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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/about/centers-and-institutes/spiritan-studies/spiritan-collection-information

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.

Three articles sound out Pope Francis’ Encyclical, *Laudato Si’ On Care for Our Common Home*. Professor Gerard Magill, “Laudato Si’: A Commentary,” succinctly relates it to Catholic Social Teaching, particularly the Catholic tradition of Natural Law. We received permission to republish Norman Habel, “Guiding Ecojustice Principles,” which illustrates how Scripture can and should now be read with ecological lens if “ecological conversion” is to receive due support from the word
of God. **Brian O’Toole**, C.S.Sp. “*The Spiritan Option for the Poor and the Care of Creation,*” shows in effect how advocating for the integrity of creation is a new name of Spiritan mission with the poor in today’s world.

Under Education, **Luke Nnamdi Mbefo**, C.S.Sp. continues the saga of New Spiritan Universities with a description of “*Marian University College, Bagamoyo,*” an achievement that caps centuries of Spiritan pioneering of education in East Africa. Duquesne’s Dr. **Matthew Kostek**, “*Spiritan Pedagogy and Cura Personalis in a Large Lecture Hall,*” carries forward the recent discussions of Spiritan Pedagogy among faculty and staff at Duquesne by illustrating how attentiveness to the Spirit can be practiced with effect in a large class.

The sole lived experience is offered by **Bernard Kelly**, C.S.Sp., “*If You Only Knew what God is Offering,*” a reflection on Jesus’ meeting with the woman of Samaria, John 4.


Francis X. Malinowski, C.S.Sp.

Francis X. Malinowski, C.S.Sp. (1921-2006) had a 25-year tenure at Duquesne University (1967-92), part of which as chair of the theology department. After studies in Fribourg University, Switzerland, he was ordained priest in October 1950 in Chevilly, France. He taught sacred Scripture at St. Mary Seminary in Norwalk, Conn. (1959-67), was visiting scholar in Heidelberg, Germany (1969) and Cambridge University (1973), receiving the doctorate degree in New Testament studies at Duke University in 1973. Malinowski had deep reverence for Father Francis Libermann and wrote Newsletters and insightful monographs on his spirituality. He is buried in the Spiritan graveyard at Holy Ghost Prep School, Bensalem, Philadelphia.

B. The Spirit and Oraison [Prayer]

The Spirit starts his action in Baptism, clothing us in sanctifying grace that essentially connects us to the Trinity. But for this inchoate grace to blossom into conscious union with the Trinity, exposure to the Spirit is absolutely necessary. Libermann calls this intentional exposure “oraison,” which we translate as “prayer.”

Prayer (“oraison”) as Libermann meant is not “mental prayer.” He writes: “...ordinarily one starts with meditation which is not strictly speaking “oraison” [prayer] but a preparation for it ...” Mental prayer is thinking about something, it is meditating for the purpose of exciting the will (ES 115); in “oraison” we do not merely think of God, but relate to him, are aware of him, look at him as it were face to face. It is a direct prayer, contrasted with meditation as indirect prayer. It is being present to God, aware that he is present to us. “Oraison” brings to bear the unitive virtues of faith, hope, and love, called theological because they touch on God immediately (ES 8), exercising these virtues like nothing else can. In this “theological” environment, the Holy Spirit, the giver of these virtues in Baptism, takes over because of our innate weakness and helplessness. It is he who prays in us, whose sole object is to make us adhere to Jesus in a faith excited by hope and energized with love.

Praying thus in the Spirit we assimilate some of his holiness and this triggers apostolic zeal; the Spirit so gives us a taste for the love that Jesus has for us that we understand better Paul’s “caritas Christi urget nos” (the love of Christ impels us, 2 Cor 5:14). Increasingly, the one who prays such “oraison” experiences the holiness of the Spirit seeping through soul and body. One effect is that increasingly the poor and the weak and the oppressed haunt one’s prayer and life.

Of course, prayer cannot be a substitute for the apostolic life of service to the poor and the oppressed nor can there be any apostolic excuse for neglecting prayer. Like Jesus, we desire in our prayer the realization of God’s plan of salvation for all and we work at it with him.

THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE WRITINGS OF LIBERMANNN
PART II: LED BY THE SPIRIT

Part II: Led by the Spirit

B. The Spirit and Oraison [Prayer]
prayer was rooted in his Trinitarian relationship radiating out into the world for its salvation. In that prayer-relationship was the only power that could realize God’s plan of salvation. The power of the Spirit (“if it is by the Spirit of God I drive out demons,” Matt 12:28) is a power which has to be to be prayed for and received.²

The important thing is reaching what Libermann calls a “state of prayer,” an awareness not of the topics of prayer but of God himself to whom we attend wholeheartedly. We know we don’t need to go here or there or anywhere to engage in such communion with God. We need only look within.

Descend deeply into your innermost self and never come out. If you do that, your joy will be full and the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ will flood your soul ... For as long as you remain withdrawn into your heart of hearts you will always find the Holy Spirit there, who will lift you up and transport you to the top of that mountain of love which our Lord has built for his elect, and he will fill you with his graces, lights, beauty and happiness.³

Libermann allows no justification for neglecting prayer. “There is definitely no relation with God without prayer [oraison]” (ES 212). Pope Saint John Paul II writes of religious life: “No movement of religious life has any importance unless it is also movement inward to the “still center” of your existence, where Christ is.”⁴ Libermann too writes about the “still center”:

May Jesus be everything in you, and may his Spirit be the unique life of your soul. Always go your way, or rather, let the divine guide lead you, who dwells in the center of your soul.⁵

Prayer is where the Spirit forges a sweet and peaceful soul, fixing our eyes on Jesus in union with the Father.

Lay open your inner being before our Lord so that you can sweetly [doucement] fix it on him, unite your heart to God; sometimes, keep it in repose, in his holy presence, looking at him thus with an eye of love, without effort, without forced attentiveness, but rather with sweetness [douceur] and suavity; sometimes, allow your soul to flow sweetly [doucement] into the bosom
Libermann speaks here in the language of lovers, not the cool and objective language of the philosopher or businessman. It’s reminiscent of childlike simplicity.

Prayer (“oraison”) is... a very simple matter... It should consist in a repose which is simple, peaceful, and full of confidence before our Lord; that is all. There is no need to look for many reflections or produce many acts of the will. Force nothing. Stand before Jesus like a needy and helpless child before his father, nothing more. Desire to be at his service. Be content with an interior glance towards him from time to time, with that intention. Do the same thing in the course of the day; from time to time an effortless glance, aware of belonging to him and aware of our own inability, but always with peace and in the calm desire to belong to him as you are. Look for nothing more.

Libermann knew that praying like this would surely permeate the practical living out of life, changing profoundly the one praying. “The more we are men of prayer [oraison], the more our soul with its faculties and senses is perfected in the natural order and in the supernatural order” (ES 212). “Prayer reforms faults of character. If we want to know if we have made true progress in prayer [oraison], see if our faults perceptibly diminish. Natural faults cannot hold out against true oraison” (ES 107). “Prayer is one of the most powerful means and even perhaps unique means for surmounting our bad inclinations because it puts us in rapport with God” (ES 216). Life lived this way keeps the one praying in constant contact with Jesus, in “practical union.” In the praying person the Spirit finds room, opportunity, and liberty to be the Spirit of holiness who produces “the greatest marvels of his grace.”

C. Oraison and Douceur

Prayer in awareness of God gives rise to inner calm, contentment and peace.” Libermann calls this array of attitudes “sweetness” (douceur), which also defines his notion of how holiness comes to be. It is not a state of being that launches out into a self-activating holiness
but a readiness to be impressed by the Holy Spirit. It is a condition of passiveness and receptivity that attracts to itself rather than reaching out to make or change this or that. It is like a magnet that attracts the Holy Spirit.

True to biblical teaching, Libermann regards the Spirit as the one who breathes life into us in a noiseless, invisible, and creative way. The Spirit is the creator of the life of Jesus in us into whose image he intends to make us. This life of Jesus is a total supernatural life, a life only possible through the Spirit who gave purpose to the death and resurrection of Jesus. It is a life, something that can grow. It surges up (John 4:13) to eternal fullness. It is no automatic growth nor a blind surge, but effected by the Spirit acting within our total humanness. Libermann insists on the necessity of a favorable climate in which the Spirit can be powerfully active. Attitudes of anxiety, grouchiness, surliness, sullenness, impetuousness, impatience, e.t.c., disturb this climate and cause the Spirit to be null and without effect.

Commentators on Libermann’s spirituality focus on this “climate” differently. Some see it as a peaceful soul, others as abandonment, others as self-denial—attitudes that occur frequently in Libermann’s exhortations. He did not mean muscular effort or mental strain. “Never strain with head or heart to maintain recollection or arouse good feelings towards our Lord.” “In order for God to act in us, it is extremely important to keep oneself in continual peace before him; it is even the unique means of arriving at the interior spirit” (ESS 47).

Libermann thus often warns against “contention.” In his last conferences in 1851, he defined contention as straining in an aggressive manner to be virtuous and prayerful by one’s own natural efforts. Libermann saw a lot of this among seminarians. Not a few of his associates suffered incapacitating headaches, namely, Beauchef, Bureau, Roussel, Lannurien, Briot, Regnier. F. X. Libermann (his nephew), even Frédéric Levavasseur who for four years was not able to read even a few lines in a book or pray a decade of the rosary. Libermann was horrified by the violent and futile struggle these young men engaged in. He warned of the devastation: “All this was really spiritual sensuality” (ESS 180), the cultivation of self-love (ND 4.229). For it was a denial of the supernatural character of holiness; it wanted what it could see and feel, it was confident in human muscular
The theme of “douceur” is increasingly seen as a central element in Libermann’s spiritual insight and missionary spirituality. But “douceur” is not “meekness” and “gentleness.” James C. Okoye, C.S.Sp. translated “doux” as “meek” of the Beatitudes. But “meekness” evokes non-violence, nonresistance, both negative attitudes whereas “sweetness” [douceur] is positive, like goodness, mildness, tenderness, affection, all in the one word. A woman might call a man “sweet” meaning tender, concerned, thoughtful, loving; she certainly wouldn’t use “meek” in that context. Adrian van Kaam, C.S.Sp. uses “gentleness,” but acknowledges it does not do justice to Libermann’s conception of douceur which defies translation in English. Some find the translation “sweetness” archaic, even repulsive. Others combine words, for example, “loving gentleness,” avoiding the saccharine taste suggested by “sweetness,” but retaining the element of love missing from “gentleness” and “meekness.”

The context of the word “douceur” and its cognates (“doux” “doucement”) often leaves little room for limiting Libermann’s understanding of the word to “gentleness” and “meekness.”

Sweetness [douceur]... one of the most beautiful virtues that our Lord brought to earth is not only practiced towards others, it first touches ourselves. It proceeds directly from our union with God, it is a ray of Jesus’ love flowing into our souls to refine them by removing uncouthness and harshness of which they are full. This ray of love gives off a suavity which is felt in all our actions. Those who possess lovable sweetness [douceur] open themselves up before God with tenderness and receive everything from his love with suavity, joys as well as sufferings. In peaceful humiliation of heart they patiently put up with their own troubles and imperfections. They maintain with their neighbor and with themselves such suavity and tenderness of heart that they win over everybody and diffuse God’s blessing on all capable of it (ESS 39).
So more than gentleness and meekness we are dealing with union with God, with Jesus’ love for us. “Douceur” flows from that union and love. It is an integral element of loving union. Love does not exist without it.

Be careful, friends, that it doesn’t become your sweetness [douceur]. It isn’t a question of your being sweet [doux], but that Jesus living in you lives there with his Spirit of sweetness [douceur] and suavity.12

Hence, Jesus in his Spirit is the source of our “sweetness.” Its nature is divine, celestial and irresistible. It proceeds from the Spirit who unites us in love with Jesus and makes us experience within ourselves the sweetness of Jesus. In this sense, a “sweet” person is not just a gentle person, but loving and tender, caring, warm, pleasant, accessible, pliable, mild, compassionate, kind, sympathetic, and empathetic, devoid of harshness, bitterness, and vengefulness. There’s a beauty in such people that even an ugly physique cannot conceal. Jesus is the original sweet person, it is his sweetness that makes us sweet and can create the climate for authentic growth in holiness by the Holy Spirit.

Libermann’s teaching on “douceur” depends on biblical imagery. Jesus said, “Learn of me for I am “doux [sweet] et humble de coeur” (Libermann’s French text of Matt 11:29). He “grew in grace before God and man” (Luke 2:52). He was easy to approach. Children saw he liked them and they found him likeable.

The Tradition of the Church has retained the meaning of “douceur” as “sweetness” in its devotion to Mary, the Mother of Jesus. It likes to call her “Dulcis Virgo Maria” (sweet Virgin Mary), “Dulcedo Nostra” (our sweetness). We mean much more than gentleness, rather lovableness, tenderness, responsiveness, warm embrace.

The “douceur” that proceeds from union with God and is a ray of Jesus’ love for us is beyond our control. It is pure gift, grace. It is something that the Spirit wraps us up in, clothes us with, soaks us in, to use common similes of Libermann. We become meek, gentle, and “sweet” with a sense of being loved that leads to fulfillment, contentment, expanding affection.
D. Douceur and Self-Denial

Through the sweet serenity of soul produced by the Holy Spirit in prayer we find ourselves wanting to repudiate anything that disturbs it (=self-denial) so that union with God remains the one absolute good of Jesus’ love. Self-denial finds its raison d’être in the experience of sweetness that “proceeds directly from our union with God” (ESS 39).

Libermann affirmed the absolute necessity of self-denial: “The true means of preparing yourself for a great gift of prayer is the most perfect self-denial ... Once entirely empty of every creature and yourself, you will be disposed and ready to receive the Spirit of God with abundance” (ibid).

His idea of self-denial is expressed in shocking imagery and language: “annihilate one’s own faculties,” “desire to be nothing and abject before God and man,” “beat yourself down,” “crush the old man.” Libermann was a man of his time. P. Blanchard ties Libermann’s strong insistence on self-denial to his long exposure to the French School: “The principle [of self-denial] is the object of penetrating and prolonged reflection in the perspectives offered by the French School.”

Libermann’s language discloses a gospel urgency and clarifies the memorable saying he uttered not long before he died: “God is all, man is nothing,” an expression totally biblical and profoundly exposing the spiritual thrust of the Bible. Libermann insists that the Spirit operates best when the human being realizes he is poor and nothing by himself. It’s not a question of self-humiliation, rather of experiencing our desperate need to rely on the Spirit. This is the core of how the Spirit fashions a person in holiness as he marvelously did in the Virgin Mary.

Holiness as the work of the Holy Spirit should guide us in assessing Libermann’s “dark side” of self-denial. He is not recommending psychical stamina or a future without laughter, rather something like Thérèse of Lisieux experienced. When her sister marveled that she must have suffered a great deal and given up a lot to have reached sanctity, Thérèse answered, “No, it isn’t that!” She is not denying the mortification and suffering she endured. She is saying that looking at them as the painful cause of her holiness misses the point; love came...
first and total love means total and exclusive self-gift that is joyful.

Libermann is not proposing an active and *afflictive* program of mortification, rather a *passive* stance, a kind of negative (*privative*) mortification in which we give up our own planning and choosing and accept what happens to us in everyday living, seeing in the present moment the hand of Providence. “The most sanctifying crosses are those that come to us independently of our willing them,”¹⁶ he writes. Both P. Blanchard and Liagre see Libermann as close in this to Saint Thérèse.¹⁷ However, some “afflictive mortification” may help prime the pump, as it were, for better discernment of the Spirit’s call to “privative mortification.” Moreover, such “afflictive mortification” can be expressive of a deep sense of Jesus’ love and sacrifice for us, filling the need to respond to his love and sacrifice. And in some cases Libermann did allow it for a short time,¹⁸ as long as it emanates from divine attraction and from a calm interior attraction without anxiety and tenseness.

### E. Self-Denial and Divine Providence¹⁹

For Libermann, privative self-denial protects and nurtures sweetness [*douceur*]. It accepts the privations occurring in daily life (which he calls “providential”). His missionaries will have enough suffering without looking for it in bodily self-affliction. He presupposes God is actively engaged in bringing everything that is happening into such a harmonious interplay to achieve his purposes in creating and redeeming. Divine Providence runs things sweetly and effectively. We have no control over this “sweet and effective” action of Providence, but are players in the game, consciously or unconsciously, because our decisions and actions are taken up into this divine plan. For our own good, we can be a contributor and enjoy a glimpse of how nicely things turn out in the long run. This means waiting for the right time to do something or recognizing the right time in what is happening around us.

Libermann waited confidently for the signs and actions of God’s moment.

It seems to me that anyone ... who counts on his own forces can be stopped before an obstacle; but when one counts on our adorable Master alone, what difficulty need be feared? We
Francis X. Malinowski, C.S.Sp.

stop only when there is a wall in front of us, waiting patiently and confidently until there is an opening, then we pass through as if nothing had happened.\(^{20}\)

Libermann was conscious that his plans never turned out the way he expected, that divine Providence brought about results that exceeded his hopes. His confidant, Frédéric Levavasseur, wrote:

...our dear Father took great pains to wait for the moment of God when he had some good work to do. He was not slow to act when it was necessary, but he knew how to wait a long time for indications of the will of God and his moments; this dependence on the conduct of God, this fidelity to observe his moments, he carried over to the least circumstance (ND 1.339-331).

Waiting for God’s moment appears frequently in Libermann’s recommendations regarding apostolic work. He knew how to wait for things to mature before making decisions and taking action. He excelled in discerning this “moment” when dealing with his missionaries in Africa, despite having to wait months, sometimes many months, for events to gel and personnel to measure up to his expectations.

The word “moment” appears for the first time in his Rennes’ correspondence (1837-39) when apparent lack of success, feelings of uselessness, re-emerging epileptic seizures, and perhaps, unexplainable to him, absence of God ravaged his physical and emotional being.\(^{21}\) He had nothing to rely on except God who would act only in his own time. This could explain why from then on “waiting for God’s moment” occurs increasingly in his letters until the end of his life.

Libermann often referred to the divine management of affairs in Wisdom 8:1, “Attingit a fine usque ad finem fortiter, et disponit omnia suaviter” (which he translated, “La Sagesse atteint avec force d’un bout a l’autre, et dispose tout avec douceur” – wisdom reaches with force from one end to the other and disposes everything sweetly). He saw this passage as biblical justification for his exhortations to nurture sweetness [douceur] interiorly and exteriorly, so that the Spirit can operate more easily within the person...
and that apostolic action proceed effectively in imitation of Jesus. The missionary is not discouraged by lack of success or emotional satisfaction in his prayer or absence of human comfort.

F. Practical Union: The Goal of the Holy Spirit’s Actions

According to Libermann the Spirit of God is a Holy Spirit, who starts the process of holiness in Baptism and intends that it be finished. The human being, when aware in faith that the Spirit is present within him, responds in the only “logical” way possible: he lets the Spirit in a climate of sweetness lead him into the holiness of living for God and for others, holiness and zeal being integrated, each in the other, each unable to do without the other. This integration Libermann calls practical union.

Practical union offers a new way of looking at the holiness for which his missionaries willingly undertook difficult and dangerous works. This was not a new secret for achieving holiness. There is nothing in his explanations of practical union that cannot be found in his earlier writings. Nor does he give the impression of discovering something new.

As far as we know, he first used the expression in 1851 the year before his death (February 2, 1852). The expression does not appear in his letters. It is only found in his Instructions for Missionaries (ES 480-96, 1851) and in the notes Father Lannurien took at Libermann’s conferences (ND 13.697-702). Hence, it is used in situations where Libermann can give it special attention. Father Jean Le Meste, C.S.Sp. thinks that the formula, “practical union,” was too loaded with meaning to be treated informally in a letter. He wrote:

perhaps this new expression, which served to bring together his thought on a crucial point, appeared to Libermann too complex and too rich to be grasped on the fly, when he had no leisure to explain it. For the expression contains, it seems, the last stage of a doctrine which needed a concise and significant formula.

It seems to have been forged out of awareness of his missionaries’ experiences in equatorial Africa where they labored in enervating climates, crude living conditions, and exhausting apostolic endeavors. Prayer
Francis X. Malinowski, C.S.Sp.

proved to be difficult and unattractive. Yet they knew, as Libermann taught them, that without prayer there was not much chance of growing in holiness which, in turn, was absolutely necessary if they were going to be effective missionaries. Libermann urged them to persevere in prayer despite the lack of feeling or consciousness of union.

Tell our beloved brothers not to be at all discouraged if they feel no sensible piety, if they experience a certain lassitude due to the heat and difficulty in praying well. They are not children any more: so they have to be vigorous in walking in God’s ways without bodily enjoyment. They must seek God for God himself and in God.25

Libermann studied the nature of prayer all his life—people who knew him said “he had an answer for every difficulty in prayer.” He learned that many people desired a life of solitude and contemplative prayer which he himself longed for. But, for him, this was not the superior form of prayer and life, because that was not the way Jesus lived. Jesus didn’t remain in the mountains to pray or in less populated places to get away from the people but exposed himself to the public at large. He worked for his Father and nothing other than that. “I always do what is pleasing to him” (John 8:29) denotes active ministry and connotes unbroken union with God his Father. His life was the complete blending of prayer and action. The example of Jesus himself should convince them that the integration of prayer and ministry through practical union was possible and necessary.

The apostolic life is that life of love and holiness the Son of God led on earth in order to save and sanctify people, and by which he continually sacrificed himself for the glory of God and the salvation of the world (ND 10.505, Règlement of 1849).

Libermann knew that his missionaries will have more than enough work. They will not easily find the satisfaction of being successful nor of enjoying what they are doing for God. The climate and work will see to that. They will not “feel” holy. But the process of holiness is going on in profound ways and with startling effectiveness, because they have entrusted themselves
to God. “The soul is directed towards God and that renders its actions holy” (ES 96). The attestation of one of his former novices at Rennes (M. Mangot) shows how Libermann realized this teaching in his own life:

One day I made this observation to him [Libermann]: It seems to me that your very busy life opposes habitual union with God. He answered: on the contrary, as each new duty rises, I appeal to God for his assistance, and then it happens that the more I have to do the more my union with God is strengthened (ND 1.521).

Libermann sees his missionaries as men of action (often he calls practical union “active union”). He expects them to be busy people, engrossed in apostolic tasks (preaching, establishing churches, liberating people from ignorance, poverty, and oppression). The experience of his missionaries compelled him to think in terms of practical union. That teaching, in his mind, belongs naturally in a missionary world.

Libermann calls this union “practical” because it relates to “the ordinary habits of life” (ES 496). In these daily experiences he talks of “directing ourselves towards God” (ES 96), “tending towards God” (ES 491), “being inclined towards God” (ES 447), “being attached to God” (ES 448). Practical union is initiated and developed in tending towards God, intending God as the purpose of our actions.

He describes practical union in various ways, all reminiscent of biblical teaching and experience.²⁶

It is a question of living and acting practically under the influence of and in dependence on Jesus Christ who lives [in us] (ND 13.684).

To attain a habitual tendency towards practical union with God it is necessary to be zealous in adhering practically to all that pleases him (ES 486).

... the soul inspired by grace is united to God in the acts and ordinary habits of life by faith, hope and love ... In that is the foundation of the union of the soul and the essence of its holiness (ND 13.410).
Practical union is what Paul means when he says “that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised” (2 Cor 5:15). This Pauline text, among others, shows how traditional Libermann’s teaching is and easy to hand. Practical union touches on everything we do and experience, “the acts and ordinary habits of life.” James Okoye27 says that it “describes...a total relationship, a spirituality.” Alphonse Gilbert28 comments: “in order to describe the way of practical union the entire spirituality of Libermann needs to be summarized.” Henry Koren goes simply to its essential nature: “In such a union [practical] the soul is faithful to God’s grace in all the big and little circumstances of everyday life and sees everything in its relationship to God and God alone.29

These authors stress the all-embracing nature of Libermann’s conception of practical union, which he also calls “active union” and “habitual union,” both synonyms stressing the pervasiveness of this union throughout human life. It is a union that comes to terms with a busy apostolic life and finds in that apostolic life the expression of its relationship with Christ, rooted and developed in prayer, initiated and sustained by the Holy Spirit. The interplay of prayer and apostolic activity becomes a fertile field for the Holy Spirit, the same Spirit who is “the author and consummator of all holiness and inspirer of the apostolic spirit (ND 10.568; Règlements 1849).

Mary who was overshadowed by the Holy Spirit lived to perfection “in the ordinary habits of living” the faith, hope and love that brings to fruition practical union. The Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55) reveals that she could rejoice in God her Savior in ecstatic prayer and at the same time be concerned about the hungry, the oppressed and the weak and conscious of her people Israel. In her decisions she always says, “Be it done to me according to thy word.” Her Son remembered best about her that “Blessed rather is she [they] who hears the word of God and keeps it.” That is why the Spiritan Rule of Life asserts that “we live out our mission in willing obedience to the Holy Spirit, taking Mary as our Model.”

Conclusion

Practical union is the summit of the life of grace given by the Holy Spirit in Baptism. It shows that that
life was meant to affect human life in all its ordinary habits and acts. Noteworthy in Libermann’s teaching about practical union is the apostolic emphasis this expression evokes. Tending towards God must reach out to all human beings; pleasing God in every way includes all human beings, particularly those who are in misery and are abandoned. The Spirit is a power and energy, but a “sweet” Spirit who accomplishes his purposes in practical union in a smooth and solid way. The Baptism Spirit is an “apostolic Spirit” bent on comforting poor human beings through the vibrant apostolic effort of those deep into practical union. It is the sweet and gentle Jesus that the missionary works for and sweet union with him provides the space and freedom for the Holy Spirit to accomplish the salvific economy of the Father.

Francis X. Malinowski, C.S.Sp.

Endnotes

1Notes et Documents XIII, 698: Libermann’s last conferences based on Fr. Lannurien’s notes. The references are as follows: CSJ: Commentaire de L’Evangile de saint Jean; DS: Directoire spirituel; ES: Ecrits spirituels; ESS: Ecrits spirituels supplements; RP: Règle provisoire; IM: Instructions aux missionnaires; LS: Lettres spirituelles; ND: Notes et Documents.

2All the Gospels speak of Jesus praying often and exhorting to prayer. Luke in particular gives the most emphasis: 3:21; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18, 28, 29; 11:1; 22:32, 41, 45, etc.

3LS 1.386, Jan 1838, to M. Tisserant, seminarian; ND 1.495.

4John Paul II Speaks to Religious: 1978-1980, ed. Jean Beyer, S.J., no. 375. Recently, well-known Trappists (T. Keating, B. Pennington, both influenced by Thomas Merton) have been propagating the practice of Centering Prayer. This type of prayer absorbs input from Oriental mysticism, especially in the use of the body, and the rich Catholic tradition of mystical experience as represented in books, like The Cloud of Unknowing. It is based on the belief, like that of Libermann on prayer, that the Holy Spirit is present and always operative in the soul and seeking to open up space for God in it.

5LS 1.386, Jan 1838, to M. Tisserant, seminarian; ND
1.495.

In the New Testament writings “peace” is the most prized effect of believing in Christ and being laid hold of by the Spirit: “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, endurance, kindness, generosity, faith, mildness and chastity” (Gal 5:22-23). The first word of the risen Christ was SHALOM (peace). Libermann not only exhorted to peace but also tried to show the “logical” connection between peace of soul and holiness. “In order for God to act in us, it is extremely important to keep oneself in continual peace before him; it is even the unique means of arriving at the interior spirit” (ESS 47).

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Blanchard says: “One has claimed that Saint Thérèse had effected... a real revolution in substituting for an asceticism of grandeur that emphasized crucifying performances an asceticism of littleness that preferred interior mortifications. From 1835 to 1850, in France, the Venerable P. Libermann had begun this revolution in his direction of innumerable people who entrusted themselves to him” (I. 436). Louis Liagre, “Saint Thérèse de l’Enfant Jésus et le vénérable père Libermann,” Conference, Feb 2, 1926 at Blanche de Mortain Abbey, 1936 on the spirituality of Thérèse and Libermann, singled out profound similarities between them, especially in the priority of love.

There would consist in fasting, long prayers, discipline, wearing hair shirts, anything that would inflict pain on the body (ND 13.72, Mar 1851, to M. Collin) and block the emergence of a sweet disposition essential to the Spirit working in us.

[I heavily abridged this section; readers very interested in this topic may want to consult the original. Editor].

Authors consider the Rennes experience (July 1837-Dec 1839) pivotal in his spiritual development. The excruciating desolation and sense of personal uselessness and failure echoed the classic experience of “the dark night of the soul” so impressively described by John of the Cross.


In 1829 (ND 1.134-35) he urged M. Viot to the “holy practice” of doing nothing without raising the mind to Jesus and asking for help which is the same as living in God’s presence; in 1836 (LS 1.163-64) he explained to M. Mangat that continual prayer consists in the unique desire of pleasing God in everything; in 1845 (ND 7.213) he tried to encourage M. Perée to be attached to Jesus in everything and united to him in action; in 1847 (LS
4.547) he counselled J. Schwindenhammer to have a sincere intention (a key word in Libermann’s elaboration of his thought on practical union) to be for God. Similar ideas occur in the materials he prepared for discussion in the “Bands of Piety” at Issy and St. Sulpice (ESS 1-57).


25LS 4.59-60, April 1842, to Fr. Levavasseur; ND 4.198.

26He knows what has been the practice of the biblical saints. Adam, Henoch and Abraham “walked before God.” Micah (6:8) counselled: “what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” Jesus taught that God blesses those who do his word like Mary who, completely trustful of God, was ready for the word to be done in her life. The essence of this biblical experience can be summed up in memorable Pauline statements: “If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s” (Rom 14:8). “And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Col 3:17).

27*Spiritan Papers*, no. 20 (Dec 1986), 91.

28*Le feu sur la terre*, 182.

Introduction

Prayer (oraison\(^2\)) is one of the privileged means of developing our communion and closeness with God and of leading us to continuous prayer, to practical union. We are all convinced of the importance of contemplation in our Christian life. We have only to look at the place of silent prayer in the life of Jesus to understand the absolute necessity of this form of prayer. Jesus spent whole nights in this silent contact with his Father.

It is certainly not easy to talk about prayer since there are as many ways to pray as there are people praying. Yet let us try, by referring to Libermann, to provide some clarification on the nature of prayer, followed by the role and aim of prayer in the project of the love of God.

What is Prayer?

This is how Libermann described it: “prayer—that is a serious business, but a very simple business. Your prayer should consist of a simple, humble, peaceful, and completely confident repose before our Lord, that’s all.”\(^3\)

- Repose: tranquility, quietude . . . which does not mean “sleep”!
- Simple: without pretense, without complication, without getting all worked up, in keeping with our physical and psychological state at the moment.
- Humble: conscious that we are as nothing before our Creator, conscious of our misery, our sin.
- Peaceful: without contention, relaxed, without strenuous effort.
- Completely confident: convinced that it is with a gaze of benevolence, understanding, and love that I am received, whatever state I may be in.

God loves us as we are, despite our wretchedness, even because of it. This simple repose, this “very simple business,” is nevertheless a difficult conquest and requires a long apprenticeship. We will attempt to examine how and by what paths Libermann intends to lead us there. First let us clarify the nature of prayer.
The Nature of Prayer

Libermann deserves credit for freeing prayer from the straightjacket of meditation in which it had often been confined, in part at least due to a rational interpretation of the Exercises of St. Ignatius, whereas St. Ignatius himself had made clear that “it is not the abundance of knowledge that satisfies the soul, but to feel, to savor things inwardly.”

