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Introduction

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 that seeks to further the Center’s aims. The journal combines articles of a scholarly nature with others related to the praxis of the Spiritan charism in a wide variety of cultural settings. 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 third edition, Christian de Mare explores the religious, social, and political context in which Claude-François Poullart des Places lived and the factors that shaped his vocation. David. L. Smith investigates the spirituality of Francis Libermann in terms of its constituent components, underscoring the centrality of the notion of presence, while Donald J. Nesti reflects on Libermann’s Jewish background and its enduring influence after his conversion to the Christian faith. Tony Geoghegan examines the Apostolic Life in the doctrine of Libermann, noting its relevance for today in a world where so many seek integration; Cornelius van der Poel looks at the significance of consecration to the apostolate in Libermann’s writings and in contemporary Spiritan life. Frans Timmermans, former Superior General, takes us through the exciting journey of renewal that began with Vatican II, its impact on the Spiritan Congregation, and the developments that took place during his period in office (1974-1986). Matthew V. Bender, African History professor at The College of New Jersey, analyzes the missionary strategy of the Spiritans among the Chagga people on Mount Kilimanjaro, and the extraordinary transformation to which it led, between 1892 and 1953. François Nicolas explores the educational legacy of Blessed Daniel Brottier, director of l’Œuvre des Orphelins Apprentis d’Auteuil from 1923-1936, and Seán Kealy reflects on the motto of Duquesne University, “It is the Spirit who gives life,” from the perspective of current Johannine scholarship. Guy Tapin introduces us to an innovative approach to continuing the Spiritan heritage in the wake of the transition from Spiritan to lay administration at the In’Afu Center in Quebec. Chibuike Ojilere from Nigeria, drawing on the significance of his Igbo name, shares with us his personal story as an African missionary in Asia and Spiritan poet Cothrai Gogan muses on the sentiments that surround the death of a missionary in his native land, far from the people among whom he lived and worked.
CLAUDE-FRANÇOIS POULLART DES PLACES
THE SHAPING OF A VOCATION

On May 27th, 1703, on the feast of Pentecost, a small group of theological students met together in the church of Saint Etienne des Grès in the heart of the Latin Quarter of Paris. Their leader was Claude Poullart des Places, aged 24, who was also a young student of theology. In the side-chapel of Notre Dame de Bonne Délivrance, a well-known center of Marian pilgrimage,1 the little group consecrated themselves to the Holy Spirit, under the protection of Mary Immaculate.

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.2

This new community of the Holy Spirit was the origin of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit into which the young congregation of Francis Libermann would be absorbed 145 years later, on September 26th, 1848. In 2003, we celebrated the 300th anniversary of the original foundation; we will soon be commemorating the tercentenary of the death of the young founder on October 2nd, 1709.

BRITTANY AND RENNES
Claude-François Poullart des Places was born at Rennes in Brittany on February 26th, 1679, of François Claude Poullart des Places and Jeanne Le Meneust de la Vieuxville, an old Breton family. At that time, Brittany was one of the so-called “Provinces with Provincial Estates.” It had been attached to the Crown of France in 1532, some years after the marriage of Anne of Brittany to Charles VIII in 1491. It enjoyed a degree of independence that was somewhat precarious, above all in the reign of the absolute monarch, Louis XIV (1638-1715). Brittany had its own parliament from 1554; situated in a luxurious palace at Rennes since 1665, it had absorbed many of the aristocracy of Brittany. M. des Places was no longer a member since he was unable to produce his letters of nobility, which had gone astray a few years previously; he was greatly mortified by this turn of events and dreamt of the day when he would once again enter the ranks of the nobility.

Under the Ancien Régime,3 society was made up of three social orders: the Third Estate - dominated by the bourgeoisie - the
nobility (Second Estate), and the clergy (First Estate). The nobility and the clergy had accumulated many privileges, the most notorious being their exemption from paying taxes. At the other end of the social scale, the rural population (85% of the total at the end of the 17th century) and the ordinary people living in towns had no rights or political representation whatsoever. This was also the case with the “lower clergy” in the countryside. The bulk of the population was extremely poor and people were lucky to survive the rigors of the climate and the consequences of a social order built on inequality.

M. des Places belonged to the upper middle class of business men. As part of the landed gentry, an administrator of ecclesiastical goods, and a trader with the help of his wife, he eventually became a high official in the economic affairs of Brittany when the parliament returned to Rennes in 1690, after 15 years of exile in Vannes as a punishment for its spirit of independence. Young Claude was 11 years of age when his father was at the height of his career, nursing the hope that, if his son became a councilor in parliament, the whole family would once again be ranked among the nobility.

**The re-evangelization of Brittany**

Brittany had been evangelized a very long time before, but by the end of the 16th century it had reverted to a faith that was mingled with Celtic traditional beliefs. Two priests resolved to restore this country to a faith and a practice that were more in line the Gospels. Firstly, there was Michel Le Nobleitz (1577-1652), usually known as Don Mikel, who had received a solid priestly formation from the Jesuits at Bordeaux and Agen. He started work in the 1620s and for 30 years he founded missions amongst the rural population of Armorique. A rigorous ascetic, an untiring preacher who lived only for the Gospel, he was greatly loved by the poor because of his evident charity towards them.

For the last 10 years of his apostolic life, he was helped by Julien Maunoir, a Jesuit, who continued the work of Don Mikel until his own death in 1683. The work of renewal of these two great Breton missionaries, which continued for more than 60 years, eventually included several members of the diocesan clergy, as well as Jesuits and Eudists. It was highly successful. They placed great emphasis on the holiness of priests, on openness of heart to the Holy Spirit, on devotion to Mary, on service to the poor, on the purity of the faith received from the Apostles, on a certain distance to be kept from the influence of the world, and on the vocation of every Christian to seek perfection. Claude Poullart des Places grew up in this climate of Christian renewal and his parents were also much influenced by it.
Since there was such a need of good-living priests who would preach sound doctrine, the first step was to ensure that they were well trained. The situation at the time, above all in the countryside, was lamentable. One of these Breton missionaries, Jacques Alloth Doranleau, describes it graphically in “A letter to the Archbishops and Bishops of France regarding the best education that they can give to their clerics.” He says that many of the lower clergy had neither studied theology nor been trained in their duties. The main reason for this was the great poverty of the rural families. At that time, bishops did not pay for the education of their future priests so vocations could not flourish in situations of such dire poverty. Doranleau saw only one possible solution to this state of affairs which was hampering the success of the interior missions: to establish communities for poor students where they could be prepared for their pastoral and spiritual tasks free of charge.

The convictions of Doranleau were shared by a colleague of the Brittany missions, Fr. Bellier, who set up a small house at Rennes for the education of poor theological students. Bellier persuaded some of the students of St. Thomas College, run by the Jesuits, to help him. Amongst these students were Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort and Claude Poullart des Places, who was five years his junior. He introduced them to the Hospital of Saint Yves, which looked after the destitute, and undoubtedly also to the establishment that he ran for poor students.

Theological and political movements in the Church of France

The origins of Gallicanism can be traced back to the stormy relationships between the French monarchy and the papacy in the 14th century. The movement insisted on the freedom of the Church in France from papal interference and the superiority of the temporal power of the king in the realm of his own jurisdiction. The kings of France claimed the right to supervise the Church (“regalism”), and the appointments of bishops and abbots were done by election. Finally, by the concordat of 1516, the king himself designated the candidates and presented them to the Pope for canonical investiture. It was Bossuet who gave to Gallicanism its established form in the “Four Articles,” drawn up in 1682 after a General Assembly of the clergy of France:

The authority of Popes is purely spiritual, so kings cannot be subject to them; the spiritual power of the Popes is limited by the General Councils and, in France, by the customs of the Kingdom and of the Church; the Pope has a ‘principal role’ in questions of faith, but his judgment is only ‘un-reformable’ when it is confirmed by the Church.
Despite a strong reaction from the Pope in 1693, these articles were compulsorily taught in the faculties and seminaries of France. They produced some fierce theological opposition, especially from the Jesuits (who were also confessors to the kings of France!). Two academic establishments in Paris symbolized the depth of this tension: the Sorbonne and the College of Clermont (also known as Collège Louis-le-Grand) – a house of studies of the Jesuits which was not allowed to award university degrees to its students. The Sorbonne, on the other hand, was the surest path to a glittering career in the higher clergy of the kingdom.

The roots of **Jansenism** are to be found in a problem that theologians had sought unsuccessfully to solve over hundreds of years: How can one reconcile the freedom of God when he gives grace and the freedom of human beings when they respond to it? Is God subject to the freedom of his creatures? One of those who sought an answer was the Bishop of Ypres (in present-day Belgium), Cornelius Jansenius (1585-1638). In his interpretation of the thought of St. Augustine in his book *Augustinus* (1640), Jansen came up with the following formula: Sinful man (as a result of original sin) has completely lost his liberty, so he cannot reach salvation except through a gratuitous gift of God. Therefore, some people are predestined to know the life of God but others are not. This theological position, totally denying all freedom of choice to every human being (and therefore all control over his or her ultimate destiny), gave rise to a very lively debate. It sounded like the teaching of the reformers of the preceding century, so the Jesuits managed to get it condemned by Pope Innocent X in 1653. Because of its echoes of the protestant reformers (above all, the Calvinists), Jansenism inevitably also took on a political importance in an age where the religion of the person in power was automatically seen as the religion of a particular country: “*Cuius regio, eius religio.*”

The controversy became increasingly fierce as the Jansenist position was adopted by the University of Louvain, as well as the Parisian monastery of Port Royal, directed by Antoine Arnauld (1612-1694), and consequences were drawn in regard to the fundamental unworthiness of the Christian in the practice of the faith and the sacraments. Jansenists were ascetical and rigorous in the sphere of morality, and deeply pessimistic in their appraisal of human works; they did not dare to raise their eyes to the Lord and they received communion rarely. Their conviction of human corruption stifled any trusting openness to the mercy of God.

The social scandals, typified by Louis XIV and the private life of Louis XV (1710-1774), gave some justification to the Jansenist austerities of Arnauld, who was joined by Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) in a combined attack on the Jesuits and their humanistic
and optimistic view of human liberty. Neither the condemnation of the Popes\textsuperscript{10} nor the violence of Louis XIV against the Port Royal faction did anything to calm the conflict. Amongst the episcopacy, the clergy, the aristocracy, and the bourgeoisie, many were converted to a Jansenistic view of the misery of human life. Jansenism remained an influence throughout the 18\textsuperscript{th} and 19\textsuperscript{th} centuries.

The Jesuits were in the forefront of the struggle against Gallicanism and Jansenism. They educated a large number of young Christians in a respect for the legitimate authority of the successor of Peter, a trust in the capacity of men and women to receive the grace of God, and an esteem for the cultural activities of the human spirit. Amongst their many students was Claude Poullart des Places, a pupil at their colleges of Rennes and Caen (in Normandy). They also gave him spiritual guidance and education at the Collège de Clermont (Louis-le-Grand), where he completed his theological studies.

**The Exercises of Saint Ignatius**

Drawn up in the form of a travel diary by Saint Ignatius Loyola (1491-1556),\textsuperscript{11} the *Spiritual Exercises* give an account of his own experiences and spiritual journey.\textsuperscript{12} They became very well known and practiced and are laid out in the form of a retreat. They gradually lead the retreatant to understand the place that God should have in his/her life, the responses he/she has given to the call of the love of God, and the conversion necessary and the steps to be taken to bring this about. Their impact is strengthened by the fact that they have been personally lived by Ignatius. They are still a very efficacious way of leading somebody to the Gospel or of strengthening those who wish to live their lives by it.

By 1701, Claude Poullart des Places was in his 23\textsuperscript{rd} year. He had acquired a solid literary education and was a skilled speaker. He had completed two years of legal studies at Nantes as well as a year's practical introduction to business management by his father. The time had now come to put this long preparation to good use and to take decisions about the future. It was foreseen that he would enter the parliament of Brittany as a councilor, a post acquired for him by his father, but when he put on the official robes that his mother had prepared for him, he felt a sudden revulsion for continuing down that route. He needed to come to a decision, so he decided to place himself humbly before God and to follow an accompanied retreat.

At Rennes, as in many towns in France, the Jesuits had a retreat house called *Marnesa*, the name of the place in Spain where Ignatius had started his own spiritual journey. Claude went there...
and was guided by a Jesuit whom he undoubtedly knew already. The retreat followed the classical path of the Exercises: a first part aimed at the conversion of the retreatant, and a second in which a choice was made regarding future commitment, according to the criteria that had emerged from the conversion.

Claude has left us his notes of these two joined retreats, which record the conversations he had with his guide and his own reactions to them. The title he gives to his first retreat is, “Reflections on the truths of religion made during a retreat by someone thinking about a conversion.” It is in a notebook of 34 pages, written with great care in a clear hand. The themes follow carefully the Exercises but the reactions of the Claude are personal. The meditations on sin and the terrible punishment of God (including a frightening description of hell) do not make too much impression on him. Claude concentrates above all on the experience of the love of God:

You sought me, Lord, and I fled from you. You had endowed me with reason but I would not use it… Did I not deserve to be utterly abandoned by you, to cease being helped by you and to be punished instead?… How kind you are, my Savior! All you want is my conversion, not my death. You always treat me with kindness, as though you needed me. You almost seem to enjoy overcoming a heart as cold as mine.

This rediscovery of the patient love of God leads Claude to a radical conversion, with a desire to love him in return by proclaiming the goodness of the Lord to those who do not know him:

I want to make myself worthy of your love, whatever the cost…I will make you known to people who are ignorant of you… Only God loves me sincerely and is solicitous for my welfare. If I please him, I am exceedingly happy; but if I disappoint him, I am the most wretched person alive. If I live in a state of grace, I lack nothing; if I lose it, I have lost everything.

All that remains is to continue with his reflection until he can find a future which fits in with his conversion. He does that in another notebook of 19 pages which he entitles, “Choice of a State of Life.” It is a work of discernment. “I shall begin by examining my temperament”; then he examines his “inclinations and repugnances” in the context of “a great indifference for all the states of life.”
At the end of this long search, and with the help of his director, Claude decides to become a priest in the service of his diocese of Rennes. It was a huge disappointment for his father and his plans to re-enter the ranks of the nobility. In October 1701, Claude re-entered Collège Louis-le-Grand to prepare himself for the priesthood, under the guidance of the Jesuits, renouncing thereby a distinguished career in the higher clergy.

Claude Poullart des Places was now completely detached from his ambitions for glory and acclaim. He was ready to answer the call that the Lord would give him to dedicate himself to the service of the poor scholars who sought a solid formation to serve poor and abandoned Christian communities.

Footnotes

1 The pilgrimage of Notre Dame de Bonne Délivrance had been well known in Paris since the 13th century. St. Dominic, St. Thomas Aquinas, and St. Albert the Great went there frequently, as did many other well-known personalities. The statue of the Virgin that was venerated there dated from the 14th century; it can be seen today at Neuilly, near Paris, in the Mother House of the Sisters of St. Thomas de Villeneuve.

2 Extract from a C.S.Sp. register which has been lost but which was copied in “Gallia Christiana” in 1744.

3 The administrative organization in France up to the French Revolution in 1789.


5 Cf. Dictionnaire de Spiritualité, art. « Julien Maunoir ».

6 M. Poullart des Places was a member of a spiritual association called The Assembly of Friends.


8 A good number of students who lacked the money for study offered their services to parish priests in exchange for lessons in theology.

9 This was formulated at the Peace of Augsburg (September 25th, 1555) between the Catholic and Lutheran traditions.

10 Above all, the Bull Unigenitus Dei Filius of September 8th, 1713, which condemned 101 Jansenist propositions, drawn from the works of Pasquier Quesnel.

11 The founder of the Company of Jesus (1534).

12 Two years before his death, Ignatius was asked about the origins of his Exercises. “He answered that it was not written at one time. Whenever he noticed things in his own soul that could be useful to others, he wrote them down,” recorded Fr. Luis Gonçalves da Camera in 1554. St. Ignatius was very anxious that his Exercises should receive the approval of the Holy See.

13 The original documents, in Claude’s own handwriting, are to be found in the General Archives of the Spiritans in Paris. The critical text, presented by Joseph Lécuyer, C.S.Sp., is published in “Claude-

14 Ibid., pp. 299-311.
LIBERMANN’S SPIRITUALITY:
A SPIRITUALITY OF PRESENCE

“Let us come into the Lord’s presence singing for joy.”

INTRODUCTION

It was a crisp September afternoon in 1946 when a young fourteen-year-old first set foot upon the beautiful grounds of Holy Ghost Apostolic College. Youth had made the decision of a lifetime, and the next day I found myself kneeling at morning prayer in the chapel of the Holy Ghost Fathers’ Minor Seminary in Cornwells Heights PA, praying in unison with a hundred other young men. “Let us place ourselves in the presence of God and humbly adore Him.” Over the next thirteen years of our Spiritan formation for the priesthood, that holy invocation would greet the dawn of our every day. At the time, we had no way of knowing that these words echoed the words of the original founder of the Congregation of the Holy Ghost. Nearly 250 years before we had even arrived on the scene, Claude Poullart des Places had prayed, “Let my heart and soul be filled with you alone, O God. Keep me always in your presence.”

In the 19th century, Fr. Libermann would continue this Spiritan doctrine of the divine presence with his notion of “practical union with God.” This expression appears only toward the end of his life in his Instructions to Missionaries (1851), but it does not seem to be in any way a new doctrine, but rather an expression that sums up his entire spiritual teaching. “Action or practical union [with God] consists in divesting oneself of natural impressions to open one’s soul to divine impressions … Then we have a superabundance of truth…we see the things of God effortlessly and clearly, because our soul is in its element, the divine light” (cited in Gilbert, 1983, pp.99-100). Heedful of the busy and difficult lives of his missionaries in Africa, Libermann expands upon his notion of practical union with God: “One can have distractions in prayer without ceasing to be united with God…Our whole being must be united to God, and that can only be done by practical union” (cited in Gilbert, p.100).

Libermann’s fascination with ‘union with God’ stretches back to the early days of his own seminary training. In a letter to Father François Liévin (1/22/1837), he writes,

Pay close attention to the great principle which was the constant theme of your conversations at St. Sulpice, namely...
peace and union with God, based upon complete denial of self and the intimate knowledge and conviction of the exceeding greatness of our misery and weakness. Think back on this great principle constantly.

Don’t become discouraged if you find yourself oppressed with all kinds of weaknesses and imperfections. On the contrary, the poorer and smaller you see that you are, the more you ought to place your trust and confidence in God alone. The moment has arrived, dear friend, when you must come to a complete surrender of yourself to the hands of God. (Libermann, 1963, p. 16)

Libermann always understood this union with God to be intimately related to the Holy Spirit and to the apostolic life. To express the inextricable bonding of the two, he once wrote to his brother Samson and his wife, “Give him [Holy Spirit] freedom [to act in you] and you will see the great things he will work in you” (cited in Malinowski, n.d., p.39).

When we unpack all of these texts, we discover that Libermann’s spirituality is above all a **spirituality of presence**. We also detect within the texts four basic constituents of his spirituality. Each one in its own unique way contributes to the co-constitution of the gestalt and they all cohere to form a network of reciprocal personal relationships. In every true gestalt, the whole shapes each constituent, each constituent shapes the whole, and each constituent exerts a formative influence upon each other to form together a gestalt of personal presence. In an authentic spiritual gestalt, an inexorable logic demands the total presence of the whole in each and every one of the parts (see Gurwitsch, 1966, p.26). It follows inevitably that if one constituent changes or disappears the total gestalt is essentially changed. For this reason each of the four constituents must be operative simultaneously to constitute an authentic Spiritan spirituality. Merleau-Ponty (1962) calls this type of phenomenon “a relationship of reciprocal expression”(p.160). The four constituents of Libermann’s spiritual doctrine are:

1. **Availability to the Holy Spirit**—Evangelical Availability;
2. **Abandonment**—Releasement;
3. **God is all; Man is nothing**—The Decentered Ego;
4. **Practical Union with God**—Union in Action.
1. Availability to the Holy Spirit—Evangelical Availability

In the spirit of a true phenomenologist, Koren (1990) invites us to attend to the lived experience of the Spiritans themselves, and not so much to theory, if we wish to discover what constitutes a Spiritan spirituality. In this vein, he writes,

*It seems to me that 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)

Koren describes two profiles of this single availability. The one profile reflects our total availability before the Lord with our hearts wide open to be fully available to him. He describes this existential disposition as our personal holiness; an inclination of our total being to live out in our daily lives the words that Jesus taught us: *“Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done.”* The second profile reflects our availability to be at the service of others. Jesus spoke of these two profiles of one reality when he gave us the great commandment to love God above all things and to love our neighbor as ourselves. Koren goes on to explain how this twofold reality enfolds a double dimension: the life of prayer, which is our personal union with God, and our life of action to transform the world for Christ’s people. Our work of faith at the altar must always overflow into the public square. *Lex credendi/orandi* must always inspire *lex operandi.* According to Koren, our availability before God in our life of prayer and our availability for others in a life of service forge a unity of our religious and apostolic life. This double reality has been beautifully captured in the words of Jean Gay:

*Listening calmly to what the Holy Spirit has to tell us and living intensely the love of Christ so as to be close to the poor – this is the essence of Père Libermann, the summary of his spirituality.* (cited in de Mare, 2002, p.8)

In this text we find both a spiritual and material form of poverty embodied in Libermann’s spirituality. There is first of all availability to the guidance of the Holy Spirit in our daily lives, allowing ourselves to be open and to be led by the inspiration of the Spirit. Hand in hand with this spiritual poverty goes a material poverty, lived out in a lifestyle of simplicity and frugality with a moderate attitude toward the necessities of life. With regard to our service to the poor, Kritzer (2006) informs us that in the context of Jewish traditions and attitudes -- where Libermann...
was so comfortably at home-- charitable giving is essential to ethical behavior. She writes,

The word tzedakah, which is usually translated "charity," is derived from a Hebrew root that means righteousness, justice, or fairness. The central attitude is that food, shelter and other basic needs are a human right; giving food to the hungry is not doing them a favor but rectifying an injustice by giving them something they should have had in the first place. (p.8)

Echoing the sentiments of Libermann, Kritzer reminds us that, in Reform Judaism, charity and justice are situated in "the larger context of tikkum olam or the 'repair of the world'" (p.8). Where there is no justice there can be no true charity. Where there is no charity, there can be no true justice.

Libermann’s spiritual poverty found expression in his radical openness to the world. He never believed in dividing up the world into “we are good and they are evil.” He rejected the religious prejudice that all the angels sang in the church choirs and the demons slept on the streets of the world. Koren reminds us that Libermann distrusted practical plans that were worked out in ivory towers, “because they always contain speculative elements… and experience is lacking.” He wants his men to avoid measuring everything by fixed ideas… (because) one does not acquire any true experience in such a way” (1990, p.23). This radical poverty of spirit immunizes his spiritual doctrine against all forms of rigidity. Koren interprets Libermann’s “poverty of spirit” as “openness to the world and to the experience of concrete life” (1990, p. 22).

Libermann speaks as loudly and clearly to us today as he spoke to his men after the people’s revolution of 1848 in France. At the time, while many priests, bishops, and even Rome feared the new democracy introduced by the revolution, Libermann encouraged his men to get out and vote. He wrote,

The misfortune of the clergy has always been that they remained stuck in notions of the past…Any attempt to cling fearfully to ‘the good old times’…nullifies our efforts …Let us therefore frankly and simply accept the new order and bring to it the spirit of the Gospel. (cited in Koren, p.22)

Without doubt, Libermann would have agreed wholeheartedly with Jaroslav Pelikan who once said, “Tradition is the living faith of the dead. Traditionalism is the dead faith of the living.”
Libermann rooted his spirituality of presence in availability to the Holy Spirit and evangelical availability. He never ceased to remind us of the intimate presence of the Holy Spirit active in our lives: “Pay particular attention to the Holy Spirit dwelling personally in the core of your being” (cited in Malinowski, 5/1/1998).

When God sent the angel Gabriel to Mary at Nazareth he announced God's presence to her: “Rejoice, O highly favored daughter! The Lord is with you.” When the angel leaves her, she has agreed to give flesh to “the Son of God.” She has assumed responsibility for the presence of God in her womb and in our world. In the case of Mary, making herself available to the Holy Spirit, her “yes” becomes “an act of self-presentation to the God who is already present” (Westphal, 2005, p.21). One of the Son's names shall be Emmanuel, God-with-us; God present among us.

When we hear God speaking his Word to Mary, we hear echoes of the Gospel of John. “In the beginning was the Word; the Word was in God's presence, and the Word was God…whatever came to be in him found life, life for the light of man…The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (John1:1,4,14). Commenting upon this text, McKendrick (2003) writes,

> In the beginning of this Gospel is the Word. Almost immediately the Word is Light [and Life] …and soon too it becomes Flesh…, by which the Word might be both heard and seen. Flesh makes possible the shining of light, the sounding of the word, in the world. (p. 105)

The Word, the Light, the Life, the Flesh - they all express God's presence among us. The proclamation of Isaiah that Jesus chose for his own self-definition fully expresses the unity of Libermann's spirituality of presence - both an availability to the Holy Spirit and an availability to the world. When Jesus stood up in the synagogue of his home town of Nazareth to proclaim God's Word, he took the scroll and read,

> The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring the good news to the afflicted. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives, sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim a year of favor from the Lord. (Luke 4:18-19)
It is not accidental that this text opens the Spiritan Rule of Life. It is the perfect expression of Libermann's spirituality of presence, of availability to the Holy Spirit and to all the afflicted of the world. Pope Benedict robustly affirmed the unity of this double presence when he met with the Episcopate of South America and the Caribbean in May of 2007. In his address, he reminded them that “the preferential option for the poor is implicit in the Christological faith in God who became poor for us in order to enrich us with his poverty.” Still the question remains: Even though God is always present to us, how do we become present to him? When God calls us by name, how are we enabled to respond? What is required of us to be able to say, “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening”? Libermann does not hesitate to answer, abandonment.

2. ABANDONMENT / RELEASEMENT

Our personal availability to the Holy Spirit, who speaks to our hearts in the concrete experience of our daily life, springs forth from what Libermann called abandonment. Jean Gay, quoting Libermann’s close friend, Frederick Le Vavasseur, informs us that for Libermann,

Abandonment is the perfection of patience. When one has reached this state, the person rests in God, gives himself up completely and no longer wants to act of himself. He allows himself to be totally directed by God, according to his wishes. It is a state of continuous availability. (cited in de Mare, 2002, p.185; emphasis mine)

Libermann’s own description of abandonment reveals its major constituent to be a total detachment from bondage to any created thing, a liberation inspired totally and only by love of God and neighbor. The following passage from Libermann’s own pen provides us with his personal understanding of abandonment as he exercised it in his own hectic and burdensome daily life:

Our Lord wishes our business to drag on. Every step I take must have its hitches and delays, so that I learn to abandon everything into his hands and rest in him in everything... Providence alone has guided us... Christian perfection [consists] in a union of perfect love with our Lord, founded on a complete renouncement of ourselves, our self-love, our will, our ease, our satisfaction, and everything we prize. (cited in Gilbert, 1983, pp.120-121)

In this text he speaks of “to abandon,” which means to give up something completely, to relinquish, or to ban totally from one’s life. He also uses the word “renouncement,” which means to
Abandonment/releasement is above all a liberation in the service of a free(ed) spirit.

