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The Center for Spiritan Studies, inaugurated in September 2005, is a collaborative venture between the Congregation of the Holy Spirit and Duquesne University. Its purpose is to promote scholarly research into Spiritan history, tradition and spirituality with a view to fostering creative fidelity to the Spiritan charism in a changing world. *Spiritan Horizons* is an annual publication of the Center for Spiritan Studies which seeks to further the Center’s aims. The journal combines articles of a scholarly nature with others emphasizing the lived experience of the Spiritan charism today. Special attention is given in each issue to the Spiritan education ethos, in view of the university context in which the journal is published. It is hoped that the journal will provide a wider audience than hitherto with access to the riches of the Spiritan charism and spirituality.

In this first edition, Jean-Savoie explores the originality of the Spiritan founder, Claude-François Poullart des Places. Articles by David Smith, John Fogarty, Bernard Kelly and Pádraig Leonard investigate different aspects of the spirituality of Francis Mary Paul Libermann, 11th Superior General of the Spiritan Congregation and effectively its second founder, and point to his relevance for the contemporary world. Anthony Gittins and Casimir Eke, each from his own perspective, reflect on the meaning of the *charism of a religious Congregation* and on the issue of creative fidelity, with particular reference to the contemporary Spiritan context. Janie Harden Fritz and John Sawicki, two professors at Duquesne University, explore the notion of *charism* in regard to *the founding vision of a university* and outline how the charism is expressed and lived in the context of the Department of Communication and Rhetorical Studies at Duquesne today. Bruce Beaver, a chemistry professor at Duquesne, introduces us to his efforts to bring the *Spiritan charism into the classroom and laboratory*. Scripture scholar Séan Kealy examines the text that introduces the Spiritan Rule of Life, Lk 4, 16 ff., and looks at the challenge of St. Luke to bring the *Good News to the poor*. Lay Spiritans Gary Warner (Canada) and Maria Jesús de Souza (Bolivia) share with us their *personal stories* of how the Spiritan charism has shaped their lives and continues to do so.
Amongst the many foundations of major religious Congregations in the 17th and 18th centuries, the birth of the Spiritans was rather inconspicuous. They were not conceived as a great new project in the making; their founder and his first collaborators were ordinary students of theology. They had no great backing, no lofty spirituality, no ambitious work in view. They were just a group of students in Paris who wanted to offer their services to the most pressing needs of the Church. They wanted to train poor priests to serve the poor.

On May 27th, 1703, twelve students of the Jesuit College of Louis-le-Grand in Paris pledged themselves to the service of the Holy Spirit and of Mary conceived without sin in a side chapel of Saint Etienne des Grès, a church close to where they were studying. They had been meeting together for several months, with the encouragement of their Jesuit professors. Their primary aim was to help each other materially and spiritually in their studies and to help the poor and the sick in their area.

So it was nothing like, for example, the historic meeting of the first seven companions of Ignatius Loyola in 1534, in a chapel at Montmartre. They were people who were already fairly well known in several countries of Europe. They had a plan for apostolic activity on a global scale, which took off almost immediately as the Company of Jesus.

Sharing amongst students

The twelve students of the rue St. Etienne at Pentecost, 1703, had a much more modest ambition, but they were equally determined to follow the plans that God had in store for them. In this group, Claude François Poullart des Places played a pivotal role. The first initiative came from him – to share with other students the money that was given to him by his well-to-do family. This plan of mutual support, which was their initial idea, would gradually expand into something more ambitious.

From the start of this project, Poullart was in search of his own spiritual personality. As it had been during his initial studies in Brittany, he wanted to be open to the will of God, he wanted to help others who were seeking a similar path. He examined all these things in the light of the method of discernment taught to him by his Jesuit teachers. He regularly wrote down the fruit of his reflections, giving us an insight into his intentions, hesitations and actions.
One day in 1702, he met a ‘poor student’ named Jean-Baptiste Faulconnier who did not even have enough to live on. It was the first link in a chain which would continue to grow. Claude shared his own resources – his allowances, his money for meals and everything else he had. The Jesuits allowed him to give the leftovers from the college meals to his students. He rented a room in the vicinity and Jean-Baptiste was soon joined by another student in similar circumstances, and then another…

"From then on, he used what he managed to save, as well as a part of what he really needed for himself, to provide a few poor students with the necessities to continue their studies; eventually, each day he would give half of his rations to one of them who lived at the gate of the College. This is how he began his work – with an enthusiasm which is still bearing fruit today."  

A supportive community for poor students

The way in which Poullart went about his help is significant. From the start of his seminary studies in Paris, he housed the students he was helping in lodging close to the seminary, while he himself remained at Louis-le-Grand. It is clear that it was not just a question of material aid: he took responsibility for their studies and their journey to the priesthood as well as their financial needs. In fact it was a community that he had established, including board and lodging, studies, prayer in common and classes at the seminary.

Claude-François moved from the College of Louis-le-Grand at the start of Lent, 1703, as it was becoming increasingly difficult to take proper care of these poor students. He moved in with them, accepting all the difficulties that this entailed – great disparity of education and background, crowded bedrooms, lack of privacy etc. And the numbers continued to grow. He had to find more lodgings and resources, seeking help from his peers and becoming indebted to them. It turned into a real pilgrimage of poverty, far more costly to him than the self-imposed penances of his earlier days.

By May, there were about a dozen students with him. It was then that they decided to place themselves, as a group, under the protection of Mary conceived without sin. This happened on May 27th, before the statue of Our Lady of Rescue (Notre-Dame de Bonne Délivrance) in the church of St Etienne des Grès. They now became a community with a rule of life.  

“Messire Claude-François Poullart des Places, in the year one thousand, seven hundred and three, on the feast of Pentecost, while still only an aspirant to the ecclesiastical state, began the establishment of the so-called Community and Seminary
consecrated to the Holy Spirit, under the invocation of the Holy Virgin conceived without sin.”

“M. Desplaces began by renting a room in the rue des Cordiers, near the College, where he placed the poor students that he had previously been helping and whose good qualities he had already ascertained. The progress made by these first scholars was so remarkable that it soon attracted other excellent subjects, so he set about renting a larger premises. In no time, he had set up a community of clerics to whom he gave very wise rules, examined and approved by others of great experience. He himself was the first to practise what he recommended to others. He did not limit himself to simply giving them instructions: he also arranged retreats given by acknowledged experts in this field. He used every opportunity to provide them with spiritual talks, especially by those amongst his friends who were good communicators.”

The structure of this ‘community’ for poor students

The relationship of Claude to his friends changed somewhat after their joint dedication. Living amongst them and supplying the necessary funding for their food and lodging, they naturally regarded him as their leader. The Jesuit authorities also saw him as the one in charge. Their daily life had to be further organised to prepare them for their future life as priests. They moved into a house on the rue des Cordiers, close to rue Saint Jacques and not far from the Collège Louis-le-Grand.

As the community grew, even more space was needed. On June 6th, 1705, they moved to rue Neuve Saint-Etienne (the present ‘rue Rollin’) where they remained until a short time before Poullart’s death. Then on October 1st, 1709, they moved again to rue Neuve-Ste-Geneviève (rue Tournefort today), in the parish of St. Etienne-du-Mont. It was there they adopted the name of the Séminaire du Saint Esprit and they remained in that location until 1731.

The spiritual life of Poullart des Places after the foundation

In the first months, their community life was lived in an atmosphere of great joy, but the worries and responsibility of looking after these young students soon began to weigh down upon Claude Poullart. He was helped by his fellow students at Louis-le-Grand with the teaching programme but the main burden fell on himself and the precarious situation of the new community began to get him down. It continued to grow and one year after the foundation there were nearly forty students in the house. Poullart was pulled in different directions by the demands of their formation. As the year 1704 progressed, he became increasingly exhausted, both physically and spiritually. He had to
do something about it. Around Christmas, he decided to do a retreat, where he was guided by a wise Jesuit. Throughout his life, Claude never took any important decision for his future without seeking the guidance of the Jesuits.

He gave his retreat notes the title: “Reflections on the past”. The text follows the structure of a psalm: a) recalling the past blessings of God; b) a consideration of his present sufferings; c) a cry to God and trust in his fidelity.

First of all, he recalls the good times when he was continuously united to God:

“... I could hardly think of anything but God. My greatest regret was that I could not think of him all the time. I only wanted to love him and to be worthy of his love. I gave up even the most legitimate attachments. I looked forward to a time when I would have nothing, living only on handouts, having given away everything I had. The only earthly thing I wanted to keep was my good health, so that I could sacrifice it entirely to God in the work of the missions. I would have been so happy if, after having told everybody of the love of God, I could give the last drop of my blood for him who was always giving me his blessings...”

In the second part, he speaks of the spiritual disorder in which he now finds himself:

“...To sum up, I must confess before God that, at the present moment, I am someone who is thought to be alive but who is certainly dead, at least when I compare the present with the past. I am no more than a mask of devotion and a shadow of my former self... This is the way that some people who used to be strong in virtue begin to slide downwards and end up by perishing miserably. Nobody should fear such a fall more than I, having been, throughout my life, so inconsistent in my returning to God and then later on falling into prolonged disorders.”

This crisis he is going through makes him doubt the legitimacy of his foundation. Was it not motivated by ambition? Was it not presumptuous of him to throw himself into such an undertaking? But he takes heart again when he recalls the unwavering love of God – a love which has followed him since his childhood and that he can still see at work in the midst of his present suffering:

“...But even apart from all that, I have every reason to believe that the good Lord will have pity on me once more if I return to him with all my heart. My assurance is based on the way the Lord has led me up until now:

(i) He has never allowed me to be satisfied with myself; on the contrary, I have always been
anxious and sorrowful about my disorders;

(ii) He has always given me the grace to see that, within me, I was not in the least what others thought or said that I was;

(iii) He never allowed me to rid myself of my scruples. Though these have to some degree contributed to my disturbed state, they have also made me go to confession more frequently and have given me greater remorse when the occasion to offend God presented itself.

So the way God has led me gives me hope that heaven will no longer be inaccessible to me if I am sincerely sorry for my sins and seek to live once more by the Lord’s grace. Therefore, full of confidence, by the grace of God, and ignoring my own inclinations, I am going to look for the shortest path which will lead me back to the One without whom I cannot live in peace for a single moment.”

The originality of the Foundation of Claude Poullart

Claude Poullart directed his efforts towards establishing a house of formation for poor priests, to cater for the needs of the Church which were not being met. So he created a foundation with a new spiritual orientation. It also led to an innovative style of community; its insistence on poverty, extended studies and financial aid to poor students had an influence on other seminaries that were subsequently established:

- A seminary for the poor. The rules of the seminary were unequivocal: “We will only accept students whose poverty is clear”, who are incapable of paying for their accommodation elsewhere. The course of studies lasted for 6 to 9 years. It was a continuing struggle to find sufficient money both before and after the death of Poullart, but the students were never charged anything and they were not expected to reimburse the seminary at the conclusion of their studies.

- The influence of the Jesuits. Poullart and his disciples followed the Jesuits closely, for studies, spiritual direction, in their opposition to the Jansenists and in the stance they took regarding the on-going question of the Chinese Rites. Like the Jesuits, they maintained a constant fidelity to the Church and the Pope. Even after the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1767, the Spiritans did not go to the Sorbonne for their studies but obtained permission to give their own classes – something very exceptional at the time.
- **A course of studies that was regulated and supervised.** Each day, there were 3 obligatory classes plus revision back in the community. There were debates and theses, with supplementary classes in singing, liturgy, preaching and catechetics.

- **A blend of knowledge and virtue.** Poullart des Places used to say that he would have serious doubts about a zealous but ignorant priest, but he would likewise fear for the perseverance in faith and obedience of a learned priest without virtue. Michel de Nobleize had said that piety without doctrine could do considerable harm to the Church.

- **A spirit of poverty.** Detachment was seen as a cardinal virtue for a priest, but Poullart was reduced to real material poverty. He refused some legacies that were left to him. In 1740, the Spiritans turned down a legacy because the descendents of the deceased were suffering real poverty themselves. Spiritual poverty and refusal of any signs of esteem were stressed in the rules and the spirit of the Seminary.

- **A deep-rooted family spirit.** The members of the community showed a great attachment to each other and continued this spirit in their future ministries.

**The last days of Claude Poullart des Places**

The final days of Poullart show us a man who had given himself heart and soul to the poor; his heroic dedication to them during the famine of 1709 led directly to his death:

> "While Monsieur des Places gave himself entirely to the demands of his nascent community and exhausted himself by austere mortifications, he suffered an attack of pleurisy that was accompanied by a violent fever and a painful tenesmus which for four days caused him atrocious sufferings. But not one word of complaint, and still less of impatience, escaped his lips. One could only tell that his pain was growing by the fact that his prayers of resignation became more frequent. His very exhaustion seemed to give him new strength as he repeated continually the prayer of King David: ‘Lord of Hosts, how lovely is your dwelling-place! I pine and faint with longing for the courts of the Lord’s temple’ (Ps. 83: 2-3).

As soon as it was known in Paris that he was seriously ill, a great number of people, known for their holiness, came to see him… He eventually received the last sacraments and then quietly expired around five o’clock in the evening, on October 2, 1709, at the age
As they seek out their original vision, Spiritans will discover the Gospel-inspired outlook of this rich young man, who became poor so that the poor would have access to the same gifts of God...

of thirty years and seven months. Thus was the holy and famous Monsieur des Places, the founder of the Holy Ghost Seminary in Paris. The friendship that sprung from the shared opinions and similar characters of Poullart and M. de Montfort continued with the successors and the students of these two great men”.

When celebrating its 300th anniversary in 2003, the Congregation of the Holy Spirit recognized how much it owes to its founder. Because of him, it inherited a habit of listening in all simplicity to the voice of God, of giving itself up to His will, of attending to the material needs of the poor and the spiritual needs of people both near and far. As they seek out their original vision, Spiritans will discover the Gospel-inspired outlook of this rich young man, who became poor so that the poor would have access to the same gifts of God, and that the whole Church would receive the good things that God has prepared for those who accept his love.

The Congregation of the Holy Spirit rejoices in the gifts that were given to Claude-François as a founder and the fruits that the whole Church received through him for its missionary action. His cause for canonization was introduced in Paris in 1988 and is now being examined in Rome.

Footnotes
1 A seminarian who was too poor to continue with his preparations for the priesthood.
2 Pierre Thomas wrote in his Mémoire: “His father, who was fairly frugal, only gave him an allowance of 800 livres. It was quite a modest sum for a young man of his age and standing.”
4 The title “community” was not officially adopted until it was formally recognised in 1734. The rule of life was elaborated only gradually.
5 This is an extract from an old Spiritan register that has since disappeared but which was copied into “Gallia Christiana” in 1744.
6 Besnard, op.cit.
8 This text and the preceding one are taken from “Reflections on the past”
9 Besnard, op.cit.
# Chronology of the Life of Poullart des Places

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1679</td>
<td>26th February: Claude-François Poullart des Places was born at Rennes in France and baptized the following day</td>
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<tr>
<td>1685</td>
<td>The des Places family moves to the parish of Saint-Germain</td>
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<tr>
<td>1690</td>
<td>They move again to rue Saint-Sauveur. Claude-François enters the Collège Saint-Thomas in October</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1693-1694</td>
<td>First studies at Rennes</td>
</tr>
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<td>1694-1695</td>
<td>Studies at Caen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1695-1698</td>
<td>Studies philosophy at Rennes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1698-1700</td>
<td>Studies law at Nantes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1700-1701</td>
<td>Returns to his family at Rennes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1701</td>
<td>Enters the Collège Louis-le-Grand in October</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1702</td>
<td>Receives the tonsure on August 15th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1703</td>
<td>Foundation of the Community of the Holy Spirit, May 27th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1704</td>
<td>Retreat with the Jesuits at Christmas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1705</td>
<td>Receives minor orders, June 6th. The community moves to rue Neuve-Saint-Etienne (rue Rollin)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1706</td>
<td>Receives the sub-deaconate, December 18th</td>
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<tr>
<td>1707</td>
<td>Ordained deacon, March 19th and priest, December 17th</td>
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<tr>
<td>1708</td>
<td>Arrival of M. Louis Bouic, a deacon from Guillac, diocese of Saint-Malo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1709</td>
<td>The community moves to rue Neuve-Sainte-Geneviève (rue Tournefort) on October 1st. Claude Poullart des Places dies on October 2nd and is succeeded by M. Garnier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>October 1st: The Decree opening the Cause of Canonisation is promulgated.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Spirituality of Francis Libermann: A Man Beyond His Time

...the Holy Ghost over the bent World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.
(Gerald Manley Hopkins)

Introduction

Since the mid-nineteenth century, Francis Libermann’s spiritual teachings have animated and inspired the Congregation of the Holy Spirit. To fully appreciate his unique spiritual doctrine it is essential to keep in mind the original cradle of its birth. Born and raised the son of the Rabbi of Saverne and steeped in the study of the Torah, the Law and the Talmud, Libermann was immunized against the prevalent philosophical anthropology of his day, the dichotomized world-view of René Descartes. Descartes’ philosophy had tainted Western thought-categories since the early seventeenth century. Under its all-pervasive influence all things spiritual - mind, soul and spirit - had metamorphosed into disembodied entities. A language of mind vs. body, spirit vs. spirit, natural vs. supernatural, and secular vs. sacred became the coin of the religious and spiritual realms. In many ways human spirituality had evolved into an angelistic perfectionism. Libermann escaped the pernicious influence of this Cartesian philosophy, in large part thanks to his early education. Studying under the tutelage of his rabbinical father, he would have learned early in life that the Hebrew language had no one word for the human body equivalent to our own. The closest Hebrew cognate is \textit{basar}, sometimes translated as \textit{body}, but its essential meaning is \textit{flesh}. Robinson (1952) informs us that in the ancient Hebrew worldview it was not the \textit{flesh-body} that made us separate individuals; it was rather the \textit{flesh-body} that connected us in a web of life tissue to all other human beings. This \textit{flesh-body}, animated flesh, is the total human being, and the foundation for our corporate identity, our solidarity with one another and, above all, the ground of our common bonding to God. Robinson highlights the fact that the ancient Hebrews were not directly interested in the body for its own sake, but in its vertical dimension, insofar as it is the \textit{flesh-body} that binds us together God-ward. \textit{Basar}, our animated human flesh, emphasizes our co-existence, our bodily be-ing together in the world, open to the Holy Spirit of God.

To understand Libermann’s uniquely existential and incarnational spirituality, we must keep this Hebrew notion of the human body alive. It will sharpen our insight into his passion for social
and racial justice, human solidarity, democratic values and deep respect for the freedom and dignity of every human being. Pope Pius XII described Libermann as an “outstanding master of the spiritual life.” Henry Koren, C.S.Sp., after studying his writings intensely for many years, did not hesitate to claim that in the sphere of spiritual doctrine he proved himself to be an authentic pioneer. To express the reasons for the originality, universality and timelessness of Libermann’s spiritual doctrine, he writes:

“Father Libermann’s science of holiness escapes the confines of his native France, rises above the romanticism and self-conscious mortification of the nineteenth century and exercises its appeal far beyond the personnel of his own congregation” (1958, p.157).

With his profound grasp of our common human flesh and our deeply rooted solidarity, Libermann was ahead of his time in many ways and in many arenas. He understood that the mission of the Christian community and that of the missionary are identical to the mission of Jesus, “…to proclaim God’s reign as the power of unconditional grace to make persons, relationships and bodies whole.” (Volf & Lee, 2001, p.389).

The Here and Now of Gestalt Psychotherapy

Libermann’s spiritual doctrine, always rooted in basar, points us toward the Holy Spirit’s action in the world of our daily life. Koren never tires of reminding us that it is not enough just to listen to the words or read the texts to discover what truly animates an individual or an organization. We must pay heed to what the French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty has called “operational intentionality”, the lived and living motivation of a person or an organization: “One must pay attention to what really lives in a group—its driving force, its charism”. (Koren, 1990, p.15). And so he asks of his fellow Spiritans, what has been and what is the driving force of their founders and of their members? In his unequivocal and oft-repeated response, he replies, “…our lived spirituality can best be described as an evangelical availability which remains attentive to the Holy Spirit manifesting Himself in the concrete situation of life” (p.15). Libermann’s spirituality is contemporary in so many ways, precisely because he roots it always in the existential situation. In his insistence upon the “concrete situation of life”, we detect echoes of Gestalt Therapy’s focus on the Here and Now of human experience. The authors of Gestalt Therapy: Excitement and Growth in Human Personality (Perls et al., 1951, p.31) encourage this exercise: Try for few minutes to make sentences starting with what you are at this moment aware of. Begin with the words ‘now’ or ‘at this moment’ or ‘here and now’. After presenting this technique for contacting the environment more vividly, they make this comment:
“Whatever is actual is, as regards time, always in the present. Whatever happened in the past was actual then, just as whatever occurs in the future will be actual at that time, but what is actual—and thus all you can be aware of—must be in the present. Hence the stress if we wish to develop the sense of actuality, on words such as ‘now’ and ‘at this moment’.

