

EXEMPLARY MISSIONARIES



DON VITTORIO PASTORI

By

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Father Vincent Lebbe (1877-1940)

THUNDER IN THE DISTANCE

He spoke Chinese like a native; he alone among the missionaries became a Chinese citizen. He fought the Japanese invasion and succeeded in convincing the Pope to consecrate the first Chinese bishops of the modern era. In truth, Fr. Vincent Lebbe, the most outstanding missionary to China of the Twentieth Century, well deserved his Chinese name: Lei Ming-yuang: "The thunder in the distance". After him, the Communist storm tried to erase Christianity from the face of the earth. But the seeds sown in the tempest form then face of the earth. But the seeds sown in the tempest are now slowly giving consoling fruits.

In the storm of the Sino-Japanese war

In the years between the two World Wars, China became a laboratory of different tensions. On the one hand, the Nationalist movement of Chang-Kai-Shek was trying to unify the immense country. On the other hand, the Communist of Mao-tze-dong had their own hidden agenda and plan. By 1928, Chiang Kai-Shek had waged the Northern campaign and set up the National government in Nanjing. Meanwhile the Communist were also gaining strength. They now had over 40,000 Party members. The two forces found a common enemy, the Japanese who had invaded China and for a while they worked and fought hand in hand.

The Japanese invaded Manchuria in 1931 and bombed the Great Wall in 1937. In this scenario, there emerged the example of a Belgian catholic missionary, Fr. Vincent Lebbe. He had committed his life to China to the point of becoming a Chinese citizen, something unique among the foreign missionaries. He was given the Chinese name Lei-Ming-Yuang (the thunder which rumbles from afar). During the invasion of Manchuria by the Japanese, Fr. Lebbe launched himself in a campaign meant to awaken the patriotic spirit of the people. He redacted the letter of the sixteen Catholic bishops of China addressed to the commission of inquiry of the Society of Nations. All the same, Sino-Japanese war was officially declared in 1937.

During the war, Father Lebbe organized teams of stretcher-bearers, made up mostly of his Little Brothers, whom he dispatched into the mountains of Shanxi to care for the

wounded. His commitment to non-violence was absolute since his arrival in China, in the aftermath of the Boxers' war. On that occasion, impressed by the witness of the martyrs, he had made the absolute decision "never to defend his own life". His motto, during the Sino-Japanese War, was: "To live and to die with the wounded". Under his responsibility, there was a moment when he had to evacuate more than 20,000 wounded people. His moral stature and commitment were such that he really appeared as a national hero.

For his humanitarian work, Chiang Kai-Shek raised him to the rank of an officer. The Communist took note of this and, in early 1940, Lebbe and his six Brother-workers were arrested by the Eight Communist Army. Lebbe was reproached for his links with the Guomindang and subjected to a program of re-education; all no to avail. He was released in April but he was very ill. He died in Chongqing, in the home of Chinese friend, on the feast of St. John the Baptist, June 24, 1940. He was sixty-three years old.

Strong will in a weak body

"I am going to go to China and be a martyr," the 11 years boy exclaimed. "I will join the Vincentians and, like Blessed Jean Gabriel Perboyre, I will become a martyr". In many ways, Lei Ming-yuan did achieve the desire of his youth. The future missionary to China was born on August 19, 1877, in Ghent, Belgium. He was a serious youth who was inspired by the stories of missionary martyrs. When he was 18, he joined the Vincentian Seminary in Paris, his heart set on going to the Far East and devoting his life to the Chinese.

Vincent's hopes going to China, however, were dashed when, during the course of his studies in Paris, he became ill. Whatever his sickness may have been, it precluded his being sent to the missions. Instead his Superiors decided to send him to Rome to study Theology.

The Boxer Rebellion of 1900 devastated the Catholic Church in China. It was estimated that at least 18,000 Catholics, including five Bishops, 40 Priests and a large number of women religious were massacred in the process. Shortly after these happenings, Bishops Pierre Favier, the Bishop of the Apostolic Vicariate of Peking, came to Rome to report to the Vatican on the tragic incidents. The Bishop's talk to the Vincentian Theology students once again fired young Vincent with the desire to go to China. He begged the Bishop to let him accompany him back to the Far East. On February 10, 1901, full of zeal and enthusiasm, Vincent left for China. The turn his life was about to take was immediately evident. He studied the Chinese language assiduously; he adopted Chinese dress and immersed himself into the culture, a phenomenon fairly in those days.

The passionate and sensitive nature of the new missionary became evident in the sense of separation and loss he felt in leaving his family. It was however a bonus when expressed in his love for music and painting which made him exceptionally proficient in mastering the Chinese classics. Vincent was ordained to the priesthood in 1901 and very soon he was submerged by pastoral commitments. His creativity showed itself in original pastoral initiatives like the putting up of conference halls in different places to spread the knowledge of Christianity, the commitment to lay associations like the Legion of Mary and even the first Christian daily paper: *I-che-pao* (The Public Good) that very soon acquired the extraordinary circulation of 50,000 copies it appeared objective and impartial.

“China to the Chinese and the Chinese to Christ!”

A faithful son of St. Vincent de Paul, Vincent Lebbe was remarkable for his kindness to the poor and needy. He soon won the hearts of the Chinese who recognized his love for them and their culture. He was relentless in urging Western missionaries to love the Chinese and in denouncing what he interpreted as their patronizing behaviour towards them. He was thoroughly convinced that in order to prosper the Church in China would never prosper. To become Chinese the Church had to be in the hands of Chinese leadership. He insisted that the Church’s policy should be “China to the Chinese and Chinese to the Christ.”

One of Father Lebbe’s supporters was his friend, Anthony Cotta, a fellow Vincentian and veteran missionary from Madagascar and China. Father Cotta’s love of the Chinese and his desire to see the Chinese clergy promoted to their rightful place in the Chinese Church equalled that Fr. Lebbe. Like Lebbe was also instrumental in bringing the matter to Rome’s attention. Much of the credit for the publication of *Maximum illud* is due to Vincent Lebbe and Anthony Cotta and those who held the same concern as they did. But for that time was not yet mature. In the meantime, both missionaries paid for their commitment to the cause of the Chinese. Fr. Cotta was kicked out of China by his confreres and as for Fr. Lebbe, he was sent back to Europe because of the pressure of his own environment.

The Chinese in Europe

With much of his life’s mission accomplished, he set upon another venture in favour of the Chinese. He organized the welcome of Chinese students in Belgium and France, in this way contrasting the influence of the Communists. Within the group of Chinese students he could detect some independent thinkers, not influenced by Communism and open to the Catholic Church. With these Lebbe formed a friendship association of “free” students. Several students were eventually baptized. For them he founded the Catholic

Association for Chinese Youth in Paris and even published a Chinese weekly newspaper.

This is how one of his Chinese students, who later became a Benedictine monk, remembers him: “During the Christmas vacation Father Lebbe came to Louvain to see the 15 or 20 Chinese students studying there. He was short in stature, and his cassock was old, faded and full of patches, not unlike the robe of a Chinese stage “beggar”. But when he opened his mouth he immediately revealed his extraordinary moral stature. I challenged him saying that a number of doctrinal points were holding me back from becoming a Christian, like for example, the death of Jesus on the cross. The very thought of a Buddha or a God who is liable to suffering or death is repugnant to us Buddhists. By definition, a Buddha is a being that cannot suffer or die, for he is outside and above the Wheel of Life and Death”.