For centuries prayer was viewed as a way to penetrate the mystery of salvation by actively using the powers of the soul: discursive reason, imagination, affectivity, will... It was a meditation. Libermann strongly challenged such a concept of prayer. He was not unaware, of course, of the enhancing role of reflection in the organization of prayer. Such work yields a more penetrating belief in the truth to which one is applying one’s mind. This truth is more fully assimilated, one ends up relishing it. In this way it leads to an improvement in our relation with God, to a life change.

But Libermann refused to see in meditation thus understood—as relying solely on natural faculties—the essential and definitive component of prayer. He himself had attempted to follow this method at the beginning of his life as a seminarian. He quickly freed himself from this constraint which threatened to become artificial after a very short time. He then sought to free those who came to him for guidance, all the while respecting each one’s path and the particular work of the Holy Spirit in each soul. There are in fact, as we have noted, as many ways to pray as there are people praying.

The Means of Prayer

For Libermann true prayer is not a matter of technique but a question of grace. Its goal is to put the soul in living and life-giving contact with God; yet neither the most rigorous methods, nor meditation through zen or yoga, nor the natural efforts of reflection, can attach the soul to God or draw God into the soul. God is not conquered. He gives himself. That is why for Libermann natural prayer, in which the soul claims to unite with God through its mental activity, through the action of its sensibility, through the effort of its will, is “bad and worthless.”

God gives himself to whom he wishes, when he wishes, as he wishes. The first condition for succeeding in prayer is the conviction that we are incapable of achieving prayer.
Libermann makes his own the declaration of St. Paul: “the Spirit too comes to the aid of our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit itself intercedes with inexpressible groanings” (Rom. 8:26).

It is he alone who makes us say, “Abba, Father.” That is why, all the while proceeding by stages, Libermann sought to orient his correspondents as quickly as possible towards supernatural prayer, for him the only true one, the only one which transforms, hence prayer in the Spirit, prayer of the heart. If we try, without becoming discouraged, to live as much as possible from the heart and in the present moment, very quickly the Holy Spirit will draw us toward this prayer.

Some lines from Libermann mark out the path: “Pray with calmness, let your presence with God be gentle, humble and without effort.” Libermann never stopped warring against tense and strenuous effort that unnecessarily wearies the mind. God is not directly present in our thought, but in the depths of our being beyond discursive thought. By thought alone we cannot enter into true contact with him.

Libermann writes elsewhere:

We must not pray through the work of our intellect by trying to hold on here and there to some thoughts having to do with God. That is not exactly bad, but it would be fairly mediocre and bear little fruit. Nor must it be, he continued, our mind at play, seeking to keep itself occupied in its own way, entertaining itself with thoughts it finds beautiful and striking, turning them round and round to keep itself busy. Try to give as little as possible to your mind; simplify as much as possible its activity in your prayer and recollection.

In fact, to pray:

- is not to reflect on God or on the mysteries of faith in a monologue where God is reduced to an object of study. In that case, we remain in our own presence. That is not bad in itself, but hardly fruitful.
- is to let the Holy Spirit place us in humble and peaceful repose before God, in contact with him, in his presence.
Joseph Hirtz, C.S.Sp.  If we restrict ourselves to meditation, to “natural prayer,” this work of the mind and imagination will become false and insipid. If we do not give it up, the imagination will produce only malaise, boredom, the impression of wasting time. We will have experienced the limits of our nature and failed to advance to establishing ourselves in the open realm of grace, in “supernatural prayer.”

This supernatural prayer, said Libermann, is passive. It is not we who enter it when we wish. It is God who lets us in. That doesn’t mean that we have nothing to do but to wait for God to let us in. On the contrary, we have to prepare ourselves for this gift that he wishes to grant us with all his love.

What does Libermann say in this regard? As long as we have not resolved to surrender ourselves to God, to turn ourselves over to him, as long as we “waver between the two thresholds of natural life and supernatural life” as he puts it, we will keep the door to our heart firmly closed to him. God cannot bind us to himself. He can only do it if we are detached from ourselves. It is the renunciation of oneself and creatures, this “inner decentering” which is ordained towards supernatural prayer.

And progress in abnegation leads to progress in prayer. In return, that progress detaches us still further from ourselves. Libermann writes:

The true means of preparing yourself for a great gift of prayer is the most perfect renunciation, it is to this you must solely devote yourself and aim for in your every action . . . As long as nature still has a breath of life, the Spirit of Our Lord will be unable to live perfectly in you, but once nature is dead, you will live only the life of God and then the spirit of prayer will animate all the movements of your soul, it will become your regular practice and will be like second nature to you. This is why, my dear one, you must apply yourself to inner renunciation, make it the foundation of your entire spiritual life.6

We can now review everything Libermann says about the conditions and means for liberating the Holy Spirit within us: remain in a state of inner peace; live in the present moment, by moderating the disorder of our mind and imagination. That is the meaning of “inner...
...this communion with God will easily come to exceed our moments of prayer. It will accompany us in our daily occupations, at first intermittently, then on a quasi-permanent basis.

renunciation.” Then, and only then, can prayer become for us “a peaceful and simple repose before God.”

If we are faithful in our prayer and if it is truly supernatural, this communion with God will easily come to exceed our moments of prayer. It will accompany us in our daily occupations, at first intermittently, then on a quasi-permanent basis. It becomes a state of prayer or what Christ asks for, a continuous prayer. For Libermann, the practice of prayer is not a goal, but the means to lead us to a life in God, to a permanent communion with him.

This is not something exceptional, reserved for an elite. It is sufficient, Libermann says, to be convinced that on our own we are incapable of opening ourselves to the action of the Holy Spirit. Humility and audacious faith in the merciful love of the Father, fervent desire and patience in learning to love: that is the path marked out by Libermann. Young Thérèse of Lisieux would say the same thing but she added—and it is this that perhaps proves to be our greatest obstacle—there are few souls who consent to remaining “little.”

Peace and Relaxation in Personal Prayer

We can encounter God in multiple ways: in his Word, in the Sacraments, in our brothers, through signs of the times. But the primary place of our encounter with God is in ourselves, in the stillness of our soul. Prayer is but one approach, among others, for reaching God, but it is the one which brings us closest to him, for then our attention is completely absorbed by his presence.

Practicing prayer means being peacefully united with God, in faith and in love, after having created silence within and around oneself. Prayer is a dialogue with God, a friendly exchange with God. In prayer we enter into direct contact with God who lives in us. We penetrate, in its profound reality, the rich doctrine of the Holy Spirit’s dwelling within souls. Prayer is therefore not a discretionary discipline; it is the daily occasion of our encounter with God.

Nothing Artificial in Prayer

In the recent past, many religious orders and spiritual writers imposed their own particular methods. Libermann, having personally suffered from an overly-strict application of the method in use at Saint Sulpice, opposed rigid
His principle: let the Lord act in souls according to their own "state of prayer." The form of our relations with God actually depends on our personal fidelity as well as the graces granted us, for all souls do not receive the same graces and are not called by the same paths.

When he accepts for his beginners to follow the method of their choosing, Libermann also advises them to quickly free themselves of it in order to not materialize prayer. "Do not be a slave to one method of prayer. Follow your inclination and don’t worry about the method." Maintain a great freedom, the method means little. Only one thing matters: to remain before God “in a simple, humble, completely confident repose.” In your prayer, “manage as best you can. Be in prayer as at mealtime, meaning preserving that freedom, that complete forgetting of yourself and that peaceful calm before God.” Nothing systematic, in other words.

Affective Prayer

It is a good idea to keep to traditional terms, fruits of centuries of experience, which help to clarify the principles of mental prayer. Libermann reprises the classic divisions of prayer: meditation, affection, contemplation.

In meditation, the soul raises itself to God through the work of reflection. It seeks to penetrate more and more deeply a knowledge of supernatural truths and the understanding of the Scriptures and the mysteries of our Lord. The most profitable subjects of meditation are those which correspond to an individual’s inner leanings, spiritual advancement, and occasionally, “to the circumstances in which one is situated.”

Libermann finds meditation useful in the beginning. But are not many people periodically beginners? Although some—this was his own case—are called to affective prayer without passing through meditation.

When reason and imagination take up too exclusive a space, Libermann does not recognize in that type of meditation a true value of prayer. He instead considers reason and imagination as preparation for contemplation. Reasoning, analysis, the work of imagination can give rise to easy illusions. Thus, he remarked, “some people imagine themselves to have done a great deal to acquire humility when they have reasoned about this virtue.” They have erected a
beautiful speculative assembly and persuaded themselves that this is what comprises virtue. But as soon as reflection ceases, the entire structure crumbles.

Affective prayer, whose goal is to keep the soul in the love of Christ, must be considered the better. If meditation makes God known, affective prayer leads to loving him, showing its superiority. The goal of this prayer is not to address God with beautiful speech, but to elevate us in his love and incite us to the practice of virtue.

In affective prayer, the soul turns to God. It draws from itself the feelings of love for God by starting from a supernatural truth and considering the mysteries of our Lord. Its predilection is to bring itself to bear on subjects that stimulate its love. The truths of faith do not remain for this soul in the realm of the speculative; on the contrary, the soul adheres to the truths of faith through profound feeling. It “savors these truths through the heart.” It is useless to impose on it a program. The divine mystery, the supernatural truth provides it with opportunities for union; at times all it needs is the simple feeling of God’s presence.

Libermann hopes that meditation, even for beginners, might lead to affective prayer, and that reasoning leaves more and more room for an affectionate conversation with God. There should not be an airtight divide between meditation and affective prayer; all meditation must move towards becoming affection. He gives advice on practice: to frequently interrupt one’s thoughts and reasoning “in order to savor those things that one sees in our Lord and let oneself go with the desires and feelings of the heart.”

If all collaboration with God requires a repose of the spirit, the calming of imagination, and inner and outer silence, these general laws of surrender are particularly vital in the intimacy with God that we enter into in affective prayer.

In the highest stage of affective prayer, reflections have diminished, the work of the mind has dwindled, the soul no longer feels the need for long outpourings. It slowly learns to love God in a selfless manner, with a love that is simple, quiet, wordless, and without display. It gazes and it loves. It listens and follows. This prayer of simplicity marks a long ascension. It is already the threshold of contemplation.
Contemplative Prayer

In contemplative prayer, “the powers of the soul are focused on God” by a particular grace. Reason is suspended. Emotions are reduced. The soul is happy to receive, abandoned to God in tranquil attention, fixing a simple gaze on the divine light, steadied in this peace which according to Paul surpasses all feeling. With the intellect and will under the possession and control of God, contemplation is the most perfect union with God that can be achieved on earth.

Infused grace granted by God with no merit on the part of the one who receives it, contemplation is sometimes the reward for long perseverance in prayer [oraison], conformity with divine will, and habitual concurrence with grace.

The Place of [Affective] Prayer in Active Life

What place should prayer occupy in an active life? How to insert it into our daily occupations? What type of prayer to recommend to men overburdened with work? What type of difficulties will be encountered? To these questions, Libermann responded with wisdom.

Libermann held no illusions concerning the difficulties encountered in the daily exercise of prayer. If bad weather, the extreme task of evangelizing in newly-formed missions, fragile health, and shortage of food supplies generally prevented missionaries from maintaining a high level of prayer, why would they not have the possibility of uniting with God in their personal prayer? These men had left everything to serve God and souls; are they not filled with love, often heroically so? The saints were not all contemplatives, but they all devoted themselves to living in union with God, in their prayer as well as in all their activities. Libermann thus recommended to his missionaries a middle way, accessible to all, even to those who struggle to focus calm attention on God: the path of affective prayer.

Despite dry periods and difficulties, he affirms that prayer remains possible.

You will often find that, deprived of emotions, given to distractions and sometimes even to revulsions, you will be tempted to judge your prayer according to what you are feeling, and you will see it as useless ...
After a brief time it will happen that you no longer pray because you believe it is not working. You will be tempted to lessen the time of prayer as much as possible, even to omit it altogether... That would be a grave error and a dangerous temptation.

If prayer proves to be a rigorous exercise, it is because the preliminary conditions have not been fulfilled or have only been met imperfectly. We might well report for prayer with the best intentions in the world and employ all “the diligence taught by the spiritual writers”; if the rest of the time we lead a “natural life” we will be fatally prevented at the hour of prayer from focusing our mind on God. The contact with God, maintained in the midst of our normal occupations, must be considered as the indirect and necessary preparation for prayer.

Libermann calls this union with God amidst earthly tasks practical union, because it is attained in activity. It differs from prayer proper, which is contact with God in the most complete inward gathering, with our attention turned only towards him along with a pause in our activities, a time of respite from our work, a momentary forgetting of our preoccupations.

Libermann differs from M. Olier who considered the exercise of prayer as “the most important action of the day and the night.” For Libermann, prayer is not an exceptional exercise which is inserted into the middle of our days. It is an episode of our daily life, a stage of our love for God. It is in fact always the moment to unite ourselves with God. We have to encounter him in our prayer as well as in our work or leisure, in our ministry as well as in the most humble labors. We must unite with God in moments of action as closely as in prayer so that action is transformed into prayer, into love (which doesn’t occur without effort) and so that our apostolate may become the radiant emanation of our prayer.

In the coming together with God which is attained in prayer, the soul sees its level of love increase. Its supernatural habits and even its natural virtues are perfected. It is given enlightenment regarding its faults, regarding everything in it which is contrary to Christ’s love. From it the soul draws greater strength for action.

In prayer one attains unity between interior life and a life of action, between love for God and love for one’s

Prayer does not consist in “good thoughts.”

Christian perfection does not consist of a state of prayer of varying degrees of elevation, but of perfect union of love with our Lord, based on a complete renunciation of ourselves, our pride, our will, our comforts, our pleasures, and all that has to do with us.

Prayer does not consist from prayer for the apostolate of all the baptized.

Practical Advice for Prayer

To these general reflections on prayer, let us add some practical advice given by Libermann. They will help us ensure balance in prayer.

- In prayer, don’t look to develop beautiful pious thoughts that occupy the imagination and the intellect for your own gratification. Prayer does not consist in “good thoughts.” It is not a mental attitude or play of the intellect, but a repose in God without effort or mental searching.

- Be, in prayer, “as if you held your soul open before God, withdrawn into itself,” in a calm, effortless attention to God.

- In affective prayer, don’t exaggerate your feelings for God. Do not seek to express all the emotions that you would like to have. Don’t strain to put your needs forward. As for inner attractions and holy desires, never push further than the Good Lord leads you . . . Do not seek to retain inner emotions or pious affection longer or higher than would be pleasing to our Lord.

- You say that you have all the trouble in the world letting a few words of love escape from your heart. I reply: Why do you want to draw them out? Leave these words of love in your heart. Jesus is there, he will take them himself.

- Do not chase after the extraordinary blessings of prayer. Have a humble and calm piety, “a sincere, natural piety.” Do not strain for a more perfect prayer, “do not take food that you cannot digest. Christian perfection does not consist of a state of prayer of varying degrees of elevation, but of perfect union of love with our Lord, based on a complete renunciation of ourselves, our pride, our will, our comforts, our pleasures, and all that has to do with us.”

- When you are in “a state of agitation, be content with a little return to our Lord at different intervals, with a lifting of the soul, a simple gaze, a rest before him, a desire to live for him. Gestures of this type made simply, without effort or striving, that is excellent prayer. Be happy to be what you are, as long as it pleases God to
leave you thus.”

- To put oneself in the spirit of prayer, self-dispossession and inner solitude must be achieved.

- Do not seek to shorten or eliminate prayer because you find yourself unmoved before God. Sensation and pleasure are not essential to prayer; the essential is the surrender to God’s will, the resolve to please him and serve him more completely; that is true love. You must suffer with “patience, tenderness, love” from the inferior state of your prayer.

- When distractions arrive, gently brush them aside. “Distractions during prayer are not dangerous and will not impede your progress. Our Lord can act in the midst of these distractions; let him do so. He will not hold them against you . . . for he is not reliant on you not having any.”

- With a surrender full of trust, humility and love, you will make amends for anything you may lose through distractions in prayer.

- Strengthen your prayer “without examining too closely whether what you are doing is perfect; simply do your part and leave the rest to God.” Beware of slackening and delusion! You must avoid “false security as much as anxious uncertainty.”

- As for resolutions to make in the course of the prayer, do not worry about them. “You must place all your trust in God, never in yourself or in your resolutions.” Resolutions will be “practical and not too vague.” You will put yourself in a position to carry them out as soon as the occasion presents itself. If you have trouble formulating any resolutions, “it is better not to make any. Your prayer will be just as good, especially if you form a resolution to always remain peaceful and to aim to please God.”

- The best resolutions will be resolutions of silence (inner and outer), renunciation, calmness, surrender to God.

Paris

Endnotes

Libermann uses both prière and oraison for prayer, but the term, oraison, refers to the actual act of praying, of exclusive focus on and dialogue with God, as distinct from meditation or thinking about God. This would correspond to what he later termed affection or oraison d’affection (affective prayer). [Editor].

Lettres Spirituelles (henceforth LS) III, 462.

Notes et Documents (henceforth ND) IX, 41.

LS I, 405 and 406.

LS II, 355.

Directoire Spirituelle 172 and 340.

ND III, 154.

LS II, 452.

LS III, 479.

Cf. LS III, 166.

LS III, 6.

LS IV, 552.

LS I, 231.

LS III, 166.
François Nicolas, C.S.Sp.

Translated from French by Roberta Hatcher

Libermann's Provisional Rule of 1840

The Libermann Provisional Rule, written in 1840, is one of the fundamental references for the Spiritan missionary ideal: profoundly inspired by the Gospel, it remains marked by the permanent newness of the same. Libermann liked to comment on his Rule to the novices in the young missionary community of the Sacred Heart of Mary; the founder was a pedagogue, and even more, a witness. Libermann always knew how to get close to young people; “he listened with great interest to all their questions, even during recreation.”¹

Beginning in 1846, Libermann’s commentaries on the Provisional Rule were painstakingly noted by one of the novices, the future Father Lannurien, and collected under the name of “Glose” (brief commentary).

The Meaning of a Rule (Introduction)

The Founder often recalled how much a rule of life provided structure at once for the mission, for individuals, and the community: “when one member of a body is dislocated, out of place, all the members suffer” (Introduction, No. 6). At the same time, Libermann is fully aware that his Rule is “provisional,” because the form of mission in which the young people are going to find themselves will be of a completely new type. Despite the qualifier of “provisional” that the founder gives to his Rule, “its inner core, that which concerns the spirit of the Congregation, must not change” (Introduction, note). Libermann tells us. Indeed, from the opening articles of the current Spiritan Rule of Life we find the key statements of the original Rule.

Libermann describes the spirit of his Congregation in the first two parts of his provisional rule: the first speaks to a certain extent of the identity of the Congregation; the second describes the way of life, “the state” it must achieve if it wants to respond fully to its mission. The third addresses the government of the Congregation, but Lannurien did not note any commentaries or glosses on this section.
1. THE IDENTITY OF THE CONGREGATION

The profound Being of the Missionary (Chapter 1)

The first article of the rule sums it up: The missionaries of the Sacred Heart of Mary “in the name of Jesus Christ and as sent by him, devote themselves completely to announcing his holy Gospel, and to establishing his kingdom among the poorest and most neglected souls in God’s Church” (Art1.4). Libermann immediately draws attention to the fact that missionaries are called to live the itinerant life that Christ himself lived on earth, “having not even a rock on which to rest the head” (Art 2). Christ sends them in order to carry on his mission. With the priests, lay brothers will be very useful “for sharing our work,” “taking care of material needs” and “the education of the ignorant” (Art. 1.1), this latter being a priority for everyone.

Libermann asks his missionaries to give priority to their spiritual life: “Those who have done the most good in God’s Church were generally not those who are called learned,” but like the Apostles they were filled with the Gospel, and their wisdom “was accompanied by the spirit of a life of prayer” (Art 2). To evangelize requires a long labor of sowing the seeds of faith, which is what Jesus did all during his apostolic life.

The result is that Libermann demands of his novices a very high idea of this type of vocation which carries with it a very particular need of holiness: “they will not lose sight of the fact that if they are to establish the love and reign of Jesus Christ within others, the more so must they first establish it more powerfully and solidly in their own souls” (Art 3). The missionary vocation is a great responsibility, for missionaries are the founders of churches and communities: “even if a missionary in Guinea only converts a dozen people, he will have performed an incalculable good . . . what glory for a missionary to have been the founder of a church! And Libermann adds: “ten converts here and ten over there, it’s not the same!” (Art 3)

Servants (Art 5). Can one change hearts by arriving as conquerors? Following the example of Jesus (Matt 20:28), the missionary will not seek “to be served but to serve” (Art 5), and he will sacrifice everything, even a certain spiritual comfort, for the good of those he wants to lead to Christ. Of course, faced with such a vocation, missionaries will increasingly discover themselves poor, but that experience in itself will be a special grace and a great strength for
them. Indeed, the missionary “walks in the presence of God” (Art 7), knowing that “I have the strength for everything through him who empowers me” (Phil 4:3; Art 6) and that God through his Spirit will cause the growth of that which one has planted (1 Cor 3:6; Art. 7). In this sense, the missionary cannot be content to live a “natural life,” meaning being inspired in faith and a true relation to Christ only from afar (Art 8). People must not be able to say of us that “we are only doing our job,” nothing more; “that will prevent them from profiting from our words” (Art 9). Never say: “that is enough”; “otherwise, since we always have a weight in us which drags us down . . . our ministry with souls will be little productive” (Art 9). “Let us be like the fire that warms” (Art 10).

**The Meaning of Consecration (Chapter 2)**

To follow Christ in his mission is to engage in a veritable “consecration.” “The nature of the work we are proposing” (Art 1), missionary life, consists of entering into the heart of a mystery, that of God’s own life. Missionary life is thus in a sense captured in the radiance of Trinitarian love itself, it is consecrated by that love. That is why Libermann says that “the Congregation is consecrated in the first place to the very Holy Trinity . . . God alone is our heritage!” (Art 1)

Our place in the dynamic of Trinitarian love is that “we have been given to Jesus Christ by his Father” (Art 2), specifically to continue his mission. It thus follows that “we belong to and are completely dedicated to Our Lord Jesus Christ. He sends us as he sent his Apostles, knowing “that he generally uses the weakest instruments” (Art 2). This consecration is indeed the work of the Spirit!

However, following from these two consecrations, there is the vow of the Congregation to the apostolic Heart of Mary (Art 3). The mission being a humanly impossible task, we want to identify ourselves with Mary who humbly says in her Magnificat: “The Mighty One has done great things for me.” We must therefore regard the apostolic heart of Mary “as the model of the perfect zeal with which we must be consumed” (Art 3). Libermann draws again on the image of the heart that, like a fire, warms all those who are in its presence.

These three consecrations (to the Trinity, to Christ, and subsequently to Mary, Art 3 and 4) do not prevent our turning to some “favored patrons or models,” such as Saint John and the Apostles and saints who opened the
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...“the mission that our Lord gives us now is to the Blacks”...

path to the mission. Saint Joseph also has a very special place in our hearts “because of the close relationship he had with Jesus and Mary . . . and he is the model of the inner life” (Arts 5-7).

What is the Congregation Destined for? (Chapter 3)

For Libermann, at the time of the Provisional Rule, the Congregation was destined for “distant and foreign missions” (Art 1), “among the poor, despised peoples whose needs are very great” (Art 5); also “the mission that our Lord gives us now is to the Blacks” (Art 7). It is a matter of priority over all other types of mission, until the local church “has enough clergy for the needs of this people (Art 6). Libermann judged that the moment was favorable because slavery was thankfully going to be abolished soon: “already 50 ships are being sent to prevent trading in slaves” (Art 7). It is this primary urgency which led to the founding of Libermann’s small Congregation; but at the same time Libermann foresaw the harm that could accompany the arrival of large numbers of colonists: “Look at this crowd of Europeans who are going to arrive in their land,” bringing with them “corruption of manners” (Art 7), not to mention the competition of a very active Protestantism, much feared at the time.

What will be “the Missionaries’ special and ongoing Task”? (Chapter 4)

Libermann understands that his era conveys many prejudices against blacks and he specifies that it will be necessary from the outset “to carefully study the customs of people entrusted to our care” (Art 2). All the while he insists on the fact that the moral transformation of the people could never be achieved without their own true discovery of the faith (Art 3). The missionaries are thus exhorted to establish as soon as possible Christian communities that radiate influence because profoundly driven by faith and charity (Arts 4 and 5).

The Means of attaining this Goal are “Missions” (Chapter 5) and “Stations” (Chapter 6)

Father Libermann first envisioned “missions” on the model of rounds made throughout the island parishes, with a team of missionaries coming to teach and hear confessions. Of particular note is Libermann’s insistence on evangelizing children; for him they are “new souls who readily believe and in whom prejudices and habits have not
taken root; whereas older men . . .” He gives this instruction: “win over the rising generation, who in ten years will set the tone.” (Chap 5, Art 8). The “stations” are central points where the missionaries, fewer in number, will allow themselves time for more in-depth evangelization. Libermann anticipates that this will be the case for new forms of mission (Chap. 6, Art 1).

The Ministry to Priests and the Birth of a “native Clergy” (Chapters 7 and 8)

Libermann makes a priority of ministry to priests. It is on the good priests the missionary “leaves behind him that the stability of the good he was able to accomplish will depend, they will spread this good and thereby bring salvation to an incalculable number of souls” (Chap 7, Art 1). Beginning with the missionaries’ relations with the secular clergy or parish priests in the Islands, Libermann recommends having “the greatest respect and affection for them, just as our Lord Jesus Christ gives us towards our superiors” (Art 2, Art 10); even if they sometimes encounter opposition, they are to seek every way to be useful to them and “to help them in their sacred functions” (Art 8).

Libermann next demands of his missionaries, “once they are situated in a country, to do all they can to establish a native clergy there” (Chap 8). He determined that the missions undertaken elsewhere failed due to lack of attention to this fundamental objective (Art 1).

**Attitudes.** Libermann ends his reflections on the identity of the Congregation (Chap 9) with a description of the “rules of conduct towards those we must evangelize.” The attitude of the missionary in the manner of his encounter with other peoples is best summed up in the last article of this important chapter of the Rule:

We will do all we can to establish between rich and poor, blacks and whites, that Christian charity which makes all men consider themselves brothers in Jesus Christ...
don’t yet know their worth. “We must therefore seek to help them in earthly matters, but for us this assistance will be based on faith and charity; that is how we will gain their trust and affection” (Art 2).

The missionaries’ zeal must be directed first towards the poorest and also the sick (Arts 3-5). This led Libermann at the same time to utter a very strong statement: “They will be the advocates, the supporters and the defenders of the weak and the little against those who oppress them” (Art 6), “the master or the colonist who thinks of them as dogs” (Art 6); all the while making clear that, though feeling strong emotion and indignation over injustices suffered, they must maintain self-control and try to act towards all with tenderness and prudence, yet without weakness (Art 7). To find the right balance, there is a fundamental spiritual rule: one must “look upon our Lord in their souls,” without asking oneself who may be deserving or not, and without limiting ourselves to those we find pleasing (Arts 8-11).

Libermann insists on the necessity of studying people’s “character,” “the penchants of their hearts, their inclinations and affections” (Art 12). Every missionary may not necessarily be able to “give a scientific report” of such a study, but each can acquire the practical knowledge that stems from “natural tact perfected by grace, that allows us to penetrate as with a glance to the interior of souls” (Art 12). We will then learn “to adapt to different ways of being”; “it is a gift of the Holy Spirit that is so admired in St. Paul” (Art 12).

2. THE CONGREGATION’S WAY OF LIFE

Libermann envisions for his missionaries the way of life of religious apostles: that is what will create the unity of the Congregation and ensure its “spiritual state,” along with community life and the three vows (Chap 1). This latter, progressively required of all members of the Congregation (Art 3), will be clearly influenced by the demands of the mission itself.

Concerning the practice of poverty (Chap. 2), Libermann foresees that there will always be a certain gap between the missionary’s living standard or resources and that of the needy populations where he is sent; allowing our resources to create a distance from the people or even among missionaries must be avoided. In asking that poverty be practiced “as perfectly as possible” (Art 1), Libermann distinguishes first between poverty of the heart,
which involves “having the mind free from regard for riches and greatness” and a concrete poverty which is controlled by the concrete demands of the missionary relation (Art 1). Poverty experienced in common requires detachment and discernment on everyone’s part, as all become easily attached over time “to trifles that make our heart smaller” (Art 3) and must learn “to suffer privations with love” (Art 4). A long series of prescriptions (Art 6, 20) makes it possible to keep a watch out for inequalities and see to it that everyone has what he needs for his work and his health, the standard of living of the community seeking to stay as close as possible to that of the poor in the country where it is carrying out its mission (Arts 6-20). Being very pragmatic, Libermann particularly insists on a regular auditing of the accounts: a council of almoners (Arts 16 and 17) is planned for this task. Libermann specifies as well that we must not be “ashamed to appear before a rich man in humble clothing.” And yet, “we do not profess absolute poverty: except for cases of necessity, we must maintain an ordinary appearance, and not be dressed like a Capuchin who practices the poverty of St. Francis!” (Arts 21 and 22).

Concerning chastity, the founder details at length (Chap 3) all the usual rules of caution and control of the imagination and senses; he insists a great deal on the control of affectivity and, as an experienced spiritual director, he describes the possible drifting of generous hearts living the relationships inherent in every mission: the temptation to “capture hearts” or to “let our own be captured” (Art 8).

Essentially, for Libermann, the best stabilizer of the missionary’s emotional life is community life. The founder was even more convinced of this fact when, after the merger with the Seminary of the Holy Ghost, he received government reports on drifting by priests isolated in the colonies.

Obedience (Chap 4) is tied to our consecration which consists of espousing the loving will of God with our entire being. Obedience towards one’s superiors is still very influenced by the rules of the era, but the fact remains that the practice of obedience, over and above its spiritual grounded-ness, also has a large practical advantage: it allows for “long-lasting and concerted efforts!” (Arts 1-4). Nor does obedience exclude “explanations to enlighten the superior” (Art 4, 7). It must also be expected that the bonds which are established between a pastor and...
his community can make it difficult to accept “a change of locale” and in the case of a new assignment “one will find a thousand pretexts to be excused from it” or to resist a transfer, for example, “the good one is doing, the experience gained” (Art 10). These are certainly arguments which may be put forward (provided one doesn’t use roundabout means to do so!). Obedience will always remain the best guarantee of being certain of fidelity to God’s will; it also requires a great deal of spiritual humility in situations where one receives reprimands that one feels are undeserved . . . (Art 16, 17).

Community life (Chap 5) is already justified by the fact that “a missionary alone is very vulnerable to becoming lax” or getting discouraged (for Libermann the worst of temptations will always be discouragement). Solitude? : “Out of 100, you will not find one capable of truly withstanding it! Solitude was very hard for our first three missionaries (“with the exception of Father Laval” Libermann noted . . .) (Art 1). Therefore the Rule is that “all members live in community” (Art 1). One must be wary of easy excuses or urgent reasons for being exempted from communal life (Art 8). Libermann also raises the question of food: ideally it would be the same as that of the people living in the area, but reality shows that it is also necessary to take care of one’s health! (Art 9, 10). Regularly returning to a central community, if one has to leave to make rounds, allows one to be revitalized in spiritual and fraternal life; it also allows one “to rest a bit,” to give reports to several people . . . and receive advice (Art 12 and following).

Relations in Community. After a chapter touching on the regulations organizing “community life in general” (Chap 6), Libermann spends a long time on “Rules for conduct towards each other” (Chap 7). Community relationships are the place where the “cordial” love that is the heart of our mission is borne out (Art 1).

