

Father Hubert Boumans (1914-1993): “Father Ever Blasting”

The CICM “*Elenchus Defunctorum*” of 2015 mentions the names of 2,342 deceased confreres. Some of them died very young. Two became more than one hundred years old. Among them we have numerous pioneers, fine scholars, and outstanding bishops. Many of them were also generous brothers and priests who never made it to Wikipedia or Facebook. About one confrere belonging to this last group, namely father Hubert Boumans, I will write a few lines.

From the end of October 1983 up to the end of April 1988, I was a missionary in Natonin, Mountain Province, Philippines, and a distant neighbor of father Hubert Boumans who was the rector of the mission of Barlig.



Father Boumans was born in Ubachsberg, municipality of Voerendaal, Limburg, the Netherlands, on February 10, 1914. At the minor seminary of Sparrendaal, he completed his humanities. He entered the novitiate in 1935, and was dreaming of being a missionary in China. He pronounced his first vows on August 8, 1936. After having finished his philosophical studies and three years of theology, he was ordained a priest on July 25, 1941. The second world war delayed his departure for the Philippines. From August 1944 to April 1946, he was treasurer of the novitiate in the Netherlands. Only on August 9, 1946, was he able to sail for the Pearl of the East.

At the end of 1946, he was assigned to Barlig mission which at that time covered also the mission of Natonin. His stay of 41 years in Barlig mission was only interrupted by a four year stay in Dutch Limburg for mission promotion (1955-1959).

In Barlig, he started as assistant of father Omer Jonckheere (1911-1992). In 1950 he became the rector of the mission of Barlig when father Omer received another assignment, and the mission of Barlig was divided into two missions: the mission of Barlig and the mission of Natonin.

During all his years in Barlig, father Hubert meant a lot for the people. Aside from his “strictly priestly” activities, he served the people in many ways. When he was about to go on his first home leave, the people complained to Father Provincial: “But who will now repair our watches, flashlights, and Petromax (pressurized kerosene lamps)?” Hubert could patiently listen to the people who came to him. He took his time, and there was plenty of it. However, not all confreres or superiors appreciated his extreme patience, and many called it slowness. Other confreres realized that pioneering missionaries need to foster the beautiful virtue of patience. It takes time before people can grasp why a missionary came to live among them. After some time, they realize that he is not trying to find a wife; they observe that he is not engaged in business

enterprises, nor is he running for mayor... And so people ask themselves and others: “Why is this man living here among us?” Slowly, some people see the light.

In 1955, the Provincial Superior, father Rafael Desmedt, had to admit that Barlig mission was not an easy mission. “Fortunately,” he writes, “Hubert is patient and does not give up. He has also some hobbies so that he can relax.”

Hubert had time, unbelievable much time for anybody who approached him. When I was his neighbor in Natonin, I had always to pass Barlig in order to attend the recollection in Bontoc. Every two months I would undertake the trip. Usually, the recollection started the Monday evening and lasted up to Tuesday noon. After the 8 o’clock Sunday mass in Natonin, I and a companion would hike seven or eight hours to Kabawa, where Hubert or his driver would be waiting to bring me to Barlig. Upon arrival strong coffee was prepared for the tired missionary, while people were dropping by for a chat. Hubert listened patiently to their joys and woes. Unfortunately for my hungry stomach, these conversations delayed supper for quite some time. During and after supper, Hubert would inquire about my activities and life in Natonin. At midnight, Hubert would listen to the BBC news. By that time I was slowly being embraced by Morpheus, and Hubert encouraged me to go and sleep.

Father Hubert tried to help people whenever he could. One of the felt needs of the people was the improvement of the irrigation system. Especially the presence of many big boulders in the rice fields irritated the people because they took too much space. There was only one way of removing them, blasting them to smithereens. And lo and behold, in the course of time Hubert became a blasting specialist. This rare charisma, at least among CICM missionaries, earned him the nickname “Father Ever Blasting.” His fame spread, and confreres of other missions in the mountains and elsewhere, benefitted from his blasting expertise. In this way he also contributed a lot to the opening of the road between Paracelis and Natonin in the 1970s.

Hubert not only blasted rocks in the ricefields, repaired pressurized lamps and watches, improved the irrigation system, contributed to the opening of a road, he also opened the way to Jesus.

He was not able to make all the paths straight,
nor make low every mountain or hill,
nor make all rough ways smooth.
During 41 years, he let light shine on the path to
the Lord Jesus.
In his own way, he contributed to the birthing
of Jesus in many hearts.



After his visit to father Hubert in 1989, the Superior General, father Michel Decraene, wrote him a short note to thank him, and to wish him good health so that he could continue to witness to Jesus by a simple life of dedication.

On July 28, 1991, Hubert celebrated fifty years of priesthood in Ubachsberg. His last years he would now spend in the retirement house Home Sweet Home in Baguio City. Many Barlig friends, who had moved to the city, visited him.

In the course of 1993, his physical condition weakened. When the people of Barlig came to know this, they called for a meeting. During the meeting of June 13, 1993, attended by members of the Catholic Women's League, the Knights of Columbus, the Catholic Youth Organization, Catholic parishioners, and others, two points were discussed: [1] will we bury Hubert in Barlig? [2] if yes, where will we prepare his last resting place? It was unanimously decided "that the body be brought home," and that he would be buried in the grotto compound. The minutes of the meeting also mention that the municipal engineer of Barlig and the Knights of Columbus will make plans for the tomb, and find ways and means to finance the whole undertaking.

On August 3, 1993, father Hubert passed away in the Sacred Heart Hospital of Saint Louis University, Baguio City. His body remained two days in Baguio, and was then transferred to Barlig where he was laid to rest. "Father Ever Blasting" is now enjoying God's everlasting love and presence.

Fr. André De Bleeker, cicm

Bishop Ferdinand Hamer: An Outstanding Martyr (1840-1900)

During the summer of 1864, when Father Théophile Verbist, founder of the Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (CICM), visited some seminaries in the Netherlands to win candidates for the mission work in China, Ferdinand Hamer was the first to present himself. This was barely a couple of weeks before his ordination to the priesthood.

On August 21, 1840, he was born in Nijmegen, where his parents had a grocery store. He was the seventh of nine children. One brother entered the Franciscan order, and another became a Jesuit. From the time of his entrance in Scheut on October 15, 1864, he had found an atmosphere of brotherhood and readiness to sacrifice, and so he quickly felt at home there. In a letter written in early January 1865, he characterized his five confreres as broad-minded guys with open hearts. That was very much to his liking.

On August 15, 1865, he professed his first vows, and ten days later he began his journey to China with the first group of Scheutists. His companions were Théophile Verbist, Aloïs Van Segvelt, Frans Vranckx, and a lay person Paul Splingaerd. On December 5, 1865, they arrived in Xiwanzi, the central mission station of Inner Mongolia, and also the very first mission station of the Scheutists.



To East Mongolia

He could scarcely stammer a few words in the Chinese language when he was assigned in the territory of the “Black Waters” in East Mongolia. This made him feel helpless in the midst of all the work. Initially, he had to leave most of it to a freshly ordained Chinese priest with whom he discussed the work in Latin. Yet, he did not lose courage. He wrote to Father Verbist: “Even during the saddest moments I thanked God for being a missionary... I have wanted the missionary life, so I have also accepted the problems and difficulties that go with it, and I shall bear them to the end.”

Father Ferdinand was a man of order and discipline. He had a flair for mathematics, a talent already apparent during his humanity studies. At Xiwanzi, when he was the procurator, the confreres called him, because of his brotherly care, “the good Hamer,” although he had more to refuse than to give. In spite of his talent for figures, he preferred direct apostolate. How happy he was when in 1873 he could return to his old place in East Mongolia. In the meantime he had become fluent in the Chinese language. Later, at the end of 1897, he said that those years in East Mongolia, in spite of poverty, famine, bandits, and other miseries, were the most beautiful of his life.

Apostolic Vicar of Gansu



In 1878, Scheut was entrusted with the Gansu vicariate, a territory deep in China that also included Chinese Turkestan and bordered Russia in the West. Father Hamer appeared to be the right man to direct the unusually difficult task of organizing the evangelization in this area. Pope Leo XIII sent him his appointment in full trust. On October 27, 1878, the young Vicar Apostolic received the episcopal consecration at Xiwanzi from the hands of Msgr. Jaak Bax. A month later he was on his way to his see, hundreds of kilometers away.

In a letter, dated May 22, 1882, to his family he describes some of his experiences. What follows is the translation of the original text:

Although I have passed the age of 40 and bear a cross on my breast, I am still the same Ferdinand whom you have known 18 years ago; somewhat older but the same at heart: joyful in the Lord. I am as pleased with the missionary life as I was in the first days. I believe that, should I have to leave it even for a short time, it would mean a greater sacrifice for me than when I left Europe and everything that was dear to me. I love the Chinese as my children, and I now have eight good and virtuous priests with me, who all work diligently and live together in love and unity as true brothers. About the mission of Gansu: since this was a totally new mission, I found nothing in order. There was, so to speak, nothing. Everything had to be started from the beginning. We found here only 1,300 Christians, scattered here and there, completely neglected, poorly instructed, and who scarcely deserved the name of Christian. In these 4 years we have built 7 chapels and residences for missionaries, constructed a high school; the Christians have improved visibly; we had about 60 baptisms of adults and rejoice for about another 100 or so catechumens. This result may appear meager after a diligent effort of 4 years: but if we take into consideration that all beginning is difficult, that we had everything against us, the antipathy of the people – European missionaries had never come this far before – then we have every reason to thank the good Lord.

Seven years later the number of mission stations had grown to 17. There was a minor and a major seminary, and a number of orphanages and medical consultation bureaus.

For his confreres Msgr. Hamer was a true father. “The Bishop,” one of them stated, “always received us with open arms. It was a true joy for him when he could share with his priests what he received from Europe. He inspired them to diligence through his friendly letters. In particular, he knew how to comfort and encourage whenever anyone was faced with the resistance of the mandarins, or when he saw that the work remained without result.” No

wonder that both the Christians and the missionaries loved their Bishop. This showed clearly in 1889 on the occasion of the silver anniversary of his ordination to the priesthood. The faithful flocked together from far and near. Unfortunately sad news awaited them right on that day: Msgr. Hamer had just received his appointment to another vicariate! He had to move to Ortos where Msgr. De Vos had died some time before.

Apostolic Vicar of Southwest Mongolia

First East Mongolia, then Central Mongolia, next Gansu and finally Southwest Mongolia: these are the assignments Msgr. Hamer willingly accepted one after the other. The fact that each time he started the work again with the full force of his energy seems almost sufficient to declare him a saint. It should be kept in mind that in the 1880s the Ortos mission was known as one of the hardest in the whole territory. "The distances between the various districts are great," one of the confreres wrote, "and the journeys very difficult...the roads pass through deserts or sparsely populated areas. It is extremely difficult to find food provisions, and one has often to sleep out in the open with temperatures not seldom more than thirty centigrade below zero. It was not without solid reasons that the superiors, at the passing away of Msgr. De Vos, thought of Msgr. Hamer for this succession. They wanted someone who had enough drive to guide the mission through the difficulties; a man who had shown prudence and wisdom in all his former undertakings, a confrere who was known for his love of his fellow brothers."

