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# Introduction

*Spiritan Horizons* is a journal of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit and Duquesne University of the Holy Spirit. Published annually by the **Center for Spiritan Studies** at Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, 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. 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 the Spiritan charism available for learning and teaching. It likewise serves all people who wish to benefit from the Spiritan charism in their various callings.

*Spiritan Horizons* 8 focuses on the four priorities of mission for the next eight years as decided by the **Bagamoyo** (Tanzania) 2012 General Chapter, namely, mission as evangelization of the poor, mission as interreligious dialogue, mission as promotion of justice, peace, and the integrity of creation, and mission as education (Bagamoyo 1.7-32). **Marc Whelan**, who presided over the chapter after the election of the superior general, reflects on how we may drink from our own wells for the energy of this new mission. **Pedro Iwashita** takes up the issue of Spiritan mission and spirituality after Bagamoyo, precisely interreligious dialogue from a Latin American perspective. **Pedro Fernandes** reflects on the Spiritan community in mission and the tensions sometimes posed between community and mission. He does this through an in-depth commentary on Libermann's *Provisional Rule* of 1845. **Anthony Gittins** takes up the vexed question of "Spiritian Spirituality."

In the next section, Soundings, **Donald Nesti** presents a possible template for the New Evangelization at the Center for Faith and Culture, University of St. Thomas, Houston, Texas. **Fintan Sheerin** wonders whether the policy of excluding people with disabilities conforms to the praxis of Jesus. **Jocelyn Gregoire** and **Christin Jungers** bring the section to a close with investigations on How Catholic Priests Grieve Losses.

**Philip Massawe** opens the section on Education with a commentary on the new *Guide for Spiritan Formation*. The reflection on Spiritan pedagogy prepared by the **Education Committee of the US Province** for their 2012 chapter may help other circumscriptions formulate and share their own Spiritan education policies. Finally, **David Somers**, a Duquesne professor who just retired to dedicate himself to the poor district of Hazelwood (Pittsburgh area), reflects on the mission of a Spiritan university.

**Raymond Gonnet** opens the Lived Experience section with a short but deep reflection on interreligious dialogue in Algeria; he tells of Muslims asking for and joining the Focolare Movement as Muslim Focolari! **Brian Starken** reports on his mission in peacebuilding in Sierra Leone and shares some of his vast experiences working with Caritas Internationalis on Peacebuilding.

## **SPIRITAN STUDIES SCHOLAR IN RESIDENCE PROGRAM**

The Center for Spiritan Studies at Duquesne University solicits applications from Spiritans for the Spiritan Studies Scholar in Residence Program. It is ideal for sabbaticals. Fr. Jean Pascal Lombart, C.S.Sp., former superior of Taiwan, started this August as the first Spiritan Scholar in Residence.

### **DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY SPIRITAN SCHOLAR-IN-RESIDENCE PROGRAM PILOT**

#### **Description**

Launched in 2013, the Spiritan Scholar-in-Residence Program provides an opportunity for selected individuals to conduct research on the Spiritan tradition with immersion in the extensive resources available at Duquesne University. These resources include the extensive print and online resources of the Center for Spiritan Studies and the Gumberg Library. They also include access to academic courses and faculty expertise, the Spiritan community, and various other educational and religious organizations in the Pittsburgh area. The Program operates on an academic year calendar (nine months, September through May). In order to ensure a quality experience and adequate support, the program is limited to a maximum of three participants each year. At this time the program is open only to qualified Spiritans.

#### **Purpose**

The Spiritan Scholar in Residence Program was created by the Center for Spiritan Studies of Duquesne University with endorsement of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit. The purpose of the program is to develop a new generation of scholarly specialists in Spiritan Studies. Therefore the program is academic and research-oriented. Outcomes of the program will include lectures, colloquia and publishable articles and books on topics such as:

- Spiritan Founders and Heroes
- Spiritan Rules, Constitutions and Chapters, especially since Vatican II
- Spiritan History, including the history of various missions or circumscriptions
- The French School of Spirituality and its times
- The Theology of the Holy Spirit
- The Holy Spirit in Spiritan Life and Mission
- Spiritan Mission, Yesterday and Today
- Spiritan Pedagogy and Education
- Spiritans and Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation (JPIC)
- Spiritan Experiences in Interreligious dialogue

#### **Eligibility**

Eligible candidates who may apply or be invited to participate in the Spiritan Scholar-in-Residence Program include Spiritans, especially those in formation roles, who fulfill the academic requirements. Candidates must possess academic qualifications and demonstrated research ability, as well as language competency in English and French. Spiritan candidates are nominated by the general council and must also receive all necessary approvals from their respective authorities. All non-U.S. citizens must be able to travel to the United States with necessary government visas.

### **Privileges and Support for Scholars-in-Residence**

Duquesne University will provide library access and technology support, including a laptop computer (if needed). A faculty mentor will be matched to each scholar. Spiritan scholars may reside on campus as a member of the community in Trinity Hall. Other services may be considered as needed.

### **Application Process**

In order to apply for the Spiritan Scholar-in-Residence Program, the candidate should submit an application form with attached documentation to: Director, Center for Spiritan Studies, Duquesne University, 18 Chatham Square, Pittsburgh, PA 15282. Documents may also be sent by e-mail to Fr. James Chukwuma Okoye at [okoyej@duq.edu](mailto:okoyej@duq.edu).

Required documentation includes a resume or Curriculum Vitae (C.V.) and a personal statement of 1,000 words or less outlining a proposed research project that conforms to the topics listed in the Purpose section. Candidates should also provide a letter of recommendation or support from their respective Superior. Application deadline is February 1, 2014.

### **Selection Process**

Applications will be reviewed by the Director of the Center for Spiritan Studies and by the Dean of the McAnulty College and Graduate School. Successful applicants will be notified by the Director by May 1, 2014.

**THE CENTER FOR SPIRITAN STUDIES ANNOUNCES AN  
INTERNATIONAL ESSAY COMPETITION ON  
SPIRITAN IDENTITY AND VOCATION**

The competition is part of the Animation Plan of the General Council. It will hold from October 2, 2013 to Pentecost 2014. It is destined to professed Spiritan students in both cycles of formation.

**Topic: *Spiritan Identity and Vocation***

The essay will demonstrate the following qualities:

- Knowledge of Spiritan tradition and history
- Insight into the meaning of the religious missionary life
- Deep and critical evaluation of the question of identity in the contemporary world
- Adequate contextualization of the topic in the local church
- Concrete proposals for the renewal of Spiritan identity in the contemporary world
- Personal experience of the Spiritan missionary life will be appreciated

**Methodology:** The essay, which can be written in English, French, or Portuguese, should be well researched, 1.5 line spaced and should not exceed 15 pages (or 4,500 words). The font should be Times New Roman 12 cpi. It should include full bibliographical data and footnotes. Essays are to be forwarded to The Director, Center for Spiritan Studies, 18 Chatham Square, Pittsburgh, PA 15282 or by email [okoyej@duq.edu](mailto:okoyej@duq.edu) Participants should know that abundant resources, among others, are available at the Spiritan Collection at Duquesne: <http://digital.library.duq.edu/cdm-spiritan/>

**Prizes:** The best three essays will be published and the authors will receive a Kindle, the first overall also receiving a Certificate from the Center for Spiritan Studies, Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, USA. The results will be announced by Pentecost 2015.

**Assessors:** Assessors for each of the three languages will be Spiritan experts chosen through the Center for Spiritan Studies, Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, USA.

**VENERABLE LIBERMANN'S PROVISIONAL RULE, 1845**

No published work exists in English of Libermann's 1845 *Provisional Rule* with Fr. Lannurien's glosses. Walter van der Putte's translation of this exists only in manuscript (available on the Spiritan Collection). The text published in John Daly, *Spiritan Wellsprings: The Original Rules with Commentaries*. Dublin: Paraclete Press, 1986 is of the 1849 edition which lacks the glosses and whose text differs.

The Center for Spiritan Studies proposes to check van der Putte's translation against the original and to publish this precious piece if a sufficient number of confreres and houses of formation indicate interest. Please email, fax, or phone the director of the Center.

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## Marc Whelan, C.S.Sp.

Marc Whelan was professed in the Congregation in 1982 and studied philosophy in Ireland and theology in France, including a specialisation in Liturgy and Sacramental Theology. The subject of his research was “A reflection on charism and sacrament / tradition and modernity with regard to the sacrament of the sick in contemporary Africa.” His mission appointment was to the West African Foundation where he worked in Ghana in pastoral work and then, in 1996, was appointed to the Indian Ocean Foundation where he worked in formation in Reunion Island and Mauritius as Rector of the Inter-Island Seminary of the Indian Ocean. Returning to Ireland in 2008 he worked in the Office for Spiritan Life and also with Spirasi, the Spiritan initiative for asylum seekers in Ireland. Currently Marc is on the leadership team of the Irish Province as the Provincial Superior.

# DRINKING FROM OUR OWN WELLS BAGAMOYO 2012 AND SPIRITAN IDENTITY AND TRADITION

It has been said of Chapters, and especially General Chapters, that they are often such deep and profound experiences as to render them incommunicable to anyone who was not present at them. And that is the challenge of any assembly or chapter of the Congregation. How does one transmit not just a text and decisions but also a spirit and an élan that encourages and strengthens the community to look to the future with hope and confidence?

This was my first participation at a General Chapter of the Congregation and so I arrived in Bagamoyo with a clear sense of being a neophyte. Much to my surprise and joy, I discovered that I was not the only one in this case. In fact, for a large majority of capitulants this was, indeed, their first chapter. It was to be a baptism for all of us who found ourselves in the same situation. With this frame of mind I thought that the opening ritual was very appropriate when, on the evening of the first day we went down to the waters of the Indian Ocean to pray and participate in the remembering of the first Spiritan missionaries who arrived from across the sea and whose first task was to lift up and liberate the hearts of those whose lives had been enslaved.<sup>1</sup>

In his preface to the chapter documents, John Fogarty, the Superior General, recalled that event by reminding us that this simple ritual captured the fundamental significance and purpose of our Chapter. This is the call to return to our sources and to seek new inspiration and new courage for our Spiritan life and mission today.

When I was asked to write this article, my thoughts went back to the chapter to remember for myself what was the water that I was given to drink during those four weeks and where were the wells that would ensure that we Spiritans continue to drink from the source of life.

## Sources Present at the Chapter

There are five gospels which speak about the life of Jesus. We find four Gospels in books of the Bible and one Gospel in the landscape and context of the place and time that was Jesus' environment. If we read the fifth Gospel, the others will open up before us. In the same way with this Chapter in Bagamoyo,

the landscape and historical context of the place are key to understanding the spirit and texts of the Chapter.

James Chukwuma Okoye, who was at the service of the Chapter as theological resource person and who punctuated the days of discussion and deliberation with moments of theological reflection, spoke these words as we began the Chapter: “Today Black Africa hosts a chapter of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit! The history of our Congregation comes full circle. The Congregation began with Poullart des Places; the Savoyards and twelve poor seminary students on Pentecost Sunday 1703. Under Libermann, the Congregation took on the enslaved black peoples as its principal mission. Now, the Congregation comes home to roost in black Africa.”<sup>2</sup> Chukwuma would conclude his reflections at the end of the Chapter by observing that the Congregation is now like a mosaic, or *rainbow family*, defined by a common mission to the poor and in which every member feels a citizen wherever he or she is on mission.<sup>3</sup> This might explain the fact that Circumscription Europe elected an African as their delegate and the Circumscription of Kenya chose a European!

Of course, as with many chapters the wells we are looking for can be more like wishing wells. We bring a list of things that we wish for and we seek for change and renewal thinking that this can happen without effort or by simply closing our eyes and making a wish! If only life was so easy. This point was made at the chapter by one delegate who reminded us that the truth and verification of a text is not in its publication but in its being lived out in the life and mission of those who would read it. There was a tendency during this chapter, perhaps because of our relative inexperience, to think that the necessary renewal and correction of dysfunctionality could be remedied by a prescriptive text.

But this inexperience was also a strength at the Chapter. There was a very clear sense of a generational shift in the Congregation that is also part of the demographic evolution that we have been experiencing over the past thirty years. There is the energy of youth which, for any Congregation, is an extraordinary well to be able to drink from. There is a freshness and zest which we experience at these new wells. They might lack the solidity and tradition of some of the older wells but they are capable of irrigating the contemporary field of mission with a new supply of water adapted to ever-changing needs of a world in constant transformation.

It is true also that at the chapter there were a good number of more experienced Spiritans whose long experience and fidelity to their mission was also a wonderful well to be able to drink from.

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At these wells we encountered wisdom and tradition. We could imagine the many men and women who over the years have had their lives touched and transformed by these life-giving waters.

I left Bagamoyo then with a sense that not all our wells have dried up and that there are still life-giving streams within the Spiritan family capable of sustaining us in our mission. Certainly there is always the danger that wells dry up or we lose heart because we have to dig too deep before we find the water we are seeking. In some cases the water has become contaminated and muddied and so no longer fit for giving to anyone to drink. It can happen also that while the well remains in place people have moved on. The well is now too far removed to serve any purpose. Other wells have become weakened and need strengthening in order to find again their primary purpose.

### **We Drink from our own Wells**

“The Word of God is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (Rom 10:8). The proximity of God’s Word to us is read not just in the text but also the events and relationships that weave together the different strands of our life. By following Jesus’ injunction to read and discern the signs of the times, we acknowledge that it is precisely in this time that God’s spirit is present to us. As Spiritans, as men and women consecrated to the Holy Spirit (Bagamoyo 2.1), we must be particularly attentive to this presence because it is this presence that enables the Word we proclaim to be Good News, here and now.

The expression *We drink from our own Wells* comes from Bernard of Clairvaux in his book *De consideratione* (On Consideration) which was addressed to the new pope Eugenius III in the twelfth century. According to Bernard’s theology we must think, pray and work in the place from which we receive our nourishment. In other words we find and seek to understand our faith identity in the context in which we find ourselves. It is in this space and time that is given us to live that we develop and define our spirituality.

But the phrase is perhaps most familiar to us from the work of Gustavo Gutiérrez and his seminal book on spirituality: *We Drink from our own Wells: The Spiritual Journey of a People*.<sup>4</sup> Gutiérrez’s theology is well known: “the experience that comes from the Spirit” is to be found in the midst of a people’s struggle for liberation and that it is through this struggle and graced with God’s gift of faith, hope, and love that we become disciples of Jesus. It is this experience of the praxis of faith and Gospel that is our well - the source of living water.

*The Chapter recognises that more and more our mission is to be grounded in a contemplative life which seeks the integration of our life and ministry.*

The Chapter recognises that more and more our mission is to be grounded in a contemplative life which seeks the integration of our life and ministry. Libermann calls this “practical union.” We are invited to become “more aware of the call to a deeper interior life and a greater integration of our work and prayer” (Bagamoyo 2.4). The last three General Chapters and, indeed, many local Chapters and assemblies have echoed this theme that there can be no missionary life, no Spiritan life, unless it draws deeply from a spiritual life.

This attraction for spirituality is becoming more and more a feature of contemporary life. People will say they are “spiritual” but not necessarily religious. Spirituality is now being understood as a seeking for personal fulfilment and an antidote to the stresses and strains of a busy life. Is this the kind of spirituality that we are talking about? If so then it can be a very narcissistic exercise centred, not on my neighbor and the poor as we find with Jesus, but on my own needs and desire for fulfilment.

Gutiérrez reminds us that spirituality is a community endeavour. “It is the passage of a people through the solitude and dangers of the desert as it carves out its own way in the following of Jesus Christ. This spiritual experience is the well from which we must drink. From it we draw the promise of resurrection.”

### **A Spirituality rooted in Life**

Aquinas would remind us that grace builds on nature. A spirituality that is not rooted in the complex mystery of human life and conflict is just an illusion or, at best, a placebo for our perceived ills. In a world which is becoming more and more fragmented and individualized a spirituality that is rooted in the example of Jesus will call us to community, solidarity and inclusion. The Eucharistic tables that Jesus tended to frequent were not located in sacred places but in messy, though, hospitable homes. Access to Jesus, as with access to the spiritual life, is not to be found in privilege but in a capacity to welcome and risk an encounter with the other.

### **A Spirituality rooted in the Word**

To drink from the wellspring of God’s Word is to drink deeply from the experience of humanity’s awareness of God present in the lives of men and women. When we engage in a *Lectio Divina* of the scriptures we encounter the struggles and dreams of God’s people as spoken in the prophets, the wisdom writings, the letters and, above all, the Gospels. It is from this well that we learn how to recognise God’s unfolding and ever surprising presence to the world. There we meet God - Creator, Spirit and Christ. We read of the necessary journeying to understand who God is for his

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people and the struggle of the poor to make heard their voice and to vindicate their right to respect and dignity.

One of the major themes that has emerged in Spiritan spirituality over recent years is that of *pilgrimage*.<sup>5</sup> The starting point of the pilgrim search is the recognition of one's own inadequacy, hunger, or emptiness. To be a pilgrim is also to recognize the wells which will quench our thirst and sustain us for the journey. Gutiérrez, in his book, points out three aspects to this pilgrim journey. These are the encounter with Christ, walking according to the Spirit, and searching for the Creator. We can recognize these aspects in the life of our own founders, Poullart des Places and the Venerable Father Libermann. But they are also fundamental to any life of discipleship.

Already in 1985, the General Council was employing the metaphor of exodus to describe the evolution that was going on in the Congregation and the need to adopt lighter structures that are not linked to the power and glory of the past. Today more than ever we need to follow the example of Libermann and to recognize that our Spiritan vocation requires us to have no fixed abode, to be always on our pilgrim way. In the past we have been pioneers and builders, in the future we shall be called on to be pilgrims and prophets.<sup>6</sup>

### **A Spirituality rooted in Mission**

The Trinitarian expression of the pilgrim journey that Gutiérrez describes in his book is also how we Spiritans articulate the mission confided to us. We participate in "the mission of God who is revealed as a communion of three Persons: the sending by the Father of the Son and the Spirit into the world reveals God's plan to share his life and his love with all human beings" (Bagamoyo 1.1). There can be no true communion with the mystery of God without participation in the mission of God.

Bagamoyo situates the context of our mission as being in the globalized world. How we understand that the globalized world will be key to how we engage in our mission. It is, as the Chapter pointed out, a complex world where at the same time we see the dominant and often oppressive role played by financial and transnational corporations; a world saturated with data and information but which lacks interpretation and the power of narrative; a massive movement of peoples some of whom are seeking a new life while others are fleeing conflict and terror; a greater desire for democracy and a realization that people can be mobilized to work for a better world and more just structures in society; the improvement in the status of women; a growing secularization and sense of human autonomy with regard to the divine.

It is within this context that we Spiritans must find the wells that sustain us and lead us to a stronger sense of mission. In this mission in a globalized world, the Chapter points to four areas in which we commit ourselves to act and mission. In many respects they are places where we would be drawn to by the magnetism of our charism. They are places where we would go on mission. But they are also places from where we draw life-giving water which refreshes and quenches our thirst. The Chapter's call to renew our methods of evangelization is not just about technique or strategy. More fundamentally, it is a call to recognize our fragility and insecurity and that it is only in emptying ourselves that we can truly drink from the sources of life.

### **Aspects of Spiritan Mission**

These are the four aspects of our mission to a globalized world that Bagamoyo outlines for the next eight years: 1) Evangelisation of the poor; 2) inter-religious dialogue; 3) the promotion of justice, peace and the integrity of creation and 4) education. It also focused on the resources we have in new mission appointments and the need to maintain a healthy tension between consolidating what we have and not being afraid to answer new calls to mission from elsewhere.

### **Inspired by Libermann**

Apart from the Scriptures one of the main sources that we Spiritans drink from is the wellspring of the founders and their manner of living the Gospel. Vatican II calls us to a constant return to these sources which give us the original inspiration for the founding of our Congregation. But this original inspiration, which is our communion with the well of our tradition, must always be seen and understood in the context of today's mission. Otherwise it is just bringing us to stagnant water which has lost its clarity and freshness. This is important if we are to understand and appreciate our founding tradition. It is not in the past that we must look to interpret and understand the present. Rather it is the present situation which leads us to look to the past and tradition and to see how this can bring meaning and significance for us today.

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Bagamoyo, faithful to our tradition, places evangelization of the poor at the heart of our Spiritan mission. In this we share a similar mission to so many religious institutes. In what way then can we say that we are different from other religious with the same objectives if, indeed, this is the case? Perhaps we need to put the question in another way. What is there in our common Spiritan identity that we have inherited from the founding events of our missionary family and which gives shape and form to the way we live our mission today?

An important element in our response to this question is found in the Chapter document on mission. Perhaps influenced by the geographical and historical context, not to mention the Holy Spirit, the Chapter delegates repeat the clarion call of Libermann to “forget about Europe...be African with the Africans...” (Bagamoyo, 1.8).<sup>7</sup> This refers to the famous mission charter of Libermann, written to the community of Dakar in the perspective of a spiritual grounding of the missionaries who had arrived there on mission. Indeed Libermann calls it their “practical novitiate.”

### **Libermann’s Theology and Spirituality of Mission**

We have in this text of Libermann an abundant source of wisdom and direction for the mission that we live today. Paul Coulon has described it as the “missionary strategy of a mystic.”<sup>8</sup> Coulon points to the striking affinities between Libermann’s writings (especially this particular letter) and the Pauline corpus of the New Testament. Indeed, as the Chapter points out, this letter invites the Spiritan to two fundamental attitudes.

*The first attitude is that of kenosis this self-emptying that Libermann writes about when he invites his missionaries to “Forget about Europe and be African with the Africans.”*

The first attitude is that of *kenosis* this self-emptying that Libermann writes about when he invites his missionaries to “Forget about Europe and be African with the Africans.” The missionary should be the servant of his people. We find here an echo of the hymn in Philippians (2:6–11) and its call to conversion and kenosis in the manner of Jesus. It is this radical call that identifies the missionary not as the one who carries within themselves the means and end of evangelization but rather as the one who recognizes the paradox of the Gospel that it is only in losing one’s life that one finds it. It is, therefore, to this attitude of kenosis, of self-emptying that Libermann invites his missionaries so that together we might be raised up to become a people of God. Without this self-emptying we cannot recognize our thirst and the need to drink from the wells of our mission. And when this happens we depart from an essential part of our Spiritan identity which is identity with the life, struggles, and dreams of those who invite us to be part of their lives.

The second attitude of the Spiritan missionary that Bagamoyo identifies is a commitment and readiness to be able to stay for a long time in one place in order to learn from those to whom we are sent. This is why the Chapter recalibrated the Congregation’s position on mission appointments in order not to fix it to a definite period of time. In the globalized world that is ours to live in, where more and more life choices have terms and limits applied to them, the mark of a missionary will be his or her capacity to stay and share the pilgrim road of the people to whom

*...the mark of a missionary  
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they have been sent.*

they have been sent. Drinking deeply from the wells of mission requires giving it the time and duration that are necessary for thirsts to be recognised and then quenched.

### **Conclusion**

What I have sought to do in these few lines is to engage in a reflection both with the experience and also the texts of Bagamoyo 2012. The invitation given to the entire Congregation at the beginning of the Chapter process to “be fervent in the Spirit” (Rom 12:11) remains valid today. We are being invited to be fervent in the Spirit of God; to be fervent in the spirit of our founding tradition; and to be fervent in the spirit of our common mission with the poor. These are the sources of our life and mission and in which we are constantly invited to drink deeply.

We are at Jacob’s well and with the Samaritan woman we pray to Jesus: “Give us this water so we will never be thirsty again” (John 4:15).

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### **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup>Slaves were kept imprisoned in Bagamoyo. At night they were transported by ship to the slave-markets in Zanzibar. This explains the meaning of the word Bagamoyo (“Bwaga-Moyo”) “Lay down your Heart”

<sup>2</sup>James Chukwuma Okoye C.S.Sp., “A Chapter of the Holy Spirit,” Unpublished conference.

<sup>3</sup>James Chukwuma Okoye C.S.Sp., “What We have Heard, What We have Seen with our Eyes,” in *Spiritun Horizons*, No. 7. 2012. pp. 5 – 13, here p. 5.

<sup>4</sup>*We Drink from our own Wells: The Spiritual Journey of a People*, SCM Classics, 2005.

<sup>5</sup>cf General Council, *Living Spiritun Spirituality* I/D 60, February 2007. p. 11.

<sup>6</sup>Cf. General Council, *Towards a Missionary Spirituality for Today*, I/D 40, December 1985. p. 3.

<sup>7</sup>Cf *Notes et Documents*, IX, 324-332. *Spiritun Anthology*, pp. 281 – 287.

<sup>8</sup>Paul Coulon, “‘Faites-vous nègres avec les nègres’ où la stratégie missionnaire d’un mystique’ in Paul Coulon et Paule Brasseur, *Libermann 1802-1852 : Une pensée et une mystique missionnaires*, Le Cerf. 1988. Pp :489 – 546.



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*For this reason, the Church should be involved at the source through influencing cultural evolution at the university level and in the media.*

## SPIRITAN MISSION AND SPIRITUALITY AFTER BAGAMOYO. INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE FROM A LATIN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVE

### Introduction

The V General Conference of the Latin American Bishops in Aparecida (May 12-13, 2007) took place in the context of a society that has become increasingly multi-cultural and multi-religious, and this not only in Latin America but also throughout the world. This is an area that Spiritan mission *Ad gentes* is called to engage with. Thus the XX General Chapter in Bagamoyo (2012) emphasized that “inter-religious dialogue is one of the great challenges of our time and deserves to be a priority of the Congregation.” (Bagamoyo, 1.11)

Cultural and religious pluralism makes itself felt in a very clear and indisputable way, displayed through the means of communication, and which also highlights the conflicts which exist between cultures, ethnicities and religions. In Latin America there is a plurality of indigenous traditions, afro-American and European, signifying that we are peoples from many ethnic origins, cultures and religions.<sup>1</sup>

This fact was underlined by the V Conference of Aparecida right from the initial comments of the document which underlined the finding that the “context of religious pluralism” has led to a crisis in Christian identity, making more urgent the living out of a more conscientious and living faith. The more present religious pluralism, the more necessary the conscientious living out of the Christian faith. Religious and cultural pluralism was seen as having been the catalyst behind the need for individual choices, which are personal options provoked by the dictatorship of relativism which through the force of the global culture makes these choices necessary.<sup>2</sup>

### 1. Religious Pluralism in Latin America

On deepening their reflection on religious pluralism in Latin America, the bishops made a distinction between believers in Christ within other Christian groups and the difficulty of realizing dialogue with all religious groups. Added to this is the challenge of dialogue with cultures, especially youth culture. This is because of the change in the *language* of post-modernity.<sup>3</sup> This *language* has many elements of social and cultural pluralism and this causes problems for family, society and Church in their efforts to pass on the faith. For this reason, the Church should

be involved at the source through influencing cultural evolution at the university level and in the media.

Overall, in the development of the reflection on this issue around the V Conference, pluralism came to be seen not only as a challenge but also as offering a new opportunity for enculturation of the faith of the Church. This latter can be enriched by new modes of expression and values, by the mystery of Christ being better formulated and celebrated in such a way that it offers the possibility of faith becoming closer to life, more Catholic, not just geographically but also culturally. Pluralism is a phenomenon which reveals the many and successive changes produced by the advance in human knowledge and scientific discoveries and technologies. However, one must maintain a critical capacity in all this. One must have bases for choosing, because in the presence of so much cultural and religious data the Christian ought to assume responsibility for developing his own personality and molding his social identity. He must also be conscious of the present tension in cultural and religious pluralism between, on the one hand, the emergence of the primacy of the individual, of freedom, of human dignity and self-awareness, and, on the other hand, a globalized culture which can present itself clothed in individualism, but which instead of recognizing the inalienable dignity of the human person can set itself up as an absolute reality to the detriment of ethics and human relations, thus generating problems, especially within families.

Cultural and religious pluralism always existed. However, writes Libanio:

*To eat is natural; to  
prepare a meal is cultural.*

“Meanwhile there is a novelty in the pluralism that has begun in modern times. It is this novelty that strongly challenges Christian faith. Culture demonstrates the capability of the human being to stand back from his own character and surroundings and to find meaning in it and to change it. A hungry animal looks for food. A hungry human being concocts a meal. To eat is natural; to prepare a meal is cultural. There lies the difference. Culture is therefore, a universe of symbols, meanings, representations, imaginations, institutions that the human being creates for the double purpose of developing himself personally and living socially with others.”<sup>4</sup>

Religious and cultural pluralism in the past did not have the same effect as it does in present times: causing division, personal breakdown, internal crises and rupture. Religious pluralism today calls into question a faith lived in peace with others because this faith was considered fully contained in the Catholic

Church or the religion in which it was lived. Now, the faithful are questioned about their faith and are tempted to experiment with or to change their religion, to experience new things because the range of choices is great and they feel at liberty to try new things.

Given the above situation, the V Conference did not play with the Christian faith as if the Christian lived under a singular Christian cultural view. It set out on a new way, that is, through having a personal experience of encounter with Christ.<sup>5</sup> (Dap 243-254). One must have a personal encounter with Christ. It is from this encounter that should follow the firm conviction to follow him, to be a disciple and to proclaim him to others. The Church should invest in this way forward in order to face up to the great challenge of the new millennium, to continue to proclaim Christ in the context of a multi-religious society where the importance given to inter-religious dialogue by the V Conference of Aparecida forms part of the evangelizing action of the Church.

## **2. Inter-Religious Dialogue**

Christian reflection on inter-religious dialogue (Dap 235-239) during the past few decades has opened up new avenues, permitting at the same time the rediscovery and the re-reading of certain unknown theological approaches, even those foreign to the history of Christian thought. This reflection, new and renewed, is intimately connected with a greater consciousness of religious and cultural plurality; religions co-existing together are no longer an aspect of only some regions of the world, so dialogue is the way forward given this reality.<sup>6</sup>

On the one hand, dialogue is to be subscribed to in the relationships of the common living together of citizens; on the other hand, it responds to the necessity of mutual knowledge through cooperation and exchanges beyond confessional boundaries.

One must recognize that it is difficult to define dialogue in an inter-religious context; dialogue provokes excitement in some people and reserve in others and is almost always a source of misunderstandings. Instead of describing it, one must seek to recognize it in the experiences of encounter, above all in one's manner of being in relation to the other.<sup>7</sup>

Dialogue between partners from different religions can create a space for personal sharing and an openness to the concerns of the other which may not be just intellectual. However, it may also disclose a limit to exchanges and lay open difficulties with mutual understanding. In both cases, one has a duty to

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*Dialogue can never be a secret weapon of aggressive Christian activism, but a way to live faith in Christ with our neighbor and at the service of the human community.*

respect the integrity of the other partner. Apart from respect, the endeavor of dialogue gives witness to the love of Christ. It is an affirmation of life against the forces of destruction and chaos and a participation in the effort of all those who, without any illusions, seek to build up a better human community. Dialogue can never be a secret weapon of aggressive Christian activism, but a way to live faith in Christ with our neighbor and at the service of the human community.<sup>8</sup>

Meanwhile, it must be recognized that the credibility of Christian initiatives at dialogue is frequently put in doubt, not without justification, by partners from other religions, given the ambiguity of the missionary narrative and how Christians preoccupied with proclaiming the Gospel of Christ go about doing this in practice. Without doubt, it would not be realistic to see this ambiguity eliminated once and for all. However, the experience of Christians involved in inter-religious dialogue invites to bringing a double corrective to the above, namely, emphasizing an openness to the witness of the other and calling into question the attitudes and methods of certain missions. Indeed, mutual witness is an inherent part of dialogue with people from different religions. Authentic dialogue will only be established when it is conceived and lived as a mutual engagement of response and questioning.<sup>9</sup>

One of the frequent causes of tension between religious communities is related to “mission.” One is not questioning the right and obligation of Christians and other religious communities of proclaiming their faith. However, this desire to spread the faith and the zeal each one invests in the enterprise should in no way undermine the respect for freedom and the dignity of individuals and communities, nor put in danger civil and inter-communitarian harmony and peace. Many partners from other religions do not hide their suspicion that educational, medical, and philanthropic outreaches are in fact proselytism by another name.<sup>10</sup> Given this context, the debate around the complex relationships between dialogue and religion has been important, as has been demonstrated in the numerous official documents from the Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches.

