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**The Impact of Evangelism in the Kellé District from 1947 to 2012**

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Oba Dominique  
Marien Ngouabi University, Teacher Training College, Brazzaville, Congo

**Abstract.** Considered as the way of eternal salvation, the religion occupies a prominent place in society. Each civilization has always had the same religion if it has not been written. Since ancient times, the people of Congo in general and those of Kelle district in particular are attached to old customs and values, even if modernism never ceases to transform and distort certain practices by methods considered as sometimes abnormal. Upon their arrival, the missionaries had largely rejected the *Mberé* cultural system, considering that its practices were pagan and contrary to the Christianity. For several years, the mission practically *lost* interest in the main aspects of the *Mbere* culture. The missionaries' goal was to bring the gospel to all the people of the district of Kelle since without the gospel man is that human being who is considered to be without markers. The message remains very important; it must be proclaimed to all humanity. Evangelize is to obey the order of the mission given by the Lord Jesus Christ to his disciples. The holy scriptures affirm in this connection: "go everywhere preach the good news and baptize them in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ". For several years, the missionaries will cross a large part of the Congolese territory.

**Keywords:** Incidence, evangelism, culture, traditional values, Kelle district

### **Introduction**

The Evangelization of the District of Kellé is linked to the gradual arrival of the first Catholic missionaries. This arrival marks a decisive turning point in the religious practices that were observed in this region of northern Congo. On July 8, 1947, the Reverend Father Martin Joosten, founder of the Catholic mission of Kellé arrived in Kellé. Upon their arrival, the missionaries had largely rejected the *Mbere* cultural system, considering that its practices were pagan and contradictory at the same time Christian. For several years, the mission practically *lost* interest in the main aspects of the *Mberé* culture. In this work the study of the impact of evangelization and the traditional powers in the District Kelle, the main objective set by this article is to identify the impact of the Catholic mission and perpetuation of culture. It will first present the impacts of Evangelization, and then the sustainability of cultural. Evangelization has had a considerable impact on traditional Congolese societies in general and on that of the *Mbere* in the district of *Kelle* in particular. These impacts can be grasped through traditional culture and power. These are the main points that this article proposes to study.

### **The Cultural Impact**

The *Mberé* were influenced by European civilization. Here, the cultural impact remains on the education of *Mbere*, wage work, the emergence of religious marriage which devotes a kind of openness to the world.

### **The Schooling of *Mbere***

From the arrival of the missionaries, the blacks had benefited from many things. In Catholic schools, the supervision of young people was free. But they taught the natives the French language by proceeding with the alphabet. The missionaries thought that the real way to be in contact, if not in communication with the children and their parents, was to put them in the school where they will learn the vocabulary of the French language. Born at the same time as the beginning of Evangelization, in 1940, Catholic education contributes and

promotes the emergence of an intellectual community. It was a source of emancipation of young people in the tutelage of the elders. Although uneven and inefficient, Catholic education has enabled *Mbere* to discover universality according to the French model because the missionaries who provided this education were French.

Thus, this teaching led the *Mbere* to discover French culture through programs developed in mainland France. The Church took advantage of the teaching to teach doctrine, its morals. It proposes a Christian morality in relation to local realities. This morality is based on universality, on the ideas of the Republic around human rights, on the dream of a just and fraternal liberal world without oppressors. The fundamental consequence of this teaching is the uprooting of the culture of the *Mbere*. Despite an attempt the *Mbere* managed to preserve their cultural identity, the Church also introduced models of French culture. The teaching of the Catholic religious influenced the law (justice), the social, economic, political and moral institutions of *Mbere*. The weight of this foreign culture is such that some natives wanted to make adaptations. This is the case of Leon Mba who had written Fang customary law in Gabon, inspired by the code of Napoleon<sup>1</sup>. European culture dominated local cultures which are depreciated despite some attempts at scattered resistance. It has become an essential element for building a *Mbere* consciousness. It especially favored the French model in the District of Kellé. This work develops the idea that the Catholic Church was in the long term a living force of the *Mbere* country. Indeed, to become a lively force, it was helped by the attitude of the *Mberé* who had collaborated in its action from its installation. The hope raised by the Church among the traditional *Mberé* chiefs was great. Some of the latter converted to Catholicism, thought to consolidate their powers and legitimize their micro-political entity to make it a modern society on the French model.

