

GRICIGLIANO

The Yearly Review of Saint Philip Neri International Seminary
Institute of Christ the King Sovereign Priest

1990 - 2015

25 YEARS OF APOSTOLATE IN AFRICA

www.institute-christ-king.org

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Dear Friends,

Twenty-five years already! Twenty-five years of missionary apostolate in Gabon, Africa, where our community has been present since its founding, thanks to the paternal kindness of the late Cyriaque Obamba, Bishop of Mouila. Twenty-five years of work and sacrifice on the part of our missionary priests, often at risk to their health. Twenty-five years of innumerable visible fruits already reaped: hundreds of baptisms, first communions, confirmations, marriages, and even vocations.

This second issue of *Gricigliano* is a brief presentation of the Institute's work in equatorial Africa. All of our missionaries are formed in our seminary at Gricigliano, where, with the grace of God, they acquire and foster their apostolic zeal.

Their ardour is an example and a source of encouragement for all of us. We are pleased to be able to acquaint you with this beautiful apostolate, and to give thanks to God for the manifold graces that He has deigned to bestow through it.

In Christo Rege,

Canon Philippe Mora,
Rector

The Libreville community. From left to right: Revd. Mr. Alexander Willweber, Steward of Sacred Art in charge of the church's construction; Canon Arrasate, vicar; Msgr. Schmitz, Vicar General; Canon Bergerot, the current Parish Priest; a seminarian and a deacon helping in Libreville for the year.





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**THE LORD IS CALLING EACH OF YOU TO FOLLOW HIM IN
HIS CHURCH AND TO BE MISSIONARIES!**

Pope Francis
27th July 2013 at World Youth Day in Rio de Janeiro

THE INSTITUTE OF CHRIST THE KING SOVEREIGN PRIEST

A society of apostolic life composed of secular canons and of Pontifical right since 2008, the Institute is dedicated to Christ the King Sovereign Priest. It honours the Immaculate Conception as its principal patroness and Saint Benedict, Saint Thomas Aquinas and Saint Francis de Sales as secondary patrons.

The goal of the Institute is the glory of God and the sanctification of its priests in the service of the Church and of souls. Its specific aim is the diffusion and defense of the reign of Christ in all areas of human life.

The canons of the Institute carry out their apostolic work with a view to promote the supernatural and human values of Christian civilisation. They strive, in accordance with their constitutions, to be “both pastors and preachers, educators, teachers and missionaries...” (n. 6).

This vocation is particularly visible in the mission countries where the Institute works to evangelise through the care of parish churches and missions. This has been the case in Gabon since the Institute’s foundation in there in 1990. It was in Gabon that the Institute first received canonical recognition by the Bishop of Mouila, Cyriaque Obamba, who desired a greater number of priests to serve in his diocese. For the last twenty-five years, the Institute has maintained a missionary presence in the country in order to honour his request.

Right: English translations of letters of encouragement sent to our first missionaries by Cardinals Stickler and Palazzini. “To be an authentic missionary, one must desire sanctity.”



Cité du Vatican, Semaine Sainte 1992.

Chers amis de l'Institut.

I know that your presence in Gabon accomplishes much good.

Yours is a missionary Institute; it responds to the call of Jesus Christ to evangelize every nation everywhere. The Church was “sent to reveal and to communicate the love of God to all men and to all the nations of the Earth” (Vatican II, Ad Gentes n°10).

Your priestly presence during this time of trouble and of torment, when errors and sects attempt to mislead people and to destroy souls, is indispensable for the part of the flock of the people of God that has been confided to you, always remembering that “the Church is the ordinary way of salvation, and she alone possesses the fullness of the means of salvation” (Vatican II, Ad Gentes n°10).

The fecundity of your mission will depend on your fidelity to your own constitutions and to the specific spirit of your Institute. His Holiness Pope John Paul II has reminded us of that forcefully in paragraph 66 of his encyclical “Redemptoris Missio.”

In know that in imitation of Saint Benedict, one of your principal patrons, the Latin and Gregorian liturgy holds a place of great importance in your Institute; seek therefore to promote the love of God by means of the liturgy, “the source and summit of Christian life” (Sacrosanctum Consilium n°10).

To be an authentic missionary, one must desire sanctity. “It is not enough to renew pastoral methods, nor to organize better, nor better to coordinate the Church’s strength, nor to explore with greater insight the biblical and theological foundations of the Faith; it is necessary to stir up a new momentum of sanctity” (Discourse of HH Pope John Paul II at Port au Prince to the Latin American Bishops’ Conference, 9 March 1983).

Saint Francis de Sales, doctor of the Church and another of your Institute’s patron saints, will show you the path of sanctity. For he is a master of the spiritual life “very well adapted to the present time” (Apostolic Letter “Sabaudiae Gemma” of Pope Paul VI).

Hopeful to receive again good news of your mission and of your missionary efforts, either by your Bishop or by your Prior General, I ask you to believe, dear friends, that I pray for your intentions before the tomb of Peter, and that I bless you, your apostolate, your mission and your faithful, with my whole heart.

Rome le 18-IV-1992

Pietro Card PALAZZINI



Cité du Vatican, Pâques 1992

Chers Amis missionnaires,

The news of the good work that you are doing in Mouila has reached us here in Rome. I know that the Pope has blessed your work in receiving the Bishop and your Prior General. I rejoice with him, and I pray Heaven that it send you the graces necessary for the work of re-evangelisation of which the Pope speaks so often.

I know that at Gricigliano you have received an excellent doctrinal formation in a spirit of perfect faithfulness to the Magisterium of the Church and to the See of Peter. In addition, the Salesian spirituality that enlivens you and which we have in common can only be a great help in bringing souls the love of our unique and true God.

I also know that your attachment to the traditional Roman liturgy in full accord with the Holy See is an unmatched wealth as much for your own spiritual life as for that of your faithful. Given the close link between faith and liturgy, “Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi,” if you absorb this liturgy and teach the beauty of its rites to your faithful, you will increase in them and in yourselves faith, hope and charity.

