows both the effort to internationalise the recruitment of Missionaries of Africa, and the disparity between the number of different countries represented. France remains a strong majority as a source of vocations, even if already in the years 1930-1940, countries like Belgium or the Netherlands are well represented in the Society. Finally, note that a total of 1,641 priests and 973 Brothers are actually on Mission, a proportion, or nearly 60%.

The Report continues by addressing the question of the morale of the Missionaries, and it explicitly refers to the equivalent document of 1926 to summarise the main findings. Piety, common sense, fidelity to the Rule and the missionary spirit are experienced by all the Fathers and Brothers. The young Missionaries, however, give some cause for concern:

*‘Those in charge of Missions, Regional Superiors and Directors of our formation houses notice in the younger generation a very pronounced tendency to external activity, to moving around, with a certain spirit of independence. There is a greater aptitude for material life, but also more attraction to comfort and well-being. This makes it more difficult to practice poverty, obedience, and true piety, virtues which are, however, so much recommended by our Revered Founder.’*

Despite these reservations, the Report is positive about the seriousness of the candidates. Regarding the Missionaries, a good group of experienced ones are already welcomed at the Mother House to follow the 30-Day Retreat *‘which significantly contributes to creating and maintaining this spirit of fervour and zeal prevailing in the Society’* (p. 13). 236 Missionaries thus took part in the Long retreat in the space of ten years.

The Report merely raises the question of temporal goods quickly by referring to the document presented elsewhere by the Treasurer General. He adds, however, we cannot fail to worry at the considerable expense entailed by the great development of mission works. As for the government of the Society, mention is made of the concern of Very Reverend Father Voillard to visit all the houses and missions of the Society. On the other hand, the Regional Circumscriptions were twice reviewed, especially in the areas of Tanganyika and Nyassa, either because of the increasing number of missions or because the development of the means of communication favoured the combination of certain geographical areas. Moreover, the text identifies key changes among the Major Superiors, in Africa or in the home countries of the Missionaries.

**2 - The Missions** - This second part of the Report extends to nearly forty pages, that is to say, two-thirds of the document. It is not possible, as part of this booklet, to present all the developments, but here is at least an outline. The text begins with a detailed presentation of missionary implantations of the Society presented under three headings: North Africa, West Africa and the African Great Lakes, the latter being subdivided into five groups: Southern Africa, Tanganyika Territory, Uganda Protectorate, Belgian Congo, Belgian mandated Territories. For each major region and each group, the document indicates the number of Vicariates Apostolic, their delimitations, the number of Missionaries, the number of baptised Christians and catechumens, with the increase recorded since the last Chapter.

Several pages are then devoted to the presentation of the group of Vicars Apostolic and other Heads of Mission. It is reported as well, for the past decade, the deaths of their Lordships John Forbes, Joseph Smith, John Joseph Hirth and Etienne Larue. Retired for reasons of age or health were Emile Fernand-Sauvant, Henri Leonard, Joseph Sweens, Henri Streicher and Mathurin Guillemé. During that same decade, eleven Missionaries were ordained Bishops as Vicars Apostolic: Paul Molin, Edward Michaud, Burkard Huwiler, Antoine Oomen, Edward Leys, Guillaume Trudel Alphonse Matthyssen, Oscar Morin, François-Xavier Lacoursière, Roy Alexander, and Oscar Julian. To this long list text were added the names of Marcel Paternot, Max Donders, Jean Van Sambeek and Benjamin Milinault, appointed Prefect Apostolic for the first-mentioned and Superiors of autonomous missions for the other three. This presentation concludes with a checklist of twenty-one missionary circumscription thus entrusted to the Society and its titulars.

