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Spiritan Horizons is a journal of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit and Duquesne University of the Holy Spirit, Pittsburgh. Published annually by the Center for Spiritan Studies at Duquesne University, the Journal combines scholarly articles on Spiritan history, spirituality and mission with others related to the praxis of the Spiritan charism in a wide variety of cultural and life settings.

Special attention is given in each issue to the ethos of Spiritan education (including service learning) and especially the interface of faith and reason in the setting of higher education. Past issues of the journal can be accessed online at the Spiritan Collection at http://www.duq.edu/spiritancollection.

The Center for Spiritan Studies is a collaborative venture between the Congregation of the Holy Spirit and Duquesne University of the Holy Spirit. The Center was founded in 2005. Its purpose is to foster and disseminate research into Spiritan history, tradition, and spirituality. It serves the Congregation throughout the world and Duquesne University by making resources for the Spiritan charism available for ministry, learning, and teaching. It likewise serves all people who wish to benefit from the Spiritan charism in their various callings.

In 1890, then Father Alexandre Le Roy, C.S.Sp. (later archbishop and superior general) spearheaded the first Spiritan team to survey the interior of East Africa for purposes of evangelization. In 1914, he published Au Kilimandjaro, detailing the fortunes of this expedition and the founding of the first East African Catholic communities. Adrian Edwards, C.S.Sp., translated this book into English before his death. The Center has prepared it for publication early next year as Mission to Kilimanjaro. Florentine Mallya, C.S.Sp., introduces our readers to this work and its implications for mission and formation today. Le Roy, for example, was not only fluent in Swahili, but was geographer, botanist
and anthropologist. **Bede Uche Ukwuije**, C.S.Sp., takes up the discussion of missionaries and culture in “**Spiritan Missionaries: Precursors of Inculturation Theology**.” He shows that with the production of the first catechisms, Bibles, hymnals and dictionaries, etc., the missionaries were actually forerunners of inculturation. In the section, Spiritans for Today, we portray deceased Spiritans who were trailblazers in some aspect of Spiritan life and mission. **Brendan Carr**, C.S.Sp., “**Spiritans for Today: Willie Jenkinson, C.S.Sp. Portrait of a Missionary**,” shows how this Spiritan embodied the tension of the transition after Vatican II. Most older Spiritans did their novitiate in the Jesuit mold. **Damien Meki**, C.S.Sp., “**Discernment: Ignatius of Loyola and Libermann – Two Models? Toward a Methodology of Discernment**,” clearly shows the difference between Libermannian and Ignatian discernment and calls for the embrace of the greater flexibility of the former. This was part of Meki’s research as Spiritan Scholar at the Center for 2018–2019.

The Tanzania Province is celebrating 150 years of evangelization. **Gerard Nnamunga**, C.S.Sp., “**Spiritan Pedagogy of Evangelization in Tanzania**,” shows the part education played and is playing in evangelization in the country.

For three years, three Duquesne professors, **Dr. Steve N. Hansen**, **Dr. Maureen O’Brien**, and **Dr. Anne Marie Witchger Hansen**, have been interviewing Spiritans engaged in education and formation work. Their initial report, “**Spiritan Charism, Vocational Commitment, and ‘A Different Kind of Excellence’: A Study of Spiritan Educators**,” opens the door for further discussions on Spiritan Pedagogy and how Spiritans should be involved in education.


Director, Center for Spiritan Studies*
The Center for Spiritan Studies

The Center for Spiritan Studies is a resource facility for the Spiritan Congregation (through research on its charism and history, tradition and spirituality) and Duquesne University Community (in re-imagining its Spiritan legacy for a new era).

ITS SERVICES INCLUDE:

The Spiritan Collection
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scholarships for research on Spiritan subjects

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a scholarly annual journal on topics related to Spiritan life and mission

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Further information on these services can be found on the Center’s website at www.duq.edu/spiritans
Agostinho Tavares, C.S.Sp.

Agostinho Tavares, C.S.Sp., was director of CESM. Licensed in philosophy and theology, he left for mission in Angola. Recalled in 1987, he worked in formation, becoming novice director with specialization in spiritual and psychological accompaniment. For a time, he worked on the formation of young Spiritans in Paraguay and Angola. Returning to Portugal four years ago, he accompanies missionary groups while functioning as spiritual director in the Seminário Conciliar de Braga.

Translated from Missão espiritana 21-22 (Jan 2013) 52-70 by Daniel Snyder.

MISSION IS BORN OF LOVE

“Whoever acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God remains in him and he in God. We have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us. God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him. There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear because fear has to do with punishment, and so one who fears is not yet perfect in love. We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:15-16, 18-19).

A Life of Faith and Love

The life of faith is a life illuminated by the love of God revealed in and by Jesus Christ. How can we live this life unless it is marked by the immense joy of being children of God? Indeed, the Father tirelessly and lovingly repeats to our heart these same words he directed to Jesus: “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased” (Luke 3:22). And we can say to him, moved by the Spirit: “Abba! Father!” (Rom 8:15).

I am deeply convinced that the greatest joy and the greatest fortune that can happen to us is to find ourselves with this look of tenderness and love from God. In Jesus Christ, God looks at us not as just creatures, but as dear children.

In the spiritual life, everything is faithfulness to grace! Everything is a response of love and gratitude, filled with rejoicing, to the love of God. In light of this principle, we can identify some mistakes that can occur in the life of faith.

1. Living a Life of Faith motivated by Fear

Fear of punishment, fear of reaching the end empty-handed, mistrust of God. But this is absurd. The disciple of Jesus is to live out their faith with profound joy, with an attitude of boundless trust in God. With the trust of a poor person’s heart, rooted – not in their own merits – but in the love and mercy of God. In fact, the love of God, manifested in and through Jesus Christ, opens the heart of whoever, by this trust, believes in him and drives out every fear. For that matter, the Lord himself tells us: “(For) those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received a spirit of adoption, through which we cry, ‘Abba, Father!’” (Rom 8:14-15; cf. 1 John 4:18).

Good! It is precisely in this perspective that Claude Poullart des Places situates us, when he prays:

The chastisements which will follow my crime will not
be the cause of my prudence and wisdom, but it is fear of displeasing You and offending a master who deserves to be so tenderly loved which will keep me, God, faithful to You as I ought to be.²

2. Understanding Spiritual Life as the Fulfillment of a Duty

We do this or that, we go to Mass or we help our neighbor, because it is commanded, as if the commandments were a capricious imposition of God. This is a very poor and limited comprehension of spiritual life. Effectively, when our heart encounters the beauty and goodness of the love of Christ, the life of faith comes to be lived as a response of love and gratitude to the gratuitous love of God. In this way, our own faith is seen as a precious gift of God. This is how the young Claude Francis understands his relationship with God:

Speak Lord, when you please. All the evil I may have attempted to inflict on you, while doing myself infinite harm, has not prevented you from crying out for me. Hence, Lord, I now repent of my blindness and renounce with all my heart all those things that have caused me to flee from you. I am ready to heed the sacred commands of your divine Providence. Descend into this heart where for so long a time you have desired to enter. That heart will now listen to you alone and will henceforth conceive no other affections than those that will make me love you as I ought. You will find a place in my heart that will not be stained by any passion. And there, surrounded by the virtues which your law commands me to practice, you will be able to make known your holy will to me. Nothing in all the world will be able to rob you of a servant who vows to you with courage, worthy of a Christian, blind obedience and infinite submission.³

Obedience to God is filial and loving obedience, dictated by the trust and gratitude of a heart that recognizes the unfathomable love with which God, for all eternity, loves us.

3. Thinking that We are Doing God a Favor

Thinking that we are doing a favor for God when we believe in him and live in accordance with his will. If we think like this, we demand due reward, and we can even intend to negotiate with God. In reality, if there is favor, it
is on God’s part, who always remains faithful in his love, even when we are ungrateful and unfaithful to him. For that matter, if we believe in God we add nothing to his glory and greatness. In fact, he does not need anyone to be who he is. We, all of us, are the ones who have an absolute need of him. So may it be for us a great grace and a great happiness to be able to believe in him. This is exactly what Elizabeth said of the Virgin Mary: “Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the LORD would be fulfilled” (Luke 1:45).

In his *Writings*, Claude demonstrates a profound awareness of having been overwhelmed with blessings by God. And he feels moved to respond with love and gratitude to the merciful love of the Lord:

My Savior, I want at all costs to render myself worthy of your love. This from now on is the limit of my desire. My heart, until now, has been full of vanity and ambition. It found nothing in the world that was high or great enough to give it peace. I am no longer astonished that earthly and perishable things were unable to satisfy my heart. It was reserved for God, and now has found something to fill it entirely. It will no longer be occupied with anything except yourself.  

The Radicality of Love

“As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and remain in his love. “I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete. This is my commandment: love one another as I love you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (John 15:9-13).

In a world that promotes adrenaline and extreme sports, permit me to speak of the radicality of love. The radicality of love is, in fact, the essential radicality of the Christian life. I can have a faith capable of moving mountains, the generosity to distribute all of my possessions in alms, and the audacity to sacrifice my own life, but if I do not have love, it is of no use to me and I am nothing (cf. 1 Cor 13:1-3).

It is important to make clear that the radicality of love

The radicality of love is, in fact, the essential radicality of the Christian life

The radicality of love is, in fact, the essential radicality of the Christian life
has nothing to do with fundamentalism. Fundamentalism relates to aggravated attachment to an idea, a doctrine, a belief.

The radicality of love has to do, likewise, with the radicality that we contemplate in Jesus, who “loved them to the end” (John 13:1). And the radicality of Jesus manifests itself above all in the path he undertook after becoming man, assuming the condition of a slave, without laying claim to being treated according to his divine condition, even giving his life on the cross (cf. Phil 2:5-8) and forgiving and asking for forgiveness for those who so cruelly and unjustly betrayed and killed him (Luke 23:34). Jesus Christ lived out the radicality of love and invited his disciples to follow him to the extreme of giving their lives (cf. John 15:13), forgiving and loving their enemies (cf. Matt 5:44).

But how does one live out the radicality of love? Or, how can one love like this, in the way of Jesus? What led Jesus to follow this path? It is clear in the Gospels - living deeply united with the Father, with the awareness of being the Father’s beloved Son: “After Jesus was baptized, he came up from the water and behold, the heavens were opened [for him], and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove [and] coming upon him. And a voice came from the heavens, saying, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (Matt 3:16-17; cf. Matt 17:5). Only insofar as we live united with Jesus Christ and in the deep consciousness of his look of infinite love will it be possible for us to walk the paths of the radicality of love.

We see this very thing in the life experience of young Claude Poullart des Places. The encounter with the tenderness of God’s love aroused in him the desire to respond to the Lord’s love with the Paschal offering of his own life.

Of all temporal things, I wished to keep health alone, and I wanted to offer the latter in a complete sacrifice to God in the work of the missions. I would have felt most happy if, after enkindling the fire of God’s love in the hearts of all, I could have shed the very last drop of my blood for him whose mercies were almost always present before my mind.⁵

And we see the young founder die at the age of thirty, certainly because exhausted by the labor that the work of the
Seminary demanded of him as well as his concern in helping those afflicted by the epidemic spreading around Paris at the time. Like a grain of wheat thrown to the earth…

It is enjoyable to show how this radicality of love — the authentic radicality of the Christian life — is also present in Francis Libermann, the other founder of the Spiritan family:

My body, my soul, my whole being are for God; and if I knew that there was still a little vein in me which was not for him I would tear it out and trample it underfoot in the mud and dust. The ties of love that link me and bind me to my Lord Jesus are too strong for you to break.6

Later, commenting on the Gospel of John, Francis Libermann would say: “It is great joy for a soul to know that it is loved by Jesus. The awareness of this joy becomes the abundant fountainhead of boundless trust”

We can find an identical radicality in the Blessed Daniel Brottier. He wrote in the request that he made to be admitted to the Congregation of the Holy Spirit:

From the age of twelve, I have thought about the life of a missionary, a life of one who wishes to sacrifice and immolate himself for the salvation of souls—at once or drop by drop, what does it matter? However if I were allowed to express a preference, it would be for the former. That is to say, Monsignor, that my head does not care much about remaining attached to my shoulders. I have some good reasons for this. I do not wish to be presumptuous, but if you have a particularly perilous post, where someone must be put at risk, I simply say: Here I am.7

The Ruptures that Love Inspires

“As they were proceeding on their journey someone said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.” Jesus answered him, “Foxes have dens and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to rest his head.” And to another he said, “Follow me.” But he replied, “[Lord,] let me go first and bury my father.” But he answered him, “Let the dead bury their dead. But you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:57-60).
Human life is marked, from beginning to end, by the dynamism of rupture. The process of birth is the first rupture that all of us live. The beginning of our life is marked by a cry of pain, of freedom, and of light. And the end of our life? What does our last breath signify? Is it not a cry sometimes silent — Jesus let out a loud cry, but in that cry proclaimed, God is here! — of rupture and freedom?

In this sense, speaking of rupture means speaking of birth - the passage to a new way and a greater quality of life. What gives meaning to the rupture is the love that leads to life.

When we think about rupture, we feel, almost always, a certain repugnance, as we fixate on the part of pain that it carries. But why must we fixate on the pain? Why must we not think about the greatest degree of freedom and of life that rupture brings? If a mother fixated on the pain, a child would never be born. And yet, it is well worth a child being born!

Whoever wants to avoid rupture at all costs never comes to generate life and never comes to have a fertile life, which is worth being lived.

How did Claude Poullart des Places live out the reality of rupture? The first note that comes to the top is that of a considerable time of hesitation. Since he was a child, the young founder felt the call to the priesthood. His parents, however, fostered another dream. And although they were good Christians, they resorted to various strategies to steer him away from the priestly life.

The rupture with his parents’ dream was not easy for Claude. As he himself confesses in his Writings, he had a great appreciation for his parents and his sister. The blood ties held him down, they would not let him open his heart to the call of God. He hesitated for several years without achieving the rupture that the call of the Lord required.

This kind of rupture is generally difficult for those who have a good experience with family life. Where does the difficulty come from? It seems to me that, in large part, it can be attributed to this: we are known, we are understood, we are loved, we feel safe. So, the difficulty is in risking it. We fear the unknown. We fear above all not being recognized and loved.

The difficulty becomes even greater when we don’t
understand this rupture with the “blood ties” well, when we think that it means loving less those who are dear to us. But it is not so when this rupture happens for reasons of faith. It is about, moreover, loving in a different way. In fact, we end up loving more and with greater depth. If we take the ruptures that the Virgin Mary lived, we will find a great light.

I leave here, without further comment, the testimonial of Claude Poullart des Places:

I hope, my God, that in this retreat You will speak to my heart and through your mercy You will disengage me from the embarrassing anxieties in which my indecision has plunged me. I realize full well that You do not approve the life I am now leading, that You have destined me for something better and that I must make a definite and reasonable decision in order to think earnestly of my salvation.8

God has created me only that I might love and serve him and finally enjoy the blessedness that is promised to the just. This is my only business. This is the end to which I must direct all my actions. If I do not labor in accord with that end, I am a fool, for there is no other purpose of human life (ibid.).

This matter is most important and I cannot afford not to invoke your help. Lord, I invite You to guide my steps, since I am resolved to walk in the way You wish to point out to me. I renounce all of the advantages which might flatter me and which you do not approve... Speak to my heart, O God, my God, I am ready to obey you.9

In his analysis to discern what state of life God called him to, Claude Francis, at pondering the state of his religious life, commented to himself:

How would you reconcile living in such a retreat with the attachment you have for your sister? You love her dearly, and are unable to deprive yourself of her presence for any length of time... My father is old and he will leave behind a lot of business affairs which few beside myself will be able to put in order. You know what obligations I have towards my father and my mother, the authors of my life. They will not oppose my vocation when they know it is a holy one,
but would it not be a relief for them to see me in the
world and to be able to count on me?\(^{10}\)

This was a rupture that Claude lived with perplexity and
suffering. It cost him years of hesitation and escape. But it
ended up giving him, at the age of twenty-two, the push
that faithfulness to the call of the LORD required. The other
rupture, that we will address next, is linked to his natural
ambition.

The Logic of Jesus’ Passover

“Amen, amen, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls
to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat;
but if it dies, it produces much fruit. Whoever loves
his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world
will preserve it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must
follow me” (John 12:24-26a).

Claude Poullart des Places had to achieve more than just
the rupture with his parents’ dreams in order to follow Jesus
Christ and to be faithful to God’s will. In fact, insofar as we
correspond to grace, God always leads us farther, because he
prompts us and moves us with the power of his infinite love.

The other rupture that Claude Francis lived reached
the core of his being, in the depth of his soul: it was the
rupture with his “heart of stone” — a heart hardened by self-
absorption, more concretely by ambition — in order to be
able to receive from God, by the power of the Spirit, a “heart
of flesh,” capable of loving without measure, even offering its
own life. This is how he speaks of this rupture:

Come, my soul, it is time to surrender yourself to so
many loving persecutions. I must, as it were, change
my nature, divest myself of the old Adam to be
clothed with Jesus Christ.\(^{11}\)

I shall have enemies to combat… Defend me, O
Lord, against those tempters. The most formidable is
ambition—my predominant passion. Humble me,
crush my pride, confound my vain glory… I accept
all of this, my God, provided that You love me always
and that I may always be dear to you.\(^{12}\)

This rupture is so radical, it is hardly done in just
one day. In one day, we can make the decision to change
our life. But change like this is progressive, at times
almost imperceptible. Look at yourself in the process
of transformation as a seed that has been planted. It is something similar to what happens here. The change is progressive, and depends, first of all, on the action of the Spirit, and, then, on our faithfulness to grace (docility to the Spirit).

This is perhaps the rupture that hurts the most. And it hurts, not because God enjoys seeing us suffer — how can a Father, who is infinite Love, enjoy seeing a dear child suffer? — but because of the hardness of our heart. And the more hardened our heart is, the greater the pain will be. Pain that is provoked by our resistance to the action of the Spirit, resistance caused by that which is in us and is the root of sin: pride, ambition, vanity, avarice, hypocrisy, lust…

When we come to terms with entering into the dynamism of this rupture, we start to walk the path of the first bliss, the path of poverty and humility.

For Claude Poullart des Places, directing his steps toward this path involved achieving a third rupture, which decisively marked his life. A rupture that he completed in a short time, though in a progressive way: the rupture with the aristocratic world which until then had moved him. In other words, passage from the world of the rich and powerful to the world of the insignificant and poor.

He began by withdrawing his attention from his ecclesiastical career, refusing diplomas and opting to pertain to the lower clergy. He abandoned his aristocratic garb, declined benefits, shared with the poor; lastly, he lived with the poor - poor with the poor and serving the poor. Only seven years passed until he gave the total gift of life. But from this seed of love thrown to the earth, in the field of the poor, the Congregation of the Holy Spirit was born.

“Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit” (John 12:24). It is the logic of the Passover of Jesus. We cannot follow it if we are not determined to enter into this dynamism of life that gives itself, that is given to God as a service of love to one’s brothers and sisters.

The Purification of Faith and Love

“Then he said to the host who invited him, “When you hold a lunch or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or your wealthy neighbors, in case they may invite you back and you
have repayment. Rather, when you hold a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind; blessed indeed will you be because of their inability to repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous” (Luke 14:12-14).

After the conversion retreat and vocational discernment, Claude Poullart des Places lived moments of great spiritual fervor, which we can situate in the context of the prayer of affection of which Francis Libermann speaks: “A state of prayer in which the person, touched by a supernatural and sensitive impression, goes to God and treats with violence what belongs to him or her. It is a prayer of love to God.” It was from this new light which the love of God aroused in his heart that Claude Francis made the crossing to the poor, which led him to found the Seminary of the Holy Spirit.

About three and a half years later, Poullart des Places, during a retreat, which he had in December of 1704, wrote:

It would not have been too much had I shed tears of blood to bewail my wretchedness… At the present moment I am merely a man who is reputed to be still alive, but who is certainly dead… Blessed am I in my extreme misfortune if I do not fall away even more.13

Being full of vanity and presumption and also so unfaithful to grace, must I not fear that God may abandon me entirely? If that evil has not yet befallen me, I owe it to his infinite mercy. Always full of tenderness for me, unable to let me get lost, he has first preserved me from the hardness of heart that leads to final impenitence.14

I must believe that the Good Lord will again have pity on me if I return to him with all of my heart… Filled with this holy confidence through the grace of God, I shall therefore examine which road is the shorter one … in order to regain him without whom, whatever I do, I cannot live in peace.15

This impressive testimony makes us understand that the young Founder went through a period of spiritual crisis, coming even to doubt the work which he brought to life - like the desert of spiritual purification about which we already spoke in the first part of this book. In this desert of purification, Claude Poullart des Places had to examine his relationship with God and his motives. Reviewing his spiritual path, Claude Francis realized that, even in the
Agostinho Tavares, C.S.Sp.

midst of difficulties, God was applying towards him a loving pedagogy which precisely allowed him to maintain an attitude of vigilance.

In this crucial moment of his spiritual journey, the young Founder could have been brought to succumb to the temptation of pride and discouragement, resulting in the abandonment of the initiative that he had founded, as he himself attests:

I consider first, that the source of my laxness, or to speak more honestly as I should, of my falling off and disorder, is the fact that I left solitude too soon. I have poured myself out, as it were, on external things, undertaking this work for poor students and striving to keep it going. I did not have a sufficiently strong foundation in virtue for such an undertaking. I had not yet acquired enough humility to put myself safely at the head of such a work.¹⁶

It was an insidious way—all the more dangerous because it appeared good to me—of gradually insinuating pride into my heart. Here then was an entry to a vulnerable spot, and it could have thrown me into the very trap which had already caused me to fall into even more shameful disorders… I would not be wrong in believing that on this occasion the devil transformed himself into an agent of light to seduce me. I hardly know what to think of it. What happened makes me believe that I made a mistake (ibid.).

Claude Francis finds himself facing the risk we can always incur of the illusion of the “apparent good.” The initiative he founded was, in itself, good. But the motives could not be. Jesus himself calls our attention to the danger of this mistake: “[But] take care not to perform righteous deeds in order that people may see them; otherwise, you will have no recompense from your heavenly Father. When you give alms, do not blow a trumpet before you…” (Matt 6:1-2).

In this crucial moment of his spiritual journey, seduced by the infinite mercy with which the Lord had protected him, Claude Francis turned to God, with an attitude of abandonment and trust.

The young Founder learned, not without pain and
when the human heart is touched by the love of God, it feels compelled to respond with enthusiasm and generosity

perplexity, that, when the human heart is touched by the love of God, it feels compelled to respond with enthusiasm and generosity. But it is necessary to not confuse that initial enthusiasm with holiness. In fact, growth in holiness of life necessarily passes through the purification of faith and love, the purification of motives.

The purification of faith and love is above all an effect of the action of the Holy Spirit. But this purification also calls for collaboration on our part. It implies purification of the image that we have of God. It brings with it purification of the image we make of ourselves as well as that of human beings in general. It still supposes the purification of love which leads our heart to learn to love God for God himself and to love our brothers and sisters with the same love with which God loves us — Jesus’ way.

### The Purification of Motives

“[But] take care not to perform righteous deeds in order that people may see them; otherwise, you will have no recompense from your heavenly Father. When you give alms, do not blow a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets to win the praise of others. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right is doing, so that your almsgiving may be secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you. “When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, who love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on street corners so that others may see them. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you” (Matt 6:16).

Jesus Christ directs us to a path of happiness. From love of sympathy to gratuitous love. To walk this path, we need to purify the reasons for our love. Jesus reveals to us a preferential gaze. His gaze of love preferentially falls on the “forgotten” and “unloved”: the paralytic of Bethesda (John 5:1-9). His gaze fixes on the most “insignificant”: the widow who lays down the smallest coin. Jesus points out the value of her offering, which comes from the greatest degree of generosity (Mark 12:41-44). His gaze fixes on the most “unprotected”: the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-17). His gaze fixes on the most “sinful”: Zacchaeus, Mary Magdalene...
The purification of faith and love goes through the purification of the motives of our living and acting. And, here, it is important to know that we can be predominantly motivated by emotions or we can be predominantly motivated by the values of the Kingdom of God.

The image we cultivate and we want others to have of us. Wanting to be the center of attention. Wanting to be well-regarded, to have renown. Wanting to be the first, the best. Wanting to have success, to be seen, to appear as a socially successful person. Wanting to receive praise and applause. Wanting to occupy places of honor. Wanting to be valued, appreciated, wanted, loved... Many times, they unconsciously condition our attitudes and behaviors.

The concrete examples that Jesus presents us (Matt 6:1-8) — giving alms, praying — are examples of “good works.” When the works are evil, it is easier for us to see that our motives are contrary to the values of the Gospel. But we easily fall for the trap when what we do is, in itself, a “good work,” as was the work that the young Claude Francis undertook. The trap is in this. Praying is good. Giving alms is good. Helping others is good. Whoever practices such actions easily reaps the applause and consideration of others. That others recognize us, in itself, is good. The issue is in doing what we do only, or mainly, to receive applause, recognition, approval, and esteem.

Jesus indicates to us the deep motivation that must be at the root of everything we do or do not do. To act in the presence of God, not wanting to be recognized and appreciated except by him. The praise, the applause, the recognition of men are the reward. But they are a fleeting reward, without the weight of eternity. For that matter, the same people who today applaud, tomorrow condemn. Jesus tells us that the authentic reward is the one that comes to us from God. And it is this that he invites us to seek in all we do.

When Claude Francis undertook the foundation of the Community/Seminary of the Holy Spirit it was well-intentioned. He wanted to please God and serve the poorest. But the dynamism of sin was betraying his generosity, as he himself confesses:
I know of course that if I faithfully used all God’s graces, I could really be on my guard and remain steadfast in the midst of my occupations… it was true that, I could have persevered and so I was led to think somehow that I was not undertaking anything beyond what was willed by God. And yet it was hard for me to remain steadfast and keep from being thrown off balance.¹⁷

It was an insidious way—all the more dangerous because it appeared good to me—gradually insinuating pride into my heart (ibid.).

I left the world in order to seek God, renounce vanity and save my soul. Is it possible that I merely changed the object of my ambition and that I preserved that ambition all the while in my heart? If so, of what use was it to undertake that work?¹⁸

Facing the spiritual crisis that he was going through, Claude Francis questions himself in order to discern the source of his motives. In fact, stopping, reflecting, praying, and asking some questions can help us to remain vigilant and to purify the motives of our living and acting:

What is it that constitutes the inspirational source of my life? What is, really, the reason for my existence and for my actions? What is it that, in general, leads me to act? The much or the little that I do, why do I do it? When I do something or I don’t do something, am I moved by my emotions or by the values of the Kingdom? Do I act according to what pleases me or doesn’t please me, or according to the values implied in the evangelical following of Jesus Christ? What is it that determines my choices: pleasing God or doing what pleases me? Serving my brothers and sisters or using them for myself and being served by them?

Being a Man According to God’s Heart

“That is not how you learned Christ, assuming that you have heard of him and were taught in him, as truth is in Jesus, that you should put away the old self of your former way of life, corrupted through deceitful desires, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new self, created in God’s way in righteousness and holiness of truth” (Eph 4:20-24).
In the self-portrait that he makes of himself, after better discerning God’s appeal in his life, the young Claude Poullart des Places looks at himself as he is, with his gifts and virtues, his limits and defects: he depicts himself authentically and truthfully both with himself and with God.

The Word of God referenced above refers us to the “truth which exists in Jesus.” Indeed, this truth is connected to being man, fully and truly man: a “new self,” “created in God’s way.”

During his crucial conversion and discernment retreat, Claude Francis, touched by the tenderness of God’s love and illuminated by his Word, becomes aware that the first appeal that God guides him to is that of being truly man. He understands that God demands a profound change in his life: “It is necessary, so to speak, that I change my nature, that I strip myself of the old Adam to be clothed in Jesus Christ.”

This radical change that God proposes to him does not in any way deny his being a man. What’s more, the change that God wants to see in him, not without his consent and collaboration, is intended to lead him to be truly and fully man: “My God, You want me to be a man, but You want me to be a man after your own heart” (ibid.).

In his passage through Fatima, Paul VI shared this invitation with men of the twentieth century: “Men, thirsty men!” Words as surprising as they are extraordinarily simple and profound.

It is a temptation and a delusion that human beings have dealt with since the beginning of their journey in this world: thinking that God is a threat, a rival that hinders freedom, that he stops them from being fully man. In reality, it is about a tremendous delusion and, even worse, a suicide attempt.

In reality, what God wants - and he is so committed to this that Jesus Christ went to the extreme of giving his life for us on the Cross - is for man to have life, a full life: “I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly” (John 10:10).

Listening to the voice of God and following in his footsteps do not mean constraining one’s own freedom or diminishing one’s humanity. On the contrary, it is bursting
into the infinite horizons of fullness of being and life.

We see this amplitude of horizons in the life of the young Claude Poullart de Places from the moment he opened his heart to the dimension of God’s merciful love. He left the closed world of the aristocracy to which his family belonged, which held him captive, to open his eyes to the other world, much vaster, of the Kingdom of God, which calls the small, the poor, the desperate and excluded of this world, who unfortunately still constitute the majority of the human family even today.

This profound life change didn’t present itself as easy to young Claude. He knew that the temptation of the comfortable life that his aristocratic lineage offered him, along with the success and glory that those so inclined felt, was not easy to overcome. And it is for that reason that he addresses God and pleads:

My God, You want me to be a man, but You want me to be a man after your own heart. I understand what you are asking of me in one word, and I want to grant it to You, for I know You will help me. Give me strength and anoint me with your wisdom and virtue. I need your help to defend myself against the tempter. I am abandoning him and he will seek to bind me once more in his horrible chains… That enemy is strong when You do not appear near him. This your task, my God, to fight for me. I entrust myself entirely to You, for I know You always side with those who hope in You, and we have nothing to fear when we do our best and You sustain us.²⁰

Worshipping in Spirit and Truth

“All the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They prostrated themselves before the throne, worshiped God, and exclaimed: ‘Amen. Blessing and glory, wisdom and thanksgiving, honor, power, and might be to our God forever and ever. Amen’” (Rev 7:11-12).

One often hears that one worships this or that, or some dear being. Worship, however, is due only to God: “The Lord, your God, shall you worship and him alone shall you serve” (Deut 6:14, cf. Matt 4:10).

Worship is the attitude of whoever takes off their shoes and remains on their knees before the mystery of God.
Worship is reverence, recognition of the smallness of the human creature that we are before the infinite majesty of God, who is Creator and Lord. Worship is reverential love of those who know they are loved by God, who is infinite Love! Worship springs up spontaneously in the heart of whoever, by the grace of God, has obtained the true knowledge of themselves — of their condition as a fragile and vulnerable creature — and the true knowledge of God who is Love. The heart understands — not with fear, but with reverence and love — that on your knees is the best way to be before God.

Thus, it is not surprising that Jesus invites us to worship the Father in spirit and in truth: “But the hour is coming, and is now here, when true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth; and indeed the Father seeks such people to worship him. God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship in Spirit and truth” (John 4:23-24).

Worship in spirit and truth is not restricted to moments of worship and prayer. It is, before anything else, an attitude that pervades the entire life and actions of whoever desires to respond with love and gratitude to the love of God, who first loved us.

Worshipping in spirit and truth is living unfocused on oneself, because one is wholly centered on God, with a gaze fixed on the Lord. Worshipping in spirit and truth is walking in the presence of God and serving the Lord in holiness and justice all the days of our life (cf. Luke 1:75). As a matter of fact, something else that the Lord does not expect of us: “With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow before God most high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with myriad streams of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my crime, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? You have been told, O mortal, what is good, and what the LORD requires of you: Only to do justice and to love goodness, and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:6-8).

Well, Claude Francis, wanting to respond with love and filial obedience to God, assumes this attitude of worship in his life, as we can verify by the beautiful prayer that he prayed several times a day to the Most Holy Trinity:

Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, I
adore You through your holy grace, with all my heart, all my soul and all my strength. I beg You to grant me faith, humility, chastity, the grace of not doing, saying, thinking, seeing, hearing or desiring anything except what You want me to do and say. Grant me those graces, my God, together with your most holy blessing. May my heart and my mind be filled with You alone. May I always walk in your presence and pray ceaselessly, as I should. My Jesus, be for us eternally a Jesus. I place my mind and my heart in your hands through the most Holy Virgin.21

The Mission is Born out of Love

“After all the people had been baptized and Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased” (Luke 3:21-22).

Jesus, the Father’s Envoy par excellence, lives out the mission with the anointing of the Holy Spirit (cf. Luke 4:18). But the mission that the Father entrusted to him was not easy at all, as it led him to the extreme of giving his life, on the cross. What was the inner strength that emboldened Jesus Christ? The account of Jesus’ Baptism in the Jordan offers us an answer: The anointing of the Spirit who communicates to him the unflinching certainty of being the “Beloved Son” of the Father. Effectively, it is Love that sustains Jesus in the crucifying hour of his mission.

Well, it was his encounter with the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ that awoke in the heart of Claude Poullart des Places the imperative of the mission. In fact, he understands the mission as a thankful proclamation of the love of God, a joyous announcement of the marvels of his merciful love:

I will make you known to all hearts that no longer know You. Aware myself of the disorder that exists in souls who have fallen into a bad habit, I will persuade, convince, force them to change their lives, and You will be praised eternally by mouths which otherwise would have cursed You eternally.22

I never tired of speaking about these favors. I found too few people to whom I could recount his mercies towards me. I found pleasure only in conversations in which God was not forgotten. I accused myself for
having kept silence when I had missed a chance to speak of him.\textsuperscript{23}

In fact, when someone “tastes that the Lord is good” (1 Pet 2:3), when someone “sees” the salvation of God, one cannot stop saying with St. Paul, “Woe to me if I do not preach it!” (1 Cor 9:16).

At discovering the beauty and goodness of the love of God, Claude Francis feels moved to sacrifice everything, even the most licit things that life in this world offers, in order to correspond to the love of the Lord. He wants to take the Good News of divine love to the ends of the earth, making his own life an offering of love:

It was almost impossible for me to think of anything other than God and it was my greatest regret that I did not always think of him. I desired to love him alone, and out of love for him I would have renounced the most legitimate attachments of this life... Of all temporal things I wanted to keep health alone, and I wanted to offer the latter in a complete sacrifice to God in the work of the missions. I would have felt most happy if, after enkindling the fire of God’s love in the hearts of all men, I could have shed the very last drop of my blood for him whose mercies were almost always present before my mind.\textsuperscript{24}

The mission is born from Love and is the irradiation of Love! This is a conviction that we find in the perspective of the mission that Francis Libermann, the second Founder of the Spiritan Family, offers us.

The mission is the irradiation of the Love of God. The mission is the irradiation of the Spirit. In other words, the mission is born out of the “heart” of the Trinity. It is through the action of the Holy Spirit that Jesus Christ lives out and achieves the mission which the Father entrusted to him; before departing to the Father, he promises to send us the Spirit of Truth (cf. John 14:16, 26; Acts 1:4-8).

The Acts of the Apostles give testimony of the consciousness that the nascent church held in order to live and carry out the mission by the power of the Spirit. In the Apostolic Letter \textit{Redemptoris missio}, Saint John Paul II affirms that the protagonist of the mission is the Holy Spirit. The Venerable Francis Libermann situates us precisely in this perspective when he says:
He who sows is the Son of God, the Incarnate Word; it is he who merits and imparts the seed of grace in each soul. The one who reaps is different – the Holy Spirit… He is the light and strength of the Apostles, the power of all their words. It is he who touches souls, who draws them, who is the life imparted by the sacraments which bring people into the church and sanctify them. Our Lord attributes to himself the sending of missionaries since he sends the Holy Spirit and merited him. Our Lord merited him and sent him, but the divine Spirit consummates the work and is the true harvester.25

Union with God and the Mission

“Remain in me, as I remain in you. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit on its own unless it remains on the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing. Anyone who does not remain in me will be thrown out like a branch and wither; people will gather them and throw them into a fire and they will be burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you. By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples” (John 15:4-8).

In chapter 15 of the Gospel of John, Jesus tells us that only insofar as we remain united with him will we be able to bear fruit. Without this intimate and vital union with the Lord, we cannot do anything. No matter how much we tire ourselves in apostolic tasks, we will do nothing for the growth of the Kingdom of God.

Authentic prayer leads the mission. And there is an experience of the mission when there is prayer. As the word itself indicates, mission is a sending. But the sending implies a relationship. The relationship of the sent with he who sends, and of him with the sent. The mission has an origin and objective. Between the origin and the objective, a relationship which gives one meaning and one foundation.

When I speak of the mission, I like to refer myself to Francis Libermann. Now, the perspective that the Venerable Father Libermann has of the mission is, first of all, Christocentric. He understands that the mission of the
church, and in the church our mission, is nothing but the mission of Jesus Christ.

As Jesus Christ was sent by the Father, so we are sent by him. He calls us. He sends us. It is in his name that we live the mission. In fact, the members of the congregation, says the Venerable Francis Libermann, “will become imbued with the idea that the Son of God sends them as his Father sent him,” as they form a community of consecrated people who “in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and as sent by him, devote themselves wholly to announce his Holy Gospel, and to establish his reign among the souls that are poorest and most neglected in the church of God.”

There is but one mission: the mission that the Father entrusted to Jesus, by the power of the Spirit. Our mission is sharing and communion in the mission of Jesus Christ. But our participation in the mission of the Savior only happens insofar as we live united with him and as we have his life in us.

From this understanding of the mission, which Francis Libermann offers us, emanates a whole dynamic of life and action. The mission is a call that fully commits the life and person of the missionary.

Life is the mission. The mission is life. Inside, at the very heart of this life, is the relationship of the missionary with Christ. What relationship? The relationship that Jesus had with the Father as one sent from the Father; that relationship bears with it that of the missionary with Jesus Christ. This is how Francis Libermann expresses it:

By living in us and communicating the mission he received from his Father, Jesus Christ, in his turn, sends us as he himself was sent, and he wills that those who see us will be able to discern him in us, as once his Father was manifest in him. And this will be brought about by our personal holiness, by the resemblance of our life to his, and our union with him.

We are, in relation to Jesus who sent us, what Jesus was to his Father.” And what was the relationship of Jesus Christ with the Father? “How is it that the Father sent his Son? Did He not send Him to become sanctified, in order to sanctify others in holiness and in truth?”
We can indistinctly see this perspective that the Venerable Libermann offers us of the mission in Claude Poullart des Places, as he insists, in the Regulations of the Seminary. Named the “General and Particular Regulations,” it focuses on the importance of the cultivation of a life of holiness and union with God, which goes through prayer and the assiduous reception of the sacraments. I have transcribed, by way of example, some of the prescriptions:

Every morning there will be a little better than a half hour of vocal and mental prayer. The vocal prayers will always be the same and shall not run longer than five to ten minutes so as to leave a little less than half an hour for mental prayer. The subject matter of the mental prayer may be changed every day.28

Before every study period or repetition, all shall ask the Holy Spirit for light so as to work fruitfully … Every day the Office of the Holy Spirit will be recited (ibid.).

During the day, all shall raise their heart to God as often as possible (ibid.).

Nothing is more warmly recommended than the most devout assistance at Holy Mass. No one will ever be absent from it unless sickness prevents him. Everyone shall receive the sacraments of Penance and Holy Eucharist [at least] once a fortnight (ibid., 173).

The clearest example of the importance that Claude Francis gave to union with God by means of prayer is in his own actions, of which we have some indications in the Fragments of a Private Regulation, referring to his personal spiritual life project. For us to perceive the assiduity and intensity of his prayer life, it is enough to consider Article 15°:

I shall never enter my room (when I have no urgent matter to attend to) or leave it, without putting myself on my knees and begging God’s blessings, using expressions like these: Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, I adore You through your holy grace, with all my heart, all my soul and all my strength. I beg You to grant me faith, humility, chastity, the grace of not doing, saying, thinking, seeing, hearing or desiring anything except what You want me to do and say. Grant me those graces, my God, together with...
May I always walk in your presence and pray ceaselessly, as I should

your most holy blessing. May my heart and my mind be filled with You alone. May I always walk in your presence and pray ceaselessly, as I should. My Jesus, be for us eternally a Jesus. I place my mind and my heart in your hands through the most Holy Virgin. In the name of my Jesus and Mary.29

I beg You to grant me faith, humility, chastity, the grace of not doing, saying, thinking, seeing, hearing or desiring anything except what You want me to do and say. Grant me those graces, my God, together with your most holy blessing. May my heart and my mind be filled with You alone. May I always walk in your presence and pray ceaselessly, as I should. My Jesus, be for us eternally a Jesus. I place my mind and my heart in your hands through the most Holy Virgin. In the name of my Jesus and Mary.

Please excuse this repeated citation, but it shows, more than any other, the place the young Founder gave to his union with Jesus Christ. In the longer version of this prayer, which Claude Francis would pray in the morning and afternoon, he asks for, among other things, the grace to live deeply united to Jesus Christ and intimately imbued with the mysteries of his life in this world:

Through your mercy grant me also, O my God, the favor to imprint in my heart by the indelible darts of your grace the death and passion of my Jesus, his holy life and holy incarnation.30

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References


Endnotes

1 Translated from Missão espiritana 21–22 (January 2013) 52–70.
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4 Ibid., 57.
6 Lettres Spirituelles 1, 10 (1830). Cited from Gilbert, You Have Laid your Hand on Me, 21
8 “Choice of a State of Life,” Koren, Spiritual Writings, 89, 91.
9 Ibid., 93.
10 Ibid., 99.
13 “Reflections on the Past,” 139, 143.
14 Ibid., 145.
15 Ibid., 147.
16 Ibid., 147.
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18 Ibid., 149.
20 Ibid., 52–53.
21 “Personal Daily Rule,” Koren, Spiritual Writings, 123.
24 Ibid., 134–135.
25 Commentary on the Gospel of John, 1, 134.
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30 “Memoir of Father Thomas,” Koren, Spiritual Writings, 261.
Jean Le Meste, C.S.Sp., was ordained priest in Chevilly October 04, 1931. For twenty-five years till 1956 he taught mathematics, the sciences, and Literature at Saint-Ilan. He became a specialist on Fr. Libermann and greatly imbibed his spirituality. Greatly sought-after as counselor and spiritual director, the superiors freed him to devote full time as chaplain, confessor, and spiritual director, and charged him with research on Father Libermann at Chevilly. As such, he collaborated in the publication of the first numbers of the journal Spiritus. He died on February 15, 1982.

"Libermann et l’union pratique," Spiritus 22 (1965) 29-43. Translated by Roberta Hatcher.

