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Centenary of the Mission of Huila (Angola)

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CENTENARY OF THE MISSION OF HUILA (ANGOLA)

The Mission of Huila celebrated its centenary in 1981. This deserves recognition in this issue of Spiritan papers because of the important contribution it made to the evangelisation of South and Central Angola, and also because it was the only mission to be founded in the brief Generalate of Father Le Vasseur, the centenary of whose death we commemorate this year. This article is no more than a summary of the lengthy account of the establishment of the Mission that appeared in the General Bulletin of the Congregation at the time.

Speaking of the appointment of Father Duparquet as P.P. of Capangombe, in the district of Moçâmedes, Levi Maria Jordão wrote:

“The Holy Ghost Fathers have laid siege to Angola, North and South, in the North by the mission of Landrana, in the south by that of Huila” (Quoted by Fr Brasio in *Ação Missionária*, Dec. 1981).

The opening lines of the General Bulletin report referred to above reads:

We can best begin our account of the new mission of Huila by quoting the lines addressed by the late-regretted Father Le Vasseur to announce the foundation of this mission to His Eminence, Cardinal Simeoni, Prefect of the S.C. of Propaganda, on Oct. 20, 1881: “It is my privilege, Your Eminence, to send you herewith . . . a copy of the documents relative to the foundation we are making at this moment on the coast of Moçâmedes, in the south of the Portuguese colony of Angola . . . As Your Eminence can observe from the letter addressed by Fr Duparquet to the Minister of Overseas Affairs at Lisbon, this is not a new project. Already 16 years ago, in 1866, we attempted to get a foothold on that coast but were forced to renounce the enterprise because of the difficulties raised by the Portuguese government, both at Moçâmedes and in Lisbon.

“The attitude of Portugal is quite different at the present time. They are now aware of the need for dedicated missionaries to resist the incursions of Protestant ministers. For this reason, the proposals of Fr Duparquet have been eagerly welcomed. There is only one restriction: the Superior given charge of the Foundation must be a Portuguese subject; and one condition, that the jurisdiction of the Bishop of St Paul of Luanda be recognised . . .

“We have been led to undertake this work because of its great usefulness, firstly for this part of the Portuguese colony, until now completely abandoned from a religious point of view, and more especially for the evangelisation of the interior of East Africa in what concerns our missions of Congo and Cimbébasie . . .

“The Government has graciously granted us all the land necessary for building the mission and for schools, and recognises one of our missionaries as parish priest. It has also guaranteed to the mission personnel free travel and transport of luggage but does not exempt us from paying customs duties. This is indeed a big concession for which we are grateful.

“The personnel at present is made up of six members (three Fathers and three Brothers), all of whom set out from Lisbon on the 5th of this month. They will be joined later by Sisters of St Joseph, who will care for the sick and undertake the education of girls.

“Undoubtedly, like ourselves, Your Eminence will be pleased with these happy results of our endeavours. I most earnestly ask you, by your pious and fervent prayers, to draw down God’s blessing upon this infant work, that it may bear abundant fruit for his glory and the salvation of souls.

“With the expression of, etc . . .”

* * *

His Eminence expressed (to Fr Eschbach) his lively satisfaction at this new undertaking and more especially at the favourable dispositions of the Portuguese government on this occasion.

The personnel referred to . . . were Frs Duparquet, Charles Wunemburger, and Antunes; Brs Gerard, Lucius and Rodrigues. Frs Hogan, Lynch and Br Onufre would soon join them,

having been driven out of Omaruru by the Protestants: their ultimate aim, however, was to regain the mission of Cimbébasie by another way.

The importance of these two Missions of Angola and of Cimbébasie and their presumed future development required the immediate dispatch of adequate reinforcements. This help was all the more necessary because Fr Charles was suffering greatly from gallstones . . .

Fr Duparquet, the initiator of the new foundation, was appointed to supervise its installation and at the same time to undertake the reopening of the mission of Cimbébasie. At his own request these two missions were soon to be administered separately, as the distance between them required.