You will no doubt have trials and difficulties. These are saving crosses, necessary that your apostolate be fruitful, and your work blessed by God.

Do not stop there. If God is with you, who will be against you? Imitate Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus, patron saint of your mission: love Our Lord’s sorrowful cross, for it will one day become a cross of glory.

If by chance you travel through Rome, come again to greet me at the Vatican; the door is always open for you.

Looking forward to seeing you again or to receiving your good news, I offer my paternal encouragement and blessings, and the assistance of my prayers

Alphonse, Cardinal STICKLER



Mayumba Lagoon viewed from Blessed Daniel Brottier House.

GABON

Located in central Africa, on the Gulf of Guinea, Gabon covers an area of 267,000 km². The equator passes through it between Libreville, its capital, and the city of Lambaréné; its climate is tropical. The country is covered with vast forests containing a rich variety of flora and fauna. Timber, especially okoumé wood, constitutes an important part of the domestic economy and is one of the country's principal exports. Gabon has other natural resources, including large reserves of fossil fuels.

The country has over a million inhabitants, more than half of whom reside in Libreville. The official language is French. Gabon has been independent since 17th August, 1960, but it continues to have close ties with France.

The Portuguese, who arrived in the beginning of the sixteenth century, were the first to evangelise the region. Dominicans, Franciscans, Capuchins, and the secular canons of Saint John the Evangelist (in blue habits...) all



contributed to the work. Nonetheless, the efforts ceased after about fifty years, due to a lack of missionaries. A second wave, including a large number of Holy Ghost Fathers, arrived in the 1840's. Today, in spite of the many animist practices that survive, the population is mostly Catholic. Gabon has four suffragan dioceses, attached to the archdiocese of Libreville, and an additional apostolic vicariate.

FOUNDATION IN MOUILA

The story of the Institute of Christ the King Sovereign Priest began in Mouila. On 1st September, 1990, His Excellency Bishop Cyriaque Obamba of Mouila erected the community canonically as an institute of diocesan right and named Msgr. Wach the Vicar General of his diocese.

On 25th July, 1991, Bishop Obamba canonically erected the house of Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus in the former residence of Bishop de Lamoueyre, Mouila's first bishop (from 1959 to 1976). The first times were difficult; the house was in very bad shape, and the previous occupant, a marabou stork, was rather reluctant to leave!

The residence overlooks the Ngounié River. Upon our arrival in 1991, it was comprised solely of the principal pavillion.

From the first, Bishop Obamba entrusted large apostolates to the priests of the Institute, notably Saint Kisito, one of the largest parishes in Mouila. Bishop Obamba also conferred Holy Orders to several Institute seminarians, among them Canon Direz, whom he ordained a deacon.

The priests of the mission of Saint Thérèse occasionally serve at other missions near Mouila, such



Above: the House of Saint Thérèse upon our arrival in 1991 and a catechism classe taught by Msgr. Wach in the church. Below: the large construction projects of 1998. The main house, which was the only building there when we arrived, is visible in the top right of the photograph.



as Saint Martin of the Apindiji, the first mission founded by the Holy Ghost Fathers who came to the region in 1900. The mission was abandoned at the end of the 1950's because of the steady move of the inhabitants to Mouila.

After Bishop Obamba's retirement, Bishop Mvé, who was the apostolic Administrator of the diocese for nearly four years, continued to encourage the Institute and conferred minor and major orders to several seminarians. There were many baptisms, marriages, communions and confirmations. The mission grew to the point that new buildings needed to be constructed. After several months of work, the project was completed in 1998. Msgr. Wach blessed the buildings that same year.



Construction projects in 1998



*Procession for the enthronement of the statue of Our Lady by Mathieu Madega, current Bishop of Mouila.
The new buildings from the 1998 construction projects are visible in the background.*





A marriage at the mission in the chapel built by Canon Fragelli. On the left is Deacon Pierre Bivouli, originally from the Diocese of Mouila. The fresco shows only six Sacraments, since the seventh is already present in the tabernacle!



Canon Fragelli cutting the wood that will be used to build the new chapel.

The founding of the Libreville apostolate contributed to the growth of the mission. Less than six hours from Libreville, and located near both the Ngounié River and Blue Lake, the environs of the house of Saint Thérèse are perfect for summer camps organized by the Institute. Young residents of Libreville come in large numbers for these events.

Since the arrival of Canon Fragelli in Mouila, the mission has seen a new burst of activity. He has worked tirelessly to build and to restore, drafting plans and carrying them out himself. A new chapel which can hold more than 100 worshipers has recently been built. It was blessed and inaugurated in the summer of 2013 by Msgr. Wach. The event was attended by the local authorities and many faithful. On important occasions the chapel is already completely filled!



Communion taken to the sick, baptism and Holy Mass in the new chapel. (Canon Téquie can be seen in the background).

Religious formation is by no means neglected. Canon Fragelli preaches every day at the mission and gives catechism classes which both adults and children attend faithfully.

Other recent projects include a small bakery with a brick oven, a sewing room and a wood shop. These projects provide precious help for the mission and help to form the local young people in useful trades. A beautiful wall is being built around the mission, and a small bell tower was recently put up to call the faithful to Mass.

Bishop Mathieu Madega of Mouila came in the spring of 2014 to bless the statue of the Blessed Virgin on the mission grounds. Twenty-five years after its foundation, the mission of Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus in Mouila is still thriving!

Below, left: a burial officiated by Canon Fragelli; right: a view of part of the mission of Saint Thérèse. A statue of the Blessed Virgin, blessed by Bishop Madega, watches over the mission.



APOSTOLATES IN THE BANIO REGION: MAYUMBA

On 13th December, 1992, Canon Jean-Marie Moreau was designated parish priest of Mayumba by Bishop Basile Mvé, then President of the Gabonese Conference of Bishops and the apostolic administrator of the diocese of Mouila, where Mayumba is located. The Institute opened its second mission in Gabon on the occasion of the patronal feast of Saint Odile Church. Saint Odile's had first been built by Father Stoffel, a Holy Ghost Father from Alsace, at the end of the 19th century, and its growth was fostered thereafter by another Alsatian Holy Ghost Father, Father Heidet, who lived there for 40 years.

