

A KONGO PRINCESS, THE KONGO AMBASSADORS AND THE PAPACY¹

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With one most notable exception, relatively little is known concerning Christian women in the ancient kingdom of Kongo, whose importance for the history of African Christianity has been so notably demonstrated in Adrian Hastings's great history (Hastings, 1994). Much of the seventeenth-century history of the neighbouring kingdom of Matamba is dominated by the exploits of Queen Nzinga, but, apart from the dramatic, tragic and much studied career of Beatrice Kimpa Vita, very little attention has been given to women in the study of Kongo's ancient history. Yet scattered across the documents from the sixteenth to the early nineteenth century are a number of indications that women played an important, and even at times vital, role in the maintenance and development of Kongo Catholicism. As early as the mid sixteenth century, a Jesuit reported that the king had decided that 'all the women should be gathered into a church called Ambiro', and that it was there that the Jesuits said Mass for them and 'taught them to know Our Lord' (Van Wing, 40-41). A century later, the recognition by the Capuchin missionaries of Garcia II as a Catholic monarch was seriously endangered by his persecution of leading Christian ladies, who from the arrival of the Capuchins were reported to have 'daily participated in all the spiritual exercises setting a great example and edification to the court' (Mateo de Anguiano, 365-9). At the end of the seventeenth century and well into the eighteenth, when the unity of the Kongo kingdom had been destroyed and its power dissipated among competing rulers, royal women continued to maintain the faith and warmly welcome Catholic missionaries. Hastings has recently drawn attention to the role of a former queen, Ana Afonso de Leão, 'a woman of great authority . . . politically responsible and devoutly Catholic'

(Hastings, 1998, 151), and her importance, together with that of other Kongolese women, has been amply illustrated in John Thornton's recent, most valuable book (Thornton, 1998). In 1749 Bernardino Ignazio d'Asti reported how a royal widow had been recently visited by a Capuchin in 'one of the most remote parts of Kongo'. He had been overwhelmed there for almost a month, making four thousand baptisms and hearing the confessions of all the people 'who had been prepared for the sacraments by that worthy lady'.² So far as is known, however, the impact of all these notable Christian women was confined to Kongo itself. Yet in the late sixteenth century the fancy, perhaps fleeting, of a young Kongo princess, through the response which it evoked in Europe, played a part, minor yet significant, in the process which eventually persuaded the papacy to establish in 1622 the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide, which was later to become the most powerful organization in Catholic mission history.

It is a strange story; church historians might even dare to call it providential. A series of fragile, brief, yet powerfully consequential, encounters established a network of Christian contacts which stretched across two continents. Perhaps the most extraordinary was the first: the audience given in the Escorial by Philip II of Spain to Teresa of Avila probably in December 1577. She herself described the meeting as follows:

'Imagine what this poor woman must have felt when she saw so great a King before her. I was terribly embarrassed. I began to address him; but, when I saw his penetrating gaze fixed on me—the kind of gaze that goes deep down to the very soul—it seemed to pierce me through and through; so I lowered my eyes and told him what I wanted as briefly as I could. When I had finished telling him about the matter I looked up at him again. His face seemed to have changed. His expression was gentler and more tranquil. He asked me if I wanted anything further. I answered that what I had asked for was a great deal. Then he said 'Go away in peace, for everything shall be arranged as you wish . . .' I knelt to thank him for his great favour. He bade me rise, and making this poor nun, his unworthy servant, the most charming bow I ever saw, held out his hand to me again, which I kissed' (Peers, 146). At that time the persecution of her reform was at its height, but within two years Philip recommended to Rome its recognition.

