

# When Congo Wants To Go To School - The Missionaries And The Belgian Congo: Preparation, Ideas And Conceptions Of The Missionaries



Primitive School, Mission area MSC,  
location and date unknown

*"I have been interested in the Congo all my life, because I always wanted to be a missionary in the Congo, even as a little child. And so in a way I paid some attention to it, but only the achievements of my heroes at the time - a number of family members were missionaries and the mission exhibitions, the missionary action. The Congo came to us through missionary work and it was very heroic. ...I remember the moment to the minute when I discovered the background or the 'depths' of the colonisation of the Belgian Congo. And then I got the feeling, which I still have today, that during my training, my education, I had been deceived about the Congo."*[1]

Flemish and, by extension, Belgian missionaries left for the Belgian Congo in droves. The Statistical Yearbook of the N.I.S., which had a separate section for the colony, recorded a few tables with data about the 'white' population. As well as divisions on the basis of nationality, gender and place of residence, for a number of years it also included a "*class division*". In this table, the population

was divided into three categories: 'civil servant', 'missionaries' and 'general public'. The presence of a separate category for missionaries points to the fact that they were very important in colonial society. On the basis of the available figures it can be posited that during the interbellum period, religious workers comprised 10 to 15% of the white population. This percentage was certainly not only men, the proportion of female religious workers was fairly stable throughout the colonial period and amounted to over 40%.<sup>[2]</sup>

The above quote, from an '*experienced expert*', indicates that the conceptual world of the missionaries was not an empty page, that they did not leave without expectations and that they did not work in a vacuum. The colonial attitude in general has frequently been the subject of analysis. The question raised in this chapter is more specific: what can be said about the conceptions and attitudes with which the missionaries left for the colonies? A number of aspects of missionary life have been the subject of research in recent years. Jean Pirotte, who wrote an important work on the mission periodicals in Belgium, gives a good overview of relevant research questions about the missionaries during the colonial period.<sup>[3]</sup> He divides these questions into a number of categories, more specifically: the interest in the missions, the 'agents' of missionary work, the support on the home front, the use of time and space, the missionary 'conscience' and the dialogue between societies. Further, a number of works have recently appeared which try to capture the missionary spirit, at least partially. It is certainly not the intention to deal with all these questions systematically in the framework of this thesis, let alone to answer all of them.

In any case, it is with the necessary reservation and some caution that we attempt the assessment of the 'intellectual baggage' of the missionaries who left for the colonies. Indeed, the difficulty with which this specific theme is dealt in the existing scientific literature is striking. When Depaepe and Van Rompaey discussed the ideas of the missionaries they talked predominantly about the appreciation of the black intellect and character and they supported themselves, necessarily, with the views of a pair of figures considered influential, namely Pierre Charles and Gustaaf Hulstaert.<sup>[4]</sup> Thus when, by way of conclusion concerning the missionary attitude after the Second World War, they make a pronouncement like "*Even so, most missionaries could still only muster very little appreciation for the traditional milieu*",<sup>[5]</sup> this can serve as the necessary correction to the still dominant view of the missionary as the 'friend of the

Congolese'. Even so, the statement must at the same time be interpreted itself. The reality was, after all, more complex than that. It is not appropriate to paint all missionaries as uncompromising, dogmatic people, who did not want to learn about their surroundings, or at least did not try to understand them.

Moreover, it appears from the available literature that it is very difficult to pursue certain conclusions or hypotheses to the level of daily practice. Concretely, scientific literature about missionary work and mission history speaks a lot about 'missiology' itself. Missiology counts as the scientific approach to missionary work, which itself developed during the colonisation of Belgian Congo. This scientific transformation occurred at the University in Leuven as a result of the Jesuit Pierre Charles' initiative and the *Semaines missiologiques de Louvain*, which he organised. The question of whether these theories and ideas actually found their way into the field is far harder to answer.

As an example: the CREDIC (*Centre de Recherches et d'Echanges sur la Diffusion et l'Inculturation du Christianisme*), connected to the University of Lyon, organised a colloquium in the early nineties of the twentieth century on the subject of the training of missionaries.[6] In the different contributions offered in the presentations of the colloquium, however, no clear link was established between the missiological science and work in the field. The question of whether there was an influence from the Missiological Weeks on the formation of missionaries is only formulated explicitly by one participant: "*Ultimately, what influence could the Missiological Weeks in Leuven have had on the preparation for missionary work given to the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa? It is truly very difficult to establish this. Perhaps it may be labelled 'vital interaction'.*" The mission sister in question subsequently posited that the possible influences that came from missiology or from the themes discussed during the Missiological Weeks were, in any event, very indirect. In any case, they are not to be found explicitly in the archives.[7] There were various training initiatives covering the needs in the field but the same author mentioned that even after the Second World War "*the people responsible for training realised that all the Sisters had little culture: years of study were required before they could carry out the profession: nursing diplomas, primary school teachers, domestic education, English (necessary in Anglophone Africa). There was a sense of an immense need for training.*" Taking into account that these assertions were made in the framework of a French congregation of sisters, which was active in other parts of

Africa, we must ask ourselves if this tendency also recurs in the information and documentation about the formation of (primarily) Belgian missionaries in congregations which were active in the missionary region of Coquilhatville.



Lesson by a Father in the Equator area

Closer to home, it also appears from recent research that the truth is certainly not to be found in the missiological discourse. Carine Dujardin, who did extensive research into the missionary work of Scheut in China, asked a number of former missionaries about the influence of the *Semaines Missiologiques*, which seemed to have been of national and even international renown at the time.[8] The answers she received confirm that this influence was almost non-existent. Dujardin cites a number of reasons for this: the rather more elitist character of the missiological movement, the isolation of most active missionaries, the seniority principle which obliged new missionaries to adhere to certain rules of obedience and the practically focused and even anti-intellectualist profile of most missionaries. She also gives a fifth reason: the education of the missionaries themselves, which was usually very elementary.[9]

If it is thus already clear that there is no necessary connection between the scientific mission discourse and that of the people in the field, how is a researcher to try and deal with this problem concretely? He or she can try to observe these people themselves and to look at their ideas in detail. I have in this case chosen to work in two phases. In the first phase, the situation with which the missionaries were confronted in the period preceding their 'career choice' was analysed. Firstly, as an introduction, I will give a short general sketch of colonial conceptualisation in the mother country. The image formed by a person about an *in se* unknown, distant and removed phenomenon will after all be greatly

influenced by the ideas about it circulating in the society in which he or she lives. Secondly, a more specific examination will be made of the image that was entwined with that situation: the image of the missionaries themselves and of their activity. From this, presumably, it will be possible to deduct in a general way which considerations formed the basis for a person to leave for the Congo as a missionary. Logically, the question of where these images and ideas come from must also be asked. The answer to this question leads to the second phase: considering that conceptualisation is fundamentally influenced by education and training, the analysis of the general situation is followed by the analysis of the specific context in which the aspiring missionary was educated and trained. As part of this subject, a more specific examination will be made of the education of the people working in the vicariate of Coquilhatville. Furthermore, an attempt has been made to complement and complete the written documentation as much as possible by means of personal testimonies.

### *1. The broader societal context as an influential factor*

#### *1.1. Promotion of the colony and missionary activity in Belgian education[10]*

In any case, conceptualisation about the colony and missionary activity was clearly related to training at school and in particular with the intellectual framework given with this training. In his research into the origin of the vocation of missionaries, Claude Soetens posits that it was not the school as such that created missionary interest for the majority. According to him, school was an environment dominated by the religious workers. He posits that primarily through this, feelings of responsibility, service and selflessness could be developed in the young. That these values played a big role in choosing a missionary vocation can hardly be denied, although this statement, in our opinion, does not put enough emphasis on the power of societal pressure. The connection between the two is therefore not an automatism. As the Jesuit Joseph Masson said when asked in an interview about his memories of the beginning of the Missiological Weeks: *"In 1923, I was a pupil in third year Latin at the St-Servais College in Liège. I was undoubtedly already enrolled for the missions: sorting out stamps, collecting and dragging away old paper to help them."*[11] This statement suggests that the environment in which people lived influenced the children to develop in a certain way, without this having to be decisive as such.

##### *1.1.1. The government and the promotion of the colony at school*

We can assume that the missionaries received the same schooling as the majority

of other children and consequently also concerning their vision of Africa, the colonies and the Africans. There are clear indications that conscious effort was made early on to 'steer' the Belgian population in its view of Belgium's presence in the Congo. One of the themes discussed at the *Congrès colonial national*, organised in 1920, was how to imprint the population with a favourable stance towards the colony. It was posited: "*In order to educate the nation, encourage vocations, in short to form public opinion in a colonial regard, it is of primary importance to organise colonial education in the schools of all levels in an interesting and intuitive way.*"[12] Much earlier, in 1905, Leopold II had made his own attempt to impart more international sensitivity to his subjects via education. In that year, the Belgian government organised an international scientific conference in Mons on *L'expansion économique mondiale* (so-called 'world expansion') and this at the instigation of the King.

Colonial politics as part of a broader expansionist idea was one of the central themes of the world expansion conference. One of the sub-commissions at the conference was, in fact, devoted to education. The central idea put forward there was to adapt the school curriculum in such a way as to make people more amenable to everything taking place outside their own direct and limited social environment. The possibility of emigrating abroad was then also included (for example to the colony). That this was not merely a gratuitous remark made at a conference can be seen from the fact that a brochure about the proposed reforms to the education system was published after the conference.[13] The option to make world expansion a permanent focus point in schools fitted a certain tradition.[14] For the time being it remains difficult to ascertain how far the proposed reforms were actually introduced. From the studies available on the subject it can be concluded that this certainly did not happen as planned by the government. However, it does appear that the colony was placed on the school curriculum. This can be deduced, for example, from the fact that at that time song lyrics about the Congo circulated in pedagogical periodicals on the home front.[15]

#### *1.1.2. The Catholic Church and the promotion of the mission at school*

The colony was also present in education via another route. The official mission propaganda was strongly connected to and interested in education. The 'Heilige Kindsheld' or 'Holy Childhood', founded in 1843, was an official organ of the Catholic Church[16] aimed at the education of children to the missionary spirit

and cooperation, through prayer and material aid, to relieve the suffering of less fortunate children in mission countries. I refer to it because for years this organisation was responsible for the missionary idea being present very strongly in Belgian society and especially in education. In Flanders, it developed particularly quickly and was present in every Catholic primary school. By means of specific periodicals and pedagogical instructions it certainly had an influence in the classroom: The Priests' mission union, periodicals such as 'Annaaltjes van de Heilige Kindsheid', 'Tam-Tam', mission poems, mission songs, the 'Romereis' (trip to Rome), the 'Hemeltrap' (stairway to heaven), etc. The arsenal of pedagogical aids intended to produce support, respect and money for the missions was impressive. Apart from this, the mission idea was promoted on a large scale.

In a very extensive article in *De Vloed*, a periodical for missionaries in training, the MSC Joris Vlamynck sketched an image of what was happening in Flanders in the field of missionary action in the second half of the 1930's. Vlamynck described both in-school and extra-curricular activities which were organised for the benefit of the missions or the theme of which was at least missionary. In the first part, about the Holy Childhood, it was stated that their proceeds for the Diocese of Mechelen were nearly one million Belgian francs in 1931, an enormous amount for that time. The article refers to the annual membership contribution of the Holy Childhood, to contribution cards, to offertory boxes. Furthermore, aside from the financial information in the article it is apparent that a lot of attention was paid to the missions. Missionary duty was, according to Vlamynck, forced upon educational personnel in pedagogical periodicals and at annual educational conferences.

Situated further outside the school environment were the 'Eucharistische Kruistochten' or 'Eucharistic Crusades', established by the Norbertines of Averbode in 1920.[17] The aim was, at first glance, primarily to keep the fire and enthusiasm for the missions burning through frequent prayer. However, Vlamynck posits that means other than prayer could be employed: "*Even the material mission action is included in the E.K. (Eucharistic Crusades) life: in the mission sewing circles the crusaders find a way to turn their apostles' spirits into deeds.*" The financial aspect was not forgotten either: "*Through the E.K. management collecting boxes were made available from the E.K. departments; the profits, which were deposited by the members, went to the S.P.L. for training native priests in the mission.*" The Eucharistic Crusades were apparently a well-

structured organisation with 200 000 members at the time of Vlamynck's article. The movement must of course be situated in the broader societal context as part of the Catholic reaction to the progression of moral corruption. The Crusades were aimed at the whole population and had youth divisions and adult divisions, both supported by a solid press infrastructure. Among others, *Zonneland* and other publications from the *Goede Pers* (the editing house of the Norbertines in Averbode) were aimed at children. For the other groups there were also specific publications. Vlamynck furthermore mentions the organisation of divisions in the Congo, for which the Crusades on the home front supplied the necessary materials: *"To ease the task of the missionaries in establishing and leading the movement, the E.C. centrel of Averbode will provide all the necessary information about spirit and method and provides them with rich E.C. documentation and literature: books, brochures, papers, etc."*

### *1.2. The Belgian Congo in schoolbooks*

In the framework of this research the schoolbook can be considered the supplier of relevant information in two different ways. On the one hand, it was a tool used by the 'coloniser' to bring ideas, concepts and values across to the 'colonised'. We will come back to this concept later. On the other hand, of course, the schoolbook was at the same time used in the western education system, also to communicate ideas, concepts and values. Both these cases raise the following question: How much relevant information can we obtain concerning the formation of ideas as a result of the content of these schoolbooks? We will start here with the discussion of the schoolbook in Belgian education as a tool for the formation of ideas about an unknown culture, in this case, the Congolese.

#### *1.2.1. Conceptualisation in schoolbooks*

Scientific research concerning the formation of ideas about other cultures using the medium of Belgian schoolbooks is rather limited to date. The most extensive study available is the doctoral dissertation of Antoon De Baets, from 1988, about the influence of history textbooks on Flemish public opinion concerning non-Western cultures, using a study of the content of history textbooks from secondary education in the period 1945-1984. This study is interesting in this context for at least two reasons: Firstly, because it contains an overview of previous research on conceptualisation in history books in Flanders. Information on this subject gathered by the author confirms and strengthens for Belgian Congo what is generally applicable for other regions: very little scientific research



has been carried out into conceptualisation in schoolbooks.[18] Secondly, the study is important because the author questions how what is learned at school influences the way people think about other cultures. Here he convincingly shows that research into the influence of a schoolbook on the formation of ideas puts this influence into perspective. On the one hand, it is clear that it is difficult to ascertain how certain ideas are retained from the texts of schoolbooks and the extent to which they are representative for more broadly applicable values and thoughts within a society. On the other hand, the medium of schoolbooks almost vanishes completely when the multitude of other media and influences affecting the children during and after their time at school are also taken into account.[19]

Schoolbooks can only provide information about the transference of values on a general level. The conclusions that can be drawn from the research into schoolbooks are never final, they are only indicative. The manner in which schoolbooks deal with particular themes therefore only reveals something about what the makers of the book think. It does not necessarily tell us what the pupils who used the book did think. It can be assumed, however, that the information given in schoolbooks did, in general, fit with what was thought about those things in a broader social context. The producers of the schoolbook thereby functioned as a kind of mirror, reflecting current ideas via the book. The conclusion may be drawn that the same types of information or the same kinds of messages circulated via other media and other means and thus also reached the pupils.