All these documents give witness to a notable evolution in Christian thinking about mission from the point of view of the reality of dialogue. There is an explicit recognition of the tension that exists between the spiritual and moral conditions of an authentic and legitimate inter-religious dialogue on the one hand and the implications for mission theology on the other. It is appropriate that, given this tension, Christians live as best they

*It implies an affirmation of God working through them and of his love for them...*

*Two extremes can be identified: on one hand there is an exclusivist and intransigent attitude that refuses to grant to non-Christian religions the status of being revealed religions or to recognize their saving value; on the other hand, there is a relativism that considers all religions as being the same.*

can in fidelity to Christ, in humility, acknowledging that this tension cannot be resolved. The San Antonio World Missionary Conference (1989) emphasized that Christian witness in the presence of people of other religions presupposes a presence among them, with sensitivity towards their efforts. It implies an affirmation of God working through them and of his love for them, remembering that the mystery of God in Christ goes beyond our understanding and that our knowledge of his saving grace is imperfect. For this reason, Christians are invited to be witnesses and not judges.<sup>11</sup>

But, apart from this issue, the question of dialogue and mission directs us to a fundamental theological question: how to situate and recognize non-Christian religions in their own otherness, how to take into account religious pluralism in God's plan, and how to understand salvation for members of other religions. It is here, despite the development of a theology of religions, that there remains a space for open reflection, characterized by various directions, propositions and normative principles. Opinions are far from being uniform. Two extremes can be identified: on one hand there is an exclusivist and intransigent attitude that refuses to grant to non-Christian religions the status of being revealed religions or to recognize their saving value; on the other hand, there is a relativism that considers all religions as being the same. The middle ground also has a large spectrum of contrasting positions related to the plurality of contexts and procedures. Many Christians in conscience pursue a middle ground which would allow them to combine their faith in Christ, the one and universal Savior, with a positive understanding of other religious traditions as cherished by God.<sup>12</sup>

### **3. The Awakening of the Necessity of Dialogue in the Church**

John Paul II recognized that the coming to awareness of the need for dialogue was helped by the rapid changes taking place in the world and the deeper awareness of the mystery of the Church as the universal sacrament of salvation.<sup>13</sup> Globalization has shown an interdependence at all levels of living together and human development, with the demands of peace and religious pluralism making dialogue and encounter more necessary than ever. Also missionary experience has made new approaches possible and has made others aware of the necessity to communicate in new ways with the followers of other religions so that the Church may make itself present and understood by them.<sup>14</sup>

Overall, Vatican II is the origin of these new relationships between Christian Churches, other religions and the world. The Constitution *Gaudium et spes* (On the Church in the Modern

World) and the declaration *Nostra aetate* (On the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions) approved the way of dialogue in theology and ecclesial practice. The assertions in *Nostra aetate* gave rise to new ideas in the official language of the Church. The encyclical of Paul VI, *Ecclesiam suam*<sup>15</sup> (On the Church) can be considered the “*magna carta*” for dialogue. The Church must enter into dialogue with the world in which it lives, becoming the word, the message and the conversation.

*...we are all pilgrims on  
the road to seeking God.*

The Council backed many missionary initiatives and both Paul VI and John Paul II through teachings and prophetic gestures played the roles of guides and animators in inter-religious dialogue. Thus, in 1964, during a visit to the Holy Land, Paul VI met with both Jewish and Muslim leaders; in Bombay, he had a meeting with representatives of religions in India saying to them that we are all pilgrims on the road to seeking God. Another important initiative of Paul VI was the setting up of the Secretariat for Non-Christian Religions (1964), renamed the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue in 1988. This has become the central Church structure for the animation and coordination of initiatives through dialogue and has played an important role in the guidance of dialogue in the context of the global mission of the Church, connecting proclamation with dialogue. Among the many important initiatives of John Paul II, special mention must be made of his talk to young Muslims in Casablanca on 19 August 1985 and above all the Day of Prayer in Assisi with the leaders of the world religions on 13 April 1986.<sup>16</sup>

During his pontificate, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI strove to continue the effort to promote inter-religious dialogue. Regarding inter-religious dialogue, Benedict XVI presented three conclusive theses:

*I need to have respect for  
the faith of others and  
a readiness for research  
of the unfamiliar. Here  
there could be truth  
which is relevant to me,  
might help me correct  
some presuppositions and  
guide me forward.*

1. It is not by renouncing the truth that the meeting of religions will be possible but in striving more deeply for it. Skepticism and pragmatism serve only as entry points to ideologies that crop up afterwards. Man is not best served by renouncing truth and one's convictions; this only puts one at the mercy of profit and deprives man of his greatness. I need to have respect for the faith of others and a readiness for research of the unfamiliar. Here there could be truth which is relevant to me, might help me correct some presuppositions and guide me forward. I need to seek out in the expressions of different cultures, which might even be upsetting at times, the hidden and deeper reality beneath the external. I need to go beyond the narrowness of my own perception of truth and be aware of my own truth in the context of including the

*One must always seek out the positive in the other, an attitude that sees that other as a help in my search for truth.*

other. In this way I can place myself within the project of God with a recognition that I never will be the owner of all the truth of God. I will also recognize that I am always an apprentice journeying in the direction of Truth, but always a pilgrim whose journey never ends.<sup>17</sup>

2. One must always seek out the positive in the other, an attitude that sees that other as a help in my search for truth. This does not mean however that one can or ought to leave aside one's critical capacity. Religion offers, one might say, a shelter for the precious peril of truth; however, religion also spreads the truth without ceasing and thus always runs the risk of losing that which it is of its very nature. Religion can become feeble and become something destructive. Religion knows and ought to lead one to the truth but it also has the capacity to cut man off from the truth. An analysis of Old Testament religions shows that it was not long before they lost their meaning. It is relatively easy to criticize other religions, but it is also necessary to be ready to accept criticism, in the same way, of one's own religion. One cannot separate religion and faith. Faith without religion is unreal; religion is a part of the Christian faith and it is in the very nature of Christian faith that it manifests itself as a religion. Among Christians faith can become feeble and turn into superstition, so then it needs to be continually purified on the basis of the truth that shows itself through faith but which at the same time, through dialogue, allows her mystery and infinity to be recognized in a new way.<sup>18</sup>
3. This does not mean that mission should come to an end and be substituted by dialogue, where one no longer engages with truth but, above all, only to help one another become better Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus or Buddhists. We are not dealing with this because this would imply a total lack of conviction in which, under the pretext of affirming that which is best in each of us, we would neither take ourselves or others seriously and we would renounce forever the pursuit of truth. Dialogue and mission cannot be seen as opposites but ought to permeate one another. Dialogue is not an endeavor without an objective. On the contrary, it seeks to persuade others to find the truth. Otherwise, it would remain useless. On the other hand, mission can no longer proceed into the future as if the message implied that the subject was until then deprived of all knowledge of God. This may occur with increasing frequency in an

atheistic world, but in the milieu of other religions we meet people who have heard about God through their religion and who seek to live in relationship with him. Given this, the proclamation of the message has to necessarily become a process of dialogue. One does not speak to the other, in this context, of things completely unknown but one reveals for him its hidden depths, that which he has already touched upon through his faith. Also, the person who is evangelizing is not just someone who gives but also one who receives, such that inter-religious dialogue ought to always become a listening to the *Logos* who demonstrates to us unity in the midst of our separations and contradictions.<sup>19</sup>

Pope Francis, in his first encyclical *Lumen fidei* affirms that the great gift brought by Jesus was the light of faith and thus in the non-Christian world hunger for the light meant that many would worship the sun. However, this sun was incapable of radiating light on all human existence. Christians, however, enlightened by the light of faith called Christ the true sun “whose rays give life.”<sup>20</sup> Dialogue also has the dimension of witness so that all may have the opportunity to know the “light of the world”, who is Jesus the Christ. (John 12, 13).

*...no knowledge is complete and in this context inter-religious dialogue is realized only in a territory where it is accepted that no participant has a complete understanding of the faith which constitutes their religious identity.*

The General Chapter at Bagamoyo, in its turn, considered that “there ought to be considered four complementary levels to dialogue: the dialogue of daily life, the dialogue of collaboration in common works, spiritual dialogue and theological dialogue.”<sup>21</sup> These different levels help to build true peace among believers in mutual respect and the refusal to allow oneself to be imprisoned by one’s own fears.” (Bagamoyo, 1,11).

### **Conclusion**

The Document from the V Conference which took place in Aparecida conceded that no knowledge is complete and in this context inter-religious dialogue is realized only in a territory where it is accepted that no participant has a complete understanding of the faith which constitutes their religious identity. As well as this, the knowledge of non-Christian religions among Christians is not very deep<sup>22</sup> so that it is necessary “to invest in the knowledge of religions, in theological-pastoral discernment and in the formation of competent agents for inter-religious dialogue” (Dap 238). In the footsteps of Vatican II, Aparecida recognizes that through the breath of the Holy Spirit and other means, the grace of Christ can reach all those that he redeemed, outside of the ecclesial community (Dap 236). One must, therefore, promote a way of life where everyone respects the other and each may have the right to live and express their convictions, in a dialogue through which the testimony of

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*According to Aparecida,  
inter-religious dialogue  
can help in the building  
up of a new humanity...*

one's faith and its proclamation will be embedded. According to Aparecida, inter-religious dialogue can help in the building up of a new humanity, opening up new ways of Christian witness, the promotion of freedom and the dignity of all peoples, stimulating collaboration for the common good, helping to overcome violence based on fundamentalist religious attitudes and educating citizens for peace and harmonious living together (Dap 239).

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*Translated from the Portuguese by Michael Kilkenny, C.S.Sp.*

### **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup>Cfr. Libanio, João Baptista, Pluralismo cultural e Pluralismo religioso, in: Amerindia (org.). V Conferência de Aparecida. Renascer de uma esperança. São Paulo: Amerindia/Paulinas, 2008, 73.

<sup>2</sup>Ibidem, 73.

<sup>3</sup>Post-modernity ...or of relating to art, architecture or literature – that reacts against earlier modernist principles, as by reintroducing traditional or classical elements of style or by carrying modern styles or practices to extreme.

<sup>4</sup>Ibidem, 74-75.

<sup>5</sup>The Christian has to have a personal encounter with Christ and as a result of this encounter he has the firm conviction to follow him and be his disciple.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Miltri, Tarek. “Dialogue interreligieux”. In: Bria, Ion et alii (Dir.). *Dictionnaire oecuménique de missiologie. Cent mots pour la mission*, Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2001, 81

<sup>7</sup>Ibidem, 81

<sup>8</sup>Ibidem, 81-82

<sup>9</sup>Ibidem, p. 82

<sup>10</sup>Ibidem, p. 82

<sup>11</sup>Ib, p. 83

<sup>12</sup>Cf. Knitter, Paul F. *Introdução às teologias das religiões*, São Paulo: Paulinas, 2008.

<sup>13</sup>CF. *Dives in misericordia*, 2; 21.

<sup>14</sup>Zago, Marcello. Diálogo inter-religioso. In Karotempel, Sebastian (dir.). *Seguir a Cristo en la mission. Manual de misionología*. Estella (Navarra): Editorial Verbo Divino, 2000, p. 92

<sup>15</sup>Cf. *Ecclesiam suam*, 34-68.

<sup>16</sup>Cf. Zago, Marcello, op. cit. p. 93

<sup>17</sup>Ratzinger, Joseph. *Die Vielfalt der Religionen und der Eine Bund*. Regensburg: Verlag Urfeld, 2005, p. 117-118.

<sup>18</sup>Ibidem, p. 119.

<sup>19</sup>Ibidem, p. 119-120.

<sup>20</sup>Clement of Alexandria, *Protrepticus* IX: PG 8, 195, *apud Lumen Fidei*,

<sup>21</sup>Cf. Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, *Dialogue and Proclamation* (1991), no. 42.

<sup>22</sup>Ibidem, p. 119-120



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*Community—this is the key and the secret of the vitality and fruitfulness of mission, of the balance and happiness of our life!*

## CONSTRUCTING RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY. A SPIRITAN REREADING

Seventeen years ago, I was preparing to leave for Mozambique with other confrères where we would start a new Spiritan missionary presence. Those of us appointed to this new mission were having animated conversations about the challenges and struggles that awaited us with the people of that church. An elder confrère who was helping us for a few days before our departure said that “the heaviest thing is not the difficulties, the challenges, and trials that you will encounter; the most decisive thing will be the manner in which you live together through these difficulties. If community is guaranteed, whatever difficulties you meet can be confronted without too much penalty! More than the ‘what to do,’ will matter the ‘whom to be with.’” These words were the fruit of the long experience of an old missionary now deceased. Many times through the years, I have remembered these words for better or for worse. Community—this is the key and the secret of the vitality and fruitfulness of mission, of the balance and happiness of our life!

### **1. Where We Are**

In the third chapter of the Spiritan Rule of Life (henceforth, SRL), we read the citation from the Acts of the Apostles (4:32): “The community of believers was of one heart and mind, and no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they had everything in common.” The first numbers of this chapter give the following explanations: we are called to live our vocation in community (#27); community life is an essential element of our identity, in regard to both our consecration and our mission (#28); the apostolic life is common, also in respect of the sharing of goods and the discernment and execution of common projects (#29); bringing us closer to the human and ecclesial milieu in which we live (#30), and so on. The twenty-two paragraphs that compose this section on community life are very rich and inspirational, full of references to the word of God and to the writings of the Venerable Father Libermann.

### **Bagamoyo**

The *Instrumentum Laboris* (Working Document) introducing the theme of community had this to say: “community life is one of those topics where experience tells us that there is no direct relationship between the production of documents and the process of change in individuals and institutions.”<sup>1</sup> Subsequent

reflection in the chapter itself began from the presupposition that we do not always live in accord with our convictions.

Reflecting on the obstacles to community life, the *Instrumentum Laboris* was insightful: “There is a general feeling about our failures in our Spiritan community living.”<sup>2</sup> There is individualism, rationalization that justifies unacceptable behavior, clericalism, and the accentuation of the monarchical priest in “his” parish (the document used the term “diocesanisation”) in opposition to a true sharing of the mission project, inability in taking up poverty in a serious and radical way, while sharing the resources generated in community. Further, there is formalism and ritualism in prayers, and a lack of the sharing of faith. The document went on to propose many courses of action and possible ways to address the difficulties and enhance fidelity to community life.

Starting with these, the general chapter developed its own thoughts relative to the challenges to Spiritan community life today. In a short text of two and half pages, it reaffirms the Spiritan community as an essential aspect of Spiritan identity saying that it is “the privileged place for listening to the Spirit and for living in fidelity to our vocation and mission (Torre d’Aguilha 1.1.2).”<sup>3</sup> The community is the proper context for living the great dimensions of our Spiritan identity: the evangelical counsels, the praying community, and our evangelization commitments. In synthesis, “community and mission are two dimensions of the Spiritan vocation which are mutually enriching.”<sup>4</sup>

*...community and mission are two dimensions of the Spiritan vocation which are mutually enriching.*

According to the preparatory document, we do not lack great statements for renewal; what has lagged behind is concrete practice. So the chapter went beyond general intentions to propose concrete steps to revalue and renew community, a simple and succinct method. The first of these is the community project (*projet communautaire*), “a dependable guide for Spiritan life and mission. Here are found the most important options of the community: community action, moments of celebration, pastoral commitments and involvement of and with the laity.”<sup>5</sup>

The other great means emphasized by the capitular document is the service of authority: “Superiors will exercise their ministry in a discerning and loving manner. At the same time they will be firm and rigorous in insisting that every confrere and community carries out the orientations coming from SRL, the General Council and from the circumscription”<sup>6</sup>; in demanding the fulfillment of what is contained in SRL and other orientation documents. There should be particular focus on what concerns living poverty, the budget, the sharing of goods, clarity and

rigor in accountability, “as well as combatting every form of individualism.”<sup>7</sup> Internationality remains a “treasure not always made capital of”; the potential of community life to challenge and confront us should be taken advantage of for our conversion and mission.

In general, the reflection of the Bagamoyo chapter takes seriously the real problems present in the Congregation and sees the community as the place where these problems should be resolved. It is evident that there is need to “raise the tone” as regards the measures to be taken concerning grave infidelities in the areas of chastity, finance, community responsibility, the use of the media, the service of community authority that should address these difficulties and, where necessary, utilize mechanisms with more firmness. Rereading the chapter reflections, one notes a positive approach, full of hope and openness to the future, but also enough clarity about the difficulties and contradictions.

### **Lights and Shadows**

What can one say, then, about the crisis of community life and the “general feeling of failure”? The Congregation of the Holy Spirit, while a large worldwide community, is a plural reality, characterized by a great cultural and ecclesial diversity. This diversity is certainly a richness that can be recognized by many and represents, in fact, one of the most beautiful missionary expressions. Communities with dozens of confrères observe the discipline of community life that includes, according to SRL, the sharing of material resources, common meals and common liturgy on a daily basis. We have both communities with an institutional style and discipline and communities that are more spontaneous and with a familiar style. We have small missionary communities that live the mission as a common project, planning the work, daily sharing a real fraternal and profoundly prayerful life, cultivating effective and affective relationships that become the sustainable source and efficacious expression of vitality and of fruitful missionary life.

However, we do not have in the Congregation only a rainbow of complementarity. We have also a panoply of confusions, with different models, different ways of conceiving and experiencing community life. There are a good number of confreres living alone, exercising their ministry in parishes, and installed in their parochial residences. They keep a fraternal relationship with other Spiritan confrères which, in practice, cannot be distinguished from relationships cultivated among the diocesan clergy in many local churches. You could truly say that in many dioceses there exists among diocesan priests a community sharing and fraternal administration (including the sharing of a

common house and maintenance of a common life) that is more effective in testimony than among many Spiritans. There also exist communities that, in practice, are nominal communities: a shared roof under which all live, community prayer absent or partially present, meals taken at individual times, the rhythm of life poorly synchronized. Money stays in the pocket of the person who earns it, sharing is at the level of honorable citizens who share the expenses of a condominium, but without the responsibilities of religious poverty or personal divesture. The material administration and economics are marked by evident individualism, with personal cars, personal bank accounts, independent or almost independent projects.

*There are Spiritans who want to take from the community every subsidy that they have a right to (and even those they do not have a right to!)*

Besides these practical dysfunctions that have no support in the “doctrine” but subsist as simple expressions of the degeneration of living ideas, there are theoretical discourses that try to legitimize or substantiate models which, in fact, were never present in authentic Spiritan tradition, never expressed in any document of our founders or any subsequent text. There are Spiritans who want to take from the community every subsidy that they have a right to (and even those they do not have a right to!) forgetting the solidarity that is their obligation by the same title. The Congregation seems to be an institution that guarantees stability and material security and to which, in the best hypothesis, one gives an accounting of the goods received from her. But one does not give an accounting of the goods received from others; these are “mine.” In enough cases, community is not taken as “ours,” it remains something external with which I relate or from which I distance myself, whichever suits me, demanding in one or other case rights acquired in the name of natural law or the laws of a particular place or culture. “My” way of living community and religious life is justified by my cultural difference. One’s cultural identity becomes in that way the criterion of discernment for the administration of community life and the other dimensions of religious life. Such rationalization makes community an expression of mere spiritual communion and empties it of its power of witness in practice, concretely depriving it of the very renunciation that is appropriate for one who has opted to share resources, life, and the mission project. There also exists the erroneous idea that what is learned during initial formation is not necessarily applicable to the adult community life. It is as if you learn to be a novice, not a Spiritan, during the novitiate. In this type of ideology, the missionary community by being missionary can dispense with many of the demands expressed in the Rule of Life that are very beautiful, but only for teaching novices or scholastics. Formation communities (or those in close proximity) are obliged to live a

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lifestyle consonant with SRL so you do not scandalize those in formation, according to this position.

If we really wish to value differences and promote internationality in the plural space of effective common living and a common identity, we urgently need to correct the confusion and arrive at an understanding of models of common life which we all recognize and with which we all identify. It is this that is recognized in what Bagamoyo calls “*Spiritan culture*.” This signifies a deep unity that should characterize the style of life of all Spiritans. In fact, beyond legitimate diversity, it is necessary to identify infidelity for what it is.

Sometime ago, I was conversing with a young Spiritan in initial formation. I heard him cite different models of community life which, to his understanding, legitimized opposite directions in the way to be situated in a community. There already exists in the Congregation examples for everything, it would be legitimate to opt for the models that I like. I defended the advisability of objective criteria previous to all models in existence and defining the greater or less legitimacy of each model. Who defines these criteria? SRL without a doubt. And what grounds this Rule to make it the actual expression of our charism and a model for our common life?

In the ultimate analysis, it is evident that it is the founders, Poullart des Places and Libermann, to whom we must refer. It is their original intuition and their founding project that will always define us, without which we would not be ourselves. Poullart, the founding pioneer, who left all of his social prerogatives and money to live in a community of the poor putting himself totally at the service of the poor, is our first inspiration. This inspiration must be reread in the light of Libermann who deepened and defined the original charism. And of Libermann there are innumerable texts and sources of inspiration. It is impossible to go through them in an exhaustive way, so I propose that we stay with an unavoidable text, and let us see what Libermann intended exactly for community life—the *Provisional Rule*, which was started in Rome in 1840, published in 1845, and republished in 1849. This Rule, articulated with glosses, gives us a rich and profound resource to locate the community within the Spiritan identity. We will refer to a few aspects of this framework, focusing on chapter 5 of this Rule.

## **2. From Where We Came**

In a letter to Dom Sallier, dated July 1840, Libermann said that with the Rule he intended “to direct souls to a missionary perfection or to the apostolic state, as I understand it.”<sup>8</sup> “As I

understand it” gives us the measure of the importance of this text: if the understanding of Libermann is the foundation of our identity, reference to the Rule that he elaborated is indispensable. Libermann himself attributed absolute importance to the Rule: it is not only a rule, but the principle of regularity: «If there is no rule, there will be disorder; if the rule is not observed, there will be no unity; if it is poorly observed, the missionaries will not be fervent»<sup>9</sup> The intention of Libermann was totally radical, he conceived a project which should, by nature, make great demands, «something solid, fervent and apostolic: in other words, a commitment to all or nothing... We don't want timid people joining a Congregation which is completely apostolic. We only need fervent and generous members who will give themselves entirely and are ready to undertake and suffer all things for the greater glory of God.»<sup>10</sup>

### **Community in the Provisional Rule**

In this extremely demanding project, totally at the service of mission, what is the place of community? “It is an important and fundamental rule in the congregation that its members should live in a community, being subject to a common rule, and that they should never work separately and alone outside their community.”<sup>11</sup> Isolation favors a relaxing of the Rule and exposes one to lack of fervor, explains Libermann in a gloss of this article. He recognizes that there are situations in which some were sent alone for a mission (James Laval, for example, to whom Libermann explicitly refers), but he did not hesitate to affirm that such a situation is not the rule, people would not endure in fidelity in such a situation – “among one hundred you will not find one.”<sup>12</sup> “That is why our missionaries will not be sent to a work where they will be alone.”<sup>13</sup> It is fascinating the practical manner in which an extreme realist like Libermann regulates the manner of administering a community. He recognizes that sometimes there will be tasks which demand that the missionaries go alone and stay some days outside community, however, he determined that “it should not always be this way” and “ordinarily let there be an interval of one month between such missions; this will enable the missionary to recover his fervor in recollection and in the observance of the Rules. Also this will prevent him from acquiring habits of freedom of action and so find it difficult after a while to observe the Rule.”<sup>14</sup> The Rule later makes a series of detailed prescriptions about the way to organize community life, like daily prayers, common meals (what they consist of and duration), community recreation, etc. In all these practical aspects that obviously follow the context and circumstances of the time, there are however some elements equally valid for all times and cultural contexts. Before all else, community life is the

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proper ambient and situation *sine qua non* in which you live and develop Spiritan mission. Libermann adds, “Someone will say, is it not better that I go to hear confessions, to visit the sick, than to stay in recreation? No, it is not! For maintaining regularity is extremely important.”<sup>15</sup> Regularity permits one to keep active that value that one recognizes and accepts; only an extraordinary or urgent situation can justify breaking practical vigilance and the rule of community. And Libermann well underlines the urgent character: it is not enough that it is an exceptional circumstances, it needs to be clear that besides being proportionally necessary it is really a necessity that could not be put off and taken care of later after respecting the community duty.

### **Community Poverty**

We come to the fundamental value of poverty, another aspect of the details defined by the Rule: “no one will have anything that belongs to him in his own right. But everything that is for the use of missionaries must be provided by the community to which he belongs, and all shall be wholly detached from the things that are given them for their use. They must be always ready to return them gladly as soon as the superior will judge it proper to use them differently.”<sup>16</sup> Libermann attached great importance to simplicity in community life and interior freedom in the use of goods, sobriety in available materials. Missionaries should be poor, the community should spread evangelical poverty and there should be total vigilance not to let this zeal for a poor and unattached life diminish. “We must take care to practice renunciation and poverty, even in small things. There are those who after they have made great sacrifices to enter a community, seek their ease and cling to trifles - to a cassock, to a particular hat, etc. Attachment to foolish things causes our hearts to shrink; we are no longer worthy of our vocation and it hinders our apostolic action.”<sup>17</sup> It is for this that “we shall profess great poverty regarding everything that is for the use of the congregation and its members. We will avoid in all things that which comes somewhat close to luxury or superfluity.”<sup>18</sup> The lifestyle of Spiritan communities will be identified even by the food, houses and decoration in the manner of the poor of that location, safeguarding the health of the missionaries.<sup>19</sup>

*Missionaries should be poor, the community should spread evangelical poverty and there should be total vigilance not to let this zeal for a poor and unattached life diminish.*

The mission and its demands do not justify individual use of riches or material means: “A wealthy missionary is not permitted to keep the revenue of his property under the pretext that he will give it to the poor of the place to which he will be sent. This would be the occasion for serious disorders in communities.”<sup>20</sup> This means that Spiritan mission, as understood and passionately defended by Libermann, includes poverty as an essential element and as an element of equality.

*What this means is, community is missionary and mission is communitarian.*

*Personal fulfillment or personal development and the individual's potential and aptitudes do not occur as parallel to the community project...*

Community and mission are not articulated as parallel elements, in fact one interprets the other and you cannot conceive one without the other. Missionaries integrate their personal lives and their journey of conversion and sanctification is not something distinct from their missionary concern. This means that not even the mission is secondary in the name of community interests, nor is the community to take second place with regard to missionary commitments. What this means is, *community is missionary and mission is communitarian*. All that is lived in community has a missionary witness dimension, and all done in missionary work is fruit of community discernment and decision, prolonging the vitality that is received and transmitted in community.

### **Community Project**

The community character of mission and the missionaries' life is reflected in a personal project that is to be defined beginning with the other and, in particular, the community. It is precisely this that Libermann proposes when he said: "Obedience is the renunciation of one's own mind and will so as to submit oneself to the holy will of God, which is manifested by the Rules of the Congregation and by its superior."<sup>21</sup> The mediation of the community, the Rule, and instances of authority and coordination is necessary to develop one's life project that is defined beginning with love: the Other (God) and the others (the community and the Church) are the specific environment of the project of life of the Spiritans. There is a dimension of renouncing one's self, so dear to Libermann, which is at the service of a positive option for God's plan, expressed in community.

Personal fulfillment or personal development and the individual's potential and aptitudes do not occur as parallel to the community project, even when this community project does not express the personal options or the will of each individual. Personal happiness is not the simple satisfaction of necessities or individual beliefs, but is frequently constructed on the painful work of the individual in relation to community, and the embrace of the loving presence of the God of communion who calls each one to be formed by way of concrete integration into community. The many practical dispositions that Libermann proposes in the *Provisional Rule* fundamentally achieve this idea.

### **Christocentrism and God's Primacy**

The challenge of obedience implied in this is another way of stating the theocentric and christocentric character of community. Libermann's writings are impregnated with this christocentric orientation, which incidentally is strongly present in the life of Poullart des Places and his short written works. Community is

not simply an intersection of personalities and human effort, but an expression of the mystery of God, which prolongs the eternal Trinitarian life in history. Communion, like mission, begins in God and has the mystery of God as its source and reason for being. Missionary theology, developed from the Second Vatican Council from the perspective of *Missio Dei* already, in fact, underlay the missionary thought of Francis Libermann.

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continue the great work  
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Nothing in religious community life is simply organizational; organization, indispensable as it is, reflects the fundamental mystery of God: all flow from God and refers to God. The community and missionary character come together with the spiritual character of community life. All is part of faith, all is centered on Christ. All of Libermann's thoughts are christocentric: "We must belong wholly to our Lord; this is absolutely necessary if we desire to be true apostles."<sup>22</sup>; "We must be united to our Lord; he is our Master, our Head. Only in him and through him can we have virtue and power. In him we will find the life and the strength which are demanded by the holy apostolate. Or rather, it is he who wants to continue the great work of the redemption of mankind by living and acting in us. Let us convince ourselves that we are not the ones who save souls. Only the Holy Spirit can work that wonder. We are only useless instruments which he deigns to make use of."<sup>23</sup> The concrete relationships that evolve and are organized within the community are concrete expressions of this theology of the Spiritan missionary community: "The conduct of our members among themselves must be that of children of the same family, that is, children of Jesus and Mary. We shall regard as done to our Lord himself all that we do to our confreres, and we shall do towards them what we would have done towards Jesus and his Blessed Mother."<sup>24</sup> The soul of community life is therefore God's charity; this is explained in a detailed manner by Libermann in the glosses that refer to this theme.

### **3. Where Would We Like To Go**

There is reason to be grateful for so many communities and so many confrères who today, like yesterday, reflect in their lives the dream of Libermann, living it with fidelity and dynamism. On the other hand, we were also aware of serious contradictions that this project encounters in the ways in which community life is sometimes organized in the Congregation. We are aware of evidences of how individualism is so strongly in opposition to the affection of communion in which Libermann places Spiritan mission, and how secularism is in opposition to the foundational Christology on which Libermann builds so much for life in common and for mission.

It is not for lack of documents, reflections, articles and discourses that we lack renewal. The big question is then how to be effectively renewed, make concrete in our life all that we repeatedly affirm as important. We recognize the challenge of conversion and renewal that our sources place before us.

Before this demanding challenge that Libermann leaves us, we could fall into some possible temptations, the first of which would be fundamentalist regression. Since we have gone off course in some way from the initial project, we need to restore it, literally reproduce it. Libermann himself cautioned us against this danger: Spiritan life should be inserted into the proper context of each people and each culture. Another temptation would be opposite of this: eliminate the perceived challenges of applying Libermann's thought to our present time. In this case, being faithful would be for us only a form of fundamentalism. The radicalism and seriousness of the community project of Libermann were no less challenging or demanding in his time than in ours. If we want to be faithful to this project we need to assume the radicalism and the demands on us. It is not easy, it is not immediate, it does not happen without effort.

*The life project is life as a project.*

*Ongoing formation is this: a continual process of learning from life and its vicissitudes, allowing the Holy Spirit in this process to make us grow as men, as religious, and as Spiritan missionaries.*

### **Life Project**

The life project is life as a project. It is a vital dynamism in which people remember and deepen their convictions and ideals and put them in dialogue with the concrete challenges of their historical situation, defining objectives to be reached and the means to arrive there. It does not reinvent the Rule, but recovers its orientations and integrates them into the concrete reality of the community.<sup>25</sup> This should be talked about, pondered and written in a way that it becomes a real instrument of growth and renewal. Ongoing formation is this: a continual process of learning from life and its vicissitudes, allowing the Holy Spirit in this process to make us grow as men, as religious, and as Spiritan missionaries. In a certain sense, the life project is largely identical with ongoing formation, as much in relation to our personal project (the individual) and our community project (the community).

The life project is Christocentric: it starts in Christ and is oriented to Christ. It refers us to the baptismal gift and our common religious profession as Spiritan religious. In this sense, the community life project keeps us from every type of clericalism, intrinsically sinful because not centered in Christ but in adulterated forms of power or domination. Centered in Christ and Trinitarian communion, the life project guards us from all forms of individualism and secularism, and immerses itself in the primacy of God experienced in fraternal communion and

the service of the mission work project, evaluated and executed in a team. The annual elaboration of the life project will allow the recovery of objective community values. Before this memory of our identity, we can ask ourselves: is this what we are living? More important still, is this what I believe in?

### **Personal Project in Community**

The community project is articulated in relation to the personal project: it is not enough to know the group identity, but also necessary to again encounter for myself not only the values that my intelligence holds but also the necessities and tendencies that my personality has. Values confessed do not always coincide with values lived. Taking into account the discrepancies and owning them is necessary so that inconsistencies do not slowly carry us to what we do not believe or prevent us from living what we do believe. We need constantly ask ourselves, “what does this have to do with the Spiritan project?” Without a personal project, there is no community project: to conceive and execute a community project presupposes real people who recognize in the Spiritan project an instance in which God has called them to develop their own personal project. Beginning with this discovery a personal project is constructed in permanent reference and subordination to the community project.

The community project as an instance of objectivity is not merely a horizontal construction developed by members of the community to negotiate solutions and reach an agreement. To be authentic, the community project is founded always on SRL and Spiritan sources. Here lies its strength; this objectivity, however, remains dead letter and ineffective as long as it does not enter into dialogue with the free subjects involved in the project.