The next chain of events began with the death of King Sebastian of Portugal at the battle of Alcazar-el-Kabir, that total defeat in 1578 of the last attempt by European Christendom to reconquer North Africa by the force of crusading arms. Two years after this death, Philip II of Spain successfully asserted his rights to the Portuguese crown. With

bullion from Spanish America already providing a major part of his finances, he was anxious to explore the potential mineral riches of his new African dominions. Additional forces were despatched to Mina to protect the export of West African gold, and the rumours of silver mines in the hinterland of Luanda attracted his attention. Together with these material interests, he was concerned to develop and deepen the *padroado*, the ecclesiastical rights and responsibilities which the Portuguese crown had been granted by the papacy in the course of the fifteenth century. Philip was careful not to offend unnecessarily the susceptibilities of his new subjects, and Portuguese affairs in general continued to be administered separately. Yet for a mission to West Africa and Kongo in particular, Philip turned not to one of the orders which had previously sent Portuguese missionaries to the area, but to the order reformed by Teresa of Avila which was attracting some of the most ardent spirits of Spanish Catholicism.

Jerónimo Gracián, the young confidant of the aged saint, had just been elected Provincial and he was informed of the royal wish that the Discalced Carmelites should undertake this mission. By March 1582 five Spanish Carmelites were chosen, instructed by Gracián while their leader received words of encouragement from Teresa herself (Bontinck, 116). Philip himself went down to the port in Lisbon to see them set sail in April. The ship was lost at sea and the priests drowned. The following year a second group of Carmelite missionaries were captured by English pirates, but Philip encouraged Gracián to persevere and a third group set out from Lisbon in 1584. After eleven days of missionary work on the island of S. Tomé, the missionaries joined another boat sailing with military reinforcements 'sent by our king', as they reported, 'to conquer a mountain of silver discovered' in the kingdom of Angola (Florenco, 13-35). The ship's passengers neatly illustrated Philip's parallel, and competing, concerns.

Directly after their arrival in Luanda, the Carmelite missionaries set out for Kongo. When they were near the royal capital, they informed King Alvaro I (1568-87) that they were bringing with them a statue of the Virgin Mary and that they should therefore enter Mbanza Kongo in a solemn procession. Diego de la Encarnación, one of the missionaries, reported that a large crowd watched their entry. He estimated that more than thirty thousand people participated, including one hundred Portuguese merchants resident there. Immediately, he claimed, 'a great devotion to the image of the Virgin' developed (Brásio, IV, 395-7). An unnamed princess, one of the four daughters of Alvaro and his canonical wife Dona Catalina, was swept up in this devotion. Seeing

the statue clothed in the habit of a Carmelite nun, she asked the reason and was told that this was because the Virgin was the patron of the Order of Mount Carmel, and that the nuns were so clothed. Listening to the preaching of the Carmelites, she developed a great desire to enter the Order as a Carmelite nun. She therefore sent a letter about this to Mother María de San José, prioress of the newly-founded convent in Lisbon, who replied to her, promising that she would try to find some way of meeting her wishes.

We know nothing more about this princess, but one of the people to whom Mother María spoke about her request was Jean de Brétigny, a young man from Rouen, then the second most important town in France (Sérout, 54). Jean belonged to one of the rich merchant families of Spanish, and often Jewish, origin who dominated the maritime trade of Rouen. His family came from Burgos, in northern Spain, and his relatives there continued to trade with Flanders and France. Jean's grandfather went to Rouen in 1510 and married into a family of Spanish origin, already well established in France, one of its members being a secretary to the king. Jean's father married into an old landed family and continued to prosper in trade. Jean, his eldest son, was born in 1556, but at the age of six he was sent to live with an uncle in Seville until 1570, probably to avoid the turmoil and violence of the religious wars in France. As a young teenager he returned to Rouen, and then in 1581 he was asked by his father to go back to Seville to undertake various business affairs for him. By this time, however, Jean was more interested in religion than in his family's business, and, with his father's consent, he first accompanied a group of Flemish Franciscan nuns to Lisbon, helping them to find a refuge there. Reaching Seville in 1582, he was introduced by a Spanish friend to Mother María de San José, then prioress of the Carmelite convent there. She sent him to Jerónimo Gracián, and for several months Jean attended the novitiate exercises of the Carmelites while also undertaking his father's business affairs. Under the influence of Gracián, María and their colleagues, Jean began to learn that the ultimate aim of the Discalced Carmelites was not the individual perfection of their members, but the furtherance of the kingdom of God. Gradually they encouraged Jean to devote his considerable financial resources to this end (Sérout, 2-51).

