

|                    |   |     |
|--------------------|---|-----|
|                    | INTRODUCTION  | 2   |
| <b>WELLSPRINGS</b> |   |     |
|                    | WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM POUILLART DES PLACES<br>IN 2009?<br>Eamonn Mulcahy, C.S.Sp.                                      | 3   |
|                    | ORIGINS OF THE SPIRITAN CONSECRATION TO THE<br>HOLY SPIRIT ON MAY 27, 1703<br>Christian de Mare, C.S.Sp.                | 13  |
|                    | POUILLART DES PLACES AND THE REFORM OF THE<br>CLERGY<br>Adélio Torres Neiva, C.S.Sp.                                    | 23  |
| <b>SOUNDINGS</b>   |   |     |
|                    | WEALTH, POVERTY, AND VOCATION IN THE LIFE AND<br>TIMES OF CLAUDE-FRANÇOIS POUILLART DES PLACES<br>Jotham Parsons, Ph.D. | 35  |
|                    | EVANGELIZATION OF SLAVES: A MORAL MISSTEP?<br>Paul Kollman, CSC   | 51  |
|                    | SPIRITAN MISSION TO SOUTH-EAST ASIA –<br>TEN YEARS ON<br>Brian McLaughlin, C.S.Sp.                                      | 66  |
| <b>EDUCATION</b>   |   |     |
|                    | EVALUATING THE ETHOS IN OUR SPIRITAN SCHOOLS<br>AND COLLEGES<br>Cormac O’Brolchain, C.S.Sp.                             | 77  |
|                    | ATTENTIVE LISTENING AND RESPECTFUL<br>INTERVENTION<br><i>THE SERVOL STORY</i><br>Sister Ruth Montrichard, SJC           | 84  |
|                    | MOMENTS OF REVELATION ON THE SPIRITAN<br>JOURNEY<br>Fintan Sheerin  | 91  |
| <b>LIVED</b>       |   |     |
| <b>EXPERIENCE</b>  | SPIRITAN MISSION IN THE CONTEXT OF SOUTH<br>AFRICA<br>Sylvester Kansimbi, C.S.Sp.                                       | 102 |
|                    | CREOLE MISSION IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF BLESSED<br>JACQUES DESIRE LAVAL<br>Jocelyn Gregoire, C.S.Sp.                         | 110 |

# Introduction

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

This year, *Spiritan Horizons* pays special attention to the founder of the Spiritans, **Claude Francois Poullart des Places**, who died 300 years ago this past October. We turn to him in four essays, not out of nostalgia, but to drink from our own wells.

**Eamonn Mulcahy's** enthusiasm for the task is transparent as he reawakens our interest in a talented and courageous young man who died at the age of thirty. **Christian de Mare** traces Spiritan consecration to the Holy Spirit back to its origin, when Claude gathered a small group around him in prayer in 1703 in a Paris church, long since destroyed. **Adelio Torres Neiva** goes further back to situate des Places in the reform of the clergy as it gathered momentum in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In a scholarly essay, **Jotham Parsons** provides a veritable treasure trove of insights, featuring contemporary evidence from the milieu of des Places.

A small trickle has become a river. Happily beginnings retain their fascination for us.

**Paul Kollman** takes a penetrating look at the beginning of Spiritan missionary endeavor in East Africa. **Brian McLaughlin** writes of a modern beginning: the recent Spiritan initiative in South East Asia. **Fintan Sheerin** speaks of a new beginning in his personal journey, of being empowered by the powerless.

**Ruth Montrichard** writes of Servol, the heartwarming Trinidad success story that developed from taking the unfortunate seriously through "attentive listening and respectful intervention." We accept our ethos as the elusive spirit we live by. With greater authenticity in mind, **Cormac O'Brolchain** helps to dissipate any difficulty we may have in grasping and evaluating just what is the ethos of our schools and colleges.

**Sylvester Kansimbi** describes for us how the Spiritans still face difficult challenges in post-apartheid South Africa. **Jocelyn Gregoire** laments the situation of the Creoles in Mauritius: a situation that prompts his own vigorous response and his heartfelt prayer to the "Apostle of Mauritius", fellow-Spiritan Blessed Jacques Laval (1803-1864).

## WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM POULLART DES PLACES IN 2009?

Eamonn Mulcahy,  
C.S.Sp.

Eamonn is a Spiritan of the British Province who has had extensive experience in giving retreats to priests, religious and lay-people. He enjoys being involved in Adult-Faith Formation programmes. He has had missionary experience in Congo-Brazzaville and Nigeria and is presently working on the Spiritan Formation Team at Nairobi, Kenya, while lecturing full time in Systematic Theology at Tangaza College, which is part of the Catholic University of Eastern Africa.

### **Poullart in the Shadows**

Like most English speaking Spiritans of a certain age, I have very little recollection of receiving anything substantial about Claude-François Poullart des Places during my years of formation. Only the vaguest memories linger in my mind of reading in 1972 during my Novitiate in Kilshane the early chapters of Henry Koren's *To the Ends of the Earth* (in those days still entitled *The Spiritans*). Even though later on in the Scholasticate, Fr. Wilf Gandy, an avid Poullart fan, was my Spiritual Director and the archivist of the English Province, Poullart was still left in the shadows and greatly eclipsed by Libermann in our Spiritan formation programmes in Britain. And the same was true on the broader canvas of the whole Congregation. It took the threat by the French Government in 1901 to suppress the Congregation before the majority of confreres were willing to trace our origins back to Poullart. Indeed it was only in 1903 that in the Congregation itself Poullart was officially recognised as the first Founder of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit and not without an uphill struggle by the then Superior General, Mgr. Alexandre Le Roy, a decision that was ratified only much later in the General Chapter of 1919<sup>1</sup>.

Non-French speaking Spiritans have for a long time been at a disadvantage, being greatly deprived of having access to detailed information about Poullart's life and work. Henri Le Floch's first edition of his life in June 1905 [originally intended to mark the second centenary of the foundation of the Congregation in 1903] and his more historically accurate second edition of 1915 are virtually unknown in Anglophone circumscriptions<sup>2</sup>. Maybe this substantial first life of Poullart was neglected by English readers because of its tendency to flowery hagiography or by knowledge of the author's controversial status in the Church; Le Floch was dismissed as Rector of the French Seminary in Rome by the direct order of Pope Pius XI for his support of *Action Française*. But Le Floch's biography is not without its value. It was the first wake up call to the whole Congregation to acknowledge and appreciate the original impact of our First Founder and bring him out of the shadows.

*It was the first wake up  
call...*

Joseph Michel's masterly and indispensable 1962 study of Des Places has sadly never been translated into English<sup>3</sup>. It remains until today the classic and authoritative life of Poullart. Surely

EAMONN MULCAHY, C.S.S.P. this tercentenary year would be the time to have it translated into the other official languages of the Congregation! Christian de Mare's wonderfully rich resource, *Aux Racines de L'Arbre Spiritain* (1998)<sup>4</sup>, with its critical edition of Poullart's writings, has not yet appeared in English. We are grateful to have at least two studies in English about Poullart – one from the hand of Ireland's indefatigable Seán Farragher, entitled *Led by the Spirit* (1992)<sup>5</sup> and the other from Trans-Canada's nonagenarian Michael Troy, with his highly reader-friendly, *Riches to Rags* (2005)<sup>6</sup>. Jean Savoie's insightful *Prier 15 Jours avec Claude-François Poullart Des Places* has recently been published in English.<sup>7</sup>

*...we have no photograph  
of him...*

### **Poullart unreal?**

One of the reasons perhaps why Poullart has failed to impact confreres is that he often seems unreal to us. Maybe because, unlike with Libermann, we have no photograph of him and have to rely on paintings and pictures which either make him out to be a young effeminate boy or a ghastly sickly other-worldly spectre. The surviving portraits simply do not do him justice and have the effect of turning people off Poullart. That's a pity because several episodes from his childhood and youth highlight the reality of his humanity and the fact that he was a tough likeable character, with a strong temper which got him into all kinds of trouble and adventures.

*He was vivacious and  
popular, if a little  
«cocky».*

Poullart was not a wilting lily. He undoubtedly had character. He was exceptionally intelligent and bright, articulate and eloquent, chosen out of 400 students publicly to defend a philosophical thesis in Latin in the famous «Grande Acte» of 1698 at College St Thomas at Rennes which he executed to perfection. He was a trained lawyer with a philosophical mind. He charmed people. He had a great capacity for friendship. He was vivacious and popular, if a little «cocky». He had a warm personality. No introvert, he acted out roles in tragedies and ballets in school theatre and took part passionately in college debates. He was anything but a «softie» or a «wimp». He was an accomplished horse rider and swordsman.

We forget that as a teenager, in a temper, he almost shot his little sister Françoise and his mother with a gun! The bullet just missed them both by an inch. We forget too that once when he was out hunting with friends, he himself ended up getting shot in the stomach by one of his pals! Then there was the infamous incident on the road to Nantes in 1698, as he was leaving to begin his law studies in the University, when in a fit of anger the 19 year old Poullart wounded with his sword and could have

*It took his father's hush-money to cover up the scandal...*

*To offer a solid human, spiritual and intellectual formation to the young men entrusted to his care was his priority of priorities.*

killed the coachman Pierre Le Huédez, stabbing him in the arm and inflicting a flesh wound on his body! It took his father's hush-money to cover up the scandal and buy Le Huédez off who was suing for assault. For years afterwards Claude referred to this as his «crime énorme». Clearly, the real Poullart des Places was so much more alive and so much more human than the pallid portraits make him out to be.

### **Poullart the Priest**

October 2<sup>nd</sup> 2009 marks three hundred years since the death of one of the youngest founders of a religious Institute in the history of the Church. It is perhaps providential that we are celebrating the third centenary of Poullart's death in the middle of the Year of the Priest begun by Pope Benedict XVI on June 19<sup>th</sup> 2009 because Poullart was first and foremost a priest. In the beginning all he ever wanted to be was a diocesan priest, originally in Brittany, and then in Paris. Poullart des Places was ordained a priest aged 28 on 17<sup>th</sup> December 1707 and he was dead less than 21 months later. Only one year and nine months in the priesthood yet we can learn valuable insights from his practice of priesthood.

All his energy was channelled single-mindedly into the formation of future priests. It was his sole focus. Convinced of the value of the priestly vocation, he was passionately concerned about the quality of priestly formation. To offer a solid human, spiritual and intellectual formation to the young men entrusted to his care was his priority of priorities. This is an integral part of our Spiritan charism and identity and part of the legacy we have inherited from Poullart which we sometimes forget. Look, for example, at the tremendous role Spiritans have played in the formation of thousands of priests whilst directing for the last 156 years the Pontifical French Seminary in Rome (1853-2009) and how many national or diocesan seminaries were originally founded and staffed by the Spiritans in the 20<sup>th</sup> century? How many indigenous clergy were first launched in Africa by the Spiritans? How many Spiritans around the world are still working in priestly formation at the moment?

### **Poullart's Core Intuition**

Poullart entered the Jesuit College of Louis-le-Grand in October 1701 aged 22, and it changed his life. It must have been sheer chaos at Louis-le-Grand – 3,000 students, 600 boarders, 100 Jesuit teachers. Classes were free and open to all but 2,400 external students had to find places to live and eat, and provide for their own board and lodging. Many students must have

EAMONN MULCAHY, C.S.SP. fallen through the cracks. Poullart saw that many of his fellow seminarians were just as badly off as the poor little immigrant chimney sweeps from Savoy that he had been trying to help in his own pastoral work in the *Assemblée des Amis*.

*He began by making a significant difference to just one person's life.*

Seven months later, May 1702, still in his first year of seminary, Poullart begins helping a young sixteen year old lad, Jean-Baptiste Faulconnier, whom he noticed was struggling to stay in the Seminary. He paid attention to a single individual. He began by making a significant difference to just one person's life. It begins with one. It starts small. The micro-scale. Then he gets this poor student to help other poor students. He gets the poor to help the poor. The poor to evangelise the poor. One student becomes a small band of three or four and then develops into a group of twelve. Poullart had no big project, no preconceived plan for founding an Institution or a Congregation. His "work" was not a logical conclusion. He simply listened to the Spirit and responded concretely to the needs of one person.

*... he moved from working for the poor, to living with the poor.*

His basic intuition was that the poor have the right to an excellent education. Poullart became concerned that many gifts and talents would be wasted to the Church because the poorest of the seminarians were blocked, unable to find enough money to pay their rent and get enough food to live on and hence they would be forced to abandon the seminary and their potential would be lost to the Church. He wanted to save authentic vocations from shipwreck due to lack of material resources. This prompted his bold initiative of renting a room for these poor students so that they could continue their theological education. He was moved because he saw they could be useful for the Church. He created a new beginning for them. Then he moved from working *for* the poor, to living *with* the poor. He actually left the comfort and security of his lodging at Louis-le-Grand and moved in with these youngsters in an already over-crowded Gros-Chapelet. He started with one poor student – and he ended up looking after seventy by the time of his premature death.

### **Poullart the Formator**

According to Joseph Michel, Poullart supplied the best response to the Council of Trent's attempt to renew the Catholic Church's seminary system.<sup>8</sup> Can Poullart's intuitions still play a helpful role in the formation of priests today in Africa, Latin America, Asia? What can Formators in our Spiritan Scholasticates around the world today learn from his style as a Formator? Though it would be inconceivable today, he founded a seminary whilst still just a seminarian himself aged only twenty-four – a

*The secret of his success lay in his personalism and his relational approach to students.*

tonsured cleric in minor orders (just the way that Libermann himself founded his own religious institute though not yet ordained). Essentially, Poullart opened a house of formation for his poor friends called *la maison du Gros Chapelet at la rue des Cordiers* before moving on to the bigger premises at *rue Neuve-Saint-Étienne* and later at *rue Neuve Sainte-Geneviève*. 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.

In our Second Cycle Houses of Theology we are all professed Spiritan religious, yet in some Scholasticates the Fathers don't eat at the same table as the students, the Fathers don't do the washing up, the Fathers don't do manual labour, the Fathers don't wash their own clothes or do their own ironing. Often there are huge discrepancies in the life styles between Formators and students as regards possessions and privileges, with inevitable tensions arising. But Poullart, the undisputed leader of the community, was a brother among brothers. There was one rule for everyone – no exceptions, no privileges, no clericalism; totally egalitarian. He shared his time, his presence, his intellectual gifts. Sometimes our houses of formation are simply too big. This makes it hard for formators to really know and accompany each student personally and help them discern their vocation. Poullart was totally student-centred. Those of us who are formators in the Congregation could certainly do with taking a page out of Poullart's book.

### **Poullart the Tutor**

Poullart insisted on academic excellence in his Seminary of the Holy Spirit. He was serious about study. He didn't just take in anyone. In a sense, he was élitist. He may have accepted only the poorest of the poor, - for nobody who could pay his way elsewhere was admitted into his Seminary - but he took only the *intelligent* poor, those who were bright and smart. He wanted to give the gifted poor the chance of doing good theology. He facilitated a free education for the poor which lasted between six and nine years. He accepted no «careerist seminarians». After morning and afternoon lectures at the Jesuit College of Louis-le-Grand, Poullart's students came back to Gros-Chapelet or rue Neuve Saint Étienne to have several sessions of so-called «répétition», personal tutorials, conferences and other academic exercises to ensure that each student had fully understood and assimilated the theological lessons of the day. Poullart's personalised tutorials

*He accepted no «careerist seminarians».*



EAMONN MULCAHY, C.S.S.P. were the key to the academic high standards that the first Spiritans were famous for. Poullart had benefitted greatly in his own education from the personal interest of a young Jesuit, Fr. Jean-Pierre de Longuemare who was his regent and tutor. Poullart was determined to commit to his poor students on their academic journey the same personal investment that he himself had been fortunate enough to receive on his.

The students' progress was regulated by frequent exams and those who gave clear signs of being academically hopeless were sent away.<sup>9</sup> He wanted his students themselves to be future «masters» and «guides», to excel in theology even as they worked in hospitals and prisons and distant missions. To achieve this goal Poullart insisted that all his seminarians attend the lectures of the Jesuits. It is a pity that some Spiritans over the years have acquired anti-Jesuit prejudices. Poullart owed so much to the Jesuits and his project would never have survived without their help and support. He always had a positive regard for the Jesuits and their spirituality. The first Spiritans went to class to the Jesuits, went to confession to the Jesuits, had their annual retreat preached by the Jesuits and were treated each day to the scraps and the left-overs of the Jesuits' table, thanks to the kindness of the Jesuit bursar!

### **Poullart's Three Conversions**

Just as Barney Kelly has spoken of the «Second Conversion» of Francis Libermann<sup>10</sup>, we can also speak of several «conversions» in the life of Poullart des Places. Significantly, each one of them was occasioned by him going on a retreat. This is surely something else we can learn from Poullart – the seriousness with which he undertook retreats. They were privileged moments of discernment and growth, *kairos* moments in his life. Poullart felt personally the need to make retreats; not because it was part of the yearly routine or the Rule of Life. Retreats were no mere formality for him. Something actually happened to him during his retreats. They were real turning points; they were the occasions of at least three conversions in his young life. Moreover, we can see that all through Poullart's adult life he was never without a spiritual director. Someone was always there accompanying him on his spiritual journey. Someone he could turn to to help him discern the road ahead. Surely we could learn something from Poullart here? How many of us professed Spiritans can honestly say that at the moment we have a Spiritual Director of our own? And yet the Spiritan Rule of Life encourages each one of us to have a spiritual companion to journey along with us.

*This is surely something else we can learn from Poullart – the seriousness with which he undertook retreats.*



*...in the end he followed  
his father's advice...*

In 1698 after his brilliant performance at Le Grande Acte when the whole world was at his feet, and whilst his parents were looking for an eligible young lady for him to marry, Poullart chose to make a personal retreat the result of which was his decision to go and study theology at the Sorbonne to become a priest - one who would be a great preacher and convert the whole of France by his wisdom and eloquence. Though this decision was based on youthful pride, ambition and fantasy, it could be called his «first» conversion. Due to his spiritual immaturity at this time, its effects understandably lasted only forty days and in the end he followed his father's advice and went to Nantes to study Law instead.

In 1701 a much more mature Poullart made the most decisive retreat of his life, directed by a Jesuit father. In this retreat he experienced God's unconditional love for him. Finishing the retreat, he decided he would leave Brittany and that he would become a simple priest without a university degree and without any hope of advancement or an ecclesiastical career. He would not go to the prestigious Sorbonne but to the Jesuit College of Louis-le-Grand in Paris which could not confer any degrees. This was the moment of his «second» conversion and aged 22 he abandoned any prospect of a successful career in law or business and became a seminarian to train to be a diocesan priest.

In 1702, in the second year of seminary life, Poullart went on another retreat and his soul searching reached a new depth and intensity. He undertook to re-organise his interior life and composed his *Fragments of a personal regulation*.<sup>11</sup> During this retreat his intuition to help his poor students sharpened and he decided to regroup the lads in one house, whilst throwing off his image of a rich young noble man and actually becoming poor himself.

*It is the time of his  
breakdown; his burn-out.*

In 1704, six months after the foundational event of Pentecost 1703, his project is getting out of control. He's in crisis. Exhausted. He's alone with 40 students. He no longer had the time to form himself. No longer nurturing himself spiritually. He had neglected his own formation. It is the time of his breakdown; his burn-out. He's bitten off more than he can chew. He is out of his depth, drowning. What does he do? He decides to go on retreat and examines his life with excruciating honesty and this leads him to his «third conversion». Poullart realises he had abandoned solitude and meditation; that he had not been totally open with his spiritual director. He sees that he cannot cope alone, that he needs others to help him form the young scholars.

EAMONN MULCAHY, C.S.SP. So he calls on his childhood friends – Michel-Vincent Le Barbier, just newly ordained a priest, and Jacques-Hyacinthe Garnier. He realises the only way forward is collaborative ministry. Poullart becomes a Team Player. No one man bands anymore. No Lone Ranger. No going it alone. It was really only now, when he moves into team ministry, that the Spiritans were born. Not in 1703 when he first gathered the students together, but in 1704 when he persuaded a small group of his friends to become formators and shoulder the responsibility of forming these young penniless men for the priesthood. Poullart founded a community of formators, a community of educators of priests and that was the real beginning of the Spiritans.

*It was really only now,  
when he moves into  
team ministry, that the  
Spiritans were born.*

### **Conclusion**

Poullart des Places was a man open to the Spirit. He was attentive to the needs of individuals. He listened to the young people he lived with. It was their idea, not his, to consecrate themselves to the Holy Spirit. He went along with it. First of all leading them in a retreat on the theme of «He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor» (Luke 4). It could have been on any other day of the year. But it was on Pentecost Sunday. And they could have dedicated themselves to Mary or to any aspect of Jesus' life. But they chose to dedicate themselves to the Holy Spirit. To the Holy Spirit on Pentecost Sunday – our identity was sealed forever! 27<sup>th</sup> May 1703 at the Church of Saint-Étienne-des-Grès in front of the altar of Our Lady of Rescue, when Poullart and these twelve young students consecrated themselves to the Spirit of God, a new reality was born in the Church which has not ceased to bear fruit.

*His life is all we have and  
his life is everything.*

Poullart left us very few writings. But he left us his life. His life is all we have and his life is everything. It still inspires us today. He made a deep impact on the lives of the people he met. He never grew old. He died young. He was always with young people. His closest collaborators were all young. He empowered the young. He empowered the poor. He got the poor to evangelise the poor. A life of poverty and simplicity in service of the priesthood. He only directed his Seminary for six years. Dead aged 30. Buried in an unmarked grave, a nameless plot – we don't even know where his body is! But his legacy lives on.

Part of that legacy is surely his passion for excellence in priestly formation. The mottos of our congregation seem to go back to him: «one heart and one soul», «*paratus ad omnia*», «those works for which the Church has difficulty in finding workers».

Poullart is a deep mine that has not been fully exploited, especially in the Anglophone world. He can still yield rich treasures. The grace of our beginnings must have something to say about our identity and mission today. Especially our eight hundred young confreres in formation in the circumscriptions of the South have the right to a greater exposure to his life and work. We owe it to them.

*What would be the best way to celebrate..?*

What would be the best way to celebrate this Tercentenary Year of Poullart des Places 2009-2010? Here are some suggestions for what we can concretely do:

- Get Joseph Michel's biography translated and published in English
- Actually address Poullart des Places directly in our own personal prayer
- Intensify our efforts to get Poullart beatified
- Decide to go on a serious personal Retreat
- Commit myself to a Spiritual director
- Pay a poor student's school fees in Africa
- Sponsor a seminarian's formation in the Southern Hemisphere
- Make a significant difference to one person or one family wherever we are
- Respond to the needs of just one person, right here, right now

There can be no better way to celebrate the third centenary of Poullart des Places' death.

#### **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Cf. MAURICE GOBEIL, «Claude Francis Poullart Des Places: A Life-Experience under the Breath of the Spirit», *Spiritans Today*, 4 (1985) 46.

<sup>2</sup> HENRI LE FLOCH, *Une vocation et une fondation au siècle de Louis XIV: Claude-François Poullart des Places, Fondateur du Séminaire et de la Congrégation du Saint-Esprit (1679-1709)*, Paris: Lethielleux, 1906<sup>1</sup>, 1915<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> JOSEPH MICHEL, *Claude-François Poullart des Places: Fondateur de la Congrégation du Saint-Esprit, 1679-1709*, Paris: Éditions Saint-Paul, 1962

<sup>4</sup> CHRISTIAN DE MARE, ed., *Aux Racines de L'Arbre Spiritain: Claude-François Poullart des Places (1679-1709) – Écrits et Études*, Collection Mémoire Spiritaine, Études et Documents, No.4, Paris, 1998.

<sup>5</sup> SEÁN P. FARRAGHER, *Led by the Spirit: The Life and Work of Claude Poullart des Places, Founder of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit*, Dublin: Paraclete Press, 1992.

<sup>6</sup> MICHAEL J. TROY, *Riches to Rags: Claude Francis Poullart des Places*,

EAMONN MULCAHY, C.S.S.P. Toronto: Spiritans, 2005.

<sup>7</sup> JEAN SAVOIE, *15 Days Prayer with Claude Poullart des Places*, Dublin, Columba, 2009.

<sup>8</sup> JOSEPH MICHEL, *Claude-François Poullart des Places*, 187-206

<sup>9</sup> JOSEPH MICHEL, *Claude-François Poullart des Places*, 200.

<sup>10</sup> BERNARD KELLY, *Life Began at Forty. The Second Conversion of Francis Libermann*, Dublin: Paraclete Press, 1983.

<sup>11</sup> See JOSEPH LÉCUYER & WILFRID GANDY, ed., *The Writings of Claude Francis Poullart des Places (1679-1709)*, Re-Edition of Spiritan Papers No. 16, Rome: 1988.

## THE ORIGINS OF OUR CONSECRATION TO THE HOLY SPIRIT ON MAY 27, 1703

Christian de Mare,  
C.S.Sp.

A member of the Province of France, Christian de Mare served for many years as a missionary in Senegal and Congo. He worked subsequently for some 14 years in Spiritan formation, after which he was appointed to the Spiritan Generalate in Rome. Christian has directed numerous retreats and workshops in the area of Spiritan spirituality, a ministry which he still continues from his community in Bordeaux. He has edited two important publications in this regard: "Aux Racines de l'Arbre Spiritain, Claude-François Poullart des Places" (*Mémoire Spiritaine* n°4, 30 rue Lhomond, Paris, 1998) and *Anthologie Spiritaine* (Congrégation du St Esprit, Rome, 2008).

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

The great work of Fr. Joseph Michel, "*Claude François Poullart des Places*"<sup>1</sup>, includes a chapter on the origins of the consecration to the Holy Spirit chosen by Claude and his companions. They made this consecration on Pentecost Sunday, 1703, in the chapel dedicated to Our Lady of Rescue in the church of St. Etienne des Grès, situated next to their house. This is Chapter XIII of Michel's book and it goes under the title of "*Under the Sign of the Holy Spirit and the Immaculate Conception*". This is now part of the collective memory of the majority of Spiritans.

The re-evangelisation of Brittany was well underway when Claude was born in 1679. The main protagonists were Jesuit missionaries, partly through their parish missions, partly as a result of the follow-up retreats in which they deepened the doctrinal and spiritual contents of these missions. But they were not the only ones involved; through the initiative of Jesuit Frs. Rigoleuc, Surin, Huby, Le Grand and Maunoir, a good number of Breton secular priests joined them and were formed in their spirituality, especially in their retreat houses. We know of Fr. Michel Le Nobletz, perhaps the most influential, and Frs. Leduger and Julien Bellier.

These Jesuit priests mentioned above, plus Fr. Champion, were largely responsible for this reform and the re-evangelisation of the clergy. All of them were profoundly influenced by the guidance of Fr. Louis Lallement S.J., either directly, in the case of Rigoleuc and Surin, or indirectly by his disciples. Fr. Lallement was master of novices for four years and in charge of the second Jesuit novitiate for three years, from 1625-1632 at Rouen. But his teaching was so influential that he came to be recognised as the founder of a new school of spirituality, even though he himself was profoundly Ignatian in his outlook. As Michel puts it, his school was "*based on docility to the Holy Spirit and purity of heart, so as to be totally available to this same Spirit*".

So this focusing on the Holy Spirit characterised the whole work of re-evangelising Brittany by the Jesuits. The secular priests who joined them formed an association called "*The Priests of the Holy Spirit*", and their spirituality was laid out in a booklet named "*The Institution of the Congregation of Priests dedicated to the Holy Spirit under the title of his Holy Bride, the Blessed Virgin*".

The contents of this manual were in complete conformity with the teachings of the school of Fr. Lallement. Fr. Michel tells us that the Senior Seminary of Quimper, founded in 1678, was directed by these Priests of the Holy Spirit and concentrated on detachment from everything which could be an obstacle to their commitment:

*They must see spiritual poverty as the foundation of the evangelical perfection that they must cultivate, hating not just avarice but all aspects of it. They must keep clear of all ambition and reject any desire to consider themselves better than others.*

*...there were retreat centres at Vannes, Rennes, Quimper and Nantes. The one at Rennes was opened four years before the birth of Claude...*

We have already mentioned the practice of enclosed retreats; they were used particularly in forming the collaborators of the Jesuit missionaries and there were retreat centres at Vannes, Rennes, Quimper and Nantes. The one at Rennes was opened four years before the birth of Claude by Fr. Jégou, the rector of the college where Claude would do his studies, a man who had been greatly influenced by the teaching of Lallement. The centre at Nantes was run by Fr. Champion.