By a decision of Jan. 30, 1883, Fr Coste was named religious superior of the Community of the Sacred Heart at Huila, with special responsibility for the direction of the Portuguese Seminary of St Paul of Luanda, which had recently been transferred to huila. Fr Antunes retained the spiritual care of the parish and was also in charge of relations with the Portuguese Government.

Having given a bird's eye view of the new work undertaken at Huila, it is fitting that we now return to its origins and consider the providential circumstances that gave it birth.

. . . Fr Duparquet had desired to found a station in Ovampo. In order to carry out this plan, approved by the Mother House, he had made two successive visits to this country, in 1879 and in 1880. On the second of these trips, June 14, 1880, he met an Englishman, Mr Jordan, from the Cape, who had come to negotiate with the Portuguese Government for the entry of a number of Boer . . . farmers, Dutch emigrants from the Transvaal, into the Province of Angola. He encountered the Boers not far from Counène.

He had previously made an agreement of mutual help, at Okombake. As soon as they heard of his arrival they at once sent two elders to him to tell him the Portuguese government had offered them a site at Huila. Fr Duparquet strongly urged them to accept. Some days later, the Portuguese of Humbe sent him by intermediary of the emigrants a letter from the Governor of Moçâmedes, Mr Ferreira de Almeida, offering them very advantageous conditions of settlement in the colony. According to the advice given them by Mr Jordan, they sent a delegation of twelve to examine the land offered to

them. Fr Duparquet was most anxious that they accept, for this would be the best guarantee of the communications he sought to establish with Ovampo and Moçâmedes. When he returned to Omaruru on Sept. 15, his wishes in this respect were realised.

Fr Duparquet's journey was two-fold in result: it prepared the way for a future foundation in Ovampo; at the same time, he had proved that it was possible through the Portuguese colony in Angola to establish relatively easy lines of communication even with the interior of Cimbébasie. This latter was of the utmost importance. It was also truly providential, for soon war, begun in the south of the mission between Damaras and Hottentots, made relations with the Cape quite impossible and led later to the expulsion of our Fathers from Omaruru.

But, even as Fr Duparquet prepared in Africa his journey to Ovampo, Mr Andrada, a former Portuguese military attaché in the Portuguese Embassy in Paris, came to our Mother House there on behalf of Mr Fernando Pedrono, President of the Committee in Lisbon for African Missions, to request Fathers for the Portuguese colonies.

The question of Africa preoccupied the Lisbon Government more than ever. The extension of English Protestant missions was viewed with anxiety . . . need was felt . . . to work for the renewal of the old missions, to raise them out of the sad level of decadence into which they had fallen . . . the Colonial Seminary at Sernache was virtually unproductive of results. True a project of reform had been drawn up by the Geographical Society of Lisbon but what could be expected from that?

This was what Mr Andrada had to tell the Mother House . . . he added that the Governor of Moçâmedes . . . had expressed a keen desire to be put in touch with Fr Duparquet: he would even welcome missionaries and guarantee them his protection.

Fr Duparquet had just returned from Omaruru when he received this news. He was overjoyed, for this had been his ambition over many years.

He wrote: "At last, the Portuguese are learning that instead of driving out the missionaries they should treat them as allies . . . now they see they were wrong in forcing us out and making us take our resources to Congo or Counène. Since

advances are being made for our return we should recognise that the time has come for us to regain in the Province of Angola the place we had won with such effort in the past.

"It would be best for us to establish ourselves on the high plain of Chella, either in the district of Huila or its surroundings . . . the presence of the Boers guarantees us facility of communications with Ovampo at the very time a station is being opened there as an entry to the whole valley of the Zambezi. The foundation of Huila would be, so to speak, a safe conduct to the whole Portuguese colony and would complement our house at Braga, which is only awaiting the moment to minister to the great spiritual needs of the vast diocese of St Paul of Luanda"

* * *

In order to handle this matter more easily, Fr Duparquet left Omaruru on Oct. 19, 1880, for the Cape of Good Hope, where he arrived just a month later. There he met the Portuguese Consul General for the Cape, Mr Carvalho, who urged him to address, without delay, a request to the Portuguese government. He assured him of his support and told him no time was more opportune. Fr Duparquet followed this advice. On Dec. 15, he made a report on the matter to the Ministry for Overseas Affairs in Lisbon through the intermediary of the Portuguese Consul.

