CHAPTER IX

THE AFRICAN MISSIONS

FIRST FOUNDATIONS ON THE PERIMETER (1820–75)

At the beginning of the nineteenth century African Christianity was in process of extinction. Its revival should undoubtedly be dated from the day when a few nuns belonging to the order of St Joseph of Cluny landed on Senegal in 1817 and in 1820 opened a school at St Louis de Senegal, but still more from the day of the arrival, two years later, of the foundress of the new institute. A trifling matter, you may say. No, it was a matter of immense importance if we bear in mind the vision which Mother Javouhey had seen in 1800.

At a time when, already attracted to the life of perfection, she prayed to be granted new light, she saw little children with black faces crowding into her room. "They held out their hands to me and called me 'dear mother'. They seemed so unhappy that the memory of it has ever since been impressed on my memory..." St Teresa appeared in one corner of the scene and told her: "They are God's children and I am giving them to you. I shall be the protectress of your order." She had just established this order, the Sisters of St Joseph of Cluny. Mother Javouhey found her "children" on Senegal in 1822 in the streets of Saint-Louis.

Her genius for putting ideas into practice was so quick in action that she was already thinking of giving them instruction, of providing for them a specially recruited body of priests prepared for the apostolate in the colonies, and a seminary to which young Africans fitted to become priests would be admitted.

In 1825, she made herself responsible for the transfer of eight of these to France where they began their studies at Bailleul-sur-Thérain. Three persevered and were ordained by Mgr Affre in 1840.

But even before this threefold ordination, the cause of the missions in Africa had found its second hero in Abbé Libermann. Among the "devotional groups" he had formed in the seminary of Saint-Sulpice, two Creole seminarists, one from the island of Bourbon, the other from Port-au-Prince, had opened his eyes to the wretched state of the Negro slaves. This staggering discovery which followed his meditations on the bold programme of Mother Javouhey, moved Libermann and his friends to found the Congregation of the Sacred Heart of Mary, which was to devote itself to the evangelization of the Negroes. When it received the approval of Gregory XVI in 1840, it was composed of a mere handful of priests. Its founder entrusted ten of his men (seven Fathers and three Brothers) to Mgr Barron, vicar apostolic of the two Guineas. This first party was all but wiped out in a few months (1844) in the Cape Palmas area by a deadly climate against which at that time there was no defence. Two survived and one of them, Fr Bessieux, was sent to Gabun where he landed in 1845.

In France, the news of the disaster was a torture to Libermann, torn between his sorrow ("I do not want to send my children to be butchered", he cried) and his desire not to abandon "more than fifteen million souls who have never heard of the good news our Lord brought to earth". His disciples all asked if they might leave for Guinea. He yielded, and in 1846 a second party founded a post opposite the small island of Gorée in a modest concession which in 1862 still had the appearance of a village but later became Dakar.

Thus the two first bases for this new evangelization were now in existence, one in Gabun with Mgr Bessieux, appointed vicar apostolic of the two Guineas in 1848, the other on Senegal. Their founders thenceforward belonged to the Congregation of the Holy Ghost which emerged from the fusion in

1848 of the Congregation established by Libermann and the Seminary of the Holy Spirit. In both places, the period of trial and error lasted, it may be said, until the speeding up of exploration during the last quarter of the century. On Senegal, Mgr Kobès (Mgr Bessieux's coadjutor in 1849), helped by the Lammenais Brothers and the Sisters of Castres for the schools, and the Sisters of St Joseph of Cluny for the care of the sick, succeeded, in spite of the strong positions held by Islam, in establishing six posts on the coast: Saint-Louis, Gorée, Joal, Dakar, Sainte-Marie de Gambie and Ngazobil. At his death in 1872, the Senegal mission was well established and had six Senegalese priests and a congregation of Negro sisters, the Daughters of the Sacred Heart of Mary, founded by the Blue Sisters of Castres. His successor brought the Gospel to the south, to Casamance in the country of the fetichists, where Islam had not gained an entry.

Progress was slower perhaps in Gabun. France had only one miserable little outpost on the Libreville peninsula, inhabited by a Negro population which the slave traffic and various kinds of trade kept in a state of listlessness and corruption. Beyond the post was the unexplored forest. Mgr Bessieux, with the monks of the early centuries in mind, decided to give these rather unapproachable Negroes an example of a Christian life and productive work. He himself took part in the clearing of the forest and the prairie, so that a mission post might be set up. It had its church, workshops, vegetable and fruit gardens and soon after its schools under the direction of the Blue Sisters of Castres. This method was that adopted in Canada during the seventeenth century by the builders of the first Christian villages. He himself acquired sufficient prestige to be able to tell the French admiral who, after the events of 1871, was talking of evacuating Gabun: "Admiral, we are standing in front of a door which may well open one day." And he proved to be right when exploration began to develop.