We argued back and forth until midnight. To dispel my doubts, Father Lebbe invoked the Buddhist notion of Bhakti, which my Father to explain to me in the sense of total devotion to the Buddha-Savior Amitabha and total compassion towards all sentient beings. “ He gave Himself up on the cross in order to lead mankind to his Father not only the mankind of two thousand years ago but all mankind until the end of time”. What finally convinced me was father Lebbe’s own personal religious conviction rather than the soundness of his theological reasoning. Father Lebbe himself was all immersed in Bhakti, so totally dedicated was he to Jesus Christ, and so totally devoted to the welfare of his Chinese students. That night I did not sleep at all. At 6 o’clock in the morning, I asked Father Lebbe to baptize me”.

The victory of a lifetime

At last things were coming to a head in Rome. Pope Benedict XV’s Apostolic Letter, *Maximum illud* of November 30, 1919, aimed at putting the leadership of the Church into native hands. It called for a better spiritual and intellectual formation of the native clergy thus stopping missionaries from providing “a raw and unfinished preparation of the native clergy in view of keeping them in subordinate positions. “ The Letter dealt a blow to that common practice and helped end the “colonization” of the local churches in mission territories.

The year 1922 signaled the end of the French Protectorate over the China missions. But the greatest signal that the Church in China was fully recognized as an equal among the local Churches was the Episcopal ordination of six Chinese Bishops on October 28, 1926 in St. Peter’s basilica in Rome. This was the first ordination of Chinese Priests to the Episcopacy since Gregory Luo Wenzao was ordained the first Chinese Bishop by Bernadine della Chiesa, vicar apostolic of Beijing, in 1685.

THE LAME GOSPEL RUNNER

A Spanish Franciscan missionary to California, Junipero Serra walked the length and breadth of the long American peninsula, notwithstanding his injured leg, preaching the Gospel to the natives and founding a string of missions which gave a peculiar feature to that territory. Academically proficient, a professor of philosophy and a successful preacher, his dream was to be missionary among the natives as he struggled to protect them from the impact of the arrival of the white men. Pope Francis will canonize him during his coming trip to America, in this way confirming the great name he left among the inhabitants of California.

The missionary journeys of Blessed Junipero Serra have caught the imagination of the historians since they have sometimes assumed a miraculous character like in the following episode. Father Junipero, with a single companion, once arrived at his convent on foot, without provisions, having crossed a vast desert area. The brothers welcomed the two in astonishment, believing it impossible that men could have crossed such a great stretch of desert in this naked fashion.

The Superior questioned them as to whence they had come, and said the mission should not have allowed them to set off without a guide and without food. He marveled how they could have got through alive. But Fr. Junipero replied that they had fared very well, and had been most agreeably entertained by a poor Mexican family on the way.

At this a muleteer, who was bringing in food for the Brothers, began to laugh, and said there was no house for twelve leagues, nor anyone at all living in the sandy waste through which they had come; and the Brothers confirmed him in this. Fr. Junipero, and

Fr. Andreas, his companion, with some of the Brothers and the scoffing muleteer, went back into the wilderness to prove the matter. The three tall trees they found, shedding their cotton, and the dead trunk to which the ass had been tied, as they had narrated.

But the ass was not there, nor any house. Then the two fathers sunk down upon their knees in that blessed spot and kissed the earth, for they perceived that it was the Holy Family that entertained them there. Fr. Junipero remembered that, after prayers, when he bade his hosts good night, he had stooped over the little Boy in blessing, and the

Child had lifted his hand, and with his tiny finger made the cross upon Fr. Junipero's forehead.

A real missionary

Blessed Junipero was so popular because he was spontaneously taken as a missionary. On the one hand, he really enjoyed being with native peoples who were not baptized because that was the reason he had come to the New World. For instance, one of the most emotional days of his life was in a place in Baja California where a group of natives came out of the woods and presented themselves to the priest. This was the first time in his life that he had personally encountered a large group of un-baptized Indians.

He was overwhelmed. In his diary of the journey from Loreto in Baja California up to San Diego in 1769, he wrote: "I kissed the ground and thanked God for giving me what I have longed for so many years." It was really a tremendously emotional experience for him. After 19 years in America, he was finally going to get to do what he came to do: preach to the un-baptized.

On the other hand, the native peoples he met perceived that he really wanted to be there with them: he really enjoyed being with native peoples because he felt that his identity as a missionary, which was the most important thing for him, was in such way fulfilled. The Indians really did like Fr. Junipero and they were very fond of him. They kept calling him *Padre Viejo*, old father/priest. He kind of liked that. He was considerably older than most of the other Spaniards or Mexican the natives were encountering. He was also shorter and more frail than most of them.

In December 1776, he was traveling through the Santa Barbara area, and there was a huge rainstorm. So the small party that he was with had to leave the beach where they were traveling and go up to the foothills because the waves were coming in. They got bogged down in the mud. Suddenly, and out of nowhere, a group of Chumash Indians appeared. They picked Fr. Serra up and carried him through the mud so that he could continue his journey. They stayed with him for a couple of days, and he enjoyed trying to teach them to sing some songs. That was the kind of thing that he just loved.

A successful scholar

Serra was born as Miguel José Serra y Ferrer to a family of humble means, in Petra, Majorca, Spain. On November 14, 1730, he entered the order of the Franciscans and took the name "*Junipero*" in honor of Saint Juniper (*Ginepro*), who had also been a Franciscan and a companion of Saint Francis.

For his proficiency in studies he was appointed lector of philosophy before his ordination to the Catholic priesthood. Fr. Serra was considered intellectually brilliant by his peers. Once a priest, prior to his departure for the Americas at age 27, he was assigned by his superiors to teach philosophy in professorial status to students at the Convento de San Francisco. He received a doctorate in theology from the Lullian University in Palma de Mallorca, where he also occupied the Duns Scotus chair of philosophy.

In 1749 Fr. Serra applied for the missions of the New World, but once arrived there, he was still assigned to teach. While traveling on foot from Vera Cruz to the capital, he injured his leg in such a way that he suffered from it throughout his life, though he continued to make his journeys on foot whenever possible. At last, at his own request, he was assigned to the Indian Missions of Sierra Gorda, some thirty leagues north of Querétaro. He served there for nine years, part of the time as superior, learned the language of the Pame Indians, and translated the catechism into their language.

Recalled to Mexico, he became famous as a most fervent and effective preacher of missions. His zeal frequently led him to employ extraordinary means in order to move the people to penance. He would pound his breast with a stone while in the pulpit, scourge himself, or apply a lighted torch to his bare chest.

In 1768, Fr. Serra was appointed superior of a band of 15 Franciscans for the Indian Missions of Baja California. The Franciscans took over the administration of the missions on the Baja California Peninsula from the Jesuits after King Carlos III ordered the latter forcibly expelled from New Spain on February 3, 1768. Fr. Serra became the "Father Presidente." On March 12, 1768, he embarked from the Pacific port of San Blas on his way to California.

The next year the Spanish governor decided to explore and found missions in Alta (Upper) California. This was intended both to Christianize the extensive Indian populations and to make them citizen of the Spanish empire. Early in the year 1769, Fr. Junipero accompanied Governor Gaspar de Portolà on his expedition to Alta California.

As he had founded a mission in Baja California, he founded the first nine of 21 Spanish missions in Upper California from San Diego to San Francisco. He began in San Diego on July 16, 1769, and established his headquarters near Monterey, California, at Mission San Carlos Borromeo de Carmelo. He remained there also as "Father Presidente" of the Alta California missions.