### *1.2.2. The image of the Belgian Congo*

As far as the Belgian Congo is concerned, there are strong indications that the same types of information circulated in various ways and that particular images and ideas were part of a whole concept that was fairly generally present in Belgian and Flemish society. This statement can be reinforced, for example, by investigating the ideas and concepts about the same themes in different milieus. For the missionaries, the strong interrelationship of education and church must have unmistakeably contributed to the unity of conceptualisation within certain social groups from which the missionaries were recruited. We have already pointed out that the image given of missionaries at school could largely have been created (and maintained) by the missionaries themselves. It suffices to point out parallels between the image given in mission periodicals and that shown in schoolbooks.

There is very little material available on the way in which the colony was

presented in Belgian schools. One study was devoted to the aforementioned 'world expansion conference' (a very inadequate translation of *congrès d'expansion économique mondiale*). It is a master's thesis which examines the impact the plans, made in preparation for the conference on world expansion, had on the primary school curriculum. This research was done on the basis of reports from conferences on education and periodicals on education. In another master's thesis the phenomenon was approached on the basis of schoolbooks.[20] This research concerned the manner in which the colonial period was written about in a number of history books used in secondary education in the period between 1900 and 1980. The conclusions of this study, based on the contents of about sixty different textbooks, can be summarised as follows:

In the first period, from the beginning of colonisation until the First World War, hardly any attention was paid to the colony in the fatherland's history books. Some events concerning the King were mentioned, of which the most prominent was about the protection and civilisation of the Congolese, the war against Arabian slave traders, evangelisation and the tapping of new markets. In the interbellum period, the approach changed to a more contextual one, in the sense of heightened interest, and the results of colonial action were further discussed. Devoting entire lessons to the colony only became the norm after the Second World War. A more detached approach to the first years of colonisation was introduced, especially compared to the heroic proportions the deeds of King Leopold II had taken on in earlier periods.[21]

In addition, there is also a study by Edouard Vincke from 1985 on the image of foreign cultures. This concentrated on Belgian French language geography textbooks, published in the period 1880-1980. His research, based on a representative sample of schoolbooks, also provides information on the image that Belgian pupils received about foreign peoples in distant lands. It is primarily a study about ethnocentrism, tracing the evolution of the concepts of 'race' and 'primitivism' over a period of 100 years. Vincke also researched a number of concepts that concerned the image of the Congolese. Regarding the assessment of the phenomenon of colonisation by the authors studied he states: *"It is possible to follow the changes of position regarding colonisation. During the first period, there is a direct panegyric for the possession and exploitation of riches. Then there is a panegyric for the humanitarian and economic work, the valuation of the spiritual and material welfare. Finally there is a panegyric for development in the*

*modern sense. A fashionable polemicist (P. Bruckner) vehemently criticises Western culpability in relation to its old colonies and the Third World. This is a criticism from which the analysed authors escaped.” [22]*

Marc Depaepe also paid attention to data about ‘*the colony at school*’ in the study and exhibition ‘*Congo, a second fatherland*’. Based on his assertions, I can only draw the following conclusions from the above studies, which correspond strongly in a global sense. Though the emphasis was on progress and the results achieved through the civilising action, the basic position towards the Congolese remained fundamentally racist, even though this position was based on so-called scientific premises. The Congolese were stuck, according to this conceptualisation, between actual progress and inherent inferiority. This justified the continued presence of the colonisers, whose bravery and achievements, of course, were also endlessly praised. The Congolese were also praised insofar as they achieved the image that the colonisers themselves wanted of them.[23]



The Groupe Scolaire Building in Coquilhatville

A striking example of this very ambiguous position is to be found in ‘*Taalwerkboek 5*’, a textbook in Dutch for the sixth year of primary school, published in 1960. In this textbook, over a total of thirty reading lessons, three texts are devoted to the Congo. The first of the three is entitled “*Pioneering work in the Belgian Congo*” and deals with the creation of the colony, the role played by King Leopold II and the memory of a number of colonial heroes (De Bruyne and Lippens, Dhanis and Jacques). The heroic sacrifice of the missionaries is also discussed. Furthermore, it is posited that Leopold gifted the Congo to Belgium, to fulfil his initial purpose. The second lesson has the title “*A metropolis grows*” and

considers the growth and prospects of Leopoldville. Finally, the third text describes a remote mission post. It is entitled "*Where the tam-tams drum*". Through their choice of vocabulary, these last two texts clearly illustrate the contrast created in the depiction of the colonial undertaking. Numerous strengthening adjectives were used in these texts to show this image as sharply as possible. In Leopoldville, at the 'wide' Congo River, 'spacious, beautiful' avenues formed a 'modern' city, with 'tasteful' buildings, 'luxurious' hotels, 'magnificent' bank buildings and 'well-kept' gardens, 'sober' school complexes and 'proper' hospitals. By contrast, many dangers had to be risked to get to the mission post in the bush, over 'winding, narrow' roads. However, the mission post itself was an oasis of civilisation, as literally stated, because "*the remaining, extensive mission territory is located even further away: thick woods along the hills and swamps in the valley. (...) Far away the dull, heavy beat of the tam-tams is heard. Over there, in that mysterious distance it is hard work; the fetish servants and the sorcerers still have great, ill-fated influence over the population. They are the worst enemies of the civilisation of Congo. Slowly we come to understand what mission work means.*"[24] Naturally, this kind of description shows how the authors, consciously or unconsciously, represented Congo as a distant exotic place. It was described as a place where only hardworking, motivated people could go to take part in a heroic but far from completed mission to alleviate the misery of the totally different people who lived there.

An important marginal note here: Congo and everything that had to do with the colony was, of course, only one of the topics considered in these books. Relatively speaking, the attention devoted to this topic was not so large.[25] This realisation also applies to the political interest in the Congo and perhaps to society in general. The colonial idea must have remained strange and mysterious in public opinion, far from the daily reality. Although the colonial propaganda reached even the smallest villages through education and missionary action, there is no doubt whatsoever that the image of the colony, as it came about through missionary and state propaganda, was essentially ethnocentric and certainly persisted until after independence. This image perfectly corresponds to the descriptions generally spread by the colonial propaganda services.[26]

### *1.3. Where did the missionary vocation come from?*

The concrete situation that brought young people to the point of becoming missionaries can partially explain their intellectual frame of mind and the

worldview from which they approached their job as missionaries. Since the beginning of the 1980s scientific investigation in this area has made clear progress in collecting and analysing the testimonies of those involved. However, there are as yet no coordinated studies published.[27] For the period preceding missionary life, including the motivational factors and the surroundings in which those involved grew up, two research projects can be cited in the Belgian context. In the first case there are a hundred testimonies from missionaries that were collected by the *Centre Vincent Lebbe* in French-speaking Belgium during the mid-eighties. This project had a historical nature; the intention was to determine what memories those involved still had of their lives as missionaries. The results of this research were seen as an initiative towards the creation of a 'database' of missionary testimonies. The second case concerns a survey of one hundred missionaries throughout Belgium at the end of the 1980s by Carine Dujardin. She was aiming specifically at the value pattern of the missionary population in the year 1989 and their position in the context of changes made after Vatican II.

In both cases those interviewed were mainly African missionaries. Each time a number of general questions were asked concerning motivation, attitude, descent and such, that can offer us useful information in the context of our investigation. In both cases the researchers reached the conclusion that there are no general lines to be drawn concerning the descent or motivations of missionaries, although there are a few trends. For instance, it was found that the great majority of missionaries came from what was described as 'the higher middle class'. In the second investigation, which was geographically conducted over the whole country, there was also an overwhelming representation of people from the countryside.

The class-bound division of the missionaries may not seem significant but from the results of the two investigations it is apparent that the ideological base was clearly present in many cases, and this in a variety of ways. The Catholic action, which was fully developed during the interbellum period, was a meaningful framework of reference for very many missionaries during their youth. Catholic action and missionary action overlapped through this. School was also, in a great majority of the cases, taken into account as a stimulating factor when deciding to become a missionary. The Catholicism of the private life seems to connect to this easily in most cases.[28] From Soetens' research it is further apparent that there were many practical reasons to start work as a missionary. In this way the author

emphasizes that school is often named as a stimulus in general but that there were mostly other, more exact factors that were mentioned: a particular religious person who exercised a decisive influence; older friends who took the same road; missionaries who came to give talks at school.

For Soetens, one of the most important conclusions is that among the reasons given there was almost nothing said about a broader church project. As a possible explanation he puts forward that the specific missionary training before departure was very brief or lacking entirely. Of course it is also possible that the nature of the research method used could have something to do with this: no doubt interviewees will sooner answer with facts to specific questions. When they are questioned about their motivation they might not spontaneously talk about a system or broader phenomenon but call on an individual person or concrete occurrences. Finally, it is a noteworthy conclusion that school had as good as no influence on religious women. The shorter school career and the fact that most orders of teaching sisters had their own recruiting system and only had missions quite late (or not at all) would have been the cause.[29]

What was the image of the missionaries themselves in society? This too is a complex question. Keeping in mind the influence of the church structures on people's everyday lives, and considering the decisive influence of other missionaries at the origin of new vocations, it is likely that the image of the missionaries was shaped by the actions of missionaries. Also, this kind of literature, including the mission periodicals (and therefore the Catholic propaganda in the strict sense), was itself a part of the influence on the creation of vocations in the younger generations of priests. In his study on the shifting mentality of Belgian mission periodicals during the first half of the twentieth century, Pirotte suggests that few countries had more different mission periodicals than Belgium.

According to Pirotte, the main aims of missionary action that were emphasised in the mission periodicals were proclaiming the message of salvation and establishing the church community in a strange territory. On the subject of the missionaries, Pirotte concluded: *"Firstly, there is an excessive simplification in the presentation of the missionary. This simplification is not only manifested in the absence of profound reflection but also in the dichotomy used between the good and the bad; the missionary, shown as the hero of good, facing the forces of evil represented by the enemies of God's work. A second conclusion is of diffuse*

*romanticism which may be seen in the periodicals throughout the period studied."* From there, he appropriately concluded: *"Undoubtedly, a large number of missionary qualities may be exact and we certainly may not ignore their generosity and endurance; but, in part, this image appears tailored with a view to being shown as attractive to young people avid in their devotion and self-sacrifice"* Nevertheless, at the end of the interbellum period a critical tendency came about in the periodicals that opened themselves to deeper reflection (these were a minority) and turned against the overly sentimental, romantic and heroic image of the missionary and his task in a strange land. These kinds of periodicals are situated on the side of missiological science. After a global quantitative investigation Pirotte decided that in the mission periodicals, in general, the emphasis was sooner placed upon proselytism, the gospel and spiritual welfare rather than moral and humanitarian objectives. This conclusion was even more true of the Catholic than the Protestant periodicals.

## *2. Specific training for missionaries*

### *2.1. General*

Dujardin states that specific training for missionaries in the nineteenth century was very limited and was practically nonexistent. Most congregations only provided the normal priest training consisting of the noviciate, a number of years of philosophy and a theological education. Apart from this a distinction had to be made between the specific mission congregations and other religious congregations. For specific mission congregations, attention was only given to the place and circumstances in which the missionaries would find themselves in the future but this attention was very fragmented and certainly not scientific in nature. In the other congregations, particularly the women's congregations, the level was even lower. The ideas of missionary work and education did evolve over the course of the twentieth century, also influenced by a number of papal encyclicals (namely *Rerum ecclesiae* from 1926, *Saeculo exeunte* from 1940, *Evangelii praecones* from 1951 and *Princeps pastorum* from 1959). Apart from the fact that three of these four encyclicals could only have had an influence after the Second World War, it must be stated that Dujardin did not announce any changes in the condition of the missionary training and thus it seems that the nineteenth century situation endured in the twentieth. The development at or around Leuven University in terms of missionary training shall be considered in what follows. There are two reasons for this: firstly, MSC will be considered in particular with regard to the treatment of the concrete training initiatives in

congregations. They undertook a great deal of their training in Heverlee, close to Leuven. Secondly, as a Catholic university, the University of Leuven was noticeably at the forefront in this regard. Pierre Charles has already been referred to, but to what extent his ideas and the activities he organised were applied in 'the field' will have to be investigated in more detail.

### 2.1.1. *Towards a central missionary training?*



Playground Girls School Sainte  
Thérèse in Coquilhatville, 1950s.

There were several attempts to create a general training institute for missionaries in Belgium. At the start of the colonisation of the Congo by Leopold II an African seminary was founded in Leuven at the request of the King himself as part of the negotiations with and the search for Belgian missionaries. The seminary received the task, analogous to that of the American seminary, to train future missionaries for Africa. It functioned as a general training establishment for missionaries from December 1886 onwards but always suffered from a lack of resources and, particularly, a lack of students. In May 1888 it was taken over by the congregation of Scheut. According to Marcel Storme, courses in theology and the basics of African and Arabic languages were taught.[30] It may be assumed that, considering the early stage of the colonisation and the missionary work in the free state of Congo, there was no place for other subjects. The curriculum also included "*The concepts of hygiene and essential medicine in an equatorial climate.*"[31]

A second attempt to set up a general training for missionaries took place in the 1920s. In March 1923 the so-called 'militia law' was passed in the parliament. This allowed missionaries to be released in part from military service, on the condition that they "*(...) spent one school year in higher education in a nurse-missionary training programme that is accepted by the Minister of Colonies and whose curriculum has received his approval*".[32] This centre for higher education was situated in Leuven and opened in November 1923. Strictly speaking the training was not a part of the university curriculum since it was very practical. The principle behind it can be seen from the words of Rector Ladeuze, who noted in early March 1923: "*The house has just voted that missionaries shall*



*be relieved from military service on the condition of doing a year of colonial studies (in addition to a few months in the field). Reason: services that they may provide in the colony during wartime, or in the absence of doctors“.*

It is clear from the existence of a complete curriculum that there were plans for a specific missionary training at Leuven University. This curriculum made a fairly global and wide impression and paid attention to history and languages, ethnology and teaching, agriculture, transport and engineering, besides a more traditional focus on the elements of medicine and hygiene. It was actually a slight extension of an already existing curriculum. Like other universities, the Catholic University played to the demand for staff with higher education when the Congo went over to the Belgian state in 1908. Training in colonial sciences was introduced, as in Brussels and Liege, in the framework of the *Ecole supérieure de sciences commerciales et consulaires*, where a degree in the *Sciences coloniales* could be attained in one or two years. Considering its place in the organisation chart the training was more situated in the ‘*economic*’ or ‘*commercial*’ area.

One of the professors in this training course was Edouard De Jonghe. It has already become clear that he played an important role in shaping the colonial education system. However, De Jonghe was also very taken with colonial education at home in “the metropolis” and undoubtedly played an active role in the decision-making on this subject. At the same time it can be seen from his correspondence with Ladeuze that these two maintained very good relations. The question also arises as to whether the nurse-missionary training was set up following demands from Leuven University. This cannot yet be answered definitively on the basis of the available information.

