

THE ROLE OF EARLY “MISSIONARIES OF AFRICA” OR “WHITE FATHERS” IN THE STUDY AND DEVELOPMENT OF AFRICAN LANGUAGES¹

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In virtually all regions of sub-Saharan Africa outside the reach of Islam, Africans were introduced to written literature through Christian propaganda. Christian missionaries' pioneer work in African languages was scientifically very important. Most African languages had at first to be learned and reduced to writing before the difficult but vital task of religious instruction and the preparation, translation and publication of religious texts could be undertaken. Missionaries supplied unwritten African languages with a written form and provided the beginnings of a translated literature. The very first books in most African languages were produced to advance the Christian cause. The linguistic work of early missionaries in Africa is thus crucial for the correct evaluation of the nineteenth and early twentieth century Christian missionary enterprise.

Key words: Missionnaires d'Afrique, White Fathers, study of African languages

The origins of the penetration of the deep interiors of West, East and Central Africa by Catholic missionaries can be traced to the zeal and activities of one remarkable person, Archbishop of Algiers and Carthage, Primate of Africa and Apostolic Delegate for the Sahara and the Sudan, Cardinal Lavignerie. Charles Martial Allemand Lavignerie (1825 – 1892), who was ordained to the priesthood in 1849, having acquired brilliant academic honours, started his career in 1854 as Professor of Ecclesiastical History at the Sorbonne where he lectured on the Early Church History in Egypt and North Africa. As a young priest in 1856 he accepted the direction of the Oeuvre des Ecoles d'Orient, which undertook

¹ This is an abridged and revised version of the study *White Fathers's Linguistic Work and Contribution to the Development of African Languages and Literatures*, published as Chapter 2 in PRAH, K. K. (ed.) *The Role of Missionaries in the Development of African Languages*, pp. 61 – 90.

educational and welfare work in the Middle East. There he made acquaintance for the first time with Islam. In 1863 Lavigerie was consecrated Bishop of Nancy, being at that time the youngest Bishop in France, but already four years later, in 1867, he decided to give up the Bishopric of Nancy and accept the Episcopal see of Algiers. The practice of the Roman Catholic Church in Algeria was to minister only to the French Catholics residing in the country, but Lavigerie saw Algeria as a field of charitable works for all. In the diocese of Algiers, he wanted to reinforce the charitable works, to increase the number of schools and to work for the development of the country. In order to have enough personnel, he decided to form in Algiers a new Catholic mission congregation to maintain a non-proselytising presence among the Muslims and to take care of and educate children orphaned by famine and epidemics in this part of Africa in the years 1867 – 1868. Self-supporting orphanages became the basis of operations of the newly-founded Society of Missionaries of Africa in North Africa.² However, Lavigerie nurtured a much more ambitious vision. “That is not all, Algeria is only a door opened by Providence onto a continent of two hundred million souls. It is there especially that we must take the work of the Catholic apostolate, Lavigerie thus explained his decision to leave the Episcopal See of Nancy to become Bishop of Algiers.”³

The vast African continent was always present in Lavigerie’s mind and from the very beginning he planned an apostolate south of the Sahara. From his episcopal residence, Maison Carrée in Algiers, Lavigerie prepared and submitted the most ambitious project in the modern history of African missions. The new missionary society he founded in 1868 in Algiers was an international society supported by the international Vatican congregation *De Propaganda Fide* and was wholly devoted to Africa. The religious order was named the Société des Missionnaires d’Afrique (the Society of Missionaries of Africa) but came to known by the nickname “White Fathers” after the Muslim attire of gandourah, burnous, chechia and tashbi, the Missionaries of Africa had adopted in Algeria and kept when they established themselves in sub-Saharan Africa.⁴ The first novitiate of the new missionary society opened on 19 October 1868 in Algiers under Jesuit direction, and the first vows were taken in 1872. When Cardinal Lavigerie, who was called “the most outstanding Catholic missionary

² See MERCUI, J. M. *Les origines de la Société des Missionnaires d’Afrique (Pères Blancs)*. Algiers: Maison Carrée, 1929.

³ Lavigerie wrote in a letter of December 1869 addressed to his former Professor, Mgr. Maret, Dean of the Faculty of Theology at the Sorbonne. See LAMEY, R. X. *Cardinal Lavigerie. Selection of articles*, p. 37.

⁴ In recent years the White Fathers have reverted, for general use, to their original name “Missionaries of Africa.” SHORTER, A. *Cross&Flag in Africa. The “White Fathers” during the Colonial Scramble (1892 – 1914)*, Preface, p. XXV.

strategist of the nineteenth century,”⁵ passed away on 26 November 1892 at Saint Eugène in Algiers, many predicted that the two missionary societies he had founded,⁶ would not long survive him. Such voices proved wrong. The Missionaries of Africa, or “White Fathers”, and the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa, or “White Sisters”, became “a missionary force of unsurpassed vigour and consistency in the interior of Africa”⁷ and came to play a vital role in the conversion of the African continent.⁸

I.

Cardinal Lavigerie as Professor of Early Church History knew well the long history of Christianity in Africa and tended to regard the nineteenth-century Catholic missionary enterprise in Africa as a “reprise”, the renewal of the ancient churches that had flourished and then vanished in different parts of Africa.⁹ When elaborating the Catholic mission strategy in Africa, he always emphasised the legacy of ancient Churches of Africa and asked the staff entrusted with the task of teaching the future missionaries: “Teach them and inspire in them a great affection for the Fathers of the Church of Africa... So to do is nothing but justice, because we are Africans and because they have left us such great richness, I would like to see the monuments of the Church of Africa interpreted at Carthage.”¹⁰ Drawing his inspiration from the examples of the early Church of Africa, Lavigerie attempted to restore the Church of St. Cyprian in North Africa by renewing the primatial see of St. Cyprian and reviving the

⁵ HASTINGS, A. *The Church in Africa 1450 – 1950*, p. 254.

⁶ One year later, in 1869, Lavigerie founded the Society of the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa, nicknamed the White Sisters. See Sr. Marie-André du Sacré-Coeur. *Histoire des Origines de la Congrégation des Soeurs Missionnaires de Notre-Dame d’Afrique*. Algiers: Kouba, 1946.

⁷ HASTINGS, A. *The Church in Africa 1450 – 1950*, op.cit., p. 298.

