The Modern Missions

Our Catholic Heritage

Evangelization — A Magnificent Adventure

By MSGR. JAMES F. CONNELLY

Msgr. Connelly is a professor of theology at St. Charles Borromeo Seminary in Philadelphia.

The missionary activity of the Church whereby the Gospel is preached and the Church planted among peoples or groups who do not yet believe in Christ is not only the Church's duty but an unmistakable sign of her vitality.

At the end of the 18th century the Church was so wounded by the wars and the anti-Catholic politics of Europe that she hardly had the personnel or the opportunities to carry out her mission of evangelization in foreign lands.

For peculiar political reasons, the Church had suppressed the Society of Jesus in 1773 at a great loss to the missions. In 1814 Pope Pius XII (1800-1823) restored the Society of Jesus in the Church, and the next year approved the Society of Foreign Missions which was founded in France. These two events marked the revival of the missionary activities of the Church in the 19th century.

Pope Pius VII restored the Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith to coordinate all missionary activities in the Church. He also reopened the College of the Propagation of the Faith in Rome to form priests for service in the foreign missions.

Most encouraging to the missionaries was the support of the laity. It was the laity who founded societies to support the foreign missions. The three most outstanding of these were: the Ludwig-Missionverein (Bavaria); the Leopolddinen-Stiftung (Vienna) and the Society for the Propagation of the Faith (France).

Old religious orders began to renew and expand their foreign missions. The Jesuits, Dominicans, Franciscans, Benedictines, Vincentians, and the members of the Foreign Mission Society of Paris made heroic efforts in North, Central and South America, in Australia and New Zealand, in Indochina and the Philippine Islands, in Korea, China and Japan, in Africa and India.

New religious orders, founded for the foreign missions, discovered eager recruits. We have space to mention but three, the Missionaries of Our Lady of Africa (White Fathers and White Sisters) of France who worked in North Africa and the Sudan; the Society of the Divine Word (Germany) who labored in the Americas, China, Africa and New Guinea; and the Mill Hill Fathers (England) who carried the Gospel to the Sudan and Afghanistan, to Borneo, New Zealand and the United States, where they developed into the Josephite Fathers. (The United States did not have its own foreign missionary society until 1911 when the Catholic Foreign Mission Society, commonly called Maryknoll, was founded.)

The foreign missions of the 19th century were flawed by a lack of funds and personnel; the hesitancy by some missionaries to form a native clergy; and the tendency for the missions to be closely identified with the colonial aspirations of their home countries. The first two problems are always with the Church. The latter two defects were emphatically condemned by the popes of the 19th century and eventually corrected. In spite of these flaws, millions of converts came into the Church; millions of others were served by thousands of heroic Catholic men and women, many of whom gave their lives in the missions.

All in all the evangelization efforts of the Church in the 19th century were a magnificent missionary adventure.

100 Catholic Ugandans Die in Persecutions

By MSGR. JAMES F. CONNELLY

By 1854, European explorers had trekked across the Sudan as far as Chad. In 1858, they stood on the shores of Lake Tanganyika. By 1860, they had discovered the source of the Nile. Lake Albert was discovered in 1864 and 11 years later Cameron and Stanley has mapped the central region of the Dark Continent.

The nations of Europe, particularly France, Germany, Belgium and England, saw the possibility of vast political and economic advantages in colonizing the new discoveries. They supported the growing steam-ship lines and protected the sea lanes for their own interests. In 1869, France and England combined to dig the Suez Canal to shorten the travel time to the Far East.

England sent her Protestant and Catholic missionaries. France, Belgium and Germany sent Catholic missionaries. These governments, unfortunately, attempted to use the missionaries as their own agents of pacification at times, and not as heralds of the Gospel. By 1900, the French accounted for two out of every three Catholic foreign missionaries.

At first, priests went out to the missions, then lay brothers and finally, when the situation became feasible, heroic women. By 1900, there were 44,000 European nuns working in the foreign missions.

In 1850, all Africa south of the Sahara desert was divided into two ecclesiastical provinces. By 1900, there were 61 such provinces.

The Uganda Martyrs

(Art by Robert McGovern)

The White Fathers began their mission in the Kingdom of Uganda in the 19th century. They had great success, but had the sorrow of witnessing the massacre of the first African martyrs in 1886. One of those martyrs was Charles Lwanga, chief of the pages at the kings court.

The king of Uganda had become so enraged at one of his Catholic pages for reprimanding him for murdering a Protestant missionary and for immoral actions with his court pages that he ordered Charles Lwanga and many of the Catholic pages murdered. In all, 100 Catholic Ugandans died in that persecution. In addition to Charles Lwanga, others died such as a young catechist, Denis Sebuggawa; Andres Kaggwa, a native chief; Matthias Kalemba, a judge; Matthias Marumba, an assistant judge; and Andrew Kagwas, chief of Kigowa, who was an active convert-maker.

Pope Paul VI canonized St. Charles Lwanga and 221 others of that persecution as the Martyrs of Uganda in June, 1964. He selected St. Charles Lwanga as the patron of Catholic Action in Africa. On that occasion, the Holy Father remarked:

"These African Martyrs open a new epoch ... Africa is rising free and redeemed, bathed in the blood of these martyrs ... Africa is the land of the Gospel. Africa is the new homeland of Christ."

Inside

Bishop Sebastiano Rosso To Visit Diocese May 10-17 15