... all species of fanaticism are expressions of a totalization of one aspect of reality.

take back or cast off. Sometimes the word *detachment* is used to express the sense of unfasten or disconnect. Each case suggests some type of dis-engagement, de-coupling, in essence, a re-release from some form of bondage. Abandonment/releasement is above all a liberation in the service of a free(ed) spirit.

In the realm of the spirit (Holy Spirit), we might say that abandonment is akin to the philosophical notion of the phenomenological reduction or epoché. In order to see reality clearly, after it has been covered over by familiarity and scientific explanations, we need to question it, even interrogate it. Merleau-Ponty (1962) speaks of our “complicity” with the world. We are so close to our everyday world and so intimately immersed in it that we need a way to stand back from it to see it afresh. The epoché or phenomenological reduction brackets the taken-for-granted world of everyday life. We take a stand back from it and try to see it anew. We then discover how we have even contributed to the co-constitution of our world and how we have become bound to it. To describe this strategy, Merleau-Ponty speaks of the loosening of the threads of consciousness that in an original naiveté bind us to the world (p.xiii). With this approach we can begin to see the structures (not the etiologies) of certain phenomena much more clearly. The very seeing can be liberating.

For instance, with the epoché, we begin to see that all rigid ideologies and all species of fanaticism are expressions of a totalization of one aspect of reality. Strasser (1977) invites us to consider the political or religious fanatic:

> He also sets everything in relation to an ideal which fills him completely and constitutes for him the horizon of all values and meanings. The fanatic considers things and persons…evaluates them according to his totally dominant aim and makes them accordingly into objects of well calculated actions. Of such a man one would say that he has “no heart.” (p. 197)

By absolutizing the partial in place of the whole, we become enslaved and blinded by a species of idolatry. This myopic view of the world permeates all the common “isms,” be it racism, sexism, consumerism, militarism or totalitarianism. On the affective level, in depression, for example, human consciousness bears the world as a crushing and constricting burden and other profiles of the world recede beyond consciousness. In addictions, the totality of the individual’s existence is imprisoned by the ‘drug,’ whatever it may be. In a personal communication,
Father Raymond French, C.S.Sp., has drawn my attention to suicide as perhaps the boundary example of the constriction of consciousness to a hopeless and foreclosed future. It is precisely because humor provides a space, a distance from our ordinary complicity in our world, that we can appreciate it as a saving grace. Abandonment/releasement suspends our ‘complicity’ with the world and, by loosening the threads of our consciousness with the world, liberates us from bondage to any created thing (see Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p.xiii).

I do not wish to suggest that abandonment was for Libermann some type of philosophical methodology or psychological technique; it was not. He did not practice it or promote it in order to produce practical benefits for himself or others. Still, to be docile to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit, to be guided only by Providence, does keep all the reality of our life in proper perspective, *sub aspectu aeternitatis*. Living constantly “in a union of perfect love with our Lord,” nothing could enslave his mind or his heart. As he lay dying, the members of his religious community gathered around his bed and when they recited, “*In manus tuas, Domine, commendo spiritum meum*” [“Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit”], he looked as though he understood (van Kaam, 1959, p.296). That is the ultimate spiritual epoché and the key to his unbounded serenity, joy, and freedom. Libermann’s spiritual doctrine was in no sense relativistic, but it did radically relativize all of temporal reality - time in the light of eternity. This did not mean that his spirituality was in any sense a disembodied way to God. On the contrary, the gift of the Spiritan epoché he bestowed upon us sharpens our vision to see our world through the eyes of the poor. Father Joseph Maier, S.J.,(Anderson, 2007) tells us that St. Ignatius once wrote to a community of Jesuits in Padua to remind them that when we identify with the poor we identity with Jesus. Of course, he was merely reiterating the point that Jesus himself had made when he told his disciples, “I assure you, as often as you did it for one of my least brothers, you did it for me” (Mt. 25:40). In consequence, the ‘epoché of the poor’ enables us to unmask the political and social structures that oppress the poor. Our taken-for-granted vision of the world is then disrupted, and we see the world as the poor see it: a world where they are hungry and no one gives them to eat; thirsty and no one gives them to drink; hungry and no one clothes them. To identify with Jesus is to see afresh through the eyes of the poor. At this juncture, availability to the Holy Spirit and evangelical availability embrace.
Libermann’s spiritual wisdom of abandonment resonates with other expressions of renouncement, both practical and philosophical. For example, in the Twelve Step program of A.A., members are encouraged to “let go, and let God”; to “get out of the driver’s seat” and to “turn their wills and lives over to the care of God.” Even though abandonment is a profound willingness to allow the Holy Spirit to take over our lives, we do not become passive puppets or will-less automatons. Rather, we actively welcome God into our lives. “Come Holy Spirit fill the hearts of your faithful and enkindle in them the fire of your love.” What we give up for the sake of freedom is our own will-full-ness that always struggles to force the state of affairs.

The German philosopher, Martin Heidegger, uses the word releasement (Gelassenheit) to express the philosophical sense of this phenomenon. At first, he used the word to describe an authentic and free-spirited stance toward the tyranny of technology. In common German usage today, it is most often used to express ‘composure,’ ‘calmness,’ and ‘unconcern.’ In earlier ages, some mystics, including Meister Eckhart, used the word in the sense of ‘letting the world go’ and giving oneself to God. Heidegger (1996) writes,

*Releasement toward things and openness to the mystery belong together. They grant us the possibility of dwelling in the world in a totally different way. They promise us a new ground upon which we can stand and endure in the world of technology without being imperiled by it.* (p.55)

Both Libermann and Heidegger were preoccupied with the values of human freedom and human dignity. They both sought for a way for humanity to escape domination by things and to remain open to ‘the mystery.’ Each one offers a new ground upon which we can stand to discover a possibility of dwelling on this earth in a totally new way. In spite of any differences, we can only marvel that they both insisted that “releasement toward things and openness to the mystery belong together.” For Libermann the mystery was God/the Holy Spirit; for Heidegger it was Being. With the concept of abandonment, Libermann articulated his concern for the liberation of the human spirit from the tyranny of any created thing; Heidegger’s ‘releasement’ expressed his alarm in the face of the tyranny of the spirit of technology. Only releasement can ward off the day of the approaching tide of technological revolution in this atomic age, which according to Heidegger,

…could so captivate, bewitch, dazzle and beguile man that calculative thought may come to be accepted and practiced
as the only way of thinking... Then man would have denied and thrown away his own special nature—that he is a meditative being. Therefore, the issue is of saving man’s essential nature. Therefore, the issue is keeping meditative thinking alive. Yet releasement toward things and openness to the mystery never happen of themselves. They do not befall us accidentally. Both flourish only through persistent, courageous thinking. (p.56)

At the time of Libermann, humanity was not yet faced with the threat of the imperialistic spirit of technology. Though the exploitation of the poor flourished in his time as well as ours, he did not yet have to face the globalized sweat shops or the behemoths of modern agribusinesses that oppress the poor of our day. Libermann would have agreed with Heidegger’s prescription for the salvation of humanity - “releasement toward things and openness to the mystery” - but he would have added to the prescription loving action as well. He had foreseen the necessity of this releasement to the mystery with his notions of availability to the Holy Spirit and evangelical availability to the poor. Though he did not use the language himself, I have no doubt that he would have embraced the notion of a ‘radical de-centering of ego’ as a sine qua non for the very possibility of this double availability.

3. God is all-Man is nothing: The Decentered Ego.

On the last day of January 1852, two days before his death, as they gathered around his bed, his confreres heard Libermann whisper, “God is everything; man is nothing” (cited in van Kaam, p.206). His words strike our modern ears as strange and even somewhat bizarre. To fully appreciate them they must be placed in their proper historical context. Libermann’s age was a time of rationalism. Approximately two hundred years before his death, his fellow countryman, René Descartes (1596-1650), had launched a new philosophy that soon spread throughout France and the rest of Europe. For our purposes, it stands out as notable for several reasons. Since the time of the ancient Greeks, Being had been the central concern of philosophical speculation. During all the Christian centuries prior to Descartes, God had held pride of place. Though Descartes was and remained a faithful Catholic, his new philosophy had two unintended consequences. First of all, with his famous Cogito ergo sum, he shifted the central focus of philosophy from Being/God to human subjectivity. Then, he exiled God from active participation in the daily affairs of humanity by relegating him to a distant point in past time as a first cause. In due time this divine banishment would give rise to
Deism, and among the French intellectual and political leaders rationalism would eventually rule the day.

Historical conditions actually determined that Libermann would be born into a world permeated with French rationalism. Following the turbulent years of the French Revolution of 1789, on November 10, 1793, the French National Convention, at the suggestion of one of its delegates, Chaumette, proclaimed a Goddess of Reason. They chose Thérèse Momoro, the wife of a printer, as the personification of the goddess and she was duly enthroned on the main altar of Notre Dame Cathedral by the freemasons. Imagine the shock to Catholic sensibilities! This event transpired only nine years before Libermann’s birth, on April 12, 1802. When we situate this divinization of reason in the context of Libermann’s Jewish origins, we grasp intuitively what a blasphemy he must have found it to be. To enthrone a human being as the personification of reason on God’s altar was a gross defilement of all that was holy. Gilbert (1983) alerts us to the intrinsic link between Libermann’s Jewish upbringing and ‘God is all’ to “Hear, Israel, the Lord is your God; you will have no other God but him alone.” Gilbert continues,

The expression, man is nothing, is a paradox when one knows the esteem, respect and love that Libermann nourished for people, in particular for the poorest and most abandoned. In fact the axiom wishes to highlight the fact that in the domain of faith and in sharing the life of God human beings are completely dependent on God and are invited to expect and to receive everything from him. In Libermann’s spirituality the expression gives us to understand that the more one leaves place for God the more one finds the way of freedom, peace and limitless happiness. (p. 131)

Faced with a culture that had divinized human reason, Libermann executes a corrective maneuver to put reason in its place – its proper place - and to remind us that it is in God that “we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28).

Intellectual historians are wont to describe three major decenterrings of human consciousness in the course of Western thought. The Copernican revolution displaced the human race from the center of the physical universe. Darwin toppled the human being as king of the jungle, no longer entitled to lay claim to a place at the apex of the biological hierarchy. Finally, Freud shifted the cool rational ego of human consciousness to the seething cauldron of the instinctual unconscious. Humanity had fallen from riches to rags almost overnight. Ever since the
‘Fall,’ various thinkers, especially in the social sciences, have used these three major decenterings to demean the human condition and the nobility and freedom of the human being. Libermann never followed suit. Rather, he often expressed his high regard for his fellow human beings. He once wrote, “The nature you possess is a gift of God, a beautiful gift…” and after having completed an exhaustive study of all of Libermann’s voluminous writings, van Kaam (1959) was convinced that “He knew that only the mature, fully developed personality can surrender himself to apostolic activity without losing himself in it” (pp.259, 262). With regard to Libermann’s frequent use of the phrase, “God is everything; man is nothing,” van Kaam wrote,

[it] clearly indicates his conviction that whatever makes a man to be what he is, his whole capacity in the natural and supernatural order is truly a gift and a mandate of the Creator. (p. 264)

Rather than demean the dignity of human existence, Libermann’s insistence upon our availability to the Holy Spirit decenters the false self, only to elevate and ennoble humanity. “Give the Holy Spirit freedom to act in you and you will see the great things He will work in you” (cited in Malinowski, 1998, p.15); we might add, and you will work for others. The Holy Spirit in Libermann’s spirituality never transports us into some nebulous spiritualistic realm, but always sends us back into the wounded heart of the world to serve and to heal.

The decentering of the self expressed in Libermann’s paradoxical phrase is a form of kenosis, shifting the self from the technical, functional ego level of existence to the meditative core of our being where we become open to the action of the Holy Spirit. Gilbert identifies this emptying of self as the very essence of Libermann’s spirituality. He writes, “This then is the heart of Libermann’s spirituality - docility to the Person of the Spirit of God living in us” (p.39). Libermann spoke of this docility in many different ways. All we have to do is “to follow the movements and the impressions of the Holy Spirit who is within us. This is to be your whole line of action…”; “It is the Spirit who must work in our souls, more or less perfectly according to God’s plan for us…”, “All you have to do is to keep yourself pliable in the hands of the Spirit of life…” Finally, he wrote, “Your soul is the ship, your heart represents the sail, the Holy Spirit is the wind; He blows into your will and your soul goes forward” (pp.37-41). When we reflect deeply upon Libermann’s principles of the spiritual life, ‘availability to the Holy Spirit,’ ‘holy abandonment,’ and ‘God is all,’ we can only marvel at how perfectly they embody Westfall’s description of
prayer: “Prayer is a deep, quite possibly the deepest, decentering of the self, deep enough to begin dismantling, or if you like, deconstructing that burning preoccupation with myself” (2005, p.15). “God is all; man is nothing” perfectly expresses this radical decentering of self required for practical union with God, the fourth principle of Libermann’s spirituality of presence.

4. PRACTICAL UNION WITH GOD; APOSTOLIC AVAILABILITY

Libermann repeatedly encouraged his missionaries to be attentive to the Holy Spirit in the concrete situation of their daily lives. He possessed a deep trust in the power of our personal experience to teach us how to respond to the Holy Spirit in the conduct of our everyday affairs. Since he practiced what he preached, he too learned from experience, his own and that of his missionaries. When he sent out his first missionaries to equatorial Africa, he knew that they were going to a land where they would experience great hardship and possibly even death. As we know, the first ones did die very soon after their arrival in Guinea on the coast of West Africa. In various letters at the time, he writes that “hot weather disheartens and enervates” and he calls the climate “unhealthy” and a murderous influence which “can wreak havoc on prayer life, community relations and apostolic zeal because of the stifling heat.” In one letter he encouraged them to persevere in their life of prayer in the midst of the most difficult circumstances, even when they did not experience any spiritual consolation or feel any union with God (see Malinowski, A, p.35, n.152). In response to the plight of these early missionaries, Libermann crafted the phrase ‘practical union with God’ to enable them to cling to a life of presence to God while continuing to labor zealously for the ‘poor Blacks’ entrusted to their apostolic care.

Confronted by the horrible environmental conditions of his first missionaries, Libermann was challenged to discover a way to adapt his traditional teachings with the practical circumstances of their lives. He continued to insist on the necessity of prayer if their apostolic labors were to produce any results. In his commentary on his Provisional Rule of Life, he wrote,

_They must be filled with the Spirit of holiness of the adorable Master and act so much under the influence of divine grace that they will spread it by their words and their actions and will thus fill all those with whom they come in contact._

(cited in Malinowski, B, The Glose, p. 2)

Nothing new here, but he goes on to add a quite original twist:

_For in order to serve the mission, missionaries must be able to offer the service of their bodies: their mouth to speak,
their lungs to continue their apostolic labors, their feet to run after the wandering sheep, their hands to administer the Sacraments and to celebrate the Holy Sacrifice. There is an obligation also with respect to the Holy Spirit, of whom those bodies are the temple and the instruments. Hence their bodies must be respected, must be taken care of...

In these two texts we find a beautiful example of what Libermann meant by practical union with God: “When we are holy we are like a fire that warms all that comes near it” (p.2).

Gilbert (1983) asks the incisive question uppermost in Libermann’s mind: “How can a person of action remain united to God?” Reflecting upon Libermann’s own texts, he responds,

By practical union… The essential thing is to live all day long in practical union with God, not only by accomplishing his holy duties but also by exercising a gentle and peaceful vigilance over oneself and by acting in everything conformably to God’s good pleasure, in a spirit of faith and love. (p.99)

Libermann also calls this practical union a union of action or operation. “Our whole being [prayer, thoughts, feelings and actions] must be united to God, and that can only be done by practical union” (cited in Gilbert, p.100).

If he had felt free to follow the inclination of his own heart’s desire, Libermann would probably have become a contemplative monk. He once wrote, “… my most ardent and constant desires carry me towards retreat and solitude” (cited in Malinowski, A, p.35). At the same time, it may come as a surprise to some that he considered the apostolic way of life to be superior to contemplative life. Taking only Jesus as his model, who synthesized in his own life union with God and action for others, Libermann would write,

There is nothing so beautiful, so noble on earth as the apostolate; the contemplative life is very inferior to it: it represents only a part of the life [of] our Lord. The apostolic life represents in itself the perfection of the life of our Lord on which it is modeled. More than any other life, it gives us conformity to Jesus Christ. (cited in Malinowski, A, p.36)

In light of this text, no one could ever legitimately interpret ‘practical union’ as nothing more than a type of instant coffee or fast food for the spiritual life of busy people.
The *Spiritan Rule of Life* (1987) captures precisely the intrinsic unity between practical union and apostolic activity when it says,

... they are intimately linked. They complement each other. Union with God in prayer leads us to be of service to others, and the apostolic work we do is, in its turn, a worship offered to God in the Spirit (cf. Romans 1:9) and a deepening of our union with Him. (No. 87, p. 48)

