Léon de Saint Moulin, S.J.

Histoire des jésuites en Afrique: Du XVIe siècle à nos jours. Paris: Éditions jésuites, 2016. Pp. 137. Pb, €12.

The presence of the Jesuits in Africa is as old as the Society of Jesus itself. Unfortunately, their history on the continent is also the least studied. This volume is short, yet it is the first comprehensive history of the Jesuits in Africa. In its 137 pages, the author, himself a seasoned missionary, seeks to focus not on mission history as such, but on the birth of local churches. The book is divided in three parts corresponding to three periods of the history of the Jesuits in Africa.

The Portuguese or *Padroado* era covers the early missions in the kingdom of Congo and Angola, Ethiopia, Cape Verde, the Zambesi, and Madagascar, from the foundation of the Society of Jesus in 1540 to its suppression in 1773. Beyond a clear chronological report of events, nothing substantial is said about this period. Then follows the colonial era, from the restoration of the Society in 1814 to the wave of African nations becoming independent in the 1960s. Characteristic of this period was the emergence of most of the present Jesuit provinces and sub-provinces in Africa. Here, de Saint Moulin provides a chronology of those foundations, their most important achievements, and the most significant missionaries (including Africans) in Madagascar, the Zambesi, and Central, Western, and Eastern Africa. Missions were dependent upon colonial powers for their foundation and functioning. Yet, missionaries also took a stand against colonial abuses. Last comes the African era that followed the Second Vatican Council. Characteristic of this period is what the author calls “Africanization” of the Jesuit leadership and membership. De Saint Moulin links the roots of this process to the politics of “authenticity” in Mobutu Sese Seko’s Congo and to the figure of Cardinal Joseph Malula, archbishop of Kinshasa. But he also warns about new challenges, as Africans come to the realization that the process of Africanization, to bear fruit, has to go beyond the assumption of positions of ecclesiastical leadership. Even more, he fears that the current rise of African Jesuits might align them with the political *status quo* rather than with a history of liberation (126–28).

According to de Saint Moulin, the concept of Africanization includes four aspects. First, it means the expansion of Jesuit houses and apostolates, as well as the creation of new Jesuit regions and provinces. Second, this expansion leads to the secularization (understood here as what I would call the de-missionarization of the church), by building up a diocesan clergy and new ecclesiastical jurisdictions, led by African bishops and priests. This was the case for today’s Congolese, Chadian, Zambian, and Malagasy dioceses. The third aspect of Africanization is education. In addition to tens of primary and

secondary schools, the Society of Jesus also helped create early African national universities in today's DRC and Burundi. The Jesuits chose the location and led the negotiations to acquire the land where the University of Lovanium, today a state university in DRC, was built. The first presidents of Lovanium were Jesuits. Finally, through Africanization, the Jesuits affected social change. They contributed to the areas of health, the economy (including the construction of roads and bridges), culture, science, and agriculture.

De Saint Moulin applies the term "missionaries" to African Jesuits, sisters, and lay catechists. Theologically, he argues, they too are called to evangelize (169). As far as numbers are concerned, until 1920, there were never more than fifty Jesuit missionaries living in the Congo territory. Net growth is observed from 1920 to 1940, which accelerated exponentially after 1945 (170). Interestingly, though, even after independence the number of non-African Jesuits, including Spanish and Latin Americans, kept increasing, moving from two hundred in 1949 to 334 in 1966.

De Saint Moulin's book offers a case study for sociologists of religion. On the one hand, the improvement in economic conditions coincided with the growth in personnel rates in Congo (170). On the other, there is at least one example where improved social conditions led to the erosion of African personnel. Looking closely at the data, the number of African personnel grew from fifty in 1954 to ninety-four in 1960, but then fell to sixty-nine in 1966. De Saint Moulin explains this decrease by the defections of young African Jesuits who joined the administrations of newly independent states. This number went up again in 1971, and fell back in 1975 during the debate on "authenticity" and its anti-Catholic vitriol (171). A steady growth is observed from 1979 until this day. Clerical identity also seems to be a factor for perseverance among African Jesuits. For example, Jesuit brothers outnumbered scholastics being trained for priesthood forty-eight to thirty-four in 1960. By 1966, this trend was reversing, as the brothers were only thirty in 1966, twenty-five in 1980, and nineteen in 1993.

Through the development of "fermes-chapelles," Fr. Emile van Hencxthoven sought to spur local development with no foreign aid. The main purpose of these catechetical schools was to instruct young boys to the Catholic religion, and train them to agricultural techniques for their own subsistence and economic independence. But, according to de Saint Moulin, his project was "assimilationist," a reproduction of the paternalistic and exploitative colonial system in the church (175). He also acknowledges the missionaries' stance against the exploitation of the colonial system, and the willingness of Africans themselves to integrate the new economy put in place by the colonial

system—going so far as to suggest that their very conversion was linked to this materialism (177).

This review focuses mostly on the work of the Jesuits in Central Africa because the author knows this province better. In fact, the book seems to be an expansion of de Saint Moulin's "The mission of Kwango from 1945." There is no mention of the Spanish mission in Fernando Po (1857–72). One might also object that the book's title is pretentious. Would it not have been more appropriate to call it an "introduction" to the history of the Society in Africa? The author, finally, claims in the introduction to write his story in a way African natives themselves would. Yet, the first footnote and periodization, and the very first sentence of the book repeat general assumptions and prejudices about Africa held by outsiders: the very first sentence compares the population of Africa, a continent, to that of China, and India respectively. Then the author affirms, with no nuance, that Africans see Africa as a unity. Those claims are questionable, reminding the challenge he still faces as a Belgian missionary to talk effectively about Africa the way Africans themselves would.

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