The education in the colonial sciences mentioned here should also have formed the basis for the new ‘missionary’ study option, which Ladeuze and De Jonghe were aiming for. It appears from the correspondence between them that they had been planning this for some time. In a letter of September 1922 there was reference to the *programme du cours pour missionnaires* that would go together with the existing curriculum (“*notre programme*”, which referred to colonial science), supplemented by current medicine, history of evangelisation methods and psychology, applied to the education of children. The intention was to have the missionaries receive one extra year of training in order to give them a real scientific and practical background: “*If they agree to sacrifice one year of apostolate this would be in view of a truly solid scientific and practical*

training.”[33] A number of congregations were positive about this type of training, although there were a number of complaints and uncertainties with regard to founding a general educational course. The Jesuits thought the curriculum too general in intent and too specifically intended for the Congolese situation. After some negotiation and lobbying, in which Ladeuze participated, the coordinating committee of missionary superiors did consent.[34]

The rector of Leuven University was apparently not opposed to such an initiative, although he did emphasise to De Jonghe that everything would have to be feasible, also financially. It was not the first time that De Jonghe found himself in this situation; he was also involved in plans to start anthropological training in Leuven. The key factor in finally deciding against teaching missionary studies at Leuven University is not clear from the few fragments that can be found on this subject in the De Jonghe papers. The only possible explanation that comes out from this exchange of letters is the opposition of Alphonse Broden,[35], the director of the still starting *Instituut voor Tropische Geneeskunde* (Institute for Tropical Medicine) (at that time still in Forest near Brussels). Asked for his cooperation, De Jonghe is said to have received a principle promise from Broden, who was a well-known figure in scientific circles at the time.[36] However, in a later letter Broden showed some objections to founding a tropical medicine training section in Leuven. It is probable that this was due in part to his desire to protect his own department.[37]

Although this missionary training never came about there was an alternative: Broden had already written to De Jonghe in 1922 with a proposal for the education of *missionnaires-brancardiers*. As already mentioned, the work continued in this direction. After the approval of the militia law in 1923 De Jonghe and Ladeuze started work on the creation of the curriculum. It was approved by the Minister for the Colonies, Louis Franck, in August. In the following months there were negotiations with various professors but to start with the medical training would be almost exclusively provided by one person, Dr. Dubois, who was recommended to Ladeuze by Mgr. Rutten,[38] the Bishop of Liege. The training was started in the 1923-24 academic year, although the year started late on the third of November due to practical preparations and negotiations. Around fifteen missionaries were enrolled, including a number of Scheutists, a few Jesuits and also 4 MSC: Willem Huygh, Jan De Kerck, Paul Trigalet and Edouard Hulstaert.[39] It is also clear that the last three completed the year. All three of

them received a distinction. The centre for nurse-missionaries had a wavering start. In the following years there were no more students but halfway through the thirties this changed and the number of registered students went far above fifty.

However, it was clear that there had been more potential. Although the status of the training remained vague, which is clear from the fact that at one time it could be found under 'medical training' in the university curricula brochure and at another occasion under 'economics', it was originally the intention to give this very medical education the title of 'master's'. At the end of the first academic year there was a discussion in which several professors took part and of which there are several visible traces in the rector's correspondence. In a letter of 20 June 1924 to Ladeuze, Professor Michotte questioned whether it was necessary to give a master's degree for a one-year course with an incomplete curriculum at that.[40] Doctor Dubois, who taught almost all the subjects in the first year, declared that he did not want to examine the students on pathology but could just give them a certificate that they had taken the course. He thought the level of the course much too high for them and that they did not have enough prior knowledge, therefore making it impossible to examine them.[41] De Jonghe also took this up in a letter to Ladeuze and said that he had sorted out the matter after a conversation with Dubois and Broden, who supervised the exams as the government representative.[42]

The original concept of a complete area of study for missionaries, rewarded by a 'real' degree, was now fulfilled in a different way. A degree of 'Bachelor in Colonial Sciences' was created in which the nurse-missionary would follow a number of options in addition to the normal courses. During the first period there was the choice between a limited number of subjects that were part of other disciplines. A subject of De Jonghe's, *Ethnologie et ethnographie du Congo - politique indigène*, a history subject *Histoire et législation du Congo* by P. Coppens, and *Organisation industrielle du Congo* given by P. Fontainas. Apart from these two subjects, the following were provided on education: *Méthodologie générale*, taught by François Collard, and *Organisation de l'enseignement primaire*, taught by Raymond Buyse.[43] Apart from this obligatory package one of the following three topics had to be chosen: *Langues coloniales*, *Géographie physique du Congo* or *Botanique des plantes tropicales*. De Jonghe suggested a further step: the possibility to achieve the title of *Docteur en Sciences coloniales* after a stay of three years in the colony and the defence of a thesis on an adapted

topic. This was never put into practice however.[44]

The real impact of the training for the MSC seems to have been limited. The bachelor education, for which a number of non-medical subjects had to be taken, was never really successful. During the peak year of 1938-1939 ten missionaries were awarded this degree. This result was never equalled: the number of graduates constantly fluctuated between zero and ten. Only a handful of MSC achieved the degree over the years. Things were slightly better with the medical training. This could be expected because of the accompanying exemption from military service. However, the number of people that completed the training fluctuated considerably, there can be no definite number given. The only conclusion that can be drawn is that both training programmes gained in popularity during the second half of the thirties. This was the busiest period of participation at the MSC as well. It is no coincidence that this was also the period in which the Catholic missions in the Belgian Congo flourished.

### *2.1.2. Home education*

The missionary's preparation for their work in Africa remained essentially a matter for the congregations. In relation to this it can be asked how this took place in the congregations that were active in the MSC mission area. The information available on this is very scarce. Generally, it can be said that there were no strict rules for education and that education was in no sense required. For the majority of these congregations there are only indications that future missionaries were housed together during a certain period, in the nineteenth century tradition of being isolated from the outside world. This was, for instance, the case for the Daughters of the Precious Blood, who had a central house in Holland from 1891 where a noviciate was organised. The Brothers of the Christian Schools were probably an exception as they were specifically a teaching order, with systematic training in a teacher training college.

To illustrate this: even an outspoken and large missionary congregation like Scheut kept to the classical division. An information brochure from 1925 states: *"The trainee missionary first has a noviciate year in Scheut. During the noviciate the scheutists receive their first training, wholly based on obedience and following Jesus Christ. ... Great emphasis is placed on the supernatural in everything: devout piety, independent strength of character, unwavering love for the call and congregation, all encompassing "brotherly love". After the noviciate the vows are made and the mission country is made known. In principle, they then*

stayed in Belgium for another six years in order to complete the usual two years of philosophy and four years of theology in Leuven. The brochure stated that, once arrived in the mission area, the missionary spent a year at the central post where he would “*acquaint himself further with the language*” and was taught the rest of the practical matters.[45] As an extension of what was the case in the African Seminary, the Scheut missionaries already received training in Chinese and Congolese languages in Belgium.[46] The entrance requirements for the candidates were not very high: they had to have completed their studies successfully. However, “*(...) If there was anything lacking in this regard but he was accepted to study philosophy in his diocese – if he had applied for this – then he may still have the chance of also being accepted by us.*”

## *2.2. The education of the MSC*

According to Honoré Vinck, these conclusions largely correspond with the accepted practice of the MSC.[47] The large majority of the MSC working in the Belgian Congo had not received any more education than the aforementioned philosophical and theological training (the normal priestly training). Of those who worked in the Belgian Congo and were still living at the time of my research, to my knowledge only one possessed a university degree: Frans Maes, who had a Bachelor in Education.[48]

### *2.2.1. Philosophical and theological training*

An aspect that is hard to grasp is the influence of the philosophical and theological training of the MSC on their positions concerning missionary work, being a missionary, Africa, the Congolese and everything to do with their future. The MSC organised their own education. This happened in two steps. In the first phase, the aspiring missionaries spent some years in Gerdingen in the province of Limburg, where the congregation had a training house. They received two years of philosophical training and the first year of their theological education. Subsequently, the students moved to Heverlee near Leuven, where they received three more years of theology. The curriculum (the *Ratio studiorum*) consisted of a number of subjects, although none of these paid any specific attention to foreign cultures. According to Vinck, educational theory and psychology were only studied in a very limited fashion. The vast majority of the curriculum consisted of theological and philosophical material. A course on ethnology was written by Edmond Boelaert but was certainly not used before the end of the 1950s.[49] Boelaert had already taught classes on ethnology when he was in Belgium, such

as in the autumn of 1948. They cannot have been systematically organised courses, however, considering that he never stayed in Belgium for long.[50] Information about the Congo and about missionary life was chiefly an extracurricular activity, given during the activities organised by the community.



Classroom front view

The community life in the training house is perhaps best shown through the chronicles kept by the students. These chronicles were summary reports of the most important events in the monastery or training house. They were published under various titles (*Kronijk, Kronieken, Uit ons Leuven*) in magazines that the students made and distributed themselves. In Bree the magazine was called *De Vloed* ('the flood'), in Leuven *De Toekomst* ('the future'). The 'chronicle', usually to be found at the back of the magazine, was almost always signed with a pseudonym, its' tone always flowed well and it briefly sketched the events organised, those that had taken place, who had died and was buried, who had visited, who had been appointed, etc. In the first issue of *De Toekomst* (1927), for example, it was stated: "10 August: Opening of the missiological week, scholars were present from all countries. The papal nuncio opened the first meeting." [51] Whether or not many MSC aspirants were present was not mentioned. Later, active participation in this event was reported: "Missionary work finds eager students at our school, to such an extent that a number of them went to the AUCAM to brave the conferences of Dr. Rodhain from Brussels about 'La situation médicale au Congo' and of Mr. Olivier Lacombe from Paris about 'La spiritualité Hindoue'." [52] In another article about missionary action, another aspirant, Joris Vlamynck, mentioned the AUCAM (*Academica Unio Catholicas Adjuvans Missiones*), which was more or less connected to student life and the university.[53] He found that in student associations there was too little attention for the M.V.S. (*Missiebond Vlaamse Studenten - Mission Union of Flemish Students*), the academic mission union of which professors were also part: "The

*number of members, 400 in 1935 went back to 200 in 1937. Too small a percentage of the 1 600 Flemish students at the College of Higher Education in Leuven". He was apparently more enthusiastic about the AUCAM about which he said: "Against the pernicious influence of many modern theories in the scientific milieu, the AUCAM is looking for a way to enter that world and to break the inaccessibility of 'scholarly' heathenism and its prejudices."*

Although Vlamynck considered the working and action of AUCAM fairly extensively, he gave no further indications concerning the possible participation of MSC in this organisation. There are, however, some indications that this was the case in the second half of the 1930s. In June 1935 it was stated that "*Brother Van Kerckhove, using the lessons he had taken with P. Charles, S.J., spoke to us about 'The goal of the Church and the essence of missionary work'*" and two years later the mission club was divided into an ethnological and a missiological department, in which the recently published missiological articles were discussed. During the school year 1935-1936, there were suddenly huge numbers of enrolments for the courses at the university missionary centre. At the start of the school year it was noted in the report that good organisation would be needed because "*(...) half the students would become soldiers and would have their hands full*". However, during November it was announced there would be no festivities on the occasion of the Mgr. Verius day, "*because of the pressures involved in attending university.*"[54] That year there were indeed a record number (17) MSC Members enrolled for the courses.[55]

From the magazine chronicles it further appears that initially a missionary only came by occasionally to talk about the Congo, sometimes with a film or slides. In 1930 the chronicle writer remarked: "*19 May: Understandably enough we welcomed the conference with light images that Father Lefèvre came to give us about our Congo mission - everything about the mission awakens our interest and this also brought immeasurable satisfaction.*"[56] There was a great need and demand for information about the future place of work in the Congo. Later, this need also appeared sporadically in the records. In February 1932 the training house in Leuven was visited by a number of missionaries who were on a holiday to the motherland. The chronicle reported: "*To our great joy, Father Yernaux arrived here very early. We lived with the 'charcoal artist' in Mondombe, we heard about the hard 'labour' of the development and establishing of the mission post, of the great expenses and hardships, etc.; We got to know the great heart of 'Fafa*

*Joseph' and many a wise lesson for later, among others about our contact with the whites, good confirmation of one of our previous lessons from the mission club."*[57] It was phrased even more strongly in 1945: "On 10 (October, JB), Fr. Moeyens, recently returned to the Congo, gave us a captivating talk about the Watuzi tribe in Rwanda (where he had spend some leisure time); he also spoke to us, as a person with true knowledge, of 'our' blacks (those of our Mission) and the depopulation of the Congo. It is useful to state how much such conferences are favourable to the missionary spirit of the Scholastic, which is too long frustrated of the good influence emanating from the direct relations with out dear Missions and those returning."*[58]* Here, of course, there was an allusion to the war circumstances, which had reduced the contact between Belgium and Congo to a minimum. The need for more information about the future workplace was also expressed at other times. From the second half of the 1930s, the number of meetings increased considerably and in 1950 Father Standaert, when looking back on the period, noted that: "Ample use is also made of the retired missionaries. Too much sometimes, because our own activity is sometimes forgotten."*[59]* After the Second World War, the colleagues were still called on to contribute to the meetings regularly. A report of the mission club from 1948 reported: "This year we were often given the opportunity to hear holidaying missionaries, among others Fr. Van Linden, Fr. De Rijck, Fr. Meeuwese, Fr. Wauters, etc. Others gave us studies about missionary work, Fr. Hulstaert, Fr. Geurtjens, Fr. Boelaert, etc. The striking highlight was reached this year on the grand mission day with the staging of the mission play 'Under the Cross of Tugude' by Fr. Boelaert and with the striking lecture of Fr. Jan Cortebeeck about the scholasticate and Mission'."*[60]*

That same Jan Cortebeeck also wrote the foreword to the text of Boelaert's play, which was published in 1930 by Davidsfonds as the first part of a new series of children's books. The tone and style of Cortebeeck's writing, though a barely concealed attempt at mission propaganda, also illustrate well what the missionaries thought about the mission activity: "For you, youths, this missionary life is easier to understand than for the old. You have a young, fresh, spring soul that can sympathise and empathise with ambitious, cheerful, daring, creative spirits, who can carve from a rough stone artwork which experts will regard with admiration. A missionary is such a daring force. Going to unknown, foreign lands, not knowing what one will find there except many miseries not yet taken into account, to live there away from all the comfort of modern European civilisation,



*this European civilisation where nothing is left to coincidence, where there are no unforeseen circumstances and requirements, where all the needs of the spirit can be met with the greatest ease, where there is no more distance, transport no longer necessary, where it suffices to lie, in a comfy chair and to turn a button to see and hear the enchantment of all arts, all over the civilised world."*

The valiant and heroic element was still at the fore here, together with an aversion towards the 'modernisation' that society was undergoing at home. With the presupposition that the missions should thus be different, the question of how the missionaries saw this was of course raised: *"He dreams of a reversal of the heathenism and sees his primitives, his country and people recreated into a cultured society of people singing peace without even one single police helmet; of laughing prosperity and restful sufficiency, where every family can live well on the fruits of their own labour, in their own house, on their own estate without import or export; an ideal society where one is more sustained from lively, fresh virtues than from bread and where one doesn't see or know money: a society with no banks and no poverty, where one lives happily and dies happy and goes straight to Heaven."*[61] This message directly criticises the situation as it was being experienced in Europe. For many people in the period in which this text first appeared, this type of discourse would probably have been experienced as a way out of the bad economic crisis they were confronted with. It is not coincidental that 'banks' and 'money' were named as things to be avoided in a new, ideal society.

