

Petit ECHO

2022 / 07

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Missionaries of Africa





The General Chapter 2022 was a time of reflection, of gathering, and above all a time of prayer and thanksgiving.

We thank God the Father for His great goodness and love. Our hearts are filled with gratitude every time we think of Him and His care for us and for all those we love. The contemplation of His wonderful works renews our strength and fills us with peace.

We thank the Son for all the ways in which he shows us his love and care. He is always with us during all the situations we face day after day. With Him, our lives have a purpose. We thank Him for all that He enables us to do. Thanks for inspiring us to proclaim His Word.

Thank you Holy Spirit for opening our minds to all that is right and good. Thank you for guiding our steps towards the discovery of others and for helping us to establish a dialogue without hidden pretensions.

Fratelli Tutti n°198

«Approaching, speaking, listening, looking at, coming to know and understand one another, and to find common ground: all these things are summed up in the one word “dialogue”. If we want to encounter and help one another, we have to dialogue.»

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Salvador Muñoz Ledo



Faces of Mission in the Maghreb

On my first trip to Algeria, just as we were leaving the airport, we passed a field with a large building under construction, and my confrere told me "that is Maison Carrée". I was astonished because I had left with the hope of visiting Maison Carrée, our motherhouse. I later realised that we had lost it long ago and that the building I saw would be the largest mosque in Africa when completed. I wondered if my 'homecoming' was nostalgia or a sense of belonging. Ironically, this mosque is called the Maison Carrée Mosque.

Heirs to the mission of yesteryear

This name not only keeps alive a memory but also recalls a heritage: the role of the Missionaries of Africa in the human and socio-economic development of the country. This is what will remain when the beneficiaries of our presence at Maison Carrée have disappeared. In fact, they will have passed on to their children the values learned through their contact with our elders in the mission. The structures disappear, but the service for which they were established survives; it survives in the hearts of men and women.

Today our confreres in the Maghreb continue to render this service according to our time and its demands, especially considering that the origins of the personnel of the mission confirm this: in the past, the confreres were exclusively from the West; today they are mostly from the South. The people, as well as the methods, change but the mission continues in the same spirit. In this sense, the White Fathers of today are truly the heirs of the White Fathers of yesterday.



Ignatius Anipu
General assistant



As heirs, they have the privilege of continuing but also bear the burden of the legacy of the mission of yesteryear.

At the service of humanity for an abundant life

In the Gospel perspective of mission, where Christ became incarnate for abundant life, disciples are at the service of human life. Their commitment is to promote it. They are therefore called to act where life is endangered or mortgaged. Life in abundance is not only quantitative; it is above all qualitative. It is about helping people to flourish. This is integral to human development: to develop the human being and the whole human being.

On the surface, the political, economic and religious instability, as well as the local realities, the style of the apostolate, but above all the religious legislation in force in the Maghreb countries and the fragility of the small Christian communities, can cause frustration and discouragement. However, the mission continues because the challenges of daily life can become allies of the mission. Moreover, it is difficult to assess what is happening in the human heart. The disciples are called to bear witness to God's love; it is the Spirit who knows the hearts and God alone converts people.

Apostles of God's love for Africa and Africans were forged in the Maghreb, the cradle of our missionary family. Lavigerie wanted to put the Gospel at the heart of human relations given a true social transformation. Thanks to this charism, the confreres living and working in fraternal teams are witnesses to the possibility of a better life in society. Thus, their houses become places of reference for sharing and solidarity where attentive listening and mutual exchange are lived. This bringing together of people through authentic encounters is a source of human brotherhood.

Real places of fraternal encounters rich in diversity

The accompaniment they provide to the people who come to them is done in close collaboration with other missionary agents (sisters, lay people, students, etc.). They are living the mission in the spirit of synodality. This mission of proximity is lived through the learning of



local languages, respect for the cultures and the socio-economic life of their environment. By ensuring the human and professional formation of marginalised people, they commit themselves to the existential peripheries. The libraries and documentation and research centres they run are real places of encounter and service for building a fraternity rich in diversity. This helps to change how people look at each other, accepting each other's differences. Despite the differences, the approach to each person must value them as brothers or sisters. This brings about the kingdom of God. No wonder evangelising is synonymous with peace-building, for diversity is a gift, while division is a scandal!

Nurtured by a personal experience of encounter and attachment to Christ, they are animated by God's love for all. Keeping their doors open at all times, they facilitate closeness and conviviality without borders, thus strengthening friendship and unity because the Gospel takes root in the people's hearts.

A very specific but not exceptional mission

The mission as lived in the Maghreb is specific but not exceptional. It is specific because of its context. It is not exceptional for it is an integral part of the Church's mission. The mission is unique but also complex because it is lived in different human contexts.

Our presence in Algeria and Tunisia is a prophetic parable not only for us but for the missionary Church. It is a call to place ourselves at the service of Man through the promotion of everything that contributes to his total fulfilment. In the words of Irenaeus of Lyons, "the glory of God is man fully alive". Will we be able to listen to him? The fruitfulness of the mission will depend on it.

Ignatius Anipu



Library Le Figuier

Center of documentation and meeting (cdr) Tizi Ouzou



Presentation

Our library is officially known as the Centre de Documentation et de Rencontre (CDR), Bibliothèque le Figuier. It is situated in the centre of Tizi Ouzou, not far from the APC, next to the Kerrad Rachid Training Centre, opposite the Boukhalfa bus stop (1 boulevard Abderrahmane Arrous). It is a place where young students and professionals from the region can meet, study and revise. We have the following disciplines: medicine, pharmacy, biology, English and Tamazight. Given the lack of space, we chose to limit ourselves to a few fields and not become a

general library. Registrations are made following the academic year. It goes from October to the end of September each year. However, the number of subscribers has decreased to about one hundred per year since the health crisis.

Apostolic life

The library apostolate is part of our apostolic life inspired by Jesus who sends us: "As the Father has sent me, so I send you" (Jn 20:21). According to our Constitutions and Laws, "Apostolic love requires us to be all things to all men" to be welcoming and open, to live close to the people and to be simple in our relations with them. It entails a thorough study of their language and customs, a knowledge of their history and culture and of the current events of their country. It means above all an active involvement in every effort to make the Gospel come alive in every culture. This is what we try to live through the Fig Tree Library.

This year we continue to assist the various beneficiaries so as to facilitate their research and other study work. We also pay particular and individual attention to those who come to us.

We are helped by a Salesian Sister, Bernadette, and an Algerian, Nacira Zidelmal. Their voluntary work in the library is a great help. The team is making efforts to ensure the continuity of the work desired by the founder, the late Blessed Christian Chessel.

We continue to welcome all those who come for documentation and offer a friendly environment to those who come to meet in our garden. We have a well-laid and maintained place providing a

pleasant, clean and healthy reception. We are exploring the possibility of networking with other libraries in the region and putting our catalogue online, more precisely the Berber Documentation Files (FDB).

We are also thinking about the possibility of forming reading groups to help students and those interested in the subject express their ideas or through film debates.

Our frustration is the fact that we started the procedure to install surveillance cameras since March 2020, but we are yet to receive the green light from Wilaya, the last step in this bureaucratic complexity.



Le Figuier Library; main entrance



Le Figuier Library; study room and tutoring

Remedial classes

Besides the library service which is our main activity, we also provide coaching and introduction courses in English and French to primary, secondary and high school pupils, students and adults. This apostolate in the Algerian society makes us well-known, because our courses are well appreciated; the beneficiaries never stop thanking us. Students from the parish youth chaplaincy help with some of the classes on Fridays.

In summary, our encounter with the Algerian people is made through welcoming, listening, the library, the remedial courses at all levels in French and English. It is through this that we deepen

friendship, fraternity, mutual knowledge and unity, justice and peace. We try to grow with each other in unity, in a community rich in racial, linguistic, religious and cultural diversity. All this is done in a synodal manner.



Vincent Kyererezi,

A known name in the Society

Tizi-Ouzou - The community



Conviviality with the parishioners with a cake

We live with our Kabyle brothers and sisters in the capital of the wilaya of Tizi-Ouzou, in Greater Kabylie. Tizi is a major hub in this mountainous region: the inhabitants come here for their administrative formalities and important services; they are fairly open people in their relations, but with certain limitations imposed by the socio-cultural context.

Our White Fathers' community

It is worth noting that the community of Tizi-Ouzou, founded in 1874, i.e. 6 years after the foundation of the Society, remains the ol-

dest of our active communities. It was in this community that, on 27 December 1994, four White Fathers, Alain, Charles, Jean and Christian died. They were valiant and zealous missionaries of their time and gave their all until the very end, thus becoming martyrs of the greatest love. Together with 15 others, they were beatified on 8 December 2018 in Oran, Algeria. We are aware of the privilege of living in this community and the challenges associated with living it because they were men who were held in high esteem and respected for their dedication to the mission.



What we do.

Our life in Tizi-Ouzou revolves around three major axes which are

1. The parish: our parish is a multicultural and ecumenical community. It comprises Algerian Christians, foreign students of various Christian denominations, and consecrated persons such as the Salesian Sisters, a White Sister and a consecrated virgin. We bear witness to the love of Christ by daring to invent new ways in the zeal and dynamism of our charism so that the parish may be a life-giving place where each member feels accepted and loved.

- Algerian Christians: we accompany them closely and profoundly to build up an indigenous Church that witnesses its faith through its life in a predominantly Muslim land.

- Foreign students: we also have a good number of foreign students from sub-Saharan Africa in our parish. They are not all Catholics, but Christians and some Muslims. They find in this community a place of reference, sharing and fraternity. As a result, the accompaniment of young people finds its place in our apostolate.

- Visiting the prisoners also



Philippe and Bernard after the graduate students' thanksgiving mass

constitutes a major part of the proclamation of the good news to the little ones. This apostolate of the universal Church, which is imposed on every disciple of Christ, is part of our pastoral reality. One of us responsible for this apostolate goes every fortnight to the big prison of Tizi-Ouzou with one of the Salesian Sisters to extend our support to our brothers and sisters who live there. Half of the Lenten effort, at the parish and community level, is put into the solidarity fund for the prison apostolate.

2. The Library: our library is officially known as the 'Centre de Documentation et de Rencontre Le Figuier'. We welcome students, mostly Algerians, studying medicine, biology, pharmacy, English or Tamazight (Berber) and provide them with a friendly environment to study and meet. It is interesting to note that, in addition to providing books, we also offer extra tuition in English and French to primary, secondary and high school pupils, students and adults. This apostolate is well appreciated in Algerian society.

3. Welcoming: One of our daily tasks is to welcome people into the community. Many Algerians and

foreigners come knocking at our door for various reasons. The house or community of the White Fathers is for many a place of listening, exchange, sharing and solidarity. We try as far as possible to listen to all these people who come daily to ask for various forms of help.

Pastoral challenges and perspectives

Pastoral challenges are not the least of our concerns. We live in a Church where the commitment of the laity leaves much to be desired. Most of our faithful come



Recollection at the graves of the Blessed White Fathers



from Muslim families and are mostly the only Christian members in their families. Some remain anonymous in their Christian journey; others are known, but they run the risk of being excluded from certain social realities. Besides this, our Algerian faithful are mostly adults, not children or young people. There is also the question of religious legislation which makes us fragile to a certain extent in evangelisation.