Remember first of all that in community what unites us is more important than what might seem to momentarily divide us: “the same faith” (thus the same opinions in substance); “the same goal” based on love, the “same general principles of action”; “the same enemies to combat” and “the same weapons or means” (including community life), not to mention the priority given by all to God over the search for oneself (Art 1). In addition, community life helps to develop a sense of dialogue: in providing “the ability to willingly come round to others’ point of view, and to welcome
criticism . . . (Art 1) and to “be in control of the first stirrings of sensitivity” (Art 2), as well as to also delight in the good done by others (Art 3,4). There is this very wise note: “If your neighbor exhibits any discontent towards you, it almost always stems from a wrong you have committed or a fault of character you possess” (Art 20). But Libermann adds, “of the judgments that I’ve heard the past three years I have never heard one that was correct,” and “judging others is a common failing of pious souls”! (Art 7).

In conclusion to a long development on the theme of brotherly love, Libermann advises deeply loving one’s community and Congregation by manifesting at all times real warmth or cordiality, a spirit of service, frankness and openness (Art 12 and following).

**Having an apostolic Spirit: “apostolic zeal”** (Chapter 8)

What Libermann terms apostolic zeal is the distinguishing characteristic of the apostle and entails an exacting standard of perfection in every aspect. In addressing novices Libermann wants to warn them against an ephemeral enthusiasm or zeal, “fruit of the imagination” (Art 1, 2). Zeal assumes that one tries very hard to overcome many natural faults by starting to totally follow Christ (Art 3). Rare are those, Libermann says, who have a perfectly correct zeal because “one must love God for himself and not for oneself” (Art 3), have a “love of sacrifice” for the salvation of souls (Art 4). We must also not forget that “the crosses that are the most difficult to bear are those which come from ourselves,” (Art 4) and thus to develop a strong and faithful will despite the difficulties (Art 5-7). The sign of zeal is not an anxious activism; one of the keys to zeal is yet again that peace which is the fruit of a deep inner life. Apostolic activity necessarily confronts the missionary with a lot of opposition, even calumny, and generally with resistance to evil. Libermann recalls in this respect the words of Jesus: “I send you as lambs among the wolves” (Art 12). The virtue of gentleness will then consist of loving those who hurt us and believing in the work of grace in them. In any case, “we are made for souls and not the souls for us” (Art 13). Libermann makes frequent reference to St. Paul and the example of the saints to show his missionaries how they must join strength and gentleness in their conduct:

*If Saint Paul was forced at times to speak harshly, he immediately added words of tenderness, which*

won hearts by showing the paternal affection he felt for the souls . . . he called them “my children for whom I am again in labor, until Christ be formed in you!” (Art 16; Gal 4:19).

Chapter 9, titled “On some principal virtues that are the basis of apostolic zeal,” is like a long meditation that develops in greater depth the direction given at the beginning of the Rule:

the apostolic life is nothing other than that life of love and holiness that the Son of God led on earth in order to save and sanctify souls, and through which he sacrificed himself for the glory of his Father . . .

Chapter 10 invites the missionary to develop a very useful skill for his condition: to know how to “speak” or the art of preaching. “Preaching, to make our Lord known, is the principal and most important ministry of his apostolate” (Art 1). Like Jesus himself, it is necessary to “be simple and to strive directly for the conversion of hearts” (Art 2). As in other domains concerning the mission, Libermann asks them to model themselves on St. Paul (Art 2, 3), who adapted his manner of speech to his different publics, and not “on those preachers who write a sermon in their study without knowing to whom they will preach it; and then go and deliver the same sermon everywhere” (Art 7). Libermann also insists that moralistic preaching that seeks “first to make men and then to make Christians” will not bear much fruit (Art 8). It is then that Libermann challenges his listeners, impatient to get out in the field: “most of the time it is to ourselves that we preach” (Art 9). You must learn to “say ordinary things that have been said a hundred times, but in a non-ordinary way” (Art 12), and this presumes that “you are full of it, convinced and deeply penetrated by it.” Libermann specified too that all preaching must be prepared with great care in the study of God’s word illumined by prayer.

The final chapter of the Provisional Rule (Chapter 11) is mainly about the way to hear confessions and to exercise other sacred functions. The spirit is the same as for the Rule as a whole: one must learn “to know the human heart” (Art 1) and “to not be partial to anyone” (Art. 2), while accepting to be disturbed at any time (Art 3). One must ask “as few questions as possible” (Art 6) and “act always with the greatest tenderness (Art 7).
Conclusion

A general impression emerges from the whole of this commentary: it is a commentary on the Rule as well as a meditation on the Gospel in light of the mission as lived by Jesus himself, then in particular by Saint Paul. Many comparisons could be made between the mission described by Libermann and that which Pope Francis speaks of in the *Evangelii gaudium* (*The Joy of the Gospel*): they both have the same desire to give the taste of an apostolate based on the meditation of the Word and the same concern to give priority to encounter with the human heart, over any organization focused on itself.

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(Endnotes)

1Cf. Notes of Fr. Delaplace, March 1851, *Notes et Documents* (henceforth ND) XIII 713.
The First Spiritan Mission Method in Bagamoyo: Liberation of Slaves

In 1868, Spiritan missionaries started the Catholic Church in Bagamoyo on the East African mainland, an important harbor in the 19th century in the East African trade network. They intended to ransom slaves, following the program of Bishop Armand Maupoint, bishop of St. Denis, Reunion, who wrote: “We shall fight slavery in East Africa. We shall ransom as many slaves as possible, settle them in villages, train them in handcrafts and schools and lead them to Christianity.”\(^1\) The archives of the Catholic parish in Bagamoyo have kept the oldest Records of Baptisms and Records of Marriages, beginning with the year 1870.

In this article, I examine the Spiritan method of building up the Catholic Church with liberated slaves. Contrary to Paul Kollmann, *The Evangelization of Slaves*,\(^2\) who argues that the Spiritan missionaries regarded the ransomed slaves as slaves, it is my contention that they regarded the ransomed slaves as free persons and evangelized them as such.

Two questions come to mind. Why did the Spiritan missionaries liberate slaves? Did they force the liberated to become Christians? Let’s look at one series of figures. The number of enslaved East Africans from 1870 to 1885 was 202,000. Liberated were only 1,987, and out of these only 714 were baptized.\(^3\) This indicates that the slaves had freedom of choice as to whether to join the Christian faith and exercised this freedom unhindered. In examining this first Spiritan mission method in East Africa, I shall look at the following.

1. Slavery in East Africa during the 19th century.
2. The Anti-Slavery Movements and Spiritans in the 19th century.
3. The Liberating work of Spiritans in Bagamoyo after 1868.

**Slavery in East Africa during the 19th Century**

The number of slaves taken from West Africa to America between 1540 and 1900 is well documented: 11,769,000. For the East African slave trade, such accurate...
documentation is not available. Figures vary from 30 to 40 million slaves (so Ki-Zerbo), 17.2 million (so Austin), and 8.9 million (so Lovejoy). Because the East African slave trade is not so accurately documented, the African historian, Tidiane N’Diaya, calls that trade “the hidden genocide.”

During the 19th century, plantations of sugar cane, coffee, spices and coconut trees were introduced in countries along the Indian Ocean. Such plantations demanded cheap labor, hence slaves. At the same time, Europe and India wanted more and more the ivory of the (male) East African elephant, ivory used for carving. Soon traders used slaves as porters and merchandise at the same time.

I follow Paul E. Lovejoy according to whom 1,487,000 East Africans were enslaved during the 19th century and forced to work, as follows.

- 347,000 or 23.3 % in Arabia, Persia and India;
- 276,000 or 18.6 % in Southern Africa;
- 95,000 or 6.4 % in Reunion and Mauritius; and
- 765,000 or 51.7 % in the East African coast.

According to Lovejoy, 44,000 slaves were exported between 1840 and 1849, but 173,000 between 1850 and 1873 because farm-products got higher prices at the markets and more slaves were needed. Retained in East Africa were 147,000 slaves during the period from 1840 to 1849, mostly for the spice farms in Pemba and Zanzibar. But from 1870 to 1879, the number jumped to 188,000. The death rate of slaves on the island of Zanzibar alone is estimated at about 10–15% annually.

Slavery in East Africa was really shocking. Reports about the trade were published in Europe. As more and more slaves were demanded, more and more were hunted down. N’Diaye says this about slave hunting.

The slave hunters attack villages during the night, kill the watchmen, set all houses on fire, kill old persons and children and take the others away as slaves. For the long march from the interior to the coast, the slaves are chained one to the other with a chain of iron or wood.

Gebhard Schneider, following a report of the Spiritan missionary, Fr. Anthony Horner, C.S.Sp. portrayed the slave caravans as follows.
The slave caravans are really cruel. Men, women, and children were forced to march, in long lines, chained with iron chains from neck to neck, carrying ivory or other cargo. They are pushed on by the slave traders through forests, deserts, and rivers. Slaves who could not walk any longer were killed on the spot. Others died, totally exhausted.7

In Bagamoyo, the slaves were packed into sailing ships for transport to the slave market in Zanzibar. Fr. Horner reported this about the slave market.

Twice a day the poor slaves are sold to the highest bidder... The bidder examines the body of the slave whom he wants to buy. He checks the muscles. He orders the slave to run a short distance to see how the slave is walking and then he is sold. Females are checked into a cabin. How can I see this degrading scene without being disgusted?8

The Anti-Slavery Movements and the Spiritans

Europeans had a superiority complex. Up to the 20th century, they saw Africans as people without any culture and sometimes even as sub-human. The Africa expert, Leo Frobenius, wrote: “We have to keep in mind that even well-educated Europeans only a life time ago saw Africa as a hopeless continent and Africans themselves as barbarian and sub-human.”9 Only a life time ago - in 1933 this meant about 1850. In 1923 France, with French but also African soldiers, occupied the German area Ruhrgebiet. The German chancellor, Friedrich Ebert, protesting in the German Parliament, spoke of African soldiers of the lowest cultural level supervising the well-educated and trained European people of a higher cultural standard as violation of European culture.10 The two quotations reveal the prejudices and the superiority complex of the Europeans.

However, by the end of the 18th century, Anti-Slavery Movements had started and the 19th century was marked by the fight of “pro-slavers” and “anti-slavers” – two views of Africans. On the one hand, Africans as sub-human or at least without any culture; on the other hand, Africans as equal human beings. But it was at the same time a fight of two economic systems: the “pro-slavers” stood for an economy based on slavery, the opponents of slavery for an
economy based on modern machines and fruits, in short, the use of steam-engines instead of the work of human beings and the planting of more sugar-beets than sugar-canes. In the USA, the fight culminated in the War of the States in 1863. Egon Flaig writes, “The USA were the only country in the world which had a “slave-free-zone” and a “slave-owners zone.” He posits that the USA war of 1863 had no economic reason; it was a war to stop slavery or to continue with it.\textsuperscript{11}

**Spiritans on the Frontlines**

Spiritans were not outriders of the Anti-Slavery movements, but were nevertheless on the frontlines. A number of essays in *Memoire Spiritaine*\textsuperscript{12} affords a good view of the abolition of slavery and the involvement of Spiritans in this. This can only be expected of the sons of Claude Poullart des Places, the purpose of whose foundation was “to train … missionaries and clerics to serve in hospitals, in poor parishes and in other abandoned posts for which the bishops can hardly find anybody…”\textsuperscript{13} Spiritans were involved in pastoral work in the French colonies where they met African slaves. When in 1790 the National Assembly of the French Revolution started to suppress the Spiritans, Lescallier, a former administrator in French-Guiana, testified that the Spiritans were doing “an excellent work in Guinea” among the African slaves.\textsuperscript{14} The mission method of liberating slaves had deep impact in Reunion, Haiti and Mauritius. In 1844 the French Government requested the Catholic Church in France to send 36 priests to Martinique, Guadeloupe, French-Guiana, and Reunion who would be able to prepare the 300,000 slaves there for the liberty soon be granted them and who would be able to calm down the slave-owners.\textsuperscript{15} Spiritans were the natural “experts” for such a work. Their ninth Superior, Fr. Amable Fourdinier, wrote to Cardinal de Bonald of Lyon on April 30, 1844, “Like us the slaves are created in the image of God and like us are redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ.”\textsuperscript{16}

Spiritans started the mission in Reunion which had about 71,284 inhabitants, 45,000 of whom being slaves from East Africa. The treaties of the British with the Sultans of Zanzibar in 1822 and 1845 had limited the export of slaves from Zanzibar to Reunion. But the French farmers who owned huge farms in Reunion knew a way out. They continued to buy East Africans as slaves on the slave market in Zanzibar, baptized them on the way back, and imported
them into Reunion as “Christian contract workers.” That provoked the Spiritans, especially Fr. Alexandre Monnet (1812-1849). He sent reports to France and encouraged the Anti-Slavery Movement. In Reunion, he became known as “father of the Negroes.” In 1847 the famous anti-slavery fighter in France, Victor Schoeller, published his proclamation to stop slavery immediately. The French farmers in Reunion saw Fr. Monnet behind this and tried to kill him, but he was protected by the slaves. The Governor of the island responded to the outbreak of revolt by the slaves by arresting Fr. Monnet and sending him back to France, but he was welcomed there as a “freedom fighter.” Victor Schoeller congratulated him in public and the Spiritans elected him as the 10th Superior General.

Very important for the work on behalf of slaves was also Fr. Frederick Le Vavasseur (1811–1882) who was born in Reunion to a rich farmer who owned huge coffee and sugar-cane farms and many slaves. It seems that the father of the young Le Vavasseur was in contact with the Spiritans because when his son left for Paris for studies he asked him to make contact in Paris with Fr. Nicolas Warnet who had also worked in Reunion. One may presume that Fr. Warnet and Le Vavasseur discussed much about the East African slaves in Reunion. Le Vavasseur decided to become a priest and left for Reunion where he worked closely with Fr. Monnet. In 1842 he became, with Fr. Eugene Tisserant and Fr. Francis Mary Paul Libermann, a co-founder of the Congregation of the Holy Heart of Mary. He was the one who brought Fr. Monnet into contact with Fr. Libermann and prepared the 1848 merger of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit with the new Congregation of the Holy Heart of Mary. Upon the merger, Fr. Libermann was elected as the 11th Superior General and Fr. Monnet, the former Superior General of the Spiritans, was appointed bishop of Madagascar.17 Interesting is that Fr. Monnet and Fr. Le Vavasseur inspired Bishop Armand Maupoint of Reunion so much that he started the mission to Zanzibar (1860/1863) and to Bagamoyo (1868) with Spiritans, the main aim being to liberate slaves.

Haiti was another important place for the mission theology of Fr. Libermann. Fr. Eugene Tisserant (1814–1849), a co-founder of the Congregation of the Holy Heart of Mary, had his roots in Haiti. He was the grandson of the famous freedom fighter, General Beauvais. He was born in Paris in 1814 to a chemist and his wife, the daughter of General Beauvais from Haiti (called Santo...
Domingo up to 1795). Haiti/Santo Domingo was the main supplier of sugar and coffee for France. In 1789, 530,000 of the 600,000 inhabitants were African slaves. The declaration of human rights in the USA in 1776 and the French Revolution in 1779, with the slogans Freedom, Equality and Brotherhood, encouraged freedom fighters to stand up for the rights of the African slaves. The uprising ended in bloodshed. In 1792 the revolutionary government in Paris passed a law which gave freedom to all slaves. The government of Haiti refused to accept that law and the fight resumed, now under the leadership of Generals Toussaint Louverture and Louis Beauvais. They won the fight and Santo Domingo was declared the free Republic of Haiti. However, Napoleon restored slavery and suppressed the newly freed government of Haiti. General Louverture was put in prison in France and died in prison. General Beauvais died on the way to France. In Paris, the Tisserant-Beauvais house became the meeting point of the freedom fighters of Haiti. Here Fr. Eugene Tisserant, grandson of General Beauvais, introduced Fr. Libermann to Isaac Louverture, the son of Toussaint Louverture. From him Fr. Libermann got to know of the successful revolt of African slaves in Haiti.18

Mauritius must be mentioned in this context. Here Fr. James Laval (1803–1864) was laboring for 80,000 former East African slaves who received their freedom in 1833. Fr. Laval knew by experience how interested the Africans were to receive proper education and formation and how much they helped one another in the Small Christian Communities which he had started.19 He informed Fr. Libermann about all his experiences. Fr. Libermann collected all pieces of information from Frs. Le Vavasseur, Monnet, Tisserant, and Laval, reflected upon them, and drew up his own theological conclusions which can clearly be seen in the 1849 Reglements of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit. The upshot of this was that the members are to be advocates of the weak and oppressed. Here are two examples.

Article IX. They will be advocates, defenders and supporters of the weak and “little ones” against those who oppress them (Daly, no. 316, p. 119).

Article XVII. Missionaries will do all they can to establish between rich and poor, White and Black, that Christian charity which causes all men to see themselves as brothers of Jesus Christ.
The Irish Spiritan, John Daly, writes that through the afore-mentioned Spiritans Fr. Libermann became aware of the way the blacks had been oppressed and humiliated. They were compelled to be slaves and servants. Libermann gives examples of their qualities - their capacity for organization shown by the various struggles for liberation on the Antilles; the success of those who had received technical, commercial, and school education and which demonstrated that they could follow all kinds of studies. Libermann saw the people of Africa as open and generous, contrary to what he felt was the self-centeredness of Europeans.

The Liberating Work of Spiritan Missionaries in Bagamoyo after 1868

Spiritans were the pioneers in Bagamoyo. They came to Bagamoyo in 1868 following the 1848 merger of Fr. Libermann’s foundation and the earlier Congregation of the Holy Spirit. They met Africans who were humiliated by slavery and tried to carve out a new future for them. A premise for this was the mission method of liberating slaves. The Spiritans who came to Bagamoyo were well prepared for their work. They trained the freed slaves in various workshops for arts and crafts and in agriculture, and started schools for the boys. Well prepared also were the Sisters of the Congregation of Daughters of Mary who worked together with the Spiritans. They taught the girls sewing and housekeeping. Their Congregation was founded in Reunion in 1849 by Fr. Frederick Le Vavasseur and Aimée Pignolet des Fresnes. A letter from the Generalate of the Sisters in St. Denis, Reunion, says that “The first six Sisters were of humble origin. They came from very poor families. Four of them were former slaves or descendants of former slaves who received freedom in 1848.” John Baur writes that “The Sisters belonged to the afore-mentioned Congregation which was founded in Reunion to enable girls of humble origin, former slaves, to enter religious life. Now they became missionaries to the homeland of their ancestors.”

Four visions

Already in 1868, specifications of the Spiritan Constitution of 1878 were binding on the missionaries.

No. 96. X. The missionaries have to commit
themselves to fight slavery and the dreadful slave trade. They shall ransom as many slaves as possible and lead them to Christianity.

In an 1867 letter to the Spiritan generalate in Paris, Fr. Anthony Horner outlined some visions of the missionaries.

I have in mind to start a new colony in Bagamoyo. Our married couples can get their own piece of land and can start their own house-holdings... The first nucleus shall grow. Not only because children shall be born, but also because other Africans shall join. With our young Christians we shall start new Christian villages in the interior.24

The letter enunciated four visions.

1. To start “Freedom Villages” for ex-slaves.
2. To transform these villages into Christian Villages.
3. To start new villages in the interior.
4. To start such villages with Christians from Bagamoyo.

Spiritan missionaries ransomed slaves and also received slaves ransomed by the British, German, and French authorities. We read that for the period 1870–1920, 234,000 were enslaved and 3,626 ransomed.25 The number of ransomed slaves who were baptized cannot be given because in the Baptism Records pages for some years have been lost. Totally lost are the records of the years from 1885–1887. John Patrick Kieran gives the number of the inhabitants in the Christian Freedom Village as follows.

In 1872: 322; in 1873: 324; in 1877: 400 children and 40 adults; in 1878: 480 children and 70 adults; in 1880: 500 children and 70 adults.26

For the period from 1870–1882, 506 ransomed persons were baptized, 129 being children born to Christian parents and 20 persons who had been abandoned. The ages of those 506 who were ransomed and baptized between 1870 and 1882 were as follows.

1 to 9 years: 160; 10 to 19 years: 282; 20 and older: 32; no age indicated: 32.

The number of baptized children born to Christian
parents indicates that the Freedom Village changed to become a Christian Village. The 20 abandoned persons were aged slaves who were sick or who could not work any longer or children of slaves whose parents abandoned them “at the beach,” at the entrance to the mission, or on the way to us. That is, in places where the missionaries could find them. The missionaries did not force the ransomed to be baptized. This becomes more evident when one reads the Baptism Records and the Records of Marriages in tandem. For example: on June 5, 1871, 9 couples got married. The assisting priest was Fr. Anthony Horner. All bridegrooms and brides had been ransomed from slavery. Two brides had been baptized the day before they got married. One bridegroom, Antonius Mtoumoula, asked for baptism only on May 11, 1872 when his daughter Alicia was baptized. The records mention the couple, Eugenia and Ndege. Ndege never asked for baptism as the entries to the baptisms of his children indicate. Eugenia, an adult ransomed from slavery in 1868, asked for baptism on April 12, 1879. But she had brought her son Lucas for baptism already on June 26, 1876. This open pastoral method of the missionaries is remarkable. They ransomed slaves, but did not force them to become Christians.

One vision of the pioneer missionaries was to open new missions in the interior, but they had to postpone this. In 1870 a cholera epidemic burst out in Bagamoyo and lasted up to 1872. In 1872 the terrible cyclone Kimbungu destroyed almost all the buildings and on top of this the German–French War of 1870/71 cut off all support and supplies coming from Europe. Only in 1877 could Fr. Horner open the first new mission in Mhonda. Now the third and fourth vision of the missionaries became reality: young Christian couples from Bagamoyo accompanied the missionaries and became co-missionaries to other Africans. On November 11, 1880, six couples got married who were appointed for Mhonda. They were very young. The brides were 18 and 19 years old and of the bridegrooms, one was 18 years, another 20, two were 21, one was 23, and one was 27 years of age. For 4, no age is indicated.

**Final Reflections**

The missionaries ransomed slaves, freed them from slavery, and carved a new future for them by giving them elementary education and formation and training in
different skills. They encouraged them to get married, being sure that family life is for the ransomed ex-slaves the best way into a new future. They even expected that they could become co-missionaries to fellow Africans. From 1880 to 1888, altogether 92 young couples left Bagamoyo for Mhonda, Mandera, Morogoro, Tununguo and Ilonga. The Spiritan missionaries of Bagamoyo fulfilled the vision of Fr. Francis Libermann who in 1847 wrote his missionaries in Dakar:

Relate to them as if you were their servants and they were your masters, adapting yourselves to their style of doing things. Your sole purpose in all this must be to perfect and sanctify them and to raise them up from their oppressed state to become a people of God.27

Libermann and his missionaries were convinced that the Africans were as “intelligent as we are” and that their faults were only the effects of slavery. To liberate them from slavery means to enable them “to realize their full potential.”28

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Würselen, Germany

Endnotes

1Bishop Armand Maupoint in 1858 to Propaganda Fide, Rome. Unpublished manuscript: archive of the Catholic Museum, Bagamoyo. Author and date not indicated.


3Lovejoy, Paul E., Transformation of Slavery (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 151; see also documents in the archives of the Catholic Museum, Bagamoyo.


5Lovejoy: Transformation of Slavery, 152.


Fr. Anthony Horner, July 8, 1863. See the Central Archives of the Spiritans, Chevilly/France.


9Informationen zur politischen Bildung. Heft 314 (Berlin 2012), 11.


15Daly, *Spiritans Wellsprings*, 14.

16Ibid., 16.


18Koren, *To the Ends of the Earth*, 217.


20Daly, *Spiritans Wellsprings*, 195ff. (summarized).


22Letter kept in the archives of the Catholic Museum, Bagamoyo.

Fr. Anthony Horner, 1867. Central Archives of the Spiritans, Chevilly/France.


Cf. Fr. Libermann in his Memorandum to Propaganda Fide in 1845.
The Bagamoyo cemetery in Tanzania houses the tombs of 28 Spiritans who came from Europe to join the late 19th century missionary drive on the coasts of Africa. Among them are counted 17 religious brothers. The youngest, Brother Apollinaire, was 21 years old at the time of his death. This peaceful and moving site reminds us that for a long time our Congregation richly manifested the varied forms of vocation in Spiritan life. Our statistics show, however, that every year this variety is becoming increasingly impoverished and that the Brother’s vocation holds little appeal, including in regions of great vocational dynamism. Is that to say that this vocation now belongs to the past? In its service of the mission, can our Congregation today do without Brothers?

In December 2015, the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life released a document reflecting on the identity and mission of Brothers in the Church and the world today. We thought it would be of interest to read this document and examine it from the perspective of our experience and beliefs as Spiritan Brothers, in order to see to what extent it can inspire a new understanding of our vocation.

Can we say that there is an “identity” specific to the religious Brother, distinct from that of the religious priest?

The document from Rome, whose title presumes a positive response to this question, proposes from the outset to address “only what is most specific or particular to this vocation [of religious Brother]” (no. 3). Nonetheless, it immediately shifts the question to another level by stating that references to consecrated life in general are inevitable. Repeatedly emphasizing the variety of situations (Brothers in clerical Institutes, mixed Congregations, and Institutes of Brothers), nos. 2, 11, 39, the document does not distinguish among these in its analyses and seems to refer most frequently only to Institutes of Brothers. In fact, the greater part of the study draws on the foundations of religious life and an identity grounded in a baptismal vocation common to religious brothers and religious priests, even though priests are rarely mentioned. Yet
Marc Tyrant, C.S.Sp.
Marc Tyrant is a Spiritan Brother of the French Province. He made final profession in the Congregation in 1998. Qualified as a medical doctor, he worked as a missionary in Pakistan for 14 years. During that time he served as Coordinator of the Spiritan International Group. In 2008 he returned to his home Province and was appointed director of formation. During that time, he also entered a master’s program on the theology of religions and interreligious dialogue. At the general chapter in Bagamoyo in 2012, he was elected a member of the General Council and third Assistant to the General.

there is no doubt that within the same Congregation priests are every bit as “religious” as Brothers. In choosing to distinguish the Brother’s vocation using criteria from religious life in general, do we not risk putting religious priests in another category, essentially sacerdotal, whose religious character would only be secondary?

In fact, shouldn’t the question of identity be asked first of our confrere priests, who must reconcile on a daily basis their double vocation, religious and presbyteral? Non-ordained Spiritan Brothers have no other vocation than that of the religious missionary life which they share with their confrere priests. One could of course also mention the “vocations” of teacher, doctor or musician, but it’s not exactly comparable. Besides, those specific professional capacities can also be carried out by confrere priests. We all have these kinds of multi-faceted identities, whether tied to a specific skill, belonging to an ethnic or national group, or a particular social commitment. Do we consider ourselves French first, or religious first? First and foremost a musician or first a priest? Such oppositions have no meaning. Thus the Spiritan priest is no less religious than the Spiritan brother. The two share the same religious and missionary identity.

In our Congregation, we run the risk of two main and contradictory pitfalls when, with the best intentions in the world, we try to distinguish an identity specific to the Spiritan brother.

1. **Exalting differences:** with the legitimate aim of avoiding a devaluing of the brother – a historical legacy – we end up overly differentiating a vocation that is upheld from the outset as “specific” and “particular.”5 We glorify, for example, the figure of St. Joseph as “patron of Brothers” because he is of “the workers”,6 we emphasize the amount of manual labor done by the Brothers. But today’s Brothers don’t have any special skills that priests could not also possess. Wanting too much to single out Brothers (even in a positive way), we segregate them amongst themselves and in specific categories of activity (manual jobs, frugalness, teaching in “profane sciences”) that nothing in theory can justify.

2. **Masking differences, at the risk of a certain “clericalizing” of Brothers:** they are lay religious,
not “quasi-priests” who constitute an exception in a Congregation of “Holy Spirit Fathers.” As is the case for all God’s people, it is good that the religious Brothers be trained in theology, teach catechism, be active in the parish, etc., but it is not a sine qua non condition of their religious commitment.

Quite rightly, the document insists at several points (nos. 23 and 36) that the religious Brother is a Brother for all his life, including in sickness or weakness: his identity is not confused with his eventual occupation or ministry.7 No, the religious Brother’s real identity is religious life, which he shares with his confere priests.

Can we then say that the Spiritan mission is lived differently by a lay confere and a confere priest?

The Rule of Life is the same for all. Its first chapters, which treat fundamental elements of the vocation, the mission, and our religious life, make no distinction between Spiritan priests and Brothers, as the document Anima Una, Spiritan Priests8 rightly reminds us. Our common identity is thus truly religious and our common mission is “the evangelization of the poor.”9 If our way of living religious life is the same, the diversity of apostolates, according to each person’s skills and the specific character of the priesthood for confere priests, leads to a fruitful complementarity for the requirements of the mission.

The same document, Spiritan Priests, lays out eleven principles10 corresponding to different aspects of a specifically Spiritan vocation. These are to be an inspiration for the way the priesthood is practiced: evangelizing the poor, defending the oppressed, moving beyond borders, pursuing interreligious dialogue, bringing service to places where the Church has difficulty finding workers, working with communities, collaborating with local Churches, leading a simple life, protecting the integrity of Creation, etc. It is notable that all these points are followed with the phrase “as do all Spiritans,” reaffirming the common dimension of our mission.

A number of these points are also found in the Rome document, in sections 2.II and 2.III (nos. 21-31) in particular (“communion” and “mission”). These describe religious life in general, and therefore do not apply exclusively to the religious brother. Thus are included aspects such as sharing, fraternal love as lived
in community and through service (no. 23), spirituality unified between work and prayer (no. 19), the search for God, the practice of the three evangelical counsels (nos. 18 and 25), the prophetic and counter-cultural dimension (no. 25). 

“Common life” is especially singled out as being “an essential characteristic of the religious life of Brothers” (no. 24): Is this true? Isn’t it rather an essential characteristic of religious life itself? 

In our Congregation as in other clerical institutes, priests are no less subject to this requirement of communal life, seen as the core of our religious vocation!

The Bagamoyo Chapter neatly summarizes this question of Spiritan identity as being above all religious and thus communitarian, and which is expressed in a variety of functions and tasks, whatever the type of vocation.

We are a community of brothers endowed with varied charisms in different functions and tasks. We aspire to live simply and openly, in a prophetic way. Community life forms our identity; it is the most powerful symbol of what we are. It constitutes our way of living the mission. We live, pray, work and grow together and share everything with each other.

The Mystery of Communion

The Rome document develops the idea of the “mystery of communion” that the Brother incarnates. Rather than examining the religious Brother’s identity, isn’t it instead questions about his role that we should be asking ourselves? As we’ve already outlined, the theology of the religious Brother is simply the theology of religious life (as evidenced by the document’s many borrowings from Vatican II and Vita Consecrata and its use of the theology of the “sign”). Nothing is said about the Brother that could not be extended to religious life in general, whether for men or women. That said, and the Rome document clearly reflects this, some elements can be noted that the presence of Brothers alone bring to the fore, which suggests a unique fecundity within a clerical Congregation. These features—universal calling of the baptized, universal brotherhood, prophecy—bear directly on the question of communion in the Church, which the Brother especially manifests.

“There is nothing greater than baptismal consecration” (no. 14). The religious Brother thus becomes the witness to the universal calling of the baptized, reminding every
Christian through his religious consecration that all life is given to God (nos. 16 and 22). Near to the “little ones,” the marginalized and the poor, he invites them to the “table of the Kingdom” in “the Eucharist of life” that he celebrates in the Spirit “from his baptismal priesthood reaffirmed by his religious consecration” (no. 20). This lived solidarity, this predilection for those who “are less likely to experience the good news of God’s love in their life” (no. 6), allows the Brother to be the impetus for a community “on the move” towards the fringes, outside of parish institutions where we risk being confined by a too narrow and clerical conception of the Spiritan mission.