Likewise, what is actual for you must be where you are. Hence the stress on words like ‘here’” (p.32)

Libermann’s constant advice to seek the Holy Spirit “in the concrete situation of our lives”, cradles the “here and now” of Gestalt therapy. It grounds the individual’s spiritual life in the actual here and now of the existential dialogue of a personal past-present-future. In this context, “…openness to experience demands detachment from the past.”

A man of his time

Libermann seems to have been richly endowed with the gift of ‘reading the signs of the time’. It was for this reason that he could consider the clergy’s failure to keep up with the times to be their greatest fault. During the French revolution of 1848 and the subsequent democratic elections, Libermann, unlike so many of his religious contemporaries and superiors at home and even in Rome, did not pine for some mythical golden age of the past. He was prompt to let go of the traditional Church devotion to the ancien régime. He encouraged his men to get out to vote at the dawning of the democratic State in France. On February 22, thousands of Parisians had taken to the streets to demand suffrage reform. King Louis Philippe lost his nerve and abdicated. After months of chaos and confusion in the Parliament and throughout the nation, Louis Napoleon Bonaparte, nephew of the exiled great Emperor, Napoleon Bonaparte, was elected President of the Second Republic on December 10, 1848, by an overwhelming majority, 5.5 million votes to his closest contender’s 1.5 million. No matter that Louis Napoleon had a reputation of a ‘cretin’ and a licentious playboy. The people had spoken and Louis’ election held out promise of a more just order for the poor of France. Libermann honored the people’s decision. The sentiments of his heart must have resonated also with the goals of the American Declaration of Independence of 1776, “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” In a letter to a friend in 1848, he wrote that he welcomed the revolution because the royalist government, in his judgment, was not genuinely concerned for “the happiness of the people”. Ahead of his time in the political arena, he took pains to make clear that he saw the downfall of the old regime as a sign of God’s justice against the autocratic regimes that abused the
In the arena of social and racial justice, Libermann also proved himself to be far ahead of his time. At least 125 years before the Catholic Church adopted its “preferential option for the poor” Libermann had made this concern the keystone of his life and his work. When a Carthusian monk in France wrote to ask about the purpose of his new Congregation, Libermann replied:

“To preach the good news to the poor, that is our general goal. Nevertheless, the missions are the principal object we aim at, and in the missions we have chosen the most wretched and abandoned souls. Providence gave us our work for the Blacks…” (Letter to Dom Salier, May 30, 1840, cited by Gilbert, 1983, p.106).

Koren points out certain sympathies between the doctrines of Karl Marx and Libermann. In their common concern for the poor and oppressed of society, each in his own way arrived at the conviction that individual acts of charity would never suffice to ameliorate the social conditions that spawned poverty and oppression. They both grasped the necessity for the structural and systemic change of social conditions. What was needed to reform society was not a handout but a hand-up. In Libermann’s opinion it was not sufficient to teach the poor in Africa “how to operate things”, but it was necessary to teach them “how things operate” (Gilbert 1983, p.105). Marx equally promoted an intimate link between education and work. Koren tells us that he advocated an “early combination of progressive labor with education” as “one of the most potent means for the transformation of the existing society into the new society of universal brotherhood”. (Selected Works, 2,38, cited in Koren, 1990, p.106). In some ways, Libermann’s values so closely matched some of Marx’s that today he might well be condemned as an enemy of capitalism, or besmirched with the tag of socialist, promoting class warfare. Koren tells us that Libermann experienced a profound feeling of gratitude over the downfall of the privileged classes of the rich, “that bourgeois aristocracy”, which he calls “the legal establishment” which worships money and “tramples on the interests of the poor”… “God has overthrown their idol” (cited in Koren, 1990, p.107). Libermann is not speaking here in the voice of a political or economic reformer, but he echoes the voice of the Hebrew prophets of old:
“Hear this, you who trample the needy to do away with the humble of the land…So as to buy the helpless for money and the needy for a pair of sandals…The Lord has sworn by the pride of Jacob, indeed, I will never forget any of their deeds”. (Amos 8: 4,6,7).

In the realm of personal spiritual direction, Libermann’s principles far transcended the common orientation of his contemporaries. As we shall soon see, his style of spiritual direction closely resembled in many ways the non-directive and client-centered approach of the 20th century American psychotherapist, Carl Rogers. But Libermann was not just a man ahead of his time in many ways; he was a man beyond his time. He had no desire to be first in anything, except for love of God and service to others. He was beyond his time because his message and his approach rested solely upon the action of the Holy Spirit. He taught us to be like a feather in the wind, the sail of a ship responding to the breath of the Holy Spirit. “Your soul is the ship, the Holy Spirit is the wind; he blows into your will and your soul goes forward…” (cited in Gilbert, 1983, p.41). It is here that we find the basis of Libermann’s flexibility and notable lack of rigidity in his spiritual doctrine. His natural disposition to allow others to be themselves anticipated and prefigured Carl Roger’s Client-Centered Counseling by at least one hundred years.

Libermann’s Rogerian Inclinations

Empathy, for instance, plays a central role in the theory of Rogerian psychotherapy. It also played a major role in Libermann’s life and in his spiritual doctrine. Rogers tries to describe what occurs in the most satisfactory therapeutic relationships. He writes:

“…that it is the counselor’s function to assume, in so far as he is able, the internal frame of reference of the client, to perceive the world as the client sees it, to perceive the client himself as he is seen by himself; to lay aside all perceptions from the external frame of reference while doing so, and to communicate something of this empathic understanding to the client.” (1965, p. 29)

It would appear that Libermann’s personality was richly endowed with this gift of empathy. Boniface Hanley, O.F.M. (n.d.) describes this special talent:

“Libermann was a negotiator par excellence. ‘One of the things that contributed to his success in any transaction was his delicate courtesy’, Father LeVavasseur remembered.
His judgment was excellent and he was vividly, keenly, delicately sensitive. When he had to act, he mentally exchanged places with the people concerned and tried to imagine how he would feel if someone treated him as he intended to deal with them" (p. 24)

It is amazing how this ability to mentally exchange places with other people reflects basic Rogerian principles. For example, Rogers postulates that “…every individual exists in a continually changing world of experience of which he is the center” (1965, p. 483). This postulate closely mirrors the central role that “the concrete situation of the individual” plays in Libermann’s spiritual doctrine. A Rogerian corollary of the previous postulate states: “…the best vantage point for understanding behavior is from the internal frame of reference of the individual himself” (1965, p. 494). In his own life and teachings, Libermann fully embraced this axiom.

This gift of empathy, Libermann’s extraordinary capacity to understand the other person by entering their personally experienced world, is intimately linked with another core concept of Rogerian psychotherapy – unconditional positive regard. Rogers describes this condition of therapeutic change as follows:

“When the therapist is experiencing a warm, positive and acceptant attitude toward what is the client, this facilitates change. It involves the therapist’s genuine willingness for the client to be whatever feeling is going on in him at that moment – fear, confusion, pain, anger, hatred, love, courage, or awe. It means that the therapist cares for the client, in a non-possessive way. It means that he prides the client in a total rather than a conditional way. By this I mean that he does not simply accept the client when he is behaving in certain ways, and disapprove of him when he behaves in other ways. It means an outgoing positive feeling without reservations, without evaluations…” (1961, p. 62)

Keeping in mind this description of unconditional positive regard, we can only stand in awe before the spiritual genius of Libermann, when we read his words:

“The uncomfortable feeling we can have when we are with people who think and judge differently to ourselves, who despise us and have no time for us, can easily make us stiff and timid, with the result that we are gloomy, evasive and awkward when we are with them. This can give a very
bad impression and put people off our religion. We must love everybody, whatever they feel about us or our religion”. (Letter to LeBerre, 1847, cited in de Mare, p. 376).

Libermann’s attention to his “uncomfortable feelings” reminds us of Rogers’ focus upon the essential importance of accepting all our competing and conflicting feelings if we wish to attain to a wholesome state of bodily (organismic) congruence.

Intimately bound to Rogers’ therapeutic principle of unconditional regard for the client is the principle of acceptance. He defines acceptance as:

“…a warm regard for him as a person of unconditional self-worth—of value no matter what his condition, his behavior, or his feelings. It means a respect and liking for him as a separate person, a willingness for him to possess his own feelings in his own way. It means an acceptance of and regard for his attitudes of the moment, no matter how negative or positive, no matter how much they may contradict other attitudes he has held in the past. This acceptance of each fluctuating aspect of this other person makes it for him a relationship of warmth and safety, and the safety of being liked and prized as a person seems a highly important element in a helping relationship”. (1961, p. 34)

Libermann’s writings abound in examples akin to this Rogerian attitude of acceptance. Close associates commented on feeling at home and at ease in his company. Without doubt his generous capacity to accept others as they were, to let them be themselves, contributed greatly to the healing relationship of his spiritual direction. Here are some examples of how highly he valued both self-acceptance and acceptance of others:

“Bear gently, patiently, and most peacefully, as best you can, your needs and your infidelities. Etch deeply in your heart that Jesus and Mary tolerate them with sweetness and kindness, and that their love for you is always the same. (p. 5, 6).… The great happiness of perfection is not a matter of a day. You need time, work, prayer and confidence. One gets there only after getting up and down and being encouraged to begin again many times. Don’t torture yourself nor become discouraged (p. 7).… God… gives us his grace even when we are offending Him. My hope is there… He will help me despite my faults. Be tranquil about all that (p. 8).… Here is a general
rule that must be absolutely observed, and that for conscience’s sake: every time a thought produces in the mind some rigidity, like callousness, struggle or trouble, you must treat it as a temptation and reject it…putting your mind in calm before God and sacrificing yourself to His divine love (p. 10)… Try to keep yourself interiorly in great peace, so that the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be not idle in you. If you let yourself become troubled, agitated, anxious, the Holy Spirit will not be able to act in you as He would (pp. 19-20)… Generally speaking, when you have committed a fault, don’t trouble yourself over it (p. 29)… Here is a general rule that must be followed absolutely and that in conscience: every time a thought about no matter what comes up and produces in the mind a certain perplexity or a certain tenseness, something like a harshness, something like a hardness, a struggle or trouble you must treat it like a temptation and reject it (pp. 35-36)” (All quotes extracted from Libermann (n.d.), trans. F.X. Malinowski).

Some religious people have been suspicious of “self-acceptance,” rejecting it as an invention of secular humanistic psychology. Vitz (1977), for example, parodies humanistic psychology and blames its ‘selfist’ theories for the narcissism of our age. Unlike Rogers and Libermann who believe in the essential goodness of human beings, Vitz stands more in the Calvinist tradition of gloom and doom, and does not so believe. It is obvious from the advice of Libermann that self-acceptance is central to his doctrine of spirituality. Over and over again he urges us and encourages us in the strongest terms to treat ourselves always in a calm, gentle, peaceful and self-accepting fashion. His language is never hard, harsh, severe, judgmental or condemnatory. All self-rejection or self-hatred is foreign to his spirit. Only in the heart that is at peace with itself can the Holy Spirit be free to do its work.

The acceptance of others is a correlate of this self-acceptance. When the gentle angel of self-acceptance swoops down to slay the dragon of self-negation, it simultaneously opens its arms to embrace and affirm others. Rogers stated that closely related to openness to our own inner and outer experience there emerges an openness and acceptance of other individuals. To make his point, he quotes from Maslow about self-actualizing individuals:

“One does not complain about water because it is wet, nor about rocks because they are hard….As the child looks upon the world with wide, uncritical and innocent eyes, simply noting and observing what is the case, without either arguing the matter or demanding that it be otherwise, so
Expresses of this gracious acceptance of others just as they are abound in the spiritual writings of Libermann:

“Put down as a fundamental principle in the matters of direction: one must not constrain nor cramp the one being directed. Refrain from prescribing too many rules... I regard as a capital point in direction... leave grace with a lot of liberty... (pp. 13-14). Avoid as a big fault all that is hard and inflexible... (p. 66). It is a great principle, in divine things, not to wish to lead everybody according to one's opinion and one's manner of acting. Rigidity, in this kind of thing, has deadly results. God has His view on each one. He communicates and distributes His graces diversely (p. 35). For your ministry, follow this general rule: severity loses souls, sweetness saves them.” (Libermann, (n.d.), p. 51)

Finally, we can say that Libermann’s spiritual doctrine of unconditional acceptance spared him from all tendencies toward an idealized perfectionism. Once again, he was at least one hundred years ahead of his time. In the 1940’s and 50’s, the renowned neo-Freudian, Karen Horney, developed the concept of the ‘idealized self’. She describes this ‘idealized self’ as “…what we are in our irrational imaginations, or what we should be according to the dictates of neurotic pride” (1950, p.158). This idealized self is impossible of attainment for it is based upon the illusion that a finite being can be perfectly complete. Libermann had anticipated this psychoanalytic insight in 1846 when he wrote this advice:

“A very important principle for action is to be always on guard against ideal perfection. It is good that one knows how things ought to be for success; one must know the conduct to follow for the realization of the means of execution which are the best, but it is yet more important to know how to modify one's views, to bend, to accommodate oneself to people, things and circumstances. Be assured that you will never execute your plans as you would desire. It is a mirage to wish to obtain a complete result such as one sees it and one desires it. It is of the highest importance to adapt, to bend in all, if one wants to have success; otherwise one gets hurt from the difficulties coming from persons and things” (Libermann, (n.d.), pp.51-52).
Once again, Libermann demonstrates that he was a man with a message ahead of his time. His vision did, indeed, transcend his own constricted time and place. While most of the Western World gloriied in its own cultural imperialism, he wrote to his missionaries in Africa:

"Forget about Europe, its customs, its ways of thinking; you have to make yourselves blacks with the blacks so as to form them in their own way and not according to the European model." (cited in de Mare, p.351).

A good century before the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act of the 1960’s in our own country, Libermann wrote these words referring to his failed mission in Haiti:

"I am convinced that our success would have been complete and we would have been able to show the detractors of the black race that not having a white skin does not mean that they are any less children of God than themselves, that they have the same nobility of soul and are just as capable of accepting faith and morality. In short, color does not in any way denote inferiority" (Letter to M. Percin, Feb. 11, 1845, cited in de Mare, p.377).

We may recall the words of a powerful curial Cardinal at the time of Vatican II when the declaration on Religious Liberty was being debated: “Error has no rights”. With this bon mot, he hoped to squelch the Church’s recognition of religious liberty for all. How different the approach of Libermann. In 1846 he wrote:

“It is difficult to appreciate how important this tolerance is... There is no way in which people will always agree... If... we allow each person to see things in their own way and according to their own character and mentality, then great good will come from it.” (Letter to Lossedat, April 13, cited in de Mare, p.367).

Most striking are the words from one of Libermann’s letters quoted earlier. In 1847, he wrote that people who disagree with our religion:

“...must be given complete freedom to think and act as they want. No man on this earth is capable of forcing the will, the conscience or the intellect of others.” (Letter to LeBerre, Sept 8, 1847, cited in de Mare, p.376)

Libermann’s vision stretched over ordinary time to embrace many of the values we hold close to our hearts today. He cherished and advocated for religious tolerance, racial justice, human dignity, liberty and solidarity with all the poor and oppressed of the world. He could see far because of his total availability to the Holy Spirit. “In His light, we see light”. He foresaw eternal truths in this light...
and was thus not only ahead of his time, but a man with a message beyond time.

His spiritual wisdom constantly reminds us that we never labor alone in some ideal situation in some perfect world. It is only under the brooding of the Holy Spirit that the groaning of creation is stilled and the wounded heart of the world healed. With Libermann we pray, “Come Holy Spirit and renew the face of the earth”.

References


**Footnotes**

Introduction

There is a marvelous passage in the book *Alice in Wonderland* where the Queen of Hearts declares: “Here... it takes all the running you can do just to keep in the same place; if you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast”. I suspect that the Queen is reflecting the inner sentiments of many of us today. Our days seem so occupied with endless meetings, schedules, deadlines to be met etc.; no matter how fast we seem to go we rarely feel that we accomplish all that we should do. We know that there is more to life than increasing its speed, yet we find it so difficult to get time to stand back from it all. Despite our best intentions, personal time with God is often relegated to the periphery of our hyperactive life. Against this background, Francis Libermann offers us some very useful insights into the place and importance of prayer in our lives. In particular, the simple method he proposed for his colleagues in Africa, weighed down by the cares of their ministry and the effects of an inhospitable climate that took its toll on their health and energy, seems especially appropriate for today.

Each Person is Unique

Although Francis Libermann was a much sought-after spiritual guide by people in many different walks of life he hardly ever spoke of his own spiritual journey. The following extract from a letter, written in 1846 to Jerome Schwindenhammer, a colleague and friend, was one of those rare occasions when he did so:

“I have never made my meditation on the virtues, not even on the virtues of Jesus and Mary. I have never been able to draw any conclusion or make any resolution at the end of my meditation as far as the practice of the virtues is concerned. I have never even been able to reflect on the virtues to know what to do or what to teach. Sometimes I have put that down to a personal nervous problem, other times to a natural incapacity...”

Interestingly, he asked for the letter to be burnt three days after it was received but fortunately his instructions were never carried out. What he says in the letter is quite an extraordinary admission because as soon as he entered the seminary – shortly after his conversion – he was taught a very definite method of making his meditation. It consisted in taking a scene from the Gospels, imagining the feelings and the attitudes of Jesus, uniting oneself with him in these sentiments and finally making very definite resolutions for action afterwards.

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1. *Prayer for Busy People*

Our days seem so occupied with endless meetings, schedules, deadlines to be met etc...
In his earlier years he had spoken of this as “an excellent method of prayer”. However, his own experience taught him that people cannot be fitted into a mould – a fixed system – but that the Holy Spirit leads each one of us individually, according to our own personality, our temperament, our gifts and our weaknesses. We have to find our own unique path to God, our own unique way of praying. To someone who sought his advice in 1845 he suggested that he follow his own inner attraction, the way his heart was telling him:

“Make your prayer as simple as possible; don’t try to bring in too many ideas or to follow too closely the Sulpician method. Your prayer should consist in simply resting before the Lord in humility and peace”.

One of Libermann’s key insights was that God always comes to meet us in the reality of our situation, he always finds us where we are. He has made us what we are and he expects us to pray with the personality type that we have: if we tend to approach the world through our emotions and feelings, he wants us to use our senses to pray; if we are the intellectual, rational type, then reasoning will play a big part in the way we pray. In short, it is God who leads us in prayer; we simply have to discover the path along which he is inviting us.

**Union with God**

In the letter to the Colossians, St. Paul says: “As you received Christ Jesus the Lord, live in union with him. Be rooted in him and built upon him as you were taught…” This idea of being united with Jesus/God is at the very heart of Libermann’s spirituality. Fundamentally he believed that we are made for union with God; it is the purpose for which we are created, it is the only way to true happiness and true freedom. The passages he liked best in Scripture were the ones that clearly expressed this idea: “I am the vine and you are the branches…make your home in me as I make mine in you”; “It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me”. We are meant to be united with God not only in the next life but here on earth, in the concrete circumstances of our lives, with our own particular personality and in the reality of our particular situation. God unites himself with us in our baptism and in the sacraments but prayer is essential if we are to live our daily lives in union with him.

**Two Ways of Being United with God**

Libermann distinguished two types of union with God: *contemplative union* and *practical union*. Both are closely linked and depend on each other; in other words how we live and how we pray are closely connected with each other.
Contemplative union effectively covers all type of prayer, the type we make when we take time out from our daily activities and speak to God in our own words. It involves three actions on our part: recollecting ourselves, concentrating our attention in an attitude of faith and ‘applying our soul’ to God in love. In simple words, it can be described as loving attention to God. Love is the measure of the quality of our prayer; it is our attention to God (an intellectual act) that distinguishes prayer from all other activities. He stresses that the quality of our prayer does not depend on our feelings. Interestingly, Simone Weil, the Jewish philosopher, says something quite similar: “The key to a Christian conception of studies is the realization that prayer consists of attention…The quality of the attention counts for much in the quality of the prayer. Warmth of heart cannot make up for it.”

If the time given to God in prayer is to be quality time, if our prayer is to be real, Libermann adds two preconditions. We need, in the first place, to forget ourselves, to let go of our self-preoccupation and, in particular, of our tendency towards self-analysis. For Libermann self-forgetfulness is the principal mortification in the Christian life. Secondly, we need to be trying to respond to the voice of God’s Spirit in our hearts during the day. This is the real test of the quality of our prayer, even if it is filled with distractions.

Libermann was convinced that prayer changes us, or rather that God changes us through prayer. He outlined the reasons why:

- Prayer helps us to get to know ourselves, to see ourselves as God sees us.
- Prayer is a powerful way of overcoming our faults and weaknesses. Here he would include things like oversensitivity to what others say, the desire to do everything perfectly etc. However, Libermann quickly points out that our faults and weaknesses are never eradicated completely; we carry the fundamental limitations of our personality and temperament to the grave. Prayer actually helps us to accept ourselves and our limitations with patience, with gentleness.
- Prayer helps us to see God’s action in the life of others, to see how best to lead them to God. It gives us a wisdom and an insight that we cannot get from human effort alone.
- Prayer helps us to get to know God better and to see how and where he is leading us. Here Francis was clearly speaking from personal experience. God had entered his own life dramatically at his conversion after his personal painstaking efforts to find the truth through intellectual reasoning had failed completely; it was in prayer that he discovered the path to follow.
Practical union, or ‘union of operation’, as he called it, is effectively a way of life. It is aimed at ensuring that all our daily actions are done in God. Again, it is always linked in Libermann’s writings to letting go of oneself, of self-centeredness, of self-preoccupation and to trying to find God’s voice and respond to it faithfully in the ordinary circumstances of our daily lives. We remember the words of St. Paul: “It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me”. The whole aim of the Christian life is to allow Christ to take over my entire life so that my actions are his, my attitudes are his, even my sentiments are his. “Let this mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.”