* * *

The report arrived in Lisbon at the moment when in the Portuguese Press the question of the Portuguese Missions was being ardently discussed. A special Commission, under the chairmanship of Mgr Ferrão de Carvalho, of Braganza, had been set up for this purpose. Its secretary was that excellent and zealous Catholic, Mr Fernando Pedrozo, of whom we have already spoken.

The Minister for Overseas Affairs welcomed Fr Duparquet's request and referred it to this Overseas Commission, stating he was ready to give it immediate approval. Mr Pedrozo communicated this at once to Fr Eigemann, urging him at the same time to come to Lisbon to pursue the matter further.

Having sought instructions from the Mother House, Fr Eigemann did in fact come to Lisbon on Feb. 2 and in accordance with these instructions first consulted the Papal Nuncio, Mgr Mazella, who received him twice with kindness. His Excellency was in favour of the scheme while advising prudence. The Father later saw Mr Pedrozo and the Minister for Overseas Affairs . . .

The blow suffered by the Congregation shortly afterwards in the death of the Superior General, Father Schwindenhammer, and the change of Minister in Lisbon on March 26, led to a suspension of the negotiations for some time. Mr Pedrozo, however, kept the pressure on as far as was possible. On April 3, he informed Fr Eigemann that in the Commission for the Missions, Mr Valhena, the new minister of Colonies and a member of the Liberal party, had expressed himself favourable as had his predecessor . . . he agreed to . . . foreign missionaries and thought it foolish to act otherwise: his duty was to oppose the Protestant missionaries overseas . . .

The President of the Commission for the Missions was . . . the Bishop of Braganza, who happened to know Fr Antunes since his sister worked for him. On May 8, he wrote him the following letter, quite unofficial but revealing his favourable attitude and also the thinking of the Government:

"My dear friend,

"I write you this letter in the interests of religion, to tell you that the thinking here is disposed to accept the services of the Fathers of the Congregation . . . in the mission territories under Portuguese protection. The only condition is obedience to the diocesan authorities, dependence on their jurisdiction in the circumstances relevant to these missions in territories which are considered as legitimately under the royal protection of Portugal.

"This was the tenor of the findings of the Commission on the Missions conveyed to the Minister for Overseas Affairs. The suggestion was welcomed by the General Direction for the Colonies and by the actual Minister, following his predecessor . . .

"As the advancement of this affair seems of particular interest for the glory of God's Holy Name, the good of souls, the good of our Portuguese missions as well as that of the esteemed Congregation of the Holy Ghost of which you are so worthy a member as you are a good and patriotic son of Por-

tugal, I think we should rejoice together in Our Lord, who is the object of all our religious efforts . . .

“Long live Jesus! Thus wrote to me yesterday the Bishop of Angola in a letter recounting the permanent establishment of the new Mission in the Kingdom of the Congo, which he has already entered and where he has begun his apostolic labours. Let us also say ‘Long live Jesus’, for I believe the combined efforts of the missionaries of the Holy Ghost Congregation and those of our colonial clergy will achieve great good for this most holy name. Long Live Jesus!

† Jose Maria, Bishop of Braganza and Miranda.”

While awaiting a reply to his letter to the Minister for Overseas Affairs at Lisbon, Fr Duparquet went to Griqualand, West of the Cimbébasie, to see for himself and on the spot, how possible it was to build a station on that side . . . When he returned to the Cape on May 2, he found urgent letters to come to Moçâmedes but no definitive reply from Portugal. He therefore decided to take the initiative in urging matters forward and so set out for Europe on May 17.

At Madeira, where the vessel called on June 4 . . . he learned of the nomination, as new Bishop of Angola, of a Franciscan, Mgr Netto. What he was told of his piety and zeal filled him with hope that in this worthy prelate he would find a well-disposed supporter of the new foundation proposed.