Boelaert's own play, which he had already written in 1926, is vaguely situated in the MSC mission in Papua New Guinea and is characterised by heroism and drama. 'Tugude' is about a missionary who is confronted with a number of local customs which he opposes, quite correctly according to the story. The local tribes wish to hold a dance party behind his back. The missionary knows that these dance parties always end in tribal quarrels and fist fights. He tries to stop the various tribal chiefs from taking part in the party but does not succeed. When the party does end in murder and manslaughter the missionary is threatened with being held guilty of the death of one of the women who must be avenged. Thanks to the level-headedness of the missionary, and the sacrifice of the good, converted primitive, he manages to retain his life. In this the local people are described as primitives who can be dealt with because the white missionary is more intelligent and can confuse them by his faster reasoning. The indecisiveness and inconstancy

of the local chieftains is heavily emphasised. The self-sacrificing love, taught by the missionaries, is victorious and eventually converts all the natives.

The chronicles and similar columns only make up a small section of the scholasticate periodicals. The principle part was made up of articles that were almost exclusively written by the students themselves and which dealt with a variety of theological, philosophical, moral or social subjects. The tone of these articles was generally very serious. The subjects were mainly the extension of the training itself and so they were often theological or philosophical in impact. The choice of certain topics makes it clear that the students themselves chose the topics and that the content of these periodicals was not being dictated from above, although they regularly contain devout professions of thanks to superiors. However, it is likely that this would be an established practice in such an environment. The articles are an interesting way of finding out more about the points of view and ideas that the future missionaries generally had, especially concerning missionary activity and colonisation. Before going further into the content it is best to further situate the articles and the periodicals in the context in which they appeared. They are, after all, closely attached to the particulars of the 'mission club'.

### *2.2.2. The Mission Club*

The specific missionary aspect of the education of the young religious students was covered in a number of meetings which were organised around specific topics. This was the so-called 'mission club'. According to the information available there must certainly have been two clubs in the MSC: one in the scholasticate in Leuven and one in that of Bree, where the philosophical training of the missionaries took place (but on which much less information is preserved). The name 'mission club' is perhaps representative of the atmosphere in which this training aspect took place. From the descriptions that may be found in the MSC Archives they appear sometimes to be meetings of adventurously inclined youths, who came to listen to exciting stories about exotic situations. It will become apparent later that the voluntary and free character of this initiative still has to be somewhat interpreted. In any event, other 'clubs' also existed within the community in the training house, such as the 'Thomas club', a philosophical study club.

Meetings of the mission club began to be organised (again) after the First World War. On this occasion one of those taking part wrote: *"At the start of the school*

year 1918-1919 we began with setting up the previously flourishing 'mission club' again. This has always had as a goal (and it shall, if it pleases God, continue to strive to meet its goals with diligence) the holy fire of the mission, to awaken the extremely mighty help of the apostolate and to enrich our future missionaries with everything that may be of use to us later in the mission"[62] From a 'report of the meetings' that was made about this time: *"Every Tuesday after the walk we should come together to talk about the interests of the club, or to attend a lecture, or to practice the English language, since this is so widespread and always comes in useful to the missionary."*[63] Apparently, not everything went without difficulties. At the start of the new academic year in October 1919 the composition of the new club was recorded in the minutes. There were at that moment twelve members, including Hulstaert (who was the secretary) and Boelaert. In December 1919 the reporter finished his report with the announcement: *"After the lecture it was also suggested by our chairman that an association for prayer and fasting should be made of the mission club."* This proposal would also be accepted promptly. The mission club remained for the following years a combination of religious exercise and passing on of know-how. In the following years the subjects covered included the following: *"The attitude of the Catholic missionaries towards the Protestants"; "An interesting study of ethnology, a subject that is relatively neglected by us"; 'The Pygmies'; 'Conference by Fr. Hulstaert on the Dutch East Indies; 'The mission thought'; 'Malaria fever'; 'The actions of the Protestants in their missions'; 'The use of catechists'.*

At the start of the academic year 1923-1924 the club was again suspended, only to start up again after the first term of the following academic year. The activities and the rhythm of the meetings were perhaps very dependent on other preoccupations of the Fathers. Besides this it indicates that, certainly in this period (early 1920), the club was not really a priority. Again in the early thirties the club went into hibernation from time to time. As has been reported earlier, there were years when only the (scarce) missionaries who were resting were called upon, those who had time enough to recount memories of their time on the missions. During the academic year 1934-1935 the secretary noted after the December meeting: *"Until May A. Cortebeeck addressed the monthly meeting of the club. In rather interesting stories about the Philippines he presented us time and again with real missionary life."* After several years of very low activity from 1930 to 1935, the situation improved again. At the start of the academic year

1936-1937 two sections were set up, one ethnological and one missionary. It is no coincidence that the secretary that year was Albert De Rop, a man who was very interested in ethnology.[64] There were probably also more theologically inspired members of the mission club, though it is not possible to find out right away who these were. It is noteworthy that there was indeed a greater interest for specifically Congolese themes to be seen in the lectures that were organised from now on. The division into two sections clearly only lasted one year but the interest in the 'ethnic' Congolese culture remained prominent afterwards in the meetings. In later years there would be another division, at a time when the MSC were also active in Brazil. During the war years the activities remained reasonably constant, even though it was sometimes impossible to meet together because of the war activities[65] and there were also complaints that the interest of the Fathers themselves was not always what it should be.

### *Framework*

The contents of the subjects that were reported in the periodical of the scholasticate and the subjects reported in the reports of the mission club overlap. The lectures that were held and the subjects that were discussed in the mission club were very often supported by the writings of aspirant missionaries. On the basis of the contributions that were mentioned in the mission writings, some additional nuances can probably be displayed regarding the contents of the articles. The manner in which the subjects treated were assimilated and even simply what had been remembered, is expressed better in these writings. These are notes which form a sort of minutes of the meetings of the mission club, and as such had an archiving function within the group, but which certainly did not have an officially representative function with respect to the outside world or to any higher authority. Only during two years (during the Second World War) did the superior set his signature under the reports, from which it can be deduced that some form of control existed. Apart from this one instance there is nothing in the way of compulsion or checking from above to be detected concerning the meetings, nor in the periodical put together by the students. The situation in which these writings came to exist was naturally rather specific: this was a relatively small group of people who had a great deal of contact with each other within a closed community outside the context of these specific meetings. There certainly existed a degree of social control and there must also have been the selection of information and data, including those concerning the future activities of the missionaries, though this mostly happened in an implicit way.

In any case, within the mission club and outside it there was close contact with the Fathers, including those who came from the missions. From the manner in which the visits of 'real' missionaries, those who had already been abroad, were spoken of, it can be deduced that the students looked up to these people and although they did not perhaps glamorise them or hero-worship them, they did admire them and took them as examples. The mission club or the events that were organised by the club (Mission Sunday, 'Vérius memorial') were excellent opportunities to "learn something new". A large part of the activities were probably not at all experienced as a duty by those involved, but as something much more logical or automatic. Again, keeping reports would probably have been interpreted in this way. Honoré Vinck, who was secretary of the mission club immediately after independence, put it as follows: they did it because it was part of being a serious association and they wanted to be taken seriously. If they had not kept reports, the superior would perhaps have made some remark about it, not because of the contents of the reports but certainly because it would have been a form of laziness.[66] The qualification 'moral duty' seems to apply here. It indicates that the disciplining of the future missionaries was done comprehensively in a very subtle and implicit manner.

The mission club was part of the new world which one entered as an aspirant, a world with its own rules and fixed patterns, which one did not question. This is supported by the fact that, once the missionaries could leave for the Congo, they were given a task to do and sent to a place to do it by their superiors. They were to take on this task without complaint. Father Frans Maes, whom I interviewed, was an exception in the sense that he knew that he would get an educational task in the Congo and therefore had been obliged to take a degree in education. However, that was also determined by his superiors, "(...) *because the Government required a qualification to be able to teach*". That also was just accepted and done.[67] Maes finally ended up in a school in the mission post of Flandria (Boteke), where a degree was not at all necessary, because it was a private school. This caused Maes to remark: "*So I really could have gone to the Congo two years earlier!*" In any case, he seemed rather unimpressed by what he had learnt during his educational course. To the question of whether he had found much use for his theoretical education, he answered that otherwise he would not have been able to set examinations. He had learnt *that* in Leuven.[68] Again, from talking with other missionaries it is apparent that the future destination of the aspirants, both functional and geographic, was mostly decided by their superiors.

## Activities

The idea of the mission club was based, according to the MSC themselves, on two pillars: a spiritual, religious perception on the one hand and a more intellectually moulding activity on the other hand. The two were somewhat intertwined. It was important not only to collect information about the region, the people and mission activities but also to lay a sound spiritual and moral foundation. In fact, it would be more correct to say that the activities of the mission club were on three different levels: moulding, devotion and propaganda. Before going more deeply into the contents of the moulding, the first two elements will be discussed because they were regarded by the missionaries themselves as at least as important in the preparation of the aspirants.

It is clear that the spiritual element always remained an integral part of the meetings. The duties of prayer and religiosity were repeated at almost every meeting. *"Some exercises of virtue and prayer were imposed at the attention of the missionaries, the missions and the primitives. In this way we work on our own perfection. All members should pray a rosary each month for the fellow members."*[69] Every month there was a prayer task; more specifically prayers were dedicated for a certain goal or a certain person (or persons). Expressions such as these (but with changing subjects) are to be seen regularly in the reports: *"The speaker ended with a call to pray well for the intention of the month that our Congo mission should not fall prey to Protestant disunity."* The required devotion, religiosity and piety naturally showed through in the reports themselves, depending on the dedication and diligence that the reporter of the day showed. The war years represent a high point (probably not coincidentally).

It is not an unfounded or ahistorical interpretation when we speak here about the religious and spiritual element in the training of missionaries. This is shown by the remarks that were made during the first meeting at the start of the academic year, such as this remark from 1943: *"Following our tradition the President wants to talk about the aim and the spirit of our club and also what place these must take in our life at the scholasticate. The aim is to advance mission knowledge, but above all mission love. For the men of Leuven the romantic vision of the missionary life has faded to make way for the conviction that the missionary life is a true life of sacrifice ... What is demanded of a missionary besides prayer and sacrifice? Father Yernaux shared the following with our chairman: A great love of one's neighbour is more necessary than mission study, so that the ingratitude of*

*the negroes does not put you out of action. Also a reasonable knowledge of French, so as to be always able to get on with the white colonists.”[70]* Prayer and devotion were elements that were systematically present and that are repeatedly mentioned in the reports. It is of course in the nature of missionary life that there is a place for religious aspects. During the reading of the different reports, however, an image appears in which religious inspiration seems to be rather essential, at least in the interpretation of the various authors. This inspiration also seems to be independent of the longing for romance or heroism, though it cannot be denied that the two were very often intertwined. The fact that ‘sacrifice’ seems to be a central concept in the life of a missionary may have something to do with this. This is discussed further in the section about the role of the missionary.



Picture of a Batswa village

Besides this, the mission club was also called upon for the more earthly component of mission work; in propaganda and raising funds for the missions. This certainly fits in with what was said earlier about the presence of the missions in particular and the Catholic Church in general in the broader social context. The mission writings and periodicals of the scholasticate do not say much about concrete initiatives. Above all the ‘missie-foor’, the mission fair, usually with an accompanying ‘raffle’, was an annually repeated event for the purpose of collecting funds on which the aspirants naturally worked. The mission day of 1933 in Bree was extensively described in the mission periodical and was clearly a very popular event. *“For setting up the exhibition the gymnasium of the Noviciate was cleared out. E.P. Van Moorsel, helped by E.P. Vullings, deputy chairman of the Committee for Mission Exhibitions in Belgium, put everything together in a tidy way. The donated objects, along with the mission objects, were an expression of the love that our people have for the missions. The Brothers drew, painted, printed and decorated the halls and rooms with flags and bunting. Helpful young women from the neighbourhood plaited flower wreaths. Helpful friends planted pines and welcoming arches which, decorated with roses, gave our monastery a friendly aspect. In the Novices’ garden the fairground stalls and tents were set up. Darts, bar, ice creams, kite flying, knocking bottles over, shooting, fishing and raffles formed a great attraction. The prizes were assembled out of all sorts of objects, including puppies that Fr. Van Moorsel had got for free. (...) The streets*

leading to the monastery were full of people. The church was visited, balloons donated by the *Gazet van Antwerpen* newspaper lifted up into the blue sky, the music brought joy, the exhibition was so crowded that stalls and raffles could hardly work. Everyone opened their purses. “really, it’s for the Missions’ “[71] In the course of the years there were a number of other practical initiatives sporadically reported, such as the collection of old spectacles, making indexes of the mission periodicals, begging hikes and collections of silver paper.[72]

### *3. The world view of the future MSC*

What positions did the MSC youths take as regards the different aspects of their future lives as missionaries in Africa? The themes that were touched on in periodicals and reports illustrate these opinions. They are grouped together here in a number of themes.

#### *3.1. The market position of the Catholic faith*

##### *3.1.1. Catholics and Protestants*

The position towards the Protestants, as this appears in the reports, was one of superiority and (very) passive tolerance. As early as 1919 a lecture was held about the attitude of the Catholic missionaries towards the Protestants. That there was *de facto* a great deal of animosity between the two groups can be deduced from the advice that was given on this occasion: the Catholic missionaries must not only tolerate the Protestants, they should also help them. That naturally applied only as far as the church allowed it, “*that is to say, everywhere except in the work of conversion*“.[73] This mutual tolerance and aid were not prompted by mutual respect but because of the impression that must be given to the Congolese. Appearances must be maintained. After all, external divisions would not give a civilised impression and may even cause confusion concerning the message of belief. In 1925 the subject came up again in a lecture to the mission club. The reporter retained from the lecture that Protestantism had intrinsically much less nurturing value, that the Protestants moralised less (which was taken as negative) and that they preferred to work with the higher levels of society and were predominately interested in money and riches. Protestantism was painted as the weaker brother of Catholicism which could only compete because of deeper financial resources. In an article from 1930, from Father China, it was stated: “*We do not have to insist on the obstacle that they oppose to the spreading of Truth. Nevertheless, despite their force, the results do not correspond completely to their efforts.*”[74] And in 1933, in a discussion on “*The different factors wanting to resolve the social question in the Congo,*” it was



stated that: *"Protestantism may possibly also be dangerous and even more so than communism."*[75]

Still, this was not about enemies that had to be fought. One must try to stay out of their mission areas and, if that could not be done, *"(...) one must avoid all public discussions and direct attacks."* This last piece of advice was to avoid disturbing the mood of the local population.[76] Later, too, whenever Protestantism came to be discussed, it was spoken of in a more denigrating manner. Giving a lecture about the Protestant missions was a difficult task, it was said, because: *"it is difficult to understand what Protestantism gives to a human life."* And somewhat less laconic: *"It is difficult to get a clear picture of the conditions of living that lead to a belief in the same Christ, specifically the relationship on theological ground between Catholic missionaries and Protestant missionaries, from which a psychological and social difference grows."*[77] Even in 1957 it was stated: *"(...) the Protestants have always been a good goad for our missionaries and they do a lot of good in the fight against Fetishism but they also do a lot of harm: the divisions in their ranks and the superficiality of their conversions causes indifference."*[78] There was never any question, thus, of a really ecumenical approach between the groups.