Practical union involves frequently turning to God during the day, simply telling God our desire to do what he wants in the concrete circumstances in which we find ourselves. Our attitude should be one of complete dependence on him, trust in him in difficult moments and a desire to accept his will. Thus it is far more than just a pious turning to God from time to time with holy phrases. It is a way of living and quite a demanding one at that.

Once again, living life in this way gradually changes us:

- It gives us a practical feeling for the things of God, what Libermann calls ‘a spiritual tact’ in dealing with others
- It gives us good judgment. Again we recall the words of St. Paul: “A spiritual person judges all things wisely and no-one should question such judgment.”
- It gradually frees us from being over concerned with misunderstanding, with contradictions etc.
- It gives us serenity, peace, joy in our relations with others

As mentioned previously, both contemplative union and practical union go hand in hand and each is incomplete without the other. Practical union ensures that our prayer is not an illusion: we can’t live a life that is separate from God during the day and hope to pray properly.

Prayer and a Busy Lifestyle

For Francis Libermann, as we have seen, all our activity – our work, our study, our Scripture reading etc. – should be done in a spirit of prayer. He has a beautiful expression: “All our sighs must be in God to enjoy Him, to honor Him and to have His life in us. This is nothing but continual prayer.” St. Augustine’s insight is quite similar: desire is prayer without ceasing.

Not surprisingly, Libermann emphasized that a missionary – that really means all of us – must above all be a person of prayer. He insisted on an hour a day, whatever the demands of the work, even if the time spent at prayer seemed useless.
“It is very rare, if not impossible, that we are free of all the preoccupations and tensions that come from a busy lifestyle… It costs us a bit to stay a long while at prayer when we are preoccupied with many things throughout the day. These things invade our prayer, the time for the end of the prayer approaches and we are inclined to say that we have wasted an hour of our morning. I could have spent it much more profitably than battling with distractions, I am tempted to say to myself… but if we think that we are greatly mistaken”.

Interestingly, St. Ignatius of Loyola refused permission to his Spanish confreres to pray for an hour and a half a day. “A truly mortified person needs only a quarter of an hour to be united with God”, he claimed. This would not be Libermann’s thinking.

Although he had never traveled to Africa himself, Francis Libermann was a very practical man. He was well aware of the difficulties of the climate and of fatigue when it comes to prayer: “…the hot climate, the tiredness that comes from our ministry, from physical weakness…all of that prevents us from applying ourselves as we should.” Because of this, he developed a special method of prayer for missionaries, which we can summarize as follows:

- We give ourselves wholeheartedly and totally to God at the beginning of our prayer, without looking for any feelings to that effect
- Then we simply recollect ourselves, for example by considering the presence of God or Jesus in a Gospel scene etc.
- We should then use various means of maintaining this spirit of recollection, for example we can think of our poverty before God, of our limitations and faults, we can tell him of our desire to do better, or perhaps think of a Scripture passage…
- We should deal with distractions gently; we simply go back to considering God’s presence

It seems to me that this simple method is particularly appropriate for the hyperactive world of today.

**Final Words**

Many have correctly pointed out that Francis Libermann’s spirituality basically came from his own experience. The foundation and early development of his Congregation made incredible demands on his time and energy as he battled with ill-health, with criticism and misunderstanding by others and, at times, with his own self belief as he had to face the reality of failure. There were times when he admitted to feeling overwhelmed by it all. Clearly, it was his practice of ‘examining everything before God’, of spending time with him on a daily basis, whatever the demands of
It was in prayer that he found light, patience, serenity and peace.

...prayer will change us little by little, make us... more gentle with ourselves and with others...

his work, that helped him keep things in perspective and that gave him the energy to continue. It was in prayer that he found light, patience, serenity and peace. His life and his teaching remind us that prayer is vital to our Christian life no matter how busy we are. The quality of our prayer and the quality of our life go hand in hand and the latter is the test of the former. We have to find our own unique way of praying, of communicating with the God who loves us, a way that takes into account our own unique personality and the concrete reality of our lives. And the comforting aspect is that prayer will change us little by little, make us more serene, more patient, more gentle with ourselves and with others...and others will see the difference!

Footnotes
1 First given as a talk, under the same title, to the staff of Duquesne University during Founders’ Week, February, 2006
2 Notes and Documents, VIII, p. 203. There is another letter in a similar vein to his nephew, François-Xavier Libermann, in 1851, cf. Notes and Documents, XIII, pp. 132-133.
3 Notes and Documents, VII, pp. 37-38: Letter to M. Collin, January 29, 1845
4 Col 2, 6-7
5 Cf. Jn 15, 1,4
6 Gal 2, 20
7 Strictly speaking, Libermann distinguishes between meditative prayer, affective prayer and contemplative prayer, cf. Ecrits Spirituels, Instructions aux Missionnaires, pp. 496 ff.
9 Phil 2, 5
10 1 Cor 2, 15
11 Ecrits Spirituels, Instructions sur l'Oraison, p. 99
12 Notes and Documents, VII, p. 898: Letter to the Community in Dakar, December 27, 1846
14 Ecrits Spirituels, Instructions aux Missionnaires, pp. 526-527
15 Cf. Ecrits Spirituels, Instructions aux Missionnaires, pp. 527-528
16 Cf., for example, his admission to his close friend Frédéric le Vavasseur, who was threatening to leave the Congregation: “God is overwhelming me with this troublesome work for which we need so much patience.” [Walter Van de Putte (ed. and trans.) Spiritual Letters to Clergy and Religious, Volume III, Duquesne University Press, 1966, p. 31]

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Love increases, not decreases, with use.

PRACTICAL UNION AND THE CRESTFALLEN GOD

“(The elder son) was angry then and refused to go in, and his father came out and began to urge him to come in; but he retorted to his father, ‘All these years I have slaved for you and never once disobeyed any orders of yours, yet you never offered me so much as a kid for me to celebrate with my friends. But, for this son of yours, when he comes back after swallowing up your property – he and his loose women – you kill the calf we had been fattening.’ The father said, ‘My son, you are with me always and all I have is yours.’” (Luke 15, 28-31)

The story of the two sons in Chapter 15 of St Luke’s Gospel is disconcerting when we feel a guilty sympathy for the elder son, a complicity in his refusal to join the celebration. Maybe we also feel for the crestfallen father, completely taken aback at his son’s failure to appreciate his loving presence. Can there be a more heartrending lament than the father’s protest? “You are with me always and all I have is yours”. The father’s love has not broken through the sometimes dull surface of everyday living.

God does not love us because we are good. We are good because God loves us. (St Augustine)

In God’s creative design we have been brought into being. “I am loved, therefore I am.” God looked out on His creation and saw that it was good. This dynamic of God’s initiative in love runs through Benedict XVI’s first encyclical, Deus Caritas Est. God’s love empowers us. God loves. Now we also can love because we are created in His image.

Acknowledging that God makes the first move in no way diminishes us. It does not set a limit to our creativity or responsibility. Rather it intensifies them. We are now in the realm of spiritual energy. Goodness consists in the pouring out of itself. Love increases, not decreases, with use. Today we would say “Use it or lose it” (cf. Matt 18, 23-35).

Acknowledging that God makes the first move, that He first loves us, is enlightening and liberating, but it is not always easy to do. It is often very difficult to accept God’s love for us in the face of blatant injustice, in the midst of violence and war. It is nevertheless possible because Jesus has shown us the way. He had to suffer and die for it, but he never wavered in proclaiming God’s love for the world. (Jn. 3, 16)
We have to be concerned, to be troubled, not about the other side but about our own side, not about grace but about will. (Martin Buber)

From his Jewish background Francis Libermann was familiar with a God who made the first move, a God who cared deeply for His people, whose loving presence accompanied them on their journey through life. In his baptism Libermann was nevertheless surprised by the extravagance of God’s desire for intimacy, by His breathtaking availability in Jesus. In this period of grace, it seemed that nothing could halt God’s loving advance.

It was not long, however, before Libermann had to struggle to hold on to the sustaining conviction that God loved him. There was the open wound of estrangement from his father as a result of his conversion. There were the _grand mal_ epileptic seizures, which seemed to rule out priestly ordination. Later on there were the many crises of the fledgling missionary society, especially the disastrous start when almost all of the first group of missionaries died in Africa within the first year. Everyday pain calls God’s love into question, and draws us further into its mystery. Slowly Libermann learned that he could count on God, but to do so he had to deny himself because God’s ways are not our ways.

Everyday pain calls God’s love into question, and draws us further into its mystery.

The apostolic life is that life of love and holiness lived on earth by the Son of God in order to save and sanctify people. By it He continually sacrificed Himself, thereby glorifying the Father and saving the world. (Spiritan Rule 1849)

Libermann had a passion for the apostolic life, which for him was a share in the life of Jesus. Jesus’ union with his Father reached a crescendo in his moments of going apart for quiet contemplative prayer, but continued undiminished in the crowded hours of his activity. This loving union involved a radical absence of self-interest.

...Libermann’s own union with God was the secret of his remarkable buoyancy.

In trying to follow this pattern, Libermann’s own union with God was the secret of his remarkable buoyancy. And he continually sought to share this energy source with others. At the end of his life he made a particular effort to reach out to his missionaries. He distinguished between contemplative union with God and practical (or active) union with God. For us these are two aspects of the same reality, as they were for Jesus. They nourish each other. They thrive together and are threatened only by our selfishness or sin. Not only is practical union with God not diminished by activity, it is at once at home and restlessly creative in the apostolic life.
“Practical union” has become a Libermann footprint on the Spiritan path for the last 150 years. It has encouraged seminarians because it has offered new meaning to the drudgery of everyday living. Above all it has consoled missionaries, especially in moments of exhaustion or loneliness. Its healing balm is not in the details of its explanation, but in its putting us in contact with Jesus at prayer, at work, rejoicing at the initiatives of his Father, weeping at the stubborn resistance of his people. Together with Jesus we experience all the emotions. As his disciples we do not escape the need for self-denial, lest we miss the whisper of the poor, the suffering of the excluded.

_O Holy Spirit, I wish to be like a feather before you, so that your breath may carry me wherever it pleases and I may never offer it any resistance._ (Francis Libermann)

The Spiritan Rule of Life (1987) invites us to consider practical union as a “condition of habitual fidelity to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit”. Our model in this fidelity is Mary (cf. SRL 5 & 88). Her union with her son grew through practical everyday association. There was some misunderstanding in his teenage years, later a seeming exclusion from his ministry, but then a fierce solidarity with his final suffering. Practical union does not keep us safely on the sidelines but plunges us deeply into the drama of life. Elusive as the breath of the Spirit, practical union rarely reaches consciousness. Much of the time we may taste only our own poverty. We do not often recognize God’s presence, but occasionally, in a flash of grace, we catch a fleeting glimpse. We enjoy a brief Emmaus moment (Lk 24, 31) and it transforms despondency into wild enthusiasm.

Through his teaching on practical union, Libermann has put us in touch with Jesus’ deep desire to be with us to the end of time (cf. Matt 28, 20, Jn 17, 24). If we are feeling left out or forgotten, Jesus’ longing for our friendship comes to us with the freshness of the dawn. It brings us peace and hope. And if weariness and stress squeeze all the joy out of life, we will again hear that voice of invitation, “You are with me always, and all I have is yours.”

Practical union? It’s your move. Join the celebration!
Anthony J. Gittins, CSSp.

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...the donor of all gifts is God...

THE ROOTS OF CHARISM

The currency of the word charism (and its derivatives charismatic and charisma) has become seriously devalued in our times. Charism is now commonly attributed to “celebrities” or “personalities”, and sometimes beauty or even notoriety (charism) are deemed sufficient qualifications for celebrity status. It is also quite commonplace for national or multinational corporations, not to mention religious institutions of every stripe, to claim a special and distinctive charism. But what does this really mean? Does it really amount to anything substantial or particular?

The word charism is Greek and may be translated as “favor” or “grace.” In the Vulgate, St. Jerome translated it as donum/dona (gift/gifts), except in 1 Cor 12:31 where he simply retained the Greek word. There, St. Paul is calling the community to “be ambitious for the higher gifts [charismata].” In Christian (particularly Pauline) theology, the word has a long and distinguished history. But this is not the place for a theological exploration; my intention is to seek applications of the term to the Spiritan corporate identity, and to the actual living out of that identity in the lives of individuals.

It is critically important that we remember that the author or donor of all gifts is God: the subject of every charism, therefore, is the God who reaches out, embraces, and shares God’s gifts with whomsoever God wills. Early in the third century, Tertullian visualized the Trinity as root, shoot and fruit¹: Father/Creator as root, Jesus/the Christ as shoot, and Spirit/Advocate as fruit. Consistent with this metaphor, we can say that all those gifted with charism are continuing to bear Godly fruit in their lives. Spiritans in particular should be aware that a charism in the biblical, theological sense is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. It is not an initiative of an individual, and it exists for the benefit of a wider community.

Between St. Paul and Vatican II, however, the word was scarcely used. Having re-appropriated it, the Council used it fourteen times in the final documents. But, since then, charism has been attributed to at least the following: founders of religious institutes, religious life itself, communities, and even individuals. It is also understood both as gift and as call. In short, charism has become an exceedingly flexible, if not bewildering, term.
Meanwhile, sociologist Max Weber (1864-1920) had written extensively on *charism* as a sociological phenomenon. He was particularly interested in the relationship between the individual and the community, and between constraint and freedom. He defined *charism* as

a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he *(sic)* is set apart from ordinary men *(sic)* and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader.²

Weber’s instinct so far is not at odds with the biblical meaning of *charism*. He then proceeds to elaborate, showing that the *charism* (sociologically speaking) of the founder of a new social institution has the power to magnetize a small group of followers who recognize his (or her) authority, usually by a communal discernment of his (or her) insights and aspirations as “inspired.” They will be enkindled with the fire he has struck, and their initial fervor will lead them to attempt the impossible. And this, of course, remains consistent with most people’s reading of the charismatic qualities found in des Places or Libermann.

A question that has always challenged me personally, however, is how we authentically discern just how a founder’s *charism* is to be carried into times, places, and cultures that are quite different from those experienced by the founder. In other words, how do the descendants of Claude Poullart des Places or Francis Libermann live in a way that is essentially faithful to their ancestors, yet very different in its expression? How can we be loyal yet different, consistent yet creative, faithful yet path-breaking?

Throughout history, flora of various kinds have been successfully transported and transplanted into a variety of soils. Some have withered, while others have thrived; but an apple remains recognizable as such, whether it is a *Washington Red*, a *Golden Delicious* or a *Granny Smith*. How then can Spiritans, and the authentic Spiritan *charism*, thrive in places and circumstances so very different from those of their founders? I turn now to a more personal odyssey.

**THE FRUITS OF CHARISM**

“The poor and most abandoned souls” has never been a phrase that really resonated with me, even though the spirit and sentiments behind it are extremely significant. As my own Spiritan life has
unfolded, so has my awareness of other lives and other possibilities. It was initially surprising to discover how many other religious communities, of women and men, espoused the very same motto, and even used the same words. So what is special about the Spiritans? And there was a further discomfort: I was never able to dissociate “souls” from actual people. In order to identify more than simply “the poor and most abandoned,” it would always be necessary for me to personalize them.

“The poor” and “the most abandoned” are abstractions, categories; but there really is no such thing as “the poor” in the abstract. God does not make abstractions, or generic creatures: God’s creation is always specific, and every human person is individuated and identifiable by name. In order, therefore, to be really committed to the poor and most abandoned people, we must endeavor to know them by name, to identify and relate to them in a personal way. This, of course, epitomizes the ministry of Jesus, and his warning that we must be very careful to reach out to “the least” in such a way that we actually relate to them and their needs (cf. Mt 25:31-46). Both Claude Poullart des Places and Francis Libermann exemplified this in palpable ways; and this, as I understand it, is the real core of the Spiritan charism. But it remains for each and all of us Spiritans to absorb and reapply this spirit, whoever and wherever we may be.

My reflections here, however, are only partly about my own stumbling efforts to live the charism. No less important for me is the conviction that mission is always a two-way street. That is to say, what we call “mission in reverse” is a critical component of every authentic missionary experience, and any authentic missionary charism must therefore exemplify how it can and should be lived. “Mission in reverse” is about the ways in which those who profess to bring the good news are also recipients of that same good news; about the ways in which we evangelizers are ourselves evangelized and converted. The days are long gone, one hopes, when missionaries thought they were bringing God to Godless people, or that they were the givers and the people were simply the recipients. Such half-truths are highly dangerous, though they were a powerful idiom of a former age. By now we should have discovered how God’s Spirit lives in others’ lives, and how much we ourselves have to learn and receive from others, lest preaching to others we should ourselves be condemned (cf. 1Cor 9:27).

“EACH ACCORDING TO THEIR KIND” (Gen 1:11)
After ordination, I was sent to the University of Edinburgh to study Anthropology and Linguistics, spending a total of nearly six years there. How was I to live the Spiritan charism in such an
academic – and “swinging sixties” -- environment? The Catholic Students’ Union ran a crèche on a Saturday afternoon for children suffering from spina bifida or born with the devastating effects of the thalidomide drug. All these children demanded full-time care from their parents, and these Saturday afternoons were, for most parents, the only respite in their week. For the children, they were a time of excitement and unpredictable forms of entertainment. And for me they were a respite from more academic pursuits; they were also a first lesson in “mission in reverse,” for I not only learned to love those children deeply but I learned to be loved in turn by them. In a very informal way, I found myself enabled to live the Spiritan charism, for these children were both “poor” and “abandoned” in some fashion. But they were never just “souls”: lacking limbs or bladder control, they were radically embodied, incarnate, and in need of constant physical as well as emotional attention.

A number of years later I got to “the missions”, as we then referred to overseas postings. Now, I thought, it should be significantly easier to live the Spiritan charism. To Sierra Leone I took some of the implicit theology and clericalism I had learned in England, and all of my own immaturity, arrogance, and myopia. T.S.Eliot spoke for many when he said: “We had the experience but missed the meaning.” After thirty years I still cringe at certain memories, and am keenly aware of having so often missed the meaning and failed to be enriched by the possibilities of mission in reverse. It is surely ironic that – specifically in “the missions” – the Spiritan charism failed to bear as much fruit in me as it should have done. Maybe that is why all of us have experiences and memories: so that we can still learn before it is too late.

For more than twenty years now, my Spiritan life has been lived in Chicago. The first nine of those years were spent in the context of the Spiritan formation community. By then I was the only “survivor” of the initial group: everyone had been ordained, or left, or been reappointed. But I had discovered a new place where the Spiritan charism could flourish: among some of the most “poor and abandoned” people in the richest nation on earth. It was, for me, a new and profound epiphany.

In 1984 I began to work with Edwina Gateley who had founded the Volunteer Missionary Movement (VMM) with headquarters in London Colney, in the very same neighborhood at the senior scholasticate in Radlett (London) where I had been formation director. Edwina had started a house for women trying to escape prostitution and was looking for an appropriate male presence. I spent several days and nights each week at Genesis House. But I also wandered the streets and volunteered overnight at a shelter.
A few months after arriving in Chicago (and imagining I was really en route back to Africa), I took the funeral of a homeless woman, Josie Winn, who had frozen to death in a dumpster/skip outside McDonald’s one bitter winter night. She had been kept at the city morgue for several weeks, because the ground was frozen and she was unclaimed. Finally, several of us managed to claim the body in order to give it a real burial, rather than have her buried alone in an unmarked grave – in Potter’s Field on the edge of a cemetery. After the service, to which all the homeless people had been invited and to which more than a hundred came, we returned to the shelter for a well-prepared meal of fresh meat and vegetables. But there was insufficient cutlery, and I borrowed from someone else. As an immediate result, I contracted Hepatitis B, was quite unable to work (teaching theology) for months, and was eventually unfit to return to “the missions.” The wheel had come full circle; yet again it had become necessary for me to rediscover how to live the Spiritan charism.

For the past twenty-two years, homeless women of Chicago have ministered to me, and I to them, in a very informal way: I simply bring food, cook, and serve meals; they eagerly but graciously take and eat; we get to know each other personally and by name. It’s a kind of eucharist. These women (the vast majority of whom, it so happens, are African-American) mediate “mission in reverse” in my life; I, in turn, attempt to live the Spiritan charism among these poor and abandoned women.

