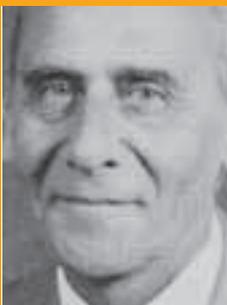


Chapter 4

Dutch Catholic Missionaries in Namibia

About 30 Dutch Catholic missionaries lived and worked in what is currently Namibia. Fathers of the Oblates of St Francis de Sales to the south of Windhoek and Fathers of the Oblates of Mary the Immaculate in the north, were parish priests and pastoral workers started primary schools and were involved in various development projects. Most of them were invited by the Roman Catholic Mission after the Second World War to fill a shortage of German and Austrian missionaries. In the early 1960's they were followed by a group of Brothers of the Congregation of the Movement of Mercy (CMM). In Dutch they were called 'Broeders van Tilburg'. This congregation concentrates on education and was responsible for the establishment of a number of secondary schools in Namibia. The work of the Catholic missionaries and brothers was also appreciated by the Netherlands government: 12 of them received a royal decoration.



Fr. Hermenegildus Beris

Adrianus Beris joined the Congregation of the Movement of Mercy in 1946 and took his vows in 1951, when he took the name Brother Hermenegildus. He has various academic qualifications in teaching and history and received his PhD in 1996 with a dissertation on the history of the Catholic Church in Namibia. He came to Namibia in 1962 and was director of St Paul's College in Windhoek from 1966 to 1989. Later he worked for the National Catholic Development Commission until his retirement. He lives in Windhoek.



Some of the places where Dutch missionaries worked between 1948 and 2006. Map by Bart Hendrix.

The first Dutch missionary who worked in Namibia was Father Hubert van 't Westeinde. He had joined the Oblates of St Francis de Sales. He worked in the Apostolic Vicariate of Pella/Keimoes in the Northern Cape province of South Africa. In 1896 he was transferred to the farm Heirachabis near Ariamsvlei in the south of Namibia. Bishop Simon of Pella had bought this farm to get a foothold in Great Namaqualand (the south of Namibia). After that appointment it would take more than fifty years before he was succeeded by other Dutch priests. The reason was that the missionary jurisdiction of this territory had been handed over to the Austrian Province of the Oblates of St Francis de Sales in the south and to the German Province of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate in the north.

In the aftermath of World War II the Catholic Mission in Namibia was in a difficult plight. No new missionaries could reach the country since 1938 and sickness and death had demanded its toll. It was also clear that the German Province of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate and the Austrian Province of the Oblates of St Francis de Sales were not in a position to send new personnel. They had lost many of their members in the war. The war was also responsible for a lack of new vocations and most of the available priests were needed in Germany itself.

The Oblates of Mary the Immaculate in the north

The German Province of Oblates looked to their neighbours in the Netherlands. Though that country had been occupied and had been involved in the war, studies for the priesthood had continued on and new priests had been ordained. Until the end of the war they could not leave the country, but as soon as the war was over these young missionaries were eager to be sent overseas to mission territories. As the Dutch were part of the Allied Forces it was easier for them to obtain visas than for citizens of former enemy countries. Around 1948 transport became available for ordinary travelers. The first Dutch Oblates entered Namibia during the years 1949 and 1950 to strengthen the ranks of the remaining German missionaries.

In Andara at the border between Kavango and Caprivi, Father Jan Theunissen started assisting the well-known Father Abba Fröhlich. Father Bernard van Roosmalen was assigned to the station of Sambyu where Father Hartmann was the leader. Father van Roosmalen, also known as the “Muruti” or “Mudama”, was manager of that station between 1976 and 1998. He earned respect among his people for the support and protection he gave them, often illegally, during the South African occupation. When in 1998 the Salesian Fathers of Don Bosco took over he retired to Nyangana. He died in September 2005.

Father Matthieu Baetsen was sent to Nyangana, the first station in Kavango. Father Baetsen introduced the africanisation of church music. This was not so easy. The older missionaries and the older members of the community disapproved strongly. Fortunately Father Schlag, the Rector, supported him. After the former died quite suddenly, Father Baetsen was entrusted with the leadership of Nyangana in 1957. Around the same time Father Harry Baeten was also assigned to Kavango. He served at a variety of places and eventually ended up at Bunya where he became the rector.

In Owamboland the station of Ombalantu was entrusted to two Dutch fathers, Martin Blondé and Father Jan Mensink. The young Jan Mensink delivered lectures during which he introduced a proper system of working with catechists and a school to train them. Martin Blondé left the church after he married a local lady. They moved to Tilburg in the Netherlands.