Previous to this period, the missionaries had blazed trails

in two other sections of central Africa on the shores of the gulf of Guinea and on the east coast.

In 1856, a former member of the Paris Society of Foreign Missions, Mgr de Marion-Brésillac who had been vicar apostolic of Coïmbatour, made up his mind to devote himself to the evangelization of the Negroes and, with the approval of Pius IX, founded the Lyons African Missions. He was appointed vicar apostolic of Sierra Leone and landed there in 1858 with three priests and two brothers. Less than two months later all five of them died of yellow fever. It was an even greater disaster than that of Cape Palmas. Yet it too was not allowed to breed discouragement. A new party set out from Lyons in 1861, this time for the Slave Coast and Dahomey, where there were still a few small groups of Christian Negroes who had been evangelized in America and repatriated after the abolition of the slave trade. At Lagos, Ouidah and Porto Novo between 1861 and 1868 new mission posts developed of the same type as those established by the Holy Ghost Fathers.

On the east coast where the slave trade was practised more blatantly and with more impunity than in the west, a Holy Ghost Father, Fr Horner, established at Zanzibar in 1863 a medical centre and a Catholic school which took in Negro children who had been ransomed. In the course of the next few years, he built it up into a mission that was a model at the time. He added to the elementary schools a vocational institute for adults with facilities for training in all trades, an embryo seminary where Latin was taught, and a school of domestic science. From 1868 onward, he built another centre on the same model at Bagamoyo on the mainland opposite Zanzibar. Soon afterwards, he built a third on the heights of Mhonda. These three foundations, and Bagamoyo in particular, were to serve as bases for the departure and as stages on the journey of new bands of missionaries and several explorers, among them Stanley and Cameron. Bagamoyo, like Libreville in the West, was "the mother of all the missions" in the East.

In South Africa, the hostility of the Protestant Boers delayed until 1820 the establishment of the first Catholic priests at the Cape. In any case, by order of the authorities, they were obliged to confine their ministry to Whites alone. The apostolate to the Negroes only really began after 1855 when the Oblates of Mary Immaculate were given the Natal vicariate. Their success in Zululand had been very moderate and they abandoned the missions they had established there and moved to Basutoland whose inhabitants gave them more satisfaction.

Of the African islands, Mauritius was entrusted to the Vincentians at the beginning of the century. They were succeeded by English Benedictines. The appeal made to the Holy Ghost Fathers by the most active among them, Mgr Collier (a missionary from 1840 to 1863), brought to the Island Fr Désiré Laval, an apostle who has rightly been compared to Fr Claver. His tomb is still honoured today. Almost half of the population is Catholic. At La Réunion, the work of the ministry was first entrusted to priests of the Holy Ghost Seminary and then, after the amalgamation achieved by Libermann, was allotted to the Holy Ghost Fathers. Today, in a population of 300,000, there are 278,000 Catholics.

After the decimation of the Vincentian missions in the seventeenth century, Catholicism had all but disappeared from Madagascar. In 1829, Mgr de Solages was appointed prefect apostolic of the islands in the Southern Sea. During the following year, he tried to enter Tananarive. Queen Ravalona forbade him to do so. In 1832, he died of fever and hunger at Andevorante on the east coast. When the Jesuits were made responsible for the Madagascar prefecture in 1841, this prohibition had not been withdrawn. Fr Finaz, however, succeeded in entering the capital in disguise during 1855. In 1861, Radama II allowed Catholicism to gain a foothold, but it was not until the general pacification of the island by Galliéni (1896) that it was really able to develop.

In the last years of the century, progress became extensive enough to bring about the establishment of two new vicariates:

Southern Madagascar, entrusted to the Vincentians, Northern Madagascar, to the Holy Ghost Fathers.