The consecrated person called “Brother,” as a “living memorial” of “Brother Jesus” (no. 15), is the visible sign of universal brotherhood, recalling by his lifestyle that we are all children of the same Father. This mission of the Brother to serve as a reminder of the ideal of fraternity among Christians is articulated throughout the document, particularly in no. 11: “[brotherhood] is the pearl that religious Brothers cultivate with special care. In this way they are, for the Church community, the prophetic memory of its origin and an encouragement to return to it for renewal.”

It is in this respect that the religious Brother is prophet amidst his clerical Congregation, in the sense that he reminds all his confreres of the horizontality of their vocation, anchored in their common religious consecration: “[the presence of religious Brothers in clerical congregations] is important (. . .) above all because they are the permanent reminder in these Congregations of the fundamental dimension of brotherhood in Christ which all members should strengthen” (no. 11).

He is also prophet to all Christians, for whom he recalls the primary dimension of service following in Christ’s footsteps, beyond the seductions of money, power and honor, when the temptations of patriarchy, authoritarianism and clericalism endanger the truth of our witness:

\[
\text{As for you, do not be called ‘Rabbi.’ You have but one teacher, and you are all brothers. Call no one on earth your father; you have but one Father in heaven. Do not be called ‘Master.’ You have but one Master, the Messiah.”} (Matt. 23: 8-10).
\]
The document proposes several evangelical “icons” to deepen understanding of the identity of the Brother.

The icon of the washing of the feet, linked to the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper, is presented as illuminating the diversity of ministries deployed in the Church to unfold the mystery of salvation. On one hand, priests renew the gift of Christ in the Eucharist through the remembrance of His death and resurrection. On the other hand, the “faithful,” inspired by the Spirit, convey Christ’s presence by their attitude of service (no. 12), by developing multiple charisms and ministries in service to fraternal communion. For the Rome document, Brothers are clearly on the side of washing of the feet. That certainly isn’t untrue, but the same can be said for ordained ministers, for it is the apostles, priests and bishops first among them, who are called to this “attitude of service” that the document appears to attribute only to “the faithful.” If the dimension of service “characterizes the consecrated life of religious Brothers,” (no. 19), it is no less fundamental to the consecrated life of religious priests, even if it can unfortunately end up being pushed aside.

Another icon the document presents as a model for the religious Brother is that of the Good Samaritan. Through this figure the entire sphere of service to one’s neighbor is emphasized: the closeness to the poor, the “being with” that has in fact inspired the vocation of many Brothers (but not only!). In reality, it is of course always Jesus who is the central icon, “who invites us to be the memory of his love” (no. 33). But it is all religious, and through them all Christ’s disciples, who are called to reflect upon the challenge of human solidarity within and beyond their community: Who is my brother? For whom or to whom do I become brother?

Finally, what is new in this text? Can we detect in it any original steps forward regarding the place of religious Brothers in the Church?

The great merit of this document may ultimately be that it exists, and that it demonstrates an interest and a real concern about the future of the Brother’s vocation. It responds to the wish expressed by Pope Francis, who reflected during his meeting with the Superior Generals in November 2013: “I don’t think at all that this type of vocation belongs to the past, but we must understand what God wants from us.”
In some respects, the document implicitly draws on a somewhat outdated and uninspiring image of the Brother, one that we would do well today to move beyond. Note in particular the question of manual labor (no. 31) and the reference to material services provided by the Brothers in clerical Congregations (no. 11). Even if these features have a historical basis, must we systematically link the identity of the Brother, even in part, to the work he performs? At the risk of limiting his role and importance to the mission to the material and financial support he provides? It’s a question we must honestly ask ourselves.

In the final section of the document, “Being Brothers Today: A Story of Grace,” the challenge of the objectives put forward by this document becomes clear: to accord more status to the vocation of religious Brother by seeking the foundations of an identity that may ultimately be unknowable, and to open new paths for the future. In this regard, certain reflections are surprising, especially the series of propositions “prophets for our time” (no. 37), which ties the Brother’s vocation, pell-mell, to affirming feminine values, protecting the environment and the wise use of new technologies.

Yet we note in the second-to-last paragraph (no. 39: “new wine in new wineskins”) a group of comments and suggestions that, if not representing a revolution in thought, remain nonetheless pertinent. For example, in the case of mixed Institutes, the encouragement “to establish among all members a way of relating based on equal dignity, with no more differences than those arising from the diversity of their ministries.” In the same point, the text addresses “the question concerning the jurisdiction of Brothers in these institutions” (understood to mean the possibility that a Brother be named Major Superior), by hoping that it be resolved “with determination and within an opportune time-frame.” Let’s recall that in 1997 Jean-Paul II in Vita Consecrata already expressed the wish “that the parity of rights and obligations be recognized for all religious in these Institutes, except those that derive from the sacred Order.”

In truth, the question of relations within the Congregation goes beyond the canonical sphere, as our recent General Chapters have reminded us. It calls for a truth process about the authenticity of what we claim to live and the conditions for a relevant and effective Spiritan mission. What matters today is to maintain the preference...
for diversity and complementarity in service to the same mission, among a Spiritan family where priests and Brothers, religious and lay associates, men and women of diverse origins may be united by the same desire for justice and sharing.

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Paris

Marc Tyrant, C.S.Sp.
Rome

Endnotes

1 On December 31, 2014, there were 115 Brothers (including 88 in Europe and 19 in Africa) among a total of 2,706 Spiritans.


3 No. 10: “Religious consecration has its roots firmly planted in Baptism.”

4 This negative formulation is clumsy, but it highlights the problem of vocabulary used to describe ecclesial realities. How to externalize the fact that a Spiritan priest is first and foremost a religious, meaning a brother? There is of course the term “confrère” but that alludes more to a professional relation. In our Congregation, the term “Brother” is never used to refer to a priest, unlike the Dominicans and Franciscans. The term “lay” is also mainly used to refer to Christians who have not entered the priesthood or religious life (cf. Lumen Gentium 31). If the main point remains the fact of fraternal relations, the vocabulary is nonetheless important.

5 Meaning in reference to a norm, which implicitly ends up being that of priests . . . We are indeed a clerical institution. Does that mean that the Spiritan identity must then be conflated with the priesthood? It is a debate which does not appear to be completely settled in practice, even though the Congregation’s latest documents are at least clear on the question (Torre D’Aguilha 6.16; Enlarged General Council Ariccia 2008 in Anima Una no. 62 §3.2.1.; Bagamoyo 2.6).

6 Why would a Brother be presumed to be more of a “worker” than a priest? We are influenced here by an outmoded typology
that draws a distinction between the laboring classes and intellectuals, and which applies in only the most caricature way to the complex reality of today’s Congregation.

“Support turns out to be necessary to prevent professional retirement from resulting in religious retirement,” (no. 36).

Anima Una no. 64, Spiritan Priests, June 2012, § 2.1.

SRL, no. 4.

Anima Una no. 64, Spiritan Priests, June, 2012, § 2.3.

This rhetoric of opposition to the world does not seem to be among the most productive: is the lifestyle of Brothers, modelled on the Gospel, really “opposed to what the world promotes”? In a certain sense yes, but it is not a question of engaging in some type of hostile counter-culture: in the world around us, many individuals, movements and organizations also promote values of solidarity, mutual aid, simplicity, communal life, etc. in full accord with the Gospel. It would be absurd to renounce these. Furthermore, our own communities are all too often influenced by those “worldly” values denounced by Pope Francis. The Rome document in fact raises this point by speaking of the “fragility” of the sign that our religious communities represent.

The document refers here to Vita Consecrata 46. However, John-Paul II’s exhortation to be witnesses of fraternity and communion isn’t addressed to religious Brothers alone but to all the consecrated!

Bagamoyo 2.6

Regarding feminine religious life, the document states in its introduction that most of what is said about Brothers can also apply to Sisters. The ambiguity nonetheless pertains more to the identity of the religious Brother, given that men can be called also to the priesthood (in a religious setting or not), and that is precisely what is at issue in the document. Plus, much has been written on religious life in general.


No. 19: “The dimension of service that characterizes that consecrated life.”

No. 9: “The consecrated life, predominantly lay in its beginnings (…) seeking to imitate Christ in his way of living: poor, obedient and chaste.”
“Clericalism and privilege.”

In the sense of *Vita Consecrata* 61. It thus in principle is not the case for the Congregation of the Holy Spirit which is from its founding a clerical Institute.

Jean-Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, no. 61.

Torre D’Aguilha 6.16; Bagamoyo 2.12.
Brian McLaughlin, C.S.Sp.

Brian McLaughlin, C.S.Sp. was ordained priest in 1967 in Dublin and has the STL from San Anselmo University, Rome, 1969. Other specializations include a 2 year post-graduate Diploma in Psychology, University College, Dublin (1970-72), Certificate in Counselling, Westminster Pastoral Institute, London 1985, and Diploma in Spiritual Direction, Milltown Institute of Spirituality, Dublin, 2007. Missionary in Brazil for nine years, Brian researched a new initiative in South-East Asia on behalf of the general council and was in the first Group to go to the Philippines in 1997. He was provincial of Brazil (1977-80), Ireland (1988-1994), and major superior in Philippines (1997-2005). Brian currently ministers part-time in counselling, spiritual direction and voluntary work with an NGO.

**Spiritans for Today: The Journey of a Non-Hero’s Hero? John Doyle, C.S.Sp.**

On 30th April 2014, John Baptist Doyle (henceforth, J.B.), a Spiritan confrere and friend I loved and admired, died from pancreatic cancer. On his desk was a framed motto: “life is like a cup of tea, it’s how you make it.” In the view of most who knew him he made a great cup of tea of his life.

John was born in Dublin in 1937 and joined the Spiritans in 1956. He was ordained in 1964, having graduated in science from University College, Dublin and theology from the University of Fribourg, Switzerland. His first overseas mission appointment was to Nigeria, where he was involved initially in seminary education and part-time parish work. This was followed, during the Nigerian Civil War, as Field Liaison Officer for German and French Relief Agencies. He was later assigned to Brazil, then to Rostock in former East Germany. He also accepted appointments in Ireland (after Nigeria) as Director of theology students, during which time he was also a member of the provincial council; post-Germany, as a community leader and, again, member of council. Put that way, “the cup of tea” is cold and captures little of a wonderful Spiritan whose person and life inspired all of those who knew him. I have been asked to try and share something of this with you.

Perhaps the thing that marked his missionary life most significantly was the experience in Biafra during the Nigerian Civil war. Three examples underline the sort of stress there.

**Coordinating relief work.** Apart from the almost unbearable human suffering he witnessed, he had to make decisions no one should be asked to make. With food and medicine in very short supply he had to decide which children would get these because they had a better chance of survival, and which would not, who would live and who would die.

**Living in a situation where one did not know who was who.** Who was on the federal side, who was a “Biafran.” He shared a story about this. Waiting, under house-arrest, in
a hotel in Lagos before deportation a ranking army officer came to him. The conversation was like this: “Fr. Doyle, are you comfortable?” “Yes.” “And the Sisters, where are they (the Sisters in question had worked with him and were also awaiting deportation)?” “They are in such and such a place.” “Not good enough – I will order them be brought here.” John, bemused, stared at him. Suddenly the officer crouched forward, stretched out his hand and emitted a pain-filled wail. “The beggar!” said John. The man, under the guise of a beggar, had been a constant (spying) presence in the compound where John lived and worked – and, clearly, secretly admired him!

Finally, towards the end of the war an incident of “shock and noise treatment.” Suddenly stopped by the Nigerian troops, he and his Spiritan confrere were dazzled by blinding lights and stunned by a very loud noise. This had effects on his body and emotions from which he never fully recovered.

On his return to Ireland, he was asked to take over responsibility for the senior students in the Seminary. Consistent with one of his core traits of openness to what the Congregation asked of him, he accepted the appointment. The students remember him as someone who was “a real human being,” who communicated an interest in each one, treating each as an adult and with responsibility. However, his razor sharp mind quickly cut through any phoniness and challenged when necessary. As one of them said he “was a role model.”

At this time he was also a member of the provincial council. There was much change, countrywide, in the style of seminary formation. For many older Irish Spiritans, this was difficult and “what are the students up to now?” was a frequent topic of conversation. J.B. was director of students on the one hand, but also member of the council which these others expected to “sort out the students!”

As in Biafra, though on a much smaller scale, he was “caught” in very stressful decision-making – torn in different directions. This was not easy for someone with a scientific mind who liked clarity. Soon, people noticed he would suddenly glaze over and seem “lost” for a minute or two. It was the sound of an aeroplane – heard by him before anybody else, and needing him to rationalise: “that is a passenger plane, not a fighter. I am in Ireland and not in Biafra.” Quickly, the damage and the after-effects of the
war came home to roost and he had a nervous breakdown forcing him to resign from both posts in March, 1972.

He first received treatment in Dublin before moving to a sanatorium in Badenwiler, Germany, through the good offices of Mgr Staufer, who had been head of Caritas Internationalis during the war in Nigeria and coordinating the medical and food relief. J.B. served as interpreter, both in French and English. Later, when Staufer knew about his health problems, he arranged for him to be treated in Germany. Following his stay there, J.B. spent almost a year in light pastoral ministry in the U.S.

The Nigerian experience was hugely traumatic for him, changing him and his way of being. As he himself put it, “I have been to the edge and am not going there again.” From now on he would be a “wounded healer.” In his book of this name, Henri Nouwen speaks of the minister of religion who must look after his/her own wounds, but at the same time, be prepared to heal the wounds of others. Further, he/she must make their own wounds into a major source of their healing power. This does not call for a “sharing of superficial personal pains, but for a constant willingness to see one’s own pain and suffering as rising from the depth of the human conditions which all people share.” One colleague, who knew him very well summarised it later on: “I believe that his immense humanity was what nearly crushed him after the Biafran war. To his great credit he was able to use these very wounds and humanness as healing for others.” As we shall see, this was evidenced through the rest of his life by those who met him, who felt so at ease with him, so understood and accepted by him, particularly in their pain and suffering.

The caring for his own wounds showed itself in a number of ways. There would be his inner, damaged core that he would protect. It was a reserve out of which he functioned. Decisions about what he did and where he went would be taken very much on the basis that this core was “safe” and would not be invaded or ravished again. He came across with a calmness and serenity that was contagious. In part, this was a strategy which hid an always sensitive and vulnerable human being. His core was both protected and nurtured by taking time for himself daily, normally in his room. This was sacred in all senses of the word and those who lived with him knew it – door open, J.B. available, door closed, “don’t even dare knock”! It was
time to be in the presence of his God and his own inner truths as these developed. In this he found journaling and yoga helped his focus and growth in “the inner man.” In his own words after a yoga session captured on a video taken of him in his ministry in the Amazon region of Brazil (cf. below): “I find sanctuary in this because there is a lot of noise around here, it is very warm, you’re driving on bad roads and shaken up. Then when you arrive at a community, many people want to talk with you. One is pulled and dragged about. If I am to do this with grace and calmness, I need to be fairly well together.”

While, as the homilist at his first anniversary Mass put it, “J.B. did not do ‘pious,’” he lived a faith-filled life grounded in the conviction that “God is all” and it was this which sustained him in the challenges. In hospital shortly before he died, he asked a friend to look up a reference in St. Luke’s Gospel, “the one about when you enter a house say: ‘Peace to this house... heal the sick who are there and tell them, the Kingdom of God is close at hand.’” As the friend put it “he admitted that all his ministry was influenced by that advice. J.B. did not see the Church merely as an institution caring for itself and its own religion. He saw it, and himself, as one sent by Jesus to think of the welfare of others, to present Good News to people who are vulnerable and oppressed in one way or another.”

Reading was another way he nourished his inner core. One of his colleagues remarked: “Reading a book after him was very difficult – so much red underlining, posing the question, will I just stay with what is underlined or should I read everything?” For John, his greatest fear was of going blind, as this would mean he could not read.

While he tended to his own woundedness, it was this very thing, which as the “Wounded Healer” made him so sensitive, attentive and caring to the woundedness of others. As he developed into mid-life he continued to grow emotionally, particularly through his friendships with lay men and women as he moved through the next stage of his journey in Brazil in 1974. Initially, he worked for 6 years in a parish in a satellite city of Sao Paulo. He was still very “brittle,” as shown in a medical check-up on his vacation home in 1976. But he settled well, being very drawn to the pastoral set-up there - Liberation Theology, Basic Christian Communities, and “Popular Movements” – or protest groups seeking civil, economic and labor

...as one sent by Jesus to think of the welfare of others, to present Good News to people who are vulnerable and oppressed in one way or another.”
rights. He put his energy into quality rather than quantity, preferring to help deepen the faith and commitment of core groups destined to be leaven in the mass. His sense of humor endeared him to all.

After a number of years there their admiration of and confidence in J.B. saw his colleagues elect him as the Group Superior. After his election we, like a crowd of school-boys, chaired him around the patio. This was one of the happiest moments in my life. I had seen him at his lowest, when, in my room in Dublin, at 2.00 a.m. on a March morning 8 years previously, he signed the resignation letter he had just asked me to type. Now, it seemed he was really moving forward again. Despite the scars, he was coping well, his personal gifts were beginning to flourish and develop in new ways and these were now recognised and affirmed by the rest of us.

A word here on his style of leadership within the Spiritans, on occasions in Ireland, also in Brazil and Germany, and in pastoral situations. In decision-making, whether on his own or with others, given his very sharp mind, he had the capacity to get very quickly to the core – see what was important and what was not, what was possible and what was really not on. Having assessed the evidence he looked for practical, “doable” decisions by those expected to implement them. Also, as when he worked with students, he was not afraid to challenge.

In practice, most decisions, one way or another involve people and it was his sensitivity here which will be most remembered of his time in leadership. He had the capacity to see the broader picture, to avoid either/or positions, to let seeming opposites co-exist, and very slow to judge people who were in conflict, whether within themselves or with others. He would try to involve people as much as possible in the resolution process so that they could both own and act on the decision when made. A young priest, who had got himself in a bit of a heap wondering how to go about his new apostolate, shared how J.B. told him: “young man, go out there, make your mistakes, come back and we can talk about them.” He says this was “a huge boost for me… and gave me the courage and the audacity to open up to the world out there, to the people and mission.”

After this time in leadership in Sao Paulo he branched into something totally new, going to the State of Rondonia
in the Amazon basin bordering Bolivia. It was a huge step into the unknown for him. He had been reared in Dublin, went to school there, did higher studies in cities and had lived in a city since coming to Brazil. True, he had spent time in rural areas, particularly during the war in Nigeria – but that reality was very different from this one. He was to spend eleven years in Rondonia and, afterwards, shared with a colleague that of all his time in Brazil this represented for him our real missionary role.

In 1978, the Brazilian Government decided to open up Rondonia. Its aim was to ease the pressure on the more densely populated parts of the country, particularly in the south-east. Financed by the World Bank, a new road was built to cover 1,500 km heading due north, with the idea of opening up the whole hinterland. People were offered a square kilometre of land of pristine Amazon forest. They were allowed to cut down half and use it to develop sustainable agriculture for their families. There was a huge response and, between 1982 and 1986, half a million people entered the forest full of dreams. Unfortunately, these turned to nightmares. The cut-down forest was productive for the first three years, but, because of the acid in the soil, turned out to be then totally unsuitable for agriculture. Further, the immigrants were very unprepared for the heat, malaria and general conditions. Many died of sickness. Ranching speculators were quickly ready to buy their cleared lots and turn them into basic grazing areas. Few of the settlers had capital to buy cattle and, so, continued on their bit of land eking out an existence, or moved off to the next “Promised Land.”

A group of Spiritans arrived there in July 1980, basing themselves in Rolim de Moura, a vast area of some 300 square kilometres, which eventually developed into a parish with 106 scattered communities. Shortly, almost two-thirds of the population of the parish were involved in church activities – way above the national average of 5-8%. John joined them in 1986. After six years, at the Bishop’s strong request, no doubt, in part, to have his experience and wisdom closer at hand, he moved to the central parish of Ji-parana. In both places his pastoral approach was characterised by training and encouraging “pastoral agents,” or part-time local, lay leaders.

In April 1993, the Religious Department of Independent Television in Birmingham, United Kingdom, produced a documentary “Two Hands Hanging.”
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I never had this idea of saving the world...  
no, no, not that.  
Mission is to go where the need is greatest.

When asked did he not miss having a wife and family he answered, “Of course, I do! But when I train another – e.g. a lay leader – and let them off to be fulfilled, there is a sense of being creative, like paternity.”

Asked was he going to stay, “What I feel I’m faced with is this: I came here because I admired these people – their spirit. Suddenly, the wind has changed. I am not going to drop out because the wind has changed. I still admire these people. My choice is: to stay here because I admire these people, or get out? I don’t see that as a choice. I happen to represent the Catholic Church – it could be any Church, but ANY element of stability, a fixed point, is of great help to them. When they hear of someone else leaving they say, ‘is he going too, another nail in our coffin?’ And I don’t want to be part of that process.” In practice, he was also very pro-active – challenging authorities, speaking on behalf of the people, despite, at times, death-threats.
“They aren’t asking for much – just asking you to stay – to be in reasonably good humor and to smile. And when they are down and moaning, you say “Ah, sure I know, what the hell” – and smile. There’s another ear – someone to listen.” Perhaps, his own wonderful pastoral approach might also be summarised as “Two hands hanging” – as in being present to others – “with a smile!”

Unfortunately, his own woundedness took over again. He eventually could no longer survive in the heat of the jungle. His body lost the capacity to feel and regulate its temperature. When it was warm, his system was totally disorganised, and when it was cold, he never felt the cold as others normally would. So, very reluctantly, he left.

Where to next on his journey? Somewhere cold. Spiritan mission in Canada or a place called Rostock, a port city on the Baltic Ocean? This latter was the eventual decision. As a Spiritan there described it:

This is a city in the post-communist society of East Germany, where God, Church and religion played a minor and subordinate role in the lives of the majority of the people. Christians lived in a situation of diaspora, in the minority…barely 4% Catholic and 9% Protestant… During his ministry, he met and was involved with people marked by their experience of communism and of State-driven dictatorship… What mattered to J.B. was not one’s office or title as priest or missionary. The most important thing was to be human and to reach out to people, even to those who might not share one’s worldview. This entailed being present and involved wherever people’s humanity was at stake…to be a missionary is to encounter and meet each person on an equal footing, first of all as a human being.

The “Wounded Healer” back to work again! Consistent with this were the ministries he became involved in: assigned by the archdiocese of Hamburg to pastoral care in the hospital of Rostock and the prison in Rostock-Waldeck; at the request of Caritas-Rostock to a rehabilitation clinic for sick mothers and children nearby as well as to the pastoral outreach to the deaf in the town. Typical of the man he learned sign-language to accompany these last. Here is how he described his work in the hospital to Kontinente, the German Mission Magazine:
The priest has to be open to all: to the patients, to the staff in the hospital and to the relatives of the patients. A great idea! But, how to do it? I got wonderful support from the Catholic layman who had been visiting from outside and was now approaching retirement age. Also, the Protestant pastor helps a lot. We do not care just about Christian denominations. Our common aim is to bring the Gospel to all: to Christians and to Non-Christians. My motto is: ‘Be open to all and listen to all.’

After five years he could hand over to a local priest. His successor remarked that “listening was his biggest quality.” Clearly, it was not just any old listening – but a presence that communicated humanity, interest, openness, and, again, non-judgemental acceptance – qualities consistent with his very way of being at this stage of his life.

These attitudes were, again, those which made him popular with the prisoners. Originally, his ministry consisted in saying a Mass now and then, and a weekly cell meeting with anyone who wanted to talk to him. After a while he spoke with the chief of the prison to be allowed to circulate among the prisoners during their periods of recreation. Finally, after a lot of discussion, he, very exceptionally, was granted this and gained the confidence of many of the inmates. In one edition of the prison’s monthly journal there is an interview with “this man who is Father Doyle.” Asked why he was visiting the prison he answered: “I want to help persons who have lost the way. That can happen to every one of us, even to me. The question is not: ‘What happened?’ – rather, ‘Where is the way out?’” A phrase of one of the prisoners, having spoken with John, became quite famous: “people who don’t believe in God should talk with an atheistic priest – it does one good”!

J.B. also became a sort of “cause celebre” on the front page of the local daily newspaper as he joined a local mixed swimming club, the “Rostocker Sehunde” (Sea Seals) and bathed regularly with them in the freezing Baltic. While he openly said, or at least did not try to hide, that he was a priest, he obviously did not fit the image his companions had of one. On a few occasions some swam underwater to get to him and surreptitiously asked him: “do you mean you are really a priest?” He said “yes” and they disappeared just as they had come. Their experience...
of the German Democratic Republic, where spying was part of everyday life, made them suspicious and wary of others. But, strangely, this also turned into a “ministry” as some asked him, when there were losses in the family, “to do that thing that a priest does when somebody dies, so that our loved-one may be in good hands.” As a colleague of his in Germany said:

He refused to be closed in on the image his interlocutors had of a priest. He wanted to enjoy his swimming and do something for his health, but at the same time widen the horizons of people he met... He told me that he learned a lot about the hidden and gentle action of God among the many non-Christians he met... God does the work of the missionary.

In a talk at a Spiritan community in Ireland, John summarised his pastoral approach in Rostock:

Someone has said that if you want to talk to people today about God you need a previous exchange on the level of humanity. Not, I would suggest, an exchange of ideas, but an exchange in a relationship - what I might call a 'whether or not' relationship. A friendly, open, personal way of relating to people that says in effect, 'I accept you whether or not I admire your lifestyle. I'm interested in you whether or not you believe in God. I've time for you whether or not you go to church. I listen to you, whether or not I believe what you say.'

At the time of his funeral another confrere remarked: “I think J.B. has left us a legacy to be explored, a missionary method for a world that is rapidly changing.”

He developed a serious blood disease, from which he nearly died. However he survived, but his final journey was imminent. Despite petitions from the diocese that he remain on because of the importance of his very presence to the community and the Rostock project, he returned to Ireland in early 2009.

As ever, he was open to accept two appointments the Congregation proposed to him. After one of these, knowing his medical situation, I asked him why he did this. He simply answered “I could not think of a good reason not to”! It seemed that all had now become quite
relative, including life itself, and he would give what he could while he could – superior of a local community and member of the Provincial Leadership Team. However, almost inevitably, he had to retire quite soon from both of these. Without any trace of anxiety or worry, he died in the Spiritan Nursing Home, in Kimmage, Dublin, 30 April 2014. Let us leave the last words to two close friends, who knew him intimately.

The J.B. we knew at the end and who drew so many to himself was the fruit of fidelity to his inner journey, especially open to incorporating what he learned from women and children, lived out and rooted in his family, culture and C.S.Sp. He learned to recognize and live within his limitations, to be true to himself even when conventional values, including those of Church and Congregation, dictated otherwise, and to allow himself to become whole, incorporating the feminine values of compassion, gentleness and reconciliation, the child’s capacity for wonder at the new and enjoyment of the moment, while not losing his manly focus and ever maintaining his sense of humor.

We would meet in a restaurant and there spend hours exploring themes of a more philosophical and psychological nature, (with a bit of gossip thrown in to keep it sane!) and their relevance to our concrete, human existence, which, with all its strivings, meanderings and broken dreams, is the hero’s ‘non-heroic’ journey, on which our world depends for its peace, its hope and its utopian solidarity. In essence, that was J.B’s journey too. The journey of a ‘non-heroic’ hero, whose quiet way did not make waves but did open up new frontiers. And who, despite, and because of, his own broken dreams, touched the hearts of many, including mine, along the way. And, like a great teacher, touched them forever.

Sincere thanks to all the people who responded to my invitation to share their memories of J.B., with apologies...
if I have not done justice to their contribution. I also make apologies to many more who might have liked to have been consulted.

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Endnotes


2 Number 6 (Nov/Dec 2005), 14.

Laudato Si’: A Commentary

Introduction

At Pentecost on May 24, 2015 Pope Francis issued his environmental encyclical, Laudato Si’ (Praise Be To You) On Care for our Common Home. He addressed it to “every person living on this planet,” adopting the well-known phrase “to all people of good will” that has characterized many previous Papal encyclicals – his aim was “to enter into dialogue with all people about our common home” as “a shared inheritance.”1 Amazingly the world rejoiced in his call, secular and religious communities alike. With remarkable astuteness, in his description of the environmental crisis that threatens creation the Pope emphasized the crucial role of climate change. He shrewdly anticipated the policy discussion at the United Nations in December 2015 where delegates from nearly 200 countries approved a landmark accord called the Paris Agreement to pursue the most far-reaching changes in climate policy ever achieved internationally.2

In the time between these two world-changing events (the publication of the Pope’s encyclical and the United Nations’ agreement), in Fall 2015 Duquesne University hosted the inaugural event of an annual conference series on the Integrity of Creation that celebrates the Spiritan Mission of the University. The theme of this first annual conference was Climate Change, recognizing the Pope’s leadership on this key issue. What an occasion to have the Pope’s encyclical address a topic that is so central to the Spiritan Mission. In this essay there is no need to discuss the papers of this inaugural conference – they will be published soon and the presentations are available via online streaming.3 Rather, this essay offers an ethical reflection on the Papal encyclical to explain how it offers new insight into the Catholic tradition of respecting nature and creation. It is worth noting that the call of Pope Francis for “a religious respect for the Integrity of Creation” highlights not only the Spiritan mission but also reflects the formal teaching of the Church on the integrity of creation in the Catechism.4

The Papal Encyclical

Unlike so many other encyclicals, Laudato Si’ is written in plain language, making it extraordinarily accessible to the non-expert lay person. After indicating the challenges that we face to nurture the common home of planet earth,
the Pope turned to Scripture to explain how the Gospel of Creation calls us to harmony and communion. When faced with this divine call to stewardship, the human roots of the ecological crisis that we currently encounter become apparent – our selfish response to God’s invitation has compromised our stewardship responsibility. Only by appreciating the common good in our shared heritage can we begin to be accountable for future generations as a matter of basic justice. We need a sense of stewardship where religion and science constructively engage each other to inspire different approaches and actions that will foster environmental responsibility. Only in this context can we have sound ecological education and spirituality as sacramental signs of God’s grace. All of these points are discussed in the various chapters of the encyclical. These insights are worth exploring to understand how the Pope’s critique and optimism are well grounded. To begin, it can be helpful to say a few words about the connection between the encyclical and Natural Law for which Catholic ethics is well known.

Creation and Natural Law

The revelation in the story of Genesis is that God’s creation was very good (Genesis 1:31). However, humanity’s fall in original sin led away from a sense of stewardship based on harmony with creation to a selfish view of selfish dominion over creation (Genesis 3: 17-19). Unfortunately, this disruption has led us to exploit rather than to nurture creation. But the redemptive message of the New Testament is to enable a return to harmony with God. This includes a sense of stewardship that fosters the harmony of creation as exemplified in the canticle of Saint Francis of Assisi.

Catholic ethics expresses this responsibility to creation in its emphasis upon what is referred to as Natural Law. This tradition seeks to decipher responsibilities from nature as God’s creation. This does not occur in a narrow manner of deductive reasoning. Rather, the Natural Law integrates the divine revelation of Scripture with Church teaching down the centuries to clarify ethical responsibilities when we encounter dilemmas or uncertainties. This means that the Natural Law in Catholicism is a theological endeavor. Often it is mistakenly understood as a merely rational enterprise in the sense of the Church explaining its ethical teachings through the use of reason – that is an important element of Natural Law, but at its core it is
Professor Gerard Magill

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a theological enterprise that engages reason to interpret ethical responsibilities.