### 3.1.2. Catholics and Islam

The relationship with Islam only came into question once. Islam was described as a religion that had always shown enmity towards European Catholicism and for this reason must be pushed back. The approach that was worked out here was that one must go to battle against the influence of Islam. Strangely enough the slave handlers were never explicitly mentioned, though during early colonisation they were used appropriately and inappropriately as a reason to colonise the Congo. In place of this, the first period of colonisation under the Portuguese was recalled. According to the author they were going to oppose Islam in Africa but did not succeed in their colonisation because they wanted to *'portugalise'* too much. In contrast, the current struggle, in which the Catholic Church triumphed, was a pacifistic one. Because Islam could not occupy any geographically enclosed area as it had earlier, its power was now broken and the danger of it taking over was warded off. Considering that armed struggle was no longer possible, the Church was naturally in the advantageous position because it was superior to Islam. *"There is already a chain of sturdily-formed, fresh-growing Christianities that connects the West coast of Africa with the East coast: Cameroon, Belgian*

*Congo, Uganda, Rwanda, Urundi ... In its turn the Church has now laid a barrier around Islam and placed it in a permanent position of isolation.*"[79]

### 3.2. The role of the missionary

In 1933 one of the students, Brother Heyde gave a lecture on the basis of a book he had read: *"Le missionnaire des temps modernes"* by Lesourd. From his lecture of the book it appeared that the missionary should help the local population in all their problems. Included in these problems was certainly the material and social problems that were partly created by economic exploitation. The reaction of the speaker was: *"(...) it is unfortunate enough but the missionary is currently obliged to know something about everything."* This fitted into the picture of the all-knowing father figure that the missionary had to be. Father Vertenten, one of the pioneers and still one of the most influential figures in the congregation, also spoke along these lines. He came to speak in October 1940 *"about the negroes"*. According to him it was the greatest praise that one could get as missionary *"That people say about him: he is a just man, he solves disputes well."* Again, according to him one should *"(...) love the Blacks very much but one should never let him see that one needs him."*[80] When problems in connection with the validity of marriages between natives were discussed in 1941 it was added that the aspiring missionary should therefore be familiar with canon law, since *"(...) in such cases it is the missionary who is the right person to clarify the situation."*[81] This explanation was so well received that the mission club gave much more attention the next academic year to all sorts of practical questions about marriage law.[82]

On the mission day in 1946, during a period in which the tone of the reports was often somewhat exaggerated, gestures were broader and religiosity increased markedly, the role of the missionary came into focus once again. The Brothers apparently read from other sources, in view of their own lack of experience and lack of anyone who had experience. A romantic picture of self-sacrifice and heroism was revealed: *"How hard a missionary life can be, but how beautiful and noble too, because it is inspired and carried by the love of eternal God."*[83] The contributions on this mission day are very instructive about the spiritual aspects of the missionary existence. The importance of self-sacrifice and of the exemplary function of the missionary were indicated again here as the kernel of the role of missionary. In this, use must be made of a number of aids, particularly prayer, self-denial and the Holy Mass. Ideally a missionary should possess a highly principled personality and be mild of character, which together should put him in

a state to become "*a mother for the primitives*". A second contribution, from Father Moeyens, complemented this and adjusted the romantic image by emphasising that the missionary life was *not* as it was shown in missionary exhibitions or by propaganda in general. It was also a purely practical job, "*Such as the mission sewing circles imagine it, that is to say baptising, reading mass, serving sacraments and clothing Negroes.*" Finally, the missionary was also no adventurer, "*free of all rules and monastic discipline*", nor a "*heroic conqueror*". The image that Moeyens put in its place was one of 'transitive' activity in which the involved person must give of himself (sacrifice and self-denial again) without becoming poorer but certainly with the intention of lessening the original sin of others.

### 3.3. *The image of the Congolese*

In the mission club of March 1919 an article from the Scheutist De Clercq was read about missionary work in the Congo because at that time it was already expected that the MSC would establish themselves there. The reporter for the meeting was obviously very impressed by the description of the moral character of the Congolese: The list of characteristics, which he cited, certainly looked impressive: "*The low sunkenness (sic) and blindness of the people ... Then he described the struggle of the converts against their inclinations and customs, long before and after their baptism: all because of their character, customs and poor inclinations. Then he briefly described the character of the natives: their fickleness, superficiality, outward appearance, laziness, childishness, suspicious nature, but on the other hand kindness and trust in their leaders.*" The task to go to evangelise such people did look especially difficult and the conclusion was consistent with this: "*The moral lesson for us was: try to develop the good, do not look for ourselves, learn our work subjects, give much and expect nothing.*"[84]

An especially surprising piece of commentary is to be found in the report about the club meeting of July 1922, in which there was a discussion about the Pygmies. Smolders, the secretary, noted in an ironic style: "*The ethical situation cannot be better, these must be true saints: the speaker has enumerated the catalogue of their virtues, it was truly believed that they did not have Adam as a common father. The relationship of parents to children, social, political and economic relations. Truth, generosity, chastity, if they would just do a few miracles we would canonise them all. Nevertheless, the speaker believes some of this glory should be removed by stating that they are children and that they have vices!*"

*How surprising.*" In the preceding part the pygmies were described as "*des paresseux*" (lazybones), something that seemed to determine their whole attitude to life. The remarks cited here give the strong impression that the reporter did not like what he heard from the speaker and could not agree with an overly positive characterisation.

De Rop wrote a contribution for *De Vloed* in 1933 about ethnology. It sets the vocabulary that was used to refer to the Congolese (or other colonised peoples) somewhat in perspective: "*For all missionaries, all natives seem to be in the beginning strange, mysterious beings: after all, the reasoning, imagination, language, customs, religious life - everything seems at first sight so totally different from what one is accustomed to see. It is very tempting then to tell some remarkable fact or another and by way of conclusion to decide that the native is a great child, without seeing in this fact the beliefs and customs of the primitive people.*"[85] On the subject of knowledge of the Africans and of local culture and customs there are only references to be found to introductions in anthropological or ethnological concepts. During the academic year 1947-1948 Boelaert came to give an introduction to ethnology. Sadly enough there is only a brief and laconic report to be found in the minutes of the mission club: "(...) *It is the history of the people who as yet have no history. In America, England and Germany it is also called anthropology. All branches of science are involved ... Ethnography describes the cultural history of a people. Ethnology tries from this to form or pose laws of cultural history. E.P. Hulstaert for example is one of the best ethnographs of our colony. - We also get to hear about the important schools of ethnology. The evolutionists - the school of cultural circles - the school of functionalists - fundamentally one only has hypotheses; there is more than enough work for the future. We must not be discouraged.* (end of report)"

Although there was much interest in the life of the Congolese, and the mission club paid regular attention to it, the fact remains that some prejudices about the Africans and their character were difficult to expunge: "(...) *It is certainly a fact that the negroes are very lazy and uncaring about tomorrow. But one should not exaggerate here. So Prof. Leplay (Leplae is meant, JB) gave an example to prove the carelessness and laziness: 'When the negroes of Equator earned quite a lot of money by looking for copal, they generally did not work their gardens any more, but began to feed themselves with preserved food from Europe. A missionary told us this same fact, but according to him it was evidence of exploitation by whites:*

*'The whites demanded so much work from the blacks that they had no time left to work and had to feed themselves with preserved food if they did not want to die of hunger.'* Which of these two was right?"[86] There was certainly room for a critical approach and they stood open for new knowledge and new data.

However, a number of ideas were not brought into question. In the same article about 'the farmer problem', which also proposed agriculture as the future for the Congolese, some remarkable reasoning was developed about the pros and cons of private land ownership by Congolese. At the time, this hardly existed or not at all. Against the ruling opinion, which stated that the private ownership of land was against the mentality of the Congolese, Wijnants stated that it was not a question of pro or contra, but that the Congolese simply had no knowledge of the concept of individual possession of land. In other words, it really lay outside their mentality. The article said "(...) *that they had not thought of it yet*". The corollary of this was, of course, that this knowledge could certainly be acquired. And even if the laziness of "the negroes" was qualified, the author still came partly back to it at the end of his article. To prevent the Congolese from selling their land at the first and best opportunity, he suggested the introduction by law of a fifty year sale prohibition.

That people were open to new knowledge and that the world of the Congolese certainly did interest the missionaries was already clear. The question naturally remains in what way this world was approached and interpreted. Gustaaf Hulstaert evidently gave talks himself for the mission club at regular intervals. In November 1919, it was reported, he gave "*some practical hints for finding out about the religion of the primitives*". The notes from this talk that are preserved not only give an insight into the manner in which scientific interest and (self-taught?) moulding can be combined with the religious conversion element, at the same time they give a nice insight into the ruling mentality of this period.

In that year further topics were: "*Kimbanguism*",[87] "*initiation ceremonies in the tribe*", "*the matriarchy*", "*native music in our Congo mission*", "*marriage in the Nkundo*",[88] "*the souls of the dead*", "*the pure spirits*" and also a discussion of an article by Hulstaert about language problems in the Congo. On the mission day in March there was a talk about the advantages that the missionaries could gain by adapting to the use of language and native art forms of the Congolese and by getting acquainted with the religious concepts of the Congolese. All in all, this represented a rather great variety. The attitude that needed to be adopted was

described as follows: concerning religion, it was not appropriate to look contemptuously or to scoff at the Africans' customs, only sympathy and love were appropriate and would bring them to the Light. The Truth must be brought, and the missionaries had the Truth. This was not open to discussion. Attention to and a sort of respect for the differences of the Congolese were thus explicitly brought forward as a subject. There grew in all respects a consciousness that two different cultures confronted each other and that the relationship between the two was not purely subordinate, not 'black-white' in any case. The same session included the topic "(...) *how the missionary with his European understanding of art should comport himself towards the understanding of art by the Negroes.*"[89] Again, the following year was well provided with ethnologically inspired subjects. It looked very much as if they wanted to effectively reach the double aim set for them: *"enrich mission knowledge by study and be a practical missionary by prayer and sacrifice."*

This knowledge is necessary for the missionary, for he must root out evil – and thus know it; besides that, with it he can also help to defend Belief. One must learn to know religion from the primitives themselves, thus one must know

*1. how one gets to know the primitives*

*2. how one can find out the Truth*

For the first point, in general, the rules of Hermeneutics must be applied and history must be critically studied – Above all, when questioning people one must be cautious. It is best to get advice from the shamans who serve the religion – but one cannot win these over so one must turn to the simple people, it is dangerous to consult the natives who have been in contact with civilisation – Also make sure that you tell your men nothing but the facts, no explanation or considerations – this also goes for the converted.

*II. Remarks about finding out the Truth.*

*a. language knowledge is most highly necessary and should be solid*

*b. win the trust of the speaker – do not sow dissent by questioning a whole group, do not pose general questions.*

*c. great danger exists of eliciting such or such answer by your manner of questioning, do not ask for too much explanation..*

*d. write everything down even though you do not see much importance in it.*

*e. avoid offence – especially for new Christians. Curiosity is accepted.*

To make that study work the apostolate speaker referred to a practical point e.g. after a story he could e.g. say that is nice, very nice, we have that in our religion, but much nicer – you can have no better opportunity to set out the truth of our religion. With examples this well worked out and founded lecture was documented.

Extract 1 – “Some practical hints for finding out about the religion of the primitives”. From the minutes of the meeting of the MSC mission club of 16 November 1919 (MSC Archives Borgerhout).

Still, this did not lead to much interest in what the Congolese themselves thought and felt. The interest in knowledge of the Congolese was much more due to utilitarian reasons. Besides that, it had to do with the exciting unknown, which one wanted to know more about and wanted to make more controllable, probably a logical reflex for the young and curious aspirants. In the last meeting of the academic year 1936-1937 a number of texts were passed around to awaken interest in the concrete reality of the mission area. These were a number of copies of *Le Coq chante*, a fortnightly periodical published by the MSC that had just started on the initiative of Boelaert and in which articles mainly appeared in the regional language Lomongo[90] and sometimes in French. The reporter reported this as follows: “A few issues of ‘*Le Coq qui chante*’ (sic) were passed around and also the annual report of Mgr. Above all, the latter was very interesting.”[91] In the annual report of the superior there was of course a general report of what was going on in the mission area, hence his remark. Besides this, it was a text that could be understood by the aspirants, who evidently didn’t understand Lomongo. The new and strange language obviously gave rise to no special considerations. Only in the late 1950s was it announced: “*It must be remarked that eight of the ten members follow the Congolese lessons with much diligence, these are given by E.P. De Rop.*”[92]

However, curiosity very often got the upper hand as is shown repeatedly in the reports. It is often shown by casual remarks: “*Father De Meyst talked to us about all of the things that happen to a missionary. It was a pleasant and enjoyable meeting.*”[93] It goes without saying that very often ordinary stories were told and that the exotic and anecdotal won out over other considerations: “*Brother Kemp was captain of the Theresita (the MSC’s river boat, JB) for about 20 years.*

*All sorts of adventures happened to him. He does not conceal how he once, in a fit of anger, kicked a recalcitrant Black from the deck into the water. Evidently he still grieves about it.”[94]*

### *3.4. Colonial relationships: white and black*

The lecture about the relationships between the colonists and the missionaries, which Father Boelaert gave at the start of 1939, did not go unnoticed. The report stated euphemistically: *“directly stated, Father Boelaert did not try to package things nicely, he stated his thoughts straight out and was not soft.”* Boelaert clearly said things that the aspiring missionaries certainly felt somewhere but which they could not precisely appreciate or evaluate, since they were *not done*, but it certainly tickled their curiosity. At first glance, Boelaert’s opinions seem to be directly opposed to the common opinion: *“The real attitude: we are the guests and the blacks the hosts. The negro can see quite well that many whites stand, in the moral arena, lower than him and he asks himself why the missionaries do not go first to the whites to convert them. This is naturally a great difficulty that holds back the work of conversion.”* This is a story that also recurs with others and that seems to fit in well with the position that, among others, Boelaert and Hulstaert had based their attitude to the local culture in part on criticism of their own society. For the youths present in the mission club it must have been a surprising experience to hear that one could see black and white in a reversed hierarchy. An image, by the way, that was not always agreed with in the discourse of other speakers. In the words of Father Vertenten, who came to tell them a year later that “the negroes” were “simple people, still the children of nature really”. However, this simplicity was explained by what they were not: *“They do not have this artificial behaviour and therefore do not have the ambiguous, unmeaning, often hypocritical way of life of the Europeans. No, they are as they live. They do not look for any affectation. That explains why they gladly listen to the Gospels, especially to the parables.”[95]*

The contribution of Brother Wijnants in 1938 about the establishment of families in the colony, a problem that caused a lot of discussion at that time, gives a few clarifying insights: the wife moving to the colony was recommended because she would make the husband more stable. Written in very bald language it sounded as if the man would otherwise probably look for the company of black women: *“The whites who give free reign to their instincts can no longer be regarded as suitable for the elevated work of civilising. After all, how would you want such a boss, for*



*that is what the white man has to be, to exercise authority over those which he must lead because of his task; how can such a teacher, for this is the white man also, bring the natives to a higher level when he himself has sunk so deep.*"[96] This message was clearly based on the traditional hierarchical model. From the conclusion of the lecture it is clear that this attitude must clearly be situated in the *Zeitgeist*. In this conclusion, the author quoted still more reasons why it was beneficial to let the wives of the colonists come to Congo: she could better round off the sharp edges of her husband, she was also better suited to help the native women and "*Above all it cannot be denied that a Christian home can exercise a beneficent influence on the natives*". However, the Brother's opinion of the wife was not really very high, as shown by another passage in which he stated that the exemplary function of the wife could only succeed if the wife "*(...) has not merely come to the Congo to sunbathe and go back to Europe with a brown skin.*" The wife should perhaps not come to the Congo immediately because she was weaker and more sensitive to a new environment and would therefore perhaps only make it more difficult for her husband.