Still in the chapter on Missions, the Report follows a review of major areas of the apostolate, and mentions seven of them. The first is the effort to promote a native clergy with the development of major and minor seminaries, and that in all major areas of apostolate, except in North Africa, the Report says, because 'Christians are not yet enough'. Then the report presents in turn the situation of catechists, the schools, Congregations and the promotion of native Brothers and Sisters. In the fifth position, the text provides an update on *European Religious Congregations working in our Missions*. The White Sisters are named in first place. However, a dozen other Institutes are listed as well, among which we note the Little Brothers of the Sacred Heart of Charles de Foucauld in Ghardaia, the Brothers of Christian Instruction of Ploërmel in Uganda and Ruwenzori, The Brothers of Charity of Ghent and the Bernardine Ladies of Oudenaarde in Rwanda (sic), etc. The last two sectors of apostolate presented are Catholic Action and the Press.

As can be seen through this summary, this Report provides a broad overview and is informative. We become aware of a very concrete way of the development in mission works and the rather remarkable increase in most Missions, the number of faithful and catechumens. At the same time, and as is usual in such documents at this time, there are no questions asked, or new challenges suggested. It will be up to the General Chapter to decide if they wish.

## **B) Other preparatory documents**

The Archives have several other texts put into service for the preparation of this 1936 General Chapter. It is not always possible to say whether they were prepared by the General Council before the arrival of the Capitulants, or if they were written by Capitulants before the Chapter or perhaps even in the early work of the Chapter. It must be remembered here that there was not then Pre-Capitular meetings organised as such, although admittedly, however, Missionaries were free to send their proposals to the General Council. It would in any case draw up a draft agenda, however, without having to communicate it before the Opening Session. On the other hand, the Directory in use at that particular time added that the General Council could communicate, along with the letter of convocation to the Chapter, the issues they felt needed to be addressed, in order to allow reflection and exchanges between confreres.

The few preparatory documents in question here are mostly neither signed nor dated. These are usually typed pages on one side, with a single sheet, or two or three together to form a small dossier. Most of these texts seem to come from the Missionaries themselves, as far as can be judged by their style and how they develop their arguments to present their proposals.

Three main issues stand out clearly from among all these documents: the organisation of the Society in canonically erected Provinces, the issue of lack of space in the current premises of the Novitiate, and some issues concerning the General Government of the Society such as the number of Delegates to the Chapter. Also included was the exact mandate of the First Assistant General (including the death of the Superior General), etc. We will see in the following pages how these issues have been addressed and processed by the Chapter.

Other issues are also mentioned in these preparatory texts, and some are worth mentioning here, although the Chapter ultimately does not address them all. Thus, there was a request to address the following points: the duality of the Official Mission in North Africa and Black Africa. Added to this was the entry of 'native priests' into the Society, and their presence as diocesan priests in our communities; entering the name of our Lady of Africa in our official name; asking more financial transparency from the Vicariates and Apostolic Prefectures, etc.

This variety of proposals reflects the interest of the Missionaries for the Mission and operation of the Society, but they also demonstrate the proper conception they have of the Chapter as a forum for discussion and guidance for the Society. Therefore, it is with multiple opportunities in timetabling and agenda that the Chapter can finally begin its work, which is at Maison Carrée, on the date foreseen of the 20<sup>th</sup> April, 1936.

## **C) The running and work of the 1936 Chapter**

After the inaugural Solemn Mass celebrated by Father Paul Voillard, Superior General, (we recall that there is no concelebration at the time, and all the Delegates have already said Mass individually) a preparatory Assembly proceeds to call the Chapter members present and check the validity of their mandates. While being consistent with the various rules of the Constitutions and the Directory in this matter, the General Chapter is declared open in accordance with the rules. After some practical information, the Superior General closes this first meeting and sets the rendezvous with the Capitulants for the next day at nine o'clock.