### **The Service of Authority**

It is precisely in this dynamic articulation of subjective persons and objective Spiritan identity that we should put the service of authority. This is not simply a service of coordination among members of the community, but a response to a sending, an order made by Christ in the Church and the Congregation. It is a true mediation between the subjective universe of the individual and the objective universe of the Spiritan religious community made up of concrete and personal subjects. This mediation serves the authenticity of life, as much in persons as in the Spiritan community (whether general, provincial or local). People have the right to be themselves and the Congregation also has a right to be herself. The mediation of authority helps people become themselves in the Congregation, divesting themselves of centrifugal tendencies that alienate them and developing their decisions to be faithful to Spiritan vocation and mission.

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Here we suppose, obviously, that discernment about the Spiritan identity of each individual member of the community has been done. If it has not been, there would be no choice of perpetual profession in the Congregation nor would they be admitted. It is true that there are exceptional cases to this discernment that could be revisited when the personal project is structurally shown to be irreversibly incompatible with the community project. The superior is not simply a coordinator; he is a servant of fidelity to our identity. His authority is built upon not only a popular vote, but on the mission received from the authority of the Church and the Congregation (which supposes a discernment process of truth that passes through consultation or election). This mission of the superior is service and is defined in SRL and our charismatic sources. It has a fundamental function in valuing persons and communities and in making life and community projects effective.

### **Mission**

Community as conceived by Libermann is not closed in on itself, but is open to the outside and shows the radical apostleship of her members. And it is for this reason that it is necessary to assure the internal quality of life for, lacking this quality and authenticity, the Spiritan project falters, in the quality of mission as in the radicality of its service to the poor, its witness to evangelical poverty and the dynamism of that service, its dialogue with the world, and its unequivocal announcement of Christ the Savior.

The shared mission presupposes missionaries who are organized to work together, programmed, distributing tasks, evaluating. However, community life more than *making* communion, requires *being* in communion, giving itself to know and to welcome the other with simplicity as he is. Fruitful fraternity is lived in docility to the Spirit of God, but is never spiritualist, because this would empty it of humanity. The fraternity of Spiritans tends to become a true sharing of life that does not exclude the delicateness demanded for listening to each other, and does not fear tenderness. It is in this opening to the other where the effectiveness of mission resides: it passes from being simply utilitarian and productive to being gratuitous and relational. It conceives the mission not so much as a sequence of actions done, but in the movement of dialogue, of welcome, and personal encounter.

*It is in this opening  
to the other where the  
effectiveness of mission  
resides...*

Only at the level of community can we conceive the sharing of our charism, as much in what refers to hospitality to candidates to Spiritan religious life as to sharing our spiritual and missionary identity with lay people. Recent signals that the Holy Spirit has

given us in the direction of mission shared with and opened to lay Spiritans only confirms the urgency of purifying and consolidating the authenticity of our community and religious life.

### **A Hypothesis**

I sometimes ask myself, because of the changes of our times, whether it would not be necessary to have more creativity in the recovery of our fidelity. In other religious families, more radical forms of community life have arisen that, in practice, function as permanent signs of the radicalism of the charism that is recognized by all. These new forms of community life, communal and praying, which in truth harbor surging renewal and true communal divestiture, presuppose accepting the possibility of a diversity of rhythms and styles in the heart of the religious community. Would it be possible to conceive of a radically praying and simple community, inserted in the middle of the poor and intensely fraternal, testifying by its life in common and by its prayer to a close following of Christ that we would all like to live? Would it not be possible to conceive, in the possible diversity of the concrete applications of SRL, a truly daring community project emerging in the style of Poullart des Places and Libermann?

Dialogue among ourselves and profound and tolerant criticism could help us discern ways of renewal. This dialogue can be profoundly fruitful and spring open another dialogue: that of prayer. For the renewal of community life, as asked by Bagamoyo, will only happen if personal and communal prayer were really valued, the Eucharist returned to its centrality, and the word of God listened to in the Church in its absolute authority. This will happen if we dare, in our community programs, to give time to daily communal liturgy and personal prayer.

Pedro Fernandes, C.S.Sp.

*Translated from the Portuguese by Daniel Walsh, C.S.Sp.*

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### **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup>20<sup>th</sup> General Chapter C.S.Sp. Bagamoyo 2012. *Instrumentum Laboris*, chapter 4, Introduction.

<sup>2</sup>*Instrumentum Laboris*, 4.4

<sup>3</sup>Congregation of the Holy Spirit. Bagamoyo 2012. XX General Chapter. Rome 2012, 4.1.

<sup>4</sup>Bagamoyo, 4.1.

<sup>5</sup>Bagamoyo, 4.2.

<sup>6</sup>Bagamoyo, 4.10.

<sup>7</sup>Bagamoyo, 4.3; cf. 4.8 and 4.9.

<sup>8</sup>*Notes et Documents*, II, 153. Cf. *Spiritan Anthology*, Chosen and

Presented by Christian de Mare, translated by Vincent O'Toole, Vincent Griffin, and Joseph D'Ambrosio (Rome: 2011) 134.

<sup>9</sup>Libermann, Introduction to the Provisional Rule.

<sup>10</sup>Libermann, *ND*, I, 662. *Spiritan Anthology*, 104.

<sup>11</sup>Libermann, *Provisional Rule*, Part II, Chap V, Art 1. English translation of the text and commentary by Father Lannurien by Walter van der Putte. Duquesne University: Spiritan Collection, 103 at <http://digital.library.duq.edu/cdm-spiritan/document.php?CISOROOT=/spiritanbook&CISOPTR=894&REC=9>

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, Commentary.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, Part II, Chapter V, art 2, Commentary.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, art 8, Commentary.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, Chap II, art 3.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, Commentary.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, Art. 5.

<sup>19</sup>Cf. *Ibid.*, Chapter V, art 9.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, Chapter II, art. 2. Commentary.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, Chapter IV, art 1.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, Part I, Chapter I, art. 8, Commentary.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, art. 7, Commentary.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, Part II, Chapter VII, art. 1.

<sup>25</sup>On this, see Juan Mari ILARDUIA, *Il Progetto Comunitario: Cammino d'incontro e comunione*, EDB, Bologna 2004.



## Anthony Gittins, C.S.Sp.

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*I place the phrase in quotation marks because I see it as problematic rather than self-evident.*

# “SPIRITAN SPIRITUALITY”? POSSIBILITIES AND LIMITATIONS. FROM FAR AWAY TO NEARER HOME

One evening many years ago and very far from home, I was sitting in a stone circle on a deserted beach as the sun slowly set behind me in the West. Staring intently Eastwards, I watched a darkening sky and even darker sea merge almost imperceptibly. A few yards away, seated on another stone that was more adequate than comfortable, was an old lady. Like me, she was looking East, but her gaze probed far beyond the horizon. I knew that long after I left she would continue to sit, immobile and utterly at peace, throughout the long night. When the first light of dawn began to bleach and transform the sky's dark canvas, she would still be there, waiting and watching, entranced, or in pure contemplation, until her gaze could no longer withstand the blazing incandescence. Only then, finally averting her gaze and saving her vision from the blinding light, would she slowly and deliberately rise from her cold stone and prepare for another day.

We were in Kiribati (pronounced KIRI-BAS) in the Central Pacific, one of the remotest spots on earth, and the woman was a healer. But accused by the Church of superstitious practices, she had been condemned years before and officially ostracized ever since. Still she continued to offer her services, freely but clandestinely, to the great benefit of her clientele, virtually all of whom were baptized and active Church members, on this very Catholic island. Her belief in the God of Jesus was unwavering, and her commitment to healing remained unshaken. And although saddened by her detractors and her marginalization, her palpably authentic spirituality left in me an enduring impression far deeper than the cold, hard stones on which we sat.

This reflection addresses the topic, not of spirituality in general, and not even of Christian spirituality, but specifically of “Spiritan spirituality.” I place the phrase in quotation marks because I see it as problematic rather than self-evident. If it were accepted and uncontested, quotation marks would be unnecessary. But if the category “Spiritan spirituality” is hypothetical or at least contested, then they are. And if this were an academic debate (“This house accepts that ‘Spiritan spirituality’ is a clearly definable and valid category”) rather than an article, I would be perfectly happy to argue either side of the motion, because I think it is very well worth debating. I see the value of the phrase, yet would not want

to identify “Spiritian spirituality” as an absolute and free-standing category describing something entirely unique. But as this is an article rather than a debate, I will try to identify some components of spirituality that Spiritian spirituality shares with other kinds of spirituality, while noting certain aspects that Spiritians may embrace in a particular fashion precisely *as* Spiritians.

### **People In Particular, Spiritians In General – And Vice Versa**

The great paradox that humanity must confront and negotiate is that human beings are all different – and yet all the same. Biologically, there is only one human race, even though it consists of great and wonderful diversity. And yet there are no “people in general”: there are only actual people, people in particular. And our particularity is largely a matter of culture and context. When we come to consider spirituality – defined originally by St. Jerome as identifying the qualitatively new or enhanced life we (all) enjoy by virtue of our common baptism, the same paradox surfaces: we are all the same as adopted children of God, and at the same time we are all different by virtue of our cultures, our circumstances and our individual character and temperament.

So, in order to say anything intelligible about “Spiritian spirituality,” this paradox must not be overlooked but acknowledged and faced. If spirituality can be described as “lived faith,” then obviously, at one level we all share a common spirituality through our common baptism and common call to discipleship. Yet, since we all live our faith as unique individuals, we embody and manifest our spirituality in a particular fashion. So, to argue the case for both sides of the paradox; on the one hand, it *is* valid and useful to speak of “Spiritian spirituality” in a unitary way, as something that all Spiritians are invited to live and to share. But, on the other, it may not be helpful if that were to claim that it is a legacy that only Spiritians enjoy, or that it is qualitatively different from “non-Spiritian Spirituality.” After all, when Jerome coined the word spirituality, he gave it both a specifically Christian connotation and a universal applicability (notwithstanding the later elaboration into “great” [Dominican, Franciscan] and “small” [‘simple faithful’] spiritualities).

The final document from the General Chapter of 2012 (Bagamoyo), describes or refers to some of the features of our “Spiritian spirituality.” We are to be “fervent in the Spirit” (*Bagamoyo* 1.1), though this is a quotation from Romans 12:11 and thus of very broad applicability. We are reminded that “The evangelization of the ‘poor’ is our purpose” (*Bagamoyo* 1.3 [SRL 4]), and the document declares that “we restate forcefully our mission to bear witness to the Gospel of justice, of peace and of

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reconciliation... [and] we renew once more our focus on education as a way to the integral liberation of individuals” (*Bagamoyo* 1.4). Thus, we clearly identify our Spiritan call to embody our spirituality in a characteristic way, though we should be aware that many other communities profess essentially the same commitment, and the call to discipleship surely embraces all such aspirations. Spiritans are not unique, though by our words and deeds we should be recognizable as living out our common call in particular ways, individual and congregational.

The Decisions of the Bagamoyo Chapter further call us to “give special attention to first evangelisation and to the new evangelisation (*Bagamoyo*, 1.7) (though “new evangelisation” remains an unclarified term, with more than 89 current definitions competing for space). Having added that “we have to be able to stay for a long time in one place” (*Bagamoyo*, 1.8) – which underscores both our *disponibilité* and our *stabilitas* (further putative markers of “Spiritan spirituality,” if you will), it moves to apply the formulation of John Paul II in the encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, that identifies “the dialogue of everyday life, the dialogue of collaborating in common projects, spiritual dialogue, and theological dialogue” (*Bagamoyo* 1.12). This is, of course, all very worthy, timely, and consistent with Spiritan values; but it is clearly not only the patrimony of Spiritans, and not unique to us.

One difficulty we might unwittingly create for ourselves is to imagine a “Spiritan spirituality” as something we can acquire, and which is then in no further need of being modified by our ongoing encounters with God, with others, and with creation as our life’s journey unfolds. But part, surely, of our spirituality is that it evolves and is shaped by our life- experience. Not to allow for that is to become closed to our own ongoing conversion, which ought to be a transformative experience. As Spiritans specifically (though this again is not unique to us) we are committed to God’s mission throughout our lives, and our commitment implies a calling and a sending to many persons, places, and circumstances. These serve to shape and (re)form our spirituality. If spirituality is about how the Holy Spirit relates to actual people (and *vice versa*), then culture – including history and context – and the specific person in concrete circumstances, are critically important variables. Unless we take them very seriously, we end up with a thoroughly impracticable and disembodied spirituality, which would not only be a double oxymoron but a rank impossibility. So let us try to construct a working definition of spirituality and then see how we might apply it to ourselves as Spiritans.

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## One Way And Many Ways

One in the Spirit, united under one Lord and with one Faith and Baptism, we are nevertheless not clones, and our differences are real and not notional. Trying to follow the Way of Jesus, we nevertheless do so in many different ways, according to our circumstances and limitations. The Way of Jesus is open to all, and is not limited to any elite or to specialists only. In a classic text to newly baptized Christians, St. Jerome (who ‘invented’ the word spirituality), says: “Act in such a way that you progress in spirituality,”<sup>1</sup> clearly *not* implying a “one size fits all” spirituality. Consequently, I suggest a simple, practical and descriptive (rather than a theoretical or normative) definition of spirituality as “*a way of being in the world with God.*”

*...spirituality as “a way of being in the world with God.”*

The meaning and application of the word spirituality has evolved a great deal since St. Jerome’s minimalist and tightly focused definition (the new life of the Holy Spirit given to every baptized person). Now used in the plural, the word is applied both to “great” and “little” spiritualities.<sup>2</sup> Before the Middle Ages, no necessary dichotomy between spirit and body, or spirituality and embodiment, is postulated: they can, and indeed should coexist harmoniously in human persons. But gradually the body was seen as inferior to the spirit, and aspirations to authentic spirituality were understood to require a demeaning of the body in order to allow for a greater flourishing of the spirit. But of course, since there is no such thing as a dis-embodied human person (not to mention a generic one), a “one size fits all” spirituality would be frankly impossible; and since Jesus himself is the “Incarnate (Embodied, Human) One of God,” such an approach was bound to do violence to our humanity. Apparently forgetful of the clarity of Hebrews 2:16 (“For it was not the angels that God took to himself, but descent from Abraham, so that he could become as we are”), an influential current within Christian spirituality attempted to persuade people that the way to authentic spirituality required people to become quasi-angelic. We are not, cannot be, nor need we be angels. If it was good enough for God to become human, it should surely be good enough for humans to try to be the same.

*We are not, cannot be, nor need we be angels. If it was good enough for God to become human, it should surely be good enough for humans to try to be the same.*

## A Way

Every incarnated or embodied spirituality is, at one level, unique to each person. None of us is without a social and historical location. Even when the ground is shifting under us, we are always somewhere in particular and we remain a particular someone. Therefore our Christian spirituality will flourish or atrophy, relative to the way on which we are embarked and the way we proceed at any given moment.

## **Of Being**

With two thousand years of Christianity behind us, and countless people who have “gone before us marked with the sign of faith,” it is evident that some people’s ways – or spiritual odysseys – began centuries ago in countries unknown to us. And others will be born into a world long after our own death and very different from ours. Likewise, Des Places and Libermann lived in worlds and circumstances we can never know for they are beyond our direct experience. There are, in other words, myriad acculturations (cross-cultural fertilizations) and inculturations (specific ways of living one’s faith in and through different cultures) of Christian spirituality. Furthermore, actual, existential states of being differ widely, both within and between individuals: some people are healthy, others sick; some rich, others poor; and during the course of a single life, a person may be alternately rich and poor, healthy and sick. A single lifetime may embrace *many* ways of being. Our spirituality – our experience of the life of God’s Spirit interacting with our lives – develops and matures (and perhaps atrophies) in the context of our ever-changing selves and circumstances. A standardized or generic spirituality cannot possibly sustain anyone over the course of a lifetime, and our relationship with God’s Spirit and with the “other” we encounter daily, must develop if it is not to die. The New Testament of course abounds with examples of widely different ways of being: from the bent-over woman (Luke 13:10-17) to the despised tax-collector (Luke 19:1-2), and from the Canaanite woman pleading for her daughter (Matt 15:21-28), to the synagogue leader pleading for his. These, and many more represent the countless incarnations or ways of being, that the Spirit of God, through the ministry of Jesus, came to restore, to Heal Or To Convert.

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## **In The World**

With so many habitable bioregions and so many human cultures on the planet, it is obvious that there are in fact many “worlds” on this earth. Sometimes we even speak of different people living “worlds apart.” Diversity shapes human persons and determines much of our potential, including, significantly, the spiritual dimension. To journey from Australia’s Great Barrier Reef to the Mississippi delta, from the desert of Namibia to the glaciers of Alaska, or from tropical jungles in Costa Rica to Chicago’s magnificent Lake Michigan, is to encounter many worlds. These and a hundred other epiphanies are evidence of the hand of the Creator and the sweep of the Holy Spirit still brooding over creation. And this brings us to a final variable: God.

## With God

*...every single God-  
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(since God is Mystery  
and all language and  
images fail)...*

To consider God as a variable is certainly atypical thinking; to think of a variable God may smack of heresy. But to acknowledge that every single God-image and all God-language is unavoidably analogical rather than literal (since God is Mystery and all language and images fail) may help us avoid the dangers of polytheism or idolatry. If there is a temptation to make God in our own image and likeness through anthropomorphism, a greater temptation might be to hypostatize a single image – warrior, shepherd, king, lord, judge, child, lamb and so on – when God is simply beyond all imagining and when we can be enriched by enriching and expanding our images from the wealth of those available and found across the world's cultures. Our existential spirituality – our (daily) way of being in the world with God – can be imaginatively captured by poets like William Blake who spoke of our capacity to discover the Creator in creation, and

To see the world in a grain of sand  
And a heaven in a wild flower,  
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand  
And eternity in an hour.

Or recall Francis Thompson, tormented yet ever-searching for God, and poetic creator of the indelible image of God as the *Hound of Heaven* who relentlessly yet lovingly seeks out the lost. He wrote *The Kingdom of God* with these opening lines:

O world invisible, we view thee,  
O world intangible, we touch thee,  
O world unknowable, we know thee,  
Inapprehensible, we clutch thee.

*The world is charged  
with the grandeur of  
God.*

Gerard Manley Hopkins offers us immensely powerful and evocative images:

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.  
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;  
It gathers to greatness, like the ooze of oil  
Crushed [...]  
And for all this, nature is never spent; [...]

Because the Holy Ghost over the bent

World broods with warm breast and with ah!  
bright wings.

And Marty Haugen's popular rendering of the *Canticle of the Sun* says it lyrically too:

The heavens are telling the glory of God,

And all creation is singing for joy.

Come dance in the forest and play in the field,

And sing, sing to the glory of the Lord

*We might then say that  
the world itself is a  
kind of theology book  
– a work or opus whose  
subject is God...*

We might then say that the world itself is a kind of theology book – a work or opus whose subject is God; but, like other worthy books, it remains unread by too many people. Still, our spirituality, or developing relationship with God and God's creation, can and should be expanded and deepened by our continuing and intentional contact with other people, other worlds, and other images of God. For, although we can never adequately define God, God remains the defining component of Christian spirituality.

Since "spirituality" is not a single entity, it will be experienced and lived in numberless different ways, in different people and in different circumstances, each of which can be an authentic expression of Christian spirituality. So what, if anything, is left for something called "Spiritans spirituality"?

### **Spiritans Spirituality?**

The *Decisions* of the 2012 General Chapter offer some useful hints. *1.11*, as already noted, speaks of dialogue and collaboration in our missionary ministry. I take this to be an invitation, specifically to ourselves as Spiritans, to be enriched in our spirituality by virtue of the actual people, locations and circumstances that become part of our ministerial lives. *1.26* is frankly declarative, stating that "more attention *will be given* to the natural environment," inviting us to develop a more holistic and ecology-minded spirituality. Declaration *1.32* is expressed likewise: "Through our personal witness ... *we will transmit* the Spiritans vision and ethos to all those involved in our educational establishments" (my italics). And finally, *Bagamoyo 3.1* addresses our spirituality thus: "Formation is a life-long process leading candidates to transformation under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. [...] [W]e affirm that the Holy Spirit is the true agent of formation and works through the life[time] of candidates to bring them to maturity in Christ." This is perfectly consistent with St. Jerome, but it focuses on the *life-*

*long development* of the gift of the Spirit, rather than simply on the gift itself. And in the case of Spiritans, that gift should produce blossom and fruit within the context of, and shaped by, the Spiritan ethos and Spiritan living.

*A Nigerian Spiritan living and working in some part of Africa (or Europe), should develop elements of Spiritan spirituality that are rather different from a British Spiritan whose life's work has been in Africa (or Europe)...*

Still, though we may therefore legitimately claim that our Christian spirituality has a distinctively Spiritan identity, we must also allow that identity to be colored or flavored by a wide variety of life-shaping encounters. A Nigerian Spiritan living and working in some part of Africa (or Europe), should develop elements of Spiritan spirituality that are rather different from a British Spiritan whose life's work has been in Africa (or Europe); and so on: different people in different or changing circumstances should be (differently) affected by those circumstances in the ways they pray, perceive the world, or respond to their particular encounters. The outcome will then be that, though we are *cor unum et anima una*, we are living our Spiritan identity and spirituality in an acceptable variety of ways, all of which should be personally and mutually enriching. Intercultural living – though difficult and challenging – would acknowledge this variety and attempt to honor, learn from, and likewise be mutually enriched by it. This would take us far beyond an assimilationist approach to formation, whereby candidates are simply expected to conform to some standard way of living, practiced – however worthily – by members of a dominant culture, whether national, tribal, or linguistic.

*If each and all were seeking to be converted, everyone would discover that our enrichment comes both from the Holy Spirit and from mutuality.*

In his challenging and inspiring Letter at Pentecost 2013, our Superior General, John Fogarty, emphasizes our Spiritan unity in diversity. He speaks of “the Spirit who brings us together into one large family” – “*from different cultures, continents and nations*,” as SRL 37 puts it. He then quotes Torre d’Aguilha, which states that our communities are “places where ... differences are acknowledged and affirmed without compromising unity.” What might this entail or demand, if we were to focus specifically on the way our Spiritan spirituality is lived out, embodied? John Fogarty then reminds us that Bagamoyo asked us to reflect on the issue of “*Spiritan culture*”. I would ask further: is it in fact possible for us to create a “Spiritan culture”? And I would like to say that, in principle it is indeed, provided we Spiritans attempt to do so with dedication (intentionality), mutuality, and tolerance, all of which demand a commitment to our own conversion. If each and all were seeking to be converted, everyone would discover that our enrichment comes both from the Holy Spirit and from mutuality. So, having offered a number of images of God from poets of the Western tradition, let me now offer some from elsewhere, as a stimulant and challenge to each of us, to think differently, and to expand our God images and our lived spirituality, as Spiritans united in our differences

and enriched by other traditions and insights, gathered from our *peregrinatio propter Christum* (pilgrimage on account of Christ) through many cultures, worlds, and ways of being with God.

Spirituality, says Gustavo Gutiérrez, is prior to theology; and unless it is incarnated in “lived practices,” says Terrence Tilley, it is no more than notional. But lived practices arise from particular people in particular contexts, and vary enormously. The Pingangnaktogmiut Inuit from Nunavut in Northern Canada and the Bidjandjadjara Aboriginals from Australia are as different as their names, and blond Scandinavians stand in striking contrast to ebony Shilluk from the Sudan. Different ways of being in the world with God are equally evident when we compare the control of a saffron-robed monk from Kampuchea, the abandon of a traditional Dogon healer from Mali, the controlled-abandon of a Sufi “whirling” dervish from Iraq or the placid contemplation of a healer awaiting the sunrise over the Pacific ocean. These represent only a fraction of the many ways humanity strives for God and perhaps even for a relationship with God. It is as unlikely that some are valid and other bogus, as it is possible that each can teach us all.

*It is important to remember that the only way to be human is in and through our bodies.*

It is important to remember that the only way to be human is in and through our bodies. We do not merely *have* bodies: we *are embodied*, incarnate. So unless our spirituality is radically embodied, it is not yet authentic, Christian, incarnational. Theologian Arthur Vogel brings the point home beautifully:

We can be incorporated into Christ’s body only in our own bodies, for only in them can the type of structure which is Christ’s body find its kind of being in us. There will be additional meaning in the Eucharist if we follow up in still more detail the parallel between our Christian lives in the body of Christ and our lives in our own bodies.<sup>3</sup>

### **Images Of God: Fragments Of Spirituality**

Here is a Maasai prayer from Tanzania:

Creator God, we announce your goodness because it is clearly visible in the heavens where there is the light of the sun, the heat of the sun, and the light of night. There are rain clouds. The land itself shows your goodness, because it can be seen in the trees and their shade. It is clearly seen in the water and the grass, in the milking cows and in the cows that give us meat. Your love is visible all the time: morning and daytime, evening and night. Your love is great. We say “Thank you, our God!”<sup>4</sup>

From Zimbabwe, the Rozwi people crafted this beautiful prayer that describes their actual world:

O Great Spirit! Piler-up of the rocks into towering mountains! When you stamp on the stones the dust rises and fills the land. Hardness of the cliff; waters of the pool that turn into misty rain when stirred; gourd overflowing with oil! You are the one who calls the branching trees into life. You make the new seeds grow out of the ground so that they stand straight and tall. You have filled the land with people.<sup>5</sup>

Contrast the spirituality underlying a traditional prayer from the Chagga of Tanzania:

We know you God, Chief, Preserver, you who united the bush and the plain. You Lord, Chief, the Elephant indeed. You have sent us this bull which is of your own fashioning. Chief, receive this bull of your name. Heal the person to whom you gave it, and his children. Sow the seed of offspring within us, so that we may beget like bees. May our clan hold together, that it be not cleft in the land. May strangers not come to possess our groves. Now, Chief, Preserver, bless all that is rightly ours.<sup>6</sup>

### **The Dignity Of Difference**

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks writes these wise words:

The radical transcendence of God in the Hebrew Bible means nothing more or less than that *there is a difference between God and religion. ... God is God of all humanity, but no single faith is or should be the faith of all humanity.* ... This means that religious truth is not universal. What it does *not* mean is that religious truth is relative. There is a difference, all too often ignored, between absoluteness and universality.<sup>7</sup>

Sacks is adverting, surely, to the many local religions of the world; people subscribe to the Absoluteness of God without being consciously aware of, or particularly concerned with the scope – the universality – of God’s sway. But he is also saying that no single human articulation, no words and no language, can condense the whole divine-human saga in a single narrative or set of propositions. God is incomprehensible mystery. But, says Sacks, that is not the end of it: “We encounter God in the face of a stranger. God creates difference. Therefore it is in the one-who-is-different that we meet God.”<sup>8</sup> This has echoes of Martin Buber:

*We encounter God in  
the face of a stranger.  
God creates difference.  
Therefore it is in the  
one-who-is-different that  
we meet God.*

*“Spiritun spirituality” can be a useful reminder of our common patrimony. It can remind us that we should drink deep from our own Spiritun wells. At the same time, those wells are not our exclusive property, and all charisms exist for others and not for hoarding.*

The believing Jew lives in the consciousness that the proper place for his encounter with God lies in the ever-changing situations of life. ... The believing Jew hears God’s voice in a different way in the language spoken by unforeseen and chang[ing] situations. ... Difference is the source of value, and indeed of society itself. It is precisely because we are not the same, that our exchanges are not zero-sum encounters. Because each of us has something someone lacks, and we lack something someone else has, we gain by interaction.<sup>9</sup>

“Spiritun spirituality” can be a useful reminder of our common patrimony. It can remind us that we should drink deep from our own Spiritun wells. At the same time, those wells are not our exclusive property, and all charisms exist for others and not for hoarding. And as Sacks, Buber, and many others remind us – and as the poems and prayers identified above attest, every one of us is different, with exposure to different refractions of the multifacetedness of God, and therefore our spirituality is not identical with that of anyone else. And each and all of us can be enriched, mutually, and through our encounters with God and God’s creation throughout our lives.

#### **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup>Quoted in James Wiseman, *Spirituality and Mysticism*. Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY.: 2006:2.

<sup>2</sup>Gustavo Gutierrez. *We Drink From Our Own Wells*. Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY.: 1984:26-7.

<sup>3</sup>Arthur Vogel. *Is The Last Supper Finished? Secular Light on a Sacred Meal*. Sheed and Ward, New York, 1968: 74-83.

<sup>4</sup>In Anthony Gittins (ed). *Halleluiah for the Day! An African Prayer Book*. Liguori, MO.: 2002.

<sup>5</sup>In Anthony Gittins (ed). *op.cit.*

<sup>6</sup>In Gittins, *op.cit.*

<sup>7</sup>Jonathan Sacks. *The Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations*. Continuum, New York. 2002:55.

<sup>8</sup>Jonathan Sacks, *op.cit.* 59.

<sup>9</sup>Martin Buber. *Der Glaube der Propheten*. Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus. 1984: 14-15.



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## NEW EVANGELIZATION IN THE AMERICAN CONTEXT: SOME OBSERVATIONS AND AN APPROACH

From the time of creation and culminating in the Incarnation of the eternal Word, God still loves the world and seeks to involve all in the relationships of his love life. The principal word in this statement is "relationships," for that is what love is all about. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* put it succinctly when it says (CCC, 53):

The divine plan of Revelation is realized simultaneously "by deeds and words which are intrinsically bound up with each other" and shed light on each another. It involves a specific divine pedagogy: God communicates himself to man gradually. He prepares him to welcome by stages the supernatural Revelation that is to culminate in the person and mission of the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ.

St. Irenaeus of Lyons repeatedly speaks of this divine pedagogy using the image of God and man becoming accustomed to one another: the Word of God dwelt in man and became the Son of man in order to accustom man to perceive God and to accustom God to dwell in man, according to the Father's pleasure.

*Evangelization* is the name that we give to the process of inviting people into this school of the divine pedagogy of divine love. It is a process in which we seek to relate lovingly to life as it is experienced by people in their cultural contexts, in the circumstances in which they find themselves, so that God can meet them where they are. It is a relational *process* which seeks to touch how they live in society, but first and foremost to respond to the perennial questions of meaning which arise in their hearts. Who is God? Or is there a God? What is the human person and who am I? What is the world? How do the three relate to one another? These, we might call the permanent questions that coincide with humanity's search for other permanent things – the One, the Good, the Beautiful and the True revealed to us in the person of Jesus Christ.

Today we speak about the *New Evangelization*, i.e., how to relate the message of Gospel Love to a world that changes so quickly that we do not even seem to have time to reflect on how to address the questions or love people through the process of

*Evangelization is the name that we give to the process of inviting people into this school of the divine pedagogy of divine love.*

clarifying them and seeking answers. Attempts of the Church to respond to major cultural shifts have ranged from defensiveness and rejection of the cultural changes to conciliatory openness to the new, while not giving in on the unchangeable truth of the Incarnation and its implications for humanity.

The defensive reactionary approach can be seen in the pontificate of Pius IX and in the deliberations and actions of the First Vatican Council. Subsequent to that Council, Leo XIII sought to counter Bismarck's *Kulturkampf*, or battle for civilization, with an intelligent and pliable defense of Christianity which did not cede on what Catholics hold as essential. Leo sought not to exacerbate the contrast and conflict with modernity by a reactionary intransigence immobilized in a cultural traditionalism fossilized in models grown old and past their time. He sought harmony and friendship between the Church and modern civilization as is witnessed best in his encyclical, *Rerum novarum*. During the pontificate of Pius X, a new approach to cultural change was adopted, namely, the development of a Catholic *Kulturkampf* to "Restore all things in Christ." Pius became the "town crier" in the battle against modern civilization. He perceived Christianity as conquering the cultural trends and bringing to perfection the ideal of Christian civilization. Evangelization and civilization became one and the same. The Reign of God was also of this world, a universal Christian civilization.

This tension between approaches to evangelization and culture continued through the pontificates of Benedict XV, Pius XI, and Pius XII. With the arrival of John XXIII and Paul VI a new understanding of evangelization emerges from their understanding of the Church and its salvific loving role in the world. Beginning with John's ground-breaking encyclical, *Pacem in terris* and then Paul VI's *Ecclesiam suam*, to evangelize means to be in dialogue with the world in which not only sin but grace is already at work. This is the message of the Second Vatican Council and subsequent synodal statements such as *Justice in the World* (1971) and *Evangelii nuntiandi* (1974).

Papal teaching subsequent to the Second Vatican Council presents variations on Council teaching as is seen in the voluminous encyclicals of John Paul II and in the syntheses and style of the powerfully insightful three encyclicals of Benedict XVI that bring Catholic teaching full circle with St. John's proclamation, *Deus caritas est*, God is Love. In his social encyclical *Caritas in veritate* (Love in Truth), Benedict XVI challenges the world with the social and economic implications of divine agape.

