

African Opinion

THE CHURCH IN THE CONGO

It is a difficult task to attempt a survey of the Congo, because in doing so, one can easily make mistakes. This is due to several different factors, as the natural condition of the country, the speed with which the history of the Congo is building up, the originality of the Congolese experience, and the fact that everybody wants to deal with the Congolese problem.

The area of the Congo is 905,400 square miles. In such a big country whose population is estimated at about 14,000,000, towns and important villages are but scattered islands in the deep forest and the exuberant grass of the savannah. Thus, one can hardly pretend to speak competently about everything which is going on throughout the country. Besides, there are so many contradictions among reports and eye witnesses that one must reflect carefully and sift newspaper reports and radio-messages. Misleading tales, issued from personal interest or wrong interpretation of the facts, lead people to doubt even the value of the objective reports which he has succeeded in distinguishing from wrong ones.

In the Congo, matters are developing so fast, and the evidence is so shifting that people find it difficult to follow the events and give a sane judgement. Moreover, the political life of the Congo is so new and original that one scarcely knows where it is leading to. And the fact that everybody deals with the Congolese problem and each wants to solve it according to his own point of view, contributes no less to create confusion of mind. In spite of these difficulties, I would like to outline some few points of our drama, as I have seen it myself, or have heard from various people some of whom have been victims or actors in the game.

In the Congolese crisis, the Catholic Church was the organism which presented most stability, and whose European members resisted better the panic of July 1960. That missionaries held steady in spite of the widespread panic among the European population during July and August 1960, that they spared nothing to organize social relief and to continue the most urgent tasks, such as schools, in the very middle of the troubles, all that denotes not only how they like this country, but mainly how they were aware of the important role they had played, and they wanted still to play, in the building up of the Congo. Missionary activity in the Congo was not limited to the religious background. Beside their direct apostolate, missionaries, since the beginning, dealt with schools and enterprises for relief, such as hospitals, maternity homes, orphanages and others. Their ardour to undertake social enterprises was such as to attract the attention of the Belgian government who had, so to say, no means to undertake the work of education in the Congo. In the year 1926 therefore, the government entrusted the schools to missionaries who exercised in this domain a real monopoly without opposition of any kind, up to 1954.

Still nowadays missionaries hold most of the schools.

The zeal of the Sisters was not less noticeable. They held and hold still now many schools for girls, and work tirelessly in hospitals, maternity homes and orphanages.

Wonderful though the work of the missionaries may be, it does not mean that it escapes all criticism: the more we were approaching independence, the more criticism rose against them and often did not take into account the injurious conditions in which the latter were obliged to work, at least in the beginning. For example, missionaries were reproached with being at peace with Europeans who practised public concubinage and most of whom never heard mass, while they attacked Congolese who were present at mass. One of the most bitter accusations formulated against the missionaries was perhaps that they kept the level of school instruction low, thus impeding the evolution of the Congolese people, and so perpetuating exploitation of the Congo's wealth. This accusation was directed against Belgians as such; but as most schools were in missionaries' hands, it weighed mainly against them. Another accusation of this kind aimed directly at missionaries, whom they accused of neglecting the formation of a lay élite, while sparing no effort for the formation of a clerical élite which counts already many priests. Unfortunately these accusations are, if not entirely, at least partially justifiable. Nowadays, some missionaries recognize their mistakes and admit these accusations in so far as they are true. Fr Moermans, a White Father, writes for example: 'The evolution is so fast that a certain number of missionaries, mainly these who work away from centres, haven't succeeded in admitting the importance of new ideas and movements. They consider them as phenomena affecting only isolated individuals. With all loyalty, they consider that they must resist these too progressive tendencies, and go on with the paternalist method. Familiar with these methods they have practised for years, they are inclined to think our Congolese not as yet trained enough, that they must therefore continue, for their benefit, to lead them with all fatherly firmness and delicacy, and that, anyhow, it is premature to trust them with the leadership of affairs, even in limited sectors. They also have difficulty in renouncing some authoritarian practices which facilitate their task, but breed confusion and nourish the reproaches which are more and more vehement against missionary clericalism'.

More explicit still are the following lines. 'Sometimes the Church has supported the colonial regime as being requisite for peace and prosperity. The Church often profited from it in so far as colonization had favoured the missionaries' dispersion throughout the African continent. It has very often been tributary respecting subsidies for its schools and works, and sometimes for its churches. At the moment when emancipation was drawing near, the fact that the missionaries were restricted in their action by the colonial powers lent colour to the impression that the missionary spirit was afraid of itself and of the liberation it was bringing. These are facts to be loyally recognized and which account partially for the accusations we have just pointed out'.