In 1955 Boelaert came again to give a lecture in the mission club, this time about the "*present-day mission problems in the Congo*". The context of international politics had evolved quickly in the meantime. The ruling political mood and Boelaert's formulations were, on the surface, certainly converging. Coexistence was no longer a dirty word and people began to talk about Belgian-Congolese communities. Boelaert stated that the Congolese themselves were greatly altered and that there was therefore no longer a real 'mission' in the classical sense of the word. The missionary now had, according to him, three tasks: he must be a representative of the rights of the natives, be a server of the sacraments (and adapt himself in this respect to "*our Negroes*") and also be a teacher. The last task was a temporary one because it was meant to "*bring the native up to be a person who can choose for himself*". One must also respect their culture. "*No cultural imperialism*" was firmly stated.[97] It is clear that the words and the descriptions used here are coloured by the internationally developing discourse about equal rights, anti-colonialism and the struggle for independence of that time. But besides that, these words precisely reflect the view that the missionaries had of the Congolese at that time.

Without realising it themselves, the missionaries took a very contradictory attitude: in the *slipstream* of this international debate they turned away from

imperialism. That also fits in with the principles of adaptionism which the MSC held earlier. However, at the same time there remained an almost unconscious form of superiority and as a corollary refined paternalism that was reserved just for themselves. The other whites were treated with much less respect but the missionary himself still took a superior position. He remained, until further orders, an educator. At the same mission day on which Boelaert spoke, Father Theeuwissen also gave a presentation in which he spoke among other things of the "colour bar" (a word that was therefore sufficiently well-known to the missionaries) the future of the colony and the policies to be followed.[98] *"The policy will therefore consist of one trying to bring coexistence into being on the basis of granting equal rights. Difficulties: the white man often has a mentality of self-satisfaction, luxury and superiority. He stands, often, lower on the moral and intellectual plane than the native. These are gradually climbing up the social ladder. Where the lowest level of whites meets the highest level of blacks, there is friction. The white man then implements a colour bar - perhaps not so brutally, not in law, but still as a fact - as a normal process of growth coming out of the first period (of colonisation, JB). The only good solution would be: to learn to respect them because they are people with their own place and their own values (cf. his article in 'De Linie' of 24 December 1954)."*[99] That some Congolese were morally and intellectually superior to whites was not a problem but these still were exceptions or extreme cases ('upper' and 'lower' levels) and the majority of the whites therefore logically stood on a higher moral and intellectual plane than the majority of blacks.

The same subtle distinction can be seen in the following citation from the historic overview of the MSC mission work in the Congo. It also was published in 1954 in the jubilee issue of *De Toekomst*. Sablon, who wrote the article, referred among other things to the scientific work of Hulstaert and Boelaert but revealed himself at the same time to be a critical follower. Above all, he did not agree with them in the interpretation they gave to the religion of the Mongo, particularly where they stated that the Mongo knew no cult to the honour of God in the real sense of the word. Instead, Sablon agreed with Mgr. Van Goethem, who said that the implicit form of worship, which was made manifest in a number of practical rituals (funeral rituals, prayers, sacrifices) was more important.[100] The writer made the following remarks: *"They naturally do not have a systematically worked out religion, their way of knowledge is concrete and intuitive. No reasoning, with premises and deductions."* The question is of course whether any religious

experience happens by reasoning. In this context we must place the following remark by the same author: *"Not thought out, but not unfelt, they carry with them a relatively correct knowledge of God and in the sense of men who do not know the true God they are not even heathens, writes Fr. Boelaert."* This sentence, which is really taken over from Boelaert, shows once again that the missionaries were stuck in an evolutionary, hierarchical context. The others were approached with a great deal of *goodwill* but there remained a fundamental distance, a value judgement and difference in values between 'us' and 'them'. For that matter, this could also be found in Van Goethem, who was cited in the same article in connection with the religious movement of the Mongo: *"Nevertheless, I retain the impression that often poor expression hides the right intentions, which God will be more content with than we are."*

### *3.5. Colonial relationships: the mission and the administration*

The attitude that the MSC had to take towards the government is difficult to describe. From previous investigation, it was clear that people such as Hulstaert and Boelaert, once they were in the Congo, dared to go repeatedly into heated debate with the authorities.[101] No conclusions can or should be drawn from this that apply to missionaries in general. Firstly, this is because the attitude of these 'reference figures' is not unambiguous in itself. This refers to the fact that, as leading figures in their congregation and in the MSC mission area in the Congo, they also collaborated with these same authorities and other Belgians on certain matters and in certain circumstances. Secondly, because the other MSC members in practice certainly did not think or do as they did. In the context of this chapter the focus is on the opinions that circulated during the training of the MSC. This theme was not often specifically covered in the reports of the mission club or the articles that the students wrote for their periodicals. In an article from 1934, written by Ulrik Staeljanssens, about the role of education in the colony, it was remarked that moral development must be the most important aim of colonial education. That this moral development must be based on religious education was obvious for the missions, as the author stated, *"(...) but for the state it is much more based on opportunistic reasons."* Probably the writer of the article was referring to the financial and organisational motives behind the collaboration between the missions and the administration. And, quite in general, he ended his contribution with the remark that there *"(...) must be close collaboration between the state and the institutions of independent education."*

Other political standpoints were represented in the contribution about "*L'action sociale au Congo Belge*". The author, Brother Declercqs, criticised colonial power relationships in this article, which was mainly inspired by the Jesuit Dubois. Of the three great powers that were at work in the colony (the image of the colonial trinity, which was often used in later years, appears here already), according to Declercqs, Capital was the strongest and most influential: "*Its (= the colony's) law is not written but is dictated (to him) by the 'Banque Générale'. There is no force that can effectively compensate for its action already becoming too much an interference in the other powers. On the contrary it only has already too much interfered and already has too great an influence on political authority. Moreover, the role of the state is in fact only an auxiliary role, even if it is presented in the form of dominance; consequently, action must at least be aimed at the preparation and organisation of a complete social structure.*"[102] Even the missions could not put enough counterweight in the scale against Capital. The limited social action that they could undertake, however, must be aimed at restructuring the whole of colonial society by organising all walks of life, following the principles of the encyclicals *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno*.

The judgement made of the administration was milder in the contribution about "*Native policy*" that appeared in 1938 in *De Toekomst*. The attitude of the administration before 1908 was described as 'a realistic one', which in practice meant assimilation policy. The official policy after the takeover of the Congo by the Belgian State was described as 'evolutionary', which meant a certain respect for the native structures and customs. The earliest period was spoken of very critically: "*The political workers of the early days would have to make the confession that they had lived next to the Blacks without taking their mentality into account. Luckily the workers at this eleventh hour were somewhat wiser and intervened in time in the destructive work of their predecessors.*"[103] A positive judgement was made of the situation at that time, although the work of the missionaries was seen as indispensable for the administration. After all, the state civil servant had other interests and therefore did not always take account of humanitarian concerns. The missions therefore had to soften state policy or keep it on the right path.

The state action and colonisation itself was criticised from the fifties. Sablon, who described the Nkundo (or Mongo)-society in his article on the occasion of 30 years

of MSC in the Congo, stated that it was a living, organic community until the moment that the colonists came: *“Although the society was open to all healthy influences and could adapt itself to all reasonable demands of civilisation, at the end of the previous century the young growth of their community was disturbed suddenly by European occupation because it did not correspond to those things that, in our European outlook about civilisation and progress, are so completely wrong: exclusion of all ethnic organs of management, forcing all individuals into line, slave-like subordination to the impersonal and unfatherlike State with its fearful semblance of freedom to be able to do anything that is not forbidden by the State.”*[104] Again, in this citation the ambiguity of ideas about colonisation can be seen: on the one hand a critical attitude towards the administration and its manner of working, on the other hand the lack of fundamental criticism of the idea of colonisation. Here again, a link is made between the criticism of the colonial administration and the attitude towards social developments in the motherland. The examples given seem to contain a direct criticism of the quickly developing welfare state of that time (the 1950s).

### 3.6. Education and training



Classroom rear view, Nsona Mbata (Matadi), 1920

Principles of upbringing were seldom spoken of explicitly. In the context of the science club of Bree the subject of ‘education’ had sometimes been included but traces are not to be found in the periodical of the scholasticate.[105] There is one clear reference to Decoene and De Hovre, the leaders of ‘Catholic educational theory’ in Flanders.[106] That can hardly be surprising in the light of the social situation of the missionaries and aspiring missionaries which has already been referred to. Catholic educational theory was a normative pedagogy and fits best in the picture of the restoration of old values and the return to a clear and

hierarchically organised society as a reaction to moral corruption and the social crisis.[107] That was also the tenor of the contribution that appeared in *De Vloed* about religious education, written by Gerard Van Kerckhove. Indifference to religion and thus also to religious education was ascribed to advancing technical progress, which led to hedonism and materialism. However, taking a hostile attitude to progress was probably not the most sensible move. What had been wrong in the old system of religious education was excessive intellectualism, the quasi-exclusive interest that is associated with the moulding of reason. In place of this, it must be pleaded for a system of religious concepts bound with human 'basic motivations' to which: "*the notions of race and nation- the brotherhood of all - personal freedom, etc.*"[108] could be easily attached.

A year later *De Toekomst* printed an article by Ulrik Staeljanssens about "*Education in the Congo*". According to him, education should Educate the Congolese and should not serve to benefit the exploitation of the colony. The text was certainly inspired by the texts of the National Colonial Congress and also by the decisions of the *Commission Franck*. The official line comes through very strongly in this text. Concerning the state of the Congolese it was stated that "the negro" must be educated, not only as an individual, as a child, but also as a group, as a 'race'. Without further subtle differentiation it sounds like: "*Moral training is the most difficult and delicate, since one must rid a fallen race of all its faults and bad habits and has to provide completely new (habits, JB) from and for him.*"[109]

The management or exploitation of the Congolese should not be the intention: on the contrary, education should be directed to steering him towards his place of origin with the intention of letting other members of his race enjoy his attained value and to give them a good example. The schooled Congolese was therefore seen as an extension of missionary activity, considering that a great part of the attained value lay precisely in the fact that he was also evangelised. Here also, 'adaptation' was very much the way to go. Simply book learning would be a wrong choice, for that distorted "the negro" instead of improving him. With a reference to the *negro education* in the United States Staeljanssens cited a certain Blackheard: "*Two gifts can only be given to the Blacks little by little. The first is higher literary education and the second is political influence. He is not prepared to use and appreciate either the one or the other properly; what he must be taught is to work, maintained and efficient work and a habit of working.*"[110]

Catholic pedagogy was not explicitly referred to in this article but the approach

that Staeljanssens used was nevertheless situated completely in that context. Moral formation was the most important component of education. If this was to be appropriate then it had to have a religious basis. This religious basis could naturally best be supplied by Christianity. The popular slogan *"If we trace the frontiers of Christianity on a map of the world we would see that we have traced those of civilisation,"* was also quoted on this occasion.

Education should be in the native language, again *"according to the rules of modern education"*. The author did, however, admit that there were some advantages to the use of French: *"First and mainly because the French language is the key to science and secondly because a single language of use between Blacks and Whites would be easier, promote unity and simplify the administration."* Still, all the advantages of French as a language of education could not compete with the following observation: *"An education that does not rest on the mother tongue has an artificial character and is doomed to failure."* This summed up Staeljanssens' opinion of the subject.

After the Second World War the subject of 'education' was only handled sporadically in the mission club and in the periodicals of the seminary. In 1950 Father De Rop gave a presentation about teaching in the colony: *"We then called in the help of Fr. De Rop who talked to us for a whole evening about certain problems about which the members had had a few questions. First the school question was handled. Attention was mainly directed to the educational establishments in the Congo, the manner of teaching and the training of teachers. In a couple of short sections some principles about school policy in the Congo also came up; requests for subsidies and suchlike business."*[111] The report gave no more details. A very striking contribution was given in 1952 by Brother Hegt, one of the French-speaking aspirants. He wrote an article with the title of *"La formation du moi."*[112] He wanted to describe the role that the moulding of the ego played in education. The title and the announcement of the subject sounded heavy and scientific but the approach used was saturated with moral and religious notions. The conclusions drawn by the author concerning education fitted entirely into that context. They were no less relevant because of this, but neither could they be called very original.

Self-respect and a feeling of self-confidence were very important in the training of the youths, as was willpower. He also emphasised the importance of apperception in the training process, interpreted as the assimilation of everything that was

newly learnt to the concepts already known. The conclusions of the article ran into a sand of rather general and vague formulations but from the citations and the bibliography with the article it seemed that the Thomist influence predominated. That is naturally not very surprising in the context of a philosophic study circle that called itself the 'Thomas circle'. However, it certainly seems that even in the 1950s the pedagogic influences, if they were such, only went in the single direction of Catholic Pedagogy. Hegt first cited texts by Thomas Aquinas himself. Besides that he referred to the French philosopher (and Thomist) Jacques Maritain and his most influential work *Les degrés du savoir*. Maritain was well-known as an anti-modernist who criticised the enlightenment and epistemology and who clung to the preeminence of metaphysics over epistemology.[113] The three other scientists whom he referred to were all Jesuits: the Dutch pedagogue Nic Perquin, the American philosopher and pedagogue Jaime Castiello and the German psychologist Johannes Lindworsky.[114]

It is clear that many of the cited articles had undergone the direct influence of what the aspiring missionaries had read and studied. This is revealed in the construction of the articles and in the manner that the subjects are treated. Quite often there are also a number of authors, book titles and articles cited. Very many of these articles were clearly seen as a sort of task or homework in the context of the training in the seminary.[115] The impact of this should really not be underestimated. The contents give a view of what was experienced as normal and provide data, facts and pieces of information that belonged to the way the students, and therefore the later missionaries, saw the world.

Finally, in 1954 another article written by Brother Crevaels appeared in *De Vloed*. It was titled "*Education in the Belgian Congo and Rwanda-Urundi*". The article was about the way in which the Congolese were trained as priests. That is not immediately obvious when reading the article, seeing that in the first instance there is only mention of "*the training of the negro up to a full member of the Church*". After a short discussion of the two most important factors in that process, namely the 'environment' and the reasoning and moral development, an overview is given of the different levels of education. Again, in this article the rhetoric of longing for tradition and opposition to modernity is revealed. The author writes about the common law environments: "*An established grouping of people with their own base, ennobled by an equal, general culture, is a foundation from which people with higher ideals can come forth*".[116] The urbanised



environment was described as *"the artificial, native townships around the European centres"*. This could not be ignored. Or as Crevaels said: *"Still, the existence of the extra-common law environment cannot be switched off."* Also on the subject: *"In connection with that, there is a widespread action taking place that moderates the displacement of people and which keeps the negroes together in well-organised and managed centres."*

Surprisingly enough, he observed in conclusion that Whites were not behaving logically as long as they did not recognise the equality of Blacks and Whites in practical life. After all, the Africans were, according to him, Catholic because of the belief itself and not because the Europeans were. It was clearly a difficult subject to grasp because in the priestly training the differences in ability between Black and White were very big but still not as big as some people stated. The author was clearly in doubt about what the correct position had to be with respect to the Congolese and their difficulties in education. *"That the negro is by nature simply inclined to satisfy his sensual inclinations cannot be taken as an absolute rule."* The general lack of civilisation in the past also played a part. Again, it could not be absolutely stated that the Black was more stupid than the White. Again, (a lack of) previous history played a part.