This important mission, blessed with a good view of the lagoon and of the sea, experienced its zenith at the beginning of the 20th century when it included a school, a free clinic, a minor seminary, and even a banana plantation. The nearby cemetery bears



Mass in Saint Odile church.

witness to the sacrifices of the priests and religious sisters who died there from tropical diseases.

The mission was placed under the protection of Blessed Daniel Brottier. It served several villages including Mayumba, which is situated on the Bana Peninsula, on the other side of the Banio Lagoon. Many of these villages are quite remote and can be accessed only by boat or by rough dirt paths. The villages are scattered throughout a space of more than 1000 km² of dense forest. Exhausting trips through the woods are a



Canon Hellmann, successor to Canon Moreau, blessing the tombs of the priests and sisters of the Congregation of the Holy Ghost buried in Mayumba.

From left to right: "The fathers' house", side view of the "Mont-Fleuri" building in 1992, the same building restored by the Institute.





The Mayumba Mission as seen from the lagoon. Until the construction of a bridge in 2014, National Highway 6 (a dirt road) used to end at the foot of the hill...

necessary part of the life of a missionary on a nearly daily basis. It takes the parish priest several days to visit all of the villages on the lagoon: Mambi, Mallembé, Mboukou, Tya, Rinanzala, Yoyo, and Ndindi.

The new parish priest first worked to rebuild the roof of Saint Odile's which was threatening to collapse. This work was completed within the first year. In 1994 and 1995, Bishop Mvé ordained several missionaries in the newly repaired Church. Between 1996 and 1997, the well known missionary residence of Mont-Fleuri, was also restored thanks to the aid of the local authorities. Dom Gérard, Abbot of Sainte-Madeleine of Barroux, sent some 40 scouts to give much needed help for the project.

In the "fathers' house" where the missionaries lived, daily life was not always easy. The mission receives a pleasant sea breeze, but there was no potable water at the top of the hill. It would be another several years before the arrival of a generator would allow the missionaries to install a fresh water pump (which only functions



Repair of a generator by Canon Thomas, then parish priest. A good missionary must also be a good mechanic.

Below: Msgr. Wach blesses the Bana presbytery.





Mass at St. Thérèse Parish in Bana with many local authorities in attendance. The official opening of Charles de Foucauld school followed.



when the power does...)

Between the years 1994 and 1995, Canon Moreau restored the mission and built a presbytery at St. Thérèse Parish, in the centre of Mayumba. This reduced the number of trips over the lagoon. (After much planning and delay, the state finally built a bridge across the lagoon in 2014). In 1997, the new presbytery was inaugurated and blessed by Msgr. Wach. Six years later a school was added to the campus, thanks to much help from France. Named for Blessed Charles de Foucauld, the building was inaugurated on 17th October, 2004 in the presence of many dignitaries, including the French ambassador to Gabon.

At that time, a number of churches were constructed in the region: Bilanga (1994), Malounga (1997), Loubomo (2002), Ndindi (2003). Another school was finished in 2000 in the village of Socoma. This school was dedicated to Marie-Clémentine Anuarite, a Zairian martyr beatified by Saint John Paul II. At the same

Left: the relics of Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus in the church in Bana accompanied by the parishoners of Saint Thérèse Church and their parish priest, Canon Moreau. Bottom left: Catholic school in Socoma, built by Canon Moreau and inaugurated in 2000.



Demolition and expansion of the clinic in Mayumba under the supervision of Canon de Ternay.

time, another building which had previously served as the school was transformed into a chapel.

In 2004, the church of St. Thérèse in Bana was blessed in the presence of the relics of its patron saint. Along the road from Tchibanga to Mayumba the locals eagerly awaited the arrival of the car carrying the relics. After several stops along the route at chapels where the relics were venerated, followed a night of adoration in the church in Mayumba. The relics were then transported to Mayumba airfield where representatives of the Gabonese navy in dress uniform waited to greet them. It was a day full of grace for the mission.

Meanwhile, the work at the mission of Blessed Daniel Brottier continued. With help from the Order of Malta, the mission undertook the construction of a new clinic, which was completed in 2008. The centre was an important source of treatment for people suffering from leprosy in the surrounding areas: the missionaries bought the costly medicines with the support of the Raoul Follereau foundation and, with the aid of young ladies who came as volunteers from France, they were able to take care of some of the lepers living in the nearby villages (up to six at a time). These volunteers were invaluable to the missionaries; they provided care to the sick, taught lessons in grammar, mathematics, music, and sometimes even catechism classes for the children. They resided in the former mission convent.

In twenty years of apostolate in the Banio region the missionaries baptised hundreds of adults and children (Canon Moreau alone, parish priest of Mayumba from 1992 to 2004, baptised 1,500) and provided the sacraments to thousands of souls. Even today, the sole presence of a church in these villages helps maintain the faith of the locals. They hasten to come together at the first sound of the bell ringing to announce the arrival of a missionary.



Deacon Tantin baptises a child.



BILANGA

Situated about thirteen kilometres from the mission, the village of Bilanga is under the spiritual care of the parish priest of Mayumba.

In the beginning of August, 1993, Canon Moreau undertook the construction of a new church in the village. Bishop Mvé came in person to bless the first stone on 30th August, 1993.

On 20th August, 1994, Msgr. Wach celebrated Mass for the feast of Saint Bernard in the chapel under construction. It still had no roof at the time.

On 4th August, 1995, Bishop Mvé returned to the church. This new place of worship was dedicated to Saint John Vianney, the Curé of Ars.

This church, the first ever built in the village, allows the faithful to avoid the long road that separates them from the mission in Mayumba.

Above: Msgr. Wach celebrates Mass in the church under construction. Thankfully there was good weather! A few years later, one of faithful rings a bell to signal the arrival of the missionaries.