The rancour against missionaries as against colonialists is a wide-spread fact, and not a matter of a few extremists as people are inclined to think. Of course the man in the street has no means to express aloud his feelings as do the intellectuals. But I often happen to hear even peasants asking me: 'What are missionaries doing still in our country, as we have already our own priests like you?' Another told me: 'It would be a pity if the missionaries were to be kicked out, but Father X must go home. I wonder whether it is not time to accuse him to the police?'

In spite of these criticisms, the Congolese population has not lost its esteem for the missionaries. This esteem which goes side by side with criticism seems to be a sign that the missionaries' work has not been mere destruction. It shows also that the Congolese population is not against the Catholic religion as such, but against missionaries only in so far as it appears to them that Belgian missionaries use Catholicism to exercise colonialism. It is perhaps in accordance with such feeling that, before the crisis, there was a government plan to replace Belgian missionaries by missionaries of other nationalities.

When the troubles broke out, missionaries were the only Europeans to resist it collectively. The answer of the Sisters in Banalia can give us an idea of their behaviour during the troubles. 'We shall not leave here', they answered the United Nations soldiers who wanted to evacuate them to Stanleyville, 'till it is ordered by the religious authorities; besides, we are well enough here'.

The Congolese Church did not limit itself to resisting panic. It participated actively in saving what could be saved. In September 1960, the Catholic Church created the Caritas Congo which was called on to relieve orphans, lepers, refugees (even from Angola), to supply medicine etc. Many missionaries and Congolese priests became teachers at schools. They succeeded in maintaining flourishing schools, youth movements like J.O.C., Scout and other Catholic movements. So the Church in the Congo has lost nothing of its expansion. But it does not mean that missions were or are quite out of danger. A few episodes and facts chosen from different points of the Congo might give us some idea about the progress of the Church in the troubling situation, and will help to mitigate the pessimism of some and temper the optimism of others. The principal centres of trouble for the Church has been especially the Maniema, the North and Centre of Katanga, and the South of Kasai.

In the diocese of Kamina (Central Katanga), six missions (Kikondja, Kayeye, Kabondo, Dianda, Bukama and Makulakula) had to be evacuated. Attacks were made also against missions in the diocese of Baudouinville (North-Katanga), especially in Kiambi, Nguzu and Kabalo. In Maniema, missions were in a very pitiful position: nine sisters were arrested in Kasongo on the 14th of February 1961 and treated ignominiously. The country was gone over by a crew of young people who called themselves 'Cartel' and had as purpose to kill all Whites beginning with missionaries. It was this 'Cartel' which arrived at Kasongo on the 14th of March 1961 to arrest the missionaries. Only four fathers and four sisters succeeded in escaping and placing themselves under the protec-

tion of the Congolese National Army. The prisoners suffered every kind of humiliation and outrage. They regained their mission only at midnight under the protection of policemen and soldiers of the Congolese National Army.

On the 16th of February 1961, Fr De Vos lost his life during the attack on the mission 'Saint François Xavier' in Bukavu (Kivu), by a crew of Bakusu and *Jeunesse M.N.C. (Mouvement National Congolais)*. The intervention of soldiers of the Congolese National Army was necessary to prevent attacks on other missions.

In South-Kasai, the tribal warfare did not respect missions. In the diocese of Kabinda (Kasai) the Kalonda mission was attacked; Abbot Beya was killed and the seminarists dispersed (26 October 1960). Fr J. Tegels was killed in Basoko (Eastern Province). In Stanleyville, on the 3rd of May 1961, a functionary sent workers to destroy the Statue of Mgr Grison and of the Sacred Heart. Mgr Grison's statue was already in pieces and the Sacred Heart had an arm broken when two functionaries of the provincial Government arrived to stop the destroyers and to demand reparation at once. In the diocese of Inongo a mission was attacked by unemployed men. The most dreadful attack against a mission was perhaps the massacre of Kongolo in which eighteen or more missionaries were killed.

I mention these episodes only as examples; there are other cases of this kind. But most missions were not in such a situation. For example, in dioceses of Lisala, Niangara and in Léopoldville etc. missionary activities were quite normal. Even in Kivu, there were missions which did not suffer the least trouble. In general we may say that missionary activities have been opposed rather on a small scale. Missions were progressing during the troubles, and now there are no more attacks on them.

In spite of their admirable work there, the missionaries have been submitted to serious criticisms. These criticisms are due to the fact that the Church was unfortunate enough to enter the Congo with slave traders and colonialists. It is trite to say that the missionaries' purpose was different from that of slave traders and colonialists. However, as they belonged to the same culture as the colonialists and they were often called to help each other, they felt closely associated and had more or less the same conception in building up the colony, so much so that the distinction between missionaries and Whites did not appear clear to our population, or was only superficial: they thought that missionaries like all other Whites, worked for the same purpose, i.e. the destruction of the 'primitive civilization', the African one, to impose the superior and the only one, the European: but they shared the task between them to facilitate the execution of their plan: European superior administration had to replace the indigenous primitive tribal organization, the European superior religion to be substituted for primitive superstitions, the superior industry to replace the primitive smiths, the superior culture, the primitive one, and so on. So a civilized Negro, an *évolué*, as they called him, should be but a perfect imitator of Whites; a Negro priest who is worth his title must be but a perfect imitator of mission-

aries etc. I wonder whether such confusion has not been the basis of the difficulties against the missions, and whether it does not constitute the real danger for the future of the Church in the Congo, for, since the Congolese people are fighting for their personality, and against a mere imitation of Whites and all forms of *paternalisme belge*, they are very touchy on this point; a suspicion of paternalism may have unexpected consequences.