So as not to lose the essentials of this school of spirituality, Champion was asked to draw up a record of its main elements, making use of the notes of two of Lallement's immediate disciples, Frs. Rigoleuc and Surin. The result was a book entitled "*The Life and Spiritual Doctrine of Fr. Lallement*", which was published in 1694, 60 years after the death of the Master. Fr. Michel quotes an extract from this book, which gives a good idea of its tone:

*Once we have worked for a considerable time to achieve purity of heart, our aim must be to be so possessed and governed by the Holy Spirit that he alone will control our forces and senses and all our internal and external movements of soul. We will renounce ourselves totally – our will and all our personal satisfaction. In this way, we will live no longer in ourselves but in Jesus Christ, by faithfully cooperating with all the promptings of his divine spirit.*

Jesuit spirituality greatly encouraged devotion to Mary, free from all sin (the Immaculate Conception), most probably stemming from its insistence on the need of purity to distinguish the workings of the good spirit and the spirit of the Adversary. The only reference we can find to this in the doctrine of Lallement is the following passage, quoted in Champion's "*Spiritual Doctrine*":

*Anyone who wishes to make progress in his spiritual life must try to excel in his devotion to Our Lord and the Holy Spirit, as well as Mary and St. Joseph in the hope of attaining, humility, through the abasement of the Word incarnate, purity, through the kindness of Our Lady, the purest of creatures, and guidance of the Holy Spirit, through the intercession of St. Joseph. (Doct. Spir VI, III, IX)*

Fr. Surin recommended and spread devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary in words very similar to those used by Claude Poullart des Places in the opening articles of his “*General and Particular Rules for the Community of the Holy Spirit*”. It was in searching for purity linked to openness to the Holy Spirit that the Jesuits founded their Marian Congregations, not just in their schools but wherever they were called to direct groups of committed lay people;

*The wonderful purity of the Queen of Angels must be in the forefront of our minds on this feast of her Immaculate Conception. Those who belong to her must share in the same purity. It is through the great mercy of God that we are led by our faith and our sufferings in this direction. Finally, the fire of God’s love will purify us, just as ordinary fire purifies whatever it comes in contact with”. (Fr. Surin, “Spiritual Letters).*

*...but there are several other things that we would like to know.*

What Fr. Michel has told us is very important, but there are several other things that we would like to know. For example,

- What was the origin of this spirituality that is so strongly focused on the Holy Spirit and which Claude Poullart des Places put at the centre of his work?
- What were the sources that Fr. Louis Lallement used, so that he can be placed, even among the Jesuits, as the founder of a school?

To take our researches further, we can learn much from the edition of “*Doctrine Spirituelle*” by Fr. François Courel S.J.<sup>2</sup>, himself a formator, as can be seen from his well documented introduction to the work.

It was Henri Brémond who revived interest in the importance of the school of Lallement<sup>3</sup>, which seems to have been somewhat forgotten by subsequent generations of Jesuits, possibly because it was so radical. For the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death, a first



*A few words about  
the person of Louis  
Lallement.*

edition was prepared in 1936 of Champion's works by Fr. Pottier S.J. The publication of Fr. Courel, which follows the original text more closely, appeared in 1959. It is not a critical edition of the original instructions of Lallement since we only know about them through Champion, who reproduced the notes taken by Rigoleuc and Surin; but the correspondence of doctrine and style shows that Lallement was in no way misrepresented by his disciples.

A few words about the person of Louis Lallement. He was born at Chalons/Marne in Champagne in 1587, where his father was in the legal profession. When he was still young, he was sent away to the college at Bourges, run by the Jesuits. He was a very intelligent child and showed a spiritual sensitivity from his early years. He was accorded the gift of an intimate experience of life in the Holy Spirit and a great attraction to Mary; he belonged to the Marian Congregation<sup>4</sup>. He felt a deep need of silence and recollection and responded to it generously, forgetful of himself. He was a real fighter.

He studied rhetoric at Bourges and Verdun to good effect, then he entered the Jesuit novitiate at Nancy, at the age of 18. He lapped up the insights of Ignatius, above all the combat against the spirit of evil so as to live uniquely according to the "good spirit". He resolved to become exclusively dependent on the Holy Spirit.

He studied philosophy and theology at Pont-à-Mousson (between Metz and Nancy) and made his solemn profession in 1621. He was successively professor of philosophy, mathematics, moral theology and scholastic philosophy in various Jesuit colleges. He was subsequently master of novices for four years then a teacher in the second novitiate for three years. He gave himself up to this work to such a degree that his health became impaired. His short life came to an end at Bourges where he was teaching. He had a happy death in 1635 at the age of 48, highly esteemed for his teaching and his religious and priestly devotion in forming his confreres.

Champion gives this general appreciation of Lallement's teaching:

*The Holy Spirit wished to produce a superior and director who was eminently qualified to train a large number of people. The Spirit always guided him and instructed him in the spiritual life from his earliest years; he bound him*

*to himself with a special devotion for his adorable Person. He showed him the most profound mysteries of grace and guided him to a knowledge of his gifts and gave them to him with a generosity that he only shows to those he wants to raise to the heights of sanctity.*

This assessment could give an impression of Lallement as a self-taught person, who founded a school of spirituality apart from his Ignatian formation and convictions, developing, above all, his own personal mystical experience of life in the Holy Spirit. In fact, his originality is rooted in the Ignatian tradition:

*In fact, his originality is rooted in the Ignatian tradition...*

- First of all, in the discernment of spirits, as taught by Ignatius in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Weeks of the Exercises (consolation; desolation; signs of the active presence of the good spirit; signs of the action of the bad angel; the spiritual combat; etc.). As Courel puts it,

*The Exercises are conceived to conquer myself, to recognise that I am a sinner in the sight of God and to allow myself to be cleansed from sin and from all attachment to sin. Having re-discovered this purity of heart, I have to re-orientate my whole life by the direction of the Holy Spirit. This is a protracted work, undertaken in the light of the examples of Christ that must be followed step by step in his public life, his suffering and his glorious life right up to his Ascension into the glory of his Father. And this final contemplation of Christ returning to his Father spurs us on to find God in everything and everything in God. The imitation of Christ and docility to the light of the Holy Spirit go together throughout the three final Weeks of the Exercises. (Fr. François Courel S.J.: "Doctrine Spirituelle")*

*This is a protracted work, undertaken in the light of the examples of Christ...*

- Secondly, his Ignatian thought pervades all his work as an Instructor in the Second Novitiate. His task was to complete the formation of religious who had already been in the Company for about 15 years and who, for the most part, were serious practitioners of the "Principal and Foundation" of the first Week of the Exercises and the other teachings of St. Ignatius. Lallement always saw the second conversion as a re-appropriation of Ignatian spirituality.

*...the two elements of the spiritual life are the cleansing of the heart and the direction of the Holy Spirit.*

*...ultimate target for the whole formation programme: to produce men of action...*

- Finally, his own personal charism and experience enabled him to elaborate in his teaching a 4<sup>th</sup> and long principle of fidelity to the Ignatian vocation in docility to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is the 4<sup>th</sup> Principle of his “*Doctrine Spirituelle*”, which is divided into five chapters and stretches over 73 pages, with a long elaboration of the gifts of the Holy Spirit and their importance.

*Here are the means by which we progress towards this docility: the two elements of the spiritual life are the cleansing of the heart and the direction of the Holy Spirit. In short, spiritual life can be summed up as identifying the ways and movements of the Holy Spirit working in our souls. Our greatest perfection lies in following the interior attractions of the Spirit and allowing ourselves to be directed by His inspirations. Once we have spent some time seeking purity of heart, we must aim to be so possessed and governed by the Holy Spirit that He alone will direct all our powers and senses and control all our interior and exterior movement, so that we will totally abandon ourselves by renouncing our own wishes and satisfactions. Thus, we will live no longer in ourselves but in Jesus Christ, faithfully following the working of his Spirit within us and subjecting ourselves and all our rebellious tendencies to the strength of his grace. (Courel: “*Doctrine Spirituelle*”).*

Courel believes that what is said above epitomises all the originality of Lallement’s School.

In his work as a formator, Lallement used other sources of spirituality apart from Ignatius: Laurence Justinian, Vincent Ferrier, Gregory Nazianzen, Basil, Jerome, Ambrose, Bonaventure, Augustine, Pseudo-Denis, Richard of St. Victor, Bernard, Thomas Aquinas, Theresa, Isidore of Saville, Francis de Sales, Francis Xavier, Lainez, Suarez... And surely we must add to this list St. John of the Cross with his “nada” (the emptiness of all that is not God within us), his long nights of the soul, Mount Carmel...

Another characteristic of the school of Lallement is its great insistence on the interior life (living in the Holy Spirit) and its ultimate target for the whole formation programme: to produce men of action:

*As a spiritual master and the head of a school, with the responsibility of forming men of both action and prayer, it is hardly surprising that Lallement engendered a double posterity (Courel).*

According to Brémond, Lallement's spiritual doctrine can be summarised under four principles: the second conversion, the critique of action, the vigilance of the heart and the direction of the Holy Spirit. It is aimed at religious men already journeying on the road to perfection, men of action and men of discernment:

*...with contemplation, one can achieve more for oneself and others in one month than would be possible in ten years without it.*

*We must join together action and contemplation to such an extent that we no longer give ourselves more to one than to the other. For we who are called to an apostolic Order, where action and contemplation go hand in hand, must aspire to the highest degree of excellence in both. The two support each other: with contemplation, one can achieve more for oneself and others in one month than would be possible in ten years without it. ("Doctrine Spirituelle").*

Before launching into his favourite lessons on docility to the Holy Spirit, Lallement had plenty to say about purity of heart. Purity as regards mortal sin went without saying, but this was also true of deliberate venial sin:

*All this must be accomplished gently...*

*The way to proceed with the cleansing of the heart is, first of all, to identify venial sins and correct them. The second step is to rectify uncontrolled movements of the heart and the third, to guard one's thoughts and put them in order. Lastly, one must detect the inspirations coming from God, his plans and wishes, and take steps to carry them out. All this must be accomplished gently, making it part of one's commitment to the Lord. ("Doctrine Spirituelle").*

The heart has to be purified of the following: venial sins, passions, pride and the slightest imperfections. We must oppose our inclinations and arrive at a holy indifference. We must not go chasing after special graces. The heart must also be purified in our active life, and our intellect needs to be cleansed of errors, false principles, and ignorance (*nescientia veri et falsi, boni et mali, commode et noxii*). We must eliminate particular friendships, foolish conversations and useless visits.

Noting how many of his confreres were only loosely committed to being guided by the Holy Spirit, Louis Lallement had this to say:

*If religious turn their minds to purity of heart, love steadily grows within them and the gifts of the Holy Spirit are clearly seen in their conduct; but this will never happen without recollection and concentration on the interior life, or if they are always led by their inclinations, avoiding only the greatest sins while neglecting things of less importance. Those who are sensual, full of earthly thoughts, desires and affections quench the spirit of God within them. They are very few who give themselves up completely to God and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to the point where He alone lives within them and is the principle of all their actions". And Lallement adds, "the number of fools to be found is infinite! ("Doctrine Spirituelle").*

These were the convictions that the Jesuit missionaries took away with them from their second novitiate. They had forged a link between purity and devotion to the Immaculate Conception and this was widely spread by the Company through their Marian Congregations. In their turn, the Breton "Priests of the Holy Spirit" adopted the same ideas through parish missions and retreats, and Claude Poullart des Places, at Nantes and Rennes, came into contact with this same spirituality of the Holy Spirit through his teachers and directors, like Fr. Julien Belier.

So this should give us a clearer idea of the origins of our consecration to the Holy Spirit. We thank the Lord for all those who have led us along this path, because it shows that our commitment to the Holy Spirit does not have its roots in a period not particularly renowned in the history of spirituality: we are born from a great river of spirituality that flows directly from the words and sacrifice of Jesus Christ. We are particularly indebted to the zeal of these Jesuit missionaries, the forceful personality of Louis Lallement and, above all, to Saint Ignatius of Loyola.

*...we are born from a  
great river of spirituality  
that flows directly from  
the words and sacrifice of  
Jesus Christ.*

---

## **Our Consecration to the Holy Spirit in our Rule of Life**

### **1709**

1. All the students will have a special devotion to the Holy Spirit to whom they have been consecrated. They will also pray frequently to the Blessed Virgin, under whose protection they have been offered to the Holy Spirit.
2. They will observe Pentecost and the Immaculate Conception as their principle feasts. They will celebrate the first to obtain the fire of God's love from the Holy

Spirit, and the second to acquire an angelic<sup>5</sup> purity from the Immaculate Conception – two virtues which will be the foundation of all their spiritual life.

### 1734

1. This Congregation is consecrated to the Holy Spirit under the invocation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, conceived without sin. It will therefore celebrate in a special way the feasts of Pentecost and the Immaculate Conception, so that all the members may be filled with the fire of divine love and obtain a perfect purity of heart and body.

In the Provisional Rule, drawn up by Libermann between 1841 and 1845, there is no mention of the Holy Spirit in the life and work of the missionaries of the Holy Heart of Mary. But just before the “fusion” in 1848, he wrote to his confreres that he found no contradiction between consecration to the Holy Spirit and their gift of themselves to the Holy Heart of Mary. He made this more explicit in the Rule of 1849 when he unified the Rules of the two Congregations.

### 1849

Devotions of the Congregation<sup>6</sup>

1. To help the members to enter into this fundamental devotion, so full of holiness, and to give them a powerful source of sanctification for the accomplishment of their duties of private, common and apostolic life, the Congregation consecrates them in a special way to the Holy Spirit, the author and guide of all sanctity and the inspiration of the apostolic spirit, and to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, filled abundantly, by the Holy Spirit with the fullness of holiness and the apostolic spirit and sharing perfectly in the life and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, her Son, for the redemption of the world. This double dedication is the special and distinctive devotion of the Congregation.
2. They will discover in the Holy Spirit, who lives in their souls, a source for their interior and religious life and a powerful spring of that perfect love which is the soul of zeal and all the other apostolic virtues. They will regard the Immaculate Heart of Mary as a perfect model of fidelity to all the inspirations of the Holy Spirit and the interior practice of the virtues of the religious and apostolic life. They will find in her heart a refuge to which they can turn in their work and their sufferings

*...the Congregation  
consecrates them in  
a special way to the  
Holy Spirit...and to the  
Immaculate Heart of  
Mary...*

and they will open themselves to her with the confidence of a child in all their weaknesses and temptations.

3. The holy day of Pentecost and that of the Holy and Immaculate Heart of Mary will be the principal feasts of the Congregation.

### **1987**

1. We are dedicated to the Holy Spirit, author of all holiness and “*source of the apostolic spirit*” (N.D. X p. 568). We place ourselves under the protection of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, who was filled beyond measure by the same Spirit “*with the fullness of holiness and apostolic zeal*” (ibid.).

Successive Spiritan Rules of Life proclaim the central place of the Holy Spirit and of Mary. Still today, consecration to the Holy Spirit involves closeness to Mary and deep involvement in the mission of her son.

### **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Editions Saint-Paul, Paris, 1962.

<sup>2</sup> “Louis Lallement, *Doctrine Spirituelle*”, coll. Christus no. 3, 413 pages, Desclée de Brouwer, Paris, 1959.

<sup>3</sup> Henri Brémond “A literary history of religious thought in France” Volume V: “The Mystical Conquest: the school of Fr. Lallement and the mystical tradition in the Company of Jesus”, Bloud and Gay, Paris, 1920

<sup>4</sup> From the start, the Jesuits adopted a Marian devotion, which they spread through their colleges. Their attraction to the Immaculate Conception fits in perfectly with their search for purification of the heart.

<sup>5</sup> The feast of the Immaculate Conception is one of the two principal celebrations of the house. Once again, we can see the influence of the Jesuits (who were staunch defenders of the Immaculate Conception) on the spiritual formation of Claude Poullart des Places. The “angelic purity” that is spoken of here does not just refer to corporal chastity but also to a purity that imitates, as far as possible, that of Mary, exempt from all stain of sin.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Spiritan Wellsprings* (1986), ed. John Doly C.S.Sp., Dublin: Paraclete Press pp. 156-157 (The Devotions of the Congregation, Pt. II Section 3, Ch. VI, Articles III, IV and VI)



## POULLART DES PLACES AND THE REFORM OF THE CLERGY

Adélio Torres Neiva,  
C.S.Sp.

Fr Torres Neiva was a former member of the Spiritan General Council. A history graduate of the University of Coimbra, he was a member of the Academy of History (Portugal). He taught missiology at the Catholic University of Lisbon. He was director of the revue “Missão Espiritana” and also of the journal of the Conference of Religious in Portugal, “Vida Consegrada.”

The above description will give an idea of how Adélio will be missed. He died while *Spiritans Horizons* was in final preparation. May he be with our risen Lord.

(Translation: John Kilcrann,  
C.S.Sp.)

*The decree on the reform of the clergy with the long expected establishment of seminaries was probably what made the biggest impact.*

Claude Poullart des Places was not an innovator like Saint Benedict, Francis of Assisi, Saint Ignatius or Libermann. He was very much part of a renewal movement of the clergy in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. This movement was a response to the appeals of the Council of Trent (1545 – 1563) which took place a century earlier and which drew up a renewal program for the entire Church.

The Church was living through one of the most serious crises of its history and reform was very much needed. The decadence of the clergy and of monastic life was a core issue in this crisis. It was because of this crisis that the Protestant Reformation took place and that the Council of Trent was convoked.

### **1. Poullart des Places and the reform of the clergy - context and influences.**

The reform of the church took place on various levels and two styles can be noted: the first institutional, the second charismatic.

#### ***The institutional level***

The high point of this reform at the institutional level was the Council of Trent. This Council took place during three distinct periods. The first session was under Paul III and lasted from 1545 to 1549. The second was under Julius III and occurred between 1551 and 1552. The third session finally took place after a long interruption in Pius IV's papacy between 1562 and 1563. Here a global reform of the entire Church took place both in the doctrinal and disciplinary areas. In this reform special attention needs to be given to the reform of the clergy.

The decree on the reform of the clergy with the long expected establishment of seminaries was probably what made the biggest impact. If the Council of Trent had done nothing more than the setting up of seminaries, it would have done an important service to the Church. These were the so-called conciliar seminaries. There were already examples of seminaries. Saints Augustine, Hilary of Arles and many other bishops were accustomed to gathering around them their clerical students and priests in order to train them for priestly ministry and at times build a community with them. Later, each cathedral had a school for the moral and intellectual formation of its ministers. But the multiplication of rural parishes and the ecclesiastical benefices

*As a reform measure this was the most exciting and appropriate proposal.*

*It wishes that the children of the poor be principally selected...*

had created a new situation. Two recent experiences from Rome itself offered a solution which the Council would embrace – namely the German College established by Saint Ignatius Loyola in 1552 and the English Seminary founded by Cardinal Reginald Polé in 1556. It was with this model in mind that the Pope and his secretary of State, Charles Borromeo, came up with the idea of setting up a Roman seminary which was expected to be ready in 1563 – precisely the year in which the Council concluded. The Council did nothing more than adopt this as a general model. As a reform measure this was the most exciting and appropriate proposal. In Chapter 18 of Session 23 we find the Council’s instruction which directs each diocese to establish a seminary:

*“Whereas the age of youth, unless it be rightly trained, is prone to follow after the pleasures of the world; and unless it be formed, from its tender years, unto piety and religion, before habits of vice have taken possession of the whole man, it never will perfectly, and without the greatest, and well-nigh special, help of Almighty God, persevere in ecclesiastical discipline; the holy Synod ordains, that all cathedrals, metropolitan, and other churches greater than these, shall be bound, each according to its means and the extent of the diocese, to maintain, to educate religiously, and to train in ecclesiastical discipline, a certain number of youths of their city and diocese, or, if that number cannot be met with there, of that province, in a college to be chosen by the bishop for this purpose near the said churches, or in some other suitable place. Into this college shall be received such as are at least twelve years old, born in lawful wedlock, and who know how to read and write competently, and whose character and inclination afford a hope that they will always serve in the ecclesiastical ministry. And It wishes that the children of the poor be principally selected; though It does not however exclude those of the more wealthy, provided they be maintained at their own expense, and manifest a desire of serving God and the Church. The bishop, having divided these youths into as many classes as he shall think fit, according to their number, age, and progress in ecclesiastical discipline, shall, when it seems to him expedient, assign some of them to the ministry of the churches, the others he shall keep in the college to be instructed; and shall supply the place of those who have been withdrawn by others, so that this college may be a perpetual seminary of ministers of God.*

*And that the youths may be the more advantageously trained in the aforesaid ecclesiastical discipline, they shall always at once wear the tonsure and the clerical dress; they shall learn grammar, singing, ecclesiastical computation, and the other liberal arts; they shall be instructed in sacred Scripture; ecclesiastical works; the homilies of the saints; the manner of administering the sacraments, especially those*

*things which shall seem adapted to enable them to hear confessions; and the forms of the rites and ceremonies. The bishop shall take care that they be present every day at the sacrifice of the mass, and that they confess their sins at least once a month; and receive the body of our Lord Jesus Christ as the judgment of their confessor shall direct; and on festivals serve in the cathedral and other churches of the place.*

*All which, and other things advantageous and needful for this object, all bishops shall ordain-with the advice of two of the senior and most experienced canons chosen by himself - as the Holy Spirit shall suggest; and shall make it their care, by frequent visitations, that the same be always observed. The forward, and incorrigible, and the disseminators of evil morals, they shall punish sharply, even by expulsion if necessary.”<sup>1</sup>*

In summary, in order to achieve the reform of the clergy, the Council invested especially in the formation of future priests. This formation included a preference for the poor; life in community; theological formation; an evangelical and pious life and a demanding disciplinary structure.

*On the charismatic level the reform was undertaken by a number of saints...*

### ***The charismatic level***

On the charismatic level the reform was undertaken by a number of saints who played a key role either in this reform process or in the establishment of numerous other religious institutes. The influence of the Council of Trent as well as the challenges offered by the Renaissance, by the discovery of a new culture as well as new worlds, brought to birth a renewal movement at every level of the Church.

*In the contemplative life, an example is the reform of Teresa of Avila...*

We can point to the reform of the Franciscans by Saint Peter of Alcantara (1540), - known as ‘discalced’ or ‘strict observance’ - and the appearance of the Capuchins (1526) also known as ‘Franciscan hermits’. Among the Carmelites the ‘discalced’ and the ‘recollects’ (named thus because they confined themselves to houses of recollection) are other examples. In the contemplative life, an example is the reform of Teresa of Avila who left the Incarnation Convent in Avila to take on the radical life style of the original Carmel founding, the Saint Joseph convent (1563). Another example is Saint John of the Cross, the contemplative of Segovia (1568). We can also point to Saint Ignatius Loyola (1534) and the Jesuits who took on new areas of evangelization which the new situation had made possible. Another example is the missionary life of Saint Francis Xavier and the new paths of mission in foreign countries. The health apostolate of Saint Camillus de Lellis and his companions is a further illustration.

In creating the Oratory, Saint Phillip Neri (1575) opened a space for the renewal of the clergy. Saint Joseph Calasanctius and his group (1597) focused on the evangelization of youth. Saint John of God (1539), in living with the mentally ill endeavored to integrate them into a process of evangelization. Saint Angela de Merici and the Ursulines, in establishing a form of religious life which was very much integrated into daily activities, opened up a space to female youth. Still another example is Friar Bartholomew of the Martyrs and the evangelization of the rural world. And there are still other examples - we could recall such examples as Saint Francis de Sales (1567) who used both the modern means and technologies of his day to bring the Gospel message to all segments of society as well as Saint Vincent de Paul and Saint Louise de Marillac who opened up possibilities for evangelization.

*Here we will focus solely on clergy reform.*

## **2. The establishment of the regular clergy during the 16<sup>th</sup> century.**

Here we will focus solely on clergy reform. What is very new during this time was the appearance of the regular clergy, that is a clergy which sought to renew itself by taking on the core values of religious life. What is happening is a combination of the priestly apostolate and religious life. Better known examples include the Company of Jesus founded by Saint Ignatius (1534), the Camillians founded by Saint Camillus de Lellis and the Order of the Pious Schools founded by Saint Joseph Calasanctius. These regular clergy had a number of common characteristics which served as a prime source of inspiration for Poullart des Places.

### ***All are priests***

Contrary to an earlier trend where practically all the founders of religious institutes were laity, now all are priests, or at least they were priests at the point in time when they received approval for their congregation. However most of them drew up their project before they were ordained. They became aware that in order to implement their project, priestly ordination was indispensable. The priesthood here in effect guaranteed a serious formation. The same happened with Poullart des Places. Priesthood is less the result of his personal option than something that was necessary for his project.

*The priesthood here in effect guaranteed a serious formation.*

### ***The beginning of a new reality: internationality***

The Company of Jesus could be taken as an example because its total membership was greater than that of all the other groups combined. It began on August 15, 1534 in the chapel of Saint

Denis of Montserrat with people of three nationalities: Ignatius de Loyola, Francis Xavier, Diego Lainez, Alphonsus Salermon, Nicholas Bobadilha were all Spaniards; Peter Faber was a Savoyard and Simon Rodrigues was from Portugal. Their aim was to offer themselves to the Pope for work among unbelievers, heretics, schismatics, as well as among the ordinary faithful. A feature which opened all the spaces of evangelization in the new world was a widening of horizons which permitted Poullart des Place's priests to consider Acadia, Quebec and the French colonies as places of ministry.

#### ***An outline constitution***

Ignatius and his companions wrote new constitutions; the other institutes settled for adapting the Rule of Saint Augustine and including a number of practical regulations. The constitutions of Saint Ignatius refer constantly to his own personal spiritual journey and to the reflections of the first group in Rome in 1539. Here they sought to harmonize evangelical aspirations and apostolic demands.

*What they did was suppress all the monastic elements.*

#### ***The exclusion of unnecessary demands***

In terms of organization, the regular clergy did not offer anything new. Their structures were inherited from the mendicant orders. What they did was suppress all the monastic elements. Their life style was apostolic, the direct opposite to a monastic life style. Office in common was dropped as well as the religious habit, penitential practices etc. On the other hand personal prayer, meditation and the contemplation of Christ and the saints became more intensive. They desired to be available for apostolic activity. While this was a model of religious life, it was freed from monastic demands. This also was the option made by Poullart des Places.

*This also was the option made by Poullart des Places.*

#### ***An intense academic formation***

The school of formation for the monks and the mendicants during their entire life span was the common life. No other formation was offered. It was religious life which formed them. On the contrary, the regular clergy had a number of years given over to specific formation. This formation is given to them, not in convents, but in formation houses, in seminaries, novitiates and scholasticates. These were structures which preceded religious life and they constituted an intensive formation in line with the demands of the Council of Trent. Saint Ignatius opted for a novitiate of two years rather than of one, as demanded by Church law. Following the novitiate, the emphasis was placed on studies. Following studies there came a third year of novitiate.

Saint Ignatius used to say that if the Jesuits were to take this program seriously, they would not need anything more to be good religious. This was also the opinion of Poullart des Places.

### ***Intense apostolic action***

The regular clergy were formed for intense apostolic activity. But instead of concentrating on one or other activity, they lived a spirituality which served as a foundation for other activities. What united them was a common spirit; this also was exactly the case with Poullart des Places. For this reason the tasks undertaken could be diverse: teaching, education of youth, evangelization, health, missions etc. It could be said that the mission of the Church or of the People of God was what impelled the regular clergy. The task of superiors was especially to coordinate and to orientate the activities. Obedience became one of the chief characteristics – here obedience was seen as strengthening the common project.

*Community was seen as a spiritual armada where an officer was needed to supervise...*

What distinguishes the regular clergy was their coming together for intense apostolic action. Community was seen as a spiritual armada where an officer was needed to supervise common problems and common tasks. It was now for the first time that the function of superior or “provost” appears. Earlier, religious life had followed a rural model with the *father-abbot* of Saint Benedict. The mendicant orders understood authority in the context of fraternity: the *minister* or the least of the minors as in the Franciscans or the first of the brothers – the *prior*, as in the Dominicans. But now the authority image becomes that of a chief or superior.