⁸ In the late 1970s the White Fathers had 3000 missionaries, priests and brothers from twenty-three different countries working in Africa. The White Fathers who are now working in eighty-one dioceses spread over twenty-nine African countries, of which twenty-seven have African bishops, are most densely represented in Algeria, Tunisia, Mali, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Nigeria, Uganda, Tanzania, Burundi, Rwanda, Democratic Republic of Congo, Malawi and Zambia. One third of all African Roman-Catholic priests have been trained by the White Fathers and these included the two black African Cardinals, Rugambwa of Tanzania, and Zoungrama – a White Father from Burkina Faso. In LAMEY, R. X. *Cardinal Lavigerie*, op.cit.

⁹ In Egypt, the Roman Africa, Nubia and Ethiopia. SUNDKLER, B., STEED, C. *A History of the Church in Africa*, pp. 84 – 85.

¹⁰ LAVIGERIE, C. *Ecrits d’Afrique*, p. 65. Also quoted in SUNDKLER, B., STEED, C. *A History of the Church in Africa*, op.cit., p. 105.

role of the bishop of Carthage,¹¹ and then proceed to the south and plant the Catholic church in the interiors of Africa by attempting to establish Christian kingdoms under Christian African kings in the tradition of the Medieval Church.¹² By converting and baptising the African kings he hoped to win to Christianity their whole nations. This became his strategy for winning the peoples living in the East African Interlacustrine area and the French Sudan to the Christian faith.

On 2 August 1968 Lavigerie was appointed “Apostolic Delegate to the Sahara and the Sudan” (later French West Africa) and “Primate of Africa”, embracing the whole African continent,¹³ and from his episcopal residence Maison Carrée in Algiers he started to send his first teams of missionaries into the interiors of the African continent, from Northern Algeria to Algerian Sahara (1872), Kabylia (1873) and Tunisia (1875) and further to the south, to enlarge the White Fathers’ mission by the evangelisation of the Sudan and far interiors of West and East Africa.

II.

The commencement of White Fathers’ missionary work in Africa was attended by many hardships and trials. The average life expectancy of early missionaries in Africa was very low, after a very short time many succumbed at a youthful age to the unhealthy tropical climate, were killed or had to be invalidated home. Cardinal Lavigerie for a long time cherished the dream of reaching the French Sudan and Timbuktu. The first attempts ended in disaster.

¹¹ He had a magnificent basilica built at Carthage as well as his own marble tomb. In 1881 he started to reorganise the Church in Tunisia, on 28 May 1881 he became Apostolic Administrator of Tunisia. The See of Carthage was restored on 29 June 1884. Lavigerie also played an important role in establishing the French Protectorate. LAMEY, R. X. *Lavigerie*, op.cit., p. 38. Some seventy years later, the Roman Catholic Cathedral at Carthage was secularised and on July 14th 1964 Lavigerie’s remains were transferred to Rome and now rest in the crypt of the White Fathers Generalate at 269, Via Aurelia.

¹² His idea was to found a Christian kingdom in the heart of Africa. Lavigerie saw a precedent in European history and tried to follow the example set by the kings and the nations of the European Middle Ages. By converting and baptizing the African kings he hoped to win to Christianity the whole nations. This became his strategy for winning the peoples living in the East African Interlacustrine area to the Christian faith, but also the Mossi. The latter were viewed very positively by Catholic missionaries, similarly to the Baganda. The White Father Prosper-Augustin Hacquard hoped to found there a “Christian empire” that would block the advance of Islam from the north and east. *Chronique Trimestrielle*, No. 102, 1903, p. 15; *Chronique Trimestrielle*, No. 105, 1904, p. 207. Quoted also in SHORTER, A. *Cross&Flag in Africa. The “White Fathers” during the Colonial Scramble (1892 – 1914)*, op.cit., p. 43.

¹³ On 19 March 1882 he became Cardinal.

In January 1876 the first caravan of three White Fathers on their way from the Mزاب to the Sudan was massacred by Ajjer Tuareg near El Golea, likewise the second caravan of White Fathers was massacred by the Tuareg on their way from Ghadamès to Timbuktu on 21 December 1881, and Lavigerie’s dream was only fulfilled after his death when a caravan of White Fathers sent by General Chapter on Christmas Day 1894 and led by Augustin Hacquard (1860 – 1901), managed to reach Timbuktu in May 1895 and found St. Mary’s mission there.¹⁴

When, on 24th February 1878, the decree of Propaganda Fide, entrusting the organisation of missions in sub-Saharan Africa to Archbishop Lavigerie, was ratified by the new Pope Leo XIII,¹⁵ Lavigerie promptly organised a caravan of ten missionaries to Equatorial Africa. Léon Livinhac (1846 – 1922), who in 1892 succeeded Cardinal Lavigerie as Superior-General of the White Fathers, had been appointed leader of the first White Fathers caravan to East Africa, with the rank of Apostolic Delegate.¹⁶

In East and Central Africa the White Fathers located themselves in the major entrepôt towns on the main caravan routes, e.g. at Tabora, or at the courts of African monarchs, in the kingdom of Buganda and other Lacustrine kingdoms, the renown of some people, namely the Baganda, eulogised by the early European travellers Speke and Stanley as a most hopeful field for missionary endeavour, no doubt being an important consideration that influenced the missionary strategy. In February 1879 the vanguard of the White Fathers, Father Siméon Lourdel and Brother Amans Delmas arrived at the capital of the kingdom of Buganda, which was then situated at Rubaga, to open a mission

¹⁴ The caravan led by Prosper-Augustin Hacquard left Marseilles on Christmas Day 1894 and reached Kayes on February 12th 1895. From there the missionaries travelled on horseback to Bamako and from there they travelled by river barge down the Niger to Segu which they reached on April 1st 1895. The Timbuktu mission they founded in May 1895 was closed in 1906. See SHORTER, A. *Cross&Flag in Africa*, op.cit., p. 40, pp. 147 – 148.

¹⁵ Pius IX died on 7 February 1878 and on 20 February Giocchino Pecci was consecrated as Pope Leo XIII.