I wonder whether it is not such a confusion between missionaries and colonialists which was decisive in the massacre of missionaries in Kongolo (31 December 1961), for it is too easy and rather a weak reason to attribute it to communist elements; the soldiers who killed the missionaries are said to have come from Stanleyville and through the province of Kivu where there are missions. If the hypothesis of communism was determinant, why did they not massacre missionaries in these two Provinces on their passage to Kongolo? Moreover, we must remark that most attacks against missions were made by a crew of unemployed and armed delinquent youth who elsewhere in the world constitute a danger. Soldiers of the National Army were often defenders rather than attackers of the missionaries. This was for example the case in Bukavu and Kasongo.

In spite of misunderstandings between the Congolese and the missionaries, our population is still attached to the Christian religion. It is perhaps because of this attraction exercised by the Christian religion and the work of education that missionaries still enjoy the favour and the esteem of our population.

However, the troubles have contributed greatly to dissipate preconceived ideas both among missionaries and Congolese. And if this feeling is kept after the crisis, we may expect progressive improvement of the relationship between missionaries and Congolese. This hope is justified by the growth of religious practice since the crisis, though we can wonder whether it is not sustained by the troubles.

We must however add that the sympathy of our population does not go to missionaries for themselves. They are interested above all in the Christian religion as such. The sign of it is that more and more they, especially intellectuals, prefer Congolese priests and are waiting for an African figure of the Church.

The most urgent problem for the Congolese Church is therefore the problem of adaptation, to show to our people that the Catholic religion is not tied to the colonialists' culture. This supposes of course, trained Congolese priesthood and laity.

It may be that communist propaganda reaches the Congo as it reaches every part of the world today; but it would be neglecting the fundamental facts to attribute all the difficulties of the Church in the Congo to communism.

To end these considerations, I must add that the Congolese crisis is only the immediate problem of the Congo, not the essential one, for this crisis came and is sustained from outside. The Congo suffers atrociously from this crisis. But the essential problems of the Congo are interior problems, i.e. the social and economic problems for the Congolese population themselves, the problem of higher

education and of the adaptation of the Church to Congolese conditions, or rather, of the adaptation of Congolese conditions to the Church, for the question is not to insert the Church in the Congolese culture, but to find the most efficacious way of nourishing Congolese life by the Christian religion.

S. N. KISANGA, O.P.

Scripture Survey

FROM WREDE TO THE NEW QUEST

Von Reimarus zu Wrede was the original title of Albert Schweitzer's book in 1906. In the translation made by William Montgomery and published in 1910, the title was freely rendered as *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, and thus an important phrase in New Testament scholarship arrived. The original title indicated the author's desire to outline the development of thought on the Gospels since the work of H. S. Reimarus (1694-1768), published in 1778, which he saw as a first attempt to present Jesus as an historical person freed from all dogmatic preoccupations, to the work of Wilhelm Wrede (1859-1906) of 1901, which was concerned with the presentation of Jesus' ideal, the *Messiasgeheimnis* as the principal theme of the Gospels, freed this time from all historical preoccupations. For Wrede the preaching of Jesus was far more central to the Gospel than any attempt to portray an historical person, and Schweitzer saw the development of this point of view as the beginning of a new era. This indeed it was, and Schweitzer's own thought, epitomized in the brilliant title coined by his translator, suggested that the Quest had come to an end: Schweitzer's quest was leading him to see the whole meaning of the Gospel in the eschatology of Christ's message, that is, in his preaching to mankind of the coming end of all things, and the consequent need for mankind to prepare for a spiritual renewal. For Schweitzer, the Master's preaching looked forward to a fulfilment that never came, but nevertheless the significance of his preaching *for me* and for every one of his followers makes it the greatest teaching ever given to mankind. Schweitzer presented Jesus as the great idealist and it is essential to see Schweitzer's teaching on the background of his own personality, for his understanding of Christ's message led his own generous spirit to throw up everything to become a medical missionary in Africa. For Wrede the whole secret of the Gospel lay in Jesus' messianic ideal; for Schweitzer not only was this so, but the preaching of Jesus emerges as the dominant factor, with an effect on the lives of all Christians.

It was on the background of these discussions that Loisy's 'petit livre' *L'Évangile et l'Église* appeared in 1902, with his call for the reconciliation of these