Pope Francis adopts this approach. However, he explains that the word “creation” in his encyclical has a broader meaning than the word “nature” — his point is that nature can often be used narrowly in terms of systems such as physics or biology. In contrast, he uses the word creation to express God’s gift as “a reality illuminated by the love which calls us together into universal communion” — that is, “Creation is the order of love.” He further explains that within this perspective “a fragile world, entrusted by God to human care, challenges us to devise intelligent ways of directing, developing and limiting our power” — hence, he emphasizes that “in this universe, shaped by open and intercommunicating systems, we can discern countless forms of relationship and participation.”

Here the Pope’s critique of creation expresses the theological meaning of Natural Law that has characterized Catholic ethics down the ages. This recalls a core insight of Vatican II in Gaudium et Spes that refers to “the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in light of the Gospel” — this insight was further expanded in Gaudium et Spes in this way: “The people of God believes that it is led by the Lord’s spirit who fills the earth. Motivated by this faith, it labors to decipher authentic signs of God’s presence and purpose …” Likewise, the encyclical of Pope Francis deciphers authentic signs of God’s presence and purpose with regard to the environment and our ethical responsibilities to nurture it, to care for our common home.

A similar approach characterizes the first (and so far the only) Papal encyclical on fundamental questions regarding the Church’s ethical teachings, Veritatis Splendor (issued by Saint John Paul II). That encyclical explains how God’s revelation and moral law seek to restore our “original and peaceful harmony with the Creator and with all creation.” Veritatis Splendor describes the “natural law” as “the light of understanding infused in us by God, whereby we understand what must be done and what must be avoided” — this gift was spoiled by the Fall and renewed by the Redemption as “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:2) in the sense that “the New Law is the grace of the Holy Spirit given through faith in Christ.” These remarks emphasize that the Natural Law tradition is thoroughly theological: indeed, it uses reason
 (“the rational character of ethical norms belonging to the sphere of the natural moral law”) but it also combines this sense of “an ethical order” with “an order of salvation.”

This approach means the following: “this participation of the eternal law in the rational creature is called natural law.”

Pope Francis assumes and applies this Natural Law approach to clarify the social responsibility to care for our common home: “every ecological approach needs to incorporate a social perspective.”

**Common Good & Mother Earth**

Another document of Vatican II on Religious Freedom, *Dignitatis Humanae*, explained this integration of human and divine law that constitutes Natural Law in this way: “the supreme rule of life is the divine law by which God ... arranges, directs and governs the whole world and the paths of the human community.” Similarly, *Gaudium et Spes* emphasized that “Christian revelation ... leads us to a deeper understanding of the laws of social life;” this includes the normative guidance of the “common good” that is defined as “the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfillment” including “the general welfare of the entire human family” – a definition that is adopted by Pope Francis. In this sense, when the Church provides ethical guidance in its teachings, *Gaudium et Spes* explained that “she serves as a leaven and a kind of soul for human society” being “the universal sacrament of salvation, simultaneously manifesting and exercising the mystery of God’s love.”

In other words, Natural Law is an expression of the Church’s sacramental mission that fosters God’s love for creation. The encyclical of Pope Francis expresses this tradition when talking of “sacramental signs” whereby “nature is taken up by God to become a means of mediating supernatural life.” Hence, the Pope highlights the sacramental responsibility for “our common home” which he addresses in the words of St. Francis as “our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us” – but unfortunately we have compromised this religious symbol insofar as “this sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her ... reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of...”
life." The harm that we have inflicted refers to the “global environmental deterioration” that results from “an ill-considered exploitation of nature” whereby our “natural environment … serves for immediate use and consumption” – “everything is simply our property and we use it for ourselves alone” with an all too pervasive “habit of wasting and discarding” that characterizes a “dominant technological paradigm” associated with “misguided anthropocentrism,” a “consumerist vision,” the “deterioration of the environment,” and “ethical degradation.”

This is undoubtedly an expansive critique. Pope Francis calls for a radically different approach that shifts from the focus upon individuals and their exploitation of Mother Earth to “an authentic humanity” inspiring an “an authentic human ecology” that is “concerned for the world around us” and ensures “respect for the environment” – requiring a focus upon “the ethical and spiritual roots of environmental problems, which require that we look for solutions not only in technology but in a change of humanity” to foster “an integral ecology” through sustainable and integral development.

This approach combines “faith and reason” to develop a sound ecology that engages the ethical focus upon the common good in the Natural Law. What Pope Francis envisions is a theological view of the common good that is inherently ecological, respecting the environment for what it truly is, a gift of God’s love that nurtures creation and fosters “a sense of deep communion with the rest of nature” and inspires “a wonderful pilgrimage woven together by the love of God,” all encapsulated in this sentence: “human ecology is inseparable from the notion of the common good, a central and unifying principle of social ethics.”

For Pope Francis this vision is in direct contrast to the “many special interests and economic interests” that “easily end up trumping the common good.” This vision can be described as a quest for the common good that integrates humanity with the cosmos. A theologian at Duquesne University, Daniel Scheid, explores this fascinating approach in his new book, The Cosmic Common Good. Religious Grounds for Ecological Ethics. Professor Scheid delineates a concept that he refers to as a Catholic cosmic common good that he relates with other major religions to explore interreligious ecological ethics. Similarly, Pope
Francis refers in his encyclical to “religious language” that can “spur religions into dialogue” in order to address our “ecological crisis.”

From the cosmic perspective of God’s creation, an interesting thought experiment might generate a sense of modesty regarding our place in the cosmos. At the beginning of his encyclical Pope Francis refers to the encyclical *Pacem in Terris* of Pope Saint John XXIII “that peace may be assured on earth.” This was written just before Vatican II when global nuclear war was an urgent threat to humanity. Pope Francis sees a similar threat regarding the degradation of the environment. The thought experiment might be stated in this way. If humanity exterminated itself through nuclear armageddon, or if humanity suffocated and poisoned the human species and planet through environmental exploitation, would God’s cosmic glory end with the demise of humanity? Not so: God’s cosmos would continue and the planet earth would likely recover (after all, over the millions of years of evolution there have been extensive periods when humanity could never have survived on earth). Even though the wonder of God’s creation in the species called humanity may end, the resplendent glory of the cosmos would continue to reflect God’s mystery – albeit tarnished due to human irresponsibility. The call of Pope Francis is to avoid such a catastrophic scenario by encouraging the human species to flourish in a manner that cares for our common home, Mother Earth, as a cosmic common good. This is especially evident in the problem of climate change.

**Climate as a Common Good**

Of all the aspects of Pope Francis’ encyclical that have attracted attention from world leaders, climate change is the most prominent, perhaps because it presents the most immediate danger for catastrophe. In December 2015 the *Paris Agreement* that was approved by delegates from nearly 200 countries was undoubtedly a pivotal achievement. The outcome is a global climate action plan that seeks to limit global warming to 2 degrees centigrade (and even try to restrict this to 1.5 degrees centigrade) above pre-industrial levels, entering force in 2020. With the earth’s population heading for two billion by 2050, this agreement is not too soon. Efforts will be made to have global emissions peak as soon as possible so that rapid emissions reductions can occur thereafter. The hope is to achieve climate neutrality by the end of the 21st century, meaning that the planet...
can naturally absorb pollution and address the ecological concerns that radically threaten it today.

To support this crucial goal, governments will meet every five years adopting transparency and accountability systems to review progress, and to set more ambitious targets. In addition, the national delegates agreed to strengthen the ability of society to deal with the threatening impacts of climate change, including addressing loss and damage and planning early warning systems and emergency preparedness. Furthermore, developed nations promised enhanced international support to developing nations. The success of this agreement combines technology and economy with political will: technological developments will focus on harnessing solar, wind and ocean power combined with emerging storage technology; economic pressure against polluting resources such as fossil fuels could mean that their increased costs will enable alternative less-polluting renewable energy resources to become more pervasive; and the political commitment in the Paris Agreement indicates the will and planning to meet the necessary emission restrictions to make the threshold difference that is required.28

These significant accomplishments reflect the view of Pope Francis: “climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all” and “a very solid scientific consensus indicates that we are presently witnessing a disturbing warming of the climatic system” – hence, we must address “the human causes which produce or aggravate” climate change such as “greenhouse gases … released mainly as a result of human activity” with two major culprits, “the intensive use of fossil fuels” and “deforestation for agricultural purposes.”29 The Paris Agreement by the United Nations has responded to what Pope Francis described as the urgent need to develop policies: “in the next few years, the emission of carbon dioxide and other highly polluting gases can be drastically reduced, for example substituting for fossil fuels and developing sources of renewable energy” – by renewable the Pope has in mind “sustainable use” by which he refers to “each ecosystem’s regenerative ability.”30

The Pope’s message that climate change is a common good reflects Papal teachings that emerge from the Natural law on other topics. Unfortunately, some Catholic politicians appear unwilling to recognize the Pope’s authority regarding this topic, though they exuberantly support this authority with regard to other issues with
which they agree. For example, in the current Presidential primaries a Catholic candidate has mentioned that the Pope should not talk about climate change, claiming that the Pope should focus on theology and ethics and leave science to the scientists. This indicates a surprising lack of recognition of climate change as a theological and ethical issue. Apart from the political undercurrent in this statement, the remark evidences a significant misunderstanding of how Papal teaching functions with regard to Natural Law. Interestingly, this candidate robustly defends the Pope’s teaching against abortion. However, the controversial stance appears not to recognize that traditional Church teaching on abortion relies as much on science as does the teaching of Pope Francis on climate change. The Catholic Natural Law applies to ecology as well as to embryology. In other words, it is the consistency of Pope Francis’s teaching on ecology with Natural Law that makes his teaching so robust and challenging: climate change is a common good just as protecting the natural process of procreation is a common good.

This can be surprising for many Catholics, but Pope Francis is intent on using his Papal authority to protect Mother Earth. He all too willingly concedes that “on many concrete questions, the Church has no reason to offer a definitive answer” recognizing that “honest debate must be encouraged among experts, while respecting divergent views” — but regarding the environmental crisis that we face, Pope Francis unambiguously demands “a frank look at the facts to see that our common home is falling into serious disrepair” to the extent that “we can see signs that things are now reaching a breaking point, due to the rapid pace of change and degradation.” The response of the Pope is to develop an integral ecology.

**An Integral Ecology**

Pope Francis develops a bold and dramatic vision for the environment. He is unwilling to speak evasively about the ecological threat facing us: “doomsday predictions can no longer be met with irony or disdain … our contemporary lifestyle, unsustainable as it is, can only precipitate catastrophes” — in the face of this bleak outlook he courageously challenges the “ethical and cultural decline which has accompanied the deterioration of the environment” and is emphatic that “halfway measures simply delay the inevitable disaster.”
To develop an integral ecology we must engage the “relationship existing between nature and the society in which it lives” to seek “comprehensive solutions which consider the interactions within natural systems themselves and with social systems” – his point here is breathtaking insofar as he integrates the environmental and social components: “we are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental.”

What is sought is an ethical ecology that is extraordinarily broad including all of these components: an environmental ecology in which “economic ecology” and “social ecology” work together “in the service of a more integral and integrating vision”; a “cultural ecology” that respects our “historic, artistic and cultural patrimony” including “care for indigenous communities and their cultural traditions”; an “ecology of daily life” supporting “human ecology” and celebrating “the relationship between human life and the moral law” which is necessary for “a more dignified environment”; respect for “the principle of the common good” that not only applies “the principle of subsidiarity” (to “develop the capabilities at every level of society”) but also has a “particular concern for distributive justice” as “a summons to solidarity and a preferential option for the poorest”; and a commitment to “justice between generations” that promotes “intergenerational solidarity” and “intragenerational solidarity.”

To effectively implement this bold vision, Pope Francis combines several approaches as “major paths of dialogue” to address the “great cultural, spiritual and educational challenge” that emerges before us. His hope for dialogue in the international community was robustly engaged by the United Nations in the Paris Agreement. The Pope encouraged us “to think of one world with a common plan” that fosters “a global consensus” around “systems of governance for the whole range of so-called global commons,” and the Paris Agreement appears to have accepted and responded to this challenge.

The Pope’s agenda delineates a wide spectrum of ecological issues including preventive actions and progressive interventions such as the following: limiting greenhouse gas concentration in the atmosphere; using less polluting forms of energy while progressively replacing fossil fuels; protecting biodiversity; planning sustainable
and diversified agriculture; promoting the efficient use of renewable energy; developing good management of forest resources and sound governance of the oceans; and creating universal access to drinking water.42

Fundamentally, the Pope seeks a “covenant between humanity and the environment” urging an approach to “environmental education … which gives ecological ethics its deepest meaning;” he emphasizes that “an ethics of ecology” needs to foster “an ecological citizenship” that seeks “to instil good habits” and “make a selfless ecological commitment;” and all of this requires an “ecological conversion” based upon “an ecological spirituality” for “a genuine culture of care for the environment.”43

Conclusion

This reflection has used the words of Pope Francis extensively to let his rhetoric inspire and guide us on this very challenging landscape of the ethics of ecology. The connection of his environmental vision with Natural Law is intended to emphasize that while his teaching is extraordinarily bold it is connected in a seamless way with how Catholic moral teaching has developed over the centuries. This has enabled the Pope to integrate faith and reason to engage a meaningful dialogue with people of all faiths and none about our common home. The success of the Paris Agreement in the wake of this landmark encyclical is amazing – the Pope’s call for a global commons and consensus has certainly been significantly engaged by the work of the United Nations in December 2015. Indeed, there is much to accomplish, but this encyclical may have had more immediate success in global politics than any other. Now that is a nice start to 2016!

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Endnotes


4Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, no. 130; *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), no. 2415-2418.


6Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, no. 82, 87.

7Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, no. 76-77.

8Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, no. 78-79.


12Pope John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, no. 36-37.


14Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, no. 93.


16Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 23, 26; Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, no. 156.

17Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 40 and no. 45.

18Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, no. 235.


20Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, no. 3-5, 27, 56, 101, 107, 119, 144.

21Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, no. 5-6, 9-10, 13, 112, 124, and chapter four that has the title, “Integral Ecology.”
22Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, no. 63.

23Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, no. 91-92, 156.

24Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, no. 53.


26Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, no. 199, 201.


30Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, no. 26, 140.


32Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, no. 61.

33Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, no. 161, 194.

34Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, no. 139.

35Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, no. 141-142.

36Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, no. 143, 146.

37Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, no. 147, 155.

38Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, no. 157-158, 196.

39Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, no. 159, 162.


43Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, no. 210-211, 216-217, 229.
Guiding Ecojustice Principles

Introduction

The principles enunciated in this chapter are the basic understandings about ecojustice that are shared by those who have developed the Earth Bible series. This set of principles has been developed over several years in dialogue with ecologists and their writings, some of whom, like Thomas Berry, have developed their own distinctive sets of ecological principles (Berry 1988). The principles formulated here have been refined in consultations and workshops concerned with both ecology in general and the relationship between ecology and theology or the Bible.

These principles serve several purposes. First, they identify the ecological orientation of the Earth Bible series, though particular writers are free to dialogue with these principles and offer variations relevant to a given text or topic. Second, they embrace specific ecological values consistent with the basic approach, the aims of which are articulated at the end of the previous chapter. Third, they provide a basic set of statements that provoke the key questions we pose as we seek to read and interpret the biblical text.

One feature of these principles, which is immediately obvious to those with a theological interest, is that the specific terms “God” and “creation” are not employed in the wording of the principles. This formulation has been chosen to facilitate dialogue with biologists, ecologists, other religious traditions like Buddhism and scientists who may not function with God or God’s creation as an a priori assumption. This formulation also forces the interpreter to focus on the Earth itself as the object of investigation in the text rather than on the Earth as God’s creation or property.

These principles are not intended to be exhaustive and writers may wish to complement them with additional principles. There is no principle, for example, which explicitly links the plight of oppressed peoples of the Earth with the plight of the Earth. Clearly social justice and ecojustice are closely connected in many contexts. Nor will writers find all of these principles useful in reading a given biblical text afresh. Any one of these principles, however, may provide the stimulus needed to pose new questions as we converse with the text, become conscious of the Earth’s presence in the text or join the struggle of the Earth for justice.
...we can expect biblical texts to be anthropocentric.

...detecting features of the text to retrieve traditions about the Earth or Earth community that have been unnoticed, suppressed or hidden.

**Suspicion, Retrieval and Dualism**

A helpful way of using these principles to pose questions to the text is follow the basic model of feminist scholars introduced in the previous chapter and use a model of suspicion and retrieval (Schussler Fiorenza 1985). The suspicion aspect of this model means that we may legitimately suspect that biblical texts, written by human beings reflect a primary interest in human beings—their human welfare, their human relationship to God and their personal salvation. In short, we can expect biblical texts to be anthropocentric.

Even where scholars have insisted that texts are theocentric rather than anthropocentric in character, the writer may ultimately be more concerned about God’s relation to humanity or a group within humanity than about God’s relation to the Earth or the Earth community as a whole. The Bible has long been understood as God’s book for humans. And for those of us who have been reading biblical texts that way for years, this understanding has come to be self-evident. Should we not then, with a new ecological consciousness, legitimately suspect that the text and its interpreters have been understandably anthropocentric?

The second aspect of this model involves detecting features of the text to retrieve traditions about the Earth or Earth community that have been unnoticed, suppressed or hidden. The task before us is to re-read the text to discern where the Earth or members of the earth community may have suffered, resisted or been excluded by attitudes within the text or the history of its interpretation. The task demands a strategy for reclaiming the sufferings and struggles of the Earth, a task that involves regarding the wider Earth community as our kin.

There is a strong possibility that biblical texts may be more sympathetic to the plight and potential of the Earth than our previous interpretations have allowed, even if the ecological questions we are posing arise out of a contemporary Earth consciousness. This is suggested by the very title of Gene Tucker’s presidential address to the Society of Biblical Literature in 1996: “Rain on a Land Where No One Lives.” (1997:3). Some texts may even celebrate the Earth in a way that our contemporary anthropocentric eyes have not detected or have regarded as the quaint language of ancient poetry. Is it ‘only poetry’ when the Psalmist asserts that “the heavens/skies are telling the glory of El” (Ps 19:1)? The verses that follow speak of a genuine message coming from parts of creation in a form that is other than human “words.” (Ps 19:1-4).
We also need to consider the possibility that there are suppressed Earth traditions that resist the dominant patriarchal anthropocentric orientation of the text. By counter-reading the text it may be possible to identify alternative voices that challenge or subvert the normative voice of the dominant tradition. Whether these sub-texts point to the continuing voice of Canaanite traditions still in touch with the Earth, or whether these alternative perspectives arose as a mode of resisting the patriarchal orientation of monotheistic Yahwism is a task for further exploration.

One of the reasons for this blind spot in our interpretive work as readers of an ancient text, is that we are still influenced by the various dualisms about reality. This view of reality has developed since biblical days but because these dualisms are so much part of our Western view of reality, we may assume they are necessarily found in the biblical text. The key elements of the dualistic structure of Western thought are outlined by Plumwood (1993:43). These include, among others, the following sets of contrasting pairs:

- culture / naturereason / nature
- male / female
- mind, spirit / body (nature)
- reason / matter
- reason / emotion (nature)
- rationality / animality (nature)
- human / nature (non-human)
- civilized / primitive (nature)
- production / reproduction (nature)
- freedom / necessity (nature)
- subject / object

To this listing, in the context of our project, I would add the following closely related pairs:

- animate / inanimate
- spiritual / material
- heavenly / earthly
- heaven / earth
- sacred / profane

These dualistic pairs are deliberately listed here as background for the discussion which follows in connection with the six principles, each of which articulates an ecological view of reality which challenges at least one of these traditional pairings. It is immediately apparent from these pairings that
the realities associated with the human pole of the pairing are understood to be superior in some way to the nature pole of the pairing. These dualisms necessarily devalue the earth as belonging to the weak side of the pairings. Do these pairings reflect genuine dualisms in the ancient biblical text, or are they complementary opposites within the structure of the cosmos, or are they discerned there because of the dualistic vision of Western readers?

Perhaps the most destructive form of this dualism developed as a result of the mechanistic approach of Descartes and his successors. Ponting quotes Descartes and analyzes his position in the following way:

This tendency was reinforced by a mechanistic approach to natural phenomena, which can again be traced back to Descartes who wrote, “I do not recognize any difference between the machines made by craftsmen and the various bodies that nature alone composes”... His mechanistic view of the world seemed to be vindicated by the spectacular success of Newton in the late seventeenth century in applying physical laws, such as that governing the force of gravity, to explain the workings of the universe. (1991:147).

Philosophers and scientists of the seventeenth and eighteenth century pressed the dualism of medieval Christianity to its logical conclusion. They viewed earth as a machine, God as the great designer of the machine, and humans as beings fashioned to determine the workings of the machine and run it for the benefit of humans. As modern interpreters we are still influenced by this heritage. We are obliged to make a conscious paradigm shift if we are to view the world in terms of complementary opposites rather than Western antagonistic and hierarchical dualisms.

Before discussing the principles in detail, it is important to recognize that because Earth and women have traditionally been associated on the same side of these dualistic pairings, Earth has been viewed as female, as “Mother Earth,” or as “Mother Nature.” We are clearly avoiding any such equation in this study, referring to the Earth as “it” rather than “she.” To regard Earth as “she” as a matter of course is to impose the language of social domination on a part of our physical world. And, as Rosemary Ruether insists,
Any ecological ethic must always take into account the structures of social domination and exploitation that mediate domination of nature and prevent concern for the welfare of the whole community in favor of the immediate advantage of the dominant class, race and sex (1989:149).

Is Earth, in our minds as readers, already viewed as material rather than spiritual, natural rather than rational, and therefore inferior? Is the Earth assumed, a priori, to be “inferior” to heaven? The task of transcending this dualistic form of Western thinking may not be easy, but the Earth Bible project is designed to facilitate that process. Our aim is to recognize our kinship with all members of the Earth community and to assume a posture of empathy and partnership with the Earth, rather than assume dominion over Earth as partners with a hierarchal deity above the Earth. In so doing, we will also seek to retrieve biblical traditions that may be consistent with the ecojustice principles enunciated below.

1. The Principle of Intrinsic Worth

The universe, the Earth and all its components have intrinsic worth/value.

This ecological principle is fundamental for developing an ethic, a theology or a hermeneutic that seeks to promote justice for the Earth. This principle asserts that the Earth, and its components, have value of themselves, not because they have utilitarian value for humans living on the planet, nor because they are vehicles that reflect the Creator's handiwork. Nor is this intrinsic value to be confined to sentient or living beings. All of Earth, as a complex of ecological systems, and all the components of those systems from rocks to rainbows, have worth because of what they are in these systems. The question before us as we approach the text is whether the Earth so understood, is respected and honored by the voices in the text.

Given the history of Western thought, we may assume that biblical interpreters have read the text in terms of the dualities dominant in their society. In this context heaven is viewed as spiritual, superior, pure and eternal. The Earth is correspondingly viewed as material, inferior, corrupt and transitory. We may suspect, at the outset, that the biblical materials reflect a similar dualism, especially if we have imbibed the spirituality of hymns based on the Book of Hebrews where heaven is apparently depicted as our true
home and Earth as a motel for passing pilgrims (Heb. 11.13-16). In such hymns this earthly domain is “very evil,” a place where “exiles mourn,” while heaven is a “sweet and blessed country,” an endless “land of rest.” (Lutheran Hymnal, 1941, # 605).

The task before us is to ascertain whether a given biblical text reflects the kind of dualisms we have inherited in the Western world, or whether a different cosmology is reflected. The second task involves discerning whether any such alternative cosmology, where it can be identified, honors the Earth and its components in terms of intrinsic worth, or whether the Earth in that cosmology is negated and relegated to a position of secondary value.

The point can be illustrated by the language of the first verse of Genesis. The Hebrew expression hashemayim weha`arets has been traditionally translated “heaven and earth.” This expression has the potential for being read as a dualism embracing two opposing cosmic domains. If, however, the expression is rendered “sky and land” the meaning is radically different. Land and sky are two complementary parts of the known physical world of the ancient Near East. According to my reading of Genesis 1 (in the first article of volume 2) the Earth is highly honored and not made inferior to the sky.

Can the same be said of the cosmology of Isa 66.2, where sky/heaven is declared to be God’s throne and the Earth/land is God’s footstool. In this passage the shemayim is no longer the sky as a part of the physical world, but the locus of God’s presence and power as ruler over the Earth. The posture of the earth as a subject of this ruler is represented by the image of a “footstool.” Even if the emphasis in the text lies on the limited perspective of those who viewed the temple as God’s abode, the Earth is devalued in relation to heaven. Heaven is God’s abode; the Earth is God’s property. The reader who dares to assume the posture of the Earth, hears the voice of a controlled subject beneath God’s feet. In this tradition, the Earth is demeaned even if we are hesitant to admit it.

In many interpretations, the Earth is understood to be valued or “good” precisely because God has invested the Earth with value. The expression “and God saw that X was good” in Genesis 1 is often viewed as a formula of divine pronouncement or approbation. This literary critical language is misleading. It is preferable to speak of an event, a divine reaction. When God sees the light (v. 4) or the Earth emerge from the waters (v.10), God reacts to what God sees,
The Earth and the components of the Earth in Genesis 1 are valued as “good” by God when God discovers them to be so, not because God pronounces them to be so. In Genesis 1, the Earth is “good” of itself. Are there other biblical passages where the same affirmation of Earth can be retrieved?

2. The Principle of Inter-connectedness

The Earth is a community of inter-connected living things which are mutually dependent on each other for life and survival.

One of the most sobering and significant outcomes of the ecological movement is a growing awareness that the Earth is not a controlled or mechanical structure consisting of independent parts governed by the so-called laws of nature. Each species and each member of each species are connected by complex webs of interrelationships. Humans, too, are dependent on the fields, the forests, the trees, the air and the wide diversity of life that inhabits these domains. Humans are an integral part of what has come to be called the “Earth community”; humans are Earth-bound. All breathing creatures inhale the same air. According to Birch, “Every molecule of oxygen in the planet comes from plants. All the oxygen is completely recycled by living organisms every two thousand years” (1993:18). We breathe today the same air once breathed once recycled by the cedars of Lebanon.

Traditional Western thought has assumed that male humans are beings of a different order than other life forms. In terms of this human/nature dualism, male humans are superior beings possessing mind, reason, soul, language and spiritual consciousness; male humans are the creators of culture. Other forms, including women, whether animate or inanimate, are believed to be inferior, possessing, at best, certain basic natural instincts but lacking the higher faculties given to male humans.

When approaching a text that relates to the Earth or any part of the Earth community, we may suspect that the history of interpretation has been anthropocentric regarding the rest of the Earth community, and the Earth itself, as inferior creations. We may suspect that male interpreters have massaged their own egos by highlighting references to the higher standing and nature of humans, especially men. We may expect that biblical texts themselves exalt humans over other creatures even if their writers do not reflect the sharp dualism of later Western thought.
In Psalm 8 the reflection of the psalmist on the nature of humans seems to be unequivocally anthropocentric. The order of things seems to be a carefully structured hierarchy in which humans are “a little less than the gods” and the animal world is under their domination. Keith Carley explores this anthropocentric hierarchy in his article on Psalm 8 in this volume. Is this orientation assumed in most biblical passages which deal with the connection between humans and the wider Earth community?

One way of highlighting the interconnectedness of the ecosystems of Earth is to focus on the kinship of these systems. Philip Hefner argues that such kinship is integral to our very identity as humans. Science, he argues, has demonstrated quite clearly that humans are “indissolubly part of nature, fully natural” (1995:121). He continues,

On the basis of these scientific perspectives, there can be little doubt that *homo sapiens* is nature’s creature. How are we related to the rest of nature? We flourish only within an intimate ecological fabric, and within the relationships of that fabric we are kin to the other citizens of nature’s society. Our interrelatedness is best conceptualized according to the model of genetic relatedness. Nature’s processes have produced us, we are constituted by our inheritance from its past and we live in the ambience of its created balances today. There is a kind of non-negotiability to the message that science delivers on this point. Our kinship with nature is not a matter of our preference, nor is it an issue that calls for our acquiescence. It simply is (1995:122).

The task before us then, as we read a given text in the light of this principle, is to discern whether a dualistic or hierarchical structure is assumed, or whether traditions can be retrieved which affirm an interconnection and interdependence between the domains of the biological world as well as between this world and human beings. Are there texts which indicate that humans are one with the earth, kin with the animals and an integral part of an integrated earth community?

3. The Principle of Voice

*The Earth is a living entity capable of raising its voice in celebration and against injustice.*
There is a growing consciousness among many biologists, ecologists, feminists and theologians that the Earth is a living entity, both biologically and spiritually. Deep ecologists argue that the Earth functions more like a living organism than a machine governed by rigid laws. According to the Gaia Hypothesis of James Lovelock the earth is itself alive, sustaining and regulating its own environment. Sally McFague uses the metaphor of the body of God to describe the Earth as a living entity. Theologians like Jay McDaniel speak, as we do in this hermeneutical process, of the need to identify with planet Earth as a whole. In doing so he views the Earth as a total community of subjects “like a forest whose ‘spirit’ is the sum total of each of its living beings.” (Hessel 1996:15). The interconnectedness of all living ecosystems amounts to a super-ecosystem, to the Earth as all-embracing organism.

Whether or not one opts for a particular understanding of the Earth as a living entity, our growing consciousness of the Earth as a subject and a “thou,” can no longer be dismissed. Those who have experienced the Earth in this way are committed to hearing the voices of the Earth, whether they be those of the various species inhabiting the Earth or the voice of the Earth itself. In this context it is valuable to recall how “how nature has grown silent in our discourse, shifting from an animistic to a symbolic presence, from a voluble subject to a mute object” (Manes 1996:17).

This awareness of the Earth as a subject or community of subjects presents a formidable challenge to our traditional conceptions of the earth and the non-human components of the earth as objects, devoid of the consciousness, soul, mind and form of language that humans possess. This dualism extends to the belief that humans have genuine feelings, a spiritual consciousness and a capacity to worship, all of which are denied in other living creatures or inanimate parts of creation. Only humans, it was said, had the voice and language to praise God. Non-humans are dumb brutes.

The history of biblical interpretation has, by and large, tended to justify this dualism. When we approach a given text we may suspect that the language of the text gives rise to this kind of differentiation between “voiced” humans and the presumed “voiceless” members of the wider Earth community. Given this dualistic mindset, passages referring to “the works” of God’s creation blessing or praising God (as in Ps 103:22), have been easily dismissed as poetic license. But do these texts reflect more than poetry? Do they reflect a common bond between humans and non-humans as
worshippers before God?

We may, however, look afresh at the text and ask whether the voice of the earth and the members of the earth community can be heard in many passages in a way that views them as subjects with their own languages, non-human voices and capacity for worship. Or we may ask whether the voice of the Earth has been suppressed because it is a threat to the authority of anthropocentric writers?

How then can we know the voice of the Earth? How can the voices of other species and entities on Earth be heard? We need not, a priori, assume that their mode of consciousness is the same as that of human beings or that their form of self-expression involves using a voice like ours. Ecosystems vibrant with healthy creatures possess a presence that testifies to the life energy and spirit within them. Conversely, a system broken by pollution and exploitation, testifies to the alien intervention of humans. Can their voice be heard in spite of their cursed condition?

Just as significant is the mediation of these non-human voices to our consciousness by sensitive humans. Ecologists like David Susuki, who claims to be in tune with the Earth, echo the cries of the denuded forests and the polluted seas in our hearing. Indigenous poets, like Mary Duroux, hear the land crying and confront us with the pain of their mother, the crucified land.