This text lucidly illustrates that we are not dealing here with two discrete actions but a mutual sculpting of the two. Our practical union with God is actually nourished and shaped by our service to others and our service to others is inspired and informed by our total fidelity to the Holy Spirit. As the Holy Spirit unites us to them in loving service so they bind us closer to that same Spirit. A few months before he was murdered by a right-wing death squad in El Salvador, Father Ignacio Ellacuria, S.J., called for “a civilization of shared austerity with the poor” (Anderson, 2007, p.19, quoting Maier). Maier speaks of “salvation by the poor” in the sense that “The thrust of kenosis is to go from riches to poverty, from power to powerlessness” (p.17). The perfect marriage of practical union with God and apostolic activity finds its highest expression in Jesus’ own *kenosis*:

```plaintext
Though he was in the form of God
he did not deem equality with God
something to be grasped at.
Rather, he emptied himself...
obediently accepting even death,
death on a cross. (Phil. 2, 6-8)
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In an interview about her father, Rabbi Abraham Heschel, his daughter, Susanna, tells us that for him religion began with “a sense of mystery, of awe, wonder, and fear, but religion itself is concerned with what we do with those feelings” (2007, p.12). He understood God to be a God who demands that we transcend ourselves to reach out to others, “and it is precisely that going beyond, that awareness of challenge, that constitutes our being” (p.13). In this same vein, Thompson-Uberuaga (2006) reminds us that each time we respond “Here I am, Lord,” we recognize not only who God is but who we are as well. According to Rabbi Heschel, his daughter tells us, “We pray because there is a vast disproportion between human misery and human compassion” (p.13). Libermann could not agree more. The Rule of 1849 sets down the words that best define a Spiritan when it insists that they must make themselves “…the advocates, the supporters, and the defenders of the weak and the little ones against all who oppress them” (cited in Spiritan Rule of Life, No.14, p. 21).
CONCLUSION

Libermann’s notion of practical union fused with apostolic action leads us to believe that he would have agreed that, even though God’s Kingdom is not from this world, it certainly is of this world. From this scriptural text, Dennis Hamm, S.J., rightly concludes that,

*For exponents of Catholic social tradition, this means that any issue of public policy impinging upon the dignity of persons must be addressed within the Christian perspective of Jesus’ reign over our lives here and now.* (2006, p.19)

Must this not always be the burning and defining concern for a Spiritan? Lisa Cahill directly and concretely addresses this concern in her book, *Theological Bioethics; Participation, Justice, Change,* when she insists that ‘theological ethics’ must evolve into ‘social ethics.’ As the reviewer of her book writes, “Christian bioethics in particular should work to mobilize efforts for change, especially changes concerning fair and equal access to health care, both nationally and globally” (Lysaught, 2007, p.33). How can we mobilize effort for change? United with the Holy Spirit, Spiritans throughout the world strive to be present for the ‘little ones’ by mobilizing efforts for the poor and powerless. “*Let us place ourselves in the presence of God and humbly adore him*” still resounds from the days of our youth. Every constituent in the gestalt of Libermann’s spirituality announces and expresses some form of presence, be it in community, solidarity, prayer, service, evangelization, welcoming hospitality, or care for the environment.

In 2003, on the happy occasion of the 300th anniversary of the Spiritans’ founding, Pope John Paul II welcomed the Superior General and his Council with these words:

*Be faithful to the twofold heritage that you have received from your founders: dedication to the poor and the missionary apostolate...*
is a radical option “to be involved in the world of beings at all, rather than encapsulate oneself in one’s own ego” (Rojcewicz, 2006, p.135). And so, as Spiritans we pray, “Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and enkindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit, they are created and you renew the face of the earth” (Spiritan Manual of Prayer). Then we can go into God’s presence singing for joy.

References


In 1960, I entered my first Scripture class as a student of Francis X. Malinowski, C.S.Sp., at Ferndale, our senior seminary. In the bibliography that he gave us for the course, he included a book by Dom Celestin Charlier entitled, “The Christian Approach to the Bible.” One of the most important things that I learned both from that book and from Francis Malinowski is that, in order to understand the Scriptures, you have to “walk in the shoes of the Semite.”

Over the years this dictum has become more and more meaningful to me. This was especially true when I traveled to Israel as a member of an inter-religious tour group sponsored by the Anti-Defamation League. On that trip we toured the holy sites of Nazareth, Tiberius and the Sea of Galilee, Capernaum, the Mount of the Beatitudes, Caesarea, and the Holy City, Jerusalem. We also visited secular sites like Tel Aviv, the Golan Heights, and Haifa. One of the most moving experiences was the visit to the Yad Vashem, Israel’s Holocaust Museum. As we traveled, we were constantly challenged to look at all of our experiences through the eyes of Jews, Muslims, and Christians (of various denominations). Our dialogue took place on various levels: political, social, economic, military, cultural, and religious. But the most profound dialogue that I experienced occurred in the moments when we shared prayer and our appreciation of the Holy Places: the Western Wall of the Temple, the Dome of the Rock, the Holy Sepulcher Church, the Via Crucis, the Church of Gethsemane, the Ecce Homo Church, and Shabbat worship in the synagogue.

As I walked the streets of Old Jerusalem and observed the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Quarters of the city, I reflected on the challenge of hearing what God was trying to say. What did it mean to walk the streets of Jerusalem as a Jew, a Muslim, and a Christian? How did each perceive the realities that they shared?

While on the trip, Father Libermann was especially present to me. As I passed the Jerusalem headquarters of “Jews for Jesus,” I wondered what he would say to them or, for that matter, to the Orthodox Jewish community. In a sense I was entering his world, the world of the Jew-Christian. The word that kept coming to mind was “compenetrate,” the term that Benedict XVI uses in his first encyclical, Deus Caritas Est, when speaking of how the Old and the New Testaments are related. 1 Compenetration indicates

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1. Compenetration indicates
the sharing of the same reality and life. In this case it indicates that, despite their differences, they share and enter into the same God of Mystery. They are rooted in an essential continuity in the midst of that which is discontinuous. For me, Libermann understood this compenetration in a way that most of us cannot. Even though he does not often refer to his Jewishness, it is impossible for me to conceive that his Semitic origins and deep understanding of the Hebrew Scriptures and their Talmudic interpretation did not remain with him as he prayed the Psalms, the Canticles of the Old and New Testaments, and read St. Paul and St. John.

In my reflections on his brief description of his conversion, I have grown in appreciation of how he must have experienced the compenetration of the two Testaments and understood their continuity and discontinuity. He says:

*It was an extremely painful moment for me. The sight of that profound solitude, of that room where a simple attic-window gave some light, the thought of being so far from my family, from my acquaintances, from my country – all this plunged me into deep sadness; my heart felt oppressed by the deepest melancholy.*

*It was then that I remembered the God of my fathers and threw myself on my knees, begging him to enlighten me on the true religion. I prayed that if the belief of Christians was true he would let me know it, and if it was false he would keep me far from it at once.*

*The Lord, who is near to those who call on him from the bottom of their hearts, heard my prayer. Immediately, I was enlightened, I saw the truth, and the faith penetrated my mind and heart.*

In this brief account, Libermann seeks to describe the indescribable. He uses words to capture experience, to express feelings and mood related to the deepest dialogue where encounter takes place between the person and God. In profound melancholy, which goes beyond sadness, he groans, pleads, and begs to hear and see with the heart what reason or ritual could not provide. “*From the bottom of their hearts*” simply means at the deepest level of affectivity, where Eros moves the one seeking to fall passionately in love with God (Benedict XVI and Lonergan). But who is he allowing to love him and with whom is he falling in love?

He is a Jew, whose only God is Yahweh; a Jew who prayed the Great Shema daily and seven times in synagogue on the Sabbath. This is the Jew whose father told him and his siblings repeatedly,
when they were at home or out and about, lying down or standing, that “Yahweh our God is the one, the only Yahweh.” This is the Jew who kissed the mezuzah each time he left and entered his home. This is the Jew whose psyche, emotions, and moods were immersed in the transcendent God who has no equal. At the moment of his revelation/conversion experience, he prays to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to whom he cries out in his agony desiring to “see his face,” as Moses and Elijah had done (Exodus 33:18 and 1 Kings 19:9ff). Was it possible that this God, who is so Other and beyond human conception, could be so near? Libermann’s answer is simply yes. It is the Lord of Hosts, the only Yahweh, who hears the cry of the poor. He hears those who call on him from the bottom of their hearts in worship and who love Yahweh their God with all their heart, with all their soul, and with all their strength (Deut. 6:5).

It is difficult for those who have lived their whole lives as Christians to understand the drama and intensity of his revelatory/conversion experience. This is a man raised in a radical monotheistic faith, begging Yahweh to enlighten him about “the true religion” and praying to know “if the belief of Christians was true.” He prays to the one God, not in terms of speculative problems whose solution is to be sought in metaphysics, but rather to know better the living God who creates, teaches, saves, and gives life. In these moments of struggle he moves from the God who is totally Other and yet has freely chosen to enter the contingent and transient human history of a people. But he is also praying to the “Lord, who is near to those who call on him from the bottom of their hearts.”

Yes, he would have to believe in Jesus as the Christ, but what is more dramatic is that he would have to accept that the High God, the Lord of Hosts, Yahweh, the transcendent God, is Trinity. Once he had accepted that revelation, his entire spirituality rested in the Triune God. This belief would not be cast in the limited scholastic philosophical categories of the Trinity ad intra. From that moment, his focus would still be on the one transcendent God of mystery, but in the experience of the one God as revealed through divine action in the history of salvation, or what theologians now refer to as the ‘Economic Trinity.’ He was a Jew who had a sense of God creating, God leading his people in their Exodus, God speaking through the Prophets, and God hearing the cry of the poor. God was always present in his actions in creation and history. Yahweh was, in a sense, tangible in the practical experiences of his people. Libermann’s was an experience of the one God manifested as Creator, Redeemer, and
Sanctifier. As a Jew, his focus was on the Mystery of the One, and as a Christian on Three Persons. His rooting was Trinitarian.

If this were not so, why would he dedicate both the Congregation of the Holy Heart of Mary, which he founded, and then the Congregation of the Holy Spirit, as its eleventh Superior General, to the Holy Trinity? It is the Triune God that is the foundation of the life of these Congregations. The life of the Congregation, both in its community and ministerial dimensions, was to reflect the life of God who is communio. As the Congregation of the Holy Spirit, it would place particular emphasis on God’s ongoing transformative power and action as Spirit, but it is in the life of communion, both within its vowed life and in its ministry to the poor, that the oneness of the Triune God would be most understood by a world that awaits the Good News that God is love.

Only in this way can Libermann’s statement, “God is all and man is nothing,” be understood without misinterpretation. It is to the one God, transcendent beyond all human concepts, that he refers and in whom he situates the human person’s true and appropriate dignity.

This phrase often falls heavy on the ears of people today who have so little sense of their worth and dignity. But to this Semite, God, who is all, is the Creator and we are the work of his hands. To him creaturehood, and the total dependency that it implies, is the root of human dignity. It was enough for Libermann to say that he was God’s creation in and through which God’s splendor shines. Libermann is a descendant of the people of the Exodus, led by the Lord of Hosts whose power and might manifest themselves repeatedly in defense of a defenseless people. This is the transcendent God who continues to manifest himself and “enlighten [him] on the true religion” and let him know that what was “old” was penetrating the “new,” while the “new” was penetrating the “old.” The one God is Emmanuel, God-with-us (Is. 7:14; 8:8; Matt. 1:23; Rev. 21:1-4). The essence of the Christian faith was the full manifestation of the transcendent God-who-is-love in the Incarnate Word. Is it any wonder that he would choose to write his meditation on the Gospel of John rather than on one of the Synoptic Gospels? In John, he finds a companion Semite Jew immersed in the compenetration of the Testaments, where the truth of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and Jesus Christ is spoken as the transcendent-imminent God’s last Word. The Word that was in the beginning became flesh.
As he became more and more immersed in the Christian Scriptures, I can imagine the feelings that he must have experienced when reading Revelation 21:1-4 in light of his conversion:

> Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; the first heaven and the first earth had disappeared now, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride dressed for her husband. Then I heard a loud voice call from the throne, ‘Look, here God lives among human beings. He will make his home among them; they will be his people, and he will be their God, God-with-them. He will wipe away all tears from their eyes; there will be no more death, and no more mourning or sadness or pain. The world of the past has gone.’

His conversion was Abrahamic. He was definitively leaving “family, acquaintances, and country” to follow in faith. A quotation from Karl Rahner seems to capture some of what his experience would be in the years that lay ahead: “Why have you kindled in me the flame of faith, this dark light which lures us out of the bright security of our little huts into your night?” (Encounters with Silence). He was being called beyond the penumbra of his little attic room to walk as a Semitic Christian in the dark light of faith.

Even though various assertions are made concerning whether or not there is anything Jewish in Libermann’s approach to life in the Spirit (cf. Coulon, Cahill, Kelly), I find it inconceivable to think that he did not live the compenetration of the two Testaments on a daily basis all of his life. The one book that he kept on his desk till the end of his life was the Bible in Hebrew.

In the Church’s liturgical cycle, both as contained in the Divine Office and in the celebration of the daily Eucharist, he prayed the Psalms and the Canticles of the Old Testament, and he read the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament both as a Jew and a Christian. To a great extent, one can only hypothesize why he did not make explicit reference to the knowledge he had acquired in his Rabbinic and Talmudic studies to enhance his theological reflections.

But when he read the Benedictus, the Magnificat, or the Letter to the Hebrews, how could he not do so as a Jewish-Christian? His education would have provided him with a richness of understanding and insight that most of us have acquired only since the renewal of Scriptural studies that began before the Second Vatican Council and continue to expand and flourish to this day.
Imagine him praying with the community either at the Novitiate of La Neuville, in Notre-Dame-du-Gard, or the chapel in rue Lhomond. He prays as a Jew-Christian. The words fall from his lips:

*Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel,  
for he has visited his people, he has set them free,  
and he has established for us a saving power in the house of his servant David, just as he proclaimed, by the mouth of his holy prophets from ancient times…* (Luke 1:67ff)

One wonders what must have been in his mind and heart as he heard the words which he had prayed daily being sung during his ultimate Passover to God on February 2, 1852:

*My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord  
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior...  
He has pulled down princes from their thrones and raised high the lowly. (charted at the moment he breathed his last)  
He has come to the help of Israel his servant, mindful of his faithful love –  
according to the promise he made to our ancestors –  
of his mercy to Abraham and to his descendants for ever.  
(Luke 1:46ff)*

Francis Mary Paul Libermann reveled in the truth spoken by Benedict XVI in his encyclical. He knew both intellectually and experientially on a daily basis how the divine and human had compenetrated in the Person of the Incarnate Word, who embodies both the transcendence and imminence of God in God’s healing encounter with the world. It is a compenetration not merely of two Testaments; it is the very compenetration of divine and human love, the ultimate form of inculturation, and the incarnation of the transforming Spirit of God. In Christ, the God of relationship, whose essence is creative, restorative, and transformative, is fully revealed.

The practical Jew, who did not succumb to Greek *theoria*, kept both feet on the ground as he journeyed through life with fervor, charity, and sacrifice, to make sure that all people could share what he had inherited from his ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jesus Christ. His sense of the one God, the Lord and Giver of Life, is a relational God who can only be grasped through his...
substantial modes of relating to us in every aspect of our practical existence. He shapes and reshapes life through his love-action of creating, healing, and transforming humankind. This God is known by what he has done, is doing, and will continue to do. This sense of the acting God who creates, heals, and transforms by hesed and emeth, “faithful love” and “grace and truth” (cf. John 1:14), is the foundation of Libermann’s call to love God and others with practicality in the context of everyday life – especially in regard to the “widow, the orphan, and the stranger,” the weakest. It is the same practicality evidenced not only in his Provisional Rule of 1840, but also in the Rule of 1849, which is the product of his hand.

To walk in the steps of this Semite is to seek to love God with all one’s heart, all one’s soul, and all one’s strength, the way that Jesus loved the world. With him as the full model of divine love, the bar is set very high. It demands an intense asceticism of dialogue and discernment in the practical circumstances of everyday life. He is forever cautioning those whom he counsels in their life in the Spirit to beware of illusions, the principal of which is to forget the worship of the transcendent God in spirit and truth. We must “set no bounds to [our] love, just as [our] heavenly Father sets none to his” (Matt. 5:48). Is it any wonder that one of Libermann’s favorite Scripture texts was, “in him we live and move and have our being”? - words, interestingly enough, spoken by Paul as he sought to bring the Good News of the one God revealed in Jesus Christ to pagans who knew nothing of the living God.

It has been helpful for me over the years to walk in the shoes of the Semite. I am grateful to Francis Malinowski for having challenged me to do so and for having pointed me on the right path. I am also grateful for what I have learned from Jewish brothers and sisters through inter-religious dialogue and to Benedict XVI who, more clearly than any other Pope, has shown how the two Testaments compenetrate each other. All of these have helped me come closer to our own Semite co-founder in understanding that “God is all and man is nothing.”

Footnotes
2 Alphonse Gilbert, You have laid your hand on me…., Rome, Italy: Spiritan Research and Animation Centre, June 1983, pp. 8-9.
3 Cf. Deut. 4:7: “And indeed, what great nation has its gods as near as Yahweh our God is to us whenever we call to him?”
Tony Geoghegan, C.S.Sp.

A native of Ireland, Tony Geoghegan joined the Spiritans in 1948 and was ordained in 1957. Following studies at the Gregorian University in Rome, he was assigned to The Gambia, West Africa, where he worked in pastoral ministry, and subsequently to Nigeria, where he served as secondary school teacher and lecturer in Theology at the Bigard Seminary, Enugu. He later obtained a doctorate in Theology from the Angelicum University in Rome and returned to Ireland, where he has since been involved in formation and teaching. In addition to serving on the Irish Provincial Council, he has taken part in many international Spiritan meetings.

...it is the consecration of our whole existence to the service of the Kingdom.

INTRODUCTION

Apostolic life “encompasses all the fundamental elements of Spiritan life.”¹ In the Superior General’s letter of Pentecost 1988, entitled “At the Heart of our Spiritan Vocation – the Apostolic Life,” we are told that “apostolic life” is a “life in Christ’s footsteps, with three essential dimensions: the proclamation of the Good News, the practice of the evangelical counsels, and a life in fraternal and praying community. It is thus a good deal more than simply apostolic or pastoral activity; it is the consecration of our whole existence to the service of the Kingdom.”

THROUGHOUT THE RULE OF LIFE

We find “apostolic life” occurring in a central position throughout the Spiritan Rule of Life. It is indeed a following in Christ’s footsteps. It 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” (1849 Rule, quoted in SRL 3).² So this apostolic life “contains in itself the perfection of the life of Our Lord, on which it is modelled” (Glose 7, quoted in SRL 8).

It is for the sake of our apostolic life that we Spiritans live in community: “To bring the apostolic life – for which Spiritan life is intended – to its perfection... the Congregation has adopted life in community as its founding principle” (1849 Rule, quoted in SRL 27).³ Every member of the community has a part in the apostolic life common to all (SRL 29). The prayer and pain of the aged and the sick are a form of our apostolic life (SRL 39.1).

Again, it is because we are called by God to the apostolic life that we take on lives of celibate chastity, poverty, and obedience for the Kingdom (SRL 57, 63, 78). In our celibate lives, true friendships bring our personalities to full development and support us in our apostolic life (SRL 59.2). In asking us to renounce worldly goods, Jesus is calling us, as he once called the rich young man, to the apostolic life (SRL 62). The meaning of our poverty is that all we have and are is at the service of our apostolic life (SRL 72).

Union with the Father who sends him, and with the Holy Spirit who consecrates him, marks the prayer of Jesus as well as his entire apostolic life, and in following him in our apostolic life and in our prayer we draw on the same source as he did (SRL 83, 84). Jesus used to go away by himself to pray. The apostolic
Profession is a commitment to Spiritan apostolic life and the total gift of self to God in the service of mission.

Forming, whether initial or ongoing, is the continual deepening of our apostolic life (SRL 100). Profession (“consecration to the apostolate”) is a commitment to Spiritan apostolic life and the total gift of self to God in the service of mission (SRL 127).

**Libermann’s Conferences at Le Gard in 1851**

Fr. Libermann treats of apostolic life and related topics at some length in conferences given to the novices at Notre Dame du Gard during March and April 1851, less than a year before his death, when he knew his end was not far off. At this time he was very busy with Congregation matters and often sick. “I am so burdened with matters concerning the Colonies that I have hardly time to breathe,” he wrote to Mgr. Bessieux in January 1850. And to Mgr. Kobès, who had invited him to Guinea in April 1851, he responded: “I can’t take upon myself to brave such an imprudent undertaking in the present state of the Congregation... With my frequent fevers, my liver complaint that reappears so often, and a certain tiredness of my limbs which never leaves me and which prevents me from taking even a half-hour’s walk...” Two weeks after writing this, the day after he finished his conferences to the novices, “he who had never cried in public since his seminary days at Saint Sulpice was seen weeping abundantly during the Holy Thursday Mass.” And on 24th June he had no longer the strength to write his own letters.

In the case of these conferences, we do not possess a transcript of Libermann’s own words, but rather an analysis of his conferences made by one of the novices, M. Le Saout, and by P. Delaplace, at the time assistant superior at Le Gard. He too had attended the conferences and given a finishing touch to the notes. He declared that, though he would not guarantee the word-for-word exactness of the notes, still it was easy to recognize in them the doctrine of Fr. Libermann, his way of speaking, and often even his very own expressions.

**The States of Life**

In the conferences, Fr Libermann distinguishes different vocations or states of life: the natural state, the Christian state, the religious state, and the missionary-religious state or apostolic life. Now, these states are in an ascending order of worth, so that what is higher in rank includes in itself what is less so; therefore, it is important for us to know each of these states, since we are placed at the top of the scale, and we must consequently include eminently the holiness special to each of these states.
The natural state is governed by natural law, which requires that I love God, myself, and the neighbor. Here one does not go beyond the realm of strict justice.\(^9\)

The Christian state adds to the above requirements the grace of Jesus Christ, which gives us a share in his life. He is the vine, we are the branches. A divine sap gives life to the Christian, a sap which flows into us through the sacraments and which we welcome by prayer, especially the prayer of the Church. The Holy Sacrifice is the essence and source of all prayer.

Now, as priests (the novices at that time were already ordained priests), God has made us leaders of the Christian community. We are the main branches, the immediate recipients of the sap from the trunk which is Our Lord Jesus Christ and we are to nourish the farther branches from the super-abundance that we have received. We should not be simply uninvolved channels automatically transmitting grace.

As simple Christians more is expected of us than is required of us as mere human beings. In loving God we go beyond the forces of nature, since, with the aid of grace, we love God as Jesus Christ loves his Father. With regard to the neighbor, the Christian goes beyond strict justice as far as mercy, making sacrifices for his neighbor’s sake.\(^10\)

**THE RELIGIOUS STATE**

In the religious state we renounce earthly joys to become attached to God alone. This is a contemplative state, having in view God alone. It is the private life of Our Lord in which he dedicates himself to his heavenly Father. He is the unique religious in himself; all others are so only in him. By the vows of religion we overcome the various forms of concupiscence. The sacrifice begun by the vows is completed in our lives. Happy are those called by God to religious life!\(^11\)

In those days the novitiate came after ordination, at the end of formation, so that the novices he was addressing were priests, and immediately after their novitiate they would be leaving on mission. He reminded them that during the novitiate they were working for themselves exclusively, but after leaving the novitiate their holiness would grow through their zeal and devotion:

> During the novitiate, it’s like a boat moving forward gradually under the power of oars, then, on becoming an apostle, one is launched into the sea and the sail is unfurled, because from now on it is a vessel with a magnificent cargo.\(^12\)
To preserve the religious life of missionaries as they exercise their apostolate in the midst of the world, the Congregation has taken on community life as something essential. This is, according to Fr. Libermann, “with the express view of protecting the missionaries from exterior dangers and maintaining their religious fervor, which gives life to the apostolate.”

**Apostolic Life**

*Apostolic life* pre-supposes the perfection of the religious state, the sacrifice of self to God, in order to be free to devote oneself to caring for others and leading them to God. And it is in working for the salvation of others that we will grow in holiness. For this, we must be flexible instruments in the hands of God.

This state is more effective than affective. Having no time to nourish our souls with spiritual delights, we sacrifice the enjoyment of God in order to serve this same God:

> It is as if God were saying: ‘You come to give yourself completely to me. Very well, I accept you; now, you will no longer strictly have to think of yourself, but I am going to make use of you for others, as it seems good to me, and it is in fulfilling my will in this way that you will grow yourself in holiness, in working for the salvation of others.’

Like a father who, in thinking of saving money only for his children’s sake, enriches himself by the very fact, similarly, the faithful missionary, in giving himself entirely to work for the salvation of souls, enriches himself with treasures of holiness and merit.

Of course, Fr Libermann had personal experience of the demands of giving oneself to work for others. In a letter of January 1846 to Fr. Le Vavasseur he wrote:

> Since God placed me in this work I have never had a moment of peace and consolation... Think what crushing pain it has to be not to have a moment, a minute in the day to think of the salvation of my soul, and yet you know well that my most burning and continual desires draw me towards retreat and solitude... God binds and chains me to this work – crucifying, but dear to my heart...

As instruments in the hands of the Master, we must follow Jesus in submitting ourselves completely to the Father’s will. The good Lord will see to it that we have the needed amount of consolation and strength.

> [The missionary] should by no means be upset and think that he is doing wrong because he does not experience enchanting delight. Let us be mature and vigorous soldiers...
So ended the last conference of Fr. Libermann to his novices.

**Practice**

In speaking to the novices, Fr. Libermann lays great stress on the practical as distinct from the speculative. It must be remembered that the novices had already studied theology and were about to go on mission. They needed to acquire a deep, intimate, personal knowledge of Jesus Christ that would remain with them and grow during their busy missionary activity.

The *speculative* study of God is a kind of theology that is an activity of the *mind* alone, driven by mere curiosity and producing no growth in faith. The *practical* study of God, or research into God, or perhaps better, search for God, is an activity of the *heart*, the core of our being, the seat of the Holy Spirit, and the source of our response in faith. Fr. Libermann wanted to get his novices out of the head and into the heart. The grace of Christ is given, not for speculative purposes, to satisfy our curiosity, but for practical purposes, to enlighten the intellect, warm the heart, and impel the will.18

Love runs and flies, it likes to have plenty of elbow room; it is a child who plays on its mother’s lap...

The practical research into holiness is a work of the Blessed Trinity. It is done in Jesus Christ, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. And Fr. Libermann quotes I Cor. 2:10-11: “...the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God... no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.” So it is the Spirit who is our great teacher in this kind of learning.20

The knowledge of God and his attributes attained through speculation is artificial and leaves the heart cold and blind, as the hearts of the apostles were before the coming of the Holy Spirit upon them. The Spirit is the source of a living knowledge that embraces the heart and sets it ablaze. It is like the knowledge a child has of its mother, not like speculative knowledge which is devoid of attraction or love.21

In Jesus Christ we know not only God but human nature as well, since Jesus sums up in himself humanity and the whole of creation, and so it is in him that we know the reciprocal relations between God and human beings.22 But this salvific knowledge is not given to us for ourselves only. We have to share it with others. And so the Holy Spirit has to overflow our souls, so
that we can communicate his living knowledge to others. This superabundance of the Spirit is owed to us above all others because of our vocation.\textsuperscript{23}

**Practical Union**

So far we have considered mainly Fr Libermann’s teaching concerning the *practical* pursuit of holiness by means of contemplative prayer. *Practical* here is contrasted with *speculative*. But when we begin to communicate to others, by means of apostolic activity, the experience of God we have acquired in contemplation, we still need to be united to God. This union with God in the apostolate Fr. Libermann calls *practical union*. Here *practical* is contrasted with *contemplative*. So there are two forms of union with God, namely, *contemplative union* and *practical union*. Both unions are *practical* in the sense that they advance my relationship with God and right conduct towards my fellow human beings. And nothing could be more *practical* or sensible, if the whole purpose of life and the attainment of happiness consist in a network of loving relationships between God and myself and the whole of creation in the risen Christ, through the working of the Holy Spirit!

*Contemplative union* is a thirst for Our Lord, an elevation of the soul to God, that we call mental prayer. This is as necessary for the life of the soul as air and sunlight are necessary for the life of the body.\textsuperscript{24} But contemplative union is not as necessary as practical union. Better have a perfect practical union with a less than perfect contemplative union than vice versa. Still, as Fr. Libermann remarks: “Contemplative union ought to predominate naturally in the contemplative orders; practical action ought to be characteristic of the missionaries of Jesus Christ.”\textsuperscript{25}

*Practical union* “will consist in sacrificing oneself for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, without habitually experiencing great interior delights.”\textsuperscript{26} It involves stripping oneself of natural feelings to open the soul to feelings of divine origin.