Upon the advice of many, the Bishop went first on furlough in the Netherlands, in early 1890. Twenty five years of missionary work had sapped much of his strength. Fortunately, he regained it all, so that by June 1891 he was back in his new vicariate. Once again he gave heart and soul to his task. He personally directed the construction work of his cathedral. With wisdom he adapted the missionary methods to the new circumstances. In times of famine he assisted all those in need whether they were Christian or not.

Martyrdom

In 1899 a secret sect was spreading in north China. Its members called themselves "the united fists for peace and justice," which Europeans incorrectly shortened to "boxers." This sect fostered a merciless hatred to all foreigners and their followers. Hence, they also wanted to uproot Christianity and wipe out every trace of it. It was especially in the months of July and August of 1900 that they inflicted an extremely painful trial on the missions. We can only admire the heroic attitude of Bishop Hamer. While he ordered his missionaries to care for their security, he himself wanted to stay with the Christians at the main mission. With genuine magnanimity he was ready to give his life for them. The boxers took him prisoner. For four days he underwent interrogation after interrogation, and all kinds of tortures. On July 24, he was put on a cart and brought to the vicinity of T'uo-ch'eng City (Duosheng) where he was atrociously put to death. Three poles were standing on the ground, tied together at the top and furnished with an iron hook. Next to this was a pot of oil. The martyr was taken from the cart, stripped of his clothes, wrapped with cotton cloth which was then soaked with oil. Next the

victim was tied, lifted by the feet, and hooked at the top of the poles, head down. Right away the executioner put the cotton afire. There was a dreadful scream, and then the martyr became silent forever. The sacrifice was accomplished, a sacrifice of love.

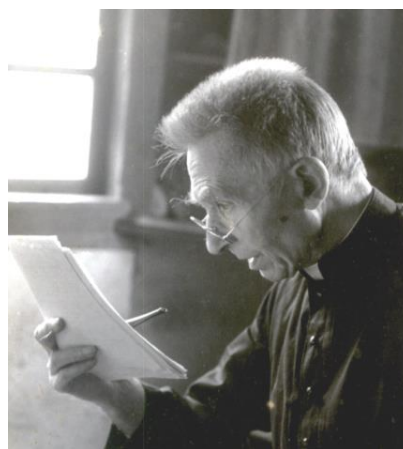
As his episcopal motto Bishop Hamer had chosen the words: **You, o Virgin, be my defender**. He certainly did not realize at that time he entrusted himself to the Queen of Martyrs, who would bestow on him the glorious crown of martyrdom.

Fr. André De Bleeker, cism

Father Morice Vanoverbergh 1885-1982: Illustrious Anthropologist, Linguist and Missionary

In this article, I will sketch the life and activities of Fr. Morice Vanoverbergh, CICM, one of the great CICM missionaries and an outstanding missionary pioneer in the Philippines. The first section will describe his missionary activities in Ilokandia¹ and the Mountain Provinces, while the second section will deal with this fieldwork among the Negritos of Northern and Eastern Luzon. The third section will be an overview of his most important publications. In the final section, I will focus on Fr. Morice Vanoverbergh as a person, anthropologist, linguist, and missionary.

Fr. Vanoverbergh was born in Ooigem, West Flanders, Belgium, on September 20, 1885.² He was the first of seven children. His father was Petrus Vanoverbergh and his mother Francisca Deschietere. After having finished his elementary education in Ooigem in 1897, he went to Roeselare where he studied six years of humanities. In September 1903, he entered the CICM novitiate and he professed his first religious vows on September 8 of the following year.



He studied philosophy at the central house of the CICM at Scheut, Brussels, from 1904 to 1906, and took his theology at the Jesuit Scholasticate in Leuven from 1906 to 1909. He was ordained as a priest at Scheut, Brussels, on July 1909 and professed his perpetual vows on September 8, 1909. Fourteen days after his perpetual profession he left for Manila where he arrived on October 24, 1909.³

¹ Iloko word for the Iloko provinces of the Philippines.

² His first name has been spelled in at least five different ways. But the most common is Morice, the way he usually spelled his first name. Since practically all his publications uses this one, I will use it throughout my article.

³ A note in the *CICM-RP Archives*, box 90.30 mentions October 22, 1909 as his day of arrival. In text of interviews conducted by Henry Geeroms in August 1971, Vanoverbergh mentions October 24, 1909 as his day of arrival. See Henry Geeroms, "Fr. Morice Vanoverbergh, CICM, Reminiscences...:Interviews of Fr. Morice Vanoverbergh, CICM" (CICM-RP Archives, Box 90.30, unpublished text), p. 1. In the CICM archives there is a typewritten Dutch text of the interviews and also a typewritten English version. I assume that the interviews were conducted in Dutch and that Geeroms, or somebody else, translated the interviews into English. In the Congregation's *Elenchus Defunctorum C.I.C.M.* (Rome: 2008), 26, Henri is mentioned as the first name of Geeroms.

1. Missionary Work in Ilokandia and the Mountain Provinces

Bauko (1909-1911)

In December 1909, Fr. Vanoverbergh was assigned to the mission of Bauko. Traveling on horseback via Tagudin, Ilocos Sur, together with Fr. Achiel De Gryse (1883-1960)⁴ and Fr. Jozef De Samber (1882-1944), he reached Cervantes, Ilocos Sur, before Christmas. Fathers De Gryse and De Samber remained in Cervantes to celebrate Christmas. Fr. Omer Cosyn (1881-1911) accompanied Vanoverbergh to Kayan. The latter then proceeded with a porter as far as Tadian. “From that point on,” said Vanoverbergh, “I was on my own and I had to find my way to Bauko. The few Ilocano words which I knew helped me to manage. Fortunately, Fr. Sepulchre⁵ came to meet me.”⁶

In the mission area, there were a few Anglicans, and an ecumenical gentleman’s agreement was upheld. In Vanoverbergh’s words, this “was a kind of mutual agreement: we kept out of each other’s way. Where we started, they stayed away, and vice versa. That was ecumenism.”⁷ Fr. Sepulchre had started a small dormitory for boys. They also opened a small school with one teacher.

Vanoverbergh started collecting plants while still a student in high school. During his novitiate he was advised to continue this hobby because this would be interesting in China.⁸ Fr. Piet Dierickx (1862-1946) was the one who recommended Vanoverbergh to the Bureau of Science in Manila. Vanoverbergh would regularly send flowers to Dr. Eduardo Quisumbing of the Bureau of Science.⁹ Geeroms writes:

They had at once a series of new flowers which I had found. There were certainly some one hundred new kinds, of which about thirty were given my name. One particular flower is named ‘Vanoverberghia Sepulchrae’. This fellow had met Father Sepulchre in Manila. When he had learned that Fr. Sepulchre had died, he added his name to the existing name of the plant to honor his memory. After some time, this botanist requested me to send flowers also to several musea,

⁴ The dates of the birth and death of the deceased CICM fathers in this article are found in *Elenchus Defunctorum C.I.C.M.* (Rome, 2008).

⁵ Fr. Jules Sepulchre (1880-1912) was buried in the church of Bontoc. In Geeroms, 7, Vanoverbergh says: “When later the new church was being constructed, they did not mind his tomb. Consequently, nobody knows now the exact spot where his remains are. Probably somewhere underneath the wall. On the original tomb-stone was engraved a text which said that he had built this (old) church in honor of the Lord God and “*sibi sepulchrum gloriosum*” (and as a glorious sepulcher for himself).”

⁶ Geeroms, 3.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁸ In 1903, CICM was only present in China and Congo.

⁹ See G. E. Mamoyac, “Bontoc Priest Marks Golden Sacerdotal Jubilee among Flock,” *Manila Times* (July 22, 1959). The newspaper clipping in the box does not have the page number.

among others to Chicago, New York, Leipzig, Helsinki, Geneva and still others.¹⁰

After his stint in Bauko, Vanoverbergh was assigned to Sagada. However, his appointment was cancelled, and he received a new assignment as assistant parish priest in Pugo, La Union. Less than a month later he was told to go to Tubao, La Union. While in Baguio City to fetch his assistant, Fr. Jozef Waffelaert (1886-1957), he learned that Fr. Sepulchre had fallen ill. He decided to visit him in Bauko; but on his way, in San Fernando, La Union, he was informed that Sepulchre had died. Arriving in Bauko, he proceeded to attend a requiem mass. Afterwards, he was told to stay in Bauko, and this was some three months after he had left the place.¹¹

Bauko (1912-1915)

In his interview with Vanoverbergh, Geeroms also inquired about his publications. This was his answer:

How it ever started? We arrived in Bauko and we did not know anything. We did not know the language and we did not know anything about the customs of the people. I began to put on paper their songs, their prayers and other customs. Fr. Wins asked me, "Why don't you publish this? Nobody has the opportunity to read your notes and when you will be dead, everything will be lost." I objected, "Who among the CICMs is ever publishing books?! That is not our custom!" However, there was a deaconess in Sagada, a certain Miss Watermann, who had published some sort of grammar of Kankanayi (the dialect of Sagada). This grammar contained a number of "stupidities which were not correct". Fr. Wins said, "Now you see! Why don't you publish yours? Her grammar was published by the government!" Finally, I gave in. I gathered data for the composition of a grammar and a dictionary, and also a series of songs, prayers and stories.¹²

In the beginning of his stay in Bauko, there were no conversions among the adults; the fathers concentrated their activities on the boys of the dormitory. Vanoverbergh says that their efforts were not in vain. Vanoverbergh is happy to state: "This has been in fact the basis of the conversions. One of those boys is now the father of one of our priests (Fr. Vincente Castro). Another man is the father of two Sisters. (There are seventeen Religious Sisters from Bauko!)"¹³

At times religious superiors are making rash judgments, according to Vanoverbergh. He recounted when the Provincial Superior, Henri Raymakers (1860-1928), came to visit Bauko for the first time:

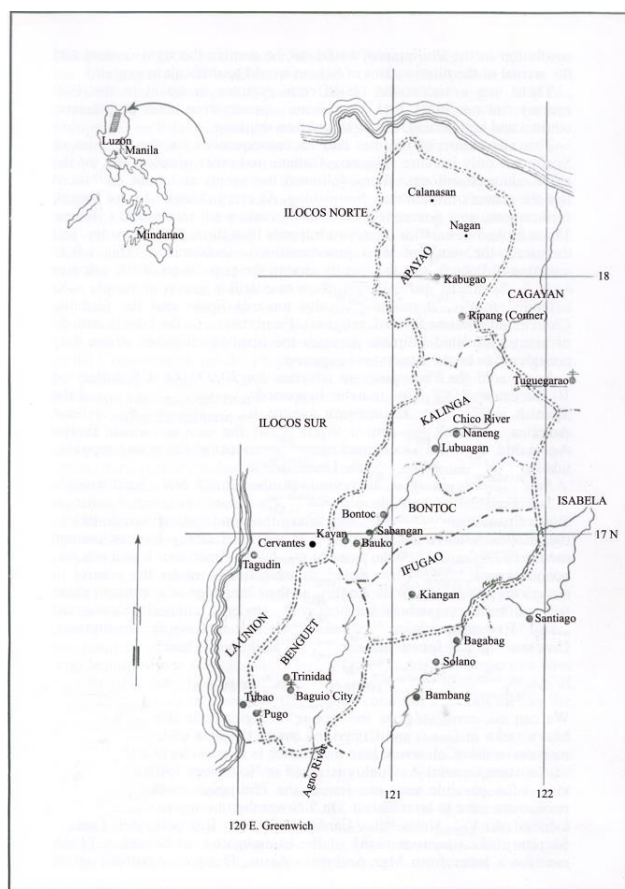
¹⁰ Geeroms, 5-6.