Father Heimerickx started at Okatana, but when the rector of Oshikuku died he was appointed as rector. Oshikuku, was the main station in the centre of Owambo. Father Heimerickx was another staunch defender of the rights of the indigenous Namibians against their occupiers. When it was found that he had smuggled photos of murdered parishioners abroad, he was placed on the list of wanted people by the South African secret police and army. The Vicar-General recalled him and sent him immediately overseas, just before he was going to be arrested. From Europe Father Heimerickx went to Lusaka and worked in the SWAPO camps in Angola and Zambia. He was the only white spiritual leader who collaborated in the camps with his black Namibian coun-



Catholic Church in Oshikuku

*Oshikuku was the main Catholic mission station in Northern regions before Independence. It was the place where Father Gerard Heimerickx was rector when he had to flee the country because of his anti South African activities. Photo reproduced from *Zwischen Namib und Kalahari, 25 Jahre katholische Mission in Südwestafrika*, Windhoek 1976*



Catholic Church in Tsumeb

*Tsumeb, one of the mining centres of Namibia, was for many years the place where Father Lamm of the Oblates of Mary the Immaculate was parish priest. Photo reproduced from *Zwischen Namib und Kalahari, 25 Jahre katholische Mission in Südwestafrika*, Windhoek, 1976*

terparts in providing spiritual guidance for the Catholics. He was highly appreciated and after independence he returned to Namibia with great honour.

Further to the south we found the popular Father Lamm as parish priest of Tsumeb, where he served for a very long time. His work was different from that in the mission stations in the north. It looked more like the work in a modern city parish. Tsumeb has a pretty little church in the centre, built in 1913, and a big church with a school in the suburbs.

Father Schramm was the assistant of the famous Father Morgenschweiz in Walvis Bay. While Father Morgenschweiz was parish priest of the central parish, the Fathers Schramm and Eisenreef took care of Narraville and Kuiseb Mund. Right in the centre of the country in Windhoek was Father Ellenbroek (Piep) who was the priest-in-charge in Khomasdal for the “coloured” population. Here he built a big church, which today is a real landmark in the suburb of Khomasdal.

The Oblates of St Francis the Sales in the south

The development of the Vicariate of Keetmanshoop followed a different pattern, but in the end it led to the same result. When after the war the Austrian Province was unable to provide staff, the Vicar-Apostolic became quite impatient. The shortage of priests in the south was much more critical than in the north. It was Bishop Heinrich Thünemann of Keimoes (Northern Cape), who made the suggestion to the General Chapter of the Oblates of St Francis to accept a policy of making all the Provinces of the Congregation responsible for the mission territories. The result was that the Italian, Swiss, north American and Dutch Provinces started to send members to Keetmanshoop. Because the common and liturgical language in the south was Afrikaans, it was much easier to transfer priests and brothers than in the north where so many languages were used, that every transfer meant learning another language. The administration in Keetmanshoop could therefore be much more flexible than in the north and could transfer personnel many more times. We will find the Dutch Fathers regularly transferred from one station to the oth-

er. The Dutch missionaries worked all over the Vicariate, but especially in the rural areas. We will mention those stations where these Fathers spent a considerable period of time or where they placed a personal mark on such a station.

Father Groos will be remembered as the priest of Aroab in the middle of the Kalahari. On the other side of the country on the Atlantic coast at Lüderitz Father Groenendijk and Father Bokern looked after the two churches in the town as well as the out stations of Oranjemund and Aus. Father Jansen spent most of his time at Keetmanshoop, where he was the parish priest of Krönlein, the township of Keetmanshoop. He built a wonderful spacious church as well as a new hospital. He also established a Catholic Secondary School, St Thomas Aquinas. Later this school would be taken over by the Government under the name of Suiderlig. Father Jansen was the contact person between the Church and Government for the Catholic schools and he served a period as Regional Superior of the Oblates of St Francis.

Father Rütten was the priest-in-charge of Stampriet, also situated in the Kalahari. He founded the Marianum, intended to be a Minor Seminary and High School. Unfortunately, it never came well off the ground as it was virtually impossible to get teachers in that out of the way place. Father Martin van den Avoirt was also Provincial for a term and, after serving at various stations, he settled at Karasburg as parish priest. From Karasburg he went out to Warmbad, Noordoever and Aussenkehr and many more stations. Br Fidelis Gielen was the manager of Tses with a primary and secondary school and hostels for quite a while. Father Bergkamp was, for a long time, the manager of Heirachabis and therefore also farmer of that place. Heirachabis is situated in the far South near Ariamsvlei. The station had a primary school. Nowadays Father Bergkamp works in the parish of Mariental.