BACK TO THE ROOTS

And so what? How does this reflection converge with our founders and their charism? Listen to Libermann:

Our project consists in giving ourselves entirely to Our Lord for the salvation of the Black Peoples, being those who are the most unfortunate, the furthest removed from the means of salvation, and the most neglected in the Church of God.⁶

Much more recently, the Enlarged General Council of the Spiritans averred that:

There is a constant need for the Congregation to rejuvenate itself. Our first criteria are our traditional ones: ‘the poor and abandoned,’ ‘difficult situations,’ ‘works for which it is difficult to find personnel’ … A missionary Congregation has to respond to the missionary challenges of the day if it is to maintain its credibility. The commitments of the past must be confronted with the calls of the present: from the poor who suffer injustice, …
from neglected minorities, from the victims of racism, from the refugee and migrants.⁷

Our Spiritan Rule of Life contains these sentiments:

We count the following as constitutive parts of our mission of evangelization: the ‘integral liberation’ of people, action for justice and peace, and participation in development. It follows that we must make ourselves the advocates, the supporters and the defenders of the weak and the little ones against all who oppress them.⁸

The face of mission has changed significantly in our own lifetime. There is no question of our abandoning the mission ad gentes or ceasing to cross national boundaries. But many of our African confreres are now being appointed to parts of the world formerly known as “Christendom” and not considered the home of the gentes; and many of the rest of us do not find ourselves living in societies or cultures that are totally unfamiliar to us. Yet each and all of us must embody the Spiritan charism wherever we may be. One of the propositions from the General Chapter at Maynooth (1998), is the following, which explicitly mentions (though rather generically, unfortunately) “the homeless” among others:

Each Spiritan will look for opportunities for action within his grasp in order to become the voice of the voiceless.⁹

This is an explicit and unequivocal challenge to every one of us. It is all the more pertinent in this time of overwork and even burnout, as another Enlarged General Council noted well:

Sometimes we become almost drugged by our work. … We become so attached to our job that we identify ourselves with it and we cannot imagine us doing anything else. But there are frontiers to be crossed, moments of generosity to be lived … .¹⁰

If there was a tendency in the past, to evangelize primarily by proclamation, there has surely always been an imperative to evangelize through less formal and more immediate ways, as Jesus also did. Pope Paul VI stated this very clearly:

Above all, the Gospel must be proclaimed by witness.¹¹

Enough said.

CONCLUSION

There are many strong statements, both in our own Spiritan documents and in the Church’s magisterium, that should challenge
...we need to attend more seriously to “mission in reverse”...

...the future of mission is collaborative ministry at every possible level.

and encourage us to greater faithfulness to the Spiritan charism. If I may be permitted three suggestions, however, they would be these: first, in the literature on charism there is still much that we Spiritans could harvest and employ; second, we need to attend more seriously to “mission in reverse”; and third, the word “missional” may be particularly helpful in the lives of many Spiritans.

The literature I am thinking of is the sociological corpus that derives from and is indebted to Max Weber. To give but one quotation: talking of the revolutionary, prophetic, and transformative possibilities in what he calls charisma, Weber says it may be generated from both within a person or a community and from beyond:

The equally revolutionary force … works from without, by altering the situations of action …. Charisma may involve a subjective or internal reorientation born of suffering, conflict, or enthusiasm. It may then result in a radical alteration of the central system of attitudes and directions of action with a completely new orientation of all attitudes toward the different problems and structures of the ‘world’.12

In contemporary theological language, charism would thus manifest itself both in a sensitive reading of the signs of the times (external challenge that galvanizes a truly charismatic response), and in certain persons or even communities that, through suffering and sanctity, continue to be converted to the world we live in now (internal dynamics that create new responses to changing circumstances).

“Mission in reverse” emphasizes the way in which every evangelizer is evangelized or called to conversion in the process of sharing the Good News. But there are few indications of “mission in reverse” in the statements we have seen. Yet the future of mission is collaborative ministry at every possible level. Gustavo Gutiérrez said, “the poor are not our problem: we are theirs.” Unless we are much more attentive to our own contributions – whether crude or subtle – to the social problems of the world we live in, we will continue to resist our own conversion. If we ask people what they need (as Jesus asked Bartimeus [Mk 10:51]), rather than simply tell them what we intend to do for them, then we will be effectively practicing “mission in reverse.” The single most important agenda item in contemporary mission theology is interreligious dialogue; and dialogue changes both parties. “Mission in reverse” may heal some of the wounds inadvertently inflicted on those we have
wanted to serve; it may even help to save the contemporary world from itself.

“Missional” is a word of recent coinage, but one with helpful applications. It identifies something common to all mature Christianity and every mature Christian. “Missionary” was a word that served to polarize members of the Christian family. It also smacked of elitism. But, as Vatican II reminded us, we are all supposed to be missionary by our baptism, though we cannot and should not all spend our lives overseas. Therefore, “missionary” must mean something other than its former connotations embraced. Hence the word “missional,” coined to express the Christian commitment to a life turned inside out rather than outside in, everted rather than inverted, exocentric rather than endocentric. Whoever we are, and whether or not we find ourselves far from home or continents away, we are all called to be missional in this sense.

Des Places and Libermann did not leave their native land; but they expressed the Spiritan charism in the only way any charism can be expressed: missionally. Everything we have, we receive. Everything is gift. Our responsibility is, first, to receive the gift, the charism bestowed on us by God’s Spirit through the Congregation and its founders; second, to foster and cherish it so that it shapes our lives; and third, to pass it on: to recycle it — and our lives — for the benefit of others, especially the poor and the most abandoned people we encounter. And we will do this, by God’s grace, until God’s Kingdom comes.

Footnotes
1 Still, as Tertullian did not speak English, he cannot have fabricated such a clever set of rhyming words as these.
3 Daniel Comboni (MCCJ) and Eugene de Mazenod (OMI) are only two examples.
4 Psychotherapist and Auschwitz survivor Viktor Frankl: “To love you must encounter; it is the only way” (my emphasis). He is quite correct, as Jesus, the Incarnate One of God, exemplifies.
5 A classic text is Claude Marie Barbour’s “Seeking Justice and Shalom in the City.” International Review of Mission 73, 1984:303-309.
6 Memorandum to Mgr Cadolini, 27 March, 1840. Emphasis is mine.
7 EGC Caravellos, 1982. I/D 32. This, incidentally, is a perfectly adequate profile of the homeless poor.
8 SRL, 14. Again, the emphasis is mine.
9 Maynooth, 2.19. My emphasis.
10 EGC Dakar, 1995, 4.2.3.
11 Evangelii Nuntiandi, 21 (1975),
Introduction
The basic teaching we have from the New Testament concerning *charism* comes mainly from the Pauline writings. Paul regards *charism* as an effect of, and as a concrete materialization of God’s grace. *Charism* is a particular manifestation of the Spirit granted to a person to be used for the good of all. In 1 Cor 12:8-10 Paul outlines some of these: to some the gift of utterance, to others faith, to others the gift of healing, to others the working of miracles, to others prophecy, and still to others the distinguishing of spirits, the speaking in tongues. There are still other gifts and services, but Paul emphasized that all these are actions of the Holy Spirit, to be received with humility and thanks and to be put to use for the good of the Church and of our brothers and sisters. *Charism*, in this understanding, has a strong social and communitarian underpinning.

In the context of religious life, before Vatican II there was only a lip service paid to the charism of founders; the tendency was to treat all institutes as more or less identical, and to differentiate apostolic institutes only by their “works”. Such was the situation when with Vatican II came a renewed understanding of the religious life as a particular state in the Church, the result of charismatic gifts that the Spirit bestowed on the founders. Without using the word *charism*, *Lumen Gentium* (45) and *Perfectae Caritatis* (2b), while outlining the principles of renewal of religious life, called on members to adhere to “the spirit of the founders,” “their evangelical intentions,” and their “examples of saintliness.” The “spirit and aims of each founder” together with “each institute’s sound traditions” constituted “the patrimony of an institute”, which was to be faithfully preserved. It was only in Paul VI’s Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelica Testificatio*, no.11, that the expression “charism of founders” appeared for the first time in a magisterial statement. Here the charism of founders is described as an “experience of the Spirit” which can be passed on to their followers so that they can model their lives on it and which produces a particular style of holiness and apostolate.

Our most recent Spiritan General Chapter (Torre d’Aguilha 2004) spoke about the necessity of “handing on” the Spiritan charism and challenged members thus: “that which began through the power of the Spirit with the founders must be received, followed and developed by each succeeding generation.
in the different historical, social and cultural situations in which they find themselves … to dare to take new initiatives and run certain risks – in fidelity to the grace that has been given us.”

For the new generation of Spiritans to really understand what is involved in the challenge of creative fidelity to our charism, some critical issues need to be addressed. Can a charism be “recovered” or “handed on”? How can the Spiritan charism retain at the same time elements of sameness and difference?

In this article, I will try to present a radical way of explicating the phenomenon of charism which places a renewed stress on its social and communitarian dimensions, while not losing the spiritual and religious connotation given it in the New Testament. I will also suggest some ways of maintaining creative fidelity to our Spiritan charism.

The reflections of Bernard Lee, especially as presented in his article – “A socio-historical theology of charism” and his recent book *The Beating of Great Wings: A worldly spirituality for active, apostolic communities* (2004) will be very helpful in giving us a model that can be used in our continued effort at refounding our Spiritan charism.

**Nature of Charism: “Deep Story” and charism**

Drawing upon resources from both anthropology and sociology, Bernard Lee suggests that the popular understanding of charism is more effectively interpreted with two terms instead of one: **deep story** and **charism**. By “effectively interpreted” he means an interpretation that can help effect those conditions which may not guarantee charism, but without which it is most unlikely to make an appearance.

“Recovery of charism,” writes Lee, is an unnecessary burden – it cannot be done. “Charism is not a property. It is not a possession. It is not transferable, nor transmittable, and not controllable. Charism is a deeply historicized social phenomenon. It cannot be duplicated in any other time or place. Charism has never been a movable feast.” Whenever charism does occur in some historical tradition, Lee writes, it is re-invented in a new social and historical setting. That happens when “a community’s deep story speaks effective, felt words to the transformation of some of the world’s most pressing needs and aspirations.”

A community does not possess a charism. It possesses what Lee calls a “deep story.” A community can rightly interpret its story as a gift from God. That story is a necessary condition for charism, but the story is not charism. What then is a community’s deep story?
Every religious institute, writes Lee, has its deep story. Another writer, Stephen Crites, calls it a “sacred” story. Sacred, not because it is inherently religious, but because it creates the life we live. A Constitution or a Rule of Life is a community’s attempt to articulate the deep story as effectively as it can. The Church’s attempt after Vatican II to tell its story in a catechism, just like the catechism that came after the Council of Trent, is an attempt at a deep story. To ask members of a religious community to name the principal features of their community’s life is to engage them in a form of story telling. When they do that they tell particular versions of the deep story. But the deep stories themselves, Lee warns, are not easily susceptible to being told. They can only be disclosed in the particular stories that are formed out of them (these particular or “mundane” stories are really the only ways a deep story makes its appearance in the world). The deep story is “more expansive, more elusive, more supple, than any particular story can tell”.

The spirituality of any religious community is a version of the deep story. No one, Lee observes, can effectively describe a community’s spirituality. Some texts are particularly disclosive and these are usually the classics of the tradition. For us Spiritans, phrases like – “evangelical availability,” “practical union,” “paratus ad omnia”, “cor unum et anima una,” etc., are part of the deep components of our spirituality, but they can’t tell our deep story once and for all.

Our deep stories, too, are subject to evolution but, says Lee, not through feasibility studies and strategic planning. When there are foundational cultural shifts, the Church reinterprets reality and so do religious orders. This is evolution time for the deep story. The religious orders which do not accomplish this pass out of existence. Lee notes that 76% of all men’s orders founded before 1500 no longer exist.

In the critical years since Vatican II, too often “charism” has been used to name a community’s deep story but, Lee says, that is insufficient. “Charism” rather names “an effective connection between a deep story and a contemporary social situation”. The deep story is validated as charism by those who experience hope and healing when a deep story has gone to work effectively and noticeably. No religious order can, on its own, claim charism. That is a judgment conferred by “others” who have experienced it as good news.

The earlier efforts in the sociology of religion to characterize charism focused upon the characteristics of a person experienced as charismatic. Max Weber typifies this approach to charism.
Weber’s understanding has had a considerable influence in religious literature and has influenced the usage of charism in the context of religious life. We have tended to treat our founders, Lee observes, as people with exceptional qualities that commanded a following, but have paid too little attention to the constitutive role of their social situation in what we are naming charism. In other words, we have tended to take a Weberian approach to charism as personal qualities in the founding person, and then treated those qualities as transferable to a social structure – the religious institution. The charism is then a time-less possession that can be reincarnated in age after age.¹⁴

Peter Worsley¹⁵, an empirical social scientist, challenges the Weberian sense of charism and proposes a radically socialized and fully historicized alternative. Instead of asking “what are the characteristics of a charismatic person?” the question shifts to an inquiry into “what is going on in some social context when charisma is attributed to someone?” What is the phenomenon? Weber said charisma names the personal qualities of a remarkable kind of leader. Worsley says, rather, that charisma names a social relationship. It names something that transpires between a person and a group (followers). This is Worsley’s interactionist model. He insists that charisma names as well the particularities of a social situation that make this special relationship possible – not inevitable, but possible.¹⁶

When the foundress or founder begins to make life together with followers, they create a style among themselves. They generate a spirit within which their faith life is lived. There is power in what they are up to, and it is supported by wide appeal. It may probably run into fierce opposition as well. These first members of a religious community are starting a story. A narrative structure is taking shape. Out of their life together patterns form. Then structures emerge. The underlying human concerns that are addressed are understood with such generalizations that the narrative is immensely supple. Thus, the narrative structure is causally related to the historical particularities of the charismatic time of founding. The deep story can be transmitted, but its moment of charism can only be reinvented.¹⁷

Lee is trying to name two distinguishable but related realities. The first is a community’s deep story. The deep story is a possession, an inheritance, and is rightly interpreted as God’s gift to the Church. But whether that story comes alive in any age depends upon whether it can mediate redemption for the cry of the age. The deep story emerges as charism when it is able to rise to the occasion, and when the occasion – which is the contemporary world in all
its concreteness- rises in turn to meet it. When they meet publicly, the world knows it. At that moment redemption has a face and charism is afoot.\textsuperscript{18} Charism, then, “is a public adjudication about the salvific presence of God’s power in the relationship between a community and its larger world.”\textsuperscript{19}

A community that can re-invent its charism has to be a community of memory and one that stays tenderly in touch with its historic forms and its historic dreams. Lee calls a community of memory one that studies its documents, researches its spirituality, celebrates its jubilees, asks absolution for its sins, and enjoys its stories. Above all, it must be a community of hope and one of interpretation.\textsuperscript{20}

**Spiritan Deep Story**

The model we are proposing here for a better interpretation of charism tells us that every religious community has a deep story, which is a necessary condition for charism. Principal features of a religious community’s life are particular versions of the deep story. Let me, at this juncture, mention a few of what I consider core elements of the Spiritan deep story before suggesting some conditions that might favor a re-invention of our founding charism.

The story of Claude-François Poullart des Places is at the very foundation of our Spiritan history. To train the poor to evangelize the poor – this was the vision that seized him and set his heart on fire. The miserable little chimney-boys of Paris were the first social group that attracted his attention. Later he realized that some of his friends at college were as badly off as these poor boys that climbed chimneys to earn a living and help their families. He made a radical Gospel choice in favor of the most neglected in the Church of his day. The miserable situation of many poor scholars was “one of the deepest wounds in the Church of France” at that time.\textsuperscript{21}

The strength of Poullart’s foundation, Koren writes, did not lie in its organization, but in what he calls its charism. All graduates of his seminary became known as Spiritans, but they had no other religious commitment than their ordination, and their common bond was the way they viewed their priesthood. “Being a priest was for them an evangelical availability in obedience to the Spirit for the service of the poor and abandoned in voluntary personal poverty.”\textsuperscript{22} This was the “spirit”, the driving force that possessed the followers of Poullart, that made them ready and available to serve the poor wherever the needs were most urgent, be it in remote countryside parishes in France, teaching in a college or seminary, or crossing the seas to work in the colonies. That spirit
of the early Spiritans still challenges us today to think afresh in every age and circumstance what it means to be available for the poor.

The story of Francis Libermann is also central to the Spiritan deep story. Born and raised in the Jewish ghetto of Saverne in Alsace, he knew the lot of the oppressed and was sensitive to the needs of the poor. His story is that of a convert to Christianity, a suffering servant in whose life God intervened unexpectedly. Nothing happened the way he had foreseen. He succeeded, however, in making total obedience to the Holy Spirit the guiding principle of his own life and he wanted others to do so also. When he heard the cry of the poor and oppressed, especially those of the recently liberated black slaves, ringing in his ears through the stories of his friends LeVavasseur and Tisserant, he felt called to get involved and do something about it. This was the genesis of the “Work for the Blacks” that took members of Libermann’s missionary band of the Holy Heart of Mary to Haiti, Reunion, Mauritius, and to West Africa. Libermann and Poullart des Places were driven by the same “spirit” to be available for the urgent needs of the poor and oppressed.

The Spiritan deep story continued to manifest itself in the missionary witness of our ancestors like Blessed Jacques Laval, Blessed Daniel Brottier, Bishop Shanahan, Bishop Godfrey Okoye, Bishop Anthony Nwedo and hundreds of other Spiritans (including our lay associates) whose stories have not been told but who, listening to the same Spirit, placed their lives unreservedly at the service of God and humanity, responding to the critical needs of their time.

Re-inventing the Spiritan charism
I would like us to see the fusion of Libermann’s missionary society of the Holy Heart of Mary with the Spiritans of Poullart des Places in 1848, as recommended by Propaganda Fide, as a typical example of a re-invention of an already existing charism. Poullart and Libermann had two different faces but one spirit – sameness and difference. The Dominican Roger Tillard made a distinction between what he calls a “foundation charism” and a “founder’s charism”, which fits very well the relationship between our two founders:

“Someone has the inspiration of a ‘foundation’ and receives from the Spirit the graces needed to realize it. But this inspiration does not necessarily come from a private spiritual vision, from a great mystical perception one wishes others to share. Very often, on the contrary, it is simply question of noting a need to be met,
the discovery of a void nothing is filling. And, in the light of the Gospel, one feels compelled to incarnate the precept of charity into that situation. Then one gathers men or women inflamed with love of the Gospel and gives them a rule .... The ‘foundation’ shines forth more than the person who gave rise to it ... The grace of this ‘inspired’ person ... will have been to allow a group to appear that the church or society needed.”

But for Libermann and his followers, the charism of Poullart des Places may not have survived to this day. The Spiritan Congregation, renewing itself ceaselessly and answering new needs, owes to itself today to answer the needs of the Church of our time, in fidelity to Poullart’s charism. This movement is always a refoundation. Libermann himself may have seen the event of the fusion in the same manner: “When the Holy Spirit inspires a work, he hardly ever gives its development from the start, but only as occasion offers. Nevertheless, all the time the development was contained in the principle by which he led him in whom he inspired the work, and there is a certain connection running through all that diversity.”

The “certain connection running through all that diversity” that we see in Spiritan mission today is what we are calling the Spiritan deep story, which expresses itself powerfully in our core spirituality of “evangelical availability in voluntary poverty for the service of the poor and abandoned”. As long as we authentically strive to live by this spirituality, I believe we are on the road to re-invention of our Spiritan charism in our different socio-cultural situations.

This challenge is well-captured in an earlier Spiritan document as follows: “To be a Spiritan is to be open, available to the Spirit, wherever it carries us ... Our Congregation will flourish as long as we do not attempt to harness that wind for our own ends.


to Macedonia when we had planned on Asia Minor; or to the house of Cornelius when we thought we should not frequent it lest holy things be soiled in that contact. This was the Spirit which moved us in the first instance to the poorest works of the dioceses of France, then to the Indians in Acadia, the slaves in Guyana, the blacks of Senegambia and elsewhere.”
Footnotes

1 In the NT the term *charism* occurs seventeen times; fourteen times in Paul (mainly in 1Cor 1:and 12; Rom 1; 5 and 12). The three non-Pauline references are: 1Tim 4:14; 2Tim 1:6; 1Pet 4:10


3 General Chapter, Torre d’Aguilha, Portugal, 2004, 1.2.


7 Ibid.

8 Ibid., 125.

9 Stephen Crites, “The narrative quality of experience”, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, vol. 39, (1971), 295. Bernard Lee was greatly influenced by the reflections of Crites. According to Crites, “sacred” stories seem to be allusive expressions of stories that cannot be fully told, because they live, so to speak, in the arms and legs and bellies of the tellers. These stories lie too deep in the consciousness of a people to be directly told – they form consciousness rather than being objects of which it is directly aware.


11 Ibid., 127.


17 Ibid., 131.

18 Ibid.


20 Ibid., 132.

21 Spiritan Information / Documentation, no. 20, Jan. 1979


25 *Notes et Documents*, vol.12, 133-134, March 23, 1850.