¹¹ Ibid., 6-7.

¹² Ibid., 11. In the third section, as I said, earlier I will mention his most important publications.

¹³ Ibid., 16.

I went to meet him at Cervantes. We were three in all to travel to Bauko. I rode my own horse, Brother Christian was riding on a pony, while Father Raeymakers¹⁴ had mounted an Australian horse. When we reached the river and were about to descend to the bank, I told them to wait for a while. Since the river often changed its bedding¹⁵ in that place, I wanted to find out which path we should follow in order to easily cross the water. The Provincial grumbled, “They don’t even know the way in their own mission!” (In the first place, this was not my mission, and the river ...Oh well, never mind!...)¹⁶



C.I.C.M. Missions in the Philippines – The Apostolic Prefecture of the Mountain Province and outside mission stations administered by C.I.C.M.
Adopted from *Scheut, Congrégation Missionnaire du Coeur Immaculé de Marie*, s.l., 1937, p. 73.

¹⁴ The name should be spelled as Raymakers.

¹⁵ This is a Dutch word meaning the bed (of the river).

¹⁶ Ibid.

Vanoverbergh and Raymakers went to visit Guinsadan because the missionaries considered the possibility of starting a mission there. Vanoverbergh says: “We could reach that place by a detour. So, we went thither. When we arrived there, all the people came out to look. Probably they had never seen an Australian horse and, in addition, a big man with a long beard. The Provincial commented, ‘It is quite obvious that they did not yet often see a missionary here.’”¹⁷

Fr. Wins had come to meet them with some boys, and together they went to the mission house. Vanoverbergh mentions a third instance of rash judgment:

We entered the convent and went upstairs. Just then, an Igorot who had still long hair happened to pass by. He was our neighbor and a good friend of the mission, who allowed all his children to be baptized, and who had helped Fr. Sepulchre to buy our house. When the Provincial saw this man passing by, he said casually, “This is obviously a fellow whom the missionaries did not yet approach too often...”¹⁸

In 1915, Vanoverbergh left Bauko, and there were plans to abandon this mission due to lack of financial means to support the missionaries. World War I was going on and there were less donations coming from Europe. The Provincial Superior requested the bishop of Vigan to assign to the CICM some parishes where the missionaries could be self-supporting.

Bangar (1916-1921)

After a short stint as assistant parish priest in Tagudin, Vanoverbergh was assigned as parish priest in Bangar, La Union.

In Bangar, there was a church and a rectory that had been very much damaged since after the Philippine revolution against Spain (1896-1898). Vanoverbergh had to do a lot of repairs. The people still harbored much anger and resentment against ‘white priests’ due to their past experiences with the Spanish friars. He recalled that “during the first two weeks, they were throwing stones on the roof of the rectory and even through the windows.”¹⁹

A visit by Jaime de Vera, the Filipino Resident Commissioner in Washington, contributed to a change in the attitude of the people. Vanoverbergh summarizes this visit and its aftermath:

¹⁷ Ibid., 16-17.

¹⁸ Ibid., 17.

¹⁹ Ibid., 18.

He had been in Vigan. He was quite interested in orchids. He had learned in Vigan that I was in Bangar and he would visit me. The town mayor with his officials and the policemen were very busy preparing to welcome this prominent visitor. There were two cars transporting the entire Philippine party. The Commissioner came indeed to the rectory to admire my orchids. His visit lasted about one hour. He departed without even acknowledging the presence of the officials. Since that time, I never again got stones on my head!²⁰



Vanoverbergh started collecting words and expressions for his Ilokano dictionary. After five years of fruitful ministry, Vanoverbergh was assigned as parish priest in Tagudin.

Tagudin (1921-1924)

When Vanoverbergh arrived in Tagudin, there were a number of Catholic elementary schools in the barrios, aside from the Catholic elementary school near the church in the center. Regarding the financial aspect of running the schools, he says: “We could support our schools. The Sisters²¹ were selling lace.²² (It was for this business that I had been sent to the States.) The lace business made enough profit to support the schools.”²³

A new rectory had to be built because the old one would be used to house the high school. Vanoverbergh was the director of the school for only one year. After his expedition to the Negritos²⁴ in Apayao and Cagayan²⁵ he was sent to the United States to sell lace made by the Tagudin girls! The proceeds of the sales would be used for financing the running of the Catholic schools in the mission territory of Tagudin.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ The Sisters referred to are the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (ICM).

²² Albert Depré, *From a Tiny Shoot: The History of the RP CICM Province 1907-1982* (N.p.: n.p., n.d.), 78: “Part of the income of the Sisters came from lace-making. They had brought with them from India a girl who was an expert in this art. She taught lace-making to the Tagudin girls who soon proved to be very proficient in producing outstanding work.”

²³ Geeroms, 20.

²⁴ Nowadays, they are called Aetas or Etas.

²⁵ More about these two expeditions in the next section of this article.

Selling lace in the USA (1924-1925)

Vanoverbergh peddled his lace in Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, New York, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Washington, and many other places. Unfortunately, his lace business was not very successful until he met a certain employee in a store. This man was a Catholic Irishman who told him: "Father, in this way you will never sell anything worthwhile. The buyers of lace get every year a free ticket to go and buy lace in France and in Belgium. Consequently, they will not buy from you, because they would forfeit their free trip. You should contact a broker, somebody who negotiates directly with the management without any interference of the buyers."²⁶

Vanoverbergh heeded the advice. He narrated the outcome: "After that, I was able to arrange this with the Consul of Switzerland. We received big orders. And, of course, once the business operated smoothly, the Sisters took over. They themselves went to the States. I have never heard any more about this business."²⁷ His trip to the USA being a great success, Vanoverbergh was called back by telegram to the Philippines. His next mission territory: Apayao.

The Apayao Mission (1925-1932)

In his interview Vanoverbergh states that the provincial superior had very little knowledge about the region of Kalinga-Apayao.

I was assigned to found the Apayao Mission, but I was supposed to reside in Lubuagan. The Provincial told me that I should go to Lubuagan every month. This would have meant six days on horseback to go to Apayao and again six days to return to Lubuagan. I was thus supposed to do practically nothing else but to trail along the road. This was indeed some kind of assignment! But what else could you expect: the Provincial had never been in the mountains, and he probably thought that the distance from Apayao to Lubuagan was more or less the same as that from Paco to Pasig!...²⁸

In the course of the interview Vanoverbergh mentions that he had nothing in Apayao. At that time the mission of Apayao comprised a very wide area, about 2,000 square miles.²⁹ The present province of Apayao and parts of Cagayan were the mission territory of Vanoverbergh and Fr. Jozef Poot (1898-1982). Twice a year, Vanoverbergh went to Allacapan and stayed there a couple of months. Regularly, he visited the other places. "I did not always go to Luna. This was newly started. Practically all the people

²⁶ Ibid., 28

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 31-32. Paco and Pasig are two places in Metro Manila.

²⁹ Morice Vanoverbergh, "The Isneg," *Publications of the Catholic Anthropological Conference* Vol. 3, No. 1 (1932): 3.

were Aglipayans³⁰ there. I visited Pudtol several times for the Holy Week celebrations. I went occasionally to Namatugan,³¹ Bayag³² and other barrios.”³³ His assistant served in Ripang, Conner, where there was a church. In most places the holy Eucharist was celebrated in a school building or any other suitable place.

Whenever Vanoverbergh traveled, he took along a catechist. At times visiting the people was indeed dangerous:

Those trips were very perilous since we had continually to cross rivers. In order to reach Dagadan³⁴ we had to cross the river fifty-nine times in one morning. The river was in fact the road, and every time the river touched a mountain, we had to try to reach the other bank. Sometimes, the river was deep and few people were living in that region. It was, therefore, necessary always to have a companion. We could have drowned, and nobody would have known it.³⁵

Either in 1928 or 1929, (Vanoverbergh could not remember the exact year), the small wooden church of Kabugao was constructed. In 1930, a public high school was opened in Kabugao. This opened new perspectives for evangelization.

Since our relations with the officials were quite friendly, we made an agreement. They said they could not start a high school if there were no dormitories. The students had to come from different places. The boys could be accommodated in the barracks of the soldiers. However, in the case of the girls they could not risk this solution. They asked us whether we could perhaps open dormitories. So, I constructed a small building where the students could sleep. Of course, there was a matron in charge of the girls. They had to bring along their food, and I had to provide them with light.³⁶

Two or three times a week, after class hours, Vanoverbergh would give the students religious instruction. He had good cooperation with the school administration; and consequently, he had quite some influence in the school. Vanoverbergh also taught students during evenings.

³⁰ The Aglipayan Church is an independent church organized in 1902 after the Philippine revolution of 1896–1898 as a protest against the Spanish clergy's control of the Roman Catholic Church. The church continued to follow Roman Catholic forms of worship.

³¹ This is a typing error. The name of the place is Namaltugan, a barangay of Calanasan.

³² This place is now called Calanasan.

³³ Geeroms, 33.

³⁴ Father Geeroms is mistaken here. The place referred to is without doubt Dagara. During my missionary work in Kabugao and Calanasan from 1975 to 1983, I visited the place at least once a year. An experienced hiker could make the trip from Kabugao to Dagara in about six hours. What made it a demanding journey was the fact that the Dagara River had to be crossed more than sixty times. The last settlement upstream the Dagara River is Maragat, about one hour farther than Dagara.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., 34.

In June 1932, Vanoverbergh left Apayao for Tagudin where he stayed only a few months, from July to November. After this short stint he left for Belgium. It was his first furlough since his arrival in the Philippines. In the beginning of 1934, he returned to the Philippines. His new assignment was Tubao, La Union.³⁷

Tubao (1934-1935)

Vanoverbergh ministered in Tubao from April 1, 1934 until December 1935.³⁸ When he arrived, there was a church, a Catholic elementary and high school in the place. The ICM Sisters supported the elementary school financially. The lace business made this possible.³⁹ He reports that “[t]he Fathers were in charge of the financial management of the high school.”⁴⁰

After his stay in Tubao, Vanoverbergh made his second expedition to the Negritos (January 1-June 30, 1936). This time he visited the Aetas along the Pacific coast.⁴¹ After this expedition he was sent to Sabangan.

Sabangan November 1936 – July 1945

In November 1936, he was officially assigned to Sabangan. There were already chapels in Pingad and Supang.⁴² He managed the construction of the church in Sabangan.

The total construction expenses of the church amounted to something between five and six thousand pesos. The money for this construction had come partially from Msgr. Cushing, who was then the director of the Propagation of the Faith in Boston. I had 3,000.00 pesos and he had promised me another 3,000.00 pesos. When he had sent already 2,500.00 pesos, I informed him that it was enough. Later, he has sent me another \$ 500⁴³ for the purpose of painting the church.⁴⁴

There were Catholic elementary schools in the center, Amatek, Pingad, and some other barrios. Vanoverbergh opened a school in Supang.⁴⁵

³⁷ Ibid., 35.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., 35-36.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 36.

⁴¹ More about this expedition in the next section of this article.

⁴² Ibid., 37.