*...what the synod  
called for most was  
renewed dispositions  
of heart of the  
evangelizers themselves.*

The Church's longing to relate gospel love to the hearts of all people and their cultures was evident in the recent Synod of Bishops which sought to address the need for a *New Evangelization*. What was evident in the synod discussions was that rather than seeking new tactics or methodologies, what the synod called for most was *renewed dispositions of heart of the evangelizers themselves*. It is in the habits of the heart of the evangelizers that one will see the embodiment of the contrast and relationship between gospel and cultural values. The Synod Bishops repeatedly emphasized that the newness of the evangelization depends on the renewed, loving hearts of the evangelizers. A Canadian layman, Sebastian Gomes, was present at the synod as a journalist for the Canadian TV channel, "Salt and Light." When speaking about what he heard in the synod he said that what most impressed him was the call for humility on the part of the Church. Humility is the recognition of the poverty and weakness of Jesus' disciples in relation to the credibility of the mission. Humility presumes conversion in the Church that is the result of the action of the Holy Spirit. This is the primary disposition of heart needed for evangelizing.<sup>1</sup> It is interesting that Pope Francis chose Mr. Gomes to do one of the readings at the Mass celebrated by the pope for his installation. Pope Francis, himself, was a participant in that Synod. Given his words and actions since becoming the Bishop of Rome, we already see signs of the spirit and gestures that must pervade the New Evangelization, our new way of relating to the *arche agape*,<sup>2</sup> the original love of God for the world.

To celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council on October 11, 1963, Pope Benedict proclaimed 2012-2013 to be a Year of Faith. This year also marks the twentieth anniversary of the publication of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Celebrating a year of faith could be likened to a time for the faithful to wash their window on the world – their worldview. Just as ordinary windows gather dust and dirt and need washing, so too does the window through which we view our 1) relationship with God, 2) who we are and how we relate to one another in community and 3) the world in which we live. Such a window washing in love can clarify for us the loving response we are called to make to God and to those who most need our love. In changed and changing circumstances in which the human life-meaning-questions remain ongoing, we are responsible for refreshing our faith response to God's self-communication to us, God who is love. Loving response to love will pervade all our relationships - personal, societal, systemic and institutional.

It is helpful to recall what Paul VI said about the essence of evangelization when he wrote *Evangelization of the Peoples* (henceforth *EN*). What Paul VI said is worth quoting in its entirety:

*...evangelizing means bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new...*

*...affecting and as it were upsetting, through the power of the Gospel, mankind's criteria of judgment, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration and models of life...*

*EN, 18.* For the Church, evangelizing means bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new.... The purpose of evangelization is therefore precisely this *interior change*, and if it had to be expressed in one sentence the best way of stating it would be to say that the Church evangelizes when she seeks *to convert, solely through the divine power of [Agape] the message she proclaims, both the personal and collective consciences of people, the activities in which they engage, and the lives and concrete milieu which are theirs.*

*EN, 19.* *Strata of humanity* which are transformed: for the Church it is a question not only of preaching the Gospel in ever wider geographic areas or to ever greater numbers of people, but also of affecting and as it were upsetting, through the power of the Gospel, mankind's *criteria of judgment, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration and models of life*, which are in contrast with the Word of God and the plan of salvation.

*EN, 20.* All this could be expressed in the following words: what matters is to evangelize man's culture and cultures (not in a purely decorative way, as it were, by applying a thin veneer, but in a vital way, in depth and right to their very roots), in the wide and rich sense which these terms have in *Gaudium et Spes*, always *taking the person as one's starting-point* and always coming back to the relationships of people among themselves and with God.

For our purposes in seeking to evangelize anew, the words and phrases in these passages that most stand out are: *all the strata, transforming humanity from within, solely through the divine power of the message, personal and collective consciences*, in relation to the interior change both of human hearts and societal habits of the heart. The strata that he refers to are: *criteria of judgment, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration and models of life*. Everything depends on *taking the person as one's starting-point*. To have a love which is so intentional that it can pervade all of these strata is the ministry of evangelizing cultures anew. It is in light of this history of the Church's desire and mandate to evangelize that the Center for Faith and Culture,

University of St. Thomas, Houston, Texas has for the past twenty years sought to relate to all sectors of the dominant American culture in building on the strengths of the culture while offering the expanded vision of human life contained in the *arche agape* of the Gospel.

### **The Center's mission states:**

The Center for Faith and Culture seeks to understand and affect the relationship between the Gospel and the American way of life in relation to God's ongoing encounter with humanity in the light of faith. Through dialogue it assists participants to live as faith-full citizens of our democratic republic. It brings the Catholic voice to the ongoing conversation about the meaning of life, and the liberty and pursuit of happiness we hold in common as Americans. In its activities it also seeks to relate the Gospel to various American subcultures, e.g., Hispanics/Latinos, African-American, and Asian.

In its programmatic offerings the Center incorporates both theory and practice, giving special emphasis to the formation of community leadership that will be capable of integrating faith and culture through ongoing reflection and action. Since we believe that holistic spiritual development is at the very core of all cultural development, this too, constitutes an essential dimension of the Center's work.

Two major undertakings offered by the Center have developed as a result of this mission as it relates to the New Evangelization, one academic and the other pastoral. The academic Master of Arts in Faith and Culture is a thirty-six credit M.A. which also offers a Certificate for students who complete the eighteen credit core courses but do not wish to complete the M. A. itself. The "New Evangelization and Pastoral Formation of Faithful Citizens" is the pastoral one that the rest of this article will describe as the Center's response to the call of the Church for a fresh approach to evangelization. The pastoral program is an outgrowth of the Center's twenty-year experience in seeking to live its mission. It presumes that the program will evangelize the evangelizer, that it will be transformative of the life of the one who desires to share the transforming power of Gospel Agape with others.

*...God Still So Loves the  
World...*

### **Adult Faith Formation in the New Evangelization<sup>3</sup>**

The title of this pastoral process is "*God Still So Loves the World: The Ongoing Dialogue with the World of Faithful Citizens.*" It is offered as a curriculum resource tool or study guide for

engaging Catholic faithful in dialogue with our American way of life. It flows from the missionary character of our faith and requires a recommitment to the social dimensions of followers of Christ as faith-full citizens. It evokes the responsibility of faithful citizens to being the life-giving message of the Gospel to the world. It is structured in such a way as to assist groups to deepen their faith commitment through reflection, dialogue and the acquisition of skills and can be adapted to youth groups, study groups, catechists, adult learners, and any faith study groups. The goal is to gather the Catholic faithful to contemplate and live their identity and lives as worship (Romans 12:1-2) as “full, conscious, active participants” in the contemporary world.

The process has been tested with two pilot groups. One was composed of students and professors from the M. A. in Faith and Culture program. The other was made up of diocesan and parish ministers and other experts who serve in the areas of adult education, family and youth ministries, retreat centers as well as representatives of religious communities. Most recently the process has been offered to a group of permanent deacons and their wives. These pilots have been of immense help in honing, reshaping and modifying the approach that we have taken. We are now at a point of sifting the materials used for the process and readying them for print.

The process consists of four stages under the general heading of: *God Still So Loves the World*. Each stage, in turn, has four sub-sections. Each stage seeks to incorporate art, literature, poetry, visuals, etc., which incorporate a holistic experience to what is proclaimed. Each section of each stage lasts approximately two hours.

Stage One: *A New Evangelization: Because God Still So Loves the World*. The aim of this stage is to rekindle in the participants a sense of the enchantment of the universe throughout which the recreating Divine Spirit of God is present and active. It seeks to allow the participants to enter into the “dearest freshness” that Gerard Manley Hopkins speaks about in *God’s Grandeur*. This approach is also based on the work of philosopher, Charles Taylor,<sup>4</sup> whose concern is to confront the challenges presented by the process of “disenchantment” that has taken place in the modern world. He says that we need to seek a kind of “re-enchantment.” To be enchanted is to be open to reality beyond what we see, to the presence of the divine, to mystery. Being enchanted means that belief is not just another option, but an everyday reality. It is the way to be enchanted by something outside the self. We might translate this into the need to give a rebirth to the sense of the

*To be enchanted is to be open to reality beyond what we see, to the presence of the divine, to mystery.*

Mystery of the Divine Being present throughout the universe even in its downtrodden state (Ephesians 1:3-14). It is a world downtrodden but nonetheless groaning for fulfillment while the Spirit works in the present bringing forth first fruits (Romans 8:23) through a new birth from above (John 3:3). *The process of this stage encourages the participant to develop a receptive habit of heart to the beauty of transformative love that God seeks to give all. It involves the experience of the universe itself as sacramental. What follows from this is an understanding of the Eucharist, itself, the "Mystery of Faith," as the Sacrament of cosmic unity and the recapitulation (Colossians 1:19) of all in the Spirit, through Christ in adoration of the Father.* It is the sense of the Eucharist in the Orthodox Tradition of the Mystic Supper, the Supper of the Lamb sacrificed and risen. The experience is captured in Teilhard de Chardin's *Hymn of the Universe* in which he uses the Roman Catholic Mass as a metaphor for his understanding of humanity in relation to the universe and the unity of all creation, emphasizing the simplicity, coherence and harmony of everything through the universal presence of the Word. It leads to a sense of the ongoing "Dance" (*perichoresis*) with the Trinity for Love of the world. The *communio* of Eucharistic love is experienced as the only force that can bring individual beings to their perfect completion by uniting them one with the other.

Stage Two: ***Cultivating Our Culture – Bringing Love to Our Way of Life.*** This stage flows from the teaching of St. Irenaeus on the unity of God and the unity of salvation history. He is the Church Father most quoted by the Second Vatican Council (14 times) after St. Augustine. He insists that God began the world and has been overseeing it ever since with his creative act. Everything is a part of this plan whose high point is the advent of Jesus. He opposed anything which held that creation was bad and insisted that God is always at work even in fallen creation. John Paul II in speaking of Irenaeus said that we cannot forget the world in which we live, its legitimate demands and the currents of thought abroad in it which often bear truths that must be recognized (Address, no. 4 on his trip to France). We have to recognize that which draws together, the authentic institutions to be favored and the need to correct.<sup>5</sup> While there are defects and errors in this world, the Church refuses to be hypnotized by them. We must always consider what the Fathers have called the *semina Verbi* (seeds of the Word), the *praeparatio evangelica* (preparation for the gospel), the traces of the grace which is active in every person and hence in every culture (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 22). *The working of grace can be seen in everything human that unifies the person and unifies the community.* Unity in love is the will of God.

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*...the glory of God is  
man fully alive...*

It is in this light that Stage Two approaches the historic founding of the United States as a democratic republic. The goal is not to *Instaurare omnia in Christo* (Pius X's motto in its Tridentine translation of the Vulgate), but to *Recapitulare omnia in Christo* (sum up all things in Christ, as the Neo-Vulgate says). Christ is the Head of all people, the universe and of Christians in particular. He is the Head who guides and directs, who causes humanity to live and develop. The image is a restorative one, concerned more with the idea of gathering, of joining together, of enrichment in universal fraternity. The Word enlightens every person. This presumes that God's creating Spirit is already at work in humanly constructed ways of life (cultures) and that these ways of life already have within them the seeds of the Eternal Word made flesh. Therefore the Council promoted culture as man's search for human value and says, "In this way, the human spirit grows increasingly free of its bondage to creatures and can be more easily drawn to the worship and contemplation of the Creator."<sup>6</sup> That is why Irenaeus could say that "the glory of God is man fully alive" provided that he remains in contact with his Creator. The full text of St. Irenaeus is: "the glory of God is man fully alive, and the life of man is the vision of God. If the revelation of God through creation already brings life to all living beings on the earth, how much more will the manifestation of the Father by the Word bring life to those who see God" (*Adversus Haereses* (Against Heresies) IV, 20, 7). The full text brings perfect balance to the approach that Christians should take to understanding the relationship between faith and culture. The seeds of God's unifying love are already at work in human efforts to unify people; the Gospel can build on these cultural unifying desires and actions with the greater vision of Gospel *agape*.

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It is from this vantage point that Stage Two looks for Gospel seeds in the American way of life as articulated in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. *This Stage also leads the participants to an understanding of what "culture" is and how it is promoted by the Second Vatican Council, not only in Gaudium et Spes but also in other documents which develop major theological and ecclesiological themes of Gaudium et Spes and Lumen Gentium.* The Stage then *undertakes the work of identifying areas of relationship and contrast between the dominant American cultural worldview and the worldview of the Gospel.* In doing so it seeks ways to shed light on how the Gospel responds most fully to the American inalienable rights of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." The aim is to name both the beauty and the tensions inherent in seeking to live the dual citizenship of American Catholics whose ultimate citizenship is in heaven. The challenge is how faith-full citizens are to live this dual citizenship

with loving realism. How, according to the Gospel mandate, to “go and teach all nations,” can members of Christ’s body who seek a “more perfect union” keep engaged fully, consciously and actively in the life of the civic community to make the *semina Christi* (seeds of Christ) within the dominant American way of life spring forth and bear fruit that will last? This is what is implied in being “faithful citizens” which far exceeds the limited interpretation of the phrase as is sometimes given it in reading the USCCB (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops) letter on the subject during the period just prior to presidential elections. Faith-full Catholic dual citizens are required to critique the way of life they share with fellow Americans. They are charged to critique in love and be neither bashers nor “love it and leave it” people.

To love is to relate! To love is to communicate! To love is to live the asceticism of dialogue.

Stage Three: *Inside Voices for the Outside World – A Spirituality of Dialogue*. What then is the way to a “more perfect union” of people living in a world enchanted by God’s Spirit? *The only way that respects human beings as essentially social, relational, as wired for community and communion - dialogue. To love is to relate! To love is to communicate! To love is to live the asceticism of dialogue.* Stage Three, therefore, intends to lead participants into the beauty, the hard knocks and rough edges involved in seeking to bridge the gap between culture and faith. It presumes the relational spirituality of the Beatitudes; the habits of the heart of the Sermon on the Mount; the putting on the mind of Christ whose life was the life of the Word in dialogue with the world. It is in the context of trying to live and dialogue with a “company of strangers”<sup>37</sup> that we encounter the greatest challenge to live the love which fulfills the law. We must be realists and recognize that our first temptation is to flee the tension that arises, to shut down, to force our point, to divide and conquer and fail to embrace the patience, perseverance and the slow tempo of transformational dialogue. We have to learn how dialogue is at the heart of how people bond in community. In dialogue we also appreciate that good borders are essential for good relationships and at the same time how to cross frontiers. We have to get beyond the noisy gongs and the clanging symbols and polarization. This involves learning the art and the asceticism of dialogue. It is an art which requires immense self-discipline. Pope Francis has made it clear in his allocutions that a culture of dialogue, listening and mutual respect is at the heart of the Church’s desire to evangelize anew.

Stage Four: *Called and Sent to Love the World*. We must realize that we are not alone in this Christian vocation to love the world. The dialogue that we enter into finds a foundation in all who share one baptism in Christ and all who worship the One

God. Our dialogue must first and foremost be ecumenical and interreligious. We are not in this alone. All four constitutions of the Second Vatican Council (*Dei Verbum* on Revelation, *Lumen Gentium* on the Church, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* on the Liturgy, and *Gaudium et Spes* on the Church in the Modern World) point to how the Catholic Church, in which the Church of Christ subsists, is in relationship with all categories of believers and non-believers alike. As we seek “a more perfect union” within our republic, these are fellow citizens with whom we walk the journey to a recapitulation of all things in *arche agape*. It is with them that we must seek the goal of Christ’s ministry, so that the whole world may be one in God who is Love. It is fitting, therefore, that *as we seek to evangelize in a new way and bring the Good News of God’s love for the world to a secularized culture, we do so in dialogue with others who believe in Christ, who believe in the one God, and who even proclaim that God cannot be known or does not exist*. We have to develop a sense of belonging and participating in what Martin Marty and Robert Bellah<sup>8</sup> call the *Public Church*. This final Stage, therefore, seeks to inform the participants on the vision given by Vatican II in all these strata of dialogue and suggest practical ways in which working with other people of faith in the context of civil and associational life we can together seek the common good and move toward the more perfect union that we desire as Americans and as citizens of heaven in God.

### **Impressions of the Process Thus Far**

At the time of this writing we have only a limited formal evaluation of the process based on the experience of the first two pilot groups. On the basis of the responses that we have received, both written and oral, the comments tell us the following. All appreciated the experience that they had over the several weeks of their participation in three-hour sessions. They found the information new and challenging. In some cases they found it to be too much to take in over the short amount of time that they had to absorb it. They found themselves challenged and are aware that something is about to take place in them in a transformative way but are not quite sure what that implies as yet. They are anxious to continue the process and go deeper and see it as contributing to a new sense of freedom and life for themselves and others. They have begun also to catch glimpses of implications that the process has for other areas of Catholic life such as the purpose and the focus of the parish, of a diocese, of Catholic educational institutions as we seek to relate to the major cultural shifts that we are experiencing.

Donald S. Nesti, C.S.Sp.

*...living together in pluralistic society can only occur when we live a love that goes beyond mere tolerance of diverse opinions.*

It becomes evident, to this writer, that it will take communities of faith who have gathered in prayerful reflection and dialogue on a regular basis to understand that faith is not an ideology and that living together in pluralistic society can only occur when we live a love that goes beyond mere tolerance of diverse opinions. Transformation of culture, its institutions and systems of order is a communitarian undertaking, not individualistic. Gospel Agape and its implications for living life in a more perfect union is not an ideology among others. It is the answer to Pilate's question about truth. It is the intransigent Truth of Love which dies and rises as the source of the perennial newness of the Gospel and Evangelization.

Donald S. Nesti, C.S.Sp.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Gomes, Sebastian, *Address on the Synod of Bishops on the New Evangelization*, presented at the University of St. Thomas, Houston, TX, January 23, 2-13.

<sup>2</sup>*Arche* (Ἄρχη) is a Greek word with primary senses 'beginning', 'origin' or 'first cause' and 'power', 'sovereignty', 'domination' as extended meanings. This list is extended to 'ultimate underlying substance' and 'ultimate indemonstrable principle'. *Arche* (or *archai*) also designates the source, origin or root of things that exist. If a thing is to be well established or founded, its *arche* or starting point must be secure, and the most secure foundations are those provided by the gods—the indestructible, immutable and eternal ordering of things.

<sup>3</sup>This process has been developed collaboratively by Maureen Bacchi and Donald S. Nesti, C.S.Sp. Ms. Bacchi has been associated with the Center for Faith and Culture since its inception twenty years ago. She has served in various ministerial offices of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston, worked with several religious orders of men and women, is a well-known teacher of spiritual direction, serves as teacher and a consultant for the Permanent Diaconate Program for Galveston-Houston and is a highly recognized family and marriage counselor and social worker. Father Nesti is the founding Director of the Center for Faith and Culture at the University of St. Thomas, Houston, TX.

<sup>4</sup>Taylor, Charles, *A Secular Age*. Harvard University: The Belknap Press, 2007.

<sup>5</sup>Mons. Philippe Delhay, Secretary General of the International Theological Commission, *Pope John Paul on the contemporary Importance of St. Irenaeus*, taken from *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly Edition in English, 9 February 1987, page 6.

<sup>6</sup>*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 57, 4.

<sup>7</sup>Parker Palmer, *A Company of Strangers*, New York, Crossroads, 2000, pp. 40-46; and *Healing the Heart of Democracy*, San Francisco: Jossey-Boss, 2011.

<sup>8</sup>Robert N. Bellah, et al., *Habits of the Heart*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985, p. 246.



### Dr. Fintan Sheerin

Fintan Sheerin is a lecturer in intellectual disability nursing at Trinity College Dublin where he teaches primarily on the subject of rights and social justice. He joined the Spiritans as a novice in 1982 but left after a year, and eventually became involved in service provision for people with intellectual disabilities. He was one of the original Spiritan Associates in Ireland and remains closely linked to the Congregation. He has a keen interest in the interface between theology and social justice.

*...the invisibility of people with disabilities has been a recurring reality throughout history...*

## JESUS AND THE PORTRAYAL OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN THE SCRIPTURES

### Introduction

I have, for some years, been engaged in participatory social action with people who have intellectual disabilities.<sup>1</sup> This has, however, become increasingly detached for me from any clear Christian basis, and has been grounded largely in humanism. That probably has to do with a growing realisation that, in Ireland, where many services developed and were provided by Roman Catholic religious Congregations, the eugenic nature of the service model (Sweeney 2010) characterised by segregation, institutional and sexual control, appeared to be significantly out of tune with the central tenets of Christianity (Yong 2007). My experience of this faith-based eugenics in largely Christian services has led me to further consider Jesus' life and message and their meaning for the people alongside whom I work. In doing so, I hope to challenge the continuance of non-Christian practices and to try and understand the faith base for the work in which I am engaged. Furthermore, it may provide an insight into the experiences of one Francis Libermann whose epilepsy caused his exclusion from Holy Orders for many years and who all through his life knew what it was to live and function with this handicap.

### A Scriptural Construction of Disability

In endeavouring to undertake this work, I decided to focus on how people with disabilities are portrayed within the Old and New Testament Scriptures and to ascertain their place particularly in the teaching and life of Jesus. This was informed from the outset by Amos Yong's *Theology and Down Syndrome* (2007), a highly interesting and personal exploration of intellectual disability within the Christian context. As Yong explains, there are no clear references to disability or intellectual disability in the Bible! It is as if it did not exist. This may be understandable from a number of perspectives. Firstly, infant mortality would have been very significant with the likelihood that babies with significant (moderate to profound disabilities) would not survive pregnancy, never mind birth (Worsley 1992). Secondly, as with most agrarian societies, most of the peasantry were probably unable to read or write (Giddens 1997, Whelan 1995) and, with the emphasis on work rather than on education, the issue of mild intellectual disability would not have been a visible one. Thirdly, the *invisibility* of people with disabilities has been a recurring reality throughout history, related most likely to the physical removal of such people

to the margins of society and, arguably, of societal consciousness, a practice described in relation to uncleanness in Levitical law (Lev. 13:1-59), to mental illness during the ‘Great Confinement’<sup>2</sup> (Foucault 2006) and to intellectual disability during the early days of Eugenics<sup>3</sup> (Sheerin 1998). A perspective on ‘difference’ in the scriptures may be drawn from what they have to say about *the blind, the deaf, the lame and people with epilepsy* (Yong 2007). Also, if the social construction of intellectual disability can be understood from a perspective of poverty and oppression (Sheerin 2011), then we may be able to learn from what the scriptures have to say about those who are poor and oppressed.

## **The Old Testament**

### *Disability as a Punishment from God*

Disability, in the form of blindness, is first encountered in the Bible in Gen. 19:11, when Lot tries to protect two men (messengers of Yahweh) from being violated by the people of Sodom. As the people of Sodom attempt to break into Lot’s house, the messengers “struck the men...with blindness.” Thus, the starting point of disablement is in the context of Yahweh’s punishment. Indeed, it is clear from Exodus 4:11 that it is Yahweh who is the source of such disablement: “Who makes him [man] dumb or deaf, gives him sight or leaves him blind? Is it not I, Yahweh?” This is again evident in the reiteration of the covenant in Deut. 28:29: “Yahweh will strike you down with madness, blindness, distraction of mind, until you grope your way at noontide like a blind man groping in the dark.” Yong (2007:24) notes that sickness and disability were the means through which Yahweh enforced his covenants with humans. The natural consequence of such punishment and stigmatisation was the making of reparation and seeking of forgiveness. Many of the Psalms, such as the *Miserere*, are songs pleading forgiveness for transgressions committed against Yahweh: “Have mercy on me, O God, in your goodness, in your great tenderness wipe away my faults” (Ps. 51:1).

### *Disability as an Impediment to Inclusion*

The occurrence of disablement suggested that a transgression had taken place and that Yahweh had imposed the limitation as a means of punishment. Such a limitation was, however, to have far-reaching implications as, within Levitical Law, infirmity and other disabilities became associated under the “Holiness Code” (Boadt 1984:189) with those issues which were the subject of the purity laws. Thus, Lev. 22:16-23 equates *disablement* with *disease* and *profaneness*. This is not to say, however, that there was any purposeful attempt to exclude, but rather that purity and holiness were considered to be intrinsic and objective properties of

*...purity and holiness were considered to be intrinsic and objective properties of individuals and things and the presence of visible disability placed an individual automatically outside purity and holiness.*

individuals and things and the presence of visible disability placed an individual automatically outside purity and holiness. Despite all of this apparent negativity, Yong (2007) notes that Leviticus 19:14 creates a perspective of protection around people with disability (“You must not curse the dumb, nor put an obstacle in the blind man’s way”) much in the same way as is done for the poor in Job 29:12-17 (“I freed the poor man when he called”) and the oppressed in Zeph 3:19 (“I am taking action...against your oppressors. When the time comes I will rescue the lame and gather the strays”).

#### *Disability and Lineage*

Whereas there is nothing to suggest that disablement was considered to be associated with lineage in any modern biological understanding, it is clear that there was an awareness of the tendency of characteristics to be inherited. There is an interesting association between disability and lineage in the Second Book of Samuel. This relates to one of the only individuals with disability to be named in the scriptures, Meribbaal. Meribbaal was one of the two male off-spring of Saul’s son, Jonathan, to survive the conflict between the Houses of David and Saul. We are told in 2 Sam. 4:4 and 2 Sam. 9:13 that Meribbaal was “crippled in both feet” having been dropped by his nurse at five years of age. As the descendant of Saul, he was a member of the least favoured tribes of Jacob, the Benjamites, a tribe characterised by violence (Gen. 49:27) and immorality (Judg. 19:25). Furthermore, his name, which was changed by the Israelites to *Mephibosheth*, removed reference to ‘Baal’ (the storm god), and replaced it with the term ‘*bosbeth*’ which may refer to shame (Jerusalem Bible 1966:387).

The Old Testament essentially attempts to explain the reality of life in the context of the relationship between God and humanity (personified in the People of Israel). This is conceptualised as one of seeking a return to the Garden of Eden where perfection existed. The mix of myth and history is particularly focused on the Covenant between God and Israel and on their transgressions against this Covenant. Whilst there is no explicit reference to disability in the Old Testament, manifestations of it, in the form of blindness, deafness and inability to speak are intimately associated with punishment and deviancy from perfection. Furthermore, they are often contextualised negatively.

#### *Disability and the Messianic Prophecies*

The Israel of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE prophets is described by Boadt (1984) as one which had seen great prosperity but which was coming under pressure from the surrounding Assyrian Empire. In the north there was also political chaos following the death of Jeroboam II, and the associated social disintegration was mirrored

by the dilution and disregard of religious practice (Bright 1972). It was against this background that the prophets emerged as voices challenging the social, rights and religious violations that had become embedded in society (Campbell 1998). It should be noted at this point that there is no scriptural evidence that the period of prosperity was one which improved the lot of those with disabilities. Indeed Amos noted a significant gap between the poor and the rich who "...have trampled on the poor man, extorting levies on his wheat" (Amos 5:11) whilst "...lying on ivory beds... sprawling on their divans, they dine on lambs from the flock, and stall-fattened veal" (Amos 6:4). It is likely that the blind, the deaf and others with disabilities continued to suffer the indignity and pain of poverty.

*These suggest that the time of the Messiah will be one marked by miracles and healings.*

One might have hoped that the lot of such people would improve in the light of these prophetic calls for justice and for a return to the ways of Yahweh; but this was not to be the case. The Major Prophets spoke of Yahweh's call for change and focus on the coming of the Servant of Yahweh, the Messiah. They reveal the signs of his kingdom: justice (Isa 42:1, 4; 61:8; Micah 7:9); healing (Isa35:5-6; 42:7; Jer. 31:8); liberation (Isa 43:1-7; 61:1; Jer. 50:1-17); and charity (Isa 58:6-8; 61:1). These suggest that the time of the Messiah will be one marked by miracles and healings. In some ways it may be considered to represent a healing of the imperfections that followed the punishments for the sins of humanity (Genesis) and of Israel (Deuteronomy), for disability, in the form of blindness, remains a characteristic of negative quality (Isa 42:18-19; Zech 12:4). These are clearly set out in Isaiah:

*Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, the ears of the deaf unsealed,*

*then the lame shall leap like a deer and the tongues of the dumb sing for joy. Isaiah 35:5-6*

Healing is foretold in the context of Israel's return from exile (Jerusalem Bible 1197, footnote a)

*I have appointed you as covenant of the people and light of the nations, to open the eyes of the blind,*

*to free captives from prison, and those who live in darkness from the dungeon. Isaiah 42:6-7*

If Isaiah's words are the signs of the Kingdom of Yahweh and of the New Exodus, then they suggest that all will be made perfect. This begs the question, what is the status of disabled people now? Are they less than perfect? Is perfection a goal? Light may be cast on these questions through consideration of the Messianic prophecies.

Isaiah also sheds interesting light on the Messiah suggesting that, whilst he would grow up *within* and as part of society (presumably as one accepted by society and considered to be “normal”), he would become *other* and separate from that society of which he was part. More specifically, it is prophesied that he would become “disfigured” (Isa 52:14) and unattractive (Isa 53:2). The form of this disfigurement is not clear, nor is the cause of it except that it will be related to his taking on the sins of others and the punishment that was meant for them (Isa 53:6-7). This too is interesting as it has been already noted that Yahweh’s punishment in the Old Testament was often associated with the imposition of disabilities. Did Isaiah propose that the Messiah would become disabled? Unfortunately, this cannot be ascertained.

Another point of note is the characterisation of the Suffering Servant as: *dehumanised* – “...he seemed no longer human...” (Is. 52:14), “...a thing...” (Is. 53:3); *ugliness* – “...without beauty...” (Is. 53:2); *powerless* – “...without majesty...” (Is. 53:2); *rejection* – “...despised and rejected by men...” (Is. 53:3); *piteous* – “...a man of sorrows...” (Is. 53:3); and *perpetually suffering* – “...familiar with suffering...” (Is. 53:3). These same characterisations are noted by sociologists and disability scholars in respect of people with intellectual disabilities (Wolfensberger 1973). Thus, it was prophesied that the Messiah would become, to all intents and purposes, like a person with disability, bodily and socially. He would, however, take on this disability in its construction as punishment for the sins of humanity. What can we learn from Jesus’ life and his teaching?

### **The New Testament**

The birth of Jesus represents a watershed in the relationship between God and humankind for God entered the existence of humanity taking on our life, pain and suffering. In this he sought to fulfil his plan to unite all things in Jesus (Ephesians 1:10; Colossians 1:20). This bringing together of all speaks to the coming of the messianic kingdom prophesied by Isaiah and others. The hope that such reconciliation could represent the acceptance of the humanness of disability is, however, dashed by the fact that Jesus’ ministry is marked, from the outset, by cures of those who have been disabled by disease (Mark 1:40-45), paralysis (Matt 9:1-8; Luke 6:6-11), mental health problems (Mark 5:1-20), deafness (Mark 7:31-37), epilepsy (Luke 9:37-42), blindness (Matt 20:29-34) and many others (Matt 15:29-31). It appears from this that Jesus’ role was to fulfil the prophecies (Schweitzer 2005) and that inclusion in the Kingdom is predicated on the removal of blemishes and the conversion to bodily perfection, something alluded to by Isaiah. Jesus does, however, significantly move the focus away from

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*In his trial and the lead up to his death, Jesus takes on the stigma of disablement, his body being increasingly marked and broken.*

the cause of disability to its meaning or purpose in the kingdom of God. Thus, the narrative of John 9:1-3, which centres on a man who was blind from birth, diverts from a hitherto sinful context to one of explicating the wonders of God's work (Meier 1994). It must be stated, though, that in this, the man essentially becomes a tool for demonstration or, what Freire (1996) refers to as "a being for others." In this, he is objectified and remains marginalised and apart, something that is compounded by the fact that like so many other disabled people in the Gospels, this man is not named, thus denying him "status in the ancient world" (Block 2002:111).

It is arguable that the historical Jesus' main challenge to the marginalisation of people with disabilities comes in the latter days of his life. This contribution may be seen to be in the fulfilment of his unifying mission as set out in Paul's aforementioned letters. In his trial and the lead up to his death, Jesus takes on the stigma of disablement, his body being increasingly marked and broken. He becomes *at once* the totality of humankind, enabled as God made man and disabled as man made broken and suffering (Eiesland 1994). However, this also represents a movement from the human/divine (imperfect/perfect) dichotomy towards the integrated realisation of human/divine perfection via a journey of pain, sorrow and disablement.