\[\text{[The soul thus] becomes spiritual and transparent, of the same nature as the divine truth, which then percolates through the soul without obstacle and, as it were, naturally.}\textsuperscript{27}\]

From all this it follows that

*One must work at contemplative union and practical union jointly, for their mutual perfection, and their combination results in bringing about the complete life.*\textsuperscript{28}

Indeed, the exterior activity of the apostolate has a favorable effect on prayer life, as a walk, or some similar moderate exercise, helps the digestion.\textsuperscript{29}
In his understanding of apostolic life, then, Fr. Libermann presents us with an integrated missionary spirituality. It is initiated through encounter with God in contemplative prayer, and it comes to perfection in the apostolate which is carried out in practical union with God, through habitual fidelity to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The contemplative-religious life, then, is not to be regarded as a closed system, cut off from the world and its corrupting influences. Nor is missionary activity simply added on, as a risk to be undertaken for the sake of others, a foray into the wicked world from the fortress of religious life, to which we return regularly to be cleansed and topped up with the supernatural energy we have lost in our apostolic efforts. Rather, missionary activity grows organically from religious-contemplative life, as its fruit and perfection. This is both upsetting and liberating for those of us still influenced by a certain Platonic way of thinking.

**Platonic Difficulties**

This Platonic mindset appears in the traditional understanding of contemplative religious life as superior to active religious life. Often this has been justified by reference to the incident in St. Luke’s Gospel (10:38-42), where Martha complains to the Lord that her sister Mary, who is sitting at his feet and listening to him, is not helping her with the domestic tasks. Jesus responds that Mary has chosen the better part. “Mary and Martha represent Christian contemplation and Christian activity,” states the fourteenth-century anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*. For him, the active and contemplative lives are contrasted as follows: “Both activity and contemplation are essential and interrelated. You cannot fully experience one without the other... The effectively active person is also contemplative. A contemplative person engages in Christian activity. The distinction between the two is that the active life begins and ends in this world, while the contemplative life begins here and continues eternally... In the beginning of the active life, we look beyond ourselves and work for others... but we remain within ourselves. But in the higher degree of contemplative life we rise above ourselves. We arrive by grace where we cannot go by nature. We unite with God in spirit...” So, activity and prayer mingle imperfectly. “Our Lord did not say that Mary had chosen the best manner of life, but rather that she selected the best part of two respected lives. This best part is eternal because heaven has no need for acts of mercy. No one will be hungry or thirsty...”

Indeed, traditionally we have imagined heaven as consisting in “the beatific vision,” that is, in the contemplation of God.
It would therefore seem to follow that the heavenly life of contemplation is superior to a life dedicated to works of love and mercy that are confined to this world. Furthermore, the life of silence and mortification within the confines of a monastery, cut off from the evils and temptations of the world, would seem to be holier and more heroic. An active religious life would seem to be a compromise, half in and half out of the wicked world. To such thinking Fr. Libermann’s insistence that apostolic life is not only not inferior in any way to contemplative life, but holds a higher rank, is quite revolutionary. The clue to this reversal is to be found in the Christological basis of all Fr. Libermann’s thinking. Jesus did not neglect contemplation and was always united by love to the Father, yet his apostolate was that of a busy missionary. And the Christian way of life, as well as its perfection in the religious and apostolic life, is a following of Jesus and a sharing in his life.

Furthermore, “the Christological orientation alleviates the excessive individualism of the scholastic notion of beatific vision by situating the individual in the context of the Body of Christ... In its corporate dimension, heaven means the fulfillment of all human relationships in the depth of the final relation with God...the Christological orientation includes a cosmic dimension. Salvation is not an escape from the world but the salvation precisely of the world of God’s creation.” 

Heaven for me, therefore, is my participation in the risen Christ, as a member of the human race, imbedded in the cosmos. And this risen Christ in all his fullness embraces all human relationships. And these relationships surely include the risen form of the relationships of effective love and compassion in the present age. So it is that Fr. Libermann’s apostolic life meets the criterion of enduring beyond death, even better than mere contemplation alone.

**Contemplata Aliis Tradere**

The phrase “apostolic life” is not unique to Fr. Libermann but goes back at least to the Middle Ages. The ideal of the apostolic life, understood as a return to the simple style of living together and of evangelizing practiced by the primitive Christian community, inspired the reform movements in the Medieval Church, as well as the rise of the mendicant orders. In 1198, St. Dominic, the future founder of the Order of Preachers (Dominicans), became a member of the community of regular canons attached to the cathedral of Osma in Spain. These canons led a community life in imitation of the early Jerusalem Church as depicted in Acts (where the apostles and their followers formed “cor unum et anima una”). This style of living was dubbed *apostolic life*. Then, “...at the turn of the 12th and 13th centuries, the true *vita apostolica*...
was a life of itinerant preaching to all and sundry, to anybody and everybody. The Dominicans combined two senses of apostolic living. By integrating the new sense of apostolic mission with the older sense of shared, apostolic community, they became in effect the first missionary order in the Church’s history.”  

From the early days of the order, the device “contemplata aliis tradere” (we pass on to others the fruit of our contemplation) has been used to indicate an essential core of Dominican apostolic life. As in Libermann’s understanding of apostolic life, there is a continuous flow from contemplative prayer to apostolic activity and mutual influence of one activity on the other. The French Dominican theologian Yves Congar writes:

If my God is the God of the Bible, the living God, the ‘I am, I was, I am coming,’ then God is inseparable from the world and from human beings... My action, then, consists in handing myself over to my God, who allows me to be the link for his divine activity regarding the world and other people. My relationship to God is not that of a cultic act, which rises up from me to Him, but rather that of a faith by which I hand myself over to the action of the living God, communicating himself according to his plan, to the world and to other human beings.  

THE FRENCH SCHOOL OF SPIRITUALITY

The so-called French School of Spirituality, which arose in the seventeenth century under the leadership of Cardinal de Bérulle, had great influence on Libermann, since he spent ten years in Sulpician houses of formation and two in the Eudist novitiate at Rennes. Fr. Olier, founder of St. Sulpice, formulated what William M. Thompson describes as “a sort of Christological mantra for the French school.”  

Olier here speaks of penetrating to the depths of one’s being, to the heart, there to find Christ and gradually become “Christified,” and consequently capable of Christifying all that one touches.  

These two spiritualities (the Dominican and the French School), which begin with attention to God in the depths of the soul and result in fruitful apostolic activity, bear striking resemblance to Fr. Libermann’s spirituality of apostolic life, which may be seen as the culmination of the expression of this missionary mindset and way of life. At the same time, they confirm Fr. Libermann’s
understanding of spirituality and help us, I think, to grasp it better.

**A Trinitarian Spirituality**

We are still influenced by a rather deist concept of God – the unitary God who is outside us, remote from us, dominating and judging us, a God of structures rather than of personal relations. Fr. Libermann’s God, however, is a Trinitarian God, who is close to us, on our side, within us, through Christ and in the Spirit, whose presence we experience, and in whose mission we participate. For Libermann,

*The apostolic life contains in itself the perfection of the life of our Lord upon which it is modeled; more than any other life, it gives us conformity to Jesus Christ; it demands an absolute and continued sacrifice and is based on that perfect love which transforms us into our Lord.*

Transformed into Jesus, we carry out his mission:

*Jesus sends us as he was sent; our mission is his. It is he who suffers in those he sends, who draws souls to God his Father and communicates his graces to them through those he sends. But so that Jesus may live in his envoys, and do all things in and through them, they in turn must live in him, be united to him in their life, sufferings, and apostolic activity.*

United with Jesus, it is in the power of the Spirit that we draw people to the Father:

*The missionaries’ strength must not be based on their character and natural fervor, but must come entirely from the grace of the divine Spirit and be drawn from intimate union with Jesus.*

**The Complete Life**

Fr. Libermann pities young missionaries who neglect religious life and give themselves too much to an external life. Holiness springs from the interior life of the missionary and spreads outwards:

*The holiness of Jesus Christ must dwell in the missionary, a holiness which must be grounded in his interior life and show itself in his conduct by his work and suffering. In that way, after the example of Jesus Christ, he begets souls to God.*

In thus begetting souls to God, missionaries grow in holiness as, in the throes of their active lives, communion with God through Christ and in the Spirit becomes ever more intimate. *Practical union,* through the self-discipline it involves in turning away
from creaturely attractions and distractions, has removed their opacity to the divine light. They have become transparent to the divine truth that penetrates their inmost being and nourishes them abundantly. As spiritual beings, they are in their element, the divine light, which enables them to see the things of God, effortlessly and clearly.\textsuperscript{46} This is not a passing glimpse as might happen in prayer, but a lasting enlightenment, an enduring taste for supernatural values.\textsuperscript{47}

In both mystical and practical union, we allow God the initiative, clearing the way for him through self-discipline, and then cooperating with his action. “Active receptivity” of the Spirit’s guidance might sum up our part in mission. Our mission is thus a participation in God’s Trinitarian mission. In this way too, we avoid an aggressive, not to say colonialist, self-starting rather than God-starting way of evangelizing.

However, not only does our missionary activity originate in God, it also seeks union with God, as it completes the work of contemplative union in carrying us towards God. In 1841, Fr. Libermann wrote to a seminarian:

\textit{The divine Spirit, while acting with great force, fills your soul with gentleness and peace. He establishes Jesus’ life in you, Jesus' desires, affections, and loves... When the divine Spirit is acting in us, our soul is on fire and, in the midst of this fire, it is carried along and united to God effortlessly and calmly and unperturbedly...} \textsuperscript{48}

In his last talks to the novices, as we have seen, Fr. Libermann insists that they must search for holiness where it is to be found, that is, in Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit as teacher.\textsuperscript{49} This search for God and holiness does not cease with apostolic activity. To serve the poor cannot be desired unless we can find among them the compassionate God who is drawn to their plight and reveals himself in their midst. We find God in people and in a life of missionary sacrifice for them. Driven by our faith in Christ, this search for God, whom we cannot possess or confine in any formula, is in the mystical tradition.\textsuperscript{50}

In this way, theology and spirituality, which split apart in the Middle Ages, are rejoined to form a heartfelt, living theology and an intellectually satisfying spirituality, all put at the service of an effective missionary activity, which incarnates God’s love for the world in our present age. This is the integration that many seek nowadays. This is Fr. Libermann’s complete life. This is \textit{apostolic life}.  

\[\text{Our mission is thus a participation in God’s Trinitarian mission.}\]
Footnotes

2 N.D. X, p.505.
3 N.D. X, p.454.
4 N.D. XII, p.21. Translations from the French are my own, except where excerpts are taken as quoted in other works in which they are already translated.
7 Ibid., p.256.
8 N.D. XIII, p.706.
9 Ibid.
12 N.D. XIII, p.709.
13 N.D. XIII, p.710.
16 N.D. XIII, pp.710-711.
17 N.D. XIII, p.711.
18 N.D. XIII, pp.692-3. Some authors, for example, contrast speculative or theoretical atheism with practical atheism, since there are some who argue themselves into an atheism which they verbally proclaim, yet their morally good lives and compassionate hearts declare a hidden faith in God. Others might be speculative theists, but in their living practical atheists.
19 N.D. XIII, p.694.
21 N.D. XIII, p.690.
22 N.D. XIII, p.691.
24 N.D. XIII, p.697.
26 N.D. XIII, p.698.
28 N.D. XIII, p.700.
30 SRL 5.
32 Ibid., pp.18-19.
33 Ibid., pp.32-33.


43 Spiritan Rule (1840) no.51; quoted in Tillard, op. cit., p.91.


47 Cf. N.D. XIII, p.701.

48 N.D. III 87-88; quoted in Bernard Tenailleau, op. cit., p.70.


CONSECRATION TO THE APOSTOLATE

INTRODUCTION
Consecration to the apostolate holds an important place in the Congregation of the Holy Spirit. The personnel directory of the Spiritan Province of the Netherlands, for instance, lists the date of the consecration to the apostolate among the three most important dates of identification for each individual member. While this may not be the case in the official État du Personnel of the Congregation, or indeed in most other provincial directories, it reflects, nevertheless, the importance that has traditionally been given to consecration to the apostolate in the life of the Congregation. In this context, I would like to reflect briefly on the following questions: (1) What is the theological meaning and reason for this act of consecration? (2) What did this act of consecration mean for Libermann and what does it mean for the Spiritans today?

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON CONSECRATION TO THE APOSTOLATE
Consecration means more than dedication or seriously trying. Consecration, in its deepest significance, touches the heart of human and religious life. The Dictionnaire de Spiritualité Ascétique et Mystique describes consecration as: “An act by which a thing or person is made sacred. This means an act which places a person (or thing) in a special category that bestows on him/her/it characteristics which take him/her/it out of the realm of ordinary relationships and confers on him/her/it a value that exceeds other values.” A secular dictionary, such as Van Dale, gives a similar meaning: “…to consecrate a person or a thing to a deity, a saint, etc.” An act of consecration he calls: “… a prayer by which one consecrates oneself to the Sacred Heart as the symbol of God’s love.”

In these descriptions we see a number of elements that ask for further explanation:

- Consecration is seen as something special. It is a ‘setting apart’ that reaches past the usual visible/corporeal human aspects. To see consecration as a special call/gift from God contains, however, a certain contradiction. We accept that people, living on this earth, are created in the image of God. Therefore, the human being is spiritual as well as corporeal. These are not two separate parts that are temporarily joined together, but they are two aspects that form together one inseparable unity. The human being is meant to be simultaneously the visibility of a...
spiritual reality and the expression of a spiritual value of the corporeal. Every person is by nature called to a holiness that surpasses whatever is visible but that must give value, meaning, and direction to the human totality, including the corporeal. A human person is by creation itself consecrated to God; however, it belongs to human dignity to acknowledge this consecration (God-directedness) freely and consciously. This introduces another element.

- Consecration involves the **human totality**. We live in a world that is visible, tangible, and perceptible. Within this corporeal setting we recognize ourselves and discover our identity, we find our place, and we fulfill our tasks in this world. But, because our identity is discovered and experienced in the material setting, the spiritual/invisible reality of our existence asks for a special and conscious acknowledgement on our part. This decision is the recognition of the person that we are in our corporeal-spiritual unity. This recognition is the most human act we can perform, because it is the first step toward a vision of our human wholeness. We are led to another point.

- Consecration, as **conscious recognition of what we are**, confirms the meaning and direction of our human existence and human activity. Consecration is a recognition of the wholeness of a person without taking this person away from daily life. Such a person remains completely within material existence. The purpose of existence and one’s personal identity not only remain the same, but they are clarified and enriched. The focus is not any longer limited to what is visible and calculable, but is widened with a spiritual perspective that includes the whole human being. This brings us to a final point.

- Consecration presupposes **an integration** or blending of the spiritual and physical dimensions so that a person becomes a oneness or human wholeness. The vision of soul and body as two distinct parts falls away to make room for an attitude that unites these different perspectives into a oneness. Consecration then becomes an expression of freedom and personal responsibility for the activation and direction of all one’s talents toward an intended cause or person.

As my focus is on the consecration to the apostolate, let me also try to define ‘apostolate.’ My dictionary, *de Grote van Dale,*
gives six variants on the word “apostolaat,” all of which suggest a religious meaning. Three of these variants are more related to our discussion, namely, apostolate is to “be active as an apostle,” or it means “the activity of the Church to spread the faith,” or it indicates “the attitude and activity of the Church as it relates to the world.” These three variants represent “mission,” “purpose of the mission,” and “the people (object) toward whom the mission is directed.”

When we look at the Church’s teaching on consecration, there are two points among the numerous references that particularly strike me. First, the Church looks at the role of individuals in the perspective of the whole community, e.g., in the Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People, we read: “In the organism of a living body no member plays a purely passive part; sharing in the life of the body, it shares at the same time in its activity.” If a part of a living body is healthy, it necessarily contributes to the health and wholeness of the body. The apostolate is not something that is added to the community, it is rather a development or contribution of an individual within the community. When the Council applies this more directly to religious aspects, its meaning becomes more precise: “On all Christians, accordingly, rests the noble obligation of working to bring all men throughout the whole world to hear and to accept the divine message of salvation.” And further: “From the reception of these charisms, even the most ordinary ones, there arise for each of the faithful the right and duty of exercising them in the Church and in the world for the good of men and the development of the Church.” Therefore, the apostolate is not the privilege of a few select souls. It is the right and obligation of every person. However, within this call that is directed to the whole community, some persons have a special task, such as we ascribe to founders and leaders. My concern here is what consecration meant for Libermann and the congregation he founded.

Therefore, the apostolate is not the privilege of a few select souls. It is the right and obligation of every person.

...his deepest motivation is this desire to establish and to deepen God’s love in the human community.

LIBERMANN AND CONSECRATION TO THE APOSTOLATE
The entire life of Francis Libermann was directed toward one end, namely, to establish and to strengthen God’s love in the hearts of people. Whether we focus our attention on his letters, on his conversations, on his readiness to help others, on his ministry for the most abandoned, or on the foundation of a religious, missionary society and its discontinuance with a view to fusion with the Congregation of the Holy Spirit, everywhere his deepest motivation is this desire to establish and to deepen God’s love in the human community. This urge was the wellspring of his life and activity, and for him it was fulfilled in the experience of being consecrated to the service of God.
This consecration was not a task imposed from the outside. It was an aspect of the inner structure of his life and personality. What he felt in his soul had an irresistible repercussion on his thinking and acting. Consecration to the apostolate was for him identical with being human and being Christian. It is therefore not surprising that the word “apostolate” occurs so frequently in his writings. We find it often in his Règle Provisoire in which he describes the apostolic task of his congregation as follows: “The apostolic life is nothing else than the life of complete love and holiness that the Son of God has led on earth for the salvation and sanctification of souls and through which he offered himself to the glory of his Father.”8

In this one concept of “apostolic life” he describes the life of Jesus as mission, as gift of self, and as self-sacrifice for the redemption of humanity and the glory of God. At the beginning of his Règle Provisoire, he speaks about his Congregation of the Holy Heart of Mary as “… an assembly of priests who, in the name of and as envoys of Our Lord Jesus Christ, devote themselves completely to preaching his holy Gospel and to establishing his reign among the most poor and most deserted souls in the Church of God.”9

The notion of “consecration” lies at the center of his life. He uses the word frequently and what it means to him he explains (almost casually) to Mr. Conny in a letter congratulating him on his ordination to the subdiaconate: “What a joy it must be to consecrate oneself completely to God. I think that this would be the only thing that I would desire if God would allow me.”10 He sees this consecration as a special grace by which the candidate, through God’s grace, is set apart from all worldly affairs to be wrapped in an immeasurable holiness.11 But immediately he cautions that this holiness does not at all eliminate our ordinary human tendencies. He continues in his letter: “Don’t think that you are so changed that all your weaknesses have disappeared and that from now on you will be as the angels in heaven who live without fear, without distrust, and without temptations. Your body will always be your body, this means it will always be miserable, weak, poor, filled with corruption and sin. But what does that matter to a soul who totally lives in God, who is not interested in this world and who does not know any other happiness than God alone to whom he belongs completely?”12

For Libermann, consecration to the apostolate is the commitment of the whole personality in answer to the invitation to establish God’s kingdom of justice and love in those places where it does not yet exist, to confirm it where it is in doubt, to support and
strengthen it where it is weak or unstable. The importance he attached to the notion of consecration to the apostolate can be clearly seen from the fact that he envisaged a double consecration for every member of the congregation he founded: a consecration of one’s whole being on entry, in the form of a solemn promise (“Act of Consecration,” which does not explicitly mention the apostolate) to live a life of poverty, chastity, and obedience, followed by a special act of consecration (“Act of Consecration of our Apostolate to Our Lord Jesus Christ”) prior to leaving on mission, when one is about to begin one’s active engagement in the apostolate.

Consecration to the apostolate means for him a total commitment to labor for the establishment and maintenance of the kingdom of God’s love among all people. Let us take a moment to see how his doctrine is reflected in the writings of our congregation today.

**Consecration to the Apostle in the Spiritan Rule of Life**

Our *Spiritan Rule of Life* (1987) does not offer a separate description of consecration to the apostolate, distinct from our religious commitment. On the contrary, SRL seems to identify the consecration to the apostolate with the profession of final vows. We read under the title of ‘perpetual profession’: “Our final consecration to the apostolate gives its full expression to the intention that we were keeping in the depths of our hearts, the day of our first profession, of devoting ourselves completely to God in the family of the Spiritans.”

Throughout the remainder of this section, SRL only speaks about perpetual vows, without mentioning again the term of consecration to the apostolate. This consecration is, however, so intimately connected with the life of the Congregation that admission without the intention to devote oneself to the apostolate would be a contradiction. Referring to the Spiritan vocation, SRL says: “In the midst of God’s people, among the numerous and varied vocations which the Holy Spirit inspires, we Spiritans are called by the Father and ‘set apart’ (Acts 13:2) to follow Jesus and to announce the Good News of the Kingdom.”

To be called to the apostolate seems to be integral to what it means to be a Spiritan. The particular form this apostolate will take, however, will depend on the time in which we are living. Spiritans must read the “signs of the times,” but their apostolate must always have the characteristic of being an answer to a need in the Church or society for which it is difficult to find laborers. For Libermann, this characteristic was present in the miserable
...the object of this concern changes.

We are participating within the Church in the mission of Christ, in communion with him and all people, proclaiming a salvation that is a gift from God, liberation from all that oppresses people, joy in knowing the Lord and being known by him.\(^{17}\)

Any particular work is taken on in communion with the Church as it is in our time. The responsibility for carrying on Christ’s mission belongs in each place to the local Church. We, in keeping with the calling that is proper to us, participate in this mission.

We take as our own the points that the Church is currently stressing in mission:

-- the universal mission understood as the responsibility of local Churches in communion with each other;
-- mission understood as preaching the gospel and founding new Churches;
-- mission as service and liberation;
-- mission as dialogue;
-- mission as inculturation of the gospel message in each local Church.\(^ {18}\)

Today, our concern should be directed toward the total human personality...

At the present time the most abandoned souls are not necessarily to be found in situations of physical poverty or where human rights and dignity are violated. Today, our concern should be directed toward the total human personality which, through progressive secularization and individualization, seems to have become trivialized in an existence that is totally confined to human reason and calculation. In these circumstances, the human person becomes an image of God from which all divine value is excised. The consecration to the apostolate that is intended in our Rule of Life tries precisely to include this dimension as an essential perspective of humanity:

The charisms of our Founders, Claude Poullart des Places and Francis Libermann, and fidelity to our tradition urge us to respond creatively to the needs of evangelization of our time.\(^ {19}\)
The evangelization of the “poor” (cf. Lk. 4:18) is our purpose (cf. N.D. XIII, 170). Therefore we go especially to peoples, groups, and individuals who have not yet heard the message of the gospel or who have scarcely heard it, to those whose needs are the greatest, and to the oppressed (cf. N.D. II, 241). We also willingly accept tasks for which the Church has difficulty in finding workers.20

The Spiritan charism received and lived by Libermann, explained in his letters and apostolic activities, passed on to his congregation as a consecration to the apostolate, is also presented to us. It is, therefore, our task to live the eternal values in our times and in contemporary ways and so to inspire the Church and society. Times change, visions and purposes need to be adjusted, but it is the breath of God’s Spirit that must guide it all, for it is the breath of the Spirit that shall renew the face of the earth.

Footnotes
1 First presented as a lecture to a gathering of the members of the Province of the Netherlands on February 2, 2008.
2 In this presentation I freely use my earlier study, “Consecration in an Institute of Apostolic Life,” presented at a month of reflection conducted by the International Centre for Research and Animation of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit, held in Gentinnes, Belgium, August, 1983. I also draw on a presentation that I gave on “Apostolische Toewijding en Practische Eénheid” at Halfweg, the Netherlands, February 2, 1999.
4 Groot woordenboek van de Nederlandse taal, Van Dale, ed. 2005, under ‘toewijding.’
7 Loc. cit., no 3, p.769.
8 N.D. II, p.290. See also N.D. X, p.505, quoted in SRL 3. All translations of Libermann’s writings are proper to the author.
9 N.D. II, pp. 235-236.
10 Lettres Spirituelles I, p.519.
13 N.D. X, p.498.
14 N.D. X, p.503.
15 SRL 133
16 SRL 1
17 SRL 11
18 SRL 13, 13.1
19 SRL 2
20 SRL 4
A New Spring For The Congregation

Frans Timmermans, C.S.Sp.

A native of the Netherlands and a former Superior General of the Spiritan Congregation (1974-1986), Frans Timmermans served as a missionary in the Central African Republic from 1961 – 1974. Working in partnership with other missionary groups to promote collaboration between local churches and missionary congregations, Fr. Timmermans served also as President of SEDOS while in Rome. He subsequently took up an appointment as Refugee Coordinator at the Secretariat of IMBISA (Inter-regional Meeting of the Bishops of Southern Africa). More recently he has served as National Director of the Pontifical Mission Societies in the Netherlands and a member of the Dutch Missionary Council. Fr. Timmermans was awarded an honorary doctorate degree by Duquesne University in 1975.

(Translation: Vincent O’Toole, C.S.Sp.)

...the Council had opened up opportunities that were beyond our dreams.

The Springtime of the Vatican Council

For me, and doubtless for many others of my generation, the years 1960-1970 were years full of promise. Everywhere, we felt that the world was undergoing a profound change and, as young missionaries, we were setting out for a recently independent Africa. Everything seemed possible – the Council had opened up opportunities that were beyond our dreams. The Church now wanted to be a servant, to share the joys and sufferings of the whole world. Mgr. Lefebvre and his fixation with the past seemed so out of touch. Spiritans were preparing for a General Chapter that would answer the appeal of Pope Paul VI to look again at our biblical roots, which were the source of our charism, to be able to answer the needs of our world. It was a tremendous grace to have lived through this springtide, which unfortunately turned out to be so short. If I retrace for you the path that the Congregation followed from 1968-1986, I must be careful to put it in its context. It was a period which could not be compared to what went before or what followed on afterwards. It was a pivotal period, beginning with the Council and finishing with the approval of our new Spiritan Rule of Life.

The General Chapter of 1968

It was a time of liberation, a new beginning, but it could so easily have turned into a disaster. I will never forget the crisis which exploded in the General Chapter in what could be called the “failed coup” of Mgr. Lefebvre. He was profoundly unhappy with the preparations for the Chapter and the way that events were unfolding, so he tried to force the hands of the capitulants by insisting on taking over the presidency of the Central Commission. In this way, he could control and direct the way the Chapter would go. But the Chapter rejected this by vote so he left the assembly, but not before accusing the capitulants of infidelity to the doctrine of the Church and the charism of the Congregation. He was leaving, he said, because he could not in conscience take part in the betrayal that was being committed by the Chapter which was manipulated by a minority.

There was great confusion, doubts were sown, and the Congregation could easily have disintegrated at that moment. It was Fr. Lécuyer who was the providential instrument that preserved the unity of our Congregation. As a renowned theologian and a confidant of Pope Paul VI, he managed to reassure those
who had been upset by the accusation of infidelity. During the audience at the Vatican which concluded the Chapter (and at which Mgr. Lefebvre was present), the Pope was full of praise for Fr. Lécuyer. Eventually, only one Spiritan left the Congregation to follow Mgr. Lefebvre.

A DIFFICULT TASK
If Fr. Lécuyer had the distinction of having saved the Congregation in this moment of crisis, it was far from being a foregone conclusion. It is true that the great majority of confrères were happy to accept the new orientations of the 1968 Chapter, but there was still a good number who partially accepted at least some of the ideas of Mgr. Lefebvre. Outwardly courteous and likeable, he had considerable charm. He had had an impressive ecclesiastical career, so the atmosphere of distrust that he had sown at the Chapter was not easily dissipated.

In the excitement of the moment, the capitulants perhaps underestimated how difficult it would be to convey the fruit of the Chapter to the circumscriptions. They also saw in the choosing of the General Assistants an opportunity to rehabilitate some eminent confreres who had been marginalized by Mgr. Lefebvre and to honor some of the prophetic voices. But in doing this, they sometimes set aside the preferences expressed by their Provinces of origin. So, in his Council, Fr. Lécuyer had some very original and talented people, but this strength also proved to be a weakness in some ways; they were never really a team amongst themselves and with the Superior General, so their impact on the Congregation as a whole was limited.

After a period of very strong centralization under the Lefebvre administration, the Congregation was determined to apply resolutely the newly acquired principle of subsidiarity. Decentralization was implemented at the heart of our juridical structures and the larger Provinces, above all, put it into practice in choosing priorities, in the formation of candidates, and in personnel policies.