**LIBERMANN AND “PRACTICAL UNION”**

“Do not complain about how little time you have for prayer and study; happy the missionary whose moments are taken up in the work of saving souls. You are more to be congratulated than pitied” (ND, VII, 147; April 1845)\(^1\)

Pope Pius XII, in 1952, proposed Father Libermann as a most reliable guide to missionary action, and rightly so, for when faced with the dilemma that readily distresses specialists of apostolic work, fruit of the quality of their prayer, Libermann never disturbed the balance. Thrust into action, this mystic did not form contemplatives, rather men who really put their shoulder to the wheel without fear of occasionally getting covered in mud. To begin with, he neither distrusted action nor underestimated it. On June 16, 1842, he responded very clearly to a young priest who told him about a problem he was having (his own sanctification or that of others):

One of these two things depends on the other .... This reflection is very important, because often priests ... have more zeal for the virtue of recollection and the other virtues that tend to their own sanctification, than they have for the salvation of souls. It is a big mistake. Once one is a priest, one no longer belongs to oneself, rather to souls, according to the divine will that deploys us among them as it pleases him. Others, on the contrary, on the pretext of zeal for souls, are entirely devoted to their ministry, without taking care of their own sanctification, which then suffers as a result. They hurt even more than the first group. They ought first to obtain the glory of God in their own souls. Moreover, if they are holy, they will save even more souls, and with much less movement. We must therefore do one and not omit the other (ND, II, 472-473).

Thus, there is no way to retreat into oneself or escape into Trappist or Carthusian dreams. It is there, on the ground that our vocation assigns to us, that we must maintain intimate contact with the Lord.

**The Greatness and Misery of the Apostle**

Most often problems stem from a lack of perspective. Father Libermann tried to anticipate them by reminding

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those who are about to depart that “the apostolic life is nothing else than the life of love and holiness, which the Son of God led on earth to save and sanctify souls”\(^2\) (ND, II, 290). As such:

There is nothing so beautiful, nothing so high upon earth, as the apostolate. Contemplative life, though possessing the splendor of high favors and the sweetness of its outpourings, is inferior to it,\(^3\)

for contemplative life represents only a portion of the life of our Lord. Apostolic life, on the contrary, includes the perfection of our Lord’s life and is modeled on that life. More than any other life, it makes us to be like Christ. It demands an absolute and continual sacrifice for it is based on the perfect love which transforms us into Jesus Christ.\(^4\)

The founder never sought to sidestep the truth. In his lectures as well as in his recruiting rounds in 1846, he brought people face-to-face with the heroic life they were choosing. In so doing, he aimed to eliminate candidates whose vocation was sustained only by false enthusiasm. His letter of March 2, 1840 to M. Bureau is a typical example; it demonstrates an almost brutal honesty and a reassuring balm. After laying bare all the candidate’s limits concerning nature and grace with regard to the demands of the apostolate – giving an unvarnished description to make Bureau keenly aware of his complete powerlessness – Libermann encouraged him to draw on this very weakness in order to be filled with strength through complete trust in the Lord’s succor:

*Learn, by everything I am saying to you here, never to worry, no matter how great your misery .... It is by grace that you must move towards perfection, not by your own strength, which is less than nothing, as you yourself must sense (ND, II, 113).*

**Union of the Instrument and the Hand that wields It**

Simple in his spiritual life, simple in his spiritual direction, Father Libermann had only one aim: to impart to his brothers a haunting feeling of their absolute poverty before the work they were undertaking, and as a consequence, to provoke in them an insatiable thirst for the living water that epitomizes the missionary’s entire life of prayer.
Little by little the soul ... fills with the thought of its nothingness ... and being in extreme need, it raises itself to him to find his support .... Then begins a new life .... Then the soul begins to become a good enough instrument in the hands of God - a rusty instrument, twisted and crippled, yet flexible enough in the skillful hand that wields it, to do some little things for the glory of him who alone works all that is good. This flexibility ... comes to him only by the overturning of his first desires and his first hopes.  

Father Libermann's synthetic thought delighted in this theme of instrument and all his teaching aimed to imbue his disciples with it. That is undoubtedly why he came to speak of “practical union.” Indeed, an instrument, no matter how perfect, can only be useful if the worker has a firm grip on it and can manipulate it as he wishes, in short, if it is fully united with him. Otherwise, something will play to adulterate the intentions of the master of the work.

In all Relationships and Life Circumstances

It was only in his final year of life that Father Libermann coined the term “practical union,” but he had often described the thing itself as being the very ideal of every Christian life, that is, this intimate connection with the Spirit in all our active life, thanks to a permanent state of receptivity and attention to God. Such state should lead us to no longer think, love, desire, and act except under the sole influence of him who has become “the soul of our soul.” A prayer by the Venerable beautifully highlights this realism of Christ’s life acting on human intelligence and will in order to enrich them and make them more and more free and original:

Most holy and most adorable Spirit of my Jesus, let me hear your sweet loving voice. Refresh me by your delightful breath .... Divine Spirit, I wish to be before you as a light feather, so that your breath may carry me off where it wishes and that I may never offer it the least resistance.  

The date of these lines is significant, for in that year of 1840, Libermann was facing a wall and expecting, in an act of full abandon, that the wall would tumble like that of Jericho and that the Lord would say to him: “set out overseas.” Libermann had only one thing to offer to God for the purposes of leading Black Africa to Christ: an attentive
ear and a receptive heart. The wall fell and the lesson was not lost; once again, he has confirmed that Jesus is the master of the impossible for those who follow him in every sense of the word. The future founder was not surprised at this success, nor, we daresay, was God surprised at this attitude, for Libermann remained consistent with his past and the conception he had formed of baptism. A few months earlier, on October 19, 1939, he had written to two recently converted Jews:

Now that you have had the supreme happiness of receiving in your souls the holy and divine life of Jesus, you must also manifest it in all your actions; it must be the occupation of all your thoughts and the object of all your desires .... Open your souls, spread them out, let them be as vast as the sea before our most sweet Jesus, so that he will make them overflow with his most holy love. I do not know if you can fully envision the thought I want to express, for when one speaks of the love of Jesus in souls one can never explain it ... because one sees oneself more than one can understand. For who has ever been able to understand the length, the breadth, the height and the depth of knowledge, and the immensity of the love of Jesus? At least, give yourself completely (to this love). There is something to fulfill you, to satisfy you and to make you flourish in all the relations and all the circumstances of your life. Jesus and his holy love are all we need (LS, II, 282-284).

Everyone knows that baptism confers upon us the dignity of God’s children and many of us recall the words of Saint Paul: “For those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God” (Rom. 8:14), or these: “yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me” (Gal 2:20). Yet how many interpret it in their own way in their practice! Libermann takes these words to their full conclusion, as much in his personal conduct as in his spiritual and missionary doctrine.

**Let Oneself be acted upon by God**

“All belong[s] to you, and you to Christ, and Christ to God” (1 Cor 3:22-23), St. Paul said to the Corinthians. “All belongs to us,” added the rabbi’s son from Saverne, for:

the divine graces our Lord imparts on earth become our very substance; by faith they impart our Lord’s holiness, his virtues, his dispositions, and his life; they make us sharers in his mysteries. All of these divine
qualities of which our Lord is the great treasury are a sort of property belonging to our souls, which enjoy them already in this life.⁹

This living water is there, within our reach; you only need to want it and give yourself over to it. How? A January 13, 1842 letter [to Schwindenhammer, then a deacon] strikingly condenses all his prior writings as well as all his instructions to the missionaries. The landmark date of this letter is also notable: it comes five months after he became the founder–novice master, and it is surely how he taught those who were preparing for the African endeavor. The commentary on the Provisional Rule of 1844 even offers proof. In the letter he writes that man’s entire role in the spiritual life consists:

in disposing, by means of the very powerful help of divine grace, which is in us very strong ... to follow the movements and the impressions of the divine Spirit which is in us. He wants to be the soul of our soul .... Let him act in us as our body allows our soul to act, which moves it as it thinks fit and as it wishes. The only difference is that the body receives and necessarily follows the impulse that the soul gives to it, while our soul must receive and follow voluntarily the holy impulse of this divine soul of the Spirit of Jesus (ND, III, 102).

Libermann abundantly develops this idea in the lines that follow. Other texts in a similar vein are legion; this one states the essence, at the same time protecting he who never tires of advocating “a vigorous, male piety . . . that of our Lord and his Apostles” (LS, II, 10) from any hint of quietism.

And for this dwell in Him

Though very enlightening, the comparison to the soul leaves us wanting more: we desire to know how human will ought to offer itself to the powerful impulse of the Spirit. Father Libermann responded many times to this desire, especially in a letter to M. Dupont, dated October 5, 1840. In this case, he refers to study, but the solution applies also to action, whatever it may be. After distinguishing between purely natural knowledge and that which is purely supernatural or infused, he arrives at the knowledge he calls mixed:
It is acquired, he writes, when, by a purely supernatural principle, such as that of pleasing God and of doing his holy will, one seriously applies his natural faculties to study, full of confidence and in a spirit of recollection and love for him.

We must, on the one hand, give ourselves over to it completely, “to avoid that natural laziness and cowardice which constantly compel us to repose”; on the other hand, “we must guard against too marked a taste and passion for study. This passion is one of the strongest. (Of course) a taste for the things we study is good; it is a gift from God, but it must not be abused. It is like the taste for food, there is a very great danger of going too far.” Balance, though difficult, is achieved by the spirit of meditation:

Study, as well as all our other actions, ought be done in God .... The spirit of recollection is of paramount importance to us; all the fruit we can produce in souls depends on it. Moreover, without contemplation, it is inevitable that nature and passion take over and engender all sorts of errors. Without recollection, our mind gradually becomes accustomed to acting by itself and independently of God. This is already an evil in itself; but it produces another and even greater evil in that our mind then acquires an extraordinarily natural activity, which renders it incapable of being pliant and docile to divine light, and becomes a terrible obstacle to prayer, to knowledge of oneself and of souls, and the action of grace in them. Believe me, I have seen and observed all these things many times and in many people; and, moreover, they are all natural (ND, II, 184-187).

All this is already very much like practical union, but the word is not there yet; it will take new circumstances to bring it forth.

Active and Practical Union

Wishing to speak ex professo to his missionaries about prayer and contemplative union, the Venerable Father Libermann felt it necessary to remind them of the other mode of union, in his eyes more necessary and more perfect, and at the same time more characteristic of the missionary. He will call it “active union” or “practical union” in chapter 5 of his Instructions to Missionaries10 (ES, 480-496), “action or practical union” in his last lectures to the novices of Notre-Dame du Gard.
Jean Le Meste, C.S.Sp.

Notre-Dame du Gard (ND, XIII, 697-702). Both texts date from the spring of 1851. The letters of the same period do not use this vocabulary. Perhaps this new expression, which serves to gather his thoughts on a crucial point, seems to him too complex and too rich to be grasped on the fly, when he does not have the leisure to explain it. This is, it seems, the last stage of a doctrine that seeks to mold itself into a concise and resonant formula.

With great clarity, our author locates union with God by way of grace, prayer, and other actions of life, respectively. The first “is passive on our part,” while the other two, requiring our participation and our loyalty, deserve, in this sense, to be called active.

By the fact of possessing sanctifying grace (whose seeds are “imparted to us in baptism”), the soul is united with God. This union is passive on our part; God, animating us through his Holy Spirit, unites us with him, without us doing anything other than to prepare ourselves, and being prepared, to not resist (ES, 480, ND, XIII, 696).

But this grace requires growth, and therein lies the entire matter of our holiness. It can only do so with the cooperation of our freedom (ND, XIII, 696-697):

God unites himself with us by giving us his sanctifying grace; he unites us to him with the aid of our fidelity. (Indeed) by our fidelity in following the impressions and inclinations of this grace, either in our relations with God or in our relations with all creatures, we unite with God, and it is an active union .... Here, two states of the soul manifest themselves: contemplative union, and practical action (or union), which are what provide openness to the development of sanctifying grace (ES, 480; ND, XIII, 697).

Libermann calls active union contemplative or practical according to whether we turn directly to God, because we are thirsty for him like a child for its mother (ND, XIII, 697), or we adhere to the tendencies of grace (ES, 480-481) in the course of all our daily activities and relationships.

Thus, in prayer [oraison], as in practical union, for the ordinary habits of life, the soul unites with God by faith and love. But there is this difference. In the latter, the soul, preserving its relations with creatures
according to the order of God’s will, obeys and adheres to the grace which animates it and unites it with God in its works, while in prayer [oraion] it breaks all relation with creatures, gathers all her powers, to apply them to God through a thought of faith, and unites with him through love (ES, 496).

Faced with such a definition, we understand that practical union is more perfect and more essential than contemplative union. “It is not those who say: Lord! Lord! ...”

A more perfect contemplative union, with a less perfect practical action, constitutes less great perfection than perfect practical action, joined to a contemplative union which is less so (ND, XIII, 697).

In any case, it is practical union that must characterize the missionaries who have to “sacrifice themselves for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, without usually experiencing great inner sweetness” (ND, 698):

Our state must be effective rather than affective. Completely devoted to our neighbor one day (he was speaking to novices), we will not have time to feed our soul with ... spiritual comforts. The good God will give us the desired measure of consolation and strength, but we must rely only on strong and active love. Such is the missionary; he must in no way be disconcerted and believe he is doing badly just because he does not feel tender sweetness. Let us be men, vigorous soldiers in his service, forgetting ourselves and breathing only his glory and the salvation of souls (ND, 711).11

Acting by Faith and Love

At the heart of practical union, there is therefore the will (actual or habitual) to make the inspirations of grace dominate the tendencies of nature in us, to inspire our actions. For if the latter remained the only “masters of our activity ... active union would then disappear” (ES, 483). A matter of intention, some will say. Admittedly, and Libermann does not disagree, but, with ruthless clinical sharpness, he denounces at length (ES, 481-489) the illusions “of a false and superficial intention” (ES, 487) and “the so-called piety, which wants to be united to God while
preserving one’s natural affections, the search for oneself, one’s vices and faults” (ES, 484).

“How, then, to act?” (ES, 486). We must learn to discern the movements of nature and grace (ES, 490) and, in order not to be dragged along by the former at the expense of the latter, we must have the courage to apply the “firm resolution of a complete abnegation “ (ES, 487, 491). This can only be done by forming in us “a habit of the spirit of faith and pure charity,” which gives us the desire to please God and makes it a joy for us to adhere “to practically anything that is pleasing to him” (ES, 486, 491). For the rest it is one and the same thing to make “the influence of the grace which unites us to God” prevail in us or to act by a movement of faith and charity “because it is in these movements that the action of grace resides” (ES, 483-484, see ibid., 556-557).

We now see the intimate relationship between prayer [prière] and practical union because “the spirit of prayer [oraison] keeps the soul in its visions of faith and disposes the heart to love” (ES, 483-484). Conversely, a soul that lives in “a state of habitual fidelity to grace ... very frequently turns to God during the day” (ES, 497-498):

One is not absorbed in God, but one comes back to him ceaselessly, without any effort and as if instinctively, during one’s occupations, such that one cannot help thinking frequently about God, as a friend frequently thinks of the one he loves (ND, 698).

Practical union thus resembles contemplative union in so far as it involves a state of latent, subconscious prayer [prière] which influences the quality of action by constantly orienting it towards grounds of faith, hope and charity and causes it to rise to conscious prayer in the most important or critical moments. An example taken from the Venerable’s life gives us a clear idea of this point. Here is how Mr. Mangot describes it during the years 1837-1839, at the Eudists in Rennes:

At the novitiate, he was perfectly proper. He served at everything and, although always busy, his lectures delighted us .... One day I remarked to him: “It seems to me that this multitude of concerns must conflict with the habitual union of your soul with God.” “It’s quite the opposite,” he replied, “since in every new
business my soul rises to God to ask for his assistance, it follows that the more business I have, the more my union with God is strengthened” (ND, I, 521).

In the end, it is the facility, as irresistible as the natural inclination of the heart (cf. ES, 483), to surrender to the slightest impulses of grace. One comes to identify with the knowledge of salvation like an artist with the object of his art “such that we march on well without having to reflect much about it” (ND, 701). “The supernatural life ... has become, so to speak, natural” (ES, 554).

A long Labor

After having depicted such an ideal, it hardly needs be said that this union is not a matter of one day, but the fruit of a long labor (ES, 487). “It takes time, no doubt, to get to that point ... but once one is there, it is a happy life “(ND, 705).

“Practical union,” like prayer [oraison], will proceed by degrees, trial and error, handicaps, and progress. It is an art, an art whose secret is first in God, who communicates it at will, though taking into account our nature, our vocation and our “practical” good will, that which, not content with shouting “Lord, Lord,” tries its best to embrace divine action in the present moment with the means at hand.

On this point, Father Libermann, who just a moment ago seemed to sketch a program of chimerical perfection, exhibits a disconcerting realism that only increases with the experience of years and deeds. Above all, let us not say, “They were saints, the people to whom his words were addressed.” Saints, these priests of twenty-five to thirty years old, who, to top it off, were French with their bristling character? Watching the ship carrying them move into the distance, the founder is not without a hint of melancholy, despite his unbreakable optimism in the almighty grace of the Lord. How will they react over there, when reality is unveiled to their conquering imagination? He knows them well. The delicate affection he has devoted to them further sharpens his keen understanding of them. He knows very well that Le Vavasseur is a “terrible rowdy,” Tisserant impulsive, that Bessieux is taken in by the mirage of the new, that Arragon, when emotional, speaks with a violence that crushes all evangelical tenderness, that Lossedat oscillates between rigidity and discouragement, and so on. He gave them credit, for he judged them to be generous and docile to grace anyway, but in the manner of spirited horses
who balk under the goad. But “practical union” in all this, how will it be viable? In the way Bossuet described it in a famous page ... from the time we read Bossuet!

See this fiery and impetuous horse, while his squire leads and tames him; only irregular movements! It is an effect of his ardor, and his ardor comes from his strength, but from an ill-regulated strength. He composes himself, moderates himself, becomes more obedient under the spur, under the bridle, under the hand that manipulates him to the right or to the left, pushes him, holds him back as it wishes. Finally, he is tamed. He does only what he is asked to do. He knows how to walk at a pace, he knows how to run, no longer with this activity which exhausted him, by which his obedience was still disobedient. His ardor has been changed into strength ... Note that it is not destroyed, it is adjusted; it no longer requires the spur, almost no more bridle ... By a small movement, which is only the sign of the will of the squire, it notifies him rather than forcing him, and the serene animal does nothing more than listen, so to speak. Its action is so united with that of the one who leads it, that it is no more than one and the same action.12

This description can be compared with the letter to the superior of missionary nuns quoted earlier, in which Father Libermann portrays the walk of “good souls” who “want to have arrived before they’ve set out,” and whom “God stops with all kinds of obstacles. They fall down, but get back up; they keep on going, at breakneck speed and gasping for breath. He closes all the passageways, etc.” (ND, IX, 155, LS, III, 575). Though the style is not as studied, it is not without charm; in any case, the inspiration is from the same source.

Yes, it takes a great deal of time and many aborted attempts to attain “practical union” in the full sense of the word. The example of the greatest saints teaches us this, by Libermann’s own admission. And even when they have achieved “the habit of this perfect renunciation and of this holy union with God ... don’t imagine ... that they enjoy so much of this light that they are never deceived .... If, on occasion, they make a mistake, some imperfection prevented them from receiving the perfect rays of light” and the divine force.13 It is therefore a long, rugged, and winding road, with ascents and descents, more or less steep depending on
the character of each person and the way the divine Guide makes himself heard.

But for all, from the very beginning, all have to surrender completely to his sovereign power by renouncing their judgment and self-will - at least the intent – as one does upon entering a motor-coach or train car. During the whole journey, we agree to let ourselves be driven and to not disturb the driver in any way until the final stop. The intention to let oneself go is the first condition of “practical union.” As God sees everything and provides for everything, the alarm signal is superfluous. Nothing is yet achieved, yet everything is at work for success. Such is the importance of the mode of total self-denial demanded of the novices from the beginning. “I begin by giving them a high idea of perfection.”

Completely different Men

To describe the journey from this beginning to the desired end would be to review and summarize Libermann’s entire spirituality, and much more space would be required. We will be satisfied simply to increase the desire to set out on the path by describing, following Father Libermann, the apostolic beatitudes promised to those who agree to unite themselves practically with their Lord. They are listed in three pages of the Instructions to Missionaries, which we will summarize here at the risk of depriving them of eloquence (ES, 49, 494).14

Beatitude of Light. “A soul thus united to God ... acquires solid and practical enlightenment, meaning a certain tact in the things of God (for oneself, for others, and for his works)” (ES, 491-492). “One has in oneself a superabundance of truth, one breathes the truth, one is nourished by it, one sees the things of God clearly and without effort, because our soul is in its element, the divine light” (ND, XIII, 699). This presupposes “a perfecting even of our natural faculties” (ES, 273) and Libermann himself had experienced it, as he confessed in an ultra-secret letter of August 3, 1846 which never should have reached us:

I can feel that my mind has acquired a certain strength, a certain elevation, and my judgment has gained expansion and rectitude; but it is certain that grace alone has created that which was not, has fortified that which was weak and rectified that which was faulty. This is so true and clear that, if I became
faithless, my mind could never deny the existence and the action of grace on my soul (ND, VIII, 203).

**Beatitudes of strength.** “The soul thus united to God ... is full of strength and does not get knocked down or become discouraged by anything. (In the midst of the most unfortunate events and setbacks), it remains calm, docile and free in her faculties and action.”

**Beatitudes of ... happiness!** “The soul thus united to God enjoys a profound peace ... of a supernatural well-being of which those who do not possess it cannot form an exact picture. This well-being (very deep: “at the source and the root of his life”) exists even in the midst of troubles and tribulation of all kinds. (Moreover, it) is often more sensitive in these states (so that in the time of affliction) the soul so disposed experiences a greater serenity of mind and gaiety of heart (mild, moderate, in its relations with others).”

**Abundance of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.** “Finally, our soul thus united to God in its practical habits, receives in abundance the graces fitting to one’s state and position, and the special gifts of the Holy Spirit in keeping with one’s vocation according to God’s plans for it.”

This allusion to the gifts of the Holy Spirit adapted to the special needs of the missionary would require a long comment. Let us only say that the Venerable Libermann remembers here chapter XII of the First Corinthians and all Second Corinthians. His *Commentary on Saint John* often returns to this theme.

The Apostles, during all the time our Lord lived on the earth, lacked these abundant gifts; also, what was not their weakness! As soon as they received them, they became completely different men (333).

**“Completely different men!”** Father Libermann is sure that his missionaries will also be transformed into completely different men through “practical union,” because their vocation absolutely demands it. If Christ “took so much care to train his apostles to holiness, would he be satisfied for us to have a natural life full of flaws and imperfections? (ES, 369). Equally, for his disciples, who are to serve as role models in everything for very poor men, Father Libermann promises all the virtues of the new man.

Indeed, by giving to weak and imperfect creatures this admirable mission of saving men, he transforms them
and makes them completely different men - of men of nature he makes men of grace; of weak and infirm men, he makes powerful and holy men; of men in the dark, he makes men of eternal light (ES, 371).

We wish we could quote here the full letter of November 19, 1847, addressed to the missionaries in Dakar and Gabon. It would show the concrete light in which the founder conceives “practical union” and its wonders. He contrasts, among other things, the man who floats according to his sensitivity and imagination to the man who, leaning on the strength of God, always remains like himself: “never any sadness, never any irritation, never spite, against (himself), or against others” (ND, IX, 329). Like the Apostle, who was overflowing with joy in his trials, Father Libermann also often insists on the pure joy produced by the suffering endured for the glory of God and the salvation of men; the words used are too eloquent to suggest any experience other than his own.

Another letter of June 18, 1848 is a useful complement to this one, showing us that this transformation is also the transition to true adulthood, while preserving the “gentleness, simplicity, and moderation of childhood.”

One is strong, one judges things by his reason aided by grace .... One is a man, master of oneself, one’s thoughts, and one’s imagination. One retains all the liveliness of feeling ... but ... feelings do not control us .... The mind is free from any hindrance .... This freedom of spirit, rid of the impressions of various passions, gives or rather preserves, this beautiful simplicity which is one of the greatest qualities of the finest minds (ND, X, 228-229).

We do not end up here on the first try, and certainly the Venerable Libermann himself was subject to the law of time. Dom Gardereau, his companion from Saint-Sulpice, noted this when he corrected the panegyric of Cardinal Pitra, Libermann’s first biographer. He recognized in the seminarian of yesteryear rigidity and excess of zeal, then added:

It was, however, the same person I have seen since at the head of his congregation ... - so prudent, so tolerant, so attentive to leading everyone in the path marked by Providence, sparing the weak, and
imposing on no one a burden he could not bear. But in that interval he had grown steadily in the spiritual life; the further he advanced, the more complete and enlightened he was with grace, the more his zeal became flexible without losing any of his fervor, but being all the more apt to direct souls according to the laws of discretion, according to the capacity of each and the extent of God’s plans (ND, I, 125).

Thus, in the doctrine of Father Libermann, “practical union” is the means par excellence to achieve the full development of nature and grace, the solution of Christian humanism. However, he warns against angelism, pointing out that if the spiritual part of ourselves is restored to order, “the root of perversion does not die; it often happens that souls, living ordinarily under the influence of God’s grace, still experience the stimulant (the spur) of evil nature” (ES, 416).

“Practical union” does not remove all effects of a lack of education; it also happens that some retain faulty manners, certain limits and other flawed traits. That matters little for the holiness and the apostolic influence that each one attains according to his capacity. This educator of missionaries does not worry too much when it comes to directing his disciples. Writing on April 15, 1846 to a young superior in Dakar who dreams of an unreal ideal, he presents own method:

You will almost never find men made just as you would like them .... Well, what is the most powerful way I use to guide them? It is by tolerating in each one the defects that I foresee not being able to stamp out ... Be sure that nothing is ever done in this vein by force ... but also, on the contrary, everything can be done, everything can be obtained through support, tolerance, gentleness and calm. I say everything; that does not mean that we manage to make people lose their character and their natural way of being, or even all the defects of this way of being, rather we win on all that is possible to win .... For example, if you wish to make Mr. Arragon moderate, polite, kind in his manners, you would be chasing a chimera, you would be stopping the sun in its course .... So leave each one in his state .... God made them as they are, they are willing to do everything for the good. We must encourage them, and they will do the good, each according to what will be given to them from above (ND, VIII, 113-114).
“It was as if He saw the Invisible”

With this article, we are not claiming that the Venerable Libermann, in speaking of practical union, was saying something original; he would have immediately denied it. On the contrary, our goal was to suggest that this scribe, this Rabbi’s son, by becoming a disciple of the Savior and missionary priest, found the “higher realism” that Bergson recognizes in the great mystics, in drawing endlessly on his treasure of both the new and the old (Matt 13:52). A witness at the beatification process said: “I will say that all his life he was invisibilem tamquam videns (as if he saw the invisible), always in the presence of God, always living in faith.”18 A recent book has rightly given this phrase new relevance, and perhaps Libermann’s doctrine as well.

At the end of the chapter on “practical union” in Instructions to Missionaries, Venerable Father Libermann recalls the words of Jesus: “I came to cast fire on earth” and comments:

Wanting to produce this fire, he will necessarily put burning torches in the hands of those he tasks with lighting it. Why are there so few of these incendiary saints? It’s that there are few saints, few souls united to God in the practical habits of their lives; their torches are therefore condemned to remain unlit, they produce at most the fire of a match .... The apostles of Jesus Christ remaining lovers of themselves, men of the earth, obeying their pride, their senses, their weaknesses, their faults ... the gifts of the Holy Spirit are necessarily denied them, God’s designs are aborted, the peoples remain in darkness ... our Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Church are in pain .... Why and until when ... ? Ah! my beloved confreres ... have pity ... pity ... pity ... (ES, 494-495).

This pathetic call to missionaries to be saints ends in a prayer that springs like a cry. If we could, at the end of this study, make it fervently our own, would that not be a good conclusion? Come, Lord Jesus, come, raise up your servants and live in them!”

Jean Le Meste, C.S.Sp.
Died in Chevilly, Paris in 1982
Abbreviations

CJ  Commentaire de l’Évangile de St. Jean.


References

Provisional Rule of Father Libermann. Text and Commentary. Duquesne University, Pittsburgh: Center for Spiritan Studies, 2015.


Endnotes

1 As far as possible, English editions of works referenced in French have been used [Editor].

2 Provisional Rule, 277 (Part II: Chapter 9, Art. 1).

3 One must not read in these notes – which moreover are not written in the hand of the Venerable Libermann but were transcribed in an interview by one of his sons, Fr. Lannurien – the sign of a lesser esteem for the contemplative life. He himself felt driven to it by “all the attractions of nature and grace,” but should he be “the last in the kingdom of the heavenly Father,” he would not admit the thought of leaving “the path laid
out by the order” of divine will (ND, VIII, 30-31)…

We remember the beautiful pages he left us in his Commentary on St. John on “the contemplative love” of Mary of Bethany.

4 Provisional Rule, 43.

5Letter of May 31, 1847 to a superior of missionary nuns; ND, IX, 155.

6Jesus through Jewish Eyes. Part 1, 69 (chapter 3).

7Ibid., 73.

8Some biographical references. 1802: birth in Saverne, to the family of a rabbi; 1826: conversion and baptism in Paris; 1827-1837: theological study at Saint-Sulpice, then, fell ill, became factotum in the seminary at Issy; 1837-1839: Novice Master of the Eudists in Rennes; 1840: in Rome for the founding of the Work for the Blacks; 1841: seminary in Strasbourg, ordination and beginning of the Congregation of the Sacred Heart of Mary in Amiens; 1848: fusion with the Congregation of the Holy Spirit in Paris, of which he became the 11th Superior General; February 2, 1852: death in Paris at 30, rue Lhomond.

9Jesus through Jewish Eyes. Part I, 112.

10Instructions for Missionaries, chap 9, 40–44.

11Henceforth, ND on its own refers to ND, XIII.


13See CJ, 358-359.

14See Instructions for Missionaries, 44 for something similar.

15See the words of the Curé of Ars: “in the soul united to God it is always springtime.”

16We find the same list of benefits in the Petit traité de la vie intérieure (ES, 273)[Small Treatise on the Inner Life] as regards the inner life whose definition clearly echoes that of “practical union”: it means to live and act practically “under the influence and dependence of Jesus Christ who lives (in us).” Cf. ND, XIII, 684.

17See, in particular, 329-333; n.e., 210-213.

18Mr. De Brandt, Vicar General of Amiens, Procès de Virtutibus (Process concerning his virtues), 195.
Amadeu Martins, C.S.Sp., was director of formation, then provincial superior of Portugal. He became the secretary of the Spiritan Study Group (Rome) in 1974. As such, he published many articles on Libermann and on Spiritan Spirituality in Spiritan Papers. He authored the “Amadeu Files,” a collection of more than 13,000 files on Spiritan topics. He did mission work in Angola before his death in 2007. Among the works he had at hand before his illness, was a large manuscript entitled, “Libermann, Distributor of the Gifts of God to Priests,” of which “Libermann, Formator of Priests,” forms the introduction and first chapter.

Translated by Isidore Nkwocha, C.S.Sp., from Portuguese

Libermann, Formator of Priests

Introduction

Jacob Libermann was born in Alsace (France) to Jewish parents on April 12, 1802. Called by God, as the Apostles were, to be part of the Church of Christ, he received baptism at the age of 24 on the eve of Christmas, 1826, with the name of Francis Mary Paul. This was in the seminary-college of Saint Stanislaus in Paris. The prophecy of his sister-in-law was being fulfilled. Together with her husband, Samson, she had converted to the Catholic Church from Judaism and had told Libermann that “not only will you convert, you will also become a priest, Libermann.” He was soon in the seminary, first in Saint Stanislaus and, the following year, in Saint Sulpice, both in Paris.

Life was moving well for him; he was fervently preparing for the reception of sacred orders which he was to receive on 14 March 1829. The evening before, however, a violent attack of epilepsy floored him. That seemed to shatter almost completely his hopes and those of his directors of seeing his dreams of priesthood come to realization. Owing to his outstanding virtue, however, and the marvelous influence he exerted on the other seminarians, the superiors did not dismiss him. They simply transferred him to the seminary of Issy, in the proximity of the French capital. Perhaps there, with the pure air of the countryside, he would recover his health. His job would be to prune and clean the trees of the orchard and run errands in Paris at the behest of both the bursar and the seminarians... This material work would contribute to the spiritual formation of several seminarians and even some priests, among them the bursar himself.

Libermann left St. Stanislaus for Issy at the end of 1831. But it was still in the Seminary of St. Sulpice that, months before, in July, he had a vision, described thus by one of his biographers:

It was on a Sunday in July of 1831, the day in which the Feast of the Priesthood of Jesus was celebrated at the Seminary of Saint Sulpice. During the solemn Mass, Libermann had a vision: he distinguished clearly the figure of Our Lord, in the aspect of the Eternal Priest ... passing slowly among the ranks of his companions, gathered in the chairs of the choir, distributing to each one his benefits. He was the only one excluded. But when all had received their share, it seemed to him that the Eternal Priest gave him the
treasury of his graces and invited him to make his
brothers, the future priests, gathered there around
him, and all the priests that he would come to meet
during his life to benefit from him.²

Libermann, Formator of Priests

If, in fact, we would want to give a title to Libermann’s
continuous and intense activity, since his entry into the
Church of Christ by baptism until his precious death on
February 2, 1852, I think the most suitable would be
“Libermann, formator of priests.” This was indeed his great
activity in the seminaries of St. Sulpice in Paris, then in Issy,
then in Rennes, in the novitiate of the Eudists, and finally in
the novitiate and seminaries of his congregation. His life was
the realization of the vision of 1831.

In the summer of 1837, Libermann left for Rennes,
where he would be master of the novices of the Eudists,
although he was a simple acolyte, and the novices were all
dacons or priests.

His activity, however, was not limited to the training of
priests. It was mainly from Rennes that he put himself in an
epistolary relationship with many people of all categories,
from rectors of seminaries and other priests to seminarians,
men and women religious, to simple Christians living amid
the world, and even to children. His spiritual leadership
did not exclude anyone. Libermann was one of the greatest
spiritual directors of the nineteenth century. Someone
affirmed him to have been the greatest indeed.

He was also a great missionary, although not directly
in the missions, and a brilliant missiologist, especially from
December 1839 when he left for Rome in order to deal with
the foundation of his “Work for the Blacks,” which was the
first title of his Congregation of the Most Holy Heart of
Mary that in the autumn of 1848 merged with that of the
Holy Spirit. The Work then went on, to be officially called
the Congregation of the Holy Spirit under the Protection of
the Immaculate Heart of Mary, or simply Congregation of
the Holy Spirit and the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

The great Task of the Church

The formation of priests should be the great task of the
church. We read in Optatam Totius, (Preface): “This sacred
Synod well knows that the wished-for renewal of the whole
church depends in large measure on a ministry of priests
which is vitalized by the spirit of Christ. Hence it proclaims the extreme importance of priestly formation…”

“There is no authentic formative work for the priesthood without the influx of the Spirit of Christ.” Each human formator should be fully aware of this. But the trainee must also be conscious of this. This is what Libermann, an eminent master, reminds a seminarian: “Be faithful to all that the divine Master asks of you. Engage yourself seriously to the work of your sanctification. It is no small thing to prepare for the priesthood.” To another he wrote: “You are getting closer and closer to the priesthood ... and to always grow in grace and spiritual wisdom before God and man (cf. Luke 2:52). Grow therefore and make your soul great with all the greatness and power of divine grace, from which you will be filled.”

Certainly, also, he, the future priest, more than anyone, must grow in the awareness that the protagonist, by antonomasia, of his formation is the Holy Spirit, who, with the gift of the new heart configures and assimilates to Christ, the Good Shepherd...

The highest function entrusted to a man in the church of God: “… How can one not rejoice in the dignity of every human formator, who in a certain sense shapes himself as the visible representative of Christ for the candidate to the priesthood?”

“The first representative of Christ in the formation of priests is the Bishop ... In addition to this and the candidate, also responsible for the priestly formation are the seminary educational community, theology professors, the community of origin, and the youths’ associations and movements.”

Libermann considers the task of forming priests as “the highest function that can be entrusted to a man in the Church of God.” Referring to a young priest, recently appointed rector of a seminary, he wrote to another: “I am sorry to see him already entrusted with the rectorship ... but God will help him, and it is very necessary, because the place that he occupies is one of the most important and the most difficult in the church of God. He can do immense good in a place like this, but he can do a lot of harm too.”

“The priest is anything but great!” Libermann writes in the same letter, “He is a man who must have all the perfections of our Lord Jesus Christ, for the highest quality that Jesus was vested with is his divine priesthood. This is why I find it truly devastating to see so few ‘truly holy’
priests. However ... a priest should no longer have human life; human life should no longer be noticed in him. All his life should be divine ...”

**Formators, First of All, should be Role Models**

Libermann continues: “The rectors of the seminaries must therefore render great services to the church and to the priesthood of our Lord when they are concerned with the priestly formation of their students. But, for this, it is necessary that they are models, and that their life be a life of consummated holiness and perfection.”8 “For this ministry, priests of exemplary life who possess various qualities must be chosen: human and spiritual maturity, pastoral experience, professional competence, stability in one’s vocation, ability of collaboration ...”9

Vatican II recommends to superiors and professors that “they seriously consider how successful formation depends on the way they think and act.”10 Libermann wrote: “Our Lord tells the rectors of the holy church that they must be fiery and luminous flames. The director may rightly be compared to one of these flames.”11 “If we were saints, Libermann wrote, we would make the seminaries everything we wanted.”12

**It is not Enough to Know how to Teach**

“The Church as such is the communal subject that has the grace and responsibility to accompany all those whom the Lord calls to be his ministers in the priesthood.”13 Libermann wrote: “It is a great evil to imagine some who do very well, if they teach theology well, content themselves with mediocre piety. They think that they can form good priests like this, but they excessively deceive themselves. A holy rector will form many holy priests; a rector of ordinary piety will not form any holy priest. And if, in an extraordinary case, a good priest comes out of his hands, you can believe that this rector trained him, at least, very badly. Such a priest only formed himself a good priest by force of graces, which the rector could not overcome. If this priest, as a seminarian, had been entrusted to a holy priest and had had the same graces and the same good will, there would have been seen in him, no doubt, many other wonders.”14

Shortly afterwards, he wrote to another priest on the same subject:

Your vocation ... is the most beautiful I know. It
is a matter of communicating the priestly spirit to those who want to train for the priesthood of our Lord. Jesus is the High Priest, who has in himself the essence of the priestly spirit and all the fullness of the perfections therein contained. Only in Jesus can you draw this treasure. If you are not constantly in the font, you will dry and cannot flourish except in dry and empty words without zeal. It may, from time to time, produce good effects, but it will no longer be a channel of grace; it will only do so occasionally. If God sometimes uses irrational creatures to impress souls, he can also use the lifeless mouths of priests attached to the earth to realize his designs of goodness in the souls he absolutely wants to save.

In the *Reglements* of 1849, Libermann explains some of the “functions of the prefects of study”: 1) to follow the students in their studies ... giving them good advice to do these studies and thus to be able to provide, later, good service to the church; 2) to watch over the observance of rule and order by students ...; 3) to form them in the ecclesiastical spirit, giving them the necessary instructions.”

**To form Pastors**

The importance of the selection of formators is already well evidenced in what was written earlier. “The best ones are chosen,” Vatican 11 recommends. Both the Council and Libermann, more than a hundred years earlier, recommend that “people with pastoral experience and adequate spiritual and pedagogical formation be chosen,” so that in seminaries “true shepherds of souls may be formed.”

This was also Libermann’s thinking. In a letter to Fr. Levavasseur, he communicated his intention to stay with Fr. Inácio Schwindenhammer in France. Fr Levavasseur drew attention to the need for the formator of the members of the congregation to have pastoral experience. Libermann replied him: “Your reflection is just, but at this moment we cannot do otherwise and we have, therefore, to stay here with a person without experience, because we do not have it in him ...” “On the other hand,” he observes, “these missionaries will have no administrative experience.” Actually, Libermann has always attached great importance to the “good administrator,” one of the most necessary attributes, according to him, for example, in the bishops. Even with qualities, not all qualify for the direction of the seminaries. About Fr. Vidal, then a missionary in Senegal, Libermann wrote to Don Aloísio Kobès: “I cannot keep him in France.
He is not qualified for seminary rector in Europe. He would spoil the young and spoil the spirit of the house, despite his excellent goodwill.”

On pastoral experiences with young people, priests or seminarians, Fr. Levavasseur made the following curious, but exact observation: “All the world’s experiences are not worth a year of ministry in chosen works, under the guidance of a man of virtue and experience. But it is difficult, in all, everywhere and always, to find anyone who has both head and heart at the same time. I recognize daily, and increasingly each time, how such men are rare in all congregations and in the whole church.”

“The superiors and professors ... constitute among themselves and with the student a family that corresponds to the Lord’s prayer ‘ut unum sint.’” If there is a family spirit, there will be a good spirit. “What is necessary is that the spirit is good.” Libermann also reminds the seminary formators that “the great formator is the High Priest, who is responsible for training his collaborators.” It requires, therefore, a close collaboration with him.

How to Stimulate a Seminary

Libermann indicates the method he followed in the seminaries of St. Sulpice with excellent results. But such a method, if it is not well used, can have counterproductive effects, as it did with the Piety Groups, which, some years after Libermann left, had to be suppressed. He spoke of his experience at the seminaries in Paris, when he wrote:

An effective means for the sanctification of seminarians and to spread their influence throughout the seminary is to choose a small number of generous young men determined to give themselves totally to God ... Such young people should be very united and concerned only with their own sanctification ... This must be the main purpose of their meetings ... If this can be done, the resulting good for the seminary will be enormous. The group will increase little by little; will grow in zeal ... for the grace of God is most powerful.

Libermann adds: “I was a witness in this regard, in the seminaries of Paris, of the great wonders which I had never seen and probably will never see again.”

In order not to create any Manichean division, it would
be better to give these meetings or associations a more academic face than a pious association, an academy open to all, where science and piety are cultivated side by side, always putting the latter in spotlight. “To introduce zeal in the seminary,” Libermann insists with a correspondent, “always adopt the following principle: the first and most important thing is sanctification itself ...”

Libermann compares holiness to central heating. “You have a heating stove in the exercise room. I lit it with the intention of warming up everyone in the room. Whoever has this intention is the one who lights it. Meanwhile, the fire immediately only heats the stove, which in turn warms the whole room when it might have become very hot.”