The Founder of Spanish California

The missions were primarily designed to convert the natives. Other aims were to integrate the neophytes into Spanish society, and to train them to take over ownership and management of the land. As head of the order in California, Fr. Serra not only dealt

with church officials, but also with Spanish officials in Mexico City and with the military officers who commanded the local garrisons.

Franciscans saw the Indians as children of God who deserved the opportunity for salvation, and would make good Christians. Converted Indians were segregated from Indians who had not yet embraced Christianity, lest there be a relapse. Discipline was strict, and the converts were not allowed to come and go at will.

Serra wielded this kind of influence because his missions served economic and political purposes as well as religious ends. The number of civilian colonists in Alta California never exceeded 3,200 and the missions with their Indian populations were critical to keeping the region within Spain's political orbit. Economically, the missions produced all of the colony's cattle and grain, and by the 1780s were even producing surpluses sufficient to trade with Mexico for luxury goods.

During the American War of Independence (1775–83), Fr. Serra took up a collection from his mission parishes throughout California and the money was sent to General George Washington. Fr. Serra received the title of Founder of Spanish California.

The way to Sainthood

During the remaining three years of his life Fr. Serra once more visited the missions from San Diego to San Francisco, traveling more than 600 miles in the process, in order to confirm all who had been baptized. He suffered intensely from his crippled leg and from his chest, yet he would use no remedies. He confirmed more than five thousand people who were Indian neophytes converted during the 14 years from 1770.

On August 28, 1784, at the age of 70, Fr. Junípero Serra died at Mission San Carlos Borromeo. He is buried there under the sanctuary floor. He was beatified by Pope John Paul II on September 25, 1988. On that occasion, the pope said: "Blessed Junipero Serra sowed the seeds of the Christian faith amid the momentous changes wrought by the arrival of European settlers in the New World. It was a field of missionary endeavor that required patience, perseverance, and humility, as well as vision and courage."

During Fr. Serra's beatification, questions were raised about how Indians were treated while he was in charge. The question of Franciscan treatment of Indians first arose in 1783. The famous historian of missions Herbert Eugene Bolton gave evidence favorable to the case in 1948, and the testimony of five other historians was solicited in 1986. On January 15, 2015, Pope Francis announced that in September, he hopes to canonize the 18th-century Spanish Franciscan as a part of his first visit to the United States. Fr. Junipero Serra will be canonized on 23 September 2015 in Washington D.C.

A Franciscan Lifestyle

Fr. Serra's religious conviction found in him a congenial mental disposition. He was even-tempered, sober, obedient, zealous, kindly in speech, humble and quiet. His Franciscan habit covered neither greed, guile, hypocrisy, nor pride. He sought no quarrels and made no enemies. He wanted to be a friar, and he was one in sincerity. Probably few have approached nearer to the ideal perfection of a Franciscan lifestyle than he. Even those who think that he made great mistakes of judgment must admire his earnest, honest and good character.

Iris Engstrand, chair of the Department of History at the University of San Diego, described Fr. Serra as much nicer to the Indians than even to the governors. He didn't get along too well with some of the military people. His attitude towards them was: 'Stay away from the Indians'. "I think you really come up with a benevolent, hard-working person who was strict in a lot of his doctrinal positions, but not a person who was enslaving the Indians, or beating them, ever....He was a very caring person and forgiving. Even after the burning of the mission in San Diego, he did not want those Indians punished. He wanted to be sure that they were treated fairly".

Besides extraordinary fortitude, his most conspicuous virtues were insatiable zeal, love of mortification, self-denial, and absolute confidence in God. His executive abilities have been especially noted by non-Catholic writers. The esteem in which his memory is held by all classes in California may be gathered from the fact that Mrs. Stanford, not a Catholic, had a granite monument erected to him at Monterey. A bronze statue of heroic size represents him as the apostolic preacher in Golden Gate Park, San Francisco. In 1884, the Legislature of California passed a resolution making 29 August of that year, the centennial of Fr. Serra's burial, a legal holiday.

The setting of his extraordinary adventure as well as that of all the missionaries in the Southwest of the USA is the subject of the classic book of American literature, written by Willa Cather: *Death comes for the Archbishop* (1927). She explains how she discovered it: "The longer I stayed in the Southwest, the more I felt that the story of the Catholic Church in that country was the most interested of all its stories. The old mission churches, even those which were abandoned and in ruins, had a moving reality about them; the hand-carved beams and joists, the utterly unconventional frescoes, the countless fanciful figures of saints, no two of them alike, seem a direct expression of some very real and lively human feeling.

They were all fresh, individual, first-hand. Almost every one of those many remote little adobe churches in the mountains or in the desert had something lovely that was its own. In lonely, somber villages in the mountains, the church decorations were somber, the martyrdom bloodier, the grief of the Virgin more agonized, the figure of Death more terrifying. In warm, gentle valleys everything about the churches was milder. I used to

Within a few months of his chance meeting with Dr. Casey, Pascal's world lay in ruins. Successive economic crises brought about by Burma's military dictatorship meant he had to give up his studies. The regime's repression grew more brutal. Pascal fled to the jungle, becoming a guerilla fighter in the life-or-death struggle against the government and seeing many of his friends die in battle.

In a moment of despair, he remembered the Englishman he had met in Mandalay and wrote him a letter, with little expectation of ever receiving a reply. Miraculously, the letter reached its destination on the other side of the world. Dr. Casey went to Thailand and had Pascal rescued from the jungle. He took him to Britain and enrolled him to study English at Cambridge University, the first Burmese tribesman to do so. After his graduation, Pascal wrote *From the Land of Green Ghosts* (2002), his best-selling autobiography: a tale of the remarkable triumph of hope over despair.

In the opening chapter about his life as a village boy, he speaks of Fr. Carlo, an Italian missionary: "Indeed we children loved him. He clothed us, fed us and taught us until his death. He never returned to Italy. He became accustomed to be a quasi tribal chief, so far had he gone in adopting our customs...Like the ghosts of our ancestors he and the other Italian priests became, after death, part of our society, pleasantly haunting and guarding our village." When Pascal wrote this from Landon, he was far from imagining that, only nine years afterwards, one of his Italian priest-friends, Fr. Clement Vismara would be declared Blessed and in this way attract again the world attention on his unfortunate Asian homeland.

A war hero

Born in 1897 in Agrate Brianza, Northern Italy, Fr. Clement Vismara took part in the First World War, as a trench soldier, emerging from battle with the rank of sergeant and three medals for military valor. From his war experience he understood that "life has value only if you give it for others" (as he wrote), and thus he became a priest and missionary of PIME (Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions) in 1923 and left for Burma.

Arriving in Toungoo, the last city with a British governor, he spent six months in the bishop's house to learn English, then he set off for Kengtung, an almost unexplored land of forests and mountains, inhabited by tribal people. After fourteen days on horseback he arrived at Kengtung where he remained for three months to be introduced to the local languages and then the superior of the mission accompanied him to Monglin, other six days on horseback away, his last destination, on the border between Laos, Thailand and China. He wrote home: "Here I am 120 kilometres from Kengtung. If I want to see another Christian, I have to look in the mirror".