The General Administration had lost much of its power and now concentrated on the new role that had been assigned to it by the Chapter – that of “animation.” In the years 1968-1974, the documents coming from the Generalate showed a big effort to publicize the relevant Church documents of the post-Council period, the general guidelines regarding mission and religious life that were coming from the Union of Superiors General and the meetings of SEDOS – a center of study and documentation set up by missionary congregations after the Council.
“Directives and Decisions,” the document that drew together the conclusions and decisions of the 1968 Chapter, became an important tool for the revitalization of the Congregation.

The journey to renewal had begun.

**The Search for a Unified Vision**

But the reality often proved to be intractable and unmanageable. The strong emphasis put on the essentially missionary identity of the Congregation exacerbated, in some places, the contrast between works which were missionary in the strict sense and those which were not. Choices that had to be made in the light of our re-defined priorities sometimes led to conflicts and internal discord. Young confreres in formation, excited by the new perspectives, also joined the debate, particularly in regard to the distribution of personnel and first appointments. Old habits died hard and the ranks closed to defend established positions and traditions. What could be done to counteract this?

This was the thinking behind the choice of themes for the General Chapter of 1974: unity in diversity, solidarity, and the place of our particular mission in the universal mission of the Church.

This Chapter also insisted that the General Council should be a team, united around the Superior General. Being elected first, he would then have a say in the choice of Assistants. And I can bear out that the group elected in 1974 was indeed a solid team, fraternal, enthusiastic, united, and rich in competence and experience. This time, the capitolants had avoided electing candidates contrary to the preferences of their Provinces of origin. The General Council was expected to lead the Congregation as a community, as a team. It was to remain in touch with the grass roots as far as possible, be attentive to the reality of what was being lived by the confreres, gather together what could inspire the entire Congregation, and look for answers on the basis of the lived experienced on the ground.

This resulted in a new style of government at several levels:

- The General Council paid considerable attention to its internal cohesion, and tried to be a real community of living, reflecting, and acting together.

- There were extended periods of reflection and common study twice a year, special times of prayer and celebration as a Council; visitations were prepared together in dialogue with the confreres to be visited.
A new wind was blowing, both in the choosing of bishops and in theological and pastoral research.

There were several bishops of high caliber from newly independent Africa...

- A new type of visitation emerged, usually of several Assistants at a time, with the Superior General joining them for the conclusion.

- A new system of conveying information evolved, where the themes to be developed were first of all researched on the ground.

The Ecclesial Context
The year 1974 was still in the immediate post-Council period. A new wind was blowing, both in the choosing of bishops and in theological and pastoral research. The reception of the new General Council by Paul VI remains an unforgettable event – very cordial, a minimum of protocol, no admonishments, and plenty of encouragement. The new Prefect of the Congregation for Religious was Cardinal Pironio from Argentina. A man of great warmth and encouragement for General Councils, he was a much appreciated guest at our meetings and we listened carefully to what he had to say on the subjects that preoccupied us. There were now two Secretaries (direct assistants to the Cardinal) at the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples: Mgr. Gantin for Africa and Mgr. Lourdusamy for Asia. The latter was the brother of the famous theologian and missiologist Amalor Pavadas, who was later killed in a tragic accident. When bishops came for their “ad limina” visits they found they were talking to men who were well informed about the problems that faced them. The missionary congregations also had easy access to them.

There were several bishops of high caliber from newly independent Africa, such as Zoa of Yaoundé, Ndayen of Bangui, Amissah and Sarpong from Ghana, de Souza from Dahomey, Hurley from South Africa, Cardinals Malula of Kinshasa, Zoungrana of Burkina Faso, and do Nascimento of Angola – to name but a few. In Brazil there was Cardinal Arns, the two Lorscheiters, Helder Camera, and Luciano Mendes. It was a joy and a privilege to be able to meet and share with them. The Episcopal Conference of Brazil had a number of world-famous theologians. There was a pastoral reflection that was both extensive and coordinated. The Conference of Religious men and women, both in Brazil and in the whole of Latin America, had an influence that was being felt way beyond the limits of their continent.

At the level of General Councils, there were the Unions of Superiors General and General Assistants where experiences were shared and, when necessary, actions coordinated. The missionary congregations had SEDOS (Servizio di Documentazione et di Studio), where a Spiritan, Fr. Bill Jenkinson, was the greatly
appreciated Secretary General for 12 years. In short, there was a climate that was both stimulating and open.

In the Provinces and Districts, one found the same concern for renewal and research in the face of many new challenges: evangelization and development, new missionary situations, internationalization of teams, new forms of belonging to the Congregation, questions of justice and peace, formation of our candidates, renewal of the management of our older Provinces (the famous principle of “rotation” of personnel). It was a real pleasure to set out on long visitations and to share the life of the confreres in the field.

But there were also crisis situations: Angola, torn apart by an unending war; South Africa, where the struggle against apartheid was continuously growing and where the position of the Catholic hierarchy was not always clear or firm. Those directly involved in pastoral ministry were also often divided as to which path to follow. The old and new worlds were colliding and people committed to the Church sometimes found themselves on different sides. Attacks on the Church from outside were painful and often unjust, especially in Angola. Even if there had been mistakes in the past, the missionaries were now the only outsiders to stay with the people, sharing their poverty and helplessness, loyal in their continuing support.

There was also the Province of Portugal which was suffering in its passage to a new age, but courageously went forward, particularly by means of LIAM (a new missionary movement), where it kept in touch with many different groups of young people. The influx of millions of refugees from Mozambique and Angola made great demands on the Portuguese Spiritans.

... the missionaries were now the only outsiders to stay with the people, sharing their poverty and helplessness...

It was very clear that we had now entered a new era of mission, above all in Africa.

**A Change of Emphasis in Missionary and Religious Thought**

It was very clear that we had now entered a new era of mission, above all in Africa. The “local Church” there was not very old; many were still at the stage of initial consolidation. It was a stage when the missionaries were more identified with these Churches which they had helped to found than with their missionary congregation. The missionary personnel were now diversifying, following the call of the Bishops. A local clergy was coming into existence. The Vatican Council had stressed that the local Church had the primary responsibility for mission in their area, not the missionary institute that had founded this Church.
The missionary congregations were also coming to realize how much they had in common, in practice, with each other; they were often founded around the same time to meet the same needs. Very many preferred to emphasize what they had in common rather than their particular features, for fear of doing harm to the unity of the apostolic body. On visitation, one could sometimes detect a certain irritation when it was suggested that confreres reflect on the charism particular to our Congregation. The visitors noticed that familiarity with the thoughts and orientations of our Founders was quite poor. They were rarely considered as points of reference. For the most part, members of the Congregation had not been led to discover during their formation the completely original intuition of Fr. Libermann, who was able to unite in his vision both a missionary mysticism and a missionary strategy.

There was another important change of perspective, originating above all in Latin America. The primary goal of mission was no longer seen as the implantation of the Church; it was rather the establishment of the Kingdom of God – good news from a God who frees and delivers. Religious life now had a prophetic role to play: not so much in being a part of the hierarchical structure as in constantly calling for the evangelical conversion of these same structures. In religious life, the accent moved from a personal piety towards the primacy of a witness of solidarity with the poor. And this pendulum at times swung from one extreme to the other.

The familiar framework of religious life, structured around prayer in common and the traditions peculiar to the institute, lost its importance and was replaced by a new model, that of personal and community witness in the service of the poor, through concrete acts of solidarity and availability, by a challenging lifestyle which would highlight the difference with the oppressors, or with those who lacked the courage to live up to their responsibilities. There were individuals and communities who adopted an extreme style of poverty and self-deprivation, often misunderstood by the local hierarchy. Sometimes, these “prophets” were a source of inspiration for their confreres, sometimes a source of division. For this renewal of religious life, people went to new sources that were used by all and were readily available both on the missions and at home while on holiday: sessions of reflection, courses of ongoing formation, an abundant literature, and the living example of Latin America. The new wind was strong, refreshing, and enjoyable.
But unfortunately, there was a tendency to by-pass the sources that could be found in our own back garden, the heritage of our Founders and our tradition. How could we once again present this treasure to our brothers and sisters in a new context and from a new angle?

**FROM THE “SPIRITAN STUDIES GROUP” TO THE “CENTER FOR RESEARCH AND ANIMATION”**

In 1975, a “Spiritan Studies Group” was set up around Fr. Joseph Lécuyer, who was living in the French Seminary. They produced a publication known as “Spiritan Papers.” It started as a study group whose principal task was the publication of Spiritan texts but, after the General Chapter of 1980, it moved towards a role of animation, in close collaboration with the General Council and confreres in the field. In 1982, this group was replaced by the Spiritan Center for Research and Animation, under the direction of Frs. Alphonse Gilbert and Myles Fay. New publications were undertaken and Fr. Gilbert, helped by other confreres, traveled frequently to Provinces and Districts to lead retreats and study sessions on Libermann. Missionary renewal had to go hand in hand with an interior renewal. All this had a considerable impact and helped the confreres to rediscover our hidden treasures. The history of the Congregation was re-written in a remarkable way by Fr. Henry Koren and Fr. Paul Coulon opened up new and exciting paths to make our shared history more readily available. He was joined later by the team of “Mémoire Spiritain”; a widespread effort began to put in writing the story of the past.

We must also mention here the beatifications of Jacques Laval and Daniel Brottier, in 1979 and 1984 respectively, which were opportunities for all of us to give thanks to God for our Spiritan Congregation which was recognized in this way by the Church as a way to apostolic sanctity.

**The Turning Point and the Landmarks**

The new and radical re-direction of missionary and religious theory and practice sometimes created considerable disarray. The compass no longer worked and the familiar landmarks by which we had previously steered were not easy to detect. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* had called for integral development and we did our best to respond. We committed ourselves enthusiastically to all sorts of development projects; in the euphoria of the first decade of independence in Africa, everything seemed to be possible. Unfortunately, we were soon to discover that the models of development adopted were quite often faulty and doomed to failure.
Where policies of confiscating schools and health centers were introduced, new forms of service to the community were also introduced, and the resulting finance that became available was now invested in training centers for catechists and lay leaders. All this meant that strictly sacramental ministry had to be rethought; a new balance had to be found, but this was not always done successfully. What were the priorities to be now?

This was also the time of “personal projects” for those who saw themselves as prophets and committed themselves to works of their own choosing. Sometimes, for example in war situations like Angola, this was quite understandable. The dramatic events in Haiti forced our confreres, exiled with their people, to adopt political positions that were often disapproved of by the bishops. During the Biafran war, new aid organizations were set up by Spiritans which continued to function after the end of the war.

At the same time, many confreres underwent personal crises and left the Congregation. In some Provinces there was a veritable hemorrhage. These confreres were often those who had received a specialized training with a view to posts of leadership or formation in their circumscriptions. The system of formation itself was closely scrutinized but solutions were not always found to the new challenges. Many students left and the number of vocations declined rapidly. Situations differed according to countries, which made it difficult to give general guidelines or directives.

The General Chapter of 1980 devoted much time to the problem and, in 1982, an international congress of Spiritan formators was held at Saverne. It asked that formators meet on a regular basis according to region. The first task was to discuss, analyze, and identify the cause of these problems; subsequent Chapters could then give guidelines and directives. At the same time, the General Council initiated a reflection on all these themes in Information/Documentation, in dialogue with the confreres; this reflection was then continued during visits to the circumscriptions.

NEW OPENINGS

This shrinking of personnel did not divert the General Administration from trying to answer new challenges as recommended by the Chapter. The accent was now moving from mission territories to what were referred to as “missionary situations.” Young confreres were very keen to get involved in such works, rather than continuing to follow the traditional paths by replacing those who had gone before them. Efforts were made to find a new form of presence in the Oeuvre d’Auteuil at the service of young and abandoned people. Commitments were taken on in Yugoslavia, and in Europe and the United States.
working with migrants, drug addicts, and refugees. We tried to look again at the nature of our involvement in education, not without considerable tension.

At the same time we could not ignore the call for more first evangelization that came from the Chapter of 1968. Finally, an old dream of Libermann himself was realized—we went to Asia. In answer to a persistent request from the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, a young and dynamic team was sent to the so-called “tribal peoples” of central Pakistan, a mission that proved to be extremely difficult and unrewarding. We built up our presence in other Muslim countries, Algeria and Mauritania, trying to live fully the dialogue that the Council had asked for.

All this was not without internal tensions, for many confreres could not understand what they saw as the abandonment of our traditional works in favor of the ideas of a passing fashion. In fact, the Congregation was stretched to the limits of its possibilities; it was only by a concerted and coordinated effort of the entire Congregation that we were able to undertake such commitments.

**Co-responsibility and Internationality**

If the Chapter of 1974 had insisted on co-responsibility to counter-balance the excessive centrifugal movement after the Chapter of 1968, the time had now come to set up structures to make this possible. Enlarged Councils were introduced for an assessment of progress between General Chapters and existing regional meetings were increased in number. The General Council was already responsible for all first appointments.

In this way, solidarity was given a new form with a view to a sharing of personnel and finance. The first international teams saw the light of day in Pakistan, Ethiopia, Yugoslavia, and Paraguay, all under the direct responsibility of the General Council. The General Administration was re-discovering its role of coordination, while fully respecting the principle of subsidiarity.

**New Foundations and Provinces**

Another feature of missionary evolution had a very important place in the period 1968-1986: the young Churches were themselves becoming missionary. They were forming young missionaries to send them elsewhere. This raised serious questions for the old missionary institutes, and there were some hesitations. If they accepted candidates locally would it not interfere with the evolution of specifically African forms of religious and missionary life? Would it not take away good candidates who would
otherwise have entered the diocesan seminaries? It was discussed at length by Generalates in Rome and they finally opted to open their doors to candidates from Africa (the situation was different in Latin America where there was already a long tradition of religious life).

Spiritans already had a sizeable group of African confreres in Nigeria, with 5-6 years of autonomous development since the expulsion of the Irish confreres in 1969. They had succeeded in organizing their own administration and houses of formation and they already had many candidates in training. Soon their first missionaries were ready to depart; the General Council would have preferred these young confreres to join international teams, but they were anxious to take these first steps on their own so that they could give their work a distinctively African character from the start. Since then, they have deployed to 26 different countries in Latin America, Asia, Oceania, Europe, the United States, and elsewhere in Africa.

Inspired by this experience, the General Council decided to give every encouragement henceforth to a genuine inculturation of the Spiritan way of life. Unlike other congregations, we set up autonomous structures called “Foundations,” alongside the old circumscriptions but independent of them. Houses of formation were increased in number, despite the considerable cost involved, to ensure that at least the initial training could be done in one’s own cultural environment. Once the idea of these vocations had been fully accepted in the old missionary circumscriptions, the General Administration tried to encourage them, with the generous support of the whole Congregation, and lead them towards full autonomy. The Lord blessed these efforts and the Congregation is now rapidly expanding in Africa. Beginning with the second mandate of our administration, there have always been African Assistants on the General Council, dedicated Spiritans who have made an important contribution to the Africanization of the Spiritan charism.

**The Spiritan Rule of Life**

All this development was crowned by the approval of our revised Rule of Life. It was the result of a prolonged exercise which had begun with the *Directives and Decisions* of 1968. Many confreres took part. The contributions from Africa and Latin America were significant, especially in the interpretation of the ends of the Congregation according to the writings of Libermann. How can the missionary vision of our Founders be translated for today’s world and for Spiritans of different cultural backgrounds? Who are the poor and most abandoned to whom we are now sent,
and what type of spirituality should be our support? These new insights gave us a dynamic inspiration, especially in Chapter 2 which is devoted to mission. This text aimed at putting into words the aggiornamento to which the Church was calling us and which we tried to put into practice during the 18 years of this period of “experimentation.”

This concluded the crucial period from 1968-1986. Personally, I lived it as a new spring in the life of the Congregation in spite of its limitations, a period of renewal, of new hope. If the future of the Congregation is difficult to foretell for Europe, a new period of youth and vitality has opened elsewhere, especially in Africa. A new sap has arisen from the old tree, whose roots were deep in the plan of God, a plan that was recognized and nurtured by our Founders and their companions. We must continue to read all these developments in the context of the signs of the times and remain faithful to these, lest our love should turn cold.

**Conclusion**

So the publication of the *Spiritan Rule of Life* also marks a new beginning, a new departure, even more difficult than the path that opened up in 1968. The present missionary period is marked by the immense suffering of an Africa torn apart, where hope quickly evaporates, and by a disenchanted Latin America, where the voices of prophets seem to have been partially stifled. Ours is a world that is even harder and more implacable than in the past, after the victory of a heartless and unchallenged capitalism. But our mission is still to question it in the name of the Gospel.

Even in the Church the spring seems far away. Much has changed for the religious orders and the missionary institutes. The Roman dicasteries today look more like organs of control than those older brothers who used to encourage us on the road to the future in the period after the Council. The liberation movement coming from Latin America seems to have been broken. Often courage is swept away by anxiety and the paths towards renewal are more difficult to open up.

But this must not stop us believing in the future and the liberating force of the Gospel. There are still signs of hope and promise. The Holy Spirit remains at the heart of the Church and we continue to be called as his instruments – “light as a feather, carried on his breath,” as Libermann used to say. We pray for the grace to embrace this challenge.
Footnotes

1 This was a presentation given by the author at a Colloquium in Paris to mark the 300th anniversary of the founding of the Spiritan Congregation. The Colloquium, entitled “Les Spiritains – trois siècles d’histoire missionnaire (1703-2003),” took place at the Institut Catholique from November 14-16, 2002.
Holy Ghost in the Highlands: The Spiritans on Kilimanjaro, 1892-1953

In July of 1890, three Catholic priests of the Congregation of the Holy Ghost – Alexander Le Roy, Auguste Gommenginger, and Bishop Jean Marie de Courmont – set out from Bagamoyo on an arduous journey across the East African interior. For nearly six weeks, their caravan trekked through the harsh conditions of the semiarid Maasai steppe, negotiating hazards ranging from inadequate water and disease to wild animals such as lions and leopards. Finally, the three arrived at their destination, the majestic snow-capped peak known as Kilimanjaro. Le Roy, in his travel memoirs, notes the sheer awe in which he and his companions found themselves:

"The spectacle that we have before our eyes is something that will remain unforgettable. Underneath a completely blue sky, there in front of us, we see the immense profile of the marvelous mountain. The two peaks [Kibo and Mawenzi] appear to be supported by this enormous pedestal...as a candelabra lit in the course of centuries to the glory of the Creator."

He remarks further at the almost heavenly appearance of the snow-capped peak, the myriad of colors radiating from its heights, and the manner in which clouds seem to hide and reveal the summit as though moved by the hand of God. To the three, the mountain was a ‘Garden of Eden,’ a symbol of God’s presence in the heart of Africa, and the perfect locale for the spreading of the Gospel.

Over the next sixty years, priests, brothers, and lay catechists from the Holy Ghost Fathers – known also as the Spiritans – established one of the largest and most prosperous Catholic communities in Africa on the slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro. They founded dozens of mission stations, each featuring not only churches but also schools, hospitals, and dispensaries. Furthermore, they transformed the economic landscape of the mountain by introducing the cultivation of Arabica coffee, which became a lucrative business for thousands. By the 1960s, the Church had become a focal point of life for the Chagga-speaking peoples of the mountain. More than 95% of people living near the missions, nearly 200,000 people, had converted to Catholicism. Also striking was the broader social transformation. The region sported the highest ratio of schools to students, the highest school...
enrollment figures, and the most medical facilities per capita of any part of rural Eastern Africa.⁴

The spread of mission Christianity in Africa has been the subject of much scholarship over the past century. Missionaries themselves compiled the earliest writings, often in the form of journals, diaries, and correspondence that were later transformed into full-length books.⁵ These works have provided tremendous insight into the experiences of missionaries and the work they performed, but with few exceptions have tended to be more descriptive than analytical. The past few decades have seen the emergence of work by historians that engages more analytically the work of various missions, their relations with local communities, and the overall social, cultural, and economic – as well as religious – implications of their work.⁶ Though this literature on Christianity in Africa is rich and diverse, relatively few scholars have focused on the missions of the Spiritans.⁷ This dearth is especially striking in that the Spiritans were among the most active Christian missionaries on the African continent in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

This article looks at the development of the Spiritan missions on Mount Kilimanjaro from the arrival of the first Catholic clergy until the establishment of the first Catholic Diocese in 1953. In particular, it examines why these missions emerged as the most successful of those opened by the Congregation, and some of the more successful in Africa. I argue that the success of the Spiritans resulted from a confluence of spiritual, economic, and social factors, which together transformed the missions from a foreign presence into a focal point of life on the mountain. This piece draws on a wide range of source materials, both primary and secondary, including letters and correspondence gathered from the Tanzania National Archives, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, and the Spiritan Archives in Chevilly-Larue, France. In doing so, it gives a vivid window into life in the Kilimanjaro mission while providing an analytical assessment of its implications for the people of the region.

**Kilimanjaro and its People**

Mount Kilimanjaro is Africa’s tallest peak, rising to an elevation of 19,343 feet in the northeastern corner of what is now Tanzania, a mere 200 miles south of the equator. It is also the world’s tallest freestanding mountain, surrounded entirely by the Maasai steppe for at least twenty miles in all directions. Nearly forty miles in width, Kilimanjaro is large enough to generate its own weather patterns. Rather than sharing the semiarid climate of its surrounding land, the mountain gives rise to a wide variety...
of climate zones, ranging from glaciers and alpine desert at the top, to lush, fertile forests on its lower slopes (between 3,000 and 6,000 feet).

It is this latter region that most of the people of Kilimanjaro call home. The ancestors of the current Chagga-speaking population first settled the mountain’s southern and eastern sides from neighboring areas approximately 1000 years ago. Attracted to this prime farmland, they developed a thriving agrarian society based on the production of bananas, yams, millets, and various vegetables. Virtually every family held its own small acreage homestead, known in Kichagga as *kihamba*, which provided for the sustenance of the family as well as goods for trade. Aside from the favorable climate, the success of mountain farming owed much to the development of a system of irrigation canals called *mifongo*. These “indigenous wonders,” of which there were over 800 at their peak, carried water from the mountain’s deep river valleys directly onto the ridges in which people lived. This not only permitted three growing seasons per year, but it also gave women an easily accessible source of water for domestic tasks ranging from bathing to cooking.

By the eighteenth century, the mountain had become home to an estimated 40,000 people. Yet there were no villages, everyone choosing to live within the confines of their own *kihamba*. Political development therefore took place through alliances among clans living along the same mountain ridges. Each ridge essentially became an autonomous community, in spite of the fact that peoples across the mountain spoke the same language, traded with one another, and held the same cultural practices. Leadership lay in the hands of male elders, who acted as governors, judges, and military generals. Also important within the community were specialists such as midwives, rainmakers, healers, and furrow engineers. A century later, political power began to consolidate. Increasing trade with coastal caravans and warfare among the various ridges led clans on the same ridge to unify as chiefdoms, with the most prestigious clans becoming the lineages of chiefs.

The mountain was also a vibrant place in terms of culture. From the time of settlement, the people of the mountain had developed a vibrant set of customs and beliefs, passing these social norms from generation to generation in the form of oral traditions. Perhaps the best example of Chagga culture was the system of religious beliefs and practices. Most Chagga came to believe in the existence of a supreme deity, Ruwa, who lived at the peak of Kilimanjaro. Ruwa created the whole universe, but had...
endowed the mountain with rich resources as a special gift to his chosen people. He continued to be active in the lives of people, bestowing blessings such as supplying life-giving water from the mountain’s peak. People on the mountain also believed in the existence of various spirits, called waruma. Unlike in Judeo-Christian cosmology where the spiritual and temporal realms are distinct (Heaven and Earth), in Chagga belief spirits remained among the living. Spirits held an intermediate position in the world, existing between Ruwa and the people. Some held control over aspects of the natural world, such as rainfall, and had existed as long as the mountain had. Most, however, were actually the spirits of ancestors. Referred to by historian Anza Lema as the “living dead,” the waruma continued to be active in the affairs of the living. They could be held responsible for bringing blessings, or for causing great hardship. In turn, people routinely made offerings to the deceased, both as a form of reverence and as a means of addressing problems ranging from drought to a sickly child.

By the late nineteenth century, Kilimanjaro had become a prosperous and culturally dynamic place. Yet, political turbulence lingered on the horizon. Increasing competition over the lucrative caravan trade led to increasing warfare and rivalry among the chiefdoms. Furthermore, in the 1890s, Germany began to exercise claims to the mountain, using military and political coercion to integrate it into its colonial possession, German East Africa. It was at this historical moment that the Spiritans decided to extend their East African mission to include Kilimanjaro.

THE SPIRITANS IN AFRICA
The Congregation of the Holy Ghost, founded in France at the beginning of the eighteenth century, had since its inception focused on assisting the poor and neglected. In 1848, the Congregation of the Holy Heart of Mary, founded six years earlier by Francis Libermann, merged with the Holy Ghost Fathers, and Libermann was elected as the 11th Superior General. Libermann set his sights on providing religious service to poor populations, particularly freed slaves, in France’s overseas colonies and former possessions. He had already opened missions in Haiti, Réunion, Mauritius, the West Coast of Africa, and Australia. Over the next twenty years, the Congregation expanded rapidly, opening missions across Africa, the Indian Ocean, and the Caribbean, as well as seminaries and colleges in the Americas, Portugal, and Ireland.
For their first mission on the coast of Eastern Africa, the Spiritans chose the island of Zanzibar. This was a daring choice. Zanzibar was a very cosmopolitan place, populated by Swahili-speaking Arabs, Indians, and Africans. A thriving hub of trade, it supplied spices, slaves, and other goods to consumers across the Indian Ocean. It was also predominantly Muslim, and governed by the Sultan of Oman and his royal family. These characteristics made the island very different from the Congregation’s other sites in the Indian Ocean, which were French colonies and largely French-speaking. As a focal point of the slave trade, however, the island seemed a perfect choice. In 1860, Vicar General Father Armand Fava and a small group of priests opened the island’s first Catholic mission. The mission grew quickly, and two years later the Propaganda Fide decided to create the Prefecture of Zanzibar, and give the Spiritans jurisdiction over evangelizing coastal areas on the mainland. This in essence transformed the Zanzibar mission into a stepping-stone for bringing Catholicism to the continent. Over the next three decades, the Congregation opened missions across the East African interior.

Initially, these efforts focused on three groups of people – freed slaves, young people, and the disenfranchised. The evangelical methodology utilized by the Spiritans is well exemplified by the Bagamoyo mission. A coastal village just north of Dar es Salaam, Bagamoyo had for centuries been a crucial hub in the Indian Ocean slave trade, a point from which slaves captured in the interior were sent by dhows (small Arab sailboats) to Zanzibar and points beyond. In 1866, the new Superior of the Vicariate of Zanzibar, Father Anton Horner, chose this crucial location as the site for the first Spiritan presence on the continent. After two years of preparation, Horner and a group of lay catechists set out for the mainland and, with the permission of local leaders, began to develop a mission. The first step they took was the creation of a Christian Village, a mission settlement adjacent to, yet distinct from, the existing village of Bagamoyo. The idea behind this strategy was that once a strong, autonomous Christian community was in place, neighboring people would become attracted and, over time, the new and existing settlements would merge. The second step involved putting together a faith community by evangelizing local populations. Initially, these efforts focused on three groups of people – freed slaves, young people, and the disenfranchised. The missionaries offered them the opportunity to learn about the Gospel, become candidates, and live in the mission community. The lay catechists acted as teachers, often developing close relationships with their students. Clergy tended to focus more on the overall growth of the mission and administering the sacraments, though many did