⁴³ During that time the peso had the same value as the dollar.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

When the Japanese imperial forces entered Sabangan, Vanoverbergh went to meet them. He showed his passport to the officer who approached him. His passport proved that he had been four times in Japan before. Vanoverbergh says:

This officer at once was satisfied when he saw all those stamps. This has probably helped me a lot. Sabangan was also the only place where the people had not fled. I had advised the people not to run away, because otherwise their houses would have been burned down and other harm would have been done. I warned them to keep the women inside the houses. I told the men to come with me in order to show that they were not afraid. I was successful, and no acts of violence were committed.⁴⁶

According to Vanoverbergh, it was the American air force which destroyed everything in Sabangan. The church was the first building that was bombed and destroyed. The American command could not claim ignorance about the situation on the ground.

They certainly could not claim that they had been misinformed, because we sent every day two reports to the guerillas: one on the position of the Japanese troops in the municipio,⁴⁷ and another on the movements of the troops that were passing by. Notwithstanding these informations, they have not done anything except bombing the church and the town. They have never shelled or bombed the Japanese garrison near the bridge. This was spared! [...] The bombings began at the end of April and lasted until July.⁴⁸ Almost every week they came over and dropped a load of bombs. We had fled to the forest. I lost a part of the manuscript of my Iloko grammar. Fortunately, a part had been printed already. Fr. Remi Schelstraete had typed the text in Tagudin, and so I was able to copy the typewritten text.⁴⁹

As a result of the bombing raids Vanoverbergh had lost everything. He could not celebrate the Holy Eucharist nor pray the breviary. Due to other causes he had lost all but four of his teeth. After the liberation of the town, he was able to ride in an army truck to Manila, via Cervantes and Tagudin. From the end of July to the end of 1945, he stayed most of the time in the Procuration House.⁵⁰

Seminary of Baguio (1946)

In his interview with Geeroms, Vanoverbergh says only a few words about his work in the seminary: "I was there only for one year. The seminary was housed in the

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ The *municipio* is the town hall.

⁴⁸ This was in 1945.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 38.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 39.

Assumption Convent (Mount Mary) in Baguio, the present location of the University (Saint Louis). I had to teach physiology and also religion to the newcomers.”⁵¹

Bauko (1946-1964)

In December 1946, Vanoverbergh went back to Bauko. Father Henri Geeroms (1912-1983) was his assistant. They resided in Otokan. “I lived in the sacristy of the church and Fr. Geeroms in the house of Meneses.”⁵² The ICM Sisters wanted to remain in Otokan, but Vanoverbergh did not agree because Bauko was the center of the municipality and also of the Christian community. Moreover, the place where the church was built was not stable and sinking.

A chapel was moved from barrio Bagnen to Bauko, and converted into a house, the first residence of the missionaries.⁵³ At the end of 1949, the fathers moved to Bauko and started the construction of a temporary church under the supervision of brother Henri Slegers (1889-1967).⁵⁴ The people contributed a lot of free labor. “They divided themselves into shifts. I gave them some pocket money so that they could buy themselves a drink. The women carried stones which they then crushed to mix in the cement.”⁵⁵ Those, who for one or another reason could not join the work, contributed cash. American benefactors bankrolled the construction materials. The construction work lasted from 1949 to 1950. During the celebration of the Town Fiesta in 1951, the church was blessed by Bishop William Brasseur (1903-1993), Vicar Apostolic of the Mountain Provinces.⁵⁶

In 1958 the construction of the priests’ residence was started. Vanoverbergh’s assistant, Fr. Wilfried Daels (1929-1992), “had requested the Bishop to have the convent ready before my Golden Sacerdotal Jubilee (July 1959).”⁵⁷ Once a month mass was celebrated in the seven barrios which had a chapel. Processions were held “during Holy Week like in the lowlands: On Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and the Sabet⁵⁸ on Easter Sunday morning. All processions, also during the town fiesta, were held on the public

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Gabriel S. Castro, “The Catholic Mission of Bauko: A Brief History,” in *Souvenir Program Golden Sacerdotal Jubilee of Rev. Father Morice Vanoverbergh, C.I.C.M.* (Baguio City: Catholic School Press, 1959), 51.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Geeroms, 40.

⁵⁶ Castro, 53.

⁵⁷ Geeroms, 41.

⁵⁸ This is the enactment of the meeting of the risen Christ and his blessed mother Mary on the morning of Easter Sunday. It is an important part of the popular Easter Triduum celebration in the Philippines.

road in the town. On Corpus Christi and for the Sabet we remained on the patio near the church.”⁵⁹

Every evening, Vanoverbergh taught catechism to the children in the convent. He had done this also in Apayao and in Sabangan.⁶⁰ In 1964, he left Bauko and went on home leave in Belgium. He returned to the Philippines in 1966.⁶¹

Home Sweet Home, Baguio City (1966-1982) and back to Bauko

Apparently, Vanoverbergh had returned to the Philippines with the intention to rest. “I am going to help those who are doing nothing,”⁶² he said. Fathers Jan Zwaenepoel (1926-2008) and Henri Geeroms persuaded him to resume the composition of his Isneg dictionary which was published in 1972. He continued his study of the Kankanay culture and published several articles about it. During the last two years of his life he was practically blind. However, he seldom mentioned his blindness and never complained about it. He finalized the *English-Kankanay Thesaurus* in 1981⁶³ although he could no longer read the final text himself. Somebody read the text to him and he would correct the errors. He had a phenomenal memory.

On November 2, 1982, Vanoverbergh passed away in Home Sweet Home, Baguio City. The following day, a group of Bauko people, led by the mayor, arrived in Home Sweet Home.

They [...] would no more leave him, until they took him “home” on November 5, 1982 after the solemn funeral Mass at the Baguio Cathedral. Night and day they stayed at Home Sweet Home, the residence of Fr. Morice since 1966. They informed us about the wish of Fr. Morice to be buried in Bauko. “As soon as you hear that I am dead, come to Baguio to take me to Bauko,” he had told them in 1969. [...] On November 8, 1982, Fr. Morice Vanoverbergh was buried in Bauko in a monument that had been built years ago.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Ibid., 42.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid., 43.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ In the third section of this article I will say more about his publications.

⁶⁴ Rafael Desmedt, “Father Morice Vanoverbergh, 1885-1982,” *Saint Louis University Research Journal* Vol. XIII, No. 4 (December 1982): 633-4.

2. Fieldwork among the Negritos

In this section I will first discuss how Vanoverbergh came into contact with father Wilhelm Schmidt, SVD, who prodded him to undertake fieldwork among the Negritos of Luzon. Then, I will have a closer look at Vanoverbergh's fieldwork among the Negritos of Northern and Eastern Luzon. Nowadays, as mentioned in footnote 24, Pilipino speakers use the word Agta or Eta to refer to these particular ethnic groups.

Father Wilhelm Schmidt (1868-1954)

Wilhelm Schmidt was a German anthropologist and member of the Society of the Divine Word or SVD. He published extensively, addressing many of his writings on the family and social ethics to a general audience. His major work is *Der Ursprung der Gottesidee (The Origin of the Idea of God)*, 12 vol. (1912–55). In this and in his *Ursprung und Werden der Religion (The Origin and Growth of Religion)* (1930), Schmidt maintained that most primitive peoples believe in a supreme being and that their religion might correctly be regarded as monotheistic.

Schmidt, founder of the journal *Anthropos*, was of the opinion that the study of the pygmy peoples “would be a valuable contribution to the elucidation of the earliest history of mankind.”⁶⁵ In 1910, he made an appeal to anthropologists, ethnologists, scientific institutes, and governments to study these ethnic groups. Initially his appeal found no echo whatsoever. After some time, a number of missionaries and anthropologists started doing fieldwork among these ethnic groups.

Schmidt's main interest in the Pygmies went to the culture of these peoples. In particular, he was struck by their belief in the existence of a high god or Supreme Being. Rahman observes “[w]hatever the shortcomings of Schmidt in certain respects may be, it cannot be denied that he has amassed an impressive amount of material about the existence of the belief in a high god or Supreme being among preliterate peoples. It is hard to see how those anthropologists who cannot find anything but ‘supernatural powers’ or ‘supernaturals’ among these peoples can do justice to the facts.”⁶⁶ According to Rahmann, Paul Schebesta⁶⁷ has stated that Schmidt, “in his attack against mechanical evolutionism, may have pushed the high-god belief too vehemently to the fore but that he

⁶⁵ Rudolf Rahmann, “The Philippine Negritos in the Context of Research on Food-gatherers during this Century,” *Philippine Quarterly of Culture and Society* 3, 4 (December 1975): 206.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ In the 1930s, Fr. Paul Schebesta performed the first anthropological studies on the pygmies of the Ituri Forest, a dense tropical rain forest in the northern part of the Congo River Basin in the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire). It covers a vast area of approximately 62,900 square km.

(Schmidt) was perfectly right with his thesis of the existence of a high-god belief among the oldest peoples (Altvoelker).”⁶⁸

When Schmidt made his appeal in 1910 to study the Pygmy peoples, he did not know that there was already field work being done on the Negritos of the Philippines. Looking for missionaries who could undertake field work among them, he thought that Vanoverbergh had some knowledge of anthropology. But Vanoverbergh states in his interview with Geeroms: “He did not know that I never had opened a book on anthropology.”⁶⁹ Vanoverbergh continues:

He wrote me a letter asking me whether I was willing to go to the Negritos. – At that time, I was the parish priest of Tagudin, a parish of more than 12,000 Catholics, and I was there all alone. - I replied that, as far as I was concerned, I was willing to go, but that my superiors would have to send me. Anyway, I was convinced that this would be out of the question!...

In 1917, Fr. Schmitt⁷⁰ had gone several times to the Headquarters of CICM to ask the permission for me to go. I have learned that Fr. Rutten, who was then the Superior General,⁷¹ once had an audience with the Pope⁷² and that the Pope asked him why he did not allow that Father, whom Fr. Schmitt wanted to send to the Pygmies, to go. With this, Fr. Rutten was, of course, practically forced to grant the permission.

The provincial⁷³ came to inform me in Tagudin that I had to go to the Negritos to do some research work. He had received a letter from Fr. Rutten in which was stated that this was the will of the Holy Father. He commented, “Why must the Pope meddle in this?! I grant you one month leave of absence. After that, you can go to America to sell lace for the financial support of the school. The Pope will not find you there any more.”⁷⁴

Initial Contact with the Negritos of Northern Luzon (April 5 to June 3, 1924)

Before departing for the unknown, Vanoverbergh received a questionnaire from Fr. Karel Desmet (1885-1968). Vanoverbergh comments: “I never had opened a book on Anthropology, and I did not know what kind of report I had to make. Fr. Carlos had in his possession a copy of the questionnaire of the ‘Séminaire d’Ethnologie de Louvain’⁷⁵.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 211-212.

⁶⁹ Geeroms, 12.

⁷⁰ In several places of the text of the interview, the name Schmidt is misspelled.

⁷¹ Fr. Joseph Rutten (1874-1950) was superior general from 1920 to 1930.

⁷² Pope Pius XI (1922-1939).

⁷³ The provincial superior was father Albert Van Zuyt (1920-1925). See Depré, 233. Obviously, Van Zuyt did not realize the importance of studying the culture of the people among whom the missionaries were working.

⁷⁴ Geeroms, 12-13.

⁷⁵ Should read: Séminaire d’Ethnologie de Louvain.