¹⁶ The caravan set off from Marseilles on Easter Monday, 22 April 1878. In June they left Bagamoyo and proceeded together as far as Tabora, which they reached on 12 September and where they built their first station. According to Lavigerie’s instructions, at Tabora the missionaries split into two groups, one group setting off for Lake Tanganyika, the other one under Father Livinhac turning northwards to the southern shores of Lake Victoria. At Kageye the White Fathers made another base, and from there they sent two of their number, Father Siméon Lourdel (1853 – 1890) and Brother Amans Delmas (1852 – 1895) to the kingdom of Buganda. They left by canoe on 20th January 1878 and on 17th February 1879 landed at a place beyond the modern Entebbe. The place is marked with a stone monument. For the history of the White Fathers society see MERCUI, J. M. *Les origines de la Société des Missionnaires d’Afrique (Pères Blancs)*. Algiers: Maison Carrée, 1929.

station and start the work of evangelisation of the country.¹⁷ They were not the first Christian missionaries to arrive in Buganda. They had been preceded in the field by the Anglican Church Missionary Society.¹⁸ The presence of two groups of Christian missionaries disputing the same territory created an atmosphere full of suspicions and hostility, mutual recriminations, insinuations and quarrels between missionaries over doctrinal differences between Roman Catholic theology and Anglican Christianity, and also led to competition in attracting and gaining converts and rivalry in educational initiatives and linguistic work. Ongoing controversy and dissensions between adherents of rival Christian denominations became part of the early history of Christianity in Uganda.¹⁹

III.

The planning and execution of all missionary work was in Lavigerie's hands, he outlined both the broad strategy and the policy on the spot. By sending instructions to the White Fathers and White Sisters working in missionary stations scattered throughout the African continent, he formed and transformed the minds of his spiritual sons and daughters. Lavigerie's own writings best illuminate the moves and motives which inspired the Society's foundation and its missionary strategy. The sharing of the exterior life of the Africans as regards language, food and clothing came to be in this early period the

¹⁷ In June their mission was reinforced by Fathers Livinhac, Girault and Barbot. LAMEY, R. X. *Lavigerie*, op.cit., pp. 134 – 137.

¹⁸ The CMS managed to respond to an alleged invitation of missionaries by Kabaka Mutesa as expressed in Stanley's famous letter published in the Daily Telegraph on 15 November, 1875. The first two CMS missionaries, Lieut. Shergold Smith and Rev. C. T. Wilson, arrived in Buganda on 30 June 1877. However, due to a number of misfortunes and difficulties of this early period of missionary presence, the work of evangelisation did not actually begin until the arrival of Alexander Mackay in November 1878 and, three months later, in February 1879, of the second party of the CMS missionaries, Dr. R. W. Felkin, the Reverend G. Litchfield and Mr. Pearson who had come by the Nile route, to be followed in only one week by Father Simeon Lourdel and brother Amans Delmas of the Roman Catholic White Fathers' Society.

¹⁹ In the early years of the missionary presence, dissensions between adherents of the Anglican CMS mission, Roman Catholic White Fathers and Islam led to serious political and armed conflicts, much turmoil and struggle for the dominant position in the country. The coming of the British ensured the Protestant faction the chief place in the administration of the country, and society in Buganda came to be divided, in descending order of importance, into Protestant, Catholic, Muslim and Pagan. Ever since religion came to play a major role in politics. Historical research has covered this period of Ugandan history in the greatest detail. For a detailed bibliography see PAWLIKOVÁ-VILHANOVÁ, V. *History of Anti-Colonial Resistance and Protest in the Kingdoms of Buganda and Bunyoro, 1862 – 1899*. Prague: Oriental Institute of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, 1988.

distinguishing feature of the White Fathers.²⁰ “Transforming Africa by the Africans,” was the formula advocated by Cardinal Lavigerie in his instructions to the White Fathers.²¹ “The missionaries must therefore be mainly initiators,” Lavigerie wrote in his instructions, “but the lasting work must be accomplished by the Africans themselves, once they have become Christians and apostles. And it must be clearly noted here that we say: become Christians and not become French or Europeans.”²² The argument that the missionary should mingle with the Africans, became intimate with them as individuals, understand their modes of thought and customs, and minimise irrelevant external distinctions was in that period a recurrent strain in missionary thought.²³ Theorists of the missionary cause usually advocated the same or similar attitude to Africans. Francis Libermann, the founder of the Congrégation du Saint-Esprit or the Holy Ghost Fathers, in his missionary instruction written between 1840 and his death in 1852 asked his fellow missionaries, “Faites-vous nègres avec les nègres”.²⁴

The Roman Catholic Missionaries of Africa were members of a religious order and bound by its regulations. They were celibate, expected to live together and not to mix with other local white people. Dressed as they were, the White Fathers were easily distinguished from other Europeans, they did not look like Protestant missionaries or other Europeans, and Lavigerie clearly did not want them to be taken for Europeans. In the nineteenth century, civilisation meant different things to different people. Lavigerie almost never spoke of civilisation and instead insisted in his instructions: “From the material aspect we must leave Africans as they are, that is to say truly Africans. We must shut our eyes and hearts to a false pity...and resign ourselves to see young Negroes close to us maintain the customs of their land, their wattle huts instead of houses, their bare earth in place of beds, sorghum and manioc instead of bread, grass waist bands

²⁰ See LAVIGERIE, C. Chapitre de 1874. In White Fathers Archives. B-18,1. Also BOUNIOL, J. (ed.) *The White Fathers and their Missions*, pp. 31, 40.

²¹ LAVIGERIE, C. Card. Ordonnance au sujet de la direction des Séminaires, 1874. In *Instructions aux missionnaires*. Namur 1950, p. 250. Also LAMEY, R. X. *Lavigerie*, pp. 90 – 91. White Fathers hoped that their own pupils fully instructed in the word of God would spread out into the villages and preach it to their fellow Africans whom the missionaries themselves could never hope to reach. The idea behind Lavigerie’s instructions was far from new, Mgr. Comboni of the Verona Fathers had advocated it in 1864 in his New Plan for the “Regeneration of Africa by Africans”, as Lavigerie himself admitted. He met Comboni in 1865 in Paris, was impressed by the idea and elaborated the concept.

²² Ibid.

²³ See CAIRNS, H. A. C. *Prelude to Imperialism. British Reactions to Central African Society 1840 – 1890*, p. 52.

²⁴ Mémoire of August 1846. Quoted in HASTINGS, A. *The Church in Africa 1450 – 1950*, op.cit., pp. 295 – 296.

in place of shirt and trousers.”²⁵ Lavigerie’s mission strategy called for less concern with “civilising” and far closer cultural identification with African neophytes and catechumens. He, however, distinguished between external habits or conditions of life and traditions belonging to the religious sphere. The latter, including Christian (Roman Catholic) religion, theology, public worship and Christian morality, were essential and unchanging, no compromise could be tolerated as far as Christian conversion was concerned. ‘External habits’, comprising food, habitation, sleeping and clothing manners and language, White Fathers were expected to safeguard and even to adopt.²⁶ Lavigerie’s ideal and vision were shared by many other nineteenth century theorists of the missionary cause, who were opposed to the ‘civilisation model’ and viewed heavy civilising and Europeanising as an obstacle to the establishment of a self-governing African Church, the realisation of which required the acceptance of cultural diversity and the adoption of non-European, African ways.²⁷ Such theoretical models had in the long run proved difficult to sustain or strictly and effectively implement in praxis, and the White Fathers missionary enterprise in Africa had in the course of time taken a direction which differed in many ways from what their founding father had advocated and anticipated.