The mission in Tizi-Ouzou is a mission that has endured from 1874 to the present day despite all the dark and tragic periods it has gone through. Our presence here is still appreciated, even if the perspectives undertaken by our predecessors are different from ours today and need to be redefined in the current social context and according to the needs of the people with whom we work. It is precisely what I tried to elaborate on above when I talked about what we are doing today. This pastoral perspective can be maintained even if new ways of doing things are developed while always listening to the social and political context which cannot be ignored. To ignore this aspect would be to put at risk the work and heritage of our elders and predecessors in the mission.

Besides, there is today the question of the origin of the confreres on the ground. People were still used to seeing only European confreres 20 years ago, but today we are, for the last ten years, of African origin, and even younger than our predecessors; this sometimes causes misunderstandings and reservations for some because they associate being a White Father to colour. We even hear some say that there are no more White Fathers here in Tizi-Ouzou. This is a challenge that we are trying to take up through our dedication to the mission and heritage that the elders bestowed on us.



Philippe Dakono



At the service of fraternal love

The community of Ghardaïa

We are at the service of fraternal love in the desert of southern Algeria where every little thing highlights the goodness of God.

I returned to our community in Ghardaïa, Algeria, in November 2021. Our community is currently composed of three confreres: Jean Marie Amalebondra (outgoing director), Koffi Alex Gnamassou (his successor) who are committed to promoting Saharan culture and heritage in the Centre Culturel de documentation saharienne (CCDS), and myself, who is working full time in the diocesan accounts and treasury.

The Missionaries of Africa settled in Ghardaïa in 1884. As soon as they arrived, they made immediate contact with the local population, and learned the language and about Islam while carrying out various activities (schools, dispensaries, etc.).

The Centre de Documentation Saharienne (CDS) was created in 1946 in Djelfa, then later trans-

ferred to Ghardaïa, in order to preserve the country's extremely rich heritage and to gather valuable documentation for future generations of researchers. It became a cultural centre in the 1990s.

The cultural centre

There are two libraries in the Cultural Centre: a research library and a lending library. The Centre keeps books and documents referring generally to the South of Algeria. Its shelves are divided between books on philosophy, psychology, general sociology (these do not necessarily concern the region), religion, linguistics, exact sciences (such as geology, climatology, hydrology, etc.), the arts, geography and history (pre-Islamic, Islamic, colonial and post-colonial).

The Centre has a treasure of materials that will fascinate historians, ethnologists, geographers and certainly many others who are interested in the Sahara, its people, its way of life and its customs.



There are more than 33,000 photos, including 6,500 on glass plates, dating from 1899 to 1940. These photographs were all taken by Missionaries of Africa or their collaborators and then later brought to the Bishop's House when they died or when the stations were closed. The management of the Centre launched a major programme in 2010 to save, digitise, catalogue and make available to the public this immense Algerian heritage. This work came to a halt due to a lack of full-time staff to continue the digitisation.

The cultural, ethnographic and historical importance of the pho-

tographic collections of the Centre's photo library encourages us to communicate and disseminate these images to the men and women of Algeria. We are making part of these photographic collections available to Algerians via a series of eight regional exhibitions on the culture of their country.

The particularity of our presence

We are different in that our presence here in Algeria is very special. It is not that we looked for it; rather, it is God who is at the origin of this call to live and witness unity in diversity: "You did



From left to right: Alex Gnamassou, the British Ambassador, Bishop John MacWilliam, and René Mounkoro



not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you" (Jn 15:16).

Each small step or gesture directs us towards our goal, to serve the Lord and our neighbours. Our main objective in this centre is to change the look on cultural and religious differences, by promoting social blending and dialogue of cultures and religions by organising activities in the cultural centres and our surroundings (parishes or houses).

The purpose of our activities

We try to promote historical and cultural heritage interactions through our activities, whilst fostering the spirit of togetherness through encounters between different genders, generations and religions.

Our Church is oriented towards encounter, interreligious and intercultural dialogue through the dif-

ferent activities carried out, among others, by the diocesan cultural service. The presence of this Church in this Muslim environment can be expressed more easily in this cultural framework, by providing educational support in the form of language courses in French and English, and by sharing elements of our heritage, thus meeting a real demand.

We live the incarnation in the heart of the oasis, in this land of Islam where we are sent by the one who "chooses" and who "establishes" us to live the goodness of God.



René Mounkoro



Life in a Muslim world has transformed my faith

Life in a Muslim world has transformed my faith. Like many French people, it was expressed through the family Christmas celebration with gifts and illuminations. Of course, there was Holy Week and Sunday Mass... After my formation in a seminary, there was the Church, the dogmas, Vatican II... In the novitiate, I was asked to write "my" creed. It took me several pages.

All that is left today is: "I believe in Christ who died and rose for the salvation of the world". Like Paul in Athens, this is scandalous: not the resurrection, but the death of Jesus. For many of my Muslim friends, Jesus did not die: a prophet cannot fail in his mission. For God cannot fail. Someone else died in his place. The death of the just is not acceptable. This is also expressed in the visceral rejection of the symbol of the cross, because of history and all it represents. Therefore, Jesus as a 'person' is the centre of my faith. This has an impact on the way I read the gospel. It often demands an attachment to

his person and his word: "Do you love me more than these? It requires a visceral (literally) union with this risen Jesus. All that follows is a consequence of this attachment, such as the importance of the Gospel, the word of God as received in and by the Church, and our regard for every human being as a brother or sister.



"I know why you are here... It's for God!"



For the salvation of the world

There are several verses: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt 28:19); "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God in other cities as well, for this is why I was sent" (Lk 4:43). For Jesus, the kingdom of God is very concrete: the lame walk, the deaf hear, the sick are healed. There are two visions of the same mission. My life is marked by the second: "to proclaim the kingdom of God". When we see Jesus alleviating the suffering of his contemporaries, the kingdom of God is not a hope for tomorrow, an ideal to be awaited, but to be announced and built today by alleviating the suffering of the men and women of today. Jesus does not ask for theorists but practical people. There is no more talk of baptism, of changing religion, of dogmas...

One day, an old man said to me: "I know why you are here; it's to evangelise". I was a bit worried about the word and I asked him: "What is evangelisation"? The answer surprised me: "It is to build peace". A colleague once said to me: "I know why you are here... It

is for God!" The world today has become more and more violent, less and less human (computers are interfering in human relationships), and the race for consumption and profit spares no one (we are more and more concerned with finding profitable activities for our budgets). "You received freely, give freely" is not so much a part of our conversation and attitudes anymore. Our world is increasingly uninhabitable for many people.

To keep life simple

The people I have lived with over the past 30 years have taught me to keep life simple: local food and limit travel to what is necessary. Thus, ever since I joined the White Fathers, I always refused expensive and polluting formations outside the country, in favour of one on the spot. I have been collecting plastic bottles in the mountains every Sunday for 15 years. My work consists of providing vocational training to a few people with disabilities. All these things are very small and of little importance to those who develop commercial strategies and geopolitical plans for the world. Nevertheless, I believe that I am faithful to God's method. Jesus chose 12 men: a traitor, some fishermen, a Zealot,



What if I were just a grain of sand
in the hand of God?

a publican... and later a fanatical Pharisee, Paul. He entrusted his church to a professional fisherman who had just denied him. In terms of management, there is much to be corrected. Now, if I refuse to take a plane it won't stop the plane from taking off; if I collect a few plastic bottles it won't reduce plastic pollution; if I train two people to be professionally independent, it won't reduce the misery of millions of disabled people around the world. I do it because I am convinced that this is the way to build

the Kingdom of God the way God intended.

To conclude, I remember a historical fact. During the Second World War, the French railwaymen who wanted to hinder the movements of the German army derailed the trains. To do this, they poured a handful of sand on the axles of the wagons. There is no comparison between a few grains of sand and a derailed train. Yet it worked. What if I were just a grain of sand



Patrick Leboulenger

Missionary life in evolution

"We do not engage in dialogue, even less encounters". We not only live outside the parish, but we don't also have an apostolate that is related to the classic first evangelisation. So, the question arises: why remain in this community? A childhood friend put it to me clearly a few weeks ago when he said "If you don't have parishioners, why don't you leave the country? Must we position ourselves in defence of the continuity of our community and our mission in this land of Islam? Our convictions and our presence in this Muslim country

would not allow us to do so. In this article, we share with you, in all sincerity, this mission *ad extra* and especially this presence in an entirely Muslim environment.

Our presence in North Africa

We start by recalling the origins of our Society in Algeria and Tunisia 150 years ago. Animated by the Spirit, we quickly discovered the importance of being with others who are different from us in order to build a fraternal life with all. We owe this heritage to our Founder, Cardinal Lavignerie, who,



We welcome people in community to share with us the Eucharist and the meal



together with certain thinkers of his time, sought ways of interacting peacefully with people of different religions while accepting that they should stick to their faith. Concretely, Lavigerie proposed engaging the culture of the people with whom one lives, serving not only individuals but also cultures and peoples, dispelling hostility and dialoguing to discern how the Spirit calls each one.

Over time, we integrated this mission of dialogue, defined in 1964 by Paul VI in the encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*, as an attitude characterised by the study of the contacts that the Church must maintain with humanity. Our mission can therefore be described as what Gaudel considers a true dialogue which includes initiatives such as good neighbourliness relations, kindness in daily encounters on the streets, mutual consultations of religious groups on social projects, informal or professional service, fighting injustice, spiritual emulation and sharing, discussions and conferences, witnessing at all levels with explicit or implicit references to faith, prayer, silence, continuous conversion or the personal struggle of Muslims and Christians to fight selfishness and ghetto mentality.



At a presbyterian outing on 27 May
in Makhtar in central Tunisia

Community life

All this sounds beautiful and impressive but what does it mean for our small community of three (a priest and two brothers of three nationalities: French, Mexican and Ghanaian) situated between two of the most popular neighbourhoods in Tunis, Bab Souika and Bab El Khadra? Our strength is certainly a healthy community life that strengthens and inspires us in our daily activities. The oldest of the community works in a Tunisian association for disabled adults for their human and professional train-



The city of Tunis

ing which, beyond their personal development, would contribute to their self-reliance in society. The second community member is working as a national chaplain for young people as well as accompanying several religious communities. He remains a resource person for those on the way and is always available to serve minorities in the Church and in civil society.

My personal experience

Today, I see a Tunisia and a Church marked by uncertainty and some apprehension due to political, economic and religious instability. There is also a strong presence of sub-Saharan Africans, and our little Society of Missionaries of Africa

is no exception. Suddenly, I feel that everything is different from what it was a decade ago with the White Fathers. We are working to keep the balance of the simple presence that we had with the Muslims and in the peripheries with the new generation who are more and more attracted by direct proclamation in our churches, which are better attended than they were some twenty years ago.

In addition, I find satisfaction in my presence in the library of the IBLA (Institute of Arab Fine Arts) for researchers and students, in my function as President of the Association Centre d'Études de Carthage, in the bursar's office of the Maghreb Province and in my



service as the Provincial's Delegate for Tunisia and as a companion for our stagiaires in formation. I participate in the meetings of the GRIC (Groupe de Recherche Islamo-Chrétien) in the hope of fraternal joy.