Through the rate of schooling, one measured the importance of the structures like school and Christian village in the missionary system, on which was based its dynamics. It expected to reduce the influence of pagan culture in the long term<sup>2</sup>. This is why the missionaries devoted enough energy to their functioning than to the quality of the new converts to God. The mission of the school was therefore to facilitate the task of the missionaries and administrators insofar as the young people by going to school were going to adopt Western culture.

In this context, we can understand that they taught black people, the French language, their civilization to the detriment of African culture. For Archbishop P. Augouar, the aim of the schools was to establish French influence in his colonies and to strengthen them better to avoid competition with other colonizing countries. By teaching French to the students, they pushed them to open up to French domination in order to allow France to settle down without problem. In his written letter to the Minister for Foreign Affairs MP Augouard says:

*Minister, I have the honor to draw your attention to our schools in Haut-Congo and to the services they can render to French influence in its distant lands. The best way to assimilate populations and to attach them to France is they learns our language. The English and the Portuguese already understood: also in all their colonies they have considerable sacrifices to meet their language. Because they are quick to collect the best results. Only French colonies women seem to want to stay behind...*<sup>3</sup>

After settling in a village, the first thing was to build a small church for prayer and a school for instruction.

<sup>1</sup>Esseno, H. (2006). Catholic Church, political life and democratization in Gabon (1945-1995). Thèse de Doctorat, Lumière University, Lyon 2, p. 563.

<sup>2</sup>Goyendzi, R. (2001). *The initiatory society Ndjobi, dynamic and socio-political implication in Congo 1972-1992*. Thesis Doctorate, Lyon II, France, pp. 247-250.

<sup>3</sup>Mgr. Augouard, *Letter of 29 Oct*, in Arch. Cssp, box 507-A1.

### Salaried Work

Another aspect that marks the mission is salaried work, because the Trehot brothers, after having created companies, recruited workers in the villages of Kelle. Salaried work required other habits, in particular rigor (respect for working hours and hours, distribution of tasks, hierarchy of command, imposition of wages, etc.) making *Mberé* a worker. To this end, the *Mbere*, an employee, no longer enjoys his freedom in time and space as he was doing in his native village. Here social relations become market relations to the point of adopting a different type of behavior which distances it from the *Mberé* culture based on clan solidarity<sup>4</sup>. He lives from his work and harmonizes his life through or in an almost closed urban center unlike the village space.

The *Mbere*, in this context identifies with white to the point where he will no longer carry out field work, hunting, fishing and others. He works under the pressure of the missionary who imposes a rhythm which no longer leaves free time as he had in his village. It is a way of cutting him off from his traditional habits. The *Mbere* were employed in following companies: The French company Haut and Bas-Congo (CFHBC) in 1899, the SMOL in 1948 to trade and exploitation mining in the district. They bought local products at low prices and those who worked on their own had low wages, which represented absolutely nothing.

### Religious Marriage

The element that shows the impact of evangelization on traditional powers is that of the emergence of monogamy. This type of marriage is the fruit of religious marriages and suddenly there is a decrease in polygamy. Indeed, polygamy was one of the essential elements of traditional *Mberé* society. It was a "crucial institution for balance and social prosperity".

Indeed, with the implantation of evangelization and the proclamation of the gospel by missionaries, monogamy was required of the followers of the Catholic religion. Here, receives a sacrament the man should be married only to a single woman and for a polygamist, the condition was to renounce other wives to keep only one. This type of marriage is a novelty in Congolese society, because a man in traditional society could not imitate it of a woman, with a few exceptions. The size of a man was also measured by the number of women. As a result, culturally, Evangelization of Kelle District leads to openness to the world. The implantation of evangelization in Congo has also brought many changes in the way of life of the indigenous populations. This can be verified on all levels. Indeed, through evangelization, it is also the Western culture which made its entry thus bringing about a new lifestyle (lifestyle *in a Western way*). To this end, the young people who attended missionary schools now coexisted with two types of culture, namely the local culture of the ancestors and that of the new missionaries.