Good News to the Poor
A commentary on Lk 4: 16-30

Evangelizing the “Poor”

Texts like Luke’s Nazareth scene (Lk 4:16-30) exploded anew on the Christian stage in the second half of the twentieth century. The “option for the poor” became the most controversial term since Luther’s famous slogan “salvation through faith alone”. It shook both Protestants and Catholics - and I hope Orthodox - to a profound reflection on their faithfulness to the Gospel of Jesus. For us Spiritans this text of Luke has always been an inspiring one, as is evident from our Rule of Life (SRL 4) where, significantly, the word poor has been surrounded by inverted commas. This text has “flamed out” and spoken to so many Spiritans since it spoke first to Poullart des Places with his chimney sweeps and Libermann with his outreach to Africa. Key questions such as “Who are the poor?” were on everybody’s lips in recent decades. Are they the economic poor or is poverty a metaphor for powerlessness and vulnerability? How can the poor be called blessed in any real sense? Is it because they are not blinded by wealth and power and are therefore intoxicated with God? Or is their’s a God who will reverse the poverty and oppression so prevalent in our world?

The Broader Context

Clearly we have learned in Scripture studies that we must be attentive to the broader context of biblical books in our examination of individual texts. Thus, even a cursory overview of the material special or unique to Luke shows that he has an extensive pre-occupation with the dangers of wealth, the proper use of possessions and the concern for the poor which should mark a Christian. Scholars like John R. Donahue S.J. (The Gospel in Parable, Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1988, p. 175) highlight some ten texts which Luke has emphasized in his development of the Gospel tradition.

1) The infancy narratives have a special interest in the anawim, people lacking money and power. Mary’s Magnificat praises a God who puts down the mighty from their thrones, fills the hungry with good things, and sends the rich away empty (Lk 1:52-53). The offering at the presentation in the Temple is in accordance with the prescriptions for poor people (Lk 2:24).

2) John exhorts the one with two coats or with food to share with those who have none (3:16).

3) Jesus’ public ministry begins not with Mark’s kingdom (Mk 1:15) but with Jesus quoting Is. 61:1-2, where the Spirit is the father of the poor.

5) In Luke only the poor are blessed and there are woes for the rich and powerful (6:20, 24-26)


7) The convert Zacchaeus gives half his goods to the poor (19:8).

8) Jesus is the O.T. prophet who sides with the widow (7:11-17; 18:1-8), the stranger (10:29-37; 17:16) and the marginalized (14:12-13, 21).

9) The early community shares its goods in common, and there is no needy person among them (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-27)

10) In both Gospel and Acts alms-giving is stressed (Lk 11:42; 12:33; 19:8; Acts 10:2,4,31; 24:17).

**Luke’s Diptych Approach**

Luke, like the artists of old, often paints two pictures which together supply the full story. Thus, the activity of the Good Samaritan is balanced by the inactivity of Mary at the feet of Jesus. Likewise, the searching God of the hundred sheep is balanced by the waiting of the Prodigal Father. Luke frequently follows a story of a man with one of a woman. In our section, we have the temptation (what not to do!) scene followed by Jesus showing how to go on mission in the Spirit. The temptations (of the Church in every age!), which draw on Deuteronomy, describe the kind of Messiahship and Church which Jesus rejected and also the kind of Messiahship and Church which Jesus intended – living by God’s word, not testing or challenging God but adoring and serving God alone and rejecting comfort and political power-seeking. The first temptation (of the Nazarenes!) teaches that there is more to life than bread, material things and pleasure. The second temptation (often of the older) is to power, social status, and prestige, to be well thought of, to influence people (see the movie *Mass Appeal*). The third temptation (often of the young) is to the quick and spectacular solution, to avoid suffering, personal struggle and responsibility, to shortcut life and suffering, to stress the spectacular, instantaneous solution.

**Three Questions**

The key word in the section, with which the Greek quotation of Isaiah ends, is *acceptable*. It is also used to describe the prophet who is rejected in his own country- he is not *acceptable*. This
term goes back to Leviticus and is used in our regular Eucharist: “Pray that our sacrifice is acceptable to God” (not necessarily to the people).

The Lukan text at Nazareth is, I suggest, an effort to answer three questions.

1) What does it mean to have the Spirit – to be charismatic?
2) Why did Jesus fail?
3) What did his program for the poor mean?

1. Perhaps the first question is the easiest to answer in words. Jesus is the one who has the Spirit. A sign of the true charismatic is concern for the poor like Jesus. But the Spirit also leads one to and through failure.

2. Jesus failed because he was not content to be acceptable to his audience, even if they were poor, as they evidently thought they were; he sought to be acceptable to God. It is easy to imagine Jesus’ (probably) all male congregation as they saw themselves. For they were poor, captives to the Romans, blind like dungeon inmates, oppressed. That God, as in the prophets, would prioritize a poor foreign woman, not to mention the Syrian army commander, was unacceptable. But further, a mission to a foreign woman and above all to the Syrian army commander, who was oppressing Israel and a slave stealer to boot, was clearly out of the question. Jesus does not hesitate to provoke his audience; “Do here what we heard you did in Capernaum.” Jesus saw himself as fulfilling their hopes but not their expectations of what God would do for them. To understand this text adequately one must explain why a group of ordinary synagogue-goers became so angry as to try to kill Jesus.

3. What did Jesus’ program for the poor mean? Probably the best way to answer this question is to examine the examples which Luke provides after his Nazareth account. These show in concrete, in the activity of Jesus himself, how he interpreted the programmatic text of Isaiah. They show what the holiness of the Spirit should really mean in action, bringing the good news to the poor, freeing prisoners, giving sight to the blind and helping the downtrodden. Thus, the scenes that follow in Luke are a commentary on and an illustration of his mission to the poor; holding the people spellbound by his authoritative teaching, curing the demoniac, the fever of Simon’s mother-in-law, a variety of diseases, curing Peter of the
fear of his own sinfulness, an excluded leper, a paralyzed man, Levi of his ostracism, etc. Central in this whole section is the teaching in the Sermon on the Plain with its radical command to love enemies. The climax of the scene is in the mission of John’s disciples who are referred to the words of Isaiah about the blind, the cripples, the lepers, the deaf, the dead and the poor. Basically Luke’s audience is asked: “Are you satisfied with the way Jesus carried out his mission, with the way God is running the world?” This question is far from easy to understand by people with the experience of the Baptist in every age. The fact is that Jesus could have saved or raised the Baptist but he did not.

What is Luke trying to teach?

Recent biblical scholars tend to focus on the hidden agenda of a storyteller like Luke, as he retells a well-known story to his audience.

Ever since Jesus proclaimed his Jubilee vision, the Church with an increasingly sophisticated array of preachers, teachers, and healers, with their hospitals and dispensaries, their universities and schools, has struggled to make this vision a reality.

However, a basic question needs to be asked: Why does Luke begin his account of Jesus’ public ministry with such a description of a failing Jesus, despite his excellent preaching, his initially enthusiastic audience whose language, culture and expectations he knows so well? Jesus proclaims the expected Jubilee and ends up rejected, hunted, and an unwelcome person, who has to escape out of town, an obvious embarrassment to his friends and admirers and probably a source of suffering to his mother.

Is Luke warning us not to be afraid to take on our audience as Jesus was not afraid to do? Is he warning the missionaries of his own and every subsequent Christian community that, while we cannot be content with an unjust world and must struggle in the style of Sisyphus for a different world, failure to achieve our ideals and dreams is at the heart of the Christian mission?

Jesus’ mission is one of liberation from the fear of death to a more abundant life, from blindness to seeing with suffering humanity, from a selfish self-centeredness to an attitude of generous giving, from vengeance to forgiveness. But it is also a divisive force. One person’s meat is another person’s poison. The freedom of our surprising God to work (or not to work) miracles is very difficult for us to understand. Jesus’ liberation message of good news to the...
poor means that the rich will lose something. Freeing slaves and those in prison will seem a threat to all modern Pharaohs, tyrants, jailors, judges and comfortable oligarchies.

Luke insists that we must have the vision of Jesus. Yet he seems to be trying to liberate missionaries from the tyranny of results and expectations of instant success, from a numerical Christianity. For Luke, as he portrays Jesus taking on his audience at Nazareth, the temptation is to preach a watered-down message acceptable to one’s audience, even if they are poor. Luke is an invitation to trust Jesus and his way of going about his mission. In a sense, he is insisting that, if a person wishes to be a kingdom or Jubilee disciple, one must deny oneself and one’s ambitions, take up one’s daily cross, as Luke puts it, and follow Jesus.

Let me conclude with the challenging words of Kathy Galloway from the Iona Community in Scotland:

Do not retreat into your private world,
That place of safety, sheltered from the storm,
Where you may tend your garden, seek your soul,
And rest with loved ones where the fire burns warm.

To tend a garden is a precious thing,
But dearer still the one where all may roam,
The weeds of poison, poverty, and war,
Demand your care, who call the earth your home.

To seek your soul it is a precious thing,
But you will never find it on your own,
Only among the clamor, threat, and pain
Of other people’s need will love be known.

To rest with loved ones is a precious thing,
But peace of mind exacts a higher cost,
Your children will not rest and play in quiet,
While they still hear the crying of the lost.

Do not retreat into your private world,
There are more ways than firesides to keep warm;
There is no shelter from the rage of life,
So meet its eye, and dance within the storm.
A Framework for a Spiritan University

Abstract
Duquesne University of the Holy Spirit, the only Spiritan university in the world, hosts a Ph.D. program in Rhetoric that prepares teacher/scholars for lives of service at small liberal arts, private, religious, and regional state universities. The faculty in this program understands the Spiritan charism as calling professors to lives of teaching, scholarship, and service productivity within the university setting, preparing Ph.D. graduates for campuses that are oriented primarily to teaching and service. In order to fulfill the “unity of contraries” presented by the institutional requirements for publication and excellence in the academic sphere of a university that at the same time aims to “serve God by serving students,” we have sought to hire teacher/scholars who see the value of the unity of scholarship, teaching, and service as labor enacted on meaningful ground. Fulfilling requirements of scholarly productivity permits the institution and program to meet demands of normative publics that provide institutional legitimacy and recognition. Preparing graduates for lives of teaching and service fulfills our understanding of the mission of this Catholic Spiritan university.

Introduction
Catholic institutions of higher education in the United States seek to provide educational excellence within a framework of identity and mission that marks their unique gift or charism (Murray, 2002; Thimmesh, 1997; Wilcox & King, 2000). O’Brien (2002) examines possibilities and challenges for Catholic education as Catholic institutions seek distinctiveness that simultaneously embraces normative standards of higher education.

Arnett (2002) states that teaching responds to scholarly content in dialogue with an academic home, emphasizing the importance of the particular as a location for enactment of a given mission. The Catholic Church’s vast scope, though unified in doctrine, is given varied particularity by the presence of its numerous Orders, groups founded to enact a particular ministry or “charism.” For instance, the Order of St. Benedict was founded to demonstrate the life of Christ in community through common living, discipline, service and seeing Christ in others, manifested in a life of prayer, work, and hospitality (Stewart, 1998). The Franciscans understand their purpose as manifesting poverty, a mobility close to transience, and a willingness to suffer for God’s people, among other elements (Short, 1999). The metaphor of “academic home” resonates with the recognition that the purpose of Catholic higher education is
shaped by the tradition and mission of the Order that founded and sustain a particular Catholic college or university, making it a place of learning and welcome for students, professors, resident religious, and staff.

The terms “academic” and “home” sustain a dialectical tension that must be navigated in order for two other goods to be sustained: that of faithfulness to the charism of the founding Order, which graces an institution with a sense of “home,” and the goods of the academic enterprise, which mark the institution as serving a recognized public purpose similar to other educational institutions to which it must conform in significant ways to maintain normative legitimacy. Navigating this tension permits the unique educational mission of the founding Order to shape the spiritual and intellectual formation of its students.

Dialectical Tensions within the Religioulsy Affiliated University
The institutional field of education in the United States has hosted, historically, great variety in mission and size (Brubacher & Rudy, 1997), providing great diversity of educational opportunities for students. Histories of higher education in the United States point out changes that have taken place over time in purposes of and expectations for different types of colleges and universities (Brubacher & Rudy, 1997). As size, scope, and purpose change, so do normative expectations. Small liberal arts schools have different purposes and functions than large research universities (Brubacher & Rudy, 1997; Newman, 1872/73/ 2001). Catholic institutions represent this diversity as well. The number of Catholic educational institutions at this essay’s writing is somewhere around 240 (Trustees of Boston College). An examination of 180 institutions of Catholic higher education listed on the National Catholic College Admission Association website reveals 87 universities and 86 colleges with access to undergraduate student population information. Ninety-eight percent of these colleges and universities combined host 10,000 or fewer students, with the bulk (92.5%) of 5,000 or fewer undergraduates. For colleges there are 27% and for universities 11.5% with less than 1,000 undergraduates. Of universities, 11.5% enroll between 5,000 and 10,000 undergraduate students; colleges, about 1%. This variety permits the exercise of different gifts and purposes for the good of all, serving students with a variety of educational needs, preferences, and senses of call.

Mission Uniqueness
The Second Vatican Council’s directive for Catholic institutions to renew their missions and purposes, articulated in the Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life (Perfectae
Caritatis) (Abbott, 1966), has prompted fresh consideration of the uniqueness of each Catholic educational institution. This concern for uniqueness echoes the call for recognition of the importance of the mission and market niche of institutions of various sorts, as well as the significance of culture and climate that mark an institution with particularity. At the same time, emphasis on the need for continued organizational learning (Senge, 1990) and the growing imperative for organizational change (Poole & Van de Ven, 2005) offer challenges to schools that would respond to circumstances and historical moment without sacrificing the narrative that first propelled the institution and seeks to guide it in the present historical moment. As institutions change and grow, the original features that marked them and represented a mission or purpose may become unrecognizable. This may result in a re-examination and adjustment or renewal of the original purpose of the institution, the loss of the original mission while the institution remains formally functional (Burtchaell, 1998), or the demise of the institution through closing or merger, as in the case of Barat College (Witkowsky, 2000).

Murray’s (2002) discussion of the praxis of charism highlights the importance of a deep story or narrative representing a school’s founding mission based on an Order’s particular calling and gift that is sensitive to changes over time and in the surrounding culture without losing its essence. This principle can be fruitfully applied to institutions of higher education that move from college to university status, a shift apparently calling for second order change (Bateson, 1979). Schools that become universities declare themselves to be in the business of scholarship and research as well as, or as part of, education. Yet the original founding mission of such schools may be primarily or only teaching. The adaptation and change necessary to initiate and sustain a research program may threaten the teaching mission of the original charism. However, with careful attention to hiring and socialization processes and recognition of the requirements of a given historical moment, the enactment of the charism can develop in response to changing times. For example, the moment in which a school is founded may engage a framework of teaching as appropriate at that formative moment, but that mission of “teaching” at a small liberal arts Catholic college requires revisioning when faced with new circumstances. New understandings of teaching require new ways of being a teacher. A moment in which continuous learning is necessary asks teachers to be learners. A teacher/scholar model embraces attention to educating students as primary, supported by scholarship appropriate to the nature of the university enterprise as shaped by the particular charism of the institution as it responds to the historical moment in which it is situated.
Mission Uniqueness in Response to the Historical Moment

To Murray’s (2002) framework we add an additional insight for understanding an Order’s responsiveness to contextual and historical constraints. We see the notion of responsiveness to the historical moment as a type of development rooted in John Henry Newman’s idea of the development of doctrine, in which understandings of theological verities undergo elaboration and greater clarity over time without violating the truth upon which they are founded (Newman, 1878/1989). One way to understand this development is as Spirit-guided responsiveness to a historical moment. Adjustments and adaptations are seen not as compromises, changes, or abandonment of original purposes, but natural enhancements of a living narrative that brings an original calling to greater fruitfulness in response to “rhetorical interruptions” of events in the passing of human time.

Newman’s thoughts on theology and education resonate with each other, providing further framing for the context of charismatic adaptation. Newman’s understanding of the role of different elements of the Church can be expressed through the metaphor of a three-legged stool for Church stability. In addressing issues of doctrine, Newman gives voice to the importance of laity or people, Church hierarchy, and theologians, each with a particular role to enact:

*I think I am right in saying that the tradition of the Apostles, committed to the whole Church in its various constituents and functions per modum unius, manifests itself variously at various times: sometimes by the mouth of the episcopacy, sometimes by the doctors, sometimes by the people, sometimes by liturgies, rites, ceremonies, and customs, by events, disputes, movements, and all those other phenomena which are comprised under the name of history. It follows that none of those channels of tradition may be treated with disrespect: granting at the same time fully that the gift of discerning, discriminating, defining, promulgating, and enforcing any portion of that tradition resides solely in the Ecclesia docens.*

(Newman, 1961/1986, p. 41)

The spirit of Newman’s remarks can be applied beyond issues of doctrine to the Church as a whole: a successful Church witnesses these three elements working together for mutual support, accountability, and faithfulness. Theologians provide the zeitgeist for the gestalt of Church existence, articulating faithfulness of institutions in a new age in a new way without losing sight of core values. Newman recognized that education enacts practical theology, rather than doctrinal or pastoral theology, engaging...
Christian principles lived out in everyday life, the life of the people (Newman, 1848/1989). The precepts of Christian theology and doctrine require practices in the world to give them life, and Catholic education is one of these vital practices. Newman’s *Idea of a University*, likewise, provides foundational theory requiring an enacted reality of lived educational experience, as articulated in subsequent volumes expressing his thinking on education (Tillman, 2001). A given Catholic educational institution, then, will enact practical theology, the concrete outworkings of which must be responsive to a given historical moment.

With this background in place, this essay turns to the narrative of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit, the Spiritans, the Congregation that founded Duquesne University: the founding of the Congregation, the establishment of the university, and how the charism is lived out in Duquesne. Following that, the essay discusses how one Rhetoric Ph.D. program understands and practices the Spiritan charism as a concrete illustration.

**History and Mission of Duquesne University**

*Founding of the Congregation*

The Congregation of the Holy Spirit recognizes two founders, each possessed of a deep concern for the weak and the little. This commitment has permeated its being and actions, following the lead of its two founders. The first founder, Claude Poullart des Places, initiated the Congregation in 1703. A wealthy French nobleman, des Places was determined to provide religious education for the poor. Francis Libermann, the second founder, was devoted to both missionary activity and learning. The Congregation he founded was joined with the previous Congregation in 1848 by the Vatican to form the present Congregation of the Holy Spirit, or Spiritans. Libermann’s understanding of the notion of mission was to learn from others as well as to teach them. This global vision of mutual learning would permeate all subsequent endeavors of the Congregation.

Fr. Libermann offers a mission-grounded “why” for the “how” of this university. The next section offers principles that echo in today’s historical moment, guiding Duquesne University’s continued movement into the 21st century.

*A Spirituality for Spiritan Education: A Primer*

The attitude with which one approaches education stems from a heart of mission. Fr. Liberman advocated gentleness and tolerance in daily living with openness to the other:

> *Always use gentleness, charity, (kindness) with everybody, act with politeness, with goodwill, with consideration. Do you get angry when you see them committing grave faults?*
is not a very good idea. Imitate our good Master who was so gentle towards sinners; become all things to all men and bear with all the faults of everybody without sharpness and without rigor. (Libermann, 1845/1956, p. 161)

While not diluting its own sense of mission, the University and indeed all education communities in the Spiritan family, need to be a “big tent” effort. It is hard to be open to the stranger if the stranger is afraid to approach in the first place. Duquesne University has always seen itself as a portal open for differences to enter. The Spiritans have operated schools in impoverished Muslim nations in Africa for many decades with no converts – to be both witness and welcoming.

To welcome diversity, practice empathy first. Fr. Libermann took to heart St. Paul’s quotation of “being all things to all men”:

In all their conduct they will limit themselves in practice to the beautiful apostolic maxim of the great apostle who said that he made himself all things to all men in order to win all of them to Jesus Christ. They will place themselves at the disposition of everybody, they will adapt themselves to the characters, the tastes, the desires, the outlook of all, so that in this way they may be able to make it possible that the love of the truths of the Holy Gospel will penetrate into every heart. (Libermann, 1840)

Differences are really new ways to communicate and understand. Libermann understood this principle intrinsically. He saw these as additional ways to connect in cultural and religious differences, not additional barriers to overcome. His was a model of learning from the other.

Fr. Libermann advocated a type of learning that embraced the lifeworld of the other; he adjured the members of his Congregation to be African with the Africans:

“Do not judge according to first impressions; do not judge according to what you have seen in Europe, according to what you have got used to in Europe, cast off the skin of Europe, its ways of doing things, its spirit; become African with the Africans, and you will judge them as they should be judged; make yourselves African with the Africans.” (Libermann, 1847/1956, p. 330)

Everyone has a story—we must be willing to assume some of another’s story in order to experience a true understanding of that
person. The first measure of tolerance is not a blank endurance of everything, regardless of its unsatisfactoriness, but to realize *ex ante* that there is importance and goodness in the different. This engagement of difference is active, not passive, seeking immersion in the unfamiliar in order to embrace it.

Our own story—however impressive—can hold us back from seeing others clearly. Being able to depart from the cultural milieu in which we are raised allows us to engage people more effectively. The value of a mission-centered university, nonetheless, is that, because tethered to a certain sense of who we are, we do not need to fear being subsumed by the many other worlds that a globalized society thrusts at us.