In the second part the author first gave a historic overview of the development of the colonial education system. This primarily served as an introduction to the discussion of seminary education for the Congolese. He was very satisfied with primary education. He found support for this in a statement by Father Brys: *"The distance that divides the elite from the masses in the Belgian Congo is no longer as large as in other African areas. We have, to a certain extent, been able to avoid the reef of a privileged caste, which lives apart from the masses and wishes to rule much more than to serve."*[117] This was, of course, incorrect. The pronouncement, that dated from 1952 according to the Brother, could hardly be considered realistic hardly four years after the introduction of the new system of selected second grade.

Again, when discussing seminary education the author regularly referred to the environmental factors, which apparently still formed a problem and made it particularly difficult for the Congolese to finish priestly studies. He certainly did not differentiate there between Black and White, but from the turn of phrase it appears that this was, in fact, the underlying idea. From time to time this was revealed very clearly: *"It is understandable that there are currently no*

*independent thinkers and masters among the young priests.*" This represented a discourse that was generally present, and had already been developed in the thirties. It emphasised, for example, the importance and the moral value of agricultural activity and handwork. The "*References*" of Crevaels' article certainly did not refer to all of the sources he had used, but the majority of the listed articles were articles from *Kerk en Leven* (a very widespread belgian common parish periodical). It seems unlikely that anything in it diverged strongly from the classical colonial concepts.

### *Conclusion*

From the themes and the commentaries that have been touched on here it can be seen that the missionaries in the scholasticate or the mission seminary had been taught an altogether very traditional vision of the colony and its inhabitants. They cherished a rather traditional worldview. Their attitude towards the Congolese can certainly not be described as aggressive, arrogant or haughty. That has much to do with the religious context in general and the values of humility and neighbourly love that were therefore communicated to the young aspirants. However, there was dissatisfaction with modern Western civilisation and with a number of its characteristics: consumption, materialism, individualism and emancipation. A specific pedagogical training was almost completely absent. Where there are still some elements of educational ideas or principles, these are based on traditional and conservative thinkers.

In this respect, the next conclusion is certainly also relevant. Gustaaf Hulstaert played a great role in providing the seminarians with knowledge about everything that had to do with the Belgian Congo. Vinck states that Hulstaert was still dominant in the priestly training of the MSC in the 1960s. He was already revered during the colonial period because of his scientific work and was considered, certainly in the seminary, to be 'the one who knew about everything'. The students knew, for example, that Hulstaert had been received by the King alone at a visit to Coquilhatville (before independence). He made an impression on the students and he was respected by the other Fathers, who looked up to him much more than to Boelaert, who was much more modest and had a milder character. The views of Hulstaert, which will be discussed more deeply, therefore must certainly be accounted for as a great influence on the seminarians.[118]

### NOTES

[1] Honoré Vinck, director of the Aequatoria research centre and MSC,

interviewed in the “Histories” broadcast “Het rijk van de stilte” (Flemish national television, 11 April 2002). [original quotation in Dutch]

[2] For a graphical representation of these relationships, and supplementary statistics, see appendix 7.

[3] Pirotte, J. & Soetens, C. (2003). Les missions à l’époque coloniale. In Pirotte, J. & Zelis, G. (eds.) *Pour une histoire du monde catholique au 20<sup>e</sup> siècle Wallonie-Bruxelles. Guide du chercheur*. Arca: Louvain-La-Neuve. p. 681. This is for the French-speaking part of Belgium but most of the questions naturally apply by extension to all Belgian missionaries. In fact the French-speakers formed a minority in the total missionary population.

[4] Gustaaf Hulstaert (1900-1990). Born in Melsele, he studied humanities at school with the MSC in Asse before entering the order. He was ordained as a priest in Leuven in 1924. After this, he taught for half a year at the college in Asse, then he took lessons in tropical medicine in Brussels. During his priestly studies in Heverlee he also received missionary training at the University of Leuven. In September 1925 he left for the Congo. Apart from a few holidays in Belgium, he would remain there continuously until his death in 1990. The time he spent in the Congo can be divided into two periods: From 1925 to 1950 he was active in mission work, predominately in education. He was successively a travelling Father (Boende, 1926-1927), mission superior and headmaster of the HCB school in Flandria (1927-1933), mission superior and headmaster of the junior seminary in Bokuma (1933-1935), religious superior and missionary inspector stationed in Bamanya (1936-1946) and again mission superior and headmaster of the HCB school in Flandria (1946-1950). In 1950 he was released from mission activity so that he could concentrate fully on scientific work. In the meantime, it had become clear that he had several interests in the scientific area in which he would invest much time and that his work would find recognition in broader academic circles. In this respect, the foundation of the periodical ‘Aequatoria’, together with Edmond Boelaert, was very important. Hulstaert’s scientific interests were very broad, and his biography is very comprehensive, with publications in many areas, including linguistics, biology and history.

[5] Depaepe & Van Rompaey, p. 92. [original in Dutch]

[6] Under the title “sciences de la mission et formation missionnaire au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle”.

[7] Fricoteaux, L. (1992). La formation au sein d’un institut missionnaire féminin, les Soeurs Blanches au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle. Y a-t-il eu une influence des semaines de

missiologie de Louvain? In Spindler, M. & Gadille, J. (eds.). *Sciences de la mission et formation missionnaire au XXe siècle*. Actes de la XIIe session du CREDIC. Lyon/ Bologna: LUGD/EMI. p.319-332.

[8] See: Dujardin, C. (1989). Van pionier tot dienaar. Profiel van de Belgische missionaris in historisch perspectief (1800-1989). In Boudens, R. (ed.), *Rond Damiaan. Handelingen van het colloquium n.a.v. de honderdste verjaardag van het overlijden van pater Damiaan 9-10 maart 1959*, Kadoc-studies 7, Leuven: Universitaire Pers. p. 114-187.

[9] By this Dujardin certainly refers to training that specifically prepared for the “material” life as a missionary. As religious workers, the missionaries had already received priestly training after their secondary school studies. This means they were highly educated people of their age.

[10] The next paragraphs are primarily based on research and texts I used for a lecture at the *Annual Conference of the British History of Education Society* in Swansea, November 2002, “*Centre and periphery as a framework for the history of colonial education*”. An English version of this text was published in Dhoker, M. & Depaepe, M. (ed.) (2004). *Op eigen vleugels. Liber amicorum An Hermans*. Leuven: Garant. p. 96-106.

[11] Derroitte, H. (1999). L'évolution des modèles missionnaires. Dialogue d'Henri Derroitte avec le Père Joseph Masson, s.j. In Derroitte, H. & Soetens, C. (eds.) *La mémoire missionnaire. Les chemins sinueux de l'inculturation*. Lumen Vitae: Bruxelles.p. 114-116. Masson was himself one of the main figures in the missiological activity in Leuven and Rome and took on responsibility for the *Semaines Missiologiques* from Pierre Charles in 1954.

[12] Cayen, A. (1920). De la formation d'une mentalité coloniale en Belgique. In *Congrès Colonial National*, s.l. [original in French]

[13] Van Overbergh, C. (1906). *La réforme de l'enseignement d'après le premier congrès international d'expansion mondiale (Mons, 1905)*. Bruxelles: Schepens. 2 v.

[14] World expansion education was one of the faces of ‘specific education’ organised under the motto “school for life”. See Depaepe, M. et alii (1999). *Orde in vooruitgang*. p. 89-90.

[15] Moriau, J. (1976). *Werelduitbreiding. Pedagogisch-didactische vernieuwing in de lagere school 1905-1910*. unpublished master's thesis K.U.Leuven. p. 92. See also Depaepe, M. (1994). ‘Kongo, een tweede vaderland’. *De kolonie in het onderwijs en het onderwijs in de kolonie (1908-1960)*. Ieper: Onderwijsmuseum.

[16] It still exists today as one of the three great pillars of missionary activity

under the name Papal Mission Work for Children.

[17] The initiative for setting up the Crusades as a movement was taken by three Norbertines from the abbey of Averbode, Blomme, Robberechts and Vanmaele. The contents of the movement was inspired by the well-known priest (Edward) Poppe. See Van Garsse, L. (1982). *De Eucharistische Kruistocht in Vlaanderen (1920-1945). Beschrijving en analyse van een kwarteeuw zedelijk-godsdienstige vorming*. Unpublished master's thesis K.U.Leuven. p. 15-36. See also Depaepe, M. (2000). *De pedagogisering achterna*. Leuven: Acco. 3<sup>e</sup> editie. p. 218en Quaghebeur, P. (2002). "De Eucharistische Kruistocht." In Ghequiere, R. & Quaghebeur, P. (ed.) *Averbode, een uitgever apart (1877-2002)*. Leuven: Universitaire Pers. p. 92-173. [original quotations in Dutch]

[18] In fact, until a short time ago this was limited to one master's thesis: Boonants, B. (1982). *Het beeld van Belgisch Kongo in de geschiedenishandboeken van het middelbaar onderwijs in België, 1904 tot 1980*. Unpublished master's thesis K.U.Leuven.

[19] De Baets, A. (1988). *Beeldvorming over niet-westerse culturen. De invloed van het geschiedenisschoolboek op de publieke opinie in Vlaanderen 1945-1984*. Doctoral thesis in History, University of Ghent. Concerning other research: p. 45-58. Concerning the general problem of the influence and qualification of the study: especially p. 473-520.

[20] The thesis concerned is an extension of the article by De Keyser, R. (1982). "Belgisch Kongo in den belgischen Geschichtslehrbüchern". In Furnrohr, W. (ed.), *Afrika im Geschichtsunterricht europäischer Länder*. München: Minerva.

[21] Boonants, B. (1982). *Het beeld van Belgisch Kongo*.

[22] Vincke, E. (1985). *Géographes et hommes d'ailleurs. Analyse critique de manuels scolaires*. Centre Bruxellois de Recherche et Documentation Pédagogiques: Bruxelles. [original quotation in French]

[23] Depaepe, M. (1994). *Kongo, een tweede vaderland*.

[24] Bogaerts, L., Noels, F. & Suetens, J. (1960) Taalwerkboek 5. zesde leerjaar. Lier: Jozef Van In & co. p. 234-255. [original quotation in Dutch]

[25] De Baets, A., *Beeldvorming over niet-westerse culturen*, p. 199.

[26] See Vints, L. (1987). *Kongo made in Belgium. Beeld van een kolonie in film en propaganda*. Kadoc: Leuven.

[27] Besides the studies mentioned here we also mention the Catholic Documentation Centre connected to the Catholic University of Nijmegen, which is probably the most extensive and complete collection of missionary testimonies

- owned within the Catholic framework of influence. See also Hogema, J.M. (1996). Stories by missionaries from and about Africa. In *Trajecta*, V, 4, p. 403-411.
- [28] Soetens, C. (2000). La vocation d'une centaine de missionnaires belges (1904-1965). Premiers résultats d'une enquête orale. In Derroitte, H. & Soetens, C. (1999). *La mémoire missionnaire*. p. 65-66.
- [29] Ibidem, p. 69.
- [30] Storme, M. (1952). L'abbé Forget (1852-1933) et le séminaire Africain de Louvain. In *Zaire: Congolees tijdschrift*. VI, p. 787-808. Idem (1952). Léopold II, les missions du Congo et la fondation du séminaire Africain de Louvain. In *Zaire, Afrikaans tijdschrift*. VI, p. 3-24. Storme was a Scheut missionary and a teacher in a small seminary in Bokoro.
- [31] Etambala, Z.A. (1987). Un centenaire: le séminaire Africain de Louvain (1886-1888). In *Les Nouvelles Rationalités Africaines*, vol. 2, n°6, p. 322. See also *Annuaire de l'Université Catholique de Louvain*, 1887, p. 391-395 & 1888, p. 420-424. [original quotation in French]
- [32] Art. 47 of the law of 10 March 1923. [original quotation in Dutch]
- [33] KADOC, De Cleene - De Jonghe Papers, no. 70. Memo from Mgr. Ladeuze to De Jonghe, 23 September 1922. [original quotation in French]
- [34] KADOC, De Cleene - De Jonghe Papers, no. 70. Memo from Mgr. Ladeuze to De Jonghe, 30 September 1922; letter from F. Willaert, provincial superior Scheut, to Edouard De Jonghe, with a rough draft of De Jonghe's answer to Willaert, 17 October 1922.
- [35] Alphonse Broden (1875 - 1929) was active as a doctor in the fight against sleeping sickness in the Free State of Congo and is seen as one of the founders of tropical medicine in Belgium. After his colonial career he became director of the Institute for Tropical Medicine. *Belgische Koloniale Biografie*, II, 102-107; Vandersmissen, J. (2001). De wetenschappelijke exploratie. In *Geschiedenis van de wetenschappen in België 1815-2000. Deel 1*. La Renaissance du Livre/ Dexia Bank: Tournai/ Brussel, p. 240.
- [36] KADOC, De Cleene - De Jonghe Papers, no. 70. Letter from F.Willaert, provincial superior Scheut, to Edouard De Jonghe, with a rough draft of De Jonghe's answer to Willaert, 17 October 1922.
- [37] KADOC, De Cleene - De Jonghe Papers, no. 70. Letter from Broden to De Jonghe, 19 October 1922.
- [38] Martinus Rutten (1841-1927). Flemish priest. He was first a teacher and school principal in Liege and Sint-Truiden and manager of the seminary in Liege. In 1902 he became Bishop of Liege. He played a leading role in the first schools

funding controversy, in the foundation of a Christian workers movement and in the Flemish movement. Michiels, G. (1977). Rutten, Martinus-Hubertus. In *Nationaal Biografisch Woordenboek*, VII, Brussel: Koninklijke Academiën van België. 831-836.

[39] A brother of Gustaaf Hulstaert.

[40] Albert Michotte (1881-1965). Studied in Leuven and Leipzig with Wilhelm Wundt, Doctor of Philosophy, among others. In 1908 he became a professor in Leuven, where he was also the co-founder of the Laboratory for Experimental Psychology. After the First World War he started the Research Centre for Psychology, applied to problems of upbringing and education. Together with Raymond Buyse and Arthur Fauville he was at the foundation of the *école de pédagogie* that opened its doors in Leuven in 1923. Luyten, H. & Vandenbussche, E. (1981). *De onderzoeksapparaten uit het laboratoire de psychologie expérimentale van Prof. A. Michotte*. Leuven: Acco. p. 9-14; Verheyen, J.E. & Casimir, R. (1939). *Paedagogische Encyclopedie*. Antwerpen: De Sikkel. p. 255-256.

[41] Leuven University Archives, Paulin Ladeuze Papers, file “*école de sciences commerciales et coloniales*”. Letter from A. Dubois to Mgr. Ladeuze, June 1924.

[42] Leuven University Archives, Paulin Ladeuze Papers, file “*école de sciences commerciales et coloniales*”. Letter from E. De Jonghe to Mgr. Ladeuze, 22 June 1924.

[43] François Collard (1852-1927). Doctor in Philosophy and Arts at the K.U.Leuven. Named professor in 1875, he taught in the Department of Classical Languages. From 1890 he was also a teacher of *Histoire de la pédagogie et de méthodologie de l'enseignement moyen* and more than likely a pioneer in this subject at the university. Rogiers, A. (1928). *L'oeuvre pédagogique de m. François Collard*. Liège: Vaillant-Carmanne.

Raymond Buyse (1889-1974). Studied at the University of Brussels, at the *faculté internationale pédologique*. In 1921 he became a primary school inspector and from 1923 went to work at the newly founded teaching institute of Leuven University. From the early twenties Buyse regularly worked closely with Ovide Decroly. Van Gorp, A. (2004).