The rebirth of the missions in Ethiopia in the nineteenth century was the work of two French explorers, the brothers d'Abbadie, and an Italian Vincentian, Fr Sapeto. The favourable reports they sent to Rome persuaded Gregory XVI to send to Fr Sapeto two other Italian members of his order, Frs de Jacobis and Montuori who landed at Massouah in 1839. The immense charity of Fr de Jacobis proved so effective that Propaganda established two vicariates, Gallas entrusted to the Italian Capuchins, Abyssinia under the charge of Mgr de Jacobis and the Italian Vincentians. The Coptic clergy took umbrage at this and launched a persecution which led to the martyrdom of an Abyssinian Vincentian, Ghebra Mikael, who was beatified in 1926. Mgr de Jacobis was thrown into prison. He escaped but died, worn out by his labours, in 1860. He had been responsible for 6,000 conversions. In the meantime, French Vincentians replaced their Italian brethren (1861) and succeeded in protecting the Christian communities in spite of the persecutions of the emperor Theodorus and his successor Johannes IV, both enemies of Rome.

The first bishop of Gallas, Mgr Massaïa, succeeded, at the risk of his life, in reaching Godjam and Choa on the Abyssinian plateau. Soon after, Kaffa, the southern territory, expressed a desire to receive missionaries. Once again, Copts and Moslems reacted violently. The emperor Theodorus imprisoned the bishop in 1863. But the dignity and prestige of the prisoner was so great that the emperor released him. In 1877, Johannes IV expelled the entire mission, including Mgr Massaïa, who returned to Italy where he received a cardinal's hat. In 1880, the Gallas vicariate was in the hands of Mgr Taurin, a French Capuchin who, after initial difficulties, profited from the friendly dispositions of Menelik, Johannes' successor. Thenceforward, the mission foundations, while still always exposed to the hostility of the Copts and the Moslems, could be consoli-

dated and expanded. In 1900 Mgr Jarosseau was succeeded by Mgr Taurin. His long ministry (1900–36), his prestige and his inexhaustible and discerning solicitude for the people who were often threatened with famine, completed the work so heroically begun before his time. The situation of Catholicism was transformed by it. In the days of Mgr Massaïa, everything which represented Catholicism in Abyssinia was detested. About fifty years later, respect had taken the place of hatred.

PENETRATION INTO THE INTERIOR FROM 1875 TO 1914

A period of rapid expansion began during the last quarter of the century. A great number of explorers arrived from all parts of the world. Each of them was working on behalf of his own country and eager to ensure that it had a good share in the forthcoming partition of Africa. The slave trade sparked off fervent anti-slavery campaigns. In this combination of circumstances, an opportunity occurred for the missions to enter the field of international politics and Cardinal Lavigerie seized it with his customary promptness.

The international Association for the exploration of Africa, founded at Brussels in 1876, had undertaken to guarantee the freedom of the missionaries. The Protestants were already preparing to take advantage of this. Cardinal Lavigerie used the fact as a pretext for sending a secret memorandum to Pius IX. In it he suggested that vicariates should be established in those places where the Protestants announced their intention of founding new missions, that "Africa should be transformed by the Africans," and finally that every effort should be made to abolish slavery. Fifty of his sons (the White Fathers, religious of the Society of African missionaries which he had just founded), he noted at the end of the document, had promised on oath to devote all their strength to carrying out this vast programme.

Leo XIII had just succeeded Pius IX. Four days after his

election, he signed a rescript establishing two vicariates in the area of the Great Lakes (1878) and giving Lavigerie the powers of an "Apostolic delegate for the missions of equatorial Africa". During the summer of 1878 the first party of White Fathers left Bagamoyo. At Tabora, it split into two. One group reached the shores of Lake Tanganyika at the beginning of 1879, the other arrived a little later at Lake Victoria-Nyanza.

The reports they sent to Lavigerie gave horrifying details regarding the slave raids organized against the Negroes by the Arab dealers. He used them in drawing up a brief for the struggle against slavery.

Leo XIII was about to issue the apostolic letter *In plurimis* addressed to the bishops of Brazil on the occasion of a decree of the Brazilian Government which had just emancipated the slaves in its territories. Lavigerie asked for a few words to be added to the letter. His wish was more than granted, the addition grew into a page which described the whole African drama.

Lavigerie supplemented the effect produced by the pope's letter by himself preaching a crusade against slavery throughout Europe. It had a profound influence on the Brussels Congress of 1890, whose final enactment therefore pointed out that among the most effective means of fighting the slave-trade was "the progressive organization of the religious institutions of civilized countries". Further, the powers who signed the document undertook to protect existing and future missions. Certainly, the missionaries had not waited for these guarantees before preaching the Gospel, but the homage paid to their civilizing work, although coming a little late in the day and with a strong suggestion of empty promises, was of a kind to strengthen their position as they faced their enemies.