After 28 years of life as a White Father Brother, I notice that my missionary life has evolved from an exclusive mission to the mission of 'all to all' and welcoming the other. It has led me to engage freely in all and for all while keeping our identity of encounter with Islam and presence in the peripheries. The positions of responsibility that I have held have allowed me to serve my brothers of the White Fathers' community in the local churches. Being in charge of various White Father communities and diocesan bodies today brings me back to the essence of our mission to be 'all things to all people' and to realise my faith

in Jesus the 'humble servant' who is victorious through weakness and self-abasement. I still feel the call to diminish so that the other may grow, to consider the other as better than myself, to not eternalise myself but rather to know how to give way to the other and to consider that the other's success is also mine and his failure is mine. This remains a vocation to which I continue to aspire.



Simon Amy Gornah

Cardinal Lavigerie and Islam



Charles Lavigerie dressed in the clothes of the local people. Syria 1860.

The subject that has been proposed to me to share with you today, 26 November, the day commemorating the death of the Cardinal 116 years ago, is a subject that has already been dealt with several times, notably around the centenary of his death in 1992. On that occasion, there was, for example, a colloquium in Toulouse titled: "Cardinal Lavigerie: Passion

of Man, Passion of God". One of the conferences was devoted to "Lavigerie and the Muslims in North Africa", a conference given by our confrere Maurice Borrman. Our two Lavigerian Institutes (White Fathers and White Sisters) also published a Dossier with the subtitle "Lavigerie 1825-1892" for personal use and for community reflection. Towards the end of the section on "Pastoral Characteristics" (p. 23ff), there is a section entitled "Lavigerie and Islam" (p. 29-32). According to the "presentation" of this dossier: "We did not ask Lavigerie to give us a precise plan of action for the mission in Africa today. We chose to 'approach' Lavigerie's personality through his letters and directives and through his life's experiences to discover his interiority and inspiration". The words 'interiority and inspiration' make me cringe a little, but I possibly do not understand them well. They evoke in me an attitude of contemplation before the person of the Cardinal, which of course is perfectly acceptable. It is also said, and this is obvious, that the Cardi-



nal can no longer be asked for a precise plan of action for today's mission.

Rather than "interiority" and "inspiration" I would like to retain two other terms which seem more useful to me, even if they are clearly more technical: reception and hermeneutics. Reception, in a technical sense, as defined in a recent theological dictionary, means: "the way in which the Church understands and embraces the Gospel while allowing herself to be embraced by it". There is, so to speak, a two-way relationship between tradition and the people who want to live it. Hermeneutics seeks to determine what certain texts really mean in order to understand their pertinence *hic et nunc*: again, a to-and-fro that implies continuity and difference. I do not intend to give a crash course in hermeneutics this evening. I would simply like to try to situate briefly the Cardinal's ideas about the apostolate to Muslims and then see how these ideas were received, i.e. how they were understood and applied by the confreres, but also how the confreres not only embraced them but allowed themselves to be embraced by them. In fact, even this is quite ambitious for this moment: let us say that I

will content myself with opening a perspective on this dialectic between fidelity to the ideas of the Cardinal on our apostolate, more precisely our apostolate with the Muslims, and their relevance *hic et nunc*, as attested in some of our documents.

The life and personality of the Cardinal

The first track to be followed is: who was Charles Lavigerie? what was his background? and what was his personality? His family was generally influenced by the school of Enlightenment and the principles of the Republic. His religious education came mainly from two servants: their simplicity and dignity made their teaching (in the words of the Cardinal) "more than acceptable". He was, from his youth, energetic, fiery, domineering, ruling, subjugating or fascinating everyone. He was also very gifted intellectually. He asked to enter the minor seminary but soon found himself a year later at Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet in Paris, an "elite" minor seminary, then at Issy-les-Moulineaux for philosophy, and finally at Saint-Sulpice for his theology. His stay in Paris allowed him to know closely the issues of



19th century Catholic France (secularism, republic, alteration of the concordat of 1801, the new situation of the Church, etc.) and to establish relationships with many important people in the world. Since he was too young to be ordained straight away, he was sent to do a licentiate in letters, and after his ordination, he was asked to do two doctorates (letters and theology). He thus seemed predestined to pursue an academic career. The choice of subjects for these doctorates shows his interest in the Church of the first centuries as well as an interest in the historical method, a return to the sources to find the living source of Christian thoughts. We will find this expression "historical method" later on when the Cardinal formulated the apostolic approach to the Kabbales.

He began to teach at the university, but his professorship lasted only two years. A director was sought for the work of the Schools of the East: Lavigerie was appointed in 1856. This was a key stage in his life: the discovery of the Churches of the East with their theological and liturgical heritage, which made him sensitive to the importance of the particularity of each milieu. He visited the East in

person in May 1860, after the massacre of Christians. He discovered the need to balance his mission as a Church with his contacts with politics, which had its own interests, something that would also come into play later when he was in Algeria. In Syria, he met Emir Abd-al-Qadir, a great Algerian leader in exile after the conquest of Algeria by France, who had saved the lives of a large number of Christians during the massacres in Lebanon.

Lavigerie successfully completed his delicate mission. It was not surprising that, when relations between the French state and the Holy See became complicated, especially with regard to the appointment of bishops, Lavigerie was chosen for the post of auditor of the Rota in Rome. One would imagine that the function was more diplomatic (or better still, para-diplomatic) than canonical, although he was given a doctorate in utroque iure after five weeks in Rome. Here Lavigerie learned the importance of respecting the proper role of politics, in which he should not interfere: in fact, there was also an ambassador to the Holy See in Rome.

He would also deepen the meaning of the Church that the Sulpicians had given him, and this at a time when Pope Pius IX had become - unfortunately - an important part of the problems. He would ask to be appointed to head a diocese in France after eighteen months. This was a normal step, and it is clear that he did not regret leaving the position of adviser and negotiator for a position where he could, at last, make decisions.

During his time in Nancy (a little over three years), I remember above all his interest in formation as a guarantee for a better future. On the one hand, he reorganised and improved the intellectual side of formation for the clergy by laying the foundations of a "true science"; on the other hand, he took care to awaken in them the spirit of the apostolate, including

notably the spirit of obedience. He did the same for the religious, especially for the apostolate of the schools, while respecting the sensitivities of the secular teaching of the state. This would be one of his objectives later in Algeria.

There was much talk of Bishop Lavigerie as a possible coadjutor (and therefore with the right of succession) in Lyon. In the same period, there was an appeal for the restoration of the Church of Saint-Martin in Tours. Lavigerie did not limit himself to recommending this quest; he wrote a long pastoral letter on St Martin which revealed how much his thinking was turned towards the question of evangelisation, an evangelisation, however, which - like that of St Martin - would take into account the environment to be evangelised.





In Algeria

In early January 1867, Lavigerie was appointed to Algiers. His objective was to ensure the freedom of the apostolate among all the populations of the colony. He had previously known his two predecessors (Mgrs Dupuch and Pavy) during one or other of their separate visits to France, and he had spoken with both of them. Despite the difficulties, Lavigerie intended to maintain an active presence among Muslims. His motto is "Caritas", which he always translated as "to love and to serve", charity of the heart and charity by deeds.

When he arrived, the country was going through a difficult time: a series of natural disasters, especially a drought that had lasted for two years. The results were famine and epidemics, especially cholera. The government's response was not up to the task. More and more orphans were abandoned. Lavigerie opened his doors to them: in a few months, 1,753 children showed up, 800 of whom died of cholera. The administration did not like what he was doing; the Arab offices in particular objected. There was a press campaign against him, but Lavigerie

stood his ground.

Shortly before, the colonists took action against the government to obtain freedom of enterprise. Lavigerie had supported them in their fight for freedom. Now he in turn demanded freedom: freedom of conscience, i.e. to be free to do what one believes, in conscience, right to act, and freedom for the Church to practice charity towards the poorest. Freedom of conscience also applied to children; consequently, no baptisms, except in danger of death, and then only for children under the age of reason. As for freedom of apostolate, he said: "not for the public preaching of the Gospel, because I do not believe the time has come, but only for the exercise of devotion and charity". In concrete terms, Lavigerie wanted the freedom to found charitable establishments, but only within the tribes that requested them.

It was in view of the project of these "charitable establishments" that Lavigerie founded three Institutes: priests, brothers (farmers) and sisters. The foundation of the minor seminary of Saint Eugene for missionaries and catechists should be seen within this context. This foundation was later trans-



ferred to France, to Saint-Laurent d'Olt, however, this project was never a real success and was abandoned at some point.

Projects and directives in Kabylia

In 1873, taking into account his experience with the orphans and with the projects launched on his arrival, and also warned by the susceptibility of the French administration, Lavigerie sent the White Fathers to Kabylia with very precise instructions:

1) To avoid any proselytism: "It is forbidden until further notice to speak to the Kabyles about religion... For the time being, we shall confine ourselves to caring for the sick and teaching the children. "Above all, do not commit any of them ... to becoming Christians and do not baptise anyone, even if they are in danger of death... This is not the time to convert, it is the time to win the hearts and confidence of the Kabyles by charity and kindness".

2) He then develops this idea of "winning hearts": winning hearts is not only a matter of acting charitably towards them, but also a matter of a spiritual attitude; it is essentially loving one's neigh-

bour as a brother, or as we would later say among ourselves: 'as a brother in humanity'.

3) practising a "pre-catechesis": a direct catechesis would not work and was unacceptable to the Kabyles and to the administration. Lavigerie said: "in the midst of peoples whose ancestors were once Christians ... the best discourse for them is to tell them their ancient history... stick to this for some time...". Then, "when we are questioned, [we should] tell in detail in a story form... everything that concerns the life of our Lord, the prophets who announced him, etc.". This is what Lavigerie called "the historical method".

4) To be all things to all people: "to make oneself, so to speak, like them by adopting their external way of life, their clothing, their food, their nomadic life, their language, by making oneself ... everything to everyone in order to win them over to Jesus Christ".

This adaptation was a continuous theme in Lavigerie's exhortations

Adaptation to the environment: living among people like them, and knowing how to change one's way of being or acting when it is the case;



Study of languages, "*sub gravi*" like he said;

Respect for the original culture: At no point must you sacrifice Arabic to "the effectiveness of teaching" (by which he meant "in French"). It was the subject of a very lively discussion amongst the capitulants at the 1874 Chapter and shortly afterwards, of a passionate intervention by Lavigerie who had missed this discussion. This was about the need for classical Arabic. Lavigerie would later take up the same idea of respect for the original culture for Sainte-Anne and for Equatorial Africa. On this point one could say that he was ahead of his time: *Lumen Gentium* no. 13 and *Nostra Aetate* no. 2 of Vatican II would make a similar statement.

These principles were applied everywhere, with one or another exception, for example - as far as baptisms were concerned - in orphanages. The greatest tensions occurred in Kabylia, from where the Jesuits finally decided to withdraw. Lavigerie remained inflexible. In 1873, he wrote to some of the posts: "I fear that you are embarking a little too much on parish works to the detriment of the Arab apostolate, and in particular that

you are seeing a little too much of the Europeans. He then indicated three things to take note of: reading the Rule in common (I interpret this as the community aspect, a sort of local council so to speak); prayer and spiritual exercises in common; speaking Arabic always (adaptation).