The brothers of the Congregation of the Movement of Mercy (CMM)

In 1958 the two first brothers CMM travelled to South West Africa on the “Grote Beer”. In Walvis Bay they were



Brothers CMM in Namibia 1992

Back row from left: Emeric Goossens, Wouterus van den Hout, Egidius de Laat, Toon Minton, Piet Dilissen, Silverius Brekelmans. Middel: Paul Schalken, Patricio Smolders, Frans Janssen, Hermenegildus Beris, Justinianus Moeskops. Seated: Gregoor van de Ven, Frans vande Meulengraaf, Sebastianus van Seters, Giovanni Simons. From Mission between Deserts, History of the Fratres CMM in Namibia, Windhoek, 1994.



Herero Chief Visit to Döbra

Visit to St. Joseph's Catholic Mission, Döbra, by the paramount Chief of the Herero, Hosea Kutako, in 1959. Chief Hosea Kutako is shown in the centre of the photograph. To his right are Father Henning and Brother Gregor van de Ven. Photos reproduced from Mission between Deserts: History of the Fratres CMM in Namibia, Windhoek, 1994.

welcomed by Father Morgenschweisz, the parish priest. From there Br Gregoor van de Ven and Br Arnulf van de Nieuwenhuizen were taken to the station of Döbra, at 25 km distance from Windhoek. Here they would take over St Joseph's Teacher Training College of the Roman Catholic Church at Döbra near Windhoek. It had started in 1924 and for all these years members of the Order of OMI and the Sisters of the Holy Cross were responsible. But the Bishop saw that he would not have sufficient staff for this highly important school. Therefore he had tried several Congregations. Every time the reaction had been negative. Then Father van Roosmalen pointed to the Brothers CMM. The Bishop asked him to travel overseas and visit the General Board of the Brothers where his cousin was a member of that Board. All together 15 Dutch and Belgian brothers taught at the school and worked for the hostel. The Teacher Training Centre and High School of St Joseph's developed into an important centre for the training of professionals for the future state of Namibia. Many current leaders received at least part of their education at Döbra.

When the Catholic parents in Windhoek heard that brothers had started teaching at Döbra they approached Bishop Rudolph Koppmann and insisted that the Catholic boys in Windhoek should also have a school of their own. Since 1906 the Catholic girls had their school in the Convent. It was time that also the boys would receive their centre of education. After deliberations that took more than three years, the General Board of CMM agreed and in January 1962 the brothers Ernestus Smulders and Sebastianus van Seters started a brand-new school in Klein Windhoek, St Paul's College. The school would cater for primary and secondary school pupils. In the course of the years twelve brothers taught at the school and two took care of the hostel for boys. Br Hermenegildus Beris was principal of the school from 1966 until 1989. St Paul's College is in the mean time almost 44 years old and has grown into the top school of Namibia.

Döbra had catered throughout these years for students from all over the country but the Odendaal Plan, which also introduced apartheid in education, did not allow students from the north coming to study in "white" areas. The Government had built a Teacher's Training Centre in Ongwediva. But the Catholic Church decided

to open a Training College for Teachers and a High School of their own. It was not easy to register the school, because the fledging Government of Owamboland, wanted to protect its own College and did not want competition. It took quite some deliberations to obtain permission and then it was accompanied with all kinds of conditions. As Br Gregoor had finished his term of office at Döbra, he was asked to prepare this new school and become its first principal. The school provisionally started in Okatana in 1971. The following year when the buildings were ready it moved to Ombalantu, under the name of Canisianum. Br Gregoor van de Ven, Hildebertus van Gompel and Faustus Dilissen worked at the school, assisted by some Sisters and lay teachers. Unfortunately, the school had to be closed in 1977 because of the liberation war. Teachers and some students were withdrawn to Döbra.

For a long time the school buildings stood empty, but after 1990 the Government opened a junior secondary school in the existing buildings. The Cheshire Home for Handicapped Children made use of the hostel. But the people of Owambo called on the Church to establish for them a school similar to the one in Kavango. The Archbishop finally listened to their call and after lengthy negotiations the State returned the school to the Church in 2003. From the beginning of 2004 the Canisianum is again a private Catholic school. From 2006 onwards the school will be extended to grade 11 and 12. In the agreement stood that the school would concentrate on Mathematics, Physics and Biology, which is being realized. In addition to the existing staff three Sisters are teaching at the school and one Father of the Missionaries of St Francis de Sales. Unfortunately, at this moment no brothers are available, but the Congregation CMM promised to support the school financially every year.