Lavigerie asked his missionaries to adapt themselves to the Africans, to strip themselves as much as possible of the cultural elements peculiar to them, of their language in the first place. Lavigerie’s approach was remarkably insistent upon assimilating oneself to Africa and upon the serious study of language as a necessary element in cultural adaptation.²⁸ Learning and recording languages and the collection of oral literature were high priorities in Cardinal Lavigerie’s mission policy. Lavigerie believed that the good language policy is a key to the establishment of Christianity in Africa and in his instructions demanded White Fathers missionaries, when they began work in a new linguistic setting, to learn the local African language as soon as possible and compose a dictionary and a small catechism in it.

In his instructions to the White Fathers working in mission stations scattered throughout the African continent, Lavigerie asked his missionaries to overcome

²⁵ LAVIGERIE, C. *Instructions aux missionnaires*, op.cit., p. 98. Since its foundation in 1622 the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide had been opposed to all unnecessary Europeanisation. See HASTINGS, A. *The Church in Africa 1450 – 1950*, op.cit., p. 289. Lavigerie and other great Catholic missionary founders must have been influenced by Propaganda Fide’s guidelines.

²⁶ SHORTER, A. *Cross & Flag in Africa*, op.cit., p. 155.

²⁷ HASTINGS, A. *The Church in Africa 1450 – 1950*, op.cit., pp. 290 – 291.

²⁸ Lavigerie also stressed the need for a local priesthood, a viable church, and upon a lengthy catechumenate. He, however, recognised that celibacy and the obligation to be fluent in Latin required by canon law might have been a great obstacle, and in 1890 he suggested to the Pope that Africa should be allowed a married priesthood. HASTINGS, A. *The Church in Africa 1450 – 1950*, op.cit., p. 289.

language difficulties by devoting their spare time to the study of local African languages and by communicating with Africans in their own language and using religious texts in translation to minimise cultural misunderstandings and distinctions between themselves and their potential converts. He believed that without effective and active communication it would be impossible to pursue the conversion of the Africans. The priority of the White Fathers’ mission policy was to approach potential converts directly, no interpreters were to be used. To master the local African language, the White Fathers were actually forbidden to speak to each other in anything else after living six months in the country.²⁹ As A. Shorter, himself a member of the White Fathers Society, put it, “The need for learning language was drummed into the White Fathers during their training in North Africa, sometimes by quite extraordinary measures, such as reading the New Testament in Kabyle in the refectory or reciting the psalm *Miserere* in Arabic after meals. In Algeria, Lavigerie imposed the speaking of Arabic or Kabyle among the missionaries under pain of mortal sin.”³⁰ The linguistic work, an intimate knowledge of the language and language proficiency were crucial, since through language it is possible to get to know and appreciate its cultural context and experience the relevant culture. The mastery, or at least the working knowledge, of an African language and the ability to carry a serious conversation in it were deemed the White Fathers’ central responsibility and a growing awareness of the richness and inherent subtleties of the African language became for them the key, in A. Hastings’ words, to “cultural understanding across chasms of otherness.”³¹

IV.

Christian missionaries’ pioneer work in African languages was scientifically very important. In virtually all regions of sub-Saharan Africa outside the reach of Islam, Africans were introduced to written literature through Christian propaganda, the very first books in their own African language were produced to advance the Christian cause. Missionaries carried the African language from the oral to the written state and gave it a basic literature. Apart from Swahili and Hausa and a handful of other African languages using the Arabic or the so-called Ajami script, Christian Ethiopia with its own script or some African

²⁹ LAVIGERIE, C. Chapitre de 1874. In Archives des Pères Blancs, B-18,1; LAVIGERIE, C. *Instructions aux missionnaires*, op.cit., pp. 70 – 71, pp. 134 – 135, p. 145.

³⁰ SHORTER, A. *Cross&Flag in Africa. The “White Fathers” during the Colonial Scramble (1892 – 1914)*, op.cit., p. 161.

³¹ HASTINGS, A. *The Church in Africa 1450 – 1950*, op.cit., p. 302.

attempts to invent and use a script,³² most African languages had first to be learned and reduced to writing before the difficult but vital task of religious instruction and the preparation, translation and publication of religious texts could be undertaken. Missionaries supplied unwritten African languages with a written form and provided the beginnings of a translated literature. The linguistic work of early missionaries in Africa is thus crucial for the correct evaluation of the nineteenth and early twentieth century Christian missionary enterprise. Christianisation went with reading and writing and with the rise of literacy and literatures in African vernaculars written in the Latin script.

The first generation of Catholic missionaries in different parts of the African continent met the expectations of their founder. Lavigerie's policy and practice of the early White Fathers from the 1870s put them in the forefront of the missionary effort to understand and master African languages. Many White Fathers became great scholars and outstanding linguists, and their linguistic work laid a solid foundation for all missionaries who came after. Léon Livinhac is an outstanding example. An author of important manuscripts on the Luganda language, who placed great stress on linguistic studies and who, becoming Lavigerie's successor as Superior General of the White Fathers, "saw Lavigerie's missionary principles being put into practice – language study, the catechumenate, medical care, the evangelization of Africa by Africans themselves – and became completely convinced of their validity."³³ Lavigerie's language policy, his insistence on learning African languages which were then to be used by confrères among themselves, except during recreation, was reiterated in 1914 by the new Directory of the Constitution.³⁴ Out of these principles came grammars, dictionaries, reading books, and catechisms in different African languages, as well as translations of liturgical, doctrinal and parts of the Biblical texts printed in small booklets, which were aids to oral evangelisation.

³² The script used for writing the Semitic languages of Ethiopia, Ge'ez, Amharic and some other Ethiopian languages has developed from the South Arabian Semitic script. Besides the Roman, Ethiopia and Arabic scripts, several other writing systems have been used in Africa for local languages. The Coptic language in Egypt was written with the Greek alphabet in the 2nd – 7th centuries and it was also the script of the Christians in Nubia. In the last centuries B.C., and the early centuries A.D. local peoples in Libya used a simple script. The script used by the Tuareg people for the Tamachek language is probably developed from it. In more recent times, several scripts have been invented for particular African languages. The Vai script invented in 1833 is the first of several local scripts developed in West Africa. Others are the Mende script from 1921, the Loma and the Kpelle.