In Kabylia and beyond

It seems to me that, in the first five or six years of his episcopate in Algiers, Lavigerie was able to express and formulate his ideas on the approach to the Muslim world and set up the two Institutes (White Fathers and White Sisters) to which he wanted to entrust this vision and this project. Of course, he continued to follow up on this work; and sometimes intervened to approve new ideas, but more often to recall the essential: his - unchanged - vision. He spent a lot of time launching the mission to Africa south of the Sahara, an adventure that had its tragic moments while trying to cross the Sahara to Sudan, but also consolations, notably the increasing number of conversions. And the long-term work among Muslims has continued in North Africa.

In Kabylia, there were quite a few problems: external problems,

especially the continuous friction with the administration over the schools; but also, and more interestingly for us, internal difficulties, on the one hand as to the policy to be adopted, and the personnel assigned to this mission on the other. As regards the policy to be adopted (or perhaps I should say: accepted), it was above all the patience demanded by Mgr Lavigerie that weighed heavily. To be a missionary meant, for a good number, to convert and baptise. Lavigerie said: in the face of Islam, we cannot guarantee that these conversions will last as long as we have not changed the environment.

In a letter or a report (cf. Father Mazé in a conference on 60 years of mission in Kabylia), some wondered whether the words of the Gospel should not be applied: "shake off the dust from your feet and go away". Lavigerie's answer was immediate: "No, you must not go at this time because we would be teaching the Kabyles how to send us back".

Another problem regarding the policy to be followed was the choice of apostolate to be undertaken. It was not about the problem of personal projects that would surface much later, but the limita-



Funerary monument built in Carthage in honour of the Cardinal Lavigerie.



tion to a common apostolate was already weighing on us. As for the personnel appointed in North Africa, the major problem was the lack of specific preparation (language and Islamology/theology) and the lack of continuity. Many Fathers were inserted in North Africa while waiting to be able to leave for Equatorial Africa. Others returned to Algeria for health reasons or for reasons related to "temperament", to be modest. Bishop Lavigerie made only a few small concessions to politics, to what he had formulated almost as soon as he arrived in Algeria. Personally, I would say: "fortunately". His thinking was, in my opinion, based on great realism. But the problems I mentioned were also real.

Here and there we find the desire for a directory, for rules of application with basic principles. This was not done during the Cardinal's lifetime. Perhaps it was not his charisma; perhaps he was too domineering for someone else to do it for him. Besides, the Cardinal could not have found the time. There was the whole organisation of the mission in Equatorial Africa and the efforts to reach the (French) Sudan. He had sent fathers to Saint-Louis in Tunisia in 1875, and in 1881 he managed

to get himself appointed administrator of the Vicariate Apostolic in Tunisia. In 1878, he obtained the charge of Saint Anne in Jerusalem for the young Society. All this while his health problems were getting worse.

After the death of the Founder

The Cardinal died on 26 November 1892. At the Chapter of 1894, decisions were taken concerning Kabylia which somewhat reduced the discretion and reservation desired by the Cardinal. Bishop Livinhac's great concern, however, was faithfulness to the principles laid down by the Cardinal: consequently, nothing was changed with regard to the main principles at the level of the General Council during his term of office, nor during the term of office of Father Voillard. There was, however, the beginning of a process of fine-tuning. The Chapter of 1894 had created "regionals". The first regional for North Africa was Father Baldit who began the work of formulating "pastoral directives" in what he called an "Essay on the Directory".

Father Weihnachter, regional from 1926 to 1934, contributed a lot to the setting in motion of a reflection on the mission in Kabylia.



What he proposed (as had Father Baldit) was basically the approach advocated by the Cardinal. Moreover, also at the level of the General Council(s), this loyalty to the Cardinal was guaranteed in a special way by the election to several successive General Councils of Father Henri Marchal (General Councillor from 1912 to 1947). He would write "Les grandes lignes de l'apostolat des Pères Blancs en Afrique du nord" (GLANA, I, 1938), "L'âme musulman" (GLANA, II, 1945), "Le milieu humain et la vie en terre d'islam" (GLANA, III, 1945), then in 1950, taken up again in 1955 "L'invisible présence de l'Église" (in two volumes), a theology of salvation of the Muslims. Officially, it is not known why his first book only appeared in 1938. My suspicion is that it has something to do, at least in part, with the election of Bishop Joseph Birraux as Superior General (1936-1947).

Bishop Birraux, who came from Equatorial Africa, was struck

by the lack of clear guidelines for the apostolate in North Africa, and by the large number of confreres who did not speak the local language (Arabic and/or Kabyle). He conducted a detailed survey (in 48 elaborate questions); Father Mazé made a summary of the answers and was also the secretary for the continuation of the initiative. It was in 1937 that the meeting of Bou Nouh took place, bringing together the provincial and all the superiors of different communities. The Cardinal's vision was confirmed, but there was much more talk about how to realise it and what means to use. In this perspective, the IBLA in Tunis, founded in 1925, was confirmed as a step in the right direction. Following this example, the CEB was opened in Kabylia and the CDS in the Sahara. After 1947, the 'formation' section of the IBLA became "la Manouba", then IPEO and, after the transfer to Rome, IPEA, IPEAI, today PISAI. Basically, the Cardinal's ideas are still relevant today.

Editor's note

- IBLA (Institute of Arab Fine Letters) 1926.
- CEB (Center of Berber Studies) 1939.
- CDS (Center of Saharan Documentation) 1945.
- IPEO (Pontifical Institute of Oriental Studies) 1960.
- IPEA (Pontifical Institute of Arab Studies) 1964.
- PISAI (Pontifical Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies) 1979.



One last thing: this Directory spoken about at the Chapter of 1894, finally saw the light in 1952. In the sixth section of Chapter X entitled: "Apostolate in Islam Africa" (pp. 364-394). The authors of this part were Mgr Mercier, Jacques Lanfry and André Demeerseman. This text concludes, as it were, the "digestion" and systematisation of the Cardinal's thinking.

Since then, we have found ourselves in an acceleration of changes of all kinds: the end of the colonial era, independence in Africa, the Second Vatican Council, the decrease in vocations, etc. For me, this 1952 text remains a reference, and I see nothing in this field that could replace it, even if the style and the language is old. As for the content, evaluating and possibly updating it, would require a reflection and sharing that goes beyond the possibilities of our Chapters, given their composition and the way they work.

By way of conclusion

The Cardinal's intuitions: I summarise here the ideas that I retain from the vision of the Cardinal, ideas with which I felt, and still feel, at ease.

1) The historical method, at least in a broad sense: one must know the "historical baggage" of people, in order to understand them and to be understood by them.

2) The "*ministerium verbi*": even without direct or explicit preaching, one must be aware of always being a spokesman for Christ.

3) Muslim resistance is a reality that cannot be ignored. This is partly because we have a common past (let's call it our "Abrahamic" heritage) and, on the other hand, a history that separates us and in fact opposes us (the crusades etc.). And then, for Muslims, the "chronological" argument comes into play: their prophet is the last in their order of revelation. The only possible answer is patience.

4) Do not aim for conversions/baptisms if there is no guarantee of faithfulness over time. This means: work to transform the environment. Nos. 3 and 4 tell us that we should perhaps count in centuries rather than years.

5) The requirements of the apostolate of the milieu: adaptation and spirit of service (the "all to



all"): doing good to the other as to a brother.

6) The presuppositions of such an apostolate: a solid specific formation.

7) The ultimate goal is not (as some have told me in the past) to make Muslims better Muslims, but to prepare the possibility of an environment where a free choice for Christ is possible. In the meantime, as they say in English: "Let God be God".

My practical conclusions

1) We need an apostolic project, whether we call it a "directory" or something else. And this at a general level and at the "local" level; this, of course, from a single vision. This means excluding personal projects, private interests, and projects that do not ultimately aim at an openness to Christ and his kingdom.

2) This project must be managed and supported by the Councils at all levels, but especially at the local level.

3) We must invest in formation, and ad hoc formation.

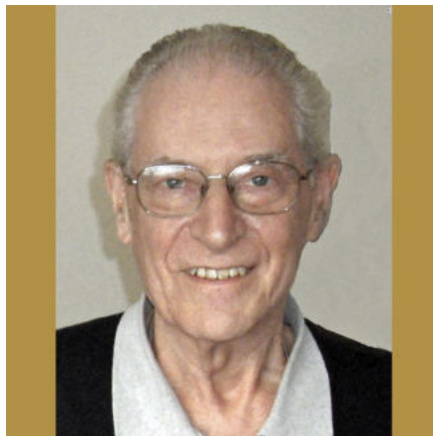
4) We must go beyond an initial formation that has become too ex-

clusively "pastoral for Christians", following Vatican II and especially the documents that followed it.

5) We need to find candidates who are capable of working alone, but who are determined to do so together, thanks to local and other councils and to the project of the Society, the province and the community.

6) This apostolate in the land of Islam should not be judged in terms of profitability or personal satisfaction. It is about THE MISSION, not mine or anyone else's.

This is what I wanted to tell you. Now we just have to do it, as best we can.



Piet Horsten (1936-2018)
November 26th 2008



BOOKS AND ARTICLES PUBLISHED BY CONFRERES

Diego Sarrio Cucarella, « Foreword » in « *A Call to Dialogue. Christians in Dialogue with Muslims* (edited by Ambrogio Bongiovanni & Victor Edwin s.j), Roma, 2022, pp.15-18.

Chileshe Christopher, *Strengthening Life-Enriching Elements in Relationships in the Formation of Missionaries for the 21st Century African World: The Case of St Martin of Tours Formation House, Ejisu*. A Thesis submitted to Southeast Asia Interdisciplinary Development Institute (SAIDI) Gradual School of Organization development, in partial fulfilment for the degree of Master of Arts in Organization Development and Planning (OD&P), Quezon City, Philippines, 2020, 135p.

Gilles EFIYO AMA, *The Centrality of the Cross in Hans Urs von Balthazar's Christology and its relevance for the Suffering in Africa*, a dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Theology in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Award of the Degree of Doctorate in Sacred Theology with specialization in Dogmatic Theology, Nairobi (Kenya), 2021, 261p.

Andreas Göpfert, in Indunil J. Kodithuwakku K. (ed.), *Christian Witness in a multi-religious World*, Roma (Pontifical council for interreligious dialogue- libreria ed. Vaticana), 2022, pp.146-148.

Moussa Serge Traore is co-founder of a new journal: "*The Journal of the African Christian and Muslim Reflections/Réflexions africaines chrétiennes et musulmanes*". In the first issue published in 2021, Serge explains the project behind the birth of this new journal ("*The African Christian and Muslim Reflections Project*", p. 9-14), writes the introduction to this first issue ("Introduction", p.15-17) and makes a first contribution in the philosophical and theological section ("*An African Perspective on Reconciliation*", p. 49-74).