This new way of life allowed them to live with the missionaries and will become the *little white people with black skin*, that is to say black people with skin but white spirit. It is in this context that Mr. Augouard said: "Today the natives of the Brazzaville area not dress too, and Sunday, those with more pants, several overcoats, put these clothes one by - above the others, to spread their wealth. Many pride themselves on following Parisian fashion and, having known that Europeans used to joke about the passion of black for the top hat, so little suited to the tropical climate and sometimes complementing in a comical way a costume more than summary, the majority decided against it and deal elegant vistas of today."<sup>5</sup>

As we have just seen, these new elements can only bring about a change of mentality. This aspect which is well underlined in the novel written by Cheik Hamidou Khan entitled:

<sup>4</sup>Dupre, J. (1977). *Modern Times*, n o56 flight 373, p. 55.

<sup>5</sup>Mgr Augouard, *The two Congo, thirty-five years of apostolate in the French Congo*, p. 164.

ambiguous adventure. He talks about the meeting of two civilizations, two worlds namely European and African through the implantation of schools, instruction structures and other training houses. However, he expressed his dismay, because through the school of whites, the children will move away from the culture of the ancestors. They will lose their real heritage to follow the culture of whites.

On this subject he writes: "the school where we push our children, will kill in them what we love and by keeping with king rightly. This change is much more noticeable today when the young generations are almost cut off from their roots. Indeed, having no more direct contact with the ancestors, they have in mind only the western culture considered as even the best because it is more free and exhausting.

### **The Impact on the Traditional *Mbere* Powers**

The *Mberé* society was run according to *tradition*, but since the passage of the missionaries it has become westernized. Indeed, power was the prerogative of traditional chiefs who could only govern in accordance with the norms of tradition.

However, after the schooling of *Mbere*, the villages are directed only by people schooled. This is one of the reasons which pushed the traditional chiefs to lose part of their hegemonies in certain village circles.

### **On the Magico-Religious System**

The magico-religious system is a set of beliefs and ritual practices based on a discourse that is both creator of the senses and normative and is written in a given space. This discourse and forms that ritual practices take does not remain on the fringes of the forms of the organization of society. It constitutes the set of magic practices known as witchcraft and rituals explaining the relationship between *Mberé* and cosmic spirits (ancestors, twins and the forces of nature).

The influence of the evangelization of traditional *Mbere* society is available through the disappearance of ancestral worship and some traditional. Indeed, a general observation leads us to say that with evangelization, some elements of traditional religion have disappeared and other disappear little by little in favor of the Catholic religion. Although Evangelism does not have a large effect, but in this new situation, many Christians had known Christ as Savior, no longer attached enough importance to the magico-religious systems, because they thought that Jesus Christ, son of God develops in them multiple devotions towards the saints. Thus, Christians addressed directly to Christ in their prayer and witnessed for themselves the effectiveness of their prayer<sup>6</sup>.

### **Evangelization and Traditional Values**

Traditional society also had its values that governed the lives of members of the community. Among these values, we have solidarity, hospitality, welcome, respect for the person, but, above all for the oldest, conflict resolution, love of offspring, the place of the sacred, pity and the fear of God. These traditional values favored to a certain extent the insertion of evangelization and the establishment of missionaries.

Thus, the missionaries found in these values a fertile ground to throw the grain of the gospel. At the heart of the gospel, there are more or less these same values but with a meaning that goes far beyond the natural and takes on a more supernatural meaning. Consequently, with missionary work we see the emergence of religious values based obviously on the gospel. From this encounter, traditional values will assume a new meaning, undoubtedly richer and deeper, because at the center they acquire a Christological

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<sup>6</sup>Hamidou, C. (1961). *The ambiguous opening*. Paris, ed. Julliard, p. 8.

dimension<sup>7</sup>. Indeed, long before the arrival of the missionaries, beings rooted in tradition had respect for these values. They had the notion of hospitality or solidarity according to what traditional teaching conveyed, but these values will be lived in the name of Jesus with the advent of the gospel. In a word, these traditional values will be transformed little by little by the message of Christ at the center of all missionary initiative. Finally, the *Mberé* who converted to Christ encountered these values comparable to their (traditional) values but with a new consideration. He lives according to these values, transforming the teaching of the gospel and its requirements. This cultural confrontation generally led to the loss of certain realities linked to one's own culture and therefore to one's identity.