Three days later a letter from Fr Duparquet arrived at the Mother House . . . It had been sent from Lisbon and began: “God be praised! Our negotiations with the Portuguese Government have been successfully concluded: the establishment at Huila is accepted absolutely without any change in what was proposed; the Minister has given his definitive approbation”.

The very evening of his arrival in Lisbon Fr Duparquet called upon Mr Pedrozo. The following day, June 7, Mr Pedrozo, having worked out an agreement with him, presented it to the President of the Geographical Society and then to the new Minister for Overseas Affairs. The latter had not at that date received the report and the suggestions of Fr Duparquet. Mr Pedrozo gave him a copy and told him the suggestions had been approved by his predecessor and by the Commission for the Missions. The Minister promised to look

into the matter. The day after, when Fr Duparquet presented himself to the Minister, the Commission on Missions discussed the question. An hour later Mr Pedrozo and the principal members of the Commission came out to tell Fr Duparquet that the affair had been happily resolved . . .

Father Antunes had already been appointed for the new foundation by the Mother House: all that remained was to submit to the King a plea along the lines of Fr Duparquet's Report . . .

Official approval was not long delayed . . . the King of Portugal signed two decrees on the subject. The first and most important, dated July 27, authorised the government-general of Angola to grant to the Catholic Mission of Moçâmedes the land necessary for the realisation of the proposed work. In the second . . . the King, Don Luis, appointed and presented Fr Antunes as parish priest of the church of Huila in the same district.

A Government Order completed these Decrees, giving special permission for schools and other works of education the Mission proposed to establish.

* * *

That, as Fr Duparquet wrote, was a success surpassing all hopes, and a favour never before granted any Religious Institute in Portugal.

* * *

There remained only to obtain from the Government a further concession: the free transportation, at the expense of the State, of the personnel and material required for the new Mission. Fr Duparquet's negotiations in this respect were equally successful.

"Just as I was finishing my letter", he wrote to the Father-General, Fr Le Vasseur, on the eve of his departure on Oct. 4, 1881, "we received the approval of the Minister for Overseas Affairs for the free passage of the members of the Mission with their baggage, about 4 or 5 tons, and exemption from customs-duty at Moçâmedes. This saves us about 8000 francs".

* * *

The first news of the travellers received was from Moçâmedes, and dated Nov. 17. We give a summary from the letters of Fr Duparquet:

"Here we are, just arrived at the end of our voyage. At Luanda, Benguela, indeed everywhere, we were warmly welcomed. At the principal centre of the colony we met the Vicar General and the priests of the diocese . . .

"The Bishop has appointed Fr Antunes as parish priest for life of the parish and district of Huila, with all the powers he himself holds from Rome, with the exception of those proper to the episcopal character . . .

"His canonical induction took place at St Paul of Luanda with all possible ceremony . . . Mgr Netto, clad in his pontifical vestments, came to a room in the palace with his Vicar General and two Synodal examiners in choir dress . . . ; he made Fr Antunes sit in front of him in surplice. He opened the proceedings by announcing that His Majesty the King of Portugal had presented Fr Antunes to the cure of Huila but that, before proceeding to instal him, he must carry out the investigation required by Canon Law on the moral integrity and literary and theological knowledge of the candidate. He said that the testimony of one like myself on the first point would be sufficient guarantee that the newly chosen had all the required qualities. For the theological examination the Bishop, Archdeacon and Vicar General asked Fr Antunes some questions on Moral Theology, which he answered satisfactorily. The literary examination was judged unnecessary and so the Bishop declared that there was no obstacle to the canonical induction. The doors of the room were thrown open and the clergy of the town were admitted to the ceremony. Kneeling, Fr Antunes made profession of faith and with his hands on the Gospels swore obedience to the Bishop and his successor; then the Prelate, having invited him to sit beside him, pronounced the words of installation and placed the biretta on his head. After that all present drew near to offer him their congratulations.

"The Mission is a work distinct from the Prefecture of Cimbébasie and the Parish of Huila. This Mgr Netto approved by a special decree dated Nov. 7, 1881, and under most favourable conditions . . .