*Left: Basile Mvé, then Bishop of Mouila, blesses the first stone, assisted by Msgr. Wach and Canon Moreau.
Right: Msgr. Wach celebrates Mass in the finished church.*

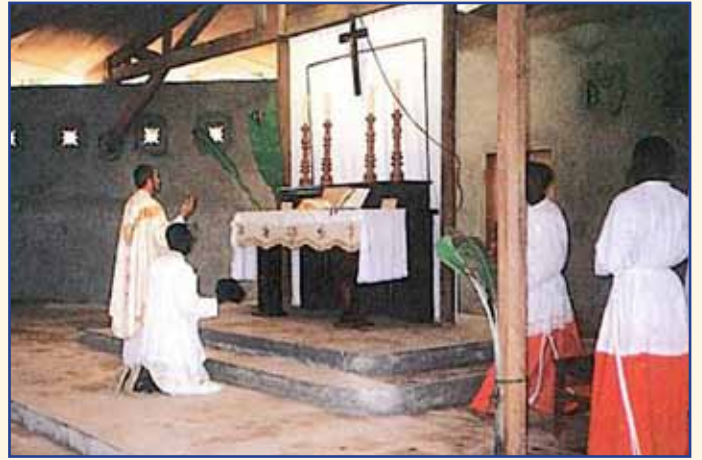


MALOUNGA

Located about fifty kilometres from the mission, Malounga is a small village: a few hundred souls with a church and a bell tower under the care of the parish priest of Mayumba.

The construction of this church was undertaken by Canon Moreau in 1994, when the project in Bilanga was just coming to an end. Canon Moreau celebrated Mass for the first time in this church in August, 1996. The church was completed in 1997, and the bell tower followed a few years later. The bell, forged in France and donated by our apostolate in Port-Marly, continues to summon the faithful as soon as a car from the mission approaches the village.

On 4th May, 2002, Bishop Bonnet of Mouila came to consecrate the church in Malounga; it is dedicated to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.



The first Mass in the new church of Malounga, celebrated by Canon Moreau. Below: baptisms and First Communions.



The church in Malounga and its bell tower.





Construction of the church in Loubomo.

LOUBOMO

The village of Loubomo is located about thirty kilometres from Mayumba, near a large okoumé logging site.

When the first missionaries arrived, there was already a Catholic school with 150 students, all in one classroom... Mass was celebrated for several years in a cramped, overcrowded room. Catechism was taught with the help of the village school teacher in the same place.

Canon Moreau blessed the school, dedicated to saint Camillus de Lellis, and began construction on the church in 2000. It was completed in 2002; the bell tower followed in 2004.

In October 2004, Msgr. Wach came to bless the church solemnly; it was named Saint Mary Mother of God.

During the years of mission work in Loubomo, the villagers have always been very welcoming and thankful.



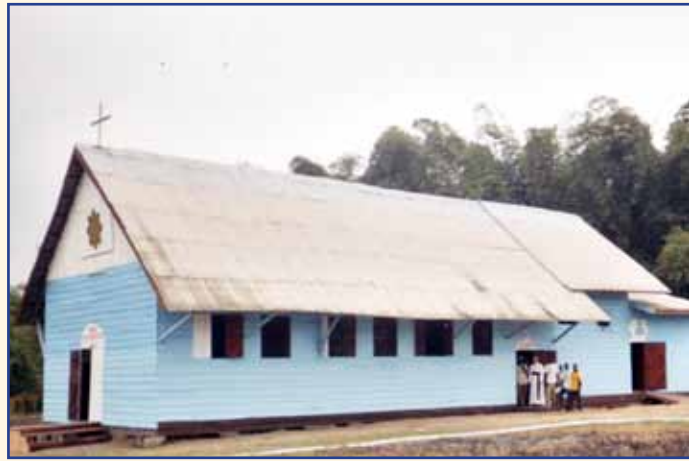
From top to bottom: at the ringing of the mission bell, the faithful hurry to meet Canons Lefevre and Fragelli. Mass celebrated by Canon Téquie. Canon Hellmann gives the traditional blessing of throats on the feast of Saint Blaise.

NDINDI

Ndindi is near the Congolese border at the point furthest inland of Banio Lagoon. From Mayumba, the only way to this village of several hundred inhabitants is a three hour trip by motorboat.

Because of its remoteness, no priest had come to the village for twenty-five years. From 1993 onwards the missionaries of the Institute began coming several times a year. Canon Moreau started by saying Mass in the village school house and then began work on a church in 2002, with the help from the Pontifical Mission Societies and the enthusiastic support of the local authorities.

The church was built rapidly using timber from the nearby forest. Only the sheet metal on the roof came from Libreville. It was built to hold about one hundred faithful. On 9th August, 2003, Msgr. Wach blessed the new church, dedicated to the Sacred Heart, in the presence of the village authorities and a large number of faithful. The church was full for the occasion. Many baptisms and First Communions followed. Grace rains down in the midst of the equatorial forest!



From top to bottom: the church during and after construction; the blessing of the church by Msgr. Wach (Canon Moreau, parish priest, can be seen in the background); First Communions. Left: elevation in the recently blessed church.

WE CANNOT KEEP OURSELVES SHUT UP IN PARISHES, IN OUR COMMUNITIES, IN OUR PARISH OR DIOCESAN INSTITUTIONS, WHEN SO MANY PEOPLE ARE WAITING FOR THE GOSPEL!

Pope Francis, Homily given Saturday 27th July, 2013, during World Youth Day.

MISSIONARIES AT THE SERVICE OF ALL

The missionaries did not stop at the mere construction and upkeep of churches and missions. They have always been on the move, visiting villages and homes to bring the Gospel and the sacraments to souls thirsting for God.



Canons Moreau and Gardner in Mboukou, on Banio Lagoon. A small church is planned for this village but has yet to be built.



Caring for both the bodies and souls of lepers: Abbé Tantin and Papa Gaston.