This Capitular Assembly numbers 48 members present out of 50 foreseen. The group of Vicars and Prefects Apostolic is formed of twelve Missionaries whose names are listed here, in the order given in the minutes of this first session. Roelens (Upper-Congo), Birraux (Tanganyika), Thévenoud (Ouagadougou), Molin (Bamako), Michaud (Uganda), Huwiler (Bukoba), Oomen (Mwanza), Morin (Navrongo), Roy (Bangweolo), Julien (Nyassa), Nouet (Ghardaia), and Paternot (Bobo-Dioulasso). Another group of ex officio members of sixteen Capitulants is constituted by the five Fathers of the sitting General Council, the Treasurer General, and five Regional Superiors (Uganda, Nyassa, Tanganyika, Soudan, Congo). There are also five Vice-Provincials (France, Holland, Germany, Canada, and Belgium). Finally, there is the group of elected Deputies constituted by 19 Missionaries coming from Regions and Vice-Provinces, in conformity with electoral rules laid out in the circular letters before the Chapter. We note there that contrary to appearances, the rule of the majority of elected members in relation to the ex officio members is perfectly respected. Indeed, curiously enough, it is calculated entirely on the basis of the number of Provincials and Regionals, the group of Vicars and Prefects Apostolic not taken into account at this level, as the Constitutions in force at the time testify (cf. articles 29 and 34).

**1) Working Committees and Elections** - The next day was taken up by the two major approaches that traditionally inaugurate the work of the Chapters. On one hand, there is the election of the Superior General and his Assistants; on the other, the establishment of Working Committees. The first approach, although solemn in its progress and of great importance for the Society, actually happened rather quickly. Indeed, from the second ballot, Bishop Birraux received the two-thirds of votes required and is thus elected Superior General. The Holy See was notified immediately, as its authorisation is required for Bishop Birraux to be relieved of his ministry as Vicar Apostolic of the Vicariate of Tanganyika. At the same time, Bishop Roelens, whose moral authority on the Capitular Assembly was to show itself throughout the Chapter, spoke to thank Father Paul Voillard in the name of all the Missionaries for his long years spent as Assistant and Superior General at the service of the Mission and the Society. He proposed to the Assembly to elect him Honorary Chairman of the Chapter. This was accepted unanimously.

**Joseph Birraux**, born in 1883, was the third child of a family of eight, settled in a small village in Haute-Savoie, in the French Alps. After passing a brilliant baccalaureate, he entered the Major Seminary of Annecy, and did philosophy and the beginning of theology. He then asked for admission to the Missionaries of Africa and entered the Novitiate in 1905. Once having completed his theological studies, he was ordained a priest in 1908 and then received an appointment for studies in Rome, where he earned a Doctorate in Canon Law. In 1911, he was then appointed to the Vicariate Apostolic of Tanganyika. After various ministries, including seminary professor at Karema, he was ordained Bishop and Vicar Apostolic of the same Vicariate in 1920. It was in this capacity that he participated in the 1926 General Chapter and of this the 1936 Chapter. His training, his missionary experience and human and spiritual qualities were certainly well-known in the Society since, as has been said, he was elected on the second ballot.

Bishop Birraux from then on took the chairmanship of the Assembly. Without delay, the Assembly proceeded to the first ballots to elect the Assistants General. Again things do not drag in the first round and Father Joseph Jeuland was elected Assistant; Fathers then elected are Jan Meeuwse, Frans Van Volssem and Henri Marchal. The last vote unsurprisingly chose Father Jeuland as First Assistant General. Voters therefore renewed two outgoing Assistants, Fathers Jeuland and Marchal for another term. During the next General Assembly, in the

afternoon, they established various five Working Committees. These were: Constitutions and the Government of the Society; Mission and Native Clergy, Formation Houses; life according to the Rule, temporal goods, that is to say, everything about Finance. Now the actual work could begin, but before that two preliminary steps were conducted in particular in the third and fourth General Assemblies.