In 1584 María was sent to establish the convent in Lisbon, and soon Jean was entrusted with organising, financing and accompanying a caravan of reinforcements from Seville to Lisbon. While he was there in 1585, María must have informed him about the princess in Kongo, for Jean never forgot this plea from the princess. In 1585, however, there

was little that either he or Mother María could do to respond to it immediately. By then St. Teresa had died, and in May Gracián was succeeded as provincial by Nicholas Jesús-María Doria, who did not share Gracián's enthusiasm for overseas missions. The Carmelites in Kongo, left with no reply to their requests for support and reinforcements, decided to return to Europe (Sérouet, 54-7).

The next initiatives came from Kongo, and there is one small but intriguing piece of evidence which indicates that the request of the princess may have been more than a fleeting fancy on the part of one individual. While Philip II had been encouraging the Carmelites to send a mission to western Africa, Alvaro I was instructing Duarte Lopez, a Portuguese trader who had been living at his court since 1578, to go as his envoy to Philip and also to the pope (Bal, 11). The instructions given to Lopez for his mission to Rome, signed by the king on 15 January 1583, reveal some of the motivations which led Alvaro to seek to enter into a closer relationship with the papacy.³ Alvaro clearly recognised Rome as a major source of the spiritual power and strength with which he wished to surround his office and his people. His envoy was ordered 'in the first instance to inform His Holiness in detail concerning what happens and takes place in these my kingdoms, to tell him the need that exists for ministers for so many Christian souls, and to ask for relics, indulgences and blessed objects so that with greater courage and devotion we may make progress in the service of God'. In the case of many European embassies in the sixteenth century, such requests and petitions might indicate little more than a customary mode of approaching the papacy. In the case of Kongo, they represented an urgent and serious demand. In the continuous cosmological conflict with evil as experienced in this African kingdom, such requests to a new source of spiritual power had lost nothing of their validity and immediacy, as is indicated by other details in the instructions.

Lopez was told to negotiate 'that matter which you have learnt by heart from me in our discussions, in the hope that you will carry this through with diligence worthy of the trust in which I hold you'. In all probability the hidden agenda thus committed to Lopez concerned the possibility of liberating Kongo from the restrictions and burdens of Portuguese patronal claims, particularly as exercised by the Portuguese bishop of S. Tomé. Alvaro and his predecessors had come into conflict with the bishop and other Portuguese ecclesiastical emissaries, including the first Portuguese Jesuits in Kongo. Tension had arisen especially over Kongo practices which contravened canon law marriage. Alvaro clearly wished to have far greater control over the nature and development

of Kongo Christianity. He also specifically raised the issue of indigenous religious orders. Lopez was told to insist that Alvaro should be given permission 'to provide in these kingdoms orders of monks and nuns' and that suitable people in Kongo should be allowed to enter these orders. Lopez should also ask for papal Bulls for the principal churches and confraternities, and for 'an image of Our Lady, copied directly from one of the four painted by St. Luke' with the indulgences attached to it. Most probably this request referred to the thirteenth-century painting, popularly attributed to St. Luke, in the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome. We do not know who had told Alvaro about this, but in 1569 Francis Borgia had sent a copy of it to Queen Caterina in Portugal (Suau, 414), after whom Alvaro's canon law wife, as opposed to his other wives, was named. His interest in this painting, and especially his specific request on behalf of Kongolese nuns, provides a fascinating background to his daughter's desire to become a Carmelite nun. It forcibly suggests that the idea of entering a religious order was not a novelty for women attached to the royal court at Mbanza Kongo.