Left to right: Canon Hellmann celebrating Mass in the school in Yoyo, Msgr. Wach at Socoma, and Canon Moreau in the Catholic school in Bitouba.





Above: baptisms celebrated by Canon Moreau; confirmations by Bishop Bonnet of Mouila (from 1996 to 2013); First Communion celebrated by Canon Téquie. Below: confession; extreme unction administered by Canon de Ternay; Eucharistic procession in Bana for Corpus Christi, presided by Canon Moreau.



Catechism class taught by Canon Thomas in the village of Rinanzala, located on the lagoon between Mayumba and Ndindi. All the children of the village were present, but none had yet been baptised.



THE LIBREVILLE APOSTOLATE

In 2004, through the workings of Divine Providence and thanks to a legacy, the Institute was able to acquire a plot of land in Libreville that would later become the parish of Our Lady of Lourdes. The buildings on the property were in poor condition. At the time there was only a house with a dozen rooms and a garage, as well as a dilapidated “colonial house” whose crossbeams seemed ready to give way.

Restoration work began in 2005, and the first missionaries were able to move in soon after. Archbishop Basil Mvé gladly welcomed them, establishing a new territorial parish, Our Lady of Lourdes, in October 2008.

A small room in the house was used as a chapel, but soon the number of faithful made it necessary to find a larger space. As the numbers increased (from a dozen to 200 in a matter of weeks), a chapel with room for 150 was built in front of the house; this structure was used for nearly four years.

Archbishop Mvé encouraged the Institute to build a permanent church. The work on the temporary chapel had barely been completed when the first stone of the new edifice was laid.

During this time, parish activities developed considerably. The number of altar boys and of young parishioners grew constantly. A large part of the parish grounds is dedicated to their use. There is a playing field built with the help of the Raoul Follereau Foundation as well as a game room. The young people of the parish are thus provided with healthy activities for



Aerial view of the mission in 2012: only the green-roofed building and the "colonial house" were there originally. Below: The "colonial house" in 2004. The interior was in ruins and completely uninhabitable at the time...



... A view of the same house 10 years later, entirely renovated and rechristened, “the Canonry”. Three large rooms were created in the main house for parish activities.

their leisure time, activities that help keep them off of the streets where there are so many temptations.

Some of them study with the help of the priests and seminarians, and on several occasions the parish priest has organised scholarships for some of the most gifted students. Two young women from Libreville were able to attend university in Italy for several years thanks in part to the help of the mission.

Catechism classes are taught for many different age groups and are very well attended. About 50 adults, 60 young people, and over 100 children benefit from these classes. Special classrooms have been built over the years to accommodate the ever growing number of students and to allow multiple classes to be given at the same time. There are currently three such classrooms,



A Mass celebrated in 2006 by Canon de Ternay in the newly built temporary chapel. It was used until 2010.

Canon Bergerot, the current parish priest, receives catechumens at the door of Christ the King Church on the day of their baptism.





Palm Sunday procession in the streets of Libreville



3rd May, 2009: Archbishop Basil Mvé of Libreville officially names Canon de Ternay as first parish priest of the Parish of Our Lady of Lourdes.

and a fourth is under construction.

Several hundred faithful receive the sacraments in the parish, and on feast days there are nearly six hundred people in the church. Every year the parish priest baptises dozens of children and close to twenty adults. Many children make their First Communion or are confirmed there by the archbishop who visits regularly.

As the parish priest of a territorial parish, the canon in charge of the mission in Libreville must look after the spiritual needs of all of the surrounding inhabitants. He often visits the neighbourhood, getting to know the people and becoming a more familiar sight to his neighbours. He is frequently asked to bring communion to the sick or to bless homes and devotional objects.

In fulfillment of the precepts of Christian charity, the missionaries bring as much material help as possible to those who most need it. Food, clothing and devotional



Neighbourhood visit and distribution of clothing.



objects are often distributed in the parish. Thanks to the help of a generous benefactor, a 100-metre deep well was dug on the premises of the parish. The well allows the whole neighbourhood to have easier access to clean drinking water.

Dedicated to the service of all, and providing physical, intellectual, and supernatural aid to the local population, the missionaries are already compensated for their efforts in this life by the gift of seeing so many souls grow in Christ, in the family spirit that characterises the mission, and in true Christian joy.

Left: The parish priest brings communion to the sick; the parish well. Below: Canon Stein says a few words to the children of the neighbouring school before morning prayers.



CHURCH CONSTRUCTION

On account of the rapid expansion of our apostolate in Libreville, we had to change the site of liturgical celebrations several times. In 2006 Sunday Mass was offered in a room in the house.

During the construction of the temporary chapel, Canon de Ternay asked the builders to make plans for the construction of a larger building. The project has never lacked the support of the archbishop or the personal attention of the highest state officials. Work has continued under the supervision of Msgr. Schmitz, Vicar General of the Institute and of Revd. Mr. Alexander Willweber, the Institute's Steward of Sacred Art.

During the summer of 2010, Mass was celebrated for the first time in the church, and since then it has welcomed hundreds of parishioners into the life of the sacraments.

The church is dedicated to Christ the King. When the intended choir lofts are completed, the church will be able to welcome up to a thousand faithful. With its bell tower of twenty-four metres and its four bells (not yet cast, but of the which the largest, "The Immaculate," will weigh 635kg and have a diameter of 1.02m), Christ the King Church will be a unique monument of sacred art in Gabon and in Central Africa. Faithful from Europe and the United States have contributed to its construction, and the parishioners themselves are proud to participate by means of an additional Sunday collection dedicated to construction costs.

The façade is decorated with *azulejos*, painted ceramic tiles. This architectural



Since 2010, the interior of Christ the King Church holds the many faithful who come for Sunday Mass.

From left to right: The foundation laid in 2006, the construction work in 2009, 2011, and 2015.





Detail from the church façade: adoration of the Magi.

technique originated in Andalusia in the 15th century and from there spread to Flanders and to Portugal, where it reached its height during the 18th century. The 235m² of the façade is decorated by 11,127 tiles, of which over 6,000 have an individual design. These tiles, 14.5cm squares, were put up in January 2015 by Portuguese workers who travelled to work in Libreville during the short dry season.