**2) Two preliminary steps** - The first was the reading by Meuleman, outgoing Assistant General, from the 'Report on the operation of the Society and of the Missions since the 1926 Chapter.' This is the Report submitted at the beginning of this Chapter and which was thus communicated by the early work as a reference document for the Chapter members. This document will clearly make an impression on the Capitulants because at the next meeting, 22<sup>nd</sup> April that same afternoon, it was announced that at the request of the majority it should be printed and distributed to the Missionaries. Several stressed during these discussions there really were reasons to take pride in the striking apostolic results presented in this document, and some add, take pride in being White Fathers! In fact, in the Report, there is little room for self-criticism or mention of any failures or deficiencies in the ministry and life of the Society, and the Assembly was carried away by a sense of pride and self-assurance that, with hindsight, may have seemed somewhat presumptuous...

The second approach, of a different order, reflected the attention of all to emphasise unity in the Society. Indeed, the new Superior General spoke to Father Steinhage, Provincial of Germany, and expressed *'his fraternal greetings to all the confreres of the Province, separated from us more than others by circumstances well beyond our intentions, but with whom we are, however, cordially united.'* Nearly twenty years after the end of World War I, German nationals were still, in some cases, subject to controls and limitations of residence, particularly in Africa, and by this statement of the Superior General, he wished to stress that vibrant solidarity and unity remained among all White Fathers.

**3) The great debate: the erection of Provinces** - The subject had been expected, since several General Chapters had already talked about it, without really having decided anything up till then. Committee No. 1 was to present the issue in the debates, and very soon it turned out that the assembly fell into the same state of indecision and hesitation used in the 1920 and 1926 Chapters! On three occasions at least decisions already voted came back into the General Assembly and were now again under scrutiny. The minutes made the rift in the voting seem palpable. On the one hand, all agree that the Society must now be organised in authentic Provinces, but all at once sees the major risk of losing unity in formation and the spirit of unity that prevailed up to then among all the members of the Society. The question was turned over and back, listing all the disadvantages, then back on the advantages, etc. If there are several Provinces, there will sooner or later be national novitiates, several scholasticates, etc. All in fact fear that each national group is closing itself in on its own Province and thus it is the end of this internationality that stayed alive so far and so strongly in the tradition of the Society. Final decisions aptly reflect this kind of blockage to the idea of taking the plunge, since the Chapter submits the decision to the General Council:

*'The question was asked thus: is it opportune at this time to erect Provinces in the strict sense of the word? In a secret ballot of 47 votes to one, the proposal was rejected. The second question was then asked: is The Chapter of a mind to give the Council the power to create Provinces when the Council deems it appropriate? In a show of hands, the motion was carried unanimously.'* (Minutes, 8<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, 24<sup>th</sup> April, 1936, pm).

What will finally happen to this issue indefinitely re-debated? Curiously, it would be about ten years before the response was given. Indeed, on the 21<sup>st</sup> September 1945, in connection with the preparation for the future General Chapter to be held in 1947, Bishop Birraux addressed a long circular letter of forty pages to the whole Society to inform them of what has done and what the future Chapter was still to do. This is not the place to review this whole affair, but let us just say that in fact, given the circumstances related to the war and despite the incomplete nature of preliminary studies, Rome granted Provincial status with full rights to Canada, Belgium, France and the Netherlands. We find the complete record on this issue in the collection of circulars of Bishop Birraux Circular Letter No. 9.

**4) Five other important issues** - Among the many other issues addressed by the Chapter, some were deemed sufficiently important for the Assembly to adopt them repeatedly. Among these questions mention can be made of at least four: the formation of Missionaries; then whatever concerns the formation and standing of native priests, the issue of finance, the mission in North Africa, and finally the number of Capitulants.

**I** - The Chapter discussed at some length to a point that may now seem inconsequential: that of doubling the novitiate. Initially, there was the following observation: the number of novices was growing more and more and they could not keep them all in one community. However, then, the Novitiate was the crucible in which was transmitted the true spirit of the Society at an apostolic and community level, and if there are several centres of novitiate, this patrimony of the Society would it really be passed on in the same way to all? This conception of the unity of mind and formation may be too narrow now, but do not underestimate the symbolic value it had then for the Missionaries, the very location of Maison Carrée and its place on African soil. The debate is complicated by the fact that several Pro-Regionals rejected the idea of hosting a novitiate on their soil, Belgium, Holland or Canada. Admittedly, while there was indeed a novitiate in Mariental for German Brother Candidates, but this is a specific situation related to the consequences of the War. Finally, Bishop Birraux himself asked that the various proposals be put to the vote, and thus it is decided that the novitiate will be well and truly split and that the General Council receives a mandate to form a new centre in the circumscription it considers the most appropriate to receive it.