...the mission hoped to create Christians who would both exemplify the Christian lifestyle and go out into the community and spread the Gospel further.

In the 1880s, the Congregation set its sights on Mount Kilimanjaro.

work closely with the people. Good examples of this were the brothers, who often took on the role of construction foremen in the mission communities, and thus worked closely with a diverse group of people. From the first small group of candidates, the mission hoped to create Christians who would both exemplify the Christian lifestyle and go out into the community and spread the Gospel further. In Bagamoyo, this strategy produced mixed results. By 1872, the village had transformed into a vibrant town, featuring over fifty buildings managed by the mission’s twenty-five priests and brothers. The mission had also opened the first junior seminary and the first Sister’s novitiate in East Africa. Though the town had quite a Christian presence, however, the number of local converts remained small, and almost all of them were freed slaves. Most townspeople chose to remain Muslims.

TO AFRICA’S TALLEST PEAK

Though the Bagamoyo mission did not generate widespread conversions to the faith, it became the center of the Holy Ghost Congregation in East Africa and the springboard for spreading the Gospel further into the East African interior. In the 1880s, the Congregation set its sights on Mount Kilimanjaro. This location appealed to the mission for a number of reasons. For one, it was a common stopping point for many of the slave caravans running between the coast and the great lakes region. By opening a mission there, the Spiritans could continue their mission of serving slave and ex-slave populations. Also, the mountain was a highly populated place, like the coast, but unlike the coast had relatively few Muslims, thus providing a large number of potential converts. Perhaps the most important reason, however, was symbolic rather than practical. The continent’s tallest peak seemed an almost mystical – perhaps divine – place. European explorers who had seen it, such as Johannes Rebmann, Charles New, Hans Meyer, and Harry Johnston, described the mountain as magnificent and formidable, and its unique ice-capped top as almost miraculous, especially considering its location so close to the equator. Such a place excited the imaginations of many missionaries, including Raoul de Courmont, the recently appointed bishop of the Vicariate of Zanzibar. With the mission already extending into the interior as far as Nairobi, Kilimanjaro lay well within the lands of the Vicariate. Seeing tremendous potential for the mountain, as both a site for evangelization and a symbol for the Church’s broader work, he decided in 1890 to lead an expedition there personally. He chose two priests to accompany him, Fathers Auguste Gommenginger and Alexander Le Roy, both of whom had experience in developing inland missions. The three met in Bagamoyo, and then traveled to
On 15 July 1890, the caravan of nearly 300 men set out on their journey. For nearly six weeks, they trekked across the interior, passing along the coast and the Usambaras before turning inward toward the Pare and along the newly established border between the British Kenya Colony and German East Africa. Their route was for the most part dictated by the availability of water and the threat of unfriendly communities, wild animals, and disease. The priests acted as directors of the group, each assuming a set of responsibilities. For example, Father Le Roy supervised the porters and the carriage of goods, while Bishop de Courmont took care of navigation and the pitching of tents. The group made swift progress. On 8 August, they reached the shore of Lake Jipe, a mere twenty miles from the mountain. One week later, they held their first Mass at the foot of the mountain.

For much of August, the three priests visited various chiefdoms on the slopes of the mountain, including Kilema, Old Moshi, Machame, and Kibosho. Their goal was to ascertain which would be the best location for their first center of evangelization. After much deliberation, they chose Kilema, a small chiefdom on the southeast corner of the mountain. They made this choice for several reasons. One, Kilema was a place of relative peace, lying outside of an ongoing rivalry involving many of the other chiefdoms. Two, the chief of Kilema, Pfumba, proved to be an accommodating host, offering them both temporary housing and land for the development of a permanent mission. Rather than viewing them with suspicion or threatening them, he went as far as to enter into a bond of blood brotherhood with Bishop de Courmont. Three, and perhaps most importantly, one of the guides who had accompanied them from Mombasa, Nderingo, was originally from Kilema, and successfully acted as a cultural intermediary between the missionaries, Pfumba, and the elders. From Pfumba, they obtained an estate, nearly one thousand acres of prime land in the lush, lower slopes of the chiefdom. With a site secure, Bishop de Courmont and Father Le Roy left for Bagamoyo the following month, leaving behind Father Gommenginger (as superior of the mission) and a small group of lay catechists. Next year, they were joined by Father Martin Rohmer and eleven additional catechists. This small group then set out to transform their vision into a reality.

Development of the Kilema mission, as in the case of Bagamoyo, started with the development of the Christian village. Father Gommenginger immediately set out to construct a temporary
chapel and housing for himself and the catechists. He assembled groups of local men to assist with construction, and he even called upon elders to assist him in procuring building materials and access to water. By March 1892, they had completed a temporary chapel and six additional buildings, as well as a furrow to bring water directly to the mission. Over the next two decades, the village continued to expand, with the addition of permanent buildings. The centerpiece of the mission came in 1910, when the priests finished construction of the permanent church. Named in honor of Our Lady of Lourdes, this impressive structure featured French baroque architecture, stone construction, wooden statues and sacred symbols, and stained glass windows.

In addition to creating the physical infrastructure, the missionaries also set out to develop agricultural production. Using the lands given to them by Pfumba, they worked to create gardens for the growing of both food and crops for sale. For the mission, these gardens served several functions. For one, they provided a source of food for the missionaries, lay catechists, and those living in the village. They also provided a means of generating much-needed revenue, lessening the mission’s financial dependence on both Paris and Rome. Lastly, they provided employment, not only for those living in the mission but also for men and women in the neighboring community. Thus, agriculture served as a form of evangelical outreach. By 1910, the gardens at Kilema were growing not only local crops such as bananas and yams, but also newly introduced crops from Europe – wheat, maize, and fruits – that thrived in the lush conditions. Arguably the most important crop introduced by the missionaries was coffee. In 1902, the priests brought over several small Arabica coffee trees from Réunion, and found that they thrived in the well-watered, high altitude conditions. Within a decade, the mission had a large garden of trees, producing lucrative coffee beans for export.

With buildings and gardens in place, the missionaries focused their full attention on their evangelical goals. As in Bagamoyo, the Spiritans first focused on establishing the Christian village as a strong religious community with the hope that – through education and outreach – the example set there would attract surrounding peoples. Over the first five years, the population of the mission grew slowly but steadily to nearly 100 people. Most of these individuals were new priests, brothers, and lay catechists from Bagamoyo, while others were freed slaves from coastal caravans and refugees from neighboring Maasai groups. Within the community, the missionaries set up a series of schools that would educate children and adults in both religion and skills.
necessary for the emergence of a Christian society. The first one took form early in 1892. The catechists serving as teachers, they taught a curriculum that included not only basic instruction in Catholic catechism, but also arithmetic and reading and writing in Swahili. By the end of the year, they had a class of forty-five pupils, including such local celebrities as the sons of Chief Pfumba and Chief Marealle I of neighboring Marangu. Over the next decade, schooling became more structured and formal, with the construction of actual schoolhouses, the employment of trained teachers, and the expansion of the curriculum to include science, domestic arts, agriculture, health, and other languages. The mission also moved gradually toward the creation of a Chagga ordained clergy, opening its first junior seminary, Saint James, in 1923.

Aside from the classroom, religious evangelization took place, as might be expected, in the church. The completion of Kilema’s first chapel provided a forum for the celebration of the Mass. They tended to be lively occasions, featuring a high-energy atmosphere and lots of music. Initially, Masses featured Latin hymns, to which local people took readily in spite of their unfamiliarity with the language, though over time the priests allowed the use of vernacular language music as well. Most religious instruction tended to take place on site, either through the schools or informal teaching sessions led by catechists. Only on rare occasion did clergy venture out into Kilema to teach in the early years, and this was usually limited to the compounds of Pfumba and prominent clan heads.

By the mid 1890s, the Kilema mission had emerged as a strong religious community, and the Spiritans began to contemplate spreading across the mountain. Initially the often-violent conflict among many of the chiefdoms had prevented this. However, the establishment of German colonial rule in this period led to the subordination of the mountain’s chiefs and a subsequent end to inter-chiefdom warfare. The period also saw the arrival on Kilimanjaro of another Christian group, the German Leipzig Lutheran Mission. Eager to avoid violent conflict and rivalry among missions as had occurred recently in Uganda, the District Officer divided up the mountain’s chiefdoms into ‘spheres of evangelization.’ This provided the Congregation with both a framework for evangelization, and also an impetus, as areas left without a missionary presence could revert to the rival group. Between 1895 and 1915, the Congregation’s presence spread rapidly, with new mission stations opening at Kibosho in 1894, Mkuu Rombo in 1898, Uru in 1911, and Mashati Rombo in 1912. In 1910, the Kilimanjaro missions separated from
Zanzibar, becoming an independent Apostolic Vicariate. Growth was even more pronounced after the First World War, when the colony shifted into British hands and became known as the Tanganyika Territory. By 1935, the Spiritans had six main mission parishes, dozens of outstations, and 214 primary schools.

The peoples of Kilimanjaro initially greeted the Spiritan missions with a good deal of skepticism. For the first two decades of their existence, few sought membership in the churches or conversion to the faith, and those who did tended to be either social outcasts or freed slaves, well outside the mainstream of Chagga society. The difficulty of the missions in attracting followers stemmed from reluctance both to give up existing religious beliefs and practices and to enter into a new social network (the Church) that often conflicted with existing ones (such as the clans). In the 1930s, however, the Catholic missions began to experience explosive growth. Records kept by the mother church in Kilema indicate that there were 29,085 baptized Catholics on the mountain in 1933. This figure increased sharply over the next thirty years, rising to 92,505 in 1953, and to 175,340 in 1961. By the latter, over ninety percent of those living within two miles of a mission were Catholic. The rising popularity of Christianity was not limited to Catholicism, however. The Lutheran missions in nearby parts of Kilimanjaro likewise claimed similar growth in membership. By the mid 1960s, Kilimanjaro had become a predominantly Christian place, with an estimated Christian population of between eighty and ninety percent.

Church membership statistics, however, are only a small indication of the increasing significance of the missions. They also had tremendous success in attracting students into classrooms. In 1934, the 214 primary schools run by the Holy Ghost Fathers had 14,740 enrolled students. By 1956, this figure increased by a factor of five, with more than 90% of young Chagga children in Church-run primary schools. Furthermore, the region boasted the largest number of primary and secondary schools of any part of Tanganyika, as well as the highest figures for enrollment. For those students who completed secondary school, several options awaited, including enrollment in mission-run teachers training colleges, seminaries, or higher education opportunities away from the mountain.

Another sign of the rising influence of the missions was the dying out of many existing forms of religious and cultural expression.
In the 1930s and 40s, many practices that had defined life on the mountain, such as polygamy and initiation, had begun to fall into decline. In their place, many people had come to practice Christian rites such as baptism and confirmation. The work of local healers and medicine men also became less publicly acceptable, with much of their work being driven underground. Perhaps the most significant indication of the rising influence of the mission was the gradual shifting of its control into the hands of the people. In the early years of the mission, the clergy held responsibility for developing the individual stations and guiding the process of evangelization. Few in numbers, however, they relied heavily on lay catechists – at first immigrants from the coastal missions, and later Chagga converts – to carry out the bulk of evangelical work. The missionaries hoped that in time, as they gained more converts and as the system of education developed, the whole mountain could eventually be placed into the hands of Chagga clergy. In 1939, the first Chagga priest, Alfonce Mtana, was ordained. Over the next thirty years, over 78 men followed in his footsteps, each taking over the roles held by missionary priests and brothers. Over this span, Kilimanjaro’s mission stations gradually became parishes, their control shifting into the hands of local clergy. A crucial turning point occurred on March 25, 1953, when the Apostolic Vicariate of Kilimanjaro became the Diocese of Moshi. The first bishop was an Irish Spiritan, Father Joseph Byrne. However, seven years later, Byrne was succeeded by Joseph Kilasara, the mountain’s first African bishop. The Spiritan era had ended.

Thus, in a span of fifty years, the Spiritans succeeded in establishing a thriving, dynamic, self-sustaining Catholic society on the slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro. Why did this happen? Though Catholic missionaries and their Protestant counterparts had tremendous success in many areas of Africa, in few areas did it become so widespread, and so quickly. Through analysis of the mission’s activities and the response of Chagga peoples between 1890 and 1950, it becomes clear that the success of the Congregation is due to an intermingling of spiritual, economic, and social factors.

Spiritually, the success of the Spiritan missions was greatly facilitated by a number of structural similarities between existing Chagga religious beliefs and Catholicism. One of these was belief in a supreme deity. As stated before, unlike many other societies in Africa, the peoples of Kilimanjaro believed that a single divine being, Ruwa, had created the world and continued to influence its daily affairs. Ruwa was, of course, distinct from the Christian God in many respects – he ruled not from the heavens but
rather from the top of the mountain, not to mention that he was not the father of Jesus. However, the essential properties of the two deities – creator, life-giver, sustainer, benevolent – were very consistent. These consistencies allowed the missionaries to create a conceptual bridge between existing beliefs and Catholic traditions. In essence, they could describe the new by paralleling it to the old, and then elaborating and explaining the difference. The Spiritans even adopted the Chagga word ‘Ruwa’ as their word for God. Though this did risk the two becoming thought of as the same being, it was enormously effective in making the faith comprehensible to people.

Another example of similarity between the two faith systems was between the Chagga *waruma* and Catholic saints. As stated before, the people of Kilimanjaro believed that the spirits of the deceased, especially people who had been particularly prominent, continued to reside in the land of the living and had the power to influence daily events.³⁶ People would regularly make offerings to these spirits, in hope that they would grant them prosperity and safety, and possibly even intercede on their behalf with Ruwa. The early missionaries found these beliefs to be unacceptable, calling them animistic and pagan, largely due to the nature of the offerings being made – usually involving production and consumption of large quantities of *mbege*, or banana beer, or the sacrifice of an animal such as a goat. Though problematic, the *waruma* did bear some structural similarity to a Catholic institution, the Communion of Saints. As a means of both discouraging these practices while at the same time presenting an important Catholic concept, the Spiritan missionaries explained saints as analogous to, yet distinct from, these spirits. Furthermore, they promoted means of worship that they found more acceptable, such as reciting prayers, saying the rosary, and lighting votives. The strategy proved to be successful. Reverence for saints, over time, displaced the worship of many forms of spirits, and practices such as animal sacrifice fell by the wayside. However, the people of Kilimanjaro retain to this day a strong sense of reverence for the ancestors, and a belief that they are a presence in their lives.

A third area of similarity related not to doctrine, but rather to imagery. Several important symbols in Chagga spirituality had similar counterparts in Catholicism, perhaps the best example being water.³⁷ In Catholic tradition, water serves as one of the most powerful symbols of God’s presence on earth. From the story of Noah’s ark to the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River, the power of water to cleanse, purify, and bring rebirth is reaffirmed across the Old and New Testaments. In Chagga
beliefs, water was likewise considered to be a divine gift (though from Ruwa), and it had the power not only to enable life in an otherwise desolate landscape, but also to purify and cleanse the individual. Both faith systems even had analogous rituals related to water. While Christians used the rite of baptism to cleanse believers of original sin, Chagga elders used rites of washing as a part of initiation rituals, which were meant to cleanse youth of the impurities of childhood.

The Spiritans quickly recognized the power that water imagery could have in creating a bridge between existing religious beliefs and Catholic ones. In teaching the faith, they focused on the importance of the resource, but claimed the Christian God – and not Ruwa – to be the source of such goodness. They also attempted to add a Christian touch to one of the most pervasive features of the mountain, the irrigation furrows. While completing the first buildings at Kilema, Brother Cere Spiekerman worked with a local specialist to construct a furrow that would carry water from a nearby river to the mission. Rather than naming it after the person who had called for its construction, however, the priests named it after the Holy Spirit, using the Swahili name Mtakatifu.

These similarities in imagery, and in turn practice, allowed the people of the mountain to interpret new Catholic practices in relation to that which they already knew. Over time, the conceptual bridges created by the missionaries likely facilitated many conversions to the faith. They also allowed local people to leave some mark on the faith. For example, though Christians came to think of the Christian God as being the creator of the earth, and not Ruwa, they still managed to retain the idea of Kilimanjaro being a sacred place. Mzee Mwasha, an elder from Machame and a devout Christian, explained the creation of the mountain in terms very similar to that of the creation story:

*When God created the world, He made water splendid on the surface of the earth. Water got into His furrows, and as the years got on these got deeper and deeper in the valleys.*

Furthermore, the fact that many Catholic practices could substitute for existing ones (baptism for initiation, for example) enhanced the social acceptability of conversion. People could retain similar forms of cultural expression, and in turn not turn their backs entirely on the ways of the past. It is very likely that increasing comfort with Catholic practices, due largely to their similarity, facilitated broader acceptance of the faith.
Economic factors were also crucial to the rising prominence of the missions. The arrival of the Congregation and German rule in the 1890s radically transformed the economy of the mountain, with an increasing emphasis being placed on the production of agricultural goods for export. Arabica coffee emerged as the real engine in this transition. Initially, the missionaries who introduced the crop had mixed success in growing the crop on large single-crop farms. In the 1920s, however, crop yields improved as clergy adopted from local farmers the practice of intercropping coffee with bananas, thus allowing the coffee trees to be shielded from direct sunlight. The crop quickly spread from the mission estates to the Chagga kihamba, resulting in a huge expansion in production. In 1923, Kilimanjaro had 3,300 farmers growing coffee on 1,200 acres of land. By 1933, the figure had grown to 16,800 growers on 6,700 acres, yielding a crop worth £46,259. Ten years later, nearly 28,000 people were growing the crop on 16,340 acres of land, at a value of £167,737. By 1953, the number of growers had reached 36,880 – over 90% of households – with over 27,660 acres of land in cultivation. The yield, valuing £3,724,184, provided an average of nearly £200 per household. In the 1960s, the numbers continued this incredible rise, due to the skyrocketing price of coffee on the global market.

By bringing coffee cultivation to the mountain’s population, both directly and indirectly the Catholic missions introduced a revenue source that transformed many aspects of life on the mountain. Money from coffee funded the construction of schools, churches, roads, coffee processing plants, hospitals, and dispensaries. People also used money to increase their standard of living within the household, purchasing clothing, books, and better quality construction materials. Aside from providing money, coffee also changed how people worked. It brought men more directly into agriculture, an activity that had largely been the place of women. Perhaps the most significant impact of coffee was that it afforded the people of the mountain a tool with which to negotiate the colonial experience. As a wealthy community of prosperous coffee growers, the Chagga were in many ways exemplary in the eyes of the colonial state. This fact, reflected not only in the spread of commerce and education but also in tax revenue, made the British administration leery of enforcing restrictive, unpopular policies there, as it had elsewhere in the colony, for fear of disrupting the industry.

A good example of the political leverage that coffee money afforded can be found in the 1920s. As the coffee industry began to take off, increasing tension arose between Chagga coffee
farmers and European settlers living at the foot of the mountain. Settlers resented not only the fact that their African farmers were beginning to out-produce them (largely due to the practice of intercropping, as opposed to the single-crop farming style used by the Europeans), but also that their success made them less likely to work as laborers on settler estates. Facing high labor costs and new competition, settlers in 1923 began to lobby the colonial government to restrict coffee cultivation in Chagga kihamba. Some even advocated an outright ban. In response, Chagga farmers banded together, forming a cooperative society and calling on the government to support their interests. In most parts of Africa with large European populations, such as the central highlands of Kenya, settler interests frequently took precedence over those of Africans, and often at their expense. On Kilimanjaro, however, the tremendous prosperity of Chagga coffee farmers shielded them from the pleas of the settlers. The government rejected the settlers’ arguments, and it not only preserved Chagga cultivation privileges, but also expanded its support.

Lastly, a number of social factors contributed to the rising role of the missions in daily life on the mountain. As mentioned earlier, the Spiritans initially designed an evangelical strategy based on Christian villages, in hope that these communities would become exemplars of good Christian living. For their first twenty years or so, the missions remained relatively autonomous communities within chiefdoms, comprised largely of people from other areas. By the 1950s, however, the chiefdoms themselves had become Christian social communities, with the missions serving as the center of community life. At the same time, existing social networks, particularly clan-based ones, began to fall into decline.

The rise of the missions as social networks can be attributed to several factors, the first and foremost being the spread of formal education. By the 1930s, mission schools on Kilimanjaro had educated thousands of people, providing them with access to new forms of knowledge and new employment opportunities. Large numbers of these students became Christians in the process, and maintained membership in their local churches. The connections made between students while they were in school thus continued into everyday life. Sharing common experience, faith, and even aspirations, these people increasingly found themselves much more comfortable with one another than they did with those who had not attended school or were not Christians.
For this new generation of school-educated Christians, the missions represented not only a social community, but also a source of knowledge. Whereas in previous generations, people looked to local healers and specialists for explanation of the natural world, by the 1940s people were looking to the missions. A good example of this can be seen in changing responses to drought. In 1907, the long rainy season failed, marking the beginning of a two-year period of unusual aridity that resulted in famine. Records from the missions indicate that nearly 1,000 people died in East Kilimanjaro alone, and tremendous social upheaval hit the rest of the mountain as well. Seeking understanding and solutions, people sought out the services of local specialists and healers, who explained the phenomenon as the act of a malevolent spirit, and offered solutions in the form of offerings of beer and goats. The missionaries tried to counter these solutions – which they deemed both un-Christian and ineffective – by organizing prayer services. In Kilema, Father Gommenginger set up a several novenas, a series of public prayer meetings at watercourses, and invited people to light votive candles and pray the rosary. In spite of these efforts, attendance at both mission churches and schools declined in this period, indicating that their efforts were less than successful. Forty years later, however, things had changed dramatically. When drought again occurred in the mid 1950s, the churches found themselves flooded with people, recording record attendance. This seems to indicate that the missions had established themselves as a focal point for community learning and support.

Lastly, the missions came to represent a new means of social advancement. For generations, one’s social position almost always correlated directly with one’s position within the clan or relationship with the chief. With the rise of education and coffee, however, many young people found that they could achieve status in new ways – by becoming highly successful farmers, by seeking employment through the colonial government or private sector, or for a select few, even attending university. A new generation of elites has arisen by the 1940s, many of whom had strong dislike for elders and, in particular, the chiefs. Tension between the old and new elites grew in the early 1950s, reaching a peak with what is referred to as the ‘chieftaincy dispute.’ Eager to consolidate governance, the British colonial administration called for the creation of a paramount chieftaincy, in essence a single chief for all of Kilimanjaro. The existing chiefs assumed that this individual would be chosen from their own ranks. However, a number of prominent men – all of whom were Christians – resisted the chiefs’ calls. They formed a group called...
the Chagga Association, which lobbied the government for a paramount chief to be chosen by open election. The group succeeded. In 1952, Kilimanjaro held its first ever election for a paramount chief. The candidate who won, Thomas Marealle, was in many ways a fusion of the old and the new. While he did have some claim to chiefly lineage, he was a practicing Christian and highly educated. His election thus represents to some extent a break from the past, and a sign of the rising social influence of Christians and the impending decline of older forms of social organization.

**CONCLUSION**

The arrival of the Spiritans in the 1890s marked the beginning of a period of tremendous transformation for Kilimanjaro and its people. In a period of just sixty years, Catholicism rose from being a faith of freed slaves and outsiders to being the dominant faith of the mountain. Along with their Lutheran counterparts, the Spiritans managed to transform the mountain into an almost wholly Christian place. The changes, however, reached far beyond the spread of new faith. Missions became social centers that displaced existing forms of social organization. They also laid the foundation for the spread of formal education, making Kilimanjaro into one of the most highly educated parts of Tanzania. Coffee, a crop introduced and supported by the Spiritans, fueled economic growth in the region, facilitating not only a rise in family incomes but also the further spread of missions, schools, technical training centers, hospitals, dispensaries, and roads. As a result of the missionary presence, the mountain had become a fundamentally different place in a very short period of time.

The growth of the Catholic Church on Kilimanjaro, occurring mostly in a span of thirty years, owes much to the dedication of both clergy and lay people. However, a number of local factors facilitated their work. One was the existing faith of the people, which, although distinct in many ways, had structural similarities that allowed for the creation of conceptual bridges between old beliefs and new ones. Another was the success of coffee. Revenue from this new crop greatly assisted the work of the Church, and also helped to locate the missions as economic centers of the mountain. Lastly, the missions emerged as social centers, due largely to their role in running local schools, and provided a form of community for those increasingly alienated by the clans and chiefs.

Today, the Catholic Church on Mount Kilimanjaro remains vibrant. As of a 1990 diocesan census, the Catholic population of the region had reached 568,004, over 67 per cent of the
...a sense of tremendous pride, faithfulness, and optimism pervades the mountain.

whole population. On Sundays, one can find bustling activity at the mountain’s parishes, the churches packed for each of the Masses. Though religious life is strong, hardships such as HIV/AIDS and low coffee prices are taking their toll, threatening both the communities themselves and the work of the missions. Our Lady of Lourdes Church at Kilema in many ways embodies these growing hardships. Once a grand structure, it is now plagued by a leaky roof and cracked windows, the result of a lack of money for routine maintenance. In spite of these problems, however, a sense of tremendous pride, faithfulness, and optimism pervades the mountain. As long as this remains strong, the Church will continue to serve as the center of life – and a beacon of hope – for thousands.

Footnotes
1 This article is based on a lecture of the same name, delivered as part of Duquesne University’s Founders’ Week Celebration, 31 January 2008. I would like to thank Fr. John Fogarty and the Spiritan Fathers at Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, for inviting me to speak and inspiring me to write this piece. I also thank Dr. Elaine Parsons and the Department of History at Duquesne for co-hosting my visit to the campus. The research for this article was funded in part by a Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship, 2003-2004, and a grant from the National Security Education Program, 2005. Lastly, I would like to thank Fr. Gerard Vieira and Fr. Vincent O’Toole at the Spiritan Archives in Chevilly-Larue, France, for assisting me with my research.


3 Also important was the work of several groups of sisters, including the Missionary Sisters of the Precious Blood (who arrived in 1898) and the Sisters of Our Lady of Kilimanjaro (formed in 1931). This article, however, will focus in particular on the work of the Spiritans. For more on the sisters, see Diocese of Moshi, *The Catholic Church in Moshi: A Centenary Memorial 1890-1990* (Mtwara: Ndanda Mission Press, 1990), pp. 99-101, 105-108.


5 In addition to Le Roy’s aforementioned text, some examples include Johann Krapf, *Travels, Researches, and Missionary Labours, during an Eighteen Years’ Residence in Eastern Africa* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1860); and David Livingstone, *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa* (London, 1857).


7 Only a handful of scholars have written on the Holy Ghost Congrega-


11 Ibid., pp. 45-47.

12 For more on the early history of the Congregation, see Henry Koren’s The Spiritans and To the Ends of the Earth (Pittsburgh: Spiritus Press, 1983).

13 For more on the history of Zanzibar, see Abdul Sheriff, Slaves, Spices, and Ivory in Zanzibar (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1987).

14 Diocese of Moshi, The Catholic Church in Moshi, pp. 35-36. Propaganda Fide is the pontifical department charged with the spread of Catholicism and the regulation of ecclesiastical affairs in non-Catholic countries. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it actively assigned regions in Africa to specific Catholic missionary orders, in order to prevent duplication of efforts and competition. Aside from the Holy Ghost Congregation, other active Catholic orders in present-day Tanzania included the Mill Hill Fathers and the White Fathers.

15 Fr. Horner, a native of Alsace-Lorraine, had spent his first seven years as a priest working in Réunion. See Koren, Spiritan East African Memorial, pp. 19-21.

16 Diocese of Moshi, The Catholic Church in Moshi, pp. 34-37.

17 Koren, Spiritan East African Memorial, p. 15.


19 These explorers, and others, made Kilimanjaro known to European audi-

De Courmont was appointed bishop of the Vicariate in 1883, a mere fifteen years after his ordination as a priest. For a detailed biography see Koren, *Spiritan East African Memorial*, pp. 65-66.


For a detailed account of the expedition, see Alexander Le Roy, *Au Kilima-Ndjaro*; and also Diocese of Moshi, *The Catholic Church in Moshi*, pp. 38-46.

Diocese of Moshi, *The Catholic Church in Moshi*, p. 46.