*New congregations continued to spring up...*

### **3. New styles of consecrated life in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries: common life societies of priests and clerical congregations.**

Another stage in the reform of the clergy was the appearance of common life societies of priests or, to use today’s language, apostolic societies, as well as clerical congregations. During the 16<sup>th</sup> century two notable trends were evident in religious life: the establishment of the regular clergy and the renewal of the older orders. New congregations continued to spring up using new styles adapted to the needs of the time: in all over 30 such new congregations appeared.

The three chief innovations were common life societies of priests, clerical congregations and lay congregations. In their first phase, the lay congregations such as the Brothers of the Christian Schools of Saint John Baptist de la Salle, and the Monfortians of



Saint Louis Marie Grignion de Monfort, did not participate in the project of clergy renewal because they were exclusively for laity.

### ***Common life societies of priests***

Already in the 16<sup>th</sup> century Saint Philip Neri had begun a new kind of association for priests. In 17<sup>th</sup> century France Cardinal de Bérulle (1575-1625) founded the Oratory in Paris. Several other societies with the renewal of the clergy in mind followed: the Sulpicians (1624), the Vincentians (1625), the Eudists (1663) and at the turn of the century, the Spiritans (1703).

The Spiritans were a group founded by Poullart des Places (1679 – 1709) as a society exclusively for the formation of poor clerical students. After his death, two of his companions, Hyacinth Garnier and Louis Bouic, continued his work organizing the seminary which he had founded. From 1740 onwards they gave up the formation of poor clerics from French dioceses, (these dioceses had now taken on this task) and dedicated themselves to the formation of the colonial clergy and to the evangelization of unbelievers.

Also in the 17<sup>th</sup> century religious congregations sprung up which brought together priests and laity for the same tasks. Here the priests were always in the majority. Examples include the second phase of the Monfortians, the Passionists of Saint Paul of the Cross, the Redemptorists of Saint Alphonsus de Liguori et al.

*Frequently their general purpose was forgotten and the means to achieve the purpose took first place.*

### ***Common characteristics of these foundations***

The purpose of these foundations was evangelization, especially of the masses. For this reason they had an inbuilt condition: the spiritual formation of the priests. Frequently their general purpose was forgotten and the means to achieve the purpose took first place. Little by little the societies of priests became cenacles<sup>2</sup>. While the founders of the earlier groups of regular clergy became priests because of the pressure of circumstances, the opposite happened in the common life societies of priests: Bérulle, Olier, Eudes, Vincent de Paul and Poullart des Places had decided earlier for the priesthood. This decision also influenced them to see the apostolate only from the perspective of a priest.

The societies of priests did not take public vows. Such vows up to this time were considered a distinctive characteristic of religious



*...while they maintained  
the right to own property,  
they put their earnings in  
common.*

*The prime objective set  
for the members was to be  
holy and zealous priests.*

*To be a formator for  
Poullart de Places was  
above all to allow oneself  
to be formed.*

life. Poullart des Places did not take vows. They abandoned the use of the title of 'order' and did not consider themselves to be religious – a trend which went against a centuries old tradition. They were societies of apostolic life. On the other hand they had structures quite similar to those of the mendicants and the regular clergy: a rule, a superior, a general assembly, as well as executive and legislative power. They made a promise or an oath to obey the superior, they adopted celibacy and while they maintained the right to own property, they put their earnings in common.

This means that even though they did not make public vows, in practice they lived them as religious did. Their originality was more on the juridical than on the practical level. In fact they were largely similar to the regular clergy. The apostolic life was their chief objective and for this they organized themselves in community.

All of the founders were priests and their recruitment limited itself to candidates for priestly life. Sanctification of the members was a priority because of apostolic work and was seen to be central to the vocation. All of the founders stressed the importance of sanctification as a support for apostolic activity. Sanctification of the members was seen as an intensification of the spiritual life and as an essential condition for the apostolate. The prime objective set for the members was to be holy and zealous priests. For this reason, the spiritual and human bonds in community were of prime importance.

Apart from larger groups, a number of similar smaller communities also flourished and these, without doubt were models from which Claude took ideas. Examples include the seminary of Fr. Bellier (1683), who was Claude's spiritual director, and Fr. Changières's Small Communities of Providence (1683). It is important to note that despite all of these initiatives, the reform proposed by the Council of Trent took time to arrive in France. Even a hundred years after the Council finished, its documents had not been translated into French.

#### **4. The profile of Poullart des Places as a formator of renewed clergy.**

I believe that as this article developed, a profile of Poullart des Places as a formator of priests and of his contribution to the renewal of the clergy, has emerged. In effect Poullart des Places can be placed in the framework of all the movements for the renewal of the clergy. Here I want to underline just a few key points from his work of renewal of the clergy. Poullart des Places'

spirituality has three principal components: docility to the Holy Spirit; community life and service of the poor. It is on these pillars which we need to base our fundamental identity.

***Formation is a journey***

To be a formator for Poullart de Places was above all to allow oneself to be formed. In fact his entire life was a process of formation. It is important to recall that at the same time as Claude was a formator, he was preparing himself for ordination. His spiritual journey was that of a person who is defining the journey. His own life was the special school of formation for the first Spiritans. He has not left us any other orientations or directives for Spiritan formation.

*It is necessary to work on adjustments of the initial 'yes' so that it can become more solid.*

In the notes of his 1701 retreat about the choice of a state of life, he speaks of a life plan to achieve perfection. This could be pointed to as a Rule of Life but from this document only four pages survive containing points 12 to 15 which he probably elaborated during the first semester at the Saint Louis College. The few written works which he left us, with the exception of the Regulations, all speak of him, of his problems, of his difficulties, of his aspirations and of his dreams. He shows us that a vocation does not begin ready-made. It is necessary to work on adjustments of the initial 'yes' so that it can become more solid. Looking at his own vocation, Poullart des Places shows us that if everything is given from the beginning, it still needs to be built step by step. He teaches us to discover unforeseen ways which become opportunities for growth when the time of certainties gives way to doubts and questions; when the time of fervor gives way to the desert and occasionally even to night. The formation process is full of stages, of necessary conversions, in order to renew the convictions coming from prayer, of life in community, in the calls of the Spirit and of the Church to the service of the poor and of the Gospel.

***Moving on to devotion and docility to the Holy Spirit***

Poullart des Places was born in a setting marked by devotion to the Holy Spirit. The Jesuits who had evangelized his native Brittany had left traces of the Holy Spirit everywhere: preaching, confraternities, novenas and devotions. After his time in school, emphasis on the Holy Spirit continued through his spiritual directors, the Assembly of Friends, readings, apostolic experiences etc. His experience with the Jesuits was what really stamped his spiritual journey.

*The Jesuits...left traces of the Holy Spirit everywhere.*

*Apostolic availability was  
an original characteristic  
of the Spiritans.*

But the important conversion took place when he moved from devotion to docility. Here, the Holy Spirit was no longer just a devotion but became the center of his life. This was a difficult conversion which he describes in his writings. This was when he experienced the revelation of God's love for him which enabled him to surmount all obstacles. In his 1701 retreat when he reread his life, he became conscious of this God who sought him out ceaselessly; a God who followed him and did not leave him in peace. At this point all the barriers fell and he lost all his defense strategies. From this moment onwards, his only desire was to give himself to God and to accept God's love. He gave himself to God with all his defects, all his shadows and all his lights. From then on, docility to the Holy Spirit became the compass which was to guide him. Apostolic availability was an original characteristic of the Spiritans. It was in the context of this availability that he came to know the poor and put himself side by side with them. When Grignon de Monfort requested him to collaborate in the popular missions in the west of France, his future was decided: to help poor students in their priestly formation. *"This seems to be what God is asking of me and various enlightened people have confirmed the importance of this project"*.

#### ***Moving from welcoming the poor to living poverty***

Poullart des Places discovered the poor in the company of Fr. Bellier on visits to the Saint Yves hospital in Rennes where the homeless and abandoned took refuge. Later he discovered the chimney sweeps and the poor clerical students wandering on the streets of Paris.

*But the real conversion  
came about when he  
learned from the poor  
how to be poor.*

A second step occurred when he became close to one of these students and began to share his funds and accommodation with him: J. B. Faulconnier. In 1702 he started to accommodate a number of students in another house. It was from this moment that the distance which separated him from the poor began to decrease and he moved from benefactor to companion, equal to them. But the real conversion came about when he learned from the poor how to be poor. Then his house became no longer a refuge for the abandoned but developed into a cenacle where poverty was lived as a characteristic of God's Reign. The poor taught the small community how to discover the poverty of Jesus Christ. Poullart des Places discovered poverty from the poor whom he gathered but also through the successive choices made which at times were difficult because of the radical self emptying, of the letting go of his security and his projects in order to root himself in faith and confidence in God and leave himself open to the Holy Spirit. It is essential to understand this process in order to understand Poullart des Places as a formator.

*It became clear to him  
that he would...need to  
share responsibility with  
others.*

### ***Sharing responsibility***

In 1704 Claude experienced a deep crisis. Six months after setting up the community he already had forty aspirants and the resulting demands were becoming too much for him: food, accommodation, formation, other problems as well as his own personal preparation for priesthood. He experienced burn-out as well as severe moral depression. It was a time of desert and silence for him. He began to question the work so seriously that he felt crushed by it. As was customary for him he did a retreat which he speaks about in "Reflection from the Past". He sought out a spiritual director and he recognized that at the center of the problem was the lack of distance between him and his followers. It became clear to him that he would have to surrender exclusive paternity to his work and would need to share responsibility with others. He chose collaborators to help him in the direction of the work and so he became freer and more at peace internally and was able to pursue his studies in preparation for the priesthood. Members of this group included Vincent Le Barbier and Louis Bouic. In this way a group of formators, who would form the nucleus of the *Messieurs du Saint Esprit*, came into being. This was the first cell of what would become the Congregation of the Holy Spirit. It was also in this way that he began to understand poverty.

### ***The spirit as more important than structure***

One of the recurring characteristics of the post Tridentine regular clergy was a model of priesthood which placed more emphasis on the value of religious life than on its structures.

*...the vigor of this  
group came not from its  
organization but from its  
charism.*

Poullart des Places' community corresponds exactly with this model. In effect from Poullart des Places we have inherited an emphasis more on spirit than on structure. The community survived without a legal basis for thirty years uncertain whether it was a seminary or a community. In effect it was both. When in 1734 it took on a visible structure, it consisted only of a group of directors as required by civil law. The directors did not make promises or religious vows. They only had a contract in which they simply undertook to observe the statutes. As Koren points out, the vigor of this group came not from its organization but from its charism. What they had in common was their understanding of priesthood. To be a priest meant for them an evangelical openness and obedience to the Holy Spirit for serving the poorest and most abandoned together with voluntary poverty. For them, to live this model of priesthood, all that was needed was to live the religious life in a radical way. What motivated them was not any legal code but rather fidelity to the Holy Spirit.

### ***A quality theological formation***

The Council of Trent had set up seminaries for the formation of students for the priesthood. The program demanded for this formation was rigorous. Poullart des Places agreed with such an academic formation of students. Studies included three years of philosophy which included the new sciences such as mathematics and the new physical theory of Newton. Following this came five years of theological studies and finally a master's degree if considered necessary, requiring two years of canon law and sacred scripture. The pastoral care of the poorest and most abandoned merited this preparation at university level. Even today, formation programs of seminarians are less demanding.

*It is no accident that the phrase “one heart and one soul” became the motto of the Spiritans.*

### ***The community as cenacle***

Poullart des Places wished to establish in his house the atmosphere of a cenacle. Such an atmosphere was common for the regular clergy. The regulations made every effort in the smallest details to ensure that the community would be a school of fraternity and communion where one heart and one soul would be central in imitation of the church of the Acts of the Apostles. It is no accident that the phrase “one heart and one soul” became the motto of the Spiritans.

If this was to be a fraternal community it also was a prayer community. The consecration to the Holy Spirit, which was basic to the community, was remembered throughout the day by calling on the Spirit before any academic activity. Docility to the Spirit was a founding characteristic.

This was also a community which tenderly loved Mary conceived without sin, under whose protection all members were consecrated to the Holy Spirit. It was a community of Eucharistic and liturgical living which marked the daily lives of the students. It was an apostolic community. From this community emerged a golden generation of Spiritans – the missionaries of North America, at a time when France and England were struggling for control there.

### **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup>The translation used here is from <http://history.hanover.edu/texts/trent/trentall.html>

<sup>2</sup>Cenacle; this word evokes a New Testament atmosphere of prayer, hope, the presence of Mary and the coming of the Spirit.

## WEALTH, POVERTY, AND VOCATION IN THE LIFE AND TIMES OF CLAUDE-FRANÇOIS POUILLART DES PLACES

Jotham Parsons,  
Ph.D.

Jotham Parsons received his Ph.D. from Johns Hopkins University and is currently associate professor of history at Duquesne University, where he has taught since 2003. He is the author of *The Church in the Republic: Gallicanism and Political Ideology in Renaissance France* (2005), as well as a number of articles on various aspects of the culture and politics of early modern France. He is completing a study of money, governance, and society in sixteenth-century France.

Pierre Thomas (1687–1751) was one of the earliest companions of Claude-François Poullart des Places (1679–1709), and was his first biographer. His account of the founder of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit’s life dwells on two things: the struggle against worldly ambition that brought Poullart des Places to his vocation, and the self-abnegation that he embraced once he had entered into that vocation. His experience of poverty summed up both of these strands:

*Before his conversion, M. des Places would not have found the allowance that [his father] gave him enough for his own needs; once converted, he found it enough for himself and for seeing to the needs of many others, so ingenious does charity joined to the spirit of mortification make one at finding even in one’s necessities a kind of surplus to give to the poor. He hoped one day to see himself stripped of everything after having given everything away, and to live only from alms.<sup>1</sup>*

Thomas considered this conversion from worldly wealth to spiritual poverty exemplary, a guarantee both of the founder’s personal religious progress and of the foundation’s roots in divine rather than human will. But Thomas would not have been alone in his day, for he echoed concerns that both he and Claude-François would have encountered many times in their youth.

In the final decades of the Sun King’s reign, many French men undoubtedly entered into Holy Orders with little serious reflection, merely because it seemed to them or their families to be the easiest or most advantageous of the careers open to them. “People enter Holy Orders on their own whim,” according to one particularly severe commentator, “and look on them as steps to climb up, to get to the jobs to which their ambition draws them. They pursue the most important ecclesiastical dignities, and use all their credit, and that of their relatives and friends to get them; sometimes, they even make use of very shameful tactics.”<sup>2</sup>

This, however, was not the way it was supposed to be. The plentiful and widely-read French moral and devotional literature of the years around 1700 made it clear that any vocation in

life, and particularly a religious vocation, was only to be entered into in the most serious and disinterested spirit, consulting the promptings only of God, nature, and one's spiritual director.<sup>3</sup> It is of course almost impossible to say how many people took this advice, but some surely did, and the available evidence strongly suggests that Claude-François Poullart des Places was among them. Looking at his career in light of contemporary religious culture can help to fill in some of the many gaps in our understanding of the Spiritans' earliest history.<sup>4</sup> It suggests, in particular, that Thomas was right in believing that des Places was led to his particular vocation in part by his complex relationship to the way wealth and social standing operated in his society.

*In 1700, France was a deeply Catholic country; more so, probably, than it ever had been before or ever would be again.<sup>5</sup>*

*...the seeds of decline were already germinating...*

In 1700, France was a deeply Catholic country; more so, probably, than it ever had been before or ever would be again.<sup>5</sup> Over a century of enthusiasm, spiritual and mystical development, and institution-building had produced an exceptionally active and engaged Christianity, shared by a broad elite and increasingly integrating the longstanding piety of the rural and, to a lesser extent, the urban poor. Protestantism, outlawed with the 1685 revocation of the Edict of Nantes, was hardly even a marginal force. If 1700 marked a high point, though, one would expect that the seeds of decline were already germinating, and indeed this was the case. The victory over Calvinism would prove pyrrhic, identifying the Church with bigotry and repression rather than any more Evangelical qualities; more immediately, the Jansenist controversy, which had been going on for more than a generation, had begun to inflict serious damage. It would lead to schism in the Netherlands in 1706. In France the schism was spiritual rather than organizational, but no less real for all that, and rather than taking sides the French public was beginning to become disgusted with the entire enterprise of Catholic theology. And the proliferation of mystics and mystical theory that had characterized the century was also giving way to a backlash, most dramatically in the campaign against the "quietism" of Miguel de Molinos and Mme. Guyon, and against its most prominent French defender, François de la Mothe Fénelon, whose advocacy was condemned by a papal bull in 1699.

Given even this very abbreviated catalogue of issues, it is no wonder that a serious and pious young Catholic Frenchman coming of age in the years around 1700 would feel a combination of elation and anxiety at the prospects for his religion. Even for the most pious, though, other aspects of the contemporary situation would also have seemed enormously significant. In particular, if the seventeenth century had been good for the



*Seventeenth-century France boasted one of the least egalitarian societies the West has ever known...*

*...the perplexities of the rich Christian were a popular subject of pious literature...*

Gallican Church, it had been very bad for the French economy, which had stagnated at best since about 1620; and if the dawning eighteenth century promised religious difficulties, it threatened economic disaster as harvests failed and Louis XIV's long series of increasingly costly and increasingly unsuccessful wars came to its climax in the War of the Spanish Succession (1701–1714). Seventeenth-century France boasted one of the least egalitarian societies the West has ever known, but by the end of the century even French elites had become concerned by the levels of poverty and inequality they were seeing. Their concern was heightened by the fact that much of that elite had obtained its wealth and its status as officials and nobles in ways that were widely seen as more or less illegitimate: through participation in the oppressive, opaque, and corrupt world of the royal finances, and through the purchase of royal offices.<sup>6</sup> François Poullart des Places, Claude-François' father, was a wealthy financier who hoped (as Thomas very plausibly has it) to claim or reclaim noble status by purchasing a royal office for his talented son.<sup>7</sup>

As he considered his vocation, then, Claude-François did so from the perspective of the son of a rich but socially insecure man in an increasingly impoverished society. He would not have lacked for advice concerning the dilemmas he faced; the perplexities of the rich Christian were a popular subject of pious literature, partly for the purely commercial reason that the rich were likely to buy advice books, but partly for the more profound one that much of the French Catholic elite naturally came from the wealthy classes and had a personal interest in their spiritual problems. By the end of the seventeenth century the medieval impulse to condemn wealth out of hand, always somewhat marginal, had almost completely vanished, but Claude-François would still have found plenty of warnings against its dangers, and much encouragement towards some level of voluntary poverty. His Jesuit mentors, not generally known for fleeing the world, cherished the memory of Pierre Lallement (1587–1635), who “loved poverty, which the world usually avoids. As soon as he undertook to follow Jesus Christ, he wanted for his own use only those things that were absolutely necessary, and the nastiest, oldest, and least comfortable ones in the community.”<sup>8</sup>

A more contemporary figure, very influential in the field of ecclesiastical education in Paris, was the Oratorian Louis Thomassin (1619–1695). At his funeral, his pastor “announced something he had had to keep secret until then, that every year Fr. Thomassin gave him half of his thousand-pound pension for the poor.” And he had “other virtues that he hid no less carefully. Though he

*was fastidious by nature, he loved poverty in his clothing, his furniture, and everything to do with himself; and he would have preferred never to witness the distinction that the dignities of some of his family gave them in the world.”*<sup>9</sup>

Thomassin’s family was indeed distinguished, dominating the robe nobility in Provence. A cousin of the same name was bishop of Sisteron, distinguishing himself by the vigor of his attacks on Quietism and by the manner of his death (he was crushed when a wall of the episcopal palace collapsed).<sup>10</sup> And he shared the simultaneously empowering and embarrassing trait of a socioeconomically prominent family not just with Poullart des Places, but with the vast majority of the great names of the Century of Saints.

*...consider a canon of the church of St. Etienne in Dijon, Benigne Joly (1644–1694), who earned a reputation as “the father of the poor.”*

To give one more contemporary if somewhat obscure example, consider a canon of the church of St. Etienne in Dijon, Benigne Joly (1644–1694), who earned a reputation as “the father of the poor.” His family was prominent among the magistrates of Burgundy and was related to the Joly de Fleury of Paris, who in his day included the very prestigious solicitor-general of the Parlement.<sup>11</sup> Benigne’s wealthy father had purchased Benigne’s benefice when he was still very young, a circumstance that caused his biographer some embarrassment. To neutralize this affront to the ecclesiastical estate, the biographer goes into great detail about how Joly prepared for Holy Orders “by repeated retreats, which he made at different times and in different places; but not until after having questioned the mouth of the Lord, that is, after having taken the advice of those who saw most clearly the ways of God, and in particular of his pious [spiritual] director ... without whose wise advice he was careful never to make any choice as important as that of the estate on which the peace of his soul and the outcome of his eternal salvation depended.”<sup>12</sup> Joly, we are told, was only with difficulty persuaded to take up his benefice rather than becoming a poor rural missionary; once in that position, he used it to establish in Dijon a group of Lazarist missionaries and a “*petit séminaire*” for the instruction of rural priests.

*The parallels between Joly’s biography and Claude-François’ career are striking.*

The parallels between Joly’s biography and Claude-François’ career are striking. Both seem to have been spiritually dissatisfied with the career strategies their families developed for them. Both turned to retreats for guidance, as contemporary tracts always advised: “When you need to consider something as important as choosing an estate or a job, it is useful to retire from the embarrassment of the world and of the occupations that distract us to make a retreat of several days. For, besides the fact that we need calm and repose to

*deliberate a matter as serious as that, the Lord himself tells us that it is especially in solitude that He speaks to the heart, and makes His will known.*"<sup>13</sup>

*In Claude-François' case, the single most revealing documents we possess about his spiritual development are the reflections he wrote while on retreat considering his "état de vie"...*

In Claude-François' case, the single most revealing documents we possess about his spiritual development are the reflections he wrote while on retreat considering his "état de vie"; by far the most intimate and personal document he left behind, it is also very much a reflection of his age and his social context. In particular, it illustrates the rather subtle way in which Claude-François navigated between his moral and spiritual imperatives and his family's strategies of social advancement.

He was clearly convinced that worldly considerations should have no place in the choice of a vocation, but at the same time he seemed confident in his ability to set them aside, asserting "that I have achieved a great indifference towards all estates." This indifference presumably came more easily for him because (as he claimed, and as the subsequent course of his life certainly seemed to bear out), he was "fairly indifferent towards wealth," "greatly loving almsgiving, and naturally sympathetic towards the misery of others."<sup>14</sup> Indeed, contemporary moralists taught that the rich "may ... possess goods and family wealth; but they must do so with detachment so that their tranquility is not troubled by them."<sup>15</sup> And almsgiving and sympathy for the poor were at once a means toward and a fruit of such detachment. "And who better than the rich to buy Heaven and acquire the virtues that lead there, above all charity towards the poor?" asked a perhaps rather over-enthusiastic Italian Jesuit in a tract that went through three French editions in the second half of the seventeenth century.<sup>16</sup> Poullart des Places, though, by no means felt that this exempted him from moral danger, for if relatively indifferent to wealth he was "greatly impassioned for glory and for everything that can raise one man above others by merit."<sup>17</sup>

Such ambition was in fact seen as close kin to avarice, "for though cupidity seems to be divided among honors, pleasures, and riches, which it loves blindly, one can nevertheless truly say that avarice alone includes all of them, since we do not love riches for their own sake but because they are the instruments that bring us worldly honors and sensual pleasures."<sup>18</sup> Practically speaking, the system of venal office made a desire for money and a desire for public prominence inseparable since, unless one was born into a noble and wealthy family, only cash gave access to the positions and prestige that were the prerequisite for glory and recognized merit. There was thus no straightforward way for Claude-François to

evade engagement with wealth when considering his vocation; his ambition would require him to maintain and extend his father's lucrative activities.

*And one thing Claude-François clearly did not want to do was to cast aside his father and his father's affairs.*

And one thing Claude-François clearly did not want to do was to cast aside his father and his father's affairs. One reason he gave for rejecting his impulse to join the Carthusians was that "my father is old and will leave behind him considerable business that few besides myself are capable of putting in order." His only comment on the possibility of following his father's career in the royal finances was that the estate "is not at all to your taste" (addressing himself in the second person), whether that distaste was based on moral qualms, fear of social opprobrium, or merely a dislike of accounting was a question Claude-François did not broach even in the intimacy of his spiritual reflection.<sup>19</sup> This tolerant and cautious attitude certainly did not betoken any lack of religious sensitivity; on the contrary, among upwardly mobile French families of the time, filial piety was inextricably bound up with piety towards God the Father and the Mother Church.<sup>20</sup> This tendency drew not only on the obvious scriptural and theological sources, but on the structure of French society itself. The monarchy, which served as the source of both authority and social advancement, was seen by its supporters (among whom the Poullart des Places were clearly to be numbered) as at once divine and patriarchal, and as a model for society as a whole.<sup>21</sup> The king was also the "eldest son of the Church," an identity that had been intertwined with the monarchy from the conversion of Clovis on, and by the 1690s Louis XIV had embraced the role of its protector against the threats of heresy, libertinism, schism, peace, prosperity, and common sense. And the near-total identification of family with patrimony, notably including venal offices, the wealth that obtained them, and the social standing they brought, meant that, no matter how much moralists might inveigh against avarice, ambition, and the spiritual dangers of careerism, for someone like Claude-François avoiding them was neither practically nor morally straightforward.<sup>22</sup>

Claude-François thus found himself in no position to reject the world and embrace the cloister, fearing, it seems, as Girard de Villethierry warned, that his attraction amounted to "a fault that some individuals fall into by a love of leisure, by the desire to live a solitary life."<sup>23</sup> Nor did he feel that it would be safe to try to live "as an honest man and even as a good man" in the world, along the lines laid down at the beginning of the century by St. François de Sales (1567–1622). This left the secular priesthood, but how was he to trust a vocation chosen almost by default?<sup>24</sup> In

*Claude-François must have begun his theological studies with no clear idea how he would live out his vocation once he had completed the training it required.*

the short term, he probably had no clear answer to that question; though it did not fit the model of contemporary moralists who (as the case of Joly indicates) liked vocations to be chosen early, definitively, and completely, Claude-François must have begun his theological studies with no clear idea how he would live out his vocation once he had completed the training it required. In his struggle to detach himself honestly and without cowardice from the attractions of wealth and careerism, though, he might have had in the back of his mind council like that offered by the same Girard de Villethierry, that one mark of a true ecclesiastical vocation was that it be characterized by “*a poor and laborious benefice, ... and one that has nothing that might flatter our corrupt nature.*”<sup>25</sup> Ultimately, anyway, this was the kind of life he sought out for himself and for his companions.

One of the best reasons to believe that Claude-François remained for a long time unclear about his vocation is that if he had already known that he wanted to devote his life to missionizing the poor and neglected, and to training poor but dedicated young men to do the same, there were much more direct routes he could have taken. He might, for example, have joined the late Jean Eudes’ (1601–1680) Congregation of Jesus and Mary, which was directed towards exactly those goals, was headquartered in Caen (where Claude-François attended the Jesuit college), and which had had a strong presence in Rennes since its founder led a revival of supposedly almost Savonarolan proportions there in 1670. In 1698, just as Claude-François was embarking on his career, the Eudists took over the management of the *petit séminaire* of Rennes.<sup>26</sup> But that was just one of many alternatives. A number of other congregations all across France combined in various ways missions of education and preaching to the dispossessed—Oratorians, Lazarists, Sulpicians, and others—as did individuals and small groups working, as Poullart des Places soon would, at the diocesan level.<sup>27</sup> Though both his own spiritual development and the force of circumstances were important to the way the Congregation of the Holy Spirit came together, it was also clearly an enterprise with deep roots in contemporary sensibilities and priorities.

The seventeenth-century French obsession with education, and especially religious education, requires far more analysis than there is space for here. It was part of a larger European phenomenon—of the late Renaissance, Scientific Revolution, and proto-Enlightenment; of the Tridentine (Counter-) Reformation and the Borromean model of seminaries; of the requirements of an ever more cosmopolitan and commercial civilization. But it

*Given the context, it is easy to see why Poullart des Places would have been drawn to education as a vocation.*

*The relationship between the mission of education and the problem of poverty, while it clearly existed, is harder to pin down.*

certainly seemed especially acute in France, where the competing schools of the Jesuits, the Oratory, and Port-Royal turned education into an ecclesiological battleground, where projects like Cardinal Mazarin's "College of the Four Nations" and Louis XIV's royal academies made it a matter of state, and where, by the second half of the century, both seminaries and convents largely dedicated to educating girls were being planted even in the Canadian wilderness.<sup>28</sup> In France, it seems, the general belief, spawned by the Reformation, that education was a critical tool for saving souls combined with a broad and noisy variety of pastoral and educational opinions, approaches, and institutions to produce an exceptional level of both concern and innovation. Given the context, it is easy to see why Poullart des Places would have been drawn to education as a vocation.