The question, however, bounced back when a few Capitulants raised the issue of splitting, this time already done, of the Scholasticate: the establishing of the new formation centre at St. Croix de Thibar (north-western Tunisia). Remove some of its scholastics to Carthage, and it destroys unity! It was then suggested that the first three years be done at Thibar, and the final year of theology at Carthage, and all would be together throughout the formation. Let us add here that, during this debate on the years of theology, the Chapter registered several proposals for the formation of professors and course organisation.

**II** - The second issue, discussed at length also, for the formation and status of African priests, 'native' priests as the minutes of the proceedings say. The Society was then in charge of several major inter-diocesan seminaries it had founded. The Chapter asked those who were responsible should be able to meet to establish the extent possible common standards for admission requirements, curricula, possible dismissals, etc. On the other hand, the outgoing Superior General mentioned another problem concerning these same major seminaries:

The T.R.P. Voillard said it appears to him that the Chapter has to say something about the tendency of Apostolic Delegates to organise seminaries. It is certain that the Society currently has a rather long and tested experience of the affair, while the Apostolic Delegates are far

from practical knowledge about it. So he proposes that Chapter expresses a wish on it, to be forwarded to the S. C. Propaganda’  
(Minutes of the 17<sup>th</sup> General Chapter, p. 426)

Thus the Vicars Apostolic considered that Apostolic Delegates improperly intervened to regulate the operation of their seminaries. The Chapter finally decided to send a request for explanation (actually a protest!) To the Congregation of Propaganda, a message that would be raised and vocally explained by Bishop Roellens during a future trip to Rome. Moreover, in this connection, the Chapter addressed and resolved without delaying another question on relations with Rome:

*‘Bishop Michaud speaks of the desire expressed by the Superior of the College of Propaganda in Rome, to receive students Seminarians from our Missions. The Chapter adopted by a show of hands the proposal that the Vicars Apostolic do not send subjects to Rome before the priesthood.  
(Minutes of the 17<sup>th</sup> General Chapter, p. 426)*

Still in the area of African clergy, the question of their presence and their place in the Mission communities is discussed, and one feels hesitation if not sometimes embarrassment on the issue. Indeed, this time we touch on the sensitive issues of conviviality, habits, table manners, language, etc. Should we and can we really live together? The Chapter decides that the students on probation may be received into the communities of Missionaries, but they take their meals apart. By contrast, priests will also be received, including at table. The text of the minutes will then immediately add that *‘take steps to ensure that the diocesan priest present in the community does not remain completely outside the conversation, not understanding what is said.’*

This detail is both interesting and not really easy to interpret. Does it mean that the priests did not speak European languages well enough, used during their training, including English or French? Alternatively, is it not rather because the Missionaries tended to talk to each other in their own language, different from the country’s official language? The text does not give the answer to this question. It continued simply stating that diocesan priest would participate in the Parish Council but will not be present at meetings and other activities under The Rule of Life and the Constitutions. This type of debate can be surprising today, and we would probably detect that it smacks of segregation, racism, etc. Obviously, we must put them in the context of the time and the living environment experienced by the Missionaries at that time, and it also measures human limitations, and the progress made since the 1930s.