It was October 1924. In 32 years Fr. Clement, out of nowhere, built three parishes: Monglin, Mong Phyak and Kenglap. He used to live with three orphans in a mud and straw shed. His apostolate was to tour the tribal villages on horseback, to pitch his tent and make himself known: he brought medicine, pulled rotten teeth, adapted to the life of the tribal people, the climate, the dangers, the food of rice and spicy sauce, the hunting for meat. In the midst of World War II, he was a prisoner of the Japanese. From the outset he took in orphans and abandoned children in Monglin to educate them. Later he founded an orphanage that became home to between 200 to 250 orphans. Today he is invoked as the "Protector of children" and a lot of the graces received concern children and their families.

Opium smugglers and brigands

It was a life lived in conditions of extreme poverty. Clement wrote: "This is worse than when I was in the trenches during World War I, but this is the war I wanted and I have to fight it to the end with God's help. I'm always in God's hands." Fr. Clement was a poet and a dreamer. He used to get up very early in the morning and climb the nearby hill to contemplate the sunrise. "When I look at the sunrise –he once wrote- I understand that God has not abandoned me".

In his utter simplicity, Fr. Clement was clever and cunning: he had a kind of Gospel ingenuity. He tended to trust everybody, even those who did not deserve it. One time he was stopped by some brigands who relieved him of everything he had. He exclaimed: "Poor people! They too were hungry!". Another time, when he was travelling with a group of people, the brigands appeared, but Fr. Clement faced them by saying: "Aren't you ashamed of robbing all these poor people the little they have. If you are hungry, come to the mission of Monglin and you will eat to your hearts' content". He was an impressive man, big and more than six feet tall. The brigands listened to him. In him what prevailed was always the welcoming, forgiving and trust in his fellow human beings and ultimately in God.

Blessed Clement founded the church in a corner of the world where there are no tourists, but only opium smugglers, black magicians and guerillas from different backgrounds. He brought peace and helped the nomadic tribes to settle within the territory. Gradually a Christian community was born, the Sisters of the Child Mary came to help, he founded schools and chapels, factories and rice fields, irrigation canals, he taught carpentry and mechanics, built brick houses and brought new crops, wheat, corn, silkworms, vegetables (carrots, onions, salad – "the father eats grass," the people would say).

Through schooling and health care, the indigenous people raised their standards of living and now have doctors and nurses, artisans and teachers, priests and nuns, bishops

and civil authorities. Many of them are called Clement and Clementine. In 1957, Fr. Clement took his only vacation to Italy. Back in Burma, he was active for other thirty years.

He died June 15, 1988 in Mongping and is buried near the church and the Grotto of Lourdes, which he built. His grave is visited also by many non-Christians. Fresh flowers are never lacking and candles are always burning in his honor. Now, only 23 years later, Father Clement Vismara was declared a Blessed of the Universal Church and the first blessed of Burma. The cause of beatification started from the diocese where Fr. Clement lived and worked, died and he is buried.

The bishop Abraham Than declared: "Never had we seen such a thing in Kengtung. We have had many holy missionaries who laid the foundations of the diocese, first of all, the first bishop, Mons. Emilio Bonetta, whom many still remember as a model of Gospel charity and others whose goodness is still a living memory. But for none of them there is such a movement of people and devotion as for Fr. Vismara and this not only on the part of the Catholic population, but also on the part of members of the traditional animist religion, as well as Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims. In this I saw a sign from God. This convinced me to open the diocesan inquiry on Fr. Clement's heroic virtues.

Extraordinary in the ordinary

Why is Father Clement Vismara declared Blessed? In life he did not perform miracles, have visions or revelations, he was not a mystic nor a theologian, he made no great works nor had any extraordinary gifts. He was a missionary like the rest, so much so that some of his confreres in Burma said: "If you declare him Blessed, you need to declare all of us here blessed who have led the same life he did". One of his religious brothers said: "Fr. Clement saw the extraordinary in the ordinary."

At eighty years, he had the same enthusiasm for his vocation of priest and missionary, as when he was twenty. He was always peaceful and joyful, generous to all, a man of God despite the tragic situations in which he lived. He had an adventurous and poetic vision of the missionary vocation that made him a fascinating character also through his writings. He is perhaps the most famous Italian missionary of the twentieth century.

His trust in Divine Providence was proverbial. He had no budgets or estimates, he never counted the money he had. In a country where the majority of people during some months of the year suffer from hunger, Fr. Clement gave food to all, he never turned

anyone away empty-handed. The PIME Brothers and Sisters of the Child Mary would reproach him for taking in too many children, old people, lepers, disabled, widows, mentally unbalanced. Fr. Clement always said: "Today we all ate, tomorrow the Lord will provide."

He trusted in Providence, but across the world he wrote to donors for support and help with articles in various magazines. He spent his evenings writing letters and articles by candlelight (over 2000 letters and 600 articles of his have been collected). Father Vismara's writings are poetic, adventurous, burning with love for the poorest and most abandoned. They have attracted many vocations to the priesthood and missionary life and not only in Italy.

Fr. Clement well represents the virtues and the values of the missionaries to be passed down to future generations. In the last half century, Mission to the Nations has dramatically changed, yet it always remains what Jesus wanted, "Go into all the world, proclaim the Gospel to every creature." The new methods (responsibility of the local church, inculturation, interreligious dialogue, etc..) must be experienced in the spirit and continuity of the Church tradition that dates back to the Apostles. Fr. Clement is one of the last links in this glorious Apostolic Tradition. He was in love with Jesus (he prayed a lot!) and in love with his people, especially the small and the least.

He lived to the letter what Jesus says in the Gospel: "Do not worry too much, saying, 'What shall we eat? What shall we drink? How will we dress?'. The pagans are the ones who care for all these things. But as for you, you should look first for the Kingdom of God and do God's will and everything else God will give you"(Matt. 6:31-34). Utopia? No, for Fr. Clement it was a living reality bringing joy to his heart despite all the problems he had.

The greatest apology of our faith

The beatification of John Paul II, on May 1, rocked the whole world like a hurricane. But there are also other exemplary witnesses of Christ, much less known, whom the Church joyfully points out to the veneration of the faithful: humble, ordinary saints – including those who will never get a halo – are a key theme in the preaching of pope Benedict. For him, the saints are "the greatest apology of our faith". Together with art and music, he has often added; and much more than the arguments of reason. "The saints are the great luminous trail on which God passes through history. In them we see that there truly is a force of good which resists the millennia; there truly is the light of light."

One of these lights was brought to wider attention on June 26, the day of the feast of

He had believed in the prophecies of a shoemaker poet, Bandarra, dealing with the coming of a ruler who would inaugurate a time of unparalleled prosperity for the church and for Portugal. In Vieira's famous opus, *Clavis Prophetarum* (The Keys of the Prophets), he had endeavored to prove the truth of his dreams from passages of Scripture. As he refused to submit, the Inquisitors kept him in prison from October 1665 to December 1667, and finally imposed a sentence which prohibited him from teaching, writing or preaching.

It was a heavy blow for Vieira and also for the Society of Jesus. Shortly afterwards, on the accession of King Pedro II to the throne, Vieira recovered his freedom and much of his prestige, but he decided to go to Rome to procure the revision of the sentence, which still hung over him though the penalties had been removed. During a six years' residence in the Eternal City Vieira won his greatest triumphs. Pope Clement X invited him to preach before the College of Cardinals, and he became confessor to Queen Christina of Sweden and a member of her literary academy.

At the request of the pope he drew up a report of two hundred pages on the Inquisition in Portugal, with the result that after a judicial inquiry Pope Innocent XI suspended it in Portugal for seven years. Ultimately Vieira returned to Portugal with a papal bull exempting him from the jurisdiction of the Grand Inquisitor. But Vieira, amid his triumphs, longed for his Indians of Maranhao, and after a brief stay in Portugal, he embarked for Brazil in 1681.