Fernando Balduz Fernández (1934 - 2022)



Born in:	Olite, Spain on 22/07/1934
Sp. Year:	Maison-Carrén Algeria on 27/09/1954
Oath:	Thibar, Tunisia on 26/06/1957
Priesthood:	Carthage, Tinsia on 03/02/1958
Died at:	Pamplona , EspSapainagne on 12 /02/2022

Father Fernando was born - as he used to repeat with healthy pride - in Olite, a village in the middle of Navarre called "Villa", famous for its rosé wines, but also for its history, with its imposing 14th-century castle whose towers dominate the town, the Royal Palace of the Kings of Navarre, its cobbled streets, its splendid churches and its summer cultural festivals, which are well appreciated by tourists. Fernando never missed his town's patron saint's day, with its procession and the generous aperitif offered by the town hall to the civil and religious authorities.

He was born on 22 July 1934 and baptized a few days later at Saint Peter parish as was the custom in those days. His parents, Julio and Angelina, had seven children, five boys and two girls. Fernando was the sixth on the list.

He began his preparation for the priesthood in the minor seminary of Pamplona at the age of 11. At that time, after the Spanish Civil War, vocations were abundant, and the seminaries were well-filled with young candidates for the Priesthood. Navarre, the homeland of St. Francis Xavier provided a good atmosphere for missions. The diocese of Navarre



was a real breeding ground for missionary vocations. Enthused by the visit of some White Fathers, Fernando decided to join them.

He did his novitiate in Maison-Carrée (Algiers, 1954-1955); theology in Tunisia (1955-58) to complete the studies initiated in Pamplona; Missionary Oath on 26 June 1957 in Thibar; ordination to the Priesthood on 3 February 1958 in Carthage.

We do not have many details about his early life: motivations, character, preferences, spiritual life, social relations and academic grades. To fill this gap, I cross-checked and compared two photos, one in black and white, when he was still a student: lowcut hair adapted to the style of a future celibate. His face appeared firm, intelligent, with penetrating eyes, perhaps a bit severe, determined and courageous. He gave the impression of knowing what he wanted. The other photo, in colour, is from his years as a mature person. You could clearly see the difference, though the impression given by the first photo still being present. His look had changed: deep and serene, perhaps with a hint of sadness. You can see the weight of life, full of pleasant but

also painful experiences.

Mali

Fernando's missionary life began in Mali, where he arrived in October 1958. After a few months at the language school in Faladie, to learn Bambara, the local language, he went to the parish of Niono, in the diocese of Segou, neighbouring Bamako. There he was obliged to make another linguistic effort. Near Niono, there was a small Christian colony of Burkinabe of the Mossi ethnic group, which they attended to without knowing the language. This motivated Fernando, who was very good at languages, to travel to Burkina to learn Moore.

Shortly after his return to Mali, Fernando was appointed parish priest of Niono, where he remained until 1964. We know how well he integrated into this parish thanks to the joy he expressed in one of his letters, on his return from his holidays in Spain, at being with his parishioners again. This letter also contained some interesting details: "I left Olite on 29 September and took the boat in Marseille on 2 October: 12 days journey to Abidjan. The sea was calm throughout the journey, but 12 days was a bit long. We were



21 missionaries, including 4 White Fathers. Twelve days were enough to get bored. We stopped in Genoa, Casablanca, Dakar, Monrovia, and arrived in Abidjan on 14 October. There was still the journey by road before arriving in Bamako on the 22nd. It took six days to arrange the documents for the car (3CV). Finally, after a short stop in Segou, I arrived at the mission in Niono on 29 October completing a full month of travel. I was tired of it and eager to arrive. Now everything has changed; it is all smiles, at least at the beginning, when I met the people. My joy was enormous, finding myself again in this familiar atmosphere. I have already started to visit all the corners of the parish going from one place to another."

Intervals in Spain and Senegal

Fernando remained in Niono until 1966. He was a complete man who was totally committed. However, since he needed a little rest, he was appointed to missionary animation in Seville, a service in which he integrated easily and wisely, according to the letters from that time.

Between 1969 and 1984, several very important events took place in Fernando's life: frequent

changes of parish and the assumption of important responsibilities that showed the confidence his superiors had in him. His first appointment after his return from Spain was to Beleko, a beautiful parish south of Segou, somewhat isolated geographically, but prosperous with the arrival of three Spanish Sisters of Mary Immaculate, known in Spain as the Sisters of the "Servicio Doméstico". Fernando took charge of teaching them French and Bambara.

In 1974, he was appointed to Makala, where he stayed for a year. In 1975, he was appointed to Segou, first as curate, then as parish priest and Vicar General of the diocese. It was a stimulating and happy time for Fernando. His Provincial would write, "in perfect agreement" with his bishop's way of thinking. But two years later, in 1977, the romance with his bishop ended dramatically. Bishop Sidibe of Segou, concerned about the lack of priests, wanted to restructure the diocese, so he appointed his priests, including the White Fathers, in pairs to the various parishes. He wanted to increase the pastoral efficiency of the diocese, but he imposed his will without taking into account the community rule of "three members", proper to



the Missionaries of Africa, and this was against the opinion of his main adviser, Fernando, who resigned.

To get him away from this painful situation, Fernando was appointed to St. Peter of the Baobabs parish, in Dakar. It was there that he discovered that he was suffering from leprosy. This worried him, though he managed to cure it. He spent several years at the Marchoux Institute in Bamako. Fernando kept his illness a secret.

He returned to Mali in 1983. The superiors could not find a suitable place for him: Kolokani, Faladié, Kati, Uolosebugu and, finally, the parish of Badialan, in Bamako. Fernando suffered and made others suffer. His health deteriorated again with painful arthritis in his hips. His only wish was "that he be forgotten and that no one think of him anymore". It is not clear what caused this: personal insecurity crisis, lack of motivation, fatigue, health problems...

In Spain

He finally returned to Spain in 1998. Fernando wanted to turn over a new leaf and gradually withdrew from active life. He dis-

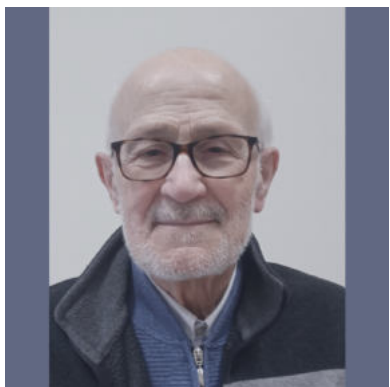
cerned his real possibilities in the service of the Mission after the session of confreres over 60-years in Rome. He stayed in the White Fathers' residence in Barañain (Pamplona) until 2015. He knew what he could do and what he couldn't do anymore. He knew that it was time to say goodbye to many things and to keep what he considered essential to protect his equilibrium: the emotional relationship with his family and his native town, a minimum of community relations, walks around the house, the daily Eucharist, live in peace, with a few small caprices in eating and drinking.

Physical damage – a hip and heart operation - as well as cognitive problems, forced him to ask to be admitted to the Casa de la Misericordia in Pamplona. The confreres of Barañain visited him regularly. He died on 12 February 2022 in the peace of the Lord. He is buried in the family pantheon in Olite, his native village.

Agustín Arteche Gorostegui



Aldo Marcello Giannasi 1935 - 2022



Born in:	Frassinoro, Italie on 28/10/1935
Sp. Year:	Maison-Carré, Algérie on 27/09/1955
Oath:	Carthage, Tunisie le 26/06/1959
Priesthood:	Frassinoro, Italie on 30/01/1960
Died at:	Modena, Itale on 19/05/2022

Aldo Marcello Giannasi died on the evening of Thursday 19 May in the hospital in Modena where he had been admitted to intensive care following a catastrophic fall in his house in his hometown of Frassinoro (MO).

Born on 28 October 1935, Aldo Marcello was the last child of his father Emilio's second wife, and the last heir of 11 children, 6 from his first wife and 5 (2 boys and 3 girls) from his second wife, Marcolini Virginia, Aldo's mother. Born and raised in a peasant environment in the Tuscan-Emilian Apennines, he inherited a jovial and sociable character, a tenacious

temperament in the face of difficulties, and a bold and enterprising spirit. He finished primary school in Frassinoro and began secondary school at the White Fathers' seminary in Finale Emilia and later studied philosophy in Parella, in the Turin area.

He entered the novitiate at Maison Carrée in Algeria in 1955 and did his first year of theology at Thibar in Tunisia the following year. He was then sent to Carthage where he completed his theological studies. He took his oath in the Society of Missionaries of Africa on 26 June 1959 and was ordained a deacon in October.

He was later ordained a priest



in Frassinoro (MO) on 30 January 1960,

Aldo, with his bright and lively intelligence, was first appointed to Rome for a degree in philosophy. He was then appointed in October 1962 to the major seminary of Gargagnago (VR) as formator, where, in addition to teaching the seminarians, he continued his studies in philosophy at the University of Milan up to the PhD.

In Mali with intervals in Italy

On 30 June 1970, he left for Africa, to Mali, to Kolokani, in the far north of the diocese of Bamako, which was made a parish only five years earlier, with a very small Christian community, but with great prospects, especially in the surrounding villages, with the communities of adult catechumens led by local catechists.

"When I arrived in Africa, I had the experience of what is called the 'first proclamation', a discreet presence of proximity made up of relationships and contacts on a daily basis".

In April 1972, he was appointed parish vicar in Bamako and, the following year, to the south of the capital, first in Oue-

lessebougou, then in Buguni, where he remained until 1976.

He was called back to Italy and followed the opening of the first cycle of formation in Verona. He remained there as superior until the end of 1981, following the formation of young seminarians and building relationships with the people of the area and the parishes of the diocese. The parishes of the diocese have fond memories of his presence, as several parishioners testified on the occasion of his death.

On 1 January 1982, he returned to Mali to Kolokani, first as curate, then as parish priest. The construction of the church in Kolokani dates back to this period, thanks to a donation from a benefactress in Valpolicella and the work of Aldo's friends and relatives, not forgetting the collaboration of local youth.

In 1985, he participated in the session/retreat in Jerusalem. He then returned to Kolokani where he stayed until 1991.

On returning to Italy in 1991, he was entrusted with the responsibility of the magazine AFRICA, first in Treviglio, then from 1993 in Milan. In 1996, he was ap-



pointed to the PISAI in Rome as a librarian. He remained there until 2001.

Upon his return to Mali, in Bamako, the Archbishop asked him to accompany secondary school students who were forced to study under lampposts with no access to essential books and texts. This led Aldo to create a Documentation and Study Centre where young people of all ethnicities, religions and schools (public and private) found a safe structure with bright rooms and a library.

«When I left the Documentation Centre in 2008, -writes Aldo-, there were 600 students of all ethnic, religious and educational backgrounds. The vast majority were Muslims. We experienced dialogue and encounter concretely. I saw what a "school of peace" can do. There were girls dressed in European style, while others wore veils. Feasts were celebrated and prepared together. I am convinced that the "school of peace", through serious education and training in lived dialogue, can lead to a society that will be able to collaborate not only for a green Sahel, but also for a peaceful, secure and progressive Sahel.»

From Italy to Algeria and back

Aldo lived in the community of the Missionaries of Africa in Castelfranco Veneto (TV) from 2008 to 2012, a community of seven missionaries, all of them veterans of Africa and all of them close to or over the age of 80, who, however, still live the mission, albeit in a different way from Africa: missionary animation in the various dioceses and groups, providing pastoral assistance in the parishes and dialogue with Muslims.