“We must pray for one another and lead others to do it as well. It is important to lead the good and the fervent ... to spread out through the community, thus bringing piety and love of God to all hearts. In this way, you would have the fervent ones in hand, who, without knowing it, will do what you have agreed for the good of the community.”

**Saints Burning**

Of “burning saints” Libermann speaks once again. “This year,” he wrote in September 1835, “we must set the seminary on fire, and the fire must burn and consume all who dwell in it.” “I came to bring fire to the earth” (Luke 12:49). Wanting to produce this fire, Christ will necessarily put burning torches in the hands of those he charges to stir it. “Why, then,” Libermann asks, “are there such few burning saints?” He himself answers:

Because there are few saints, few souls united to God in the practical habits of life; their torches are therefore doomed to be expunged, producing at most the fire of a match. That is, those who are chosen to be men of God, the apostles of Jesus Christ, remain lovers of themselves, men of the earth, obedient to their pride and senses, weaknesses and defects, and because of that, the sanctifying grace, received in the priesthood, does not develop in them, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit are necessarily refused them. The designs of God are aborted; people remain in darkness and bondage; the demons are happy and our Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Church are engrossed in pains.

And, supposing that his missionaries will remain
faithful, Libermann exclaims with joy: “What happiness for the souls entrusted to us if our missionaries live very united to God! ...”

Libermann, model Formator

Libermann, no doubt, was a burning formator whose action in the seminaries of Paris was extraordinarily fruitful. The directors had the best collaborator in him. No wonder they were sorry to lose him. When he learned of his intention to go to the Eudists, one of the seminary priests wrote of him: “The Issy Seminary is going to lose a great deal with his departure, and Fr Pinault told me that it is a loss that cannot be repaired. Fr. Mollevault even went so far as to say that if he could cry for anything, it would be for Libermann to leave Issy.” On the contrary, the feeling of the Eudists who knew him was that of great euphoria.

“Libermann is ours! Libermann is ours!”

The servant of God now goes to work in a congregation whose specific purpose was “the formation of the clergy in the seminaries and the renewal of the Christian spirit in the people.” His experience will add new experience and new knowledge. He continues to closely follow the life of the seminaries of St. Sulpice and rejoices at his good progress. “I have received wonderful news from the Paris seminary,” he writes. “It seems that everything there is even better than last year [he refers to 1837], however, I almost would not have dared to wish better, everything works so marvelously.” In a letter to several seminarians he wrote: “Have a great desire of sanctification of your brothers ... and spread the passion throughout the seminary. It is not by the calculations of your spirit, by your abilities and the inquiries of your imagination that you will sanctify it, but by the sanctity of your life, by your inner spirit, by the most ardent and perfect love of our Lord and the Blessed Virgin.”

Continuous Formation

“There is no lack of “reasons, even purely human,” which require a priest to carry out ongoing formation.” This is meant to make the priest grow in holiness and to keep him up to date in the doctrine of salvation. “A diplomat,” Libermann wrote, “has a wonderful mastery of his science, and applies himself to it relentlessly and with pleasure; it is his life, he needs it. Workers, each in his specific genre, know how to make an immediate judgment on every object of his art, and dedicate himself wholly to it. We must also be able
to identify ourselves with the science of salvation in such a way that we may walk well without much thought in it.”

The priest needs knowledge. This, according to Libermann, should be sought more in prayer, in union with God, than in books. “The sanctification of priests” was for him always considered “one of the most important points” of the priestly ministry. “The salvation of an innumerable multitude of souls depends on it, as well as the solidity and conservation of the good that we can do in people.” For this reason, he sought, from the beginning of the “Work for the Negroes,” to create a truly holy local clergy.

All that concerned the sanctification and formation of the clergy interested him. On his journey from Rennes to Lyon on his way to Rome, he was radiant with the plan, which “an excellent priest” showed him, to form a society of fervent and holy priests, who would charge themselves with maintaining in zeal the priests who exercise the holy ministry in the midst of the world.”

When he founded his congregation, he wanted to establish the novitiate in Strasbourg so that he could assist the German priests, who he thought were greatly lacking in moral and religious assistance. He exhorted a correspondent to help a certain priest, of whom he wrote: “I do not know his background ... I do not know why he runs from diocese to diocese ... But I do not think you should abandon him ... Continue to be interested in him ... giving him the advice that the divine Master will inspire you.”

Ecclesiastical Reunions under the Patronage of St. John the Evangelist

As soon as Libermann settled in Paris, a group of priests, “desirous of assisting each other in the fulfillment of their obligations,” founded under his presidency an association which they called, “Ecclesiastical Meetings under the patronage of St. John the Evangelist.” All these priests proposed “by common resolution to be faithful to the life of faith and prayer, to exercise the holy ministry with zeal and detachment from themselves and from their own interests, and to dedicate themselves, with particular devotion, to the service of the poor.” They met every week. “In these meetings they dealt in turn with matters pertaining to the personal sanctification of the members of the association and the spiritual direction of souls, as well as matters concerning the holy ministries, and works of zeal.” The President was
Fr. Libermann, whose word at the end of the meetings was always eagerly awaited and followed with fidelity. The fine flower of the Paris clergy belonged to this association. Thanks to these and other meetings, the Mother House of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit, while Libermann inhabited it, became a center “where priests of knowledge and talent, as well as of virtue like to meet ... Among others received there were, Don Pitra, his first biographer, and then cardinal; Rorbacher, a celebrated historian of the church; Msgr. Gousset, Msgr. de Ségur,”40 son of the famous Countess of the same name, and the celebrated publisher, Jacques Paul Migne, founder of the L'Univers journal in 1833.

Libermann’s missionaries in the French colonies would have the same ministry of assistance to priests, where they would live side by side with the diocesan clergy. In a letter to the Director of the Colonies, he wrote about the ministry among the Blacks: “We also count on using indirect ministry in helping the indigenous priests where we find ourselves. We will give them every possible help and raise them to remain faithful to their duties, which will have a great influence on the improvement of the intellectual state of the Blacks.”41

In fact, every ministry done in favor of the sanctification of priests turns out in favor of the People of God. Whoever does it, works with multipliers.

Lisbon, Portugal

Abbreviations


ND  Notes et Documents relatifs à la vie et à l’oeuvre du Vénérable François Marie Paul Libermann. 16 vols.

OT  Vatican II Decree on Priestly Formation, Optatam totius

Reference


Endnotes

1This piece was translated from “Libermann, Formador de Padres,” *Missão espiritana* no. 18, Year 9 (2010) 7–16 by Isidore Nkwocha, C.S.Sp.
3ND, I, 406.
4PDV, no. 69.
5PDV, no 65.
6PDV, nos. 65–68.
7ND, I, 472.
9PDV, no. 66.
10OT, no. 5.
11ES, 362.
12LS, I, 132.
13PDV, no. 65.
14LS, I, 484–485.
15Num. 22: 23
16LS, II, 279–280.
17ND, X, 493.
18OT, no. 5.
19ND, II, 30.
20OT, no. 5.
21ND, II, 30.
22ND, XI, 197-198.
23ND, XIII, 233.
24OT, no. 5. Cf. John 17:11.
25ND, XIII, 3.
26ND, VI, 184.
27LS, I, 489–490.
28ES, 362.
29ND, II, 177-178.
30LS, I, 137-139.
31LS, I, 130.
32ES, 480ff.
33ND, Comp., 3–4.
36PDV, no. 70.
37ND, XIII, 701.
38LS, II, 307-308.
39ND, IV, 257-258.
40ND, XIII, 597-598.
41ND, III, 284-285.
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Translated from French by Roberta Hatcher.

Money, Providence, and Spiritan Mission

The Congregation made its mark with remarkable missionary momentum all through the evolution of the church since the nineteenth century. Though seldom discussed, the financial aspect of this development was essential and omnipresent.

Even today, finances concretely condition and enable action on the ground. Thus, in order to understand the current financial state of the Congregation, and especially the dynamics in which it is engaged from a management point of view, it must be viewed in the context of the recent evolution of the Congregation and of the Church and society more broadly. In the last thirty or forty years, the Congregation has undergone three major transitions. The first was demographic, with the center of gravity shifting from the Global North to the Global South. The second was structural, with the exercise of authority and leadership passing from European missionaries to confreres of the new circumscriptions. Finally, the third transition was financial, witnessing the decline of mission funding by churches and donor circuits of the confreres of the North.

A characteristic of the demographic transition is its inevitable acceleration, owing to the simple fact that aging is slow at first, then accelerates. We age less quickly between the ages of thirty and fifty than we do between seventy and ninety. The confreres of the North stayed at their posts as long as they could, then departures accelerated. This phase has been nearly complete for over a decade.

Structural transition is always difficult, for no one is willing to question long-standing, proven modes of operating that change may destabilize. The most senior confreres exercised their responsibilities as long as they could remain in office. Their accelerated departure often left circumscriptions without truly experienced leaders, seeing that the transition was not really prepared for. Some confreres with little experience had to assume responsibility. Currently we are seeing the emergence of new superiors who have had experience with circumscription councils and animation and the exercise of authority at various levels of the circumscription. They also have not lived through the frequently conflictual transitional phase. Now that the demographic and structural transition is almost

The confreres of the North stayed at their posts as long as they could, then departures accelerated
complete, these new leaders realize that the destiny of their circumscription is really in their hands.

The third major shift, the *financial* transition, lags slightly behind the other two, because confreres of the North, once returned to their home circumscriptions, continued to help the circumscriptions of the South, raising funds through their various networks. Established self-help channels continued to exist for some time; in some cases, circumscription reserves helped to cushion some of the shock of the transition.

These three transitions allow us to outline some features of the Congregation’s current situation from a financial standpoint.

Circumscriptions in the North are experiencing a threefold challenge. First, the society that could once be described as Christian is no longer so, or only minimally. The missionary drive of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries no longer exists. As a result, gifts and inheritances that were essential for missionary life at that time have become insignificant and no longer make it possible to finance missionary activity. The confreres no longer have vibrant and lively parish communities behind them providing support.

Second, the relations networks of confreres, and so of the circumscriptions themselves, have aged along with them. As these networks dwindled, their support also decreased considerably.

Finally, resources are declining, to the point that some circumscriptions are in difficult financial situations. Revenues in northern circumscriptions came mainly from support networks and parishes (ties that need to be maintained through contacts and events, etc.), but also from works, and more recently, from pensions of retirees and the salaried work of confreres in parishes and various organizations. With the diminishing work capacity of aging confreres and the financial difficulties of the churches in the North, income is no longer sufficient for the life of the circumscriptions, especially since the care of older and sick confreres is becoming more and more demanding. As a result, circumscriptions are seeing their real estate patrimony diminish, to such an extent that we must consider the prospect of no longer having enough to live on in the next ten or fifteen years.
Circumscriptons in the South face other challenges. As a result of transitions experienced by the Congregation, they inherited structures (buildings, works) and mission territories that required a certain amount of financial resources to sustain, at a time when those resources no longer exist. The churches and the local population often do not have the means to help priests and support their works.

In order to operate, the circumscriptions face many expenses: the training of seminarians, which is expensive and consumes a large part of the resources; the structures of formation; frequent and costly travel for students, those on oversees experience, confreres on missionary appointment, meetings of the Unions, international meetings, confreres’ vacations, etc. The provincial administration must also find resources for its own functioning.

Finally, for lack of means, certain circumscriptions are unable to accept positions of first evangelization or ministries for which the local church cannot find anyone, which is nevertheless an essential part of our charism. In many circumscriptions, the only regular income comes from parishes, particularly urban parishes. This is not without its problems, as diocesan clergy often wish to take over these parishes themselves. There is a “competition” which puts our status as “missionaries” in question.

Conclusion on the Financial Situation of the Congregation

One of the first consequences of this triple transition is that the assistance provided by Cor Unum and the personal contribution to the general administration will decrease quite rapidly in the future. In addition, the northern circumscriptions need the solidarity of those in the South to continue the Spiritan mission, which still has its place in their countries.

In the South, many circumscriptions are almost in a state of re-founding. The changes have been such that they have to be almost completely rebuilt. For this, they must begin with the foundations: establish the bases of their subsistence, and gradually structure their institutions and their action. One cannot start a building on the first floor\(^2\) - one cannot have more students than confreres.

In the current global environment, this overhaul includes, among other things, self-reliance projects, the establishment of a network of benefactors, and the
establishment of a network of NGOs and funding agencies.\textsuperscript{3}

Such is our assessment of the current financial situation of the Congregation. To contemplate the future, we must deepen the analysis and identify the challenges that await the Congregation in view of its evolution and that of the church.

**Cultures and Governance**

The triple transition mentioned above occurred within the context of a much more fundamental trend: the shift from a movement-oriented Congregation, the “go ye afar,” the \textit{ad extra} mission, to a Congregation connected to local churches, immersed in them, where the missionary spirit must be brought. The Congregation was founded in the context of a geographically expanding church, and today we live in a church with a large presence in the world, with vibrant local churches and flourishing vocations, with this paradox, that the northern churches that initiated the missionary movement are in sharp decline, while young churches are growing vigorously.

From a material, administrative point of view, this has important consequences, particularly for governance, in the areas of entrepreneurial culture and financial management.

The gravitational shift of the Congregation - and of the Church - from the North to the South has led to considerable changes, particularly in the cultural sphere. This observation is not extraordinary and seems to state an obvious reality, but curiously, this issue of interculturality has received little attention in current thought. We may talk about it within international and intercultural communities, but it is not really a priority topic of reflection and even less an element of the Congregation’s strategic thinking and animation.

However, there are fundamental issues in the wake of the transitions experienced by the Congregation.

**Precarity and Security**

From an anthropological viewpoint, a culture is a set of representations, beliefs, and behaviors developed by a human group to adapt to its environment. This simple definition will suffice for our purposes. Of all the approaches to analysis of culture, one model seems particularly interesting: that of Clair Michalon, who situates cultures not in the usual terms of “tradition” or “modernity,” but on an axis that runs from “precarity” to “security.”
“precarity” to “security.”

Each human group has an unconscious purpose, a fundamental task: to ensure its preservation and reproduction. In precarious societies, survival is not guaranteed because material and human resources are limited and uncertain. The group must be united, and all must work for the common good. Children, the sick and the elderly—in other words, those who are not autonomous and cannot fully contribute to the subsistence of the group—must be cared for. Natural disasters, poor harvests, epidemics, conflict, can quickly put everything in question and endanger the whole group. Social control must be very strong.

In security societies, institutions were gradually set up to reduce this precarity and ensure the future: pensions for the elderly, insurance against illness, accidents, unemployment, improved health, etc. Society has become more complex and specialized, and the accumulation of wealth secures the future. When the preservation and reproduction of the social group is assured, the main concern becomes the improvement of the standard of living.

Absolute security hardly exists, nor does absolute precarity, except in the case of violent and lasting conflicts with large displacements of the population.

This model of analysis makes it possible to locate all human groups somewhere along the axis from precarity to security.

“On this axis, it is fairly easy to place certain social groups in the” precarious zone,” particularly groups from Africa. On the other hand, Asian societies are probably in a middle zone, full of uncertainties and ambiguities, a source of strong tensions. The confrontation of social logics is undoubtedly at the root of clashes between generations, between urban and rural life, between the new industrialization and proletarians, between the new rich and those who are marginalized. More broadly, this median zone is obviously the most blurred, one in which many developing societies find it difficult to locate themselves. Their capacity for dialogue is diminished accordingly.”
Contrary to the commonly used “tradition-modernity” schema, this model is not a discourse elaborated by one generally dominant society over another; but rather, a model that makes it possible to locate all human groups, whoever they may be, on the same axis. On the other hand, though the definition of culture as adaptation to an environment is relevant, classical anthropology devotes a great deal of study to cultures, but much less to their environment. Yet a society is a living whole, in constant interaction with its environment, which is itself in continual evolution. This flux shows the difficulty of understanding a culture in its dynamic and creative dimension. And the element that makes reality even more complex in today’s world is the speed of environmental change on every level: the natural environment, technology, communication, economics, migration, conflicts, and so on. One can say that the world has changed more in the last fifty years than in the preceding two or three centuries. Everything evolves very quickly, and on a global scale, demanding great reactivity and creativity of human groups. On every continent, one can find groups living in great precarity directly opposite groups living in comfort and security in the same country or the same city.

As far as our Congregation is concerned, we can see that many of our circumscriptions are located to a greater or lesser degree on the side of precarious societies. A majority of confreres come from this type of society. This is also where we are destined to work, since we want to go to the poorest.

This has direct consequences for governance, on two fundamental points in particular: relationships and financial management.

**Relationship Societies and Function Societies**

As we have said, in precarious societies, everyone must work for the common good. Each person is important and indispensable, and must adhere fully to the objectives of the group. The dissident, the marginal, is potentially dangerous because he can sow discord and thus increase risks and precarity. In this type of society, relationships are essential. It is necessary to know one another, to observe each other, also to maintain a unity that must always be consolidated. To identify who contributes to the common good and who puts it in danger is essential. Solidarity manifests this unity, and no one can escape it; it also plays the role of “insurance” for old age, health and the vagaries of life. These are also highly hierarchical groups, where everyone must know his place.
and those of others, know his role and stick to it. Social control is omnipresent.

In security societies, a single individual cannot put the life of the group in danger; the logic of accumulation favors quantitative benchmarks. A person becomes part of a more complex structure and is replaceable. What matters is not the person, but his function.

A typical example: in security societies, when people meet, they introduce themselves by saying their name and their job. This locates them on the social ladder by salary level and function. In precarious societies, people say their name and then their family and their village. They are positioned in relation to their network of relationships.

Whether one is in a situation of more or less precarity or relative security, in more relational or more functional societies, has important consequences for financial management. In security societies, people are used to managing inventories, surpluses, an accumulation of goods. These are societies that make “investments.” The phrase is significant: money is immobilized, usually in banks, who then invest it in industry, services, real estate, etc. This money produces wealth for the investor, as part of a globalized and integrated economic system. Investment in the stock market can even show gains without being connected to any productive activity, purely by speculation. In precarious societies, the majority of the population has little or no money. Nobody can become rich by himself, and whoever becomes rich must make his riches available to all who supported him in his ascent, whether politically or economically. In ordinary life, the constraints are many: housing, food, clothing, health care, schooling, etc. Solidarity also has a high cost: support for the needy, the sick, family members, funeral expenses, celebrations, etc. In other words, people are constantly having to deal with lack, and everyone helps everyone inside the solidarity group, whether it be family or at the level of the neighborhood, community association, or the village. It should be noted that a person usually belongs to several circles of solidarity. This financial logic is contrary to that of “investment”: the more money circulates, the more it creates ties. The person who helps another has a “credit,” but it is a social investment, not an accounting. As precarious societies are highly relational, individuals find themselves very well in this “social accounting.” Everyone knows his economic ties with his entourage, as well as his rights and duties of solidarity.
This system generally works in a balanced way, because anyone who does not respect his commitments or does not fully enter the solidarity circuits will be excluded. Everyone will be wary of him and he will no longer be accepted in any group because he will be deemed unreliable. Thus, in this context, the poor man is not the one who has no money, but the one who has no relationships.\(^8\)

On one hand, we have functional societies, which have management based on financial investment, and on the other, relational societies, with management based on social investment.

In the context of the transitions from the North to the South that the Congregation experienced, these two models met, confronted each other, and especially mixed, as in the world today. No society is totally on one side or the other, and individuals must learn to live in both worlds, according to both models. The majority of our confreres, as we have already pointed out, come from societies of more or less precarity and work there. Concretely, for a bursar, how to manage the often low reserves of the circumscription in order to assure formation, maintain buildings, provide health care, plan for the needs of aging confreres, and on the other hand, respond to the requests of communities or confreres who sometimes live in conditions of extreme poverty? Not to mention that a confrere can also be involved in a number of solidarity networks, particularly at the level of his family. This last problem is particularly delicate. In light of what we have described above, to ask a confrere to cut himself off from his familial solidarity network is to ask him to exclude himself, to be rejected, to give up something that has profoundly shaped and structured his personality since childhood ... One possible solution to this kind of situation is to have the community, the circumscription and the Congregation also function as a network of solidarity, which is already the case in many areas.

It may be noted in passing that this helps us to better understand the gravity of Christ’s demand when he asks his disciples to leave everything - for those who lived in precarious societies, this amounted to throwing themselves into the unknown, with no more attachments, no security for their future.

Making provision for the future when the present is precarious is difficult, and the margin of maneuver very narrow when it exists. During a training session of the new
circumscription superiors in Rome, when it was pointed out to a provincial that his circumscription had more students than confreres and that financially it was impossible to sustain, he replied, “If we don’t have young people after us, who will take care of us when we can’t work anymore?”

In this context, one can also ask what is the real meaning of the vow of poverty. In many countries we live better than the average population. And how to share or pool assets that we do not have, or over which, in fact, a solidarity network has a “right of access”? In societies where true wealth is one’s network of relationships, it is perhaps this network that should be pooled and shared. In countries where the rule of law is very weak and where corruption is commonplace, a broad and influential relationship network is essential and just as important as money to carry out projects and manage the structures of the circumscription. Sharing and solidarity are to be implemented within circumscriptions, but also between circumscriptions and in the Unions.

A Governance in Transformation

In the realm of governance, security societies, oriented towards the organization of various functions, aim for efficiency and put in place stable and rigorous structures. Thus, over time, the Congregation has established an extremely efficient network of missions and Procures. In the countries where this was present, it was able to produce and provide all that was needed for missionary work in all domains: construction, pastoral care, health, schooling, mechanics, printing, etc. These structures functioned like real banks, allowing efficient and fast money transfers. Everything was based on trust and adherence to common rules and procedures passed down from generation to generation. The structures remained operational even in cases of conflict or war; often they were the only ones still effective, while state services had ceased to function. The flip side of the coin is that this kind of structure requires a lot of resources: financial means, rigorous administration, strict procedures, and continuity. Individuals may come and go, but the system must remain stable because the most important element is the permanence of its operation. It also requires a very hierarchical system. Authority and communication go from the bottom to the top, then instructions and information return from the top down. Until the general chapter of 1968, the Congregation was structured on this pyramidal and centralized scheme.
In societies of precarity, social organization is also very hierarchical, but people's belonging to multiple networks of sociality and solidarity creates a society made of interconnected networks. Authority and communication are vertical, but also horizontal, no longer according to the image of the pyramid, but of the “fishing net.”

With the transitions experienced by the Congregation, we have mostly moved into a situation where we no longer manage reserves, but precarity. When everyday life is a struggle to find the resources necessary for the life of a circumscription, we have to be flexible and inventive, and we especially need to have large networks which multiply the chances of finding solutions. In these cases, relationship networks are more important than administrative rigor. This is precisely where the great challenge for governance in the Congregation lies: in order to sustain an organization of roughly 2,700 members in over sixty countries, good organization is needed, to which everyone adheres: common rules, procedures, ongoing relationships, risk analyses, reliable statistics, good communication, as well as the transmission and continuity of knowledge and procedures. At the same time, in many countries, vital and urgent needs mobilize most of the energies, and the organizational aspect takes second place.

We now find that the indispensable verticality of the relation of authority is still present, but horizontality tends to develop. For this, social networks are a boon. They allow transversal communication, between confreres, as well as communication with the persons in charge. We can even say that the phenomenon goes beyond communication to enter the realm of interaction, which could open new horizons of governance.

Respecting the pyramidal hierarchy and intensifying networks are not incompatible, but reconciling them requires an awareness of these types of functioning and the collisions of interests that they can arouse, along with the will to solve them. The enterprise is difficult, and in this type of situation, the great temptation would be to return to greater centralization, considering that if we centralize the problems, we have a greater chance of centralizing the solutions. In fact, this approach does not work because it amounts to separating responsibility and authority. To avoid this, it is useful to recall a principle as fundamental as it is old: subsidiarity.
“The principle of subsidiarity is often confused with delegation. It consists in considering that all responsibility must be assumed by the level directly confronted with the problem to be solved, the higher echelons intervening only if the answer to be given exceeds the capacities of the level in question ... the principle of subsidiarity has been adopted by business from the 1980s onwards. It has its origin in the thought of Saint Thomas Aquinas and in several authors whose reflections have influenced the writing of the Encyclical Rerum novarum, 1891, the founding text of the social doctrine of the Catholic Church.”

If the social doctrine of the church insists on this point, it is not that it wants to be a manual of business management, it is rather a question of human dignity and respect for the person. For self-actualization in one’s humanity, one needs to undertake things, succeed, be fully responsible and recognized. It is therefore necessary - and generally more effective - to distribute responsibilities widely, and not make people merely carry out tasks, thus limiting their initiative and creativity.

In our Congregation, the essential organizational level is not the generalate, but the circumscriptions. These are the ones who have the most authority and responsibility, and who have the most resources, because, let’s not forget, they are the ones who largely support the general administration by providing staff and financial contribution, and who sustain solidarity and a certain equity in the Congregation. In the exercise of subsidiarity, the strongest link is the circumscription, thus constituting the “top echelon” to which the principle of subsidiarity refers. The general council has a preeminent role in ensuring the unity of the Congregation, promoting and coordinating solidarity, supervising the work of circumscriptions, and ensuring their fidelity to the Spiritan vocation. The general council has a strategic role in the general plan of the Congregation, while the circumscriptions are at the operational level.

Another principle to be added is that of collegiality, which is sometimes aligned with synodality, which Pope Francis has been trying to promote since the beginning of his pontificate. The principle of collegiality means that persons in a position of responsibility, when they make a joint decision in the framework of a board or an executive body, defend the collective decision in public debates, even if
it contradicts their personal position. Without this principle, authority is considerably weakened.13

The Teachings of our Founders

If our rapidly changing world needs to invent ever new ways of working, we may also wonder if there aren’t lessons from the past whose value goes beyond their particular conjuncture. Despite the differences in times and conditions, did our founders not face challenges as great as ours in terms of organization and management? How did they face them?

First, both Claude Poullart des Places and Francis Libermann were what we would today call men of networks. Poullart des Places, through his family, belonged to the elite society of his time in a period when the social classes were very delimited and compartmentalized. He did not use the opportunities for social advancement that he could have personally enjoyed, but he had the necessary connections, and especially the spirit of initiative and enterprise of his social milieu. As for Libermann, we need only consider the extent of his correspondence, which the Notes and Documents provide us, to see the incredible breadth and the immense diversity of his network of relations. But what is striking when one looks at the way our two founders managed and governed the Congregation is their absolutely unshakeable faith in Divine Providence.

This notion has been the subject of numerous and complex debates because it touches on the sensitive subject of God’s intervention in human history. Historically, positions range from the absolute predestination of human destiny to the total non-intervention of God in the events of the world. Unable to enter here into this highly theological debate,14 we will content ourselves with seeing how our founders grasped and lived Divine Providence. Both Claude Poullart des Places and Francis Libermann were trained in a theology and spirituality that placed Divine Providence at the center of the life of the world. The Council of Trent, in reaction to salvation by faith advocated by Luther and his followers, strongly refocused practice on Christian acts, which were to be part of the divine plan, according to his mysterious will. Attacked also by philosophy and science, which, since the Renaissance, had increasingly freed themselves from the church’s influence, the church had to reaffirm the submission of all things, even natural phenomena, to God’s omnipotence and his plan for humanity.15
“What is particularly striking in the life of M. des Places is the spiritual poverty, the total confidence in Providence, in whose hands he gives himself up entirely ... This complete availability appears very well expressed in the prayer which opens his reflections titled ‘Choice of a state of life’:

‘O my God, who lead to heavenly Jerusalem the men who truly trust in You, I have recourse to your Divine Providence, I abandon myself entirely to it, I renounce my inclination, my appetites and my own willingness to blindly follow Yours.

Deign to let me know what You want me to do, so that by fulfilling here below the kind of life You have meant for me, I can serve You, during my pilgrimage, in a state where I am pleasing to You and where You abundantly cover me in the graces I need to render forever the glory which is due to your divine Majesty.’"\(^{16}\)

Father Libermann could have repeated this reflection in every respect. Divine Providence is omnipresent in his correspondence, in terms of his personal spirituality of course, but even more so in the direction and management of the Congregation. For him, Providence is a plan of God, in which every human being has a role, and which constitutes the deep logic and ultimate meaning of the world. God leads history, and Christian action consists in placing ourselves at the disposal of this Providence, as a docile instrument, renouncing one’s own will to enter totally into that of God. Providence has its own rhythm, its mystery, and it is necessary to wait for God’s time, God who makes everything happen in its time. In return, God provides for the needs of those who surrender themselves to him. Fr. Libermann also associates Mary with Providence:

“We have much difficulty finding enough to maintain our novitiate. The lovable Heart of Mary, who is a good Providence for her children, will not abandon us ... “\(^{17}\) It must be noted that this notion of Providence does not lead to fatalism or to predestination where everything is already written in stone. Since evil is at work in the world, the action of God, which goes through that of his creatures, must constantly adjust.

There is still much to be said about the infinite nuances of the Libermanian conception of Providence, but what
must be remembered above all is that it was a formidable
driving force for our two founders. It helped them to
overcome the innumerable obstacles in founding and
managing a Congregation in difficult times in every respect.
Divine Providence was a powerful anchor of their faith,
which led them to boldness and perseverance. Closer to
home, Blessed Daniel Brottier had the same attitude towards
Providence, which was also at the center of his faith and his
action. A troubling phrase is attributed to him: “As long
as we can say to God, ‘I have welcomed these unfortunate
children out of love for you, help me now to raise them,’ be
assured that Providence will intervene. While if we purport
to tailor admissions to available reserves, we would have
unpleasant surprises.”18 A strategy a little difficult to advise
for a modern manager ...

Our Congregation had to make its aggiornamento as
early as the sixties in order to reread its charism according
to the orientations of Second Vatican Council. At present,
this re-reading is made necessary by the transitions we are
experiencing. Many Congregations have traveled the same
path, and many have rediscovered on this occasion the
importance of Divine Providence in the birth and growth of
their Congregation.

“In the history of religious congregations, the
founders and foundresses were animated by a
great apostolic impulse, allowing themselves to be
moved and to live by compassion, like Jesus before
the sufferings of the people. They embarked on an
adventure, often without many resources, and in small
numbers.

We have in our history a great experience of the
Providence of the Father ... In a social context that
confronts us with an entrepreneurial management
mentality, it is important to deepen the concept of
Providence, so important for our founders. Experience
shows that when we develop projects for the poorest,
Providence is never lacking. We must have the courage
to take risks, sure that the Lord never abandons his
people, especially his beloved ones. This courage starts
from a passion that no difficulty can stop.”19

The rediscovery of trust in Providence among our
founders must also remind us of the attitude it induced in
them: a total and unconditional dedication to their mission.
When we look at their lives, we quickly realize that for them
the notions of personal comfort, leisure, “time for oneself,” did not exist. They lived a degree of renunciation, and even destitution, which it is difficult for us to imagine today. Their mission, their apostolic zeal, occupied each moment of their life and took all their energy, often to the point of exhaustion. Only prayer and spiritual exercises could distract them from their mission for a moment. Thus Providence, as the engine of their faith and action, gave them a capacity for work and perseverance capable of overcoming all difficulties. It is a fundamental component of the Spiritan charism.

In our reflection on management in our Congregation, this confidence of our founders in Divine Providence is a source of inspiration. “The confrontation of charism with history leads to discernment and allows one to look with the gaze of God; it is a gift to know how to look with different eyes, able to see what others do not see. Charisms make it possible to see capacities where others only see inadequacies.”

Conclusion

The transitions we have mentioned, and their consequences, are an immense challenge, as we have seen, especially from the point of view of management and governance. The passage is not finished, but the Congregation is on the right path to succeed in this challenge, with the help of the Holy Spirit and fidelity to the charism of our founders.

In the young churches where we work, with our specific mission, we have to find a place that has changed considerably since the origins of the mission.

“It is essential to start from a theological perspective of communion to fully understand openness to the universal church and, at the same time, the need and commitment to collaborate with the local church. When communion is not the foundation of all ecclesial relations, we risk falling into a logic of reciprocal demands. It is necessary, therefore, to promote relations based on the principle of communion, which is based on fraternity and doing together.”

A professor of missiology said: “Even if one day the whole world is evangelized, there will always remain a specific role for missionaries, to call to mind that in every
Even if one day the whole world is evangelized, there will always remain a specific role for missionaries, to call to mind that in every community, every church, there must be a place for the stranger."22

Our missionary life leads us to live in other cultures, to learn other relationships with God and others. In a world of travel and migration, our experience allows us to create ties, build bridges between cultures and religions, between people. If those who have this experience do not do it, who will be able to? This is perhaps the place for new poverties and one of the new faces of the mission?

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Abbreviations

GE    Vatican II Declaration on Christian Education
      Gravissimum educationis

GS    Vatican II Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World Gaudium et spes

SRL   Spiritan Rule of Life

Endnotes

1We use the terms “North” and “South” to refer to the old and new circumscriptions. This simplifies the matter, despite the limitations of these terms.
2First floor in Europe is second floor in America.
3The Central Development Office, which is currently being set up in Rome, wants to meet this requirement and promote the coordination and establishment of this network at the level of the Congregation.
Everything we say here about precarity and security societies is taken from his analysis, which is extremely rich. We only take up a small part.
6Ibid., 14. He wrote this in 1991, almost 30 years ago. The rapidity of the changes in the world since that time requires that we relativize the geographical divisions he mentions and reinterpret his remarks in a global way.
7Ibid., 6.
8See Ndione, Emmanuel, Le don et le recours, ressorts de l’économie urbaine. (Dakar, ENDA Editions, 1992) - [The Gift and the Recourse, Mainsprings of the Urban
Economy]. In this book, the author describes steps taken by a local NGO, after gradually becoming aware of the economic functioning among inhabitants of a district in Dakar, to adapt its action to this relational and social economy.

7Procure, as explained in the text, is French for a government-recognized office that serves missionaries of the area as travel agent, and for visas, aspects of banking, car procurement, etc.

10Verrier, Gilles, “Le principe de subsidiarité: une clé” at https://www.rhinfo.com/thematiques/management/le-principe-de-subsidiarite-une-cle/ 17/08/2017 [“The principle of subsidiarity: a key”]. See General Chapter 1968-1969, Directives et Decisions, Rome 1970. At no. 149, it defines subsidiarity as follows: “The Congregation is a unity, the organization of which must be in accord with the principle of subsidiarity, leaving to individuals and intermediate bodies initiative and responsibility in the tasks proper to them. All higher authority, moreover, has the duty to sustain and encourage the efforts of the intermediary bodies. It should intervene when these latter, or do not, adequately fulfill their function (GS, 86a; GE, 3, 6)”

11The vow of obedience is also a commitment to initiative and creativity, in fidelity to the mission of the Congregation.

12SRL 198.1

13SRL 198 and 198.1 also refer to subsidiarity and collegiality.


17Notes and Documents, Vol. 13, 171.
18 P. Brottier, 10.09.1978, cited in the beatification process.
20 Congrégation pour les instituts de vie consacrée et les sociétés de vie apostoliques, L’économie au service de la mission (Rome, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2018) 46 [Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, Economy at the Service of Mission].
21 Ibid., 55.
22 Personal recollection of the author.
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THE CHALLENGES AND FUTURE OF SPIRITAN MISSION

Introduction

The first concrete instance of Jesus’ mission is presented by Luke in an account of his visit to Nazareth (Luke 4:16-20). Luke, in quoting Isaiah (61:1-2), portrays Jesus as the one who was to come to offer all who do not see the possibility of seeing him. In the apostolic era, the church received the mission mandate to carry Jesus’ message to all men and women.1 This means that the church manifests her nature in doing mission. We, Spiritans, are involved in that mission of the church, we undertake the duty of evangelization ad gentes. This task is not an easy task to perform. As the church in her history faced challenges, our Congregation faced and continues to face challenges as far as mission is concerned. Therefore, we ask: What is Spiritan mission all about? How is it operated within the mission of the church? What can be its sources, its potential challenges, and its future in this world challenged by the dictatorship of globalization?

For a better understanding of our work, we begin by talking about Spiritan mission as seen by the founders, how it is related to conciliar and post-conciliar documents, and as it is presented in some Spiritan documents. The last part will be consecrated to the challenges of mission at all levels and her future.

FOUNDERS’ IDEAS OF MISSION

Poullart des Places

The Spiritan mission was born on the day of Pentecost, 1703, when Poullart dedicated his congregation to the Holy Spirit under the guidance of Mary Immaculate. Koren writes: “Mr. Poullart des Places ... then only an aspirant to the ecclesiastical state, began the establishment of the said Community and Seminary consecrated to the Holy Ghost under the invocation of the Blessed Virgin conceived without sin.” Poullart formed missionaries who could devote themselves to the Holy Spirit in order to continue and bring to completion the work of Jesus.

The missionaries Poullart des Places formed were to accept mission wherever it was found. Koren presents the characteristics of Spiritan missionaries in Poullart’s expectation: “Claude wanted his priests to be priests in
the true sense of the term, good shepherds, not hirelings. This was the reason why they should be willing ‘to accept and even prefer the most humble and difficult functions in the church, for which it is difficult to find laborers.’”3 The emphasis is on the verb to accept and the expression where it is difficult to find laborers. Those two elements show the commitment, the passion Spiritan missionaries developed in Poullart’s time as far as Spiritan mission was concerned.

Francis Libermann

One hundred and thirty years after Poullart, Libermann became the leader and preserved the idea of mission developed by Poullart des Places. But he just replaced the idea of “going anywhere where there is work to be done,” by “for the Slaves and Black people.” Slaves and Black people became the heart of Spiritan mission:

Eight days after Hérard closed his eyes in death, Libermann had a first vision showing his future role in the work for the Blacks […] The members of the Congregation consecrate themselves wholly to preaching the Good News (of Jesus Christ) and establishing his kingdom among the poorest and most abandoned souls.4

Francis Libermann, as he directed his mission to the Blacks, also advised his missionaries to be led by the Holy Spirit whom he considers as the agent of mission. Father Malinowski comments on Libermann’s teaching on the Holy Spirit as follows: “… In the complexity of coming to the aid of the poor, weak, and oppressed, the poverty of means and the powerlessness of human endeavor called for continued and greater reliance on the Holy Spirit. The Spirit was now called upon to be a light to the missionary path and a consoling presence in the missionary’s labor and fatigue.”5

Some Challenges

What we can retain from the two founders about mission is that it was directed to the poor, the most abandoned, the slaves, and Black people. The first Spiritan missionaries sent by them faced some challenges, like language barriers, travel by boats that took a long time to arrive at the place of mission, the challenge of converting Africans, the challenge of organizing African societies considered as colonies of the colonizers for so long, and, lastly, the challenge of studying the character of the people and examining the tendencies of their hearts, their
inclinations and affections.  

**VATICAN II DOCUMENTS AND SPIRITAN MISSION**

Vatican II really influenced Spiritan mission since it gave the church a new direction as far as mission was concerned. What we can surely affirm is that Spiritan mission has not moved away from the new direction the Council had given to the church. That is why the Vatican II documents can be considered as one of the major sources of Spiritan mission today.

**Ad Gentes Divinitus**

The Church finds its nature in doing mission, and that mission is led by the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit (AG, 2). This view of the Holy Spirit as the agent par excellence of mission was already at work in Libermann’s time, especially when he invited Schwindenhammer to be led by the Holy Spirit: “The Holy Spirit wants to be the soul of your soul. Our task is to make him absolute ruler of our spirit so that he will share his life and action with us. Let him act within you as our body lets our soul act within us, moving it as it will…” Today we, Spiritans, still consider the Holy Spirit as the agent par excellence of our mission.

In the same perspective of mission to the Gentiles, Spiritan mission is still based on sending Spiritans where the church has difficulty finding laborers. Spiritan mission extends to all over the world, including Islamic lands, as is the case with Pakistan, where Christianity is not yet a recognized religion. In short, we can say that *Ad gentes* has really encouraged our Congregation in terms of maintaining our founders’ ideas of mission - to spread the Gospel in the very difficult areas.

**Gaudium et Spes**

*Gaudium et spes* made some missionary Congregations revise their Constitutions in order to incorporate the ideas raised by the Conciliar Fathers regarding mission. The key goal here is for the church to show solidarity with all men and women. Related to that, Spiritan mission is also about bringing joy and hope to all, and especially to the hopeless and joyless found in Africa immediately after the end of the shameful slave trade. The Spiritan missionary has a task to show solidarity with the people he finds in mission. This solidarity must be expressed in listening to them, living and walking with them, and bringing them joy and hope. Is this
what we have done so far in our personal mission experience?

**Evangelii Nuntiandi**

One of the first Apostolic Exhortations of Pope Paul VI, *Evangelization in the Modern World*, expounds on mission and the role of missionaries in the Church. Just ten years after Vatican II, Paul VI clarified the roles of the various constituents of the People of God: the successor of Peter (Pope), Bishops and Priests, Religious, the Laity, the Family, and Young People. We shall just take a look at the role of Religious, for it is more concerned about our topic. To Paul VI, there are so many tasks of mission in the church accomplished by different groups of people: “The whole church therefore is called upon to evangelize, and yet within her we have different evangelizing tasks to accomplish. This diversity of services in the unity of the same mission makes up the richness and beauty of evangelization.” In addition, the most important thing is where he presents the role of religious dedicated to mission, which includes us Spiritans. He states:

> Other religious, in great numbers, give themselves directly to the proclamation of Christ. Their missionary activity depends clearly on the hierarchy and must be co-ordinated with the pastoral plan, which the latter adopts […]. Thanks to their consecration they are eminently willing and free to leave everything and to go and proclaim the Gospel even to the ends of the earth. They are enterprising and their apostolate is often marked by an originality, by a genius that demands admiration.

From the above quotation, we clearly notice that the role of Spiritans is to evangelize all men and women, and to work in harmony with the local church. We shall now analyze some Spiritan documents about mission.

**Spiritan Mission after Vatican II: A Crisis in the Spiritan Family**

I consider this point very important as it shows how our the Spiritan family became divided in the wake of Vatican II. The spirit of Vatican II was based on *aggiornamento*, a renewal of the life and mission of the church. The Congregation of the Holy Spirit, sharing the same mission of the church, also wanted to renew its way of doing mission. Three years after Vatican II (1968), a general chapter of the congregation was held when Mgr. Lefebvre was the
superior general. He decided to move away from the Congregation and from the Catholic Church, for he was against collegiality and *collegial government*[^11]. Let’s pause for a moment and consider how there could be a Congregation without a shepherd. Fortunately, a good number of Spiritan missionaries did not follow him, and Fr. Joseph Lécuyer became superior general and took over the leadership. How did Spiritan mission survive?