When Lopez eventually reached Rome, the pope, Sixtus V, was unwilling to respond actively to Alvaro's initiative. Beset by the disastrous religious wars in France and many other problems, he was reluctant to challenge Philip's patronal rights. Doubtless he was also aware of the logistical difficulties of sending to Kongo an independent missionary expedition. The critical, on-going contact with Rome was made by Alvaro II, who succeeded his father in 1587. Seven years later, his close relative, Antonio Vieira, arrived in Lisbon, charged with negotiating the creation of a separate diocese for Kongo. He quickly established a close and friendly relationship with Fabio Biondi, the papal representative in Lisbon. Vieira gave Biondi a lively, detailed account of the practice of the faith in Mbanza Kongo (Brásio, III, 502-3). Already the king and his notables were members of six lay confraternities, actively supporting and participating in their activities, which included attendance at a weekly mass offered in part for the souls of previous members.⁴ Kongo respect and veneration for the ancestors was gradually becoming subsumed into orthodox Catholic practice.

Above all, Biondi was deeply impressed by Vieira's Christian character and knowledge. An indication of the impact which the Kongolese ambassador made on Biondi can be glimpsed in the letters of recommendation that the papal collector wrote on his behalf when Vieira was setting out from Lisbon for a visit to Madrid. Biondi informed the Archbishop of Evora that the ambassador merited a warm welcome on

account of his personal qualities and 'particularly for his religious commitment'. He added that in view of the remoteness of Kongo, God should be praised that there were Christians there 'of this quality'. To the nuncio in Madrid, he affirmed that Vieira was 'a very good Christian and devoted to the Apostolic See'. On a later occasion Biondi admitted to being astonished at the fact that the ambassador was 'very well instructed in Christian doctrine and in ecclesiastical history'.⁵

As a result of these contacts, Biondi despatched in November 1595 a long and very optimistic report to Rome on the nature of Kongo Christianity, warmly supporting the request for a diocese to be created separate from that of S. Tomé (Cuvelier & Jadin, 194-207). The Portuguese Mesa de Consciência in Lisbon also supported the request, and recommended to Philip that the bishop of S. Salvador, or Mbanza Kongo, should be given by the crown the same salary as that of S. Tomé (Brásio, III, 480-1). With this recommendation, the council maintained the assumption that Kongo, although an independent kingdom, fell within the Portuguese *padroado*. Its members may well have thought that the presence of a Portuguese bishop, paid for by the crown, would not only strengthen the faith but also serve Portuguese interests, since Alvaro II, unlike his father, had already been involved in hostile exchanges with the Portuguese settlers in Angola.

Since Vieira's request was thus supported both by the papal representative and by Philip II, with the Portuguese crown meeting the expenses, the papacy had no hesitation in creating the new diocese of S. Salvador, approved at the consistory held on 20 May 1596 (Brásio, III, 490). Already however Biondi's links with Kongo, and his admiration for its people, had been strengthened. A letter written by Alvaro II in the previous September had just reached him in Lisbon. In it Alvaro thanked the pope for 'the favours and honours' shown by the papal collector to his ambassador, and asked, as a result of a letter he had received from Biondi, for further assistance from the papacy. (Brásio, III, 490-1.) Biondi reported how the messengers carrying the letter had been seized by English 'pirates' and taken to England. Ill-treated, only with difficulty had they been able to save the letter from destruction. The whole story prompted Biondi to a further affirmation of his interest and affection for the people of Kongo. Forwarding it to Cardinal Aldobrandino, the pope's secretary of state, Biondi said that 'they were people of great commonsense' and the ambassador and 'those who come from that kingdom give a very good account of their faith, which for me is exceeding wonderful, having so great a lack of priests who can instruct them. One could well say that the harvest is plentiful but

the labourers are few indeed'.⁶ His admiration was about to launch the papacy on a confrontation with the *padroado* rights which was gradually, yet inexorably, to grow in intensity.