³³ SHORTER, A. *Cross & Flag in Africa. The "White Fathers" during the Colonial Scramble (1892 – 1914)*, op.cit., p. 6.

³⁴ Directory of the Constitutions, Society of Missionaries of Africa, White Fathers. Algiers: Maison Carrée, 1914, Nos. 345 – 347.

In a Muslim milieu of Western Sudan that precluded evangelisation, White Fathers engaged in medical work, education of children ransomed from slavery and put in the orphanage, and the linguistic work. Auguste Victor Dupuis (1865 – 1945), known to the local people as Yacouba, fell in love with Timbuktu and devoted most of his time to the study of local languages and cultures. He mastered Arabic, Songhay, Tamachek, Bambara and Fulani (Fulfulde, Peul) and together with Prosper-Augustin Hacquard, who was also a good linguist and allegedly knew the Arabic language and literature better than any marabout, had managed by 1900 to produce four books on Songhay. Others were to follow.³⁵ Hacquard’s successor in the Sudan, Hippolyte Bazin (1857 – 1910), studied the Bambara language, finalised its orthography and composed the first Bambara dictionary.³⁶

There were also many excellent linguists among White Fathers working in the region deep in the interior of East Africa, in the present-day Uganda – Livinhac, Le Veux, Gorju, Achte to name a few, where, after some initial hardships and trials, White Fathers’ efforts at evangelisation met with huge success.³⁷

V.

Linguistic work and the compilation of traditional information was a task entrusted to all White Fathers as part of their training. Cardinal Lavigerie desired his missionaries to learn and record the local African language as soon as they started to work in a new linguistic setting, and laid down rules for composing a small catechism and a dictionary. The missionary was not only asked to respect the culture and the language of each people, but also to devote “all his moments of leisure to the study of the culture of the people to whom he

³⁵ Hacquard reported that Dupuis or Yacouba had become too deeply immersed in the study of African languages and cultures and was “going native”. Faced with the order to leave Timbuktu, in 1904 Dupuis left the ranks of the White Fathers, married a Muslim Peul wife and raised a family of seven children. *Chronique Trimestrielle*, No. 93, 1902, p. 158, No. 100, 1903, pp. 156 – 157. Hacquard to Livinhac, October 25, 1900, White Fathers Archives, 071 348. Also SHORTER, A., op.cit., pp. 147 – 148.

³⁶ BAZIN, Hippolyte. *Dictionnaire Bambara-Français*. Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1906. Bazin studied the Bambara language but never preached or spoke publicly in it. See SHORTER, A. *Cross&Flag in Africa. The “White Fathers” during the Colonial Scramble (1892 – 1914)*, op.cit., pp. 42 and 44.

³⁷ According to A. Shorter, out of some two hundred thousand baptised Catholics and an equal number of catechumens the Missionaries of Africa or White Fathers could count in 1914 in its vicariates, two thirds were in Uganda. SHORTER, A. *Cross&Flag in Africa. The “White Fathers” during the Colonial Scramble (1892 – 1914)*, op.cit., p. 236.

is sent.”³⁸ Lavigerie’s spiritual sons held his vision before their eyes. His recommendation must have certainly encouraged the composing of grammars and dictionaries but also stimulated the study of the history, narratives and other forms of oral literature, legends and customs. Early White Fathers were very prolific writers and keen observers of the local customs, religions, and historical traditions and of the day-to-day events as testified to by numerous works from their pens kept in the archives.³⁹

Apart from Arabic and Swahili there were no pre-existing religious texts in any African languages and the White Fathers had to start from nothing. Thanks to Cardinal Lavigerie’s policies the language knowledge of many White Fathers was very good. After the initial phase, when some basic words and phrases were learned from local African speakers and a few grammatical observations made, missionaries proceeded to the collection, recording, standardisation and classification of African languages and to the production of grammars, dictionaries and small booklets of religious texts for all the regions in which they started the work of evangelisation. During the process they had to collaborate very closely with native speakers because apart from mastering an African language, they had to create a specialised theological and liturgical vocabulary before they could use the African language as a tool for evangelisation and worship and prepare translations of religious texts as aids to oral evangelization, as they were expected to do. What they needed was not only excellent language proficiency but also an insight into the religion, thought and worldview of the local people.⁴⁰ The role of African catechumens and converts in the process of language recording, classification and standardisation should be emphasised, without their assistance, collaboration and invention the task of translation of religious texts into African languages could never have been accomplished.

A list, perhaps not complete, of the corpus of nineteenth and early twentieth century White Fathers linguistic work is quite impressive.⁴¹ The pioneering language work of early White Fathers started with a catechism. The first catechism in an African language, which is at the same time, the very first

³⁸ LAVIGERIE, C. *Instructions...*, op.cit., pp. 70, 116, 131.

³⁹ PAWLIKOVÁ-VILHANOVÁ, V. White Fathers Archives as Sources for Reconstruction of Ugandan History, pp. 177 – 189; PAWLIKOVÁ-VILHANOVÁ, V. White Fathers Archives’ Value to the Student of African Societies, pp. 72 – 85.

⁴⁰ A letter written by Livinhac to Cardinal Lavigerie of 2 June 1879 describing White Fathers’ effort to learn the language and the religion of African people well illustrates this. In *Chronique Trimestrielle*, No. 4, X, Octobre 1879, pp. 170 – 173.

⁴¹ DIEMER, E. *Essai de Bibliographie des travaux bibliques des Pères Blancs en Afrique*, pp. 127 – 134. Also MONCHAMPS, Georges Mgr. *L’Oeuvre Linguistique des Pères Blancs d’Afrique*. Bruxelles: Hayes, Imprimeur de l’Académie Royale de Belgique, 1904; and *Missionnaires d’Afrique*, Publications en Langues Africaines, Catalogue provisoire. Algiers: Maison Carrée, 1928.