He resided in Bahia and occupied himself in revising his sermons for publication, and in 1687 he became superior of the province. Trials and tribulations again faced him. Worn out by his labors as preacher, superior, and visitor of the missions, slanderously accused of conniving at the murder of a colonial official, denounced to his superiors for illegal canvassing in a provincial congregation of his order, and cleared of the charge only when in his grave, he died, sorrowing but unbroken, in his ninetieth year, on July 18 1697, at Salvador, Bahia. The slaves and the poor were his chief mourners.

Talented youth

Antonio Vieira, Portuguese Jesuit and writer, the "prince of [Catholic pulpit](#)-orators of his time," was born at Lisbon, on February 6 1608, to Cristóvão Vieira Ravasco, the son of a mulatto woman, and Maria de Azevedo. Accompanying his parents to Brazil in 1614, he received his education at the Jesuit college at Bahia. He entered the Jesuit novitiate in 1625 and two years later pronounced his first vows. At the age of eighteen he was teaching rhetoric, and a little later dogmatic theology, at the college of Olinda, besides writing the "annual letters" of the province.

In 1635 he received the priesthood. He immediately astounded all by his eloquence. When the Dutch besieged Bahia (1640), he delivered his "Discourse for the Success of the Portuguese Arms". The sermon was a hit and was considered by Abbé Raynal to be "perhaps the most extraordinary sermon ever heard from a Christian pulpit." When the revolution of 1640 placed king John IV on the throne of Portugal, Brazil gave him its allegiance, and Vieira was chosen to accompany the viceroy's son to Lisbon to congratulate the new king.

His talents and aptitude for affairs impressed John IV so favorably that he appointed him royal preacher, gave him free access to the palace and constantly consulted him on the business of the state. Possessed of great political sagacity and knowledge of the lessons of history, Vieira used the pulpit as a tribune from which he propounded measures for improving the general and particularly the economic condition of Portugal. His pen was as busy as his voice, and in four notable pamphlets he advocated the creation of companies of commerce, the abolition of the distinction between Old and New Christians (Jews who had been forced to accept Christianity and who were the constant concern of the Inquisition), the reform of the procedure of the Inquisition and the admission of Jewish and foreign traders, with guarantees for their security from religious persecution.

In 1647 Vieira began his career as a diplomat, in the course of which he visited England, France, the Netherlands and Italy. The Jesuit little relished such honors, and steadily refused the official title of ambassador and the offer of a bishopric. His success, freedom of speech and reforming zeal had made him enemies on all sides, and only the intervention of the king prevented his [expulsion](#) from the Society of [Jesus](#), so that prudence counseled his return to Brazil. In 1652 he returned to Maranhão.

First and foremost a missionary

In his youth Vieira had vowed to consecrate his life to the conversion of the negro slaves and native Indians of his adopted country, and arriving in Maranhão early in 1653, he resumed his apostolic labors, which had been interrupted during his stay of fourteen years in the Old World. Starting from Pará, he penetrated to the banks of the Tocantins, making numerous converts to Christianity among the most violent tribes; but after two years of unceasing labor, during which every difficulty was placed in his way by the colonial authorities, he saw that the Indians must be withdrawn from the jurisdiction of the governors, to prevent their exploitation, and placed under the control of the members of a single religious society.

He was thus one of the initiators of the initiative of the *Reduções* that will flourish almost one hundred years later, especially in Paraguay among the Guarani Indios and

cause the animosity and opposition of the colonizers as one can see in the famous historical movie *The Mission*.

In June 1654, Vieira set sail for Lisbon to plead the cause of the Indians, and in April 1655 he obtained from the king a series of decrees which placed the missions under the Society of Jesus, with himself as their superior, and prohibited the enslavement of the natives. Returning with this charter of freedom, he organized the missions over a territory having a coast-line of 400 leagues, and a population of 200,000 souls. In the next six years (1655–61) the indefatigable missionary set the crown on his work. He worked for the Indians, translating the Catechism into their idioms, teaching them the arts of peace, travelling hundreds of miles on the Amazon and its tributaries, winning even the fierce Nheengaibas by his eloquence, but again arousing the hatred of the slave owners.

After a time, the colonists, attributing the shortage of slaves and the consequent diminution in their profits to the Jesuits, began actively to oppose Vieira, and they were joined by members of the secular clergy and the other Orders who were jealous of the monopoly enjoyed by the Society of Jesus in the government of the Indians. Vieira was accused of want of patriotism and usurpation of jurisdiction, and in 1661, after a popular revolt, the authorities sent him with thirty-one other Jesuit missionaries back to Portugal. He found his friend King John IV dead and the court a prey to faction, but, dauntless as ever in the pursuit of his ambition, he resorted to his favorite weapon of preaching, and on Epiphany Day, 1662, in the royal chapel, he replied to his persecutors in a famous rhetorical effort, and called for the execution of the royal decrees in favor of the Indians.

In many of his sermons, both in Brazil and Portugal, he defended the New Christians and pleaded for the liberty of Native Americans and black slaves as well as fair treatment for them. In one fiery sermon preached in Brazil, Vieira asked rhetorically: "Can there be a greater want of understanding, or a greater error of judgment between men and men than for me to think that I must be your master because I was born farther away from the sun, and you must be my slave because you were born nearer to it?" It was a revolutionary question for the 17th century. Many of the social views of this Jesuit were far in advance of his time.

Achievements of a lifetime

Fr. Antonio Vieira's works form perhaps the greatest monument of Portuguese [prose](#). Two hundred discourses exist to prove his fecundity, while his versatility is shown by the fact that he could treat the same subject differently on half a dozen occasions. His letters, simple and conversational in style, have a deep historical and political interest, and form documents of the first value for the history of the period.

Father Vittorio Pastori (1926-1994)

A HOTELIER'S IMPOSSIBLE DREAM

“Those who are hungry are hungry now. Poor people cannot wait”. This was the motto of Vittorione (Big Victor), a successful hotelier turned missionary, who would have liked to sit at table all the starving people of Uganda, to taste the gourmet course of his incredible generosity. Helped by a precarious band of volunteers, he travelled 147 times from Italy to Africa, bringing the poor all kinds of goods until his enormous size got the better of him. He is the founder of “Cooperation and Development”, a lay organization that still continues to help the poor of Uganda, 15 years after his death.

Sometimes in April 1980, a convoy of cars was traveling through the savanna north of Gulu, in Northern Uganda, heading towards Alelelele, the lepers' village situated within the territory of Lacor Parish. By that time, I had assumed the position of acting Parish Priest, and I was happy to accompany that expedition of friends from Italy in my capacity as guide and translator. The group was headed by an enormous Italian lay man.

As soon as we arrived at the lepers' village, two camp stoves were unloaded and put quickly into operation, while the lepers and the local population stood around with gaping mouths, staring at the size of the leader of the *Wajungu* (White people) who were now busy cooking rice on top of a generous splashing of olive oil, tomato sauce, onion, garlic and saffron powder, in two huge pots.

When the rice was cooked, an appetizing aroma spread around to the incredible delight of the populace and Big Victor tied an immense apron around his gigantic stomach, got hold of an oversized ladle and started distributing paper plates full of the most delicious Italian risotto to the lepers, the children and whoever wanted to eat. The occasion was then marked by speeches, songs and dances. In the end, the lepers withdrew to their huts, wrapped in their soft new blankets, still overwhelmed by wonder and unbelief.