Pope Clement VIII read Alvaro's letter to all the cardinals in consistory, warmly invited him to send ambassadors to Rome and also sent him a plenary indulgence. (Brásio, III, 544). Vieira left Lisbon in March 1597, taking with him the papal brief and a long letter from Biondi to Alvaro II, congratulating the king on the fact that the Bishop of S. Tomé would no longer have occasion to trouble him. Biondi warmly underlined the papal invitation to send an ambassador to Rome 'as do all Christian Kings'. This, wrote Biondi, would result in Alvaro's 'great glory and elevation', and he assured the king that the ambassador would be 'received and honoured by His Holiness with every honour and paternal affection'.⁷ These phrases proved to be no mere diplomatic niceties, for Biondi was to be highly instrumental in turning them into reality.

On his return to Kongo, Vieira discussed with Alvaro the possibility of sending an embassy to Rome. Alvaro accepted the proposal, but during the preparations Vieira died, and it was not until June 1604 that another ambassador was finally given his formal instructions. Alvaro chose his cousin, Antonio Manuele Nsaku ne Vunda, a man in his early thirties, who was to be described in Rome by those who saw him as someone 'of noble manners and above all pious and devout, also endowed with strength and prudence in diplomacy'.⁸ The embassy arrived in Lisbon in November 1605, but then they encountered many delays. When the ambassador eventually reached Madrid, he was confronted by the authorities with stern and vigorous attempts to dissuade him from proceeding to Rome. The situation facing the ambassador was becoming desperate in the extreme. Alvaro was reported to have sent his embassy equipped with at least twenty-five attendants, but it was supplied merely with shell currency.⁹ Although this was very effective when conducting commercial transactions with the Portuguese in Luanda, as soon as the embassy left the African coast it ran into financial difficulties. According to a petition, the embassy had left Lisbon with very considerable debts to traders there, and as late as June 1607 the authorities in Madrid still hoped that the ambassador could be persuaded to entrust his mission to the Portuguese and Spanish envoys in Rome (Brásio V, 261-3, 311). Antonio eventually found board and lodgings in Madrid with the Mercedarians, an Order whose principal task was to redeem Christian captives taken by North African Muslim corsairs. But besides being a pauper, he was now a very sick man,

Mwana
ngangu,
ingeta!

suffering severely from gallstones. After Antonio had been in the house for three months, the Mercedarian provincial reported that his behaviour and way of life had given them all 'a very great example'. He only went out of the house 'to discuss the affairs of his embassy with the king or with his ministers.' For the rest of the time he stayed in his room, suffering greatly 'with very great patience submitting himself to the Will of God'.¹⁰

At this critical juncture, the Discalced Carmelites intervened. Most members of the reformed order in Spain were still extremely hostile to Gracián's overseas missionary interests, indeed Gracián himself had been expelled from the Order in 1592 by his successor Nicholas de Jesús-María. In Rome, however, the situation was completely different. Here the leader of the Discalced Carmelites was in the forefront of curial strategic planning. The menace of Ottoman expansion in the Balkans, which threatened Austria, Bohemia and Poland, and also the Turkish raids on the Italian coast, which caused terror in Rome, powerfully influenced what papal interest there was in sub-Saharan Africa at this time. Beyond Ottoman power, long enshrouded in medieval myth, the kingdom of Prester John or Ethiopia had emerged in the minds of missionary strategists as a potential ally of very great significance. Towards the end of his life, St. Ignatius had devoted a great deal of time and energy in sending to Ethiopia the most extensive mission ever launched by the founder of the Jesuits. Later, the first major attempt in Rome to establish a curial congregation charged with supervising and organising the propagation of the faith, under the able direction of the remarkable Cardinal Santori, had been very largely concerned with strengthening the ties between Rome and the Christian communities within or neighbouring the Ottoman empire. And Ethiopia had a position of prime importance among these Christians on the underbelly of the Ottomans. Already it was believed that control of the Nile waters by its Christian emperor could be a key to the mastery of Egypt. After Santori's death in 1602 the nascent curial congregation was allowed to wither, but leadership of these papal and missionary strategies devolved upon Pedro de la Madre de Dios, the gifted and outstanding Spanish leader of the Italian province of Discalced Carmelites. Clearly involved in the decision to send a mission to Persia whose ruler had defeated an Ottoman army in 1603, he was often called upon to advise Paul V on Middle Eastern questions. He took a leading part in directing the negotiations with the Coptic Church in Egypt, and in an undated memorandum to the pope he highlighted the importance of fostering relations with Ethiopia through the Ethiopian monks in Jerusalem.¹¹