A Spirit-filled life gives us openness. Speaking about experts’ opinions in regard to Africa, Libermann advises:

“*Do not pay too much attention to what the people who travel along the cost of Africa say to you about the small tribes which they have visited…Listen to what they have to say, but do not let their words have any influence on your judgment. These men examine things from their own point of view, with their own prejudices; they will distort all your ideas. Listen to them but stay at peace within yourself; examine things in the Spirit of Jesus Christ, independently of every other impression, or any prejudice whatsoever, and filled and animated with the charity of God and with pure zeal which the Holy Spirit gives you.*” (Liberman, 1847/1956, p. 330)

There is no substitute for the interior life. The spiritual care and pastoral concern for our students, staff and faculty is integral to the Spiritan university. Wellness is an intrinsic, ontic element of mission-oriented education. All are worthy:

“*Would it not be to insult God if we say that he chose one people alone from among all those on earth in order to enlighten them and give them the principles of the true religion, whilst letting all others rot in ignorance and idolatry? Were all the other peoples not his creatures just as much?...Would they not in their turn have accepted this sacred law if it had been presented to them accompanied by so many miracles?*” (Libermann, 1826/1956, p. 53)

We discover the spark of the divine in all. We do not hold a monopoly on truth. We do hold a gift which we are bound to share. The true missionary builds bridges and discovers deeper truth. The best idea of a university is that it facilitates both of these things.
Duquesne University’s founding took place in 1876 by request of the Bishop in Pittsburgh, who invited the Congregation to establish an institution to provide education for children of poor Catholic immigrants as well as other marginalized groups. Hence, both the des Placian concern for education and the Libermannian intercultural perspective element were articulated. In time, the College of the Holy Ghost adopted a university structure, adding the School of Business and other schools to the College of Liberal Arts.

Living out the Charism

The dual concern of the university was and is both pragmatic and mission-driven: to pay bills and to live out its mission, which includes inviting students from other cultures in order to bring an international perspective to Duquesne University. This international concern is manifest in a number of ways, including study abroad programs and a strong international student office. Duquesne University makes mission-driven choices about its focus, making education a clear priority in every area. The athletic department provides one example. Its academic success is outstanding and distinctive (Anderson, 2005). This focus on academics demonstrates the concern for education that provides the background against which the foreground action of athletics is carried out, making the practice of athletics consistent with the Spiritan mission and charism.

Duquesne University must attract and retain excellent faculty who are sensitive to its mission, who can thrive in this environment. Not everyone is suited to a mid-sized university with this particular blend of student, service, and research focus. The anticipatory socialization process is important for providing a realistic job preview (Wanous, 1973), particularly for faculty who hail from large public universities with research-focused missions. The importance of teaching and service in addition to research must be clear to potential faculty.

The Spiritan charism seeks to affect the everyday life of every element of the university...
within this Catholic Spiritan university (Arnett & Fritz, 1999; Fritz, 1997). As one aspect of this embeddedness, we understand teaching, scholarship and service as inextricably bound together. We offer this portrait not prescriptively, as the only way a department may live out the Spiritan charism, but descriptively, as a way one department has found its way in this local institution. Each department has a disciplinary identity as well as an institutional identity, a professional history that shapes how that discipline fits within the larger educational system, a uniqueness and particularity that defies formula and dictate.

Models of Catholic Education: Honoring the Past While Embracing the Future

We consider two primary audiences. One is the internal “audience” of the Congregation and its mission, which is Catholic and Spiritan. In order to strengthen and advance the mission, faculty must be socialized to the institution. The McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts, under the leadership of the most recent Dean, Francesco Cesareo, instituted a new faculty orientation for members of the College, a good example of what is necessary to reclaim and institute an organization’s particular mission.

External audience: Peer Educational Institutions, Religious and Secular, of the University

Consider the issue of external audiences: normative publics require attention to features of organizations in that sector; therefore, universities need to meet necessary features of those peers. Such attentiveness requires research as well as teaching.

John Henry Newman has been a standard-bearer for secular and Catholic liberal arts education for a century and a half. His philosophy still provides resources to assist in framing the purposes of education. Far from being opposed to research, Newman saw the role of a university to consist in scholarship and exploration. Undergraduate colleges tend toward the past, while universities look to the future. Colleges embedded within a university structure was, for him, the ideal, though usually unattained (Newman, 1872/3/2001).

There are at least two ways to frame the issue of scholarship, research, and production of new knowledge, in relation to learning as an end in itself for the mission of a Catholic university like Duquesne University, whose focus has historically been education. By way of introduction, consider Ex Corde Ecclesiae (n.d):

15. A Catholic University, therefore, is a place of research, where scholars scrutinize reality with the methods proper to
each academic discipline, and so contribute to the treasury of human knowledge. Each individual discipline is studied in a systematic manner; moreover, the various disciplines are brought into dialogue for their mutual enhancement.

For Catholic colleges and universities undergoing change toward a greater research focus and fear losing their teaching mission, Newman’s work on development of doctrine is instructive (Newman, 1878/1989). In a new historical moment, we can employ principles from his vision of development of doctrine as elaboration and greater understanding to engage “production of knowledge” as a type of learning. Learning is an end in itself, and as a byproduct produces useful action in the world. A unity of contraries approach permits both to have a place in the midsized university.

We can integrate Newman and *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* by understanding the relationship of research and learning as follows: as professors, as teacher/scholars, we both continue to learn and offer new understandings and prompts to the learning of others. The phrase “production of new knowledge” reflects a modernist notion of “progress,” which we reject or reframe. Instead of an accumulation model of learning, the banking metaphor of education critiqued by Freire (1970), we understand scholarship as additional understandings or insights, from a humanities perspective—not new “truths,” but new ways of thinking and engaging life, producing additional insights rather than fixed bits of information that become a totality, where nothing more needs to be known and where quantity trumps quality. The new insights become part of the hermeneutic development of understanding, where more parts of a phenomenon receive light through the offers of those who engage it. As Freiere warns, newly freed people and minds can become easily seduced into the old patterns of constriction, dominance and control. The great goal of all education is to free people and preserve their own desire to see others grow as well.

Additionally, from this perspective, both scholars and students are learners. Scholarship, then, serves teaching and learning. All become an element of service to the human community. In this way, the need for a university to “render unto Caesar” (external university peer institutions) can be done without compromising the mission’s standards. Furthermore, since we ask students to have their work evaluated, to be part of a learning community, we must subject our own work to criticism, as well under the tutelage of peer review.
Likewise, Newman’s understanding of professional and pre-professional education provides an integrative model for learning helpful to programs designed to prepare students for the marketplace as well as for lives of citizenship and public engagement. Such education is well-suited to the liberal arts in today’s moment, where the practical and the philosophical have criss-crossed (Bernstein, 1989). Engaged appropriately, the marketplace can supplement liberal education (Grabowsky & Fritz, forthcoming).

Another element of meeting the mission is to resist cultural and educational/pedagogical trends, fads that are grounded neither in the charism nor in good philosophy. As Arnett (1997) points out, a therapeutic model of discourse imported into the public sphere is bankrupt, destructive of institutions, as highlighted by Coulson (1994). Although therapy is a helpful practice, without a strong narrative foundation grounding the self, no resources are available to offer wisdom to the seeker (Arnett & Arneson, 1999).

The Department of Communication & Rhetorical Studies at Duquesne University

A Philosophy of Education Responsive to the Historical Moment

What it means to “care” for students varies from generation to generation. For example, students in the 1950’s brought with them a work ethic that prompted gratitude in response to the attention they received. In today’s moment, where generational expectations are different and caring is so expected that we can never care enough to satisfy, risking resulting cynicism from unmet high expectations (e.g., Arnett & Fritz, 2004), we must reframe unreflective practices of caring to the praxis of caring, where theory-informed understanding of nurture in this historical moment directs our interaction with students. Our understanding of caring for students means engaging them in education where learning together provides a foundation for relating. It means having regular office hours as well as time away from students to engage in scholarship and research leading to publication. It means asking them to join us in meaningful tasks of scholarship and service, focusing attention away from the temptation of an ever-demanding self and toward life itself. As a byproduct of engaging in worthy labor with teacher/scholar mentors, healthy persons-in-community are formed who can direct their attention to others in the spirit of Fr. Libermann. The work of spiritual formation and self-discovery take place in parallel with the work of education for the mind, heart, soul, and spirit in this Spiritan university. This philosophy of education guides education from the undergraduate to the Ph.D. level.
The institution as a university can work in tandem with the Spiritan charism as we develop students for leadership. The nature of the university in this historical moment permits development for leadership, where undergraduate students in need of assistance must take action to obtain it, but are never turned away. The small liberal arts campus surrounds students with attention and assistance; the large research university risks ignoring them. Here, when undergraduates raise their hands, they get help.

We work not only with current undergraduates, but with those yet to come as we engage in graduate education. Educating doctoral students, as expressed by our department chair, requires that we hold not their hand, but the hand of those students they will someday instruct. We hold the hand of future students under their care (R. C. Arnett, personal communication, November 14, 2005) as we ask for focused, disciplined work. In this manner, we meet and address multiple constituencies in the same moment.

Multi-level education: From undergraduate to Ph.D.

From the perspective of the Department of Communication & Rhetorical studies at Duquesne University, the Spiritan charism calls us to provide excellent, well-educated Ph.D. students to teach at small liberal arts, religiously affiliated, and regional state schools with a teaching mission. For us to fulfill our mission as a Ph.D. granting institution and to educate these students the best we can, we must publish, and we must illustrate how to function on a campus that will require attention both to students and to life outside of the campus.

A Philosophy of Scholarship and Service

Our undergraduate and graduate students deserve professors who are continually learning and subjecting their work to outside review. Our outlets for publication are peer-reviewed regional and national journals in our discipline, but it is not our primary purpose to sacrifice all to achieve regular recognition in the most selective journals—though we have published in such places. While the productivity of the faculty must meet the level of the educational institution it claims to be, we also must model teaching for our Ph.D. students, so each of us, including the department chair, teaches a full load of three courses per semester, avoiding release time for the administrative work we do. In this manner, we hope to illustrate for our Ph.D. students a constructive way of teaching and working within the parameters of scholarly productivity appropriate to this institution in this historical moment.
Teaching Theory and Practice

Content: A Specialist/Generalist Model
The particular nature of this institution and our departmental purpose calls us to embrace a specialist/generalist model of education (Fritz, Arnett, Ritter, & Ferrara, 2005) that permits teaching a wide variety of classes at the undergraduate level making use of the foundational doctoral education in language, communication, and the humanities each of us has experienced. We embrace new classes that require a professional learning experience for ourselves as we educate students at the undergraduate level. We teach our Ph.D. students to work as specialist/generalists as well, preparing them for the expectations they will find at the teaching institutions that will most likely become their academic homes.

The Little Red Schoolhouse: Ph.D. Student Engagement as Benefit to Undergraduates and to Ph.D. students
As our Ph.D. students engage their students in the undergraduate classroom and as TAs (Teaching Assistants), they learn as they teach. Our graduate students are present in the classroom with us in many of our undergraduate classes as teams of Ph.D. and MA students. This “doubly pedagogical” practice teaches graduate students to teach and also gives undergraduate students a variety of persons to assist them and from whom to learn while still having access to the professor of record. The metaphor of the “little red schoolhouse” (R. C. Arnett, personal communication, April 7, 2001) guides our practice.

Mentoring Ph.D. Students for Service
We ask our Ph.D. students to find ways to foster learning for themselves and their students rather than to create a community of complaint about what their students do not know. Our Ph.D. students are encouraged to embrace a philosophy of taking on the burden of the educational enterprise rather than placing it on their students. We must expect more of ourselves than we do of our students. We take whatever students God gives us, at whatever level they may be, and work from there to offer the best education we can, “drawing out” the best in them by giving them the best of ourselves.

Conclusion
Duquesne University of the Holy Spirit lives out its mission by attending to dual concerns: the charism of the Spiritan Congregation for education and international mission, and the identity of a university, with expectations for scholarship and secular excellence. By understanding mission as responsive to changes in the historical moment in ways that preserve the original intent of the Congregation’s founders, this institution continues to address student needs in its unique educational fashion. A
A model of learning and growth appropriate for students...invites commitment to teaching, scholarship, and service.

One department’s experience serves as an illustration of the lived experience of this university’s mission. Consistent with the Spiritan understanding of particularity, there are many potential manifestations of mission at the school and university level, with this example serving as only one articulation. As educational institutions continue to serve an increasingly diverse student body, the value of institutional uniqueness coupled with institutional consistency is likely to increase, presenting continued opportunities for responsive institutions to offer constructive alternatives for human flourishing. This essay is offered in service of that goal.

References


Footnotes

1 Thanks to Renee Stanton for compiling statistics on college and university size
"I AM THE VINE, YOU ARE THE BRANCHES…"

Bringing the Spiritan Charism into the Laboratory

Bruce Beaver

Bruce Beaver is Associate Professor of Chemistry at Duquesne University, Pittsburgh. His research interests include sustainable forestry and the development of clean fuels from coal. Recently, Bruce has become interested in exploring aspects of the complex relationships between science, technology and Catholicism. He lives together with his wife, Gina, and their three children, Vinny, Sammy and Gussie, in a rural Pennsylvania home in an oak forest.

As a Catholic, I am familiar with John 15:5 and its spiritual meaning – the Lord is the vine and we, His followers, are the branches. As a professor who studies and teaches aspects of forestry and wine making, I can also look at John 15:5 in a scientific way – a sturdy vine produces a multitude of branches which produce abundant fruit. As a Catholic chemistry professor, I know that the transcendent and the physical rarely gel: it’s the ole’ science vs. religion debate where conviction is a curse and physical reality is all that is real. It can be a struggle.

Fortunately, my faculty position at Duquesne University has allowed me to develop a Catholic sensibility while participating in contemporary teaching and research. Over the years, the faith or fact deliberation has disappeared for me thanks, in part, to one of the Lord’s “branches” (transcendent meaning, mind you) known as the Spiritans. But it’s not just me, the little ole’ Catholic chemist, who has benefited from the Spiritan charism, which recognizes that all people of good will, whether they realize it or not, are involved in growing God’s love. Yes, we are all branches. For hundreds of years and in hundreds of places, the Spiritans have been sharing God’s love through many and varied ministries, one of which is Duquesne University. In collaboration with laity, the Spiritans at Duquesne have been agents for positive change in the Pittsburgh region for more than 120 years. As the world becomes smaller through globalization, because of its Spiritan legacy, Duquesne is well-positioned to continue its neighborly legacy even across the oceans.

The Spiritan charism has energized much of my teaching and research. Let me share some of my “fruits” . . .

What are people for?

The most obvious way that a university can improve the world is through attention to its educational mission. Catholic universities are potentially powerful cultural correctives through their core curriculum. I believe the best curriculum contains general education courses which engage various academic disciplines with a Catholic sensibility.

At appropriate times in my chemistry classes I illuminate the topic at hand with a Catholic sensibility. I call my educational approach...
Value Added Education (VAE).² I define VAE as secular education that is in dialog with the transcendent aspect of reality. For example, I have the students in my course in our core curriculum read a 1985 essay by cultural critic Wendell Berry entitled, What Are People For?³ The essay is part of a unit on the chemistry of food and energy production. In this essay Berry suggests that transportation fuels are more than just energy sources, they are powerful social forces as well. In the United States, since World War II, Berry claims a corporate technological culture has developed and is engaged in extracting natural resources from rural regions in a non sustainable way. He writes that very little has been economically contributed to the affected rural economies and communities. Berry also suggests a colonial relationship has evolved between urban and rural communities. He goes on to point out:

…with hundreds of farm families losing their farms weekly, economists are saying that these people deserve to fail, that they have failed because they are “the least efficient producers,” and that the rest of us are better off for their failure. …The resulting farm to city migration (in search of jobs) has obviously produced advantages to the corporate economy. The absent farmers have had to be replaced by machinery, petroleum, chemicals, credit, and other expensive goods and services of the agribusiness economy…At the same time the cities have had to receive a great influx of people unprepared for urban life…people whom are many times assumed to be “permanently unemployable.” …The great question that hovers over this issue, is the question of what are people for. Is their greatest dignity in unemployment? Is the obsolescence of human beings now our social goal? … In the country, meanwhile, there is work to be done. This is the inescapably necessary work of restoring and caring for our farms, forests, and rural towns and communities—work that we have been unable to pay people to do…

Catholic social teaching has much to tell us about the economy described by Berry. Simply stated, Catholics believe the economy is to serve people, rather than the reverse. However, it is difficult to find examples of Catholic social teaching being applied in today’s world. I believe that part of the reason for this is—as a culture—we have not learned how to connect transcendentally derived values to the real world. Our common experience is that Catholic social teaching is for the academy while the real world seems to be driven solely by technology in the market place.

Look at the Eucharistic celebration. The Church takes great care in the presentation of the bread and wine which will become the
body and blood of our Lord. The Church also cares about all the varied agricultural aspects involved in the production of the wheat and grapes which, upon consecration, become the body and blood of Christ. Catholic social teaching informs us that we should care about the work of human hands which is involved in the growing and harvesting of wheat and grapes. All agriculture should be done in a manner that is both environmentally and socially sustainable. Social sustainability includes whether the work of human hands is paid a just wage, including health care and retirement benefits, worthy of a human dignity that is derived from God.

Unfortunately, the world in which we live is a fallen world. It is a world full of pain, suffering and injustice. It is a world often driven by values antithetical to those of Catholic social teaching. In this dark world, the Church is called to be light that radiates God’s love to our neighbors. VAE is designed to address this problem by making students aware that transcendent values are, in isolated places, driving science and technology in the marketplace. Students must also understand that their marketplace choices either hinder or help these efforts.

“Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened For my yoke is easy and my burden light”. (Matthew 11:28-30)

In addition to socially aware teaching, Duquesne and other Catholic universities can positively influence the world through faculty research projects. In my case the cultivation of VAE ultimately flowed into my choice of research problems.

Having lived for 13 years in rural Pennsylvania, I have come to believe that some people are constitutionally made by God to make their living in rural occupations. These are people who Berry describes as having agrarian sensibilities and are happiest working in what Berry calls an agrarian economy. Such an economy:

…rises up from the fields, woods, and streams - from the complex of soils, slopes, weathers, connections, influences and exchanges that we mean when we speak of local water shed. . . . The agrarian mind is not national or global, but local. It must know on intimate terms the local plants and animals and local soils; it must know local possibilities and impossibilities. . . . The agrarian mind feels threatened and sickened when it hears people and creatures and places spoken of as labor, management, capital, and raw material. . . . The agrarian mind is interested - and forever fascinated
- by questions leading toward the accomplishment of good work: What is the best location for a particular building or fence? What is the best way to plow this field? What is the best course for a skid road in this woodland? Should this tree be cut or spared?

In Berry’s 1996 essay, Charlie Fisher, I was introduced to a man living agrarianism in the United States. Mr. Fisher is representative of hundreds of horse loggers working in the field of restorative forestry. Typically these people were conventional loggers, who have come to realize through their experiences that, when the prevailing corporate paradigm is applied to the forest, both environmental and cultural destruction results. These people have chosen to follow their personal vocation and leave more lucrative and comfortable jobs as conventional loggers. Instead they work with horses to log in a manner that restores and promotes forest health. They typically work in private forest holdings whose management has historically alternated between ‘cycles of neglect followed by abuse.’

Correcting a forest’s past management abuse is the goal of restorative forestry. Also known as “worst-first forestry,” it is practiced by the partial removal of the lowest quality trees from a forest every decade or so. In this approach the best timber is left to grow larger and to provide the best genetic seed stock for forest regeneration. The best timber is ultimately removed, after reaching financial maturity, and after seeding the best possible genetic stock for the future forest. Contrary to conventional logging, restorative forestry values future forest health over short-term financial gain. With restorative forestry the primary reason why horses are used, rather than a mechanical skidder, is economics. When worst-first forestry is practiced, not much money is generated from the initial timber sales. Consequently, the advantage of using horses is that they are cheaper to buy and maintain. In addition, generally less soil compaction occurs since a team of horses is lighter than a skidder. However, horses can be difficult to work with and they are less productive in terms of log volume. But, since a horse logger has less money invested in his logging “equipment,” that means that he is able to earn less money from a particular logging job. Loggers engaged in restorative forestry tend to make less money and physically work harder than conventional loggers. Forest owners that hire horse loggers also get less financial return on their timber sales. Restorative forestry is practiced primarily because of the personal satisfaction gained in improving the quality of the forest.
It could be argued that the restorative forestry community, by rejecting dominant economic paradigms of forest management, is living some of the precepts of Catholic social teaching. From the perspective of the Spiritan charism the restorative forestry movement is a fruit of the vine.

About a decade ago, inspired by the example of selfless horse loggers such as Charlie Fisher, I decided to explore ways in which I could support the local restorative forestry effort. As previously noted, one of the hurdles of worst-first forestry is the low economic value of the low quality timber initially harvested. The economic value of timber is determined by both tree quality and species, with the most valuable timber yielding the greatest volume of unblemished lumber. Currently, Pennsylvania black cherry and red oak are desired internationally for quality furniture, flooring and paneling. Various species of hickory, white oak and maple are less desired and therefore of lower value economically. For instance, comparing logs of similar size and quality, black cherry is currently about nine times more valuable than white oak. Since restorative forestry is economically supported by a portion of the revenue generated by the sale of the logs, it is easier to finance the effort if the species removed have greater economic value.