By means of three General Chapters (1968-69, 1974, and 1980), the Congregation progressively defined its role in the mission of the church [...]. “The Congregation is one of the Church’s living cells. Its purpose is the preaching of the Good News of Christ to the world.”[^12]

**SOME SPIRITAN DOCUMENTS ON MISSION**

**Spiritan Rule of Life (SRL)**

Briefly, it presents Spiritan mission as having its origin in the person of the Trinity. It promotes mission to the “poor” (*anawim*, the “Poor of Yahweh”) led by the Spirit. The Congregation is defined by its role in the mission of the church. The purpose is the preaching of the Good News of Christ to the world.

**General Chapter 1968-69, Decisions and Directives, and Spiritan mission**

The spirit of this general chapter of 1968-69 was to update (*aggionamento*) or revise our missionary activity in the spirit of *Ad gentes*. According to this Spiritan document, Spiritan mission is directed “to people who have not yet been evangelized” (no. 380), to non-Christians (no. 381); no. 382 insists on the preaching of the Gospel message to those people or groups who have not yet heard it. The general chapter also insists on the fact that Spiritans should develop a real missionary spirit; for instance, by teaching the catechism not only to converted people, but also those considered as pagans. Related to our missionary activity, the general chapter warns all Spiritans that money is for the purposes of evangelization. According to no. 384 of this document, Spiritans should devote and equal portion of men and money to the evangelization of those still outside the church (cf. AG, 30). This effectively reminds...
Our poverty of life is for the purpose of advancing God's kingdom. Also that the whole congregation is to be in solidarity with those on mission by allocating funds to them. Experience today shows the need to listen again to the instruction of this document for some have become slaves, dependent on and addicted to money. How many cases have we witnessed where issues concerning money and ethnicity are ruining Spiritan communities on mission? For Spiritans, money should only be a means for the success of mission and not a goal.

Itaici (1992) and Spiritan mission

Itaici (1992) stresses our capability to identify ourselves with the people we are sent to, our commitment to the poor, our support in time of crisis, and to some extent being the voice of the voiceless as far as justice and peace are concerned, and our ability to care for the refugees. The same document sees Spiritan mission as dialogue and ecumenical evangelization. It also directs Spiritan mission to the poor children, and to the Asian world (nos. 5 and 7).

Maynooth (1998) and Spiritan mission

On Spiritan mission, Maynooth emphasized preaching among the nomads of Boranaland (Ethiopia). Spiritan mission is also directed towards educating people, for instance, teaching them catechism, giving them new options, new views of life, and making them get back their due place in the society, in the economy of the country. Spiritan mission is also directed towards educating people for instance, teaching them catechism, giving them new options, new views of life, and making them get back their due place in the society, in the economy of the country. In missionary activity, Spiritans are called forth to strive to develop the sense of belonging and togetherness among people of different colors, races, and ethnic groups in order to live in perfect harmony. In short, Spiritan mission is about developing people as we evangelize them, to improve their way of living, and to make them understand the word of God in their local language, for example:

We go to a people not primarily to accomplish a task, but rather to be with them, live with them, work with them, listen to them and share our faith with them. At the heart of our relationship is trust, respect and love... Mission is not to be conceived primarily in geographical terms and not as a crossing of cultural boundaries and a reaching out to groups of people who are abandoned, excluded and oppressed. As these frontiers of mission change, the frontline of mission must also move.
POTENTIAL CHALLENGES AND FUTURE OF SPIRITAN MISSION

Ethnicity and Nationality within the Congregation

For me, the challenge of ethnicity and nationality constitute the first hiccup of Spiritan mission. I can’t imagine this situation happening in our congregation that has an international character. This is the case where some of our confreres are still ignoring the precious heritage our founders left us, community life. They forget the fact that we are in the same family founded by Poullart des Places and Francis Libermann. To me, ethnicity and nationalism are two main factors that, if we are not careful, can contribute much to the downfall of our Spiritan mission. It is really a shock when one notices that in some countries, Spiritan mission is reserved only to Spiritans born in that country. Ethnicity and nationalism are the counter-values of Spiritan mission. What have we done to our solidarity in the congregation as it was discussed during the general chapters in Itaici and in Maynooth? An instance is the situation in Cameroon. Can anyone tell us how many non-indigene confrere Spiritans are presently working in Cameroon? Where is our sense of internationality?

Another case arises when more than two Spiritan missionaries are sent to a particular place for mission. An unfortunate sight to behold two confreres running away from each other because they are not from the same place. Why can’t we practice what our forefathers have given us? What does it cost to welcome your confrere from abroad to preach the Gospel in your native place? Is the Congregation going to die? Spiritan mission is really challenged by the lack of community life among ourselves. What do our founders think looking at us from above? Finally, some of us are still thinking that the Congregation belongs to them, it is our own business in the sense that we have even managed to change the direction of Spiritan mission. They consider themselves masters of mission instead of Jesus Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit. The new trend of mission seems to be mission as no longer received but chosen. Our Spiritan mission is dying because some of us have lost the sense of belonging, have decided not to embrace our Spiritan identity.

Insecurity and Spiritan mission

This is one of the biggest challenges of Spiritan mission. Though Spiritan mission is about bringing Jesus’ message
to the ends of the earth regardless of identities, races, tribes, cultures, background, we need to acknowledge that it is not an easy task. Even the expression itself “where the Church finds it difficulty to send laborers” is signal of a serious matter. Far from being pessimistic, I am tempted to say that it is very difficult to evangelize people from another religion like Islam, or people who are still attached to their beliefs and traditions, as we can hear from Fr. Apolinaris: “In Zanzibar, it is the Christians who convert to Islam. It is tough working with people who do not trust you fully but such is the challenge and calling.”16 These are the kinds of challenges Spiritan missionaries face when doing their mission. But as we have said, Spiritan mission is not one’s business, the Holy Spirit is always ahead of us to prepare the environment. The Spiritan should just accept to empty himself, to let the Spirit take over. We should then together take the initiative to encounter and spread the Gospel among those Muslim and indigenous people. But then, to be led by the Holy Spirit is a challenge to accept.

The Problem of Street Children and Refugee Crisis

As Spiritan mission is to carry the Gospel to the most abandoned, we Spiritans are automatically challenged by the phenomenon of street children. The causes of it can be either the cost of educating the children or the crisis of broken families, especially here in Kenya.17 The Spiritan missionary must be challenged by a beggar child, street child, destitute child, exploited child, depressed child, because they are those to whom we have been sent since the beginning of our Congregation in 1703. Whenever we see them, we should always remember the first poor scholastics Poullart des Places took care of. Did they have homes at that time? Was not Poullart des Places their new father? He was just a deacon when he realized his project. How many years do you have in the Spiritan family and what have you already done? Maybe it is a call for us now to realize something in mission regarding those abandoned children because there is nowhere to escape them, they are the recipients of the Gospel.

The refugee crisis is relevant here in Africa and it needs to be addressed here as one of the challenges of Spiritan mission. There is no need to google it, we all know that most of the regions of the refugee crisis are increasing, especially here in Africa, such as South Sudan, Sierra Leone, Angola, Rwanda, Senegal, Ethiopia, Uganda, Burundi, Somalia. To remind us, the refugees are among the people to whom
our mission is directed. As Spiritans in mission, we should be challenged by them, because they are in need, they are hopeless and joyless. Our task is to bring them Jesus, the source of hope and joy. But this is not done by word of mouth. It implies commitment, solidarity, accompaniment. It is not an alternative, we have no choice in the matter, rather this is a duty to which we have been called. Fr. Patrick Roe reminds us: “This remains our task today as we find ourselves once again challenged by the movement of history which has brought the stranger to our shores.”

**Spiritan Mission and the Dictatorship of Globalization**

Intrinsically, globalization is something good. The world becomes more inter-connected. In short, it is a process by which the people of the world are incorporated into a single world. But there are some bad effects, when, for instance, it affects the sovereignty of a state, allows some people to oppress the rest, places some cultures on top and reduces the others, promotes capitalism and reduces human dignity, or when it does not promote equality in global economics. As Spiritan mission is done within this single world where people are incorporated, the Spiritan missionary is therefore challenged by that world. He will face situations in which human dignity is less valued than the economy of the state. Globalization is not something we shall think about, it has already occurred and has brought several problems that threaten the life of the powerless today. It has already turned into a problem, exactly the way Fr. Mkulima predicted: “it is still in our memories that by the end of the twentieth century globalization had turned world order into a problem.” Hence, Spiritan mission is already challenged by the phenomenon of globalization.

**The Growth of Urban Poverty and the Issue of Famine**

How is Spiritan mission challenged by the issues of poverty and famine? The answer is in the field where missionaries are sent for mission. The people to whom we are sent are exposed to poverty and famine, and to some extent to drought. In his missionary activity, the Spiritan should be able to uproot the causes that enslave the people and help those people get back their basic needs and rights. This is really a challenge that can be overcome if we let ourselves be led by the Holy Spirit, the agent of mission.
Some Other Challenges according to Frs. Kimaryo and Mkulima

Fr. Kimaryo and Fr. Mkulima mention other challenges to the Spiritan mission. Kimaryo writes:

The phenomenon of refugees, the tribal and ethnic wars, tribalism, injustices at all levels, mismanagement of the common good, lack of political good will, growing individualism, misappropriation of public funds, violation of human rights, bad leadership, rampant corruption, suffering from diseases such as HIV/Aids and malaria, illiteracy, laziness, the growth of urban poverty, the international debt, the commerce of arms for wars, demographic problems, women’s freedom, and modern practice of slavery.20

Fr. Mkulima emphasizes four major challenges of Spiritan mission. I summarize these as follows. First is intercultural hermeneutics that makes people understand the dynamics of living in multicultural societies and the effort Spiritans must make to penetrate the cultural world of the people they are serving. The missionary needs to understand the language and the meaning of the cultural symbols in order to mediate the word of God. Second, marketing the church, which is an invitation, a call for us Spiritans to read the signs of the times and to be attentive to the emerging trends. Third, the need to take positive options; and lastly, Spiritan pedagogy which is about how to evangelize people or communities in an integral way.21

These four challenges are very relevant in the sense that they really challenge the Spiritan in how to integrate the culture of the people to whom he has been sent, how to read the signs of times in terms of decision making, as directed by Francis Libermann; lastly, they impact how we as Spiritans evangelize the people we are sent to and how we consider the place of the Holy Spirit in mission.

THE FUTURE OF SPIRITAN MISSION

Because of the above challenges, it is objectively very difficult to predict a positive future for Spiritan mission as the world is getting spoiled by the rise of globalization, in the sense that people are more interested in what is happening in the USA and China than in what the priest preached in today’s Mass. But the missionary is still the one who can bring them back to the church. The success and failure of the mission is the missionary himself as we can
The success and failure of the mission is the missionary himself.

The success and failure of the mission is the missionary himself.读K. Paul: “In all formation to mission, the person of the evangelizer is the secret to the success or failure of mission.” However, for the future of Spiritan mission, we need to point out the following conditions.

Living Spiritan Solidarity

For the future of our mission, we need, first of all, to strengthen ourselves by revisiting what Itaici (33.1; 33.2.1; 35.4) and Maynooth (Introduction 4.24-4.26) say: solidarity is also lived within the congregation. We all know from our founders that community life and solidarity are the two major pillars of our Spiritan mission. What can the future of our mission without those two pillars? We need to accept that a confrere from another country can bring something new and constructive to my native province. This is what Fr. Mkulima refers to as updating the mission behavior. We need to develop the spirit of openness and stop categorizing or choosing the confrere we want to live with.

Formation of missionaries

From the challenges we just talked about, we all know that theological studies are not enough for the survival of our congregation as far as its mission within the mission of the church is concerned. We really need to form, prepare, and train our missionaries in several fields where human existence is threatened, and that before they are sent on mission. For sure, theology alone will not help unless they are in a place where there none of the above challenges exist. I propose one way of training future missionaries: we could give confreres in initial formation the possibility of studying something else while they are studying theology. Some can specialize in inter-religious dialogue, mechanics, electricity, plumbing, and others in agriculture, soldering, finance, education, leadership and management, counselling, health care, etc. In short, specialization or professionalism will be very useful for the missionary to overcome some potential challenges encountered in mission. This program can be implemented during initial formation time or the year after.

Constructing a Spiritan JPIC Spirituality

As the phenomenon of globalization tends to unite countries around the world in terms of politics, economics, culture, and even in the environment, there is a necessity to develop a Spiritan spirituality of Justice and Peace and Integrity of Creation. For sure, the world is wounded, and some countries are still affected by what happened in the
past, and because of that, they refuse to embrace the process of unification. For instance, South Sudan is hesitating to join the East African Community (EAC) because they have been oppressed for so many years. For that particular case, we need Spiritan missionaries, well trained in JPIC, to live with them, talk with and listen to them, and even make them understand Jesus’ way of forgiveness and reconciliation.

**Attention to Emerging Trends**

This is not the time for priests to be comfortably seated on their chairs in their offices waiting for some generosity from the Christians. We no longer live in the era when Christians respected the Bible or were passionate in listening to the priests. Of course today, we still find some Christians doing that. Rather, we are in a time of change led by the phenomenon of globalization. Spiritans really need to read the “signs of the times,” we need to be very attentive and responsive when some matters arise. Again, Fr. Mkulima presents some cases that I find very relevant today and even for the future: “How to deal with the issues of divorce? What is the pastoral care given to homosexuals and lesbians? How do we deal with the prostitutes? How to handle the issues of rich but corrupt people in the parish?” We need to be ready to face any matter arising from the people to whom we are sent to preach the Good News.

**CONCLUSION**

This article reviewed the topic of Spiritan mission with a focus on its challenges and future. Beginning from our founders’ ideas of mission, and visiting some conciliar and post-conciliar documents and some Spiritan documents, we observed that Spiritan mission shares the mission of the church in general, but has some particularities: it is directed to the poor, the most abandoned, and the marginalized; it is focused on where the church finds difficulty to send laborers. Spiritan mission has its origin in the *missio Dei*, with solidarity and community life being the two main pillars of mission.

Concerning the challenges of Spiritan mission, we noticed many but not all: ethnicity and nationality within the congregation, insecurity in mission, the dictatorship of globalization, the challenge of street children and the refugee crisis, injustices in treating others, mismanagement of the common good, rampant corruption, lack of political good will. And for the future, we said that we need solidarity.
lived in the congregation, and that missionaries need to be formed for different areas of life. We also need to construct or develop our Spiritan spirituality of JPIC, and lastly, we need to read the “signs of times” as far as pastoral issues are concerned.

Jean Maturin Mougheney, C.S.Sp.
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Abbreviations of Church Documents

AG Vatican II Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity, Ad Gentes Divinus, 7 Dec. 1965.

EN Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii nuntiandi, 1975.


Abbreviations of Spiritan Documents

SRL The Spiritan Rule of Life, 2013.


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Koren, Henry, Essays on the Spiritan Charism and on the
**Spiritan History.** Bethel Park: Spiritus Press 1990.

——. *To the Ends of the Earth.* Duquesne: Duquesne University Press, 1983.


**Endnotes**

1AG, no. 2.
2Koren, *To the Ends of the Earth,* 10.
3Ibid., 15-16.
4Koren, *Essays,* 21. Fr. Hérard was the last surviving Spiritan missionary of the 18th century.
5Cleary, *Spiritan Life and Mission,* 22.
6See Burke, *No Longer Slaves,* 108.
7See *Spiritan Anniversary Diary 1703-2003,* 19.
8GS, no. 3.
9EN, no. 66.
10Ibid., no. 69.
12Ibid., 31.
13Itaici, nos. 4, 6-7.
14Maynooth, 18.
15Ibid., 99-100.
17I credit this information from an interview of some of natives here in Kenya.
18Roe, “Refugees and the Challenge of Horizons,” 104.
19Mkulima, Ethics in the Age of Globalization, 173.
20Kimaryo, Venerable Fr. Libermann, 78-79.
21See Mkulima, 150 Years of Successful Evangelization, 33-37.
23Mkulima, 150 Years of Successful Evangelization, 42.
Marc Botzung, C.S.Sp.
Marc Botzung is currently the provincial of France. He has been interested in interreligious dialogue since his overseas training in Algeria (1987–89) where he met a deeply islamized society and the rise to power of political Islam. After graduating from the Pontifical Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies in Rome, he became missionary in the Islamic Republic of Mauritania (1997–2008). Spiritan Coordinator for relations with Muslims (2006–2015), he was also member of the Commission for Islam of the Episcopal Conference of West Africa, while teaching at the Institute for Islamo-Christian Formation, Bamako, Mali, and at the Institut Catholique de Paris.

Translated from French by Roberta Hatcher.

**Spiritan Commitment in Interreligious Dialogue: A Look at the Road Traveled**

**Introduction**

Thirty years ago a Spiritan confrere asked me what kind of mission I was planning to engage in. I told him about my interest in a strongly Muslim context, which had originated and grown over the course of my internship in Algeria (1987–89). He told me that this type of mission was not part of the congregation’s mission, that I would do better to join the White Fathers or accept a more Spiritan mission. This exchange later caused me to reflect on what the congregation’s mission may have been in the past and the developments that led us to integrating interreligious dialogue as an important dimension of our mission today. We have come a long way in the congregation (though perhaps not everywhere!), in the church and, of course, in the world. That said, let me add that our congregation has discerned the “signs of the times” in the past and discerns them today, and that interreligious dialogue is part of what “the Spirit says to the churches” at this time. This discernment along the way and in our history has consequences for the mission of our congregation today.

**Some Flashes from the Distant Past**

Fr. Libermann’s letter to King Eliman of Dakar is one of the few, perhaps only sources, written by one of our founders to a non-Christian political and religious authority.1 The tone is polite and respectful, the form is simple. The attitude is positive and has a statesmanlike impact. The tone is close to that described when the first Spiritans arrived in Zanzibar where they earned the esteem of the Sultan.

Another period in history led me to consult the *General Directory of Missions*, written by Bishop Le Roy, former superior general, and published in 1930 by his successor, Bishop Le Hunsec. This book, sent to Spiritans throughout the world to provide guidelines for the various situations in their life and their apostolate, contains a description of the public that the missionary will meet. Number 66 refers to Muslims. Bishop Le Roy begins with a global view: “Islam is a bloc whose religion is the cement and which takes man in his individual, family, and social life: that is its strength.” He develops his point, then concludes harshly: “Islam sterilizes the land it invades.”2 He then discusses the situations of people who, taken individually, can be of divergent
tendencies. He even talks about the situation of the dying: he generally recommends not to baptize them because a clandestine baptism would not allow a Christian funeral and could lead to hostile movements against the mission. Finally, his conclusion on Muslims sheds light on the thought of the confrere I mentioned in the introduction and helped me understand his reaction: “in any case, as long as we have real unfaithful to evangelize, we should not waste our time, our sorrow, and our money on the Muslim populations: it will already be a lot to try to stop the progress of their propaganda.”

Number 67 follows, titled “Animists and Fetishists”; about these he writes:

Here we are on our true ground, the one we have long glimpsed and sought ... The workers of the Gospel will have to know the native language, the country, the evangelized tribe, their religion, and local superstitions, family and social customs, not to mention the names of the villages and their leaders. This can only be accomplished gradually but continuously, with the help of a notebook and notecards that can be used as needed for letters, reports, and ongoing studies. In any case, they will be useful to their successors.

Bishop Le Roy practiced this method himself and he was known for his ethnological works. He then addresses the attitudes to have: “Inspire respect, affection, and trust ...” Respect local customs in so far as they are good or indifferent ...

But let’s not forget that during the Second Vatican Council, Archbishop Lefebvre, who represented the Congregation of the Holy Spirit as superior general, opposed the overtures made to other religions, including a clear rejection of the texts of Dignitatis humanae on religious freedom, a text he considered to be a strong deviation from tradition, and Nostra aetate, on non-Christian religions, which is in some ways a continuation of it.

I conclude from this history leading up to the Second Vatican Council that the positions, convictions, and attitudes of the Spiritans on interreligious dialogue could vary, but that they seem to have involved simultaneously a great firmness of principles, a priori, rather negative of other religions, and behaviors on the ground that could be more
The Council’s Contribution and the Succeeding Years

It is not possible to develop here how the Second Vatican Council addressed the relationship to other believers and how that relates to a paradigm shift in the church’s relation to the world. We’ll limit ourselves to referring to the two texts mentioned above, as well as to the Encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*, published by Paul VI in 1964. The latter, in my view, provides a hermeneutical key to reading the spirit of the Council, particularly the introduction of the notion of dialogue.

I would like to recall, however, two famous phrases of the Council. First, that which opens the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, no. 1:

> The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts. For theirs is a community composed of men. United in Christ, they are led by the Holy Spirit in their journey to the Kingdom of their Father and they have welcomed the news of salvation which is meant for every man. That is why this community realizes that it is truly linked with mankind and its history by the deepest of bonds.8

This text implies solidarity with all, which also includes religious diversity, even if it is not explicitly named. Then this part of *Lumen gentium* which defines the role of the church in the world: “by her relationship with Christ, the church is like a sacrament or sign of intimate union with God and of the unity of all mankind” (no. 1). The point which seems important to me here is that the mission of the church cannot be reduced to the defense of the sole interests of a group, even a local Catholic community. But it can happen that this local community has difficulty understanding that its leader is active in a consideration or collaboration with other believers ...

Nor can we neglect the impact of a text like that which followed a Synod on Justice (1971) and where the work for justice would henceforth be declared as a “constitutive” element of the proclamation of the Gospel.
The proclamation of the Gospel is therefore done in various ways, in word and in deed.

These various texts impact the way of conceiving the mission of the church and they would gradually be accepted in the life of the congregation, which came to express the actualization of its charism in a more varied way than before. While studying the archives of Bishop Michel Bernard in the general archives of the congregation in Chevilly-Larue (France), I could see how he sought to put into practice these new recommendations in the framework of an Islamic Republic. Bernard was bishop of Mauritania from 1966 to 1973 after having been bishop in Congo (Brazzavile). He consulted and reflected with others at the regional level (West Africa) and within the congregation, then proposed original pastoral orientations for its context, providing on the one hand certain priests for pastoral service to the Christian communities (of foreign origins) and other priests called to invest in a greater knowledge of the country, its cultures, and its religion (Islam).

It should also be noted that the congregation has had several personalities who worked for interreligious dialogue to become part of the Spiritan mission, often combining field experience with theological or pastoral reflection. I will mention in particular: René You (Algeria), Raymond Zimmermann (Mauritius), John O’Brien (Pakistan), Robert Ellison (The Gambia), Patrick Holland (Senegal), but we could also include those, probably more numerous, who expressed a deep interest in meeting with traditional religions.

The New Spiritan Rule of Life

This theological work coupled with pastoral experience in the field made it possible to incorporate interreligious dialogue as an integral part of the congregation’s mission in the edition of the Spiritual Rule of Life (SRL), the content of which was discussed during of the general chapter of 1986. The relevant numbers are the following:

- SRL 13.1: “We take as our own the points that the church is currently stressing in mission: ... mission as dialogue.” The argument is strong because it does not situate dialogue (understood here as interreligious) as a means, but as a possible goal of the mission!
- SRL 15.3: “In certain circumstances it is not possible for us to preach the gospel by word. In such cases our
motivation is the conviction that the Holy Spirit is already present and that our presence is witness and service in the name of the gospel for the Kingdom (Ad gentes, 6).” This article seems to me to directly target the experience of Spiritans present in a very strongly Islamized context such as Algeria or Mauritania. The inscription of these experiences in the Rule of Life therefore authenticates their missionary reality as truly Spiritan.

- SRL 16.3: “We try in dialogue to co-operate honestly with the leaders and the faithful of other religions as well as with those who do not believe in God. We put our trust in the Holy Spirit, leading both us and them ‘to the complete truth’ (John 16:13).”

- It is also worth mentioning SRL 16.1: “So that the Christian witness may become integrated in the culture, reach people from within and become a force for liberation in their contemporary history, we strive in every way we can for a fruitful coming together of local cultural and religious traditions with the gospel of Christ.” This article is probably aimed primarily at the relationship with traditional religions, but it does not exclude a fruitful dialogue with the great religious traditions of humanity. This dialogue sometimes deals with relatively external elements, but we must also see in this text the allusion to these many inner dialogues that are lived in believers confronted to the very depths of themselves by various memberships, allegiances or convictions.

**Major Changes in Religions Around the World**

Since the time of the Council, several developments have radically transformed the world, especially with regard to religions, and this had an impact on the congregation’s way of thinking. These include the end of the grip of the Marxist and atheistic paradigm which presented religions as systems of oppression that were inexorably coming to their end; a strong demographic growth which continues to upset the world religious balances through migrations; and finally, within Islam, profound changes still in progress: the emergence of a political Islam after the Iranian revolution (1979), the diffusion of a Wahhabi Islam thanks to the oil money of the Gulf countries, and the ever more radical developments of ultra-violent millenarian groups (al-Qaeda, Daesh, Boko Haram, Ash-Shabab, etc.). The Islam of today is no longer that of the 1970s.
Obviously among the recent religious changes we should also mention are growing secularization, especially but perhaps not exclusively in the West; the formidable vitality of the Protestant revivalist churches; and the impact of the internet and current communications on religion.

Spiritan International Meetings Devoted to Interreligious Dialogue and Some Publications

Several international meetings were organized by the congregation to share experiences, to learn about people and situations, and to integrate the dimension of interreligious dialogue into the concrete life of the congregation. Several of these meetings gave rise to publications.\(^{11}\) Recall in particular:

- Dakar (Senegal), July 1986, “Session on Mission and Islam,” bringing together confreres from Algeria, Mauritania, Senegal, Gambia, Nigeria, and Mauritius.\(^ {12} \)
- Chevilly-Larue (France), November 1991, “Spiritual Encounter on First Evangelization,” which largely covered the reality of traditional religions.\(^ {13} \)
- Banjul (Gambia), July 2002, Symposium “The Spiritans and Islam.”\(^ {14} \)
- Rome (Italy), September 2011, “Meeting on Interreligious Dialogue and Dialogue with Cultures.”\(^ {15} \)

The 1989 Dakar meeting had initiated a process of exchange and mutual support for confreres living in Islamized contexts. The Banjul symposium occurred a few months after the events of September 11, 2001. It had global dimensions (now with participants from Europe, the Philippines, etc.) and further integrated the rise of political Islam with its violent expressions in various locations, including Nigeria and Algeria. It also noted that the Spiritan commitment to the relationship with Islam was now widely accepted in the congregation. The meeting in Rome went beyond the Islamic framework to open up to wider interreligious horizons, such as the meeting of cultures. It also incorporated critical views on religious expressions and formulated concrete proposals that were then largely adopted by the 2012 General Chapter in Bagamoyo.

This critical look deserves to be maintained in order to not spill over into naivete and illusions. I therefore recall a few phrases:
This focus also highlights how religious practices can themselves be sources of oppression and marginalization. It’s no longer a question of simply knowing the situations, but instead of having a critical look at these operations in order to challenge them and become advocates for the poor. Obviously this also concerns life in the church (clericalism, communitarianism, exploitation). To be credible, interreligious dialogue cannot limit itself to ideas or speeches. It involves the transformation of everyday life and the improvement of people’s life conditions. Common initiatives can be many: development projects, poverty alleviation, environmental protection and reforestation, maintenance work and public sanitation, etc. Finally, if dialogue is a spirit and a way of life, our daily life and our way of working say more about ourselves than our words. Are our methods dialogue or not?16

My Experience as Spiritan Coordinator for Dialogue with Muslims

The Banjul meeting (2002) called for the appointment of a confere to establish a network between the participants and more broadly with all Spiritans involved in the encounter with Muslims. René You was chosen and began its realization (2002-2006). The development of the internet began to facilitate contacts and the dissemination of information. Particular attention was paid to the question of specialized training, with research into places likely to welcome confreres invested or ready to invest in the Islamic-Christian dialogue.

I succeeded him in this responsibility and I sent out four to six annual messages using a contact list and a specific email address (csspislam@gmail.com). The distributed content included shared experiences, various texts (including the text circulated annually by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue on the occasion of ‘Ayd al-Adha / Tabaski, more rarely the dissemination of a video, etc. I stopped sending messages in 2015, when I was elected provincial of France, no longer having the time needed for this work. Following the general chapter of Bagamoyo, the general council had already proposed that we broaden the topic and the circle of correspondents to include all interreligious dialogue, but I resisted this appeal which exceeded my knowledge and abilities.
What conclusions can I draw from this experience? It is certainly useful to have a minimum of coordination between Spiritans working in interreligious dialogue. Indeed, this allows us both to collect and distribute useful information on a fairly large scale (about 200 addresses during my time). Translation of texts (French and English) could, however, prove difficult. We gave priority to establishing a distribution list of interested confreres rather than sending it to everyone, in order not to make the information so general as to render it useless. We therefore focused on a specific audience, though some confreres were not directly in a situation of dialogue. A coordinator allows for the initiation of newcomers in this area, through advice or the sharing of information already disseminated previously.

It seems to me necessary that the published content return regularly to the Christian and spiritual foundations of dialogue and to our motivations, because there are many resistances both among the Christians we encounter and among other believers. As Bishop Augustine Shao of Zanzibar says, working in dialogue means often going against the grain. It is tiring to do so, hence the need to develop a spirituality of dialogue that is nourished by the encounters made.

Having a coordinator finally makes it possible to remain vigilant about formation, particularly specialized training in Arabic language or Islamic studies or more general formation in interreligious dialogue. This also allows us to know if confreres are actually trained!

It is logical that the coordinator already be well informed and that this subject be part of his usual work, otherwise he will only do research for this broadcast and he won’t allow himself enough time ...

Conclusion

I’ll make four points in conclusion as well as an opening:

1. The Spiritan assembly meeting in December 2018 in Zanzibar (Tanzania) to exchange experiences of interreligious dialogue was composed of many young confreres from various backgrounds, Africans in particular. This is a clear sign that young Spiritans have invested themselves in interfaith dialogue in recent years. The initiators, frequently European, have often passed away, but today the action has been taken over from horizons far and wide.
2. The work pays. To bear fruit in the field of interreligious dialogue, staying and investing in a relationship that involves both work on the ground and study ultimately pays off. As the Gospel says: “Whoever sows sparingly, reaps sparingly. Whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.” To be interested in the language, cultures, and religion of those who welcome us expresses, more than our words can, the interest that we take in them.

3. Today we reap the fruits that have been years in the making. The appointment to cardinal of Bishops Maurice Piat from Mauritius and Dieudonné Nzapalainga of Bangui (Central Africa) signifies that the spiritual investment in interfaith dialogue is fruitful. It is now recognized by the universal church and in certain places (Belgium, France, Cameroon, Mauritania, Mauritius); such competence and know-how on the Spiritans’ part are now expected.

4. It is not religions that dialogue, it is people. To remain in dialogue it is necessary to deepen relations with certain concrete people, in a word to make friends: very simple people, poor people perhaps, or religious leaders. Without the living touch and conviviality of friendship, it is difficult to persist and continue to believe that a relationship is possible. It is therefore a question of “receiving” in these dialogues what we live with others.

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Abbreviations

I/D Information/Documentation. General Council, Rome

ND Notes et Documents relatifs à la vie et à l’oeuvre du Vénérable François Marie Paul Libermann. 16 vols.

References

Endnotes

1Letter dated January 1, 1848. A draft has also been preserved. See ND, X, 22–26. Paris, 1940.

2Directoire général des Missions, 114.

3Ibid., 115.

4Ibid.

5Here is the rest of the quote: “... making it an obligation of conscience to avoid anything that could distance us from the religion we represent; hence the need to be always just, faithful to the word given, patient, free from all anger or brutality, without rancor, without preference, and without weakness.”

6Ibid.

7His opposition to certain evolutions of the Council was not representative of the thought of all the confreres, nor even of that of the Spiritan bishops present at the Council. It is difficult to imagine, however, that he was the only one to think thus ...


9The promulgation of the new SRL was preceded by a few months by the publication of I/D 39, Rome, June 1985, “Dialogue – At the Frontiers of Evangelization” (4 pp.). This publication was probably intended for the preparation of the general chapter.

10We call millenarian some contemporary Islamic movements that develop a symbolic imaginary and action that corresponds to an understanding of the times in which we live as the end times, a time of final struggle between the forces of good and the forces of evil. In our opinion, these radical and hyper-violent movements mark a departure from the political Islam of the Muslim Brotherhood, insofar as a political vision like that of the Muslim Brotherhood is accompanied by a project of society, of progressive phases of realization, an organization into parties, the acceptance of compromises, etc.

11Three successive publications were devoted to the theme of dialogue. Two of them dealt with interreligious dialogue as we will see a document I/D 47, Rome, January 1991, will even deal with “Mission and dialogue: dialogue with the modern world” (4 pp.).


13This meeting resulted in the publication of I/D


16Final text of the Rome meeting, reproduced in the Instrumentum Laboris of the XX General Chapter, 38–39.
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did a Masters in Multimedia
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Humaines (1973) at Metz before
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After license in philosophical
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Communication is a
means of expressing the
missionary vocation of the
entire Church

MULTIMEDIA AND THE SPIRITAN MISSION TODAY

Introduction

The 2012 Bagamoyo XX General Chapter (1.10), “Be Fervent in the Spirit,” urges that “Greater use has to be made of the latest information technology, not for our own personal interests, but as a way of making ourselves known and as a means to evangelization.” Fr. John Fogarty, the superior general, commented in 2016:

New technologies have revolutionized our means of communication, and we have come to understand more clearly that our community witness – the way we live together as an international and intercultural family – is integral to our mission if we are to make credible the dream of Jesus for a new humanity.¹

This echoes Pope Francis who insists on using the media effectively in the Church’s mission: “Communication is a means of expressing the missionary vocation of the entire Church […] The revolution taking place in communication media and in information technologies represents a great and thrilling challenge; may we respond to that challenge with fresh energy and imagination as we seek to share with others the beauty of God.”²

The Focus of this Article

This article accepts the communication challenge of Pope Francis. It makes the case that in our evangelizing efforts and in making the community witness of Spiritans better known, greater attention should be given to those current trends in information technology that respond to evolving styles of acquiring knowledge of the world. It describes those evolving styles, the paradigm shift in the manner of consuming information, and the implications of all this for our evangelizing mission. Plotting how current media are adjusting to the paradigm shift, it singles out audio-visual technology as particularly apt and calls for the formation of young Spiritans in this evolving field. It posits that such communication technology works best in a team of persons with complementary expertise in the field.
External and Internal Communication: the Need for Quality

It is usual to distinguish between external communication and internal communication. External communication for purposes of evangelization addresses persons and groups in the outside world. Internal communication addresses members within the Congregation to boost their ethos and mission morale. My focus is on external communication, which because it reaches the general public, must be of high quality, both in form and content. But what is said here applies in a secondary manner to internal communication. This is because, when it comes to audio-visuals, the Internet does not distinguish internal from external communication. A video published on a site with limited access and for internal communication is published on any of the mainstream platforms, such as YouTube. Such platforms by definition are open networks and videos published in them are continually indexed by search engine robots and, with time, eventually show up in people’s Internet searches. So, quality production applies in a sense to both external and internal communication.

Our provinces traditionally rely on printed matter (especially magazines). A magazine tries to attract an outside audience and has this audience as its reason for existence. Magazines are adjusting to the trends of the time in order to draw interest and hold the readers’ attention. They are paying greater attention to the design, presentation, and look of articles; they watch their length and place illustrations and graphics according to carefully applied aesthetic and efficient rules. Yet, the subscription to these magazines continues to decrease. To more effectively reach those we target in our evangelizing efforts, we need to try something new, beside or even instead of the print media. Audio-visual technology lends us an opportunity to drive the message home. It can serve to populate and update the contents of the various province websites and social media contexts.

Communication: Printed versus Non-Printed

The younger generations perceive the world differently from their forebears. Two different kinds of perception influence our understanding of and accounting for the world. We are more or less familiar with one or the other depending on age, training, and cognitive habits. No value judgment is involved. Nor is it a question of a better or worse way of communicating. It is rather a question of linking to two different types of media. And one of these
Spiritans need to venture into this “other world” and context that young people find themselves at ease with. Media appeals particularly to young people. Spiritans need to venture into this “other world” and context that young people find themselves at ease with.

**Book versus Screen, Logic versus Emotion**

Another way of saying the same thing is to contrast print versus screen, logic versus emotion. In a civilization based on the written word, the architecture of discourse has a beginning, a middle, and an end, that is, it obeys the logic of the sentence. We have learned to think, preach, and even entertain ourselves on a structural basis of thought that is roughly “subject-verb-complement,” “thesis-antithesis-synthesis,” “introduction-development-conclusion.” This is the “Logic of the Book” or the “Logic of Discourse.” But such is no longer the intuitive habit of the younger generations who are glued to screens. For them, the “Logic of the Screen” is at play, with its audio-visual language and intuitive navigation, free of the need to follow a strongly predetermined model as in the “Logic of the Book.” This Logic of the Screen represents a 180° shift from the culture of the written-word where the logical function intervenes at the beginning. The Culture of the Screen, the culture of the digital age, is a culture where the logical function intervenes only at the end, while the emotion reigns at the starting point and must be “digested” to produce some logical function with multiple choice.

We are grappling with a paradigm shift in the realm of communication. Screens and monitors have become ubiquitous with the development of cell phones, touch screens, tablets, and laptop computers. The gap has become a gulf between certain forms of the discourse of the church and that of younger people. The latter relate better to a new form of discourse informed by fast-paced, multi-layered, and ever-changing, emotion-based information flows. We attempt to engage them via what looks to them like an archaic and boring “Logic of the Book” that they intuitively tend to reject for their more familiar “Logic of the Screen.” This means that, communication-wise, Spiritans and the church, on one hand, and the younger generations, on the other, exist in two differing realities of knowledge. Spiritans and the church are more generally in the “Logic of the Book/Discourse/Speech,” while the youth has moved from the culture of the written-word to that of the digital age, the “Logic of the Screen.”
Paradigm Shift: Why attempt a Response?

A hundred and fifty years of cinema and seventy-five years of television have accustomed spectators to expect a certain type of information delivery. Cinema and television impact the heart before the head, the emotion before the mind. We said that this new digital age relies on a fast-paced, multifaceted audio and visual stimulus. It often means that many strands of information are simultaneously experienced. Modern news-casting is an example; the same screen might have video, scrolling text, and a verbal voice-over or an anchor speaking. We are even on the cusp of a new era where information immersed in virtual reality may already be accessed in some departments of knowledge, such as education, medicine, museums, the reconstruction of archaeological or historical sites, even the sale of objects in stores, etc. This virtual reality will become more and more accessible as technology evolves and as the habit of being in a situation of “emotion-toward-logic” versus “logic-toward-emotion” becomes increasingly common.

For us Spiritans, it is less a question of finding a bridge to the screen-informed world than speaking and acting from within it. To do this, we really have to engage in being present on screens.

Various Ways of Meeting the New Demands in Communication

Most schools, parishes, and institutions now run a website. Publishers of magazines, websites, and Powerpoint presenters, as intimated above, are trying their best to meet the new demands by countering the tedium of text-intensive writing. Websites have fewer long texts, are dotted with bold titles, subheadings, and short paragraphs, with a “Read more” button that allows the user to click and get more details for rather long paragraphs. Such less directive and more attractive websites emphasize graphic design, use of images, charts, and video.

The same goes for other media like Facebook. Photo-editing software like Photoshop allows an ordinary skilled user to superimpose images from archives. Use of
sound effects and animations (of texts, multiple images, infographics) enhance the reader’s experience. Pictures from the archives can be given new life through such methods. Voice-over commentaries may elicit the appropriate emotion, background music may create the appropriate atmosphere.

The Making of Short Videos

Since websites can be created by anybody using a CMS (Content Management System) platform like WordPress and many others, short videos stand out in modern multimedia information. Spiritan multimedia training should be oriented towards the production of such short videos. What is still a problem is regularly updating websites with new content, and any website not regularly updated is soon abandoned. Thus, the making of short videos is only a first step towards a better use of the “latest information technology.” A second and perhaps more important step is constant updating. Videos are very good ways of making these updates, besides they provide ever-new content that is accessible to the screen and thus to the emotion-driven generation. Audio-visuals help websites make the transition from printed text to screen, from the “logic towards emotion” to the “emotion towards logic” contents.

Audio-visual Quality

As noted above, all videos, regardless of their internal or external destination will be reachable from their distribution platform. Hence the insistence on quality (sound, image, framing, and editing) of any videos published online. Quality of form attracts, poor quality repels. When viewing news, scrolling text does not captivate, even if the content of the information and the music chosen are excellent. Even when the scrolling text content is better than that offered by a team of TV news professionals, people prefer the quality of presentation they are used to.

The cooperation of different professionals allows for better effects - well-lit studios with several cameramen taking shots from various angles, multiple mixer tables, sound effects etc. This is what we are sub-consciously choosing, since cinema and television have shaped tastes and expectations in terms of form quality. And teamwork enhances quality. Multimedia production left to a single individual cannot reach the minimum level of quality demanded by the public. For reasons explained above, it is
likely to be rejected and the rejection may have little to do with content, rather the form of delivery.

We can hardly attain the level of technology and skills necessary for the production of documentaries, films, or newscasts. Yet a certain level of quality is obligatory in our external multimedia communication. Thus, Spiritans working in multimedia need good professional training. One thing that may give us pause is the cost of equipment. Yet, the cost of filming equipment which used to be prohibitive, is decreasing constantly. Besides, training and forming Spiritans in multimedia production and narrative technique can promote Spiritan mission in various ways and help make the Congregation and its activities better known.

A few Statistics

On YouTube in 2019, one billion videos were seen per day. This illustrates a clear predominance of video media on the Net. The following predictions of video marketing use are a good example of this predominance.

-on average, the French people each watched 190 videos in January 2014 (more than 16 hours).

-59.7% of videos were viewed online in 2008, this increased to 78% in 2014.

-85% of French Internet users saw at least one video on the Internet during the month of January 2014 (40.5 million, 66% of the population).

- video on Demand (VOD) will multiply three times in 2016.

- it will take 6 million years to watch all videos downloaded in one month in 2016.

-when someone looks for your name on the Internet, they prefer to click on a video: the chance of viewing a video than reading written content is twice greater.

- 36% of videos viewed on the Internet are advertisements.

- in 2019, 80% of global data traffic will be linked to video.⁴
The Production of Multimedia as Part of the Mission of the US Province

The US Provincial and his Council recognized multimedia as an important part of the mission of the province. I was mandated to produce short videos illustrating our mission and works. As the creation and maintenance of the website by a coordinated team is facilitated by the choice of a proper CMS platform, I concentrated since December 2013 on the production of short videos, working with multimedia professional, Dr. Dennis Woytek, a retired (2016) professor from Duquesne University, who has vast experience in radio and video production. The provincial council allocated a budget for equipment, travel, and other related expenses. Over thirty videos were produced. About half dealt with Spiritan works; the other half dealt mostly with events at Duquesne University. The former required the long chain of pre-production, production, and post-production processes; the latter did not involve this heavy chain of production.