After nine years of work, the result is truly encouraging: the new church, full every Sunday, has become the centre of the thriving Libreville mission. Its recently completed façade is a beautiful catechesis that anyone can understand.

The work left to be done is no less impressive: casting the bells, completing the decoration of the exterior, and the entire furnishing of the church's interior. Divine Providence, which has blessed us so richly up to now, will not abandon us.

Right: Msgr. Schmitz with Canon Bergerot and Revd. Mr. Alexander Willweber, designer of the façade.



MEMORIES OF 25 YEARS IN AFRICA

In twenty-five years of mission work, there have been many occasions worth remembering, often amusing or picturesque. Allow us to share some of them with you.

The roads have gotten a lot better throughout the whole country over the last quarter century, but many missionaries still remember travel in Gabon as a tiresome affair. Left: the Institute's first car, used by the missionaries well past its prime...



Trips in the mission motor boat (often as full as in the picture below) can last up to 4 hours, that is, if the motor can last that long...





Bamboo is an under-exploited resource for church cleaning!



A Bwiti (animist) temple in a village: local superstition maintains a strong presence in Gabon.



The priest on an outing with the parish youth.

In the missions, everything is traditional, even lighting!



There is no lack of friendly wildlife!



BISHOP BESSIEUX, THE APOSTLE OF GABON

Bishop Jean-Rémi Bessieux was born to a Catholic family on 24th December, 1803, near Béziers. During the French revolution, his grandfather was accused of sheltering priests who had refused the obligatory oath of allegiance to the new republic. He was ordained a diocesan priest before joining the Holy Ghost Fathers. Bessieux was one of the first missionaries in equatorial Africa, including Gabon, where he lived for more than thirty years.

The Institute of Christ the King Sovereign Priest's house in Montpellier is named in honour of this great missionary. The following excerpts from Christ in Gabon, by Sister Mary Germaine, recount his adventure in the missions.

ARRIVAL IN GABON

On 13th September, 1843, seven fathers and three brothers sailed from Bordeaux with Father Bessieux as their superior. They settled temporarily at Cape Palmas where they began to evangelise on 3rd December, 1843. After only ten months their little force was dispersed, reduced to nothing... Of the original seven priests destined to the mission of Gabon, only Father Bessieux was left standing. The ship that was supposed to retrieve him from Cape Palmas forgot him there for three months!

But at last, in the company of a certain Father Gregory who had joined him on the passage to Grand Bassam, Bessieux arrived in Gabon. Captain Brisset of the colonial infantry, commandant of the outpost, welcomed him warmly and led him to his little wooden cabin situated behind Fort Aumale. Father Bessieux's first act was to claim this poor land by entrusting it to the protection of the Holy Angels after having consecrated it to their Sovereign Mistress, his "all powerful Mother" and "only hope."

Father Bessieux celebrated Mass on the Feast of Saint Michael, 1844, and he later built a chapel on the spot where Our Lord's redeeming Blood flowed for the first time in Gabon. He lived and died there, and rests there to this day. His temporary house leaked everywhere. He was flooded day and night. Only his crucifix and his statue of the Virgin escaped destruction. He had to recover the roof according to a local technique... But yet a greater trial awaited him: absolute spiritual solitude. It had been a year since he had received word from his superiors and brethren in France. He was believed to have met the same fate as his first companions, and he was mentioned in the prayers for the dead.

THE MISSION

With never a thought of himself, the valiant religious resolutely set to work without delay, "as though he were there to stay." Despite the apparently insurmountable difficulties, he began to learn the local language. "I had," he wrote, "several people to speak with, but no one understood French. I learned plenty of nouns, but I couldn't make out the verbs."



Bishop Jean-Rémi BESSIEUX

- 24 December 1803: Born in Vélioux, France.
- 1818 : Enters seminary in Castres.
- 13 June 1829: Priestly ordination.
- 1830 : Parish priest of Minerve, professor at the minor seminary of Saint-Pons.
- August 1841: Father Bessieux meets the Venerable Father Liebermann in Paris.
- 1842-1843: Noviciate with the Society of the Holy Heart of Mary (which was to merge with the congregation of the Holy Ghost in 1848).
- 28 September, 1844: Arrival at Fort d'Aumale (the former name of Libreville).
- 1848: Apostolic Vicar of Senegambia and the Two Guineas.
- 1876: Death in Libreville.

Three months after his arrival he opened a school. The presence of three American Methodists, who had been there for three years, broke his heart, but it also increased his zeal. What could his poverty do against their annual budget of 350,000 francs?

But God was on his side and would assure his triumph. None of his troubles overcame him. “My difficulties are without end,” he admitted, “but constancy will overcome even Hell.” He recounted his troubles not in order to complain, but for the instruction of his future collaborators. 29 June 1845, he wrote to Venerable Francis Liebermann, “God forbid that you abandon poor Africa. If we are meant to serve abandoned peoples, this is our place.” Despite the series of deaths that had crushed Liebermann's heart, this holy Father Superior hastened to write a consoling letter, promising reinforcement.

This response, written on 4th May, 1845, arrived at its destination on 28th September, one full year after Father Bessieux's arrival at Fort Aumale and two years after his departure from France. In his letter, Bessieux's superior made known his firm intention not to abandon Africa. Well comforted, the apostle renewed his holy labour. Despite his constant obligations to the school children, he did everything he could to visit the surrounding villages, seeking to help the dying and to baptise children. He travelled in Mpongwe with particular ardour, trying to train catechists and interpreters; he dreamed of an indigenous clergy.

Help arrived on 7th March, 1846, but his trial was to continue. The brother priests he had so badly wanted were forced to leave shortly after their arrival, along with Father Gregory; they were all sick. This time Father Bessieux was left really alone. “Alone ? Not at all, my very dear Father; I am not alone,” he wrote. “Our Divine Master is just there. I left the door to His little sanctuary open during the night. His light brightens me; His dear presence consoles me. He is the Master, and I sleep in peace beneath His powerful protection.”