The relationship between the mission of education and the problem of poverty, while it clearly existed, is harder to pin down. Traditionally, education was the preserve of the well-to-do, and centuries of effort, from the time of Robert de Sorbon (1201–1274) on, to extend aid to poor students had made little dent in that reality. What changed in the seventeenth century was not so much a newfound belief in universal education, which would remain very rare well into the Enlightenment, but a growing concern, even panic, about the salvation of the unlettered. The competition between confessions after the Reformation played an important part in this change of perspective, but the discovery of the New World was probably even more significant. It is hard for us today to appreciate the impact of the sudden appearance, to Europeans who had spent a thousand years encountering non-Christians, for the most part, only as marginal figures or as Muslim warriors, of an entire world filled with millions of people who neither rejected nor combated Christianity but simply had never heard of it. To the more philosophically inclined, the New World raised the question of whether or how salvation might be available to those ignorant of Christ; the more practically minded were driven to evangelize the ignorant, leading to the surge of missionary work in the Americas and Asia that continued to mark the French church, in particular, in Poullart des Places' day.<sup>29</sup> It also changed Europeans elites' perspective on their own continent, though, as they came to see similarities between pagan "savages" and the poor, especially in the countryside, who sometimes seemed hardly more Christian.<sup>30</sup> It was by this indirect route that educating the European masses, or at least educating pastors who would serve them (for small salaries and in difficult conditions) came to be a real priority.



Claude-François presumably did not think the matter through in exactly these terms. As a Christian, and above all as a priest, he was concerned with saving souls, and the souls of the poor would have seemed to him least likely to attract attention and thus most in danger—remember that Joly’s biographer had attributed exactly this attitude to him. The care of the poor and powerless was the first victim of the ambition and avarice that, as he would have feared, motivated far too many ecclesiastical careers, since the poor could provide their pastors with no material rewards, no influential connections, and little of the applause that might impress *le monde*. Thus, Poullart des Places would have seen plentiful reasons to participate in the movement to train pastors and missionaries for the poor at home and abroad. And, again like Joly, he would probably have seen men who were already relatively poor (and thus, it is worth noting, very much unlike himself) as best suited to this task, partly because of their shared experience with their prospective flocks, but mainly because they were thought best able to tolerate the low pay and poor living conditions that such work would entail: early modern Europeans had an almost Lamarckian belief in acquired characteristics of fortitude and endurance. While Claude-François probably drifted into his project of running a community of poor but dedicated theology students, it was, in this intellectual and spiritual context, both an urgent and a well-tested type of enterprise.

*Claude-François probably drifted into his project of running a community of poor but dedicated theology students...*

*...one of the things that drew him to the ecclesiastical estate was “the inclination that I have for the poor.”<sup>31</sup>*

But there is still at least one aspect of Poullart des Places’ vocation that invites further consideration. For the poor, above all in the first years of the eighteenth century, were certainly no mere abstractions. They were human beings, and human beings with whom even elites far more sheltered than Claude-François were in continual contact. As a person and as a Christian, how did he react? By his own account, as we have seen, he was “naturally sympathetic towards the misery [or, “poverty”] of others”; one of the things that drew him to the ecclesiastical estate was “the inclination that I have for the poor.”<sup>31</sup> This hints at a level of genuine sympathy and personal connection that was rare in seventeenth-century discussions of poverty and Christian virtue. All but the most severe moralists tended to echo the sentiment of St. François de Sales, that “*to be rich in fact but poor in affection is the great happiness of the Christian, for by this means he has all the advantages of riches for this world, and the merit of poverty for the next.*” When actual poverty was valorized, it tended to be in the more general terms used for the discussion of vocation. Thus, de Sales advised his readers of two spiritual benefits of actual poverty:



*The first is that it does not come to you by your choice but purely by the will of God who has made you poor without any concurrence of your own will. Now, what we receive only from God is always most agreeable to Him, as long as we receive it with a good heart and for the love of His holy will. Where there is less of our own, there is more of God.... The second privilege of this poverty is that it is a poverty that is truly poor. Poverty that is praised, pampered, esteemed, helped, and assisted retains something of wealth, at least, it is not altogether poor; but poverty that is despised, rejected, reproached, and abandoned is truly poor.<sup>32</sup>*

*...poverty was presented to the elites as a solution to the spiritual problems their wealth and ambition posed, not as a social injustice...*

Like any vocation, poverty was to be referred to divine Providence and kept free of the contamination of ambition and the desire for social approval. Even if the poor were not seen purely instrumentally, as convenient recipients of the alms by which the wealthy could advance their salvation, poverty was presented to the elites as a *solution* to the spiritual problems their wealth and ambition posed, not as a social injustice or as the incidental condition of Christians essentially like themselves.

Though Poullart des Places, in cultivating his sympathy for the poor, would have found little guidance in contemporary literature on wealth and poverty, he might have found more such guidance in discussions of charity, which were surprisingly sparse given the practical importance of the subject. When it appears, charity seems always to be linked to the struggle against self-interestedness that we have seen so often. Thus, Jean Eudes offered a prayer for someone “*carrying out an act of charity*” that proffered it in union with Jesus’ divine love, asking him to “*annihilate in me all self-love and self-interest, and establish in me the kingdom of your divine charity.*”<sup>33</sup> In this case, charity as interior struggle seems again to short-circuit any actual relationship with the recipients, but such was not necessarily the case. According to his contemporary biographer Louis Abelly (1604–1691; he was yet another ecclesiastic whose career was in many ways reminiscent of Claude-François’), St. Vincent de Paul (1581–1660) once asked his followers whether, if one took someone entirely dedicated to the contemplative love of God, and “*another who loves his neighbor as well, however rude, uncultivated, and imperfect he may be, for the love of God, and who gives his entire effort to bring him to God—tell me, I ask you, which of these two loves is the more perfect and the less interested?*” This vision of missionary engagement that not just evokes but participates in divine charity, directing the impulses of self-aggrandizement to the benefit of others, must have appealed to Claude-François. At any rate, like

the founder of the Congregation of the Mission, it could be said of the founder of the Spiritans that the “*effect of this love that he had for the poor ... was to help and assist them as much as he could, which he always did, making himself the provisioner-general of the poor..., working with great effort to provide for their needs, and to furnish them with food, clothing, lodging, and the other necessities of life.*”<sup>3,4</sup> In the context of the time, a vocation that combined practical ministry and a kind of apostolic poverty was a logical path for a young man of wealth and standing whose ability and ambition were exceeded only by his piety.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Pierre Thomas (C.S.Sp.), attr., “Mémoire sur la vie de M. Claude-François Poullart des Places,” in Henry Koren (C.S.Sp.), ed., *The Spiritual Writings of Father Claude Francis Poullart des Places* (Louvain: Editions E. Nauwelaerts, 1959), 268: “M. des Places, avant sa conversion, n’aurait pas trouvé la pension qu’on lui donnait suffisante pour ses propres besoins: est-il converti, il en trouve assez pour lui-même et pour soulager les besoins de bien d’autres, tant la charité, quand elle est jointe à la mortification, rend ingénieux à trouver dans son nécessaire même une espèce de superflu pour le donner aux pauvres. Il souhaitait se voir un jour dépouillé de tout après avoir tout donné, et ne vivre que d’aumônes.” This is my translation, not Fr. Koren’s. The standard biography of Poullart des Places is Joseph Michel (C.S.Sp.), *Claude-François Poullart des Places, fondateur de la Congrégation du Saint-Esprit, 1679–1709* (Paris: Editions Saint-Paul, 1962).

<sup>2</sup> Jean Girard de Villethierry, *Traité de la vocation a l’etat ecclesiastique. Nouvelle edition* (Paris: Alexis de la Roche, 1707), unpag. pref., sig. a ii r-v: “On s’engage de son propre mouvement dans les Ordres sacrez, & on les regarde comme des degrez pour monter plus haut, & pour avenir aux emplois que l’on ambitionne. On poursuit les Dignitez de l’Eglise les plus importantes; on se sert de tout son credit, & de celui de ses parens & de ses amis pour les obtenir; on use même quelquefois de pratiques tres-honteuses.” For what little is known about Girard de Villethierry, an enormously popular writer in his day, see idem, *La vie des vierges, ou les devoirs et les obligations des vierges chrétiennes. Edition de 1714*, ed. Constant Venesoen (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2000), preface. From the internal evidence of his works it is clear that his outlook was substantially Jansenist.

<sup>3</sup> On the place of pious works in the culture and publishing industry of the period, see Henri Jean Martin, *Print, Power, and People in Seventeenth-Century France*, trans. David Gerard (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1993); Philippe Martin, *Une religion des livres, 1640–1850* (Paris: Editions du cerf, 2003), esp. 127–54 and 489–521; and most recently Joseph Bergin, *Church, Society, and Religious Change in France 1580–1730* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 227–336. They were both the most widely printed and the most widely read form of literature in France, and by 1700 they had deeply penetrated the world of French Catholicism.

<sup>4</sup> Substantial work has already been done in tracing Claude-François' relation to the spiritual literature of his time: see in particular Joseph Michel, "Du nouveau sur les sources de la spiritualité de Poullart des Places et sur la genèse de son œuvre," which stresses the influence of the "Société de l'Aa," and Jean Orcibal, "Problèmes d'origine," in Christian de Mare (C.S.Sp.), ed., *Aux racines de l'arbre spiritain. Claude-François Poullart des Places (1679–1709): écrits et études* (Paris: Congrégation du Saint-Esprit, 1998), 101-34. I cast my net somewhat more widely than those studies, examining less canonical spiritual works that are indicative of the climate of the time rather than necessarily influential on Poullart des Places himself.

<sup>5</sup> There is a vast literature on the crisis of the turn of the eighteenth century in France, which had political, military, and intellectual as well as social and religious aspects. A few classics that have particularly shaped my outlook are Georges Pagès, *La monarchie d'ancien régime en France (de Henri IV à Louis XIV)*, 4 ed. (Paris: Armand Colin, 1946); Paul Hazard, *The European Mind, 1680–1715*, trans. J. Lewis May (London: Hollis and Carter, 1953); and Lionel Rothkrug, *Opposition to Louis XIV: The Political and Social Origins of the French Enlightenment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965).

<sup>6</sup> This had been the case since early in the sixteenth century, but the wars and economic stagnation of the seventeenth century had made the situation ever more acute. The classic work on venality is Roland Mousnier, *La vénalité des offices sous Henri IV et Louis XIII*, 2 ed. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1971); on the world of finance in the seventeenth century, Daniel Dessert, *Argent, pouvoir et société au grand siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 1984).

<sup>7</sup> "M. son père, qui se voyait un bien considérable, voulait en faire un conseiller au Parlement de Bretagne. Il espérait que ce fils en qui il voyait tant de belles qualités, rendrait à sa famille son premier lustre qu'elle avait perdu par la mésintelligence etc." Thomas, "Mémoire," 242.

<sup>8</sup> *La vie et la doctrine spirituelle du pere L. Lallemand de la Compagnie de Jesus.*, ed. Pierre Champion (S.J.) (Paris: Estienne Michallet, 1694), 10–11: "amoit la pauvreté, que le monde la fuit ordinairement. Depuis qu'il se fut engagé à la suite de J. C. il ne voulut avoir à son usage, que les choses qui luy estoient précisément nécessaires, les plus viles, les plus usées, les moins commodes de la maison."

<sup>9</sup> Louis Thomassin, *Traité du negoce et de l'usure, divisé en deux parties* (Paris: Loüis Roulland, 1697), "Eloge du feu P. Thomassin auteur de ce traité," sig. 3 iii r.: "déclara ce qu'il avoit été obligé de tenir caché jusqu'alors, que le P. Thomassin lui donnoit tout les ans pour les pauvres la moitié de sa pension de mille livres.... A ces charitez secretes se joignoient plusieurs autres vertus qu'il ne cachoit pas avec moins de soin. Quoi-qu'il fût naturellement propre, il aimoit la pauvreté dans ses habits, dans ses meubles, & dans tout ce qui le regardoit, & auroit voulu n'être jamais témoin des distinctions que les dignitez de quelques-uns de ses parens leur donnent dans le monde." The only modern discussion of Thomassin's (very interesting) economic thought, Deirdre N. McCloskey, *The Bourgeois Virtues: Ethics for an Age of Commerce* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 484–85,

merely presents him as a strawman.

<sup>10</sup> See Joseph Bergin, *Crown, Church, and Episcopate under Louis XIV* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 481; Pierre Clair, “La famille du père Louis Thomassin,” *Oratoriana* 11 (1965): 122–39; and idem, *Louis Thomassin (1619–1695): étude bio-bibliographique, avec vingt lettres et deux textes inédits* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1964).

<sup>11</sup> Guillaume-François Joly de Fleury (1675–1756). Another distant relative, Claude Joly, was precentor in the chapter of Nôtre Dame in Paris and a substantial political propagandist in the mid-seventeenth century.

<sup>12</sup> Antoine Beaugendre (O.S.B.), *La vie de messire Benigne Joly, prestre, docteur de la Faculté de Paris, de la maison & société de Navarre, chanoine de l’église abbatiale & collegiale de S. Etienne de Dijon, instituteur des religieuses hospitalieres de la même ville, où l’on le nommoit: le pere des pauvres. Où l’on voit l’idée d’un saint chanoine, & la modele d’un parfait ecclesiastique* (Paris: Louïs Guerin, 1700), 21: “par des retraites réitérées qu’il fit en divers temps, & en divers endroits; mais il ne le fit qu’après avoir interrogé la bouche du Seigneur, c’est à dire qu’après en avoir pris l’avis des personnes les plus éclairées dans les voyes de Dieu, & particulièrement celuy de son pieux Directeur ... sans les sages conseil duquel il n’avoit garde de faire un choix aussi important qu’estoit celuy de l’estat d’où dépendoit la paix de son ame, & l’affaire de son salut éternel.”

<sup>13</sup> François Nepveu (S.J.), *Conduite chrétienne ou reglement des principales actions & des principaux devoirs de la vie chrétienne* (Paris: Louis Guerin and Jean Boudot, 1704), 300–301: “Quand on doit délibérer sur une chose aussi importante que sur le choix d’un état ou d’un employ, il est à propos de se retirer des embarras du monde & des occupations qui nous dissipent, pour faire une retraite de quelques jours; car outre qu’il faut être dans le calme & dans le repos pour faire une délibération aussi serieuse que celle-là, le Seigneur nous avertit lui-même, que c’est particulièrement dans la solitude qu’il parle au cœur, & qu’il fait connoître ses volontez.” This was very much the conventional wisdom at the time, and the Jesuits were particularly insistent on it—not surprisingly, since it came directly from the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius. Compare e.g. the treatise of an anonymous Jesuit, *Conduite chrétienne, dans les actions principales de la vie* (Paris: R. Chevillion, 1688), 178–79.

<sup>14</sup> De Mare, *Aux racines*, 302: “que j’ai acquis une indifférence très grande pour tous les états”; 303: “assez indifférent pour les richesses”; 304: “aimant beaucoup à faire l’aumône, et compatissant naturellement à la misère d’autrui.” There is a full English translation of this document in Koren, *Spiritual Writings*, 87–113; for a brief and approachable discussion, see Christian de Mare, “Claude-François Poullart des Places: The Shaping of a Vocation,” *Spiritum Horizons* 3 (2008): 3–10.

<sup>15</sup> Jean Girard de Villethierry, *La vie des riches et pauvres, ou les obligations de ceux qui possèdent les biens de la terre, ou qui vivent dans la pauvreté, prouvées par l’Ecriture & par les saints Peres* (Paris: Charles Robustel, 1700), 45: “ils peuvent donc posséder des biens & des

heritages; mais il faut que ce soit avec un tel détachement, que leur paix n'en soit point troublée." This ideal of detachment was strongly influenced by the Christian Stoicism that was so popular in the seventeenth century, on which see Gerhard Oestreich, *Neostoicism and the Early Modern State*, trans. David McKlinton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

<sup>16</sup> Daniello Bartoli (S.J.), *La pauvreté contente* (Paris: Edme Couterot, 1689), 256–57: "Et qui peut mieux que les riches acheter le Ciel & acquérir les vertus qui y conduisent, sur tout la charité envers les pauvres?" It must be said that Bartoli's rather extreme moral complacency helps one understand the mordancy of contemporary Jansenists; French Jesuits, though, seem not to have gone nearly as far.

<sup>17</sup> De Mare, ed., *Aux racines*, 303: "tres passionné pour la gloire et pour tout ce qui peut élever un homme au-dessus des autres par le mérite." "Merit" is a key term here: on its use in seventeenth-century French social discourse, see Jay Smith, *The Culture of Merit: Nobility, Royal Service, and the Making of Absolute Monarchy in France, 1600–1789* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996); and Jotham Parsons, "Money and Merit in French Renaissance Comedy," *Renaissance Quarterly* 60 (2007): 852–82.

<sup>18</sup> Louis Thomassin, *Traité de l'aumône, ou du bon usage des biens temporels, tant pour les laïques, que pour les ecclésiastiques* (Paris: Louÿs Roulland, 1695), 136: "Car quoi-que la cupidité semble être partagée entre les honneurs, les plaisirs, & les richesses, qu'elle aime aveuglément: on peut néanmoins dire avec verité, que la seule avarice comprend tout cela, parce qu'on n'aime pas les richesses pour elles-mêmes, mais parce que ce sont les instrumens qui servent à parvenir aux honneurs du siecle & aux plaisirs de la sensualité." Thomassin was here working in an Augustinian tradition, but Aristotle and his followers had also stressed the close links between a disordered desire for money and an excessive desire for public honor.

<sup>19</sup> De Mare, ed., *Aux racines*, 305: "Mon père est vieux qui laissera après lui des affaires considérables que peu de gens que moi seront capables de mettre en ordre.;" 309: "Ce dernier état n'est pas de ton goût."

<sup>20</sup> For some sixteenth-century examples, see Jotham Parsons, "Papauté, histoire, et mémoire gallicane au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle," *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 29 (2009): 315–28; Nancy Lyman Roelker, *One King, One Faith: The Parlement of Paris and the Religious Reformations of the Sixteenth Century*, ed. Barbara Diefendorf (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), despite numerous flaws is the only systematic study of early modern French Catholicism from this perspective.

<sup>21</sup> The classic expression of this outlook under Louis XIV was Jacques Bénigne Bossuet (bishop of Meaux), *Politics Drawn from the Very Words of Holy Scripture*, trans. Patrick Riley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

<sup>22</sup> On venality and patrimony in the French upper classes, see Ralph Giesey, "Rules of Inheritance and Strategies of Mobility in Prerevolutionary France," *American Historical Review* 82 (1977): 271–89.

<sup>23</sup> Girard de Villethierry, *Traité de vocation*, 321: "un défaut dans lequel

quelques particuliers tombent par amour de leur repos, par le desir de mener une vie solitaire.” Compare Claude-François’ objections to his inclinations towards the cloister, de Mare, *Aux racines*, 305: “Pourtant la paresse n’aurait-elle point de part dans cette affaire...? ... Mille autres sujets de vanité ne t’engageraient-ils point à aimer la retraite?”

<sup>24</sup> De Mare, *Aux racines*, 309: “comme un honnête homme et même un homme de bien.” “Honnête homme” and “homme de bien” are almost untranslatable, though they were fundamental categories of the early modern French social understanding. “Honnêteté” was both secular virtue and the social polish appropriate to the elites; an “homme de bien” could mean either a solid citizen or simply a good man.

<sup>25</sup> Girard de Villethierry, *Traité de vocation*, 353: “un Benefice ... pauvre & laborieux, ... & qu’il n’a rien qui puisse flatter la nature corrompue.”

<sup>26</sup> See J. Meyer and B. Pocquet de Haut Jussé, “Histoire religieuse de Rennes du XVIe au XVIIIe siècle,” in Jean Meyer et al., *Histoire de Rennes* (Toulouse: Edouard Privat, 1972), 185–209.

<sup>27</sup> Besides Bénigne Joly, one might point to the example of Claude Thomassin, a cousin of both the Oratorian and the bishop Louis, who founded and ran a seminary in Manosque until, in 1687, his cousin newly installed in the See turned it over to the Lazarists: see Clair, “La famille,” 130–31.

<sup>28</sup> There is an engaging look at the Ursuline experience in early Canada in Natalie Zemon Davis, *Women on the Margins: Three Seventeenth-Century Lives* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 63–139. On the history of the Séminaire de Québec in this period, see Noël Baillargeon, *Le séminaire de Québec de 1685–1760* (Québec: Presses de l’Université Laval, 1977).

<sup>29</sup> On the impact of the Age of Discovery on Europe’s religious perspective, see the important new book of Stuart B. Schwartz, *All Can be Saved: Religious Tolerance and Salvation in the Atlantic Iberian World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 31–42.

<sup>30</sup> On the connection between foreign and domestic missionary impulses in France, see Dominique Deslandres, *Croire et faire croire: les missions françaises au XVIIe siècle (1600–1650)* (Paris: Fayard, 2003). Historians now suspect that early modern Europeans, driven by zeal and ideology, were too quick to see parallels between American natives and rural Europeans, who in fact broadly shared the religious culture and beliefs of their urban and upper-class compatriots. The pioneering study in this field is William A. Christian, Jr., *Local Religion in Sixteenth-Century Spain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).

<sup>31</sup> De Mare, *Aux racines*, 308: “l’inclination que j’ai pour les pauvres.”

<sup>32</sup> *Œuvres complètes de saint François de Sales*, 4 vols. (Paris: Bethune, 1836) 1: 509: “estre riche en effet, et pauvre d’affection, c’est le grand bon-heur du chrétien car il a par ce moyen les commoditez des richesses pour ce monde, et le merite de la pauvreté pour l’autre.”; 511–12: “Le premier est, qu’elle ne vous est point arrivée par vostre choix, mais par la seule volonté de Dieu, qui vous a faite pauvre, sans qu’il y-ait eu aucune concurrence de vostre volonté propre. Or ce que nous recevons purement de la volonté de Dieu, luy est tousjours tres-agreable pourveu que nous le recevions de bon cœur et pour l’amour de sa sainte volonté: où il y a moins du nostre, il y a plus de Dieu....



Le second privilege de ceste pauvreté, c'est qu'elle est une pauvreté vraiment pauvre. Une pauvreté louée caressée, estimée, secouruë et assistée elle tient de la richesse, elle n'est pour le moins pas du tout pauvre mais une pauvreté mesprisée, rejeттée, reprochée et abandonnée, elle est vraiment pauvre." The *Introduction à la vie dévоте*, though nearly a century old when Claude-François died, was reprinted at least seven times in his lifetime.

<sup>33</sup> Jean Eudes, *La vie et le royaume de Jesus, dans les ames chrétiennes, contenant plusieurs exercices de pieté, pour vivre & mourir chrétiennement & saintement, & pour former, sanctifier, faire vivre & regner Jesus dans nos ames*, "Derniere edition, revuë & corrigée" (Lyons: Antoine Besson, n.d.), 334, "Faisant une action de Charité.... Aneantissez en moy tout amour & interêt propre, & y établissez le Royaume de vôtre divine Charité."

<sup>34</sup> Louis Abelly, *Vie de S. Vincent de Paul, instituteur et premier supérieur général de la congrégation de la mission*, 2 vols. (Paris: Librairie de Mme. Ve. Poussielgne-Rusand, 1854) 2: 253: "une autre qui aime Dieu de tout son cœur, et qui aime aussi son prochain, quoique rude, grossier et imparfait, pour l'amour de Dieu, et qui s'emploie de tout son pouvoir pour le porter à Dieu: dites-moi, je vous prie, lequel de ces deux amours est le plus parfait et le moins intéressé?"; 2: 268: "effet de cet amour qu'il avait pour les pauvres ... était de les secourir et assister autant qu'il pouvait: ce qu'il a toujours fait, s'étant rendu comme le proviseur général des pauvres...; s'employant avec de très-grands soins pour subvenir à toute leurs nécessités, et pour leur fournir la nourriture, le vêtement, le logement, et tous les autres besoins de la vie." Abelly, like Poullart des Places, was the son of a financier; his brother began a career in the robe as an *avocat* in the Parlement of Paris while he was a curate in Paris and briefly bishop of Rodez before returning to de Paul's community. See Bergin, *Crown, Church, and Episcopate*, 365–66.



## EVANGELIZATION OF SLAVES: A MORAL MISSTEP?

Paul Kollman, CSC

Paul Kollman, CSC teaches the history of Christianity in the Department of Theology at the University of Notre Dame, focusing on African Christianity, mission history, and world Christianity. He has also taught at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago and the Philosophy Centre in Jinja, Uganda. In 2005 he published *The Evangelization of Slaves and Catholic Origins in Eastern Africa*, and he is currently preparing a book on the Catholic missionary evangelization of eastern Africa.

*This article is the text of a presentation given at Duquesne University during Founder's Week, February 2009.*

### INTRODUCTION

Good afternoon. I'd like to first of all say how grateful I am to be here during Founders' Week at Duquesne, hosted by the Center for Spiritan Studies. I feel very much in debt to the Spiritans for generous hospitality shown me on three continents—in North America, Europe, and Africa. I've received kind welcomes at parishes, universities, retirement communities, archival centers, and administrative headquarters connected to the Congregation in 5 countries (the US, France, Kenya, Tanzania, and Italy). Without the cooperation of many members, as well as others who work with them, I would have never been able to do my work. In addition, US Spiritans generously sponsored the publication of my book with a generous subvention. So, thank you—and if today's talk disappoints, blame them!

I'm also glad to be here because I admire François-Jacob Libermann, the second founder of the Spiritans, honored during this Founders' Week along with the first founder, Claude Poullart des Places. Libermann's reinvigorating spirit prompted the growth of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit into eastern Africa, where my own research took me, and also here in the US, leading to Duquesne and other laudable undertakings.

Libermann, you likely know, first founded another missionary/apostolic society that later joined the existing Holy Spirit Congregation. Yet you might not know that *before* that he considered attaching his group to my religious congregation, the Congregation of Holy Cross, founded a few years earlier. Be assured that my own good fortune due to Spiritan generosity overcomes any hurt feelings at our having been spurned by the Venerable Libermann 160 years ago!

Today I would like to consider certain moral and ethical questions connected to missionary practice. The case I am going to discuss—the evangelization of slaves carried out by Holy Spirit missionaries in eastern Africa in the latter 19<sup>th</sup> century—is unusual. Yet I believe it raises general questions for any missionary undertaking—indeed all sorts of humanitarian or helping intervention. Thus while considering the ethics of this Spiritan work, I will also use it to address ethical questions associated with missionary activity more generally.

An anecdote to begin. In 1882, two male African Catholic Christians at a Holy Ghost mission in today's Tanzania fled their mission on the mainland, seeking sanctuary and assistance at the French consulate in Zanzibar (Kollman 2005, 2-3, 253-256). Zanzibar, located some fifty miles off the coast of mainland Tanzania, is an island and has long been a regional and global trading center. Through most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Zanzibar was for all practical purposes the capital city of eastern Africa, a bustling cosmopolitan place with Arabs, Indians, Africans and Europeans interacting in a busy port. Ships left Zanzibar carrying ivory, spices, and slaves from mainland eastern Africa, embarking into the Indian Ocean and beyond. European countries and the US had consulates there, and the Spiritans had started their east African work in Zanzibar, and from there moved to the mainland. Now twenty years after the start, two Africans evangelized by the Spiritans had fled to the French consul for help.

One of the two had been with the Spiritans for nearly all the 20 years they had been in eastern Africa. His name was Léon, and he'd arrived as a child at the mission. By 1882 he was married and living at a Spiritan mission. We lack direct evidence of the thoughts of both escapees, and of the consul's reaction to their plea. We do have, however, Spiritan reactions to this event—and these are most telling. The Spiritans sweated as they awaited the outcome of the two Africans' appeal to the French consul. Much was at stake. The Spiritans, mostly French, had long relied on French government support for the mission—financially, but also politically. Now French sponsorship seemed at risk.

*The Spiritans sweated as they awaited the outcome*

...