The videos have been published on the US Province website. We could not distribute the videos on other sites where they could be useful, mainly because of lack of time and shortage of staff in this less than minimal team. A further team member could do this dissemination work via social media and liaison with those responsible for websites and communication in Spiritan Provinces, communities and for projects, again without the need for specialized training in the field of video production.

Production ideas are numerous. We have material for future videos on Spiritan Life (for example on Lay Spiritan Associates), and for historical Spiritan videos – see for example, the video at: https://youtu.be/163vx6DpId8. These short documentary-style videos describe Spiritan communities and their pastoral work in the US based on the theme “See How They Love Each Other.” An example is the video, ‘The Spiritans in Baltimore’ (2015 – at: https://youtu.be/jiwi4Y8ZqNc), about two Afro-American parishes served by the Spiritans. It attracted more than 800 viewers (across different platforms) and allowed the Spiritans of St. Edward and St. Gregory to raise funds from different sources.

Short videos could also highlight areas such as: Spiritan individual community or institution (school-, parish-, or mission-based) projects; projects in the planning stage (such as the planned building of a school or a maternity hospital);
projects showing the needs of a population and the worries of its Spiritan pastor. People who feature in them may also find them useful as a resource for their pastoral activities or fund raising. Videos can be used to thank donors for their help or ask for more help to finish constructions or buy equipment or to show how well the project serves the local population. Finally, short videos can feature the life and history of the founders and important figures of the Congregation. These must be thought out very carefully, including how to illustrate various aspects. For example, I plan a future video of Libermann’s stay in Lyon after the time spent in Rennes, at the beginning of his journey to Rome, as this is a significant moment in his life as well as a decisive moment for the Congregation.

A Video Production Team

As I have said before, all this is better done by a video production team who reside in a community. Linking various members with IT skills scattered around the globe in virtual encounters through video-conferencing will not do. Unity of time and space is ideal in this matter. Linking colleagues scattered around the world may be a good thing for different companies and for meetings about specific agendas. But as religious we need community life with sharing of daily prayer and work that the unity of space and time offers. Unity of space facilitates the collection of data for given productions, often subject to very tight schedules before and after production. It facilitates the proper integration of skills and knowledge and the interactions needed to produce quality videos. Of course, teleconferencing services can be used to connect, for example, with archivists or colleagues who are specialized in the history of the Congregation, or to discuss a particular point with members of other communities before sending someone to the field to collect footage and data essential for production, etc.

Conclusion

Print media can still give effective communication about our Congregation that highlights its strength and originality in the Church, its internationality and focus on the most abandoned and rejected by society. But in an era where screen-based communication is omnipresent, and the younger generations are emotion-based, communication must adapt to the way the general public receives most of its daily information. It must observe the paradigm shift noted
above, from logic and book to emotion and screen. And one of the best ways of doing this is through short videos.

Taking effective part in modern mission requires the Congregation to train some members in the use of the “language” that engages people today. This language encompasses the effective use of images and sounds within the context of a constantly evolving media. The development of photography, radio, cinema, and television, with their mass distribution, gradually began to take shape in the mid-nineteenth century, at the very time when our Congregation experienced its Libermannian growth. We have to continue to grow and to develop our ability to communicate effectively as Spiritans.

We are called to the same kind of humble learning as any missionary. Missionaries have to learn new languages as if they were children, experiencing once more all the frustrating stages of dependence on others, learning to slowly refine their understanding of new languages, and that, often without the help of textbooks or dictionaries! It is all part of the effort to become “Negro with the Negroes”7 and share the history of the people whose culture and destiny we have embraced for the sake of Christ. Exactly the same demand is being made today by the new information technologies and multimedia.

Jean-Michel Gelmetti, C.S.Sp.
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Endnotes

1Rome, Spiritan Celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the Generalate in Rome.
248th World Communications Day, 2014.
3This is how many Spiritan videos meant for internal communication have become publicly available. Even those on a password-protected Spiritan website ultimately end up indexed by engines such as Google. The very nature of the Internet delivers them to the general public even though they were not so intended.
5According to Honest Munishi, C.S.Sp. (Tanzanian), the Pastor of St Edwards, the then (2015) Ambassador of Tanzania in the USA who saw the video allotted some
funds to the parish; he mentioned also other donations.

6 I put up one such about Claude François Poullart des Places, at:https://youtube/5J6dAal0wQg.

7 Francis Libermann in a letter to his confreres in Dakar and Gabon, November 19, 1847. See Spiritan Anthology, 281-287, here 287.
PRESS RELEASE.

COMPETITION ON SPIRITAN MISSION TODAY

As part of the final phase of its Animation Plan, the general council asked the Center for Spiritan Studies, Duquesne University, Pittsburgh (CSS) to organize an essay competition on Spiritan Mission Today among professed Spiritans in formation worldwide.

The four judges appointed were Paul Coulon, C.S.Sp (Paris), Pedro Iwashita, C.S.Sp. (São Paulo), Raymond Jung, C.S.Sp. (Paris), and Marc Whelan, C.S.Sp. (Dublin).

Entries were received from Spiritan candidates all over the world. In a first round, each judge chose a first, second, and third among the essays. CSS tabulated the results and sent back the top three to the judges. In a second round, each judge chose a first and second that resulted in a tie. In a third round, the scores came down to a tie again.

SHARING THE FIRST PRIZE

Maturin Jean Moughen
Nationality: Gabon
Formation House: Langata, Nairobi
Circumscription: Gabon

Phung Manh Tien
Nationality: Vietnam
Formation House: Manila, Philippines
Circumscription: Taiwan-Vietnam-India

Each receives a tablet or cache of theology books and an award certificate signed by the Superior General and the Dean, McAnulty College of Liberal Arts, Duquesne University. Their essays will be published in a forthcoming issue of Spiritan Horizons and on the CSS website.

Director, Center for Spiritan Studies
June 25, 2019
Florentine Mallya, C.S.Sp., of the Tanzanian Province, is the Coordinator for Formation and Education in the generalate in Rome and superior of Villa Notre Dame, the Spiritan House of Studies for confreres doing specialized studies in Rome. Before that, he served on the Tanzania provincial leadership team, having been a missionary in Guinea Conakry and Senegal for thirteen years. He has a D.Min in Cross Cultural Studies from the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago (2003).

Le Roy was not just a good writer; he was also an accomplished geographer, botanist, anthropologist, and artist.
A missionary is supposed, “by his vocation, to know the physical geography of the countries he is evangelizing, which are the waterways, routes, pathways, means of communication, the obstacles, forests, deserts, and mountains. He is to study the general nature of the terrain, take account of the population density of any given location, and examine the relationships that link one people to another, one tribe to another, one family to another.”

Le Roy admirably attends to these parameters and with disarming ease in the way he recounts events along the way. In addition, this method clearly distinguishes the missionary agenda from a colonial one. It is good to bear in mind that the exploration took place just five years after the infamous Berlin Conference (1884–5) that gave juridical status and recognition to the frenetic scramble for, and partitioning of, the African continent into spheres of influence among the major European powers. Le Roy and his colleagues were keenly aware of this political reality. They stubbornly chose to stick to their missionary agenda and avoid all that could compromise it.

Le Roy had an adventurous nature. As a young missionary in Zanzibar and Bagamoyo, he had already crisscrossed a good part of the Vicariate of Zanzibar scouting for new possibilities of expansion from these “mother” missions. His gaze was constantly fixed on the interior. By the time Bishop de Courmont decided to explore Kilimanjaro, Le Roy had accumulated a rich experience and knowledge of the terrain that became a huge asset for the team.

From Zanzibar to Kilimanjaro

Part I of the book offers rich background information about Kilimanjaro, “the mountain of water,” which hitherto had been a puzzle not only to coastal Arab and Swahili traders, explorers, travelers but also to geographers.

Apart from the scientific interest and the build-up of intense political maneuvering towards the Berlin Conference, Kilimanjaro had also awakened missionary interest. The Anglican Church Missionary Society paved the way to Kilimanjaro for Christian missionaries from their base in Mombasa in 1885. Mgr. de Courmont who had been mulling over this project for some time, finally made up his mind in 1890.
From Zanzibar, the missionaries sailed to Mombasa where they arrived on 10 July and established an ad hoc logistical base on the outskirts of the town. Unfortunately, they could not leave from there as early as planned. The hiccup was mainly due to the difficulty in recruiting indispensable porters.

When they finally set out on 17 July, at nine o’clock in the morning, they were unequivocal about their destination and the purpose of the journey.

Our target was Kilimanjaro. From Mombasa the shortest route, and the one which most travelers had taken, was that through Taita. But water was very scarce at that time of year, moreover, the area has already been explored, and, with the possible exception of one particular point, it does not seem to offer opportunities for missionary work. To the south we have the Digo country, which has been very little studied. If we passed through it, we could finish that part of the journey at Vanga, and, from there go on to Sambara and Pare country, Lake Jipe and Taveta. Such a journey would be twice as long as the other route; but, in making it, we would have water and food for the caravan, and we would be able to see the different areas where, sooner or later, missions must be started.3

What follows in the first part of the book is the actual trek according to the itinerary described above. Le Roy was not an abstract writer. He knew his readers and wished to engage them in every possible way. Apart from writing, he used pencil sketches to immortalize landscapes, animals, insects, plants, flowers, trees, people, villages, rivers, mountains, hills, artifacts, instruments, utensils, etc. His fine eye captured little details shown in some drawings he made almost with photographic precision. On some occasions, he addressed himself directly to his public. “Reader, it is a big secret. However, if you promise me not to tell anybody. I can let you into my confidence...” He really wanted to capture their imagination and travel with them to exotic places where they had never been.

The missionaries saw a silhouette of Kilimanjaro for the first time as they were leaving the Pare mountains towards Lake Jipe. They saw it “unveiled” just before sunset on the eve of their departure for Taveta from the lakeside encampment. Le Roy was poetic.
What I was seeing was the sort of experience which you can never forget. There, before us, against a background of blue sky, the huge outline of the marvelous mountain stood out, as though it were the work of a vigorous artist. I could see two summits: the one on the left, somewhat rounded and dazzling in its brightness, which is called Kibo, the African giant, which raises its snow-covered head to more than 6,000 meters; the other one on the right, closer to us, jagged, dark, and rather frightening, with only a few white patches - this is Mawenzi which is only 5,300 meters above sea level, but which from Lake Jipe appeared to be as high as Kibo. Because of the position where I was, the plateau which links the two summits was practically invisible. I could not see any of the details of the landscape of the massif, neither forests, nor valleys, nor individual peaks. The two craters seemed to be supported by an enormous pedestal, formed into one by the flow of lava, as though to serve as candelabra lit in the course of centuries to the glory of the Creator. Alas! It is almost the only homage that he has received in these lands, and it has been given to him by his own hand.4

Part I of the book ends in Taveta where the missionary caravan camped for two days. This was a much-anticipated stop because of its proximity to Kilimanjaro. It was also a popular site “where all the Europeans camp.” Famous travelers and explorers passed through Taveta. Le Roy was proud to declare: “But we were the first Catholic missionaries and the first Frenchmen who had the honor of pitching our camp here.”5

In Kilimanjaro

Just before the missionaries left Mombasa for Kilimanjaro, Le Roy laid bare the details about their onward journey and the purpose of the exploration. The feasibility studies they were to carry out did not exclude other areas but Kilimanjaro remained their prime target. Therefore, part two of the book covers a range of elements of the missionaries’ program in Kilimanjaro in a very extensive and well-researched manner. Le Roy gives an update about this program:

We have now seen the most interesting and the most heavily populated districts of Chagga land: Marangu, Kilema, Kirua, Moshi, Uru, Kibosho, Machame,
Useri, and Rombo on the east. We did not go to Kibong’oto on the west but got reliable information on it: but we have yet to complete all the items in our program.\textsuperscript{6}

If the missionaries’ programme was rolling out as expected, it was partly due to the dedication and sacrifice of humble people like Nderingo, a young man from Kilema who asked to join the missionary caravan in Mombasa. In Le Roy’s words, “It was Providence that had sent him to us missionaries.”\textsuperscript{7} He became the right-hand man of the missionaries and he served in different capacities as a “guide, interpreter, and intelligence gatherer.”\textsuperscript{8} He was a sort of a “hidden figure” considering the tenacious\textsuperscript{9} role he played in convincing the missionaries to visit Kilema, where the first mission station was eventually founded in Kilimanjaro. He provided them with unequalled loyalty of service all along. It was, thanks to Nderingo, that the missionaries met the first Chagga chief, Fumba, with whom Le Roy made the famous blood pact of brotherhood in Kilema.

The one-month period spent in Kilimanjaro was hectic but equally rewarding in many ways. To begin with, Mgr. de Courmont’s most cherished wish became a reality when he celebrated Mass at the foot of Kilimanjaro on Assumption day, 15\textsuperscript{th} August 1890. Then they were able to travel extensively around the mountain in the midst of Chagga wars and managed to spend countless hours of conversations with local chiefs and the local people. Some of these encounters helped to adjust their program taking into consideration the local reality. Writes Le Roy, “Our conversations with Mandara, as well as the knowledge we had acquired from other sources, had convinced us that
only by visiting the western side of the mountain could we claim to have explored Kilimanjaro thoroughly.”

One of the items at the top of the missionaries’ agenda was to climb Mount Kilimanjaro. Everyone was excited about this:

Mgr. de Courmont himself wanted to go further up “as high as one can go.” We were there at the foot of the biggest altar which God has given to this continent: we were under an obligation to go and offer the holy sacrifice of the Mass there and pray for the whole of Africa. “Introibo ad altare Dei, ad Deum qui laetificat juventutem meam (I shall go in to the altar of God, to God who brings joy to my youth).”

The climb to the “roof of Africa” was not just a religious pilgrimage; it was partly an adventure but also a veritable scientific expedition. As they climbed, Le Roy observed, compared and contrasted the geographical, botanical, and zoological data he had gathered about the massif. He also collected a variety of flora and fauna specimens destined for scientific research.

There is no doubt that he had taken time to gather a lot of information about Chagga land and its population. He was very aware that they were not going to reinvent the wheel. That is why he alluded to stories, reports, and writings of travelers, other missionaries, coastal Arab and Swahili traders, but he did not feel obliged to follow their views. The reader will also find later some of Le Roy’s accounts in Part III of the book, which could be compared to field work study carried out by a serious researcher.

The convergence of two key factors did not make it easy to choose a secure location for the founding of a first mission in Kilimanjaro. On the one hand, there was political posturing over Chagga land among local chiefs in their struggle for hegemonic control over smaller chiefdoms. On the other hand, it was the beginning of the establishment of German colonial rule. However, the timing of their visit during the period of Chagga wars did not prevent the missionaries from pushing ahead with their agenda, as is evident in Part II of the book.

From Kilimanjaro to Zanzibar

Part III of the book covers the return journey down to the coast at the beginning of September 1890. The missionaries opted for a completely different itinerary back,
which was rather challenging as they would be obliged
to pass through unchartered territories. Nevertheless, it
was a worthy experience because it fitted well with the
overall objective of the exploration. While on the way,
Mgr. de Courmont would seek in advance the guarantee of
protection of the planned missionary caravan to Kilimanjaro
from local chiefs. Another spin off benefit is that the
experience gained during the journey would be useful for the
logistical preparation of the new caravan.

A decisive duty imposed itself upon the missionaries
before they started off on their return journey. They had
to decide on the place where the first Catholic mission
in Kilimanjaro would be founded. This was not a
straightforward decision. They carefully thought about it,
asked for advice and took time to pray about it. Finally, Mgr.
de Courmont gave the instructions. Fr. Gommenginger, the
would-be founder of the mission, was to stay behind in the
meantime under the protection of M. d’Eltz. Depending
on the political situation, Plan A was to establish the
first mission at Machame, plan B at Kilema. Moshi was
eliminated from the choice, perhaps due to the presence of
the Anglican Mission. Bishop de Courmont and Le Roy
were to take the road down to the coast following a different
itinerary, which would allow them to explore lesser known
territories and to encounter different populations on the
way. They aimed to reach Bagamoyo to the south east via
Mandera in a timely fashion.

The missionaries spent 4 days at the government post
in Lower Arusha, courtesy of M. d’Eltz, in preparation for
the long trek towards the coast. On 13th September, the
missionaries had reorganized the caravan and started the
journey towards Ruvu where a touching scene took place just
before they crossed the river. It was time to bid farewell to
the good company of M. d’Eltz, Dr. Baxter, Father Auguste
Gommenginger, the two Catholic children and Nderingo.
On 14th September they reached the foot of the Pare
mountains on the western side. Remember that they had
already travelled on the opposite side of the same mountains
from Gonja on the way up to Lake Jipe in the north. Now
they had to negotiate their way southward for five good days,
passing through dense, thorny bush-land, between five to
eight hours a day to navigate around the Pare mountains.
The Maasai seem to have been unique travelers in that lonely
land.
Le Roy dedicates all of chapter 26 to the Maasai, looking at almost all the aspects of their lives from birth to death. As they continued along, the missionaries kept coming across people from other ethnic groups such as the Zigua and Ndorobo hitherto unknown to them. They had an eventful encounter with the famous Sambara chief, Semboja. The missionaries’ party moved on. They marched southward on the plain along the western side of the Usambara mountains past Korogwe to Maurwi. The people they encountered, for example, the Bondei, carried out farming activities, used money, dressed in linen and spoke Swahili. Islam was already present in these areas given the proximity to the coast, but it had not taken root. It is interesting that Le Roy continually saw the possibility for missionary work among different ethnic groups which they met. Personally, he felt that missionary work could have been successful among these people but for the fact that there was lack of personnel and funds to achieve it.

To reach Bagamoyo they could either take the Pangani or the Zigua route. They chose the latter and parted ways with the group of Salim. Here is the reason for the option which they took:

While the route to Zigua is much longer, it permitted us to learn about a region, still little known, even though it is not far from the coast. Moreover, we would have the pleasure of meeting en route Selemani’s brother, one of the big men of the region, and, further on, to visit our mission at Mandera.

The pause at Mandera was brief. The traverse through the Doe country brought sad memories to Le Roy who, in the company of a colleague during one of his previous exploratory voyages in the interior, had witnessed one of their porters being literally eaten with “pepper and salt” in front of them. That is why he called the Doe, “a land of hills and cannibalism.”

Bagamoyo at last! The missionary caravan crossed the river on a boat and soon reached the outskirts of Bagamoyo. The coconut palms of the mission beckoned the termination of their long and arduous journey to and from Kilimanjaro. The scene of the triumphant entry was carefully prepared. The porters knew how best to stage and dramatize the scene not only by the noise of rifle shots but also in the way they donned traditional accoutrements which gave them an impressive exotic look before the mesmerized local
population. Le Roy captured this memorable moment:

We entered the mission majestically and slowly. Even Mgr. de Courmont had to participate. He was at the very end of the procession, holding his pastoral staff in his hands. I mean of course the pastoral staff that the chief of Same gave him. Then, at a given signal, these valiant porters, who had tried our patience during the three months of the journey, but to whom now everything is forgiven, broke into a Maasai song, with tremendous success, which gained them enormous admiration from the passers-by. People ran up, rifle shots were fired, different bursts of cheering mingled, the bells were rung, the chapel was opened, and we gave our thanks to God .... The journey was over.20

Forty Years After

Le Roy added a postscript later to inform the readers about the outcome of the expedition they made to Kilimanjaro. He looked back with a sense of satisfaction and gratitude. The success of the courageous attempt to found a Catholic Mission in “a distant region of Africa” was a dream come true. The update is about the people mentioned in the previous pages and about places and events that were linked to the entire account. He comments:

If we count up the steps taken by a missionary in an unevangelized land, some are fruitless, some are wasted, but this cannot be said of all of them. He will experience sufferings, sometimes from things, sometimes from beasts, sometimes from human beings, sometimes from all of these together. St. Paul made this point in his own time. But when, later on, he looks back on those unexplored roads which he watered with his sweat, he sees light breaking through the darkness which had reigned there. He forgets the miseries of the past and only remembers the delightful experiences, he has only smiles for his present situation, and he steps forward into the future, happy with his lot and profoundly grateful to God.21

Overall, it must be agreed that the book is permeated with great missionary fervor which could still be contagious in our day, notwithstanding the lapse of time. The story ends with a passionate appeal worth heeding: This (evangelization) is our work: come, young men, replace the
missionaries grown old, who, before they fall asleep, seek new hands to whom they can entrust their flag. Glory to God! And peace to men of good will!²²

Today, this book can rightly be considered an artifact of great missionary and historical value. It records unique raw information about people and places hard to source elsewhere. The book is of particular interest to us missionaries of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit (Spiritans), because it creates a sort of historical flashback. However, this is not said with the intention of evoking feelings of nostalgia, but rather it is hoped that the reader will be edified and draw wisdom from this great missionary story as a fitting tribute to those who made personal sacrifices for this mission.

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References
Le Roy, “Exploration et mission au Zanguebar, Belgeo,”  

Endnotes
³Mission to Kilimanjaro, chapter 2.
⁴Chapter 14.
⁵Chapter 15.
⁶Chapter 20.
⁷Chapter 16.
⁸Chapter 16.
⁹Chapter 16.
¹⁰Chapter 18.
¹¹Chapter 19. The Tridentine Mass started thus.
¹²For us, M. d’Eltz was far from being an unknown quantity. He was born in Poland, of an aristocratic family, which has some members living in France. Much of his youth had been spent in Russia, in the Ural Mountains and Siberia. Later on, he came to Africa, and, when at Bagamoyo, we had had different occasions to benefit from his straightforwardness, his trustworthiness, and the integrity which marked him as a true gentleman. He had
often urged Mgr. de Courmont to commit himself to founding a mission on Kilimanjaro; but circumstances had made him postpone the project, so, as it seemed today that it must be realized, M. d’Eltz was particularly happy” (Chapter 17).

13 An amicable volunteer at the Anglican mission in Moshi.

14 Chapter 3 and Postscript.

15 “The Maasai are the only people who travel in this lonely land, and they do not bother about paths. Wearing tough sandals made of cattle skin, and carrying a big spear in their hands, they travel like a romantic poet, without money or even a pocket. The only thing that they might fear would be what worried the people of ancient Gaul: the possibility that the sky might fall on the earth” (Chapter 25).

16 Chapter 27.

17 We accepted this (the request of some ivory traders from Pangani who had asked to join the missionary caravan) very readily, since among them we could find guides for this journey into the unknown and even an interpreter for dealing with the Maasai. This was a man called Salim, who had the devil’s own daring, and an extraordinary glibness in speech (Chapter 25).

18 Chapter 26.

19 Chapter 28.

20 Chapter 28.

21 Postscript.

22 Ibid.
Spiritan Missionaries as Precursors of Inculturation Theology in West Africa: With Particular Reference to the Translation of Church Documents into Vernacular Languages

Introduction

Recent studies based on documents available in the archives of missionary congregations have helped to arrive at a positive appreciation of the contribution of the early missionaries to the development of African cultures. This presentation will center on the work done by Spiritans in some West African countries, especially in the production of dictionaries and grammar books and the translation of the Bible and church documents into vernacular languages. Contrary to the widespread idea that the early missionaries destroyed African cultures (the tabula rasa theory), this presentation will argue that, despite their limitations, the early missionaries were precursors of what is known today as inculturation theology. The reflection hopes, on one hand, to challenge African scholars to update their interpretation of the history of the early missionary enterprise in Africa and, on the other, to challenge present day African missionaries to pursue the task of inculturation of the Gospel in their different missionary contexts.

The reflection has three sections. The first section defines the problematic and the historical borders of the research. The second section exposes samples of works done by Spiritans in the area of linguistics and translation of church documents, in some West African countries - Senegal, Nigeria, Ghana and Sierra Leone. Finally, the third section presents a theological reflection on the work of translation done by Spiritan missionaries. It will show that Spiritan missionaries not only contributed to the development of the cultural identity and heritage of the peoples they encountered in West Africa, but also inaugurated what is today called African inculturation theology.

1. Problematic and Delimitation of the Subject

Period Considered

The period under consideration is the eighteenth to the twentieth-centuries, precisely from the arrival of the first Spiritan missionaries at the West African Coast of Senegal, 1779, to the end of the Second Vatican Council, 1965. We
have chosen to highlight this period because it is a period that remains unknown to many historians. Most of the documents produced by the early missionaries - dictionaries, Bibles, Catechisms, and hymn books that gave birth to more modern ones - are not available in the market or even in the libraries of religious congregations and dioceses in West Africa. They are mostly found in the archives of the congregations in Europe. Our research was done in three archives of the two major congregations that initiated the evangelization of West Africa, namely, the Spiritan General Archives in Chevilly-Larue, France, the Spiritan Archives in Ireland, and the General Archives of the Society of African Missions (SMA), Rome.

Moreover, it is instructive to discover how the work done by these missionaries prepared the Vatican II Council. After Vatican II, foreign missionaries were largely replaced by the indigenous clergy they had formed. In Nigeria, the expulsion, in 1971, of foreign missionaries among whom were a majority of Spiritans and Holy Rosary Sisters at the end of the Biafra-Nigeria war marked the end the nineteenth to twentieth-century missionary adventure in Nigeria. It would be interesting also to know how the work the early missionaries initiated was prolonged and even perfected by the indigenous clergy, diocesans and religious.

**Beyond the Tabula Rasa Theory**

For reasons connected with the struggle for emancipation from colonialism, historians invented the *tabula rasa* theory which has it that Western missionaries destroyed indigenous culture. Intellectual honesty requires that the errors and cultural biases of the early missionaries be recognized and critiqued. Nevertheless, some affirmations based on the positions of missionaries as regards some cultural practices, like African traditional religion, polygamy, title taking, etc., give the impression that those missionaries did not make any positive contribution to the development of indigenous culture.

An open and comprehensive retrieval of the legacy of the early missionaries is a *conditio sine qua non* for the renewal of missionary fervor in the present generation of missionaries. The exercise will be more fruitful if instead of analyzing missionary theories, we ask ourselves the question: What exactly did the missionaries do? From this perspective, we can take a different look at the contribution of Spiritan missionaries to the development of cultures in West Africa as prelude to the work of inculturation.
Inculturation

We have to avoid anachronism here. The word “inculturation” dates to 1962 when a French Jesuit, Fr. Jean Masson, asked for “un catholicisme inculturé” (an inculturated Catholicism). However, it took almost fifteen years for the word “inculturation” to be used in its present theological sense. It was officially used at the thirty-second Congregation of the Society of Jesus in 1975, and later by the general of the Jesuits, Fr. Pedro Arrupe, during his Introduction at the Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in Rome, *Evangelization in the Modern World, 1974*:

Inculturation is the incarnation of the Christian life and message in a given cultural milieu such that the Christian message is not only expressed through the elements of the culture in question (which would be a superficial adaptation) but also that the experience becomes a principle of inspiration and at the same time a unifying norm that transforms and recreates this culture and consequently becomes the origin of a new creation.

The term entered the *magisterium* of the church when Pope John Paul II referred explicitly to it in his *Address to Members of the Pontifical Biblical Commission* on 26 April, 1979. He used it to express an element of the mystery of incarnation. He argued that one of the consequences of the incarnation - the fact that “God always communicated his marvels using the language and experience of men” - is that cultures have great value. Since cultures already contain the germ of the divine logos, “…. the proclamation of the Church is not afraid of using contemporary cultural expressions: thus they are called, so to speak, through a certain analogy with the humanity of Christ, to participate in the dignity of the divine Word itself.” In *Catechesi tradendae*, John Paul II took up the question again and argued that like evangelization in general,

Catechesis … is called to bring the power of the Gospel into the very heart of culture and cultures. For this purpose, catechesis will seek to know these cultures and their essential components; it will learn their most significant expressions; it will respect their particular values and riches. In this manner it will be able to offer these cultures the knowledge of the hidden mystery and help them to bring forth from their own living tradition original expressions of Christian life, celebration and thought.
Since then, inculturation became the term used in theological reflection to designate the confrontation between the gospel and cultures, faith and cultures, Christianity and cultures in such a way that permits the insertion of the Gospel in the cultural values of different peoples. Saying that the early Spiritan missionaries did the work of inculturation would be an anachronism. However, it is possible to demonstrate - and that is the goal of this research - that the work done by Spiritan missionaries before Vatican II prepared the evangelization approach that is known today as inculturation.

2. Development of Languages and Translation of Church Documents

 Origins of Catholic Missionary Adventure in West Africa

The spread of the Gospel in Africa took place in different phases. The first centuries of Christianity saw the evangelization of Egypt and North Africa. The second phase, involving the parts of the continent south of the Sahara, took place in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The third phase was the missionary enterprise that started in nineteenth-century.

One had to wait for the late eighteenth-century for the first missionaries to arrive West Africa. The City of St. Louis, Senegal, was founded in 1638, and in 1763, a century after, it was erected as Apostolic Prefecture. The first Spiritans arrived St. Louis in 1779. In 1787, freed slaves from USA were settled in Freetown, capital of future Sierra Leone, which became a British Colony in 1808. The majority of the slaves were of Igbo origin. Converted to Christianity they, in 1857, called on the Church Missionary Society (CMS) to come to the assistance of their brothers and sisters in Nigeria. In 1816, other migrants from USA arrived in Liberia. Thanks to the insistence of Pope Gregory XVI Propaganda Fide asked Bishop Baron from Philadelphia to initiate a mission in Liberia. On 28th September 1842 he was appointed Vicar Apostolic of the Two Guineas, an area covering 7408 km, from Senegal to Gabon, Congo and Angola.

The first Missionaries of the Society of the Holy Heart of Mary, founded in France in 1842 by Fr. Francis Mary Paul Libermann, arrived Liberia in September 1843. In 1848, this Congregation merged with the Congregation of the Holy Spirit, founded in Paris, France in 1703 by Fr. Claude Francis Poullart des Places. On 20 June 1848, Fr. Bessieux,
C.S.Sp. was appointed Apostolic Vicar of the Two Guineas.

In 1872, an Alsatian Spiritan, Fr. Joseph Lutz, C.S.Sp. was sent to Freetown, Sierra Leone. Appointed later as Apostolic Prefect of the Lower Niger, he arrived Onitsha on 5 December 1885 in the company of Fr. John Horné, C.S.Sp. and Brothers John Gotto Jacob, C.S.Sp. and Hermas Hück, C.S.Sp. The growth of the mission in Igbo land surprised the missionaries themselves. They benefited from the hospitality of local chiefs, especially Chief Ogbonnaya Onyekomelu, Idigo 1 of Aguleri. The superior General of the Holy Ghost Fathers, Fr. Emonet asked Rome to erect the Prefecture of the Lower Niger. This was done in 1888 and entrusted to Fr. Lutz. He was followed by a certain number of Spiritans who distinguished themselves in different ways12: Fr. Albert Bubendorf, Fr. Jean Cadio, Fr. François Xavier Lictenberger, Fr. Aimé Ganot, Fr. Charles Vogler, Fr. Joseph Reling (1896-1898), Fr. Pawlas (1898-1900). Fr. Alexandre Lejeune who arrived from Lambaréné, Gabon, succeeded Lutz as Prefect of the Lower Niger. In 1902, Fr. Joseph Shanahan, Irish, who spoke French, because he did his formation in France, arrived to help Lejeune. He was later appointed Apostolic Vicar of the Lower Niger in 1920. Others include, Fr. Joseph Treich (1909), Fr. Charles Heerey, founder of the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary Mother of Christ and later Archbishop of Onitsha (1950), and Fr. Joseph B Whelan, later Vicar Apostolic of Owerri (1948) and first Bishop of Owerri (1950) etc. After the Biafra-Nigeria War, Bishop Whelan was arrested together with many of his priests, thrown into jail for ten days, fined and expelled from Nigeria in 1970.

Spiritan mission in Ghana was established in 1971 by some of the missionaries expelled from Nigeria after the civil war.

Translating the Message

Nigeria

Language and Culture. Documents in the three archives mentioned above show that the early missionaries contributed to the development of languages in Nigeria. They believed that nothing would be achieved unless the missionaries spoke to the people in their local languages. The first missionaries to produce documents for the study of the Igbo language were the Protestants, missionaries of the Church Missionary Society (CMS). Joseph Friedrich Schön
CMS), an eminent philologist, was the first to publish the *Vocabulary of Igbo Language* in 1843. This was revised by Samuel Ajayi Crowther’s *Vocabulary of Igbo Language* in 1882 (London). It was followed by *Grammaire élémentaire* by J. O. C. Taylor in 1892. This helped Taylor to publish the Igbo translations of the Gospels of Mathew (1860) and Mark and Luke (1864).

The Spiritans participated actively in the development of the Igbo language. A French Spiritan, Fr. Aimé Ganot, who arrived in Nigeria after the departure of Fr. Lutz learnt Igbo language, especially the Onitsha dialect. With the help of another French missionary, Fr. Charles Vogler, he published *Grammaire Ibo* in 1899. Ganot acknowledged that he benefited from the notes of his confreres, Frs. Lutz, Lécuyer, and P. Pawlas who was the Apostolic Prefect of the Lower Niger. He distinguished the different Igbo dialects according to different Zones. For example, he was able to note the similarities in the Igbo dialects spoken in Aguleri, Nsugbe, Umuleri, Nteje, Ugwuele, Nando, Ibaku, Anam, Nri, Awka and Igbariam. Later, Ganot published an *English-Ibo-French Dictionary* on 4 March 1904. It comprises of 306 pages and 17,000 entries. This was before the publication of *L'Essai de dictionnaire français-ibo ou français-ika* (1907) by Fr. Carlo Zappa, S.M.A. and T. J. Dennis’ *Dictionary of Ibo Language* (1923).

Fr. Alexander Lejeune, C.S.Sp. also encouraged the study of Igbo Language and worked for its expansion with the help of his team, especially, the Chief of Onitsha, John Okolo, who was baptized Catholic. The work done by the missionaries served as basis for the development of Igbo grammar and literature. They set the pace for the prodigious works done by Frederick C. Ogbalu and Emmanuel Nwanolue Emenanjo etc. Ogbalu later created the Society for Promoting Igbo Language and Culture (1950), which handled the question of the standardization of the Igbo language. This brought about the establishment of the Department of Igbo Language and Culture at Alvan Ikoku College of Education, Owerri (1974). A Department of Igbo Language and Culture was started in 1978, with the opening of Anambra State College of Education, Awka, with Ogbalu as Head of Department, and in September the same year another Department of Igbo Language was established at Federal Advanced Teachers College, Okene, Kwara State. The contribution of Spiritans to the development of languages in other parts of Nigeria.
is limited since they arrived later in those areas. The SMA missionaries made more impact in the Yoruba speaking areas.

**Bible, Catechisms and Liturgy.** In 1901, Fr. Ganot with the help of a man he called Sami, Chief of Onitsha, produced the first catechism, *Katekism Ibo*, which is an exact translation of the Catechism of Cambrai, that was in use in the Dioceses of France. It has 36 pages and contains three sections. Section 1 presents morning and evening prayers. Section 2 has 2 litanies and the Rosary, and section 3 has the catechism in questions and answers. It concludes with the commandments of God and the church. At the end, there is a song “Agamedjefu I.”

In 1903 a second catechism titled *Katekisma n’okwukwe nzuko Katolik n’ásuzu Igbo* (Catechism of Catholic Faith in Igbo Language) was printed in Strasbourg, France. In the introduction, it is explained that the Catechism was put together by Fr. Charles Vogler with the substantial help of Fr. Lejeune and indigenous catechists: Ephrem, Agha, Samuel Epundu, and Jacob Tshukwumaka. It contains three preliminary pages on Igbo language pronunciation. Later the *Katekism nke mbu nkuzi ndi Katolik* put together by Fr. Zappa SMA before his death in 1917 was published in 1928.

The Igbo Catechism was later simplified and improved by the Irish missionaries with a significant contribution from Bishop Joseph B. Whelan. This gave rise to *Catechism Nke Mbu, 1951* (Holy Ghost Fathers, Owerri) and *Catechism Nke Abo*.


Mention has to be made also of a publication in the Efik language, though with an English title *Catechism of the Catholic Religion*, by another French Spiritan, Fr. Louis Lena C.S.Sp. (M. C. Calabar 1908, reedited two times; M. C. Anwa 1909, M. C. Calabar, 1915). Fr. Lena was in-charge of the station called Old Calabar, which was renamed Calabar in 1904. He was instrumental to the development
of schools in Calabar. Unfortunately, he left Nigeria abruptly in June 1914 because of his election as member of the Congregation’s general council.

Fr. Paul Biechy, C.S.Sp., published the *Catechism of the Catholic Religion*, Anwa, St. Peter Claver, 1929. He worked with a network of 122 catechists. He was called back to France to be the novice master in Chevilly-Larue, and later Vicar Apostolic of Brazzaville, Congo in 1936. Fr. Joseph Krafft, C.S.Sp., also French, who was known for the development of schools in Calabar, published a hymn book in Efik, *Nwed Ikwö*, M. C. Anwa, 1921.

The Spiritan Archives in Chevilly-Larue, Paris, also documented the *Tiv-English Children’s Bible History*, produced by Fr. Herbert Maher, C.S.Sp., Makurdi, 1961. He hailed from Great Britain and came to Nigeria in December 1944 after few years of mission in Angola. He was in charge of a station in Gboko with over 2,300 Catholics and Catechumens.

### Senegal

**Language and Culture.** From 1873, French Spiritans began to produce documents in local languages, especially Wolof and Serer. In the Spiritan Archives in Chevilly-Larue, Paris, there are more than 500 documents in different vernacular languages. These include dictionaries, grammar books, collections of folk-tales, proverbs, and books on plants, Bibles, Catechisms, and hymn books. Spiritans learnt the languages of Serer and Wolof and the people’s customs, by being in contact with the people. Two of them, Frs. Crétois et Berthault were officially decorated by former President Leopold Sedar Senghor.

The Senegal Mission also covered Guinea-Conakry and Guinea Bissau. In his recent book, *God or Nothing*, Cardinal Robert Sarah renders a vibrant homage to Spiritan missionaries who evangelized his people and trained him. He noted that the Spiritans taught him catechism in his own language as well as in French.

Fr. Ezanno, C.S.Sp., *Quelques proverbes sérère recueillis à Fadiouth*, Anthropos, 1953. These studies served as basis for further studies on the vernacular languages like that of Gabriel Manassy and Serge Sauvageot, *Études de phonétique et de grammaire descriptive*, University of Dakar, 1963. A Belgian Botanist continues till date the monumental work of Fr. Berthault.


Catechisms abound: *Katisism Fana (Sénégambi & Senegal)*, Ngasobil, 1886; *Katesism nâ dat kêrtèn Katolik*, Mission catholique, Dakar, 1913; *Kao kin a bèlna and ndah té vòg o fadik na ardyana* (Les verities nécessaires, Mgr. LE RÖY) translated by Fr. Ezanno, Fadiouth, 1922; *Katésis mbat Akatin nâ dat kêrtèn katolik*, Mission de Fadiouth, St. Peter Claver, Rome, 1927; *Katésis. Akatin nâ dat kertèn katolik* (with illustrations by R. Rigot), St. Peter Claver, Rome, for Dakar diocese, 1956, etc.


**Ghana**

The Holy Ghost Fathers, who had to leave Nigeria on account of the Biafra War, arrived in Kumasi on 30 October 1971. Hence their contributions to the mission in Ghana cannot be taken care of in this discussion of the Spiritan legacy before Vatican II. The major works available within the period we have chosen were done by the Society of African Missions (SMA).

**Sierra Leone**

Though Spiritans arrived Sierra Leone in 1864, the mission there grew very slowly with many difficulties. Many
died because of sickness and difficult climate. Nevertheless, the major contribution of Spiritan missionaries in Sierra Leone was in the field of education. At the independence from Britain in 1961, the Spiritans, Sisters of St. Joseph de Cluny and Holy Rosary Sisters headed about 300 schools.


### 3. Spiritans as Precursors of Inculturation

What are the theological implications of these works done by the early missionaries? The translation of the Bible, catechisms, and hymns in vernacular languages marked the beginning of the process of inculturation. Though mostly done in view of the work of evangelization, they turned out as beneficial for the development of the cultural identity and heritage of the peoples.

**Openness to Cultures and Peoples: Libermann’s Instructions**

The Spiritan approach to local cultures and traditions was influenced by radical and innovative openness to cultures and peoples by their second founder, Francis Libermann. In 1844, Liberman submitted to Propaganda Fide, a document he called “Plan for the Salvation of the Peoples of the African Coast.” At the heart of the plan is the idea of the formation of indigenous clergy and catechists in view of the independence of the local churches, to whom the missionaries can entrust the work of evangelization, the development of schools, social works, and a positive attitude towards peoples and cultures. The ideas he advanced influenced Pope Gregory XVI’s Encyclical *Neminem profecto* published on 23 November 1845. The Encyclical was edited by Bishop Luquet, a close friend of Libermann who belonged to the Foreign Missions of Paris. He was appointed to India in 1842 and took part in the synod of Pondicherry in 1844. He was later chosen by Propaganda Fide to be the principal editor of *Neminem profecto*. After this publication, Libermann followed up with a “Memorandum On the Black Missions in General and that of Guinea in Particular,” 1846. “If missionary activity is to lead to the implantation of the Church in a new region as a self-sustaining Christian community, it will have to be rooted in the mentality,
customs and culture of the people and not in the civilization proper to the missionary’s home country.” So, in 1847 Libermann sent a detailed letter to the Spiritan community of Dakar, warning against listening to colonial masters who were prejudiced about the Africans. Rather, they must listen to the people and strip themselves of Europe in the light of the kenosis of Jesus Christ.

Do not judge by first impressions or by what you are used to in Europe. Forget about Europe, its ways of thinking, its customs, its conventions. Make yourselves Negroes with Negroes and you will learn how to judge them as they should be judged. Make yourselves Negroes with Negroes so as to form them into what they can be, not along European lines, but according to their own way of being. Relate to them as if you were their servants and they were your masters, adapting yourselves to their style of doing things.

The expression “make yourselves Negroes with Negroes” may shock many people who discover it for the first time. This led to a reinterpretation of the text to read “make yourselves Blacks with Blacks.” However, if one wants to respect the text, one has to leave it as it is. Libermann knew that the word Negro was pejorative. He used it in this text as a provocation in the context of the nineteenth-century, when people were reduced to inhumanity because of their color and race. He also knew the word “Black,” which he always used positively. He called his Congregation “L’oeuvre des Noirs,” “The Work of the Blacks.” When he used the expression “Negro,” he meant Black slaves subjected to inhuman treatments in the colonies and in Africa at that period. This translated the Pauline use of the word “doulos,” in Phil 2:6–1. This brings out the depth of Libermann’s reflection. Making oneself Negro with Negroes means making oneself slave with slaves. The movement becomes even more radical when in the light of Paul, Libermann said: “be to them as servants to their masters,” that is, the missionaries should make themselves servants of the slaves or even slaves of slaves.