The importation of Arabica coffee into Kilimanjaro and its subsequent implications for both the Catholic mission and the people as a whole has been analyzed by J.A. Kieran. See J.A. Kieran, “Congregation and the Coffee Industry in East Africa,” *Cor Unum* 3, no. 3 (1966), pp. 20-26.

Diocese of Moshi, *The Catholic Church in Moshi*, pp. 74-76.

This refers to a period of religious strife in the Kingdom of Buganda, along the shore of Lake Victoria in present-day Uganda. In 1886, the reigning ruler Kabaka Mwanga attempted to expel both the Catholic (White Fathers) and Protestant (Church Missionary Society) missionaries living in his kingdom, and ordered the murder of twenty-two of his own servants who refused to renounce the faith. They became known as the Uganda Martyrs, many of whom were canonized in 1964. In response, the missionaries and several prominent Muslims joined together to overthrow Mwanga. However, the three religious groups then turned on one another, leading to a period of violence so severe that, the next year, Mwanga was restored to his throne. This event had tremendous influence on colonial governance throughout Africa, and in many areas led to policies of restricting more than one missionary group from evangelizing the same populations. For more on this period, see Semakual Kiwanuka, *A History of Buganda: From the Foundation of the Kingdom to 1900* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1972).

From *Erection du Vicariat du Kilimandjaro* (1910), Spiritan Archives, Chevilly-Larue, France (hereafter CSEA), 2K1.11a1.


From *Bulletin des Oeuvres* (1933-1953), CSEA 2K1.12.6; and *Kilimanjaro District – Correspondence* (1960-1968), CSEA 2K1.16A3.


Diocese of Moshi, *The Catholic Church in Moshi*, p. 79.


Diocese of Moshi, *The Catholic Church in Moshi*, p. 92.

The Diocese was named after Moshi Town, which is the district seat and the principal town in the region.


For more on this point see Matthew Bender, “Water Brings No Harm,” pp. 211-215.

Interview with Mzee Mwasha, Machame, Kilimanjaro, conducted in
spring 2004 by Matthew Bender.


41 For more see John Iliffe, *A Modern History*, p. 276; also Matthew Bender, “Water Brings No Harm,” pp. 128-129.

42 In the 1920s and 30s, Chagga farmers joined to form two different cooperative societies, the Kilimanjaro Native Planters Association (KNPA), and its successor the Kilimanjaro Native Cooperative Union (KNCU). Both were crucial to the rising success of the Chagga coffee industry. See *Kilimanjaro Native Planters Association*, British National Archives (Formerly Public Record Office), CO 691/116/6; also *Kilimanjaro Native Cooperative Union*, TNA 5/237; and R.J.M. Swynnerton and A.B. Bennett, *Habari yote ya Kahawa ya KNCU* (Moshi: Moshi Native Coffee Board, 1948).


44 *Documents divers sur l’Afrique Orientale, 1910-1922*, CSEA 2K1.11B3

45 *Journal de la Communauté de Kilema*, 29-30 October 1907, also 11 October 1908. CSEA 2K2.7.

46 For more on the chieftaincy dispute, see Tanzania National Archives 5/548. Also John Iliffe, *A Modern History*, pp. 525-526, 568-569.
François Nicolas, C.S.Sp.

François Nicolas, a Spiritan from the French Province, has given many years of service to the Congregation in a leadership capacity and in the area of formation. Ordained in 1959, he taught Philosophy at the Spiritan seminary in Mortain, France, and was director of the senior seminary at St. Ilan before serving as Vice Provincial of his Province from 1979-1986. A member of the Spiritan General Council in Rome from 1986-1992, he later became a director of the Auteuil Foundation at its headquarters in Paris. A former director of the journal Spiritus and co-editor of Synopse des Deux Règles de Libermann (30 rue Lhomond, Paris, 1968), he is currently superior of the Spiritan community at Marseille.

(Translation: Vincent O'Toole, C.S.Sp.)

You are a born educator—your place is among children.

BLESSED DANIEL BROTTIER
–A BORN EDUCATOR

THE EDUCATIONAL WORK OF FR. ROUSSEL

Fr. Daniel Brottier is looked on as the second founder of the Work for Apprenticed Orphans at Auteuil (l’Œuvre des Orphelins Apprentis d’Auteuil). This foundation, which had been started by Fr. Roussel on March 19th, 1866, soon gained an unparalleled reputation for helping poor and orphaned children, victims of the industrial revolution and its adverse effects on family life. Fr. Roussel had already approached the Spiritans to take over the work in 1876, and he put the same request to Don Bosco, the founder of the Salesians, two years later. Finally, it was the Brothers of St. Vincent de Paul who took over responsibility for the work from 1895 to 1923.

After the 1914-18 war, many other children in distress were in need of care. But the foundation of Auteuil had run into several difficulties, so the Archbishop of Paris, Mgr. Dubois, turned again to the Spiritans to ask for help. This was principally because of the reputation of the Spiritans in the field of education. The successors of Claude Poullart des Places were well known as the founders of schools and seminaries. In opening an orphanage at Noyon in 1846, Fr. Libermann had a future trade school in mind. In 1855, the Congregation took charge of an agricultural center for orphans at Saint Ilan and, in 1857, it opened an agricultural camp for poor children at Saint Michel en Priziac (Langonnet).

In 1876, Fr. Le Vavasseur wrote to Fr. Roussel on behalf of the Superior General, Fr. Schwindenhammer, that his work was “very fine and clearly in conformity with the ends of our Congregation.” One reason why Mgr. Le Roy finally agreed to accept the proposal of the Archbishop was that his missionary congregation would be able to make good use of the fine printing press already established at Auteuil.

A CHARISMATIC EDUCATOR

When he took over the direction of Auteuil, Fr. Brottier was 47 years old and he had the reputation of a great educator and organizer. As a young priest of the diocese of Blois, his Bishop, Mgr. Laborde, had appointed him in 1899 to the post of teacher-supervisor at the College of Pontlevoy, saying, “You are a born educator—your place is among children.”

During the process of beatification, one of his former students, Mr. André Duchâteau, testified that “Fr. Brottier for us was unforgettable…He impressed everybody, without exception, with
his energy and outstanding personality. He joined in our games and walks and he knew how to inspire and guide us with his wonderful dynamism and imagination.” These words underline some of the basic qualities of Fr. Brottier as a teacher.

In 1903, Daniel Brottier, now a Spiritan, was appointed to Saint Louis in Senegal, where he had to operate within the context of the French anti-religious laws of the time. Christian teachers had been expelled, so the bishop asked him to develop new ways of reaching out to young people. Amongst his initiatives were the setting up of a youth club called “Joan of Arc” and a brass band called “La Faidherbe,” both of which accepted young people from any religion or social background. But he also showed his concern for adults with a group known as “The Catholic Circle” and a review entitled “The Echo of Saint Louis.”

As soon as he arrived in Senegal, Fr. Brottier appreciated the growing importance of the media, so he made sure that the young felt at ease with the culture and concerns of their own time. He wrote in the Echo of Saint Louis: “When I see young adults, around 25-30 years of age, making heroic efforts to learn the alphabet, far from laughing at them, I am full of admiration: they understand the times in which they live.” He also said in the same review: “At the Catholic Circle, you can find a real reading-room, where reviews for the more learned share the same shelves with books for children.” Finally, Brottier developed the interest of young people in gramophone records, photography, and cinema; he started the “Cinerama of Saint Louis” and, later on, opened up at Auteuil one of the first parochial cinemas.

During the First World War, when he volunteered as a chaplain, his educational mission continued as before. In fact it reached its full maturity in his day to day companionship with so many young men who were putting their lives at risk on the front. The experience brought home to him the reality of human suffering and, at the same time, the plight of children left orphaned by the war. Expressions like the following recur frequently in his daily talks and his correspondence with the children of Auteuil who had been sent to the countryside: “Causes which progress are those for which one is prepared to die”; “your ideal must be to become a man”; “a man is one who knows what he wants and achieves it whatever the cost”; “hard struggles affect the soul and temper it like steel”; “the less one is concerned with oneself, the greater one’s life becomes”; “to serve is to no longer be oneself: it is self-sacrifice for the common good.”

**Brottier at Auteuil**

When Mgr. Le Roy asked Daniel Brottier to take over the running
of the orphanage at Auteuil, he told him, “I think you are the man for the job,” a phrase that echoes what his bishop had said at the start of his educational ministry twenty-five years previously.

So what were the principal elements of his vision for education?

**Necessity of a stable framework:** When he took on responsibility for this fragmented work, Fr. Brottier realized that the primary need of these children, who had been deprived of their natural support, was security and stability in their educational journey. He resolved to give them that personal identity that they would normally have acquired in a family atmosphere—an identity which would root them in a past, as well as a future. His first step was to create an extensive network of benefactors around the work. In addition to supporting the work, these people would also effectively supervise and sustain the whole educational system through their ongoing correspondence. Fr. Roussel had already set up a large network of benefactors, due particularly to the newspaper “La France Illustrée,” edited and printed by the students themselves. Fr. Brottier greatly extended this set of connections to cover the whole of France, thanks to his communication skills and his reputation both in the Church and among the veterans of the war, and to links he had already established with the huge number of benefactors who had contributed to the building of the cathedral at Dakar.

The future of the educational project was further secured by Fr. Brottier in 1929, when he sought and successfully obtained from the State recognition of his work as “a foundation of public utility.” At that time, it was a minor miracle that a Church project should receive such praise from the government! In other words, it was the whole society as a family that was being invited to support this work for young people in difficulty. Henceforth, it was to be known as “The Foundation for Apprenticed Orphans at Auteuil.”

Today, it is recognized that this network of benefactors, which has been a constant part of the history of Auteuil and often passes from one generation to the next, is still one of the secrets of its success: “To be a boarder in a house of Auteuil does not just mean that they are the recipients of knowledge and careful formation; they become part of a dream, a collective symbol. Auteuil respects the freedom of thought and the convictions of each person. But, at the same time, it is the guarantor of an inheritance passed on to each one, thus allowing them to enter into a prestigious history and giving them ancestors, symbolic fathers of whom they have reason to be proud.”

For Daniel Brottier, the patronage of Saint Theresa of Lisieux, to whom he consecrated the entire work as soon as he arrived at
Auteuil, was one of the foundation stones on which its stability depended. His first step was to build a sanctuary to Saint Theresa, a decision that was much criticized at first by his co-workers because of the financial fragility of the work. But eventually this bold initiative was instrumental in bringing a flood of benefactors to support the foundation at Auteuil. Brottier even had posters about Saint Theresa placed in the Paris underground. By choosing Theresa as a patron and helper, he wanted to introduce a female presence into the lives of the orphans and give them the example of a spirituality that was simple and accessible to all.

Brottier was always convinced that Theresa had protected him in a special way throughout the war. During her life, Theresa had actually followed the early development of the work at Auteuil through one of her novices in Carmel, whose father, Monsieur Castel, had worked with Fr. Roussel.

**Importance of quality educators and teamwork:** From the moment of his arrival at Auteuil, Fr. Brottier was very careful to recruit only qualified people and he did everything to develop their skills and mould them into a genuine team.14

There was no doubt that he was the leader, but always in an atmosphere of genuine friendship: “Authentic leadership can only exist with the help of intelligent and totally committed collaborators.” Monsieur David, the chief supervisor, who was already there before he arrived, assisted him with the devotion of somebody whose life was totally given to God and to the young people. Brottier himself testified that he was “an extraordinary man who was never put out, but who put himself out continually for others.”

The strength of any educational work lies in unassuming people who remain in the background yet make sure that everything is going well by their generosity of spirit. Because of them, many a crisis is avoided and the young people sense an atmosphere of total security.

Fr. Brottier also relied heavily on Monsieur Mouillier, a highly educated man and a convert, who had become his close friend in the trenches. Mouillier devoted his whole life to Auteuil, modernizing the workshops and the system of formation. The entire team shared the goal of a rounded education, built on a combination of a professional, human, and spiritual formation for the young people. The workers who had been trained at Auteuil soon built up the reputation of being amongst best available in Paris. The fact that the number of apprentices rose from 140 to 1,500 in his first 13 years testified to the quality of the formation given at Auteuil. Today, they number around 10,000. Monsieur Mouillier developed other foundations at Vésinet, Saintry, and
Priziac. The latter, which was confided to the care of Fr. Rigault, had been a former educational establishment of the Spiritans.

Brottier had arrived at Auteuil with another Spiritan, Fr. Yves Pichon, who shared the same educational vision as himself and was in daily contact with the young people. He subsequently wrote the first biography of Fr. Brottier. There were also some diocesan priests, like Fr. Despons, who took charge of the Young Christian Workers, the aim of which was to make them into witnesses to the faith in their own milieu. Fr. Durand was the head of the new house at Malepeyre, supported and encouraged by a regular correspondence with Brottier himself. Fr. Rigault was the first of a long line of Spiritan directors and chaplains at Priziac who have had a profound influence on the foundation of Auteuil up to our own day.

At that time, the profession of educator did not yet exist; the real educators were in fact the “masters of the workshops,” who around the machines taught the young people life skills in addition to their trade. Fr. Brottier avoided any interference in the running of a workshop or during the periods of recreation so as not to obstruct the work of others. But he was still the boss, present to all and recognized by all. He liked to say, “I know everything that is going on.”

It was he who had the final say in the most delicate matters, for example, deciding whom to admit and when to send away a young person who was a danger to the whole group. He agonized over the fact that he could not accept all the requests for admission; if he had to dismiss somebody, he took care to ensure they could be accepted elsewhere. The first article of the statutes of the foundation, even today, stresses the duty to keep in touch with past students “for the rest of their lives,” including those who have been expelled. One of the essential dimensions of education is to guarantee a real support to each individual, however difficult it might be.

**Building self-respect:** The life of a young person sent to an orphanage 50 years ago left much to be desired. Daniel Brottier insisted that each child should feel welcome at Auteuil and be treated like all the others. He asked for the uniform to be abolished, apart from the clothes for manual work and sport. He believed that “a child who is clean and well dressed will have much greater self-esteem and this in turn will help him to take pride in his work.”\(^\text{15}\) The general conditions of hygiene followed the same lines, as can be seen from the buildings put up by Brottier, with large windows and well equipped showers. One past pupil wrote: “Before I arrived at Auteuil, I had always been called by a number;
Fr. Brottier called me John.16 Geneviève Beslier, an historian of Auteuil, records that a child from the 16th arrondissement (a well-to-do quarter of Paris) once announced that he would prefer to go to school at Auteuil!17

This same pedagogical approach underlay all his initiatives. Writing about his review “L’Ami des Jeunes,” he said: “This review, unlike many others designed for children, refuses to treat them as little idiots who have to be amused at all costs. It aims to elevate the character of the child, to entertain him, and make him laugh – but it also sets out to instruct him, to make him manly, and to improve him.”18

At that time, only boys were accepted at Auteuil. But Fr. Brottier realized the importance of having a feminine influence about the place. This was the role of the religious sisters. While looking after the children’s clothes and the infirmary, they had plenty of opportunities to listen to their problems and to encourage them in different aspects of their everyday lives.

**Personal accompaniment:** The gift of a good educator is to be able to know each child personally – not just by what he does but by what he is. The young person has to be guided to recognize and develop his human and spiritual capabilities. In this context, Fr. Brottier summed up his own role as follows: “The children must feel that I know what they are doing and that I am following their progress with genuine affection.” In this way, they will be able to accept acts of authority when they are considered necessary.

In several ways, Fr. Brottier showed himself to be an exceptional companion to the young people in his care. First of all, his very presence was an education in itself, even if he said nothing. His piercing eyes, which seemed to be able to penetrate into the hearts of others, was sometimes overawing for the children. Even recently, a young woman from Auteuil made allusion to this: “When I pass in front of his portrait, his look still lifts me up if things are not going too well; it calms me if I am feeling anxious.” Some of the young people used to go to his office when they felt discouraged. He let them sit there while he continued his correspondence and they inevitably left feeling much better.

In his letters, he showed himself to be a faithful guide, helping each one along the road of life. He had founded a “Center in the Countryside,”19 where hundreds of young people were able to learn agricultural skills. They were placed with local farmers, but Brottier insisted they would not just be regarded as cheap labor, with no future. He saw to it that they were properly paid. A part of the salary was set aside for the future so that they could eventually set themselves up. The receiving families were
carefully chosen and the parish priest and mayor of the village were asked to send in regular progress reports. But the children continued to be looked on as members of the Auteuil family. So even though he was snowed under with correspondence, Fr. Brottier wrote regularly to each one, giving the necessary advice and encouragement. Seeing himself as their father, he was anxious that they should progress simultaneously in their trade and in their Christian life.

Often, in the past, education concentrated on control and punishment, with the idea that the child needed, above all, to be corrected or reformed. Today, the ideal is to create trust, an approach especially developed and exemplified by Don Bosco and the Salesians. This “trust” is not to be confused with certain naïve theories of the nineteenth century (Jean-Jacques Rousseau), nor with the more recent crises of authority. In our contemporary society, greatly marked as it is by the frequent absence of a real father, good education means finding teachers who know how to combine firmness, goodness, and closeness to children with a respect for their personal freedom. Daniel Brottier offered an outstanding example of this kind of approach, showing the young people that he was their father in every sense.

In this way, Fr. Brottier was doing no more than living out his Spiritan vocation. Is it not the role of a missionary to assist at the birth and the growth of peoples and communities, guiding them and respecting their freedom until such time as they will take charge of their own destiny? It is a human adventure, but also an adventure of faith. This is how thousands of young people came to know and understand themselves with the help of Fr. Brottier and the other Spiritans and lay people who succeeded him, fully committed to this deeply paternal style of education.

Footnotes
1 This congregation, founded in 1844 by a layman, Jean Léon Le Prevost, was the congregation to which Fr. Roussel originally belonged. The Brothers of St. Vincent de Paul led the work indirectly after the passing of the law on associations in 1901 and the law separating Church and State in 1905.
3 Archives of Auteuil (in safe).
4 Archives of Auteuil. BII, 27.
6 Archives of Auteuil. Cause for Beatification.
7 Fr. Brottier is also remembered in Senegal for his work for the construction of the cathedral in Dakar, the so-called “Souvenir Africain.”
8 Echo de Saint Louis, August, 1908.
9 *Echo de Saint Louis*, September, 1909.
10 Grach, op.cit., page 161.
11 Grach, op.cit., page 120.
12 Together with President Clément, Fr. Brottier had founded the National Union of War Veterans.
14 Grach, op cit., pp.177-180.
15 Grach, op.cit., p.138.
16 Ibid., p.138.
17 Ibid., p.139.
18 Ibid., p.156.
19 “Foyer à la Campagne.”
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"IT IS THE SPIRIT WHO GIVES LIFE" (JN. 6:63)

MOTTO OF DUQUESNE

"Spiritus est qui vivificat," the motto of Duquesne University taken from the Gospel of John (6:63), was chosen by Fr. John F. Malloy, C.S.Sp., who taught for 20 years in the English Department at Duquesne before he became a Trappist monk. Little is known as to why Fr. Malloy chose this particular text, but his comment has survived that "the many implications of this motto make it an excellent choice." It involves a clear recognition of the limits of any university in its all-too-elusive quest for happiness, knowledge, and, in particular, wisdom. For we know only too well, as G.K. Chesterton once said, that a man is not a man (and a woman is not a woman) until they have passed the breaking point and have not broken. Further, faith is not real faith until all ground of belief has been swept away and yet one keeps on believing. But it is also a reminder of the popular Alcoholics Anonymous insight of our times that help is available if we but accept our need.

LIVING LIFE TO THE FULL

There is a marvelous statement in the academy award-winning movie "Braveheart": "Everyone must die but few there are who really live!" I think of the discussion occasioned by the death of the famous baseball player Mickey Mantle, a flawed, insecure, alcoholic hero. Underneath the laughter and the kindness, he seemed so empty inside and haunted by the fear of his own death. In his will, he asked for the song "Yesterday when I was young" to be played at his funeral. Significantly, it contained the provocative line, "I never stopped to think what life was all about and every conversation that I can recall concerned itself with me and nothing else at all." Pope John Paul II reminded us in his encyclical on "Faith and Reason" that the quest for meaning has always compelled the human heart to think: Who am I? Where have I come from? Where am I going? Why is there evil? What is after this life? We recall how Abraham Maslow, one of the founders of modern psychology, used to insist that most of us suffer from a Jonah complex. As Jonah fled God’s call, so many of us flee inner calls and dreams because we think such things are beyond our grasp. He would ask students, “Which of you hopes to write the great American novel or to be senator or governor someday?” Maslow himself actually changed his own famous “needs hierarchy,” which began with the primary human needs for God, warmth, and shelter, then safety, and next the need for society. No longer, he now realized, was “self-actualization” (the
full use and exploitation of talents, capacities, potentialities, etc.) the highest experience but “self transcendence,” the living for a higher purpose than oneself. He reminds me of the famous Irish atheist, George Bernard Shaw, for whom the true joy in life was being used for a mighty purpose: “being a force of nature instead of a feverish little clod of ailments and grievances, complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy.” Shaw saw his life as belonging to the whole community and that he was privileged to do whatever he could for it all his life long: “I want to be thoroughly used up when I die. For the harder I work the more I live. I rejoice in life for its own sake. Life is no brief candle to me. It’s a sort of splendid torch, which I’ve got to hold up for the moment and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations” (From the Dedicatory Letter in Man and Superman).

“Life” in the Gospel of John

John’s Gospel is a reflection on human life, or perhaps better put, on the quality of life which he calls eternal life. John uses the language of the prophets who speak of the search for the Lord and his Word, the language of the Wise Men who speak of Wisdom, and of the Rabbis and Essenes who search the Scriptures. The search leads to the foot of the Cross where Jesus’ death is the supreme revelation and judgment of the world. For John, only the believer realizes that to search and find, in faith, is to find the absent one so that a person can truly live. Believing Jesus is the first stage of faith; the second stage is believing in Jesus’ identity and mission; and the third and final stage of faith is believing in Jesus, according to the Indian Jesuit scholar George Mlakuzhyil. Jesus is the answer to the endless life-denying realities of the twenty-first century - widespread poverty, corruption, unscrupulous policies, fanaticism, racism, fundamentalism, and ecological exploitation. Life is a central theme in John; it is found in his introduction (1:3-4) and in his conclusion (20:30-31). In both of these texts he uses the Greek word zoe. He uses psyche for natural, physical life (10:11, 15, 17) and zoe for a qualitatively different, divine life, often qualified by the adjective “eternal” (3:15, 16, 36; 5:24; 6:40, 47 and, in the derivative, 6:63).

The first words in John of the key actor, Jesus, are highly significant: “What are you seeking?” In other words, Jesus is asking, “What are you looking for that you do not get from the Pharisees, Sadducees, Baptists, Zealots, Herodians, Samaritans, and so on? Somewhat confused in their own search, Jesus invites his questioners to “come and see.” They see him making the difference at a wedding by turning water into wine. They see an angry Jesus using a whip...
to cleanse the Temple court, which had become a market place. They hear him treating the intellectual Nicodemus as deficient, and telling him that he hasn’t understood at all and that he must begin at the beginning. He shakes them by asking a Samaritan woman for a drink of water. Yet he reminds her, “If you knew the gift of God and who is saying to you ‘Give me to drink,’ you would have asked him and he would have given you living water” (4:10). Further, they will see the cure of the royal official’s son, the cure of the man ill for 38 years, the multiplication of the five barley loaves and the two fish, and the walking on water. Finally, Jesus gives a solemn discourse that he is the bread of life and quotes (6:45) the mysterious prediction of Isaiah, “They will all be taught by God.” Jesus insists: “I am the living bread that came down from heaven …Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink” (6:51, 54-5).

In a recent study,² Stare finds two signs in Jn. 6:1-21 which introduce the theme of life. The first shows Jesus giving life-sustaining food and, in the second, Jesus’ word saves the disciples in a life-threatening situation. Next, four dialogues (6:25-71) develop this foundation. Here Jesus is not merely the giver of life but the gift itself, the real bread of life. He has received this life from his Father, the source of all life. What the Spirit does is to work through the words of Jesus. The Spirit mediates this divine life to humans, but only to those who have chosen to enter into a mutual dwelling with Jesus and the Father, who come to him, who are taught and learn from him, and who “eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood.” Peter and the twelve here choose life. Jesus invites all, not only those present, but also the Gospel readers to make the same choice of life.

MODERN CULTURE OF DEATH

Some brief reflections from modern literature show us that, even in what John Paul II called our culture of death, the theme of life is not far from the surface. At the recent turn of the century, the fool dreaming of righting all wrongs (Don Quixote de la Mancha) was voted the best novel of the millennium. Cervantes’ comment is often repeated:

_I have lived nearly fifty years and I have seen life as it is: Pain, misery, hunger… cruelty beyond belief …These were men who saw life as it is, yet they died despairing. No glory, no gallant last words…only their eyes filled with confusion, whimpering the question, ‘Why?’ I do not think they asked why they were dying but why they had lived._
One could also quote Bloom in *Ulysses*:

> And I belong to a race too, says Bloom, that is hated and persecuted. Also now. This very moment. This very instant ... -Robbed, says he. Plundered. Insulted. Persecuted ... -Are you talking about the new Jerusalem? says the citizen – I’m talking about injustice, says Bloom – Right, says John Wyse. Stand up to it then with force like men ... - But it’s no use, says he. Force, hatred, history, all that. That’s not life for men and women, insult and hatred. And everybody knows that it’s the very opposite of that that is really life – What? says Alf. 
> -Love, says Bloom. I mean the opposite of hatred.

“Life is difficult” is the opening salvo of M. Scott Peck’s best selling call to discipline, *The Road Less Traveled*. He comments: “This is a great truth, one of the greatest truths. It is a great truth because once we truly see this truth, we transcend it. Once we know that life is difficult – then life is no longer difficult. Because once it is accepted, the fact that life is difficult no longer matters.” He concludes that laziness, or the desire to escape legitimate suffering, is the root of mental illness. But what is life? Before death? After death? Today, there is much emphasis on the quality of life, the fulfilling of our basic needs and capacities to live, love, learn, and leave a legacy, as S.R. Covey argued so eloquently in *First Things First*.

Some (not many) speeches remain in one’s mind. I still remember quite vividly the graduation speech of the late Michael Weber to our students some years ago. Michael insisted that, unfortunately, his generation had not done a very good job in the twentieth century, which had exploited a generation of immigrant workers, killed and maimed two other generations in senseless wars, and squandered the talents and resources of a fourth generation in a wasteful cold war. Yet, it produced the highest standard of living in history, scientific discoveries equal to those of any age, and cures for countless, previously fatal, diseases. Michael emphasized the following examples:

- Half of the children in America will reach adulthood without ever having known one of their parents. Many children will grow up in serial families in which parents are changed as often as one paints the house.
- Racism and segregation, once thought to be on the wane in America, have begun to reappear in city after city throughout the country.
- There are now more minorities in prison than in college. In America, a prison sentence has become a
normal part of the male maturation process within the black community. It is ironic that the largest structure built in Allegheny County in the past two decades is the new jail sitting on the edge of our campus.

- Cancer and other physically debilitating diseases continue to claim tens of thousands of lives each year.

- Countless numbers of the aged are left alone to deal with infirmities, loneliness, and often helplessness. Life expectancy has more than doubled in this century, yet we know almost nothing about providing our elderly with dignity, grace, and a sense of importance during the last years of their lives.

- Millions of Americans live on the streets in our cities or in the mountains of Appalachia, as malnourished physically and spiritually as those in any third world country.

Bill Gates was speaking recently at a neighboring university urging students to pay attention to the bottom two billion of the world. He noted that the top two billion don’t like being bald. As a result, billions of dollars are spent on curing baldness. Among the bottom two billion, a million children die each year from malaria. Yet, there is less than 10% as much money put into malaria research as into baldness research.

Daniel Groody, in his recent book *Globalization, Spirituality, and Justice,* gives the following startling statistics:

- In 2005, the world spent as much money on fragrances as all of Africa and the Middle East spent on education.

- The world spends almost as much money on toys and games as the poorest one-fifth of the world’s population earns in a year.

- The United States and Europe spent nearly ninety times as much on luxury items as the amount of money that would be needed to provide safe drinking water and sanitation for those in our global village who do not have these necessities now.

- For one day’s military spending in the U.S., we could virtually eliminate malaria in Africa.

Recently, I noticed in an Indian study that, since 1960, America’s divorce rate has doubled, the teen-suicide rate has tripled, the violent-crime rate quadrupled, and the prison population...
quintupled, with also an increase in depression, anxiety, and other mental-health problems.

“I HAVE COME THAT THEY MAY HAVE LIFE AND HAVE IT MORE ABUNDANTLY” (Jn. 10:10)

John’s Gospel is a profound analysis of the meaning of life (Jn. 20:31). For John, the purpose of Jesus’ coming is that we may have a more abundant life than we are presently experiencing. But he also warns that people, even his own, prefer darkness (Jn. 1:4-11), prefer to be miserable, to hide, to cover up. For life, he uses a whole series of figures of speech: bread, light, the door, the way, the shepherd, the vine. These mean what a person longs for and must have in order to truly and fully exist and have a meaningful life. The feeding of the five thousand is the point of departure for Jesus’ magisterial statement, “I am the bread of life.” Clearly, one must read the full text of John to get his whole picture. Here, we must be content, with the help of such scholars as Rudolf Schnackenburg, to isolate the most characteristic features of this core concept “life”:

- The starting point is Christ, who has come to give the bread of life to the world (6:33-48; 8:12; 11:25; 14:6).
- The life which Christ embodies in his person, words, and miracles is given to all who believe in his revelation. It is a liberation from death here and now and not just in the future (8:51; 11:26; 12:25).
- This gift of life is the answer to our search for the meaning of existence. People left to their own unaided resources, as seen by A.A., cannot break out of their imprisonment in their own way of thinking and acting.