*...Spiritans missionary activity, which had focused on the evangelization of slaves.*

And the complaint of these African Catholics—the actual content of their appeal—also gave cause for alarm. The reason? According to Spiritan accounts, these two African Catholics pleaded that the French consul provide them “*liberté*,” freedom, against the unjust demands of the mission. The plea for *liberté* had special resonance in light of Spiritan missionary activity, which had focused on the evangelization of slaves. Holy Ghost missionaries had pursued the making of Catholics from onetime slaves with great sacrifice of time and talent, not to mention money, for two decades, and had developed a much admired program for such formation. Despite their work with slaves, *liberté* was not a word that French Catholics like the Spiritans used in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in self-description of their goals, for it carried with it connotations of the French Revolution and resultant anti-Church sentiment. Now, with its use in the appeal to the consul—and a rash of other escapes and frustrating episodes

in the 1880s—the Spiritan mission in eastern Africa, centered on the evangelization of slaves for two decades, seemed in peril.

This episode condenses a number of questions about the Spiritan evangelization of slaves in 19<sup>th</sup>-century eastern Africa. To address them, today I will first outline the evangelization carried out by Spiritans between 1863 and 1890 in what is today eastern Tanzania. Second, I will review evaluations of the Spiritan work with slaves over the years. There have been many, often critical, and they began early. Finally, I will conclude with my own ethical reflection on this Spiritan work, acknowledging previous critiques while challenging common presuppositions.

*This will be a cautionary tale...*

This will be a cautionary tale, but cautionary in a double sense. First, we ought to be cautious of helping other people on terms we set ourselves—a conclusion very much at home in the contemporary secular world, which can be suspicious of supposed paternalistic undertakings like mission, and doubly suspicious of something as overtly paternalistic as mission directed at slaves. A second caution, however, should fall upon those inclined to condemn mission—or similar actions—in the past. Those with such inclinations ought to be cautious of how their present-day perspectives shape their view of the past. The challenge facing ethical judgments of past actors is first of all to gain a deep understanding of the worlds in which those we tend to judge acted, and not to let our quite proper moral opinions override that attempted understanding. Historians sometimes call this tendency to judge the past with the present-day perspectives “presentism,” but I prefer the phrasing of English historian E. P. Thompson, who decried the distortions arising from “*the enormous condescension of posterity*” (Kollman 2005, xxii, citing Thompson 1968, 13).

## II.

*Spiritans were a natural choice to take over a new mission in Zanzibar in 1863...*

The Spiritan mission in eastern Africa began as part of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Catholic missionary revival. With their history of serving in French islands in the Indian Ocean, the Spiritans were a natural choice to take over a new mission in Zanzibar in 1863, three years after it began. This mission initially covered a huge area—from Ethiopia to Mozambique, and inland across Africa. The 1850s influx of the Libermann-inspired priests and brothers—those guys who almost joined my Congregation of Holy Cross, but didn’t!—led to new Spiritan energy, and Zanzibar became a celebrated site of their work. They continued the emphasis on slaves begun three years before them under the direction of clergy from Réunion in the Indian Ocean.

*...the British, who increasingly sought to stop the maritime slave trade from east Africa...*

*...Spiritans sights were set on the mainland and inland Africa.*

Slaves came to the mission through several means. A few were abandoned by their masters, or escaped and found their way to the mission. Second, the Spiritans used monies from European Catholic donors to purchase slaves at the slave market in Zanzibar, which remained open until 1873. Third, the Spiritans received slaves freed at sea by the British, who increasingly sought to stop the maritime slave trade from east Africa the same way they had earlier done in west Africa—and had made treaties with the Sultan of Zanzibar allowing interdiction. Such freed slaves presented the British navy with a dilemma, and the Catholic mission looked a worthy outlet for those freed, for whom a return to their homes seemed an unaffordable and impractical extravagance.

Spiritans attention to slaves was certainly motivated by compassion. It was also central to their missionary strategy, which they thought of in two stages. As they considered the future, stage two, Spiritans sights were set on the mainland and inland Africa. There the population was perceived to be less shaped by Islam and more open to Christianity. The Spiritans dreamed of a day when their mission would flourish on the mainland, away from the coast where mosques and Islamic population centers impeded evangelization. In the short term, however, the Spiritans continued the evangelization of slaves that had preceded them—stage one—and even intensified the formative program. They foresaw these slaves becoming the foundation for the anticipated thriving church of the future. From the beginning, fully formed communities were their goal, and thus they sought to form differing groups—seminarians who would eventually become priests or men and women religious; skilled workers through training in trades; agricultural workers; and eventually married couples—to compose such fully formed communities. With formation their goal, they focused on children, for adults seemed to the missionaries to have been formed already—as pagans, or, less commonly, Muslims—and thus difficult to transform, while children seemed more pliable. A quote from the founder of the Spiritan mission in eastern Africa, Antoine Horner, captures the sentiment well: *"We must before everything work to create an enduring and solid foundation; trying to form children already advanced in age would be like wanting to bend large trees."* (Kollman 2005, 94)

For five years this program proceeded in fits and starts at Zanzibar. Then in 1868 the bulk of the operation moved to the mainland port of Bagamoyo where the Spiritans established a larger mission with more extensive plantations that would allow them to support themselves by raising crops. They also were

*...Bagamoyo grew into one of the most admired missions in eastern Africa...*

able to remove their once-slave, now in-the-mission charges from the Islamic enclave at Zanzibar. Over time Bagamoyo grew into one of the most admired missions in eastern Africa, with a widespread reputation for order and missionary success. From there the Spiritans and African Catholics, mostly onetime slaves, founded other missions away from the coast: first in 1877, then 1880, 1883, and every few years after.

These inland foundations followed a typical pattern. Usually a few Spiritans went off with a dozen or so young men from Zanzibar or Bagamoyo to build huts on land granted by local authorities in places deemed desirable due to local ecology and politics. After completing preliminary dwellings, those men then returned to Bagamoyo to marry one of the young women at Bagamoyo. As Catholic couples they then returned to be “kernel” of the new church, inhabiting the huts, building new structures, and—the missionaries hoped—serving as a beacon of hope, faith, and civilization for the surrounding peoples.

Eventually this plan stood at the origins of the Catholic Church in both Tanzania and Kenya, with formidable growth in the region around Kilimanjaro, discussed in Matt Bender’s talk last year during Founders’ Week. Closer to Bagamoyo, such missions formed the earliest parishes in the current diocese of Morogoro in Tanzania. All in all, I believe around 4000 slaves came into Spiritan missions between 1863 and the early 1890s (Kollman 2005, 45).

*At first, Spiritan efforts received widespread praise...*

### III.

At first, Spiritan efforts received widespread praise from outsiders. The Sultan of Zanzibar, European explorers, European officials centered in Zanzibar, and other missionaries lauded their efforts. A common feature of such praise included an implicit contrast with other missionary activity in eastern Africa. Thus Henry Morton Stanley contrasted Catholic Spiritan work what he characterized as “*attempts to make gentlemen*” or to work for “*conversion*,” for like many European witnesses he felt that the so-called practical approach of the Spiritans was more effective than Protestant evangelization. Stanley belittled efforts like those of many Protestants as follows:

*Instead of attempting to develop the qualities of this practical human being, [the missionary, in this case Anglican] instantly attempts his transformation by expounding to him the dogmas of the Christian Faith, the doctrine of transubstantiation and other difficult subjects, before the*

*barbarian has had time to articulate his necessities and to explain to him that he is a frail creature requiring to be fed with bread, and not with a stone.* (Kollman 2005, 142, citing Stanley 1878, 80)

An official British visitor to the region appointed by Parliament in 1873 to investigate the slave trade, Sir Bartle Frere, belittled Protestant efforts in similar terms. In contrast, Frere wrote of Bagamoyo:

*I can suggest no change in the general arrangements of the institution, with any view to increase its efficiency as an industrial and civilizing agency, and in that point of view I would recommend it as a model to be followed in any attempt to civilize or evangelize Africa.* (Kollman 2005, 142, citing Frere 1873, 122)

*...not long before such admiration, while not ceasing, was mixed with harsher questions.*

But it was not long before such admiration, while not ceasing, was mixed with harsher questions. What in the 1860s and 70s looked like realistic work to civilize—a sensible contrast to Protestant attempts to make *gentlemen*—by the 1880s seemed to some too close to re-enslavement. Early in the 1880s the British consul ordered a stop to the practice of handing over freed slaves to the Catholic mission by the British navy, accusing the Spiritans of not paying their workers on their missions and thus continuing slave or slave-like status. Likely the extensive plantations at Bagamoyo, not to mention problems the missionaries were having with their Christians like the escape and appeal of Léon and his companion, encouraged suspicions that residents did not enjoy the freedom ostensibly sought by the British government for onetime slaves. Later accusations against the Spiritans asserted that their practice of purchasing slaves through various means (which continued after the 1873 closing of Zanzibar’s slave market) in fact encouraged the slave trade by maintaining a market. (Kollman 2005, 210-12)

*...and differences of opinion among the Spiritans about missionary strategy...*

Spiritans writings display awareness of the potential for such accusations. Arguments over missionary strategy revealed internal disagreements that suggested sensitivity to the opprobrium under which their work with former slaves could fall. Revealing comments arose early, for example when Horner complained to his superiors in Paris that if subsidies were cut then the mission risked treating its Christians “like ordinary slaves.” Others expressed misgivings at the hard work that the mission mandated from its Africans, and differences of opinion among the Spiritans about missionary strategy traded accusations that one strategy or another amounted to re-enslavement.



Attempted reforms by the Spiritans, discussed in local meetings and in formal chapters in 1870 and 1884, also show awareness of the possibility that their work might be seen as ongoing enslavement. They mandated minimum ages at which children could leave school and proceed to work exclusively in the plantations of the mission, for example, suggesting that otherwise such labor would be merely exploited (Kollman 2005, 150-51, 220-23).

Other evidence is also telling. In 1892, a letter describing the mission's work to the Paris motherhouse was revised in Paris in a revealing way. The reporting Spiritan missionary spoke of slave *rachats* or "ransoms," but the Paris-based scribe (likely a Spiritan whose job was filtering and prioritizing correspondence from overseas missions received by the mother house) crossed out the "r" to make it *achats*, "purchases." (Kollman 2005, 34, n. 73)

Influentially, Vincent Donovan's account of his mission among the Maasai mostly in the 1960s, *Christianity Rediscovered*, begins with an account of Spiritan slave evangelization at Bagamoyo in the nineteenth century, repeating suspicions about its dubiousness first made in the nineteenth century. For Donovan—as for most observers—evangelizing slaves was not a good idea, for all sorts of reasons. It was unfair to foist the faith on those unable to voluntarily accept it, and whatever converts ensued thus made bad and unreliable Christians. Moreover, very few Christians actually resulted from those decades of effort. (Donovan 2003, 4ff)

*...very few Christians actually resulted from those decades of effort.*

#### IV.

Without denying the accuracy of some of the accusations leveled against this early Spiritan work—though I would be quick to add that growth in the church in Africa in the last three decades has made Donovan's assessment of the evangelization of slaves as "sheer folly" seem premature, to say the least—I want to reassess the evangelization of slaves. In particular, I want to underscore the need for better historical awareness prior to easy condemnation. Historical understanding must locate and appreciate the worldviews of those it wants to understand prior to moral judgment, otherwise it risks not being properly historical. Such appreciation for nineteenth-century missionaries is not easy from our twenty-first century vantage. To reconsider Spiritan slave evangelization through an historical appreciation more sensitive to past actors' horizons, three areas seem especially relevant. First, what practices did the Spiritans pursue, and why? Second, how did they represent their evangelization and those evangelized, and why? In evaluating the Spiritan efforts, one must attend to both the

*...appreciation for nineteenth-century missionaries is not easy from our twenty-first century vantage.*



ethics of their practices with slaves and the ethics of representation of those efforts. Third I believe that proper moral evaluation of slave evangelization depends on appreciating the responses of those evangelized.

### **Spiritans Practices**

In reading analyses of missionary activity, I am often struck by the lack of attention to what missionaries actually do or did. Even less time is spent discerning why they chose to do what they did. Lack of interest in such questions often, I believe, goes along with easy condemnation of what missionaries are presumed to have done, even when this is left unspecified. In this case, several questions need to be examined in particular in order to appreciate what the Spiritans did and why.

*...why did the Spiritans focus on slaves in their mission in eastern Africa?*

First, why did the Spiritans focus on slaves in their mission in eastern Africa? Why did they not evangelize free people? The answer derives in part from their perceptions of the Islamic regime in Zanzibar, which traced its origins to the Persian Gulf state of Oman in the earlier 19<sup>th</sup> century and assumed political control, not only in Zanzibar but also—incompletely, but at times effectively—over much of eastern Africa, especially the Indian Ocean coastal areas. After refusing several times in the 1850s, the Sultan of Zanzibar (who sometimes was also the Sultan of the Oman, though other times the roles were separate) had given Catholics permission to establish the mission in 1860, and the implicit understanding was that the missionaries would not carry out public preaching or other overt evangelization with the local Muslim non-slave populace. Upon assuming the mission, the Spiritans feared, not unreasonably, that public preaching would undo the Sultan's permission. Moreover they doubted that many converts would come from among Muslims—long missionary experience had suggested the difficulty. This presence of a recognized Muslim overlord distinguished the earliest Catholic mission work in eastern Africa from similar efforts in southern and western Africa.

*...why did the Spiritans target children for evangelization?*

Second, why did the Spiritans target children for evangelization? Children, especially slave children, seemed the right sorts of people for the formative program they wanted, allowing them to form children in the Catholic faith. Slavery was thus, though regrettable, an opportunity. Having come from a world in which they themselves were subjected to intense practices of social formation in schools and seminaries, the Spiritans trusted their capacity to form the young through such practices, especially if they could establish an enclosed environment, shaped by a timetable, education, regular worship, and the encouragement of

proper work habits. Far from considering their evangelizing task as presenting the truth of the Gospel to people who could in freedom (understood in a modern sense) choose to accept it or reject it, the Holy Ghost missionaries wanted to form young people into the faith. They only rarely called the children at the mission “free,” instead preferring a paternalistic idiom like “our children” even if those discussed were adults. And often they *were* children, for, as noted already, the Spiritans preferred to receive children rather than adults.

*...why did the Spiritans  
not pursue slavery's end...*

Third, why did the Spiritans not pursue slavery's end like so many other missionaries in the later 19<sup>th</sup> century? Their desire not to upset the Sultan of Zanzibar, whose revenues and authority depended on slavery, was one reason. In addition, Spiritan wariness about abolitionism reflected their social identity. In the first place, they were mostly French, and abolition was linked to Great Britain and Protestantism in a time of Anglo-French rivalry. Abolition even was suspected by Spiritans and others as a pretext for British political ambitions—a harsh but in retrospect not unrealistic suspicion even if overt political goals were absent among most British anti-slavery activists. Second, abolition was linked to the French Revolution, an event seen as profoundly anti-Catholic by Spiritans and many other Catholics. Thus the Spiritans emphasized the gradual abolition that would come with Christian and European civilization, but did not push for abolition with much energy, thus not following Libermann's example. In addition, the Spiritans had views about salvation in which proper membership in the Catholic Church was, if not mandatory for salvation, nearly so. In such a case, enslavement as a social condition was not nearly as important for eternal life as belonging to the church, and could even be seen as a providential opportunity allowing the enslaved to be saved.

*...the growing dependence  
on the labor of their  
African Christians...*

If these considerations explain why the Spiritans did what they did, such choices had consequences that in retrospect look morally dubious, for example the Spiritan willingness to confine those who wanted to leave their missions. The background to this lies in the first place in their religious convictions about the need to be in the church for salvation. Also, however, such confinement derived from the growing dependence on the labor of their African Christians experienced by the Spiritans in eastern Africa, due to the near-constant financial constraints faced by the mission. Physical work on plantations began as an important element in the process of formation that the Spiritans sought to establish for those they were evangelizing, but over time their mission became dependent on such labor for the agricultural surpluses that they sold to support the mission's work.

Did the Spiritans keep slaves? Certainly the mission's growth, coupled with their efforts to evangelize former slaves through processes involving an enclosed, disciplined, and spiritualized social environment, eventually led them to be accused of ongoing enslavement of those at the mission. This the missionaries would have denied, and I believe such denials were sincere. Their words suggest that they were wary of their mission practices turning into re-enslavement. But clearly they did not accept the presuppositions about freedom and personhood that underlay abolitionist rhetoric, and over time their religious convictions and economic strictures encouraged restrictive measures.

### **Spiritans Representations.**

Another set of moral questions can be asked about Spiritan practices of representation of their work and those they evangelized. Here again it is worth acknowledging the historical circumstances that shaped their writings—in particular, the wide variety of audiences for whom they described what they were doing (the Vatican, their own religious superiors, national and regional political authorities of various sorts, local bishops, funding agencies, friends and family), and the differing purposes of such representations (to raise money, defend their actions, fulfill religious obedience). In this area, too, Spiritan actions face moral questions.

In the first place, despite their reluctance to embrace abolition, it is clear that the Spiritans depicted the cruelties of slavery to attract funding for their mission. In so doing, they took part in a complex and longstanding European tradition of representing Africa as prone to and in need of outside intervention. A crucial part of that process in the 19<sup>th</sup> century meant presenting Africa as a *slave-ridden continent*, an image that was a *major component of the knowledge of Africa available to the reading publics of Europe* (Cooper 2000, 115). Spiritan accounts of their work in eastern Africa epitomized such a history of representation. Their descriptions of their missionary work commonly featured the misery at the customs house of Zanzibar or the slave market, both contrasted with the bustling harmony of the mission's schools, workshops, and plantations. Such descriptions—even if not, strictly speaking, false—are not unproblematic, for they cannot be extricated from what looks in retrospect as the inexorable European attempt to draw Africa into a moral context where the case for systematic intervention "religious and political" could be made.

*...it is worth  
acknowledging the  
historical circumstances  
that shaped their  
writings...*

*...European tradition of  
representing Africa as  
prone to and in need of  
outside intervention.*

*...Spiritans had to make their mission worthy of financial assistance from Europeans...*

*...over time Spiritans paid little attention to the cultural features of those evangelized.*

Second, the Spiritans generated a complicated and contradictory discourse about Africans in which descriptions could be harsh or flattering, shaped by the needs for the writing in question. Part of the reason for the contradictions lay in the conditions that produced such writing, which were often shaped by the need to legitimate their missionary work. Thus when describing the Africans they were evangelizing, Spiritans had to make their mission worthy of financial assistance from Europeans, and that goal could generate negative descriptions of African neediness or more positive portrayals emphasizing the likelihood that any contributions would be well-used. The rhetorical mode of the discourse, if such a thing could be named, is often *conditional*: if the help requested comes, *then* our Africans—whose potential we believe to be extraordinary—will flourish. On the other hand, if hoped for assistance is not forthcoming, then they will suffer—often because they have predilections to suffer without the intervention of outsiders. Again, this was not a coherent representation of Africans, but one that oscillated due to perceptions of the need for legitimation.

A third feature related to Spiritan representations of Africans that arose in connection to slave evangelization is that over time Spiritans paid little attention to the cultural features of those evangelized. Since the Africans at their first missions came from a variety of places in eastern and central Africa, “adapting” or “inculturating” the message made little sense as a programmatic gesture. In the long term, however, the learned inattention to culture fostered by slave evangelization shaped the ways that Spiritans represented the Africans whose evangelization they depicted. Growing nineteenth-century racism, increasingly supplemented by what we now see as pseudo-science, though sometimes resisted by Spiritans, only encouraged such default inattention to African cultural particularities.

### **African Responses to Evangelization.**

A final consideration in examining moral aspects of the Spiritan evangelization of slaves lies in African Catholic/ex-slave behavior itself, which can be interpreted in different ways and which bears upon the moral evaluation of the practices that targeted such people for evangelization and the ways such work was represented. The escape and appeal of Léon and his companion in 1882 and 1883 were only part of larger set of difficulties the Spiritans faced with those who underwent their missionary evangelization. Such difficulties led Spiritans to denigrate their African Christians in unprecedentedly harsh ways. Yet I am wary

of accepting Spiritan frustrations and accusations of ingratitude that they leveled at these Africans as the last word, or even the most important evaluation. In fact, many of the actions by their Christians that disappointed or angered the Spiritans in fact reveal missionary success at some level rather than missionary failure, even if it was a success the missionaries themselves were inclined to misrecognize.

Escapes like Léon's should not be seen as a pursuit of "freedom" in some modern sense. It is better to situate such actions in the settings in which they occurred. The most encompassing and relevant situating context was the complex world of eastern Africa—broadly, if incompletely, Islamized and soon to be colonized by Europeans. Those evangelized by the Spiritans thus lived within changing circumstances, and their actions bear comparing with others facing the same social transformations, especially those who faced overt enslavement. Recent research shows that such people pursued their interests through various means. Jonathan Glassman argues that slaves at the Swahili coast, even at their most rebellious, did not strive after something like Western freedom:

*Theirs were not struggles to escape slavery and become "free"; in societies such as those of pre-conquest East Africa, where most people relied on ties of personal dependency to provide social security and social identity, it would be difficult to find an equivalent of the modern Western concept of "freedom."*  
(Glassman 1995, 94)

*In such a world, the ideal self, especially for Africans who were not native to the coast, was not the free autonomous individual, but rather one with a considerate patron...*

Most of those evangelized by the Spiritans were either already at least partly socialized into the Swahili world as slaves, or they grew up in the mission as dependents on the missionaries. Though not "ordinary slaves," their self-perceptions were shaped partly by this larger environment and its attendant social expectations. In such a world, the ideal self, especially for Africans who were not native to the coast, was not the free autonomous individual, but rather one with a considerate patron who abided by the coastal codes of proper behavior in relations with his clients. And since these earliest east African Catholics had also undergone extensive evangelization in the mission, it was natural for them to consider the Spiritans as their patrons, as well as religious leaders of a pastoral sort. In addition, Catholic families at the missions grew increasingly peasantized, partly through the actions of the missionaries who gave land to married couples but also demanded work from them on the mission's own lands.

*...such actions give evidence of real changes of consciousness due to evangelization.*

*...these people were loyal to the mission at a profound level...*

Such contextualizing factors mean that in escaping and appealing, people like Léon, therefore, were seeking to pursue their interests in the larger world of eastern Africa, and in relation to the mission. Instead of indicating only ingratitude, as the Spiritans often said, such actions give evidence of real changes of consciousness due to evangelization. Among many possible ways to show this, allow me to mention two. First, as revealing as the content of their appeals is the nature of the authorities to whom escapees made their appeals. These Christians did not appeal to the Sultan of Zanzibar, as they might have, given that he was the obvious political authority in the region until the late 1880s. After all, the Sultan was the authority to whom slaves in revolt, both in 1873 and later in 1888-89, appealed (Glassman 1995, 111-113, 267), and even during the Maji Maji rebellion beginning in 1905 those who protested German colonialism appealed to the Sultan (Iliffe 1979). Christians like Léon instead appealed to authorities much more in line with social hierarchies that the missionaries themselves lived within. After being rebuffed at the level most immediate to their experiences (their local superior at the mission in question) and by the Spiritan superior at Bagamoyo or Zanzibar, they appealed to the perceived higher authority, the French consul. Second, those fleeing often did so not in order to sever relations with the mission in some decisive way. Instead, they often returned after having received promised concessions, or sometimes without such concessions. Over time it becomes clear that their flights and protests were part of efforts to enhance their position within the faith as they had come to know it—in relation to the mission—rather than to flee it.

In acting this way, I would argue, these people were loyal to the mission at a profound level, but were pursuing the interests generated by their social experiences at the mission, especially their evolution into peasant-like local producers with patronal ties. Such clients have long known the strategy of appealing above the head of their local patron to his superior, until they receive the justice they seek. Their actions also suggest some understanding of the missionaries' own predicaments. Might not Léon and his companion have known the vulnerability of the missionary regime to accusations couched in the idiom of other European ideas? Of course, this is difficult to prove. But an appeal to liberty from a mission Christian, to the consul of the nation with the closest links to that mission and with a complex history of church relations over the concept of liberty, might indicate insight into the contradictions and discrepancies between different European authorities. Regardless, even the Spiritans at the time recognized that those whose escapes and

protests most frustrated them were those who had been under missionary direction the longest. Spiritan responses too often were frustration and accusations of ingratitude—occasionally even violent restraint and punishment—but I believe this showed a fundamental misrecognition of the effects of their evangelization, not the overt failure of that evangelization.

In the event, Léon and his fellow escapee were ordered back to the mission by the French consul. Much to the relief of the Spiritans, the consul accepted that they “belonged” at the mission in some sense, and that the freedom they sought—whatever it meant—was not the consul’s responsibility to confer over Spiritan wishes. Léon died a few years later, once again part of the mission, and is buried in its cemetery.

## V.

I have tried here to situate Spiritans actions, both in their practices of evangelization and in the ways they depicted their work and those they evangelized. I would contend that they acted with a great deal of creativity and zeal given the circumstances in which they were acting and the worldview they brought with them. With the benefit of hindsight, we can see that some of their choices were regrettable. In addition, their own social conditioning poorly predisposed them to appreciate the fruits of their work, for they did not easily recognize as “good Catholics” the first African Catholics in eastern Africa, the products of their missionary zeal. In looking at today’s east African Catholic Church, burgeoning with vitality, I am grateful for the Spiritan work then, which I’ve so much enjoyed learning about, and for Spiritans of more recent vintage, whose generosity has helped me uncover the too-often overlooked successes of those earliest efforts.

*...their own social conditioning poorly predisposed them to appreciate the fruits of their work...*

### References

- Cooper, Frederick. 2000. “Conditions Analogous to Slavery: Imperialism and Free Labor Ideology in Africa.” In *Beyond Slavery: Explorations of Race, Labor, and Citizenship in Post-Emancipation Societies*, eds. Frederick Cooper, Thomas Holt, and Rebecca Scott (Chapel Hill & London: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 107-49.
- Donovan, Vincent. 2003 (1<sup>st</sup> edition, 1978). *Christianity Rediscovered*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.
- Frere, Bartle. 1873. Correspondence concerning the mission of Sir Bartle Frere, Holy Ghost Archives, Paris: CSSp Box 196bi, #3 (old system of referencing).



Glassman, Jonathan. 1995. *Feasts and Riot: Revelry, Rebellion, and Popular Consciousness on the Swahili Coast, 1856-1888*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Illiffe, John. 1979. *A Modern History of Tanganyika*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kollman, Paul V. 2005. *The Evangelization of Slaves and Catholic Origins in Eastern Africa*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

Stanley, Henry Morton. 1878. *Through the Dark Continent*. Volume 1. New York: Harper & Bros.

Thompson, E. P. 1968. *The Making of the English Working Class*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Harmondsworth, UK: Pelican.

## SPIRITAN MISSION TO SOUTH-EAST ASIA – TEN YEARS ON

Brian McLaughlin,  
C.S.Sp.

Brian McLaughlin enjoyed the challenge of missionary work in Brazil. Later, having done research on behalf of the General Council into a new initiative in South-East Asia, he was part of the first Group to go there in 1997. Since his ordination in 1967 he has been involved in leadership roles within the Congregation in Ireland, Brazil and Philippines for a total of more than 20 years. Recently he has worked part-time in counselling and also in the area of spiritual direction.

*Asia contains over 60% of  
the world's population...*

### **Why did we go to South-East Asia?**

“Listening” was one of the key words at the General Chapter of the Congregation in Itaici, Brazil in 1992. The methodology was about listening to what Spiritans were actually doing in different parts of the world, and trying to discern what “mission” might be for us TODAY, and where, and how, the Spirit might be calling us to minister. Regarding the decision to expand in Asia, two presentations at the Chapter were particularly influential. Firstly, the delegates were opened up to a new and unfamiliar culture through the presentation from Pakistan, which was, up to then, the only presence of the Congregation in Asia. Secondly, there was that of the Pont-Praslin Centre in Mauritius, where Christians, Muslims and Hindus come together. Also, another delegate gave a brief input on his sabbatical in India.

Asia contains over 60% of the world's population, with 21% in China alone. A high percentage lives below the poverty line. The great world religions and philosophies, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Taoism, Judaism, Christianity, Confucianism and Shintoism, all began there. Yet, as the Chapter stated, “the message of the Gospel has scarcely found a home there,” as Christians comprise only 2.8% of the population. Beside the richness of religious traditions, the countries of Asia have the most varied cultural traditions. Further, these countries continue to assume ever-greater influence in terms of world trade. As the Chapter put it, “these facts cannot be simply overlooked by an international, missionary Congregation.” The delegates concluded that “listening” more to the cultures and religions of the East would certainly enrich us.