It would be an exaggeration to claim that all Spiritan missionaries who worked in West Africa adopted this mystique attitude. One cannot deny the fact that some of the missionaries were disrespectful to the peoples and their cultures. Some found it difficult to strip themselves

When he used the expression “Negro,” he meant Black slaves subjected to inhuman treatments in the colonies and in Africa at that period.
of Europe and the colonial mentality of their epoch. Some others, due to circumstances beyond their control could not immerse themselves in the local culture.

Bishop Joseph Shanahan of Southern Nigeria would complain that his Irish confreres were very poor in learning the Igbo language. This is probably because they were involved in schools and lost contact with the local people. Moreover, there was strong pressure from the colonial administration to reinforce the learning of English language in schools. Some historians believe that the increase in the number of people who spoke English reduced the gap between the missionaries and the people, hence the missionary no longer felt the pressure to learn Igbo. Missionary annals and bulletins of the epoch documented the explosion of interest in the English language among the Igbo. This was certainly exploited by the Irish missionaries. A Spiritan Nigerian theologian and historian, Charles Ebelebe noted that,

The Irish Spiritans discovered quickly the Igbo love for novelty and the mystique of the English language for the Igbo (…) It is because they discovered this Igbo attraction for English that the Irish Spiritans emphasized its teaching and learning in their schools to the almost total neglect of the Igbo. This was an important selling point of their schools in contrast to the Church Missionary Society who used Igbo as a medium of instruction in their schools.

He also noted that “…English language played a significant role in giving the Catholic Church the upper hand against the Church Missionary Society in their missionary rivalry in Igboland.”

Throughout the history of the Spiritans, there have been several members of the Congregation who have gone to extraordinary lengths to learn and write in the language of the people to whom they were sent as missionaries. It is not uncommon for Spiritans to know/speak three or more languages. Language, of course, is an essential bridge to get to know those among whom Spiritans live and work. Suffice it to name for example Blessed Fr. Jacques Dérisé Laval (1803-1964), one of the early companions of Fr. Libermann. He is known today as the “Apostle of Mauritius.” He learned Creole upon arrival on the island and wrote a Catholic catechism in Creole to help instruct natives and freed slaves in the faith.
Fr. Peter Maillard arrived in 1735 to work among the Micmac tribe in eastern Canada. He mastered their language and “created a hieroglyphic alphabet, a grammar and a dictionary, in addition to a book of prayers, hymns and sermons ... Copies of his manuscripts containing prayers, hymns and sermons were placed in the hands of every chieftain. In the absence of a priest, the chief was to hold Sunday services as described in the book, and to use its formulas for baptisms, marriages, and funerals.”

Fr. Vince Stegman of the American Province spent thirty years in mission in Ethiopia, working among the Borana people. He has been instrumental in developing compilations of the Borana language and providing commentaries on the meanings of Borana words and phrases. The Dutch Spiritan, Fr. Ton Leus, produced a Borana Dictionary in 2006. Fr. Ralph Poirer was among the first Spiritan missionaries to the Maasai tribe in Tanzania. He learned the language of the Maasai, produced a dictionary of the language, and even developed pictographs which could explain connections between Maasai culture and Gospel stories.

The Impact of Translation on Cultural Identity and Heritage

The first striking impact of the translations done by the missionaries is the collection of linguistic and ethnographic data, words, rituals, ceremonies, practices, names of animals, plants, etc., and the fixing of the vernacular languages. The historian, Lamin Sanneh, notes that the meticulous and painstaking business of learning African languages, of producing very careful scientific linguistic materials as an aid to translation, including the creation of alphabets - all this constituted landmarks that belonged with the native patrimony. They redefined Africa’s material and intellectual values by placing them solidly within the general language of human consciousness, and it is a matter of incalculable significance that on the historic front line of cross-cultural encounter, Europeans should meet Africans not just as vanquished populations but as inalienable possessors of their own languages.

Second, the translation of the gospel message into vernacular languages transformed the encounter between Christianity and the African cultures. This work stimulated Africans who saw Christianity as a canal for their
emancipation. First, it gave them a stronger self-awareness as part of a larger world. For example, they were able to develop concepts to think about God in dialogue with other concepts of God in the Western culture. Second, as Sanneh observed, “the Christian Scriptures, cast as a vernacular oracle, gave the native idiom and the aspirations it enshrined a historic cause, allowing Africans to fashion fresh terms for their own advancement and possibility…”

*African Inculturation Theology*

*Theological Speculation.* The movement initiated by Spiritan missionaries was also a determining factor for the development of African theology of inculturation. The first official attempt at an African theology was made by young priests from Africa and Haiti. They included the Cameroonian Jesuit, Meinrad Hebga, Vincent Mulago (Zaire), Robert Sastre (Benin), Gerard Bissainthe, C.S.Sp., (Haiti). They published a book, *Des prêtres noirs s’interrogent,* in 1956 in which they asked Christianity to adopt *Négritude,* black cultures and values. The group, led by Gerard Bissainthe, used the Spiritan Seminary Chevilly-Larue as meeting point. This was a boiling laboratory of theological thought under the influence of stories brought home by Spiritan missionaries working in Africa. They benefited from the editorial support and mentorship of a great man, the Senegalese Alioune Diop who led the Society of African Culture in Paris.

The movement initiated by this group would be a stimulus for the openness of the Second Vatican Council to different cultures. The same group formed the team that wrote *Personalité africaine et Catholicism* (African Personality and Catholicism), a handbook Alioune Diop gave to African bishops present at the Vatican Council II. Tharcisse Tschibangu, Bishop emeritus of Mbujiemayi, DRC, who was an expert at the Vatican II Council, testified that the lobby propelled and orchestrated by this group influenced the redaction of *AG,* 22 that foresaw that “from the customs and traditions of their people, from their wisdom and their learning, from their arts and sciences, these [young] Churches borrow all those things which can contribute to the glory of their Creator, the revelation of their Savior’s grace, or the proper arrangement of Christian life” (*AG,* 22). The Council also called for the emergence of theological speculation “in each major socio-cultural area.” Such theology will be rooted in the cultures of the people...
as well as the universal Christian tradition in such a way that “a fresh scrutiny will be brought to bear on the deeds and words which God has made known, which have been consigned to sacred Scripture and which have been unfolded by the Church Fathers and by the teaching authority of the Church” (ibid.). African theologians later took the Council seriously and developed proposals in different disciplines of theology, which led to the dynamism of the Church in Africa today.

**Celebration of the Christian Faith.** Long before Vatican II officially authorized the integration of cultures, customs, and traditions in theological reflection (*AG*, 22), the use of vernacular languages in liturgy (*SC*, 36.3; 63a; 100) and the “adaptation of the Liturgy to the culture and traditions of peoples” (*SC*, 37–40), Spiritan missionaries took bold steps in the integration of the different languages of their peoples in the celebration of the mystery of faith.

The risks taken by the missionaries influenced several reforms done by the church. After 1900, the number of Latin hymns increased due to Pope Pius X’s *Motu Proprio, Tra le sollecitudini, On Sacred Music*, 22 November 1903. The Pope associated the universality of music with Gregorian Chant. However, Pope Pius XII’s Encyclical, *Musicae sacrae disciplina* (Dec. 1955, no. 70), happy with the work done by missionaries, encouraged them to promote religious songs among the people in such a way that they can “sing in a language and in melodies familiar to them.”

We have seen the enormous work done in the translation of songs into vernacular and the production of hymn books. As Jann Pasler, rightly stated, “This laid the foundation for the collection, transcription, and systematic use of not only indigenous texts applied to European religious hymns, but also indigenous-inspired music in the African missions. This meant experimenting with various ways local airs could be used to inspire religious sentiment, collaborating with indigenous composers, and creating new recueils de cantiques.”

Spiritan missionaries in the Lower Niger were so much involved in evangelization through songs. The people admired how the missionaries were able to use their local languages to transcribe songs. “What was crucial to capturing their interest was giving the prayers in the language of the country, singing the chants that they knew and understood.” With this, people came to church in large
numbers.

It is true that the missionaries sang what they knew, hence the songs were mostly of French or English origin, but that the chants were translated in local languages shows the effort made in translating the Christian message.

Conclusion

We have argued in this reflection that through the painstaking work of structuring vernacular languages and translation of church documents, Spiritan missionaries not only contributed to the development of the cultural identity and heritage of the peoples they encountered in West Africa, but also inaugurated what is today called *African inculturation theology*.

We have also demonstrated that the ground-breaking work of those missionaries influenced magisterial decisions of the church, especially Vatican II Council’s openness to the cultures, traditions and vernacular languages of different peoples.

This does not mean that the early Spiritans who evangelized West Africa were perfect. Intellectual honesty requires that their limitations also be noted and critiqued. Nevertheless, a closer examination of what the early missionaries really did puts a serious question mark on the *tabula rasa* theory, which bluntly declares that the missionaries destroyed African cultures and traditions.

No society prepares the future through the transmission of the failures of its ancestors. People from one generation to the other transmit the legends or what is noble in the memory of their ancestors. This helps young people aim at excellence. The failures of the past are however not denied, but wisdom demands that our predecessors be excused their limitations, because, as the Igbo proverb would have it, “the hand does not throw as far as the eye sees.”

When we retrieve our heritage positively, we are able to face the present challenges of mission. How seriously do the local churches take the development of indigenous languages? What efforts are made to pursue and deepen the inculturation of the Gospel and Christian worship in their different contexts, through the translation of the Bible, development of contextualized catechisms and publication of lectionaries and missals suitable for the liturgy? What is the connection between present day religiosity and the task of
inculturation, which aims at the incarnation of the Gospel message in a particular context, such that it can give life to a new creation? These are tasks for contemporary scholars of African inculturation theology.

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Abbreviations

AG  Vatican II, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church, Ad gentes.
SC  Vatican II, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Sacrosanctum concilium.

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**Endnotes**


3I am very grateful to Fr. Roger Tabard, Spiritan general archivist, Paris, Fr. Brian O’Toole, Spiritan archivist, Ireland, and Fr. Trichet, SMA archivist, Rome for their collaboration and support.


5This is already the case in some known works, Nwosu, *The Catholic Church in Onitsha*; idem, *The Laity and the Growth of Catholic Church in Nigeria*.

6Some original works in this sense include: Forristal, *The Second Burial of Bishop Shanahan*; Ezeh, *Archbishop Charles Heerey*. 
9 John Paul II, *Catechesi tradendae*, n° 53.
10 See John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, n° 30-34.
17 Koren, *Spiritans Nigeria Memorial*, 47.
18 Ibid., 67.
19 Ibid., 52.
20 2015.
21 Ibid., 20, 37.
27 ND IX, 330. *Spiritans Anthology*, 287 wrongly translated « Be African with the Africans. »
31 Ibid.
33 Sanneh, *Encountering the West*, 87.
34 Ibid.
37 Ibid., 1290.
Brendan Carr, C.S.Sp.

Brendan Carr, C.S.Sp., previously spent seventeen years in Angola and Southern Africa where he worked in pastoral and community development, adult faith development, directing a minor seminary, and area co-coordination for relief of displaced persons during the civil war. He served as pastor in the Kimmage Manor parish in Dublin for seven years; he was on the last Spiritan provincial leadership team in Ireland. He is a Board member of the Immigrant and Asylum-seeker Support Service (Spirasi) and of Misean Cara (Agency for funding of missionary development). Until recently a chaplain at Mountjoy prison in Dublin, he awaits a new assignment following a sabbatical.

Portrait of a Missionary.

“The harm that is done can always be reimagined, however four square, Plank-thick, bull-stupid and out of its time It happens to be.”

The Irish poet, Seamus Heaney, in “The Settle Bed” images an old piece of furniture. It may be a family heirloom or a symbol of the past that seems somewhat out of place in our present, yet had served a family faithfully. It carries an emotional attachment but is a burden too, an “un-get-roundable weight.”

Heaney doesn’t suggest jettisoning it, but carves that resonant line “whatever is given can always be reimagined.” It is a metaphor that might be used by a psychologist attempting to lead a client to accept the “given” while reshaping life’s narrative around it. Or by a preacher who continuously tangles with the Scriptures to reimagine and refresh the Gospel message to a reflective community. Or by a missionary who stokes the embers of cultural traditions to rekindle a fire for contemporary heat.

For Heaney, steeped in the culture of small farming stock in his native Co. Derry with a reverence for its people and traditions but having grown through his own education and decades of religious and political conflict, it was a poetic allegory for his experience of embracing inevitable change while remaining true to one’s roots.

A Fellow Companion

William Aloysius Jenkinson, C.S.Sp., (1923–2016), known as Willie and as Bill to family and friends, trod a similar path – as a man and a Spiritan – engaging change, not poetically but spiritually and theologically. He continually sought to reshape and rethink Missio Dei as lived in the communities and communion of the church, in Religious Missionary Congregations, and in his personal life. He was drawn to John Henry Newman as he recognized in him a kindred spirit - one who sought to give meaning to the evolution of thought and praxis that is not only necessary but inescapable in a human life and in the life of communities and institutions. “To live is to change, and to be perfect is
to have changed often” or “to live well is to have changed often,” he would say shunning any attempt at perfection. This was quoted in the homily by Brian McLaughlin, C.S.Sp., at Willie’s funeral mass in Kimmage Manor on 26th November 2016.5

Like Newman, Willie was motivated by a sense of mission that had at its core a truth-telling about the reality of the human person and the relationship with God as grasped through what has been given or already experienced. He would have seen in Newman an integrity and care for what he spoke about. Faith talk cannot be cheap or populist but must be disciplined, honest, and reasonable: “we can believe what we choose. We are answerable for what we choose to believe.” 6

A Time to be Born

The new Irish State came into being in the early 1920s just before Willie’s birth in a small market-gardening community in the rural hinterland then supplying Dublin city’s fruit and vegetables. Ireland had just gone through a decade of turmoil in which so many of its young men had fought and died in Europe in World War I. Their sacrifice generated little popular sympathy at home coinciding as it did with the push for Irish independence which culminated in insurrection and an independence war, a treaty of partition of the island of Ireland, and the establishment of a new State followed by a short but bitter civil war. Dealing with conflict and division is not far from the psyche of any Irish person.

Reflecting on Willie’s life gives us, Spiritan missionaries in the Spiritan Congregation, an opportunity to see, through the life of one, what might be appreciated by all in our life and mission.

Willie is but one tile in the mosaic of the Congregation and its Province of Ireland that enriched the lives of many people and contributed to shaping our Spiritan reality. Many others could be identified and focused upon, as Seán Farragher, C.S.Sp., did so well in Irish Spiritans Remembered. The attraction is that the Spiritan life of Willie Jenkinson spanned that of many of the living members of the Province of Ireland and that he was a principal witness to changes that shaped the reality of Irish Spiritans today. Also, the context of division that the Province of Ireland faced in the early 1970s is repeated today in many of the new circumscriptions. The tensions between the interests of the home community and the impulse to cross boundaries and seek a new reality of mission through intercultural community living.
mission through intercultural community living which is the challenge of today, is reflected in the challenge of that time in Ireland.

Willie saw the “winds of change” that swept away colonialism and brought independence to the African continent. He accompanied closely the Second Vatican Council that brought momentous change in the church ushering in dialogue with other religions, the evolution of the mission of the laity, the implementation of liturgical reform, and the growth of the congregation on African soil.

Change was the heartbeat of peoples and events when he was in his prime. It was liberating and enriching for many parts of the developed world, but much of the geo-political and economic change would be disastrous for others in the developing world. In Europe the hardship of war and its frugal aftermath gave birth to the revolution of the 1960s, a rejection of old formality and codes, and a desire for a liberty of spirit in education, politics, sexuality, and music. This revolution would impact the church. With Vatican II as a motivation, Christians, including religious and seminarians, would seek new ways to be authentic and to answer the call of the age. Willie Jenkinson viewed all this with a keen eye, not in condemnation but with a sense of challenge to understand “the signs of the times.”

The Formative Years

Completing his secondary studies at O’Connell’s Christian Brothers’ School in Dublin’s inner-city, Willie set out from his home for Kilshane to enter the Spiritan Novitiate in September 1943. He brought with him his simple and grounded lifestyle with its practical faith of “loving the God he cannot see in the people he can see” (cf. 1 John 4:20).

Willie was the third of seven children. His only sister Marie followed him as the fourth child, and they remained very close all their lives. In his latter days in Marian House Nursing Home at Kimmage, he would speak to her almost every evening while he was able. The second last child was Joseph who was born with Downs Syndrome and the youngest of the family, Noel, was born deaf and Willie observed his parents adapt to these unexpected realities in their lives. He, as part of that family, lived its dynamic, cooperating in attentive sensitive ways to ensure that those who were in need, or whose needs were more obvious,
were protected, loved, and cared for. This sensitivity to the vulnerable was demonstrated in many later circumstances when dealing with needy or powerless individuals.

In the experience of early family life, Willie captured the skills of loving interaction and was instilled with the values that would remain with him and determine his interpersonal and professional relationships all his life. He learned the ways of responsibility and care in helping his parents with the shared tasks of family life. The experience of those early years was the training ground for all that was to follow - dependability and care for the wellbeing of others. It stayed with Willie and marked his ministry and leadership. Trustworthiness with creative initiative and good humor he saw as the hallmark of good community, something he learned in his home from his first experience of community.

A Cherished Uncle

His many nieces and nephews paint a picture of their “Uncle Willie” as an interested and compassionate guide and companion to them from childhood to their own adult and family lives. Ann, his niece, would say “it is not what he said but how he was with us.”

In moments of sadness he was the first to appear or be in touch and shared as many of the extended family’s joyful moments as he could. He was an integral part of the backdrop to their lives and an essential figure in their family narrative. He had a lovely singing voice and graced every occasion with a rendition of “The Hills of Donegal.” He captivated them with stories of his time in Kenya during the Mau-Mau rebellion and the country’s transition to independence. They remarked on his great pride in the work of Spiritans worldwide that he witnessed as Provincial of Ireland and later at the generalate in Rome and through his work in SEDOS. He conveyed to them the image of a missionary, content in his life and passionate about the remarkable network of missionary outreach around the globe that lightened the burden of vast populations by communicating a God of love. They would say that, as children, when the emphasis of school and family was on religious practice, moral virtue, and compliance with rules, Uncle Willie always insisted that “God is love” and that this took precedence over all other considerations of God’s relationship with humanity.
as young people. He would engage with their questions and their doubts about faith and practice and defend them in discussions with their parents. No topic or issue was off limits.

Willie also imparted to them a social conscience and spoke of social justice as an essential aspect of Christian life. He sensitized them to treat everyone with equanimity, acknowledging the needs of others on the road of life, and that “a good turn never goes unrewarded.” Sport was a great interest for him. He played Gaelic football as a young man and never lost his interest in the football and hurling seasons in Ireland. Later he would play and follow rugby which gave him great delight in Rome with his French, English, and Scottish confrères.

For his family, Willie was a cherished ally and confidant, an anchor they greatly miss. Nieces, nephews, and the generation that followed were lovingly attentive to him in his last years when life was ebbing, giving him a great celebration at his Ninetieth Birthday in Kimmage Manor, where they shared the Eucharist and family tables, full of story, song and gratitude for the mystery that weaves lives together in the human encounter, through family, friendship or work, and is the threshold of the spiritual.

Character moulded by early Experience

Every life is multifaceted and consequent on multiple influences, constituting its own unique character. Christianity notably celebrates the uniqueness of the individual and its connectedness to the other. Spiritans have as good a claim as other groups to the cliché, “we’re all different.” There were realities that shaped Willie Jenkinson’s character and his relationship to the fraternity he joined and became part of.

From his earliest years Willie was adventurous, curious, and a risk-taker. Being an avid reader and a good student, he sought always to know the parameters and context of concepts and issues he was dealing with. History was a particular interest and he absorbed the how and why of events and their outcomes. Confidence in taking risks and being innovative gave him the courage to embrace new ideas and try new paths. This led some to recognize leadership qualities while others thought that he had advanced before the majority of the group was ready. He would be impatient to respond to situations, perhaps recalling Newman’s “A
man would do nothing if he waited until he could do it so well that no one could find fault.\textsuperscript{13}

It was often noted, particularly in the era of serious tension between “colleges and missions” as it was labelled, that Willie had not attended a Spiritan school. The schools did indeed make an enormous contribution to the missionary personnel of the Province right up to the 1960s and early 1970s and for some confrères a Spiritan education was a significant mark of approval and acceptance. However, in later decades it became insignificant as candidates for membership of the congregation came from differing age groups, backgrounds, and experiences. It may even have been viewed as a hindrance to capturing the vision of contemporary mission.

Another aspect of Willie’s personality was a determination to see plans through. Some may have called it a stubborn streak. Certainly, tenaciousness in his work with the IMU\textsuperscript{14} and with SEDOS in Rome proved very successful and people saw it as effective leadership which broke new ground in establishing creative institutions for cooperation and solidarity among missionaries.

The provocative or sardonic quip was not beyond Willie who might use it to invite response or humor, to deter an expected verbal attack, or to swiftly get to the point. Many enjoyed the style, but some experienced it as inappropriate or disrespectful.

Those in formation for Spiritan life identified mostly with others of their novitiate year, their years in the study of philosophy (now called First Cycle) or theology (Second Cycle) or with colleagues of their ordination year. Willie had a very unusual formation path. He entered the novitiate twice, the second time in 1943 when he was 20 years of age and a little older than the others. He was based in St. Mary’s College, Rathmines and not part of the student group at Kimmage while doing his university studies. For theology he was sent to Fribourg in Switzerland but would be separated from his colleagues when he contracted TB and was sent to Montana in the Swiss Alps for treatment and recuperation. Joining new colleagues, he went on to be ordained in Fribourg in 1952. So, although a Spiritan who went through the formation program, perhaps he didn’t have an embedded group he could claim as “his.” Indeed, this may have anticipated the experience today of many younger confrères, especially if newly appointed to a circumscription.
of a different and dominant age-group or cultural background. One may feel isolated but, as in Willie’s case, this can offer great freedom of accessibility and objectivity.

The Irish writer Ruth Fitzmaurice, in her recent book entitled *I Found My Tribe*, something of a populist journal, says that we need to be intentional about seeking and valuing the people who nourish and inspire us in life. She says of her experience in life:

Some stay a while, but most are passing through. Some stay longer.

Some people understand that the small things make a difference. A nice pen to write with that slides perfectly on the page. Hot coffee in a particular cup. These things matter when your soul is on the edge. It fills you full of holes, this life. Great love has brought me to the sea and I am trying to be brave. It’s important, when your soul just might need saving.15

Willie found his tribe through experiences when his “soul was on the edge” in the rough seas of discord and conflict in the Irish Province. He had very loyal and supportive friends, confreres, and others who were close when his soul needed saving.

These traits were simultaneously advantageous and disadvantageous in his engagement. They facilitated his taking of initiatives, leadership, and consistency in achieving goals and at the same time could invite suspicion, opposition, or lack of cooperation.

**A theological Perspective**

In an article looking back over his life,16 he indicates a spirituality that began when he was very young and developed with him and grew to shape his theological perspective. He reflects on the celebration of Christmas throughout his life, beginning with a vivid memory when he was a boy in his home parish serving midnight mass. He had the task of carrying the baby Jesus to the crib. He captures the atmosphere and “magic” of that night which never left him.

The village was in darkness. No electric lights, just the windows of the houses and the candles to welcome Mary and the child … We were the altar boys and I had been chosen to carry the infant Jesus to the
crib … It was a magic night. And I wonder if it was not on that night that the first faint touch of a love relationship with the infant Jesus began in my life. So the Word became flesh; he came to dwell among us.17

He recalls midnight mass in the Swiss Alps, in the various missions in Kenya where he served, in Rome, and finally as an elderly retired Spiritan in Spirasi.18 He contemplates how the message of the vulnerable Christ-child is constant, but received and celebrated distinctly in those different contexts throughout his life. He says:

The years have passed. The world has changed they say. It is now 2005 and I am living at Spirasi. It was founded a few short years ago to welcome asylum seekers. Today it has become a Centre for refugees and especially for survivors of torture … It is a busy house. Soon it will be Christmas and the house will be quiet. On Christmas night the image of the infant will be placed in the small oratory … The world has indeed changed. But the greatest change that ever took place was the coming [of God] to dwell among us. And we saw his glory, full of grace and truth.19

This spiritual connectedness of the feast of Christmas with the various communities and cultures in which he worked shaped a theology of incarnation and mission for him. The gaze of the Christ-child on a world full of potential. The vulnerability of the child with a message to a fragile world in need of grace and salvation that can only be realized through human agency. This being the meaning of incarnation. So “the Word made flesh” becomes the mission of the church to make present in the context Christians find themselves to be “light in the darkness” and “joy to the world.”

On his ordination card Willie had a picture of the Christ-child, a window into his personal spirituality and theology.

Mission in Kenya

The two primary destinations for Irish Spiritan missionaries in the 1950s were Nigeria and Kenya. The early Spiritans were sent by Libermann in 1842 to the island of Reunion to liberate slaves, form communities, and evangelize through social and educational works. They later established a mission on the island of Zanzibar (1860) with
a view to an outreach in East Africa founding Bagamoyo (1868), Malindi (1881), Mombasa (1892), and Nairobi (1899).

A statistic from 1972 records 160 Spiritans serving in Kenya (Go Teach All Nations p.178) so when Willie arrived in 1952 it was still a growing mission of first evangelization. He initially went to Bura in the Taiti Hills in the Diocese of Mombasa, later to Voi, a hot, remote place which owed its existence to a stop on the railway line from Mombasa to Nairobi and a junction road climbing the 200 km to the foot of Kilimanjaro.

He immersed himself in mission life focusing on development and education for the communities he served. He was soon recognized as a man of initiative and a strategic planner. He was requested to take up the onerous task of Education Secretary for the Diocese of Mombasa and set about developing a network of primary and secondary schools with teacher training colleges to supply personnel for them. He was convinced of inclusion of lay people, women and men, in the decision-making committees and boards needed for successful outcomes. Essential to his vision was valuing the crucial role of women religious in mission and he would not begin a project without seeking their collaboration and that of the laity. What was emerging from the Vatican Council in the early 60s resonated with his vision for an inclusive church and he became an advocate for the participation and responsibility of the laity in all mission and church activity.

He witnessed the struggle for Independence that came in 1964 and assisted the church to find its place in the new reality. His confreres and colleagues recognized his talent and leadership, relied on him for direction and his skills in negotiation and dialogue with church and government authorities. He would be chosen to represent them at congregation consultation and chapters.

Return to Ireland as Seminary Rector

In 1966, fourteen years after his ordination, Willie was appointed back to Ireland as director of theology in the Spiritan Seminary at Kimmage. He was now a passionate proponent of the vision and reform emanating from Vatican II in Rome, and had seen the beginnings of its implementation in Kenya by the local church, motivated by many of the missionaries of various congregations.
In his four-year tenure he would bring to the seminary a program of education and practice that would reshape and reimagine Missio Dei in the understanding of young future missionaries. With Heaney’s metaphor in the “Settled Bed” manifest Willie would undertake to give new meaning to something that had become archaic, stale and fixed.

Willie’s students would attest to how he organized seminars, debates, and workshops, and invited guest speakers to inculcate the exciting new vision of the church: Catholic social teaching, ministry of the laity, ecumenism, inter-religious dialogue, liturgy, and above all, inculturation of church rather than replanting. He introduced courses in anthropology, sociology, and communications. It was not his intention to minimize or cushion the reform that had happened, but to prepare missionaries for new situations in Brazil, Ethiopia, Papua New-Guinea, the traditional Spiritan missions of Kenya and Sierra Leone, and new situations in Ireland.

Perhaps Willie had given all that he could or maybe the pace of change in the seminary was becoming a worry to some; after four years in 1970, he took up a new challenge.

The Irish Missionary Union (IMU)

It was a creative and bold initiative. In the late 1960s, missionary congregations in Ireland were meeting at leadership and formation levels to explore paths of cooperation and sharing experience. In 1970 the Irish Missionary Union (IMU) was formed with Willie Jenkinson as its first Executive Secretary. At his insistence it was to be a union of numerous male and female congregations and lay missionary organizations many of which had young, energetic, and professional students in training. The outreach of Irish missionaries was to countries on five continents. In a time of heightened awareness of global poverty and its structural causes, missionaries had a platform for advocacy and they impacted greatly on public awareness, even effecting church and government policy on relations with the countries of the developing world. In 1974 the IMU, with representatives of other churches and through the Agency for Personal Service Overseas, negotiated funding support for Irish citizens serving in the developing world with church organisations or NGOs. This funding to Irish missionaries has continued until today through Misean Cara while Trócaire was established by the Irish Episcopal Conference.
in 1973 to channel support from the church in every parish in Ireland to development work because of the witness and advocacy of missionaries.

The IMU also consolidated its cooperation in establishing joint programs of formation and training for novices, missionaries on sabbatical and those returning to offer service in the Irish Church. Willie Jenkinson was at the forefront of many of these initiatives. He showed creative leadership and saw the IMU become a substantial voice in Irish society for forty years until its recent amalgamation with the Conference of Religious in Ireland to become AMRI (Association of Leaders of Missionaries and Religious in Ireland).

Provincial

The reputation for competence and leadership that his name gained among Irish missionaries surely indicated the choice of Willie Jenkinson to become Provincial of Ireland in 1973, to succeed Fr. Christy O’Brien, C.S.Sp., who had led the province for the previous three-year period, one that had seen some of the most difficult and challenging times in the history of the province. The Nigerian Civil War (also known as the Biafran War), from 1967 until early 1970, caused a horrendous humanitarian crisis for the civilian population in the separatist state of Biafra. The Spiritans had been serving as missionaries in Nigeria since 1885 with the arrival of Frs. Joseph Lutz and John Horné and Brothers Hermas Huck and John Jacob; they had “a humble start” but laid “solid foundations” according to Henry J. Koren C.S.Sp.²² With the arrival of Joseph Shanahan in 1903, the mission took on a new and soon flourishing impetus into the interior via the Niger river. Shanahan became the head of the Spiritan mission in 1905 and made his momentous decision to concentrate on education.²³ In time a vibrant local church and a remarkable education, health, and social structure were established. Confrères were inserted into the life of the Igbo people and were not going to abandon them in their hour of need. Heroically, they strove to feed the starving masses through an airlift that is well-documented in publications such as *Airlift to Biafra* by Tony Byrne C.S.Sp. Some 300 Irish Holy Ghost Fathers were serving in those years in Biafra and, when it fell to the overwhelming might of Nigeria’s Federal Government, they were expelled.

The crisis did indeed spawn opportunity, as many Spiritans relocated to Ghana, Ethiopia, Malawi, and
Zambia, creating new foundations of Spiritan life in those African countries. However, others, because of age or circumstance, could not continue in Africa. A number would retire, but for many who were still relatively young and active, the Province in Ireland faced the challenge to find meaningful work and ministry. A large number went to the USA, serving in dioceses and forming regional groups which offered refreshing impetus to pastoral plans in many dioceses. The crisis also allowed for collaboration with the new foundations in Africa through fundraising and it helped the Irish Province as it began to plan for the care of those who were retiring. This influx of Irish Spiritans to random places in the US did cause concern and tension with the two established Provinces of the USA and it took many years to find common understanding. These communities of Irish Spiritans, spread all over the globe, needed management and leadership, direction and resourcing. This was the situation in which Willie was called to lead when he assumed the role of provincial.

**A Storm Erupts**

The winds of change or, if you prefer, the taste of revolution, hit the Irish Church especially in its seminaries and religious communities. There was a clash of theologies and this resulted in deep division in the Irish Province. The reform of teaching and discipline of Vatican II had reached Ireland. The missionary congregations were very much the conduit of new thinking and they served to pilot implementation. The Holy Ghost Seminary at Kimmage became a locus of the clash. The fifty-three students in 1972 who were studying theology and the somewhat smaller number then studying philosophy and taking university degrees saw the new perspectives of a church engaging with the world as an exciting new time for them. For others it seemed a time of confusion and the lowering of standards in discipline and community life.

This period in the life of the Irish Province was a painful experience and has never been adequately processed by those who lived through it. The province suffered greatly from events of this time and, though they have healed, wounds are still easily opened when confrères revisit those experiences. It is a period of our history that invites and merits greater focus and attention. It would require a skilled and dispassionate researcher to comb the ample material available of the 1970 and 1973 chapters and the time between, to offer an accurate record of what unfolded - the context, influences, decisions,
and personalities that determined its outcome.

Willie Jenkinson was provincial and seen by both sides as central; as either the one giving leadership to guide a community of missionaries in resetting their vision and negotiating a changing world or as the one who led to an accommodation with the world that had allowed destructive dynamics enter religious life under the guise of personal responsibility.

In his book, \textsuperscript{24} Patrick Ryan, C.S.Sp., describes well and sensitively the background and historical facts that created the tensions. The Spiritans’ involvement in schools and colleges in Ireland had always been a contentious issue within the Irish province. The mission was often not seen as a single entity but as, on the one hand, an overseas mission, and, on the other, the schools at home in Ireland. The schools had originated as a source of vocations to serve the mission of the congregation and they achieved this goal for many generations. At the same time, they became large and successful works in themselves. When free secondary education was introduced in Ireland by government in the 1960s, Spiritan schools opted to remain in the fee-paying sector. \textsuperscript{25} This deepened the strain between those dedicated to education in Ireland and those who believed that managing fee-paying schools in a country where free education was now the norm was not in accord with the congregation’s charism or mission. Many would have been urging their provincial to end the anomaly by initiating a move of Spiritan schools from the fee-paying sector or even of a complete disengagement by the province from the schools. A great deal of the province’s energy during Willie’s mandate was taken up with this issue.

Much of the division and unease about whether the schools in Ireland were part of the mission of the congregation arose from the general chapter of 1968 which focused on the primary aim of the congregation being first evangelisation. It was at this juncture that educational apostolates in Ireland and other European Provinces began to feel marginalized. Many provinces had struggled with the rigid governance of Mgr. Lefebvre who, as a significant participant of Vatican II, had voted against many important orientations of the chapter and who, as superior general of the congregation, intervened in the provinces, especially in the formation program and changed a number of directors of formation and teachers. He had kept the congregation out of the new mainstream of “renewal.” The 1968 Chapter...
came as a liberation for many, but at the price of a conflict with its superior general who even accused the chapter of betrayal of its charism. Father Joseph Lécuyer, C.S.Sp., who was a confident personal theological adviser to Pope Paul VI, accepted to become superior general and so saved the unity of the congregation but it left a number of provinces divided. This period is covered extensively by Fr. William Cleary, C.S.Sp. 26

The General Chapter of 1968 with its focus on first evangelization, the preferential option for the poor, and justice and peace, challenged the provinces, like Ireland, that had a long history of works of education. They felt excluded from newly and narrowly defined concepts of mission. It happened in several provinces that the young no longer accepted to be appointed to prestigious colleges and were enthusiastic about the new orientations of the general chapter.

In fact, Willie appreciated the work of the schools and their contribution to Spiritan Mission:

In the early years of the 20th century and indeed throughout the century many Spiritans never saw overseas missions. But it was the mission sentiment that inspired them in their commitment to the Congregation to its ideals and all its varied works. . . . . . In the Irish context, the educational stream flowed abundantly as a result of the founding French confreres. . . . . . providing generations of missionaries. 27

Much of the cause of the conflict was projected on to Jenkinson. Sides lined up like two football teams for whom victory was the only result. However, Willie believed that he was seeking compromise and solution where cooperation might provide pathways for the schools to move towards non-fee-paying education in alignment with the congregation’s mission to the disadvantaged. When dialogue and opinions became entrenched and ideological, his role as problem-solver was lost. It is customary to blame the referee. After a single three-year term, a new provincial was elected. The provincial administration led by Jenkinson offered new directions to the province in the crucial polemic areas of formation and education, but the chapter of 1976 reached an impasse with little option for him to continue.
Before his Time?

The claim is often made that Willie Jenkinson was a man before his time, that he was too progressive, and that the province was not ready for that. Rather than continually put the focus on the leader, projecting on him the division of the province, could it not also be claimed that the province started out, in a time of crisis but also of opportunity, on a journey of discernment which stalled after three years out of fear or insecurity? “Every country has the government it deserves,” also “In a democracy people get the leaders they deserve.”

Dark Night

Willie described the year after his term as provincial as his “Dark Night of the Soul.” Despite his strength in confronting problems and his determination in executing decisions he was, as many would attest, a sensitive and mellow man. He felt the pain of rejection, a sense of not having accomplished a mission, experienced failure. He spoke of feeling lost, dispirited, and for the first time since his student days of re-evaluating his place in the world. He went on a sabbatical program in Berkeley, California where he found rest, space to think, new interests and new perspectives on faith and church. He undertook a programme in theology and was awarded a Master’s Degree. He could reflect on a text from Libermann:

Don’t look at things in an imaginary way but consider everything calmly and practically. Never be over-elated by success, or depressed by the possibility of failure. Don’t build imaginary castles in the air, nor afflict yourselves with unreasonable fears. Work as faithful labourers in the Lord’s vineyard, with neither complacency nor discouragement before, during or after your efforts. Whether you are successful or not, your reward will be great.

When Fr. Frans Timermanns, the then Spiritan superior general, invited him to Rome at the end of his sabbatical in 1980, Willie was ready to embrace a new time and new challenges.

SEDOS

When Willie arrived in Rome most congregations had gone through their “chapters of aggiornamento” and there was great openness to renewal. Most leaders of the
horizons

orders and congregations were new, and a number of the ancient orders, like the Jesuits, the Dominicans, and the Benedictines, had prophetic leaders, like Fr. Arrupe, Fr. Quesnongle, and Abbot Weakland. In the missionary congregations much new thinking was happening, new paths were explored, and the old mission territories in Africa, Asia, and Latin America were in the middle of civil society struggles for a new future as independent nations – and churches.

Missionary congregations came together to form a resource centre of information, documentation, and communication of experiences and initiatives in mission around the globe. SEDOS (see note 10 above) was established in Rome as a result of Vatican II. When Willie was nominated as its general secretary, the organisation had been growing for over a decade having begun in the years of the Council. Under Pope John Paul II there was a strong tendency to control the religious congregations, and Cardinal Tomko, the Prefect of Propaganda Fide, persistently tried to get a seat on the board of SEDOS. The religious congregations, however, were protective of their independence. They defended their freedom of reflection and strategy, keeping communion with the church at the structural level of the USG (Union of Superiors General) and UISG (Union of the Superiors General of the sisters) in relations with the Vatican.

Willie thrived at SEDOS. All his experience gave him an insight for the patterns and direction of mission globally. He forged friendships with congregations and influential missionaries and missiologists across the world and found his place as a missionary of the margins from Rome.

He followed his twelve-year service at SEDOS by accepting to be superior or, as he preferred, community leader of the generalate community in Rome where he is renowned for having offered warmth, welcome, friendship, and good humor to all who passed that way, regaling confrères and visitors in English, French, and Italian. He would reflect with his mentor, Newman, that “growth is the only evidence of life.”

“Supposing Him to be the Gardener” (John 20:15)

For all who knew Willie Jenkinson it is no surprise that the gospel text chosen for his funeral mass at Kimmage Church in Dublin on Saturday 26th November 2016 was from John’s resurrection narrative, where Mary of Magdala
mistakes the risen Jesus for the gardener. It is one of those Easter texts where the narrators, curiously and repeatedly, insist that the disciples did not recognize him, even though they had lived closely with and beside Jesus for the previous years. Are they telling us that they weren’t really expecting to see him or were so overcome with grief they were closed to seeing him? Commentators suggest that the Easter message is that we recognise him now, not in physical recognition, but in his word, when he spoke and when Mary recognized him, or in the breaking of the bread when the disciples at Emmaus recognised him, or in his wounds where Thomas recognised him.

It was so in keeping with his life that Willie chose to live at the Spiritan Centre for Refugees and Asylum-seekers (Spirasi) in the inner-city of Dublin for his last active missionary assignment. He served as community leader, but with no particular role in the refugee service other than being available to listen to and engage with many lonely and distressed migrants. But he loved the little garden there and worked in it, giving guidance about shrubs and flowers to those who looked after it. He was often taken to be the gardener and when asked one day by a woman migrant, “Are you the head gardener?” he was delighted to claim the title and would later describe himself as such!

The scriptural allusion was not lost on Willie; not that he saw himself a messiah figure, rather the human encounter is most spiritual and most real in its most simple. He would have seen that the most honest exchanges about life and faith occur when people honestly tell their stories without titles or status complicating the encounter. In that role as head gardener many broken people confided their stories to him. It was a very happy and fulfilling time of his life, even though he was then already in his eighties.

His ministry in his later years reflected his whole life’s ministry. It was always person-centred, a dialogue in respect of the other, exposed and not flinching from real human problems, exchanges to achieve healing and always in simplicity. Like the Master.

The challenges of today in church and society are quite different, almost a reversal from those of Willie’s time; the world of the 1960s and 70s sought reform, global connectedness, and communication; today culture is pulled towards protectionism, populism in tribe and race, and reductionism. Church has experienced two decades of
punishing criticism for its lack of governance and credibility
and cannot find the new wineskins for this time. Perhaps
what is common is a crisis that is also an opportunity. In
this Willie would surely repeat that “the world has changed,
they say!” but rely on the incarnate God to gaze on a new
time and await human agency to respond. We can only be
grateful for his simple, powerful presence in the Spiritan and
church community and in his family too. He exemplified
the words of Schillebeeckx, a theologian close to his heart:
“Christianity is not a message which has to be believed, but
an experience of faith that becomes a message.”

Brendan Carr, C.S.Sp.
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Abbreviations

AG Vatican II Decree on the Missionary Activity of
the Church, Ad gentes. In Documents of Vatican II:
Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents, edited
by Austin P. Flannery O.P. Dublin: Dominican
Publications, 1996. Vatican documents are cited
from this edition.

GS Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern
World, Gaudium et spes.

ND Notes et documents relatifs a la vie et a l’oeuvre du
Venerable Francois-Marie-Paul
Libermann (1802–52). Paris: Maison-Mere, 1929-
1941. 13 vols. + Appendices.

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All Nations, 113 – 155.


*Spiritian Anthology*, edited by Christian de Mare, with the collaboration of Joseph D’Ambrosio and Vincent O’Toole. Enugu, SNAAP Press, 2011.