## The Sustainability of Culture

### Traditional Practices

After more than fifty years of evangelization in the *Mbere* country, we find that certain traditional practices have not ceased to exist. *Mbere* systems have resisted to the religious education. The study of traditional practices allows us to understand that most *Mbere* have not accepted evangelization, because the majority are those who still live in tradition than in modernism. It is the resistance of the traditional powers. Among these powers we have the worship of ancestors, traditional medicine, the emergence of occult practices, traditional religions etc.

#### *Ancestor Worship*

In traditional religion, the cult of ancestors occupies a special place. Because the ancestors are much regarded. They protect and intercede for the living people presenting their grievances to God. This "ancestor worship" is a practice common to all religions without the involvement of gods. Abandoned under its primitive form in many places, this type of worship subsists in Asia (China, Vietnam, South Korea), in America (Mexico), in Africa (Gabon, in Congo) through a syncretism with Christianity. African religions have integrated ancestor worship from the beginning. This cult has always existed for centuries and even the arrival of Christianity has not put an end to this practice. To this end, the living worships the ancestors of the deceased by appropriate rites and sometimes by sacrifices: libations, deposit of wine, depositing clothes on the grave... In this context, Rene Luneau writes: "Almost everywhere in the African bush, you never drink palm wine or millet beer without throwing a few drops on the ground for the deceased; we avoid throwing hot water on the hut floor so as not to burn the souls of the favorable deceased"<sup>8</sup>.

Thus, ancestor worship, in African religions, represents an important component, but does not constitute the essential part of the practice, contrary to what is generally concluded. This term "ancestor worship" is inappropriate in the case of African spirituality. Indeed, the ancestors having respected the divine precepts, are honored by prayers and offerings of tributes, in order to benefit from their benevolence. These are perceived as being able to intercede, between God and men. In addition, benevolence for the ancestors is accepted as necessary, for oneself benefited from good spin-offs in life. Devotion due to ancestors, therefore, is part of a desire for harmony between the afterlife and the physical world of men. If this harmony is not respected, an imbalance is created, which can be harmful, for the man as for the rest of creation. It is in this same concern that the totems of the French spiritual tradition exist, but here between men and the other elements of creation, animal, vegetable, more often.

The ancestor worship is linked, without a doubt, to the nature of Africans who often use intermediaries or an interpreter to get their message across to someone else as Amadou

<sup>7</sup>Ntampaka, C. (1989). *Values of the traditional family in a changing society*. Telema, p. 61.

<sup>8</sup>Thomas, L. (2004). *The African land and its religions*. Paris, the Harmattan, p. 104.

Hampate Bas rightly tells us<sup>9</sup>. He writes: "The Negro by nature tends to place everywhere and in all circumstances an intermediary between him and his interlocutor, whoever he is".

Finally, although the "Ngaha" or "Fetishers" of the traditional religion are less and less frequented, but certain traditional rites such as libation, the sacrifice are still accomplished by the large part of the *Mberé* population. We also find in the district of Kellé, certain Christians who continue to frequent the *Ngangas-Ngaha*. These are still attached to fetishes showing the superficiality of their faith. It is often in the face of different life problems that these Christians turn from their faith to seek consolation or solution among the *Ngaha*. Others, however, fall into a religious syncretism bringing together different practices<sup>10</sup>.

### **Traditional Medicine**

Medicine is the art of preventing and treating disease, or the technique of preserving and restoring health<sup>11</sup>. It studies the organization of the human body, anatomy, its normal functioning (physiology), and seeking to restore health through treatment (therapy) and prevention (prophylaxis) of pathologies. For this purpose contemporary medicine uses healthcare, biomedical technology to diagnose, treat injuries and illnesses through prescription of drugs, surgery or other forms of therapy. On the other hand, traditional medicine relates to practices, methods, knowledge and beliefs in matters of health. These involve the use for medical purposes of plants, animals, spiritual therapy, techniques and manual exercises to cure, diagnose and prevent disease or preserve health. In the Kelle district, this medicine still largely exists. The population is still interested in these practices which are not too expensive. By the plant we manage to heal several diseases, wounds and others.

### **Fetishism**

Fetishism is the cult of fetishes. It comes from the Portuguese word *fétiço*, which in turn comes from the Latin *facticus*, which means *artificial* and applies to what is the joint product of human skill and nature. The origin of the term is European and the fetish is the name given by white to objects of worship and religious practices of African peoples and civilizations in the 15th and 16th centuries. Thus, the fetish is the composition of natural elements such as the roots or leaves of plants, grain or fruit, pieces or powder of bone, teeth of animals, fish, insects, soil and others.