In fact, during the Chapter the idea had been percolating that, after our long history in Africa, and our growing African membership, the Congregation should now be looking towards missions outside Africa. So, a decision was taken that “another initiative in Asia” be considered and explored. These ideas were given extended life after the Chapter by the widely circulated article, dated May 1994, of that great Spiritan, Henry Koren, entitled “Are we putting too many eggs in one basket? – a plea for further internationalisation.” The “basket” was Africa, and his alternative for expansion was the Far East.

***The Decision.***

On the invitation of the General Council, from late 1995 on, I gathered information about a possible mission in South-East Asia through contacts with Congregations, entities and individuals in U.S., France, Ireland and Rome. Following this, the General Council decided on initial research in Thailand, Vietnam, Taiwan, Japan, Philippines, and Hong Kong, with brief visits to China and Macao. Initial criteria, to be checked out during the visits, were established. Among these were:

- The possibility of contact and encounter with Asian cultures and the great world religions.
- Work with the poor and underprivileged.
- Places which offer the possibility of our African confreres being part of the new initiative, given that in fifteen years time we will be very much dependent on them for personnel.”

Then followed visits to these countries over a period of eighteen weeks.

Based on the report on these visits, and after much discussion, the General Council redefined the criteria for the selection of the places where we should start. In view of later developments relevant among these were:

- We give preference to first evangelisation or some specific/specialised service to the local church or society, or a parish situation, at least initially, as long as it permits the possibility of other outreaches.
- The possibility of awakening missionary vocations. While we are not going to Asia specifically to find vocations, this objective is not to be excluded in the context of our presence and development there.

Eventually the Council opted for Vietnam, Philippines and Taiwan. It was decided that a return visit to these be made by Fr. Schouver, the then Superior General, and myself. This took place in August 1996. In underlining our position with the various Bishops we stressed: “We come as missionaries with a vision of evangelisation and of helping the local church itself to be more missionary. Our option is to be with the poor and those on the margin, to meet people in society beyond the borders of the established Church, to share our faith with people of other religions and cultures. Initially, this could be from a parish base, as we are new in the country and new to its culture... However, we are not coming to ‘plug gaps’. We want, again after a period of adaptation, to be available to the local church for more specialised ministries e.g. youth, justice, formation at all

*... We come as missionaries with a vision of evangelisation and of helping the local church itself to be more missionary.*

*Community is an essential  
part of our lifestyle.*

levels, minorities, interreligious dialogue etc. Community is an essential part of our lifestyle. We also emphasise teamwork and want to collaborate closely with others.” Following this visit the General Council made the following decisions:

- 1) We will take new initiatives in Asia.
  - a. An initial team (group) of four will be assigned to the Philippines to work in the **diocese of Iligan, Mindanao.**
  - b. A presence in Manila is envisaged at a later stage.
  - c. An initial team (group) of four will be assigned to Taiwan to work in the **diocese of Hsinchu.**
  - d. We continue to seek ways of having a presence in **Vietnam** in the future especially through educational and development projects.
- 2) We encourage confreres, who are willing and have the required aptitudes, to become involved as teachers in Continental China.

Given that foreign missionaries are not allowed in Vietnam, its inclusion might appear strange at first sight. It is a poor country - though this is now changing – and its people have suffered much. Its needs, material and pastoral, are great. It was thought that we could make a real contribution there at both levels. Moreover, we already had Vietnamese expatriates joining the Congregation’s formation programme in Houston, Texas, US.

## **Beginnings**

### ***Taiwan and Philippines***

*...two Teams of four each  
were appointed to Taiwan  
and Philippines.*

As a result of the above decisions two Teams of four each were appointed to Taiwan and Philippines. The first challenge facing us was learning a new language. The option in Taiwan was to learn mandarin, instead of Taiwanese. The former is the “official” language, while the latter is spoken by many in their homes. However, mandarin would give access to Continental China. Both are very demanding, entailing at least two years of individual tuition and study in order to gain a basic mastery. The group in the Philippines spent six months studying “Cebuano” – one of the five major dialects in the country - at a language school run by the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers. After this, the group split up for five weeks before coming together again to begin work in the Diocese of Iligan. During this time three of them went to live with different Diocesan priests in order to

gain more fluency with the language and an understanding of the pastoral approach in Filipino parishes. This custom has continued with all new arrivals since.

During their language studies, the confreres in Taiwan tried to postpone invitations to start some ministry in order to focus on the language. They only took weekend ministry in English. Jean-Paul and Sean started in a parish set-up, where many of the parishioners were English-speaking immigrants. Sean also began his involvement in prison ministry. James' work was in the ministry to migrants, quickly becoming Diocesan coordinator, while Jean-Pascal moved into Campus Ministry and was soon appointed Diocesan Youth Chaplain.

*...the people were poor farmers eking out an existence on subsistence farming.*

In Philippines the Congregation was given responsibility for a new parish, Our Lady of Fatima, Digkilaan and the two “younger” men went there. This parish was situated in the mountains, covering a wide area and with 34 small centres, some of which could only be reached on foot. The majority of the people were poor farmers eking out an existence on subsistence farming. When they arrived there was not yet electricity in the area. Daniel immediately became spiritual-director and teacher in the Diocesan Junior Seminary, chaplain to the Filipino-Chinese Community and part of various groups involved in Christian-Muslim dialogue. My initial ministry was as diocesan coordinator for the formation of lay ministers, but I was also involved with groups linked to the family and prison ministries, as well as a Centre for abused girls and young women. So, a great variety of ministries, even at this early stage, but we were happy that all these met the goals of our Mission to be “at the service of local churches.”

### ***Vietnam***

*...Brian died of a heart attack...*

The presence of a member of the Congregation began in 2002 with the arrival of Brian Fulton of the English Province. He came in partnership with the NGO *Les Orphelins Apprentis d'Auteuil*, which set up a project in Qhuy Nhon 400 Km. from Ho Chi Minh City. As with his colleagues in Taiwan and Philippines, his first task was language studies. Apart from the educational work with Auteuil for children of lepers, he became involved in other social projects for poor families, and a project initiated by his confrere Jean-Pascal in Taiwan for the education of poor Vietnamese children. Tragically, Brian died of a heart attack on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2006. At a commemorative Mass organized by the Diocese of Ho Chi Minh, the Auxiliary Bishop praised him as a model religious and a foreigner who came to serve the Vietnamese people.

## Ten years on

### *Taiwan*

The tenth anniversary celebrations were combined with the opening of a new Central House for the Community at the parish of Saint John, Hsinchu for which the Spiritans have pastoral responsibility, along with the affiliated churches of Holy Rosary and St. Joan of Arc. The day was very well planned and the participants celebrated Eucharist together, at which the Bishop presided. It was great to see the number of friends and co-workers of the Spiritans who came. I was particularly struck by the number of Diocesan clergy, a sign of how well the Spiritans have settled in, and been accepted, in the Diocese.

*The original group of 4 has grown to 10...*

The original group of 4 has grown to 10, with representation from Senegal, Portugal, Vietnam, US, Nigeria and Ghana. This is in line with current Congregational policy of trying to have at least two colleagues from any one country, particularly for those beginning their missionary apostolate.

The variety of nationalities is striking, as also are the ministries they are involved in. Having spent six years in the Diocesan Junior Seminary, one continues as Diocesan Coordinator of Campus Ministry and is also attached to the parish of Saint John, where another Spiritan is Pastor. Yet another who spent 3 years living in a “halfway house” for young offenders, will soon be moving fulltime into prison ministry, a challenging task with five detention centres in the diocese. The two Vietnamese confreres are in Holy Spirit parish. One of these will probably move into Migrant ministry. Another Spiritan now holds the very important post of Diocesan Coordinator for Ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue. While I was there over 1,000 participants from many different faiths anticipated Christmas at a very successful function organized by him. He has also been heavily involved in the scout movement since his arrival. The latest arrivals have their noses to the language grindstone, but also do ministry with different English-speaking communities. One of them is football Coordinator to the best Senior High School in the City – a great opportunity for contact with youth.

*One of them is football Coordinator...*

For two years, two young Vietnamese who were doing their Overseas Training Programme, joined the Community. They have now returned to Chicago to continue their studies for the priesthood. Again, in a very short space of time, an Associate programme is underway with some 9 lay people, who meet monthly with members of the Community, exploring ways of closer affiliation with the Spiritans.

*...260 children are participating in the programme.*

A very significant outreach programme is the support given for the education of poor children in Vietnam. Through funding from Taiwan, Japan, U.S., Canada, France, Italy, Portugal, Germany and Ireland, 260 children are participating in the programme. The fund-raising in Taiwan is a ministry in itself, making people aware of the poverty elsewhere. There is a child-to-child connection, with classes, and individuals, in the High School undertaking the sponsorship. A programme of University Students international volunteers is also taking shape, in collaboration with the Spiritans in Tanzania in the area of education. A first group of 16 went to Bagamoyo in August 2008.

The plans for the future include expansion into a new Diocese – possibly Taipei or Taichung. Those assigned to this may learn Taiwanese instead of Mandarin. While not the official language, it is, however, the one spoken by the majority in their homes, especially in the Southern part of Taiwan. Probably, the ministry will be from a parish base, giving the opportunity for involvement in more specialised ministries to the confreres themselves and to the parishioners. Spiritans do not want to be seen just as missionary “specialists”, but as people involved in trying to help the local church become more missionary.

The confreres are also very eager to plan a form of insertion in Mainland China, and are working to build up contacts there, and to plan for personnel and for financial support. They want to be ready for the “moment of God”, 250 years after Fr. Pottier, Spiritan, went to Sichuan Province.

### ***Philippines***

There is a similar increase in personnel and ministries in the Philippines. Today there are 11 in the Community, 6 of whom are from Nigeria. Two come from Cameroon and one from USA . Finally there are two Spiritans from Tanzania. With two exceptions, all are on their first assignment after ordination.

Some of the ministries taken on originally continue – e.g. the mountain parish in Digkilaan; Christian-Muslim dialogue, and spiritual direction in the Seminary. Some, in which there was initial involvement, have developed – e.g. the focus in the prison ministry has been expanded to involve working with the prisoners’ families; the Filipino-Chinese Community has developed into a non-territorial parish. With financial help from our European Provinces, a small scale modern farm, overseen by a lay volunteer from France, has been started near the parish of Digkilaan with

*...the focus in the prison ministry has been expanded...*



the aim of training local farmers in modern farming techniques and improving the quality of their products and of their lives – as well as providing some income for the new Spiritan formation programme.

As mentioned, the founding of the Congregation in a particular place was not to be one of the criteria in going to Asia. However, the General Council indicated that “this objective is not to be excluded in the context of our presence and development there.” We thought that, after a five-year period, we would be more at ease with the Filipino culture and have a better understanding of, and apostolate to, youth. After much discernment, an overall formation plan was developed and contact made with the first aspirants in 2004. Today there is a fine formation house on the outskirts of Iligan City with three Postulants, all of whom are university graduates. The first novitiate began in May 2008.

*...three Postulants, all  
of whom are university  
graduates.*

The beginning of the formation programme in Philippines owes much to the various apostolates with youth, which the Community is involved in - the excellent “Catholic Campus Ministry Centre” where third level students meet, share their activities and faith and have a variety of outreach programmes to their peers; also the chaplaincies to Colleges and Universities. Finally, since 2001 a member of the Community has been Chaplain to the Mercy Community Hospital in Iligan, which, apart from the ministry to the patients and staff, also provides some opportunity for a “dialogue of life” with the many Muslim patients – 50% of the total – and their visiting families.

### ***Vietnam***

Certainly the visit to Vietnam was a real morale booster. Earlier plans had been centred on Brian Fulton and with his unexpected death, inevitable doubts arose about our future presence there. But, thankfully, that presence has grown to three confreres – Pat, former Irish Provincial, Frederic from Belgium and Trinh from Vietnam itself, but who came to the US in 1993 for medical treatment and joined the Congregation there. The three arrived in Ho Chi Minh City on 24<sup>th</sup> September 2007. Obviously, for Pat and Frederic, the learning of the language is the present priority, but they also do some English teaching. Trinh is catching up on meeting friends and is also involved in visiting various social projects, particularly a couple which are receiving some financial support through Spiritan contacts living abroad. As with Brian Fulton, the groups hope to serve the Vietnamese people in ways acceptable to the Government.

*But, thankfully, that  
presence has grown...*

Candidates from Vietnam may also join, at a later stage, the Spiritan Formation Programme of the Union of Circumscriptions – Philippines and Taiwan-Vietnam - which may also include the Circumscriptions of Papua New Guinea and Australia. A community of Spiritan Students in Theology opened in 2009 in Manila for all students of the Union. Similarly, the Novitiate may, for practical reasons, be organized jointly among the members from the different countries.

### **Some characteristics of Spiritan approach to mission today**

While not necessarily to be taken as a model, the above story of the new initiative in South-East Asia does highlight changes in approach to mission, which are characteristic of the Spiritan missionary charism as lived by its members in various parts of the world today.

#### ***Internationality***

From very early on, the Congregation became international as the original French members shared their charism in other countries. Today, the Spiritans are present in 65 different countries worldwide. Further, Mission Teams and Communities are now made up of Spiritans coming from different countries and cultures, as is very obvious in the personnel make-up in South-East Asia. Missionaries gain from the riches of working alongside confreres from a different culture, and face the challenges that this implies, as all try together to adapt to the local culture where they now live and work.

#### ***Smaller mission groups - from founders to partners***

Despite the fact that the membership of the Congregation has fallen from around 5,000 in the 1960s to just under 3,000 today, the number of countries in which Spiritans work has increased significantly. This increase is linked to a shift from being the “founders” of the local church, to being firmly at its service. While first evangelization remains very much part of our charism, and members live in such situations where the Word of God has not been heard, or scarcely heard, the Catholic Church is already established in most places where we are today. In the past, Spiritans were the people who founded the Church in a particular place through education and catechesis of laity, the training of diocesan clergy and the founding of indigenous Religious Congregations of men and women. Candidates to our own Congregation were only accepted after the Church had a firm footing in the particular place. Now, instead of being the dominant force in a diocese, our role is one of supporting the

*...Spiritans are present  
in 65 different countries  
worldwide.*

*...a shift from being the  
“founders” of the local  
church, to being firmly at its  
service.*

*...working as partners  
alongside local laity, clergy  
and religious.*

*...projects focusing on the  
care of the earth...*

local church and working as partners alongside local laity, clergy and religious. As our Rule of Life puts it: “Any particular work is taken on in communion with the Church as it is in our time. The responsibility for carrying on Christ’s mission belongs in each place to the local Church. We, in keeping with the calling that is proper to us, participate in this mission.” (SRL 13)

***Increase in the variety of ministries Spiritans are now involved in***

“Paratus ad omnia” – “prepared for everything” – was one of the catch phrases during our formation in the past. It typified the Spiritan ideal of being prepared to go where the need was greatest and to adapt one’s ministry to the local, and ever-changing, situation. In this spirit, and just as the number of countries where Spiritans now live has increased, so also have the variety of ministries they are involved in. While we continue to work in parishes, these are, increasingly, seen as the area of ministry of the secular clergy and laity. This allows us to offer our services to the local church for more specialised ministries, and this is happening in South-East Asia. Apart from those mentioned above, worldwide, Spiritans are heavily committed to other needs as these arise in our society – e.g. HIV Aids; projects focusing on the care of the earth; accompanying immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers etc. Also, the new emphasis on smaller groups allows for greater mobility – of doing a job and moving on.

***From northern to southern hemisphere – and back again***

Among our contributions to any local church where we are, is to help to make it more missionary. One very concrete way of doing this is by founding the Congregation there. The formation of Spiritans in Africa and Latin America constitutes a very visible reminder of the inherent missionary dimension of the Church to their local churches. Of the 32 missionaries in South-East Asia, 23 are from Africa or Asia (Vietnamese who joined in US). This is typical of the membership trend in the Congregation today. On 5<sup>th</sup> December 2009 there were 2,865 members. 1,363 of these were from Europe and North America – but with almost a 1,000 of these aged 65 or over. More striking are the statistics on formation. Of the 972 in initial formation in March 2009, 38 were European and 8 were North American/Canadian – with the vast majority from Africa, (819), Latin America, (50) and Indian Ocean and Asia, (57). The growth, and future, of the Congregation now lies firmly with our members from the Southern Hemisphere.

## Cultures

One very obvious thing about the mission in South-East Asia is the clearly different cultures (note the plural) in the three countries. Vietnam, Taiwan and Philippines are each, culturally, very different. So, while speaking of the “mission to South-East Asia”, or the “Region of South-East Asia”, may feel like we are talking of something homogeneous, in reality, we are not. In the future we will, hopefully, have an increasing Vietnamese contribution to the Congregation, as, also, a Taiwanese contribution and a Filipino contribution – not some nebulous “Asian” influence. Do we appreciate the cultural differences of the confreres from different countries in Africa, South-America and Asia who now live among us? Do we appreciate the gifts they bring?

As mentioned above, we did not go to Asia with the motive of starting the Congregation there. Itaici said: “The ultimate aim of this (new) initiative would be to contribute to making the Asian Church more missionary and self-evangelising.” (No. 7) Also, there was the strong feeling at the Chapter that we would, as a Congregation, be greatly enriched through more contact with Asian religions and cultures, and, later, this became one of the criteria in making a choice of where to go. How, in practice, does this happen? After much discernment, it was decided that having Filipino, Taiwanese, and Vietnamese Spiritans is our best way of contributing to making these local churches more missionary and of our being enriched by their respective cultures. So, within a very short time a formation programme has begun, with realistic hopes that it will develop well.

## Conclusion

Looking back over this article, what strikes me most is our continued effort, as a Congregation, to be faithful to our Founders and traditions - “Congregation of the Holy Spirit” – people “led by the Spirit”, who “blows where It wills”. Perhaps, rather surprisingly, at our first General Chapter outside Europe in Sao Paulo, Brazil in 1992, the Spirit pointed us towards Asia. The incoming General Administration at the time very honestly and openly tried to discern what this call might mean. Rarely have I, personally, been so aware of the Spirit in my life as I was during the almost 5 months I spent visiting in Asia. Leaving Rome with a short list of contacts, a suitcase and a credit card, I was amazed at how one meeting led to another, one disappointment seemed to open an opportunity, the most unlikely “coincidences” happened. One proof of this is that, while we had at least heard

*...we would, as a  
Congregation, be greatly  
enriched...*

*Leaving Rome with a short  
list of contacts, a suitcase  
and a credit card...*

BRIAN MCLAUGHLIN,  
C.S.SP.

of “Ho Chi Minh City” or “Saigon”, “Hsinchu” and “Iligan”, were nowhere in the Spiritan vocabulary – and, yet, these are the places where we began in South-East Asia. The developments that have taken place over the last ten years in all three countries are proof of the Spirit abiding with us and of our desire to be faithful to Its urgings.

*...as if, somehow, the Spirit  
has gone on vacation.*

The story of South-East Asia is but a repeat of similar stories in other areas where Spiritans live and work. Those of us now living in Europe and North America may, as we get older and experience diminished health, feel our Congregation is slowly dying – as if, somehow, the Spirit has gone on vacation. Maybe It has, but on a “working vacation” to places where Spiritans are in Africa, Latin America and Asia. Let us rejoice that we continue to be “led by the Spirit”, and that the Lord continues “to do great things” among us.

## EVALUATING THE ETHOS IN OUR SPIRITAN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

Cormac O’Brolchain,  
C.S.Sp.

Cormac O’Brolchain is an Irish Spiritan priest, who has been active in education on three continents, including 13 years as teacher, principal and then headmaster at St Mary’s School, Nairobi, Kenya. Since his return to Ireland, he has been associated especially with Blackrock College, Co Dublin, where he was principal from 1987-2000 and where he is currently president. He is an accomplished musician and has used his musical talent generously, and never more enthusiastically than when enlivening liturgical celebrations.

*In schools, it could be achievement in games or studies...*

Ethos is a term that has been variously explained. For some it means the mission or the identity of a group; however, I tend to favour describing ethos as “the characteristic spirit”<sup>1</sup> of a group. Using terms like ethos, mission, identity or the characteristic spirit of an institution or school is one thing, explaining precisely what ethos means as applied to the day-to-day living in a school community is another. In this brief article I will strive to address the overall implications contained in this seemingly simple word, ethos, and then explain why I believe we Spiritans should at this juncture evaluate our schools.

### **Ethos**

So, what is the meaning of ethos in real living terms for our school communities? Is the ethos of a school the espoused way of living within the school community, a way of living that is normal and natural and everyday; a lifestyle that the whole community takes for granted and even unconsciously expects? I believe it is. What we are dealing with here, as the researchers and educationalists Canavan and Monahan<sup>2</sup> explain, comprises the inherited values, beliefs, assumptions, expectations, norms and symbols of defined groups, and in this case, our schools. Let us consider one by one the six terms just mentioned.

Firstly, the *inherited values* of a school normally refer to all that represents and expresses what is considered important to the school group or community. There is a story of a lion that visited a Government department and ate one of the people working there. It caused little stir. A few days later he ate another member of the institution, and again little stir. However, the lion decided that he needed more tender meat and ate the person who served coffee. There was an immediate uproar and investigation. In schools, it could be achievement in games or studies, or something more mundane like prestige, or a mixture of all the above, that the school community in practice really feels are important. I have heard professed educationalists explain that since the academic results were good, all was well; it was probably only partially meant but it still represented a gut-feeling. In another school it was remarked that since the football team was successful in a given year, it was a good year. Again, this might be announced with tongue in cheek but again some real emotion and belief are involved. Then how do we find out what is really in fact important to the group? We might begin by asking what it is that the school community deeply cares about in

real terms. The answer will be complex but I might recommend searching through the accounts and timetables of the schools to see, besides necessary maintenance and core salaries, what area or areas are given the major funds, time, thought and personnel. We might also inquire as to which areas elicit most effort and tend to cause both the deepest heartbreak and the greatest celebration.

*...they can be very difficult  
to uncover...*

The *beliefs*, the second issue to consider, can be defined as the *cognitive* views of the community about truth and reality. So long as beliefs do not greatly impinge on the gut-feelings of the group they might easily be discovered through anonymously-answered, well-prepared and piloted questionnaires and discussion.<sup>3</sup> However, if the beliefs do relate to deep emotional realms, self-identity and such areas, they can be very difficult to uncover since to discuss with any individual or group their deeply-held beliefs can be very threatening indeed. Oftentimes in this latter situation the responses we end up with are mere defensive clichés or politically correct responses, abstract concepts or conceptual constructs, not reflecting the real truth and beliefs that actually inspire the group. Some suggest that a way to find out the truth at this level might be to ask the individual or group to suggest what “others” of their group believe and think and do.

*...so that they won't  
disappear at the touch of  
'reality' after school...*

Moving to our third issue, *assumptions*, we can say that assumptions are a wider area for consideration than what has gone before since assumptions include cognitive beliefs together with perceptions and values that guide behaviour. The Lord said: “By your fruits shall you know them” (Mt 7: 20). Oftentimes, if behaviour is watched it might clearly point to what an individual or a group assumes; however, sometimes it might not. Individuals, young and old, when in groups often act differently compared with when they are on their own; they also can act differently in school as compared with when they are at home or ‘on the town’ or elsewhere. Looking at behaviour individually and collectively in the different places, one might ask whether it is the behaviour at school, at home or elsewhere that reveals the true assumptions by which the group lives or is the reality an amalgam of them all. From a school’s perspective, if the education in the school is to bear fruit that will last, it will have to strive to make sure that the assumptions of the ethos of the school are deeply held so that they won’t disappear at the touch of ‘reality’ after school and into the future. Yes, we all are affected by our surroundings, by ‘the birds of the air’ and the ‘thorn-bushes’, peer pressure and the Zeitgeist of society, and much else; we can all be left floundering. But that truth being a given underlines even more the need for an ethos in our schools that is ‘pro-active’, strong, deep and dynamic.



The fourth issue within the schools is the in-built school **expectations**; these arise from the values, beliefs and assumptions of the group. These expectations can be defined as the hopes of the group that stem from all their shared understandings. I have seen two schools within a few hundred yards of each other. In the first school many of the children hoped to become lawyers and doctors, and practically all wanted to go to Third Level, and practically all went. In the second school, a few hundred yards away, going to Third Level for the many seemed a step too far; and few went. How can this be? It comes down to expectations that can stem from many areas especially from the home and the school. As far as the school is concerned, the ways of achieving their expectations might be to set up certain norms, standards and principles that are 'acceptable'; and then these are followed up with varied pressures. It can be hard to understand how in one school excellence in all things could be the norm while in another 'to get by before joining real life' is taken for granted.

*...in another 'to get by before joining real life' ...*

Finally, added to the above, as a constant reminder of what the group holds dear, their real values, beliefs, assumptions and expectations, are the **symbols** used by the school. The symbols which are used by a school are probably the easiest of the six areas to discover. All over the school there will be symbols. It might be Christian artifacts or general works of art that deck the walls and spaces; it might be a long list of photographs of winning individuals and teams and/or portraits of "important" or "successful" alumni; it could be the taken-for-granted notices on notice-boards, revealing hidden agendas; it also might be blank walls and empty spaces since they too symbolise a school's general ethos. What symbols are there and what symbols are not there sends its own message. More probably it will be an amalgam of all of the above. In Colonial times in Ireland, displaying a crucifix in a classroom or public area was forbidden. The then Government obviously saw the importance of symbols. If we study the symbols that are extant in our schools they could give insights as to what the group really believes, assumes, hopes and stands for at their gut or deep personal level. We ignore the awareness and evaluation of symbols at our peril.

*We ignore the awareness and evaluation of symbols at our peril.*

In brief, the whole human process of living in school communities, as stated, is indeed very complex to understand or evaluate even if what is happening seems entirely natural. It would be folly, I believe, to consider that we will ever fully understand or exhaustively evaluate any school's ethos, but we can strive to do our best.

### **Ethos Statements in Our Spiritan Schools**

The stated and hoped-for 'characteristic spirit' or ethos of each Spiritan school can normally be found on the school's website. Some of the statements from our schools speak of: 'a Catholic school'; 'A Christian community'; 'A community of faith and learning'; 'A united family of God known for excellence in the formation of the human person'; 'A religious and moral education is fundamental'; 'A concern and care for others, especially the underprivileged'; 'Encouragement and affirmation of all'; 'Provide the boys with the skills, knowledge, values and adaptability'; 'Fosters idealism'; 'Inspiring hearts'; 'Enables people to know and do what is right'; 'Independence of mind'; 'Holistic educational environment'; 'Fosters the spiritual, intellectual, social, emotional and physical qualities of the students'; 'Conscious of its own unique Holy Ghost traditions enhanced by Irish, European and world-wide educational experience'; 'Cultivate respect for God, the Church, God's creation and for our cultural heritage'; 'Independence of mind'; 'Be responsive to the needs and aspirations of both parents and students'; 'Offer a focused and directed religious education and pastoral care programme'; 'Who are motivated to live their lives in accordance with Gospel values', et al.

*... 'Holistic educational environment'...*

These statements and others not quoted are inspiring and insightful and most helpful; but I suppose the question we have to ask ourselves is whether the schools are actually living up to their ideals or are they merely aspirational or exercises in political correctness. Interestingly, the artistic side of the schools is not mentioned in these declarations of ethos, but probably more remarkable is the fact that the name of Jesus, our Teacher and Model is not mentioned. Neither is love of God or neighbour, with one's whole heart, soul and mind. Nor is it clear that the striving for Jesus' kingdom in the school involves the whole school community: teachers, administration staff, domestic staff, catering staff along with the students, so that all the school community are supported in striving to follow the Gospel way of life and to perfect all God's gifts within themselves as individuals and the community as a whole. Nor is it clear that within the ethos of each school there would be the unstinting practice of expending significant thought, time and money in affirming, teaching, practising and integrating the way of living taught by Jesus into every aspect of school life, so that the world vision of Jesus would affect all relationships both inside and outside the classrooms, the offices, the dining rooms, the playgrounds and all the meeting places.<sup>4</sup>

*...the name of Jesus, our Teacher and Model is not mentioned.*

*...is more than a mere school-time pursuit but a way of life choice...*

Regarding commitment to concern for the poor, the disabled and the marginalised, so well emphasised in the ethos statements, it might need to be asked if this elemental aspect of the Spiritan ethos is a quintessential practice for all or only for the few in our schools<sup>5</sup>. Furthermore, does this concern apply beyond the 'servicing of wounds' to fundamental questioning, fighting for and, where possible, helping to implement improved societal structures? Even more, is it understood that this commitment and concern is more than a mere school-time pursuit but a *way of life choice* meant to continue when staff and students are outside the school environment, such as when they go home each day or go on holidays or graduate or change jobs etc.? Finally, is it clear that all the above includes supportive and close relationships with the parents, families and local communities, so that the school, the home and the local communities would all be giving the same messages, the same example, the same theology of life? Yes, this is what ethos is all about in Spiritan education.