He was then appointed parish priest of the Basilica of Our Lady of Africa in Algeria from 2012 to 2015. Here is his testimony:

"There is a people in Algeria, fundamentally Muslim of course, but who must be met, who must know with whom to live in the evangelical truth... Since the construction of the Basilica of Our Lady of Africa, many people, men and women, have come to pray and have always been well received. Today the Basilica has lost its Christian population (almost all of them have left) and is filling up with Muslims... About 70,000 people visit the Basilica in a year, not only as tourists, but often they



sit down to pray... and according to tradition, they light candles in front of the Madonna. Mary, the mother of Jesus Messiah, the greatest prophet after Mohammed, is part of the Koranic tradition and of Muslim piety..."

Returning to Algeria after a well-deserved holiday in Italy in 2015, he was appointed to Ouargla, an oasis in the Sahara, 800 km south of Algiers, once a small fortification of a French military garrison. "When the Fathers arrived among the Berber huts, it became a modern city after the discovery of oil. The White Fathers had arrived there in 1875 and, in addition to providing religious assistance to the military, they began to study the local languages and, in particular, Mozabite, a Berber dialect, and to collect ancient books, parchments and photographs. Over the years, the missionaries catalogued this heritage, which became more and more impressive and was to constitute a garrison of memory for the region and for all of Algeria. The photographs, in particular, bear witness to the different moments of the presence of Christians who, over the years, have become more and more closely linked to the local population. The

Cultural Centre has become a reference point for the city over the years, also because students are helped in their research, and the whole population can take advantage of the French, English and computer courses that are organised there. The Centre also provides a platform for a film forum on scientific and social issues. The structure is a testimony of a community of believers who come together in their diversity.

Aldo returned to Italy definitively in 2017, first to Castelfranco Veneto and then in 2020 to Treviglio, still offering his service in the missionary animation of the parishes and above all in the care and closeness of the older confreres.

On Monday 8 May 2022, he went home to Frassinoro for a short period of rest before a planned trip to Rome on 15 May to attend the canonisation of Charles de Foucauld. However, on the third night, that is between Thursday 12 and Friday 13 May, he fell down the stairs, and was discovered by his niece who, seeing the windows still closed in the morning, suspected something and went into the house. He was immediately taken to the Baggiovara hospital in Modena where he



died the following Thursday evening, 19 May.

His funeral took place in Fras-sinoro on Monday 23 May, with burial in the local cemetery on bare earth and with only a wooden cross, as written in his will.

Father Aldo was a man of prayer, an example of fidelity to meditation in the presence of the Lord and to the reading of the Word of God, a peaceful and gentle man. "I found in Father Aldo a great openness, a fraternal welcome, a deep understanding and an equally great capacity to play down with a witty irony and a simple, open and disarming smile. I thank God for having known him..." (testimony of Maria

Stella of the Castelfranco mission-ary group).

Aldo was a man of dialogue, always looking for respectful and enriching human relationships, of benevolent attention to the most fragile of the "peripheries of the world". He loved Africa, from Algeria to Tunisia, from Mali to the Sahara, with a special memory for the Basilica of Our Lady of Africa.

Vittorio Bonfanti



There is a people in Algeria,
fundamentally Muslim of course,
but who must be met,
who must know with whom to live
in the evangelical truth...

Aldo Marcello Giannasi



Mgr. Remi Sainte-Marie 1938 - 2022



Born in:	La Minerve, Canada on 11/01/1938
Sp. Year:	St-Martin, Canada on 16/08/1958
Oath:	Eastview, Canada on 23/06/1962
Priesthood:	La Minerve, Canada on 29/06/1963
Consecrated Bishop:	Bembeke, Malawi on 09/05/1998
Died at:	Montréal, Canada on 18/06/2022

Bishop Rémi left us in a rather unexpected way. He had just returned from Malawi in early February 2022, suffering from severe pain in his right shoulder. We thought that this was a resurgence of pain from the two road accidents he had suffered during his time in Malawi. Further medical examinations revealed that Rémi was suffering from generalized cancer which was already quite advanced. He died about five weeks after his illness was discovered.

Rémi was born on 11 January 1938, into a traditional rural

family. He was the youngest of 18 children. One can well imagine that he enjoyed the treats bestowed by his elders. What is certain is that he received the attention of a deeply religious mother from a very young age. His primary education, at the school of his native village (La Minerve), reinforced the education he received in the family. The instruction of the 'little catechism' was just as important, if not more so, than geography and arithmetic!

Rémi had to leave the family nest at about the age of 12 to become a boarder at the minor sem-



inary of Mont-Laurier where he started his secondary studies which he finished with two years of philosophy at the Philosophy seminary of Montreal. It was no doubt during these studies that his missionary vocation matured. Those were the days still when religious visited schools to present the life and apostolate of their congregations to young students. After these studies, Rémi left for our novitiate of Saint-Martin de Laval; he received his theological formation in Eastview a suburb of Ottawa. He took his Missionary Oath on 23rd June 1962 and was ordained a Priest on 29th June 1963.

Missionary in Malawi

Apart from the short time spent in animation in Montreal and Ottawa, it was in Malawi that Rémi lived out his missionary vocation. Like any good 'White Father', his journey began with a course on the language and customs of the country. The then Regional in his first report on the young missionary wrote: "At the language centre, he made a very good impression; he learned the language quickly and well. He was bursar during his stage and did very well. He has a generous disposition, is

active and interested in work, and shows initiative. He is a man of good character, always cheerful and smiling. He also seems to be well grounded spiritually."

His first appointment was to Bembeke, a parish in the Diocese of Dedza, one of the oldest parishes in Malawi. An unfortunate motorbike accident he suffered during the language course, overshadowed his first years of apostolate. He even had to return to Canada for a rest and would feel the effects of this accident all his life with quite pronounced neck and back pains. But this did not deter his energies!

His talents as an educator quickly set him on a new path. Besides, he had improved his natural talents by pursuing two years of studies in religious education at Laval University in Quebec City during his medical leave in his native country. In 1967, he was appointed as a teacher at the inter-diocesan minor seminary of Saint Kizito, in Mtendere, and became its Rector in 1973. He would retain this position until 1978. A confrere who knew him well wrote: "Rémi was, of course, gifted with the usual qualities of a good teacher. He also had a very



special talent. He could very well call a young person to order, and in an unequivocal manner, without however estranging him!" This great quality was to accompany him throughout his life and would be of great help in the functions and responsibilities to which he was later called.

On his return to Malawi after his service in animation in Canada from 1978 to 1984, he was again called upon as a formator. He was responsible for the first cycle for our candidates for six years, and at the same Superior of a seminary for the aspirants of several missionary congregations in Ludzi. This service was interspersed with a few short stints in parish ministry and his delegation to the 1986 Chapter and was crowned by his participation in the Jerusalem retreat in 1990.

Regional assistant, district superior, then auxiliary bishop

It was at this point that his life took a decisive turn. He was first chosen as a regional assistant to Father Jesus Esteibarlanda, whom he replaced as District Superior in 1994. Four years later, on 28 February 1998, he was appointed auxiliary Bishop of the diocese of Dedza. He was ordained by

Bishop Gervazio Chisendera, the titular bishop of the diocese, on 9 May 1998.

Saying 'yes' to this call to join the episcopate of Malawi was not automatic for Remi. Like all those who are called to this service, he undoubtedly asked himself whether he had the qualities to fulfil this mission. He also wondered how the first diocese to be entrusted to a Malawian bishop could now receive a missionary bishop as its pastor.

In a homily during the Eucharist celebrated at La Minerve a few weeks before his return to Malawi for his episcopal ordination, he revealed this concern; above all, he told us how the faithful of the diocese welcomed his appointment: "The people of Malawi have understood that we are part of a Church that proclaims its catholicity and the universal brotherhood in Jesus that transcends our differences and brings us together."

The first years in this new ministry were not easy. His duties as auxiliary bishop were not very well defined and the state of the diocese's finances left much to be desired. Rémi did not let the situation put him off.



As bishop, he reunited with a large number of his former students from the minor seminary now in the clergy. The same concern to make them first-rate pastors was awakened in him, and he never ceased to make it a priority throughout his years as bishop. He did his best to look after the spiritual life of his clergy; nor did he forget that everyone needed certain material well-being in order to serve God with a free spirit.

The religious working in his diocese were also the object of his attention. In a letter of sympathy, the head of one of the congregations wrote: "Bishop Remi did a lot for our people in his missionary life in Africa. Many of our priests passed through his hands in the seminary." He was also instrumental in the formation of the religious of his diocese.

This desire to ensure a decent lifestyle for his clergy, combined with all the other needs of a diocese, required considerable material resources. Anyone who knew Rémi well, knew his constant concern to find these resources and, as a good administrator, to make the most of them.

Bishop of Dedza, coadjutor in Lilongwe, then first archbishop of Lilongwe

In September 2000, Bishop Chisendera resigned as Bishop of Dedza and Remi was appointed in his place. He was installed as titular Bishop on 17 October. His episcopal mission in Dedza continued until February 2006 when he became Coadjutor Bishop of Lilongwe. His status changed rapidly: in October 2007, he took charge of the diocese and became its first archbishop when the diocese became an archdiocese in February 2011.

His time in the Malawian episcopate impacted the Church in the country. According to Father Michel Meunier in his homily at the funeral Mass: "Rémi was very close to the dream of Pope Francis of a missionary Church with the poor and for the poor. His fight for justice was well known. He dreamt of helping the poorest of the people and living in a society where sharing would become something normal, something natural. He himself received many gifts from his benefactors, but he shared everything. His concern for justice went far beyond sharing his resources with the poor."



As a bishop, he acquired a widely recognised moral authority in the country. He knew how to use his influence with his fellow bishops. He also never missed an opportunity to remind the country's leaders of their duties towards all citizens and, when necessary, denounced any government activity that did not respect the rights of the least of the people.

At his funeral Mass in Lilongwe on 22 June, Bishop Martin Mtumbuka of Karonga Diocese said that Bishop St Mary was a strong advocate for justice, always standing up for the poor and marginalised: "We cannot thank God for the gift of Bishop St Mary without highlighting his deep desire for justice and his unconditional commitment to the poor and marginalised. A striking symbol of this can be seen in celebrating the memory of Archbishop St. Mary's on the Memoria of St. Thomas More who preferred fidelity to God to obedience to his king."

Remi lived in a permanent state of service. We all know the reception reserved for disciples who made themselves servants of their brothers and sisters: "Come, you blessed of my Father; receive the

inheritance of the kingdom prepared for you... for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink... I tell you, whenever you did it to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me" (Mt 25:34-38). We can certainly assume that this was the welcome Remi got on his arrival in the New Life.

His ideal of justice was also reflected in his concern for truth. He abhorred 'double talk', an ambiguous formula that hides the reality of life with beautiful words. He could even lose his temper with someone who refused to denounce the non-evangelical attitudes that were sometimes conveyed; it is necessary to recognise this in the Church.

Remi was more like Martha than Mary, the friends of Jesus. But his life was rooted in prayer. His devotion to Mary, the mother of Jesus, was particularly ardent. One of his faithful friends in Malawi put it well: "Monsignor Remi never stopped seeking Mary's protection. At his cottage where he had retired on the shores of Lake Malawi, he had a small grotto of the Virgin built. Yes, he had been preparing for his final journey for



a long time. He was ready to meet Jesus and his Mother. He had chosen as his episcopal motto: "Sub tuum Praesidium".