publication in an African language kept in the Department of Publications in African languages of the White Fathers Archives, was in the Luganda language. The Luganda catechism was prepared by Father Léon Livinhac, printed in 1881 and numbered forty-four pages. The essential Christian truths were condensed into nineteen pages, followed by seven pages of prayers, then a syllabary and some pages of reading which were intended to enable the Baganda to learn to read and write. Father Livinhac was the author of many other books in Luganda, of a Luganda grammar and a vocabulary. Livinhac had to leave the kingdom of Buganda, because in 1883 he was named Vicar Apostolic of Nyanza and then ordained bishop by Lavigerie in the seminary chapel at Carthage,⁴² but he continued to work on a Luganda grammar in North Africa during his second novitiate. Bishop Streicher (1863 – 1952) had managed to learn Luganda with the aid of Livinhac’s grammar before his arrival in Buganda in February 1891. And George Pilkington, one of the early Church Missionary Society missionaries (CMS) in Uganda and a linguist who, with the help of Bishop Steere’s Swahili translation, translated the Bible into the Luganda language, found the White Father French Luganda grammar far better than the English.⁴³ This opinion was reiterated in 1903 during the discussions concerning the language policy to be used in the Uganda Protectorate with respect to Luganda and Swahili.⁴⁴ Unfortunately, Livinhac’s Luganda dictionary of up to seven thousand words, with narrative texts, was lost at sea.⁴⁵

Auguste-Armand-Aimé Achte (1861 – 1905) had mastered Arabic in North Africa and on the boat from Port-Said he started to learn the Swahili language. Before arriving in Uganda he was proficient in French, Flemish, Arabic and Swahili, and during his stay in the country he added to these languages the knowledge of Luganda, Runyoro-Rutoro and Kiziba. Achte became an outstanding scholar in these African languages translating catechisms, Gospel

⁴² Livinhac was the first of the White Fathers to be raised to Episcopal rank.

⁴³ The first Luganda Bible, published in 1896, came to be popularly known as “Biscuit Bible”. See PAWLIKOVA-VILHANOVA, V. *Biblical Translations of Early Missionaries in East and Central Africa. II. Translations into Luganda*, pp. 198 – 210, p. 204; SUNDKLER, B., STEED, C. *A History of the Church in Africa*, op.cit., pp. 580 – 581.

⁴⁴ “The best book at present is the French Luganda Grammar. It is simple and fairly complete,” wrote Bishop Hanlon of the Mill Hill Mission, when asked by the colonial administration whether Swahili or Luganda should be used in schools and as the official language of Uganda, and continued, “Luganda is already a more efficient medium than Kiswahili,” and “would give much better results than Kiswahili.” All three missions in Uganda, White Fathers, CMS and Mill Hill missions, were addressed to express their opinion, and they were unanimous in preferring Luganda. See reference in Hanlon to Sadler, 15 October 1903, re Swahili versus Luganda. Enclosed in Despatch No. 345, Sadler to Lansdowne, 1 December 1903, FO 2/792, forwarding reports by three mission societies.

⁴⁵ SHORTER, A. *Cross&Flag in Africa. The “White Fathers” during the Colonial Scramble (1892 – 1914)*, op.cit., p. 6.

readings, and hymn and prayer books into them. Later on he studied English to be able to communicate with the British colonial authorities. Father Le Veux (1868 – 1942), who arrived from Europe in 1895, was the author of a Luganda-French dictionary of over a thousand pages long, which has, since its publication, remained the basic work on Luganda vocabulary. He was also the author of *Lexicon Latinum Ugandicum*.⁴⁶ At that time the liturgy of the Roman Catholic Church was always and everywhere in Latin, there was no liturgical scope for an African language, and the White Fathers were obliged to teach Latin in their seminaries, which resulted in Latin-African vernacular lexicons and grammars. The earliest was the above-mentioned *Lexicon Latinum Ugandicum*, but many others were published after the World War I.⁴⁷

White Fathers lacked printing presses to which Protestant missionaries gave a high priority. Already in 1879 Alexander Mackay of the CMS mission used his engineering skills to set up his own printing press in Buganda and printed a simple reading book and reading sheets with short passages of the Bible translated into Luganda. Both Swahili and Luganda used to be written in Arabic script and Mackay was one of those missionaries who were responsible for reducing Luganda to writing in Roman script. The first publication in Luganda that Mackay prepared and printed on his printing press was a booklet called *Mateeka* or “Commandments”, which comprised an alphabet, the Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, the Ten Commandments and a selection of texts Mackay himself called “Certain words from the Book of God.”⁴⁸

Although a printing press was set up at Mengo by the CMS missionaries right upon their arrival in the kingdom of Buganda and they started to produce religious literature locally, the White Fathers had their books published at their headquarters at Algiers and from there they strived to keep pace with the literary needs of the White Fathers mission in Uganda and elsewhere. Being a linguist, Livinhac closely followed what had been done by Protestant missionaries in this sphere. He was well aware of Catholic missionaries’ handicap and asked in a letter to Algiers to print his little catechism and send it to Uganda as soon as possible and in great numbers to meet the rising demands of their postulants and catechumens, since the rival Protestants who had a printing press, he argued, were producing lots of reading materials and attracting more and more local people eager to learn.⁴⁹ However, only after

⁴⁶ VEUX, P. H. le. *Premier essai de vocabulaire luganda-français*. Algier: Maison Carrée, 1917. Father Le Veux was also the author of *Lexicon Latinum Ugandicum*. Bukalasa, 1912. 632 p.

⁴⁷ SHORTER, A. *Cross&Flag in Africa*, op.cit., p. 163.

⁴⁸ Chronique Trimestrielle, No. 143, 1907, p. 63, quoted also by SHORTER, A. *Cross&Flag in Africa*, op.cit., p. 162.

⁴⁹ “Nous vous envoyons un petit catéchisme en kiganda, vous priant de le faire imprimer au plus tôt, et de nous en envoyer en très grand nombre d’exemplaires; nous y

Bishop Julien Gorju had started to operate a printing press at Bukalasa, works prepared by the White Fathers could be published in Uganda. One of the earliest works published by the White Fathers in Uganda was a Runyoro prayer book printed in 1907.⁵⁰

According to A. Shorter, “Between 1892 and 1914, nearly fifty vernacular dictionaries and grammars were printed at the White Fathers’ headquarters in Algiers. Another one hundred doctrinal, Biblical, devotional and liturgical books were printed there, together with manuals of geography, arithmetic and agriculture for use in schools. These represented virtually all the languages in the regions of North Africa, equatorial Africa and the French Sudan where the Missionaries of Africa were working.”⁵¹ “Some works were printed elsewhere, such as Bishop Bazin’s dictionary of the Bambara language, produced in Paris by the French Government in 1906, and Jean-Martin-Michel van der Burgt’s (1863 – 1923) linguistic and ethnographic works, published between 1903 and 1921 at s’ Hertogenbosch ad Boxtel in the Netherlands.”⁵²