This helped me to find out what I had to observe and also in the selection of data to make my report.”⁷⁶

Rudolf Rahman mentions how Wilhelm Schmidt evaluated Vanoverbergh’s fieldwork among the Negritos of Northern Luzon:

For Father Wilhelm Schmidt the most important achievement of Father Vanoverbergh was the fieldwork among the Negritos of northeastern Luzon. His findings and statements about the religious beliefs and practices of these Negrito groups may not in every instance be the last words about these aspects of their culture; however, the assumption that their high-god belief is simply due to Christian influence is certainly not the last word either.⁷⁷

On April 5, 1924, Vanoverbergh started his journey in Baguio City. In Bacnotan, La Union, he met a certain Mr. Maximo Padua, a professional photographer, who wanted to accompany him during the expedition. His wish was granted. This man took a number of interesting pictures which were published together with the report of Vanoverbergh in *Anthropos*. Together they traveled via Tagudin, Claveria, Tuguegarao, Tuao, Ripang to Kabugao, where they arrived on April 16. They stayed at the house of Captain Lizardo. The following day was Holy Thursday and Vanoverbergh heard some confessions. On April 20, Easter Sunday, he baptized some children, and officiated at two marriages.⁷⁸

The following day, Vanoverbergh and his companion left by boat for ‘negrito land,’ where they met a number of Negritos who were always very friendly, even sad when he left. Vanoverbergh writes that “on the day I left Nagan, over twenty of those living in the neighborhood came to say good bye, and when I came to the shore of the river and entered the boat, many of them wept.”⁷⁹

On May 3, Vanoverbergh met with Fr. Cornelis de Brouwer (1881-1960), a CICM missionary residing in Bontoc,⁸⁰ At that time the whole of Apayao and Kalinga was part of the mission of Bontoc.⁸¹ Fr. de Brouwer was passing by to visit Isneg settlements. Vanoverbergh decided then to travel together with him to Bontoc.

On May 6, Vanoverbergh and de Brouwer left for Kabugao. Reflecting on his short stay with the Negritos, Vanoverbergh muses: “Adieu, kind people, may God bless you and soon send a missionary to lead you on the right road, which, with God’s grace,

⁷⁶ Ibid., 36.

⁷⁷ Rudolf Rahmann, “Obituary: Morice Vanoverbergh, CICM (1885-1982),” *Anthropos* 78, nos. 5-6 (1983): 873.

⁷⁸ Vanoverbergh, “Negritos of Northern Luzon,” *Anthropos* 20, no. 1(1925): 151-9.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 150.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 173

⁸¹ Depré, 246: The missions of Lubuagan and Kabugao were only founded in 1925.

will be an easy thing to do, much easier, humanly speaking, than to convert most of the other pagan tribes, that are living in these mountains.”⁸²

The two missionaries arrived in Kabugao on May 7. From there they continued their journey via Lubuagan to Bontoc, where they arrived on May 24. Four days later, Vanoverbergh left alone for Bauko. On May 30 he arrived in Tagudin, and four days later, on June 3, he reached Baguio City, the place of departure.⁸³

Later, Vanoverbergh will be able to penetrate more deeply into the culture and life of the Negritos. In his interview with Geeroms, he says: “Later, I was assigned in Apayao and, consequently, I had the opportunity to observe and to deal with the Negritos for about seven years. As a result, I wrote more extensively about them.”⁸⁴

Vanoverbergh’s Fieldwork among the Negritos of Northern Luzon (1925-1932)

In this section I will concentrate on what Vanoverbergh wrote about the Negritos' concept of a Supreme Being and their prayer ceremonies.

First their belief in one God. Although Vanoverbergh did not ask direct questions about their belief in one God, he was able to get a clear answer when he was inquiring about the rites they were performing after having shot down a wild boar. One day, he had a conversation with Masigun, a Negrito, who said that they take home the animal, except for a small piece of meat that they stick on a sharpened piece of bamboo and roast it over the fire. Then they place it in a tree and recite a prayer in Negrito-Ibanag. Vanoverbergh quotes the text of the prayer and adds his literal translation: “*Yáwatmi níkaw, apó, ta ariákkami karulatán nga itdán ta lamán*; which translated literally means: we-offer [this] to-thee, lord, so-that you-not-with-us be-disgusted to give [ta] wild-boars.”⁸⁵

Later, Vanoverbergh asked Masigun what they did when they had killed a deer, “and he repeated the same prayer all over, changing *lamán* into *uttá*, deer. Remember that *nikáw* is the singular.”⁸⁶ Then Vanoverbergh asked in Ilokano: “You say: lord; who is this fellow? (I used purposely the term: “daydiay”, which is rather disparaging or even slightly contemptuous.)”⁸⁷ Masigun answered in Ilokano: “ ‘Who he is?’ (and here the expression on his face indicated intense astonishment at my ignorance); ‘well, the one

⁸² Vanoverbergh, “Negritos of Northern Luzon,” 175. Maybe the CICM missionaries could have given more attention to this friendly and well-disposed people. In 1976, during my visit to Palanan, Isabela, I too was struck by the kind and friendly disposition of the members of this ethnic group.

⁸³ Ibid., 176-185.

⁸⁴ Geeroms, 13.

⁸⁵ Vanoverbergh, “Negritos of Northern Luzon,” *Anthropos* 20, no. 2 (1925): 436. Vanoverbergh places accents on the vowels to indicate the stress. Normally these accents are not found in written texts. He indicates in a footnote that [*ta*] before the *laman* is a copulative, and that in this construction it is more or less equivalent to the English ‘some.’

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

who placed the earth, of course' (and at this juncture he made a wide gesture, stretching out his whole arm and moving it from left to right)."⁸⁸

Vanoverbergh points out that Masigun did not use the word *namarsua*, created, which Christian Ilokans use for the Christian concept of creation. Instead, He used *nangikabil* which means he placed or put down. Christian Ilokans never use this term to indicate creation. "Masigun talks Ilokano very well and must certainly have heard the term *namarsuá*. Nevertheless he used *nangikábil*."⁸⁹ Vanoverbergh, who spoke the Ilokano language flawlessly, concludes: "*Namarsuá* is a derivative from the stem *ressuá*, to happen without obvious cause. *Namarsuá* is used only in the technical sense of creator or creation, never in reference to human activities, and means literally: to cause to happen."⁹⁰

After having heard the Negrito belief in one God, creator of the universe, so clearly expressed, Vanoverbergh was struck with wonder.⁹¹ His findings are supporting the conviction of Wilhelm Schmidt that most primitive peoples believe in a supreme being and that their religion might correctly be regarded as monotheistic. The question is of course whether this is the case for 'most primitive peoples'?

Vanoverbergh describes the Negrito prayer ceremony in great detail.⁹² I will limit myself to some salient points. He came across several versions of the text of the prayer which are quite different from one another. Regarding the first version he copied at Nagan, he writes: "The Negritos, who recited this prayer, stated that it was used by all Negritos of that particular country, whenever they met at prayer, and that none other was known. I gave it to several Kagayan and Ilokano to read, but nobody could make head or tail of it; perhaps some European or American scientist will be more fortunate."⁹³ The Negritos too had no idea of what the prayer was all about.

Vanoverbergh is of the opinion that the prayer is an example of the original Negrito language, although he is certain that a few of the terms are certainly Ibanag or Ilokano.⁹⁴ In connection with the original Negrito language, he observes the following: "As to their spoken language, I think I shall have to agree, at least partially, with the statement made by most scientists and travellers, who have written about the Negritos, that is, that they lost their original language and took over the dialect of the people in whose immediate neighborhood they were living."⁹⁵

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid., 435.

⁹² Vanoverbergh, "Negritos of Northern Luzon," *Anthropos* 20, no. 2 (1925): 420-1, 436-43; Vanoverbergh, "Negritos of Northern Luzon again," *Anthropos* 24, no. 3 (1929): 902-5; idem, "Negritos of Northern Luzon again," *Anthropos* 25, no. 2 (1930): 555-8.

⁹³ Vanoverbergh, "Negritos of Northern Luzon," *Anthropos* 20, no. 2 (1925): 421.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 420.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 417. Rudolf Rahman refers to William A. Reed who made a similar observation: "Reed states ... that the Negritos of Zambales 'seem to have lost entirely their own language and

On May 3, 1925, Vanoverbergh attended for the first time the nocturnal Negrito prayer ceremony at Nagan. He was overcome with awe:

The tone, the emotional coloring of the chant and the gestures so impressed me at first that I myself was struck with awe and respect. No doubt could possibly exist but that they felt deeply the sense of communication with the supernatural world. No one could be present at such a ceremony, in the dead of night, hear these solemn chants and see the strikingly reverent bearing of the participants, without being forced to the conclusion that here he treads on sacred ground.⁹⁶

The text of the prayer, 21 lines long, is chanted by men (M) and women (W). Now, follow its first three lines chanted during the above mentioned prayer ceremony.

1. M.: lilímamataralón, tálliaginasosón
W.: gerináy, tabalátanináy
2. M.: maganítokanéroy, tálliaginasosón
W.: kaniaggúray, kagínamaganítoy
3. M.: baróngonawáriton, ritónnakarárriton
W.: nónow, nogónabanabalóy⁹⁷

Vanoverbergh raises the question whether the chant is a real prayer or not. He answers in the affirmative. “That it was a genuine prayer seems to be clear beyond any reasonable doubt.”⁹⁸ Another question has to do with the time or the occasion for performing the prayer ceremony. Masigun repeatedly said that “this ceremony was in vogue at weddings, after burials and at the time somebody was dangerously ill.”⁹⁹ Later, Vanoverbergh learned that some Negritos had it more frequently. However, he does not elaborate. Later at Kabaritan, Vanoverbergh witnessed the Negrito prayer ceremony for a second time. Like at Nagan nobody could explain it to him nor give any translation of the same.¹⁰⁰

to have adopted that of the Christianized Zambal.’ ” And Rahman adds that Reed “seems rather inclined to assume that research into an eventual original language of these Negritos would not lead very far.” See Rahman, “The Philippine Negritos in the Context of Research on Foodgatherers during this Century,” 214-5.

⁹⁶ Vanoverbergh, “Negritos of Northern Luzon,” no. 2 (1925): 439.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 421.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 441.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Vanoverbergh, “Negritos of Northern Luzon again,” *Anthropos* 24, no. 3 (1929): 902.

To the Negritos of the Sierra Madre, Eastern Luzon (from February to June, 1936)

From November 1932 to March 1934, Vanoverbergh was in Belgium. At that time Fr. Wilhelm Schmidt was the director of the Vatican Museum in Rome. Vanoverbergh recalls that Schmidt wrote to him hoping “to meet me in Rome and also in Vienna, in the house of the SVD Fathers.”¹⁰¹ Schmidt also arranged for him an audience with Pope Pius XI. The Pope, speaking in French, “gave me his blessing ... ‘I give in the first place my blessing upon all your scientific work which is so useful for the Church.’”¹⁰²

In 1936 Schmidt came to organize an expedition among the Negritos who were living along the Pacific Coast and other places. Vanoverbergh relates that “[t]his time, I was granted six months leave of absence. But, of course, this adventure was not supposed to cost anything! The Provincial of SVD gave me one thousand pesos, while I received one hundred British pounds from the Society of Linguists of Paris. After all, I could manage financially.”¹⁰³ His plan was also to visit the Negritos in Zambales, but he had no more the time.

Vanoverbergh prepared well for this expedition by, among others, to learn a new language.