It was on the shores of Lake Malawi that Rémi spent the last years of his life, following his retirement in July 2013. His health was much better suited to the climate of Malawi than to our Canadian climate! It was there that the final scare hit and forced him to return to Canada.

The last months of his life were painful. He confided to a confrere: "I don't think I have ever suffered so much in my life. I never thought I would have to suffer so much". But his faith and his prayer kept him company. As gospel text for his funeral, he himself had chosen the text from John, which proclaims that the risen Jesus is the source of life, of eternal life: "Whoever believes in me," says Jesus, "even if he dies, he will live; and whoever believes in me will never die."

One day, when the television set was not working in his hospital room, he confided to a friend who

was near him: "That's good! I will have more time to pray and prepare for the great journey." As already mentioned, his trust in Mary was very deep. During his last days of illness, when prayer did not come easily to him, he liked to pray the rosary.

Rémi died in the early hours of June 18, at the Marie-Clarac Hospital in Montreal-North; a niece and her husband were at his bedside. A Scripture passage sums up his life: "Love and Truth have met, Justice and Peace have embraced" (Psalm 85:11).

Denis-Paul Hamelin
and
Michel Meunier



Guido Verbist 1933 - 2022



Born in:	Mechelen, Belgium on 21/09/1933
Sp. Year:	Varsenare, Belgium on 07/09/1955
Oath:	Heverlee, Belgique on 04/07/1959
Priesthood:	Heverlee, Belgium on 02/02/1960
Died at:	Bruges, Belgium on 21/06/2022

Guido was born on 21 September 1933 in Hever, a small village near Mechelen. After three years of Greco-Latin humanities, he went to the Cardinal Mercier Technical Institute in Schaerbeek and obtained a diploma in "Dental Prosthetics" in 1953. He was a scout leader in the scouts, where the White Fathers of Louvain were the chaplains. While still a student, his father was killed in a car accident at the age of 43. Although he was an only child, his mother supported his desire to join the White Fathers in Boechout. Having completed his novitiate in Varsenare and theology in Heverlee, he took his Missionary Oath on 4 July 1959 and was ordained a Priest on

2 February 1960. His first three years in Africa took the place of his military service. Guido is described as a true idealist, but also as someone who had both feet on the ground, in other words, balanced. He always did his work with care. He was dedicated, tactful and always ready to help; he was also quiet and discreet. He was always very much appreciated in the community.

Long missionary life in Africa

Since he was in principle appointed to take charge of the formation of the Brothers, he followed two years of catechesis at the University of Louvain. An urgent need from the diocese of Bobo-Dioulasso for a mathematics



and natural science teacher for the minor seminary of Nasso resulted in his departure for the Upper Volta of the time. He taught maths, science and Latin. "He is appreciated and loved by the seminarians. Has a good judgement of their abilities", notes Father Cormy, the Regional.

Three years later, Guido became part of the new Senufo project in Konandougou. In November 1969 he was appointed director of the Catechist Training Centre in Orodara, a position he held for nine years. "He likes his work. Reads a lot and is well-informed. Would like to return to parish ministry, rather in the bush than in the city", according to the Regional Fr Puiroux. Guido published a journal for the catechists of two dioceses, as well as "Dossiers pour la Formation des Catéchistes", which was also used by neighbouring dioceses. In July 1978 he was appointed to the cathedral of Bobo-Dioulasso, as Episcopal Vicar in charge of urban pastoral work and as the one responsible for catechists in the diocese. He returned from the session/retreat in Jerusalem at the beginning of 1983 and was appointed curate (and three years later parish priest) in N'Dorola, among the Senufo. He stayed

there for 13 years. He was also a member of the M.Afr.- Council.

He returned to Konandugu in October 1995 as an "elder" in a team of young confreres. However, in 1995 he had to undergo an operation in Belgium due to kidney stones. In 1996, he was appointed bursar in Varsenare for three years. In May 1999, he left again and became the main chaplain of the hospital of the city of Bobo. Unfortunately, in March 2000 he had to return to Belgium for health reasons (a virus that threatened his right eye). During a routine check-up at the Tropical Institute, he was diagnosed with serious heart problems. Since temperatures in Burkina regularly reach 40°, the doctors advised him against returning to Africa.

Special missions in Belgium

In mid-June 2000, Guido was appointed in charge of Cogels-Osylei in Berchem. He took advantage of the missionary month of October 2000 to commit himself body and soul to the project proposed by the Pontifical Mission Society: Burkina Faso. For several months, he visited schools and parishes in the diocese of Antwerp to make this little-known country known. "It's my last publicity stunt", he remarked



during the presentation of the voluminous dossier devoted to "the country where I have worked since 1961".

Guido became bursar at La Plante (Namur) at the beginning of November 2001 for six years. After the 1998 Chapter, with its strong emphasis on "the encounter with the other, different in culture and religion", our Province launched, under Guido's direction, our famous "green leaflet", a supplement to *Nuntiuncula*, containing news, summaries of articles, reviews of books on Islam, ecumenism or other religions; since 2016 until 2018 they have been published on our website. He was also personally involved in ecumenism for fifteen years, especially in Namur and Antwerp (until the new bishop appointed a diocesan priest). He was part of the Provincial Council in 2002 and again in 2005. He also participated in the 70+ session in Rome in September 2003.

In 2008 Guido joined our Antwerp Procure community, which included taking on the role of interim leader in 2017. However, he noticed that the confreres were generally not very interested in his ecumenical work, and he felt it. However, this did not prevent him from carrying on with his anima-

tion. He continued to follow current events and was active in community discussions as long as his health allowed. His health gradually began to deteriorate. He was glad to be able to join Avondrust in Varsenare on 19 May 2022. Unfortunately, he was only able to enjoy it for a short time. He had to be rushed to St. John's Hospital in Bruges on 6 June. There, on the evening of 20 June, at about 8.30 p.m., he gave up the ghost.

The liturgy of the Resurrection for Guido took place on Friday 24 June in our chapel in Varsenare, followed by the burial in our cemetery. Father Wellens, in his homily, remembered with gratitude what he had signified as a priest and catechist for so many young Africans; his pastoral work with the Senufo people; his numerous contacts with animists and Muslims. He was a missionary from the bottom of his soul. He concluded his homily by saying: "If there is one thing we could and should learn from Guido, it is not to have blinkers on, but to have our eyes open to the whole world and to all religions."

Jef Vleugels



Georges Benoît 1933 - 2022



Born in:	Marieville, Canada on 23/12/1933
Sp. Year:	St-Martin, Canada on 18/08/1956
Oath:	Eastview, Canada on 18/06/1960
Priesthood:	Marieville, Canada on 28/01/1961
Died at:	Sherbrooke, Canada on 03/07/2022

Georges Benoît was serious and hard-working, discreet and conscientious in the tasks entrusted to him," testifies a confrere who lived in community with him in Ottawa during the last years of his active life in Canada. Piet de Bekker, a Dutch confrere who worked with Georges during his first years of mission in Ghana, wrote to the Father Provincial of the Americas: "Having learned of the death of Georges Benoît, I would like to offer my sympathy with you and the Province at his death. He was my first Parish Priest when I arrived in Ghana in October 1970. Together with an Irish confrere (who later-on left the Society), we formed a young

community in Bawku, a small town in the east of the Navrongo-Bolgatanga diocese. I remember celebrating Georges' 10th anniversary of ordination. But soon after in May 1971, Georges fell sick (malaria) and was evacuated back to Canada, never to return to Africa again. I was later appointed to the Parish of Tongo, which had been Georges' place of apostolate in 1961. I tried to connect with him but to no avail. Georges was a silent person but a hard worker and was satisfied with a minimum of comfort. Tongo parish, founded by Émile Rioux (+1991) and Brother Tim Murphy (+2015), had a simple single-story house when Georges arrived. However, the plan was to make it a double-story



house. With the help of a young boy (later the Mission cook and still alive), Georges single-handedly built the second floor and roofed it during the hours of the night under the light of a kerosene Tilley lamp.

Some fifty years of missionary life separate these two memories of Georges, that of Togo in Ghana, 1961-1964, and that of Ottawa in Canada, 2003-2012. Georges Benoît remained the same: "Discreet and conscientious in all the tasks that were entrusted to him", "A silent person and a hard worker".

Georges (first name) Benoît (last name) was born on December 23, 1933, in Marieville, a rural parish in the diocese of Saint-Hyacinthe, into a family of three girls and three boys. "Good Catholics who went to Communion frequently. The parents educated their children in the love of God", as stated in the evaluation of the parish priest who recommended Georges to the novice master, Father Georges-Albert Mondor. After his secondary studies at the minor seminary of Saint-Hyacinthe and philosophy in an institute, Georges was admitted in August 1956 to the novitiate of Saint-Martin (now Ville Laval). He had applied by writing in

March: "I have been thinking of joining the White Fathers for a long time. I have gathered some information and I will be happy to receive more, especially concerning the novitiate. I ask you to admit me into your community. For the time being, I consider myself an aspiring White Father novice. I will come to see you at the novitiate shortly. I await your reply."

Already at the age of 23, one could sense that Georges was in control of his life and at the same time wanted to integrate himself into the White Fathers' Society. All the evaluations of the novitiate and the scholasticate of Eastview went in the same direction: "Serious candidate. A good, well-balanced person. Although not an 'intellectual', he has good practical judgment. Good at manual work. He has a set of qualities which will make him appreciated in the community and which will enable him to give a good performance in the apostolate. I am in favour of his admission to the Society" (Father Jauréguy).

Missionary in Ghana from 1961 to 1971

Georges Benoît took his Missionary Oath and was admitted to the Society on 18 June 1960. He



was ordained a Priest on 28 January 1961. He started his pastoral stage in London in September 1961 (formerly an introduction to the British Way of Life). He arrived in Ghana in December, in the mission of Tongo, diocese of Navrongo, where Father Emile Rioux was parish priest. But some years later Father Rioux was appointed Regional... and this led to a period of anxiety for Georges. In 1964, Georges became the parish priest of Tongo. The above testimony dates back to this time when everything went well. However, pernicious malaria forced him to return to Canada on sick leave in December 1966. He then returned to Ghana six months later and was appointed superior of the Bawku mission, where he served for three years.

Apostolate in Canada

He returned permanently to Canada, reportedly ill, tired and anxious. Unable to return to Africa, Georges considered incardinating into a Canadian diocese. However, he later abandoned the idea. He changed dioceses and parishes in Canada several times between 1971 and 2003. Often at his request. He ministered as a vicar or parish priest in the dioceses of Saint-Hyacinthe, Amos, and Saint-Jean-Longueuil. He al-

ways maintained a link with the various Provincial Superiors who visited him.

In October 1989, Marcel Boivin, Provincial, visited him in his parish and wrote: "Georges has been in ministry outside the Society since his return from Ghana in 1971. After 11 years in the diocese of Amos, he returned to work in the diocese of Saint-Jean as pastor of Notre-Dame-de-Lourdes. He is happy in his ministry but does not see himself living in one of our large communities. He is interested in everything that happens in our Society. He should be attached to the community of the provincial house rather than to the one on Saint-Hubert Street."