The vessel *Our Lady of August* finally brought him Fathers Le Berre, Briot, de la

Maillerie, and Pierre. He went himself to meet them at the boat and to bring them back in a dugout canoe. He was pale, undone, unrecognizable. “Once landed,” recounted Father Le Berre, “our first visit was to our Divine Master who had the central room of the poor wooden hut. A few children to whom Father Bessieux had already taught a few words of catechism and of French were the mission’s only hope.” Next they visited the treasures of the mission’s supply house... “A few pieces of fabric, some leaves of tobacco and... the safe: a small white iron box with nothing in it but a small coin with an image of the Infant Jesus asleep on the hay and, in large letters, this inscription: ‘He who has Jesus has everything!’”

RETURN TO FRANCE AND EPISCOPAL CONSECRATION

The cross, lifted for a moment, was to fall back heavily on the shoulders of the holy priest. Worn out by fever, and extremely weakened by a liver disorder, he was forced to confide his beloved mission to Father Briot and to return to France (22nd December, 1846). His trip to Europe could separate neither the valiant missionary’s heart nor his thoughts from the Gabon where he had lived for twenty-five months.

He employed this time of forced leisure in perfecting his instruments of evangelisation. At Amiens he printed a grammar, a vocabulary, a catechism and a translation of the Gospels for the Mpongwe. Despite their imperfections, these efforts were able to open the way for linguists, and they are a testament to his understanding of the true needs of the mission. It is indispensable really to know the indigenous people, and to meet them at their level rather than trying to push them directly to one’s own.

Just when he intended at long last to rejoin his dear Gabon, he received an urgent summons to Paris, probably, as he wrote to Father Lossadat, “to give information, as the most experienced missionary.” What must have been Father Bessieux’s surprise on receiving the briefs naming him Bishop of Gallipoli and Apostolic Vicar of Senegambia and of the Two Guineas?

The good religious submitted. He took as his episcopal arms the image of Mary and as motto the words with which he often began his letters: “Spes Nostra, Salve.” He received episcopal consecration on 14th January, 1849, in the chapel of Holy Ghost Seminary at Paris. On 18th February he sailed from Toulon with Bishop Kobès, his coadjutor, with several other missionaries, and with six sisters of the Immaculate Conception.



THE LABOURS AND JOYS OF AN APOSTOLE

The Vicariate of the Two Guineas was by rights considered among the most daunting, thanks to the variety of races and of tribes and to their different dialects, as well as to difficulties in communication and to the insalubrious climate.

Bishop Bessieux was ready for the task, but suddenly a case of dysentery stopped him, leaving him at death's door. Despite the care he received on board the *Adour*, the doctors concluded in alarm that he should be sent back to Europe directly. Nothing could have been more disagreeable to the zealous prelate. Yet he accepted it with the simplicity that characterised in every circumstance. "If you send me, I will go," was his only response. And so he left again. As always, his travels were dedicated to the good of his mission, which he was able to recommend in person to Pope Pius IX.

When he was at last able to return to Libreville, the time of great trials seemed to be at an end. From then on he was to be seen, after his morning mass, heading to the forest, a pick on his back and his axe in hand. To the sound of psalms and hymns, he beat back the brush, tearing up the wild grass and sowing good seeds. This uncultivated tract, watered by his sweat, was slowly transformed, bit by bit, into a magnificent plantation. It was he who dug the first well for the sisters at Libreville; they were never able to draw the water without thinking of all the pain that their goodly bishop had taken for them.

His manual labour by no means obstructed his other works. Children flocked to the school. He took for himself the task of teaching Latin to six of the brightest students. The zealous apostle assisted in these developments with great joy.

He accepted serenely the vicissitudes that arrived to undo his work. He was in France when he learned that a fire had destroyed the chapel and most of the other buildings. Not a word of discouragement escaped him. "With the grace of God, we will work to raise these ruins and to rebuild a shelter for our children." They did in fact rebuild, and this time in stone. On 8th September, 1863, Bishop Bessieux laid the cornerstone of the current chapel that he was to bless solemnly on 5th August, 1864, the Feast of Our Lady of Snows. In June, 1871, he consecrated his vicariate to the Sacred Heart.

BISHOP BESSIEUX'S LAST DAYS

Since 1866, Bishop Bessieux's health had been declining. On 30th April, 1876, after having received Holy Communion as usual, he felt more exhausted than ordinarily, so he returned to his little room and lay down on his bed. Shortly thereafter he was discovered dead, still clutching the crucifix that had received this last sigh and his last kiss. This death, peaceful and solitary, fulfilled the desires of the venerable prelate. It was the second Sunday after Easter, whose Gospel seems an exhortation from that other Good Shepherd to the flock of his predilection.

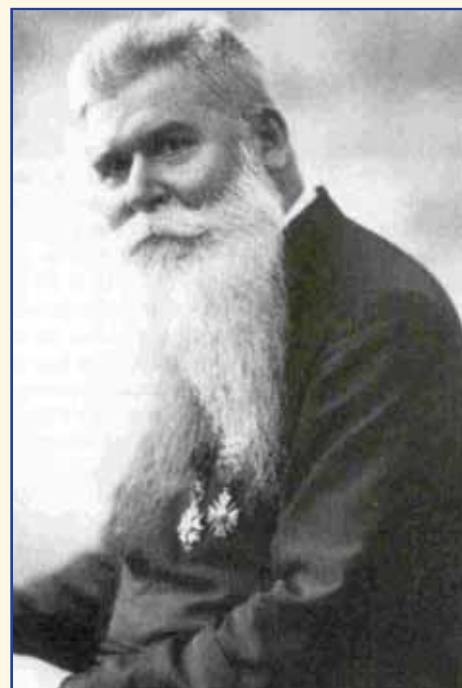
The founder of the Church in Gabon lies at Saint Mary's, in front of the chapel, under the maternal regard of the Virgin whom he loved so well. It seems that he still watches over the mission that he created, built, and sanctified during his life, and that he continues to vivify and to protect in silence since his death.