That was the first time I met with Vittorione (Big Victor), an Italian hotelier turned missionary. I was impressed by his enthusiasm and down-to-earth approach to the poverty and need of the African people. “Whoever is hungry, is hungry now. Whoever is thirsty, is thirsty now. Whoever suffers, suffers now. The poor cannot wait”, was his simple philosophy. With his 450 lbs bulk, his baby complexion and rumbling voice, he

was an impressive figure: people in Italy could easily identify with his generous approach and flooded him with every type of good and the poor of Uganda saw him as a Father Christmas figure, always ready to share the most unexpected and delicious surprises. He was however a man of deep spirituality and a heroic self-forgetfulness.

Africa Mission Travel Agency

Vittorio Pastori was born at Varese, in Northern Italy, on April 15, 1926. He grew up in his adolescence to become extraordinarily obese, but this did not make him lose his natural creativity and zest for life. In the early 50s, Vittorio opened a restaurant in his city, a flourishing commercial activity which kept him busy for the next 15 years. The responsibility for what soon became the most renowned place in the whole town revealed the managerial gifts of the owner and his capacity as an accomplished businessman. A turning point in Vittorio's life was when he met with a priest, Mons. Enrico Manfredini, parish priest of San Vittore, who entrusted him with increasing administrative tasks.

When, in 1969, Mons. Manfredini became bishop of Piacenza, he invited Vittorio to follow him to the new place and take responsibility for the financial administration of the Bishop's residence, the seminary and other diocesan institutions. The interest for Africa originated in the experience of Bishop Manfredini when he was still a priest under the authority of his archbishop, Cardinal John Baptist Montini, who became pope with the name of Paul VI, who put him in contact with some African priests.

In 1969, already a bishop, together with his cooperator Vittorio Pastori, he decided to take a trip to Africa. They visited Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania and other countries belonging to the Sub-Sahara area and were struck by the miserable conditions of the people and impressed by the work of the Catholic Church and its missionaries. Back home, Vittorio and his bishop decided to do something immediately.

The first idea was to give the possibility to as many people as possible to see what was happening down there: it is only by seeing with their own eyes that people can understand certain situations. So Vittorio founded the Africa Mission Travel Agency. The first years were very tough, pioneering years. He started giving conferences, showing slides, then the missionary trips started. All in all, Africa Mission has taken to Africa more than 700 people.

From the first sight experience the commitment to help followed and gave origin to the trips to Uganda with many containers of goods (every kind of food, plows, tractors, and other mechanical, agricultural and sanitary implements). In 1982 Vittorio started the NGO "Cooperation and Development" that established two independent centers in Kampala, the capital, and Moroto, the far away outpost in the wild Karamoja, in order to host the volunteers and to store the goods for distribution.

On September 15, 1984, Vittorio Pastori, crowning a long standing desire, was ordained priest by Mons. Cyprian Kihangire, bishop of Gulu (Uganda), and continued to carry on his mission on behalf of the hungry and marginalized people, without separating the spiritual aspects from the material ones. He alternated long periods in Uganda, at Kampala and Moroto and other periods in Italy, during which he met with communities, parishes, groups, associations in order to solicit help.

A deluge of Christmas cakes

Paolo Scaravaggi, a construction engineer in his late sixties, heads “Cooperation and Development, nowadays, since 1994, the year of the Founder’s death. From the desk on which Don Vittorione used to organize his missions on behalf of Uganda, giving trouble to ministers, cardinals, bishops, air force and army generals, big and small businessmen, Mr. Scaravaggi likes to reminisce that, in 1972, he himself was in the Alitalia flight loaded with goods for the great famine in Africa, that touched down at Athens before heading for Entebbe, the international airport of Kampala, the capital of Uganda.

The place had emerged from anonymity two years before when it had become the theater of the famous raid by the Israeli commandos to free the Jewish hostages from the kidnapped plane. To welcome the delegation from Piacenza, at the landing, there came, in t-shirt and blue jeans, the young Comboni missionary Fr. John Scalabrini, vicar general of the Bishop of Gulu. From the cavernous interior of the plane there rained a deluge of Italian Christmas cakes (“panettoni”), something which would continue to be like the trade mark of Big Victor’s generosity.

To those who objected, Mr. Scaravaggi with a smile replies: “Why be surprised and wonder? We must approach this fact with a broadminded attitude: take the case of the missionary priest or sister who have spent years without coming home for Christmas: is there something better than to provide them with a Christmas cake? And if they enjoy their “panettone”, why not give them the possibility of sharing it with their people? Christmas is our feast. When we give out our Christmas cakes, we are celebrating our feast. I wish we had always tons of “panettoni” to send to Uganda!”

At any rate, the activities of “Cooperation and Development” have increased over the years and have become differentiated. One of the most remarkable has to do with the dire need for water. By means of specialized and experienced technicians, in Uganda, the association has dug more than 700 boreholes for drinkable water and, at the same time, repaired and reactivated existing boreholes. The last initiative is the “Don Vittorio Youth Center” opened in Moroto, the little town which is the capital of Karamoja, the less developed area of Uganda. The center is dedicated to the memory of the Founder and means to cater for the Karimojon youth, promoting literacy, sports activities, traditional music and folk dancing, indoor and outdoor games.

Saint John De Brito SJ (1647-1690)

TRUE NOBILITY

Son of the Governor of Brazil, he mixed as a boy with the future king of Portugal Pedro II, sharing games at court. Fascinated by the heroism of the Jesuit missionaries, he joined the Society of Jesus when he was only 15 and asked to be sent to India. Very successful in his pioneering efforts of Inculturation, he converted thousands of high caste Hindus. Condemned to be beheaded because of his success, he achieved in martyrdom the true nobility he had longed for during his whole life.

Christianity was born with persecution. The first three centuries saw the religion of Jesus Christ oppressed by the obsessive opposition of the Roman emperors and the first category of followers of Jesus who emerged from the common crowd of the believers was that of the martyrs. The first serious witnessing to the religion of Jesus was made of the shedding of blood.

That is why the martyrs were the first Christian nobility: on their bodies, torn and broken by the torturers, the Eucharist was celebrated in the catacombs. This pattern remained throughout the history of the Church. The 22 Martyrs were the beginning of Christianity in Uganda, Africa; hundreds of martyrs marked the beginnings of the faith in Viet Nam and China; thousands of martyrs followed too soon the promising beginnings of Christianity in Japan.

This year, on October 1, feast of saint Therese of the Child Jesus, at the Pope's General Audience, a descendant of the Japanese Martyr, Blessed Julian Nakatura, was proudly displaying a picture of his saintly relative. Blessed Julian Nakatura was one of the five *Tensho* boys sent by the great mission strategist, the Jesuit Alexandro Valignano, to visit Pope Gregory XIII. Later Nakatura was ordained priest and died a martyr in 1633. To bear the supreme witness to Christ by the shedding of blood is still the mark of those who want to be the heroes of the new people of God, the Church. This was the burning desire of the Portuguese noble young man who at 15 was entering the Society of Jesus, John De Brito.

The miniature Jesuit

John was born of Portuguese aristocracy in 1647. His father, Salvador Pereira De Brito, was the governor of Brazil and died there when John was still very young. John became a member of the royal court at age nine and a companion to the young prince later to become King Peter II. When De Brito was young, he almost died of a sudden illness and his mother vowed he would wear a Jesuit cassock for a year if he were spared. He regained his health and walked around court like a miniature Jesuit, but there was nothing small about his heart or the desire that grew to actually become a Jesuit.