Endnotes

3AG, no. 2.
5The Church of the Holy Spirit, Kimmage Manor, Dublin is the central church of the Congregation in the Province of Ireland, where Provincial event and liturgies, including funerals, are held.
6Newman, Sermon 26, in *Sermons Bearing on Subjects of the Day*.
7GS, no. 4.
8A popular Irish folk song; Donegal being a County in Ireland.
9The Mau Mau Uprising, also known as the Mau Mau Rebellion, the Kenya Emergency, and the Mau Mau Revolt, was a war in the British Kenya Colony between

10SEDOS (Service of Documentation and Study on Global Mission), a forum established in Rome as a result of Vatican II and open to Institutes of Consecrated Life, who commit themselves to deepening their understanding of global mission.

11Gaelic football, commonly referred to as football or Gaelic, is an Irish team sport played on grass between two teams of 15 players.

12Hurling is an outdoor team game of ancient Gaelic and Irish origin. The game, with pre-historic origins, has been played for 4,000 years. One of Ireland’s native Gaelic games, it shares a number of features with Gaelic football, such as the field and goals, the number of players, and much terminology.


14IMU, the Irish Missionary Union. A Union of Missionary Congregations in Ireland founded in 1970.

15Fitzmaurice, I Found my Tribe, 3

16Jenkinson, “The World has changed, they Say!” 15.

17Ibid.

18Spirasi, Spiritan Initiative for Refugees & Asylum Seekers in Ireland, founded in 1999.


20Misean Cara is an international and Irish faith-based missionary network working in developing countries. The movement is made up of 91 member organisations working in over 50 countries.

21Trócaire was established in 1973 by the Irish Episcopal Conference with the dual mandate to support vulnerable people in the developing world and raising awareness of injustice and global poverty in Ireland.

22Koren, The Spiritans, 531.

23Go Teach All Nations, 122.

24Ryan, Kimmage Manor – 100 years of Service to Mission.

25NB: a very successful Spiritan secondary school was founded in 1966 in the non-fee paying sector; the congregation undertook the shared governance of another secondary school in 1981 with the Presentation Sisters and local Vocational Education Authority.

26Cleary, Spiritan Life and Mission, chaps. 2 & 3.


28The remarks are popularly misattributed to better-known commentators such as Alexis de Tocqueville or Abraham Lincoln, but actually originated with Joseph-
Marie de Maistre, a French philosopher of the counter-revolutionary period.

29ND, VII, 191-195: Libermann to Père Briot, 8th June, 1845. In *Spiritan Anthology*, 266.


Damien Méki, C.S.Sp.

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**Discernment: Ignatian and Libermannian - Two Models? Toward a Methodology of Discernment**

**Introduction**

To discern is to find in every day’s events or in exceptional circumstances a path to freedom that guides our history in the world. Ignatius of Loyola and Francis Libermann are two renowned masters in the field of discernment. From the first, the Ignatian tradition has inherited the *Spiritual Exercises*, a reference for discernment. The second has not left a systematic treatise on discernment. However, he wrote a series of comments and letters that suggest an aptitude for the conduct of souls of which he was aware. He wrote to Jerome Schwindenhammer: “I believe that it pleased God to give me a special grace for the truth of salvation and the guidance of certain souls .... It is a grace that is purely for others and from which I derive nothing for myself.”

If the purpose of discernment is to lead to a choice of life as the unfolding of what is still germinating in the individual, then it must lead to discovering the expectations and the appeals addressed to that individual. It will help mobilize resources and energies towards the fulfilment of a life in accordance with the individual’s very self; one becomes reasonable and productive under the influence of the Holy Spirit. It is thus a matter of finding the inspiration that nurtures a choice.

Discernment presupposes three conditions: right intention, an experienced guide, and the time and means to discern. These three elements occur in both Ignatian and Libermannian ways of discerning. However, some quite detectable variations indicate two distinct approaches to one’s relation to the divine, justified by anthropological and religious backgrounds of diverse provenance. This tints the two ways of discernment in a particular way to the point of rendering them non-reducible one to the other, revealing an “Ignatian tradition” and a “Libermannian tradition” in discernment and spiritual direction.

I carry out an interrogative and critical investigation on the ways and means these two masters propose for spiritual discernment, with a special focus on their anthropological and theological backgrounds, highlighting their convergences and divergences. An assessment of the fruitfulness of Libermann’s way of discernment will justify...
interest in cultivating and deepening its originality.

1. IGNATIAN DISCERNMENT

Our purpose is not an exhaustive description of an already known process, validated by a great tradition of spiritual direction, but to give its main lines, emphasizing the relevant themes for our discussion. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556) through the rules of discernment of spirits exposed in his *Spiritual Exercises*, opened in the sixteenth century the way to procedures of spiritual growth and well-being in the unconditional search for the will of God by a free and responsible person. As Quenum, Jesuit Novice Director in Cameroon, writes: “Spiritual growth consists in St. Ignatius of Loyola in a personalized itinerary towards God where the concern to decide the best for oneself is marked by the thoughtful and prayerful dynamics of the spiritual exercises.” The dynamics of the *Exercises* therefore make us walk in faith towards a free decision inspired by love of God, praise, reverential fear, and service of God. The purpose of the one who engages in the *Exercises* is to become free in order to choose, which supposes a path to inner freedom guaranteeing joy and peace at the end of the decision.

This path has four stages over four weeks. The beginning is the time of “Principle and Basis.” This time places the relationship to God within the created world, within a received narrative where the whole creation is made to gear man towards his aim which is to serve God (*Spir. Ex.* No. 23). It unfolds this way:

- Man is created to serve God;
- Things are created to serve man;
- So man can use things for God.

The underlying principle is that human freedom is realized only if one chooses the good. Because he can choose the good, then he must, since his purpose must be fulfilled. One has to use things for God if one wants to achieve one’s aim. In the same movement, human freedom is accomplished by consenting to God.

However, because he has free will, the person may not want to accomplish his purpose without knowing it clearly. The stages of discernment reveal the resistances of freedom and open the way for a personal response to Christ’s call to serve, according to who one is and what one has to live out
in the world.

- The first week is turned towards the recognition of being a forgiven sinner.
- The second calls to contemplate the life of Christ in order to follow him, answering his call; at the end of that week there is a time of election that allows for a choice of life with complete freedom and responsibility.
- The third week is a time of contemplation of the Passion; and
- the fourth week is a time of contemplation of the Resurrection.

The last two weeks are times of confirmation of the choice: the retreatant, having experienced the conditions of freedom and made the choice of doing God’s will, must uproot everything that prevents this freedom to perform in order to be born to the joy of freedom according to Christ.

**Some Elements in Detail**

*The guide.* The guide is necessary as an assistant, to indicate the way of conducting the research and the dispositions needed to carry out the discernment in a fair, true, and complete manner for a free and responsible decision. Throughout the process, he delivers general information, leaves the candidate free of his choices without ever relieving him from his personal responsibility. He can only offer his support to allow the candidate to exercise his free initiative and refine his own discernment. His experience helps to point out the states and movements through which the retreatant is passing, to initiate him to the recognition of the Spirit at work, and to allow him, in a personal relationship, to discern the paths towards God.

*Discernment.* Discernment is a matter of wanting the will of God and consequently of desiring more deeply the will of God than the realization of one’s aspirations. It implies a greater spiritual freedom because one prefers the will of God to personal aspirations. Steps 2 and 3 provide access to the lucidity and firmness of the will necessary to conduct this discernment with the help of grace. But one must have turned down beforehand the “hidden refusal,” the one that makes it possible to accomplish the good without actually doing the will of God. To become indifferent is the way of being free to choose the will of God because personal will is not the Father’s and the Son’s and could be an injustice or even a refusal of what is right.
Indifference. Indifference consists in the verification that the subject is not insensitive, that he has desires, because desire is the basis for any motion towards choosing. To truly serve, one must become indifferent to all created things. The candidate must then realize that God is present in the world under the mode of absence and want. Indifference to things springs from the subjective opening by which one becomes sensitive to what is not palpable: the presence of God in created things. This presence of God is experienced through the want that cannot be satisfied, felt through the difference between the vibrations of the senses and spiritual motions. In the discovery of things as given, man's desire and his aim, the desire of God, are experienced.

But this desire being intermingled with what drives our behavior and our choices, we often confuse our own will with the desire of God. To discover the desire of God thus presupposes passage through indifference as experience of being loved by God with the consciousness of not responding to this love, a discovery both peaceful and painful of a resistance to his call felt in the heart. Indifference makes it possible to recognize the world as the place of God's presence and of encounter with the Creator in order to serve him (Spir. Ex. No. 233).

Election. It is a choice of life, an expression of a liberated and purified desire to respond personally to the call of Christ to serve according to who one is and what one has to live in the world. The choice is confirmed and renewed daily or by particular reminders in order to bear fruit.

Examination. The Exercises invite, by way of examination, to follow the track of feelings experienced in respect of thoughts which are of three kinds:

- My own, born of my freedom and my will;
- Those that come from the evil spirit;
- Those that come from the good spirit (Spir. Ex. No. 32).

For Ignatius, one becomes master of oneself, one's thoughts, words and actions, by recognizing that he is led, and allowing himself to be led, by the Spirit of God. Self-control is preceded by self-sacrifice. Examination allows to recognize the presence of God and to move forward serenely. Concurrently, it is necessary to dispose oneself to encounter the other. With the help of the Holy Spirit, one can then turn with faith to the inner host to make himself present.
to God’s presence in him. This process requires a certain voluntarism to learn how to receive the self from the Creator in loving fidelity. Then the immediate experience of God becomes possible where he is “within reach of invocation ... when we do not seek to subject him but we rather surrender to him unconditionally.”

2. LIBERMANNIAN DISCERNMENT

Libermann left a practice and abundant correspondence on spiritual direction. I base myself on three articles written by Spiritans.9 For Libermann, vocation is God’s work. It is not to be invented, but to be known. From this principle, we can draw the following conclusions.

• *One does not choose one’s vocation.* We only decide to answer it or not. Our vocation is God’s concern because it is he who has the initiative: “he has determined for all eternity the ministry to which he destines [us].”10 What we need to do is set ourselves in a state of discovering what is expected from us, in total availability, faithfulness to his will, in a peaceful and confident expectation of the manifestation of his hidden wishes. For that, we must have “the soul free, calm, recollected, humble, and peacefully abandoned to God.”11

• *It must be welcomed as a grace.* It is useless to make voluntary efforts, as if God were within reach of our human will. If our will is to intervene, it is to welcome and dispose ourselves to the action of God, because it is God who attracts, God who transforms, God who acts.12

• “These are not conjectures that must decide us either for or against ... It is not necessary that your reason constructs or dismantles your vocation. Vocation is to be known in the light of God ... It is neither for you to give yourself a vocation nor for you to decide it ... Your vocation ... is a matter that does not concern you but only God. Set yourself in a position to be all his own and he will command you at his pleasure ... he will manifest his will to you.”13

• *It manifests itself as an inner attraction.* For Libermann, every vocation is attractive because attraction is an essential modality of grace’s action in us. Every vocation is a call by God and the inner attraction of grace is the voice through which God speaks to souls. The Holy Spirit speaks to the Christian soul:
• “I believe that the Holy Spirit constantly breathes in the same way in the same soul, all its impressions are almost similar in it, its conduct on it is always uniform, and consequently ... vocation is declared in the same way in a soul as its other attractions, and therefore the same means must be used to know it and to discern it.”¹⁴

• So vocation is all about listening to God who speaks to the heart and to “Listen to God in your interior ... It is a general rule that the voice of God who calls us is within us ...”¹⁵

• Which must be confirmed by an outside call. Vocation implies the correspondence of an inner and an external call which is often the voice of the superiors and the events of Providence. If there are two calls, there is only one vocation, because the One who calls is unique and cannot contradict himself. For priestly vocation, the internal call is subject to the double control of the director and of the superior who accepts or refuses it, on behalf of the church. In the absence of this submission and this authentication, the internal attraction loses all value and can no longer be considered as a call from God. “It is the Spirit and the church, in a perfect harmony, who say to a soul: come”¹⁶

• To recognize God’s call, it is necessary to discern the attraction of the supernatural and to recognize it in one’s own history. A spiritual guide is needed to help this discernment: “For your vocation, it is necessary to consult your director ... he has the grace of state to decide these things ... The opinion of the director must be an infallible rule, which one always follows with the assurance to have done the will of God.”¹⁷

However, one of the major principles for discernment and spiritual direction for Libermann is the refusal of a system and insistence on the personal character of each journey. Such a principle holds especially for the spiritual guide who should in no way substitute for the candidate in his search for the will of God. At most, he can clarify the situation, in the light of faith and of his experience, without ever wanting to bring anyone to his own mind. It is the meaning of Libermann’s remark to Mr. Feret: “I blame your principles on the direction of vocations ... I think I can say with certainty that this is not the true conduct of a good director.”¹⁸
On the contrary, “It is a great principle, in divine things, not to want to bring everyone to his opinion and his way of acting … God has his views on everyone; he communicates and distributes his graces differently; and no matter how hard we try we can never succeed in changing others.” Refusal therefore of “spiritual imperialism” or “manifestation of the will of power” for the spiritual guide in order to respect the will of God and the freedom of the soul. According to Blanchard, Libermann sees in John the Baptist the type of purity needed from the guide in the direction of souls of whom he must imitate the reserve and discretion.

The spiritual director is a guide, the outer word of God, who, according to circumstances, helps to discover and hear his inner voice. He must therefore beware of any personal influence. “A director must be careful not to drive a soul; it’s up to God to lead her.”

• **To obey the will of God.** Once the will of God is manifested in one’s life, the call must no longer be questioned. One must be wary of attractions that tend to move him out of it: “We fulfil the will of God when we observe what we have promised in the presence of angels and saints … Nothing is deceptive like attraction, especially when it does not fit with the life in which the Divine Providence has placed us. Woe to the soul, who attaches more importance to it than to the ordinary duties of life.”

• **Led by the Holy Spirit.** The remark to Mr. Feret on the determination of the choice of life is worth as much for the director as for the candidate: “I have noticed that you direct vocations by reasoning a great deal on things, comparing and examining with reason a lot of even foreign circumstances, which seems to me to be highly questionable; for it is certain that divine and interior things must not be subjected to the examination of our reason.”

This does not mean we must despise intelligence; it remains necessary to resort to it when one does not see clearly. However: “What is the means which the director must employ to know the general conduct of God in a soul, either for the whole of his state, or for the particular attractions, if not the light of God alone which he must receive in his soul in prayer and in continual union with Our Lord?” This light of God received in prayer is the Holy Spirit who, far from annihilating our intelligence and our
will, comes to guide and adjust them to the plan of God over us. Libermann writes:

“Your soul is the ship, the heart is the sail, the Holy Spirit is the wind; he breathes in your will and the soul walks, and it walks towards the goal that God proposes; your spirit is the tiller which must prevent that in the force and vivacity of the movement given to your heart, you will not leave the direct line determined by the divine goodness.”

This presupposes from both the director and the candidate confidence and union with God. However, this presumption does not prevent critical thinking in order to test the spirit that speaks in us. Hence a number of criteria for discerning the grace at work: perseverance, peacefulness, patience, humility, strength, fidelity, and joy.

- Right intention. One must enter religion only by the pure desire of pleasing God. Libermann wrote in 1842 to a young subdeacon: “The disposition in which to go (to ordination) is to be ready to sacrifice yourself for the glory of our Lord and to do all that you can to make him live in souls.”

Then, personal aptitudes can be supplementary criteria to determine the existence and the authenticity of the interior call to the service of God.

3. CONVERGENCES AND DIVERGENCES

3.1. Spiritual Experience is a singular Experience

For Libermann, as much as for Ignatius, the starting point of the spiritual life is personal experience. The encounter of Jesus is a personal discovery, a reality everybody feels in his own way; it varies according to time and place. It witnesses of a reality that transcends our experience, in which we must enter, even though we can never completely get hold of it. It inspires a global style of existence and of attention to the others where everyone can project himself freely and find his own way. The response to the Gospel is the conversion of the whole being.

In the Gospels, Jesus of Nazareth expresses the essence of the religious attitude in its bare, frightening, and confusing nakedness. By his example and teaching, he proclaims that nothing makes sense except by the decisive conversion to love that turns the individual simultaneously towards
others and towards the Other, in a total and irrevocable self-donation that expresses the same love in two different aspects. Indeed, what appears common to all spiritual experience is the perception of reality and of others as revealing God’s presence. For van Kaam, it is the experience of emptying oneself to welcome grace which tells me who I am in the encounter with others. Whereas everyone has his unique way of living that experience, it will always be a matter of knowing oneself by opening up to the divine.

Then, because it is human and always opened to the ultimate reality, spiritual experience invents the words to express and communicate itself. This is why it is always new and cannot be satisfied with the formulations of the past. It requires a critical effort to confront the experience, to enlighten it from within, through a language seeking to express the integral experience of the openness of man to the world, to others, and to the Other, in a shared setting, historically located. Because it takes such a personal tone, no one can speak for others. The history of our journeys with God can only be narrated by the one who underwent the experience.

### 3.2. Spiritual Experience always involves a Call

The opening of a new world of relationships through religious experience involves new calls and expectations. To hear these calls supposes a listening ear for those who are searching for existential meaning and effective truth. Libermann answered God’s call because he learnt how to listen and hear the voices from the depths, addressed to all and to everyone, to open new paths of experience towards a creation awaiting new achievements. This could explain why, in the process of discernment, Libermann absolutely distinguishes all that comes from the Holy Spirit from what comes from man. The specific otherness of the One who is neither world nor man is set over against the self-consciousness of one’s finitude. Therefore, the last words of Libermann, “God is all, man is nothing,” resound as the expression of his conviction that a healthy relationship is unthinkable except in the recognition of a differentiating otherness, excluding all confusion, all compromise, all equivocation.

Concurrently, the consciousness of being incomplete reminds of the ontological limit of one’s personal power: “We are a lot of poor people ...” However, authentic faith sets in motion an exceptional movement that exceeds
logical evidences and historical arguments. It is an impulse of intimate evidence, of visceral hope for a spiritual future, in a burst of love which gives meaning to everything else. Without such a faith, Libermann would never have undertaken the trip to Rome, as a simple acolyte, to present the project of a missionary congregation while he was not even assured of access to the priesthood. It is this hope that makes his faith authentic. It emerges from the vital experience of “a heart-sensitive God” and nourishes an awakened, restless, caring, and self-giving conscience, justifying one’s own life and endeavors. One could make the same analysis of Ignatius of Loyola’s experience in Manresa.29

3.3. Answering the Call from the Perspective of our own Life

Le Déaut30 invites Spiritans to revisit Libermann’s personal history to realize that his spirituality is rooted on a symbiosis of the Jewish religious tradition and the revelation of Christ. He indicates a number of factors to be considered.

• The trauma that once represented for a Jew his passage to the church. Such an experience might partly explain why Libermann insisted so much on renunciation, asceticism, sacrifice, and the austere virtues that were foreign to Jewish spirituality.

• A conversion is a culmination, but also the beginning of a search. It implies such a fundamental choice that all life is radicalized. Like Paul, Libermann forgot the past (Phil 3:13), giving himself totally to Christ who became his life (Gal 2:20). Converts are often absolute, demanding.

• Traditional Jewish life was impregnated with prayer and the feeling of God’s presence. For the Jew, there is no non-religious act.

• The Talmud itself, while forming the spirit to the rabbinical dialectic, provided a rich teaching on the relations between Israel and her God, on how to remain constantly “connected” with the divine will. Jacob was marked by typical traits of Jewish piety: sense of divine transcendence, the absolute dependence of man, humility and surrender to God. “God is all; man is nothing”: this doctrine was lived before being learnt later in Saint-Sulpice.

Heikje31 recalls that Libermann was raised in a climate of faith in which no minute, no place, escaped the service of God and that the meaning of God is permanent in the
Jewish soul. For the Jew, God is present in history and the only attitude that suits man before God is dependence and availability. Unreservedly, man is at the disposal of God and has to be attentive to the moment of God, a moment always involving a definite task. This must be considered when Libermann speaks of the “moment of God,” “practical union,” and “abandonment,” or when he writes: “We are made for the works of God; the works are not made for us”; or “As with every new business, my soul rises to God to ask for his assistance; it follows that the more I have business, the stronger my union with God.”

Because of this closeness, Heikje wonders whether Libermann was not a Christian Hasid by his attachment to the pre-eminence of the inner life and the attachment to the theological virtues, which are faith (“faith alone”) and charity (“charity above all”), or even by the sentiment of nothingness of man before God that we already pointed out. This points towards a Jewish inheritance which has influenced the religious anthropology of Libermann, justifying his shift from Western anthropology, rooted in the Greco-Roman philosophy and centred on the subject and his freedom.

For the modern western man, the point of departure can only be his own existence in its original autonomy and its constitutive opening to the globality of the world. This existence is marked by a fundamental and intrinsic duality: dialogal articulation of the subject and structures, reason and finitude, activity and passivity. Even though the Ignatian understanding of the subject is closer to Ricoeurian “broken cogito” than the Cartesian “cogito ergo sum” in its triumphant self-determination, it sprouts from the Western source where the relationship of man to God differs fundamentally from the Jewish approach. Freedom and will do not play the same role in both perspectives. That seems an obvious point of divergence in Ignatius’ and Libermann’s approach to spiritual direction. Without finding a radical separation between the two orientations, one can say that in the Jesuit tradition insistence is set primarily on the work of the intelligence, while in the other the will is more in view.

As the analysis of Laplace shows it, both Libermann and Ignatius are attentive to the historical modalities of the individual existence, but the areas they emphasize differ, because they are rooted in distinct anthropologies.

- Ignatius, in the strict Western tradition wants to purify intentions, but does not speak of the annihilation of
the natural being. He considers natural gifts and strives to fit them into the Christian training. He assumes human nature as a condition of progress. Discernment is gradual, because there is no perceptible difference between what comes from nature and from grace at the beginning of the process.

• Libermann considers human nature insofar as it is transformed by grace. We must hit the boundaries of its “misery” in order to receive it back, transformed by the power of God. This is how Libermann speaks about human nature: the “miserable me” (LS, I, 341, 448), “the old man X” (LS, I, 24-25), or “the sensual man,” in struggle with “the inner man” for the control of the human heart (LS, I, 363). This carnal man must be brought down. No doubt we have an enemy on the outside: the world, “an object of horror and abomination,” because “the spirit of the world is a spirit of pride, of falsehood, of vanity, of ostentation and riches” (LS, I, 157-158), with its honors, pleasures and riches (LS, III, 32). He too is unmasked and denounced. However, Libermann prefers to attack the inner enemy, the most dangerous. Urging seminarians to walk the path of perfect renunciation, he gives them these pieces of advice: “Practice this renunciation especially with regard to yourself and within your soul ... Get used to ... live in a continual abnegation of yourself .... Why do you always think of this wretched me? ... Leave yourselves, dear brothers, and surrender to our dear Lord.”

But this renunciation is only one of the two faces of spiritual experience which must, to be complete, open to total union with God who becomes thus the mover of our life and apostolate, leading to what Libermann calls practical union.

Thus, the motions of Libermann and Ignatius are reverse as to self-renunciation. For Ignatius, it is not a matter of renouncing contentment but of analyzing it by means of the discernment of spirits to know if it really comes from God. This discernment comes after the election and aims to comfort it, either by discarding a contentment that would be an attempt of manipulation on the part of the bad spirit, or by welcoming a consolation from the good spirit. For Libermann, renouncing contentment is right from the very beginning. The real contentment can only be given by God as a sign of the Spirit living in us.
Regarding spiritual direction, while the Ignatian tradition seeks to lead the candidate by techniques and precise rules to the knowledge of himself and the deepening of the relation to God in order to prepare, confirm, and hold the election in time, Libermann aims rather to immediately immerse the person in the influence of the Holy Spirit by giving him criteria to recognize his voice and the psychological effects of grace in his soul. So while it is more of a reasoned choice for Ignatius, the impulse of the Spirit for Libermann acts directly on the will rather than on intelligence and imagination. Libermann writes in 1848:

Beware of any inner movement that has its principle and action in the mind. It is the heart that is the center of all that is good in us, that is to say, of all that comes from divine grace, especially when the movement stirs up the imagination, we must look at it as unhelpful, as a temptation, not to be troubled about, but to ignore and not worry about.

Ignatius recommends to work on desires to direct them progressively towards the source. Libermann’s pedagogy consists in showing at first the distant and fascinating goal to achieve:

When I see a soul whose thought seemed high, I mean a soul that seems to me called to the perfection of the inner life (and there are more than one thinks), I begin by giving him a strong idea of Christian perfection, so that he is impressed and taken away. I do so because in his interior God pushes him with violence. Seeing the height and the beauty of the aim, he is delighted and feels a violent desire to reach this state so beautiful and so admirable.

Hence the three moments in accompaniment: (1) initial shock of perfection that arouses desire; (2) spiritual initiation; and (3) the task of resolving difficulties and making the soul live in peace with its consent to God’s action.

The ideal perfection projected from the earliest stages of spiritual accompaniment must be transformed into an existential one while respecting the law of growth and maturation, ranging from a lesser fervor to the perfection of the union, from a sensitive fervor to that of faith, from the fervor of the senses to the one of the spirit through the
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purifying crises, so that, freed from the multitude of created affections and the search for oneself, the will goes straight to God and does things without hesitation, with righteousness and purity.43

It is only at the end of this journey that the soul is consecrated, totally surrendered to God according to the various modes of abandonment. But first one has to go through the test of time because “patience is the first step and indifference the last moment of abandonment.”44

Conclusion: Originality and Fecundity

For Piault,45 spiritual direction, for Libermann as well as Ignatius, endorses a certain personalism: the conviction that each individual has his own history, his personal decisions to take, and that he cannot enter into any pre-established scheme, especially not that of the director; conviction also that time is necessary to see clearly in a soul and for this soul to mature in the will of God.

For Bouchard, “compared to the doctrine of the Exercises of Saint Ignatius on the three stages of a good election, there is no doubt that Libermann’s way resounds the same way.”46 However, while conceding that it is an imperfect process to regulate one’s conduct, Ignatius pays greater attention to reasoned choice, while Libermann thinks that God is always ready to move and attract our will so as to guide our decision rather by the experience of the discernment of minds than by the examination of the reasons. As a result, he warns against an introspection that turns the subject towards himself rather than towards God and leaves him tormented by his faults rather than preoccupied with pleasing God. True religious quest can set the person out of the ordinary and even scandalize good souls. Libermann’s experience seems to confirm a general observation Onimus expresses this way: “We do not meet religious creativity in well-balanced wisdoms and passive obedience, but rather in impatience, enthusiasm, rejection, active resistance, wherever the attraction of transcendence is exercised.”47

The religious quest is a passion that must devour life. It is therefore not immune to regrettable excesses because the core of religious life is to go beyond, to risk oneself on ways that blow out the norms, to impregnate with the divine the spontaneous impulses that push towards more being, love, and creativity. It generates audacity to face the novelty of the present with its challenges and opportunities.
Even though Libermann’s letters suggest that he wants to deal only with the soul and its inner movements, in a sort of supernatural sphere where the human is banished - which is not without dangers for the individual involved in situations that are not formally supernatural and yet must find meaning within God’s plan of salvation - his practice appears quite different. Like for the Hasidim, the one who goes to God is sent back to the world: the presence to God is openness to, and commitment to, the world. Libermann’s conversion to Christ is already openness to universality: there is no longer any race discrimination for him. As Heikje writes it, “he was baptized a missionary.”

Libermann actually emphasizes the positive aspect of spiritual life as dialectic of presence and implication: the person in relation with God thinks first of the One of whom he is the creature before he considers his relationship to God and to others. Thus, if he seeks to know himself, it will be a knowledge in God, because the true knowledge of himself operated by divine grace produces an increase of love for God that impregnates all his human relations.

This Jewish understanding of the human being takes into account the dimension of transcendence to achieve its completion. God alone having life in essence, man is defined by his ability to receive this life. God draws man to himself to communicate with him through his Son, who in turn draws him by his humanity imbued with divine virtue to give him fullness of life. In that sense, God has always the initiative. But the encounter is possible because it is through man’s thirst for life that God penetrates him from within and dwells in the inmost and at the root of all his spiritual faculties.

Thus, spiritual direction for Libermann presupposes a good knowledge of what vocation is: “the knowledge of the attraction and the impression of the grace of God with respect to the state of life which a soul must embrace.” The answer to God’s call becomes part of the progressive unfolding of a story to be written as soon as the first movement is initiated by the Lord himself.

Despite the criticism often made to Libermann of underplaying the role of reason in spirituality, his approach is interesting as an alternative way of spiritual direction - will-centered (commitment) or relation-centered (dialogue) - because all these aspects of human life can become places of encounters that promote life and love in the manner of Jesus.
Christ. And I believe that this legacy holds so much promise for the people of our century in search of a meaningful existence in a world where landmarks are collapsing that it deserves to be deepened and promoted.

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Abbreviations
CSJ Commentaire de Saint Jean/Commentary on St. John's Gospel
ES Ecrits Spirituels/Spiritual Writings
LS Lettres Spirituelles/Spiritual Letters
ND Notes et Documents. 13 volumes + appendices.

References
Bouchard, Athanase, L'appel intérieur de Dieu dans la spiritualité de Libermann, Pdf, Spiritan Documents, CSS, Duquesne University, 18 pages.
Heikje, Jean, 25 ans d'empreinte juive. Document Pdf, Spiritan Documents, CSS : Duquesne University, 18 pages
Laplace, Jean, Discernement spirituel chez Libermann et Saint Ignace, Pdf, Spiritan Documents, CSS, Duquesne University, 6 pages.


**Endnotes**

1. L.S. IV, 30
3. See Dalmases, *Ignace de Loyola*.
4. The fourteen rules of discernment of spirits are proper to the first week of the spiritual exercises.
5. Texte autographe des Exercices.
6. Quenum, « Le discernement spirituel » page 1
7. This decision is understood as the active and free acceptance of God’s love manifested in the life of Jesus revealing the typical relationship of humankind to God.
10. N.D., IV, 10 and III, 326.
11. N.D., VIII, 8.
16. Blanchard, tome II, 32.
17. N.D., III, 184; IV, 9; L.S., II, 81
18. L.S., II, 310
19. LS II, p. 468
22. N.D., IX, 369-370.
26 N.D., IV, 19-20.
27 Van Kaam, *Fulfilment in Religious Life*.
28 See ND IV, 303.
29 See Salin, “St. Ignace et la liberté.”
30 Le Déaut, “Connaissance du judaïsme et spiritualité spiritaine.”
31 Heijke, *25 ans d’empreinte juive*.
32 Ibid., 8.
33 Ibid., 10.
34 N.D., XIII, 347; 29 Oct 1851.
35 N.D., I, 518-519.
37 Ibid., note 28.
41 LS IV, 544.
42 L.S., II, 388-399.
43 See L.S., II, 246.
44 Blanchard, tome 1, 515.
49 See L.S I, 296.
50 L.S. II, 312.
51 CSJ 47, 107.
**SPIRITAN PEDAGOGY OF EVANGELIZATION IN TANZANIA: FOCUS ON EDUCATION**

**Introduction**

Last year we celebrated 150 years of Catholic evangelization in Tanzania. The history of Catholic evangelization of Tanzania is intrinsically connected with the Spiritans because they were the first Catholic missionaries to evangelize that country or even East Africa in modern era. Their methodology of evangelization set a pace for other Catholic missionary congregations which came later to eastern Africa. The main purpose of this paper is to examine the methodology of evangelization of our ancestors in faith who dedicated and sacrificed their lives for this beautiful country. We will focus on education as one of the major strategies our ancestors in faith used to evangelize eastern Africa.

**Methodology of Early Spiritan Missionaries to Eastern Africa**

The first Spiritan missionaries to East Africa arrived in 1863 in Zanzibar which was by then a flourishing slave trade centre, and on March 4, 1868 they arrived in Bagamoyo. The major Spiritan ministry at Zanzibar and later at Bagamoyo was to ransom slaves, teach them useful trades in life, and christen them.

**Christian Villages**

For early Spiritans to eastern Africa, the two main purposes of evangelization of the East Africans were anthropological, *salus animarum* (salvation of souls) and ecclesiological, establishment of the Catholic Church. The methodology they used to achieve both aims was the creation of Christian villages or “sacred space” which had been spearheaded by Jesuits in Latin America in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-centuries. Influenced by nineteenth-century theological anthropology and dominated by Catholic ecclesiocentricism that stipulated that proper human personhood was to be found within the confines of the Catholic Church outside of which there is no salvation, the Spiritans created Christian villages where they enclosed ransomed slaves in order to form them into Christians. They were convinced that Christian villages (for the Spiritans “freedom villages”) would help the ransomed slaves to deepen their faith. Like any European missionary during...
that time, Spiritans had a patronizing and *tabula rasa* attitude to the ransomed slaves they evangelized.

Spiritans never attempted to evangelize the surrounding Muslim community even though they enjoyed good relations with their leaders. First, they did not want to imperil the permission given to them by the Sultan of Zanzibar to establish their mission; also they wanted to avoid awakening Muslim fanaticism when European presence and control in this region was thin on the ground.\(^6\) Second, Spiritan missionaries were aware of the fact that it was difficult to convert Muslims. Attempts to proselytize Muslims in North Africa had not achieved much success.\(^7\) Third, Spiritan missionaries looked at the surrounding Muslim environment with mistrust and disdain. It was unsafe for “liberated” slaves because they could easily be recaptured and be either reinserted into the slave trade circuit or taken in by slave owners at the coast. Some of those who tried to escape from the Spiritan enclave often turned back after realizing that it was safer and better to be in the hands of patronizing Spiritans than to be exposed to marauding Arab slave traders.

The Spiritan ministry won the admiration and praise of many people who visited Bagamoyo and Zanzibar missions, like Henry Stanley. The British who had ships in the Indian Ocean to monitor illegal shipment of slaves, gave the slaves they intercepted on high seas to the Spiritans rather than to the Anglican mission. Another unlikely source of support of Spiritan missionary activity came from Sultan Majid who gave Spiritans large estates of land (which they still own) on which they established Christian villages at Bagamoyo. He did this in recognition of the good work the Spiritans were doing.

**First Attempt to Train the Local Clergy**

Fr. Francis Mary Paul Libermann, one of the founders of the Spiritans, had insisted that the training of the local clergy was a “*sine qua non*.”\(^8\) This is what *Propaganda Fide* in Rome had recommended. In the beginning, Spiritans were very enthusiastic to train the local clergy and a seminary was built at Zanzibar, but this effort fizzled out, as Kieran reports:

There were eight students in the seminary in 1869 at the start of the project. By mid-1870, there were twelve, but Horner said he would be happy if four persevered. At the end of 1870, there were twenty and
this remained the figure throughout 1871 and 1872. On returning from France in 1876, Horner put out all the poor students, so then only ten were left who were reduced to four by June. That was the end of the attempt. Although in 1880 and 1881 Baur referred to thirty and forty in Zanzibar Seminary, these were really being trained as catechists.9

**First East African Spiritans**

The second attempt was to train Spiritan Brothers, and on November 1, 1875, Brother Philip Mzuako became the first native born East African to be professed in the Congregation.10 However, one major setback was that East African professed members were not treated as members, rather had an intermediate status between professed Brothers and laity. Baur, the Superior, suggested to the Spiritan generalate in France that Africans who were professed should be given an intermediate status, because he had problems in putting them on the same footing with the Europeans. In response, the congregation said that those admitted should do the novitiate and be allowed to take vows renewable every year, and should be given the title *agregés*.11 *Agregés* means “associates,” not full Brothers; at the same time they were supposed to keep the vows of poverty, obedience, and chastity. Those who were professed in this arrangement were frustrated and left the congregation.

The initial failure to train priests and brothers to join the congregation frustrated the Spiritans so much that it took them many decades to recover; instead they concentrated on the training of catechists. The first priest to be ordained in Spiritan mission territory was Alfonse Mtana from Moshi diocese, Tanzania in 1939.12 By contrast, other groups of missionaries that came to East Africa later were more successful in training the local clergy. For instance, the Missionaries of Africa, who arrived in Uganda in 1879 via Bagamoyo where they were facilitated by the Spiritans, ordained the first two indigenous priests, Basil Lumu and Victor Mukasa in 1913, and by 1935 there were 122 African Missionaries of Africa.13 The Consolata missionaries who arrived in Kenya in 1902 ordained two local priests, Giacomo Camisassa and Tommaso Kimangu in 1927.

**Education: A Cherished Evangelization Strategy**

Education had played an important part in the evangelization pedagogy of the early Spiritan missionaries
to East Africa. With the closure of Christian villages and the advent of the German colonialists after the Berlin Conference (1884-5) which partitioned Africa, education became even more important. The purpose remained the same: to win converts to the Catholic faith and for the salvation of souls. Schools also were meant to instil Christian morals and to compete with other religions, for instance, the Muslim and Protestant faiths. Again, like the evangelization of the slaves, children were the main target for education. Since the purpose of schools was to convert people to Christianity, the teaching of the catechism was part and parcel of the school curriculum. Donovan rightly observes:

It is no exaggeration to say that the school became the missionary method of East Africa. This was a policy eagerly backed by Rome. In 1928, Monsignor Hinsley, Apostolic Visitor to East Africa, told the gathering of bishops in Dar-es-Salaam: ‘Where it is impossible for you to carry on both the immediate task of evangelization and your education work, neglect your churches in order to perfect your schools.’

Schools were opened rapidly: “The twentieth-century saw a great development of schools which were increasingly accepted as the best hope and the future of the mission.” The schools taught religion which gave a place of prominence to the catechist at the mission compound. Furthermore, mission schools taught the 3Rs (Reading, Writing and Arithmetic). However, as Kieran reports, “[t]he teaching of agriculture and trades was the most characteristic aspect of the Spiritan schools, as it had been with freed slaves in Bagamoyo.” There was a lot school enrolment around Kilimanjaro region where it is reported that by 1898, there were already 2,000 children attending schools run by the Kibosho mission.

Kieran continues to report that the numbers kept on increasing with leaps and bounds, so much so that by 1912 the Vicariate of Kilimanjaro reported 150 schools with 16,000 pupils. Schools were very attractive for the Chaggas (natives of the Kilimanjoro region) but were also a prerogative for Catholics and prospective Catholics.

Spiritans felt incompetent in the education of girls and for that reason invited Sisters to help them in this noble task. By 1903, there were 2,160 girls in Kibosho schools. Spiritans were disappointed by the government’s refusal of
financial support and reluctance to make school attendance compulsory. There was also a felt need to train future leaders, and for that reason Spiritans built St. Francis, Pugu. Among the prominent leaders who were taught at Pugu is former President of Tanzania, Benjamin Mkapa. Mwalimu Julius Nyerere also taught at the school.

New Efforts to Revitalize Education

There are now new efforts by Spiritans to revitalize education after the nationalization policy was abandoned. The Spiritans together with other Catholic Congregations have not opted to reclaim the old schools which were confiscated by the government, rather to construct new ones with Christian ethos.

Nationalization of Schools and its Aftermath

Spiritans involvement in schools continued until after independence when the government by the Arusha Declaration of 1967 nationalized all the schools. When the government abandoned the nationalization of schools policy and was ready to give them back to the church, many Religious Congregations were caught off guard and turned down the offer, because they had not been sufficiently prepared to run them. In addition, the schools had been so much dilapidated that many congregations felt that they did not have enough resources to rehabilitate them and so opted to start afresh. However, it took time for Spiritans to go back to education after a period of recess.

The nationalization of schools policy did not affect seminaries. Usa River, a Spiritan Seminary which was a novitiate and then a pre-Philosophy training school became a Seminary (Forms V and VI), a status it has maintained up to date. Although the primary purpose of seminaries is to train future priests, yet, because of their academic excellence and the lack of alternative good secondary schools for boys in Tanzania, they became for many Catholics a viable option for quality education - no wonder that many high ranking officials in government and parastatal bodies in Tanzania passed through Catholic seminaries, President John Pombe Magufuli the current President of Tanzania being one of them.

Bagamoyo, a Beacon of Spiritan Education

After a slow start, Spiritans in Tanzania are prioritizing education again as an important evangelization strategy. 
Bagamoyo is playing a leading role in this new venture. When Donavan\textsuperscript{20} visited Bagamoyo in the late 70s, he sarcastically and pessimistically described it as a “ghost town with a huge and empty cathedral … melancholy vineyard filled with remains of so many young missionaries with a sleep of a century upon them. Bwaga moyo indeed “leave here your hearts and hopes” a fitting symbol for the thousands of slaves, the many missionaries and half-century missionary work in Africa.”

Contrary to Donovan’s pessimistic view, Bagamoyo, is no longer a “ghost town” as it might have appeared to be thirty-five years ago, but rather a springboard blossoming with education. A Spiritan network of social and educational projects has brought a positive awakening to Bagamoyo in the last twenty-five years. The first Spiritan General Chapter on African soil was held at Bagamoyo in 2012.

At Bagamoyo, Spiritans run two secondary schools, one primary school, one vocational training school, a small catering school, two health centres, a dispensary and a university college. It is highly symbolic that where the former Marian freedom village was located, there stands today Marian Girls School, offering quality education to more than 800 high school level students from different social and religious backgrounds. Certainly, these girls are experiencing a new form of liberation and hopefully a nucleus of responsible citizens will emerge from them. Spiritans have built Libermann Primary School in Dar-es-Salaam, Tengeru Boys’ School in Arusha, Ngarenaro Secondary School (handed over to the Archdiocese of Arusha) and many others. With these new schools and institutions, Spiritans must remain focused on the original intention of education of their ancestors in faith.

**Indispensable Lessons from our Ancestors in Faith**

The lives of early Spiritan missionaries to eastern Africa are an indispensable example to all Spiritans to emulate. They sacrificed their lives for the mission. They worked with great zeal. Whatever strategy or methodology they employed was always aimed at empowering the poor and marginalized.

**Education for the Liberation of the Poor**

Early Spiritan missionaries to Tanzania prioritized the liberation of the slaves who were the poorest at the time. The Tanzania Province “Education Policy” provides principles and guidelines to those involved in education ministry. The
The educational institutions which have been successful so far have been driven by the great zeal of Spiritans who have sacrificed their life, and not by selfish driven motives.
The Assembly of Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) that met in Dar-es-Salaam in 1976 succinctly said that the common denominator to all African reality has been the “pauperization of the African person: political, social and economic known as anthropological poverty.”22 It is basically manifested in disdaining what is really African and embracing whole-heartedly what is European. Early Spiritan missionaries to eastern Africa addressed this challenge by empowering ex-slaves with liberating education which helped them to be masters of their own destiny. With acquired skills, ransomed slaves catechized the interior of Africa and brought social development to the Africans who had been stigmatized by slavery.