After the division of the party at Tabora in 1878, the first group of White Fathers, as we have said, arrived at Lake Tanganyika in the early days of the year 1879. By 1881, it had firmly established itself there, although it had lost two religious during an attack by partisans of slavery who had

tried to recover some orphans rescued from their clutches. In 1886, the Holy See established the provicariate of the Upper Congo and entrusted it to Mgr Roelens, a Belgian White Father who was joined in 1891 by his first party of missionaries. They were of the same nationality as himself. Thus was inaugurated the Great Lakes Mission, one of the finest creations of the Institute founded by Lavigerie.

In 1887, the first representatives of a recently established Belgian Institute, the Scheut Fathers, at the cost of severe losses (more than thirty per cent of the pioneers), laid the foundations of Christian communities which were eventually to flourish, on the Kasai and at the top of the Congo loop. The Jesuits in 1893 made similar foundations on the Kwango, with the help of the Sisters of Charity of Ghent.

The second party of White Fathers setting out from Tabora had reached the area north of Lake Victoria-Nyanza where three religious were murdered during the first months. Reinforcements arrived. The Superior, Fr Livinhac, obtained from the local ruler a concession at Kasubi. But the baptism of the pages of his court angered the Moslem party who maintained that the missionaries should be deprived of their freedom and Mohammedanism made obligatory. Fearing new outbreaks of violence, Lavigerie ordered the Fathers to withdraw to the opposite side of the Lake. Left by themselves, their first baptized converts made many others and they all begged the religious to return. When they did so, six hundred catechumens were waiting to be baptized. This new progress on the part of Catholicism unleashed a persecution which put eighty martyrs to death in 1886. Twenty of them, among whom were thirteen pages who were burned alive, were beatified in 1920. This sublime sacrifice brought about fresh conversions. Between 1886 and 1893, and in spite of two persecutions, one instigated by the Moslems, the other by the Protestants, the number of Christians in Uganda rose from 4,000 to 50,000.

Other missionaries also set out from the east coast: in 1890, Mgr Leroy, a Holy Ghost Father, who celebrated Mass on the

slopes of Kilimanjaro, at a height of 11,641 feet, laid the foundation of a vicariate bearing the name of the mountain. In 1891, the Nairobi mission was founded, again by Holy Ghost Fathers.

In the first years of the twentieth century, the Consolata Fathers successfully evangelized the Kikuyu and the Ameru in the south of Kenya, and the Mill Hill Fathers, the Kourrondo. In 1889, the White Fathers established the Lake Nyasa mission on the initiative of Lavigerie who had estimated that the Great Lakes missions would be more easily accessible from Mozambique than from Bagamoyo. In 1897, Propaganda established the Nyasaland vicariate and in 1908 divided it to form the new vicariate of Shiré, which was entrusted to the de Montfort Fathers.

As Mgr Bessieux had foretold, the open door leading from the west coast to Gabun widened to allow new parties of Holy Ghost Fathers to pass through. Between 1878 and the first journeys of Stanley and Brazza, they settled at Saint-Paul de Donghila (on the estuary of the Gabun), then at various points along the two banks of the lower Congo, especially at Banana and Landana. This latter mission gave hospitality during the early days of 1881 to Brazza who arrived, in a semi-dying condition, from Mfoa on Stanley Pool. It was from Landana again that Fr Augouard set out towards Mfoa where he found Stanley at the beginning of August 1881. Mfoa was later to become Brazzaville. The same religious helped towards the peaceful settlement of the French at Pointe Noire. Shortly afterwards, the basin of the lower and middle Congo became the field of action of this high-spirited missionary. When he had founded the mission station of Saint Joseph of Linzolo, he arranged for the separate parts of a small ship to be sent to Brazzaville from France. The ship was constructed under his direction and at times with his help and, under the name of the *Léon XIII*, established connections between the various mission posts that had been established in the Congo basin. *Léon XIII* wore out in time

and was succeeded by another ship of the same name, then by a *Pie X*. The vicariate of Oubangui and Brazzaville, established in 1890 to include these posts in one district, and extending from Stanley Pool to the Nile basin, covered areas that were mostly unexplored; it was a very suitable assignment for Mgr Augouard. For many years, there was only a handful of Christians there, the majority of them ransomed Negro slaves. Then, towards the beginning of the twentieth century, an extraordinary movement led these man-eating tribes towards Christianity, and to such good effect that in 1909 the original vicariate had to be divided. The southern part formed the vicariate of the French Upper Congo and the northern part the prefecture apostolic of Oubangui-Chari.

Still in equatorial Africa, the Holy Ghost Fathers had settled in 1885 on the Ogoué at Lambérénê, at Ndjolê, Lastourville, Fernan Vaz, and to the south of the river, at Loango.