I had been obliged to learn the Tagalog language in order to be able to communicate with those people. Interpreters are not reliable in such matters. I experienced this in Montalban: a Tagalog wanted to do the interpreting. However, since I understood and spoke Tagalog, I found out that he sometimes related the opposite of what the Negritoes had said! The Negritoes themselves protested when they heard his report, “We did not say that!”¹⁰⁴

In the course of about five months, Vanoverbergh visited Baler (Tayabas), where he stayed for several weeks; Casiguran (also in Tayabas), where he did research for two months; Montalban, Rizal; and Baggaw, in Central Cagayan (northwestern part of the Sierra Madre).¹⁰⁵

Once more Vanoverbergh is struck by the Negritos’ belief in one sole Supreme Being. His Christian companions were very much surprised to hear the Negritos defend

¹⁰¹ Geeroms, 14.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 13.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Vanoverbergh, “Negritos of Eastern Luzon,” *Anthropos* 32, nos. 5-6 (1937): 908. Baler and Casiguran are now municipalities of Aurora Province created out of Quezon Province in Eastern Luzon. Quezon Province used to be called Tayabas. Baler is the birthplace of Manuel L. Quezon, president of the Philippine Commonwealth government (1935-1944) and his wife Aurora Aragon.

their belief in ‘one God.’ “They could not understand how a Negrito, knowing almost nothing about religion, could be so emphatic about the unity of the Being he worshiped, and even enter into a discussion with the Malays in order to confirm his statements.”¹⁰⁶

Regarding the nocturnal prayer ceremony, Vanoverbergh observed “that the farther we proceed toward the south, the less the Negritos know about it. This also seems to prove that the original Negrito culture has been best preserved among the Isneg-Negritos of the northwest.”¹⁰⁷ He wrote that at Adawag, at the foot of the Sierra Madre Mountains, in eastern Cagayan, “the Negritos at that place did not know what I was talking about, when I quoted some verses from the Nagan prayer.”¹⁰⁸ In Casiguran, and Baler, the Negritos told him that they did not know anything about the prayer and that they did not understand the Nagan prayer text.¹⁰⁹

Vanoverbergh must have made a good impression on the Negritos living in the Sierra Madre Mountains because “[b]efore I had been at Calabgan (Cas.) one week, the Negritos considered me as their missionary and wanted me to baptize their children; later on, they repeatedly proffered the same request.”¹¹⁰

During the second half of 1936, Vanoverbergh wrote two reports on his expedition to the Negritos of Eastern Luzon. “One about anthropology for *Anthropos*, and the other about linguistic findings for the Society of Linguists of Paris. The report for Paris was made in book form.”¹¹¹

3. His Publications

Anybody familiar with the writings of Vanoverbergh is astonished to learn that he never undertook any formal anthropological or linguistic studies. He had a keen sense of observation. No detail escaped his attention. In addition, he was blessed with a phenomenal memory which helped him a lot when learning a language. As a missionary, he was interested in the culture and language of the people because he wanted to share the Good News of Jesus Christ using their own language.

Wherever he went, he mastered the language of the people who were entrusted to his ministry. He learned and wrote about the following languages: Ilokano, Isneg, and Kankanay. As mentioned in the previous section, he also learned Tagalog. In addition he wrote extensively about the culture of the Ilokanos, Isnegs, Kankanays, and Negritos.

¹⁰⁶ Vanoverbergh, “Negritos of Eastern Luzon,” *Anthropos* 33, nos. 1-2 (1938): 161.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 162.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 164.

¹¹¹ Geeroms, 14. The book being referred to is *Some Undescribed Languages of Luzon* (Nijmegen: Dekker & van de Vegt, N.V., 1937).

What follows is an enumeration of the most important publications of Vanoverbergh concerning the culture and language of the people with whom and among whom he lived.

Iloko Culture

“Iloko Constructions.” *The Philippine Journal of Science* 62, no. 1 (January 1937): 67-88.

“Iloko Furniture and Implements.” *The Philippine Journal of Science* 64, no. 4 (December 1937): 413-33.

“Iloko Games.” *Anthropos* 22, no. 1 (1927): 216-243.

“The Iloko Kitchen.” *The Philippine Journal of Science* 60, no. 1 (May 1936): 1-10.

Iloko Language

English-Iloko Thesaurus. Baguio City: Catholic School Press, 1959.

Iloko-English Dictionary: Rev. Andrés Carro's Vocabulario Iloco-Español.

Translated, Augmented and Revised. Baguio City: Catholic School Press, 1956.

Iloko Grammar. Baguio City: Catholic School Press, 1955.

Isneg Culture

“Isneg Songs.” *Anthropos* 55 (1960): 463-504; 778-824.

“Religion and Magic among the Isnegs: I. The Spirits.” *Anthropos* 48 (1953): 71-104.

“Religion and Magic among the Isnegs: II. The Shaman.” *Anthropos* 48 (1953): 557-568.

“Religion and Magic among the Isnegs: III. Public Sacrifices.” *Anthropos* 49 (1954): 233-275.

“Religion and Magic among the Isnegs: IV. Other Observances” *Anthropos* 49 (1954): 1004-12.

“Religion and Magic among the Isnegs: V. Samples of Pakkáv.” *Anthropos* 50 (1955): 212-240.

“The Isneg.” *Primitive Man* 3 (April 1932): 1-80.

“The Isneg Domestic Economy.” *Annali Lateranensi* 18 (1955): 119-256.

“The Isneg Life Cycle: I. Birth, Education, and Daily Routine.” *Primitive Man* 3 (March 1936): 81-186.

“The Isneg Life Cycle: II. Marriage, Death, and Burial.” *Primitive Man* 3 (December 1938): 187-280.

Isneg Language

Isneg-English Vocabulary. Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1972.

Kankanay Culture

“Kankanay Religion.” *Anthropos* 67 (1972): 72-128.

“Prayers in Lepanto Igorot as It Is Spoken at Bauko.” *Journal of East Asiatic Studies* 2, no. 2 (1953): 1-28; no. 3 (1953): 69-107; no. 4 (1953): 39-105.

Kankanay Language

A Dictionary of Lepanto Igorot or Kankanay as It Is Spoken at Bauko. Vienna-Mödling: St. Gabriel’s Mission Press, 1933.

Negrito Culture and Language

“Additional Notes on Negritos of Northern Luzon.” *Anthropos* 31, no. 3 (1936): 948-954.

“Negritos of Eastern Luzon.” *Anthropos* 32, nos. 5-6 (1937): 905-28; 33, nos. 1-2 (1938): 119-64.

“Negritos of Northern Luzon.” *Anthropos* 20, no. 1 (1925): 148-99; no. 2 (1925): 399-443.

“Negritos of Northern Luzon Again.” *Anthropos* 24, no. 1 (1929): 3-75; no. 3 (1929): 897-911; *Anthropos* 25, no. 1 (1930): 25-71; no. 2 (1930): 527-65.

The above incomplete list of articles and books by Vanoverbergh gives us an idea of his monumental scientific work.

4. Illustrious Missionary, Anthropologist, and Linguist

Illustrious Missionary

Vanoverbergh joined the CICM Congregation in order to be a missionary. For about fifty years, ministered to the inhabitants of the Mountain Provinces. On horseback or hiking, he visited his flock living in the most isolated settlements. Throughout his stay among the Ilokanos, Isnogs, and Kankanays, he paid special attention to religious instruction. “While a missionary at Bangar and Tagudin, he prepared an outline of doctrine, that served as the basis of his sermons and instructions for many years. He called it ‘Christian Doctrine Outline;’ it was written in Ilocano.”¹¹² He taught in two seminaries for about fifteen months. He never taught in institutions of higher learning although he was a monument of scholarship.

Wherever he went, Vanoverbergh was close to the people. Fr. Rafael Desmedt (1905-1990) writes: “In spite of his superior talents, he lived a simple and sober missionary life, close to the Ilocanos of Tagudin and Bangar, to the Kankanays of Bauko and Sabangan, to the Isnogs of Apayao, to the Negritoes of Pudtol and Casiguran.”¹¹³ With enthusiasm he would talk about his missionary work:

...about the Holy Week processions which were objective lessons in religion for the people, especially the children; then, one could see mothers holding their small children by the hand and explaining to them the holy persons represented by the statues. The “sabet” (the meeting of Jesus and Mary after His resurrection) of early Easter Sunday drew his special approval.¹¹⁴

In order to better understand and communicate with his flock, Vanoverbergh made it a point to learn their language well. Mastering the language of the people was a priority for him because he wanted to share with them a very important message, the Good News of Jesus Christ. Being a good listener, he was able to grasp the intricacies of the languages he was learning.

Vanoverbergh was also a grateful missionary because he always thanked his benefactors. In his interview with Geeroms, he said:

I have sent a letter of thanks to all those kind people. I never had to ask anything. The only thing I had to do was to thank. They understood that a missionary always needs something. [...] Now I do not write any more to those who did not answer since 1964. This means that still now I correspond with some sixty to seventy benefactors. I really must not beg any longer, but these are all people with whom I had contact for forty years or more. They would, of course, take it

¹¹² Desmedt, 632.

¹¹³ Ibid., 631.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 632.

amiss if I would stop writing them now. I still write them once a year, on the occasion of Christmas.¹¹⁵

On several occasions he expressed his gratitude for the assistance he received from religious and diocesan priests, bishops, and officials. For instance, upon leaving Kabugao for Bontoc, Vanoverbergh thanks the household of Captain Lizardo – “our kind hosts for their inexhaustible generosity and hospitality.”¹¹⁶

In a short note, dated September 1, 1948, addressed to the Provincial Superior he writes that he is not a letter writer.¹¹⁷ This statement seemingly contradicts what he mentions in his interview with Geeroms:

When I was assigned in Bangar, I wrote a letter to editors of more than thirty magazines and newspapers in the U.S.A. I asked whether they would be so kind to request their readers to send their discarded magazines and newspapers to me. I explained that I did not have the means to buy all those publications, which, at the same time, could be an aid to teach English to the children of my school. [...] I had at once 1200 addresses of people who had responded to my appeal! I have sent a letter of thanks to all those kind people.¹¹⁸

He was, after all not only a great letter writer, but also a grateful one who had sent thank-you letters to thousands of people.

Vanoverbergh also realized that providing basic education and literacy is an important missionary activity. Hence, he gave plenty of attention to the management of the schools entrusted to his care. For sure his commitment to the Gospel fueled his missionary activities. The people among whom he was working were touched by his kindness and interest in their daily life. It is no surprise then that the people of Bauko, where he had ministered for more than twenty years, insisted that their beloved Father Moricio will be buried in their place.

Illustrious Anthropologist

Although he had no formal training in anthropology, Vanoverbergh became one of the “most outstanding pioneers in the ethnographic and linguistic fields of Northern Luzon.”¹¹⁹ In between his missionary duties he found the time to learn firsthand the ways of life of the people. He meticulously jotted down their religious ideas, riddles, songs, and tales. He did this wherever he was assigned.

¹¹⁵ Geeroms, 41.

¹¹⁶ Vanoverbergh, “Negritos of Northern Luzon,” *Anthropos* 20, no. 1 (1925): 176.

¹¹⁷ This letter is found in box 90.30 of the CICM-RP Archives. The letter was written in Dutch, and the words used: “Ik ben geen groote brievenschrijver.” (I am not a great letter writer.)

¹¹⁸ Geeroms, 40-41.