Together with some of Santori's former assistants, Pedro had become deeply interested in investigating the feasibility of developing a trans-continental route from Kongo to Ethiopia. From the early sixteenth century an exaggerated idea of the southward extension of Ethiopia to the equator had lent credence to the belief that the journey from Kongo to Ethiopia would be a relatively easy undertaking. As soon as Pedro learned of Antonio Manuele's arrival in Madrid, he wrote to Tomás de Jesús, a leading young Spanish Carmelite who was already a key figure in the conflict between contemplative and missionary vocations within the reformed Order. Tomás's primary objective had been to promote the hermetical way of life, but gradually the needs of the missions both in Europe and overseas were brought before him. Pedro told Paul V that he hoped Tomás would take charge of a projected mission to Kongo and from there 'open a route to Prester John'. At first Tomás remained firmly set against accepting this mission, even when informed of the pope's approval, but while saying Mass one day he became convinced that he should accept this challenge, and immediately he began to collect information concerning 'the lands and languages of Congo and the Abyssinians' (Joseph de Santa Teresa, t.iv, libro xvii, cap 39.) Pedro also contacted Diego de la Encarnación, a member of the 1584 mission to Kongo, ordering him to assist the ambassador in his attempt to reach Rome. The papal nuncio was also instructed to help, and eventually in October 1607 Antonio Manuele set out from Madrid, together with the nuncio, being joined en route by Tomás and Diego.

They reached Rome on 3 January 1608. As Adrian Hastings has said, there seemed at that moment 'a great and not entirely illusory hope for the conversion of Africa . . . well, if ambiguously, symbolized' by the ambassador's arrival 'that strangest of events in our history'. (Hastings 1994, 126-7). Antonio Manuele was in a pitiable state. All but four of his attendants had died, among them at Livorno a nephew to whom he was deeply attached. From Civitavecchia he had been carried to Rome, where Fabio Biondi, now majordomo to Paul V, had assigned to the ambassador the rooms in the Vatican palace recently used by Cardinal Bellarmine. The pope visited him on his death bed and administered the last sacraments. After his death on the eve of the Feast of the Epiphany, Biondi personally arranged and supervised a magnificent funeral in Santa Maria Maggiore. (Filesi, 1970).

Even before the ambassador had arrived in Rome, the papacy was prepared for a public confrontation with Philip III over the patronal powers of Spain and Portugal. Paul V had instructed the secretariat of

state to begin preparations for sending a Carmelite mission to Kongo (Brásio V, 362-3), and had decided to receive the ambassador in public consistory 'despite the opposition of the Spaniards who maintain that this kingdom is tributary to them'.¹² Antonio Manuele's death, followed by that of Pedro de la Madre de Dios in August, delayed the preparations for the Carmelite mission but eventually on 4 October 1610 Paul V informed Philip III that it was setting out and asked for assistance for it. (Brásio V, 617-9). A year later Cardinal Borghese, the secretary of state, informed Diego de la Encarnación that the news that he and the other Carmelite missionaries had been prevented from leaving Lisbon for Kongo had caused the pope 'great displeasure'. (Brásio VI, 41). The papal collector at Lisbon was ordered to brush aside 'the pretext for this impediment', and to emphasize to the authorities the damage that this would cause to Christianity in Kongo and 'in preventing the conversion of neighbouring kingdoms'.¹³ The nuncio in Madrid was reminded of 'the irreparable harm' that this obstruction would involve, and he was told that 'since the affair is public knowledge, it would damage the reputation of this Holy See'. (Brásio VI, 42-3.) Curial concern over Ethiopia and Kongo, the two Christian kingdoms in Africa, had thus become a matter of vital interest for the papacy. Rome lacked the ships, finance and human resources immediately to turn its missionary interest in Kongo into reality. The desire to foster the development of Kongo Christianity had, however, become an integral feature of the papal challenge to the Portuguese *padroado*. A critical fracture had opened between Iberian colonial expansion and Catholic missionary enterprise.