Any science or technology that increases the value of logs coming from regional forests could help the restorative forestry effort. Currently this effort is driven by the goodwill of loggers and individual forest stewards. The problem reduced itself to finding a way to improve a commercial product made with a local tree species of current low economic value. A few days in the library convinced me that the best way to help the Pennsylvania restorative forestry effort was to become an expert in the role of cooperage oak in crafting fine wines and spirits. As Gerald Asher, the wine critic for Gourmet magazine suggests, oak barrels are not used to introduce the flavor of oak. Rather, oak aging is used to craft an appealing bouquet by the appropriate marriage of the wood and grape-derived aromas.

“Then the Lord looked upon the earth and filled it with his blessings. Its surface be filled with all manner of life which must return to it again.” (Sirach, 16, 27-28)

My original idea was to develop inexpensive analytical techniques to assess the concentration of important wood-derived aroma compounds in individual white oaks. Then the trees from individual wood lots could be sorted into various groups, based upon similarities in their oak-derived bouquet potential. White oak timber with a quantitative estimate of its oak-derived bouquet
potential could incur an increase in value to cooperage companies. Such knowledge would help cooperage companies make barrels with differing degrees of oak-derived bouquet potential in a reproducible manner. The enhanced timber value would be significantly greater than the cost of the analytic chemistry used to characterize the logs. The extra economic value could then be used to financially support local restorative forestry.

For the first few years of the project, I was blessed with the help of a fine Duquesne chemistry undergraduate, Steve Matta. Our work was originally difficult in that we were “plowing new ground,” but we made some progress. Steve went on to medical school and is currently a practicing physician. Fortunately, other undergraduates and even high school students have helped move this venture slowly forward.

Major advances started in 2001 when doctoral student Paul Kolesar joined the effort. Paul is now in the process of writing his results into several papers soon to be published in the wine literature. Important conclusions include that we have been:

(i) unable to develop a cheap analytical protocol that can assess the oak-derived bouquet potential for individual trees;

(ii) able to establish that there are regional differences in the wood-derived bouquet potential for white oaks from different parts of the world;

(iii) able to establish that Pennsylvania white oak has an oak-derived bouquet potential similar to that of French oak.

The last observation is extremely important with respect to our original goal of developing financial support for Pennsylvania restorative forestry. That is because French oak barrels are the premium for winemakers globally. The high demand for these barrels results in their price being approximately twice that of typical Midwestern United States barrels. This observation suggests that cooperage oak from Pennsylvania has great market potential. We are now exploring ways of linking this market potential with the local restorative forestry community.

...Pennsylvania white oak has an oak-derived bouquet potential similar to that of French oak.
“I am the vine, you are the branches…”

I have tried to illustrate how a contemporary expression of the Spiritan charism is present at Duquesne University in the classroom and laboratory. Hopefully, the Spiritan charism will soon be expressed in regional white oak forests and rural communities. Finally, I must acknowledge that it is very satisfying to help in a very small way to realize ‘a branch’ of the Spiritan charism.

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4. For an overview explore the work of the Nation Catholic Rural Life Conference at [www.ncrlc.com](http://www.ncrlc.com).


7. Wendell Berry, *Conserving Forest Communities*, see, [http://www.tipiglen.dircon.co.uk/berryfc.html](http://www.tipiglen.dircon.co.uk/berryfc.html)

8. Typically the money derived from the sale of timber to a saw mill is split between the land owner and the logger.

Along with my wife, Joy, I became a Lay Spiritan after what seems in retrospect like a long journey of life-based formation for Spiritan mission. The initial thrust of the Spiritan Congregation as a “mission to the Blacks” is reflected in its contemporary mission of service primarily to the most disadvantaged and disenfranchised. The Danish philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard, once said, “Life can only be understood backward, but must be lived forward.” In the following pages I will try to understand the unfolding of the formative experiences that eventually led me to this Spiritan commitment, which continues to shape my life choices today.

**Life as Gift**

Mary Jo Leddy remarks in her book, *Radical Gratitude*, that in our consumer culture we are conditioned to be never satisfied. Perpetual dissatisfaction is integral to our economic system, “which expands to the extent that it can continue to expand the needs and wants of consumers.” She recommends as an antidote “Radical Gratitude [which] begins when we stop taking life for granted. It arises in the astonishment at the miracle of creation and of our own creation.” Having almost been killed by a falling coconut as a child in Trinidad and having escaped unscathed from two serious car accidents in Canada and England as an adult, I am acutely aware that life is a precious God-given gift and that we each have a unique presence and role to play in the world. In traditional African thought, awareness of this unique role for every individual is so strong that it is believed that diviners can identify this special purpose even before a child is born and that it is the responsibility of the community to help the individual to remember and focus on her or his life purpose.

I had the good fortune several years ago to attend a retreat led by the Spiritan theologian, Vincent Donovan, author of *The Church in the Midst of Creation*. Fr. Donovan reminds us in this book that “[t]he Gospel begins with God the creator and God’s creation. Everything else must flow out of this creation. We know God only in relation to creation and to humankind...The God of revelation is a God who entered into human history, into earth history.” Our lived experiences are an important pathway to encounter God and the sources of inspiration that God provides for our guidance. It is in this light that I reflect on my lived experience and on the convergence of factors that led me eventually to become a Lay Spiritan.
Life as Commitment

The theologian Jon Sobrino writes that “Our spirituality is our profoundest motivation, those instincts, intuitions, longings and desires that move us, animate us, inspire us...But it is also our ultimate concern or orientation or goal, that person, object, ideal or value that attracts us, that draws us, towards which we incline... to where we go. If you like, it’s the inner life of the cup. But our spirituality is not just interiority. It is also our choices and actions; it is where spirit is given flesh, where intention becomes action, where we practice what we preach. Our spirituality shows up just as much in how we spend our money, our time, our abilities, as in how we say our prayers. If you like, it’s how we use the cup.”

In that spirit, for me, “what we say with our words is so much less important than what we mean with our lives...” I have come to see my own calling as living in the secular world, translating my Christian spirituality into the everyday world of family, work and civic interactions, being a witness, working for the building of God’s Kingdom of love, justice and peace by the vision I bring and the choices I make in my family, professional and social life. This is the essence of the formal commitment we make as Lay Spiritans in TransCanada.

The Early Years

As a young student at a Spiritan school, St. Mary’s College, Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, I acquired my first experience of faith-inspired social outreach through the praesidium of the Legion of Mary of which I was a member. One of the activities I recall in particular that was assigned to me on occasion was visiting the sick at the General Hospital. This experience nurtured in me a sense of compassion for people who were experiencing pain and suffering in their lives. Shortly after I finished high school and was teaching junior classes at the college, and before I left for university abroad, I was invited by one of the teachers, Mr. Pantin, to join a small reflection group which was studying the social teachings of the Church. In retrospect, both of these experiences served as important sources of my Spiritan formation without my realizing it at the time.

As a university student in France during the first half of the 1960s, I was privileged to know two chaplains in particular who contributed significantly to my ongoing formation to a life of faith in action. L’abbé Zaire was the chaplain of the Fédération Antillo-Guyanaise des Étudiants Catholiques (FAGEC), a national organization which regrouped Catholic students from several
university campuses across France. The FAGEC held an annual congress in Paris at which the theme for the year was debated, resolutions made and an editorial team assembled to publish the reflections emanating from the congress. One year, for example, was devoted to studying the role of the Church in the contemporary social, political and economic context of the French Caribbean “départements d’outremer” (overseas departments). L’Abbé Zaire was a charismatic and inspiring leader who deepened our social consciousness as Christian students. An added bond for me was that, at the end of our studies, l’Abbé Zaire later married Joy and me at the Eglise St. Julien, the university parish church in Caen, where I had been a student.

I have never forgotten the words of Fr. Gwenael, the Franciscan chaplain of the FAGEC group at the Université de Caen, in Normandy: “When you pray the Our Father and say ‘Your Kingdom Come, Your Will be done on earth as it is in heaven’, it doesn’t mean that you fold your arms passively and wish for the coming of the Kingdom - you must be an active agent working in the vineyard.” The message I took from his words was that we are called upon to be bearers and livers of the “good news” - not the bad news that the poor will always be with us, with the implication that poverty, deprivation and marginalization are ordained by God - but the good news announced in Isaiah: “Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free and to break every yoke?”

Together in Canada

We moved to Canada in 1967 where I took up my appointment at McMaster University in Hamilton. Joy and I soon became involved with a vibrant Roman Catholic community on the McMaster campus, led by a kind, loveable Jesuit priest, Fr. Gerry Gallagher, who challenged us and himself to think of our religion with the same intellectual curiosity that we brought to our academic studies. It was during this period that I first read Gustavo Gutierrez’ *A Theology of Liberation*. The theology of liberation challenged the Church and people of faith to be active participants in helping to change the economic and political systems that maintain social injustice. In Latin America, traditionally, the Church had been an ally of the rich and powerful. This was a call for a preferential option for the poor. Gutierrez explains that “God’s love excludes no one. Nevertheless, God demonstrates a special predilection toward those who have been excluded from the banquet of life. The word *preference* recalls the other dimension of the gratuitous love of God—the universality.” This is the good news that Archbishop Oscar Romero preached and for which he
was martyred. There are several dimensions to liberation. At one level, it means liberation from the immediate causes of poverty and deprivation, recognizing that poverty is not an accident or a misfortune but an injustice. The Canadian Catholic Bishops also recognize poverty as injustice when they write in *Do Justice: The Social Teaching of the Canadian Catholic Bishops (1945-1986)* that “[t]here is nothing inevitable about the realities of being rich and poor in the world today...The gap is the product of our own making as men (people) of history. We have the responsibility of choosing the kind of social order we want to develop as a human family. The development gap is no less than a critical problem of injustice for (hu) mankind.” At one level liberation recognizes the dignity to which every human being is called and as such entails enabling the poor and marginalized to develop themselves in freedom and dignity by addressing the constraints placed upon them. At another level, based on the vision of Christ who liberates us from sin, it refers to liberation from selfishness and sin, which is “the ultimate root of all disruption of friendship and of all injustice and oppression”. It means re-establishment of right relationship with God, with others, and, we would add, with the planet (which we now know to be a living web of complex interaction). In a world of growing disparities, this option for the poor could not be more relevant nor more in keeping with the Spiritan charism.

**Sabbatical in Senegal**

The Dominican priests whom we met during the sabbatical year that we spent in Senegal became a source of inspiration for me. The elder of our two sons was born in Dakar in mid-January 1974 and was baptized at the Eglise Saint Dominique in Dakar where we went to church. During our stay in Senegal we got to know the priests at the Fraternité Saint Dominique quite well. I volunteered there as an English teacher for the youth in the alternative school which they had created. The classes were open to all youth regardless of their religious background. The Fraternité Saint Dominique also served both as an outreach center and as a “centre de réflexion” (center for reflection), known as the *Centre Lebret*. The Center not only mobilized the parish to learn about and contribute to rural development projects but also engaged the Senegalese students to become themselves directly involved in rural development work. The Dominican Center also organized presentations and discussions. One of the sessions that I remember most vividly was a presentation followed by a discussion on the inculturation of the Church in Africa. I had great admiration for the respectful, dynamic and progressive witness of this Dominican mission in Senegal, a predominantly Muslim country. The *Centre*
Lebret continues to be active in Senegal today.

Sources of Inspiration

I have derived great inspiration in pursuing volunteer work in the area of anti-racism and civil rights from people like Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., Nelson Mandela, and Bishop Tutu. Martin Luther King had a vision of the Beloved Community that was broad in scope. This was a vision of human relationships, at both the local community and the global level, which embraced diversity and recognized the inter-relatedness of human beings everywhere. It envisioned a world where values of love, justice, and peace prevailed and where the activities and choices made by institutions, whether public or private, for-profit or not-for-profit, took into account ethical concerns. The Beloved Community would be a community free of racism and the many forms of physical violence (such as child abuse, domestic violence, sexual assault, racial profiling, acts of state- or group-inspired terror, and war) but also of economic injustice and exploitation.

Action for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation

Systemic racism, often unintended and unconscious, but resulting in the limiting of opportunities or discrimination against specific groups of people, has been a major focus for me. Campaigning on issues related to racism has taken many forms for me over the years. I have served on a few occasions as a volunteer advocate for individuals who felt that their voice would not be heard by large institutions in the face of which they felt intimidated. It has involved delivering many workshops, alone or with my wife, Joy, to schools and in the community, in Hamilton and elsewhere; also, serving on school board committees developing antiracism policies. I have also been active in antiracist organizations, including chairing the Working Committee of the Strengthening Hamilton’s Community Initiative (SHCI), created by the Mayor of Hamilton following an upsurge in racially motivated incidents, including the burning of the Hindu Temple and an attack on a mosque in the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks in the US. I have envisaged my service on the Board of Directors of Settlement and Integration Services Organization (SISO), and on the advisory committee for a Center for Civic Inclusion being launched in Hamilton, as an extension of the same commitment, through working to facilitate the integration of refugees and immigrants locally and to create a barrier free community.

International development work and advocacy for global justice have also been avenues for me to translate my faith into action. The words of the Australian Aboriginal woman, Lilla Watsoa,
invariably come to my mind when I think of the concept of development: “If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.” This is the spirit in which I have approached international development work, not in a donor-recipient mode, but as a partner, ready to listen and willing to both give and receive. One of my students sent me a card explaining how she came to an understanding of Lilla Watsoa’s words during a visit she had made to India. “I bought a basket made of leaves and filled with flower petals from a young girl in a city on the banks of the Ganges. I lit the small string among the petals and knelt beside the rushing waters of the river to set afloat my basket and make a wish. I wished for the well-being of the young girl who had sold to me my promise of good fortune upon my visit to her city on the banks of the Ganges. Only seconds after releasing my basket to be swallowed up by the waves of the holy river, I realized my mistake. My mistake was not in the selfless act of donating my wish to another - but why hadn’t I asked the young girl what she wanted me to wish for?” I thought that this was a simple yet profound insight, one that is fundamental to development work.

I have had fairly extensive involvement in international development, mainly through serving overseas with CUSO and later as Director of my university’s International Office. Project investigation, planning or monitoring, has taken me to several countries in West and East Africa, Indonesia, and the Caribbean. Development has also become the core of my teaching. I include a segment on spirituality and development in my teaching. Contrary to the still dominant concept of development as essentially an economic issue, with mass consumption as its highest state, Pope John-Paul II, in his encyclical On Social Concerns/Sollicitudo Rei Socialis, puts development in truer perspective:

“Today, perhaps more than in the past, the intrinsic contradiction of a development limited only to its economic element is seen more clearly. Such development easily subjects the human person and his deepest needs to the demands of economic planning and selfish profit... True development cannot consist in the simple accumulation of wealth and in the greater availability of goods and services, if this is gained at the expense of the development of peoples, and without due consideration for the social, cultural and spiritual dimensions of the human being.”

We have also come to see more clearly the links between peace and development. In most religious traditions, as peace scholar Elise Boulding points out, we find two contrasting forces, which
she calls “holy war culture and holy peace culture...The holy war culture has tended to encourage the exercise of force at every level, from family to international relations... There is also a holy peace culture, whose voice has often been historically muted, that works to restrain the use of force and for peace and reconciliation.” A peace culture offers an alternative vision of human development, which as Mahbub ul Haq put it, is “a child who did not die, a disease that did not spread, an ethnic violence that did not explode, a dissident who was not silenced.” Supporting the building of a peace culture has taken for me the form of participating in the work of the Center for Peace Studies at McMaster, helping to build peace locally through projects such as the Civic Center and the SHCI, and working through the Development and Peace group in my local parish. The Spiritan Congregation has itself considered peace and justice work important enough to devote resources to the coordination of work on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation across the Congregation.

University Community

Faith in action for me is also reflected in my everyday role as a teacher and former administrator and as a member of the university community. Active for many years in the McMaster Catholic Community, which was ministered to by Spiritan chaplains in the 1970s and early 1980s, I considered it important for faculty and staff to be a witness and mentor for students at all times. One of the Spiritan chaplains in particular, Fr. Seán Byron, was a tremendous source of inspiration to me and many others. Seán had the uncanny gift of anticipating your questions and your needs before you articulated them. One important lesson that I learned from him is encapsulated in the story he told about walking from the house to the Chaplaincy Center on campus, meeting people on his way to work and thinking as they stopped him that he was being held up from arriving at work. It was when he got to the office that he realized that his work was really with the people he had met on the way. It was Seán who introduced Joy and me to the Lay Spiritan group in Toronto. He also introduced me to Raimundo Panikkar, an extraordinary scholar priest, author of over 40 books, son of a Hindu Indian father and a Catholic Spanish mother. Raimundo Panikkar portrays himself as being in no way a cultural or religious “half-caste”, but as 100% Hindu and Indian and 100% Catholic and Spanish. I have been struck, in the context of inter-religious dialogue which has been one of his central preoccupations, by the interesting distinction he makes between dialogue and “duo-logue.” Indeed, he prefers to speak, not of inter-religious dialogue, which he defines as established religions confronting questions of doctrine and discipline, but of...
intra-religious dialogue which is more of an exchange of religious experiences and insights, without resorting to relativism or religious syncretism. He describes the dialogue between religions not as “a strategy for making one truth triumphant, but a process of looking for it and deepening it along with others.” Inter-religious dialogue is also an important dimension of contemporary Spiritan outreach.

**Convergence of Values**

It was not until the early 1990s, about a decade after we were first introduced to the Toronto Lay Spiritan group by Fr. Seán Byron, that Joy and I opted to become Lay Spiritans. We recognized formally in this way the convergence between the values we were trying to live and the Spiritan vocation. My early education at St. Mary’s College combined with our close association with the Spiritan priests who ministered to the McMaster Catholic Community and our involvement with Volunteer International Christian Service (VICS), for which we organized orientations for outgoing volunteers over a decade or so at the invitation of then VICS Director, Fr. Dermot Doran, cemented our Spiritan ties. We were attracted by the Spiritan charism of special concern for the marginalized and the excluded, recognizing that God’s Spirit resides in every human heart, and the willingness to be guided by the Spirit which blows where it will. Lay Spiritans commit themselves to an active prayer life and, following the prompting of the Spirit, to work to give options to those who are most poor, vulnerable and excluded from society, enabling them to break out of their cycle of misery. Spiritan spirituality is characterized by what Libermann called “practical union”, finding the divine in the ordinariness of everyday life and being available to go where we discern the Holy Spirit to be leading us.

**Worldwide Community**

As Lay Spiritans associated with the TransCanada Province and with an increasingly multicultural international order, we have privileged access to the inspiring example of service and holiness exhibited by so many Spiritans around the world (over 3000 in 62 countries), as well as the rich spiritual resources of which the Congregation is the depository. We found inspiration in the life of the founders, especially Fr. Libermann who, despite much suffering in his life, retained an unshakable trust in God and brought new life to the Spiritan mission. We feel part of a worldwide community. Joy and I have been privileged to spend a month participating in the two most recent international Chapters of the Spiritans as lay delegates, myself in 1998 in Maynooth, Ireland, and Joy in 2004 in Torre D’Aguilha just outside Lisbon.
Portugal. For many years the Spiritans have also provided us with a priest for a small monthly home worshipping community – we are grateful for these privileged moments of prayer and intimate sharing. As the outcome of our largely life-based formation, we were led by the Holy Spirit to make a lifelong commitment as Lay Spiritans. We see our role as bringing the Spiritan charism and spirituality to the areas of secular life in which we are involved as lay people.

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Silence

Some things require an emptiness
a space of silence
a nothingness:
like shells that whorl and twirl
around a curved naught
or bubbles blown
that float
bared in the sunlight
flashing light signals
resting on a bloom
one borrowed moment

Some things require an emptiness,
a round of space
a little silence – me.

Or think of atoms
set in phantasmagoric speed and space
electrons aeons apart
infinitesimal ultimates
ringing inner void
zero essentiality…
you

Some things require an emptiness
a round of space
a little silence
even to be.

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Cothrai Gogan, C.S.Sp.
Cothrai Gogan, C.S.Sp., is a Spiritan of the Irish Province. He has worked as a missionary priest in Nigeria, Ivory Coast, Tanzania, Mauritius and Kenya, where he is currently chaplain at Star of Hope Children’s Home in Ruiru. Cothrai has published a number of works of poetry and prayer including God Knows: A Journal of Sorrow, Poems of Prayer, Come Deaf Now Hear, Something Else and Hymns of the Universe.

“The sense of a vessel is not in its shell but in the void”
Dag Hammarskjöld
What is Spirituality?

There are many definitions and descriptions of “spirituality”, most of them quite vague. It would be good, therefore, to clarify first my own understanding of spirituality, before going on to talk about “Spiritan” spirituality. In my opinion, the best definition runs as follows: a person’s spirituality is the way that person develops his/her relationship with God (the divinity, the transcendental, the “beyond”), how a person experiences God’s presence, communicates with God and allows God to communicate with him/her, knows God and allows oneself to be known by God, and in God’s light interprets the universe, the world and life.

Each individual, family, religious group, ethnic group, nation, and indeed epoch, can have its own spirituality. The individual or group that does not believe in the transcendental, but only in the material world as experienced through the five senses, has its way of interpreting the universe and life, known as “ideology” – for example, the ideology of materialism, be it Marxist or Capitalist.

