



Fr Henri van Roy, S.J.

(1904-1985. In Zambia Jan 1948-Feb 1950)

2 August 1985

Henri van Roy was born in Turnhout, in north Belgium, on 6 October 1904. He entered the novitiate at Arlon in 1921 at the early age of 17. He did a year of juniorate at Tronchiennes (Drongen) and his philosophy (1924-1927) at Drongen and Louvain. He then studied Colonial Sciences (cultural studies) at the Catholic University of Louvain (1927-1928). His regency was divided between College Notre Dame (1928-1929) (Anvers), Gowa (1929-1931) in the region of the Bayala (Congo) and at Wombali (1931-1932) in the region of Kwilu. His theological studies were done in Louvain (1932-1936) where he was ordained in 1935. His tertianship was at Drongen (1936-1937).

He went immediately (1937) to the region of the Bayaka, in the diocese of Popokabaka in the south-west of the Congo, near the north of Angola. His toughest years were between 1940-1945 when there were so few men to run the mission in the Bayaka region with the lack of all comfort and the inevitable uncertainty of every new beginning. Often he was the only priest in the midst of catechists, schoolchildren and first generation Christians.

In 1942 he was mobilized into the Congolese army as a chaplain and dispatched to different countries in Africa with the troops, where he knew neither the language nor the customs of the people. However, he always worked hard and taught people what he had already learnt himself – the art of weaving cloth which he was deeply involved in with the Bayaka. His practical and inventive ability was always much appreciated by everyone.

After the war and some home leave, he was back again among his beloved Bayaka – building churches and bridges. In early 1948 he was sent to Zambia for a couple of years to help out in the developing Polish Mission in Lusaka. He arrived at Chingombe on 13 November 1948 and he was soon out with Br Perdik working on the construction of the new road – Perdik's Pass. In December he helped dismantle a new tractor and have the parts brought to the mission by carriers where it was re-assembled. By February he was already able to say Mass in Bemba. In June Mgr Wolnik and Fr Schurmanns arrived for visitation and it was then decided that he return back to the Congo within a few months.

While endowed with great energy, he was much sought after for his practical advice and his organizational ability. He erected churches at Kasongo-Lunda, Pelande and Kingunda.

In 1961 he was sent to Lemfu, in the diocese of Kisantu. Freed from most of his material concerns he devoted himself wholeheartedly to direct pastoral work, although he still kept an eye on practical things! It was here that he launched the weaving ventures of Lemfa.

After building his last church, he returned to Belgium in 1969 and took up parish work at Noucelles in Wallon Brabant, where he remained as a curate until his death.