My mother, my mother
what have they done?
Crucified you
like the Only Son!
Murder committed
by mortal hand.
I weep, my mother,

As we read the storytellers, prophets and poets of the Scriptures we ask whether they are mediating the voice of the Earth or members of the Earth community, or whether in fact they are suppressing those voices as they strive to hear the voice of God? Is Jeremiah, who hears the land mourning typical (Jer 12:4, 11)? Is Job simply being rhetorical when he asserts, “Ask the animals and they will teach you” (Job 12:7)? Or are most biblical writers happy to announce curses, brought about by humans, on the ground, trees, animal life, or rivers without any sense...
of the anguish felt by the Earth? We are invited in this hermeneutical process to stand with the Earth to retrieve the silenced voices of the Earth. This is the task undertaken by Shirley Wurst in her analysis of the curse on the Earth (Gen 3:14-19) in Volume 2 of this series.

4. The Principle of Purpose

The universe, the Earth and all its components are part of a dynamic cosmic design within which each piece has a place in the overall goal of that design.

The Earth is a complex of interacting ecosystems that function according to an in-built design or purpose. These mysterious patterns of balancing inter-dependent life forces are still being explored by scientists and philosophers, and evoking wonder in poets and prophets. Whether one views these patterns as being developed by an evolutionary impulse, an immanent energy, a living Spirit or a Creator God, the reality remains that all the pieces of these ecosystems form a design and reflect a direction. The design is a magnificent green planet called Earth and the direction is to sustain life in all its biodiversity and beauty.

What is the future of this design, this complex pattern of ancient life cycles that still operate to keep planet Earth alive? Charles Birch in Confronting the Future and On Purpose demonstrates not only the wonder of this design but the tragedy of how modern human society has smashed ancient patterns, broken complex life cycles and thereby placed the future of the planet in jeopardy. As Birch reminds us,

The closing circle is the image or metaphor of the way nature deals with things. It closes the circle. It takes nutrients from the soil, turns them into something else and puts them back, so that it is a completely circular process ... Traditional economists seem to think that the economy is a flow in a single direction between two infinities: infinite resources on one side and an infinite hole on the other side into which we can dump all our wastes. There is no account of recycling and reuse of wastes. Nature doesn't work that way. There is no pollution in nature's ecosystems. This is Garrett Hardin's 'law' of ecology, “There is no away to throw to.” (Birch 1993:18).
This growing concern for understanding the design of Earth’s life systems is motivated not only by those who now revere the Earth for its wondrous life patterns, but also by those who, out of self-interest, seek to create a “sustainable society” in the future. Within much of traditional Western Christianity, we viewed the wonders of the Earth as but a foretaste of the glories to be experienced in heaven. We paid relatively little attention to whether natural resources or non-human life cycles were declining. After all, the Earth was disposable matter. The Earth would eventually become waste, destroyed by God’s grand incinerator.

This eschatological dualism emphasized heaven as eternal and glorious, an endless linear mode of existence, without the life cycles and ecosystems that are typical of earth. In the past, many have read the Bible from this dualistic perspective. Is this the orientation of biblical passages about the design, purpose and future of Earth? Is the idea that the destruction of the elements by fire in 2 Peter 3:10 the dominant orientation of the New Testament? When we view the text from the perspective of the Earth, however, is the death of Earth considered inevitable and, if so, is that death part of a natural cycle of birth, death and renewal? This question is tackled by Duncan Reid in his article on Revelation 21.

When we step back into the Hebrew Scriptures we need to ask afresh how the life cycles of Earth are understood. Is the grand “design” that confronts Job anything like the pattern of ecosystems that we marvel at today? Is the purpose and direction of life on Earth to sustain the pattern of life established by God? Given the violation of life cycles by humanity, even in biblical history, do biblical texts tend to focus on a restoration of past life systems, or lean towards a liberation and transformation into a new system? In this connection, Brendan Byrne and Marie Turner explore the contribution of Romans 8, when viewed from an ecojustice perspective.

5. The Principle of [Mutual²] Custodianship

The Earth is a balanced and diverse domain where responsible custodians can function as partners with, rather than rulers over, the Earth to sustain its balance and diversity.

This principle is designed to reflect the role of human beings in the Earth community. Understandably, there is a widespread recognition today that the language of human dominion over the Earth is not acceptable but is, in fact, one of the factors that has led to the ecological crisis. A considerable
A mass of literature has arisen advocating the concept of humans exercising responsible stewardship over the Earth. According to this model, the ‘oikos (household) of the Earth has been entrusted to humans by God, the owner of the house. The fact that humans have been unfaithful stewards in the past does not nullify the usefulness of the model.

I have critiqued this model elsewhere as one which retains an inherent anthropocentrism and a hierarchy of power that is based on an economic model of the ancient world (Habel 1998). The ‘oikonomos (steward) has responsibility for the planning and administrating (putting in order or nomos) the affairs of the household (oikis). Thus the steward is responsible for the ‘oikonomia, the economy of the house (Hall 1990:41). The anthropocentrism of the model is exposed by Clare Palmer when she writes,

... the perceptions of stewardship have great difficulty in accommodating the idea of God’s action or presence in the world. God is understood to be an absentee landlord, who has put humanity in charge of his possessions ... Within the framework of this model, God’s actions and presence are largely mediated through humans. This is so both in the feudal perception, where God the Master leaves man [sic] in charge of his state, and also in the financial perception, where God, the owner of financial resources, puts them in the trust of humanity, the investor, to use for him as best it can (1992:74).

Even more tempered understandings of stewardship, like that of William Dryness, retain the concept of ‘ruling’ as integral to the role:

Proper stewardship of the earth, then, is a matter of recovering the creative rule that God intended people to exercise toward the natural order. This is a rule that involves a proper husbanding [sic] of resources so that they will produce enough to care for the needs of all, and a respect for the order as accomplishing purposes that transcend even our understanding (1990:64)

Given the force of this model in the history of interpretation, we may suspect that biblical texts and their interpreters represent humans as stewards ruling on behalf of God, but nevertheless
ruling. These readings reflect a dualism which reflects the traditional humanity/nature antagonism. Humans are creatures of a different order from the rest of creation and destined by God to rule over the Earth community for God.

An alternative ecological model views humans as a species which is an integral part of the Earth community, inevitably interconnected with other species and ecosystems, and dependent upon these systems for survival. Humans, therefore, have a natural kinship with other living beings on Earth, a kinship that reaches beyond pure biological dependency (see Hefner quoted above). Many indigenous peoples testify to this sense of kinship in their culture. George Tinker describes a ritual among his people where the community is assembled in a circle.

In fact the circle is a key symbol for self-understanding, representing the whole universe and our part in it. We see ourselves as coequal participants in the circle, neither standing above nor below anything in God's creation. There is no hierarchy in our cultural context, even of species, because the circle has no beginning or ending (1992:147).

The indigenous tradition cited by Tinker is reminiscent of the indigenous traditions of Australia where kinship with the earth and with the community of the Earth is a fundamental understanding of reality. Through the appropriate rites at sacred sites, human custodians are responsible for sustaining a particular species of the natural world who will be close kin to members of their community. They are the custodians of the sacred, in tune with sacred presences in the Earth. Is the Earth ever considered sacred in the Scriptures? Are humans ever viewed custodians of a sacred Earth?

Our task is to ascertain whether the hierarchical stewardship model dominates the biblical tradition and its interpreters, or whether there are suppressed traditions where humans are kin with the rest creation. And more importantly, we need to ask whether the concept of humans being custodians of their kin and of the sacred Earth is reflected in any texts, or whether such a concept is suppressed as typical of the nature religions of Canaan. Are there texts which can be counter-read so that Earth affirming traditions within the text, perhaps from a Canaanite heritage, can be identified?
6. Principle of Resistance

The Earth and its components not only suffer from injustices at the hands of humans, but actively resist them in the struggle for justice.

This ecojustice principle is not as widely disseminated as the previous five, but is, in our opinion, integral to the process of ecojustice. In the struggle of social groups for justice, whether they be indigenous peoples, Dalits, women, people with disability or some other category, members of the group do not necessarily view themselves as helpless victims, but as oppressed human beings who find ways to survive and resist their oppressors. Victim construction by oppressors is itself part of the process of maintaining power over those being marginalized, exploited or disempowered. Victims are even blamed for their condition as part of the conditioning process.

Those who belong to such groups and those who dare to identify with them and espouse their cause recognize that oppressed groups have numerous means of resistance to survive their lot. There are powerful resistance stories in the Scriptures including the account of the Gibeonites who tricked Joshua (Joshua 9) and the record of the midwives who defied Pharaoh (Exod 2:15-22). Are there explicit or oppressed resistance stories that relate to the Earth or non-human members of the Earth community? Is the Earth constructed by anthropocentric writers into a passive victim? Or are there Earth voices in the text resisting victim construction?

We may well suspect that a given text is likely to focus on sins against God and wrongs against other humans, but ignore the injustices committed against the Earth, because the Earth is viewed as a passive object without feeling or voice.

We may well suspect that a given text is likely to focus on sins against God and wrongs against other humans, but ignore the injustices committed against the Earth, because the Earth is viewed as a passive object without feeling or voice. When God sends plagues or curses on the Earth, the earth seems to suffer because of human misdeeds. Is that just? Is that considered natural, or is there a hint that the Earth resists this injustice?

If we assume a posture of empathy with the wider Earth community, can we ignore the way the Earth seems to suffer unjustly because of what humans do? The curses of the covenant in texts like Deuteronomy 28 involve numerous domains of the Earth that have played no part in the human sin against God. When the sky turns to bronze and the earth to iron (Deut 28:23) the people may indeed suffer. But does the Earth not suffer too? Is not this suffering unjust? Do these
texts portray a deity who simply “uses” the earth to punish humans (cf. Amos 4:7-9)? Or is this a form of corporate suffering where the Earth suffers in sympathy with humans?

Suggestions that the Earth or Earth community are not insensitive to these injustices can be found in prophets like Jeremiah who hears the land mourning because Israel’s sin has made the land desolate (Jer 12:4, 7-11; cf. Hosea 4:1-3). God too seems to suffer in sympathy with the land, a concern Terence Fretheim tackles in his article on Jeremiah 12 in this volume. Is the groaning of creation in Romans 8 also part of the resistance of the earth to the injustices to which it has been subjected? Brendan Byrne’s discussion of Romans 8:18-25 seeks to come to terms with this question. Is there more than poetic imagery in the assertion that the land will “vomit out” those inhabitants who defile the land? (Lev 18:24-30)

Biologists and ecologists have made us aware that the ecosystems of the Earth are not necessarily that fragile. They have a remarkable capacity to survive, regenerate and adapt to changing physical circumstances, in spite of human exploitation. Do any of the biblical traditions of hope reflect a similar awareness of the Earth as a subject with the power to revive and regenerate? There is a limit to this ecological healing. The earth is a finite body of ecosystems, resources, and species. The time has come for eco-sensitive humans to join the Earth in its struggle against these injustices that now threaten the total ecosystem of Earth. If we, as people who still find the Bible relevant, have been involved in the ecological crisis, we have a moral obligation to help find a solution.

Permissions


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**Endnotes**

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2"Mutual" is added from later elaborations of these principles, for example, Norman Habel and Peter Trudinger, *Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 2 [Editor]
THE SPIRITAN OPTION FOR THE POOR AND THE CARE OF CREATION

Introduction

Pope Francis when declaring September 1 to be an annual “World Day of Prayer for the Care for Creation” said:

As Christians we wish to contribute to resolving the ecological crisis which humanity is presently experiencing. In doing so, we must first rediscover in our own rich spiritual patrimony the deepest motivations for our concern for the care of creation. We need always to keep in mind that, for believers in Jesus Christ, the Word of God who became man for our sake, “the life of the spirit is not dissociated from the body or from nature or from worldly realities, but lived in and with them, in communion with all that surrounds us.”

I am honored if this essay makes some contribution to understanding the seriousness and urgency of the challenge created by today’s environmental crisis and by climate change. I am not an academician or scientist, nor a theorist of ecology or climate change. My particular focus is on what challenges “care of creation” issues present for us Spiritans avowedly committed to serving among people experiencing poverty.

It is often said that environmental challenges require us to “think globally but act locally.” For this reason, in this essay, I visit many parts of the world where Spiritans are present on mission, places where climate change affects food production, coastal populations, forests, ecosystems and whole communities.

While acting locally, we cannot ignore what happens elsewhere. We live in an increasingly inter-connected world and what happens half way around the globe can impact all of us. Whether referred to as “climate change,” “global warming,” or the “greenhouse effect,” the phenomenon describing the consequences of increasing the concentration of atmospheric gases absorbing solar radiation cannot be reduced to a single metric or indicator. Others include glacial melting, changes in precipitation patterns, ocean heat content, and sea level rise. The conclusion that climate change is occurring rests
on an assessment of all these indicators. Consequently the importance of assessments by groups of experts such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.\textsuperscript{3}

Cardinal Peter Turkson, President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, in his address on climate change at the United Nations in New York on 30\textsuperscript{th} June 2014 said “Through its Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the United Nations has availed itself of the best scientific research available.” We need to allow such scientific conclusions to touch us deeply so that we see and hear how the poor suffer and how the earth is being mistreated.

**Integrity of Creation**

The Judeo-Christian tradition has always held that the world of nature and all living things, including humanity, are created beings – the work of God. However, it is only in the recent past that the term, *Integrity of Creation*, has been used. In 1983 Jürgen Moltmann convinced the World Council of Churches (WCC) Assembly “that ‘peace and justice’ was meaningless unless it took place within a *whole* creation, a creation *‘with integrity’.*”\textsuperscript{4} The phrase, integrity of creation, was intended to convey the dependence of creation on its Creator and also the worth and dignity of creation in its own right (that is, its own intrinsic value). In 1990 the WCC adopted the title *JPIC*, Justice Peace and the Integrity of Creation. Spiritans began to use this phraseology at the General Chapter of ITAICÍ in 1992.

*Integrity* invests creation with a fresh meaning not fully captured by the terms nature or environment. Integrity implies that we are called to be narrators of the story of creation. Our missionary role is to help people tell the story of the God who loves the universe, Earth, and all creatures, especially human beings. The story is about land, water, air, food, shelter and security, who we are, where we are and how we relate and belong. The integrity of the ecosystem within which human life exists is vital to respect for the work of God and the well-being of future generations.

Our dealings within the Earth environment are bound up to a Creator-God who speaks through creation. Appreciation and respect for the sacredness of creation becomes a fresh and vital mission task. *Ecological conversion*
Brian O’Toole, C.S.Sp.

calls for a deliberate consciousness about how we live on the Earth and what is happening to our planet.

As Spiritans we make a deliberate choice to respond because the climate change debate tells us life systems are being threatened and eroded. We face the negative aspects of ecological and environmental reality: the exploitation of resources; pollution of the natural environment; wealth and prosperity in the face of hunger and poverty; tension over land, water, oil, minerals, crops, seeds and food distribution. We ponder a vision that generates life for the world with integrity and dignity, with sensitive care for the Earth and a reverential sense of the sacred in all of creation.

**Spiritans at the Coalface where Climate Change is not a Theory**

Involvement in Spiritan mission takes us beyond information and statistics to see the human face of the negative effects of climate and environmental destruction. Our long Spiritan missionary tradition teaches us that the key to flourishing is in our ability to adapt to local situations; that the key to overcoming environmental problems today lies in the local community. Our missionary confidence tells us that if we can create vibrant, increasingly autonomous and self-reliant local groupings of people that emphasise sharing, cooperation and living lightly on the Earth, we can avoid some of the fate warned of today. Worldwide, Spiritans with resilient communities are responding in many different ways.

*Gabon.* “Creation is a dynamic reality. It renews itself every day. What must we preserve in it? We think that each one at his level and in his own precise pastoral area is confronted with safeguarding the integrity of creation … The socio-economic difficulties with which our people are surrounded do not encourage this pastoral approach. But it will not be good to pull back, but rather to pursue our policies for the good of future generations.” (Jean Simon Ngele, C.S.Sp.)

*Haiti.* “The parish where I worked in Haiti was on average 1,500 metres above sea level. On my arrival, I got the schoolchildren together so that they themselves could prepare the saplings for
planting. The future beneficiaries pointed out to us the species they wanted to be planted in their area. Why? Because, often, re-planting efforts fail if the beneficiaries are not involved from the beginning … It seems to me that wherever you are involved in education, you should make the children and students aware of this kind of activity.” (Jean-Yves Urfié, C.S.Sp.)

**TransCanada:** “In my experience simple living is anything but simple. It takes more time and effort to take public transport or walk, to cook from scratch, to look for fair trade products, to recycle, to wash and reuse containers, to check labels, to try to use locally produced and in season food, to give handmade gifts … Often the fruits of simple living are not evident in terms of immediate results or effective impact on the ecological crisis...Ultimately voluntary simplicity is a spiritual quest…” (Joy Warner, Lay Spiritan)

**Reunion.** “The latest technology has given me the chance to meet people of all beliefs, belonging to all kinds of groups, going beyond the usual circle of our Church … All I know is that sustainable development, respect for creation, reduction of rubbish, new ways of travelling about, the history of slavery on the island, awareness or inequalities and initiatives to protect the environment are now taking their grip on the individual and collective conscience of the people of Reunion (Jean-Yves Carré, C.S.Sp.)

**Brazil.** “In the Prelature of Téfé, this impressive story of Spiritan commitment to Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation was partly played out by our confrères through the Movement for conservation and lasting development which emerged from the Basic Christian Communities … but when the communities were set up, the people started to farm and fish for their own needs and to sell whatever remained over. They also came to appreciate the importance of preserving the fisheries for the future …” (Bishop Sérgio Castriani C.S.Sp.).
These examples show us that the poor are already resilient, both by nature as well as necessity; however, they need further funding, information and support to escape poverty traps and to cope better with weather-related disasters. Because poverty and vulnerability are so closely intertwined, climate and disaster resilient development must be central to the global goal of ending poverty and promoting shared prosperity.

**A New Geological Period**

Very many scientists and anthropologists are using the term *Anthropocene* to describe a new geological period in which we are living. This succeeds the post-Ice Age Holocene epoch which lasted 12,000 years. Anthropocene refers to the idea that humans have had such a dramatic impact on the Earth’s ecosystem as to alter its natural evolution. This new epoch is driven by a radical change in humanity’s relationship with the rest of the Earth’s systems so that global-scale social and economic processes are now becoming significant features of its geological functioning. In the Anthropocene, humans are largely responsible for changes in the Earth’s climate. Future predictions on the effects of anthropogenic climate change are often bleak, however, if we follow the Gospel imperative, if we change our ways, if we change our destructive practices in relation to the Earth, we may be reconciled with it and live.

To reach this point of understanding has been a rapid and existentially steep learning curve for all of us. A short twenty-five years ago, for most of us, the word *environment* simply meant “surroundings.” Only scientists had heard of the *biosphere* and *ecosystems*. In 1992 at the Earth Summit in Rio the ecological problems of Earth started to become clear, so did the obstacles to solving these problems emerge. Warnings went out listing the crises in the atmosphere, water resources, the oceans, the soil, the forests and biodiversity. Although the technologies and the ecological problems they created are new, the human obstacles to solving them are as old as greed, vested interests, power structures and property interests.

The advent of anthropogenic climate change puts not only a new slant but also a new urgency into the Spiritan *option for the poor*. The poor are least responsible for the excessive carbon consumption that causes climate change. However, they are the most immediately vulnerable to the impact of climate change. In total, more than 90% of
those who live in extreme poverty reside in sub-Saharan Africa and South and East Asia. The majority of the poor in developing countries are to be found among rural populations, 75% of whom are small scale subsistence farmers engaged in fishing and pasturing. Furthermore, most of these people have little or no access to healthcare, education or credit systems.

In this context the understanding of the option for the poor must be widened because the wellbeing and destinies of the poor and all creation are intertwined. “We will either bequeath to the next generation a fruitful, beautiful, and vibrant planet for the wellbeing of all creatures or all future generations will be diminished.” The struggle for the defence of the natural world is thus a new way of living the option for the poor. We Spiritans need to find new ways to articulate and live out our option for the poor, or else live in an ever more degraded and degrading world.

Ecological Conversion

At the personal and community level, a starting point is by responding to the invitation to ecological conversion, a term first coined by then Pope John Paul II in 2001. He identified a spiritual and moral crisis of alienation from the natural world which has allowed us to dominate and despoil it. The term means a complete change in relation to how we interact with the environment and other living organisms. It suggests a change for the better, or for some sort of improvement to our environment. Today, creation can no longer sustain the dichotomies of rich versus poor, spirit versus matter, or ecology versus spirituality; it is up to us to reconcile these historical “opposites” for the life of the world.

Pope Francis frequently refers to what he regards as the creeping “culture of waste” enveloping our lives. He says that a throw-away attitude towards material resources infects the way we treat people. There’s a connection between a culture that squanders the gifts of creation and societies that place little value on the gift of life. Ecological conversion graces us with being able to see clearly. We see the countless scars on our earth. We see the shifting climate wreak havoc on farmers with drought, on fishing communities with storms. We see, again and again, that the poor bear the heaviest burdens of our heaving world, shoved closest to the precarious edges of a slipping planet. We see pictures, we see statistics, and we
see YouTube clips. Flashes. Echoes. And we can never turn away, never put out of sight, never forget.

All developing Regions are Vulnerable to the Impacts of Climate Change

Limited human and financial resources and weak institutions drive the vulnerability of these regions. But other factors, attributable to their geography and history, are also significant.

Sub-Saharan Africa (with 1,263 Spiritans by appointment) suffers from natural fragility (two-thirds of its surface area is desert or dry land) and high exposure to droughts and floods, which are forecast to increase with further climate change. The region’s economies are highly dependent on natural resources. Biomass provides 80% of the domestic primary energy supply. Rain-fed agriculture contributes some 23% of GDP (Gross Domestic Product), excluding South Africa; this region employs about 70% of the population. The impacts on agriculture with lower crop yields for maize production further compound the direct impact on human health by increasing the rates of undernutrition and reduced incomes, ultimately producing negative repercussions for economic growth. Inadequate infrastructure could hamper adaptation efforts, with limited water storage despite abundant resources. Malaria, already the biggest killer in the region, is spreading to higher, previously safe, altitudes.

Asia (with 44 Spiritans by appointment). A major driver of vulnerability is the large number of people living along the coast and on low-lying islands - over 130 million in China and 40 million in Vietnam. It is an area where income and employment depend on agriculture. In the East Asia Mekong River basin, the rainy season sees more intense precipitation, while the dry season lengthens by two months. The region's economies are highly dependent on marine resources—the value of well-managed coral reefs is $13 billion in Southeast Asia alone—which are already under stress by industrial pollution, coastal development, overfishing and the runoff
from agricultural pesticides and nutrients. Rising temperatures and reduced precipitation in **Central Asia** exacerbate the catastrophe of the disappearing Southern Aral Sea (caused by the diversion of water to grow cotton in a desert climate) while sand and salt from the dried-up seabed are blowing onto Central Asia’s glaciers, accelerating the melting caused by higher temperatures. In **South Asia** water resources are likely to be affected by climate change through its effect on the Monsoon, which provides 70% of annual precipitation in a four-month period, and on the melting of Himalayan glaciers. Rising sea levels are a dire concern in the region, which has long and densely populated coastlines, agricultural plains threatened by saltwater intrusion, and many low lying islands. In more severe climate change scenarios, rising seas would submerge much of the Maldives and inundate 18% of Bangladesh.

**Latin America and the Caribbean** (with 144 Spiritans by appointment). Most critical ecosystems are under threat. The tropical glaciers of the Andes are expected to disappear, resulting in water stress for at least 77 million people as early as 2020, and threatening hydropower, the source of more than half the electricity in many South American countries. Warming and acidifying oceans will result in diebacks of coral reefs in the Caribbean, which host nurseries for an estimated 65% of all fish species in the basin and are a critical tourism asset. Damage to the Gulf of Mexico’s wetlands will make the coast more vulnerable to more intense and more frequent hurricanes. The most disastrous impact could be a dramatic dieback of the Amazon rain forest and a conversion of large areas to savannah, with severe consequences for the region’s climate—and possibly the world’s.

**North Africa** (with 61 Spiritans by appointment). The world’s driest region; water is the major vulnerability. The region has few attractive options for increasing water storage, since close to 90% of its freshwater resources are already stored in reservoirs. The increased water scarcity
combined with greater variability will threaten agriculture, which accounts for some 85% of the region’s water use. Vulnerability is compounded by a heavy concentration of population and economic activity in flood-prone coastal zones and by social and political tensions that resource scarcity could heighten.

**Spiritans as Advocates for the Poor**

As climate change impacts the planet and peoples across the world, our ecological and missionary duty is to be advocates on behalf of the poor about what is happening in creation. The climate crisis ultimately offers Spiritan mission the privilege of experiencing a fresh sense of mission to the ends of the Earth. Creation must be given a voice. We must listen to the people who fish the sea, harvest the forest, till the soil and mine the earth, as well as to those who advance the conservation, protection and preservation of the environment. We recognize numerous obstacles to participation. People often lack the political or economic power to participate fully.

Included in our mission is concern about what sort of world, environmentally and economically, culturally and spiritually, future generations will inherit from us. It is not just an environmental and economic issue, or a political and business one but rather a moral and spiritual one. Concern for the wider Earth community is part of a new moral order. “The climate change issue calls us to seize the moral imagination and embark on nothing less than radical transformation.” As missionaries we carry the conviction that a religious element is at the heart of ecology and the environment. At its core, climate change is about the future of God’s creation and the one human family. It is about protecting both the human environment and the natural environment.

To proclaim and demonstrate the value of environmental responsibilities, we are all called upon to act. As individuals and in families, we are urged to improve the ways in which we impact on and interact with our environment. “Recycle,” “Reuse,” “Repair,” and “Reduce” must become our environmental watchwords. We are stewards of the common patrimony of the planet. We are part of the universe, the universe is bigger than us, and dealing with it we have to respect its system. As John Paul II has cautioned:
There is an order in the universe which must be respected and [...] the human person, endowed with the capability of choosing freely, has a grave responsibility to preserve this order for the well-being of future generations.\textsuperscript{10}

While we Spiritans are a small group, our attempt to reduce our carbon use is an evangelical sign of our commitment to recognizing that all is gift, and to celebrating and protecting that gift. By seeking to reduce our carbon use in a measurable way, we stand in solidarity with the poor and with the vulnerable earth and we bear witness to the integrity of creation.\textsuperscript{11}

To find the living God in solidarity with the poor of the Earth remains an enormous challenge for Christian faith. Commitment to the poor and commitment to the well-being of life on this planet must go together as two interrelated dimensions of the one Christian vocation.\textsuperscript{12}

Ecological conversion is not opposed to, but intimately involved with, conversion to the side of the poor. We therefore need to advocate on issues relating to, for example, Ecological Generational Debt and Climate Debt, to mention but two.\textsuperscript{13}

Creation-centred Formation

There is a need for more formation on creation-centred theology. There has always been sensitivity towards the Earth within the Catholic Church, but it was far from mainstream.\textsuperscript{14}

Thomas Berry, an American Passionist priest, made it his life’s work to explore the connection between humans and the Earth. Described in Newsweek magazine in 1989 as “the most provocative figure among the new breed of eco-theologians,”\textsuperscript{15} Berry felt all religious communities needed to see themselves in the context of creation and to play a role in preserving the environment. He taught that the “great work” of our time is to establish a mutually enhancing human presence on our planet. He felt the planet’s environmental crisis was fundamentally a spiritual crisis, with huge implications for religion.

Creation theology gives us hope for today’s world in giving us a deeper awareness of our interconnectedness with our world. Initial and ongoing education and action on global warming issues need to be a significant feature
A critical task for missionaries is to organize programs to motivate communities and partners to play their part in responding to the call to “Care for Creation.” Here there is a need for the bringing together of all our gifts and talents. The scholars discover in Scripture and theology insights to share with and animate others. The moral and prophetic voice of the activist is an inspiration in public policy debates. Poets and contemplatives critique the situation and evoke a fresh imagination.

We need to be learners in the school of hope. We need to be mystics. Karl Rahner has said that the Christian of the future will be a mystic or he or she will cease to be anything at all. What he has in mind here is the “the mysticism of everyday life.” He believes that there is an experience of God that occurs in every life. In such experiences there is an openness to mystery; the experience of grace. In the light of Christian revelation we can see this as the place of the Holy Spirit in our lives. This is the mysticism of daily life. What then would a mysticism of ecological praxis look like? I suggest that it might embrace some of these kinds of experiences:

- The experience of being caught up in the beauty of the natural world.
- The experience of being called to solidarity with the creatures of Earth, of being called to an ecological conversion.
- The experience of conversion from individualism and consumption to the simplicity of what Sallie McFague calls “life abundant.” And knowing that what matters are the basic necessities, medical care, educational opportunities, loving relationships, meaningful work, an enriching imaginative and spiritual life, time with friends, and time spent with the natural world around us.
- The experience of commitment to the creatures of our Earth community.

Conclusion

In living out the Spiritan option for the poor our mission...
concern is about what sort of world, environmentally and economically, culturally and spiritually, future generations will inherit from us. We share a responsibility to those in the poorest countries who will experience the most acute suffering from the effects of environmental degradation. We join in the task of finding equitable ways to compensate and accommodate those who are suffering most.

To be ready for these tasks, Spiritans need to be credible, literate and fulfilled. Along with all disciples of Jesus, Climate Change challenges Spiritans to be people of hope rooted in the realities of our world. Spiritans are being led by the Spirit into a new mission task for our times to be:

*Truth Tellers:* welcoming knowledge about Earth’s systems and the consequence of human induced climate change as advances in truth;

*Spiritual Visionaries:* accepting changing patterns of climate as another chapter in cosmic revelation and a new turn in encountering God;

*Just and compassionate:* committing to challenge economic structures that disrupt Earth’s ecological systems as a continuation of healing social disruption especially among the world’s poor;

*Active:* leading the way in a commitment to new ways of living lightly on the earth.

Prayer for the guidance of God’s Spirit to renew the face of the Earth is central to Spiritans making individual and community responses to climate change: Come Holy Spirit.

In praying her Magnificat and honouring her role as Mother, Mary can help lead Spiritans to respect this planet which nurtures us all and to rightly call it *mother Earth*. The ecological conversion spoken of by Pope John Paul II will require courage as Spiritans choose to make sacrifices and change life styles to reconnect with nature’s rhythms.

The Jubilee is a further summons to conversion of heart through a change of life. It is a reminder to all that they should give absolute importance neither to the goods of the Earth, since these are...
not God, nor to man’s domination or claim to domination, since the Earth belongs to God and to him alone (Leviticus 25:23). 21

Spiritans are learning to be more humble in the face of what Earth is saying to us now. The endangered Earth demands a new prophetic way of being missionaries. Spiritans are called to empty themselves as God chose to do in taking on flesh in Jesus Christ, and in doing so they will help bring the transformation that leads to the fullness of life God wishes for all peoples and the world in the Cosmic Lord.

When history records the actions we take or fail to take at this our moment of truth, we will not have the excuse that we did not understand, that we did not know. We have been gifted, in a global communications order, with the knowledge and the opportunity to act.

Would it not be the greatest of all human achievements if we were to succeed in delivering the benefits of science, the shared wisdom, instinct and intuition of diverse cultures, and the products of reason and faith; and in delivering all of these through new, balanced models of development, ecology and society?

Then we might say, that when facing the fullness of our challenge, we made the decisions that offered a shelter that protected the vulnerable of the present, and at the same time, offering creative and imaginative possibilities for future generations. Let us succeed together. 22

Brian O’Toole, C.S.Sp.
Dublin

Endnotes

1 Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis for the Establishment of the “World Day Of Prayer for the Care of Creation” [1st SEPTEMBER] at https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2015/documents/papa-
Optimal amounts of naturally occurring greenhouse gases, especially water vapor, are necessary to maintain the Earth’s temperature at inhabitable levels. Without greenhouse gases, Earth’s temperature would be too cold for human and most other life. However, excessive greenhouse gases cause Earth’s temperature to warm up considerably which cause major, and occasionally catastrophic, changes to weather and wind patterns, and the severity and frequency of various types of storms. Major sources of greenhouse gases generated by mankind are:

- Burning of fossil fuels, which includes oil and gas, coal and natural gas.