Much emphasis is put on the concept of the Suffering Servant in Christological texts. Indeed, Sobrino (1978:224), for example, ponders the fact that "the Son is innocent and yet is put to death." This is further considered within Sobrino's attempts to explore the suffering of Jesus as man and God in the context of the Arian-Nicene debate (Sobrino 2001). But many gloss over the actual suffering leading to the cross and focus instead on the crucifixion. It is in the combination of these two events, though, that Jesus takes on the characteristics foretold in Isaiah 52—53. He is set apart, ridiculed (John 19:1-3), rejected by loved ones (Mark 14:50, 66-72) and brutalised (Matt 26:67-68, 27:26). As Boff (1988) notes, such torture carried with it significant bodily marking and disfigurement. Furthermore, it produces psychological effects such as shame, humiliation and self-degradation (Vorbrüggen and Baer 2007), effects that Wolfensberger (1973) has identified as being present in many institutionalised people with intellectual disabilities. It is clear that Jesus was brought to this psychological margin too in his agony, "My soul is sorrowful to the point of death" (Matt. 26:38) and again in his experience of total loss and abandonment, "*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?*" (Mark 15:34, "my God, my God, why have you abandoned me?"). For some he became Isaiah's Man of Sorrows (Luke 22:27) as he proceeded, his body weakening, towards his crucifixion, an event that would

mark him with the stigma of his suffering and that would signify inclusion of all disabled and enabled in the kingdom (Eiseland 1994, Yong 2007). As Kasper (1984:172) states Jesus' "death is the form in which the reign of God becomes a reality under the conditions of the present aeon; it is the form in which the reign of God comes to pass in human weakness..."

*...the movement from ability through disability back to ability seen in Jesus' suffering and death can be considered to have normalised disability in the scriptures.*

Whilst there has been much debate on the identification of Jesus and the Suffering Servant, there has been a tradition of such since Jerome in the 5<sup>th</sup> Century. Furthermore, there are numerous attempts in the New Testament to understand the life and death of Jesus in the context of the Servant passages. It is noted, however, that whereas the Servant may have been disfigured and disabled from birth, Jesus was an "able-bodied suffering servant" (Schipper, 2011:80). Despite this, the movement from ability through disability back to ability seen in Jesus' suffering and death can be considered to have normalised disability in the scriptures. However, it is arguably his resurrection which demonstrates that, in the kingdom of God, all are equal and all are valued, for he manifests his resurrected body to his followers replete with the stigma of suffering and crucifixion (John 20:20), presenting them instead as signs of completeness, manifestations of total enablement, and perfection. Furthermore, he returns disablement, described in the Suffering Servant song, back into the reality of the living from whence it had been torn (Isaiah 53:8).

### **Discussion**

So, what does all of this mean? It has been shown that many of the Old and New Testament scriptures demonstrate an understanding of disablement that is determined by the religio-social perspectives of the period. Thus, disability is often seen to be punishment for sins committed and healing is a symbol of the kingdom. Jesus, whilst enacting the role set out in the prophets, shows charity and compassion towards the disabled, bringing about "miracles." In his suffering, death and resurrection he draws all to himself, enabled and disabled in part fulfilment of his mission. This is enshrined in Jesus' teachings on love and is particularly evident in his response to the lawyer who asked "who is my neighbour?" The parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37) demonstrates that love is evident, not just in giving, but also in journeying with others, that is, in communing. This is further evidenced in his willingness to cross barriers and humanise others, for example, when he touched the man who had leprosy (Luke 5:13). Indeed, much of Jesus' public life involved entering into community with others and journeying with them. The essence of this is evident in the accounts of the early Christian community where sharing, *caritas* and unity were paramount (Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-35). Despite

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*The need to heal or cure those who have disability, though, meant that the greatest of the spiritual gifts, love, was not afforded in its totality to those with disabilities and it was in charity, and not in solidarity...*

this, however, it appears that the meaning of Jesus' suffering and brokenness in life, death and resurrection was, to some degree, lost in the apostles' and their followers' performance of his mission (Mark 16:16-18). Thus, an abundance of healings is recounted in the Acts of the Apostles, healings that are explicitly described as being manifestations that the kingdom of God was at hand (Mark 1:15). Such healings are, indeed, manifestations of the kingdom, as pointed to by the prophets, but it is arguable that Jesus' life, death and resurrection transcended such prophecies. Thus, they were signs, but the reality of the kingdom, defined in Jesus' resurrection, is something quite different. Sadly, the continuation of healings in Acts is a return to the concept that the weak and the disabled can be used for others' reasons, in this case, God's (Meier 1994, Freire 1996). Such a concept may not be congruent with that of true communing described within the non-disabled Christian community for, though *caritas* embodied both love and charity (giving/sharing), those with disability were afforded love *through* charity (donations and healing).

Community should, however, be a "place of belonging, a place where people are earthed and find *their* identity" (Vanier 1989:13), [author's italics]. Acts 2:32 described this reality when it said that the early Christian community was "of one heart and mind" (*cor unum et anima una*). Vanier, the founder of l'Arche, a movement dedicated to community and, in particular, to people with intellectual disabilities, describes his understanding of such community as a grouping "of people who have left their own milieu to live with others under the same roof, and work from a new vision of human beings and their relationships with each other and with God" (Vanier 1989: 10). Central to Vanier's understanding of the Christian community are the concepts of having "the right to be oneself" (42) and solidarity with others who accept the uniqueness of one another. The need to heal or cure those who have disability, though, meant that the greatest of the spiritual gifts, love, was not afforded in its totality to those with disabilities and it was in *charity*, and not in *solidarity*, as the emergent Christianity grew. Furthermore, Christians – lay and religious – supported and facilitated the removal of such people from the inclusive Christian community, in keeping with the prevalent social practices, and created marginalised communes centred on segregation, control and institutionalisation (Rafter, 1992, Foucault 2006). It has been written that Jesus' suffering and crucifixion was a scandal (Sobrinho 1993). I would contest that the occurrence of such exclusion and suffering among people with intellectual disabilities, and its continuance under new facades, is as significant a scandal as it demonstrates a failure of the Christian community to receive a central message in the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth: that

through his suffering, death and wounding, Jesus brought about the healing that is in the recognition of human enablement. “Through his wounds we are healed” (Isa 53:5). Saints Peter and Paul refer to such healing in terms of having “come back to the shepherd” (1 Peter 2:25), back to the community that is united in Jesus through his blood (Eph. 1:10) and in which all can achieve human fulfilment and enablement as defined by Jesus himself, in returning as the ‘First-born from the dead’ (Rev 1:5).

### **Conclusion**

The New Testament scriptures identify unification of all in Jesus as being central to his mission. The early Christian community of the Acts of the Apostles tried to embody the component values of this through their faithfulness to the fellowship but actually set out a model of community which arguably maintained the exclusion of those with disability. Thus, the message of true inclusion, that was inherent in Jesus’ life, death and resurrection, was compromised and this has become manifest in the social mission of the Church, one that has often excluded the poor, the oppressed and the disabled (Vanier 1989, Boff 1985). I propose that true reflection and renewal take place at all levels of the Church, aimed at restoring Jesus’ message of inclusion, and informed by the adoption of faith-based participatory action strategies with people who have intellectual disabilities. Such approaches are contiguous with the work of justice that has been identified as essential to the Spiritan mission in the recent Irish Chapter 2012 papers: “Among these ‘new poor’ are young people in difficulty, migrants, people who are discriminated against and oppressed, and those marginalised by the phenomenon of globalisation” (Spiritans Province of Ireland 2012:7). It is time for us to listen to Jesus in those who are the embodiment of his message.

*It is time for us to listen to Jesus in those who are the embodiment of his message.*

Dr. Fintan Sheerin

### **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup>For the purposes of this paper, the term intellectual disability refers to a disability that involves significant limitations both in intellectual functioning and in adaptive behaviour, which covers many everyday social and practical skills. This disability originates before the age of 18 and encompasses a wide range of conditions, types, and levels. Intellectual disability is caused by factors that can be physical, genetic, and/or social (American Association of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, 2011).

<sup>2</sup>A movement that began in Europe in the 17<sup>th</sup> century that established institutions to lock up insane people but also others deemed socially unproductive or disruptive, including the unemployed, single mothers, defrocked priests, failed suicides, heretics, prostitutes, and debauchees.

<sup>3</sup>A movement that sought to improve the human race through selective breeding of people seen as having higher genes, while sterilizing the poor and the disabled.

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# THE CLERGY GRIEF PROJECT: INVESTIGATING HOW CATHOLIC PRIESTS GRIEVE LOSSES

One of the most challenging human experiences to endure is the loss of a significant relationship through death. During the grieving process, many people turn to priests in search of comfort and compassion and with the hope that the clergy person will be able to offer a sense of meaning to the loss they have experienced (Proffitt, Cann, Calhoun, & Tedeschi, 2007). That priests are expected to provide empathy, be present to a grieving person or family, and propose theological explanations to suffering and death is a well-recognized component of their work and religious role. However, what is less well understood is how clergy experience their own grief process. The lack of attention paid in the grief literature to how priests grieve their own losses raises questions about how aspects of the priestly role intersect with their individual grieving processes. What is it like, for example, for a priest to lose a parent, friend, sibling, or confrere? To whom do priests tend to turn to satisfy their own human need for comfort when a loss is sustained? Do priests acknowledge their own grief and loss or is it considered as an unacceptable part of human experience whose recognition would only get in the way of their spiritual or religious mission? In what ways might the faith of the priest affect the grieving process, especially when viewed against the backdrop of St. Paul's remark in 1 Thessalonians 4:13 "...that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope"? These are but a few of the questions that deserve exploration in order to better understand how one of the most difficult human experiences—dealing with the death of a loved one—is lived by priests. Because so little attention has been paid to priests and their responses to loss, we have taken it to task to initiate this clergy grief project in order to understand how this challenging human experience is concretely lived by a very particular cultural group, namely, the Catholic clergy.

The clergy grief project is a three-stage endeavor, with Stage I being this article whose primary purpose is to pose questions for investigation rather than make conclusive statements about the Catholic clergy's personal grief journeys. Specifically, in this article we will explore literature about grief and the grieving process as well as the characteristics of the priestly role in order to begin to understand how a priest's religious identity has the potential to affect grief experiences. In Stage II of the project, we will use a quantitative approach to investigate the intensity



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*Do priests acknowledge their own grief and loss or is it considered as an unacceptable part of human experience whose recognition would only get in the way of their spiritual or religious mission?*

of grief and the level of psychological reactions associated with grief among Catholic clergy following the death of a parent, sibling, or other loved one. And, lastly, in Stage III we will take a more phenomenological approach to Catholic clergy's grieving processes by surveying their lived experiences after the death of their loved ones. Research findings will be explored in subsequent articles.

### Understanding Grief: Some Basics

In order to understand grief, it is helpful to appreciate the central role that human relationships play in our lives. At their best, interpersonal relationships provide people with a sense of safety, security, and love, and they offer an environment in which people can flourish and grow. John Bowlby's (1969) noteworthy work on human attachment set the stage for scores of subsequent studies that all point towards the central role of healthy, responsive, and trustworthy relationships in normal human growth and development. Cicchetti, Rogosch, & Toth (2006) found, for example, that a warm and secure attachment between parents and their children not only aids in long-term healthy human development, but significantly decreases the chances for a person to develop a mental illness. Deci and Ryan (2008) discovered that having connections with others is a basic psychological need without which the human person cannot grow and mature as expected. Hodges, Boivin, Vitaro, and Bukowski's (1999) work revealed that children who possess many risk factors for unhealthy development, including peer victimization, but who also have a best friend are protected from the negative outcomes of these risks more than children who do not have a close friend. Waite & Joyner (2001) found that middle-aged people who are married or who have a significant relationship in their lives tend to report higher levels of happiness than those who do not. In childhood and adulthood alike, a healthy relationship is like a greenhouse that insulates one from the harsh realities of life, and thus it is not surprising that to lose an important relationship to death often leaves people feeling exposed, raw, and alone—without a buffer against the stresses and trials of daily life.

With human relationships playing such a central role in psychological well-being, it is not surprising that there is a wide body of literature that explores human responses to the loss of significant relationships through death (e.g., Aiken, 2001; Altmaier, 2011; Rando, 1984, 1993, 1995; Servaty-Seib, 2004). Martin and Doka (2000, p. 12) suggested that loss is the experience of "being deprived of or ceasing to have something that one formerly possessed or to which one was attached." They used the terms *grief* and *grieving*, meanwhile, as a way to refer to

the various reactions that people have when they go through any type of loss, including (but not limited to) the death of a loved one. Others (e.g., Rando, 1995) have used the term *mourning* similarly to refer to the process of coping with a loss. Grief responses, Doka and Martin (2000) explained, are a mix of ways that people try to hold onto their assumptions or beliefs about the world, while also trying to assimilate and accommodate to the reality of the loss. After losing a loved one, people enter into a world that they have never known before—a world without the physical presence or emotional support of the person whom they loved. It takes time, effort, and a great deal of energy to survey the new land of loss, let alone get used to a world in which a loved one no longer physically exists.

The journey into a world where a significant loss has happened includes some universally recognized reactions, such as shock, denial, anger, sadness, and despair (Martin & Doka, 2000; Rando, 1984). It is not uncommon for people who are grieving not to be able to comprehend the fact that their loved one has actually died, as the death may be so unexpected that it seems unreal. Others who are mourning may expect their loved one to show up suddenly at daily events at which they were always present, such as at dinner, bedtime, or a child's school play. Still others might be overcome with heartache to the extent that they question their own interest and investment in continuing to care for themselves and their other relationships and responsibilities. The death of a loved one can prompt people to question their identity, to feel as if they have lost a part of themselves, and to perceive the world as unfamiliar, unsafe, and devoid of goodness. These responses are well-known because they tend to cut across social, cultural, gender, economic, racial, and ethnic differences, even if the ways that people live out or express these reactions are affected by culture. Finally, while most theories of grief and mourning (e.g., Rando, 1995; Worden, 2002) account for reactions such as shock, anger, and disbelief, they also tend to point out that people eventually must come to terms with the reality of death, face the pain of the loss, and reinvest in their lives if they are to achieve a sense of well-being after a significant loss.

The literature on grief and theories of mourning clearly identify typical or universal responses to loss as noted above, but they also recognize that the grieving process unfolds at other levels of our human experience, such as the individual level and the group level. At the personal or individual level, grief responses are as intimate and unique as each person and each relationship (Aiken, 2001). Individual responses are affected

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by such factors as the type of relationship that was lost (e.g., parental, spousal, friend, sibling, etc.); the meaning one attached to the relationship; the circumstances under which the loss occurred; and the availability of social support following the loss (Rando, 1984). Personality traits and the developmental phase of the person who sustained the loss also factor into individual grief responses (DeSpelder & Strickland, 2002). In a sense, one person's grieving process is like no other person's and cannot ever be fully understood by another. Philosopher, Martin Heidegger, (as cited in Macquarie, 1968) suggested that we are all in the world in our own unique way and existing in a set of relationships that fundamentally constitute our existence as human persons. The uniqueness of one's own experience of being-in-the-world extends to personal relationships. Although two people may both have lost the same dear friend, neither will grieve the loss of that friend in exactly the same way.

In addition to the universal human reactions to loss and the uniquely individual side of grief, there is also a way in which the grief process is affected by one's group membership. Group membership, or the participation in a particular culture, race, ethnicity, gender, religion, and so forth, has the potential to affect all aspects of human experience, including the grieving process. Sue and Sue (2008) pointed out that people interact in the world not just in universally shared ways (e.g., most people use the symbol of language to communicate) or uniquely personal ways, but that they also respond to the world out of their understanding of what it means to be a member of a particular social or cultural group. Though group membership is often overlooked as a significant factor in individual growth and identity development, it nevertheless shapes the human experience. Martin and Doka (2000) explored this idea when they looked at differences in how men and women tend to grieve. They proposed that there are patterns of grieving that relate to gender; some patterns are more strongly intuitive while others are more strongly instrumental. An intuitive pattern of grieving tends to involve the grieving person in using a great deal of energy to adapt to loss by expressing feelings, including crying or talking to others about their emotional and psychological reactions. Women often use intuitive means to deal with loss. The instrumental pattern involves the grieving person in taking a more cognitive or intellectual response to grief; this pattern of grieving frequently characterizes men's response to loss.

*In what ways does being a priest inform and form how a man lives his grieving process?*

The central interest of this article and the clergy grief project lies primarily at the group-level aspect of human experience. What we are most curious about is how a man's membership

in the clergy of the Catholic Church might interact with his grieving process. In what ways does being a priest *inform* and *form* how a man lives his grieving process? Are there common ways in which priests live their own grief, just as there are patterns to how men and women grieve or members of other social and cultural groups grieve? As noted already, these questions deserve further exploration. But, for now, we explore existing literature about the culture of the priesthood and ponder how that culture might influence the experience of grief.

### **The Priestly Role and Grief**

The role of a priest is specifically defined; it involves particular activities and is characterized by certain moral standards and behavioral expectations. Understanding the features and characteristics of the priestly role is important when considered from the point of view of role identity theory. Role identity theory (McCall & Simmons, 1978; Stets & Burke, 2000) was developed by social psychologists who suggested that a person's identity is strongly related to the social roles that he or she lives out. When a person identifies with a particular role and when others reinforce the individual's identification with that role, a person tends to take on the "expectations with regard to others' and one's own behaviors" that accompany the role (Stets & Burke, 2000, p. 225). For example, a woman who gives birth to her first child is likely to begin to think of herself not just as a woman, a spouse, or an employee of a company, but also as a mother. As she feeds, holds, and cares for her child and as other people in her family or neighborhood comment on her "motherly" actions, her identification with the mother role is expected to develop. Similarly, when a man is ordained to the priesthood and begins to celebrate Mass regularly, officiate at religious ceremonies, wear the vestments of a priest, and hear people refer to him as "Father," his identity as a priest is anticipated to grow stronger.

Pooler (2011) noted that when people have continuous and ongoing interaction with a certain social role(s), they are likely to engage in behaviors consistent with the role. He also pointed out that a person's self-concept will increasingly be shaped by what he sees as a central social role in his life. In the examples above, the woman might, with time, find herself acting in mothering ways not just to her own children, but to other children who are not her own or even to adults whom she perceives as needing care. Likewise, the man who primarily identifies with his role as priest might behave in ways consistent with that role in most social circumstances, even non-religious ones. According to role theory, the more people identify with a role that they embody, the more they are expected to act in ways that are congruent with

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the role. Role identity theory thus has been described as one way of explaining how and why people make certain choices, adhere to particular perspectives, or behave in specific ways. When one understands the expectations of certain social roles, he or she may be able to explain the behaviors of people who take on those roles. What, then, are some of the common characteristics that tend to define the priestly role and, more importantly, how might they affect a priest's grieving process? We turn now to an exploration of some well-recognized characteristics of the priestly role as prescribed by the Church and by various other authors who have written about standards and expectations common to clergy of various denominations.

### ***Catholic Church and the Priestly Role: A Sacred Ministry***

In order to appreciate the identity and role of priests in the Catholic Church, it is helpful to know what official documents of the Church, such as Council decrees, papal encyclicals, and canon law, say about the priesthood. Given the vastness of the literature addressing the role of the priest, we will limit the discussion to a few key documents and points about the priestly identity. One of the first and important documents to address the topic of priestly identity came from the Council of Trent (1545-1563). In its 23<sup>rd</sup> Session, the Council discussed the writing known as "*The True and Catholic Doctrine Concerning the Sacrament of Order*" (Schroeder, 1941). This text described the role of the priest as relating primarily to the reality that a priest is a representative of Christ on earth. In addition, the decree underscored the very intimate unity between the celebration of the Sacrifice of the Mass and the priesthood. Both of these facets of the priestly role have been repeatedly upheld. For example, four hundred years later, at the Church's most recent council (Vatican II), Pope Paul VI promulgated *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, an official decree on the ministry and life of priests in the Catholic Church. Like the Council of Trent, Vatican II decrees reiterate the portrayal of priests as representatives of Christ on earth, stating that "by the anointing of the Holy Spirit [priests] are signed with a special character and so are configured to Christ the Priest in such a way that they are able to act in the person of Christ the Head" (Flannery, 1996, p. 865). Vatican II also emphasized the uniqueness of the priestly role by stating that priests are unlike lay persons because, through the sacrament of holy orders, they are given the power to offer sacrifice at the Mass and forgive sins. Vatican Council II proceeded further in explaining the threefold function of priests as a) teachers called to proclaim and teach the Gospel, b) sanctifiers whose vocation is to perform sacred functions through the celebration of the sacraments, and c) shepherds entrusted with the mission of

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gathering into one flock the family of God. Finally, the New Code of Canon Law also addressed the role of the priest and ratified the intimate connection between the celebration of the Eucharist and the priestly role (Flannery, 1995). Canon 900 §1 of the New Code of Canon Law stipulates, “The minister who is able to confect the sacrament of the Eucharist in the person of Christ is a validly ordained priest alone” (The New Code of Canon Law, 1983, p.166).

While upholding Trent’s view of priests as representatives of Christ on earth whose role is intimately linked to the celebration of the Sacrifice of the Mass, both Vatican II and the New Code of Canon Law, in discussing the role and identity of priests, give more emphasis to the Body of Christ. Vatican II documents and Canon Law point out that the priest is one who, *with* the body of faithful believers, shares in the holy and royal priesthood of Jesus Christ. This most recent Council viewed the priest as being with all the “*faithful*” who in a unique way “were to hold in the community of the faithful the sacred power of Order, that of offering sacrifice and forgiving sins” (Flannery, 1996, p. 864). An echo of this view can be heard in Canon 1008 which stipulates that priests are called out *from the body of the faithful* by “divine institution” and by virtue of their ordination are set apart and appointed to “fulfill, in the person of Christ the Head, the offices of teaching, sanctifying and ruling, and so they nourish the people of God.” (The New Code of Canon Law, 1983, p. 181).

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At different times and in different ways, both the late Pope John Paul II and Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI have emphasized in no uncertain terms the importance of understanding the priesthood as a “sacred ministry” and not as a “profession” or “career.” For Pope John Paul II, a candidate who aspires to the priesthood needs to be ready to accept “the priestly ideal,” which involves embracing a life of celibacy, poverty and simplicity, as well as a commitment to the “care for souls” (Catholic World News, 1999). Pope John Paul II affirmed that during the celebration of the Eucharist, a priest truly acts in the person of Christ and contended that, since they act in the person of Christ, humanity has profound expectations of priests. These include quenching humanity’s thirst for Christ through the proclamation of the Gospel, being a minister of mercy through the Sacrament of Reconciliation, being constantly in contact with God’s holiness, and being holy themselves (Pope John Paul II, 1996). Pope Benedict XVI meanwhile asserted that God immediately avails himself of his creatures through the ministry of the priest, and consequently “a Catholic priest is no mere ‘office-holder’” but a direct participant in Christ’s saving action. While emphasizing

the total commitment dimension of the priesthood, he also exhorted priests to “enter like Christ into human misery and take it up, going to the people who are suffering” in order to be effective ministers (Catholic World News, 2010).

One thing that seems clear from Catholic Church documents is that priests indeed occupy a unique and sacred ministerial role. While they are recognized as being called to the priestly role from among the community of believers, they also, at their ordination, take on a unique role that sets them apart from others. They become Christ’s representatives on earth. With an appreciation for the profound ministry that priests are called to fulfill, we are curious about how such an identity might influence the human experience of grief for priests. For example, does the awareness of being marked by the Holy Spirit lead priests to grieve differently from other people? Does and in what way might the identity of being Christ-on-earth have an impact on how priests grieve? Might a priest’s own awareness that he is set apart from the community lead him to grieve differently than others?

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### ***High Expectations and Idealization***

A prominent feature of the priestly role that is expressed both in Catholic documents and related literature is the high expectations that people have of the priest. Like clergy of other denominations, Catholic priests are expected to have personal qualities that set them apart from the community. They are looked upon to be competent, intelligent, free from personal problems, in charge of their lives, sensitive to others, and spiritually mature (Pooler, 2011). Grosch and Olsen (2000) used terms like calm, infallible, and perfect to describe how clergy are perceived. Priests are held up as models of what it means to live a humanly and spiritually healthy life, and people anticipate that priests will live in congruence with what they urge others to do. In addition to possessing these personal qualities, many people also believe priests should have answers to their most poignant philosophical questions about good and evil, suffering and pain, and life and death. Most Christians live with the deep conviction that through his incarnation among us, his death on a Cross, and his resurrection, Jesus Christ responded to these very fundamental questions. By virtue of their ordination, Catholic priests become Christ-like figures on earth (Canon 1008), and thus, it is little wonder that people turn to them to have their existential concerns addressed.

Arguably, developing healthy personal qualities and being responsive to the Church’s call to be the embodiment of Christ on earth is generally helpful for clergy given the demands of their

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work. However, when priestly qualities become so idealized and the priestly role so rigid that they are lived only as unrealistic expectations rather than aspirations towards which priests continually strive, they can serve to de-humanize priests when they struggle with personal issues, including loss (Burton & Burton, 2009). For example, because priests are admired and revered by their congregants, they may feel pressured not to expose their human frailty or weakness, even in times of grief and loss (Haug, 1999). Moreover, parishioners who idealize priests may not be open to knowing about or witnessing their pastor question his own relationship to God or God's purpose in his life following a significant loss. With this in mind, Proffitt et al. (2007) looked at the relationship between post-traumatic growth, social constraint, and cognitive processing among a small group of Judeo-Christian clergy, including Protestant ministers, Catholic priests, and rabbis. Their research suggested that the perception of being socially constrained was related to a clergy person's overall well-being following a loss. Specifically, they found that the more a clergy person felt that other people did not want to know about his or her personal thoughts and feelings about a personal loss or crisis, the less satisfied the person was. The sample of participants that Proffitt et al. (2007) used, however, only included a small number of Catholic clergy, so questions still remain about to what extent priests might feel constrained by their priesthood in sharing their grief and sorrow with others after a loss. Thus, when looking at the broad question of how being a priest affects a man's grieving process, it may be helpful to better understand the impact of idealization. For instance, do priests who are grieving feel cut off, or constrained from the social networks that might otherwise serve as a social support during the grieving process? Might they believe that to admit to their own sorrow or to express anger at God after the loss of a loved one would undermine others' expectations of them as a priest?

### **Caregiver Identity**

Catholic priests embody a social role that is strongly identified with caregiver qualities. They provide care in countless settings and for numerous kinds of difficult life circumstances. As we have already noted, it is to priests and other clergy that most people turn when they themselves are in need of solace after a significant loss or in times of crisis. Bento (1994) considered the impact of occupying a caregiver work role on the grief process. She noted that caregivers, such as priests, nurses, social workers, and physicians, are a segment of the population who may feel the need to suppress their own grief after a significant loss in order to be present to others' pain. Caregivers' own grief reactions can be

perceived to get in the way of or contaminate their ability to be helpful to others and thus they might minimize attention to their own loss responses.

Doka (1989) referred to the suppression of grief when it is seen as inappropriate to a particular individual or unacceptable within an organization or a person's work role as disenfranchised grief. Simply stated, people are disenfranchised when they are not afforded the right to grieve following a loss. Attig (2004, p. 205) called disenfranchised grief a "failure to respect suffering." Doka (1989; 2002) provided specific examples of how and under what circumstances people can be deprived of the right to grieve. Sometimes, the relationship that was lost is viewed by others as socially unacceptable (e.g., homosexual relationship). Sometimes, also, the loss itself is not seen as significant (e.g., a miscarriage) or the griever is not perceived as capable of grieving (e.g., young children or mentally handicapped persons). Corr (2002) suggested that grief reactions and the expression of grief can be disenfranchised as well, when a community indicates to a person who has sustained a loss that they ought not emotionally respond to a loss or think about themselves or the world differently after the death of a loved one. Considering the caregiver role that priests often embody, we are left wondering if and to what extent they might overlook their own grief reactions in order to perform their ministerial duties? Furthermore, we also are curious about the extent to which Catholic clergy perceive that they have the right to grieve (i.e., to show emotions related to loss or to think differently about their world following a loss)?

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### ***Boundary Issues and Burnout***

Boundaries refer to the degree of relational separation between one person and another; they can be rigid, clear, or diffuse. A rigid boundary between two people is usually characterized by a lack of felt closeness and a lack of flexibility, while a diffuse boundary may be so permeable that the distinction between one person's feelings, responsibilities, and physical needs and another's is not easily distinguished. Clear boundaries tend to be associated with healthy relationships and are characterized by known rules and habits that allow people to enhance their interactions with one another, while rigid or diffuse boundaries can lead to relational and personal struggles. Stated simply, healthy and professional boundaries are growth-enhancing for all people, while unhealthy or inappropriate boundaries can be destructive and have the potential to harm (Gregoire, Jungers, & White, 2013).

Healthy boundaries are evident when priests foster caring and supportive relationships with parishioners and also respect the need for separation from them. For people in a caregiver

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role, such as priests, maintaining healthy boundaries can be challenging. On the one hand, priests may be prone to develop diffuse boundaries, as they are expected to be available nearly all of the time to their parishioners and immediately responsive in crisis situations. Some priests even live in a rectory where the physical separation between their work and personal space is not well delineated, giving the impression that they are always “on” or available to those in need. At the same time, Proffitt et al. (2007) and Sanford (1982) suggested that clergy also are prone to live with a sense of isolation, which can be experienced as a rigid boundary between themselves and others.

One of the risks of not being able to maintain healthy boundaries is burnout. Pastors are especially prone to experiencing burnout, which has been described as involving emotional exhaustion and depersonalization in one's relationships (Maslach, 1982; 1993; 2000). The excessive demands on a pastor's time coupled with a sense of isolation and loneliness are contributing factors to burnout in clergy (Chandler, 2009). Holaday, Lackey, Boucher, and Glidewell (2001) looked at the day-to-day experiences of clergy in working with trauma. They found that clergy regularly deal with a variety of emotionally draining issues and personal traumas that seem to have a notable effect on clergy. Indeed, 57% of the participants in their study reported moderate to high levels of emotional exhaustion on the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Holaday et al., 2001; Maslach & Jackson, 1986). Although literature that examines the effects of burnout and poor boundaries on the grief process is scarce, we are left with a number of questions when we consider the fact that many clergy are prone to burnout and to developing either too diffuse or too rigid of boundaries. For example, how might a priest's level of emotional exhaustion or burnout affect his ability to be present to his own emotional and psychological needs at the time of a loss? What are the long and short term effects of burnout on a priest's grief process? How do the demands on a priest's time affect his attention to his own loss?

### **Conclusion**

One goal of this article was to draw attention to the topic of grief and grief processes among the special population of Catholic clergy. Admittedly, the literature that specifically explores this topic is limited and more often than not either deals with how priests should help others to grieve or with how religious leaders and ministers from a broad spectrum of faith systems experience grief, though this area of inquiry still is not well developed. In pondering the broad question of how being a member of the Catholic clergy affects a man's grieving process, we

raised a number of more specific queries in relationship to some of the common characteristics of the priestly role, such as the sacred ministry of the priesthood, high expectations, idealization, caregiver duties, boundary issues, and burnout. Questions raised include the following:

- Does, and in what way, might the identity of being Christ-on-earth have an impact on how priests grieve?
- Might a priest's own awareness that he is set apart from the community lead him to grieve differently than others?
- Do priests who are grieving feel cut off or constrained from the social networks that might otherwise serve as a social support during the grieving process?
- Might priests believe that to admit to their own sorrow or to express anger at God after a loss would undermine others' expectations of them as a priest?
- To what extent might priests overlook their own grief reactions in order to perform their ministerial duties?
- To what extent do Catholic clergy perceive that they have the right to grieve (i.e., to show emotions related to loss or to think differently about their world following a loss)?
- How might a priest's level of emotional exhaustion or burnout affect his ability to be present to his own emotional and psychological needs at the time of a loss?
- What are the long and short term effects of burnout on a priest's grief process?
- How do the demands on a priest's time affect his attention to his own loss?

It is our hope that future stages of this clergy grief project will be able to shed light on at least some of these questions in order that priests' grieving processes can be better described, understood, and appreciated.

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## A COMMENTARY ON THE GUIDE FOR SPIRITAN FORMATION



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### Preamble

This article is a short commentary on the newly updated and recently published *Guide for Spiritan Formation* 2013 (henceforth, *Guide* or *GSF*). It is not a commentary in the biblical sense, nor is it a study of the *Guide*. It is an attempt to explain the need to update it, the different stages of reflection during the process of updating, and the areas that have been emphasised in the new *Guide*.

For the sake of perspective and for a better understanding, the article begins with an introduction and then offers a brief history of the evolution of the *Guide*.

### Introduction

Formation—initial, ongoing, and specialised—has been, and still remains, an important aspect of our Spiritan life and mission. It is during the early stages of formation that we are introduced to the Spiritan life, its history, spirituality and charism, all of which aim at moulding us into becoming future religious missionaries. What we acquired during initial formation has to be deepened continually, for missionary vocation is never static, but continues to develop. Thus the quality of both apostolate and mission depends on the quality of our formation (initial, ongoing and specialised). The *Guide* aims at enabling us to achieve this.