In 1985 the Congregation decided to open a house in Katutura. The special work of the brothers would be social and pastoral. The first three brothers who started this work were Br Justinianus Moeskops, Br Arnulf van de Nieuwenhuizen and Br Wouterus van den Hout. Br Justinianus would work in the church office and in addition remain contact official between Administration and Church for the schools and hostels. He was also responsible for the various bursary schemes at schools and universities. Br Wouterus would take care of the

Knights of the Order of Orange-Nassau

The work and devotion of the Dutch missionaries and religious brothers were also noticed by the Dutch authorities. From 1994 to 1996, eleven were made Knights of the Order of Orange-Nassau. Another recipient was Toos van Helvoort, who was a well-known and courageous health worker before and after independence.

The first was Father Emeric, in 1994 Father Heimerix and Father van Roosmalen were honoured and in 1995 the following priests and religious brothers: Martinus van de Avoird, Nic Bergkamp, Hermenegildus Beris, Johannes Bokern, Bernardus Giling, Quirinus Groenendijk, Egidius de Laat and Johannes Mensink. In 1996 it was the turn of Brother Sebastianus van Seters.

Six of the eight missionaries who were honoured in 1995 received their decoration during the Queen's Day celebration in Windhoek on 28th April. This was a special celebration because 1995 was the year that the Miss Universe pageant was held in Windhoek. The Chargé d'Affaires, Cornélie van Waegeningh, was assisted by the four most beautiful young ladies in the Kingdom of the Netherlands coming from Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao and The Netherlands. Namibia's Miss Universe 1992, Michelle McLean was also present. Perhaps it was these special guests who attracted an unusually large number of Namibian Cabinet Ministers to the reception.



Celebration of Queen's Day 1995

The beauty queens from the four parts of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and three of the eight recipients of royal decorations listen to the speech of Chargé d'Affaires, Cornélie van Waegeningh. The new Knights of the Order of Orange-Nassau in the photograph are from left Father Nic Bergkamp, Brother Egidius de Laat and Father Johannes Bokern. Photo courtesy of Cornélie van Waegeningh

youth movement such as Jongwag, the St Vincent de Paul Organisation for disadvantaged people and other church clubs. Br Arnulf was responsible for the house and the church choir. When later Br Claudius joined he remained teacher at Döbra. The house was also intended as formation house for young people who wanted to join the Congregation.

At the end of 1989 Br Hermenegildus left St Paul's and started his sabbatical years in the USA. After his return at the end of 1991 he was asked to build up a Department for Education for the Church as part of NACADEC (Namibian Catholic Development Commission). In the course of 1992 he visited all the Catholic schools and hostels to build up the infrastructure. During one of those meetings at Sambyu in Kavango, 110 Catholic teachers had assembled. One of their requests was for the Church to become again involved in education. Education was very much neglected in that region, the existing High Schools did not produce the requested results and discipline was deplorable in the hostels. In response to that request meetings were held between 1992 and 1994. A steering committee had been set up and that committee met with the Regional Office of Education, representatives of the General Board of the Brothers CMM and finally with the Ministry of Education. In December 1993 the Ministry approved the new school in Kavango at Sambyu mission station. At that

stage it would have to operate without subsidy. Fortunately, another meeting in June brought about that the Ministry agreed to pay the teachers' salaries. St Boniface College was opened on 17 January 1995.

The school started with two grade 8 classes while the hostel was scattered over various old buildings. The building programme commenced in that year and was carried on during 1996, 1997 and 1998. The official opening took place in March 1998 by Archbishop Bonifatius Haushiku, who blessed the school and Director Kantema of the Regional Office, who in the name of the Minister officially inaugurated St. Boniface College. Br Piet Dilissen was appointed as principal and Br Sebastinaus van Seters as administrator. Br Justinianus Moeskops and Br Wouterus van den Hout taught various subjects. Two Sisters and two volunteers completed the staff.

Ten years of existence of St Boniface College was celebrated in 2005. Two Ministers were among the many guests and friends; the Minister of Home Affairs and the Minister of Education, both from Kavango. Like the other Catholic schools St Boniface has progressed well and in 2004 the school came second in the national grade 10 examinations and number three in the HIGCSE results. The people of Kavango are proud of their school and it is already too small to accommodate all the applications.

