

IN MEMORY OF FATHER DR. GREGORIUS VAN BREDa

(VAN DEN BOOM) OFMCAP (1901–1985)

von Arnulf Camps

He liked to be known as Father GREGORIUS and he was the 13th doctor in theology, who presented a missiologial dissertation at the University of Münster in West Germany in 1933.<sup>1</sup> He presented a thesis *Die Sprachenfrage als missionsmethodisches Problem*. The printed edition is called *Die Muttersprache. Eine missions- und religionswissenschaftliche Studie über die Sprachenfrage in den Missionsgebieten* (Missionswissenschaftliche Studien 7), Münster 1933. As far as I know, he and Father Dr. ODULPHUS VAN DER VAT OFM (dissertation in 1934) have been the only two Dutchmen who studied missiology at Münster. Father GREGORIUS was born in 1901 and died in 1985 and was buried on his birthday, November 7. He survived Father ODULPHUS (1900–1966) by many years. Father GREGORIUS was destined to live in Holland, where as Father ODULPHUS passed many years in Brazil, the country he loved and where he died. Father GREGORIUS had a robust health, but some time before his death he said: "The tree (Boom – Baum) is going to be cut down."

Father GREGORIUS was born on November 7, 1901 at Breda, Holland, and his name was LAMBERT J. MARIA VAN DEN BOOM. He joined the Capuchin Order in Holland at Tilburg on October 3, 1920. Already before his ordination to the priesthood he was sent to Münster to continue his studies in theology and he started this study on October 6, 1926. On August 7, 1927, he was ordained a priest in the church of the Capuchins at Münster. On March 30, 1928 he started his missiologial studies at the theological faculty of the University of Münster, but he also studied comparative religion. His professors were Dr. J. SCHMIDLIN and Dr. J. STEFFES. On April 27, 1932 he passed his doctoral examination. In the same year he was appointed assistant master of the clerics in Tilburg, Holland, and he engaged himself in editing *Christus Koning* and *Kolonial Missie Tijdschrift*. After the publication of his doctoral dissertation he received the doctoral diploma on June 17, 1933.<sup>2</sup> During the years 1934–1935 he studied at the University of Vienna, Austria, where he assisted at the lectures of Prof. Dr. W. SCHMIDT, Prof. Dr. W. KOPPERS and Prof. Dr. R. HEINE-GELDERN in ethnology, and he also studied 'Rassenkunde' under the guidance of Prof. Dr. WENINGER and Prof. Dr. V. LEBZELTER (together with the latter he did some research at the frontier of Hungary in 1935). Moreover, he attended the lectures in prehistory of Prof. Dr. O. MENGHIN and Prof. Dr. R. PITTIONI.

After his return to Holland he started teaching: 1935–1960 lector in missiology at the theologicum of his order in Udenhout; 1941–1965 director of an introductory course for missionaries to be sent to Indonesia and Tanzania; 1940–1967 lecturer in cultural anthropology and comparative religion at the 'Leergangen' in Tilburg and Eindhoven; 1947–1963 lecturer at the formation-school for young women (De Graal) at Ubbergen; 1950–1960 lecturer in non-western sociology and cultural anthropology of Western New-Guinea (today Irian Jaya, Indonesia) at the institute for pastoral studies of the franciscans at Maastricht. He enjoyed this teaching and he was able to organize a very precious library. In 1959 he did ethnological research among the Wandamba in Tanzania; the results were published in *Anthropos*. His ethnological insights were published in two volumes: *Sociologie van de niet-Westerse Volken* (Sociology of the non-Western peoples), Utrecht/Antwerpen 1965 and 1966 (272 and 336 pp.). In many Dutch and foreign reviews he published more than 80 articles and he reviewed numerous publications. From 1946–1971 he was a member of the editorial board of



the Dutch missiological review *Het Missiewerk*. In 1936 he started a Mission Committee in Holland and from 1950–1960 he acted as its president. This has to do with the decision to organize the Missiological Week of Louvain every other year somewhere outside Belgium. The decision was taken in 1936 and the first Week of this kind was held at Nijmegen, Holland in 1937. Father GREGORIUS was the secretary of the executive committee. However in 1938 an independent Missiological Week was planned for Holland; they were held at Nijmegen in 1939, 1948, 1950, 1953, 1955, 1957, 1959, 1961, 1963 and 1965. As secretary or president Father GREGORIUS played an important role in finding the right topics for discussion and in promoting missiology. Three times he acted as a speaker: in 1953 on the problem of the elite, in 1959 on Mission and community-life and in 1961 on the mission-methodological significance of lay-activity. Father GREGORIUS tried to interest university students in mission and missiology: he was first assistant and later moderator of the Mission Interacademiale (MIA), which developed into the Academic Lay Missionary Action (ALMA). In 1955 he was appointed by Mgr. B. ALFRINK, archbishop of Utrecht, a member of the commission: “to promote the missionary dimension in theological studies”. He was a member of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Völkerkunde.

It will have become clear that Father GREGORIUS has been a nationally and internationally well-known scholar in missiology and cultural anthropology. One wonders why he was never appointed professor in either of these sciences. He certainly would have loved it and would have been really qualified for this task.

Father GREGORIUS was also active within his order: he was guardian, librarian, master of novices, clerics and lay-brothers. He was a much asked confessor, a spiritual director of the Legion of Mary and rector of a house for unmarried mothers. The last years of his very active life he liked to spend walking through the beautiful forests and landscapes of his native Brabant. He even became a renowned restorer of old paintings, and this notwithstanding the fact that in 1945 his right hand was handicapped by splinters of a grenade.

It is good to remember this pioneer of missiology and cultural anthropology in the Netherlands. He was the first catholic scholar in both fields trained at a university. When the history of missionary and missiological activities in Holland will be written, Father GREGORIUS will appear to have been the real promotor. His many disciples will agree to this and will remain grateful for his humble, pleasant and learned service to the cause of Church and Mission.

<sup>1</sup> J. GLAZIK (Hg.), *50 Jahre Katholische Missionswissenschaft in Münster 1911–1961. Festschrift* (Missionswissenschaftliche Abhandlungen und Texte 26), Münster 1961, 61.

<sup>2</sup> Father GREGORIUS writes in his personal notes that it took place on this date. GLAZIK, a.a.O. gives the first of July 1933 as the date of this event. We must, however, state that Father GREGORIUS in his personal notes is not always sure or exact in fixing dates. In this contribution we have tried to verify dates as much as possible, but a study of the many letters and documents left by Father GREGORIUS is much needed. For his bibliography see *Bibliotheca Missionum* and *Bibliografia Missionaria*. Father GREGORIUS was very strict in sending all his publications to the Pontifical Missionary Library in Rome.