### Evolution of the Guide

Most of us will recall that prior to the year 1968 all formation communities followed more or less the same formation programme. No one was allowed to deviate. It was a “one size fits all” approach. Formators were appointed by the General Council and admission to vows and to Orders was decided by the same Council. With the coming of the theology of the local church and the subsequent development of the theology of mission with an emphasis on inculturation, diverse programmes and courses of formation came into existence in our Congregation. At the same time we strove to remain faithful to the Spiritan charism.<sup>1</sup>

### The Spiritan Rule of Life (1987)

The General Chapter of 1986 revised the then *Rules and Constitutions* of the Congregation into what we now call the *Spiritans Rule of Life* (henceforth, SRL). The Chapter gave circumscriptions (the superior with the consent of his council and in collaboration with the formation team, and in dialogue with the General Council) the role of making decisions regarding

the orientations of formation.<sup>2</sup> The same circumscriptions were now required to plan the preparation and appointment of their formators.<sup>3</sup> The SRL presented the role of the General Council as that of giving assistance:

*The General Council has the task of imparting drive and unity to Spiritan formation through the Congregation as a whole.<sup>4</sup>*

These changes were seen as major developments in the history of our Congregation. Indeed the changes were in response to the changing times and the understanding of the meaning of mission and formation. The changes meant that the Congregation was putting in practice its model of decentralisation as it moved away from the strong centralisation which had defined it for many years. We were not unique in this. The ball was now firmly in the court of the circumscriptions.

But even prior to the production of the SRL and the General Chapter at Itaicí, two key developments were taking place in the Congregation that would impact on formation and, by implication, on mission as well. Firstly, some circumscriptions experienced a fall in the numbers in formation and, secondly, while the younger circumscriptions began to experience an increase in the number of students, they lacked formation personnel.<sup>5</sup> This new reality produced the need for a cooperative effort and real solidarity in formation as well as a pooling of resources so that wastage of personnel and material could be avoided.

*This new reality produced the need for a cooperative effort and real solidarity in formation...*

### **The General Chapter of 1992**

The Chapter of Itaicí with its major slogan “*Where is the Spirit leading us?*” aimed at waking us up in terms of mission, including formation. It was during the Chapter that a decision was made to begin the process of preparing guidelines or a *Guide* for Spiritan Formation. This is what the Chapter said:

*In this perspective of unity, it would be helpful that a general outline of formation be drawn up in the coming years, based on our mission as we see it today. It would be the result of a dialogue between major superiors, formators, and the General Council. The General Assistant for formation will be attentive to the application of this outline in the individual formation plans of circumscriptions and regions (Itaicí, 36. 3.1).*

It is helpful to recall here that prior to the Itaicí Chapter and its subsequent decision to have a *Guide*, an international meeting of Spiritan Formators at SIST, Enugu, Nigeria in 1991 had proposed

the need to have a guideline for the whole Congregation. This was to consist of general orientations allowing adequate room for diversity. One can safely say that this Enugu International Meeting of Formators did the ground work and sowed the seeds for the *Guide for Spiritan Formation* subsequently decided upon at the Itaicí Chapter in 1992. It would take another five years before the first copies of the *Guide* were circulated in 1997.

It is clear that the Chapter not only saw the need for drawing up general guidelines for Spiritan formation, it also went on to speak extensively about the formation of formators, a subject that is well covered in the updated version of the *Guide*. The emphasis on the training of formators stems from the recognition that the quality of formation correlates closely with the quality of formators available.

### **The Need to update the Guide: Process and Methodology**

Since its publication in 1997, the *Guide* has not been updated. At the same time, many changes have taken place which affect both formation and mission. Several gatherings (General Chapters, Enlarged General Councils, meetings of formators) have reflected further and presented formation guidelines for the whole Congregation. Therefore in 2006, the General Council felt that the *Guide* needed updating to include the fruits of the more recent reflections of the Congregation. In November 2006, they drew up a questionnaire which was sent to all circumscriptions. Though there were not many replies some of them were substantial and they helped in the further work on the first two chapters of the *Guide*. The basic orientations and initial formation were presented to a session of Spiritan formators which took place in Nairobi in July 2010. The formators present made many suggestions which have been integrated into the *Guide*. Subsequent to this meeting in Nairobi, the General Council worked on the text regarding ongoing formation. They clarified the distinction between specialised formation and ongoing formation.

The methodology emphasised listening to what Spiritans, not just formators and the General Council, were saying about formation (initial and ongoing) in the world of today.

### **The Structure of the Guide and its General Aim**

The updated *Guide* is divided into four main parts with initial and ongoing formation taking up the lion's share, and rightly so. This is, after all, a *Guide* about formation. Part I is concerned with general orientations which set out the context, the objectives and our convictions about formation. It begins by clearly stating that:

*The purpose of this Guide is to give direction to Spiritan formation taken in its entirety. As such, it concerns initial, ongoing and specialised formation and it is addressed to each professed or future professed Spiritan according to their particular calling.<sup>6</sup>*

*...formation should prepare and enable us to operate in an unfamiliar territory, in cross-cultural situations, and to be significantly better equipped to deal with an ever-changing world.*

This aims at laying a foundation for every Spiritan, since formation is a *sine qua non* for every future minister of God's kingdom. Just as the process of socialization enables us to become participant members of society and to be able to function properly, formation enables us to become agents of evangelization, live in community and lead a life of belonging in God's kingdom. As we are a religious missionary Congregation, formation should prepare and enable us to operate in an unfamiliar territory, in cross-cultural situations, and to be significantly better equipped to deal with an ever-changing world. The *Guide* goes on to acknowledge that mission is not carried out in a vacuum. Every mission takes place in a context and if we are to make the kingdom of God a reality whenever we do mission, then our formation must prepare us to respond adequately and sufficiently to God's call (cf. SRL 100).

### **He is the Potter, We are the Clay.**

The *Guide*, using the image of Scripture from Isa 64.8, calls us to be at God's disposition. He is the potter and we are the clay.

*Formation is the work of God who forms us like a potter. It is a work of faith which transforms us.*

*Formation is the work of God who forms us like a potter. It is a work of faith which transforms us. It requires continual discernment in order to answer the call we have received and to allow the talents given to us by God to bear fruit.<sup>7</sup>*

This well-known image from Scripture gives us a good idea of the way God wants to shape our lives with his grace. Just as a potter shapes a lump of clay into a vessel, so God wants to shape us into vessels of his grace—vessels that can hold his divine grace and pour that grace out on the people around us, especially the poor and the marginalised. God is the one moulding us but we must play our part. We are not just passively there waiting to be moulded, but are called to cooperate with the creator in order for transformation to happen. This is why the *Guide* states clearly that those being formed are not in passive formation, but that:

*the candidate is the primary agent of his own Spiritan formation. It is for him to enter loyally into this process.<sup>8</sup>*

It is clear that formation is not something we receive, but a process of growth to which we commit ourselves in order to be responsible for the life and mission of the Church, each according to the vocation of his calling, his state, and gifts. We are to offer our

students a formation that liberates, and not one that domesticates as we strive to be rooted in and united to Christ (cf. Gal 4.19).

Although we are the crown of God's creation and wonderfully and beautifully made, we also have our fair share of imperfections. Wise and patient potter that he is, God is always working to make us perfect. He is always working to shape us into the image of his Son Jesus.

## **Part II: Initial Formation and the Context of Mission**

The bulk of Part II of the *Guide* is dedicated to initial formation. Its main focus is on the principal stages of formation, with each stage having clearly articulated and explained objectives.

Part II begins by stating the fundamental aim and the purpose of initial formation:

*All initial formation will be animated by an apostolic orientation...*

*All initial formation will be animated by an apostolic orientation whose objective will be to prepare candidates for the religious missionary life.<sup>9</sup>*

During the period of initial formation, candidates are ushered into the core elements of Spiritan life. A balanced formation must take into account the context of our world and the megatrends that are significantly transforming our mission situation today: globalisation, issues of JPIC, including human rights, intercultural dialogue, multiculturalism, the gap between rich and poor, urbanization, immigration, interreligious dialogue etc. The *Guide* lists some specifically Spiritan areas that are regarded as central in the intellectual formation of every Spiritan, quite apart from the traditional courses in philosophy and theology. It stresses the essential elements of our formation, such as anthropology, sociology, religious studies, theology of mission, JPIC, economics, political science, communications, the role of psychology in formation, linguistics, but also Spiritan spirituality etc. (cf. GSF 28-28.9). It believes that this is the kind of formation that agents of evangelisation need in order to respond to the challenge of contemporary mission.

## **Points that are Stressed in the Guide**

### **The Role of Formator**

The *Guide* gives a succinct description of the term formator. Unlike the previous edition, the new version has expanded and enriched the section on the role of the formator. Not only has it more information, it also takes into account the recent developments in areas of formation, and especially today's requirement for specialization in order to carry out this ministry well.

Most African societies greatly value the role and the responsibility of persons who initiate others into the traditions, values, beliefs, and history of the community/society. Those given this responsibility are very carefully chosen by the elders. Initiators must be persons of integrity and good standing in the community. They must possess good knowledge of the values, traditions, history and other secrets of society/community, which they are expected to pass on to the next generation on behalf of the community. If those initiated did not turn out to be good members of society, the blame is directed at the initiators for not having done a good job. This is because the welfare and the well-being of the society as a whole are at stake. The responsibility of the initiators is heavy. Their work is to ensure that those being initiated appropriated these cultural elements, meaning they accepted them, took possession of them, and made them their own. They aimed at ensuring that the initiates were well-rooted in their culture, traditions, values and history, and led them into a formal admission to adulthood. The initiators developed and instilled in the initiates a sense of belonging to the community, and moulded them to become morally responsible and adult members of society in a transformation in which the initiates are “re-born” into new roles. If they did their job well, the initiators were praised for a job well done. The belief was that a poorly initiated person would become a disaster to the community.

Applying this to formation in our contemporary world, the implication is that only if we are well-rooted in our core Christian, religious, spiritual, human, and Spiritan values can we really hope to become good agents of evangelisation and live our community life well. Formators are to ensure that they embrace this sacred task professionally, seriously undertaking discernment and creating the necessary conditions for it. These conditions are part of the process itself and they should not be neglected or taken for granted.

*...the action of the formator must be at the service of the action of God and the free will of the individual who wants to form himself.*

The *Guide*, when talking about the role of formator, notes that the action of the formator must be at the service of the action of God and the free will of the individual who wants to form himself. Formators should recognize that, like those under formation, they too are involved in a journey, trying to discern the nature of God's call for each individual. In the words of the *Guide*, the formator is the one who “...helps the young disciple to discern his vocation.”<sup>10</sup>

The *Guide* reminds formators that:

*The most important formators are the persons of the Blessed Trinity: the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The formator's model is Jesus, himself a model of obedience to the Father and who was filled with the Holy Spirit. He led his disciples from the moment of their first call and he led by example.*<sup>11</sup>

So who is a formator? He is a confrère who is carefully chosen by the superior and his council after a number of years of intercultural mission experience and of living in international community. He is given a specific training for his role (cf. section on the Training of Formators; also TA 6.17). A formator is a confrère involved in a variety of tasks requiring a number of skills such as: accompaniment, assessment and evaluation. He is present in the community with students. He is called on to follow the example of Poullart des Places for whom the:

*secret of his success lay in his personalism and his relational approach to students. His attention to individuals. His sensitivity to people. His egalitarianism in community. He moved in with them. He was their friend and elder brother. He tutored them. He shared in all their duties. He did the shopping, ran errands, washed the dishes and went begging for them on the streets of Paris<sup>12</sup>.*

This might sound like a tall order for formators today, but no doubt there is food for thought here for the role of formator. This is the sacrifice that formators are called on to make for the sake of formation.

The formator's primary goal is presence in the formation community, giving this the best of himself and most of his time. He commits himself fully to his ministry and avoids the temptation of being distracted by other invitations to do other things for other communities. Just as in many of the African traditions, the initiator acts on behalf of the community, a formator is reminded that he is also doing his ministry on behalf of the Congregation. Therefore he must do it well, faithfully, professionally (keeping confidentiality) and effectively, discerning on behalf of the Congregation whose superior, with his council, has delegated him to do this job.

*A very important task of the formator is evaluation.*

*A very important task of the formator is evaluation.<sup>13</sup> Since formators have the task of accompanying students in the sense of living with them and helping them discern the way forward, they are the ones best placed to offer an evaluation of a student's progress or lack of it to a major superior and his council who have to take the decision about accepting candidates for novitiate or for vows, temporary and perpetual. The section concludes by saying that formators therefore have a humble role, somewhat like that of a midwife, helping something to be born.*

### **Care of Formators**

*In order to remain healthy and able to exercise his role effectively, a formator needs to be accompanied himself.<sup>14</sup> To grow personally and professionally he can benefit from the help of another professional*

*Initial formation is an integrated process of discernment.*

*The good thing about these evaluation grids is that they are now universal in the Congregation.*

on issues in his own life and mission. Often this is an area that can be overlooked by those who are accompanying others; there is a temptation to not look after themselves lest formation might suffer.

### **Discernment and Evaluation**

*“Initial formation is an integrated process of discernment.”*<sup>15</sup> Discernment and evaluation have been a growing concern in formation lately, considered to be at the heart of formation. They have primary importance especially, but not solely, in initial formation; they apply also to ongoing formation. An important characteristic of any formator is that he is a decision-maker; he will make decisions about accepting or rejecting candidates. The formator, who is a part of a team, needs to fulfil his role diligently and well as the Congregation has the right and responsibility to examine each candidacy and to look for more than the candidate’s declaration, *“I feel that God is calling me to this ministry.”*

The *Guide* calls on those responsible for formation to make evaluation a continuous process at the various stages of formation. Such an evaluation is laborious and exhausting, yet plays a significant role. Often there are or have been complaints that adequate evaluation is not done. Although strictly speaking there is no *recipe* for doing an evaluation as institutions and situations are never the same, it could be misleading to suggest that certain procedures will surely produce good results. However, there are principles that are usable in selecting and planning ways to get appropriate information. This is why the *Guide* has introduced grids to help discernment at each principal stage of initial formation. The grids contain clear indications and objectives that are to help a formator as he journeys with the candidate so that evaluation does not become a matter of guess work, but reflects genuine knowledge of the candidate. The good thing about these evaluation grids is that they are now universal in the Congregation. No matter where a candidate is doing formation, the standards and the criteria that are to be followed are more or less the same, allowing for variations and adaptations to local situations. After a due process of discernment,<sup>16</sup> assessment,<sup>17</sup> and evaluation<sup>18</sup> formators are required to pass on a complete dossier to their colleagues (fellow formators) in the next stage of formation.

*At each stage, the formators will receive the full file on the candidate from the formators who accompanied him in the preceding stage.*<sup>19</sup>

I believe that if the process is well implemented, it will help the Congregation as well as the candidates in ensuring that the question of motivation is well addressed right from the very beginning. It is an injustice to neglect this important aspect of formation.

## Collaboration

Another aspect that is emphasised in the *Guide* is collaboration within the Unions of Circumscriptions, particularly in the light of the suggestions of the Enlarged General Council in 2008. It is now a fact that many circumscriptions are collaborating more and more as regards formation, and this is reflected in the *Guide* as it underlines the need to foster and strengthen solidarity among circumscriptions and also calls on circumscriptions that do not have many candidates to help with the training of formators.

## Internationality

One of the many purposes of formation is to help us practice internationality, not only as part of our religious missionary life (within our communities and circumscriptions) but also because it is a witness to the kingdom of God. This will always present challenges and opportunities, and provide witness. In order for this to happen, the *Guide* calls for a type of formation that ensures that a candidate is rooted in his own culture so as to be able to appreciate other people's cultures.<sup>20</sup> The person's rootedness is the key here. There is no doubt that Unions of Circumscriptions offer possibilities of enhancing internationality and intercultural living which will prepare those in formation for mission. This has become more and more evident as the Congregation becomes increasingly diverse. As Anthony Gittins observed recently at a lecture which he gave to the Franciscan family:

*... if religious life has a future, and if the witness of Kingdom-building in the contemporary world through authentic mission and encounter is to remain strong, it can only be through a commitment to intercultural living.*<sup>21</sup>

The *Guide* calls for genuine efforts to be made so that our formation communities are international and intercultural in the make-up of the student body as well as that of the formation team. Intercultural living is something that calls for and requires the commitment of all those in the community. Intercultural living means that as candidates and missionaries we are being called to move from the relative comfort of our own cultural home to other places for the sake of the Kingdom. Genuine intercultural living and internationality is a form of being displaced; as in the case of Jesus, it is an emptying of oneself, a form of conversion in response to the demands of the Gospel.

## Part III: Ongoing Formation

Part III is devoted to ongoing formation. "*For us Spiritans ongoing formation is a vital necessity.*"<sup>22</sup> Often when we hear of the word formation, we think of the initial formation of students or candidates in formation. In fact formation must be a life-

*...the Guide calls for a type of formation that ensures that a candidate is rooted in his own culture so as to be able to appreciate other people's cultures.*

*...without ongoing formation or updating, we can experience a slow death as human beings and as a Congregation...*

long personal activity for every Spiritan. The *Guide* begins by highlighting the necessity, importance, and content of ongoing formation. It goes on to spell out its essential elements: human, spiritual, apostolic commitment, and the living of the religious life. The *Guide* intends to emphasise that without ongoing formation or updating, we can experience a slow death as human beings and as a Congregation and eventually we might become irrelevant as agents of evangelisation; hence the use of the word “vital.” The *Guide* tries to suggest concrete ways and means in which every confrère can avail of the opportunities which are there all one’s life.

### **The Concept of Ongoing Formation**

As mentioned above, the SRL 142 captures the essence of ongoing formation when it says:

*God’s call to come and work for the Kingdom is not made to us just once for all. Our response has to be **updated continually** [emphasis mine].*

So it is a necessity for all of us to retrain ourselves without fail, if we are to remain true to our calling in the world and in the Church. Indeed numerous General Chapters, Enlarged General Councils and General Council documents have continued to draw our attention to this responsibility and to the constantly changing nature of our world and mission. It is during the time of ongoing formation that we reflect more deeply on our experiences and on our style of doing mission as Spiritans in the context of today’s world. Ongoing formation means that we are constantly in the process of becoming. Failure to do so affects the way we do mission and our understanding of our spirituality and charism; it also affects our relationship with God, with one another, with our community life and with God’s creation. Ongoing formation is not only for the individual, but also for the community which it has to serve in order for the personal experience of God’s kingdom to become reality. It is an attitude of mind, a spirit of wanting to renew ourselves as well as the community.

*Ongoing formation is not limited to going to some institute of learning. It involves constant updating of oneself...*

Ongoing formation is not limited to going to some institute of learning. It involves constant updating of oneself through personal reading of good quality books and periodicals, attending the annual retreat, attending regional meetings, taking advantage of short courses that may be offered locally or symposia on numerous subjects, participating in formal programmes proposed or organised by the Congregation or other institutes. Today, with the availability of modern means of communication, we have a moral obligation to update ourselves at various levels: human, spiritual, theological, professional and pastoral (cf. SRL 142.1). Not to do so would be inexcusable.

One of the many forms of ongoing formation that SRL talks about is a **period of renewal**; it is clear about its length, preparation and purpose. Renewal can be described as a period of time away from active ministry which a confrère uses for personal growth by exploring his life and his missionary commitment as a Spiritan in a leisurely manner. This period is primarily centred on personal renewal and the *Guide* warns about the abuse of it, for example, in cases where one ends up wandering around for an endless period of time. Such practices and attitudes have negative consequences on our life as Spiritans.

#### **Part IV: Specialised Formation**

The section begins by making a distinction between specialised and ongoing formation. Indeed as the saying goes, “good fences make good neighbours.” Specialised formation is undertaken to answer “*the needs of our apostolate and of our training programmes,*” including the training of formators (GSF 107-132). In order to respond to this cry and to make sure our students are getting the best that they deserve, the *Guide* outlines steps that are to be taken to fill this lacuna. It does not beat about the bush concerning the content, the choice of those to be sent for further studies, and the role of the superior and his council. The *Guide* is in agreement that the issue of the formation of formators has to be addressed with seriousness. Indeed no one would argue against the need for trained formators. Formation will always remain on the agenda of the Congregation since it is the channel of renewing membership and passing on the Spiritan heritage to new generations.

*The Guide is in agreement that the issue of the formation of formators has to be addressed with seriousness.*

So what is specialised study/training and who does it concern? “*It is a mission that a confrere receives from his own superior and his council for an agreed period of time.*”<sup>23</sup> We look more closely at the above definition. Often individuals are asked to go for specialised training, but some unfortunately spend it doing their own thing. This is to the detriment of the institution. It can be a form of individualism, which does not take into account either the welfare of the Congregation. As a result, both the Congregation and formation suffer. This is why the *Guide* offers clear guidelines that are to be followed. The guidelines are also a clear recognition that we have long passed the time when we used to confide formation communities to confrères of good will or to confrères who were good priests or brothers, but who had not received the training necessary to take on such ministry and responsibility. Formation, like any other discipline or science, requires training. Skills such as accompaniment, discernment, assessment, spiritual direction and evaluation of students do not fall from the sky. They are learned. At the same time, training touches on the identity, charism, and mission of the Congregation and the need to preserve it.

## **Approval by the General Chapter**

The final road for the *Guide* was at the Bagamoyo General Chapter when it was presented for final approval. The Chapter made two major changes.

The first one is the place and duration of what is variously called *stage*, perfecting, OTP (Overseas Training Programme), and pastoral experience programme (PEP), depending on the area of the Congregation. The *Guide* uses the term, *Period of Missionary Experience* (PME), as in Part II.

*PME is a key moment in the formation process. It confronts the candidate with the reality of missionary life.*<sup>24</sup>

The decision of the Chapter has for the first time made this period obligatory throughout the Congregation. The Chapter modified SRL 136.1 to read:

*During initial formation, each circumscription will arrange for a period of missionary experience. Normally this experience takes place in a culture different from that of the candidate.*

*During initial formation, each circumscription will arrange for a period of missionary experience. Normally this experience takes place in a culture different from that of the candidate. This allows the young Spiritan to discover the worth of intercultural encounter and to prepare better for Spiritan apostolic life. As far as possible it will normally last for a period of two years, with one year being a minimum.*<sup>25</sup>

In the strict sense, a period of missionary experience has to take place in an intercultural situation. The document offers plenty of advice regarding the objective, preparation, place and accompaniment during this period. It is unfortunate and sad that in some situations a student is left alone without proper preparation, accompaniment or guidance. The apprentice model is to be used following the example of Jesus who learned from Joseph the skills of carpentry by handling tools, watching, practicing, measuring etc. and by being allowed to make mistakes and learn from them. This is what true apprenticeship means.

## **The Place of the Novitiate**

The second change is the place of the novitiate, which will now follow the completion of the pre-novitiate formation or postulancy or philosophy. This will also be uniform throughout the Congregation (cf. GSF 49; 53).

## **Conclusion**

Formation has a significant influence on the quality of membership, for it touches on our Spiritan vocation, identity and charism, and the mission which we have received from Jesus

*The Guide makes it clear from the very beginning that it is for every professed Spiritan and not just those in initial formation.*

Christ. The *Guide* is a clear recognition of the relationship that exists between formation (initial, ongoing and specialised) and mission. They mutually influence one another. I believe the *Guide*, in stressing the essential elements of our Spiritan life, is clear about the direction it wants us to take. The challenge ahead is the living of its content, its transmission to the rest of the Congregation and its implementation. This is where the General Administration, superiors, and formators will have to be called in to ensure that it is carried forward. The *Guide* makes it clear from the very beginning that it is for every professed Spiritan and not just those in initial formation. It is a document that is to bind us together and to give a sense of belonging to the Congregation. It is meant to help us grow as Spiritans and to respond to the mission of Christ in the world in which we live today. It is meant to preserve the unity of Spiritan formation in the diversity of different peoples and contexts. In the words of the late Superior General, Pierre Schouver:

*It indicates the main stages of the journey through which everyone must travel at some point or another. It tries to ensure that all Spiritan pilgrims are tuned in to the same frequency, listen to the same words and the same music.<sup>26</sup>*

Finally, the capitulants when approving the *Guide* had this to say:

*It (General Chapter) recognises that this document contains all relevant guidelines and orientations for application at all stages of Spiritan Formation (Bagamoyo 3.3).*

Again the word formation has to be understood in its three-dimensional meaning—initial, ongoing, and specialised.

Philip Massawe, C.S.Sp.

#### **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup>Congregation of the Holy Spirit, *Superior General's Report*, XVII General Chapter, Itaici- Brazil, 1992:3.5.1

<sup>2</sup>*Spiritans Rule of Life* 105

<sup>3</sup>SRL 105.2

<sup>4</sup>SRL 106

<sup>5</sup>Superior General's Report at Itaici, 1992.

<sup>6</sup>GSF 1.

<sup>7</sup>GSF 7

<sup>8</sup>GSF 30.1

<sup>9</sup>GSF 18

<sup>10</sup>GSF 11.4.

<sup>11</sup>GSF 11.

<sup>12</sup>Eamon Mulcahy, "What can we learn from Poullart des Places in 2009?" in *Spiritual Horizons: A journal of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit*, 4, Fall 2009, 3-12, here 7.

<sup>13</sup>GSF 11.8

<sup>14</sup>GSF 11.15

<sup>15</sup>GSF 30

<sup>16</sup>*Discernment/accompaniment* is an ongoing process of accompanying/ journeying with candidate in many ways (in terms of challenge, struggle and gift). Accompaniment is not an attitude of expecting students/candidates to make mistakes or of trapping them and then being proud that they have been caught. Rather, it is part and parcel of formation that involves both candidate and formator. The aim is to help candidates arrive at their destination.

<sup>17</sup>*Assessment* is an information/data gathering process that leads to decision on a candidate by using certain procedures (observation, interviews, tests). Since the process is ongoing, it helps to correct certain impressions, biases, wrong information, etc. so as to update the dossier of a candidate. Since formators work as a team they can meet after a certain period of time and compare notes based on the data gathered and finally put all assessment together.

<sup>18</sup>*Evaluation*, which comes last after discernment and assessment is taking one step back ...what one has recorded about a candidate in the assessment process is now brought together. One makes a summary on the candidate. So it is the information one has of assessment that leads to evaluation of the candidate.

<sup>19</sup>GSF 30.4

<sup>20</sup>cf. GSF 23

<sup>21</sup>Anthony Gittins in a paper titled, "Rooted in Christ, on fire with the Spirit, Go ... Transform the World!" at International Conference of TOR Brothers and Sisters, Assisi, Italy, April 27, 2013, p. 2.

<sup>22</sup>GSFR 76

<sup>23</sup>GSF 109

<sup>24</sup>GSF 74

<sup>25</sup>SRL 136.1 (2013 Edition).

<sup>26</sup>1997 Edition of the Guide 1.

## THE HEARTBEAT OF SPIRITAN EDUCATION IN THE US



### Jeff Duaime, C.S.Sp.

Jeff Duaime is the current provincial of the US Province. First professed in August 1981, he completed an M.Div at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago in 1986. He was assigned to Haiti immediately after ordination for three years during the time of the Duvalier downfall and was part of the re-insertion of the Spiritan community in Haiti after a 17 year absence. He has also worked 11 years in parish work in the United States in addition to serving as President of Holy Ghost Prep School from 2002-2013. He was Chair of the Province Education Committee which undertook the task of authoring the reflection on Spiritan education in the US as part of the preparation for the 2012 US Provincial Chapter.

*...Spiritans, like some other religious congregations, have preferred to define their role more broadly in terms of spiritual and human need.*

The Congregation of the Holy Spirit does not define its role exclusively as service to either education or social action. While some religious congregations define their role in terms of service to a particular group in society, e.g. the sick, the elderly, the young, etc., and make a valuable contribution by doing so, the Spiritans, like some other religious congregations, have preferred to define their role more broadly in terms of spiritual and human need. This inclusive role of the Congregation was expressed by Francis Libermann in these words: “Evangelizing the poor is our primary end. But the missions are the more specific aim we have chosen, above all, those who are poorest and most abandoned... We would also like to work for the salvation of souls in France, above all the poor, while not abandoning those who are not so poor” (*Notes et Documents*, XIII, p. 170).

### **I. A Historical Perspective: Our Founders and the Education Apostolate**

#### **a) Claude Poullart des Places**

Claude Poullart was born the only son of a noble family in Rennes, Brittany, in 1679. As a young man, aged twenty-two, he arrived in Paris to study for the priesthood. He had given up a promising career as a lawyer to study for the priesthood. He had a profound concern for the poor which found expression first in helping the young chimney-sweeps of Paris. In 1703, while still a student, he founded a seminary for disadvantaged theological students and, at the same time, the Holy Ghost Congregation. Claude was ordained a priest in 1707, and died only two years later at the age of thirty years.

After Claude’s death, the Congregation he had founded continued to flourish and to maintain his tradition of high academic standards, a simple lifestyle and a religious commitment to difficult ministries. Later, preparation of seminarians for the priesthood was widened to include foreign missionary service. “One may wonder why Fr. Beltout (the Superior General after the French Revolution) so readily decided to limit the Congregation to the training of missionaries. The answer is that the Concordat with Napoleon provided for diocesan seminaries with all the needed scholarships for poor students and thereby removed the main reason for the existence of the Holy Ghost Seminary.” (Koren, *Essays on the Spiritan Charism*, p. 127). As the situation of the Church in France and the demands of the apostolate overseas grew and were modified, the Congregation adapted accordingly.

*By the end of the eighteenth century some 1,200 priests had been educated at the seminary on rue Lhomond.*

By the end of the eighteenth century some 1,200 priests had been educated at the seminary on rue Lhomond. It was temporarily suppressed at the time of the French Revolution. After the revolution it reopened and has continued to provide a home for members of the Congregation and others studying at universities in the Latin Quarter of Paris.

**b) Francis Libermann**

Francis Libermann was born in 1802 in Saverne, Alsace, the son of a Jewish rabbi, and was given the name Jacob. He became a Catholic in 1826, taking the name Francis. Soon after, he felt called to become a priest. However, a short time before he was due to be ordained he was stricken with epilepsy and his ordination was postponed indefinitely. Having spent thirteen years in various institutes of theological education, he became interested in a project to establish a society for the pastoral care and education of freed slaves. Francis was ordained a priest in 1841 and the same year opened the novitiate of the new society, the Congregation of the Holy Heart of Mary.

In 1848 an unusual event took place when, following negotiations between the two Congregations and the Holy See, all the members of the new congregation joined the Holy Ghost Congregation founded by des Places, and Libermann became its Superior General. This union brought an infusion of new members who revitalized the older congregation. Under Libermann's leadership the Congregation continued to grow and to develop its educational, missionary and pastoral work in many countries outside France and her colonies. Francis Libermann died on February 2, 1852, leaving behind a reputation for holiness.

Henry Koren, C.S.Sp. points out how easily Libermann changed his attitude with respect to scholarship and education in the light of what he saw as the needs of the missionary church during the ten years he said he needed for laying the foundations of the Congregation. In his *Essays on the Spiritan Charism*, Koren quotes Libermann:

[If] the Spiritan Rule of Life is to be interpreted as meaning that everyone must go to the missions... If our rule says we may not have several houses in Europe "it is important that the constitutions of the Congregation be changed" (*Notes et Documents IX*, p. 293).

"In 1850 (Libermann) published a brochure about the Congregation. In its first paragraph he spoke about Fr. Poullart des Places as founder of the Congregation, and in its final paragraph he made an appeal for candidates having a special vocation to teach,

*In his famous 1846 memorandum to Propaganda Fide he viewed it as 'wholly the duty of the missionary to work ... also at the intellectual, agricultural and technical knowledge.'*

*To abandon the schools is to destroy the future of the missions.*

adding that this would be their almost exclusive task” (Koren, p. 136).

“In his famous 1846 memorandum to Propaganda Fide he viewed it as ‘wholly the duty of the missionary to work ... also at the intellectual, agricultural and technical knowledge’ (N.D. VIII, 248). When his priests objected that the ‘missionary is not a school-master,’ he countered: ‘I understand that it would cost the missionaries very much [to act as teacher]. Nevertheless, it is urgent to undertake the step.’ ‘To abandon the schools is to destroy the future of the missions’” (N.D. IX, pp. 50 and 44).

“The widening of Libermann’s horizons should not surprise us. As always, he wished to be guided by what the Holy Spirit indicated in the concrete situations of life. When he realized that the Congregation would “probably” be obliged to undertake the education of boys in junior seminaries, he also knew that this practically meant accepting colleges” (N. D. XIII, p. 35). Libermann’s fully formed convictions at the end of his life concerning education continue to animate the Congregation’s educational philosophy.