“Truly, Mgr Netto acts towards us as if he were himself a member of the Congregation: he lavishes presents upon us, has given us two large cases of vestments for the Church and a good selection of books for the library. When we left him, five days after our arrival, he came on board to see us off with the priests of his household”.

* * *

Fr Duparquet continues: “We have also received a first-class welcome from the Governor of St Paul of Luanda. He invited us to lunch at his residence and offered us 2000 hectares of land at our choice. Two thousand hectares! The property will therefore have several out-stations and I intend to have it alongside a river. How could we have ever managed to acquire such a property? The Boers have only 200-300 hectares per family, which may make our choice rather embarrassing.

* * *

“At Moçâmedes the reception was equally warm, in spite of the fact that we had to spend eight days in a temporarily improvised isolation unit, because of the smallpox outbreak at Luanda when we passed there. We were met on the quay by the Governor and the authorities. The most important hastened to call upon us, the local press expressed itself in words of warm praise”.

* * *

Fr Duparquet adds: “On the last day of November, I set out for Huila with Fr Antunes, with the intention of choosing a place and preparing the first dwellings. We took with us some children freed from slavery, whose education the Government had confided to us, and some orphans of whom the magistrate was guardian, whom he asked us to take care of. Poor children were thus the first fruits of our foundation.

* * *

“From the time of my arrival on Dec. 7, 1881, I had begun the search for the area most suited to our works. The

Boers had already, however, chosen the best sites and, when Fr Antunes presented his Letters of Grant, the local commander said he had no more land available . . .

"But, at my instance the Commander of Huila came to the town of São Januário, where the Boers were, to tell them that he was giving one of their big properties, the Palanca, to the Mission, whose claim was prior to theirs. The Boers thereat wrote to the Governor threatening to withdraw if disturbed in their rights. On his side, Fr Antunes stated that if he did not get the 2000 hectares granted he would have no option but to repatriate his companions at the expense of the State. Greatly embarrassed, the Governor saw himself with no alternative but to sacrifice the Mission which he had so heartily favoured with the Minister or to sacrifice the Boers, who were the future hope of agriculture in the colony.

"In the end it was noted that, according to the conditions of the entry-permits of the Boers, they had only claim to the use of the land. They, without paying attention to this clause, had just taken possession of the whole district and claimed to be its proprietors though failing to have their claims as proprietors ratified.

"Public opinion was aroused. Was the country going to become a Dutch colony? it was asked, since it was not even possible to obtain a farm for the Mission. The Portuguese population took sides with us and finally the Commander of Huila persuaded the Boer colonists to desist from their claims.

"As soon as he had heard of the dispute, the Governor General of Angola had sent to Moçâmedes the General Procurator of the Crown with plenipotentiary powers to put us in possession of the land, even if that meant evicting the Boers. By the time he arrived, however, the matter had been settled . . .

"For his part, the Bishop of St Paul sent us a very affectionate letter urging us out of the depths of our charity in Our Lord not to allow these events to discourage us.

"Briefly, this shows the affection in which the Mission is held by all . . . even by the Boers, who remain on good terms with us and even offered to transport our materials for us . . .

"The incident has also proved fortunate for the country by forcing a decision on the situation of the Boers in the country. Without it the Portuguese colony would just have disap-

peared. This then is the first service we have rendered to the Portuguese Government.

* * *

"In the last days of January an *agrimensor*, or land surveyor, of the Government, came to survey the lands which had been granted us. His task took him three months. He charged us only a franc a hectare, however, a total of 2000 francs in all . . . The Mission property is about five leagues (20 kms) in circumference. It is magnificent: 1500 hectares lie along the river, 500 others are in the forest . . . By reason of its position . . . Huila is ideal as a centre of the Mission . . .

"*La Moucha*, as our property is called after the nearby river, is the place which from every point of view is most suitable. We are in the middle of the peoples around . . . there is nothing lacking to its value and its attraction: agricultural land, prairies, forests, huge rocks, steep-sided mountains, fountains, pools, waterfalls, sections of water full of fish, food-stuffs at rock-bottom prices . . .