At the same time, and to stay in the same area, the Chapter covers much more positively the question of African vocations in the Society. Positively, not in the sense that the Assembly opens the door to these vocations, but because the reasons given for these different entries are essentially apostolic. Here is the statement of principle that opens the debate, very clear in its wording:

*‘The most important task in the Missions is the formation of a native clergy. The Committee believes that a Black may well be admitted to the Society and the Society has the right to admit it. However, after discussion ...’  
(Minutes, p. 417)*

Indeed, the Assembly is aware that such admissions seriously delay the implementation of the diocesan clergy in the dioceses concerned, and finally it made the following decisions: We will only accept exceptional African candidates in the Society, as long as in the judgment of the Vicar Apostolic the native clergy would not have a firm foundation in his Vicariate. As

for the few candidates who could be admitted, ‘They will be notified in advance that in becoming White Fathers, they agree to go wherever obedience will send them, a detail probably based on the fear that young missionaries would seek to stay in their home country.

**III** - The question of finance was addressed by the Chapter Assembly from several angles. The fifth Committee, in charge of the subject, proposed that each Vice-Province supports the formation costs of its own candidates. It was stated that for Germany, which could not take money out of the country, it would be preferable that its novitiate, based in Mariental (Luxembourg), would ultimately return to Germany itself. The special status of France was also discussed as its budget is practically concurrent with that of the Mother House in Algiers.

The Treasurer General then asked for the Treasurers of Circumscriptions to be reminded to send to the Treasurer General’s office a copy of their accounts, their financial situation and their annual budget. Behind these topics is the General Finance organisation seeking to marshal its forces, in view of future Provinces to come. That would be the question a few days later, at the 13<sup>th</sup> General Session. Finally, and after referring to the points to be specified, including how to fund expenses proper to the General Council and the Mother House, the Chapter took the following decision:

*‘The Chapter decided to create Deputy Provincial Banks in the following districts: Germany, Belgium, Canada, Holland, France - with the understanding that it trusted the Council to settle the terms of the details and that it gives it, as much as is needed, all the necessary powers.’*

*Minutes, p. 436)*

**IV** – The Mission in North Africa - This time it is neither the length of the debate, because in fact there has not really been one, or the significance of the decisions taken that deserve attention. On one hand, the fact that the subject had been addressed anyway and secondly, the lack of effective discussion in the Assembly and one might almost say its embarrassment. What happened?

We are at the 9<sup>th</sup> General Assembly and it is the second Committee, charged with Missions and Native Clergy that directs the work. After presenting a working folder on the relationship between Missionaries and colonial authorities, the secretary changed the subject and indicated that the Committee received for consideration a note which reads:

*‘The state of our missions in North Africa appears lamentable. Is there nothing to be done to infuse a little life? The Prudence observed there seems almost lethargy.’*

*(Minutes p. 425)*

There was no indication at all where this note came from, if it came from a single Capitulant or a group, nor the spirit in which it was written. Was this a request for the Society to increase its involvement by greater attention to the specificity of this mission, or rather to encourage Missionaries to opt for a less discreet form of evangelisation seeking clearly visible results as occurred in other missions? The last sentence seems to move in that direction, but remains cautious and does not say much more. Not only the Capitular Assembly does not take sides, but responds by practically dismissing it; indeed the secretary of the committee adds the following comment:

*‘It (the committee) stated not to have to deliberate on it, but according to the suggestion of Bishop Nouet, it expresses the wish that the Chapter states that it is sympathetic to this mission.’*

The minutes continue:

*'The Most Reverend Superior General, making himself the spokesman for everyone, demonstrated the sympathy of the members of the Chapter in respect of these missions that are so difficult and thankless. The Chapter voted unanimously the wish expressed with a show of hands.'*

This concludes the discussion of this Chapter on the mission in Islamic countries. One cannot but feel uneasy at such a lack of perspective and so little commitment to a mission field so strongly linked to the history of the Society. This treatment at best rapid for such a difficult and important question is even more surprising that the General Council members included Father Henri Marchal, founder of the IBLA at Tunis, and promoter for many years of an in-depth reflection on mission in a Muslim environment. It is not possible in the present work to explore this issue, but, optimistically, it will happen. Indeed, it is not to disparage the work of Capitulants to recognise that there is undoubtedly a problem; certainly issues, and perhaps tension, and as always in history that a deeper understanding of the dossier is beneficial from all points of view.