¹¹⁹ G. E. Mamoyac, “Bontoc Priest,” no page number.

He recorded in great detail what he observed. Eufronio Pungayan gave this description of him: “[N]atural talent for observing human behaviour and lifeways enabled him to produce many fine writings [...]. He was a first-hand culture analyst.”¹²⁰ Maybe he felt obligated to write down what he observed. Did he realize that, sooner or later, the people he was with would change their ways, and that he was a prime factor of the coming changes, and that he should record how they originally lived? I would not know.

Vanoverbergh also had contacts with Filipino scholars. Rudolf Rahmann mentions in the obituary for Vanoverbergh: “Quite early he had established friendly relations with Filipino scholars in Manila, and he told me that it was his concern to make them realize what great treasures and values the Philippines possesses in the multiple aspects of the culture of the archipelago’s populations.”¹²¹

According to Wilhelm Schmidt, Vanoverbergh’s most important achievement was his fieldwork among the Negritos of Northern and Eastern Luzon. Indeed, he left us very important reports about their way of life, religious ideas and concepts. The list of his anthropological and ethnographic publications is very impressive. His writings give the reader an idea of how the Isnegs, the Kankanays and Negritos were living and what were their beliefs during the first sixty years of the twentieth century. Rudolf Rahmann and Gertrudes R. Ang wrote this assessment:

Due to his scholarly efforts, much of the lore of these peoples has been saved from complete loss.... The wealth of information provided by the papers listed in the bibliography reflect the fruitfulness of the years Fr. Vanoverbergh devoted to these people. Many of his writings are considered excellent original contributions on hitherto undescribed aspects of their material culture.¹²²

Illustrious Linguist

In the course of his missionary life, Vanoverbergh became “an outstanding authority on the Iloko language.... No scholar, Filipino or foreigner, has probably as assiduously and devotedly studied the language of the Ilokanos as this dedicated missionary.”¹²³ In recognition of his contribution to the enrichment of the Ilokano language, the Ilocano Heritage Foundation Inc. bestowed on him a special award on July 25, 1974.¹²⁴

¹²⁰ Eufronio L. Pungayan, “Reflections on the Life and Works of Fr. Morice Vanoverbergh in Northern Luzon,” *Saint Louis University Research Journal* 13, no. 4 (December 1982): 425.

¹²¹ Rahmann, “Obituary: Morice Vanoverbergh,” 872-3.

¹²² Rudolf Rahmann and Gertrudes R. Ang, “Dedication,” *Philippine Quarterly of Culture and Society* 3, no. 4 (December 1975): 201.

¹²³ Marcelino A. Foronda, Jr., “Portrait of a Missionary as Scholar,” *Chronicle Magazine* (July 20, 1968): 6.

¹²⁴ Rahmann and Ang, 201.

But Vanoverbergh did not confine his linguistic interest to the Iloko language. When in Bauko he began working on a grammar of Lepanto Igorot or Kankanay, the language of the place. His dictionary of Kankanay was published in 1930. During his stay in Apayao he gathered the materials for his *Isneg-English Vocabulary* which was published when he was already 87 years old. When I checked the worldwide web for Isneg dictionaries, I found only one, the one of Vanoverbergh.

What puzzled him very much was the fact that the Negritos of Northern Luzon had no idea of what the text of their prayer ceremony meant. Did they lose their original language? “I think I shall have to agree, at least partially, with the statement made by most scientists and travellers, who have written about the Negritos, that is, that they had lost their original language and took over the dialects of the people in whose immediate neighborhood they were living.”¹²⁵

Concluding remarks

Looking back at the missionary and scientific work of this great missionary, one can only admire his commitment to the people among whom he lived. He befriended them and they loved him in return. He also made Filipino scholars aware of the rich cultural heritage of the peoples of Northern Luzon. He made very valuable contributions to the history and cultural heritage of the Philippines.

Without exaggeration it can be stated that he is a model for all CICM missionaries wherever they are active. He lived in contact with the people he sought to evangelize, and put the words of Anthony Bellagamba into practice long before they were written down: “The struggle of the people, their hopes and concerns, their vision of life, their experience of death, their cosmological theories, their methods of being community, their understanding of authority, their use of authority, their sexual drives, and their whole system of values are, or should be, of great interest to cross-cultural personnel.”¹²⁶

As a missionary he was truly a person of the present and also of the beyond. According to Peter C. Phan, persons of the beyond “must go beyond their own cultures, histories, values, mother tongues, native symbols, even their religions, not in the sense of rejecting them, but in the sense of “emptying” themselves of them in order to be guests

¹²⁵ Vanoverbergh, “Negritos of Northern Luzon,” *Anthropos* 20, no. 2 (1925): 417.

¹²⁶ Anthony Bellagamba, *Mission and Ministry in the Global Church* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1992), 95; quoted by Peter C. Phan, *In Our Own Tongues: Perspectives from Asia on Mission and Inculturation* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2003), 146.

and strangers among the people they evangelize and to receive and adopt as far as possible their hosts' cultures and ways of life."¹²⁷

Vanoverbergh has spent practically his whole active missionary life among marginal people like the Isnegs, Kankanays, and Negritos. He crossed the border of poverty and lived a very simple life. What filled his heart and mind, the Good News of Jesus, became alive in his actions and words. In short, he was a true missionary, a model for all missionaries.

Fr. André De Bleeker, cism

¹²⁷ Phan, 146-7.

Jozef-Juul Vandeputte (1886-1983)

On March 12, 1886 Jozef-Juul Vandeputte was born in Kortrijk, Belgium. He was the second child, eight more siblings will come after him. He studied humanities at St-Amandscollege, Kortrijk. In 1904, at the end of the sixth year, he finished second behind the *primus perpetuus* (the eternal first), Henri Lamiroy, later bishop of the diocese of Brugge, Belgium.

In 1905, after having worked one year at home on the farm, he went to Scheut with the dream of being a missionary in China and never to return to Europe. With this in mind he will study the Chinese language for ten years. On September 7, 1905 he started his novitiate in Scheut. On September 8, 1906 he pronounced his vows. From 1906 to 1909, he studied philosophy at the Gregorian University in Rome, and obtained a doctorate in philosophy. From 1909 to 1913, he studied theology in Leuven. On June 1, 1912 he and his brother Jules were ordained priest in Brugge. Two of his sisters entered the ICM Congregation. Two more brothers became diocesan priests. His brother Hector also entered CICM. Unfortunately, on August 19, 1916 Hector, who was a stretcher bearer, got killed on the battlefield.



In 1913, Fr. Vandeputte was assigned to teach philosophy in Scheut. During the war he also taught in the Netherlands. In 1919 he taught liturgy in the house of Leuven, and was also the spiritual director and the treasurer.

His China dream remained a dream because he was sent to Congo. On September 8, 1921 he left for the mission of Lisala. From 1921 to 1930, he was Director and teacher at the minor seminary of Lisala.

Abbé Mohuku Mataa Bolobo Gérard has left us a moving and precious testimony. Fr. Vandeputte, our Rector of the minor seminary of Mankanza, loved the seminarians very much. It was not always easy to feed the seminarians. And so every Wednesday afternoon, he allowed us to go hunting and fishing. He also made us plant manioc and vegetables in our beautiful garden. During vacation time, Fr. Vandeputte, always accompanied by his seminarians, loved to visit the Christians living along the river from Mankanza to Malele. We were rowing and singing. He would pray the rosary or the breviary. Every evening he would assign one of us to give the homily the following morning during the Mass. What has struck us very much is the fact that he never got angry nor ever has shouted at us. When I was

accused of some wrongdoing by the Prefect of discipline, Fr. Vandeputte called me. He let me explain my side and he never interrupted me. He only said: “Hm! Hm!,,Hm!..” After having listened to my explanations, he gave me fatherly advice. He has never punished me. He always told me: “Be careful. Think very well before doing something.” During his conferences, he insisted very much on daily meditation and prayer.

It is worthwhile to note that the first priests of Lisala were seminarians of Fr. Vandeputte. Indeed, on February 12, 1938 Mgr. Egied De Boeck ordained his first priests at Lisala. They were: Pascal and Paul Ebamba (two brothers), Casimir Bakaki, Médard Bokula, and Honoré Nzenze.

During the Chapter of 1930, Father Vandeputte was elected First Assistant. He was also Master of novices for one year. On December 11, 1934 the Superior General, Constant Daems, died, and Fr. Vandeputte took over the government of the Congregation. He informed Rome about the situation. On March 4, 1935 the reply of the Sacred Congregation of the Propaganda Fide was received. In the letter, Cardinal Fumasoni-Biondi, the Prefect of the Propaganda, stipulated that Fr. Jozef Vandeputte was made head of the Congregation, in the capacity of Vicar General, with all the powers of a Superior General until the next Chapter (which normally should take place in 1940. However, due to World War II, the next Chapter will only be organized in 1947.).

February 6, 1937 is the official beginning of the CICM mission in Indonesia. In a letter, the Propaganda entrusted the southern part of the Vicariate of Celebes (Sulawesi) to CICM. In 1946, the General Council appointed ten confreres for the new mission in the United States.

On July 14, 1947 the fifth General Chapter started in Scheut, Brussels. Three days later, Fr. Jozef Vandeputte was elected Superior General in the first round by unanimous vote, with the exception of his own vote. The General Chapter gladly accepted the beginning of a new mission in Japan.

On March 27, 1948 during his visit to the confreres in China, Superior General Jozef Vandeputte held a meeting with the Provincial Superiors and Paul Coucke, the Rector of the study house in Beijing. They decided to annul the destination of the young missionaries who were already studying in Beijing and to destine them for missions outside China. They also decided to let the old and sick missionaries return to Belgium. This decision was not welcomed by everybody. The Internuncio Mgr. Antonio Riberi said: “I am fond of the missionaries of Scheut, but I do not like their Superior!”

After the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, missionary work became very difficult in China, and the confreres were being sent to new missions: Chile, Haiti, Guatemala, Hong Kong, and Taiwan.

After the sixth General Chapter of 1957, Fr. Vandeputte departed for Lisala, where he was the Rector of the Provincial House. After breaking his ankle, he returned to Belgium in 1962, and went to reside in the house of Kortrijk. In 1967, he moved to the retirement house in Torhout, and later to the house of Rumbeke. In 1982 he was able to celebrate an exceptional jubilee: seventy years a priest! The confreres hoped he would become one hundred years old. However, he had no such wish. He was eager to meet his Lord, the foundation of his life. On October 27, 1983 he died in Roeselare. He was buried in the cemetery of our retirement house in Schilde.

Fr. Jozef Vandeputte was a man of imposing stature. Some likened him to the Moses figure of Michelangelo. For the CICM Congregation he was a giant. He was not the best speaker in the world, but what he said was always the soundest and the most concrete thing to say. As Superior General, he was an energetic and dedicated priest, a humble religious.

During the 23 years that he guided the Congregation, about 1,100 confreres left for the missions. Notwithstanding his many concerns, he always had time for everybody. It was easy to go and talk to him, for he was simplicity incarnated. One of his classical questions was: "Father or Brother, don't your superiors cause you too much trouble?" After having listened to the reply, he continued: "And have the superiors not too much trouble with you?" The confreres had a high respect for him, and they appreciated his kindness.