"Peach and orange trees are covered with flowers and fruit all the year round, as are the apple trees; fig and pomegranate trees produce abundantly; so does the coffee. And, besides European products, there are manioc, sweet potato, ground-nut, rice, soya: all these tropical plants grow and produce in abundance.

"To complete these favourable conditions, the climate is wonderfully healthy and agreeable, one of the most privileged in the world. Huila stands at an altitude of 1600 metres over sea-level. Moreover, although now (it is Jan. 27) the height of the hot season, the temperature is between 18-24 degrees: in winter, there is little frost, so that even then coffee, cotton, sugar-cane and manioc can be cultivated.

"We have not delayed our work on the farm . . . I have made a tap so that we can water the gardens when we want. We are planting a mass of fruit trees: oranges, peaches, apricots, figs, pomegranates, quince, guavas, carobs. We have the makings of an earthly paradise. The vegetation is unimaginably beautiful. Our prairies are magic-carpets of enamelled flowers: gladiolas, amaryllis, iris, etc. The corn is ripe and will be replaced by maize and soya-beans. Alongside the

potatoes grow manioc and sweet-potatoes. Agriculturally and for beauty of scenery, the country is beyond compare".

* * *

The site chosen, it was necessary to proceed without delay with the construction of the buildings. They were pushed ahead vigorously. Fr Duparquet wrote on July 24, 1882: "There are at least 40 people employed: masons, carpenters, bricklayers, roofers, etc. The establishment is dedicated to the Holy Heart of Mary, to which the oratory is consecrated".

Work on the College advanced no less rapidly.

"This year", wrote Fr Antunes on his side, on Sept. 28, 1882, "we have managed to build a first line of buildings, comprising 6 rooms each 3 metres square. That was done in 3 months but what work it entailed! The stones had to be torn from the quarries, the bricks made on the site, the wood had to be sawn by oneself from the forest-trees at some distance. All set to work willingly and, in spite of his suffering, Fr Charles has actively directed the work . . ."

"On the other, the west, side of the Holy Heart of Mary, the buildings of the Holy Childhood were advancing, for the reception of the small blacks of Cimbébasie redeemed from slavery. This is an agricultural farm and, like those of Landana, these poor children must live by manual work. They will have to cultivate the 500 hectares belonging to the Prefecture. Those who show signs of vocation to the priesthood will go to St Charles. The establishment is consecrated to St Francis of Assisi: this great lover of poverty will teach these dear children to love it. The buildings of St Francis of Assisi are almost finished. There are five rooms with some service-rooms . . ."

For his part Fr Antunes has divided the work at Huila into two: the Professional School and the College: "the former for middleclass children, the latter for rich families wishing to give their children a European education and sustenance". (Fr Antunes, Sept. 28, 1882).

To these works there was soon added that of the Seminary of Angola. Mgr Netto had long and unsuccessfully tried to create a seminary at St Paul of Luanda . . .

As soon as Fr Duparquet arrived, His Lordship offered him the direction of it as well as the cure of the people of North Luanda numbering 12,000 souls, completely neglected . . .

* * *

“No work was more in keeping with the ends of the Congregation and dear to our hearts but we were quite unable to supply the necessary personnel for two different communities, Huila and Luanda. Where the Seminary at least was concerned, Mgr Netto solved it by deciding to transfer it to Huila. It is much better situated here in fact both from a health point of view and that of providing conditions favourable to vocations”.

* * *

Impatient to tie up this important matter as soon as possible, Mgr Netto made the new Governor, Mr Ferreira do Amaral, sign the Decree translating his Seminary; it was dated September 7, 1882. Then he set out with the head of the Colony for Huila.

“What a surprise and what an embarrassment”, writes Fr Antunes, when Mr Ferreira, who preceded Mgr Netto, presented us with a letter from him couched in the following terms: ‘Behold, I bring you my Seminary!’ We had already accepted the Seminary in principle but had not even begun to think of building it. Mgr was at Moçâmedes and would be with us in a fortnight! Fortunately, we knew Mgr Netto and realised he was acting out of true Franciscan simplicity.