## **II. Spiritan Marks of Education**

### **a) Openness to the Spirit**

In keeping with the dedication of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit, both des Places and Libermann regarded openness to the Spirit as the guiding principle of their lives and of the Congregation. This represented a departure from the traditional emphasis on blind obedience rather than on fidelity to the Spirit. Two examples of their openness to the Spirit are adaptability to change and respect for each person’s uniqueness. First, they showed a deep respect for the light of the Holy Spirit manifested in the changing circumstances of life. In education, this means responding to the most pressing educational needs of the people of their times. Second, they respected each one’s personal vocation as a manifestation of the Spirit’s guidance. In an educational context, this meant respect of each individual’s personality and talents.

Libermann’s respect for the Spirit at work in peoples and cultures led him to adopt an innovative approach to cross cultural education. In sharp contrast to the “assimilation” policy of both Church and State in the Spanish and Portuguese colonies of the time, he advocated respect for local cultures in both educational and missionary activities. “(The missionaries) must pay particular attention to which customs and habits are characteristic of the peoples and the land. They must carefully avoid disturbing these customs (unless they are against God’s law) and modifying them

*They will simply try to make (the people) more perfect in their own way of life and in accord with their own custom.*

*In education, our tradition has meant combining concern for the disadvantaged with openness to the needs of people from all walks of life.*

*Spiritans educators are mentors.*

in a European fashion. They will simply try to make (the people) more perfect in their own way of life and in accord with their own custom.” This attitude ruled not merely his own life but also imposed on him the greatest reverence for the way of being proper to individuals, not excluding those who wished to join the Congregation to further its objectives.

#### **b) Global Vision**

The missionary outlook introduced to the Congregation in the eighteenth century and reinforced by Libermann has given the Congregation a global vision which inspires the hope for the realization of one world united in peace and justice in the Kingdom of God. In education, it means working for the empowerment of peoples and their liberation from injustice, poverty and ignorance. Catholic belief presumes that the human person is essentially social, created in the image of God who is love, God who is communion, the one God who in essence is personal relations in love. It further presumes that humankind is destined to live eternally in loving union with God and all of humanity.

In education, our tradition has meant combining concern for the disadvantaged with openness to the needs of people from all walks of life. Their global mission in the service of the Kingdom of God enables Spiritans to bring to the poor empowerment through education and to bring to the rich a consciousness of their responsibility to work towards a global society where poverty will be eliminated.

#### **c) A Sense of Community**

The motto of the Congregation is “One Heart and One Soul,” evoking the first Christian community in Jerusalem. As might be expected, therefore, a sense of community was highly prized by both des Places and Libermann. This is expressed in common living with shared prayer, meals, work and a simple lifestyle. In education, a sense of community translates into closeness to the students, a family spirit and accessibility.

Spiritans educators are mentors. As mentors they face two challenges. On the one hand, they are responsible for communicating a body of objective knowledge to students and holding them responsible for knowing that body of knowledge. On the other hand, they must provide nurture to students in their growth process towards human integration. This mentoring takes place in the ongoing dialogue between teacher and student. Both grow and become themselves through the dialogue. Relationship is at the core of the Spiritan educational process.

**d) Concern for the Poor**

Both des Places and Libermann focused their attention on the most needy people of their day. des Places first became interested in helping the young “Savoyards” or chimney-sweeps of Paris and later expanded his concern to helping poor theological students who would later work in the neglected rural parishes of France and in overseas missions. Libermann felt called by God to help the slaves and freed slaves in the old French colonies, whose miserable condition had been brought to his attention by two student friends, Eugene Tisserant (whose mother was Haitian) and Frederick Le Vasseur from Reunion.

Concern for the poor remains a top priority for the Holy Spirit Congregation in fulfillment of its mission “to follow Jesus and to announce the Good News of the Kingdom” (SRL, 1), a priority which it shares with all religious congregations and with the Church in general. Education has remained a potent means of translating that concern into action. For many, education is the beginning of the Good News, leading to spiritual and social empowerment.

*For many, education is the beginning of the Good News, leading to spiritual and social empowerment.*

**e) Commitment to Service**

Closely associated with concern for the disadvantaged was the Founders’ commitment to service. des Places was not content simply to pursue his theological studies in Paris oblivious to what was going on around him. He was motivated by a spirit of service to others which inspired him to help the young chimney-sweeps and impoverished theological students. His untimely death in October 1709 was hastened by his prodigious efforts to develop his young society and to provide food for his community during the early months of the year when extremely cold weather caused disruption of the food supply and widespread famine in Paris.

Libermann also had a strong sense of service as shown by his total commitment to the development of his society in the service of the poor and disadvantaged people of his day. His spirit of service also led him to carry on a voluminous correspondence devoted to spiritual counseling in addition to his responsibilities as Superior General of the Congregation. He put service to others before his own welfare, regardless of his weak health. He saw education as service to the Church and to people in need.

**f) High Academic Standards**

The standards set by des Places for the education of priests were remarkable for his time, when requirements varied widely throughout the Church, in many cases amounting to no more than one and a half years of theological studies. He required

that the course of study should extend over at least six years to include two years of philosophy and four years of theology. He encouraged an additional two-year postgraduate course oriented to law or Scripture. He exemplified commitment to high academic standards in his own life. Having graduated “*summa cum laude*” as the youngest and brightest of several hundred students, he was chosen as valedictorian of his philosophy class. He then went on to earn his law degree and later took theology in Paris.

Although he had been a brilliant student himself, Libermann at first was not convinced of the need for high academic standards for members of his society. However, he changed his mind after he became Superior General of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit when he came to know the scholarly Father Gaultier who was widely respected in academic circles in Paris. Gaultier had endowed the seminary with a rich library and had attracted a circle of prominent scholars that included the great patrologist, J.P. Migne. Libermann’s policy of encouraging higher studies from then onwards was to provide the Congregation with a number of experts and specialists in various fields.

#### g) Academic Freedom

When Claude Poullart des Places arrived in Paris to study theology, the University of Paris was dominated by the Jansenist faction. Rather than compromise his beliefs, Claude preferred to forego taking a degree which would have required him to follow courses at the Sorbonne. He took his theology courses instead at the Jesuit School of Theology, in the prestigious College Louis LeGrand, across the street from the Sorbonne.

The struggle for academic freedom and refusal to conform to ways of thinking that were “politically correct” continued for many decades. Poullart des Place’s immediate successors preferred to sacrifice even the lure of a large endowment rather than give up their freedom to teach what they saw as the truth.

The Founders’ concern for freedom was rooted neither in a blind adherence to outdated ideas nor in an appeal to a direct communication from the Holy Spirit. They believed that the Spirit usually speaks to us through events in the contemporary world.

That is why des Places insisted that all his students should master mathematics and the “new-fangled” Newtonian physics as prerequisites for the study of theology. This is also why Libermann insisted on the over-riding importance of learning from experience rather than depending on outdated paradigms, when he undertook the giant task of evangelizing Africa.

*Poullart des Places’ immediate successors preferred to sacrifice even the lure of a large endowment rather than give up their freedom to teach what they saw as the truth.*

The foregoing brief survey shows that education in the Spiritan tradition is energized by values flowing from the living heritage of the Founders: openness to the Spirit, a strong sense of community, concern for the disadvantaged, a global vision, commitment to service, high academic standards and commitment to academic freedom.

### **III. Theological Foundations for the Spiritan Educational Ethos and Ministries**

Ever aware of the theological image underlying our educational efforts, we turn to some elements and emphases that pervade Spiritan educational ministry. These elements accent and highlight dimensions of Christian adult living that are not the principal focus of education offered by others within the Catholic community, e.g., Jesuits, Marianists, Salesians, etc. These elements are inherent in and flow from our Spiritan vocation and way of life as evidenced in SRL, #18. What is more important, however, is how these attitudes and dispositions of heart are embodied in Spiritans who live our educational ministry. These philosophical and theological characteristics shape the image that embodies the education that we offer and can be found in all aspects of our institutions: modes of governance, curricula, faculty and student body composition, extracurricular activities, community service, standards of academic excellence, etc. Among these elements are:

*Spiritans education presumes that every human being possesses a specific vocation in and through which the personality unfolds and character is developed.*

- **Indwelling Presence Of the Transcendent**

We educate to bring people to an awareness of the indwelling of the Transcendent God within them (SRL #6). Spiritan educational ministry has a special emphasis on the indwelling of the Divine Spirit in every human person journeying toward becoming fully alive, humanly, spiritually, intellectually and socially. Spiritan education presumes that every human being possesses a specific vocation in and through which the personality unfolds and character is developed. This presumes that all our educational, evangelizing efforts seek to form and provide an “upbringing” in the image of Christ, who is “the image of the unseen God” (Colossians 1:15). Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:14; Galatians 5:18) those whom we serve in educational ministry are being transformed into and reflect that image in brighter and brighter glory” (2 Corinthians 3:18). “This is the working of the Lord who is the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:18). What we are sent to teach is meant to bring all to realize that they “are a temple of God with the Spirit of God living in” them as temples who are holy (1 Cor. 3:16-17).

*We educate for relationships in human community, that “all may be one.”*

- Following the Lead Of the Spirit in Life

Our educational ministry seeks to develop a keen awareness of the Spirit’s lead in every aspect and every moment of our lives. While others may contrast contemplation and action, we see Christian life as quickened by the Spirit at every moment, as did Mary. It responds to our need be aware of God’s presence in all of the practical circumstances of life, the concrete, the real. Libermann expressed this in his concept of practical union with God (SRL #5).

- Relational And Communitarian Living

Our lives are relational and communitarian just as our God is One in Three. The Church is the sacrament of God’s desire that we all may be one through loving relationships. This communitarian and relational focus confronts the schizophrenic culture rooted in individualism (SRL #1). The image of Christ, the Spirit-filled Messiah and Leader in faith (Luke 6; Hebrews 12), informs all of our educational efforts as we seek to fulfill Christ’s mandate to go and teach all nations. We educate for relationships in human community, that “all may be one” (John 17:22). No matter what area of instruction we provide - the arts, sciences, math, literature, technology - all is seen as contributing to the life of the community and the preparation of citizens who are faith-filled in a culturally diverse and pluralistic world. Spiritan educational ministry provides a New Evangelization in cultures that have forgotten their Christian roots.

- Self-Transcendence in Sacrificial Love

Just as Christ constantly transcended himself in love for the Father, we invite all to transcend themselves in the same sacrificial love that Jesus lived. This is the primary educational principle that constitutes the content and shape of our educational ministry. We are called to this fullness of life in loving relationships (SRL #3, #38-39).

- Relishing Diversity

While the Spirit is the source of our unity, we relish diversity: cultural, human, spiritual, ecumenical, interreligious, and the distribution of charismata for the building up of the People of God and the world. Variety and complementarity are characteristic of our education. The Spirit is the giver and the shaper of the gifts that each person receives for the building up of the Body of Christ and the human family. Spiritan educators are Spirit-linking leaders who appreciate the diverse ways the Spirit works in persons in community (SRL #15, #24.2).

- Focus On Freedom.

Spiritans education focuses on freedom. The Spirit which gives life in Christ Jesus sets us free (Rom. 8:2). Where the Spirit is, there is freedom. We have been released from fear which enslaves and have been brought to the freedom of sons and daughters of God (Rom. 8:14). It is a freedom that moves us beyond self-indulgence to freedom in the Spirit (Gal. 5). This freedom is also the foundation of the charismatic, creative life of the Church which complements the gift of hierarchy and magisterium in the Church. Spiritans education accents the charismatic life of the Church (SRL #7, #14).

- Masters Of Dialogue

To live a spirituality of communion presumes that we develop the art and asceticism of dialogue. For Spiritans, dialogue is the only way to be a Christian in the world. Those educated by Spiritans have learned how to enter into dialogue in a pluralistic world and are capable of articulating the Catholic voice in realizing the common good (SRL#16.3,#17.1).

- Solidarity, Subsidiarity and Discernment

All Spiritans educational ministry presumes that the Gospel is essentially social and seeks peace and justice for all. There is no peace without justice just as there is no justice that does not lead to peace. Our educational ministry is informed by the two sisters of social justice, solidarity and subsidiarity. These two principles inform the way we govern our institutions and all of our pedagogy. They shape the ethos of our lives and communities. Those whom we educate should be immersed in this ethos and be brought up in the art of discerning how to integrate subsidiarity and solidarity in society. This is our way of educating with a sense of seeking the good in common (common good). Integration of the two can only be accomplished by people who possess discerning spirits, individually and communally; spirits that see, understand what they see, judge the value of what they understand and choose to act for the good of all (SRL #21-23, #44, #46).

- Preferential Love For And Outreach To the Poor

All aspects of our educational ministry presume that all people have the right to hear the liberating message of Gospel love. This is especially true for the poor, those whose needs are the greatest, the oppressed and those who have no voice. All aspects of our educational ministry offer preferential love for the poor whom we serve, either directly or indirectly (SRL #4, #12, #14).

These elements build on and inform all of the components that are presumed to be present in any accredited, academically

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excellent educational institution - academic excellence, academic outcomes, moral discipline, the design of curricula, community outreach programs, professionalism of administrators and faculty, sports programs, the very spirit of the institution, etc.

#### **IV. The Lived Tradition**

Francis Libermann's new position as the eleventh Superior General of the Holy Spirit Congregation in 1848 obliged him to face the question of assuming responsibility for educational work, which had always been the primary focus of the Congregation. Since its inception it had provided teachers to seminaries and colleges both in France and overseas. With his customary openness to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in changing circumstances, Libermann quickly adapted to the new situation and continued the tradition of supplying teachers for seminaries and colleges.

*The first new educational project undertaken following Libermann's death was the establishment of a national major seminary for the French clergy in Rome in 1853.*

The first new educational project undertaken following Libermann's death was the establishment of a national major seminary for the French clergy in Rome in 1853. This was in the tradition of des Places' interest in the education of the clergy. Libermann heard the voice of the Spirit in the Pope's invitation to open the seminary. That the seminary was faithful to the spiritual and academic values of the Congregation's founders was demonstrated when it celebrated its first centennial in 1953. By then more than 3,000 priests had been educated within its walls and quite a number had been raised to the ranks of bishop and cardinal. Although the Spiritans were obliged to withdraw from its governance in 2009 because of declining numbers in the French Province, the French Seminary, situated near the Pantheon in the historic center of Rome, continues to be a respected center of higher education for the French Church today.

The same values inspired the expansion of educational works during the thirty years' administration of Libermann's successor, Father Schwindenhammer. Under his leadership the Congregation opened 31 minor and major seminaries and colleges, of which only one - Chevilly, near Paris - was reserved exclusively for future members. The most important of these were Beauvais and Mesnieres in France, Blackrock and Rockwell in Ireland, Braga in Portugal, St. Mary's in Trinidad and Holy Ghost College (Duquesne University) in Pittsburgh. In addition, it established 15 trade and agricultural schools (collectively known as Auteuil) mostly staffed by Brothers, who were officially recognized by the government of France as teachers.

#### **At the Service of the Local Church**

The written form of the Spiritan charism and tradition is found

principally in the *Spiritan Rule of Life*. The Spiritan Rule (SRL), like that of all religious orders and Congregations in the Catholic Church, is inspired by the life and teachings of Jesus. The Spiritan Rule has had a varied history going back to the first version written by Father des Places. It has had to be updated at intervals in order to meet changing conditions in the religious and secular world. The most recent revision of the Spiritan Rule of Life was approved by the Holy See in 1987. While the SRL references to educational ministry are brief, they express quite clearly the nature, goals, and means required to carry out this ministry.

SRL #18. “In local Churches the following are our principal activities: Fostering Christian communities and the education and training of a committed and responsible laity; Engaging in social and educational work in line with our Spiritan calling;

#18.1 We consider the following to be especially important tasks for our times: Youth apostolate, because the present situation of young people is crying out more than ever for social and educational works.

The General Chapter at Maynooth in 1998 included a thorough reflection on the role of Spiritan education as an integral part of our mission:

*Formal and informal education is not something on the margins of our apostolate, but is an integral part of our mission of evangelization.*

- “Formal and informal education is not something on the margins of our apostolate, but is an integral part of our mission of evangelization. This conviction is based on two considerations: on the one hand, this social ministry to the poor brings them freedom and promotes the dignity that is theirs as children of God; on the other, the contact it gives with the world of young people provides an opportunity for passing on the Good News, above all through the witness of the educator” (Maynooth, p. 102).
- “We will make a point of making young people aware of the problems of poverty and unjust structures in their society and the world at large” (Maynooth 2.13).
- “Where it is desirable, we will further involve lay people in the administration of our educational institutions, while retaining a Spiritan presence as a witness and a source of inspiration. In collaborating with lay people, we will try to share the spirit of our Spiritan tradition with them” (Maynooth, 2.14).
- “The training of educators is a priority for us” (Maynooth 2.15).
- “We will put greater emphasis on the training of some

confreres as specialists in education, especially for the service of the poor. This presupposes a prior assessment of their needs and will take into account the resources available” (Maynooth, 2.16).

## **V. Spiritan Educational Ministry, Formal and Informal, now and in the Future**

### **Present Formal**

*These institutions are stamped with the Spiritan character in a similar way to our own formation as Spiritans, by “osmosis,” the milieu of the institution and the lived witness of Spiritans engaged in the particular ministry of education.*

In the United States, Spiritans have been engaged in a good number of educational endeavors since almost the very beginning of Spiritan presence on these shores. These institutions are stamped with the Spiritan character in a similar way to our own formation as Spiritans, by “osmosis,” the milieu of the institution and the lived witness of Spiritans engaged in the particular ministry of education. Their values are experienced on a daily basis by the students and passed on subliminally.

As we acknowledge the changing circumstances regarding the challenge of providing trained Spiritans at our sponsored institutions, we continue to focus on highlighting and strengthening the Spiritan charism at these institutions. We emphasize the necessity to make explicit what constitutes a Spiritan educational institution in this age and place. Reflection and planning is a critical point of laying the foundation for the future. The process involves a considerable collaboration with the laity at these institutions.

### **Mission Statements**

The Congregation sponsors two exceptional educational institutions in the US that serve the church and society in preparing persons for a variety of vocations and careers. There is a parallel development at these two Spiritan institutions as they both are deeply rooted in a clear mission statement for each school. Duquesne University’s statement speaks of five concerns: Academic Excellence, Moral and Spiritual Values, and Ecumenical Atmosphere, the Spirit of Service and World Concerns. Composed by a totally different faculty and student body, we find similar concerns expressed in the Mission Statement of Holy Ghost Preparatory School: Academic Excellence; moral, intellectual and spiritual formation; service to the poor; development of community and the cultivation of unique gifts. Both statements look upon education as formation of the person and not just the intellect.

The Mission Statements really have no import in and of themselves except that they are the basis of constant reflection by the various constituencies of the institutions. So it is the process of developing a mission statement, of continued reflection on

the meaning of the statement by all engaged at the institutions, and of implementing the implications of that statement that are the foundation on which these sponsored works continue to institutionalize the Spiritan charism at these schools. These institutions are blessed to have administrators, faculties, staff and alumni that espouse, embody, and make substantial contributions of time, talent and treasure in implementing the Spiritan educational philosophy.

In addition to these sponsored Spiritan institutions in the United States, the Congregation also serves dioceses through parochial ministries that have parochial schools. Many Spiritans also serve as administrators, faculty and campus ministers in both Catholic and secular academic institutions and diocesan seminaries that are not sponsored by the Congregation. The contributions of Spiritans to the education apostolate are varied and dynamic. Benefactors, through their financial support, are a critical part of ensuring the mission focus and financial viability of our institutions. In addition to advancing the mission of these institutions at home, some have even made possible the construction of schools in other Spiritan circumscriptions, e.g., Tanzania, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Nigeria, etc. Internationally, the work by US Spiritans in Tanzania, focused on the promotion of education for women within the Maasai culture, is another important expression of our unique Spiritan commitment to education for the purpose of liberation and the promotion of their dignity as children of God.

### **Present Informal**

Many Spiritans serve as retreat directors, participate in parochial youth and adult educational programs, and are involved in justice and peace activities at the local and national levels. Spiritans also serve as Campus Ministers at institutions not sponsored by the Congregation.

In taking on new parochial ministries, one important consideration might be to look at how we are able to provide youth with a safe atmosphere, academically challenging, and accessible education at the elementary and secondary levels. When we consider taking on a new parochial ministry, one of the questions we should ask is what potential impact our engagement and Spiritan presence will have on the integral development and education of the people we serve.

### **VI. Conclusion**

The Congregation of the Holy Spirit has made a clear choice for evangelization, the promotion of justice, and for the service and liberation of the poor (SRL, 14). These objectives are realized

*In taking on new parochial ministries, one important consideration might be to look at how we are able to provide youth with a safe atmosphere, academically challenging, and accessible education at the elementary and secondary levels.*

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through a commitment to quality education with a clear vision of the Spiritan values. The Spiritan charism clearly embraces education as an important instrument of evangelization. Properly understood and fully embraced, this will entail an intensification of the educational ministry which can be a powerful tool for the transformation of attitudes and for promoting social change. Faithful to our Founders and to our sources of inspiration for over 300 years, Spiritans continue to respond to the challenges of our contemporary world and the needs of the Church through an openness to the Spirit which is revealed to us in the people that we serve.

### **Acknowledgements**

The Spiritan Education Committee of the US Province wishes to acknowledge the various contributors to this document who have provided significant input into the development of this statement. The first two parts of the document relating the historical and Spiritan underpinnings of our educational apostolate was taken from the work of the Corporation of Duquesne University which was written in 1994 under the title, “A Catholic University in the Spiritan Tradition.” We owe a special debt of gratitude to Frs. Donald Nesti and Mike Grey for the section on the Theological Foundations of Spiritan Education. The committee believes this is a significant contribution to our reflection on Spiritan education and ethos. Frs. Barney Kelly and Elochukwu Uzukwu provided some important editorial comments, and Fr. John Geary from the Province of TransCanada put much effort into redacting and editing the different components of the document. We are grateful to all Spiritans who have dedicated their ministry to Spiritan education in the various forms in which it has been expressed throughout the history of the Congregation which is the most powerful statement of all.

*Spiritan Education Committee:* Jeffrey Duaiame, Chair, John Hansen, William Headley, James McCloskey, and Paulinus Odozor. May 2012.



### Dr. David Somers

David Somers is a physical therapist and neuroscientist. He was Associate Professor and Chair in the Department of Physical Therapy and the Anna Rangos Rizakus Endowed Chair for Health Science and Ethics at Duquesne University where he served for 20 years. Dr. Somers taught neuroscience and research to students of physical therapy and physician assistant studies and investigated the treatment of chronic neuropathic pain. While at Duquesne, he helped to start the Hazelwood Partnership, an ad hoc working group of community and University stakeholders who seek to equip the residents of Hazelwood to become the community they desire to be. Dr. Somers is presently the Director of Education and Operations at the Center of Life, a nonprofit community empowerment organization within the Hazelwood neighborhood of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

*Duquesne serves God  
by serving students.*

## THE MISSION OF DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY: A RETIRING FACULTY MEMBER'S PERSPECTIVE

### Encounters of our Mission

The mission of Duquesne University of the Holy Spirit is only a few sentences long, but the concepts it contains commit those who serve to a unique Spiritan call. Tucked between introductory statements describing our Catholic identity, the founding order, the expected partnership between religious and laity, and the means by which the mission will be accomplished are six words that tell the world what we do; *Duquesne serves God by serving students.*

I was asked to reflect on the meaning of serving the mission as a faculty member for the past 20 years. One way to do this is to view our mission from the experiences and actions of others. Visitors to our campus see the mission without being part of its expression. Their comments reveal attributes of what it means to serve the mission of Duquesne. The mission can also be viewed through faculty and staff working to see it fulfilled. Observing the actions and decisions of these people opens a much broader window into the meaning of serving God by serving students. Finally, the mission can be viewed from the perspective of one who was transformed by it. These personal reflections reveal the intimate interaction between the mission and an individual's spiritual growth.

Today I would like to reflect on the meaning of serving the mission of Duquesne through these three levels of experiences and observations. It is my hope that in so doing we will be inspired to continue our service to the mission and to teach every person who joins our family the importance of these six simple words.

### The Mission as experienced by Visitors

Potential faculty members, administrators and accrediting agencies visit our University every year. These visitors are often moved to express their positive impressions and sometimes offer recommendations. Two visitors stand out in my mind because their comments reveal much about our simply stated mission.

For the past 20 years it was my pleasure to speak with some extraordinarily qualified people who wished to join our faculty. During one of these interviews, the candidate was asked why he was interested in working at Duquesne University. Without hesitation the candidate replied he was attracted by the mission. Having spent a good bit of the day with us, the candidate was

further impressed by the uniformity of awareness of the mission from all campus constituencies he encountered. He indicated he had never seen such a thorough commitment to a university's mission before in higher education. This impression is not unique among our visitors and reveals one attribute of what it means to serve the mission of Duquesne. *When the people of the University are serving the mission, we want to convey our passion to anyone who will listen.*

As part of the normal interview process, the candidate was queried about opportunities that exist at Duquesne. He responded that there was room for continued growth in research, an idea supported by those with whom he was interviewing. One recommendation he offered to increase extramural support for research was to provide financial remuneration for faculty who submit grants. This idea had worked well at institutions where the candidate had worked, and he very reasonably believed it might work well at Duquesne. I ask that you hold this recommendation in your mind for a moment for it will be considered again.

Another set of visitors to the campus was the Middle States site assessment team who evaluated the University early in my tenure. The team found strengths and weaknesses, and among the strengths was an observation akin to that made by the visiting faculty candidate. The Middle States team commented that there was something special at Duquesne University that seemed to infect everyone here. The team went on to say that they believed this specialness, although not well documented, was an essential quality of Duquesne. Our guests had defined a second essential attribute of what it means to serve the mission. *When the people of the University are serving the mission, it will create a perceptibly unique atmosphere that contributes greatly to our character.*

When the people of the University are serving the mission, it will create a perceptibly unique atmosphere that contributes greatly to our character.

The Middle States site team delivered recommendations for improvement after their visit. One recommendation was for the University to codify and document the source and behaviors that were producing our character. They believed this was necessary so that our special something would not be lost in the future. Again, please hold this recommendation in your mind as I will refer to it again.

### **The Mission as lived by the Faculty**

For the past five years I served as chair of the Physical Therapy Department in the John G. Rangos Sr. School of Health Sciences. It was my blessing to work with 11 other people who uniformly embraced the mission of Duquesne in their everyday lives. By observing the decisions they made, a far greater understanding of our mission is possible.

Several years ago Dr. Regis Turocy, a retired Duquesne Physical Therapy faculty member, began to offer *pro bono* services at the Catholic Charities free clinic in downtown Pittsburgh. A licensed physical therapist, Dr. Turocy was instrumental in adding physical therapy services to the host of offerings available at the clinic. While providing these services, he also pursued education to become a deacon in the Episcopal Church. As his ordination drew near, he returned to the Physical Therapy department to inquire of our willingness to take over his *pro bono* services. I offered this possibility to our faculty, and Drs. Kenneth Havrilla and Gregory Marchetti volunteered. In my naïveté as a new chair, I promised I would pursue funding for their work because it would require them to perform a portion of their academic responsibilities on their own time. They both thanked me and began to deliver care, inviting our undergraduate students to join them. In this way, students who had not yet matriculated to professional education could learn from their future professors about delivering physical therapy to a needy population.

Eventually, it became clear that I had no authority or budget to offer these faculty members additional pay. I went to each of them to confess that I could not fulfill my naïve promise. In independent meetings, and without hesitation, both responded that the money was irrelevant. Neither was moved to provide the services because they would be paid. Instead, their motivation was to help those in need and to demonstrate to underclassmen the values of Duquesne University and their personal commitment to the poor.

In the actions of these professors is another expression of the mission that our visiting faculty member could not discern. His recommendation to encourage additional grant submissions through financial remuneration did not recognize what true commitment to our mission means. Having not worked on campus surrounded by an entire population of people living the mission, he could not possibly know that our faculty does not work for pay alone. Drs. Havrilla and Marchetti reveal another attribute of our mission. *When the mission is being served, work becomes a calling rather than a means to a paycheck.*

When the mission is being served, work becomes a calling rather than a means to a paycheck.

Dr. Leesa Dibartola is also a faculty member in the Department of Physical Therapy who without question holds the most thankless job within our department. Dr. DiBartola is the Director of Clinical Education. Our students receive education from clinical partners for five separate periods of time. These experiences are arranged, contracted, and managed by Dr. DiBartola, and the staff who support her. Deeply committed to the education of our students, Dr. DiBartola shepherds them to a clinical facility that will best serve their educational needs. The

vicissitudes of her job include calls from parents unhappy with the placement of their son or daughter, frequent emotional episodes with her students who cannot see the wisdom she has employed to place them, communication from clinical departments who for various reasons must back out of their agreements (sometimes days before the experience is to begin), and the burden of managing a comprehensive course sequence that is dispersed over one and one half years.

In addition to these responsibilities, Dr. DiBartola teaches the courses in our curriculum on professional interactions with patients. Students historically find these courses distasteful, as Dr. DiBartola carries out practical mock experiences that challenge their pre-held convictions about how to interact with patients in desperate conditions. Complaining from students during this coursework is routine.

With a few exceptions, Dr. DiBartola receives positive feedback about the job she does two times a year. The first occurs during her annual evaluation with me when I recognize her dedication to the quality education of our students. The second comes when our students return for graduation. It is during this time that gratitude pours from these soon to be physical therapists as they recognize the value of her efforts. It takes exposure to patient populations for the students to realize how wise were Dr. DiBartola's clinical experience placements and how sound her pedagogy. She leaves this exit interview temporarily buoyed only to re-enter the storm four weeks later as the fall semester begins.

One is left to wonder why someone would perform such a relentlessly thankless job year after year. Indeed, the turnover rate of faculty members in this position at other institutions is high. If you ask, she will tell you that the reason she does the job is because she views the students in the same way she would her children. She serves them with the same love a mother would show her child, deeply caring about their success and maturation. Dr. DiBartola reveals yet another attribute of what it means to serve the mission of Duquesne. *When the mission is being served, faculty members love and support the students they teach.*

When the mission is being served, faculty members love and support the students they teach.

Dr. Rick Clemente has taught anatomy in our department for the entire 22 years of our school's existence. He is an outstanding classroom teacher, but his true talent exists within the cadaver dissection laboratory. There he interacts directly with individual students on a daily basis. Our students come to Dr. Clemente from the undergraduate years with no professional training. In addition to teaching anatomy, part of his responsibility is to begin the process of transforming young adults into caring professionals.

His pedagogical process reflects the responsibility he accepts to produce mature professionals. His first lecture begins with photographs of patients he took with permission. Every student is informed that the people just displayed are someone's father, mother, son or daughter. From now on, his students are told, there is no information you are permitted to forget, no understanding you may ignore, no effort you may withhold from your work because at the end of this education is somebody's greatest love.

As the class moves into the dissection laboratory, Dr. Clemente begins the process of individually educating students in anatomy and professional responsibility. He is often questioned early on. "What nerve is this?" a student may ask. Dr. Clemente will not answer that question. Instead, he poses one of his own: "What do you think it is?" Not surprisingly, the student often responds that he/she has no idea. Dr. Clemente will then begin the process of teaching the student what it means to have someone's life in his/her hands through a relentless barrage of questions: "What part of the body do we have here? What is the name of the structure adjacent to the nerve you have identified? What is the name of the structure to the left of it? What is the name of the structure to the right of it?" On and on it goes until the vast ignorance of the student is comprehensively revealed. He then dispenses a piece of advice: "Before you ask me what something is, make sure you understand why you don't know the answer." The prevailing message delivered to each student through countless similar interactions is that your education and future patients are your responsibility. Invest in them because I will hold you accountable.

In our increasingly secular country, one might anticipate that students would rebel against such aggressive, morally-undergirded teaching. They do not. Dr. Clemente has four times been elected by students as the University's teacher of the year, the most recent occurring last year. I believe the reason he is so revered is because he fully endorses Duquesne University's mission and believes unquestionably that he serves God by serving students. He likewise believes that his students must serve God by serving their patients.

For 22 years every student he has taught has sensed this purity of motivation and concern, and they rise to his call in large number. As graduates, these therapists flock back to our department whenever Dr. Clemente offers a continuing education course. His actions reveal a fifth attribute of serving the mission of Duquesne University. *When the mission is well served, students will be motivated to do their absolute best and be grateful to those who inspire them.*

When the mission is well served, students will be motivated to do their absolute best and be grateful to those who inspire them.