Despite pressure from the prince and the king, he entered the Jesuit novitiate in Lisbon on December 17, 1662 when he was only 15 years-old. His mother, woman of great faith, supported him in his decision. He studied classics, with an interruption because of health problems, then philosophy. He wrote to the Superior General in 1668 asking to be sent to the Far East as a missionary, but had to finish theology first. He was ordained in February 1673. Despite his demonstrated talent for academic excellence, his great devotion to St. Francis Xavier urged him to apply to serve in the Mission of India.

His request was granted, despite the strong and sometimes underhanded opposition of his family. He left Lisbon for Goa in mid-March, arriving the following September. He studied more theology in Goa and was again asked to remain as a teacher but he desired to be a missionary and to seek the glory of martyrdom. He therefore proceeded for the mission of Madura in the state of Tamil Nadu. That was the place that had seen the enlightened apostolate of Fr. Roberto De Nobili whose example Fr. De Brito was determined to follow.

Pioneers of Inculturation

The Age of Discovery inaugurated a new era in Christian mission. As Spanish and Portuguese explorers and conquerors encircled the globe they were accompanied by Christian missionaries eager to implant the gospel in fields afar. There is no doubting the faith and courage that mark their heroic efforts. But most were oblivious of the extent to which their message was compromised with the association with colonial power and wealth. Even those who defended the native populations were generally blind to the tendency to confuse the gospel with the supposed superiority of European culture.

The early Jesuit mission to Japan and China represented a remarkably prophetic chapter in the history of the Church because of the different policy and outlook. The essential architect of this strategy was the Jesuit Visitor for Asia, Alessandro Valignano whom we mentioned above. At that time a papal decree had granted the Portuguese and Spanish crowns authority for establishing and administering the church in their territories.

The Far East was predominantly in the Portuguese sphere of influence. Valignano, however, was determined to disengage the Jesuit missions from Portuguese control. He believed that the conquest model of evangelization would be absolutely fruitless in penetrating the ancient civilizations of Japan and China and that it was essential that the Church assimilate itself to Japanese and Chinese culture.

The Christian Sannyasi

The ethnocentric colonial tendency was markedly present in the Church in Southern India, established under Portuguese authority. Converts were forced to adopt Western customs that effectively alienated them from their own culture and their communities. One missionary who attempted to forge a different path was the Jesuit Roberto De Nobili. Like his confrere in China, Matteo Ricci, De Nobili adapted his lifestyle and his method of evangelization to the local mentality and culture. He was thus implementing Valignano's guidelines and became one of the pioneers of what more recently was termed "Inculturation".

Father de Brito worked in Madura, in the regions of Kolei and Tattuvanchery and very soon showed that he was more committed to the singlemindedness of the enlightened Italian confreres than to any nationalistic loyalty. He studied the India caste system because he thought that members of the higher caste would also have to be converted for Christianity to have a future. He became an Indian ascetic, a *pandaraswami* since they were permitted to approach individuals of all castes. He changed his life style, eating just a bit of rice each day and sleeping on a mat, dressing in a red cloak and turban. He established a small retreat in the wilderness and was in time accepted as a *sannyasi*. As he became well-known, the number of conversions greatly increased.

Together with his catechists, De Brito was extremely careful in the preparation of catechumens and the nurturing of neophytes, hoping that his work would soon bring about an Indian Church with Indian clergy. All of this was accomplished despite strong and sometimes violent opposition from both native rulers on one side and conservative Catholic elements both in the Society and elsewhere that clung to a European model of Church.

Miraculous red sand

He was made superior in Madura after 11 years on the mission, but he also became the object of hostility from *Brahmins*, members of the highest caste, who resented his work and wanted to kill him. He and some catechists were captured by soldiers in 1686 and bound in heavy chains. When the soldiers threatened to kill the Jesuit, he simply offered

his neck, but they did not act. After spending a month in prison, the Jesuit captive was released.

When he got back to Madura, he was ordered to return to Portugal to report on the status of the mission in India. When he reached Lisbon ten months later, he was received like a hero. He toured the universities and colleges describing the adventurous life of an Indian missionary. His boyhood mate and now-king, Peter II noticed how thin, worn out and tired his friend looked; he asked him to remain at home to tutor his two sons, but De Brito placed the needs in India above the comfort of the Portuguese court.

De Brito sailed again for Goa and returned to the mission in Madura where he arrived in November 1690. He came back despite a death threat that the *raja* of Marava had made four years earlier. The Jesuit missionary travelled at night from station to station so he could celebrate Mass and baptize converts.

His success in converting Prince Tadaya Theva indirectly led to his death. The prince was interested in Christianity even before the prayers of a catechist helped him recover from a serious illness. De Brito insisted that the prince should keep only one of his several wives after his baptism; he agreed to this condition, but one of the rejected wives complained to her uncle, the *raja* of Marava who sent soldiers, on January 28 1690, to arrest the missionary. Two days later the *raja* exiled de Brito to Oriyur, a neighboring province his brother governed. The *raja* instructed his brother to execute the troublesome Jesuit who was taken from prison on February 4 and led to a knoll overlooking a river where an executioner decapitated him with a schimitar.

There is great affection for Saint John De Brito among the people of Tamil Nadu, where he is known as *Arulananda*, the name he took as a “Roman *sannyasi*.” His place of martyrdom remains a popular place of pilgrimage for Christians, Hindus and Muslims. Red sand from the spot of his beheading is thought to possess miraculous powers. He is esteemed in the Society of Jesus for his boldness of service and his efforts to build a fully indigenized Church in south India.

While today the practice of Inculturation or Indigenization has wide official support, this was not so in the XVII century. Valignano and Ricci were accused of promoting “syncretism”. The Jesuit strategy of cultural “accommodation” was officially suppressed by the Vatican in the early XVIII century. It was again centuries before Valignano’s insights were properly appreciated by the Church.

Strangely enough, the efforts of Inculturation did not leave stronger Christian communities neither did they always attract approval or empathy from the representatives of the cultures evangelized. Persecution is raging even now in India or

source of supplies, and Fr. Isaac Jogues was chosen to lead an expedition to that purpose. They reached their objective safely and started back well supplied with goods for the mission, but the Iroquois, the bitter enemies of the Hurons, and fiercest of all Indian tribes, were on the war-path and ambushed the returning expedition.

Fr. Jogues and his companions were captured by the Mohawks, members of the Iroquois nation. His letters and journals tell us how he and his companions were led from village to village, how they were beaten, tortured and forced to watch as their Huron converts were mangled and killed. Fr. Jogues himself lost some fingers because of torture, suffering apparently beyond the power of natural endurance. Eventually, they were carried to the Indian village of Ossernenon, now Auriesville, on the Mohawk River, about forty miles above the present city of Albany.

All Fr. Jogues' companions were killed. For some reasons, however, the Mohawks spared him, perhaps as protection against reprisal from the French. In Ossernenon, he remained for thirteen months in slavery. He ended up in the service of a respected old Mohawk woman who preserved his life more than once and even called him "nephew." Once, while Fr. Jogues was acting as his "aunt's" porter to a Dutch Calvinist town, the men of the town offered to help him escape. At first he refused since he was learning the ways and language of the Mohawk people and felt he might even be able to share his beliefs with them.