### **Evaluation: Are Our Schools Living Up to Spiritan Ethos?**

There is no doubt that in the Spiritan schools that I have visited and known in three continents, one can find: both very good and broad academic programmes, games programmes, pastoral care and social outreach programmes that include retreats and outreach to the poor and marginalised and this last mentioned in some cases includes not only the students but also the alumni and parents. Nevertheless, going a little deeper into the question of ethos, we might ask ourselves whether today in our schools there is sufficient reflection, meditation, prayer, on-going group study, searching of the scriptures, social and religious debate, well-attended and well-prepared liturgies and para-liturgies and up-to-date symbols that project effectively the message of Jesus in ways that resonate with our modern school communities, both adults and children. And is there significant thought, time, personnel and money being put into this? Ultimately we know that the integration of Jesus' message into the deepest inner life and heart of the schools is primary. And if this is not happening today in our schools, then what is being achieved to justify our involvement in education, even if our involvement is reduced to mere ownership?

### **The Primary Movers and Shakers**

There is no doubt that in any school the primary movers and shakers are the administration and the staff, beginning with the Principal. The Boards of Management or Boards of Governors will have some input but their input will be more regulatory than ethos building. There will indeed be leaders in the student body

*...their input will be more regulatory than ethos building.*

CORMAC O'BROLCHAIN,  
C.S.SP.

*...the teacher teaches by who  
he or she is.*

but being immature they too, in the normal course of events, will pick up the school ethos from those adults by whom they are influenced day in and day out. "But we teachers only teach our subjects in class or meet the children casually in the halls or on the playing fields!" This may be true for many but still all adults in the school have a very significant role to play. Something, too, that is not often understood is that a teacher does not merely teach what the teacher wants to teach or is qualified to teach or what the teacher thinks he/she is teaching, but the teacher teaches by who he or she is. Yes, teachers carry a heavy burden of responsibility in making sure that the ethos of any school is as good as it can be. With this in mind, we also might ask whether, in the practice and policies of our schools, commitment to or compatibility with a school's ethos is a criterion in the selection and evaluation of school staff.

### **Should We Evaluate our Schools?**

It is reported that at each gun position at the beginning of the WWII a soldier stood some yards away from the actual gun. When finally someone asked what these soldiers were doing, it transpired that their job was to hold the horses. Of course there were no horses at gun placements in WWII since the guns were transported by motorized vehicles, but horses were used in World War I and so the practice continued. This phantom horse-holding ceased when the right observations were made and the right questions were asked. The same can apply to our schools.

All things considered, having lived in two of our Irish schools for the past twenty-four years and before that for seventeen years in the West Indies and Africa, I do believe that all our schools should be involved in on-going, serious and rigorous self-questioning, analysis and fresh articulation of their ways of living and educating. I feel that this is needed if constant growth and evolution to a better God-centered future is to be achieved. And it is noted in research that when the majority in any community agree to implement and live by a shared ethos, there is a great unity of meaning, purpose and harmony. Further, it has been found that if such an environment exists in a school the students learn better, the teachers teach better and there is less need for tight control structures by the school management team.

*...the students learn better,  
the teachers teach better and  
there is less need for tight  
control structures...*

### **In Conclusion**

I believe, as outlined above, evaluating the day-to-day living of a community is very complex but certainly much that is great has been achieved in our schools and by our staffs, our students and our alumni. But that being said, if there are only ageing

*I feel that before finally  
handing over the running of  
those schools to others...*

groups in given Spiritan schools, I feel that before finally handing over the running of those schools to others, while retaining ownership, it might be important to know as well as we can, that the knowledge and love and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth is the central concern and indeed integral to every aspect of those schools; and that an outreach to the poor and marginalized will be our special Jesus-taught, Spiritan legacy in education into the future. As I stated in an earlier work, the structures needed to support our alumni, serving Church communities as lay or clerical leaders, after inevitable detailed discussion and evaluation, could also be put firmly in place in view of the future needs of the Church. In this way, priests, deacons, catechists, teachers, lawyers, doctors and alumni in all areas of expertise, including both the married and unmarried, could be encouraged to enlist as helpers or associate members in our Congregation, to give either part or all of their working lives to the service of spreading the Good News of Jesus' Kingdom, especially in favour of the destitute and powerless poor. Connections with the Spiritan worldwide network might fairly easily be established for such a project. However, meanwhile, let us fearlessly and critically evaluate in depth the ethos of our schools as they are today with an eye to the future.

#### **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Government of Ireland Education Act 1998

<sup>2</sup> Canavan, N. and Monahan, L. (2000), *Releasing the Potential*, Dublin: Marino Inst. of Education.

<sup>3</sup> Cohen, L., Manion, L. and Morrison, K. (2000), *Research Method in Education*, London: RoutledgeFalmer.

<sup>4</sup> Vatican. (1988), *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School*, Dublin: Veritas

"In today's world the Catholic school pursues cultural goals and the natural development of youth to the same degree as any other school. What makes the Catholic school distinctive is its attempt to generate a community climate in the school that is permeated by the Gospel spirit of freedom and love. It tries to guide the adolescents in such a way that personality development goes hand in hand with the development of the baptised 'new creature'... It tries to relate all of human culture to the good news of salvation so that the light of faith will illumine everything that the students will gradually come to learn about the world, about life and about the human person."

<sup>5</sup> DEA Mission Statement: "It nurtures and develops the abilities, talents and interests of each person in ways that promote and champion active citizenship and solidarity with people who are marginalised."

## ATTENTIVE LISTENING AND RESPECTFUL INTERVENTION

### *THE SERVOL STORY*

#### Sister Ruth Montrichard, SJC

A native of Trinidad and Sister of St. Joseph of Cluny, Sr. Ruth Montrichard has worked with Fr. Gerry Pantin, C.S.Sp., for the past thirty five years and is now Chairman of the SERVOL organization. She obtained her Teacher's Diploma in Trinidad and Tobago in 1965 and a certificate in Education (with distinction) at the Department of Education, University of Oxford, England, in 1976. For twelve years Sr. Ruth taught in schools in Trinidad and Tobago and Grenada. Since 1975 she has worked with SERVOL where she has helped to develop and direct the educational programs for children and young people, and the teacher and management training programs for instructors and coordinators of the project. In 1993, she was appointed Executive Director of SERVOL and, in 2008, Chairman of the Board. She is also the National Coordinator of the Christian Meditation movement in Trinidad and served as Vicar Provincial of her Congregation.

#### THE BEGINNING

It all began in September 1970 in the wake of the so-called Black Power riots that threatened to overthrow the elected government of Trinidad and Tobago. These riots were led by activists who were enraged at the huge gap between the rich and the poor and who demanded a more equitable sharing of the country's resources. Many of those who took part were from the lower income group living in the Laventille community of the capital city, Port-of-Spain.

At the time, Fr. Gerry Pantin<sup>1</sup> of the Spiritan community was a science teacher at St. Mary's College, one of the most prestigious high schools in the country. The riots made him keenly aware that, though many of those involved lived only two blocks from where he lived and taught, he could not put a name on a single individual. His mission in the college was to the middle and upper class children of the society and not to the poor and the disadvantaged who were crying out for help. In a moment of 'divine madness,' as he often referred to it later, he resigned from his teaching post and, together with well-known cricketer, Wesley Hall, walked up the hill to the Laventille community where the riots began. With no idea as to how they could assist and no resources at their disposal, they approached groups in the area to ask the now famous SERVOL question: "How can I help you?"

This simple gesture was ultimately to give rise to the birth of SERVOL (Service Volunteered for All) with its philosophy of attentive listening and respectful intervention. Although initial reactions were skeptical, and to some extent even hostile, a small group of people gradually gathered around and sought help to build a basketball court and set up a medical clinic for the people of the area. Then came a plea to do something for the children. Realizing that poor children lack opportunities for quality education, the newcomers began to work with community groups to set up Early Childhood Centers and to train young people from the communities as teachers for the two to five-year-old age group. With funding from the Bernard Van Leer Foundation of Holland, this initial project grew and developed and SERVOL became for many years the lone voice championing the importance of early childhood development, especially in poverty-stricken areas.

The elders of the Laventille society, who had been observing these activities in silence, finally came to Fr. Pantin and told him bluntly: “If you really want to help us, you need to help our 17 to 19-year-olds who are still open to change and teach them a marketable skill that will enable them to obtain employment.”

#### **A FUNDAMENTAL INSIGHT**

By then SERVOL had established itself as a familiar presence in Laventille, or “the Hill” as it is known locally, and began setting up small skill-training programs for the youth of the depressed area. After about five years experience of running programs in welding, plumbing, woodwork, and other trades, we realized in SERVOL that we needed to address another issue: many of the young people who began with enthusiasm failed to complete the programs and went back to a life of idleness on the streets. It became clear to us that we needed to do more than simply teach a skill to young people who emerged from the formal system of education functionally illiterate, with low self esteem and a sense of hopelessness. Many of the female students had been sexually abused from their earliest years and almost all of the young males had never known their father. Something had to be done to make up for what was lacking in their family life and education; the innovative SERVOL Adolescent Development Program was created and proved to be extraordinarily successful in the years that followed.

*Today, fifteen hundred young people between 16 and 19 years of age enroll annually...*

Today, fifteen hundred young people between 16 and 19 years of age enroll annually in one of the twenty SERVOL Centers. They come to learn a skill but, much to their surprise, they discover that they must first be exposed to SERVOL’s three-month intensive attitudinal development course. Their instructors are largely from the grassroots; they are chosen not because of their academic qualifications but because of their ability to reach out to these bruised and wounded adolescents and transform them by the strength and power of their love and dedication.

The young people are not the passive recipients of information but are challenged to think and to participate in the discussions. As this program was effectively a creation of SERVOL, we had to write our own textbooks, develop our own techniques, and introduce our own training course for instructors.

*Central to the program is the Self Awareness course...*

#### **SELF AWARENESS PROGRAM**

Central to the program is the Self Awareness course which leads the trainees to reflect on all that happened to them from



*...introduced to the role that  
the subconscious plays in  
their life...*

the time they were a fetus in their mother's womb and that could possibly have influenced their future life. They come up with the answers themselves: my mother may have been on drugs or not eating healthy food, or perhaps she was physically abused by my father.

They are then introduced to the role that the subconscious plays in their life and the twin processes of repression and projection. Gradually it dawns on them that the physical and psychological defects they carry were not inevitable but were the product of the circumstances of their early upbringing. An unimaginative and stereotyped educational system sought to give information about all sorts of things but did nothing to address these issues. Subconsciously they were crying out for answers: "Who am I? What made me so? And how can I reverse this?"

A well-known psychologist sat at the back of my class one day. He came up to me afterwards and exclaimed: "But you are teaching Freud to these grassroots children!"

I will always treasure the moment when a past trainee came to visit us with his young wife and two-year-old son. He pulled me aside and said very seriously: "You see this little child? I have made sure that his subconscious is absolutely clean." Somehow I think that old Freud, wherever he is, would have smiled his approval!

### PRECIOUS MOMENTS

The climax of every term is graduation day for our trainees at the end of their three-month course. The students put on a performance for their parents and families, all of whom are present; they give speeches which they have composed, enact amusing sketches that celebrate their response to the program, all of which is intended to communicate one overwhelming message to their parents and dedicated teachers: "We have changed; we are not the same adolescents that we were three months ago. We are now ready to face skill training, to face relationships with the opposite sex, to face life with a sense of hope."

Earlier this year Jason "Mohammed Ali" graduated. He had remained very quiet throughout the program and in some ways we were not able to understand him very well. We felt that we had failed because he never seemed to respond. On the day in question, when we came to the end of the ceremony, the parents were invited to give their remarks. Quite unexpectedly, Mohammed Ali stood up and we wondered what would happen next. He took the microphone and announced in a loud voice: "I want all of you to know that since I began this course I have

*...since I began this course I  
have changed.*

changed. I used to fight before, I was expelled from school, and I caused my mother pain. Today I am different and I want my mother sitting there to stand and I want to tell you that I love you!" Tears rolled down his face; he embraced his mother and all our tears mingled with his.

It is such moments that stimulate us to come back day after day and year after year with the message: We are SERVOL and we care.

*...with a new sense of themselves and an enhanced self-esteem...*

### SKILLS TRAINING

At the end of this course, with a new sense of themselves and an enhanced self-esteem, the trainees then proceed to their skill-training programs. In twenty centers all over the country, skill-training is provided in construction skills (welding, plumbing, woodwork, masonry and electrical installation), service skills (home health aides, catering and food preparation, childcare, beauty culture and hospitality) and sound and video engineering. A period of job training is included in these programs where young people can test their ability in an actual work situation.

In 1994, realizing that our country was moving into the technological world and that we needed to bring our programs in line with this development, SERVOL ventured into the area of high technology. We were concerned that our trainees, who were already marginalized by the educational system, would forever be "hewers of wood and drawers of water" and restricted to the low paying jobs.

*...to introduce programs in computer literacy, computer repairs, and electronics.*

With some hesitancy we approached the Inter American Development Bank to help us set up three hi-tech centers with state-of-the-art technology to introduce programs in computer literacy, computer repairs, and electronics. To our surprise they took us very seriously and we were given a grant to establish the centers. This was followed in the year 2000 by the establishment of an advanced skill-training center allowing trainees to follow tertiary education courses in instrumentation, compressor mechanics, industrial electronics, computer-controlled electronics, and general industrial maintenance, giving them access to jobs in the oil and gas sectors in the country.

These programs prove that poor people from disadvantaged backgrounds, given the opportunity to make up for what is lacking in their lives and given a ladder to climb out of the pit of poverty, can and do succeed.

## ONGOING CHALLENGES

SERVOL has had many success stories but the journey of thirty-nine years has also had its challenges, its struggles, and its pain. The first and seemingly endless problem is finding the finances to run and sustain projects. In the early years we were fortunate to obtain funding from Europe and from the USA. Over the years this funding was no longer available as Trinidad and Tobago with its oil and gas reserves was not seen as a country in need of assistance. Today the world recession makes it even more difficult to obtain funding for programs.

*...the wealth of our country  
does not trickle down.*

Unfortunately, the poverty continues and the wealth of our country does not trickle down. The Government provides some social programs but these tend for the most part to be handouts with little thought for training and development. Our educational system continues to be highly academic with the result that many young people drop out of school and turn to a life of crime. Today the crime situation in our country has reached alarming proportions; marches in the city call on the Government to do something concrete about the situation. So SERVOL continues to pick up the slack.

We also 'help ourselves,' as our philosophy demands. Each of our skill-training centers is a productive unit which provides goods and services for the general public and runs as a small business, training the young people as well as helping to sustain the project.

## COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

In addition, each center is administered by a community board of education made up of people from the area. This board is responsible for monitoring the center, administering the finances of the center, raising funds and collecting the fees. Each center has its own bank account and the subvention given to SERVOL by the Government for salaries is given in turn to the board which pays the salaries of instructors and is responsible for the maintenance of the center.

*...the members of the  
community are drawn into  
taking responsibility...*

Thus the members of the community are drawn into taking responsibility for the children and the young people of their area. SERVOL continues to monitor the teaching standards, work with the various boards, and do regular financial audits. Involving the communities in this way is not without its problems but SERVOL sees this empowerment of people as its major role in helping poor people to help themselves.

*...to partner young  
parents and assist them in  
developing good parenting  
practices...*

## SERVOL TODAY

Today SERVOL also administers a Parent Outreach Program where facilitators reach out to the homes of the poor to partner young parents and assist them in developing good parenting practices; seventy-five Early Childhood Centers where some 4500 two to five-year-olds in depressed areas receive quality early childhood education; a Special School for one hundred “differently abled” children; ten Junior Life Centers providing a relevant education program for 500 twelve to fourteen-year-olds who are functionally illiterate and who cannot benefit from secondary education; twenty Adolescent and Skill-training Centers, three High Technology Centers, and an Advanced Skill-training Center, which provide training for some four thousand young people each year.

The SERVOL experience and educational approach is shared via an outreach program that offers training to teachers and instructors from similar projects in the Caribbean and beyond; the SERVOL model has been adopted in countries as far away as Ireland, South Africa and Israel.

The journey has been long and has had its ups and downs, but we try to continue to serve those most at risk, to make a difference in our country and in our world, and to live up to our Mission Statement which proclaims:

*SERVOL is an organization of weak, frail, ordinary, imperfect, yet **hope-filled** and committed people seeking to help weak, frail, ordinary, imperfect, **hope-drained** people become agents of attitudinal and social change in a journey which leads to total human development.*

*It does so through **respectful intervention** in the lives of others and seeks to **empower individuals and communities** to develop as role models for the nations.*

In truth, we have come a long way since those early tentative, unsure steps of a courageous Spiritana and an international cricketer who simply asked the question: “How can we help you?”

SISTER RUTH  
MONTRICHARD, SJC

**Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup>Fr. Gerry Pantin is a member of the Spiritan Province of Trinidad. He obtained a B.Sc. (Hons) and a Diploma in Education in University College Dublin, Ireland, and a Licentiate in Theology in Fribourg University, Switzerland, where he was ordained in 1958. After ordination he returned to his alma mater, St. Mary's College, where he taught science and was games master. He founded St. Anthony's College in 1968 and SERVOL in 1970. He was awarded an honorary degree by Duquesne University in 1987 and by the University of the West Indies in 1990. In 1995, he was given the country's highest award, the Trinity Cross. He retired as chairman of SERVOL in 2008.

## MOMENTS OF REVELATION ON THE SPIRITAN JOURNEY

### 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.

*'They will be the advocates, the supporters and defenders of the weak and the little ones' (Provisional Rule)*

### Introduction

From its outset, the Spiritan mission has been marked by an ethos of service to the poor and marginalised in society. In the case of the Founders, the recognition and embracement of this mission was associated with *metanoia* events, moments of revelation. Thus des Places, with a promising legal career set out before him, opted instead to enter the priesthood. Furthermore, he rejected the comfortable path and chose to associate with the poorest and most needy clerical students. Libermann too experienced several well documented moments of revelation and change in his life. Key among these was his option for the poor:

*To preach the good news to the poor, that is our general goal...in the missions we have chosen the most wretched and abandoned souls*

(N.D., XIII, 170).

Whilst these long preceded the Church's formal adoption of its *preferential option for the poor*, they were, in reality, lived instances of Jesus' own 'coming-of-age' during the period in the desert, which led to his statement of priorities in the Beatitudes:

*How happy are the poor in spirit...the gentle... those who mourn...those who hunger and thirst for what is right...the merciful...the pure in heart... the peacemakers...those who are persecuted in the cause of right.*

(Matthew 5:3-10)

Spiritan spirituality embodies these priorities by having as its core, mission to service of the poor and marginalised, grounded in a practical union with God that is lived and fostered in and through community (Congregation of the Holy Spirit 2004, Kilcrann 2007). Historically, the Congregation found a focus for its mission, often in distant lands and with people who had yet to hear the message of Jesus (Van Kaam 1959). More recently though, this focus has broadened to include: re-evangelisation at home, as well as ministry to refugees, displaced peoples and asylum seekers (Spiritan Life 2008). Moments of revelation occur in everyone's lives and often challenge us to choose an

alternative road to that which was planned. In this article, I will recount some such moments in my life which have significantly challenged me to examine my role and direction in the light of the Gospels and of the Spiritan charism, leading me to a ministry with individuals who have been marginalised in Ireland and many of whom have experienced social devaluation, involuntary material poverty, social and physical discontinuity, brutalisation, segregation and life-wasting (Wolfensberger 1995, 2000).

### **Background**

When I joined the novitiate in the Irish Province in 1982, I was young and driven by a sense of idealism, justice and right. During my teenage years faith and social awareness had become intertwined through my involvement in the Special Religious Development (SPRED) ministry to people with intellectual disabilities, wherein a friend with disability would share with me in my life of faith. Religious life was, however, not my road at that time and, after leaving in late 1983, I found myself with no direction in life and drifted somewhat aimlessly into ‘mental handicap nursing’ – then a backwater of the nursing profession in Ireland. Like many of my colleagues though, I entered nursing - similarly to many who entered religious life – to do something that served a greater good. Happily, much of my idealism remained intact through the early years and I frequently found myself in conflict with managers and employers when I perceived that the ideals were not being lived up to. Thus, I refused to engage in activities that I considered inhumane or cruel and advocated for individuals’ rights. Interestingly, I often found myself at odds with the ethos of many services which were run by Roman Catholic religious congregations, and which were largely custodial and segregating in nature. For many years, I had tried to understand this and questioned my own stance, which I felt was grounded in Jesus’ teaching:

*You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind... You must love your neighbour as yourself.*  
(Matthew 22:37, 39)

I have worked in the practice of nursing and in the education and training of specialist intellectual disability nurses for approximately 25 years, and throughout that time, have provided what I consider to be quality education and care grounded in evidence-based practice and research. It is easy, however, to become comfortable and complacent in one’s role while insidiously losing something of the idealistic zeal with which one started!

*...faith and social awareness  
had become intertwined...*

*For many years, I had tried  
to understand this and  
questioned my own stance...*



### **Moments of Revelation**

In 2007, over a short space of time, I was confronted by two events which challenged me immensely in my role as a nurse and an educator. I received a phone call from a student who was on the verge of leaving nursing. She cried openly as she recounted the indignity suffered by people with intellectual disabilities that she witnessed whilst on her placement; the verbal abuse, the lack of basic requirements, such as personal underwear and sanitary materials. This resonated with similar experiences which I had during my career some 15 year earlier. I was horrified to hear that they were still happening but advised her that, as a student nurse, all she could do was to ensure that the care she provided was of a high quality, that her contacts with service users could be moments of light in their lives, and that her sphere of influence would grow as her career progressed. I was conscious though that many students seemed to lose their idealism during second or third year, as they became socialised to the profession and accepting of the *status quo*. In short, they became unquestioning and uncritical, believing that they could not change anything. A few days later, when I was teaching a class on the emergence of humanist philosophies in intellectual disability services following the 1960's rights' movement in the USA, I was confronted by a first year student who asked me "*what are you doing for the rights of people with intellectual disability in Ireland*"! I was not able to answer him and the question continued to bother me long after the class, leaving me with the realisation that I too had succumbed to the comfort of my situation and, although able to teach the theory, I was not awake to the reality. I too had lost my idealism. Whatever direction I felt I had was lost and my sense of surety was gone. But the Spirit has ways of bringing clarity where there is chaos! A chance visit to a bookshop led me to purchase two books: Sobrino's *The Eye of the Needle* and Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. These I read with great interest; but not a small amount of discomfort!

*I was conscious though that many students seemed to lose their idealism...*

*...the question continued to bother me long after the class...*

### **People with Intellectual Disabilities**

The care of persons with intellectual disability has, throughout the centuries, been marked by societal fear and prejudice. Elsewhere I have suggested that such fear and prejudice may be seen at all levels of society, often resulting in the evolution of over-generalised, learned attitudes towards individuals, who do not conform to 'the societal norm' (Sheerin 1999). Typically, these attitudes are directed at any 'societal deviants' on the grounds of race, religion, sex, gender-identity and orientation, role, physical disability, physical disfigurement, behaviour, ethnicity, weight, area of residence, employment status, class, amongst many others.

*...the problem may be more pervasive and may be a throwback to attitudes and ideas of the past...*

This stereotyping of individuals often manifests itself in them being treated unequally, solely on account of their membership of that 'deviant' group. The experience of being treated in this way was expressed by disabled individuals who made submissions to the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities (Government of Ireland 1996). Many felt that they 'were being either kept at, or pushed to, the margins of society...not being allowed to realise their potential or to participate as fully as they are entitled to in everyday life' (p.5). The ability of such individuals to highlight and challenge their situation has led to improvements and to the publication of the Disability Act (Government of Ireland 2004), which advocates an agenda of enablement and equality for persons with disability in Ireland. Those who do not have the ability to make their voices heard, however, have been at a distinct disadvantage, for as a *powerless* group, people with intellectual disabilities have been reliant on service providers, family members and advocates to speak on their behalf. This has not been effective for, at every juncture, the State and its agencies seek to block real change. The inability of people with intellectual disabilities, their advocates, services and others to obtain equality for persons with intellectual disabilities suggests that the problem may be more pervasive and may be a throwback to attitudes and ideas of the past which have provided a basis for current approaches. Freire and Sobrino offer important perspectives which may be relevant here.

### **Poverty and Intellectual Disability**

The colloquial use of the term '*the Poor*' usually relates to material poverty and is defined in the Irish National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016 as:

*people 'whose income and resources (material, cultural and social) are so inadequate as to preclude them from having a standard of living which is regarded as acceptable by Irish society generally. As a result of inadequate income and other resources people may be excluded and marginalised from participating in activities which are considered the norm for other people in society'*

(Government of Ireland 2007:20)

It is clear from this description that poverty is defined within the context of contemporary Irish societal standards of living. What can we say about the characteristics of '*the Poor*'? Key among these characteristics are: inadequacy of resources; unacceptable standard of living; exclusion; and marginalisation. Such have been

the ambit of 'the Poor' for centuries as exemplified in the history of services for people with intellectual disabilities (interestingly, the *Action Plan* identifies people with disabilities as being at risk of poverty).

*...material want is only one aspect of poverty...*

Sobrinho (2008) posits though that material want is only one aspect of poverty and that other types of poverty exist. He identifies four other types. Some are *dialectically poor*, due to impoverishment and oppression, 'deprived of the fruits of their labour and, increasingly, they are deprived of work itself...they are deprived of social and political power by those who have enriched themselves by plunder...they are scorned and ignored' (p.57). It has been alleged that this is, has been, and continues to be the experience of people with intellectual disabilities in some Irish sheltered workshops, where they are 'doing real work, but are not even being paid the minimum wage and do not have employment rights' (Inclusion Ireland 2008). Furthermore, it has been suggested that some workshops are making profit based on the work of these people.

*...participants spoke eloquently and forcibly of their dissatisfaction with being treated differently to others in society.*

Sobrinho (2008) further describes those who are *consciously poor* and who have realised the reality and causes of their poverty. Whereas such insight is infrequently associated with people who have intellectual disabilities, this is changing. I had the privilege of attending an inclusive research workshop in Galway last June, where participants spoke eloquently and forcibly of their dissatisfaction with being treated differently to others in society.

The *freedom-seeking poor* seek solidarity with others in similar situations and try to build on their conscientization (Freire 1996) through 'grassroots organisation' (Sobrinho 2008:58). The self-advocacy movement has seen such developments in Ireland but many advocacy groups have been set up within, or exist in association with, service providers. As will be discussed anon, this may be a source of conflict hindering the cause of liberation for these people, for 'no-one can be the servant of two masters' (Matthew 6:24); s/he must be willing to selflessly speak and act on the other's behalf, that is, on behalf of Jesus who is within each person (Matthew 10:37-39).