- Chlorofluorocarbons, commonly used in refrigeration, cooling and manufacturing applications.

- Methane, which is caused by emissions from landfills, livestock, rice farming (which uses methane-emitting bacteria), septic processes, and fertilizers.

- Deforestation

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is a scientific intergovernmental body with the purpose of providing comprehensive scientific assessments of current scientific, technical, and socio-economic information worldwide about the risk of climate change caused by human activity, its potential environmental and socio-economic consequences, and possible options for adapting to these consequences or mitigating the effects. Thousands of scientists and other experts contribute (on a voluntary basis, without payment from the IPCC) to the writing and reviewing of reports, which are then submitted to government officials. The main purpose of the IPCC isn’t to make new studies, but to review and put together other studies, basically summarizing all relevant research and drawing conclusions from it.


Taken from *Spiritan Life*, no. 19 (May 2010).

http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/


11The total set of greenhouse gas emissions caused directly and indirectly by an individual, community, organisation, event or product is what is commonly called their *carbon footprint*.


13“The ecological generational debt of country A consists of (1) the ecological damage caused over time by country A in other countries or in an area under jurisdiction of another country through its production and consumption patterns, and/or (2) the ecological damage caused over time by country A to ecosystems beyond national jurisdiction through its consumption and production patterns, and/or (3) the exploitation or use of ecosystems and ecosystem goods and services over time by country A at the expense of the equitable rights to these ecosystems and ecosystem goods and services of other countries or individuals.” Paper on *The Concept of Ecological Debt: An Environmental Justice Approach to Sustainability*, presented at the 7th Global Conference on Environmental Justice and Global Citizenship, July 2008, Oxford, UK, by Gert Goeminne and Erik Paredis.

The concept of Climate Debt incorporates two distinct elements: *Adaptation debt* which represents the compensation owed to the poor for the damages of climate change they have not caused; *Emissions debt* which is compensation owed for their fair share of the atmospheric space they cannot use if climate change is to be stopped.
From the works by Teilhard de Chardin, Matthew Fox, Thomas Berry, Edward Echlin, Sean McDonagh, and looking back several centuries to such environmental champions as Hildegarde of Bingen, Mother Julian of Norwich, Francis of Assisi.

Berry was influenced by the work of Teilhard de Chardin and was President of the American Teilhard Association for 12 years. He himself was inspirational to a younger generation of eco-theologians, including Matthew Fox and Columban Sean McDonagh.


President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins. Address given to the Summit of Conscience at the invitation of President François Hollande on 21st July, 2015.


NEW SPIRITAN UNIVERSITIES:
MARIAN UNIVERSITY COLLEGE,
BAGAMOYO

The Spiritan Province of Tanzania Comes of Age

On May 31, 2015, the Marian University College, a constituent College of St. Augustine University of Tanzania (SAUT) located at the harbor town of Bagamoyo, was inaugurated with a sense of achievement and fanfare in the presence of an immense multitude. The Archbishop of Dar es Salaam, Polycarp Cardinal Pengo, presided over the celebration. The Vice President of the Republic of Tanzania, Dr. Bilal, deputized for the President Mr. Kikwete, who incidentally comes from the Coastal Region where Bagamoyo is situated. Saint Augustine's University is the Catholic University of Tanzania founded by the Tanzania Episcopal Conference which mothers a constellation of Catholic University Colleges spread throughout the country. It is situated at Mwanza and overlooks the awesome fresh waters of the Victoria Lake. Under its auspices, the Spiritan Province of Tanzania decided to respond positively to the invitation of the Government of the Republic to private and Religious bodies to join hands in spreading literature and higher education in the land. In order to compete in the modern world, Tanzania needs trained personnel, and science education is the preferred orientation of its current development plan. The Spiritan Marian University at Bagamoyo is science-based and is established as a Spiritan response to the government’s call for partnership. As one of the pioneer Missionary Congregations in East Africa and Tanzania in particular, the Spiritans are thus continuing their original educational services as part of their on-going contribution in alleviating the secular needs of the developing nation.

The Making of a University College

Already in 2014, a five-member task force headed by this writer was set up to recondition, refurbish, and expand the existing Spiritan Center at Bagamoyo so as to accommodate the proposed new university. It was a Herculean experiment of trust in Providence given the embarrassing financial situation at the time. The hope was, of course, that tuition and money-yielding projects would help to eventually balance the budget. Building up infrastructures and constructing science laboratories,
canvassing for library books and setting up computers, advertising for and interviewing prospective lecturers and professors, unending board meetings and consultations with government officials as well as other university colleges—such was not a task for the faint-hearted. However intimidating the task turned out to be, the preparatory group went ahead with the business, fortified with missionary zeal. After all, not giving up when facing obstacles, however apparently insurmountable, is part of the legacy of our Spiritan pioneers right from the two founders. This unflinching perseverance is silently witnessed to by the bones of the founding fathers of the Bagamoyo mission entombed in the University grounds. A five-storeyed block, when completed, would be the tallest building in Bagamoyo and will complement the seven blocks already in existence. Except for the dormitories for girls already completed, the majority of students live off-campus. Tuition respects the charges in similar University colleges. In keeping with the aims of the Congregation, efforts are made to care for poor students.

By the end of November we were ready for the inspection of facilities from the government agency. A committee was sent by the Tanzania University Commission (TCU), the arm of government responsible for accrediting new universities in the country, to evaluate the facilities at the site. The committee seemed satisfied with what they saw and made some minor recommendations. By April 2015, the new university was accredited to start. Prospective university students do not apply directly to their university of choice but through the TCU which assigns them to any of the accredited universities of the land. Normally the universities open by September/October but due to the presidential elections in October 2015, universities in the country opened their lecture halls at the beginning of November, 2015. Marian University College (MARUCO) thus opened its lecture halls for the very first time with initial 300 students allocated by the TCU which has its seat in Dar es Salaam.

A Board of Governors appointed by the Provincial Administration is entrusted with the direction and running of the University. An initial recruitment of 27 (including 3 Spiritans) lecturers and professors without prejudice to faith affiliation form the nucleus of the faculty. The parish church serves the need of Catholic students; the Anglican church at the edge of the university property is open to Protestants while the four or more mosques in the town
suffice for Muslim students.

Why at Bagamoyo?

The harbor town of Bagamoyo on the majestic Indian Ocean is situated some seventy kilometers North-East of the commercial city of Dar es Salaam, the country’s largest city and former capital before Dodoma replaced it. In recent years, Bagamoyo has hosted a number of national and international gatherings, not least the last General Chapter of the Holy Ghost Congregation that elected the present Spiritan Central Administration in Rome. It’s growing prominence must be ascribed to the missionary initiative of the Holy Ghost Fathers who first landed there from the Zanzibar Archipelago in the latter half of the 19th Century. It was a slave port from where the Moslem slave traders shipped Africa’s frightened youth to the lands-of-no-return. The Kiswahili name *Bwagamoyo* literally means “abandon your hearts”; forget the hope of ever returning to the fatherland. It was and is still a Muslim-controlled town but the uninterrupted presence of Spiritan missionary activity has breathed life and freedom into these people who once hibernated in the shadows of darkness. The impressive stone Cross planted in the now familiar Msalabani on the banks of the Indian Ocean is a monument to the Alsatian Spiritan missionaries memorializing their port of entry in the mainland. About a kilometer up from the shore of the Ocean is the oldest Church in East Africa and behind it the cemetery where the first missionaries lie. Their tombstones exhibit their youthful age when they died, unaccustomed, as they were, to the debilitating tropical heat and calamitous malaria fever. Medical research on the causes and treatment of malaria had not then advanced. Bagamoyo has become the focal point of pilgrimages from various parts of Tanzania and of Episcopal meetings where the fortunes of the Church in Tanzania are being discussed. The Catholic Church in Tanzania and, indeed, East Africa, has its roots here and return here where the pioneer missionaries are buried to pray for the future of the Church in the East Africa Region. Happily, the Spiritan Province under the initiative of one of its charismatic and pragmatic visionaries, Father Valentine Bayo, C.S.Sp. has erected a magnificent hotel, Stella Maris, to attract and cater for pilgrims as well as tourists. The celebrated British missionary and explorer of the late 19th Century, Dr. David Livingstone, had his dried corpse preserved here at a side chapel before it was shipped to Westminster Abbey for final internment. The period

*It was a slave port from where the Moslem slave traders shipped Africa’s frightened youth to the lands-of-no-return.*
of German occupation (Tanganyika was a German colony before it passed on to Britain) is still evident from the ruins of their administrative and commercial buildings. The architecturally impressive and newly renovated German Boma has become a German tourist destination and dominates the sky-line on the southern reaches of the Indian Ocean. The Government of the Federal Republic has recently undertaken to build a modern harbor in Bagamoyo in partnership with China to decongest the main harbor at Dar es Salaam. With the new paved road connecting Dar es Salaam with Msata through Bagamoyo, the city has grounds to look forward to a great future with hope.

The Spiritans have also invested a lot of energy in building up educational structures in the Bagamoyo district. From a town of fishermen and petty traders, the schools are turning out enlightened graduates at different levels. There are Marian Schools scattered throughout the district ranging from nursery and Kindergarten through technical and catering schools to Secondary Schools erected in Bagamoyo and its surrounding district. Spiritans have also built up health services such as dispensaries and health clinics for the people and in that way contributed to providing job opportunities for Tanzanians of all faiths without discrimination; clients come from everywhere since the Kiswahili language spoken in all parts of the country has banished tribalism in the land. Tribalism, a problem endemic to most African independent countries south of the Sahara, is through the one indigenous language spoken all over it, apparently lacking in Tanzania. Through these schools and job opportunities created by the Spiritan establishments, a sizable Christian community has sprung up in this otherwise Muslim dominated region. Happily, the Muslim majority lives amicably with their Christian compatriots. Mornings and evenings, calls to prayer ring out from the many Muslim mosques and Angelus bells ring out from the towers of the German built houses of prayer. One should not forget that it was the Muslim Sultan of Zanzibar that allotted the ground on the banks of the ocean to the first Christian missionaries when they landed in Bagamoyo. Hence it is fitting that the Spiritan Province of Tanzania has chosen Bagamoyo as the place to continue their missionary engagement with the country. The new University crowns their energies spent in the work of introducing the country to the modern world.

Happily, the Muslim majority lives amicably with their Christian compatriots.
Spiritans and Education in Tanzania

The murals painted on the walls behind the high altar of the gothic church built by the first German missionaries about 1878 (when the French provinces of Alsace and Lorraine were annexed to Germany under the Prussian warlord Otto von Bismarck) depict the type of work the pioneers did. They started their missionary work with buying back slaves and teaching them both to be able to read and to do hand-and technical-work. As they moved into the interior to the Kilimanjaro region, they also founded formal schools. After all, the founders of the Holy Ghost Congregation and the Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (after whom the Marian consortium is named) were moved by concern for the welfare of the Blacks. At a time when Africans were the victims of European colonialism and imperialism, when fortune-hunters, oblivious of human rights, were shipping cheap African man-power across the Atlantic to the American sugar and cotton fields and across the Indian Ocean to the service of the Muslim potentates of the Arabian peninsula, Spiritan missionaries were engaged in educating African consciousness on their God-given equality with their fellow humans and on their dignity as images of God. Establishing schools to banish ignorance was a means of empowerment and therefore a potent instrument in Spiritan evangelization strategy.

One of the early Spiritan High Schools in the country, Saint Francis College at Pugu on the outskirts of Dar es Salaam, was at one time mooted to be converted into a College of the University of Dublin. Indeed the alumni of Spiritan schools are part of the foundation stones of free Tanzania. The founding father of the nation and the first President of Independent Tanzania, the ideologue of African Socialism as enunciated in the famed Arusha Declaration, Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, was a tutor at the Spiritan College at Pugu. He taught history and Kiswahili and was able to translate into Kiswahili and perform some of the plays of Shakespeare like The Merchant of Venice in this school. Mr. Benjamin Mkapa, a student of this school who later became President of the Republic of Tanzania, acted the part of Shylock in that Shakespeare translated into Kiswahili. Many other distinguished players in the search for national independence from Britain, icons in the world of the academia and business tycoons as well as in the diplomatic corps, attended Spiritan schools. The recently deceased Chancellor of the prestigious University
of Dar es Salaam, Ambassador Fulgens Kasaura, as well as the former Education Minister, Ambassador Nicholas Kuhanga, pride themselves as having been educated by the Spiritans. Beyond these prominent alumni are the other innumerable *hoi polloi* of the Spiritan schools, the *Bodenpersonal* (ground crew) who do not make the limelight but without whose faithful service the nation would have been poorer for development workers. Without the educational contributions of the Spiritan schools, Tanzania would have been less equipped with educated and technical manpower. With the encouragement of the Bishops’ Conference of Tanzania, and building on the educational tradition of the pioneer missionaries from Europe, the Spiritan Province of Tanzania decided to embark on the university venture as in continuity with and in the tradition of the Spiritan Missionary Congregation. The only novelty is its ambition to establish a university unaided by foreign backing. Self-reliance is part of the goals of an independent Tanzania.

It may be worth mentioning that a fellow worker with Spiritans became a model for African politicians who are blamed repeatedly for corruption in government. The last Synod for Africa held in Rome proposed Julius Nyerere to African politicians as a model of Catholic participation in political life. The Spiritans were proud to have been associated with him and are determined to offer Tanzania people of such probity who would carry out public service for the common good.

**Motto and Vision Statement**

The University’s motto is: *Wisdom and Knowledge for Freedom.* The “Wisdom” implied here reflects Socrates’ life work of asking people to examine their lives in order to make it worth living as found in the Apology of *The Dialogues of Plato.* It also includes the best legacies found in all the philosophical and religious traditions of mankind, a legacy expected to be communicated in introductory as well as core courses to be offered by the university. As a Catholic missionary institute, the university will also introduce its students, without any imposition, to Jesus, “the Wisdom of God and the Power of God.” “Knowledge,” the appropriate information given on any given topic, is the goal of all pedagogy; it is the banishment of ignorance through cumulative and incremental enlightenment. Although the primary orientation is scientific, geared to providing the engines to stoke the government’s quest
for accelerated development, the University College will eventually broaden out into the Humanities. While specializations will be encouraged, yet Liberal Education is the goal of the learned and well-rounded individual, a model akin to the *homo universale* of Italian Renaissance. This is needed to satisfy the idea of a university in the direction enunciated by John Henry Newman in his monumental thesis of that name. The teacher has succeeded in his vocation when the disciple has been made similar to the master. “Freedom” is the fruit of the self-consciousness and self-esteem that are inculcated through the liberation of learning and instruction and the prudence produced by the experience of alternative cultures derived from the open-endedness of the University’s world-wide exposure. For faculty and the student body alike the goal is to work towards attaining a Nobel Prize in the chosen area of specialization. Hence in the town of Bagamoyo, where misery and slavery held sway at the beginning of the Spiritan missionary enterprise, light and self-confidence have arisen through the presence of MARUCO and its conglomerates. Bringing Light to the Nations continues to fire Spiritan missionary endeavor, even in 21st Century Bagamoyo.

Such is part of the University’s *Mission Statement*, namely, “To promote knowledge and skills which impart critical and independent thinking, integrity and self-respect, creativity and commitment to service”.

Its programs are grouped in the following combinations. There are programs in the undergraduate, Diploma, and Certificate levels. As the University grows so will graduate and post-graduate levels be added.

**Undergraduate Degree Programs**

**Bachelor of Education in Science**
This three year program includes the study of two academic subjects together with general core courses and professional subjects required for teacher’s education. The subject combinations include Chemistry and Biology; Chemistry and Mathematics; Chemistry and Geography; Physics and Chemistry; Physics and Geography; Physics and Mathematics; Geography and Biology; Geography and Mathematics.

**Bachelor of Science in Mathematics and Statistics**
This three year program is aimed at using mathematical
and statistical knowledge and skills to solve societal problems.

**Bachelor of Science in Computer Science (Information Systems)**

The programs here are aimed at producing professionals and technicians who will work in areas which apply computer skills in information communication technology. The degree program is a three year program.

**Admission and Entry Requirements for Bachelor (First) Degree**

The following are the general entry requirements for all degree programs:

**Direct Entry**

Must hold at least three Ordinary-level credit passes in appropriate subjects, one of which must be English Language.

Must have at least two principal passes (D and above) in appropriate subjects at A-level education and must have grade points total of not less than 3.0, where A=5, B=4, C=3, D=2, E=1 and S=0.5.

**Equivalent Qualifications**

Must hold at least three Ordinary-level credit passes in relevant subjects, one of which must be English Language.

Must hold a Diploma in the relevant field of study or its equivalent, with at least Grade A or Grade B, in the subjects they wish to study at degree level.

**Diploma Programs**

Diploma in Computer Science (2 years)

**Requirements for Admission**

**Direct Entry**

A Certificate of Secondary Education Examination (Ordinary-Level) with at least three credit passes in Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Mathematics, Computer Studies, and Geography including a pass in English.

**Or**

An Advanced Certificate of Secondary Education Examination (ACSEE) with subsidiary passes.
Equivalent Qualifications

Either

Ordinary Level Certificate with four passes in Computer studies or Mathematics, or Physics, Chemistry, or Geography including a pass in English and an Ordinary National Certificate qualification of an equivalent standard awarded by recognized bodies like NBAA, NACTE, IFM, etc.

Or

Certificate in Computer Science recognized by NACTE or/and TCU or Certificate in IT/CCNA (CISCO).

Certificate Program

Certificate in Computer Science and Information Technology (1 Year)

Requirements for Admission

A candidate must have a certificate of Secondary Education (Ordinary-Level) with at least four passes (D) including physics or Mathematics or Chemistry or Geography. English is a must.

Short Courses

English Language Proficiency Certificate (4 months).

Basic Computer Skills (2 months).

Further Reflection

The Chinese say that the journey of a thousand miles begins with one step. The Tanzania Province of the Spiritan Congregation has taken a historical first step in establishing MARUCO. MARUCO is still a constituent college of SAUT. It has to set high standards of scholarship and achievement in the coming years to merit that autonomy and respect within the distinguished coterie of Universities in the land. The University is as inclusive as its missionary outreach and welcomes students of all faiths and backgrounds as required by the ethos of university education in Tanzania. It is hoped that with Spiritan international connections it will add quality and excellence. It has already locked up a Memorandum of Understanding with a University in Taiwan. Arrangements are on course to do the same with other Spiritan Universities across the globe. In keeping with the indigenization policy of the government of Tanzania, the Spiritan Administration...
decided shortly after the inauguration to set up a search committee that would appoint a Tanzanian national to lead the new university as principal/president. Meanwhile, the new university has opened its doors to its pioneer students and lectures are on-going.

The University College address is: P.O. Box 47, Bagamoyo, Pwani, Tanzania; E-Mail: marianuniversitycollege@gmail.com; Website: http://www.maruco.ac.tz.

Bagamoyo, Tanzania
Dr. Matthew Kostek

Dr. Matthew Kostek is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Physical Therapy and director of the Laboratory of Muscle and Translational Therapeutics at Duquesne University. He is also a faculty member of the McGowan Institute of Regenerative Medicine at the University Of Pittsburgh School Of Medicine and a Fellow of the American College of Sports Medicine. His research focuses on the molecular genetics of muscle diseases and disorders. He has published more than 30 scientific articles, and textbook chapters in the biochemistry of muscle metabolism. He teaches the Human Physiology I & II courses to doctoral students of physical therapy and physician assistant students at Duquesne.

SPIRITAN PEDAGOGY AND CURA PERSONALIS IN A LARGE LECTURE HALL

The Spiritan Congregation has been involved in education essentially since its founding more than 300 years ago. The founder, Claude François Poullart des Places, founded the Congregation with one of the primary intentions being to help poor seminarians obtain an education. Since then, the Congregation has founded and run several seminaries, grade schools, and one University (Duquesne University, founded 1878) and two University Colleges (Spiritan University College, Ejisu, Ghana, founded 1990 and Marian University College, Bagamoyo, Tanzania, which opened in 2015). And while much has been written on the role of education as part of the Spiritan mission, there is no formal document detailing a Spiritan Pedagogy in a university setting. On the campus of Duquesne University, the idea of Spiritan Pedagogy is currently being discussed amongst faculty across various disciplines. The University has no document describing the pedagogy; yet, several essays by Duquesne faculty have recently been published on the topic. These essays are starting the conversation of what might define a Spiritan Pedagogy at Duquesne. As there is no formal dictate as to what a Spiritan Pedagogy is, it is being asked of faculty who currently use techniques inspired by the Spiritan charism to define some of the characteristics. This essay culminates my first interaction with the idea of Spiritan Pedagogy after attending several discussion groups sponsored by the Center for the Catholic Intellectual Tradition and the Center for Teaching Excellence at Duquesne. The groups were meant to stimulate, not dictate, ideas about the pedagogy. It was said we are taking a “bottom-up” approach, letting the ideas rise from within the teaching experience of the university faculty. This approach itself could be considered Spiritan.

A question that often arises in these discussions is whether a Spiritan Pedagogy is even a distinct pedagogy or is just “good teaching.” What, if anything, makes this pedagogy unique? Many examples of what might make it unique have now been written about and examples can be found in current Duquesne classrooms, in service-learning trips with reflective paper writing or engagement with the community as part of a class and/or research project. A
perspective that has not been addressed to a great extent is how Spiritan pedagogy might look in a large lecture hall, a lecture hall with more than 100 students. For example, a basic science class taught within a professionally accredited curriculum. The size, subject content, and accreditation standards of this classroom setting do not leave much flexibility or lend itself to group discussion or reflective paper writing. Is there a place for Spiritan pedagogy in this setting? In considering this large, didactic lecture-class over the past two years, I describe examples of how I think the Spiritan charism infused my classroom and I suggest this is related to the pedagogical concept, *cura personalis*. Drawing from the work of others, I describe Spiritan pedagogy with four elements: *cura personalis*, openness to the Spirit, community, and high academic standards.³

The phrase, *cura personalis*, is Latin and has been interpreted to mean “care of the whole person,” “education of the whole person,” or holistic education. The phrase is commonly associated with Ignatian Spirituality and Pedagogy. And while the phrase is likely very old, there are no records that St. Ignatius ever used it. The first Jesuit record appears to be in a letter written by the then Superior General of the Jesuit Congregation in 1935. Fr. Władysław Ledochowski sent a set of instructions outlining reforms needed of Jesuit Higher Education in America. These included some administrative changes, advocacy for Jesuit Universities joining accrediting associations in America, and changes in policy and perspective⁴. In this letter, Fr. Ledochowski advocates for the personal care of students (*personalis alumnorum cura*) and that this care should extend beyond good teaching in the classroom.⁵ His use of the phrase was likely new to Ignatian pedagogy, even if the concept was not. The phrase is now associated with Ignatian spirituality and Ignatian Colleges and Universities. Yet, the concept of *cura personalis* is not unique to Ignatian spirituality, as suggested by McGinn: “claiming that *cura personalis* is distinctively Jesuit is tantamount to trying to copyright the alphabet.”⁶ Although the phrase, *cura personalis*, is not currently used in relation to Spiritan pedagogy, it helped me to define Spiritan pedagogy in relation to my large lecture classroom.

My introduction to the idea of *cura personalis* was in listening to a colleague from a Jesuit university describe how it impacted the teaching in her department (Physical
She drew a connection from the way a physical therapist treats not just an orthopedic condition but the entire patient as a person, not as an injury. This requires considerations that are anatomical, physiological, psychological, and philosophical or spiritual. I immediately saw the connection to the teaching in my own department and to Duquesne University as a whole. The connection in fact is spelled out in bold letters and can be found at the bottom of the page of official University letterhead, “Education for the Mind, Heart, and Spirit”; this aphorism often used to describe and summarize the ethos of Duquesne University seems to be cura personalis rephrased. Other instances of cura personalis abound on our campus and become immediately apparent when one is looking for them.

**Openness to the Spirit and Cura Personalis**

Because it is the most universally discussed principle of Spiritan pedagogy and at the heart of the Spiritan charism, I begin with openness to the Spirit. The principle has been explained in many ways as taking shape in a classroom. Being open to topics and discussions that are spontaneously inspired is perhaps an obvious example. Ethical and moral discussions are, and should be, common in some classroom settings. Certainly some college courses are specifically designed to encounter these discussions, while others can address them if they arise. These encounters often lead to new insights and profound growth experiences by students that would otherwise not happen, a hallmark, perhaps, of a good liberal education. These encounters and insights contribute to the development of the whole person, intellectually, emotionally, and perhaps spiritually. Yet, a small class size seems ideal for this as it lends flexibility to instruction, assignments, and evaluation. This then seems to limit these encounters to small classes, perhaps in sociology, philosophy or ethics. Could there be a role of openness to the Spirit in a large lecture hall, was my question. Before proceeding with this question it seems to me relevant to consider the purpose. The purpose of most pedagogy is to increase understanding of a topic, which thereby should improve learning outcomes (as measured by grades). Alternatively, a purpose could simply be holistic education. This holistic purpose could be stated more specifically, e.g., to help the student understand and assimilate the information in a societal and global, or personal and human context. When the pedagogy has
During my first semester teaching at Duquesne (and each subsequent) I taught a basic life science course (human physiology) to about 100 students. This course is part of a two semester series in physiology which allows us to delve deep into human cellular organ function. It is a traditional lecture style course that relies heavily on power-point presentations and didactic instruction. While the purpose of the course is understanding normal human organ function, examples of abnormal or pathological function are used as a means to apply the knowledge. During a lecture on the cellular and molecular function of an organ, I presented a disease example to connect the molecular mechanisms with whole body function. In this case we discussed diabetes and blood glucose disposal within skeletal muscle. Skeletal muscle is the primary storage site of glucose in the human body. After describing diabetes, I then explained how a non-pharmacologic treatment (i.e., exercise) can correct the molecular/cellular abnormality (insulin signaling pathways), and thus blood measurements may no longer reach the diagnostic criteria for disease. My intent was purely academic, using an analogy to describe a difficult concept. The goal being to increase learning outcomes (increase factual understanding to increase exam grades). Questions from the students were however not about organ function, they were about the effect on patient’s lives and the ability to have health insurance. “How does that affect the patient diagnosis and what the patient has to pay their insurance company”? Considering the amount of content I needed to cover, there was no time for this discussion so I cut it off. I relayed the story to my then department chair expecting him to tell me to avoid these discussions because they are not part of my course objectives. Instead, he suggested that I embrace them, even if they use some lecture time. This is exactly the type of question, he suggested, that should be acknowledged and engaged, be open to it. In short, I should connect cellular function to the effect on a patient’s life, an effect that seemingly has nothing to do with cells or molecules (i.e., my learning objectives), an effect like insurance premiums after a diagnosis. This is not just using another clinical scenario or example to...
increase content understanding but instead to connect the basic science information directly to the patient’s life. I should be teaching the whole student to recognize the whole patient. The terms Spiritan pedagogy and cura personalis were not used, but in retrospect were certainly implied.

Embracing this philosophy I now not only engage these issues but on occasion purposefully plant seeds during lecture so more discussions might arise. Students recognize this and are now more likely to engage discussion inside or outside the classroom to explore not only course material but also the larger implications of the material to society and life.

An example from the following semester illustrates the idea. To describe thyroid hormone function it is necessary to discuss dietary intake of iodine. Iodine is a chemical building block of thyroid hormone, without which our bodies cannot synthesize it. Dietary intake of iodine is therefore necessary for the human body to produce thyroid hormone. Severe iodine deficiencies, in very young children, can cause permanent mental retardation; in older children and adults it causes physical deformities (goiters). In the US, iodine deficiencies are rare as nearly all the salt consumed in the US has been treated with iodine. Iodized salt is an inexpensive product that prevents thousands of cases of hypothyroidism (low thyroid levels) every year in developed countries like the US. Yet this is not the case throughout the world. There are thousands of preventable cases of mental retardation that occur every year in developing countries that could be completely prevented by the intake of iodized salt.

With the intention of educating the whole person, after a forty minute lecture on the molecular process of thyroid hormone production and function, I presented two slides describing how thousands of children are born each year in Africa with mental retardation simply due to a lack of salt. The treatment which can completely prevent or alleviate the condition is to consume iodized salt, costing only five cents per child per year.8 I mentioned that several non-profit organizations were trying to address the issue. After the class, a student approached me. She told me that she was a member of the Kiwanis organization (known as Circle K on college campuses) and then explained how Kiwanis along with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation is currently delivering salt to
more than a million African people each year and this has saved many lives. She provided several other details of which I was unaware; so I investigated further on my own. For the next lecture I added five more slides describing how Kiwanis (along with other organizations) accomplished this task and the effect it has on worldwide human health. Serendipitously, the lecture occurred on the 100th anniversary of the Kiwanis organization. The student was a member (at the time, president) of the Duquesne Circle K club, which allowed me to weave the discussion from textbook pictures of a cell, to people in Africa, then back to Duquesne, and to a student in our class who was working to make a difference. It all seemed amazingly coincidental. My original intention was holistic education, cura personalis, to plant the seed of a relationship to the larger world. But by being open to the spirit of the situation (the student in this case), I was able to demonstrate a model of interrelatedness of our seemingly un-relatable, dry, textbook information to disease prevention in Africa and how one student can contribute to making that difference. Recognition of the student for providing this information, during lecture, further modeled the care of the individual.

In addition to cura personalis and openness to the Spirit, this story highlights three additional components of Spiritan pedagogy that have previously been mentioned, a global vision (in this case, health), a commitment to service (volunteer organizations like Kiwanis), and concern for the poor (in a global health care context). As professors in large lecture halls we are always looking for ways to connect students to the information. Sometimes a personal story or just a unique analogy that students can relate to will improve understanding. Most would agree that this is a good teaching technique. But if the intention is not just to increase understanding but to increase understanding in a certain way, then it becomes something unique. If the intention is to connect the students’ understanding of the material to a global vision of health, community, and service, then it seems we are discussing something distinctive. Any professor is looking to connect the information to the student so the student can assimilate the information into their own personal context, understand it and use it. The context in which it is presented is what makes it unique. When the context is based on certain principles, and when it is meant to inform the whole person, as opposed to just another
Developing Community by Acknowledgement

The motto of the Spiritan Congregation, “One Heart and One Soul,” itself seems to evoke a certain sense of community. For Spiritans this is often expressed in communal living, prayer, and work. Developing a sense of community in a large lecture hall, regardless of how we are going to define community, is however going to be a challenge. Recognizing the individual by learning names would be a good start. However, learning about 100 names in one semester is rarely feasible, although an attempt to learn as many names as possible is often appreciated by students. At Duquesne, professors can obtain photo rosters before the semester and to supplement these I often have students complete an online journal entry in Blackboard and have them include a recent photo to further assist me in learning a few names. But, teaching more than 100 students, especially if teaching multiple sections of a course, only so much can be done. The effort to do this importantly models an act of recognition of the individual and is at least a brick in the road of building community. Recognition, as argued by Hyde, is a preliminary step toward acknowledgment. Acknowledgment is a process of attuning one's consciousness toward another and his or her expression of a topic, to create a personal connection where we can “know together” (con-scientia). It may not be possible to recognize all individuals, but to move toward acknowledgment creates a deeper connection to the individual and group.