When it became obvious that this papal missionary initiative was being effectively blocked by the patronal powers, Paul V began the search for financial resources. He summoned Jean de Brétigny to Rome. Jean had by no means forgotten the plea of the Kongo princess about which he had been told by María de San José in Lisbon over twenty years previously. In the meantime he had devoted much time, and a large measure of his considerable financial resources, in a patient, persistent effort to bring the Discalced Carmelite nuns across the Pyrenees to France and to Flanders. Several of the Spanish nuns who had been intimate assistants of St. Teresa keenly supported his endeavours, but with the religious wars in France and the hostilities between the French and Spanish kingdoms, it was no easy matter. In 1594 he had failed to obtain permission from Philip II and the authorities of the Discalced Order in Spain to allow the nuns to go to such hostile territory. In 1604, while Antonio Manuele was setting out on his mission to Lisbon,

Madrid and Rome, Jean de Brétigny, ably guided by Pierre de Bérulle, finally obtained authority to bring four Spanish nuns to found the Carmel of Paris. Three days after the formal foundation of the Paris Carmel in October, Queen Marie de Médicis thanked him warmly for the present which he had brought to France. (Sérouet, 107-198). By 1607 several other convents had been established in France with Jean's help, and in June, when he first heard of the presence in Spain of the embassy from Kongo, he was in Brussels as confessor to the first convent just being founded in Flanders.

Immediately, on 7 June 1607, Jean sat down to write to the ambassadors of the 'province of guinea' as he loosely described the area from which they came. He poured out his soul in the letter. He told them how he had held 'a special joy for a plan which for some years I have held for the salvation of souls in those areas of guinea (un particular gozo por un desseo que de algunos anos a tengo ala salud de las almas de aquellas partes de guinea.' God had conserved within him 'for twenty two years' the idea of sending Discalced Carmelite nuns to those parts in order to instruct young girls ('las donzellas'), for he thought this was the best way to bring them to know and to love 'as their husband Jesus Christ and to offer him their virginity and service' (al esposo Jesu Christ y ofrescerles su Virginidad y servicio). He told the ambassadors that he was ready to do all that was necessary and to go to Africa himself. He asked them to let him know if they agreed, or at least to reply to him when they had returned, sending their letters care of the convents at Lisbon, Seville, Madrid or Salamanca. Antonio Manuele was never able to reply to this letter, but he took it with him to Rome along with many other treasured papers, which, on his death, were entrusted to Diego de la Encarnación, and are now in the Vatican archives.¹⁴

It was probably via this letter that Jean de Brétigny's interest in Kongo, inspired by the unknown princess, became known to the little group of missionary strategists gathered around Pedro de la Madre de Dios. The pope's summons to Jean was notified to him by a remarkable Spanish cleric, Juan Bautista Vivés who had long been a friend of Gracián and had developed a keen interest in the work of overseas missions. Jean set out for Rome in March 1612 and he lodged in Vivés's house during the months that he stayed there. In two audiences with the pope, he promised very considerable financial support for a mission to Kongo, and offered to go there himself to help though he was then 56 years old (Sérouet, 286-8). His generous offers could not immediately be utilised, but his presence in Rome maintained and

strengthened curial interest in Kongo. The following year in a letter to Paul V, dated 27 November 1613, Alvaro II formally appointed Vivés as his ambassador in order that he could render obedience to the Holy See 'with all the solemnity that is customary for royal ambassadors' (Brásio, VI, 128-130). The challenge to the *padroado* involved in such a proclamation of Kongo's independence from Portugal would continue. Vivés was to make the initial approach to the Capuchins to send a mission to Kongo, and he was to play a notable part in the events leading to the foundation of Propaganda Fide.