In the kingdom of Buganda White Fathers had to compete with Anglican CMS missionaries both in the linguistic work and teaching. The efforts of both missions soon met with an enthusiastic response. Reading became so popular in Buganda that the booklet called *Mateeka* produced by A. Mackay and the Catholic catechism prepared by Father Livinhac were circulated in tens of thousands. Early missionaries in Uganda left vivid accounts of Baganda “readers” drifting from one mission station and one set of instruction to another, often frequenting both mission stations as well as the Zanzibari camp at Lungujja, and of Baganda lads sitting on the hay-covered floor in the royal palace reading or scribbling on boards or any scrap of paper they could pick up

joignons un petit syllabaire, sans lequel le catéchisme serait inutile. Il est important que nous recevions sans retard ces petits ouvrages, pour tenir tête aux protestants.” A letter written by Léon Livinhac to the WF Headquarters in Algiers from Rubaga, 20 janvier 1880. *Chronique Trimestrielle, Nyanza*, No. 8, X, Octobre 1880, pp. 279 – 280. “Les nègres ont la manie d’apprendre à lire, et ils demanderont à se faire instruire en plus grand nombre, si nous leur enseignons la religion dans des livres. Les protestants ont une imprimerie, et au moyen d’alphabets imprimés, ils ont, durant un certain temps, attiré chez eux bon nombre d’élèves.” Livinhac stressed in another letter to Algiers, of 20 janvier 1880. *Chronique Trimestrielle, Nyanza*, No. 8, X, Octobre 1880, p. 280.

⁵⁰ *Chronique Trimestrielle*, No. 143, 1907, p. 63, quoted also by SHORTER, A. *Cross & Flag in Africa*, op.cit., p. 162.

⁵¹ SHORTER, A. *Cross & Flag in Africa*, op.cit., p. 162.

⁵² The works were: BAZIN, Hippolyte. *Dictionnaire Bambara-Français*. Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1906; van der BURGT, Jean-Martin-Michael. *Un Grand Peuple de l’Afrique Equatoriale – Elements d’une monographie sur l’Urundi et les Warundi*. s’Hertogenbosch, Société d’Illustration Catholique 1903; van der BURGT, J.-M.-M. *Dictionnaire Français-Kirundi*. s’Hertogenbosch, Société d’Illustration Catholique, 1904; van der BURGT, J.-M.-M. *Het Kruis geplant in een Onbekend Negerland van Midden-Afrika*. Boxtel, 1921. Ibid.

and, lacking paper, sometimes even practising with a stick or just their own fingers in the dust of the royal courtyard.⁵³

To Alexander Mackay, and other CMS missionaries, literacy was a key to Christian conversion and ability to read a Gospel not only a requirement for baptism but also a way to a personal revelation of Biblical Truth. From his arrival in Buganda in November 1878, Mackay started to translate portions of the Scriptures into Luganda and Swahili, beginning with a translation of St. Mathew's Gospel.⁵⁴ Portions of the Gospels were translated by many early CMS missionaries. O'Flaherty, one of the first CMS missionaries in the kingdom of Buganda, also started to translate the Gospels into Luganda. "I have translated from Kiswahili Steere's Scripture History with other additional History of some Scriptural character from New and Old Testament. I have translated most of St. Math's Gospel and part of St. Marks & the Order of Morning and Evening Service from the Prayer Book from Kiswahili whose idioms are nearer Ruganda than English," O'Flaherty reported in one of his letters.⁵⁵ Other early CMS missionaries, R. Ashe, Crabtree, Gordon and Walker, and some others, made efforts at Gospel translation into Luganda, but the task of translation of the whole Bible into Luganda fell to George L. Pilkington. Pilkington started the work of translation shortly after his arrival, using Bishop Steere's Swahili version of the Bible and sharing the responsibility with senior Baganda Protestant converts and Church leaders, Henry Wright Duta Kitaakule as his chief assistant, as well as Sembera Mackay, Samwili Mukasa and Nuwa Nakiwafu. Pilkington completed the task of translation of most of the Bible into

⁵³ MULLINS, J. D. *The Wonderful Story of Uganda*, London, CMS 1904 includes early memoirs of a leading Protestant convert Hamu Mukasa. See also Mackay to Lang, 29 September, 1885, CMS Archives, G3A6/02, and H (Harrison). J. W. A. M. Mackay: *pioneer missionary of the CMS in Uganda*, pp. 138 – 140; TOURIGNY, Y. *So abundant a harvest: the Catholic Church in Uganda 1879 – 1979*, pp. 32 – 49. There are also many letters written by early White Fathers in Buganda kept in their archives in Rome, C13 Vicariat du Nyanza (Uganda). Correspondance des Vicaires Apostoliques: Mr Livinhac (1878 – 1889), Mgr. Hirth (1889 – 1892); C14, Vicariat du Nyanza (Uganda). Correspondance des missionnaires.

⁵⁴ PAWLIKOVA-VILHANOVA, V. *Biblical Translations of Early Missionaries in East and Central Africa. II. Translations into Luganda*, op.cit., pp. 198 – 210.

⁵⁵ O'Flaherty to Wigram, December 25, 1881. Church Missionary Society Archives, G3 A6/0 1882. There are many other letters reporting his efforts to produce a grammar, a vocabulary or dictionary, "a dialogue and phrase book illustrating the difficulties and bringing into prominence the beauties of Ru-ganda," in CMS Archives, G3 A6/0 1883/1-132, e.g. a letter of O'Flaherty to Wigram, August 9, 1882. There are many other letters by O'Flaherty describing the progress made in his linguistic work, "I have written a large grammar with copious illustrations; a dialogue and phrase book; a large vocabulary or lexicon. I have trusted no man's ears but my own," and expressing his admiration for "this beautiful language" Luganda and even the speakers of the language "The niggers are wonderful orators and elocutionists and are justly proud of their language." O'Flaherty to Wigram. 10 November 1882, G3 A6/0 1882.

