

THIEL (van) (Harry), Missionary in the Belgian Congo (Beuningen, the Netherlands, 8.11.1911 - Nijmegen, the Netherlands, 10.2.1989). Son of Rudolf and Croonen, Maria.

As a priest of the Missionary Society of St. Joseph (Mill Hill) he left for the Belgian Congo towards the end of 1937. He stayed nine years with the Ngombe people in the region of Basankusu, first in Mampoko and later in Djombo. He returned to the Netherlands towards the end of 1946 for reasons of bad health.

In this short period he acquired a good knowledge of the language and the customs of the Ngombe people and he made various contributions of scientific and literary value. In 1947 a study of the system of tonality of Lingombe was published in *Aequatoria* (Coquilhatville). Shortly after, he published a series of Lingombe narrations with a Dutch translation in *Kongo-Overzee* (1950). For a local newspaper, *Le Coq Chante* (Coquilhatville), he wrote a long series of religious and traditional texts in Lingombe (1946-1947). Moreover Father van Thiel devoted himself especially to the composition of some twenty little schoolbooks and the elaboration of a proper educational terminology in Lingombe. To this day his *Mbitagwambimbuki* ("I do not die alone") has been in demand (reprint in 1990). This is the story of a little dog at the mission station whose mother explains to him everything he sees happening around him. It is a clever mix of traditional narration and new morality. The problem of the encounter of the traditional ancestral culture with the new civilization is presented in an original fashion. The same theme runs through his two novels: "Het offer van Itota" (in *Kongo-Overzee*, 1951 and *De Sikkel*, 1952) and *Wij Ngombe* (1974 and 1981). From 1946 until 1952 he published a series of picturesque sketches taken from the life of the Ngombe. Together with his fellow Mill Hill Missionaries, N. Rood and B. Heijboer, and the Protestant missionaries Davidson and Ruskin, he is an indispensable source for the knowledge of the Ngombe people of the equator area in Zaire.

Bio-bibliography: Rood, N. 1968. Mill Hill's contribution to language and anthropology in the Congo, *Milthilliana* 20, 2: 55-57. — Vinck, H. 1993. Père Harry van Thiel. *Annales Aequatoria*, 14: 559-564.

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H. Vinck.