During the tumultuous nineteen sixties, on account of his wisdom and faith, he was a support for the old confreres who were in panic: what is happening in the Church, in the Congregation, in the formation houses? Some were encouraging him to write protest letters. His response was always: it is the church of the Lord. He knows what he is doing, and the Holy Spirit is also now at work in the superiors!

Fr. Jozef Vandeputte has spent hours in prayer. In a letter of May 23, 1970 addressed to Fr. Wim Goossens, the Superior General, he speaks about the need to pray. He also mentions that he feels guilty of not having reacted more forcefully against a growing slackening of the prayer life in the congregation during the years that he was leading the Congregation.

Gradually, he let go of everything. Due to medical care, he even had to let go of his long beard. When in the hospital, he often spoke of returning to the Lord. Notwithstanding his longing to meet his Lord, he remained himself: "You should not pray that the Lord hurry to take me along. May his will be done. He takes the decision, and that is Ok for me."

Now we should be grateful for his life by continuing the task entrusted to the Congregation.

“Mon” Van Genechten: A Great Artist and Missionary (1903-1974)

On October 29, 1903, Edmond Van Genechten was born in Geel, Belgium. After finishing his elementary education he went to the Sint Aloysiuscollege of Geel where he became known for his fine humor and Flemish idealism. His artistic talents did not remain hidden. He drew caricatures of his professors who could not always appreciate his wit. After six years of humanities, he entered the seminary of Mechelen to study philosophy (1922-1924). During this time he was allowed to enroll at the art academy because he was blessed with exceptional artistic talents. In the seminary he continued to make drawings and caricatures. Some of them he sent to *Pallietier*, a prewar journal published by the Flemish author Filip De Pillecyn. For this he was reprimanded by the director of the seminary. Maybe this dressing-down was a contributing factor to his transfer to Scheut.

On September 7, 1924, after having finished two years of philosophy, he entered the novitiate of Scheut. During his formation years he was always happy, optimistic, and simple. For four years, he studied Kiyombe, a language spoken by the people of Mayombe, Congo. His superiors offered him the opportunity to further develop his talent for painting. He was apprenticed to two great Flemish artists Albert Servaes, the first Belgian expressionist, and Joris Minne, a sculptor. Mon learned to paint frescos by Frank Brangwyn in London and by Maurice Denis in Paris. Already in the 1920s he became known for his woodcuts depicting scenes of the Campine region where he had grown up. The information about this missionary who was also a painter reached the ears of Msgr. Costantini, the apostolic nuncio in China.



After his priestly ordination on April 1, 1929, he was assigned to China! He left for the diocese of Xiwanzi on January 27, 1930. When he arrived in Shanghai, Msgr. Costantini, the apostolic nuncio, welcomed Mon with the words: “I am so happy that finally I have a missionary who is a painter! There is plenty of work for you here: learn to use the Chinese brush, study the language, Chinese esthetics and philosophy. Try to acquire a feeling for the art of your new country!”

On April 10, he left together with father Jozef Vermeulen (1885-1933) for Xiwanzi where he would spend eight years. According to Mon, these were the best years of his life notwithstanding the fact that he had been held captive by bandits.

During many years he learned how to paint on silk, how to mix colors, and how to paint the Chinese way. In 1938 he had his first exhibition in Beijing together with Chinese artists under his Chinese name Fang Hsi Sheng. In an interview in 1969 he mentioned that not even one of the visitors had noticed that some of the works were painted by a European. One of the Chinese visitors who had bought two of his woodcuts could not believe that a European had made them. Bishop Leo De Smedt (1881-1951) advised him to promote Chinese-Christian art in Beijing.

In 1938 Mon was sent to Beijing “for some months.” However, the apostolic nuncio Msgr. Constantini insisted that Mon should stay in Beijing to promote Chinese-Christian art. The Fu Jen University appointed him to teach painting. From 1938 to 1946 he created many paintings. Unfortunately, not everybody could appreciate his artistic activities. Some (other missionaries ?, also confreres ?) even vilified him. They considered him too much Chinese and were convinced that he should be sent home. Nothing new under the sun... Four centuries earlier the Jesuit Matteo Ricci dreamt of presenting Christianity in a Chinese way. Ultimately the pope did not allow him to do so. Father Vincent Lebbe (1877-1940), a Lazarist, left his congregation because his superiors could not imagine that a Chinese form of Christianity must be promoted in China. Mon was convinced that Mary should be presented as a Chinese Mary, and that Christmas night must be a Chinese Christmas night. In the course of the years Mon painted more than forty gospel scenes. All of them were left behind in China.

Mon did not only paint religious themes in his Chinese style, but he also painted landscapes. For this he was inspired by the landscape art under the Song Dynasty (960-1278) when Taoism, the rhythm of nature, influenced the painters.

It was in Beijing where he became a very close friend of the French Jesuit philosopher, paleontologist, and theologian Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955) and his collaborators. Mon later said that it is thanks to this great spiritual Jesuit that he had not become an embittered old man. He confided to him that for him painting is searching for joy. To this Teilhard must have replied: “Finding joy is the most divine duty. Only joy nourishes, creates brave optimism.” However, his friendship with Teilhard was frowned upon by some of his superiors. Mon was always firm in stating that Teilhard had been his savior. After the death of Teilhard, Mon became a member of the *Société Pierre Teilhard de Chardin*.

In March 1943, before leaving for the concentration camp in Weixian, he hid paint, rolled up paintings, his camera, and typewriter in a hollow beam of the house. In the camp he enjoyed a rather special regime that allowed him to continue painting. The Japanese appreciated very much his works. During this time he finished many works depicting unknown, poor Chinese. After his

release from the concentration camp he returned to the house where he found everything he had hidden in good order.

On January 26, 1946, Mon left Beijing for Belgium. He arrived in Oostende on March 16. While teaching at Sint Aloysiuscollege of Geel, he continued his artistic activities. During the Holy Year of 1950, he was at the Vatican Exposition “Art in the Missions” where he was in charge of the China section. Thirteen of his works were exhibited. From 1951 to 1954 he taught at the college of Geel. From 1954 to 1971 he was chaplain in the retirement house *Levenslust* in Retie. From 1946 on more than twenty expositions of his works were organized in Belgium and abroad.

Mon was always full of admiration for flowers, plants and trees. He enjoyed silence and solitude, but also loved to converse with children and simple people. He led a sober life. Two people were very dear to him: father Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and pope John XXIII. Although he loved his hermit life, he followed closely the developments of the Second Vatican Council. He also had a special interest in the evolution of communism in the world and kept abreast of new developments by reading English and Russian publications. He knew Russian quite well! It pained him that less and less young people entered religious life.

In 1969, in an interview with Felix Dalle of the Flemish weekly *Kerk en Leven* (Church and Life), Mon looked back at his missionary life. Among others he mentioned that many missionaries did not really know the situation in China. It is true, they worked very hard, helped the poorest of the poor. They knew the situation in their area, but they had little impact on the elite. When I at the university took up contact with artists, some confreres had the impression that I didn't do anything. It is true, I didn't have a parish and had little contact with the common people as the other missionaries. As happens more, many missionaries could not always appreciate one another's activities.

Mon passed away in Geel on October 21, 1974. A great missionary and painter, a good man went to his creator. His life was a celebration of lines and colors. His artistic soul exalted Chinese nature as well as the Campine landscape. While being Chinese with the Chinese, he also remained Flemish. Mon understood very well that beauty and art can lead people to the one who is **The Beautiful One**.

Fr. André De Bleeker, cism

Frederik Buyle (1869-1897): The First CICM Lay Brother

In September 1891, our Annals published an “Important Notice,” which can be summarized as follows. In the Acts of the Apostles we read that the number of faithful was growing to such an extent that the Twelve could no longer care at the same time for the preaching of the Word and for the temporal service of the community. They decided to entrust the material needs to some helpers. In this way, said the apostles, we shall be able to dedicate ourselves fully to prayer and to the service of the Word. The situation of our missionaries in China and in the Congo is quite similar. People in Europe have no idea of all the worries the foundation of Christian villages entail. If we had many lay brothers, all-round people available for all kinds of tasks, there is no doubt that our missionaries would double or even triple the number of conversions, for they would dedicate more time to this aspect of their work... For further information or applications, please contact the Director of the Brothers... This Director was a former missionary in China, father Evarist De Boeck. The young man who would be the first to pronounce vows as a CICM lay brother was Fredrik Buyle.

Frederik Buyle was born in Sint-Niklaas, Belgium, on December 23, 1869. When he was twenty-one he entered Scheut as a postulant. At that time, about one third of the confreres had come from the diocese of Gent, and several hailed from Sint-Niklaas. But Frederik’s father opposed strongly his son’s decision.

After a few months of postulancy, Frederik, who was a carpenter, was accepted to the novitiate, together with two other candidates.

Father De Boeck, their Director, was at the same time socius of the Director of novices for the scholastics. There were about twenty of the latter. The novices were close to one another and animated with an excellent spirit. They were one of heart and soul.



On March 20, 1893, he pronounced his vows for five years. Two weeks later he left for the Congo. In those days, quite some courage was needed to leave for the Congo. Of the twelve confreres who had left before him for Africa, four had died in a short time. The letters and stories of Father Albert Gueluy stated clearly the major dangers and problems: a tiring climate,

difficulties in getting provisions, insecurity, impossible roads, opposition of some state employees.

Brother Buyle started working first at Nemlao, which had been a mission of the Holy Spirit Fathers, not far from Banana and Muanda in Mayombe. Barely a month there, his parish priest, Father Calon, wrote to the Superior General Jeroom Van Aertselaer: "The Brother carpenter is already a great service to us." By the end of September 1893, Brother Frederik was requested to accompany the young Fathers August De Clercq and August Hoornaert to Kinshasa, and to proceed with them to Berghe-Sainte-Marie. They arrived on 9 November, and Frederik began working. Father Max Wolters wrote with obvious admiration that Frederik was an untiring builder and excellent carpenter. Frederik led a team of fifty to sixty workers but would not hesitate to dirty his own hands.

In May 1895, Frederik who was a general utility man received a new task: mechanic on the boat "Notre Dame du perpetual Secours." This boat was a gift from a generous Belgian countess and had to bring provisions to the mission posts. The boat was 15 meters long and three and a half meters wide, and could reach a speed of 18 kilometers an hour. For a while, the provincial, Father Kamiel Van Ronslé, served as captain and Frederik was in charge of the engine. The boat travelled back and forth from Berghe-Sainte-Marie to Mankanza, or in another direction, to Luebo or Lusambo in Kasayi.

Brother Frederik had a strong character. He was full of zeal and a strikingly deep piety. He found strong support in the good spirit of the community at Berghe-Sainte-Marie. Frederik also visited the sick in the neighborhood. Unfortunately from 1895 on, he was very often sick. He suffered a couple of heat strokes and some violent attacks of hematuria. It is this latter sickness that caused his premature death. On November 17, 1897, after a boat trip he had to be carried ashore, and died three days later in Berghe-Sainte-Marie.

Father Provincial August De Clercq, who stood by Frederik in his last moments, testifies in a letter to Scheut: "He was a model brother, appreciated and loved by all the priests who have known him. His death was just as was his life: mild, peaceful, edifying." During the Chapter of 1898, Father August De Clercq declared: "The more the missions expand and develop, the more shall we feel the need for brothers... As of now, we may be thankful to Divine Providence for having given us such worthy helpers: confreres of such total dedication." Undoubtedly he had brothers like Frederik in mind when he said this. Many have since followed their shining example.

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