Each time he left a diocese, the bishops were unanimous in thanking him for his "serious" work. In June 1991, the bishop of Saint-Jean-Longueuil, Bernard Hubert, one of the great bishops of Quebec that emerged from Vatican II, wrote to him: "The first term at Notre-Dame-de-Lourdes Parish is coming to an end. I express my gratitude for the quality of the work accomplished. I renew you as parish priest... I encourage you to continue to develop the parish project from the perspective of a community Church. Please collaborate with the Episcopal Vicar



and his assistant to achieve this. This is a priority task for the future of the parish. You will know how to surround yourself with people who are willing to combine their talents and efforts to achieve this project. I wish you much enthusiasm. May the Lord Jesus keep you joyful.”

Georges ended his service in the parishes of his home diocese of Saint-Hyacinthe in 2003. He accepted to be bursar in a small community, our house on Argyle Street, in Ottawa. In 2012, he was appointed to our retirement home in Lennoxville, Sherbrooke.

In early 2020, Georges was moved to the Saint-Vincent Hospital in Sherbrooke. He had been falling in his room at Lennoxville several times and it was noticed that his cognitive faculties were diminishing. When he first arrived at the hospital, he had difficulty recognizing his confrères. He also had the tendency to leave his room and go to other rooms. Alzheimer's disease quickly developed. Before long, it was impossible to have a conversation with him. He often won't speak. His physical strength diminished, and he would fall during the day and night. Fortunately, he never seriously injured himself when he fell.

Eventually, George started refusing to eat. He slowly fell into a coma from which he never came out. Just a few days before his death, on 3 July 2022, he was administered the sacrament of the sick. He passed away slowly.

The confreres of Sherbrooke normally organised a welcoming service and a religious celebration in the chapel of the funeral home for the friends and family of a deceased confrere. However, that was not possible this time, because none of his family members could attend the celebration. A funeral Mass was celebrated in the chapel of our residence Les Terrasses Bowen on July 15. All the confreres were present. The urn containing the ashes was buried in the White Fathers' plot at Saint-Antoine-de-Padoue Cemetery the following day. Georges Benoît now rests alongside his fellow Missionaries of Africa.

Julien Cormier

Adolf Pottrick 1940 -2022



Born in:	Grossendorf, Germany on 22/05/1940
Sp. Year:	Hörstel, Germany on 15/08/1963
Oath:	Totteridge, Great Britain on 25/06/1967
Priesthood:	Sillenbuch, Germany on 30/06/1968
Died at:	Hechingen, Germany on 30/07/2022

Whether as a war refugee, an Assistant Provincial or a Provincial Treasurer, Adolf remained calm, thoughtful and objective. If you wanted a different Adolf, you had to watch him perform in the theatre, and there you would see a mischievous Adolf, a clever character.

Adolf's childhood was marked by the war. Born on 22 May 1940 in Grossendorf in East Prussia, now part of Poland, he was the youngest of six sons and three daughters of Franz Pottrick and his wife Maria, née Hippel. His father was a construction worker, but Adolf did not know him, because he had been drafted into the

army at the beginning of the war and had died in 1944. His mother had to flee alone with her children to Denmark in January 1945. His youngest sister died on the journey. In Denmark, the family lived in various refugee camps for two and a half years.

Adolf began his primary education in the camp in 1946. In July 1947, his family returned to Germany and found a permanent home in Weildorf near Haigerloch, a small village with only 450 inhabitants. Adolf was admitted to the primary school there with more than 40 pupils in one class. In 1953 he went to the minor seminary of the White Fathers in Haigerloch, wanting to become a



missionary. From 1957 he attended grammar school in Großrotzenburg, where he graduated in March 1961.

Adolf began his philosophy studies in Trier the following April. He entered the novitiate in Hörstel in 1963 and studied theology in Totteridge. It was there that he took his Missionary Oath on 25 June 1967 and was ordained a Priest on 30 June 1968 in Stuttgart.

In Tanzania

Adolf's wish to work in East Africa was fulfilled when he was appointed to Tanzania. He arrived in the diocese of Rulenge in September 1968 and started the language course in Ibanda. He was a curate in the diocese from May 1969 to August 1974 in the parishes of Bushangano, Isingiro and Rukora. It was during these years that he became familiar with the cultural and socio-political realities of the country, as well as with the pastoral impulses of the Second Vatican Council.

In 1976, he returned to the Province of Germany where he worked in Vocation Promotion for three years. He joined the White Sisters-White Fathers team in Co-

logne, which was faced with the challenge of seeking new methods of vocation promotion in the context of post-conciliar openness and upheaval. Whereas previously the emphasis had been on preaching in parishes, animating missionary Sundays and religious education, they now had to meet young people in their White Fathers or White Sisters communities, or during international missionary pilgrimages.

Adolf returned to Tanzania in October 1979 and settled in the diocese of Mwanza. His wish was to go back to pastoral work. But his confreres elected him Vice-Provincial; he accepted the three-year term. With his calm and humble character, he was of great service to his confreres.

He became Regional in 1987 and in 1989 he took part in the Plenary Council of the Society. He took the opportunity to participate in the Great Spiritual Exercises in Jerusalem and to spend a well-deserved holiday in the Holy Land. In September 1990, he entered a new field of activity. In Dar es Salaam, he was in charge of the Missionaries of Africa Procure, which had been supporting the work of the Church in the country



since 1923. The list featured 21 dioceses, 17 schools and hospitals, as well as 23 congregations or religious orders. One confrere took care of the cars and containers that arrived at the port; all subsequent bills landed on his desk. The payments were made through his accounts and reimbursed by the dioceses and congregations concerned. Adolf was also responsible for the running of the guesthouse, which received an average of twenty people a day: community members, visiting brothers and guests.

He was appointed to the diocese of Mwanza after three years and joined the dual parish of Bukumbi-Misungwi. The pastoral work there was new to him; about 125 small Christian communities had been established in the larger parish. Moreover, women had come up with initiatives: they wanted more justice and equality. In a circular letter of 1995, Adolf described in detail this new pastoral orientation, as well as the growing awareness of women to take responsibility in parish life.

Germany - Tanzania - Germany

The years spent at the Dar es Salaam procure served as a learning period. In 1998, Adolf took

over the responsibility of the German Sector Bursar's office in Cologne, but he found himself in unfamiliar territory. German society had changed: it had become more secular and plural. The church had lost its power and voice; its arguments and values no longer had the same impact on public opinion. One of the consequences was, for example, the decline in vocations, both in the diocesan clergy and in religious societies. Against this background of change, Adolf had to envisage the material future of a community whose members were ageing and diminishing because they were without a replacement for many years. Adolf took up the challenge and reliably ran the bursar's office with his wealth of experience. To avoid being consumed by the stress of the service, he unwound by tending to the flowers and the shrubs in the community garden in Cologne.

He handed over the bursar's office to Father Frank Rossmann on 30 June 2007. In May 2008, he returned to Tanzania after a sabbatical year and until he returned to Germany for good in 2014, he was responsible for the reception in Nyegezi. Confreres from different dioceses used to stay in the former



province house in Nyegezi when they came to Mwanza. There too, Adolf found a way to rest from the demands of his service. He would go to Lake Victoria and cast his fishing rod instead of his nets. The harvest had an economic benefit because the product of his fishing was used in the kitchen of the guest house.

The many responsibilities of his life made themselves felt; Adolf returned to Germany frail.

His eyesight became increasingly poor and made it impossible for him to read. In 2017, he moved with the community to the retirement home in Hechingen. Adolf tiptoed away on Saturday 30 July 2022. The funeral took place on 5 August in Haigerloch, followed by burial in the Missionaries of Africa cemetery.

Hans Vöcking





Missionnaires of Africa

Father Guido Verbist of the diocese of Mechelen-Brussel, Belgium, who died in Bruges, Belgium, on the 21st of June 2022, at the age of 88 years, of which 62 years of missionary life in Burkina Faso and in Belgium.

Father Georges Benoit of the diocese of St-Hyacinthe, Canada, who died in Sherbrooke, Canada, on the 3rd of July 2022, at the age of 88 years, of which 62 years were spent as a missionary in Ghana and in Canada.

Father Evert van Oostrom of the diocese of Utrecht, Netherlands, who died in Horn, Netherlands, on the 20th of July 2022 at the age of 90, of which 63 years of missionary life in Italy, Tunisia, Uganda, Jerusalem, Great Britain, the United States, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Tanzania, Kenya and the Netherlands.

Father Adolf Pottrick of the diocese of Rottenburg, Germany, who died in Hechingen, Germany, on the 30th of July 2022 at the age of 82, of which 55 years of missionary life in Tanzania and Germany.

Father Sergio Stefanni of the diocese of Verona, Italy, who died in Billère, France, on the 4th of August 2022 at the age of 100, of which 73 years of missionary life in Rwanda, Italy, Burkina Faso, and France.

Father Richard Dessureault of the diocese of Chicoutimi, Canada, who died in Sherbrooke, Canada, on the 12th of August 2022 at the age of 88 of which 64 years of missionary life in Rwanda and in Canada.

Brother Josef Aversch of the diocese of Münster, Germany, who died in Trier, Germany, on the 18 August 2022, at the age of 93, of which 67 years of missionary life in Luxembourg, Burundi, Rwanda and Germany.

Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa

Sister Angela Brekelmans (Sr. Scholastica Marie). She died in Boxtel, The Netherlands, on the 10th July 2022, at the age of 98, of which 71 years of religious missionary life in Tanzania and The Netherlands.

Sr. Agnes Madai Mabone. She died in Bukavu, Democratic Republic of Congo on the 21st of July 2022 at the age of 75, of which 38 years of missionary religious life in Congo DRC, Chad, Burkina Faso and Malawi.

Sr. Johanna Hendrika van der Heijden (Maria Aloysia). She died in Boxtel, The Netherlands on the 27th of July 2022 at the age of 87, of which 64 years of religious missionary life in Malawi, Italy, France and The Netherlands.

Sr. Johanna de Groot (Alphonsa Marie). She died in Nuland, The Netherlands, on the 10th of August 2022 at the age of 92, of which 71 years of religious missionary life in Malawi, Tanzania and The Netherlands.

Sister Françoise Delouis. She died in Villeurbanne, France, on the 23rd of August 2022, at the age of 93, of which 67 years of religious missionary life in Burkina Faso and in France.

CONTENTS

EDITORIAL

- 387 **ROME** Faces of the mission in the Maghreb
Ignatius Anipu.

THE MISSION

- 390 **Mgh** Library Le Figuier, *Vincent Kyererezi.*
393 **Mgh** A known name in the Society, *Philippe Dakon.*
397 **Mgh** At the service of fraternal love *Rene Mounkoro.*
400 **Mgh** Life in a Muslim world has transformed
my faith *Patrick Leboulenger.*
403 **Mgh** Missionary life in evolution *Simon Amy Gornah.*

FORUM

- 407 **ROME** Cardinal Lavigerie and Islam
Piet Horsten.

PUBLICATIONS

- 419 Books and articles published by confreres

NOTICES

- 420 Fernando Balduz Fernández
424 Aldo Marcello Giannasi
429 Mgr. Rémi Sainte-Marie
435 Guido Verbist
438 Georges Benoît
442 Adolf Pottrick

R.I.P.

- 446 Confreres and Msola who died recently.



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