For African, follower and believer of the fetish, the association of these elements mentioned above, is endowed with incalculable energies and mysterious forces. The religious power *Mbere* is exercised by priests called *Gaha in the singular* and *Agaha in the plural*. Witch doctors are formidable characters, diviners who hold a mystical power inherited from ancestors or acquired from another more experienced witch doctor<sup>12</sup>. They demonstrate great human and supernatural knowledge.

In fact, in the human domain, they become priests, religious, doctors and scholars. They pose to the eyes of humans as living invisible facts, possessing a double, triple or even quadruple view allowing them to see and predict what will happen to the individual or to society. Through the fetish, the *Mbere*, *witch doctor* has means of activating his superhuman power to counter or pursue a sorcerer. The witch doctor is the only one capable of communicating with the souls and minds of the ancients and above all of putting them at the service of the living in traditional and current *Mbere* society. It is for this reason that according to the belief of some *Mbere*, man does not die of natural death. Death is always

<sup>9</sup>Hampate, A. BA (1965). *Animism in African savannah, in Traditional African religions*. Paris, Seuil, p. 34.

<sup>10</sup>Episcopal Conference of the Congo, 1982, *Message from the Bishops of the Congo to the Christian people on the occasion of centenary of evangelization*, n o2, the African Week, p. 2.

<sup>11</sup>2009 *Robert Pocket Dictionary*, op. cit, p. 448.

<sup>12</sup>Itoua, J., op. cit, p. 20.

explained by the practices of a sorcerer or a witch doctor. In case someone gets sick, we have to recognize the fact of a man who has a lot of supernatural power. According to the men who goes hunting, victim of his awkwardness, nobody will accuse his lack of address. His death is attributed to the maneuvers of a sorcerer, most often an uncle or a grandfather. The environment of traditional *Mbere* power is a very ambivalent environment, if we take into account the fact that a weakened traditional chief attracts a lot of comment and especially criticism, or attacks from neighboring villages. Thus, for some if those close to him are caught by the disease, this gives rise to various interpretations, in particular witchcraft, fetishes and sacrifices.

In a relationship of interdependence between the visible world of the living and the invisible world of the ancestors, this reality is experienced as a transverse correlation between magicians, Catholic priests, reverend pastors, prophets, *Nganga*, traditionalists. They form a vast political network of men whose goal is to be master of local power. For that, any political leader must by necessity and by personal protection consult them permanently in order to remain long on the throne.

In addition, the management of traditional power is characterized by an inseparable link from the visible and above all from the invisible. Power in *Mberé* country is sacred because any society affirms its will to eternity and fears the return to chaos as the achievement of its own death. These different analyses allow us to say that the peaceful coexistence between traditional power and religion then remains present in the management of current power. The ritual and initiation celebrations contributed to the mastery of the village community. Nowadays, we are witnessing even more than the head of a family, lineage, clan or village must be at the same time chief in two or three secret societies, in order to invigorate his authority.

The search for the power of power partly requires a vital participation of the invisible world as an epicenter. The instructions received during the various initiations and / ceremonies give them the key to knowing the sacred and its immediate environment filled with energies and especially surprises, can reach their physical, spiritual, intellectual and above all authoritarian life. In this context, every leader must be configured from the invisible world. To this end, some of our instructors asked the following question: Was it not God who created each people with their culture and customs?

According to them, *Mberé* customs will not be bad or asocial, because they participate and bring *Mberé* society to *life* in its cultural and political dynamics while relying on what is sacred and above all invisible. These practices and customs which derive from them in reality constitute the very essence of the cultural identity of African societies. The missionary presence in the district of Kelle does not end traditional practices, but we find that *Mberé* practices both some Western cultures and the *Mbere* cultures.

### Traditional Religions

The traditional *Mbere* religion is animism. Animism is a form of religion traditionally widespread in Oceania, Asia and Africa. It is characterized by the worship rendered to the ancestors and the forces of nature, by God fearing that the actions of the dead in the existence of a supreme ancestor with magical powers<sup>13</sup>.