But eventually, when he was about to be burnt to death, he was convinced to take refuge in a sailing vessel which carried him to New Amsterdam (New York). From there he was sent, in mid-winter, across the ocean and after a voyage of two months, landed, on Christmas morning 1643, on the coast of Brittany, in a state of absolute destitution. From there he painfully found his way to the nearest college of the Society of Jesus. Appearing at the Jesuit house, the unrecognizable Fr. Isaac Jogues told the Rector he had news from New France.

Immediately, the Rector asked if the shabby stranger knew Fr. Isaac Jogues, who was rumored dead because of his more-than-one-year absence. "Very well indeed" the stranger answered. "Have they murdered him?" the good Rector asked. "No, Father. He is alive and free and I am he!" the shabby stranger exclaimed.

Like the protagonist of the recent movie *THE REVENANT*, interpreted by Leonardo di Caprio, Fr. Isaac appeared as one who has come back from shadow land, the only Jesuit missionary captured by the fierce Red Indians who managed to escape with his life. The news spread like wildfire. Everybody wanted to see him. Even Queen Anne of Austria stooped to kiss his mutilated hand. The humble priest was embarrassed at all this

attention. He hid his mangled hands in the folds of his cassock and begged to be sent back to the Indians.

Several fingers had been cut, chewed or burnt off. Pope Urban VIII gave him permission to offer Mass with his mutilated hands, saying: "It would be shameful that a martyr of Christ would not be allowed to drink the Blood of Christ." No similar concession, up to this time, is known to have been granted. Welcomed home as a hero, Fr. Jogues might have sat back, thanked God for his safe return and died peacefully in his homeland. But his zeal led him back once more to the fulfillment of his dream. In a few months he sailed again for his missions among the Hurons.

The young scholar

Isaac Jogues was born on January 10, 1607, at Orléans, France, into a middle-class family who had him educated at home. In 1624, at the age of seventeen, he entered the Jesuit novitiate at Rouen, where his Master of novices was Louis Lallemand. The master already had two brothers and a nephew serving as missionaries in the colony of New France in North America. Paul Le Jeune, superior of the Jesuit mission in New France, had conceived a plan to keep the church and laity informed of the mission's undertaking, by the careful compilation of missionaries' letters. These described in detail their experiences and impressions. Similar letters, called *Jesuit Relations* were coming also from other missions.

As a Jesuit novice, Isaac Jogues read these enthralling letters. He was especially moved by the account of the martyrdom by fire of Carlo Spinola, SJ, in Japan in 1622. Thereafter Isaac Jogues always carried Spinola's picture with him. He professed simple vows in 1626, and was sent to study philosophy at the royal college in La Flèche.

The Jesuit community running it had a strong missionary spirit; its teachers included missionary pioneers like Fr. Jean de Brébeuf. He was the Superior of the Jesuit mission after the colony had been taken over by the British following the Seven Years' War. Upon completing these studies, Isaac was sent to the Collège de Clermont in Paris to pursue his study of theology.

In 1636 Pere Isaac Jogues, newly ordained priest and 29 years old, joined the small band of Jesuits at Three Rivers, a tiny French trading post on the St. Lawrence River. He arrived with the small Mass kit that his mother had given him. He also arrived with the hope that the Hurons, who were completing their summer's trading, would allow him to travel hundreds of miles inland with them when they returned home.

The "Indian Nations"

Over the centuries the native peoples of America had developed societies which were based on delicate balances among the tribes. and with their natural setting. Their pace of life, their boundaries, and their means of livelihood corresponded with nature. Over the ages various tribes along the water routes, now called the St. Lawrence Seaway and the Great Lakes, confederated into "nations": the Algonquin tribes north of the St. Lawrence, the Huron peoples north of the lake bearing their name, and the Iroquois confederation south of the Great Lakes.

They lived in longhouses (long wooden dwellings used as communal homes or council halls) in the cold winters and traveled to fishing and hunting grounds in birch-bark canoes during the summer. Their life was demanding: the rigid winters and the inter-tribe warfare contributed to the fierce character of the Native Americans. They used to kill their prisoners painfully after long torture.

It was soon after his arrival that Fr. Jogues witnessed these gruesome proceedings in which the Indians did not distinguish between killing an enemy in defense and taking vengeance after the battle. He would soon be a victim of this barbaric habit. Centuries of tribal customs dictated against the Christian sensitivity and way of life and made the missionaries understand that their conversion would be a uphill struggle.

When explorers came from Europe many disdained the native people of America. They brought with them a culture that disturbed the natural balance. They brought diseases for which the Native Americans had developed no resistance and weapons which enabled one group of people to make another captive. They also brought the foreign concept that the land demanded ownership and that the natural gifts of the earth belonged to a specific individual.

But also, during the two month Atlantic journey came the Jesuit priests, dressed in their black robes, who were trading their French education and homeland for a chance to share with the native Americans what was most dear to them - their faith, their belief in God's love. They came with full knowledge that they would likely suffer and die for the truths they held most dear. And they were not wrong.

Missionary Experience

At last Fr. Jogues had the chance of travelling by canoe deep inside the Indian Nations' territory, accompanied by Jean, a Jesuit lay helper. For weeks the two newcomers squatted shoeless and motionless in the fragile canoes as they followed the St. Lawrence and Ottawa Rivers westward. The Jesuits at Three Rivers had told Fr. Jogues to be of as

much use as possible, so he helped gather wood for their evening meal and helped carry the canoes and supplies when they came to dangerous rapids or to the land they must cross between waterways. Jean and Fr. Isaac began to grow accustomed to the Hurons' habits and to the sound of their language, and learned of necessity to eat the native food.

The Hurons were traditionally friendly to all strangers. The Blackrobes felt free to move in and out of the longhouses of the villages and knew the Indians would share what they had with them. The Hurons felt equally free to sit near the fire in the Blackrobes' lodge, to partake of their meals, and to talk to them of their belief. Sometimes they would wait for hours to hear the clock chime over and over, mystified, and convinced that a spirit within it was speaking to the priests.

Pere Jean de Brebeuf, who had been the first "Blackrobe" to reach the Hurons a few years before and who would later be martyred and canonized, greeted Isaac when he reached the Huron village near the present location of Midland, Ontario. Fr. Jogues' arrival brought the Blackrobes' total to five, three recently arrived. Fr. Brebeuf began sharing his several years of experience with the newer missionaries. "We can only progress slowly and count on God's ways," he cautioned the newcomers.

He had baptized few Hurons in the years he had been there, most as they lay dying. Only God would know, if they made progress. Christian conversion seemed far distant to the missionaries. When the yearly reports that traveled east by canoe and ship reached France, the missionaries admitted to no conversions among the Hurons - until a surprising thing happened.

One day, at a council fire, a respected old warrior spoke up and related the concern and wisdom he had seen the Blackrobes freely share. He asked Fr. Brebeuf to baptize him. Later Fr. Brebeuf questioned the Huron closely to make sure he realized the radical difference baptism should make in his way of life. The brave was committed to that change and so was baptized, given Peter as Christian name. This man of stature gave credence to the Blackrobes' views so that other families joined "Peter" and the new Christian way of life.

They lived together in villages for mutual support. They prayed in the way of the Blackrobes. Their way of life made a marked, contrast to that of their tribesmen. Becoming a Christian was a radical decision but, once they took the step, they were as unflinching in their faith as their Huron training had required in every other aspect of their lives. Eventually many Hurons would be Christian martyrs.