These are but four faculty members within a department of 12 who fully endorse the mission of Duquesne University and live that mission tirelessly. Every day these faculty members make decisions to support and sustain our mission. It is at this decision point where the recommendation of our visitors from Middle States is revealing. The site team called for us to codify the special something they sensed. Although the request was well motivated, it is impossible to fulfill. The mission-generated specialness cannot be codified on paper because it is written on hearts. Serving God by serving students is a lived commitment, not a typed goal. The words only come alive to create an air of specialness on our campus because of the innumerable decisions made by a campus community unified in purpose.

### **The Mission as experienced by a Person**

Twenty years ago I began my career at Duquesne. I had not before worked at a Catholic University and felt attracted to the Christian faith only because of my upbringing and wife. I carried little of this marginal faith into my work at Duquesne. Although I was certainly humane and friendly with students, they were objects to be educated and little else.

Because the people who serve the mission of Duquesne wanted to convey their passion for it, I became the object of their attention. I was invited to attend the Christian Academic Fellowship (CAFÉ). This group of faculty and staff met weekly to consider living out their Christian faith within the mission of Duquesne University. I was warmly invited into deep discussions about the struggle to serve a faith-based mission in a secular academic world. Through our discussions I was introduced to the Christian faith as a call upon your life rather than an obligation for Sunday. Those in attendance rejected the idea that faith and work should be separate and found such a notion completely inconsistent with the mission of Duquesne. Their presence in my life and willingness to convey the passion of working at Duquesne changed my perspective about teaching at a Catholic University.

*...I was introduced to the Christian faith as a call upon your life rather than an obligation for Sunday.*

Spiritans Fathers attended this group over the years and introduced me to the idea that the goal of work was not just to be excellent, but to serve. Their personal histories, stories of the Spiritan Order, and commitment to God were appealing to me. I began to attend educational sessions offered by the Spiritans. I read their literature and concluded that work indeed was not about a paycheck but about being called.

In response to this call, I started a spiritually-centered book club for students in my class. Believing my first attempt at this to

be a failure, I discontinued it the next year only to be confronted by a father during freshman orientation. His daughter was about to begin Duquesne and he wondered if I was going to conduct the book study that his son had attended two years ago. When I indicated not, I was informed that my outreach to students impacted his son and he desired his daughter to experience it as well. I started the study again the following year, and became convinced that my job was about much more than teaching neuroscience and getting paid. It was about touching lives and being touched by them.

In 2009 I became the Endowed Chair of Health Sciences and Ethics in the School of Health Sciences. I dedicated these resources to building collaboration between Duquesne and the residents of Hazelwood, a community just east of us devastated by the closure of the steel mills and its local schools. The goal for this collaboration was to provide education that might help the students of Hazelwood have an opportunity to enter colleges like Duquesne. To improve my efforts and learn about the community, I joined the Board of Directors of the Center of Life (COL), a nonprofit organization in Hazelwood. COL's mission is "to provide families and youth with the life-skills, education, training and resources necessary to be strong and to make their communities strong." COL and Duquesne are now in an established partnership that mutually benefits the community and the University.

When I came to Duquesne, teaching well and performing research were my goals as a faculty member. At the end of this semester, I will leave Duquesne to work for COL as a full-time staff member. I believe my decision to leave the University represents the final attribute of the mission; *people who serve God by serving students are transformed through the commitment and respond to the Spirit's call wherever it may lead.* This is no surprise to the members of our founding order who dedicate their lives responding to this call. It is not surprising that the University they built produces the same effect on those who elect to embrace its mission.

Our visitors were right. There is something special about the University, and those of us who live here want to talk about it. Through our actions and decisions, the Spirit becomes a palpable presence on our campus that even those who have only a passing knowledge of Duquesne can sense. The Spirit brings our faculty to work every day with a much higher calling than to earn a paycheck and with love in their hearts for the students they teach. Those students are affected by this environment and strive to reach their highest potential in service to others. They leave us with hearts of gratitude for those who educated them. Indeed, *to serve God by serving students is a profoundly powerful mission.*

...people who serve God by serving students are transformed through the commitment and respond to the Spirit's call wherever it may lead.

*Indeed, our mission does not live on paper any more than the Spirit lives in the Bible.*

## **The Future of the Mission**

The Middle States recommendation for the University to codify and document the source of our “specialness” is perspicacious. The concern undergirding this recommendation is that we could easily lose what makes us unique. Still, no amount of documentation could prevent this. Although the words serving God by serving students are written on paper or websites, those words are given life and transform only through the individual decisions of people. Indeed, our mission does not live on paper any more than the Spirit lives in the Bible.

Duquesne offered two early retirement packages in the last three years and is now experiencing an unprecedented turnover of faculty and staff. If new faculty and staff members are not touched the way I was by those who remain, the concern of Middle States will be realized. Therefore, I leave you today with a charge. Educate those who will repopulate the bluff. Invite these people to groups on campus where the mission is the topic. Introduce them to the Spiritans and invite them to Spiritan educational sessions. To do anything less than this is a misprision that will presage an inevitable unraveling of what makes us uniquely Duquesne. The Spiritans among us can only do so much. They need your help to protect the character and specialness of this University.

I know the faces sitting here today. I have been touched by you and personally transformed by your own expression of our mission. Do not relent. You are all that stands between the ongoing, lived expression of serving God by serving students and having those words become nothing more than ink on paper. I have great confidence in your commitment and ask God to bless you in your task. It is been a pleasure serving with you at Duquesne.

Dr. David Somers

*First presented at the Libermann Luncheon series, Duquesne University, March 19, 2013*



**Raymond Gonnet,  
C.S.Sp.**

I received the Lord's call to the missionary life and was able to answer thanks to my Christian training, the prayers of my mother, and the orientations of my god-father, Father Nicoud. After my ordination in 1969, the Congregation sent me to Algeria to our agricultural installation in Misserghin. It was in Misserghin that the Spiritan Brother Clement in 1892 invented the delicious fruit which has carried his name, hence Clementine mandarin oranges. There the Spiritans ran a famous agriculture and technical college where they trained disadvantaged boys from the area, but which was nationalized in 1975. At the moment, the Congregation is working in two places in West Algeria: Sidi Bel Abbès and Mascara, and with only four confreres in all. We need volunteers to help sustain this small and fragile remnant that is however high in signification and hope.

*Muslims and Christians are able to meet, become accustomed to each other, and progressively let fall the walls of distrust and fear, the set views we have of each other.*

## REFLECTIONS ON MY EXPERIENCE OF INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE IN ALGERIA

I have been in Algeria for forty-four years. I spent many of these years educating orphans and the handicapped and as professor. Since twenty-two years, I have been pastor of Mascara, a village of 130,000 inhabitants, all Muslims. And for twenty of these years, my only parishioners were the community of religious Sisters and one lay woman. Our urge has been the desire to live for the Muslim community in a spirit of fraternity, dialogue and service, and without any spirit of proselytism. It was for this reason that we created what Peter Claverie, our bishop assassinated in 1996, called a "platform of encounter." We fitted out the church building for educational and cultural activities: library, tutoring lessons in French and English, conferences, courses of formation and culture for women in cuisine, embroidery, patchwork, macramé and so on; there is also a small dispensary and reception facility for people in difficulty. It needs be said that these arrangements were made between 1994 and 1996, the period of the martyrdom of 19 members of the church: religious sisters, monks of Tibhérine, and our bishop. For this reason we named the place Centre El Amel, that is, Center of Hope. And, thanks to God, the Center has become a true beehive of activities where people from all sectors and all social situations mix. Thus Muslims and Christians are able to meet, become accustomed to each other, and progressively let fall the walls of distrust and fear, the set views we have of each other. We are creating bonds of friendship and trust, learning mutual respect and love of each other in the respecting of our differences of culture and religion. In thus working together, we are conscious of living a privileged time of the reign of God, confident that the Lord is present in each of our meetings. As our Holy Father, Francis I, has said, we ought to cultivate this "culture of encounter." Besides, has not the church of Algeria always defined itself as a "church of encounter"?

The church of Algeria has been strongly marked by the spirituality of the Foucauld Fathers which is to live simply and poorly among a people: the life of Nazareth, live the Incarnation. That entails progressively becoming a child of the country, one who takes the time to master the language, the customs, the history, and the religion of the other. This incarnation demands also the time to root oneself deeply in the rhythm of life and the family events of people, with their joys and trials. Thus I very often participate in funeral wakes and burials. People would say, "Father, thanks for thus sharing our joys and especially our sorrows, pray for us." I too

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would ask them to pray for me, especially as one of them goes on pilgrimage to Mecca. What joy to hear it said, “you are one of us, you are part of our family, you are more Algerian than us,” even when one sometimes adds “a pity you are not Muslim!” When I see the attention full of love and humility that Leila, our cook, gives to all who present themselves at the door, the patience and love of Yamina for Miloud, her husband suffering from Parkinson disease, the honesty and work ethic of Hayet and Souad, the professional conscience of Samia and Faïza, the faithful love of Mohamed, the piety and openness of spirit of Moktar, the devotion of Bachir to all challenges, I no longer think, “a pity they are not Christians,” but thank God for these marvels. To the Christian community and in each of our Eucharists, I witness that the Spirit of God is at work beyond borders, that we should all collaborate with the coming of this kingdom of fraternity, each one where the Lord has planted them.

For me, interreligious dialogue is thus not something I practice in the course of a colloquium or conference, but a state of spirit, an interior attitude, which puts me always in a situation of dialogue, interreligious and intercultural. I strive to understand why this person reacts in a certain manner or how he would feel about this or that. I ought to accept that he/she does not see social life or religious practice the way I do, even though quite a few attitudes and behaviors trouble me and make me sense some of them to be in the throes of a ritualism that I reject for myself or as marked by a fearful attitude towards God.

We live in a milieu where religion is everywhere and pervades all manners of thought and action. So a meeting will never be fixed for 4 p.m., but after the afternoon prayer that varies each day. Although after 44 years I feel myself at home in Mascara and well integrated into the community, I still always feel myself a stranger, a guest, one invited by the Muslim community that by the fact of its practice of the religious law excludes those who are not members. This in itself is a rare opportunity for witness; being always perceived as Christian I ought without cease in every gesture, word, and attitude to search myself, “am I in conformity with the Gospel, am I faithful to the spirit of Jesus?” “Are these people able to see Jesus through me?” Of course, I do interreligious dialogue of a kind when I meet an Imam or a Muslim prayer group, but also when I buy the daily newspaper or my vegetables, when I take administrative actions, when I jog with friends, in my manner of walking, speaking, driving the car, when I receive people in material difficulties or those who have need of confiding in someone. What opportunity to be at every instant in a situation of witness and watchman.

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In October 2010, we had the joy of receiving some fifteen students from the Congo, Cameroun, Guinea, Ivory Coast and Madagascar who arrived to study at the University of Mascara. They are very fervent and have need of formation, of time for prayer, listening and sharing. They are the presence of the Church in the University and bear testimony to their faith in the midst of our Algerian youth greatly influenced by diverse religious currents. Since last year I visit prisoners from sub-Saharan Africa at Mascara and Saïda. Some are living a true journey of conversion. When we pray and sing to the Lord, they too bear witness to their faith within the prison milieu. Since these visits, their relations with the personnel in particular have greatly improved.

Other Congregations work in Algeria, each according to its proper charism. The Focolare Movement has been in Tlemcen forty years now. They too have sought to create bonds of friendship, though with families, in the form of Mariapolis groups. These live together for a week in friendship and joy, sharing the “Word of Life” of Chiara Lubick, the foundress of the Movement. They also gather during the course of the year. With the passing of time, some men and women called “Friends of the Focolari” have demanded to become an integral part of the movement. They said, “we have found in your manner of living, in the gospel itself, the words of Jesus that enlighten us in our family and professional life ... but we are Muslims with our cultural and spiritual riches that we nevertheless wish to conserve. We wish to become Muslim Focolari.” After years of agonized reflection, Rome gave the green light. Thus many men and women have made the commitment which allows them to be Associates and “Muslim Members of the Focolare.” Farouk, a famous surgeon and Muslim worshiper told us that few of his friends understand the meaning of this step he took. Fayçal too has even become the deputy bursar of the diocese of Oran, a good example of trust and communion among believers, prophetic action of a new world about to be born, emerging silently in the brouhaha of arms. But, as the proverb has it, “A falling tree makes more noise than a growing forest.”

To write these few lines I went under the shadow of two olive trees over against a small Muslim country sacred place to which many pilgrims come this Friday to make their devotions to Sidi Ali and profit, as myself, of the marvelous landscape which recalls Palestine in Spring. With the smell of candles and incense, not to speak of the perfume of lavender, ideas have come to me spontaneously. I explained to my friend, El Hadi Mekki, the gardener of the sanctuary, what I have come to do—write reflections on our living together, Muslims and Christians. He took the opportunity to invite me to the feast of Sidi Ali to take place soon. We hold no grand theological discourses; we can reach

Raymond Gonnet, C.S.Sp.

no mutual understanding through these. But we have much respect for each other. "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them," says the Lord.

As illustration, here is an email that I just received.

*I would be delighted to participate in every action and work of your community that may help you, your brothers in the faith, and humanity in Mascara.*

*Salem alikoum:* Peace be with you. I am delighted to find your email address on the internet site of the Catholic Church of Algeria. I present myself. I am from Mascara, at the moment living in France. I am a free Imam. I left Mascara now thirteen years. I recall that you had a small citroen car. I am a man of tolerance and dialogue. I would be delighted to participate in every action and work of your community that may help you, your brothers in the faith, and humanity in Mascara. I am grateful to the West and to France for this climate of liberty that I live in, I and all Muslims. It is the least I can do to have good relations with you. Again, I am delighted to be able to contact you. May God help us all to do good and preserve his creation.

Ahmed.

Free Imam, Tourcoing.

*Translated from the French by James Chukwuma Okoye, C.S.Sp.*

## SOME PERSPECTIVES ON SPIRITAN PEACEBUILDING



### Brian Starken, C.S.Sp.

Brian Starken is a member of the Irish Province and was ordained priest in 1974. He was appointed to Sierra Leone in 1975 and worked in second level education for a number of years. When the civil war broke out in 1991, he worked on various programmes providing humanitarian assistance to both Liberian refugees and internally displaced Sierra Leoneans. In 1995 he was invited on to the Reconciliation and Peace-building Working Group of Caritas Internationalis in Rome and was involved in providing resource materials and training in conflict resolution for Church personnel working in conflict areas around the world. He holds a Masters Degree in Peace Studies from the University of Bradford in the UK. He will return to Sierra Leone later this year.

*When we are called to mission we are called to be implementers of God's peace.*

### Introduction

This year we celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of John XXIII's Encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, On Establishing Universal Peace in Truth, Justice, Charity and Liberty. *Pacem in Terris* is addressed to "all people of good will." It was written at the height of the Cold War and stresses the importance of Catholic Social Teaching as the basis for right relationships in communities, between individuals and the State, and for the promotion of greater peaceful relations between States.

Celebrating *Pacem in Terris* provides us with an ideal opportunity to reflect on peace-building as an integral part of our Spiritan mission and as a vital component of our commitment to Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation (JPIC).

### Our Spiritan Commitment to Building Peace

Peace-building is an integral aspect of mission in today's world. All Christians are called to follow the path of peace – "Blessed are the peace-makers." When Jesus sends out his disciples on mission he tells them that their first greeting must be, "peace to this house." God's peace gives us a vision of what his reign will be like and what peace-makers must hold as the ideal. The peace of God is a wholesome peace which he wants all of us to experience: a place of safety, justice, and truth; a place of trust, inclusion, and love; a place of happiness, joy, and wellbeing. When we are called to mission we are called to be implementers of God's peace.

As Spiritans we have, over the years, voiced our commitment to working for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation (JPIC). The general chapters of Itaici (1992), Maynooth (1998), and Torre d'Aguilha (2004) all stressed the importance of JPIC in our Spiritan Mission. Our 20<sup>th</sup> General Chapter held this year in Bagamoyo calls on each circumscription "commit itself to work with those responsible for the local Church to promote justice, peace and the integrity of creation" (*Bagamoyo*, 1.22). When we work with "the poor and most abandoned," addressing their pastoral needs as well as their human and social needs we are working for justice. When we are working for justice, we are also working for peace. Peace is the fruit of justice. *SRL 14* reminds us that we are called to be "the advocates, the supporters, and the defenders of the weak and the little ones against all who oppress them."

The Spiritan Conference in Durban in April 2007 stressed the importance of our Spiritan Ministry with Refugees, Displaced Peoples and Asylum Seekers (*Spiritana Life*, April 2008, No 17). Refugee ministry brings us into contact with those who are the worst affected by civil conflict. We work with people who have been violently uprooted from their communities and who have literally lost everything – livelihoods, possessions and family members. They are certainly the weak, the defenseless and the oppressed in today's world. During the wars in Sierra Leone and Liberia, I found myself working with both Liberian refugees and internally displaced Sierra Leoneans and it was this experience that led me into peace-building and reconciliation work. In this article I want to outline my own experience in Catholic Peace-building and outline some of the learning along the way.

### **Working in a Displaced Camp**

When the war broke out in Sierra Leone in April 1991, I was working at the Pastoral Centre in Bo. We were already catering to a large number of Liberian refugees as the Pastoral Centre had become the main distribution centre for relief aid to refugees from the war in neighboring Liberia and who were hosted by local families. The rebel incursion into Sierra Leone caused thousands of displaced people to leave their villages and towns and seek safety in the town of Bo. They were too numerous to be hosted by relatives and friends, so we had to set up a camp outside the town.

I worked on this full time for almost three years. Most of the time was spent responding to one crisis after another as we tried to provide shelter, food, health facilities, water, sanitation, clothing, and security for the people living in the camp. It was an interesting time and the work was hard but very rewarding. In a very short space of time the population of the camp grew to over 80,000 displaced people.

### **Freetown**

I was then asked to move to the National Caritas office which was based in the capital Freetown. For the first time since the beginning of the war, I had some time to reflect on what was happening in this small country and on the nature of the Catholic Church's response to the conflict. I had many questions. By this time the war had become very complex and it was difficult to distinguish between who was a soldier and who was a rebel. The war had started with a defined ideology by the rebels, but now had become a war over control of the natural resources, that is, the diamonds. Ideology had gone out the window. In fact the people had already coined the word, "*sobel*," referring to armed personnel who were soldiers by day and rebels by night.

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## Questions

There was a pattern of civilians, particularly in mining areas, being driven from their villages by rebels. A few days later, soldiers would enter the village and then declare the area unsafe for civilians to return. Both rebels and soldiers would continue to mine the diamonds. Under these circumstances we had to ask the question as to whether the humanitarian efforts of the Catholic Mission and other agencies in looking after the displaced people were actually feeding into the conflict. Were we taking the responsibility off the shoulders of the military government to take more concrete steps to resolve the conflict?

*Another question that disturbed me at that time was whether we, as Church, should not be doing more to promote a movement towards peace.*

Another question that disturbed me at that time was whether we, as Church, should not be doing more to promote a movement towards peace. Taking care of displaced people and people affected by conflict is always important. Providing shelter, food, health services, and clean water is absolutely critical in conflict areas. But given our very rich tradition in social teaching what could we be doing, or more precisely, what should we be doing to bring peace?

I was also very concerned that the vast majority of the casualties of this war were innocent civilians. People were dying directly as a result of the conflict – killed in ambushes and in attacks on villages – and indirectly because of hardship and the lack of any kind of health care due to the fact that hospitals and clinics were shut down, particularly in rural areas. Violence was being used as a means of social control and the valued institutions of a whole population were being targeted. The social and cultural institutions which connect people to their history, identity and lived values were being crushed and marginalised. It was the civilians who were displaced and who lost everything. It was the civilians who were crowding into the displaced camps around the country. This phenomenon was true, not only of Sierra Leone and Liberia, but also of the 50 or so armed conflicts taking place around the world in the late 80s and early 90s.

*...even if a peace agreement was effected between the warring factions, there would be a tremendous need for post war reconciliation as people began to return to their homes and villages.*

Since the 1980s, civilian casualties account for 95% of casualties in internal conflicts. At the time there were an estimated 18 million refugees around the world – mainly in developing countries – a six-fold increase in 20 years. There were 24 million people displaced within their own countries. Between 1986 and 1996, an estimated 2 million children had died in war, with a further 4 million wounded or disabled. I felt strongly that we had to do something in Sierra Leone, but I wasn't sure what we could do.

I had another worrying concern and it was the growing realisation that even if a peace agreement was effected between the warring factions, there would be a tremendous need for post

war reconciliation as people began to return to their homes and villages. That was when the challenging work of real peace-building would begin as people began the difficult process of getting their lives back together again. Many questions would inevitably arise when people returned home. Who destroyed my house? Who stole my property? Who killed my relatives? Whose son or daughter joined the rebels? Who harvested my crops? When, where, and how did members of my family die during the war, and where are they buried?

Every traditional culture experiences conflict and over the years has developed mechanisms to resolve conflicts that arise in families and communities. Would these conflict resolution mechanisms and institutions be strong enough to resolve post war conflicts in resettled communities? Would victims of the conflict have access to justice? Would the perpetrators be held accountable?

From the Caritas Office we got a group of interested people together and began to plan. At the beginning we were not too sure what kind of peace-building program we should engage in. We needed to gather as much information as possible concerning the conflict, how people were affected by the conflict, and what they thought might be the major issues to be addressed in post war reconciliation. We went all over the country – to the major towns, the chiefdoms, the refugee and displaced camps. We invited religious leaders, local politicians, traditional rulers, army and police, representatives of civil society. The aim of this exercise was to develop a needs-based peace-building “Training of Trainers” program for all Catholic Mission personnel in the country. The training programme took months to develop and we were extremely lucky to have been helped in the process by a Conflict Resolution NGO (Non-Governmental Organization) called Conciliation Resources based in London. They heard about the work we were doing and provided help at various intervals until we were ready to implement the program.

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We ran a pilot Training of Trainers program for Catholic Mission personnel – bishops, priests, teachers, catechists etc. This was a six-week intensive training. Those who were trained were expected to go back to their respective dioceses and replicate the training, with our help. This training programme was very successful and we were then approached by other NGOs working in the conflict to do similar training with their office and field staff.

### **Caritas Internationalis**

Meanwhile, Caritas Internationalis was preparing for their 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly which was to take place in Rome in May 1995. Caritas is the socio-pastoral arm of the Church and up to this

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point was mainly engaged in humanitarian relief and development work in the 154 member countries around the world. The work of Caritas is very much informed by Catholic Social Teaching. At this time the horrors of Rwanda and Bosnia, in particular, were still fresh in the minds of all participants and so Caritas decided to make work on reconciliation a priority for its 1995-1999 mandate. This was accepted by the General Assembly and an international Working Group on Reconciliation was set up. It was chaired by Bishop Francisco Claver of the Philippines and each Region of Caritas was represented on the Working Group. I was invited on to the Working Group to represent the Africa Region. The Working Group met twice a year over the next 4 years for a few days each time.

### **Caritas Working Group**

I think it is fair to say that the Working Group got off to a very slow start. Working in reconciliation was something new at the time and we had very little guidance and little or no direction. We did, however, have expertise and experience in different areas related to conflict. Our target audience really was the Caritas/Church agencies, particularly those working in conflict areas throughout the world, with the realisation that, as Church workers, they have an important role to play in the search for peace and reconciliation. Like myself in Sierra Leone, these workers would have little in terms of information and resources to help in developing peace-building programs. The Working Group wanted to accomplish several tasks in this regard. We needed to introduce the theme of reconciliation which was by now becoming an umbrella term to cover conflict resolution, peace-building, the healing of memories and the processes that bind people together rather than set them apart. We wanted Caritas to be an agent for peace and reconciliation throughout the world.

We wanted our material to look at the issues of reconciliation through the lens of Catholic Social Teaching. The Church already has a great theology of reconciliation with much emphasis on the vertical, reconciliation between God and humankind. We needed to explore the more horizontal reconciliation in divided communities and divided societies and supply the spiritual resources to do that. We recognised that all reconciliation comes from God and when we engage in the work of reconciliation we are simply engaging in the work that God wants us to do.

We were aware that much research was being done in the field of conflict resolution both in academic institutions and peace institutes. We needed to introduce Caritas members to the recent developments in this whole area hoping to provide background

information on conflict, to help members situate themselves in the search for peace as well as explore their own capacity for peace-building and what they have to offer to the process of reconciliation. We wanted to be practical too and to provide ideas to enable members plan a reconciliation program as part of their daily activities, to look at the kind of reconciliation activities that are appropriate to Church and Caritas agencies with an emphasis on the importance of keeping a cultural perspective on our work.

### **Keeping a Cultural Perspective**

I want to say a word about the importance of culture, and particularly traditional cultures when it comes to the resolution of conflict. Serious research only began in this area in the early 1980s. Culture may seem to be a simple construct but is, in fact, an enormously complex variable. Traditional culture is developed over a long, long period of time and is the result of a set of beliefs and behaviors, both implicit and explicit, which are fundamental to its existence and organization. These learned attributes, through which experience is interpreted, are shared and transmitted by members of a particular society through the process of enculturation.

When we think of culture, we often think of elements like language, dress, food, art and literature, symbols, and other customs and beliefs. We must also understand that values, beliefs, and attitudes are an integral part of culture as well as the social rules and moral obligations which dictate a group's behaviour. Culture is central to who we are and, therefore, central to understanding and interpreting how we do everything, from working to playing, even how we approach conflict and conflict resolution. While we recognize that culture and cultural differences can undoubtedly be causes of conflict, there is a great need to understand the cultural conceptions of conflict and develop culturally appropriate strategies for reconciliation. We understood that the Church, because of its presence – both missionary and local – has a crucial role to play in identifying, promoting and strengthening traditional mechanisms for resolving conflict.

### **Issues of Justice**

The whole area of justice is very complex in conflict situations and demands much more attention than the mention I can make of it here. We have a developed theory of what we know as “a just war.” *Jus ad bellum* (right to war) outlines very clearly the conditions needed to proclaim a “just war.” There is also a developed concept of *jus in bellum* or the just conduct of war. Experience tells us that those conditions are not always adhered to. But modern conflict has brought in a new dimension of *jus post bellum* or a just order after conflict. In internal wars the signing of a peace agreement

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is not the end of the story – it is in fact the beginning of a long process that demands transitional justice and the rebuilding of the institutions, both social and civic, that will guarantee a lasting peace. A peace agreement is the beginning of the long process of reconciliation – and justice is an important component of any reconciliation process. The rebuilding of society after war can only be achieved if that society has its foundation firmly rooted in the rule of law and is committed to a just and equitable order. *Pacem in Terris* gives a very clear outline of Catholic Social Teaching in this whole area of building and maintaining a just and peaceful society.

### **Rebuilding a Just Society**

However, while the principles of a just and ordered society are very clear, those of us on the Working Group who were living and working in conflict countries were very much aware that the reality on the ground can be totally different. Invariably injustice and in equality, real or perceived, are among the root causes of every conflict and these must be addressed in any post war agenda. When a country is coming out of an internal conflict there is often very little to work with – the economy lies in ruins, the institutions of the State are considerably weakened and unable to meet even the most basic needs of the people, the infrastructure is damaged or destroyed, society is in transition, security can still be a major problem, national elections are called for. The rebuilding of a just society is competing with many other needs.

### **The Search for Reconciliation**

John Paul Lederach, who helped us greatly on the Working Group, in his reflections on Psalm 85 outlines the competing voices that need to be heard in the search for reconciliation. The voice of sustainable peace is there, the voice of retributive justice, the voice of truth that needs to know what happened and why it happened, and the voice of mercy that calls for forgiveness and new beginnings. The challenge of any post-war reconciliation program is to ensure that no one of these voices dominates, but also to ensure that each of them is heard and listened to.

This then led us into a whole new area. Reconciliation is something the Church should be expert in – it has a readymade theology of reconciliation, but this theology needed to be applied to conflict resolution and peace-building. In Fr. Robert Schreiter we had probably the greatest theologian in this whole area. Schreiter's theology of reconciliation is very much Scripture-based. The Working Group was required to reread the scriptures using the lens of reconciliation. Schreiter enabled us to tease out the question, how do Christians understand reconciliation? We knew that the answer to this question would make a major contribution to Catholic peace-building.

## The Resources of the Church

As the Caritas Internationalis Working Group, we were very much aware that the Catholic Church has enormous resources to put at the service of peace-building. The Church, as an institution, has a worldwide network and is present in almost every country in the world. It has a leader who is not only the head of the Church but also head of a State. The Church has an ecclesiastical network that filters down from Rome to each country where the Church is present through dioceses and parishes – this gives the Church an enormous advantage in peace-building because it has local, national, regional and international networks. It can be present at all levels of conflict settlement. It is present at the top and has access to the elite at government level and to heads of national institutions that can promote peace. It has tremendous access to local, grassroots communities through its parishes and pastoral agents. It has a presence at mid-level or what we might call civil society – local leaders, professional people, and educational institutions. This access to populations at different levels of society is something no other agency possesses.

The Church has a political presence in every region with access to Heads of State and their representatives through a network of Nuncios and the Vatican Secretariat of State. The Church has a respected presence in so many parts of the world. Presence is one thing, but the quality of our presence is what allows us to be trusted agents in the search for peace. Trust is not something the Church has by right – trust is something that has to be earned and we must continually evaluate our presence, particularly in conflict situations.

Because of its structure the Church also has a highly developed international communications network. This network allows it to communicate its spiritual messages, but it also has a voice on social and moral issues. The Church also has financial resources, personnel resources, and institutional resources in pastoral work, health and education, and in many other fields.

It has a rich body of Catholic Social Teaching but perhaps its greatest asset in terms of peace-building is its theological and spiritual resources. There is a deep recognition that all reconciliation comes ultimately from God and that we are, as St. Francis prays, simply instruments of God's peace. St Paul reminds us that Christ, through his death on the cross, reconciled all things, both in heaven and on earth, and he "passed on to us the message of reconciliation" (2 Cor 5:19). For anyone working in peace-building and reconciliation, there is a great need to believe that reconciliation is possible, to have the language of reconciliation, and to be imbued with the culture of reconciliation.

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There is also the spirituality of presence and accompaniment as you stay and continue to walk alongside the people who are caught in protracted warfare, who (as Schreiter 2008:9 explains)

are mired in refugee and displaced camps, who live continually in situations slipping back into overt conflict. How do we reinforce resilience and sustain hope in such settings? How do we enable victims of war to have the confidence to imagine peace, rebuild relationships, to continue to pursue justice and hope in the future? How do we transform situations of conflict into a culture of peace? How do we reconstruct a broken humanity and create spaces where forgiveness might be possible, where memories can be healed and some measure of reconciliation can take place?

I am convinced that in these crucial areas of ministry in conflict a very deep spirituality of reconciliation is crucial.

At the end of our first four years, the Working Group produced a *Handbook*, entitled Working for Reconciliation, which was distributed worldwide to all Caritas agencies. It was eventually translated into some fifty languages – including Russian.

### **Caritas Peace-building Training Manual**

The Working Group was mandated by the 1999 General Assembly of Caritas to continue its work. We realized that the *Handbook* was a useful tool for those who would use it – but it could also end up on a shelf gathering dust in many Caritas offices. We needed to get out there and deliver the message of Catholic peace-building. Our next project was to develop a Training Manual that contained the most up-to-date ideas and tools for social reconciliation, conflict resolution, and peace-building. Catholic Relief Services took a lead here and brought together the best practitioners in the field - such people as John Paul Lederach, Mary B Anderson, Hizkias Assefa - to advise on the necessary components of the Caritas Training Manual. It was an ambitious project providing theory, appropriate exercises, and learning tools in Peace-building skills, Conflict and Context Analysis, Principles and Frameworks for Peace-building, Communication and Conflict Handling Skills, as well as Program Analysis, Design and Evaluation, with a separate section on the Challenges of Reconciliation. This was followed by translating the Manual into the two other languages of Caritas – French and Spanish.

The final leg of our journey as a Working Group, during our third mandate, was the implementation of training programs in every Region of the Caritas Federation. During these training

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programs we came in contact with inspirational people, working with the Church at local level, and deeply committed to building peace in their communities and their countries.

### **Conclusion**

No matter where in the world we work on Spiritan mission, we will encounter conflict and we will be required to resolve conflicts, effect reconciliation, and bring God's peace to the people we live among and work with. Mostly these conflicts are low level conflicts, although a number of our Spiritan confreres work in countries mired in overt internal conflicts. Regardless of the level of conflict we experience, our Spiritan peace-building efforts need to be understood in the context of our own Spiritan JPIC mandate and within the larger context of Catholic peace-building. Because of my own experience with Caritas, I firmly believe in the necessity of collaborating with like-minded organizations in peace-building, sharing personnel, resources and experience. As Spiritan missionaries, we must draw from the wells of our own spirituality of mission and our emerging JPIC spirituality, as well as the Church's own social teaching and resources in reconciliation.

Brian Starken, CSSp.

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