While passing through the campus Union Building last semester a student from my class, who was an attendant of a student organization booth, offered me a ribbon “in support of Women’s Heart Health.” I paused. In a society where we are all constantly accosted by billboards, video screens, and people soliciting merchandise, or for a cause or organization, it’s easy enough to say “thank you” and just keep moving. Personally, I experience this everyday traversing through downtown Pittsburgh to catch public transportation (bus or train), so I am familiar with this scenario and by instinct I just keep moving. For some reason, on that day, I accepted the token and paused to listen. I learned the Alpha Phi organization is a sorority dedicated to advancing women’s lives through the power of philanthropy; the primary philanthropic cause being...
women’s heart health.\textsuperscript{12} She cited some statistics and told me a bit about the work that they do in support of women’s heart health. Again serendipitously there was a connection to our class. We were about to spend the next six lectures covering cardiovascular physiology. At the time, for this portion of the class, I did not have a Spiritan pedagogy tie-in. After some due diligence of researching it myself, I saw this as a perfect societal connection. But this time I chose to acknowledge and give credit to where it was due; so I later asked the student if she would be willing to talk to the class for about 10 minutes regarding women’s heart health and what her organization does. There were actually several members of Alpha Phi in my class so they gave a group presentation. We all learned something from that presentation as this was news to me as well. This story, I believe, takes a step beyond recognition of the student (knowing a name), to being an act of acknowledgment (by recognizing, accepting, and supporting a belief). It eventually became an act of what has been referred to as, “walking with learners,”\textsuperscript{13} as I sat listening to their lecture with the rest of the class. This again brought our content of discussing seemingly dry molecular details of protein ion channels and electrochemical gradients in myocardial cells out into the societal community of heart health and health disparities, and it acknowledges individual students for the work they do. This story might seem to be incidental, trivial, or random. But it is an example of what can be set in motion by practicing the principles of openness to the Spirit, holistic teaching, and trying to connect to students to create community. This has the further consequence of increasing student engagement and overall buy-in of the course content. I have heard Father Bill Christy, C.S.Sp. (personal interview, September 9, 2016) remark that many of the major events that Spiritans have undertaken throughout their over 300 year history were seemingly “accidental.” I expect many more of these “accidental” events to occur in my classroom in the coming years.

**High Academic Standards**

Education of the whole person requires high academic standards. With the discussion of classroom community, openness to the spirit, global concern, and care of the whole person, it could give the impression of a less rigorous environment. Yet, Spiritan pedagogy and *cura personalis* require just the opposite. To lower academic standards would suggest and model that care, compassion,
To serve the whole student, their deficiencies cannot be ignored. Otherwise they are set up for future failure.  

Conclusion

Spiritan pedagogical principles are applicable in large lecture classrooms and may enhance learning outcomes of stated and unstated objectives. It certainly will educate the whole person. *Cura personalis* can be viewed as a principle of Spiritan pedagogy at Duquesne University as it is already present in many forms across our campus. It is reflected in our mission statement, administrators, and our core curriculum grounded in the liberal arts. It is also present in large lecture halls of the basic sciences. There it can be seen not just as a tool to teach the science of human physiology but as a part of the understanding of what it means to be human. There it can become a distinctive pedagogy.

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Endnotes


7See the references in note 2 above.


10Ibid.


Bernard A. Kelly C.S.Sp. was ordained in Ireland 1961. He received the STL from Fribourg University, Switzerland (1962), then taught theology at St Augustine's Seminary, Toronto (1964 to 1968). He gained the doctorate at the Cité Universitaire, Paris in 1978 with a thesis on Libermann, subsequently published as *Life began at Forty. The Second Conversion of Francis Libermann, C.S.Sp.* (1983). One time Provincial of Trans-Canada and missionary in Papua New Guinea, Fr. Kelly became general councillor in Rome (1992-1998) and director of the Center for Spiritan Studies, Duquesne University (2009 to 2012). He has written two short studies, *Where are you?* and *You are here*, on Libermann's spirituality.

**IF YOU ONLY KNEW WHAT GOD IS OFFERING**

If you only knew what God is offering and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me something to drink,’ you would have been the one to ask, and he would have given you living water (John 4:10).

“If you only knew what God is offering.” This phrase from Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan woman somehow leaps out of the context and takes on a life of its own. He badly needs a drink of water. She is surprised by the unexpected request which crosses cultural boundaries, but she wants to help.

As he slakes his thirst, he begins to speak of “living water” that he can provide. “If you only knew what God is offering ... you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.” Until now she has been aware only of a request, there is no sign of anything being “on offer.” Her interest is aroused and a conversation begins. To her bafflement, he takes the lead and they wander down the personal corridors of her life. Undeterred by her failed relationships that come to light, he insists on his offer of “living water.”

“Living water” turns out to be a very personal gift and it changes her life. She becomes a missionary. She proclaimed to her own people what had happened and the people rushed to meet Jesus. In their turn the people declared her a true missionary when they testified: “Now we no longer believe because of what you told us; we have heard him ourselves and we know that he is indeed the Saviour of the world” (John 4:42). She had somehow brought about the transparency that is a goal of all missionary activity.

“What God is offering” is usually challenging. It pushes the boundaries of our thinking and threatens our customary way of acting. We move into a more penetrating self-knowledge which may be embarrassing. We face the challenge of a new self-acceptance. We may shy away from going public. We may draw back from becoming missionary.
Mission and God’s word.

Francis Libermann wrote his commentary on the first twelve chapters of the Gospel of John in 1840. He was 38. He was a student for the priesthood still unsure of his future because of his epilepsy. He was in Rome seeking approval for a missionary project to French colonies, in particular Haiti and Reunion. This had been the dream of two seminarians, Eugene Tisserant from Haiti and Frederick Levavasseur from Reunion, whom he had met in France. Another very interested colleague, Maxime de la Brunière, who had accompanied him to Rome, had judged that the difficulties were so great that the project had little chance of success and he had returned to France.

Then, as now, the wheels at the Vatican turn slowly. And the project was complicated. The leaders were without financial resources. In touching on the question of liberated slaves, they were touching a nerve in the world’s economic structure. And then for Libermann there was a major personal drawback. Because he had suffered epileptic seizures, the road to priesthood was closed to him.

In his commentary on Chapter 4 of John’s Gospel, Libermann is intrigued by the episode with the Samaritan woman. He seems surprised by the openness of Jesus.

This is remarkable. Our adorable Master was more willing to announce eternal truths to this poor woman, degraded by sin, who was decried by her own people, a stranger despised by the Jews as a Samaritan, than to Nicodemus, a pious Jew, a doctor of the law and a prince of the people, who had come, nevertheless, with good intentions. He spoke to her more clearly and directly than to the doctor of the law.¹

At the same time it sounds echoes for him. He recognises her prayer with its mixture of desire and puzzlement, the struggle between “living water” and the tug of passions. In his commentary, he himself joins the ranks of all who know this struggle.

So they say to our Lord: ‘Lord Jesus, give me this living water to satiate my soul, which without this good surrenders to its passions and seeks nourishment in worldly goods. I am always thirsty; and not having your divine water of grace

I go and pursue the goods of this world. In these I seek pleasure. Lord, give me your living water that my passions may be satisfied and that I may no longer draw upon the pleasures of earth.\(^2\)

The emotional commotion of the passions is part of being human. It brings excitement, it spurs on our creativity. It may also mask our radical need for “living water,” for “what God is offering.” The surprise of the discovery of “what God is offering” is a turning point in life, for Libermann as for the Samaritan woman. For him it is a slow adventure, less spectacular than the marital adventures of the woman but also tortuous with surprising unexpected developments.

At this stage of his life, nothing was very clear. He had an attic room in Rome, in a building long since destroyed (Vicolo del Pinaco, no. 31, with M. Patriarche), not far from the Piazza Navona. The proprietor was kindly and Libermann’s needs were simple. He provided his own meals for the most part. He had a table to work at but he had to be careful not to bump his head on the ceiling when he stood up. When he returned to France the following year he sent a Christmas letter to M. Patriarche with greetings in Italian for all the members of the family.

Mission as “God’s Work”

“Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give will never thirst.”

Libermann continues his commentary on Chapter 4 of John’s Gospel:

After casting these first glimmers of truth into her mind and after making her soul more docile and attentive to his divine voice, our divine master advances further diffusing the brilliant light of his grace. At the same time he gives her will an impetus to move forward energetically to that saving water he so greatly desired to give. Yet he still refrained from giving full clarity until she underwent a complete change, but he was disposing her and preparing her for that perfect grace.

That is how divine wisdom gradually deals with souls, to have them come to the peak of his holiness and love. He gives a first grace we
must be faithful to, and if we are, we receive a more perfect one; to the extent that we properly respond to these graces our divine benefactor proceeds until we have entered the sanctuary of his divine love. Then there is no more piecemeal giving. He gives and bestows himself with a generosity that surpasses all understanding. This is how he dealt with the Samaritan woman; as he progressed with her he enlightened her, constantly preparing her for further illumination. He said: ‘anyone who drinks from that material water which was given to you by Jacob continues to thirst; but the living water which I give is not like that. Those who drink of the water I give experience no more thirst, not only in this world but for all eternity.’

3

Libermann was writing from experience. He had known God’s respectful, patient approach. His father had been Rabbi of Saverne and had nurtured in him a strong faith that was severely shaken when, at age 20, he left home to study at the rabbinical school in Metz. It was a tumultuous time for Jews in France, who had only recently been granted the right of citizenship. The foundations of his worldview were shaken, most seriously by the conversion to Catholicism of his eldest and favourite brother, Samson. In Paris it was time to pray again:

It was then that I thought of the God of my fathers and I threw myself on my knees and begged him to enlighten me concerning the true religion. I prayed to him that if the belief of Christians was true, he would let me know and that if it was false, he would at once remove me far from it. The Lord, who is near to those who call on him from the depths of their heart, heard my prayer. In an instant I was enlightened, I saw the truth: faith penetrated my mind and my heart.

4

In baptism Jacob Libermann became Francis Libermann. He was immediately disowned by his heartbroken father. Without knowing clearly what it might entail, he devoted himself to “God’s work.” If he had received the refreshment of “living water,” it was to share it with others. He joined the seminary of Saint Sulpice. Then he had his first epileptic attack and his future became very uncertain. Undeterred, he accepted
the insecurity. His conviction that he was engaged in “God’s work” brought him an unshakable resilience.

His brother Samson, a medical doctor, must have been surprised, maybe even troubled, by the letter he received from him in July 1830, where he made little of his illness.

And why should you be sorry on my account? Are you afraid I shall die of hunger? Well, the Lord feeds the birds of the fields, and will he not find means to feed me also? He loves me more than he does the birds of the fields.5

Francis’ situation was clearly very uncertain. He was happy to entrust his future entirely into God’s hands. It was enough for him to be engaged in “God’s work.” This conviction became a cornerstone of support in many moments of difficult decision. It served as a personal compass when the direction he should take was unclear. Of course, some people grew impatient at his waiting for “God’s moment.” Others were surprised that he would consider holiness more important in a missionary than human ability.

At Saint Sulpice, he developed a reputation as a spiritual guide and went to the Eudists at Rennes as novice master. His two years there were a time of struggle and frustration, the beginning of an interest in foreign missionary work and especially a deepening of his prayer life, where Mary had a central role.

Mary, Guide to What God is Offering.

For Mary what God was offering became known through the dialogue of life (the angel Gabriel, Joseph, the birth of Jesus, the shepherds, the magi, Simeon, Anna, the flight to Egypt, the adolescent who went missing ... the surprises of her son’s ministry all the way to the cross). She became the companion of Libermann in his search for what God was offering him. On 9 February 1844, he wrote to Fr. Desgenettes at the parish of Notre Dame des Victoires in Paris:

It is absolutely certain that our little Work for the Black Peoples owes both its foundation and the progress it has made in the few short years of its existence to the powerful protection of the Most Holy and Immaculate Heart of Mary6
Back in Rome in 1840, Libermann was a frequent visitor to Marian churches and his return to Rome from a pilgrimage to Loreto (mostly on foot) was greeted by the news that he was accepted for diaconate in the diocese of Strasbourg.

The most spectacular indication of a Marian intervention in 1840 occurred when Libermann set himself to draw up a provisional rule for the missionary group. He and Levavasseur favoured a dedication to the Holy Cross. Tisserant was convinced that the dedication should be to the Holy Heart of Mary. Here is how Libermann describes what happened.

I thought that the society should be consecrated to some perfect model of all the fundamental virtues of the apostolate. I don’t know why I failed to see that we would find all of that in the devotion to the most holy and immaculate Heart of Mary.

So I fixed my attention on another object of devotion – that of the Cross. I had gone to a lot of trouble to try and write down a Rule for the new society. But it was impossible to find a single idea because my mind went completely blank. I visited the seven most important churches in Rome, and also decided to include some churches where there was a particular devotion to Our Lady. Without quite knowing why, I found myself deciding to consecrate our work to the most holy Heart of Mary. I went back home and immediately got down to work. I then saw everything so clearly that with a single glance I had a complete view of everything, its whole complexity down to the last detail. It was an inexpressible joy and consolation for me.7

This letter to Fr. Desgenettes was not written out of the blue. Notre Dame des Victoires, Fr Desgenettes’ parish in Paris, had been an important part of the genesis and development of the missionary project. It was in the context of the Archconfraternity of the Holy Heart of Mary in the parish that Levavasseur and Tisserant realised that they shared a missionary dream. Later, when Mgr. Barron came to the church of Notre Dame des Victoires to pray for mission assistance for his vast diocese in West Africa, Fr. Desgenettes was able to help by putting him in
touch with Francis Libermann. The beginning of their collaboration brought at first heartbreaking casualties, but subsequently spectacular progress and countless blessings.

**What God is Offering at Duquesne**

This is not a course of study that you sign up for. It is really an invitation to adventure. The woman at the well must have felt Jesus’ interest in her personal life as an invasion of her privacy. Without knowing what it was or having heard of it before, she found herself asking for “living water.” And when she received it, she wanted to share it and found that she had become a missionary.

Some of the characteristics of “doing God’s work” the Libermann way may have a familiar ring. Quite clear is that in the face of the unexpected you stand your ground. You defend yourself. You don’t hide. You stay part of the conversation. Discovering what God is offering may only gradually dawn. It may involve risk. You don’t have to accomplish the task at once. Like Libermann, like the woman at the well, you just take the next step.

Having recourse to Mary is a great help in realising that the discovery of what God is offering will likely be a gradual process. Mary learned what it meant to be the mother of Jesus slowly as she dealt with the surprises during his growing up. By comparison, the experience of the woman at the well could be considered a crash course. Nevertheless, it proceeded step by step all the way from the initial shock to a new understanding that sparked fresh enthusiasm for living, and for sharing the good news.

In the 1960’s a phrase of St. Irenaeus became very popular: *The glory of God is man/woman fully alive.* The rest of the sentence situates human development in the contemplation of God. The ebb and flow of our relations with God come into the working out of the Duquesne motto: *to serve God by serving students.* This is a passport to the adventure of slaking God’s thirst. It can lead to receiving the gift of “living water” that is at once satisfying and disturbing. It holds within it a missionary imperative. It is exciting and challenging and it must be shared. It stays alive by being passed on. Serving God by serving students is a happy way to live. It brings us to the brink of Jesus’ extraordinary revelation: “You did not choose me, no, I chose you” (John 15:16)
Realising God’s interest in us and in what we do is both a challenge and an inspiration. It is at once so disturbing and so encouraging that we cannot keep it to ourselves. We are excited and restless. We want to share our good fortune. We become missionaries.

A missionary is someone who has discovered something exciting, and he/she wants to share the joy, the hope and the meaning that it holds. Spiritans have been doing this for more than three hundred years. Periodically representatives of the worldwide Spiritan family gather to renew their vision and their energy. The most recent gathering of this sort took place in Bagamoyo, Tanzania in 2012.

Sometimes Spiritans in a specialised field come together to share their experience. The most recent meeting of Spiritan educators took place in Rome in July 2011. The Spiritan presenters came from Africa, Latin America, the Indian Ocean, the Caribbean, Europe and North America. President Charles Dougherty delivered a paper giving the aims and achievements of Duquesne University. As well as formal education, informal education was given prominence. In this there was evidence of much creativity at the service of the poor.

The drama played out by the well at Sychar in John’s gospel shows us that responding to the cry of a person in need, in this case a thirsty traveller, can change a life dramatically. This is a challenge we can share whenever the unexpected threatens our routine. The interruption may be unwelcome, but behind the unasked for disturbance may hide wonder and delight. “If you only knew what God is offering...?”

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Endnotes


2. Jesus through Jewish Eyes, Part 1, 113-114.

3. Jesus through Jewish Eyes, Part 1, p109


*A Spiritan Anthology,* 561-562.

*Adversus Haereses,* 4.20.7. *Gloria enim Dei homo vivens, vita autem hominis visio Dei.*

*Spiritan Life* no 23, (Rome: Congregazione dello Spirito Santo, September 2013), is devoted entirely to this meeting of Spiritan educators.
This document was prepared for the 48th Anniversary of the Vatican II Declaration, *Gravissimum Educationis*, On Christian Education.

The “global village” means that Catholic schools are seeing the overlapping and ever-growing presence of students with different cultures and religious beliefs. A central challenge for education becomes an intercultural education that helps to promote coexistence and build a civilization of love and solidarity among the different cultural and religious expressions. Education must thus train to authentic dialogue, a dialogue that is not a compromise, but which starts from one’s faith identity. Christians start from a concept of human life centered on Jesus Christ and the centrality of the human person made in God’s image. This calls for educating the whole person in all aspects of humanity, while leading a search into the elements that characterize other religions and cultures and searching in common for ethical values that define humanity as such. The teaching of the Catholic faith must be confessional, and not just a presentation of the different religions in a comparative and “neutral” way that causes confusion and affords no solid faith basis from which to dialogue. The ecclesial nature of Catholic schools means an education imbued with a Christian spirit, that nevertheless embraces all things human (Christian humanism) while forming the students to professional competences.

To be avoided is both relativistic neutrality that places cultures alongside one another and views them as substantially equivalent and interchangeable and assimilation that demands that the other adapt to one’s one culture. Rather, an intercultural education aims at integrating cultures in mutual recognition. This approach is founded on the firm belief that every culture is a way of expressing the transcendental aspect of life and has values which are common to all. The human being is not an isolated individual, but a person, a being essentially relational. The model for the human family is the Trinity, which is absolute unity within pure relationality. The basic paradigm of relationality calls for a culture of dialogue, understanding, and mutual transformation to reach the common good. Students need be given tools to understand and interact with other cultures and relate them to their own culture, without prejudices of culture, sex, social class or religion. Mutual respect is not enough; persons need be trained to look again at their own cultures with the cultures of others as their starting point, that is, to “reflect on themselves within a perspective of ‘openness to humanity.’” (no. 63). This calls for a pedagogy of communion that implies gift and reciprocity, “love of education” linked to “education to love” (no. 47). The school must respect the family’s culture and religion: parents have the right to determine, in accordance with their own religious beliefs, the kind of religious education their children are to receive (no. 73; cf. Vatican II, Declaration on Human Dignity, no. 5). “Catholic schools are by their very vocation, intercultural” (no. 61). In a Catholic school, one learns to dialogue about the meanings that people of
different religions and cultures attribute to their respective symbols.


CONGREGATION FOR INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND SOCIETIES
OF APOSTOLIC LIFE.
IDENTITY AND MISSION OF THE RELIGIOUS BROTHER IN
THE CHURCH, ‘AND YOU ARE ALL BROTHERS’ (MATT 23:8).
VATICAN CITY, OCTOBER 4, 2015.

Steeped in Vatican II and the Apostolic Exhortation, Vita Consacrata (March 25, 1996), this document is based on the ecclesiology of communion and starts from what unites rather than what divides (no. 8) the states of life in the Church. The term, “Brother” (what is said in this document applies, mutatis mutandis, to religious Sisters) evokes the common vocation of the Baptized to make the face of Jesus-brother visible in the world—brothers of Christ, brothers to one another in mutual love, brothers to everyone in their witness to Christ’s love for all (no. 11). Saying “Brother” is like saying “mediator of God’s love,” the God who so loved the world that he gave his only Son. Mutual love is the hallmark of Christians (cf. John 13:35) and this is the sign which the Brother offers. Their brotherhood creates brotherhood all around (no. 24). As such, they manifest the essential role of brotherly love as the central core of evangelization (no. 23).

The Brother is consecrated and totally given to God. His vows make sense as a way of including, with different nuances, the whole of existence. He makes an offering of his life that it might become a sign of the primacy of God, of a life only for him, a life of commitment to love as the fundamental orientation of life. He offers himself as a guide in the search for God, an expert guide in the spiritual life, sharing his experiences of a life open to God and to people in the light of the Gospel. His life testifies to an incarnated and unifying spirituality—God’s presence is no longer exclusively in a sacred place, rather in the areopagus of human life and culture.

Rooting his life deeply in God, the Brother consecrates all creation, recognizing the presence of God and the Spirit’s action in creation, in cultures and in daily events (no. 16). He takes up various fraternal ministries indicated by the charism of his Congregation and shows how one can seek God in the secular realities of culture, science, human health, the workplace and the care of the weak and disadvantaged. With his brothers, he is committed to quality professional service in every task, no matter how profane. He renders fraternal service to everyone and makes present the gospel value of fraternal relationships of equality. Brother of the Christian people, he hears the Lord’s call to his servant, “I have chosen you as a covenant of the people” (Isa 42:6) and discovers himself to be an instrument which God wants to use to make the covenant, God’s love and concern for the weakest, more visible (no. 13). He thus demonstrates that the maternal tenderness of God and the fraternal love of Christ know no boundaries, that the resurrection of Jesus is the pledge of victory, that the
God of life will have the last word over pain and death (no. 29). The life of the Brother gives a clear answer to the question, “who is my brother”—preferably those who most need his solidarity and who are identified by his founding charism (no. 33).

Mixed Institutes, that is, those formed by religious priests and brothers, must maintain among members a way of relating based on equal dignity, without any differences other than those arising from the diversity of their ministries. In this vein, it is hoped that the question concerning the jurisdiction of Brothers in these Institutes will be resolved with determination and within an opportune time frame (no. 39).

This refreshing document merits not just a read but deep meditation by all who live the consecrated life, be they priests, Brothers, or Sisters.

*James Chukwuma Okoye, C.S.Sp.*

**VATICAN COMMISSION FOR RELIGIOUS RELATIONS WITH THE JEWS.**

**A REFLECTION ON THE THEOLOGICAL QUESTIONS PERTAINING TO CATHOLIC-JEWISH RELATIONS ON THE OCCASION OF THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF NOSTRA AETATE, NO. 4 (DEC 10, 2015).**

The Vatican II Declaration on the Relation of the Church with non-Christian Religions, *Nostra Aetate*, no. 4 dealt, among other things, with the Church’s relations with Judaism. It made clear that if the Church is called the new people of God, it is not in the sense that Israel has ceased being the people of God or that the Church has replaced Israel as the people of God. On 22 October 1974, Paul VI established the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, within the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, to carry on and deepen the Church’s dialogue with Judaism. This Commission has issued many important documents, the latest being the current reflection on theological questions pertaining to Catholic-Jewish Relations. The Commission (no. 38) made the clarification that it was not *Nostra Aetate*, 4 but Saint John Paul II in a meeting with Jewish representatives in Mainz (17 November 1980) who first explicitly declared that the covenant that God made with Israel perdures and was never invalidated. Following this, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 121 stated that “the Old Covenant has never been revoked.” This means that the Jews can hear and respond to God’s word in the Torah and be made right with God. Are there thus two paths to salvation, one for Jews through Torah, the other for Christians through Christ? Christian faith proclaims that Christ’s work is universal and involves all humankind (no. 25). There cannot, therefore, be two ways of salvation, since Christ is Redeemer of Jews and Gentiles alike (no. 37). That the Jews are participants in God’s salvation is theologically unquestionable, but how that can be possible without confessing Christ explicitly is and remains an unfathomable divine
mystery (no. 36). Meantime, the Church neither conducts nor supports any specific institutional mission work directed towards Jews, even if Christians are called to bear witness to their faith in Jesus Christ also to Jews.

The ecological crisis being also a moral crisis, a proper response must include a renewed ethical vision (2). In the search of an interreligious ethical foundation to motivate common action in ecology, Scheid employs comparative theology, which is an interplay back and forth between faith traditions in such manner that key components of the other religion become an integral part of the self-articulation of the home tradition (120). The Earth being our common home, Scheid expands the Catholic social principle of common good onto the cosmic common good to enfold “the entire commonwealth of creation” (27). He engages the Catholic tradition, especially Thomas Aquinas, Augustine, Thomas Berry, and Pope Francis (Laudato Si’) in dialogue with Hindu dharmic ecology, Buddhist interdependence and Lakota balance with all our relations to reconcile the dualisms of theocentrism versus ecocentrism, anthropocentrism versus geocentrism and nature’s intrinsic versus instrumental value.

The Catholic tradition names human dignity as central; Scheid shifts towards the common good to assert interdependency in which the good of the individual emerges only from a healthy social community (18). The cosmos becomes a “commons” and we accept that “the ultimate purpose of other creatures is not to be found in us” (Laudato Si’). Humans take on the responsibility of promoting the flourishing of other creatures and safeguarding the conditions under which a diversity of life may flourish (35).

Both Augustine and Aquinas underscore the theocentric nature of the universe, the ability of each creature and the universe as a whole to contribute to the glory of God (47). All creatures have their own goodness and beauty within the scheme of creation, all exist via participation in God. Both, with differing nuances, affirm a hierarchy of creatures, human beings being the end for which nonhuman creatures are made (51). Thomas Berry, building on the thought of Teilhard de Chardin, saw the universe as both a physical and psychic reality. He did not use the term, cosmic common good, but it dovetails with his world view. While holding to the infinite creativity of God, he also speaks of cosmogenesis, the inherent creativity of the universe to forge something new (70) as self-emergent, self-sustaining, and self-fulfilling (68). Every being in the universe has its interiority, inner spontaneity, and unique articulation: the star organizes hydrogen and helium and produces elements and light (74). Every creature exists for communion, has its own role to fill in the universe and declares itself in its own voice to every other creature. Self-consciousness properly belongs to the universe, in its human expression (75).

Hindu dharma, the law that governs the universe, refers to how all that exists is supported and ordered; it includes nonhumans in the greater good to which humans must contribute. Ātman, the stable, changeless self, resides in each creature and performs its dharma; it is the same in all creatures. It can exist as a god, a human, an animal, even a blade of grass. The ethic of ahimsa (non-injury, non-violence) respects
the divinity within all creatures. Buddhist *pratītyasamutpāda* (dependent origination, interbeing, interpenetration of beings) *with anattā* (no-self) constructs a universe where everything exists as it is because of its connections to innumerable others. The sense of a separate self is delusional; there is no stable self beneath our physical and mental processes. Each entity consists of innumerable little particles dependent on one another and each creature is both cause and effect. There is no center, or if there is it is everywhere; no hierarchy, no telos or ultimate purpose, no further source outside the universe, which is self-creating, self-maintaining, and self-defining organism (157). Expansion of the self to include the universe reinforces the ecological common good as intrinsically human good. The Lakota are rightly suspicious of “common good” since that was the predicate of their disempowerment and exploitation. For them, the story of imperiled Earth is also theirs as an indigenous people. The prayer, *mitakuye oyasin* (“all my relations”) and the symbolism of the circle portray the kinship of all living and non-living creatures within a particular location and land. Spatiality has priority over temporality, the community (of beings) over the individual. Disruption of the balance or harmony may at times be necessary (for example, hunting for food), but ceremonial acts counterbalance the disruption. Person, society, and the land are intertwined, making a purely human common good unthinkable.

Traditional Catholic social thought derives human rights from equal human dignity as image of God. Rights correspond to responsibility in others, so some theologians insist that rights apply only to human society, for only they exist for moral agents (104). However, Earth has rights that are appropriate to the kind of creature. Rivers have river rights, insects have insect rights (106). Scheid outlines Earth’s Rights on pages 113-115. They include the right to exist as Earth, to the basic creaturely inclinations one possesses as a member of one’s species, to habitat (a place to be and to live), to restoration (for degraded Earth).

This well-researched book on a Catholic cosmic common good ethics integrates insights from Hindu, Buddhist, and Lakota faith traditions on ecology. I highly recommend it to mature readers, ministers and all who advocate care for our common home.

*James Chukwuma Okoye, C.S.Sp.*

The 1884 3rd Plenary Council of Baltimore decreed that all parishes in the US construct Catholic schools and each diocese to establish a commission of examination (mainly clergy) to oversee these schools. These Catholic schools served the Catholic immigrant ethnic populations, becoming a vital source of acculturation and social upliftment. In 1965, the year of Gravissimum Educationis (henceforth GE), there were 10,667 Catholic elementary schools in the US with over 4,431,000 students; numbers began to decline after (see below). At the same time, there were 240 Catholic institutions of higher learning, enrolling 410,000 students; today the same number enrolls 950,000 students, 65% of whom are Catholic (p. 102). GE insisted on the primary right of parents to educate their children. The goal of Catholic education is to prepare students for both earthly and heavenly citizenship, thereby fostering the maturity of the whole person in every aspect - intellectual, moral, religious, social and civic – (pp. 46-47). GE itself did not deal with school governance, but lay governance and school boards arose because better poised to mediate between Church and government and to seek and receive funds from government and social bodies.

Important documents from the Congregation for Catholic Education include The Catholic School (1977); Educating to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools (2013); and Educating Today and Tomorrow: A Renewing Passion (2014). Saint John Paul II in 1990 issued Ex Corde Ecclesiae that insisted on what makes a university Catholic, hallmarks being integration of faith and reason and explicit fidelity to the Church’s teaching and magisterium. Among important documents of the US Bishops’ Conference are To Teach
as Jesus Did (1972) and Renewing our Commitment to Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools in the Third Millennium (2005).

“Catholic schools are especially effective in making a difference in closing the achievement gap for poor and minority students in urban areas” (p. 65). They are “more effective than public schools in educating African American students…” (p. 66). “Catholics now comprise one of the best educated and financially secure groups in the United States” (p. 151). Students of other faiths, especially Muslims, find Catholic institutions safe places, places of integration of intellectual growth with spiritual growth (p. 103). Unlike their Protestant counterparts (the Ivy Schools) which went secular, Catholic higher institutions have remained largely Catholic. Some reasons are their connection with a founding religious community, the stress on mission and identity, and theology as an important discipline in the Catholic university.

Catholic elementary schools have been in decline since 1965. Today there are only 5,399 elementary schools with 1,392,000 students (p. 7). At the same time, home schooling continues to grow and expand (p. 133), other religious groups (Jews, Muslims, Evangelicals…) are opening private schools in cities and suburbs so their children can be brought up “in the faith” (p. 135). A persistent issue for the Catholic school is cost and affordability. Overheads rose sharply when poorly remunerated religious and clergy abandoned elementary and high schools for direct “pastoral work.” Demographic shifts depleted inner-cities with large Catholic populations, leading to the closure of parishes and parish schools. The new Hispanic immigrants (currently 17% of the US population) send their children to the affordable public schools. Charter schools compete and are often publicly funded. Many Catholic schools and colleges face a situation where a majority of their students are from wealthier families; they are having to do soul-searching about the vocation of the Catholic school for the preferential option for the poor and the less fortunate. A successful example is the Cristo Rey Network (28 urban schools with 9,000 students nationally, 96% being students of color) which enrolls only low-income students and includes work experience as part of the curriculum. A way to the future of the Catholic school may lie in the charter school, vouchers to parents to send their children to a Catholic school, large-scale funding from alumni and lay groups, and shared ownership and leadership with the laity. The Church must also find an inroad to the large-scale education of Hispanics who will soon reach a quarter of the US population.

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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