Luganda during his stay in England, and the first Luganda Bible, known as “Biscuit Bible”, was published by the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1896.⁵⁶

However, the Bible was, above all, the book of Protestant Africa. While Protestant missionaries in Uganda and in other parts of Africa soon after their arrival started to produce translations of Biblical texts, of parts of the New and Old Testament, and then of the whole Bible, in different African languages, the White Fathers, who were excellent linguists and had been in some regions of the African continent many years before the arrival of Protestant missionaries, were encouraged to prepare grammars, dictionaries, catechisms and books of Bible stories in different African languages, but never translations of the Bible. White Fathers and other Catholic missionaries working in Africa had no mandate to undertake Bible translation, nor the intention to encourage the private interpretation of the Scriptures by their converts. “The sole translations of the four Gospels to be produced by them during this period were in the Berber dialect of North Africa in 1900 and 1907, in Luganda and Rutoro in 1905 and in Swahili in 1913. It was only after 1920 that translations of the Gospels began to be made in earnest by White Fathers in the vernaculars of sub-Saharan Africa.”⁵⁷

Lavigerie, as a historian, was well aware of the importance of “sacred history” in catechesis and in 1886 authorised its use. Instead of using difficult texts from the Old and New Testaments, White Fathers attempted to attract Africans with oral catechesis, interesting catechisms,⁵⁸ and books of Bible stories, containing beautiful coloured pictures and telling “the stories of the principal events of the Old and New Testaments, the life of Jesus and the founding of the church, the history of the church under persecution and confronted by heresies, finally the expansion of the church among the nations.” All these stories were contained in the first book in the Kinyarwanda language published in 1902, similar books were produced in other African languages.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ TUMA, T., MUTIBWA, Ph. (eds). *A Century of Christianity in Uganda, 1877 – 1977*, pp. 94 – 95; HARFORD-BATTERSBY, C. F. *Pilkington of Uganda*, pp. 190 – 237.

⁵⁷ SHORTER, A. *Cross&Flag in Africa*, op.cit., p. 141.

⁵⁸ Among the early catechisms produced by the White Fathers and used by their postulants and catechumens, the Little Catechism of Algiers could be mentioned. It was translated into Swahili in 1884, *Petit Catéchisme d’Alger. Traduit en Langue Kiswahili*. Paris, F. Levé 1884. The Kabyle Catechism was translated into Swahili in 1885; *Catéchisme en Langue Kiswahili*. Algiers: Maison Carrée, 1885. Also *Catéchisme Kabyle*. Algiers: Maison Carrée, 1904; *Katekismu Katolika*. Algiers: Maison Carrée, 1911.

⁵⁹ SHORTER, A. *Cross&Flag in Africa*, op.cit., pp. 141 – 142. The book was written by Alphonse Brard and entitled *How God has spoken to Human Beings*. According to Shorter, Jacob Ecker’s German Bible for Schools, published in Trier in 1906, was in

White Fathers were neither expected nor urged to translate the Scriptures into African languages, but the example of the rival Protestants stimulated them into rather more Biblical translations than was customary for Catholics.⁶⁰ In spite of their polemics with the CMS missionaries working in Uganda, White Fathers were impressed with their achievements in the linguistic work and Bible translations. Léon Livinhac, who in 1892 had succeeded Lavigerie as Superior General of the White Fathers, from the headquarters in Algiers closely followed developments in Uganda and Protestant linguistic contributions, and demanded that a committee composed of missionaries representing all three mission societies, White Fathers, CMS and Mill Hill Fathers, be created to correct the Luganda grammar and prepare a unified form of Luganda spelling and a Luganda-English, English-Luganda dictionary, as Uganda was a British colony.⁶¹

The linguistic activity of early missionaries in Africa facilitated an increased knowledge of and sympathy with Africans and their cultures. The study of an African language became an entry into an understanding of the African society and its culture. During the process of the study of African languages, early missionaries slowly came to appreciate their richness, inner beauty, precision and unbelievable diversity. From the beginning of contact, White Fathers found in African languages not only vehicles of communications but media for human expression of beauty. “Le Ruganda est une langue riche, coulante et qui s’est conservée très pure. Elle a une littérature, elle est fixée par une grammaire, c’est la langue dans laquelle un peuple éminent religieux reçoit l’instruction. Les Baganda aiment passionnément leur langue, et à mon avis, le Buganda ne disparaîtra qu’avec les Baganda-mêmes,” wrote Bishop Streicher in support of Luganda against Swahili on 15 October 1903.⁶² Protestant missionaries were of the same opinion. O’Flaherty openly expressed his admiration for “this beautiful language” Luganda and even for the speakers of the language. “The niggers are wonderful orators and elocutionists and are justly proud of their language,” he wrote.⁶³

1911 translated into Kinyarwanda by Paul Barthélemy and Léon Classe, and then rapidly into all the languages of Nyanza South, and was in constant use until the 1930s. The book had 245 pages, with illustrations, and contained one hundred stories from the Old and New Testaments.

⁶⁰ As has already been mentioned, a translation of the four Gospels in Luganda and Rutoro was produced in 1905. The Church Missionary Society produced a New Testament in Rutoro in 1902 and an Old Testament in 1906.

⁶¹ Livinhac to an unknown Father (Le Veux?), May 22, 1909. White Fathers Archives, Rome, Fonds Livinhac I 83/200. Also SHORTER, A. *Cross&Flag in Africa*, op.cit., p. 232.

⁶² Streicher to Sadler, Rubaga 15 October 1903, re Swahili versus Luganda. Enclosed in Despatch No. 345, Sadler to Lansdowne, 1 December 1903, FO 2/792.

⁶³ O’Flaherty to Wigram. 10 November 1882, Church Missionary Society Archives, G3 A6/0 1882.

The linguistic study of Luganda and translations of religious texts led some White Fathers to a comparison of the two languages, Luganda and Swahili, and a more positive evaluation of Luganda to the detriment of the Swahili language, despite the fact that Swahili became by then a lingua franca of East African Christianity, used by Christian missionaries of all denominations. In the early period of the missionary presence in the kingdom of Buganda, the instruction in reading and writing, which went with the work of evangelisation, was in Swahili. Both the Catholic White Fathers and the Anglican CMS missionaries had at first used Swahili as a medium of instruction, taking advantage of the local knowledge of Swahili and of the Arabic script introduced into the country by Muslim merchants. Though not openly voiced, political and religious connotations were always implicit in the missionary thought. While Luganda was, in the eyes of both the White Fathers and CMS missionaries, associated with the spread of Christianity, progress and civilization and was the language through which the Christian truth was being communicated to the inhabitants of the kingdom of Buganda and later on also to the rest of the present-day Uganda, Swahili was to them a carrier of slavery, the slave trade and Islam.⁶⁴

Thanks to the linguistic work of the early Missionaries of Africa or White Fathers, many African languages were rendered in Roman script and foundations of the literary tradition in African languages were laid in different parts of the African continent, creating the necessary pre-conditions for the building up of the literary language, literary tradition and the rise of modern fine literature.

However, in the new situation created by the imposition of colonial rule, the White Fathers were forced to change their language policy. The thirteenth General Chapter of the Society of Missionaries of Africa in 1906 reversed Lavigerie’s edict that Africans should not be taught European languages and should be educated in their own languages. French and English (and Portuguese) replaced African languages in education, and have remained to be used in administration and in education in most African countries until today.

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