For *Mbere* animisms, the world of things constitutes a global and united whole. The world of things not being separated from the world of animals or men; a vital force unites the different forms of creation. To this end, a large unity of views exists between the various traditional *Mbere* societies, be it religion, the concept of the world and the role of man in the universe.

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<sup>13</sup>Lacoste, Y. (2009). *Geography civic education*. Paris VIII, of the city, p. 484.

Thus, all these animist *Mbere* religions always recognize the existence of a supreme God infinitely good and infinitely, who resides very far, beyond the firmament, either in the depths<sup>14</sup>. Above God there is a crowd of secondary deities, geniuses who take various forms. They know the needs of men, can meet or oppose them. To obtain their favor, the *Mberé* worship them which sometimes gives rise to sacrifices.

### The Occult Practices

Each people has a particular culture which differentiates it from another. In 1871, Tylor, the father of modern anthropology, defined culture as: "this complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, laws, customs and all other skills or habits acquired by man as a member of a society"<sup>15</sup>.

When we speak of culture, it is first and foremost a concept of life which concerns a given group, although in truth it is particular individuals who rather realize this vision in practice, but so collective. The ancestral cultures of the peoples occupy a capital place for the emergence of occult practices. Currently, in some cultures there are traces of occult practices exercised by the ancestors. For some *Mberé*, occult practices were part of their life: "it is infinitely true that the superstitions, still numerous today and contained in folklore of various countries, go back to prehistoric times"<sup>16</sup>.

In addition, in *Mbere* cultures, occult practices occupy an important place, because the belief in sorcerers, witch doctors and marabouts is a cultural fact inherited from the ancestors. This is why, it will never return to the idea of a *Mberé* to deny the occult power or to mock the power of a sorcerer. The contact between European cultures and *Mberé* led to acculturation in the District of Kelle. Acculturation is the process by which a human group assimilates a culture foreign to its own. After the passage of the mission, some *Mbere* have assimilated European culture. Today they practice both traditional culture and European culture. It can be seen in education, politics and marriage. *Mberé* children receive both western education taught in schools, religious education taught in churches, and traditional education taught by parents in Bangui (*Olèbè*) and kitchens (*Candza*).

Concerning marriage, before making a religious marriage, it is necessary to go through a customary or traditional marriage. This type of marriage inherited from the ancestors is necessary and fundamental to the point where it constitutes an obligatory passage, for any *Mberé* who wants to marry. At this stage, they can therefore have an official marriage at the civil state or a religious marriage at the church.

Finally, since the European passage in the District of Kellé, the *Mbere* have married the Western political system and it practices the two at the same time. First of all, they have the traditional system, that of heads of families, clans and lineages. In this system, we have an administration inherited from colonization. Because the village chief, the vice-president and the secretary. The latter no longer direct in the name of custom, but by law or white. Despite everything that the *Mberé* have known, the *Mberé* language is among the elements that show their cultural identity. The imposition of the colonial administrative model and the creation of Christian churches prompted the *Mberé* to put in place means to safeguard their cultures. Nowadays, the *Ndjobi* is practiced everywhere in *Mberé* country, in spite of the colonial and missionary struggles.

### Conclusion

The present article aimed to show the art impacts of evangelization in Kelle District from 1947 to 2012. Evangelization has become one of the major components of

<sup>14</sup>Itoua, J. (2017). *Society and civilizations of pre-colonial black Africa*. Master 2 HG course, ENS, pp. 45-46.

<sup>15</sup>Tylor, E. (1871). *Primitive culture*, London, p. 1.

<sup>16</sup>Bricout, J. (1921). *Practical dictionary of religious knowledge* (Vol. IV). Nazareth-Revolution, Paris, VI, p. 742.



contemporary Congo. One cannot make its history without giving an account of the role played by the Church in the Mbere society of Kelle. In a little over 150 years of effective presence, it has shared the joys and misfortunes, the hopes and despair of the populations of the district of Kelle in particular. For several years, the Catholic Church has been confronted with the agitated and ambiguous political evolution of the *Mbere of Kelle* through territorial and political reorganizations, the establishment of institutions, social violence. It experienced the period of political engagement of its priests and settlers. At the same time evangelization has contributed to raising awareness, the organization of the Mbere civilization and the training of executives in almost all occupations.

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