After the founding of French Guinea, other Holy Ghost Fathers established posts near the coast at Boffa, Sangha and Boké, further inland at Kindia and Mamou, and in the Kissi territory, at Guédékou and Mongo. They arrived in Nigeria in 1885. Fifteen years later, the prefecture apostolic of the Lower Niger numbered three posts: Onitsha, Agouleri, Nsubé.

In 1879, after the Gold Coast prefecture had been entrusted to the Lyons African Missions, the first post was founded at Elmina on the coast. It included a school and a medical centre.

The king of the Ashantis wanted to make the acquaintance of these philanthropists and gave orders for them to be summoned to Kumassi, his capital. He gave a friendly reception to one of them, Fr Moreau (1881), who thought he might ask for permission to take up residence in the town. The king refused, doubtless because a Wesleyan minister had asked for the same favour. In any case, he dismissed them both. In the midst of all this, a revolt drove him from his throne. The Lyons missionaries were not able to settle at Kumassi until 1910.

To compensate for this, as early as 1880 they were able

to found a mission post at Abeokouta, the great city of the Yoruba, whose local chief, having once invited them to come, did not change his mind. A church soon replaced the little temporary chapel. An educational and medical centre followed for "the white women who do not marry and who come from the cold countries to save little children", as the nuns were called in the deed of conveyance drawn up by the local chief. Thanks to his goodwill, another mission post was established at Oyo.

The Ivory Coast became a French colony in 1893. Two years later, Propaganda established a prefecture apostolic in the country and this too was entrusted to the Lyons African Missions. After an auspicious beginning, marked by the foundation of posts at Grand-Bassam, at Memmi, then at Dabou, Bonoué, Assinie, Jacqueville and Moousso, an epidemic of plague accompanied by yellow fever decimated the 1899 mission. The missionary council decided nevertheless to keep all the stations.

The first priests to preach the Gospel in the Cameroons, Holy Ghost Fathers, came from Gabun in 1884. They were succeeded by German Pallottini Fathers when the Cameroons became a colony of the Reich and was given the status of a prefecture apostolic, and they were subsequently helped by German Fathers of the Sacred Heart (St Quentin). In the meantime, the prefecture had been replaced by a vicariate.

Nothing remained of the Portuguese seventeenth-century missions in Angola except the memory of a brilliant past, when in 1865 the Holy Ghost Fathers were given charge of the territory. One of them, Fr Duparquet, set out from Lindana on a voyage of discovery in the southern areas. He was responsible for valuable information which led Propaganda to establish the prefecture apostolic of Cimbebasia (1879), later known as Cubango. The Holy Ghost Fathers also settled at Huila (1881). At the same time, secular missionaries from Portugal, trained at the seminary of Xernache, took over the parishes that had previously been abandoned and revived San Salvador (which had seen better days) with the help of seculars from

Goa and nuns (Sisters of Saint Joseph of Cluny and Franciscans of Mary).

The advance of the White Fathers across the Sahara and the Sudan is one of the most glorious chapters in the history of this period. Cardinal Lavigerie had indicated Timbuctoo as the base where they were to establish a mission from which they could go out in all directions across the Sudan. But in 1876 three Fathers were murdered by the Tuareg. In 1881, three other religious also met their death in an ambush on the road from Tuat. On the orders of Cardinal Lavigerie, there then followed a period of retreat and preparation in the centre at Ghardaïa, where the Fathers and the nuns partly allayed the prejudices and hatred of the desert nomads by their works of charity. The time came when the Superior, Fr Hacquart, was given a respectful reception in the advance posts in the south of Algeria and in southern Oranais. When he set out on his great journey, the atmosphere was favourable and he arrived at Timbuctoo in 1894 without encountering any difficulties. From there, he undertook several exploratory journeys and investigations across the Sudan. The report he sent to Rome included a very penetrating forecast of the probable evolution of the Negro countries. "Soon there will no longer be in the Sudan any isolated communities living the simple, primitive life. This fanciful vision must be abandoned and we must train for the different ranks in the social world and according to each man's aptitudes, educated people, open-minded people and above all people who are Christian through and through."

Who else in 1900 had such confidence in the world of the Negroes? Meanwhile, as early as 1895, the White Fathers were at Bamako, Segou and Timbuctoo and from there they rapidly moved on to the Kissi, in the direction of Kankan to the west, and the Mossi country to the east. They were followed shortly after by the White Sisters. In the Sudan vicariate, of which Mgr Hacquart was given charge, were included the centres of Bobo-Dioulasso and Ouagadougou.