Many factors and many people had combined together to produce in Kongo a firm commitment to the papacy as the institution which provided the focus and final legitimation of their identity as African Christians. When eventually in 1645 Propaganda Fide managed to introduce its own emissaries into Kongo, they went not as evangelists to a non-Christian country, but as dedicated priestly reinforcements, bringing the sacraments of salvation and committed to strengthening the link with Rome. The Capuchins immediately recognised that Kongo, as represented by Garcia II and its male and female ruling elite, was a Catholic kingdom. These missionaries, like their confreres in many of those areas still ruled by Catholic monarchs in Europe, would find much to criticise and condemn in the faith and morals of the ruler and his subjects to whom they came as ministers. They rejoiced, however, to witness the strength of Kongo's loyalty to the pope. They even seem to have found it in no way remarkable that Garcia could believe that the papal monarch, so remote and difficult to contact, could be persuaded to alter radically, yet effectively, the established Kongo custom of electing and legitimating royal succession. (Gray, 1997, 294-5.)

The extraordinary hopes which the Kongo kings placed in the papacy were the result of much that had happened ever since Afonso Mvemba Nzinga had been baptized in 1491 by the Portuguese pioneers, who likewise accepted Rome as the final arbiter of their faith. The Catholic Church is nothing if not an institution, even if it may well be more than that. In that institution, the papacy has a position of undisputed primacy, however much its members may criticise and seek to manipulate or reform it. The ruling Kongo elite, like its Portuguese counterpart, did not dream of disputing the primacy of the pope. In cementing this linkage and the fundamental commitment to the papacy, the request of an otherwise unknown princess and the sacrificial death of an ambassador had played their part.

NOTES

1. I am grateful to the Leverhulme Foundation and to the British Academy for assistance in undertaking research in the Vatican and Italian archives.

2. Archives of Propaganda Fide, Scritture rif. nei Congressi, Angola, V. fol. 180. Memorandum by Bernardino Ignazio d'Asti, 12 December 1749.

3. The original instructions were in Portuguese, but they are known to us only through an Italian translation held in the Vatican archives. They have been published by Brásio, III, 234-5, and by Filesi (1968) with a facsimile, 143-5.

4. I have stressed elsewhere (Gray, 1990, 45) the role of the confraternities in strengthening Christian commitment in late seventeenth-century Soyo. Following Cavazzi's account, I had wrongly assumed that these confraternities were an innovation introduced to Kongo by the Capuchins.

5. Vatican archives, Fondo Confalonieri, 28, f. 401, Biondi to Archbp of Evora, 27.XI.1595, and f. 566v. to nuncio, same date, and f. 678-678v. to Silvio Antoniano, 31.VIII.1596.

6. Vatican archives, Fondo Confalonieri 27, f. 178v-179, Biondi to Aldobrandino, 11.V.1596.

7. Vatican archives, Fondo Confalonieri 28, f. 495v, Biondi to Alvaro II, 18.IX.1596. See Confalonieri 27, ff. 203, 213, 227, 238 for letters from Biondi to Aldobrandino dated 31.VIII.1596 to 15.III.1597 concerning Vieira's plans and movements.

8. Vatican Library, Vat.Lat. 12516, f. 43v, a report almost certainly drawing on information from Biondi amongst others.

9. Vatican Library Urb.Lat. 1076, f. 5v-6. Avvisi di Roma, 5.I.1608.

10. Vatican Archives Misc. Armadio I, 91, f. 241. Certificate signed by the provincial, 10.X.1607.

11. OCD archives in Rome 281e Cartapaccio f. 27-27v. See also Buri 237-253.

12. Vatican Library, Urb.Lat. 1076 Pt.1, f. 19, Avvisi di Roma, 9.I.1608. See also Brásio V, 367 for report by the Portuguese agent.

13. Vatican Archives, Confalonieri 43, f. 96v, Borghese to Collector, 12.X.1611.

14. Vatican Archives. Misc.Armadio I, 91, f. 222. Jhoan de quintana, uenas. The final five letters of his signature have been torn away, Brussels, 7.VI.1607. This letter provides further valuable proof of the sources quoted by Sérouet concerning the appeal of the Kongo princess.

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