FATHER BROTTIER'S LETTER TO HIS BISHOP

Daniel Brottier, born in 1876, received the clerical habit at the age of sixteen and was ordained a priest in 1899 when he was twenty-three years old. In 1903 he made his vows as a Holy Ghost Father, and in 1906 he set out for Dakar, where he established a number of good works in favour of children until ill health obliged him to return to Europe in 1911.

As a military chaplain on the front lines throughout the Great War he was decorated on five different occasions. He was named the Vicar General of Dakar under Archbishop Jalabert. His work for the diocese consisted in raising funds in France, and this effort was a great help in the construction of Dakar's African Memorial Cathedral. He also managed the Auteuil Foundation for the professional education of orphans. Worn out by his many labours, he died in 1936.

Pope St. John Paul II declared him a Blessed on November 25, 1984. The Institute's house in Mayumba was placed under his patronage.



Your Excellency,

I am a priest. I am twenty-seven, and I mean well. I have never distinguished myself by a particular aptitude of any sort.

To serve means no longer being oneself. It means having almost no rights; it means not knowing one's own good. Or in any case, it means always sacrificing it to the common good. It means always thinking, wanting, and acting in the interest of others.

Missionary life has always seemed to me as the life of a man who wishes to sacrifice himself and to pour himself out for the salvation of souls. Whether he does this all at once or drop by drop makes little difference.

That granted, if it were for me to express my preference, I would take the first option. In saying this, Your Excellency, I know that I do not exactly have my head on my shoulders, but I assure you that I have good reasons for it all the same.

I would not like to be presumptuous, but if you have a dangerous mission where someone must be risked, I would like to say simply, "Here I am."

Father Brottier

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF GRACE

Dear Friends,

I cannot help but be moved in writing to tell you about the experience of our twenty-five years in Africa.

It was more than twenty-five years ago that I first met Cyriaque Obamba, Bishop of the diocese of Mouila, who told me that he wished to invite us to his diocese to work for the new evangelization announced by Pope Saint John Paul II. As he put it, the harvest there was great, but the workers were few.

Bishop Obamba had been formed by the Holy Ghost Fathers. He was an excellent theologian and a great connoisseur of French literature. Though a good conversationalist and always good company, his real preoccupation was to see his parishes provided with good shepherds, who would teach the Catholic faith and administer the sacraments. This is why he was so insistent that the Institute come to Mouila, even though it was still in the process of being founded.

The beginning was very difficult, especially on a material level for Europeans unaccustomed to living in the bush. I am truly grateful to our first priests and seminarians, who, with courage and generosity, responded to Our Lord's call to evangelise those who had nothing.

We discovered that in the midst of material poverty certain souls enjoyed a spiritual wealth. We should be grateful to those priests who first evangelised this land. The fruits of their labour are still visible in our own day. They gave Africa many Christians, including, in part, Gabon's elite, as well as her other spiritual shepherds.

It would be impossible not to mention our debt of gratitude to the current Archbishop of Libreville, Basile Mvé, who was bishop of Oyem at the time of our arrival. Since he is a Salesian, we have St. Francis de Sales' beautiful spirituality in common. Nothing could stop his zeal for the souls of his diocese. I do not know how many thousands of kilometres he travelled across dirt roads (though I was sometimes with him) or by plane in all kinds of weather to be able to give confirmations, to bless a new chapel or church, or to meet



*Saint John Paul II receives Bishop Cyriaque Obamba
with Msgr. Gilles Wach in 1992.*



Bishop Mathieu Madega, blessing the statue of the Blessed Virgin that watches over the mission of Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus in Mouila.

with the faithful. His support and his example have always helped us to try to be good missionaries.

We were equally well acquainted with the current bishop of Mouila, Mathieu Madega. As a young priest studying in Rome he came to visit Gricigliano. He was a student of the great Don Dario Composta, another Salesian. Now he watches over our mission in Mouila and visits our priests there with paternal solicitude.

I would also like to thank Bishop Bonnet, his predecessor, who was always concerned for the needs of our priests in order to help them in their mission.

For lack of space I cannot name all of our Gabonese friends here in order to thank them from the bottom of my heart for the warm welcome they gave us to their country, and for all their kindness and generosity.

If you have been to Gabon once, you are sure to return many times again.

The crowning moment of these twenty-five years will be next summer's inauguration of the Church of Christ the King. All of our gratitude to Msgr. Schmitz and to Revd. Mr. Alexander Willweber who are the artists behind this architectural gem consecrated to divine worship. They have dedicated years of labour to achieve this masterpiece.

Dear friends, in conclusion I wish to thank each of you, reading this review, for I am sure that many of the blessings on our missions are doubtlessly thanks to your generosity. You have all, by your prayers and your sacrifices, participated in this missionary effort. Thank you!

Let us continue to pray for one another, and continue to pray for our missionary priests who devote themselves selflessly to the souls that the bishops, in their zeal for all of the Gabonese faithful, have confided them.

May the Immaculate Virgin Mary continue to protect our missions, as she has already done in the midst of many trials and difficulties.

May God Bless You.

Msgr. Gilles Wach,
Prior General



Archbishop Mvé Engone of Libreville visiting the construction site of Christ the King Church in January, 2015.

SOME FORTHCOMING PROJECTS FOR THE CHURCH IN LIBREVILLE

Placing the rest of the *azulejos*:

printed ceramic tiles from Portugal 14.5cm wide used to decorate the façade.

Total cost:
£125,000



Installing the new bells:

635 kg, 320 kg, 185 kg, and 130 kg bells cast in Austria.

Total cost:
£15,000

not including the ringing system and installation costs.



2006 - 2015

CONSTRUCTION OF CHRIST THE
KING CHURCH IN LIBREVILLE:

PLEASE HELP US FINISH!



Institute of Christ the King Sovereign Priest

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