Spiritan educational institutions in Tanzania carry an onerous task of addressing the challenges of anthropological poverty that have acquired a variety of forms. This involves instilling in students a sense of belonging and a genuine love for their culture, and continent. Being black is not a curse, but a blessing.

**Education for Self-Reliance**

One of the cherished objectives of education is self-reliance. On *Education for Self Reliance*, Mwalimu Julius Nyerere says that the purpose of education is not to train for the skills required to earn high salaries, as the colonial system of education had advocated. Rather, the purpose is “to transmit from one generation to the next the accumulated wisdom and knowledge of the society, and to prepare the young people for their future membership of the society and active participation in its maintenance or development.”23

Early Spiritan missionaries empowered the Africans to be self-reliant. They could open and manage Christian villages in the interior of eastern Africa, utilize the trades learnt to sustain their lives and the lives of those who depended on them and be a valuable source of support to their community.

Likewise, Spiritan pedagogy for education must not just focus on academic excellence but rather empower students to be self-reliant. Above all, education must focus on the Christian ethos - honesty, integrity, respect for human dignity, and tolerance in a world full of corruption, greed, hatred, murder and many forms of injustices.
Conclusion

The avowed purpose of this paper has been to review the Spiritan pedagogy of evangelization with particular focus on education as the Catholic Church in Tanzania celebrates 150 years since the first Catholic missionaries (who were Spiritans) arrived in Tanzania. We have noted that education for the poor has been part and parcel of the evangelization strategy of the early Spiritan missionaries to Tanzania and for that reason the poor must have a privileged position in Spiritan institutions.

Abbreviations


References


Endnotes

1Zanzibar, which is infamous in history as one of the greatest slave markets in the world, sold between 50,000 and 60,000 slaves per annum in its markets during the second half of the nineteenth-century. This city, whose center is known as Stone Town, exchanged hands between the Portuguese and Arabs; when the Portuguese left in the late seventeenth-century, it fell into Persian hands. By mid-nineteenth-century, a BuSaidi dynasty originally from Oman at the Persian Gulf was in full control. One of the powerful rulers, Said Said (1804-1856) moved his capital from Muscat to Zanzibar in 1840. From Zanzibar, the Sultan controlled the entrance into the interior of Eastern Africa as far as the Great Lakes region. By the time the Spiritans arrived at Zanzibar, large quantities of slaves, ivory and spices were traded there. See Kollman, *Evangelization of Slaves*, 37-38.

2Bagamoyo on the Tanzania mainland was not strictly speaking a slave trade market but since it was a main destination point of slaves en route to Zanzibar, some slaves exchanged hands for local needs, between dealers and local slave masters. Bagamoyo, it is said, is derived from two Swahili words, bwaga and moyo. Bwaga means “to throw down” or “put down.” Moyo as we have hinted in the last chapter means “heart” or “soul.” Bagamoyo then was a place where captured slaves after a long journey from the interior, would put down their hearts, lay down the burden of their hearts, give up hope because it was the last contact with the mainland before a trip to Zanzibar where misery and desperation awaited them. An alternative meaning of Bagamoyo is derived from the Swahili word ku-aga, meaning “bid farewell,” which means that Bagamoyo was a place where slaves after going through hardships and looking ahead at the Indian ocean with more despair, resignation and uncertainty, bid farewell to their heart or soul. See Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered*, 4.

3Kollmann, *Evangelization of Slaves*, 63, 91. Kollman
points out that the Spiritans believed that Africans had a soul and were so zealous for the salvation of souls that they employed someone to watch cemeteries for people thrown there still alive whom they could baptize. Kollman also mentions a special group of women who visited the sick and baptized them. In a Muslim society, these women “baptiseuses” often went to homes where priests could not be allowed to go; they assisted the sick but their real intention was to baptize them. See Kieran, “The Holy Ghost Fathers in East Africa,” 146.

Baur, 2000 Years of Christianity in Africa, 230. The Jesuits referred to Christian villages among the Indios of Paraguay during the seventeenth- and eighteenth-centuries as reductions, because they were intended to “reduce” the Indios to a deeper understanding of the faith.

Kieran, “The Holy Ghost Fathers in East Africa,” 120. The first Christian village at Bagamoyo received the name St. Joseph in 1873: forty families were living there in 1876, seventy in 1878 and sixty in 1880. The village was organized like a religious community based on ora et labora “work and pray.” They had to be indoors by 10 p.m. A bell called the villagers to morning and evening prayers. All villagers worked for the mission for five days a week and in return were given the weekly food and clothing they needed. Each household had a piece of land to cultivate, but if one neglected his field, it was given away to another.

Kieran, “The Holy Ghost Fathers in East Africa,” 95. Sultan Sayyid Majid allowed the Spiritans to establish their mission in Zanzibar and Bagamoyo and gave them material support after realizing that in Zanzibar they were not a threat to the Muslim community and taught practical and useful skills to ex-slaves.

Faupel, The African Holocaust, 15. Cardinal Lavigerie, founder of the Missionaries of Africa, attempted to convert Arabs in Algeria without any success, and this prompted him to turn his attention to the south and particularly to Uganda.


Kieran, “The Holy Ghost Fathers in East Africa,” 135. Kieran enumerates some of the major reasons for the failure of the first seminary in East Africa. First, the teaching method and curriculum was too strenuous: the medium of instruction was French and subjects taught included Greek, Latin, Arithmetic, Vocal and Instrumental Music. There was no effort to incorporate
local languages, like Swahili, into the curriculum. Second, there were disagreements among Spiritans about the training of clerical students; some wanted them to be allowed more latitude, whilst others like Horner were for confinement. Third and worst of all, Spiritans felt that Africans lacked the ability and had no true vocation, celibacy being the major obstacle.

10Nnamunga–Onyalla, 25 Years of the East African Province, 24. Brother Philip Mzuako was born in Malawi, brought to Zanzibar as a slave and ransomed by Horner for fifty francs. He was christened before he was sent to France where he did his novitiate and then was professed in the congregation in 1875. He came back to East Africa and worked at Mhonda before he left the congregation in 1880 after a quarrel with the Spiritans.

11Kieran, “The Holy Ghost Fathers in East Africa,” 140. Kieran says that when Phillippe and Dieudonné were admitted into the congregation, the problem of their status was discussed until they settled for the title agregés. Other missionaries, like Le Roy, however, wanted the establishment of a local congregation of lay Brothers rather than have Africans admitted in the congregation.

12Nnamunga, 25 Years of the East African Province, 26.


14Donovan, Christianity Rediscovered, 7.


20Donovan, Christianity Rediscovered, 5, 6.

21Bevans and Schroeder, Constants in Context, 224.

22Cited by Martey, African Theology, 37. See Also http://www3.sympatico.ca/ian.ritchie/ATSC. Chapter1.htm.

Engelbert Mveng uses the term anthropological poverty to describe the loss of African cultural and religious perspective on life, “the general impoverishment of the people. Colonialism brought about loss of their identity and diminishment of their creativity. It indiscriminately disrupted their communal tribal life and organization and destroyed their indigenous values, religious beliefs, and traditional culture” (Frostin, Liberation Theology in Tanzania and South Africa, 15. See also, Uzukwu, A Listening Church, 31).

23Nyerere, Ujamaa, 45. This book is a collection of essays and speeches by Julius Nyerere on Ujamaa or familyhood. According to Nyerere these essays are mainly intended
to be a resource for leaders and educators and also to promote further discussion about the relevance and requirements of socialism. The three main essays are: 1) The Arusha Declaration; 2) Education for Self Reliance; and 3) Socialism and Rural Development. These essays outline the policy which Tanzania consistently attempted to apply, a system of rural socialism and village regroupment, state control of the economy and schools, a stress upon self-help, local and national, in preference to reliance upon the assistance of international agencies, a deliberate restriction of affluence of the elite, the primacy of the interests of the masses, especially the rural masses, and a working democracy structured upon one party rule.
Dr. Steven Hansen directs the Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE) at Duquesne University. He oversees educational and professional programming across the campus for faculty and graduate students. He serves as an elected Core Committee Member (i.e., board of directors) for the Professional and Organizational Development Network in Higher Education. Steve helped to initiate and continues to facilitate the Spiritan Pedagogy Conversations at Duquesne University to encourage faculty to consider ways that teaching can reflect the Spiritan ethos and charism.

This study will explore how vowed and lay Spiritans involved in education manifest the Spiritan charism in their teaching practices

Spiritan Charism, Vocational Commitment, and “A Different Kind of Excellence”: A Study of Spiritan Educators

Introduction

For several years, faculty and staff from across Duquesne University have engaged in lively conversations on the topic of Spiritan pedagogy. From a variety of disciplines, backgrounds, and teaching styles, they have come to appreciate commonalities in their teaching styles that resonate with the Spiritan vision and ethos of the university. Several writing projects have already emerged from this fruitful dialogue, some published in the pages of Spiritan Horizons. The University’s Center for Teaching Excellence and Center for Catholic Faith and Culture have promoted these developments by sponsoring several sessions each year through which interested faculty come together for ongoing discussion.

During this period, Drs. Steven Hansen (Center for Teaching Excellence) and Anne Marie Witchger Hansen (Occupational Therapy and a Lay Spiritan) began to dream of conducting formal research that would go to the heart of the Spiritan educational charism by studying the central, living embodiments of this charism: Spiritan educators. They gathered other DU faculty to discuss the contours for such a study. After several consultations, they and Dr. Maureen O’Brien (Theology) devised a qualitative research project titled “Describing a Spiritan Pedagogy: The Expression of the Spiritan Charism in Teaching Practices of Spiritans and Lay Spiritan Associates in Secondary Education, Higher Education and Spiritan Formation Houses.” To our knowledge this is the first such study.

We three researchers formulated the study’s purpose as follows: “This study will explore how vowed and lay Spiritans involved in education manifest the Spiritan charism in their teaching practices. The results of this study will surface Spiritan pedagogy as it is currently practiced by Spiritan educators.”

We determined two major phases for the project. First, we designed a survey and sent it to all English-speaking Spiritans we could identify as either currently or previously engaged in education or formation. Besides basic demographic information, the survey included open-
ended questions designed to surface the foundational educational, spiritual, and mission-oriented dispositions and practices that appear distinctive in a Spiritan educational vision. The questions included attention to such areas as participants’ description of what constitutes a Spiritan educational experience, their own stories of participating in and facilitating such experiences, sources of inspiration and challenge for them as Spiritan educators, what they have learned over the years about the nature of Spiritan education, and important supports and barriers to functioning effectively in this ministry.

We received twenty-four richly detailed survey responses. The respondents are themselves well educated, with over 50% holding a bachelor’s degree and almost 49% possessing a doctoral degree. They are also experienced, with over 81% having taught or worked in education or formation for ten or more years. Most are currently working in either North America (59%) or Africa (25%).

After initial thematic coding of the survey responses, we launched the second phase of the project, a focus group of Spiritan educators held at Duquesne University on June 18, 2018. Fifteen Spiritans consented to participate in the six-hour focus session. These educators, whose collective experience spans a number of countries in North America, Latin America, Africa and Asia, helped us to validate and expand significantly upon the survey results with their in-depth comments on the themes we had surfaced, and also contributed individual “short stories” of their memorable Spiritan educational experiences. Audio recordings of their responses were transcribed, and the research team coded these results.

Our qualitative analysis1 of the surveys and focus group transcripts surfaced three broad commitments that the Spiritan educators display: 1) Spiritan educators are committed to reflecting the Spiritan charism and Gospel values in their teaching, interactions and personal lives. 2) Spiritan educators are highly committed affectively and vocationally to their work, despite significant challenges. 3) Spiritan educators are committed to fostering both academic excellence and service to the poor through their schools and individual efforts, yet navigate a tension between these priorities. In this essay we will explore each commitment with illustrations from the data.2
1. Commitment to Spiritan Charism and Gospel Values as Educators

Our data found that Spiritans share a common desire to serve those on the peripheries and the margins, reaching out to those in greatest need and in places where others will not go. Spiritans cultivate relationships that are other-focused, intercultural, inclusive and center-out, with community building as a core commitment. Spiritan educators draw upon the wellsprings of the charism; they are Spirit-led and motivated by Gospel values. To illuminate these values, the major findings in this section are grouped as responses to the following questions:

- With Whom Do We Privilege Relationships?
- What Kinds of Relationships Do We Cultivate?
- How Does the Charism Motivate Us?

With Whom Do We Privilege Relationships?

Participants made clear that for them, Spiritan education involves service to those on the peripheries: poor and marginalized people, and those in greatest need. As one commented, this occurs “when we go to places where nobody has ever preached the Gospel yet, to places where nobody wants to go” (Focus). This Spiritan and others also highlighted how these commitments can involve personal cost and risk. “I think that’s part of it, is that it’s a trust in the Spirit that facing even incredibly difficult circumstances—not necessarily physically threatening but maybe... then the whole thing of ‘to the poor.’... [T]hat is very much part of our charism” (Focus). Furthermore, as will be shown below, Spiritans not only serve those on the margins of society, but also learn from them.

However, some Spiritans in our study expressed frustration in the disjunction between a charism that privileges the poor and the present reality of the congregation’s educational commitments. As one exhorted, “Come on! Let’s get there and teach and let’s not just talk about it. I just don’t think we’re there. Where are the biggest cracks in society that need to be filled? And even if we fall in them and fall to the bottom of them, we should be there” (Focus). Section 3 will address some ways that Spiritans navigate this tension.

What Kinds of Relationships Do We Cultivate?

Spiritan responses reflected how participants cultivate
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Dr. Steven Hansen, Dr. Anne Marie Witchger Hansen and Dr. Maureen O’Brien

relationships from the “center-out” through commitments to mutuality, empowerment, and transformation. Being a missionary is about going to the margins from the center, which means engaging with diversity in inclusive ways, which brings mutual transformation. Key aspects of these relationships are described here.

Center-out: community building for the sake of other-focused, inclusive and intercultural outreach

In the words of one Spiritan: “For me a Spiritan educational experience is one that is ‘center/out.’ It begins with the lived experience of the student, their center, and from that base pushes them out to the margins of their world. At the margin they experience diversity in thought, person and worldview” (Survey).

Thus, Spiritans engage in community building among their students - one described it as “setting the center” - cultivating relationships characterized by collaboration and care for each member of the community and his/her perspective and gifts. Spiritan educators help “people see their own potential” (Survey). They foster authentic relationships and support their students and one another, modeling community in their relations with other congregational members. As one Spiritan stated, “We are best when we are united and display our community experience, when the students see us as one, enjoying one another and supporting one another” (Survey).

While establishing and sustaining this strong “center,” Spiritan education intentionally moves “out” as other-focused, interculturally engaged and committed to inclusive relationship building and oriented toward the margins. As one stated, “center-out” teaching requires valuing other cultures, people, and perspectives with a “wider world view, knowledgeable, outsider perspective, empathetic” (Survey). Another Spiritan commented that a unique quality of a Spiritan education is “integration of, and attention to, how the voices of the Southern Hemisphere can be and are included in the curriculum at hand” (Survey).

Relationships of mutuality: learning with and learning from

Spiritans engage in community building among their students - one described it as “setting the center”

Spiritan educators seek to create a community of mutual learners where teachers and students learn with and learn from one another. They believe teaching is concerned with the whole student in whatever they are facing--from academic and personal needs, their contexts
and circumstances, to discerning their own calling. As one Spiritan states: “[it happens] often ... in reflection papers and discussions with my students from different social classes and different cultures and different religions ... I learn from the other, they learn from me ... together we grow!--mutuality--learning from each other--co-learners and co-creation of knowledge” (Survey).

Attentiveness to mutuality becomes even more important and challenging as Spiritan educators encounter diverse cultures and needs. During the focus group, several Spiritans discussed the importance of intercultural awareness for the practice of mutuality. As one stated, “[Mutuality] encompasses a lot of things, but [it especially requires] attentiveness to where we go or what we meet. Sometimes cultures differ and sometimes certain things we take for granted means a lot for the people ... learning from them, they can enrich us and we can enrich them. [In these situations] mutuality is very important” (Focus).

Participants emphasized a non-patronizing approach to people, communities, and cultures, with the Spiritan educator valuing the dignity, basic goodness, and gifts of each individual, culture or community. Repeatedly, respondents eschewed condescending, paternal, and parochial attitudes and approaches in favor of mutuality and cultural sensitivity. One respondent compared this educational approach to his missionary training: “It’s kind of ironic that how they taught us to be ‘missionaries’ as priests and religious seems to me very much my sense of how to be an educator in the classroom, and I don’t see a big difference between the two and that fundamental approach [is that the people you’re with] have something and to realize it’s a gift that you get from those people. I never come into a classroom like—‘Here I am to teach you,’ but it’s ‘Here we are to learn’” (Focus). Another respondent added, “It begins with the formation of ourselves, having known that we go in and we approach people in a very simple way with great simplicity and great respect for them, knowing that they also have something to give” (Focus).

For empowerment and transformation

A Spiritan educational experience is empowering and transformative, emphasizing service to the Kingdom of God. A Spiritan education encourages students to see their full potential. “The specific Spiritan formation provides an inclusive world view, an informed and guided anthropology,
Dr. Maureen O’Brien

Dr. Maureen R. O’Brien is an associate professor of theology at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Her research interests focus on practical theology, religious education, and the education of lay ministers. She recently completed field research in West Africa as part of a qualitative study of catechists there. She participates in many initiatives related to Spiritan mission and pedagogy at Duquesne, and currently serves on the Education Committee for the U.S. Province.

helping to empower people, helping people see their own potential” (Survey).

During the focus group, one participant described an empowering and transformative educational experience as a ministry working with the poor and working for the poor. “Working with the poor and working for the poor … really emphasizing the human aspect, respect for people! And as an individual created in the image and likeness of God. And this should be very fundamental” (Focus). Another stated, “Spiritan education is both supportive as well as empowering for students to see their full potential, pushes the boundaries and margins … education has been the means of raising people up, and I think that part is very Spiritan” (Focus).

How Does the Charism Motivate Us?

Participants in our study described an educational experience as “Spiritan” in nature when it is rooted in the Spiritan charism, motivated by the legacy of Spiritan founders and mentors, and integrated in Gospel values and a theological anthropology of human dignity.

*Spirit-led, rooted in the charism*

Spiritan educators are inspired by Spiritan identity and charism and their motto, “*One heart and soul.*” This charism is meant to be modeled in Spiritan educational institutions by the Spiritans, staff and students, and supported and encouraged by the administration of the Spiritan Congregation. One Spiritan educator identified key characteristics of a Spiritan education that is “spirit led” and rooted in the charism as building authentic relationships, praying together and listening to one another. The Spiritan charism permeates all activities at a Spiritan educational institution, including extra-curricular activities, prayer, farming and an atmosphere of “brotherhood.” One Spiritan explained this in these words: “The institutions I taught in were Spiritan. We did everything in a way typical of the Spiritans” (Survey).

*Legacy of the Spiritan founders and other exemplary Spiritans*

Spiritans in our study found a wellspring of support and motivation enlivened by the legacy of the Spiritan founders who gave of themselves and did not count the cost. Some Spiritans also reported they are inspired by their own Spiritan mentors and those they live with in community. “As a teacher of theology at a Spiritan theological institute, I am
trying to walk in the footsteps of those who taught me, who
gave their best without asking for much in return” (Survey).
Further, several participants noted that this commitment to
the Spiritan charism is reflected in how they, in turn, mentor
and provide spiritual guidance for students who seek to
realize their full potential. “The Spiritan Experience extends
to helping those in need, academically and spiritually.
The spiritual needs of many of our students can be great”
(Survey).

**Incarnational, Gospel-based theological anthropology**

Spiritan education includes a model of inculturation that does
not presume the Gospel comes from “outside,”
but emphasizes how the Divine is already present
within cultures--reflective of a highly incarnational, Catholic
theological anthropology. In one participant’s words, “And
I guess it makes me think of Libermann’s famous ‘Be black
with the blacks,’ ‘Be African with the Africans,’ when he
was speaking to Europeans and reminding them, You’re not
there to bring Europe to Africa, you’re there to help people
discover Jesus in their midst already” (Focus).³

Spiritan educators are clearly inspired by Gospel
values. As one Spiritan stated, “The Spirit of the risen
Lord and the spirits of our founders are my sources of
inspiration” (Survey). Further, Spiritan education reflects a
theological anthropology built on human dignity. “There is
a personal discipline involved, grounded in a transcendent
anthropology that locates all interaction and each individual
within a divine providence that confirms a shared human
dignity and common journey into truth and goodness”
(Survey). Another Spiritan reflected a Spiritan theological
anthropology in his approach to others: “I think we as
Spiritans, when we go out, we have to appreciate what
people have. And from there we grow together and help
them to realize those values, those good things they have,
and help them to realize and to develop them and make
them their own and own them” (Focus).

Many challenges arise for Spiritan educators in seeking
to live their commitments within the opportunities and
difficulties posed by real-life settings. The next section will
explore these tensions between charism and reality through
highlighting the role played by affective and vocational
commitment for our participants.
2. Affective and Vocational Commitment

Spiritans in our research display a high degree of affective and vocational commitment. According to research in human resources, the development of affective commitment occurs through recruitment, selection, and socialization into an organization. For our purposes, we can consider how the Spiritan charism and formation process contribute to the affective commitment of the Spiritan educators we studied. However, our study shows that as they move into their vocation as Spiritan educators, they regularly find themselves in unparalleled situations amidst poverty and isolation, without precedent and clear guidance. Given these extraordinary contexts, the Spiritans in our research also show a high degree of vocational or career commitment, referring to a sense of motivation to work and persevere in one’s chosen career role.

In many ways, the career commitment of Spiritan educators in our study is consistent with insights about “protean” careers that require versatility in the face of changing circumstances. Protean careers involve working in highly evolving situations, in which individuals must manage their own development and progress. People working in protean careers show a high degree of adaptability and self-awareness in developing skills for an evolving career situation. In our study of Spiritan educators, we find important expressions of affective commitment and career commitment in relation to the protean nature of their work, their adaptability and their sense of self-awareness as Spiritans.

Expressions of Affective Commitment

Affective commitment is a person’s emotional attachment to their work and the organization to which they belong. As mentioned above, organizations lay the groundwork for affective commitment primarily through recruitment, selection and socialization. In our survey, respondents showed a high degree of affective commitment grounded in their own formation as Spiritans, including the founders’ inspiration and the guidance of those who formed them. One respondent, in describing the greatest lesson that was learned as a Spiritan educator, emphasized the role of “the Spiritans who formed and educated me. They respected me and encouraged me and so that has been my guidepost. Walk with those you have been given to form and educate. Invite them on the journey that has given me fulfillment and joy.
as a Spiritan” (Survey). And despite the meager resources of a formation house, another respondent described the experience with great affection: “The demands on our living conditions were great and we often went without basic things but maintained a good spirit of care and respect for one another. While students of other congregations had greater security we seemed to have more fun. We were characterized as a happy and open community” (Survey).

Spiritan educators sustain their affective commitment through their educational work with others. In describing what it is like to be a Spiritan educator, one said: “In my own situation, I feel a sense of joy welcoming younger confreres into our Theologate and following them until their priestly ordination. I also experience greater joy when they go on mission and are challenged with responsibilities” (Survey). Another stated that “I am inspired when I meet any former student and see how he has developed and embodies being a Spiritan. It gives me a sense of generativity, that I helped him become who he is and what he has accomplished. [I am inspired by r]eceiving their respect and gratitude toward me whenever we meet” (Survey).

Thus, the affective commitment of Spiritan educators begins in formation and deepens or grows through leading others in formation or education. As the quotations above make evident, “joy” is an especially prominent emotion that they express regularly throughout their journey.

However, the Spiritans’ affective commitment characterized by joy does not preclude the experience of negative emotion. The Spiritans in our survey feel at times isolated and challenged to persevere in difficult circumstances. In describing what it is like to be a Spiritan educator, respondents occasionally hinted at these issues.

It is a pretty isolated, disconnected experience. And, we are hardly noticed (Survey).

I must admit it’s difficult (Survey).

Painful (Survey).

Some of these negative feelings arise from personal challenges due to an educator’s perceived lack of educational community in the congregation, or their own aging, motivation, and sense of fit and abilities.
We take each other far too much for granted and do not encourage or show real interest in our Spiritan confreres (Survey).

Getting old, lack of energy, limits of time, talent, and expertise (Survey).

There are too few of us (Survey).

My own limitations and lack of ability to see the potential in others (Survey).

Despite these negative feelings, however, the generally strong positive affect of Spiritan educators shows a high level of commitment to their work as educators.

**Expressions of Career Commitment**

The career commitment of Spiritan educators is remarkable given the ever-changing, protean nature of their work. To help us appreciate this, we will present some respondents’ answers that address their adaptability and sense of self-awareness. We will also consider their career commitment in light of some vestiges of a division between “educators” and “missionaries” within the congregation.

Spiritan educational work is ultimately protean. One respondent reveals its changing nature in the following way:

> The job is always changing. Whether it is the situation, or the subject, or the students you always have to adapt. We keep getting moved about either by Superiors or by circumstances beyond one's control. You have to do it yourself because no one has ever done it before. You are not allowed to get into a rut as a Spiritan, that is, doing the same thing year after year (Survey).

The protean nature of Spiritan educational ministry is further compounded by the fact that the work regularly occurs in remote areas without access to resources, amidst poverty and isolation, and without precedent and clear guidance. Many of our respondents discussed these difficulties. These types of situations call forth a high degree of adaptability, evident in the following responses:

> We improvised to circumstances and events. We took everything one month or semester at a time (Survey).

> I never trained as a teacher, even though I got myself
immersed in pedagogical principles along the way (Survey).

Unless you belong to a select “in-group” in which you will be sent to any school and have it all paid for, you had better have an incredible love for education and for doubling down on whatever is necessary for you to develop your skills and expertise (Survey).

While they are highly adaptable, their self-awareness as Spiritans and self-validation of their educational efforts grounds their commitment to their protean work:

I am convinced I am doing a very important work, probably the most important work for the congregation (Survey).

I feel the obligation of being a true witness of God’s presence in the totality of the educational process beginning with myself (Survey).

“Being a Spiritan first” (Survey) and “maintaining a Spiritan identity and perspective in my teaching” (Survey) are also challenges related to self-awareness that respondents cited. While they admit a need to remind themselves “of the importance of the work” (Survey), the danger of “becoming rote in their role as an educator” (Survey) and the reality of their “own limitations and lack of ability to see the potential in others” (Survey), these concerns manifest their own self-awareness and genuine vocational commitment as Spiritan educators.

Participants sometimes alluded to a tension that exists between the relative status of educational ministry and missionary ministry among Spiritan confreres. One focus group participant recollected an earlier time in his ministry when “there was such a split between what we called ‘missionaries’ and ‘educators’ back then that they divided into two camps . . . I mean, to have been an educator you were looked down upon” (Focus). But generally, the participants believe this division has decreased over the years. The same focus group participant continues: “Fortunately, time allows things to settle and the Holy Spirit begins to work, so that it was for the first time in the last general council that something specific was said in the council documents and in the council activities about education as a legitimate kind of ministry” (Focus).

However, there are vestiges of the earlier division
between missionaries and educators that appeared in the comments of the focus group and survey participants, manifested in three ways. First, some Spiritan educators feel conflicted because of the tension between “educators” and “missionaries” as they perceive the differences between these roles; for example: “I always saw myself called to direct service to the poor and the education ministry removes that to a degree. I understand the need to prepare others to participate in the church’s mission but I miss being in direct service” (Survey).

A second way that vestiges of the division still appear is that the educators in our study occasionally feel challenged by a lack of congregational focus on education:

No formal or structured manual to assist Spiritans in education or teachers in Spiritan schools. Also, to my knowledge, there is no ongoing formation for Spiritan educators (Survey).

I think that if we had some kind of vibrant sharing of intellectual life that is visible and encouraged (perhaps along the lines of a blog, perhaps retreats on agreed upon themes, perhaps some workshops) it would set the tone that education as well as mission are important components of our vocation (Survey).

A third way that the study participants reflect vestiges of the tension between “educators” and “missionaries” is in their interactions with confreres and superiors. Study participants find it challenging when “other confreres not in education” do not recognize “education as a ministry” (Focus). This could be evident at the basic level of scheduling congregational events while schools were in session, as one Spiritan explained:

So it’s somehow—at times the fact that the other confreres don’t see [education] as a ministry equal. [Sounds of agreement from group] Because even when we have our recollections, retreats, it’s so frustrating because it’s always during the week. And then they tell me—I remember I had again a different superior then, not the one now—it was a five-day thing and he got so angry. I said, “It’s exam week, it’s midterm exams.” [The superior responded] “Well, if you’re a Spiritan—” and it was really as if you’re a traitor to the cause (Focus).
Despite many challenges, Spiritan educators in our study show considerable evidence of maintaining their vocational commitment. Participants expressed a strong desire for opportunities within the congregation for educators “to come together, learn from one another, and see all aspects of the evangelizing process within the congregation and the major contribution that education has” (Focus). They are deeply committed, highly adaptable and self-aware as Spiritans despite the protean nature of the work and vestiges of a division between “educators” and “missionaries” within their experience.

As this section makes evident, there are many challenges navigated by Spiritans in their ministry. In the third section, we highlight a striking theme from their reflections that illustrates a particular tension in their identities as both Spiritans and educators.

3. Commitment to Academic Excellence in Spiritan Education of the Poor and Non-Poor

Spiritans are cognizant of educational standards and hold a commitment to excellence in their educational ministry, attending conscientiously to their own professional development. Yet our analysis yielded a nuanced, sometimes contested and organically creative picture of how “excellence” is best understood and realized within the distinctively Spiritan practices of giving preferential attention to the poor, while valuing all students and fostering their fullest growth. Below are two notable dynamics from the participants’ reflections.

Navigating the Tension between Academic Excellence and Solidarity with the Poor

Participants forthrightly acknowledged the difficulties in sustaining “academic excellence”—a category used across educational institutions—alongside the particular Spiritan commitments to education that serves the poor and those on the peripheries of society. Thus, some respondents serving in Catholic schools sponsored by a diocese or another religious congregation expressed some dissonance between the expectation to perform in ways consonant with that “style and spirit” (Survey) rather than in one’s Spiritan commitment, and the resulting concern that Spiritan commitment will then be experienced as “more internal than external” (Survey). And one stated, “especially for some of us working in government-funded schools, it is becoming
increasingly difficult to build, promote, and nurture an educational experience that is ‘Spiritan’ in nature” (Survey).

However, both survey respondents and focus group participants were most passionate in their critique—and defense—of a standard educational understanding of “excellence” when criticizing elitism perceived in Spiritan schools, viewing this notion of excellence as existing in tension with the central charism of outreach to the poor. As one commented, “I think we have to recognize that there is always going to be a tension between the service to the poor and [being] professional ... there’s a value on both sides” (Focus).

Participants’ contributions revealed the complexities of navigating the tension as well as creative ways of doing so. For example, sometimes “excellence” was associated with “education for the rich and middle class,” while “education for the poor” had a different aim. Thus for at least one respondent, resolution of this tension would mean that Spiritans should not seek academic excellence at all, since the aspirations of the non-poor and the consequent focus on such excellence constitute a barrier to authentic Spiritan mission commitment:

There is a temptation in all educational endeavors to strive for excellence. For the church, and especially for Spiritans, it is a temptation we should not give in to. Education for the genuinely poor will never be excellent. That is not its aim. Education for the poor should be as good as we can make it, but the aim is to educate the poor; excellence will be found in other quarters. Hopefully the children of the current poor students whom we are educating will be able to pay for excellence. Meanwhile, as it stands, we are often letting the truly marginalized, the genuinely poor, go unserved (Survey).

Others, however, resisted this formulation and sought to sustain a balance between excellence and prioritizing the needs of the poor, while acknowledging many challenges in doing so. For example, in global South contexts characterized by extremes of poverty and wealth, some disadvantaged students are limited both economically and by their academic background. Here, Spiritans’ efforts to establish schools characterized by excellence may have unintended consequences. As vividly expressed by one focus group participant:
Many times in our Spiritan institutions in—I’m sure in Asia as well, but definitely in Africa—we will go out to a poor community, we will establish an educational institution. We insist on academic excellence. When we have academic excellence, those who have more resources will be drawn to it because we have an excellent school. And pretty soon the school that we have established for the poor is being attended by the rich! (Focus)

Further, these seasoned educators are well aware of the financial and human resources required to maintain their mission, both to the poor and to foster academic excellence. As one wryly commented, with others laughing knowingly, “It’s very expensive to educate the poor” (Focus).

Issues of justice to one’s own staff also exacerbate the tension:

Even [at Duquesne University] we need more money to pay better and better to excellent faculty and yet ... that money has to come from the students ... That challenge is a really dividing thing in the heart of any Spiritan. How can we keep the tuition low and yet have excellent education? And pay well the faculty who deserve it (Focus)?

Some participants from both the global North and South advocated navigating the tension by acknowledging economic disparities and admitting both the poor and the non-poor to Spiritan schools, pragmatically drawing upon the resources of the latter group in order to provide for the former. For others, making the effort to educate non-poor students with an orientation toward reducing poverty also provides a rationale for Spiritan education:

So what we are doing is not to justify, but we are saying that, Okay we take the children of, say, middle class, we educate them so that they can appreciate—they can fight the poverty in society and transform the society as we go along (Focus).

Or as another put it, Spiritan schools educating wealthy students should be preparing them to be attorneys defending the rights of the poor, or nurses working with marginalized populations, and so on.

It should be known because we’re focusing on those kinds of areas and that’s what I mean by not looking
at excellence, academic excellence. Looking at a different kind of excellence that focuses [in this way] and then you attract the students who are interested in serving the poor (Focus).

“A Different Kind of “Excellence”: Education of Both Poor and Non-Poor as Shaped by Spiritan Charism and Mission

No solution proposed in the previous section won full consensus among participants. However, our study suggests that in navigating the tension between external standards of academic excellence and the Spiritan charism as oriented toward those in greatest need, Spiritan educators creatively and organically shape such standards within their own institutions, giving them unique form through efforts to educate in faithfulness to their charism. In the participant’s words cited above, they work for “a different kind of excellence”--or what we might call “Spiritan excellence.” Our findings show a commitment to an excellence that does not abandon external standards and professional growth. Rather, it keeps these in dynamic, tensive relationship, focusing on one’s particular students--the poor and non-poor alike--and the absolute priority of attending to their individual growth, guided by central supports of the Spiritan charism.

The considerable resources of charism and affective/vocational commitment that Spiritan educators bring to these efforts are evident in Sections 1 and 2 of this essay. Study participants offered further illumination on how these resources come into play in shaping a distinctive “Spiritan excellence” in education. For example, one participant eloquently expressed how the legacy of Poullart des Places showed a way to negotiate academic excellence amid the deprived circumstances of his early seminary students. For him, faithfulness to this approach today required attention to building up the students’ sense of self-worth by giving them “that which is best”:

I was told that when Poullart des Places took the poor, he wanted to give them the best education, so he wanted for them to achieve academic excellence. They were coming from a very poor background …. he wanted them to overcome their inferiority complex.

There has been this tension in the congregation until today that academic excellence is sometimes equated with educating those who come from a very well-to-do background or a rich background and they are giving
them that which is best. But I think we can achieve both. You can take students who come from a poor background and then you give them the best education so that they also become among the best participants in the affairs of society…. Regardless probably of the background where the students come from, but to give them that which is best. And I think it’s a duty as educators, that’s how I look at it (Focus; emphasis added).

Others highlighted how Spiritan educators were called to take each student as they are and holistically guide them toward their own fullest flourishing. One focus group participant enthusiastically named this as an educational disposition of “intellectual charity” in leading students toward truth:

Yeah! Intellectual charity is to be able to address the intellect of people so that they can see truth and then apply that truth in their own lives. Whether they come to us with a zero on an entrance exam or one hundred on the entrance exam, our job is to provide them with the intellectual tools which will also be affected by their emotional life, their human life, their social life, and their spiritual life as an integrated whole. It’s wonderful that I hear all this around this table! (Focus)

For another, the Spiritan charism was motivational in his efforts to tutor students toward higher levels of academic achievement, starting at the appropriate level for each student and giving everything he could to that student:

I can talk of people I started with that couldn’t write an essay and I took them on, gave them private tutorials, and built them up to the extent that by the time it was time for them to write, to take exams, they were able to do that …. I had time to take them on, to really bring them up, and I think that’s where I would think of that excellence. We don’t say, Okay, let them remain there. Bring the best they can be (Focus; emphasis added).

Thus, regardless of students’ poverty, the educator’s personal limitations, insufficient resources and other constraints, Spiritan education can attain a Gospel-based excellence that does not romanticize poverty or cater to wealth.
opportunities for all students, guided by the charism and the values of the Kingdom of God. They bring their best in order to bring out the students’ best.

**Conclusion**

We have explored three broad commitments that Spiritan educators display. 1) They are committed to the Spiritan charism. This commitment shapes their approach to education as building relationships to help the poor and marginalized. It emphasizes mutuality, diversity, inclusion, non-patronizing attitudes and relationship building with a goal of empowering and transforming others. 2) They display a high degree of affective and vocational commitment. Their affective commitment, typically characterized by a sense of “joy,” arises from their formation as Spiritans, and deepens and grows through leading others in formation or education. The vocational commitment of the Spiritans in our study reveals that Spiritans are highly adaptable and self-aware as Spiritans despite the protean nature of the work and ongoing vestiges of division between “educators” and “missionaries.” 3) They are committed to educational excellence in tandem with their mission-driven efforts to educate the poor. Excellence for Spiritan educators is organic in nature. Spiritans are committed to a form of academic excellence that does not abandon external standards, but rather, keeps these in organic, tensive relationship, both through maintaining their emphasis on education of the poor and through sustained focus on the needs and potentials of one’s particular students, regardless of economic or social status.

We hope that our research will spark further dialogue among Spiritans as they continue to discern the place of education and formation within their charism. We know that the wisdom expressed by participants in our study will continue to inform our own work as Spiritan-inspired educators.

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Endnotes

1 Qualitative research in a “grounded theory” mode, as in our study, develops theory as it emerges from the gathering and interpretation of data through in-depth or “thick” descriptions, rather than beginning with a formal hypothesis and testing it through gathering large-scale data. See, for example, Glaser, Barney G. and Anselm L. Strauss, The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research (Chicago: Aldine, 1967).

2 Sources for quotations will be indicated in parentheses as either “Survey” or “Focus” (for Focus Group).


7 See Duaimme, Jeff, “The Heartbeat of Spiritan Education in the US” Spiritan Horizons 8 (2013) 105-106.
The Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis (2016) replaces the previous ratio, first issued in 1970 and updated in 1985. It is a compendium of the valued deliberations of Conferences of Bishops, individual particular churches and the papal magisterium since then, particularly St. John Paul II’s Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Pastores Dabo Vobis (1992).

The introduction begins, “The gift of the priestly vocation, placed by God in the hearts of some men, obliges the church to propose to them a serious journey of formation.” This journey proceeds from seminary formation to the continuing formation of the priest. The transfer of responsibility for seminary formation from the Congregation for Catholic Education to that of the Clergy in 2013 underscores the importance of understanding priestly formation as an on-going journey from preparing for ordination to a life-long exercise of priestly ministry.

The document is organized in eight chapters. The first (nos. 1-10) established its jurisdiction and its general normative status for each Conference of Bishops preparing its own regulations (Ratio nationalis). Chapter 2 (nos. 11-27) outlines general principles and gives consideration to the nature, promotion, and accompaniment of priestly vocations. Chapter 3 (nos. 28-53) considers the foundations for formation to the ministerial priesthood according to the overarching relationship of service leadership within the church as the People of God and the Body of Christ. The nature and mission of the priest demands a solid formation and interior maturity enabling true communion and dialogue with others. Chapter 4 (nos. 54-88) relates initial and ongoing formation. Initial formation has four major stages. The propaedeutic stage provides a time for vocational discernment with an emphasis on growth in the spiritual life and personal maturity. The Stage of Philosophical Studies is a time of Christian discipleship when the seminarian achieves maturity sufficient to make a definitive choice for priesthood. The Stage of Theological Studies is a time of configuration to Christ through a deepening of a priestly spirituality and commitment to a particular ecclesiastical circumscription. The Pastoral Stage is a time of vocational synthesis following diaconate and preceding priestly ordination usually taking place outside the seminary and in service of a local faith community. The priest is in a life-long process of gradual and continuous configuration to Christ sustained by the support of the faith community and the priestly fraternity. Progressing in his ministry, the priest will benefit from a deepening relationship in spiritual direction, bringing the experience of his own weakness into a greater awareness of God’s abiding love for him. Growing old, he maintains a joyful witness to his life-long commitment through active participation in the ministry and diocesan life. Chapter 5 (nos. 89-124) enumerates the four dimensions of initial formation. The first is human formation. The physical, psychological, and moral development along with the cultivation of an aesthetic sense and skills in social engagement prepare the seminarian for service in the ministerial priesthood. Through an open relationship with formators, he finds encouragement in moments of
crisis, appreciating them as occasions for conversion and renewal. *Spiritual formation* has as its goal the development of a personal union with Christ brought about by participation in the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church and a personal prayer life nourished by God’s Word. The seminarian will cultivate a chaste way of life that recognizes celibacy as an evangelically powerful gift from God. The seminarian cultivates virtues specific to priesthood and the pastoral ministry through a simple and prayerful life style attuned to social justice and grounded in the spiritual treasures of the church. *Intellectual formation* provides the means by which the priest can read the signs of the times and interpret them in the light of faith. *Pastoral formation* enables the seminarian to acquire the inner freedom for living well with others in the service leadership the ministry requires. Chapter 6 (nos. 125–152) enumerates the agents of formation. God, the giver of the gift of the priestly vocation, is the principal agent with the local church providing the indispensable context of formation. The seminarians and those who accompany and approve them – bishop, priests, formators, professors, family and parish – are attentive to the many actions of the Holy Spirit at work in the formation journey. Chapter 7 (nos. 153-187) outlines the organization of studies for an integrated program ensuring a rigorous intellectual formation to critically address current trends in society, science and the church. Chapter 8 (nos. 188–210) provides criteria and norms for the seminary as a true community of formation; the admission, dismissal, and departure from the seminary; the particular attention needed for evaluating persons with homosexual tendencies; the protection of minors and the accompaniment of victims; the scrutinies necessary to discern the suitability of candidates. It is for the bishop, on the advice of formators, to admit a candidate to ordination.

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Spiritan Horizons seeks to further research into the history, spirituality, and tradition of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit. In line with the aims of the Center for Spiritan Studies at Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, its overall goal is to promote creative fidelity to the Spiritan charism in the contemporary world. The journal 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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