- This life is neither material improvement nor magic power, but divine reality, a share in the life of the living Father, the source of all life (5:26; 1 Jn. 1:2).
- The sacraments are testifying and effective signs that unite believers with Christ and through him with God (3:5; 6:53-57; 1 Jn. 5:7-8). To be born of God is to lead an active and conscious “abiding in love” with Christ and God, a life furthered by the Eucharist (6:56).
- The divine life also becomes a moral obligation and is to result in action, in love for the brothers and sisters, in service of other people in ‘the washing of feet.’ The motivation and model is Jesus (“as I have loved you”). Individual striving for eternal life is
Much contemporary scholarship, according to Warren Carter, has interpreted John’s Gospel as the “spiritual” and “anti-synagogal” Gospel. For Schnackenburg, who overstates the emphasis, eternal life is “set in the context of the individual human being, as is indicated sufficiently by the predominance of expressions in the singular. The Johannine idea of life has no direct connection with life in society or the future of the human race.” For Carter, John has seldom been interpreted as negotiating the Roman imperial world, offering a vision and experience of life which sharply contests that offered by the Roman Empire. The recent tendency, however, is to see John’s Gospel as a power clash between Jesus, God’s agent, and the Jerusalem-centered, Temple-based, Rome-allied elite, which leads to Jesus’ crucifixion. The central revelation of eternal life involves physical transformation and the establishment of God’s purposes in a world dominated by Rome. It is seen in the new creation of a community of the friends of Jesus, in contrast to the friends of Caesar.

**IT IS THE SPIRIT WHO GIVES LIFE**

The words chosen for the motto of Duquesne provide the mysterious element of the biblical verse, as it were, in contrast to the remainder, “while the flesh is of no avail.” According to the late Johannine commentator, R.E. Brown, this means that the natural principle in a person cannot give happiness or eternal life. Paul makes the same distinction in Rom 8:4 and Gal 5:16 between living according to the flesh with its human limitations and living according to the Spirit. Jesus is making the principle clear that a person cannot achieve life on his or her own. His purpose is to communicate the divine Spirit from above, the Spirit who alone can give life. W.B. Yeats, in his autobiography, asks the rhetorical question, “Can one reach God by toil?” He answers that God gives himself to the pure of heart while asking nothing but attention. Attention in silence and prayer, waiting for the Spirit, is the only way. Unfortunately, we live in a world that believes in shortcuts, efficiency, methods. John stresses the biblical belief that the role of the Spirit is fundamental (cf. Gen. 1:2; Ez. 37:1-4; 1 Cor. 15:45). The key for the disciple is participation in the community and the Eucharistic meal, which makes present the activity and teaching of Christ and his words which are “spirit and life” (6:63).

The evangelist John thus invites the reader to identify with such different characters as the disciples, the Baptist, the Samaritan woman, the man born blind, Mary and Martha, and Mary...
Magdalene. These people struggle with different obstacles, as they misunderstand, question, doubt, even deny, on their journey to a deep life-giving faith.

While our motto reminds us of the limits of what an all-too-human institution like a university can achieve by itself, it is also a challenge. The words of Jesus, “Spiritus est qui vivificat,” come at a very critical time for his ministry in John’s Gospel. We are told that, as a result of his remarks, “many of his disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him” (6:66). We are being asked whether we have the loyalty that Peter showed when Jesus does not conform to our comfortable desires, when many are turning away because Jesus will not become a king of this world (6:66-68). It is a challenge to be led by the Spirit of Christ, that mysterious Spirit which blows where it wills. In “Humanae Salutis” (Human Salvation) of December 1961, with which he convened the Second Vatican Council, Pope John XXIII used the significant phrase “signs of the times.” It means that the Church does not have the Spirit in its pocket. Rather, the Spirit, who is active well beyond the known boundaries of the Church, has a habit of breaking out in such developments as the social advance of working people, women’s emancipation, and decolonization, to quote some familiar examples. The duty of the Church is, in fact, to recognize the “signs of the times” and to align with them.

However, the Spirit is always the Spirit of love. Significantly, the final chapter of John highlights the thrice-repeated question of Jesus, “Do you love me?” – even if it takes us to Jerusalem. It is a challenge to think existentially, the kind of thinking a person does when they believe their whole existence is at stake. It is a challenge to become personally, vitally, even foolishly involved, to wash feet as Jesus did, to change water into wine but not wine into water. It is a challenge to live life to the full yet to stop and think what life is all about. It is a challenge to dare to pray for the coming of the Kingdom and to say with our whole hearts “Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.” As an American social philosopher once remarked, “The search for happiness is one of the chief sources of unhappiness.” Maybe the poet John Donne put it best: “I need thy thunder, O God, thy songs will not suffice me.”
Footnotes

3. *Globalization, Spirituality, and Justice*, Orbis, Maryknoll, New York, 2007, pp. 7-9. According to the United Nations Human Development Report in 1998, Europeans were then spending eleven billion dollars each year on ice-cream, two billion more than the estimated cost of providing clean water and safe sewers for the population of our planet.
Guy Tapin
A native of Canada and an optician by profession, Guy Tapin holds diplomas in Theology and in Social Science. Guy has been involved with the Spiritans for over 30 years and with the In’Afu Center, of which he is the current director, since 1989. He and his wife, France, are also very engaged with the Catholic Diocese of Montreal, and are recipients of the mérite diocésain Ignace-Bourget medal in recognition of their outstanding contribution. They have three children.

(Translation: J. Fogarty, C.S.Sp.)

...lay collaboration had been a feature of the In’Afu approach from the beginning; it was now to be the key factor in its survival.

KEEPING THE SPIRITAN HERITAGE ALIVE

AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH IN QUEBEC

IN’AFU CENTER
In a typically Spiritan attempt to respond to the signs of the times, the In’Afu Center\(^1\) was founded in Quebec in 1972. It was a collaborative project between the members of the Canadian Province of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit and the Missionary Sisters of the Holy Spirit\(^2\) (Spiritian Sisters). The Center, located at St-Esprit de Montcalm some 50 km from Montreal, aimed at assuring a Spiritan presence among the youth of Quebec. It sought to offer a unique place of welcome where they could deepen their Christian values and share their questions and concerns. In a climate of mutual acceptance and respect, several programs were developed in response to the needs articulated by the young people who participated – sessions on self-discovery, human relationships, Christian commitment, social justice, vocational discernment, engagement and marriage. From the outset, the response was positive and encouraging; many young people of secondary school age eagerly gave up their weekends to participate in these programs and returned with enthusiasm for follow-up sessions.

PROSPECT OF CLOSURE
In 1994, diminishing resources in personnel and finance led both of the founding congregations to question their continued involvement in the Center. The closure of the Center and the sale of the property appeared inevitable. Many other religious congregations around Quebec had withdrawn from active presence in the community in similar circumstances and it seemed that the Spiritans had no real choice but to do likewise. Fortunately, lay collaboration had been a feature of the In’Afu approach from the beginning; it was now to be the key factor in its survival. A small group of lay people who had been actively involved in the Center for some years, and who were passionately convinced of its importance for the Christian formation of the youth of Quebec, succeeded in getting both congregations to reconsider what seemed an inevitable conclusion. They saw themselves as carriers of a unique Spiritan tradition that had colored and shaped their own lives and the lives of many young people who had participated in the Center’s sessions over the years; it simply could not be allowed to die.
In the discussions that followed, a new vision was born. The Center would be handed over to a group of lay people who would form a new corporation; the two founding congregations would continue to accompany the corporation for a number of years, on the understanding that it would eventually be responsible for its own future. It was an act of confidence in the future and in the ability of lay people to keep the Spiritan heritage alive.

The question, of course, was how a group of lay people who were not professed religious could express and live the Spiritan charism. The corporation faced this challenge of interpreting and adapting the charism with creative enthusiasm. In the first place, they saw their baptismal commitment as central, God’s call to work for a world of justice and equality where the poor have a privileged place, as seen so clearly by Claude Poullart des Places and Francis Libermann. They believed that the witness of evangelical community was at the heart of this call as a counter-cultural challenge to the individualism, neoliberalism, and consumerism of our age. Would it be possible to integrate the fundamental values that underpin the three vows of religion? Poverty could be lived in terms of simplicity of lifestyle and voluntary sharing; chastity in terms of fidelity, a lifelong commitment, whether single or married, to the other; obedience in the form of authenticity, both personal and communal. They would form a community comprising religious and lay people, celibates and married couples, with the aim of influencing the wider community by their actions and their way of life and placing themselves, in the spirit of Francis Libermann, at the service of those deprived of their human dignity. Initially, neither the professed Spiritans nor their lay collaborators were prepared for such a venture. There was a sense of a new Pentecost with both groups gathered together in the upper room, entrusted by Christ with a mission to continue his work in the spirit of the founders, but fearful of moving forward and not quite sure as to how to proceed.

Today, the In’Afu Center is blessed to have three small communities, accompanied by Spiritans, in the regions of Montreal, Joliette, and Longueuil. All of the members are committed to working for a world of equality and justice, and to inviting their fellow citizens to participate in efforts to change systems, laws, and behaviors that create injustice, exclusion, and the loss of human dignity. This understanding of our mission comes directly from the Spiritan vision we have inherited and
with which we believe we have been entrusted. Some of our members are privileged to work directly with the young people in the Center itself. The elimination in 2000 of all religious instruction in public schools has led to unprecedented spiritual poverty among the young people of Quebec. In the multi-cultural society in which they live today, young Quebecois have increasing difficulty in sharing their spiritual values for the simple reason that these have virtually disappeared. They live side by side with young Moslems, Jews, Buddhists, Sikhs, and members of other religious traditions, all of whom have at least a minimum of knowledge of their religion transmitted by their family and religious institution. In 2007, the Center welcomed almost 2000 young people, the majority in the 14 to 16 age bracket, who came to reflect on their lives and their future. Sessions on preparation for first communion and confirmation, which have been introduced into the In'Afu programs of more recent years, offer an opportunity to deepen their knowledge of the Christian tradition and Catholic faith in a family setting. As always, we believe that the witness of our own personal and community lives, as well as the creation of a respectful and welcoming environment, are of paramount importance.

AN ONGOING CHALLENGE

After some twelve years of constant struggle to be faithful to our original intuitions, we believe that our efforts are beginning to bear fruit. Evangelical communities in the Spiritan tradition are beginning to take concrete shape but there is still a long way to go. To describe adequately the journey that has brought us to where we are today would require a much longer article. But the above outline should suffice to illustrate the beauty, the originality, and the innovative nature of the path we have taken. We still need the support, the prayers, and the advice of the wider faith community in which we live. As Francis Libermann stressed, we have to be continually attentive so that people see what is happening in our midst as the work of God and not merely the fruit of human endeavor.

Footnotes

1 The word “In’Afu” comes from the Igala language in Nigeria and means “breath.”
2 The Missionary Sisters of the Holy Spirit were founded by Eugénie Caps, a young woman from Lorraine, France, in 1921. Today they work in several countries in Europe, Africa, Latin America, and the French Antilles. Their spirituality is essentially that of Fr. Francis Libermann.
Chibuike Ojilere, C.S.Sp.

Chibuike Ojilere is a Nigerian Spiritan assigned to the Philippines since 2000, where he is currently serving as pastor of Our Lady of Fatima Parish, Digkilaan, director of prison pastoral ministry in the diocese of Iligan, and lecturer in Philosophy and Christian Morality at St. Michael’s College, Iligan City. He holds an M.A. in Theology from Duquesne University. Chibuike has published articles in various international journals and magazines and is also the author of *Behind Iron Bars: Companion and Compassion in Prison Ministry* (2006) and *One Meal, One Globe: Eucharistic Theology of Global Oneness Patterned on the Igbo Concept of 'Igba Oriko'* (2007). Chibuike is an active member of Kiwanis International, a global organization of volunteers dedicated to changing the world, one child and one community at a time.

Indeed, there is something in a name!
At their most fundamental level, humanity and the world exist as the intangible energy of Chi.

worldview, Chi stands for the supernatural or simply God. Thus, the name Chibuike presupposes that Chi is strength or power of life. There is no life without Chi. A Chi-less life is no life at all. At their most fundamental level, humanity and the world exist as the intangible energy of Chi. By connecting with that energy in a controlled and conscious way, you can impact every area of your life to fulfill your most deeply held and authentic needs. Indeed, the energy of Chi can carry you beyond the self-created boundaries that limit so many people. For the Igbo, each individual has a Chi, a ‘spirit being’ parallel to his physical being. Thus, the concept of Chi also entails a necessary duality in the world - “wherever something stands, something else will stand beside it” (ihe kwuru, ihe akwudebe ya). The importance of Chi is also demonstrated by the frequency with which it appears as an element in Igbo names, such as Chibundu (Chi is life), Chibuzo (Chi is the way), Chinualumogu (Chi is my arbiter), Chikadibia (Chi is greater than the doctor), and, of course, Chibuike (Chi is strength).

The Chi principle does not in any way demean the being of the human person in the shaping of his or her life. For the Igbo believe strongly that, while Chi is life and strength, human beings play a participatory role in the shaping of their lives to the effect that whatever befalls one is ‘what one settles with one’s Chi’ (ihe ya na chi ya kpara). In the Igbo culture, one operative principle in the shaping of a person’s life is human will power – determination to face the challenges of life. This shaping and re-shaping of one’s life or destiny is clearly expressed in the Igbo saying onye kwe, chi ya ekwe (“if one wills, one’s personal ‘Chi’ wills also”). It is a manifestation of the optimism and dynamism so evident in the Igbo attempt at self actualization and the orientation towards achievement. In other words, one’s determination to survive is backed up by the divine’s determination to support and strengthen. Thus, the element of fatalism, where one is left to the mercy of destiny, is mitigated by ascribing some will power and initiative to the human person. Yet, at the end of the day, Chi remains the ultimate ‘energy’ of existence.

On Being Chi in Asia

I love Asia…the people, the language and culture. After almost a decade of lived experience in Asia, I have come to realize that Africa, particularly the Igbo world, has something in common with Asia when it comes to ultimate reality and meaning. Over these years, I have leisurely devoted time to studying the wisdom traditions of the Far East, including the philosophical teachings of Buddhism and Taoism and different forms of martial arts. I
realize now that there is a ‘consensus point’ for a deep Afro-Asian reflection on life as a whole, for, interestingly, *Chi* means exactly the same thing (life-force), and is indeed pronounced exactly the same way (*Chi* as in *chief*), in both the Igbo and Oriental cultures.

Heavily influenced by Chinese culture, most Asians see in the *Chi* concept a clear-cut ‘program’ for getting everything one wants and deserves, with the basic energy (*Chi*) of the universe as one’s personal power source! Among the Chinese, *Chi* is ‘the natural energy of the Universe.’ This energy, though called ‘natural,’ is spiritual or supernatural, and is part of a metaphysical, not an empirical, belief system. *Chi* is thought to permeate all things. It is the primal energy underlying all matter; it is the vital energy that gives life to living beings.

Hence, in Buddhism, for instance, *Chi* is explained as *Kundalini Shakti* – our creative energy, the energy of our soul, the energy of consciousness, the awareness of the higher self, our emanation from infinity, and the energy of the cosmos within each individual. Buddhists believe that *Kundalini* makes it possible for us as humans with finite identities to relate to our infinite identities. We become aware of our creative capacities, the inherent radiance of our being, and can unfold our true creative purpose for being. In fact, life is so *Chi*-centered that we ‘inhale and exhale’ nothing but *Chi*, whose major component is harmony.\(^1\) On this ground, my traditional Igbo culture agrees so well with the general understanding of *Chi* in Asia: *Chi is life!*

The crucial question now is: what has this *Chi* principle to do with my missionary experience?

**NIGERIAN MISSIONARY IN THE PHILIPPINES**

I was ordained to the priesthood in Nigeria on July 8, 2000. Before I could say ‘Eureka,’ God catapulted me out of Africa into Asia. Having to leave home a few weeks after ordination was quite a challenge. However, like the archetypal figure of Prometheus, who dared the world of the gods to bring fire to humanity, I landed in Mindanao in the Southern Philippines not sure of what lay ahead, but very confident that I would encounter everything with a Sisyphean spirit born out of the energy of life called *Chi*.

Though ultimately my encounter with the Filipino culture has been profoundly enriching, I must confess that initially it presented a herculean challenge in terms of adapting to a very different culture, language, socio-economic and political environment, and indeed mindset. It has been tough, but indeed necessarily
tough, because this toughness has contributed immensely to my personal transformation, a transformation made possible through the power of *Chi* that continuously strengthens and fires me up.

One of the greatest challenges for me was to see mission in terms of transformational witnessing, rather than simply as a job to be done. My first appointment to the Philippines reminds me of the critical and crucial importance of liminality, or the border-stage of passage in the human life-cycle from one state to another. Mission in this part of Asia remains for me a process of identity-formation, as in the case of crossing the threshold of puberty to the world of adulthood. At this stage I am proud and happy to say that I was *born* a Nigerian, *called* a Spiritan, *re-born* a Filipino, but *remain* an Igbo – all because *Chi* has been my strength.

**MISSION OF PRESENCE AND WITNESS**

Language helped me to permeate the heart of the Filipinos. Having to ‘master’ in six months the local language – *Cebuano* (or *Bisay*) – was a daunting challenge for me but it left me with a sense of fulfillment, particularly when I saw how impressed the people were. And having then to learn the national language – *Tagalog* – all on my own gave me further joy and made me feel as if I had become a Filipino. Spanish came later and made me even more at home among the Filipino people and more accepted by them. With these three languages, difficult as they definitely were, I have been able to communicate and relate pretty well. When in the community of Southern and Central Filipinos, my ability to speak Cebuano breaks the ice. With the Filipinos from the North, or when it is time use the national language, my Tagalog does the magic. When in the midst of the ‘living ancestors,’ who cherish the three centuries of Spanish colonization, my little Spanish works wonders. I attribute all of this to the power of *Chi*.

Undeniably, mission entails a ‘mutual exchange of energies,’ in which all have something to give and something to receive. Filipinos have also touched my life and continue to inspire me every day. The Filipino hospitality I continue to enjoy delights me. The smile on the face of every Filipino I meet on the street is truly inspiring. The generosity of even the poorest Filipino person is simply amazing; I experience it in the gifts I regularly receive, in numerous invitations to meals for fiestas, birthdays, marriages, and other occasions, and in people’s readiness to hike with me for hours to visit an outstation. The simplicity of lifestyle of the people, their spirit of ‘don’t worry, be happy,’ has taught me a lot. The Filipino respect for the *pari* (priest) challenges my sense of the sacred. In the midst of Muslim-Christian...
tension in Mindanao, the friendliness of the Muslim community overwhelms me. Indeed, many Filipinos continue to touch the very core of my being. This again is surely the power of Chi.

**Mission of Diversity**

One interesting and enriching aspect of my missionary experience in the Philippines is that it has been a ‘peripatetic’ mission. Over the past eight years I have worked in various ministries: I have been a pastor in a mountain parish, where I had to travel 14 km to get drinking water and hike for 7 good hours to reach an outstation; I have been a pastor in two different city parishes, where I felt that my homilies were more critically analyzed (and sometimes reinterpreted); I worked in prison ministry, with crime victims as well as their families, which was always a demanding task; I have been vocation coordinator for the very young but promising Spiritan formation program, facing the difficult task of convincing the youth of today of the importance of religious vocation; and finally I have been involved in campus ministry, where accompanying 21st century Filipino college students can be a real challenge. At present, I am officially assigned (amazingly!) to the following ministries: parish priest of a rural parish located in a poor remote hinterland, pastoral director of prison ministry in both Iligan diocese and the entire ecclesiastical province, campus ministry coordinator and part-time lecturer of philosophy and Christian morality at St. Michael’s College, Iligan. In addition, I remain committed to my work as vocation coordinator of the Spiritans.

‘Outside the Church,’ I have also witnessed to Filipinos through my contact with Kiwanis International, a global organization of volunteers dedicated to changing the world - one child and one community at a time. I see in Kiwanis an ‘extension’ of my ‘Spiritanness,’ or vocation to missionary life. The Kiwanis motto – ‘serving the children of the world’ – remains for me a mission that the founders of the Spiritan Congregation, Libermann and Poullart des Places, would be proud to encourage. Since December 2001, I have been an active member of Kiwanis and have worked together with Kiwanis to bring life and hope to hundreds of Filipino anawim through different social projects, providing food, clothing, shelter, education, and healthcare to thousands of poor rural children and families.

But central to all these ministries, as diversified as they are, is a needy human condition - a human situation that is terribly in need of liberation and transformation.

But central to all these ministries, as diversified as they are, is a needy human condition - a human situation that is terribly in need of liberation and transformation. From rural parish to prison ministry, the experience remains one that brings me face to face with human beings hungering for the love of God. The
cry for justice cannot but be heard in my rural parish in the mountains of Digkilaan. Covering an incredibly large area of 350 sq. km., and inhabited by people who cling to survival through subsistence farming on farmlands that, sad to say, do not belong to them, mission in this parish cannot but be holistic.

How I have been able to combine all these ministries and still have had time and energy to write two books remains a mystery to me. Without the power of Chi, all of this surely could not have been possible! Eight years on, mission among Filipinos remains a profoundly witness-filled experience. By simply being with the people, loving them, and, indispensably, learning from them, I have encountered them at the levels of their faith and culture. I have discovered how they experience God in their lives while sharing how I, as an African and a Spiritan missionary, experience the Lord in mine.

**The Power of Chi in Spiritan Charism**

The Chi concept suits perfectly well all that the word ‘Spiritan’ stands for. From a Spiritan perspective, the power of Chi is the power of the Holy Spirit. At the core of any Spiritan mission is the Spirit of God without whom there is no life; for this Spirit is both the source of life as well as life itself. As a Spiritan, one remains an embodiment of the Spirit, so to speak. The Spiritan missionary cannot but be fired up, Spirit-charged. And being a Spirit-carrier challenges the Spiritan missionary to ‘enspirit’ the people among and with whom he lives and works. To be a Spiritan is to daringly let other people experience the wonderful presence of this Spirit that empowers, vivifies, and liberates.

It is against this backdrop that the Spiritan mission in the Philippines remains a mission that is in consonance with the charism of our founders. They understood quite well that mission cannot but be Chi-centered (Spirit-filled) and that authentic evangelization constitutes the integral liberation of people, action for justice and peace, and participation in development. The Chi-filled missionaries cannot but be “the advocates, the supporters, and the defenders of the weak and the little ones against all who oppress them.”

The Philippines is among the countries in Asia that are characterized by massive poverty. Hence, compassion necessarily is at the core of mission, especially among the Filipino anawim. To say, “The Lord be with you,” without actually bringing the Lord to the people through social services would be tantamount to ignoring the essence of Christ’s message; this vision is at the heart of Spiritan mission. Working with prisoners who live in subhuman conditions, as well as trekking very long distances
...mission is simply about sharing God’s love with God’s strength.

The conviction that mission is “God’s business,”...empowers one to be resilient in the midst of hardships...

along rugged mountainous pathways to reach out to my poverty-stricken parishioners, reminds me that mission is simply about sharing God’s love with God’s strength. Our Spiritan ancestor, Francis Libermann, lived in accordance with this principle, as Cornelius van der Poel, our Dutch confere, clearly states:

_The whole life of Francis Libermann was directed toward one point, namely, to establish and to strengthen God’s love in the hearts of people. Whether we focus our attention on ...his ministry for the most abandoned souls, or on the foundation of a religious, missionary society and its discontinuance in order to be fused with the Congregation of the Holy Spirit, everywhere his deepest motivation is this urge to establish and to deepen God’s love in the human community.... This urge was for him fulfilled in the experience of being consecrated to the service of God._

Thus, crucial to my “experience of being consecrated to the service of God” in the Philippines is the profound power of the Spirit (Chi) that humbles me, opens my eyes to see, and impels me to act in response to the reality on the ground – the reality of poverty, sickness, exploitation, political and armed conflicts, and natural calamities. And as the Filipino theologian, Rodrigo Tano, puts it, “sharing in the suffering of our people and meeting their needs could well be a point of entry for the gospel.”

**FRANCIS LIBERMANN AND THE SPIRITAN PHILIPPINES MISSION**

My mission in the Philippines is Spiritan Mission. This means, in the first place, that I came to the Philippines not just as Chibuike Ojilere but more importantly as a Spiritan missionary. Simply put, I was sent. Secondly and consequently, I accept and commit myself to the Spiritan Philippines mission, which is principally the evangelization of the poor. Thus, despite the difficulties involved, I continue to commit my whole being to this mission because I am convinced that mission is God’s, and the will of God that brought me here is commensurate with the grace and strength of God that continues to sustain me. My personal lived experience has so far taught me that it is the grace of God that ultimately supplies the energy and strength needed for the missionary adventure. Simply put, God is my strength (Chi-bu-ike) in mission and “God’s strength is enough for me.” This, I believe, is what inspired Francis Libermann to say, without in any way demeaning the human person, that “God is all, man is nothing.” The conviction that mission is “God’s business,” and that the strength for missionary encounter comes from God, empowers one to be resilient in the midst of hardships, be it terrorism, economic difficulties, culture shock, or even the gigantic challenge of language learning. This resiliency remains
an evident ingredient in the Spiritan Philippines mission in the face of the ongoing threat of terrorism and natural disaster. In this context, the words of Libermann continue to be profoundly inspiring:

\[
\text{The moment I see difficulties and trouble, the divine goodness seems to give me new strength. It seems to me that I am made for suffering, for being tried. My heart overflows with joy and hope, and I drag myself along to battle. It is not in me to flee. So never fear for me. God is my strength [Chi-bu-i-ke]; nothing in the world can unnerve me...}^7
\]

Libermann’s missionary resiliency is well-described by Cornelius van der Poel:

\[
\text{Who can ever describe his feelings when the Congregation of the Holy Heart of Mary...had to be dissolved and be absorbed into the Congregation of the Holy Spirit. Only the benefit for the poor that would result from this fusion could guide his decision. He never relinquished his purpose, not even when some of his own followers called him a traitor. His missionary ideal stood firm and remained active, even under the most difficult circumstances. No one can ever put into words the pain he felt when so many of his missionaries died in the merciless climate of Africa. Nothing could break his missionary vocation.}^8
\]

With years of immersion among the oppressed and poorest of the poor in the Philippines, I remain convinced that this God-powered diehard attitude in the face of difficulties remains indispensable for mission, for in it lies the heart of missionary availability. Since “an availability for the service of the gospel, a readiness to go where we are sent by the Congregation”\(^9\) remains fundamental to the Spiritan calling, it is imperative that one embraces one’s mission with an indefatigable trust in God’s strength. To take adequate cognizance of the context in which mission has to be done, and, as Anthony Gittins puts it, to get immersed in the ongoing life of the poor from the point of view of the poor,\(^10\) is a tremendous challenge. And when such a context is as challenging as the Philippines, then the necessity of the ultimate power of Chi in the missionary adventure becomes self-evident.

**CONCLUSION**

In all, my experience as a young African working in the Philippines remains a typical *rite de passage*. My *Chi*-centered vision of life thus continues to fire me up in my missionary adventure. This vision remains my compass and map. On the one hand, the compass keeps my primary calling primary, helps me to use my
Chibuike Ojilere, C.S.Sp.

...my mission in the Philippines has been enriching...

gifts to meet the needs of others, and directs me in my journey of finding God’s purposes for my life. On the other hand, the map enables me to determine where I am, the location and distance of my destination, and the best route for getting there. It helps me to anticipate what I might encounter on the trip. Above all, this map also gives me a strong sense of confidence in the power of Chi.

I can therefore say with certainty that my mission in the Philippines has been enriching because I have a ‘power-full’ map called Chi. The Holy Spirit of God is and remains the missionary map that strengthens me and fires me up. God is strength indeed!

Footnotes
3 *Spiritan Rule of Life*, No.14.
5 Rodrigo D. Tano, “Towards an Evangelical Asian Theology,” in *The Bible and Theology in Asian Contexts*, eds. Bong Rin Ro & Ruth Eshenaur (Taichung, Taiwan: Asia Theological Association, 1984),107.
9 *Spiritan Rule of Life*, No.25
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.*

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**To a Missionary Who Died at Home**¹

Why did you go and leave your bones in that to us and you a foreign place?
For we would have taken you with love and sung and prayed night-long songs and prayers, and we would have carried you in triumph to your resting place and we would have mixed our tears with the holy sprinkling water, and dropped our red-brown dusty soil upon you, for we would have your dust as ours. And we would have planted, each one of us, a living flower on top so that you might know that all is not ended here, or there…Life is. Life lives.
Tell us again, then. Why did you go?
Did you not know? We loved you.

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**Footnotes**
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 includes articles of a scholarly nature as well as others related to the praxis of the Spiritan charism in a wide variety of cultural contexts. Special attention is given in each issue to the Spiritan education ethos, in view of the university setting in which the journal is published.

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Spiritan Horizons is an annual publication. ISSN: 1933-1762.
It is also published online at http://www.spiritans.duq.edu/publications.html.
ISSN: 1935-0759

Subscription rate: $10.00 (postage extra)

Published by the Center for Spiritan Studies, Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, PA 15282, U.S.A.

Cover design: Matthew John Walsh, Campus Minister, Spiritan Campus Ministry, Duquesne University.