*Gedragswetenschap in de steigers. Het psycho-pedagogisch vertoog van Ovide Decroly ontmythologiseerd?* Unpublished doctoral thesis K.U.Leuven. p. 147; Verheyen, J.E. & Casimir, R. (1939). *Paedagogische Encyclopedie*. Antwerpen: De Sikkel. p. 283.

[44] Leuven University Archives, Paulin Ladeuze Papers, file “*centre infirmiers-*

missionnaires". Typed document with curriculum proposal, "Epreuves pour missionnaires qui ont suivi avec fruit les cours du centre pour infirmiers-missionnaires", s.n., s.d.

[45] *Eenige woorden over de Missie-congregatie van het Onbevlekt Hart van Maria Scheut-bij-Brussel. Stichting en werking. Innerlijke organisatie*. Dirix-Van Riet: Antwerpen. 1925.

[46] *De kapel van O.L.Vrouw van Gratie en het seminarie der missiën te Scheut-bij-Brussel*, Polleunis en Ceuterick: Brussel. 1901.

[47] Verbal communication from Honoré Vinck.

[48] De Rop, A. & Vinck, H. (1971). Bibliografie van de Missionarissen van het Heilig Hart. See also interview with Frans Maes in Borgerhout on 9 July 2002.

[49] MSC Archives Borgerhout, box Boelaert. "Cours d'ethnologie", taught in Gerdingen, Bree, as part of the first and second year philosophy, 1957-58.

[50] According to the biographical information on Boelaert he only definitively returned to Belgium in 1954. He replaced his colleague Albert De Rop in giving the courses in ethnology to the philosophy students in Bree from 1957. De Rop himself had only taught there from 1956 and returned to the Congo in the following year to teach at Lovanium University. <http://www.aequatoria.be>.

[51] MSC Archives Borgerhout. "Kronijk". In *De Toekomst*, vol. I, 1927, no. 1, p. 28. [original quotation in French]

[52] MSC Archives Borgerhout. "Kronijk". In *De Toekomst*, vol. I, 1933, no. 13, p. 442.

[53] MSC Archives Borgerhout. "Jeugd en Missie in Vlaanderen". In *De Toekomst*, vol. II, 1938, no. 27, p. 1011-1019.

[54] MSC Archives Borgerhout. Mission club documents, Meetings October and 13 November 1935. Mgr. Verius is Henri Verius, a French MSC (1860-1892) who was active in Papua New Guinea from 1885. He was appointed as apostolic vicar of the section of New Guinea under German control. Since the 1930s people have been campaigning for his beatification by the Pope. He was certainly greatly venerated in his congregation and was remembered on the annual "Verius day".

[55] Leuven University Archives, Paulin Ladeuze Papers, file "centre infirmiers-missionnaires". List of C.U.M. registrations written for the 1935-1936 academic year.

[56] MSC Archives Borgerhout. "Kronijk". In *De Toekomst*, I, 1930, no. 7, p. 254. [original quotation in Dutch]

[57] MSC Archives Borgerhout. "Kronijk". In *De Toekomst*, I, 1932, no. 11, p.375. [original quotation in Dutch]



- [58] MSC Archives Borgerhout. "Chronique". In *De Toekomst*, III, 1945, no. 33, p. 1224. [original quotation in French]
- [59] MSC Archives Borgerhout. Standaert, L., "De missieclub in die 50 jaren". In *De Toekomst*, III, 1950, no. 44, p. 1780-1787.
- [60] MSC Archives Borgerhout. "Missieclub". In *De Toekomst*, III, 1949, no. 42, p. 1642. [Original in quotation Dutch]
- [61] Boelaert, E. (1930). *Onder het kruis van Tugude*. Leuven: Davidsfonds. p. 5-8. [Original quotation in French]
- [62] MSC Archives Borgerhout. No. 3033 Sch. [original quotation in Dutch]
- [63] MSC Archives Borgerhout. No. 3033 Sch. [original in quotation Dutch]
- [64] Albert De Rop (1912-1980), Missionary of the Sacred Heart. Went in 1937 to the Congo. After his return in 1948 he commenced university studies which led in 1956 to a Doctorate in African Linguistics. From 1957 to 1964 he taught at the University of Leuven (MSC Borgerhout, third series of biographical sketches, p. 50).
- [65] In the spring of 1944, for example; Leuven suffered heavy bombardment in the Second World War.
- [66] In this sense: written communication with Honoré Vinck, 22 March 2004.
- [67] Interview with Frans Maes in Borgerhout, 9 July 2002.
- [68] Interview with Frans Maes in Borgerhout, 9 July 2002.
- [69] MSC Archives Borgerhout. Notebooks from the mission club. Minutes of the meeting of 15 December 1919.
- [70] MSC Archives Borgerhout. Notebooks from the mission club. Minutes of the meeting of 11 October 1943.
- [71] MSC Archives Borgerhout. "Missie-dag in Bree" In *De Vloed*, I, 1933, p. 334-335. [original quotation in Dutch]
- [72] MSC Archives Borgerhout. "Verslag van de Missieclub '33-'34" In *De Vloed*, I, 1934, p. 508-509.
- [73] MSC Archives Borgerhout. Notebooks from the mission club. Minutes of the meeting of 15 December 1919. [original quotation in Dutch]
- [74] MSC Archives Borgerhout. China, J. "Préfecture apostolique de Coquilhatville". In *De Toekomst*, I, 1930, no. 8, p. 265. [original quotation in French]
- [75] MSC Archives Borgerhout. Leclercqs, G. "La question sociale au Congo". In *De Toekomst*, I, 1933, no. 14, p. 462. [original quotation in French]
- [76] MSC Archives Borgerhout. Notebooks from the mission club. Minutes of the meeting of 26 March 1925. [original quotation in Dutch]

- [77] MSC Archives Borgerhout. Notebooks from the mission club. Minutes of the meeting of 28 March 1943. [original quotation in Dutch]
- [78] MSC Archives Borgerhout. Notebooks from the mission club. Minutes of the meeting of 5 May 1957. [original quotation in French]
- [79] MSC Archives Borgerhout. Van Kerckhove, G. "Katolicisme – Islam in Afrika". In *De toekomst*, 1935, no. 21, p. 745-750.
- [80] MSC Archives Borgerhout. Notebooks from the mission club. Minutes of the meeting in 24 October 1940. [original quotation in Dutch]
- [81] MSC Archives Borgerhout. Notebooks from the mission club. Minutes of the meeting in May 1942.
- [82] MSC Archives Borgerhout. Notebooks from the mission club. Minutes of the meeting of 10 December 1942, 25 January, 5 April, 13 May and 15 June 1943. [original quotation in Dutch]
- [83] MSC Archives Borgerhout. Notebooks from the mission club. Report of the mission day of 20 May 1946. [original quotation in Dutch]
- [84] MSC Archives Borgerhout. Notebooks from the mission club. Minutes of the meeting of 13 March 1919.
- [85] MSC Archives Borgerhout. De Rop, A. "Ethnologie en missioneering". In *De Vloed*, I, 1933, no. 11, p. 295. [original quotation in Dutch]
- [86] MSC Archives Borgerhout. Wijnants, P. "Het Boerenprobleem in Kongo". In *De Toekomst*, II, 1938, no. 27, p. 1005-1006. [original quotation in Dutch]
- [87] Kimbanguism is a religious movement named after the founder. Simon Kimbangu (approx. 1889-1951) was a catechist at a Protestant mission in the neighbourhood of Thysville (a little to the south of Leopoldville). Following a vision he began to preach himself and is said to have performed miraculous cures. He quickly gained a group of followers, who abandoned the Catholic faith. Kimbangu himself behaved as a prophet and as the leader of a new cult. After a few months the colonial administration took up arms against this religious movement. In the area around Thysville a state of emergency was declared. Kimbangu was condemned to death by a court martial but was reprieved by King Albert. He spent the following thirty years of his life in a prison in Elisabethville. See Chomé, J. (1966). Kimbangu (Simon). In *Biographie Belge d'Outre-Mer*, VI, 576-578.
- [88] Nkundo is another name for Mongo.
- [89] MSC Archives Borgerhout. Notebooks from the mission club. Report of mission Sunday on 17 March 1937. [original quotation in Dutch]
- [90] The regional language, also often called Lonkundo.

[91] This is about the annual report that had to be composed by the superior of the mission and sent to the superior of the congregation. A number of these reports were included in the source material used for the third chapter.

[92] MSC Archives Borgerhout. Notebooks from the mission club. Minutes of the meeting of 22 September 1956. [original quotation in Dutch]

[93] MSC Archives Borgerhout. Notebooks from the mission club. Minutes of the meeting of 6 March 1938. [original quotation in Dutch]

[94] MSC Archives Borgerhout. Notebooks from the mission club. Report of mission Sunday, October 1948. [original quotation in Dutch]

[95] MSC Archives Borgerhout. Notebooks from the mission club. Minutes of the meeting of 24 October 1940. [original quotation in Dutch]

[96] MSC Archivess Borgerhout. Wijnants, M. (1938). Gehuwde blanken in Kongo. In *De Toekomst*, II, no. 27, p. 995-1001. [original quotation in Dutch]

[97] MSC Archives Borgerhout. Notebooks from the mission club. Report of the mission day of 28 March 1955.

[98] "Colour bar" was a word that came from the British colonies and indicates a social and geographic separation of people of different skin colour. In the Belgian-Congolese context there was a colour bar between Belgians and Congolese.

[99] MSC Archives Borgerhout. Notebooks from the mission club. Report of the mission day on 28 March 1955. [original quotation in Dutch]

[100] Eduard Van Goethem (1873-1949). Van Goethem was anointed as a priest in December 1899. After two years training he left for New Guinea where he became superior of the mission. On the founding of the new Congo mission of the MSC in 1924 he was transferred there and nominated apostolic prefect. On the elevation of the area to a vicariate he became vicar. He held this post until 1946. Hulstaert, G. (1980). Goethem (Van) (Eduard). In *Bibliographie Belge d'outre-Mer*, VII (c), 181-192; Vereecken, J. (1985). *Wij Gedenken. Tweede reeks bibliografische schetsen van MSC van de Belgische Provincie*. Borgerhout: MSC. p. 15.

[101] Zie o.a. Depaepe & Van Rompaey; Vinck, H. (2000). Dimension et inspiration de l'oeuvre de Gustaaf Hulstaert. In *Revue Africaine des sciences de la mission*, 12, p. 206-236.

[102] MSC Archives Borgerhout. Declercqs, G. (1933). La question sociale au Congo. In *De Toekomst*, I, no. 14, p. 465. [original quotation in French]

[103] MSC Archives Borgerhout. Bottelier, O. (1938). Inboorlingenpolitiek. In *De Toekomst*, II, no. 26, p. 967. [original quotation in Dutch]

[104] MSC Archives Borgerhout. Sablon, C. (1950). "Apostolisch vicariaat

Coquilhatstad". In *De Toekomst*, IV, no. 30, p. 2122. [original quotation in Dutch]  
[105] MSC Archives Borgerhout. Aerts, F. (1933). General report of the work of the science club. In *De Vloed*, I, 5, no. 12, p. 110. It was reported here about "Some pedagogical articles that are in prospect."

[106] In the same issue of *De Vloed* there was also an article about religious education in which De Hovre and Decoene are referred to *inter alia*. Frans De Hovre (1884-1956) and Albéric Decoene (1881-1958), who lived at the same epoch and had similar points of view, both studied neo-thomist philosophy in Leuven. Afterwards De Hovre became pastor in Gentbrugge. Decoene became head of the teacher training college in Torhout and later an educational inspector. Both were mainly known as founders of the Vlaamsch Opvoedkundig Tijdschrift (Flemish Educational Periodical) and were, certainly in the interbellum, considered as very influential pedagogues. See Verheyen, J. & Casimir, R. (1939). *Paedagogische encyclopaedie*, Antwerpen: De Sikkel, I, p. 328-329 & II, p. 86-88. Verheyen wrote the following in it about De Hovre: "*Decroly, a representative of natural science, and De Hovre, a spokesman for spiritual knowledge, are in our opinion the most influential founders of present-day Belgian Pedagogy, which, through their work, has gained international recognition and under their leadership, in depth and in breadth, has grown to a flourishing movement.*"

[107] See Depaepe, M. (2000). *De pedagogisering achterna*. p. 202-206.

[108] MSC Archives Borgerhout. Van Kerckhove, G. (1933). Iets over godsdienst-onderwijs. In *De Vloed*, I, no. 12, p. 337-341.

[109] MSC Archives Borgerhout. *De Toekomst*, 1934, no. 19, p. 706.

[110] MSC Archives Borgerhout. *De Toekomst*, 1934, no. 19, p. 704-706. [original quotation in French]

[111] MSC Archives Borgerhout. Notebooks from the mission club. Report of the Verius meeting, 1950.

[112] MSC Archives Borgerhout. *De Vloed*, 1952, no. 48, p. 2148-2153.

[113] Jacques Maritain (1882-1973) considered one of the most prominent Catholic philosophers of his time. His influence is even noticeable today, for example in the social body of ideas of Pope John-Paul II. Sweet, W. (2004). "Jacques Maritain". In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* ( Spring 2004 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2004/entries/maritain/>>.

[114] For each of these scientists there is an entry to be found in the *Katholieke Encyclopaedie voor opvoeding en onderwijs*, published in the course of the 1950s. 's Gravenhage/Antwerpen: Pax/'t Groeit. Perquin and Castiello have also to be

situated in more conservatively-minded circles. Perquin (1897-?) was a collaborator on the *Katholieke Encyclopaedie* cited here. From Castiello (1898-1937) his best known work, “A humane psychology of education” was mentioned as well as a study on Thomas Aquinas.

[115] There were a number of obligatory lecture exercises on the curriculum in the student circles of the seminary. These included an “Augustinus circle” for philosophy and a “Thomas circle” for theology. In philosophy, a strictly scholastic approach was used (strictly applying taught reasoning principles) but theology was approached much more broadly and included short talks, which could also be on mission subjects. For these exercises texts had to be prepared and these were regularly published in the seminary’s periodicals. Interview with Honoré Vinck and Jos Jans, Borgerhout, 8 March 2004.

[116] The term “common law environments” refers to an administrative and judicial concept. The administrative division of the country fell into common law areas and extra-common law areas. The extra-common law areas or *centres extra-coutumiers* (C.E.C.) corresponded to built-up areas. The common law areas were thus in the majority. Immediately before independence the Congo was divided into six provinces, each one divided into one (in Katanga two) city areas and a number of districts. Each district was further divided into a number of “*territoires*” or territories and each territory consisted of a number of “*circonscriptions indigènes*” or “native areas”. The mission area of the MSC extended over two territories, that of the Equator and that of the Tshuapa. “Common law environments” must also be understood as “the places where the common law applies”. A small part of the justice system in the colony remained under Congolese common law. The applicability of this was defined by exception, “on all the domains that are not regulated by the written law”. Office de l’information et des relations publiques pour le Congo-Belge et le Ruanda-Urundi (1958). *Le Congo Belge*. Bruxelles: INFOR-Congo, II, p. 44-57. See also Dembour, M.-B. (1999). *Recalling the Belgian Congo*. London: Berghahn Books, p. 17-30.

[117] This is the same Albert Brys already mentioned in chapter 1.

[118] Interview with Honoré Vinck, Lovenjoel, 19 July 2004.

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