**V – The number of participants at General Chapters** – This question, recurrent in the history of the General Chapters, has been addressed, once again, with the explicitly stated intention to reduce the number of Capitulants. The reasons put forward are twofold: firstly, the financial cost of conducting such a meeting, and other major upsets that are caused in missions in the prolonged absence of Capitulants. The minutes of the debates shows that the Assembly, with fifty members, was conscious of achieving a kind of critical threshold. To achieve this, the Committee proposed reducing the number of ex officio members, which would automatically reduce the number of Deputies elected with due regard for the rule of their numerical superiority. The committee proposed, as a definite measure, to exclude from then on the ex officio Regional Superiors. The proposal is voted by secret ballot and passed. To avoid misunderstanding, the text added in the proposal:

*'The committee proposes from now on to no longer include the Regional Superiors among Superiors of non-Provincial Circumscriptions; they would bear the title of Regular Superiors or visitors.'*

It was no doubt an imperfect solution, but which demonstrates awareness not to let the General Chapters become authorities too cumbersome to manage humanely, punishing for mission stations, and too costly financially. This option may seem surprising because the Regional Superiors could certainly bring a lot in discussions to a Chapter by their knowledge of the lives of Missionaries and their difficulties. However, we must remember that the heads of missions were then all members of the Society, and the function of the Regional at the time was considered less significant than it was to become a few decades later. Nevertheless, the Chapter will address the relative power of Regional and Vicar Apostolic in the area of appointments, saying that the Vicars Apostolic should never decide an appointment without a real consultation with the Regional Superior.

**5) Some other topics** - The Chapter did not stop at the few major issues just mentioned, and as at each Assembly of this type other points of varying importance were discussed. There are some minor issues and details, such as reminders of etiquette and good manners, or finding a suitable date for the annual retreat, through to the rules of precedence to be followed in the celebrations.

The Chapter also discussed the rule of three. It was not so much the subject of much debate, but rather a very strong reminder whereby we perceive the attachment of everyone to this tradition. Quoting, *'the extreme seriousness of this article of the Constitutions'*, the Assembly is aware of touching on a fundamental issue. the Chapter simply reminds them that one can never impose on a missionary to live alone or with one confrere, and that cases of exceptions provided for by the Constitutions are limited and very restrictive.

Another important issue was that of health. The Chapter decided that in view of the merciless climate of the regions of West Africa the Missionaries who live there could take home about every ten years. To conclude this presentation we could add that at one of the latest sessions, the Superior General made a proposal which would be applied even until today:

*'The Most Reverend Superior General proposes to the Chapter that a list of departed missionaries be established, day after day, by date of death, including the name, year of death, the mission in which he died and his home diocese. It was voted unanimously.'*

This is how the book of deceased missionaries came into existence, a directory still used every day in communities of Missionaries of Africa.

## **Conclusion**

Here we are at the end of this journey that took us through around thirty years of life of the Society and the operations of five General Chapters. During this long period, the Society experienced significant events, such as its final canonical recognition, the establishment of sustainable Constitutions, the drafting of its Directory, a reference of great importance for the this entire period of the life of the Society, etc. It also experienced the trials of war, not to mention the constraints of the generalised colonial expansion of the Great Powers.

At the same time, a remarkable increase in membership and real stability of its institutions also marked this period. As we tried to show in these pages, the General Chapters have brought their building bricks to the development and experience of the Society throughout these thirty years, Chapters marked by both an undeniable energy and limits, limits related to time and sometimes the weakness of men.

Leaving these generations of elders who, in these great Assemblies, tried to live their loyalty to the best of their conscience and their understanding of Mission, we find ourselves on the eve of the Second World War. The next General Chapter will be held in 1947, and it will be the last to meet at Maison Carree.

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