“The visit to Huila of the new Governor General of Angola, Mr Francisco Joaquim Ferreira do Amaral, was a great event in the countryside . . . I had an opportunity of having a long talk with His Excellency . . . the Governor was pleased at our good relations with the Boers and more especially at our good relations with the local peoples. As I drew from him, the blacks know we are not there to exploit them but to work for their welfare, that is why they come to us without fear. ‘That is already a victory for you’, said His Excellency, ‘for one of the most difficult of things is to inspire in these people affection for and confidence in the white man’.

“At the dinner given by the chief of Huila in honour of the Governor I proposed a toast to him according to Portuguese custom. I thanked him for his friendly visit, in the name of all the Catholic Mission . . . I asked him to continue the benign protection of our work manifested by his predecessor, etc . . . The Governor replied with kind good wishes for the prosperity of the Mission and the recovery of Fr Duparquet, who was ill at the time. Assuring us of his protection, he added: In doing that my predecessor only did his duty: for my part, realising all the value of the Mission and what can be expected of it, I can only continue the policy . . .

“Dinner over, I thanked His Excellency for his graciousness. He then said to me: ‘Train good missionaries, missionaries who know how to set an example of work to the local people, not desk-men, missionaries like those I once saw in India, with hob-nailed boots and stout stick in hand, setting out to visit the people in their huts, men not afraid of travelling 12-15 kilometres on foot’.

“The Bishop of Angola has intended twice already to come and spend some days with us. He very much desired to give our work his blessing as first pastor of our church. Twice he had to postpone this visit . . .

“This time also his visit was delayed a month because he could not find at Moçâmedes the porters he needed . . .”

“The Bishop has just arrived”, writes Fr Duparquet, in a letter of December 28, 1882, with the seminary students. He intends to stay some months with us, which is a blessing for the community since he is a very holy Bishop . . .”

As soon as he arrived at Huila, Mgr Netto requested help for the Mission from the Propagation of the Faith. In his letter he writes: “It would be regrettable were this Mission to be prevented from developing according to its capacity for lack of funds: its growth would be a consolation for the Church and for myself, given the zeal and intelligence of the missionaries who constitute it, given also the excellent conditions of soil, climate and good relations existing with the pagans round about them . . .”

“God in His goodness has truly blessed our work”, Fr Duparquet adds . . . “One of my first undertakings on my arrival at Huila was to start the Holy Childhood. I had redeemed two children from slavery, as well as the two confided to my care by the Government. Several others were to be

added to these. By September they were twelve, all of excellent dispositions". (Fr Duparquet, Sept. 28, 1882).

"The school has succeeded as much as was possible, in view of the difficulties about buildings . . . For what concerns the College as such, many families did not hesitate to present their children but for lack of accommodation we could only take seven . . ."

"Religious are also required to look after the girls. This is the wish of the Bishop, the Governor and the families themselves . . . We hope the Sisters of St Joseph will soon be able to come to our aid . . ."

Among the people too there was much good to be done . . . Fr Antunes had 11 Easter Communions (there had only been one the previous year) and a certain number of baptisms".

These details are all given by Fr Duparquet. In a later letter Fr Antunes wrote: "32 people have approached the Sacraments this year: I have also succeeded in instructing 10 children for First Communion which took place on the feast of the Holy Heart of Mary . . . many adults could be baptised if we had the time to instruct them. Alas, my ignorance of the native language and the little time I have at my disposition does not allow me to do more. Nonetheless, I have begun a little *mugnagneça* catechism which I have already begun to teach to the children.

"The vast parish of Capangombe would also need someone in charge of it but how is it possible to evangelise with such limited personnel?"

(Extract from the General Bulletin of the Congregation, N° 162, 6 April 1883, pp. 763-791).

* * *

Eventually many more missionaries would come and would achieve a work of extraordinary evangelisation in Southern Angola. The 51 tombs in the cemetery where the missionaries attached to the Mission of Huila lie at rest is proof of that.

Amadeu Martins