We can identify four areas in which spirituality functions—the areas where God relates to us and we to Him:

1. The world of nature: included here are not only the cosmos, earth, air, sun, water, plants and animals, but also the things created by humanity and the events and happenings, planned or not, of our daily lives.
2. The “world” which is myself.
3. The “world” which is other people.
4. The “world” of the “beyond” (transcendental).

Our whole relationship with God happens within these four “worlds”. Thus, we can describe our individual and group spirituality by the ways in which we use these four areas to enter into contact with and relate with God.

A Common Seed

Today, in Latin America, members of the Spiritan family come from 19 different nationalities (we include here the Spiritan Sisters and also the Missionary Sisters of the Holy Rosary). We are from Portugal, Spain, Ireland, Holland, Germany, Canada, France, US, Paraguay, England, Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, French Guyana, Australia, Cape
Verde, Mexico and Brazil. Each of these nationalities has its own spirituality and “face”.

Besides these national spiritualities, we also have our individual spiritualities. Among us there are charismatics, sacramentalists, followers of liberation theology and basic communities, people strong on popular devotions and particular devotions, devotees of Our Lady of Guadeloupe, or Aparecida, or Fatima. In the middle of all these, how can we trace the contours of a spirituality that we have in common as members of the Spiritan family? How can we discover the “Spiritan, Latin-American face”, which is distinct from other faces and spiritualities?

In the forest there are many types of trees; in the fields there are many varieties of plants; in the garden there are many species of flowers. However, it is the seed that determines the type of tree or plant which will appear. I believe that, in order to discover the type of spirituality that distinguishes us from others and identifies us as Spiritans, we have to return to the seed or roots – namely, our founders and foundresses: Claude Poullart des Places, Francis Libermann, Eugénie Caps and Joseph Shanahan.

We can speak of a Spiritan spirituality only to the extent that we are inspired and nourished by, and living, their spirituality.

We can speak of a Spiritan spirituality only to the extent that we are inspired and nourished by, and living, their spirituality. While we may be able to speak of spirituality or of a Latin-American face, without this we cannot speak of a “Spiritan” face. In this brief presentation, I want to focus attention only on the seed, the roots of our Spiritan spirituality - the spirituality of our two original founders: Claude Poullart des Places and Francis Libermann.

Both emphasized the priority of an unconditional response to the call of God, going to the marginalized, in a spirit of poverty and service...

While the writings of Claude, and of the people who knew him well, are few in comparison with those of Francis, we can see that their way of thinking and relating to God were very similar: Christocentric, with a very strong emphasis on docility to the Holy Spirit and Mary. Both emphasized the priority of an unconditional response to the call of God, going to the marginalized, in a spirit of poverty and service, in the society of their time. This brief synthesis will focus principally on the spirituality of Francis in order to trace the most important characteristics within the context of the four broad areas mentioned above.

1. God in the World of Nature

It is not surprising that the contemplation of nature - earth, air, sun, water, plants and animals - even though frequently referred to in the psalms and biblical literature, is not part Francis’ spirituality. He spent his whole infancy and adolescence living in a city ghetto in Saverne and so had little contact with nature.
From there he went to another city, Metz, before arriving in the large city of Paris. However, if we include in “nature” the events and happenings of life, Francis was steeped in the spirituality of the Jewish people who recognize the “dabar” (communication) of God in all that happens in our life and world. To quote the Jewish writer, Martin Buber: “The pious Jew lives in the conviction that the true place of his meeting with God is in the ever-changing situations of life. Repeatedly he hears the voice of God in a different way in the language of the unforeseen and changing situations”. The God of Jews and Christians is a God of surprises, whose will does not always coincide with ours, and the experiences we have of Him are pure gift and not the result of our own effort. Francis frequently experienced this: in the peace of his conversion, the joy of his baptism, the sadness of his illness, the various frustrations in the different stages of the foundation and early development of the Congregation and the fusion with the Congregation of the Holy Spirit. He always managed to discern the hand of God in both the happy and sad events that he encountered:

“It is wonderful to see how God’s providence arranges circumstances towards the realization of his designs for salvation... Because of this, we need not get too upset about the salvation of souls... We need only follow the example of Our Savior... to be faithful in doing what we can, and cooperating with divine providence in the circumstances which come our way”.

2. God Within Us

As the son of the strict rabbi of Saverne, Libermann could easily have become neurotic, full of self-pity, concentrating all his attention on himself as a person who was marginalized, poor, sick, weak and timid, without roots in his past, without hope for the future. He was certainly a marginalized person: he was a Jew living in a European ghetto. Someone born in Latin America does not know what it is like to be born and live in a ghetto. It is to live in a prison with invisible but very real walls and bars: walls of religious and racial prejudice, if not outright persecution. It is to be the object of contempt, hate, repugnance, without knowing why. It is not to have the courage to move out, to risk life in the world outside for fear of defiling one's culture or losing one's faith. It is to speak only one language, which is unknown to the general population. It is to attend an exclusive school and synagogue. It is to court and marry only with other dwellers in the ghetto.

But Francis Libermann did not show any indication of trauma arising from this experience of marginalization in his early years. In his writings and life there is no hint of self-pity, recrimination,
resentment or hurt, sentiments so common in someone who suffers the neurosis of being a victim. Even after his conversion to Christianity he must have suffered great discrimination as a Jew. The French Revolution of 1789 declared that all people living in France were equal before the law. However, prejudices change much slower than laws. He suffered because he could not speak or write French very well (and the French are so proud of their language). After his conversion to Christianity was discovered, Francis was abandoned and never pardoned by his own father. He suffered from epilepsy, which, at the time, was still considered by many as demoniac possession. At the seminaries of San Sulpice and Issy he was neither a seminarian nor a lay functionary. He considered himself a failure at the novitiate in Rennes. He was judged to be ambitious and proud when he tried to found a new Congregation.

However, at the time of his baptism he had such a strong experience of the presence of a loving and merciful God living within him, that, from then on, nothing could take away his peace. From that moment until the end of his life he lived as a beloved son, content in the presence of God; consciously at times of prayer (contemplative union) and habitually in his working hours (practical union). When he repeats that he is nothing, that man is nothing, this does not indicate self-depreciation, but is his manner of thanking God to Whom he owes all that he is and has achieved. For him, all is grace; all is God acting within and through anyone who is open to His grace:

“We should not disturb, afflict, upset, torment, nor despise ourselves. This would be very bad, being one of the major obstacles to perfection, and an impediment even to our correcting our defects.”

This conviction of being the dwelling-place of God was the great discovery of his conversion. For a Jew of the Old Testament, God was generally a distant Being, difficult, or even dangerous, to come close to. Moses met Him in the desert, and later on top of a mountain covered in cloud. From there he descended to give the people the message from Yahweh. Later, God went in front of the people in a cloud by day and a column of fire by night, or lived in the tent of the Ark of the Covenant, where Moses went to meet Him. After the construction of the Temple in Jerusalem, the dwelling place of God on earth was in the furthest part of the Temple, known as the “Sacred Sanctuary”, where only the priests dared enter to offer incense. The people prayed and heard the Scripture read in the synagogues; however, to meet God one had to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and to make offerings in the...
Temple. But, at the moment of the conception, God, through the power of the Holy Spirit, became flesh in the womb of Mary. And, at the hour of Jesus’ death, “the veil of the Temple tore in two from top to bottom”, signifying that, from then on, God would no longer be a hidden God confined to one place, but, by the power of the Holy Spirit, would dwell in the body of each person who would be baptized in faith in Jesus Christ, and would thereby accept to be His tabernacle or temple. That incarnation in his heart was the great revelation which Francis felt at the time of his baptism, and which, from then on, became a constant, dynamic presence and the source of all his strength and all that he thought and did:

“When the holy water flowed down my forehead, it seemed to me that I was in the middle of an immense ball of fire; I no longer lived a natural life; I saw nothing nor heard anything that happened around me; things, impossible to describe, happened to me”.

“After our baptism, the Holy Spirit dwells in us in a living and life-giving way; He is in us in order to be, in us, the principle of all the movements of our soul. It is up to us to let ourselves be moved and influenced by Him”.

3. God in the Other Person

Convinced of the presence of God within himself, and that he was called to be the presence of God in the world, it was easy for Francis to recognize the presence of God in the other. In the Acts of the Apostles and the Letters of St. Paul, he would have discovered the presence of Jesus in His Mystical Body. “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting” (Acts 9, 5). In addition, Mary, the one who welcomed the incarnate God in her womb and who always lived in the presence of God, became a huge influence in his life.

But for Francis the presence of God in the other had a very special focus. It was God’s presence in the poor, the marginalized, in the one that the society of the time judged to be without value. This identification was quite natural for one who had himself been marginalized in so many ways and who now felt himself as privileged by God, despite his weakness and poverty. At the moment of his baptism he experienced a God who had a special preference for the anawim, the little ones with whom he could so easily identify. In the Gospels he discovered a Messiah who preferred the company of prostitutes and publicans rather than those well accepted by society and religion. In his free following of Jesus he developed a self-worth, which helped him overcome the contempt and marginalization of his own situation. These
discoveries became the corner-stone of his choice of the most abandoned as the focus of the new Congregation he founded. It would be a missionary Congregation, with a mission to bring the “good news” to the poor: in the first place, the good news of their dignity as beloved children of the Father and temples of the Holy Spirit. The first recipients of this message would be the recently liberated slaves of the black race, the most abandoned both within and outside the Church:

“We would show the detractors of the African race that their members are as much children of God as they themselves are, that their aspirations are no lower, that they are no less capable of accepting the faith; in a word, that color does not signify any kind of inferiority”.

The process of inculturation, which he encouraged in his missionaries, had its root in the respect that is owed to every people with their own spirituality, without distinction of race, color, religion etc. I believe that the respect and simplicity with which we relate to each person, a very special characteristic of Spiritan living in Latin America, owes much to the focus of the spirituality of our founders.

“In His name, and as people sent by Jesus Christ, the members dedicate themselves completely to announcing His Gospel and establishing His reign among the poor and most abandoned in God’s Church”. “They will be the advocates, supporters and defenders of the poor and the little ones, against all who oppress them”.

Another discovery, which greatly influenced Francis’ spirituality and his attitude of respect towards all, was individual freedom. This did not exist for Jews like his father. The individual’s only obligation was to obey the law of God as interpreted by the Talmud, or cease to be a Jew. Before the French Revolution of 1789, the obligation of the people of Europe was to obey the laws of the Church as promulgated by the Emperor or King. Reading Rousseau, while still a Jew, Jacob discovered that the individual is not just the object of a pre-established destiny, but ought to become the subject of his own destiny, using his liberty to make his own decisions. Liberty was primary in the motto of the Revolution: “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity”. Afterwards, reading the Gospels, Francis discovered that this liberty is granted to us in order that we can love responsibly. His conversion to the Catholic Church was his first “cry of liberty”, choosing to freely follow the free man, Jesus Christ, as his response to the invitation of God.

“Our Savior gave me the grace to resist my father, who wanted to uproot my faith: I renounced him rather than the faith”.
Later, following the Revolution, the freedom of the slaves in the French colonies became his great preoccupation. How could he help these people, uprooted from their tribes, cultures and religion, descendants of generations of slaves, exercise their new freedom responsibly? It is interesting that the two people involved with him in founding the “work for the Blacks” were Frederick Le Vavasseur, a native of the island of Bourbon, and Eugene Tisserant from the island that now comprises Haiti and the Dominican Republic, where so many African slaves were beginning to experience freedom.

“It seems to me to be absolutely necessary to help these people realize that they are free, and to appreciate the beauty of the liberty and equality which they have in common with all other children of God. Any idea of inferiority must be erased from their minds”.

4. Relationship with the Transcendental World (the “Beyond”)

For Jacob Libermann the most important figure in the transcendental world was Yahweh, as shown him by his father, the rabbi of Saverne, who expected so much of his youngest son. But for Francis, the convert to Christianity, the most important figure was Jesus Christ, as shown him in the Gospels and interpreted in the light of the Holy Spirit.

In second place came Mary, not as an object of devotion, but as someone with an essential and specific role in his journey. In contrast to the majority of founders and foundresses, Francis did not propose any special devotion to his missionaries or directees. For him, the Immaculate Heart of Mary represented: “the perfect model of apostolic zeal, always full of the Holy Spirit”, “the abundant and always available source from which we should draw on God’s graces with the greatest of confidence”.

Frequently in his writings he refers to God: God’s will; God’s glory; God’s grace; God’s presence etc.; but the title “Father” does not flow easily from his pen. The image we have of God the Father is based on the experience we have, in our infancy, of our own earthly father. So, given the experience he had of the rabbi, it is not surprising that Francis unconsciously avoided giving the name “Father” to the loving and merciful God he met at the moment of his baptism. Indeed we frequently read in his writings phrases like: “We do all for the glory of Our Savior and his holy Mother” (ND, I, p. 674).
Francis’ desire was to live always in God’s presence in a union he called contemplative during the time of individual prayer, and active or practical in the midst of apostolic activities. It was this original type of union that he encouraged in his directees, confreres and missionaries. Practicing this, the missionary would always be in the presence of God, consciously or unconsciously, and in contact with His will. The result in his own case was such a great confidence in God’s love that it was easy for him to place himself totally in His hands and entrust to Him the success or failure of his plans and activities. To place all in the hands of God did not mean letting life run without any planning. On the contrary, it was to discern and plan to the extent this was humanly possible, but to leave the results in God’s hands, sometimes against all human reasoning and advice. Such abandonment is only possible for someone who has had a very strong experience of God’s love for him. It demands great attention to the happenings and events of life, and a radical abdication of control over one’s own life and that of others. The attitude of “let it happen” or “may it be done” resists the subtle temptation to control God. It demands an acceptance of the provisional, the new, the unexpected, and a relativizing of all, except for the single absolute, God and His reign.

The rule of the new Congregation, drawn up by Francis in Rome and presented by him to the Vatican, was a “Provisional Rule”. He always underlined that the details would need to be modified with constant reference to different times and circumstances.

“This rule is called ‘Provisional’, because experience may bring different modifications regarding the external behavior and the means to be used in the salvation of souls. But the kernel of the Rule, what it says about the spirit of the Congregation, should not be changed”.

“In order to achieve a stable result, it is necessary that a vision of the future governs the projects and a perspective of time the execution of the details — things that demand great patience and perseverance”.

For him all should be simple, practical and peaceful, as was his own relationship with Jesus and Mary. There are many examples of this in practice: he did not oblige nor encourage his directees or missionaries to follow any one of the traditional methods of prayer - lectio divina, the exercises of Saint Ignatius, the method of San Sulpice, the rosary, novenas etc. In prayer, as in all our attitudes, activities and understanding, we should, according to him, be open to the new, because in the new is the movement of the Holy Spirit, Who is “always renewing the face of the earth”. When he speaks of renunciation, he is not thinking of fasting or the rejection of pleasure. The most difficult renunciation is of
The most difficult renunciation is of our own will, of our attachment to what is already known, of our certainties. Renunciation implies also compassion, letting go of our judgments of ourselves and of others. It implies accepting as gift our own limits, the limits of others and the limits of our God, pardoning and being pardoned, seeing the good and not the bad in others, the seeds of the divine where the world only sees weakness and depravation.

“Let God act according to His wish. Act always with peace, grace and gentleness of heart. Try to remain in peace, in order to arrive at complete abandonment in His hands”. “Don’t be surprised if you commit faults. Don’t revolt against yourself. Allow yourself to be the subject of these, while God’s wishes to leave you so. What do you gain by being disgusted, disheartened and angry with yourself and your defects? Surrender yourself into the hands of God and abandon yourself to His pleasure”. “Why do you always reprove yourself, when the good God does not?”

Footnotes
1 Presentation originally given by the author to a gathering of missionaries of the Spiritan family in Brazil, 2003
Maria Jesús de Souza
Born in Brazil, Maria de Souza discovered the Spiritan Congregation some 15 years ago. She now lives as a lay Spiritan in Bolivia, together with two professed Spiritans, sharing in their community life and in their ministry among the poor on the outskirts of the city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra.

(Trans. T. Hickey, C.S.Sp.)

From Brazil to Bolivia
A Journey of Discovery

Background
In these few words I wish to share with you a little of my personal history, and my life and vocation as a lay missionary, a life given to God over the past 15 years.

I come from a typical Brazilian family, made up of seven members, my father Carloto, my mother Maria Ana, and my four siblings, Terezina, Maria Aparecida, Antonio and José Gregorio. I have a niece, Lorena, and a nephew, Joao Guilherme. My parents were very important in my life and in the lives of my brothers and sisters; this is true especially of my mother who had to take responsibility for all of us in the absence of my father, as he died when we were all very young. My mother brought up our family with firmness and love. She educated us in a life of Christian faith and in our duties to God; she also taught us our responsibilities to ourselves and to others. It was here that my commitment to the Church was born and that I came to know the meaning of a human and Christian vocation.

Discovering the Spiritan Congregation.
My first contact with the Spiritans was in 1991 in the city of Vilhena/Rondonia, in the north of Brazil. At that time I belonged to the religious congregation of the Missionary Servants of the Holy Spirit. I was sent to work in a parish where I met the Spiritans, Fr. Joao Chiuzo and Fr. Gumercindo Pedro de Oliveira. It was my first missionary experience.

As a pastoral team we worked closely together, sharing our different duties in a spirit of fraternity, friendship and co-responsibility. Their way of being attracted me a lot...

As a pastoral team we worked closely together, sharing our different duties in a spirit of fraternity, friendship and co-responsibility. It was here that I really came to know the Spiritan family, its founders, its mission, its charism and spirituality. Their way of being attracted me a lot, the way they lived, the way they did ministry, their relationship with the people and the way they received others. This shared experience was something invaluable for the entire pastoral team, but particularly so for me as it was the beginning of growing friendship with the Congregation.

Caught up in this dynamic parish life, I could never have foreseen the changes that lay ahead of me. In 1993, in my fourth year of temporary vows, after a long period of necessary discernment,
I left religious life and the congregation to which I belonged to live as a layperson. However, I remained on in the same parish and I continued to share the pastoral work of the Spiritans. In 1994 I accepted an invitation to participate in a meeting with the Brazilian Spiritan Provincial Council. Together with another lay Spiritan, Lucia Guimaraes, who is now working in Puerto Rico, we began the initial steps of forming a group of lay Spiritans. After a series of initial meetings the lay Spiritan group began to grow in strength and enthusiasm. Today we form a group involved in a wide variety of ways of living the lay Spiritan vocation.

Toward the end of the 300th anniversary of the founding of the Congregation, the Spiritan Generalate, along with the Province of Brazil, the International Groups of Mexico and Paraguay and the Irish District in Brazil, decided to take on the challenge of opening a new mission in Latin America. Bolivia was chosen for our new commitment and we took on a mission on the periphery of the large city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra. After having shared work for twelve years with the Spiritans in the parish I mentioned above, I was invited by the Spiritan Major Superiors of Latin America to join the team for the new missionary project.

This invitation was like a gift from God and from the Spiritans. I feel that it was a sign of mutual trust, of openness to the present and to the future – both on the part of the Congregation for inviting me to join in this new venture and on my own part for accepting the call to contribute and cooperate in the mission of the Spiritans.

Living the Spiritan Charism Today
As a lay missionary I feel much joy and contentment sharing the missionary work of my brother Spiritans in this country with all of its cultural diversity, richness and challenges. I live in the same community with two Spiritan priests. Coincidentally, one is Fr. Joao Chiuzo with whom I worked in 1991 and 1992 when I first came to know the Spiritan Congregation. The other priest is Fr. Leonardo de Silva Costa with whom I also worked formerly in Brazil. We all live together in the same house, sharing community life, prayer times, reflection times, recreational activities and pastoral commitments in the parish and in the Archdiocese. The situation on the outskirts of the city where we live calls out for our Spiritan charism and mission; of this I am certain. It challenges us to welcome the people with patience, openness, compassion and fidelity, but above all with love and devotion.
The most important thing is to be present, which means bringing hope, support, a sense of closeness, friendship and understanding. It also very often entails giving spiritual, social and concrete material help.

After having completed three years in the mission in Bolivia I have renewed my commitment here for three more years. I feel warmly welcomed by the Bolivian people and by my Spiritan confreres. This strengthens me in following Jesus Christ, and in the life and mission that I share with my brothers and sisters.

There is much that I could share about my experiences and my missionary journey but I would like to conclude by simply expressing my gratitude for the invitation to put a little of my personal story in writing. I am certain that there are many who still have to discover the Spiritan family, the richness of our charism and spirituality and the call to share in our mission. I encourage the multiplication of this type of shared missionary experience that brings together the richness of consecrated religious life with that of the lay life.

The challenge is great but God realizes great things when we open ourselves to his call: “Have no fear”.

Maria Jesús de Souza

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Spiritan Horizons seeks to further research into the history, spirituality and tradition of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit. In line with the aims of the Center for Spiritan Studies at Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, its overall goal is to promote creative fidelity to the Spiritan charism in the contemporary world. The journal combines articles of a scholarly nature with others emphasizing the lived experience of the Spiritan charism today. Special attention is given in each issue to the Spiritan education ethos, in view of the university context in which the journal is published.

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