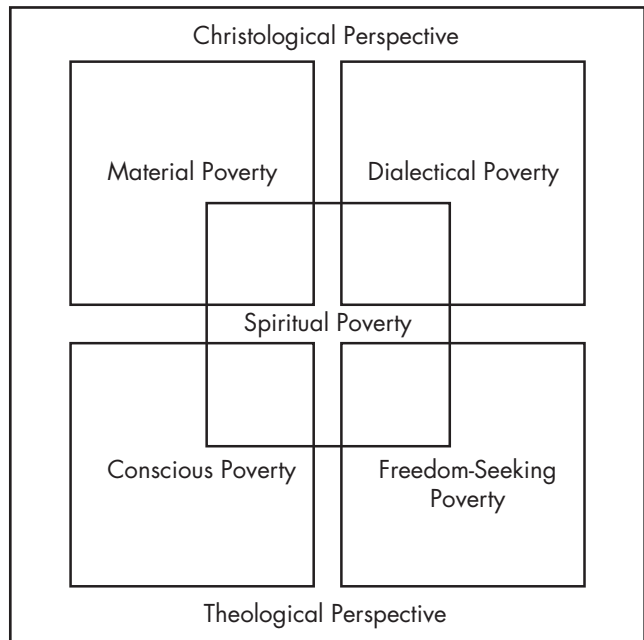
Finally, Sobrinho describes those who are *spiritually poor*: 'steadfast under persecution, they act with love...living the spirit of the Beatitudes' (p.58). That such people fall within the focus of the Spiritan mission is evidenced in the annals of the Congregation as well as in the minutes of the Torre d'Aguilha General Chapter (Congregation of the Holy Spirit 2004), where 'poverty suffered'

was firmly and clearly placed within the focus of our work for justice and peace and integrity of creation. This further resonates with Sobrino’s contextualisation, for he describes Jesus’ preference for and presence in the poor (Figure 1), sentiments echoing the words of Isaiah:

*The Spirit of God has been given to me, for Yahweh has anointed me.  
He has sent me to bring good news to the poor, to bind up hearts that are broken.*

(Isaiah 61:1)

Indeed, as Jean Vanier says, ‘Jesus tells us that he is hidden in the face of the poor, that he is in fact the poor’ (Vanier 1989:95). Thus, as we receive Jesus as our source of life and communion, so we are similarly called to receive the poor and in doing so all are liberated; all are evangelised.



*Figure 1: A Christian Contextualisation of Poverty (Sobrino 2008)*

**Poverty Grounded in Oppression**

Wolfensberger (1995, 2000) has written extensively regarding the wounds of people with intellectual disabilities. These wounds are summarised in Figure 2. He goes further to suggest that service providers collude, albeit unwittingly, in the wounding of service recipients. The reader will understand how challenging this view is to a health care professional who has dedicated many years to

*...by dehumanising others,  
the oppressors themselves  
become dehumanised.*

intellectual disability service. My despair was not allayed by Freire’s discussion of oppression in education, for he suggests that, by dehumanising others, the oppressors themselves become dehumanised. Such a position is also put forward by Sobrino (1993) in discussing the Biblical Scribes and Pharisees as enactors of ‘the ultimate evil’ – oppression (p.175).

Freire’s thesis offers an interesting and radical perspective on intellectual disability in Ireland. It has been noted above that people with intellectual disabilities have, through various mechanisms, become entangled in a state of marginalisation and oppression. This injustice was originally grounded in the institutionalisation, segregation and control of people who were perceived to be disordered. Whilst Eugenics is strongly implicated in this injustice, religion has also played a role, whether through literal interpretation of scriptures, with demonic possession being variably ascribed to mental illness, epilepsy and intellectual disability (see Miles 2001) or through the support of the sexual control of such people that was central to the Eugenic stance (see Baldacci 1997).

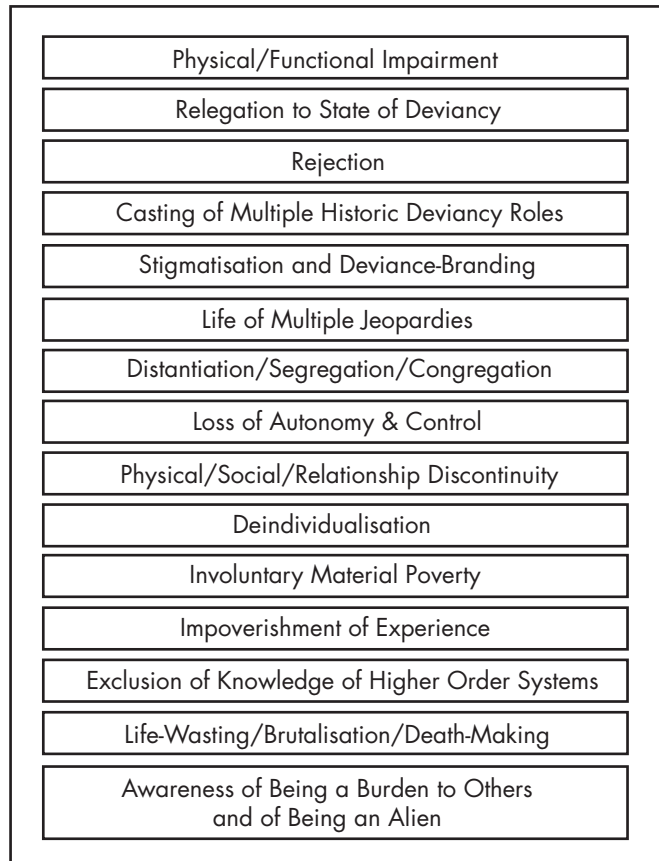


Figure 2: *The Wounds of the Disabled* (Wolfensberger 1995)

*...it served to continue the custodial approach to caring for people with intellectual disability*

The provision of intellectual disability care in Ireland has been hugely inconsistent, with the State absenting itself from this activity until the late 1980s. Prior to this, formalised approaches were provided by religious and voluntary bodies, as well as by parents and friends groups. The general custodial approach to care mirrored that evidenced in other countries, with institutionalisation, sexual segregation and repression (Finnane 1981; Robins 1986, 1992). By the late 1800s, the paradigm of care was medically focused on account of the Lunatics Act of 1845 and the transfer of Poor Law Institutions to medical governance (Finnane 1981; Chung and Nolan 1994). It was, therefore, within the context of the psychiatric medical model that Irish intellectual disability care developed. Although specialised nurses were first introduced to Irish services in the 1960s, general and mental health nurses had been working for many years in the institutions and the introduction of the 'mental handicap nurse' was not characterised by revolutionary change in service provision. Conceptually, it served to continue the custodial approach to caring for people with intellectual disability that had its roots in the scientific, positivistic, custodial and segregating approaches of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Despite attempts to redress this problem, traditional intellectual disability and many more recent services continue along variations of the above approach. Notable exceptions to this are the l'Arche and Camphill communities, which are grounded in lay Christian and humanistic values respectively.

*Such an approach may be considered to be oppressive in its nature...*

Having considered the situation of people with intellectual disabilities in Ireland from the alternative Freirean perspective, it may be posited that the current social approach to such people, formalised in the state and state-funded (including voluntary and religious) services is actually grounded in and a continuation of that which developed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries based on a positivistic perspective which essentially reduced the person with intellectual disability to a mentally disabled/handicapped/retarded/subnormal/defective person (Yong 2007). It may be argued that, in a similar way, the use of terminology such as 'person with intellectual disability' promulgates the concept of difference and alteration from normality. Such an approach may be considered to be oppressive in its nature and, through the tendency of the idea of normality to control, segregate and to marginalise people both physically and socially, constitutes a form of violence. The result of such violence is disempowerment and dehumanisation as witnessed by the aforementioned student nurse, and by me during my career.

The responses of the oppressed may be twofold. The first, withdrawal, is discussed by former residents on the Scottish NHS video *Just Ordinary People* (NHS Scotland 2002) who noted that, in order to avoid trouble in the institution, they stayed quiet – ‘you keep your mouth shut to have a peaceful life’. The second response may be to fight back against the perceived injustice. Such a response may be considered by oppressors to be unprovoked and meaningless violence (Freire 1996). When such a reaction is seen in a person with intellectual disability, it is often considered to be some form of *challenging behaviour* which warrants intervention, whether behavioural or medicinal. The outcome of intervention is a quiet and cooperative service user; one who conforms to the requirements of the oppressive society. The expectations of society regarding people with intellectual disability are therefore mediated through the health system and its body of frontline carers and other professionals, who are prepared for their task through a process of education, training and socialisation.

*...with students considering that educators are out of touch and that practice can never be changed.*

Thus, registered intellectual disability nurses, like myself, are formed through programmes which must conform to the syllabus of training and education set out by the Irish Nursing Board (An Bord Altranais). This dictates what is taught, while the students’ placements ensure that they learn how things are done in practice. Despite efforts on the part of educators to develop questioning nurses, there are invariably complaints regarding the gap between theory and practice, with students considering that educators are out of touch and that practice can never be changed. This system ensures that the *status quo* remains unchanged and that well-meaning, caring individuals unwittingly participate in what is an oppressive regime (Freire 1996).

*...the oppressors will always serve themselves.*

The revelation of my potential role as an oppressor was very painful and I despaired of the impact and meaning of my 25 years of nursing and education. I was left with a number of choices: to ignore this new understanding and carry on; to walk away from this career; or to become involved in a campaign of liberation and conscientisation. After some discernment in the light of the decisions of des Places and Libermann, I opted for the last choice and set about bringing together groups such as Amnesty International, Inclusion Ireland, self-advocating people with intellectual disabilities and others to discuss a way forward. I was conscious, however, of Freire’s and Sobrino’s rejection of the notion that liberation can come from the oppressors, as they will continue using controlling and oppressive means, even if these appear to be deeds of generosity; the oppressors will always serve themselves. Hence the adage *extra pauperes*



*...for such a process to be true it must start with and not for people with intellectual disabilities.*

*nulla salus* (Sobrinio 2008) for *theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven* (Luke 6:20). On reflection, therefore, it seemed that for such a process to be true it must start *with* and not *for* people with intellectual disabilities. Furthermore, it should be led *by* people with intellectual disabilities. At our initial meeting we all sat together and discussed what was important and how to move the process forward. This was the first time that I ever sat and talked with people with intellectual disabilities who were not recipients of my service, but, rather, equal members of society; it was truly liberating. In September 2009, a gathering of over 120 people with intellectual disabilities and their advocates took place in Trinity College Dublin. At this meeting, priorities for human rights were identified by the participants, priorities that will guide the development of this group into the future.

### Reflection

As I write this article, I am becoming increasingly aware of the fact that a number of strands of my life have been drawing together over the past two years. Since becoming a Lay Spiritan, some years ago, I had felt called to mission but could not find any clarity in this regard. I had almost despaired that no such focus would emerge and my commitment to Spiritan ideals was waning. The revelation inherent in the above events has given understanding to the dissonance that has existed in me throughout much of my career, a feeling that something was just not right. It was this perspective that led me to write several papers on marginalisation. The idealism that led me into religious life and then into nursing has been renewed and my energy has been replenished. It is, I believe, the unity of these aspects of my life through the direction of the Spirit that is guiding me forward. It is my prayer that I can remain true to this mission of service to these oppressed poor.

### References

- Baldacci, M. (1997) The bioethics of sexual practice in people with genetically transmissible physical handicaps. *Medicina e Morale*. 3; 503–532 (Italian).
- Chung, M. and Nolan, P. (1994) The influence of positivistic thought on nineteenth century asylum nursing. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*. 19, 226–232.
- Congregation of the Holy Spirit (2004) *Torre d'Aguilha General Chapter 2004*. Rome: Spiritan Generalate.
- Finnane, M. (1981) *Insanity and the insane in post-famine Ireland*. London: Croom Helm.
- Freire, P. (1996) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. London: Penguin Books.
- Government of Ireland (1996) *Report of the Commission on the Status of Persons with Disability*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.

- Government of Ireland (2004) *The Disability Act 2004*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.
- Government of Ireland (2007) *The National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.
- Inclusion Ireland (2008) People with intellectual disability will suffer as a result of Crowley resignation. *News*. Available ONLINE: <http://www.inclusionireland.ie/PEOPLEWITHADISABILITYWILLSUFFERASARESULTOF CROWLEYRESIGNATION.htm>. Accessed 26<sup>th</sup> August 2009.
- Kilcrann, J. (2007) Constructing a Spiritan spirituality of justice, peace, and the integrity of creation. *Spiritan Horizons*. 2, Fall, 71-78.
- Miles, M. (2001) Martin Luther and childhood disability in 16<sup>th</sup> Century Germany: What did he write? What did he say? *Journal of Religion, Disability and Health*. 5(4), 5-36.
- National Health Service Scotland (2002) *Just Ordinary People*.
- Robins, J. (1986) *Fools and Mad*. Dublin: Institute of Public Administration.
- Robbins, J. (1992) *From Rejection to Integration*. Dublin: Gill and MacMillan.
- Sheerin, F. (1999) Marginalisation and its effect on the sexuality-related potentials of the learning disabled person. *Journal of Intellectual Disabilities*. 3(1), 39-49.
- Sobrino, J. (2008) *The Eye of the Needle. No Salvation Outside the Poor: A Utopian-Prophetic Essay*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd.
- Spiritan Life (2008) *Spiritan Ministry with refugees, displaced peoples and asylum seekers*. Rome: Spiritan Generalate.
- Vanier, J. (1989) *Community and Growth*. (Revised Edition) London: Darton, Longman and Todd.
- Van Kaam, A. (1959) *A Light to the Gentiles: The Life-Story of the Venerable Francis Libermann*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University.
- Wolfensberger, W. (1995) Social role valorization is too conservative. No, it is too radical. *Disability and Society*. 10(3), 365-367.
- Wolfensberger, W. (2000) A brief overview of social role valorization. *Mental Retardation*. 38(2), 105-123.
- Yong, A. (2007) *Theology and Down Syndrome*. Waco: Baylor University Press.

## SPIRITAN MISSION IN THE CONTEXT OF SOUTH AFRICA

Sylvester Kansimbi,  
C.S.Sp.

Ordained to the priesthood in Malawi, 2001, Sylvester Kansimbi worked for three years in Immaculate Conception parish, Thunga, in the Archdiocese of Blantyre, Malawi. He subsequently obtained a Masters degree in Missiology at the University of KwaZulu Natal in South Africa with a dissertation entitled: "A critical evaluation of the members of the Religious Congregation of Holy Spirit's understanding of their mission to the poor in the dioceses of Bethlehem and Durban, South Africa." Fr. Kansimbi is currently a formator at the Spiritan Theology House in Harare, Zimbabwe, and lecturer at nearby Holy Trinity College.

The year 1994 will forever remain a memorable year of great rejoicing for South Africans and for people everywhere. 1994 marked the end of an oppressive apartheid regime and the new democratic government led by Mr. Nelson Mandela was ushered into power. In the words of Wilfrid Cardinal Napier, the Archbishop of Durban: "The miracle elections of 1994 were not just any achievement, but the achievement of the impossible."<sup>1</sup>

A young Spiritan confrere from South Africa, Michael Nkosingathi, who recently completed his theological studies at Holy Trinity College, had this to say:

*I can compare the year 1994 with what happened at Vatican II. It was the year of opening the windows for fresh air. South Africa had been a closed nation. Now, with the fresh air, there is a general feeling among all the people, especially the blacks, that they belong to the international community. South Africa could participate in the international games like the African Cup of Nations in 1996 as well as the FIFA World Cup in 1998. What I can say is simply, "Viva Mandela, Viva," and thanks for your patience.<sup>2</sup>*

The Spiritan confreres working in South Africa did not just see the events taking place from afar, but they played a major role in the process of calling for change and transformation. They continue to be signs of hope today. This essay is the outcome of chatting to, living with, and interviewing confreres working in South Africa. It attempts firstly to look at their missionary impact and contribution during the years of apartheid and secondly it seeks to determine how the present group of Spiritans understand and interpret "the poor" in the context of the contemporary South Africa. Before 1994, the poor were mainly the victimized blacks. How then have the Spiritans diversified their mission in the context of the new South Africa? Have they continued to fulfill their charism and mission of "evangelizing of the poor"?<sup>3</sup>

### SPIRITANS IN SOUTH AFRICA

The Spiritan history in South Africa goes back to 1878 when Fr. Charles Duparquet (1830-1888), Vice-Prefect of the Prefecture of Cimbebasia (a million square miles between Angola and the Cape), sought unsuccessfully to open a route to the heart of the African continent through Kimberley. The second missionary journey was in 1924 when the German confreres arrived in newly

created Kroonstad Vicariate under Monsignor Leo Klerlein who was appointed Prefect Apostolic. He subsequently became Vicar Apostolic in 1935. This marked the beginning of the effective presence of Spiritans in South Africa which has continued to the present day.

In 1948, when the Vicariate of Kroonstad was divided, the eastern part with Bethlehem as the center was entrusted to the Spiritans, while the western part with Kroonstad as the center was given to the Dominicans. Today, Spiritans continue to serve in the diocese of Bethlehem which now has become a missionary church.

In 1978, Spiritans opened up two missions, one in Leribe Diocese in the neighboring country of Lesotho, the other in Witbank Diocese in South Africa. In 1987, Spiritans accepted a request to serve in the Archdiocese of Durban, and more recently in the Dioceses of Johannesburg, Dundee, and Kroonstad, where they began their mission back in 1924.

#### PASTORAL INVOLVEMENT DURING THE APARTHEID ERA

During the apartheid period, the Catholic Church in South Africa tended to exist as two largely separate entities: a settler Church for whites and a mission Church for blacks. White people did not mingle with blacks at any level other than in a master/servant relationship in the workplace and in the home. As Bate Stuart puts it, “a racist Church mirrored a racist society.”<sup>4</sup> In this period, evangelization implied taking tough and risky political choices. For Spiritans, the choice meant ‘incarnation,’ namely being on the side of the majority, the underprivileged Zulu and Sotho people. Spiritans concentrated their missionary activity on the indigenous black population staying in the controlled townships, the majority of them laborers on exclusively white-owned farms. Thus, any missionary work was to be done on the so-called “white man’s land” where missionaries had to rely on the goodwill of the white man if pastoral work was to proceed.

One long-serving Spiritan, Fr. Gerhard Steffen, recalls a bitter experience when, at gunpoint, he and the little flock that had gathered for Sunday Mass within the white man’s land were ordered off the farm. Quietly, the community left the farm and celebrated Mass outside the farm fence. Commenting on the same apartheid period, Fr. Bernhard Wiederkehr noted that it was not an easy task to be the advocates of the unpopular blacks, whom the white man regarded as less human. The more one became involved in the welfare of the poor, the more one became the enemy of the white man. But there was no other option. “The

*...evangelization implied taking tough and risky political choices.*

*...it was not an easy task to be the advocates of the unpopular blacks...*

*...they gave hope of a better future to people who were downtrodden...*

poor were our friends,”<sup>5</sup> he added. Solidarity with the poor is at the heart of Spiritan mission. “We must make ourselves the advocates, the supporters, and the defenders of the weak and the little ones against all who oppress them,” wrote Francis Libermann, the co-founder of the Spiritan Congregation, in 1849.<sup>6</sup>

Despite these enormous difficulties, Spiritans as well as many other missionaries continued to make a strong missionary impact through preaching, personal witness, visitation, catechesis, and through the construction of schools and health centers. In particular, they gave hope of a better future to people who were downtrodden by the oppressive apartheid regime.

#### NEW APPROACHES TO PASTORAL WORK IN THE NEW SOUTH AFRICA

A brighter future finally dawned with the collapse of the apartheid regime and the swearing in of Nelson Mandela as the President of South Africa on May 10, 1994. The incoming Government of National Unity ensured that no one was left out. Those outside would be there by choice. South Africa became the “Rainbow Nation,” to use the phrase coined by Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

#### NEW FORMS OF POVERTY

*...can best be understood as a privilege and an added responsibility for all South Africans...*

Though the country was finally liberated, poverty was not eliminated. As Zaba Mbanjwa points out, “the collapse of apartheid in South Africa has cleared the ground for all the people to discover the other forms of suffering that might still hold back the progress and attainment of the realistic dream for the nation.”<sup>7</sup> The liberation attained in 1994 can best be understood as a privilege and an added responsibility for all South Africans as they are called to a unified force, vision, and method in combating new forms of suffering.<sup>8</sup> Nelson Mandela in his “Long Walk to Freedom” reflects on his experience of new found freedom in South Africa:

*I have walked that long road to freedom. I have tried not to falter; I have made missteps along the way. But I have discovered the secret that after climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many hills to climb. I have taken a moment to rest, to steal a view of the glorious vista that surrounds me, to look back on the distance I have come. But I can only rest for a moment, for with freedom come responsibilities, and I dare not linger, for my walk is not yet ended.<sup>9</sup>*

Several years after the end of the oppressive regime, South Africa continues to experience new forms of poverty and suffering. Pope Benedict refers to new kinds of deserts in modern society:

the deserts of poverty, hunger, abandonment, loneliness and the desert of God's darkness.<sup>10</sup> There is therefore a great need for the Church and for all God's disciples "to lead people out of these deserts towards the place of life, towards friendship with the Son of God who gives life in abundance."<sup>11</sup> Fr. Heinz Kuckertz told me that, in his opinion, the call to launch into the deep is now more valid for Spiritans than ever before in the context of contemporary South Africa, where deserts continue to emerge and where human dignity and the goal of human life are often undermined.

#### THE PRESENT SPIRITAN INVOLVEMENT

*...Spiritans are involved in a wide variety of ministries.*

At present, Spiritans are working in five dioceses in South Africa: Bethlehem, Durban, Johannesburg, Dundee, and Kroonstad. In these various dioceses, Spiritans are involved in a wide variety of ministries.

#### *Parish Work*

Of the twenty Spiritans working in South Africa today, more than half are working in parishes. This involves different ministries:

#### *Proclamation and Teaching*

By definition, proclamation is the systematic and verbal announcement of the Good News. "This is the time of fulfillment. The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the Gospel," said Jesus at the beginning of mission (cf. Mark 1:14-15). Commenting on this passage, Fr. Jude Nnorom added:

*...more than half are working in parishes.*

*Proclamation takes different forms in addition to verbal announcement. Like Jesus whose life was Good News, our life itself should be proclamation. Our Spiritan communities should be the living Gospel and a school of how people ought to live. Today more than ever we are called to live 'cor unum et anima una.' Confreres may find this uncomfortable, but we cannot avoid what is central. This is the way of doing mission; there are no short cuts. This is the only way we can be credible in the proclamation of the Good News.<sup>12</sup>*

Fr. Heinz Gibis talked in terms of teaching:

*I see my missionary vocation here in South Africa as trying to teach people the meaning of freedom that was attained in 1994. One cannot take it for granted that all people know the meaning of democracy. There is need for us to help people to use their freedom in a responsible manner. Democracy does not mean waiting for the Government to feed people and to receive handouts. As Nelson Mandela once said, 'with freedom, come responsibilities.' People need to be empowered*



*to utilize their potentialities. The grassroots people need to be encouraged and to be seen as building blocks of a democratic society.*<sup>13</sup>

### ***Administration of Sacraments***

Every confrere spoke of the administration of the sacraments as something inseparable from the life of the priest. The perception of a layperson is interesting in this regard:

*...“they have made us to be Spiritans as we have made them to be Zulus.”*

*I like Spiritans for their dedication and commitment to the people in our parish. Since I was young, Spiritans have always worked in our parish. They baptized my parents, my sisters and brothers, myself, and now they are baptizing my nieces and nephews. They are always there for us. They celebrate life with us. I have never heard a complaint about their availability to celebrate Mass, funerals, memorials, and so on. They are always in our midst. They have made us to be Spiritans as we have made them to be Zulus.*<sup>14</sup>

Erick Ncengani’s remarks show how close Spiritans are to the people – “they have made us to be Spiritans as we have made them to be Zulus.” As Libermann once instructed his missionaries: “We consider ourselves their servants; we devote all our lives to them, according to the plans of the Divine Master.” The attitude and approach are ‘incarnational’: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (John 1:14).

### ***Home Visitation***

Home visitation is an important aspect of Spiritan ministry in South Africa. As many people are unable to go to Church because of HIV/AIDS, sickness, or infirmity, confreres generally set aside time for visitation where they bring Christ to the people. Fr. Bernhard Wiederkehr had this to say:

*...if you make a visit to their homes, you come face to face with the reality of people dying of HIV and AIDS, people who are hungry...*

*Visiting people in their homes brings one closer to the lived reality and sufferings of people. The impression one may easily get when ones sees people at the parish is that they are doing well. They are well dressed and look smart. Yet, if you make a visit to their homes, you come face to face with the reality of people dying of HIV and AIDS, people who are hungry, broken families, orphans etc. By visiting people in their homes, we become daily sacraments to them. We bring inner joy to those who have lost hope.*<sup>15</sup>

Fr. Joseph Nnadi reflected further on the importance of this aspect of his ministry:

*South Africa has a wounded past. The wounds inflicted by apartheid cannot be healed within a short period of time. Ten to fifteen years is not enough to think that the country is redeemed. Many people have not come to terms or reconciled*



...There is a deep hunger  
and thirst for God out  
there.

*with the past. There is still suspicion and hatred on account of tribal or racial difference. Wherever you go, if you are attentive, you realize that there are xenophobic tendencies. There are people in the villages who have never been asked about the past. As a priest and a missionary, I see my task as visiting them in their homestead, raising these issues with them, and opening the way to freedom and happiness.*<sup>16</sup>

Fr. Jude Nnorom, a former parish priest at Vrede, added: "There is a deep hunger and thirst for God out there. People have broken hearts. Simply being with them is a source of great hope. I see this as essential to Spiritan mission if we are to be faithful to our founders Poullart des Places and Francis Libermann."<sup>17</sup>

### **HIV/AIDS**

The pandemic of HIV/AIDS and its prevalence in South Africa is matter of serious concern for confreres. Fr. Nnorom, currently superior of the District of South Africa, summed up the views of many Spiritans in the following remarks:

*This disease is the devil of our time. It is terrorizing and crippling our society and continues to hamper human development. Many able, educated people who are guardians of their families are dying each day. Innocent children are deprived of their parents at an early age. Their future is shattered. It is essential for us in our ministry to address this issue and to attempt to give hope to people, especially to those who are victims of the disease and to those who are orphaned by it.*<sup>18</sup>

...grandparents are often left  
to take care of the children...

Fr. Michael Klein, the pastor at Mapumulo in KwaZulu-Natal, pointed out that foremost among those victimized are younger people in their twenties, thirties and forties. The grandparents are often left to take care of the children and carry the burden in their old age. Like many Spiritans, he sees the fallout from HIV/AIDS as a particular challenge and responsibility in his pastoral activities.

### **Promoting the Values of the Kingdom**

Violence and crime are daily realities for many in contemporary South Africa and, sadly, appear to be on the increase. Fr. Joseph Nnadi, once a victim of violent robbery, stressed the need to address the matter openly:

*We cannot keep quiet over so many cases of killings, violence, and injustice taking place in our society. Crime rate is so high in this country. What is the cause of this? Those who are involved in such atrocities are not people from outside this country! They are with us; they pray with us; they are our children and people whom we know very well. How can*

*we address this issue which continues to bring fear among people? This is an area of mission. We have to talk about this in our interaction with people.*<sup>19</sup>

An added area of concern for several Spiritans is the fact that abortion has been made more freely available to women since 1996, just two years after the inauguration of the new South Africa. Proclaiming and fostering the sacredness of human life is therefore an essential aspect of contemporary ministry.

### ***Specialized Ministries***

Fr. Stan Augustijns shared a brief history of his experience as a chaplain of refugees and asylum seekers (Refugee Pastoral Care) in the Archdiocese of Durban, a project which began in February, 2002:

*...refugees and asylum seekers are the poor and abandoned of our day.*

*Accompanying refugees and asylum seekers is not an easy ministry as one is involved with people who are victims of injustice, violence, and disorder, people who are in despair and who see no hope for the future. They need material, emotional, and spiritual support. This is not easy in South Africa as the society looks at foreigners with a xenophobic eye.*<sup>20</sup>

Fr. Stan sees his apostolate as manifestly Spiritan; refugees and asylum seekers are the poor and abandoned of our day. Our Congregation was founded to cater for such people who need our compassion and love.

In another specialized ministry Fr. Peter Sodje is chaplain at Westville Correctional Facility, of one of the country's biggest prisons, located in the city of Durban. With some 13,000 inmates, the prison has five large wings that include a young offenders section and a female prisoners' unit. He described his work as both challenging and fulfilling:

*...I had the joy of organizing the sacrament of confirmation in the prison...*

*I find joy in encountering prisoners who for me have become simply friends. Like any other person, they need our attention, care, and love. Since I am a frequent visitor, I am now their relative and companion. About three years ago, I had the joy of organizing the sacrament of confirmation in the prison, a ceremony which was presided over by Cardinal Wilfrid Napier. It was a historical moment that brought joy to all the prisoners at Westville Correctional Facility.*<sup>21</sup>

### **CONCLUSION**

My journey of discovery into contemporary Spiritan ministry in South Africa has convinced me that our Spiritan brothers remain faithful to the charism of the Congregation to "evangelize the

poor” and that they do so in creative and inspiring ways. A simple lifestyle, solidarity with the poor and the marginalized, heartfelt compassion for the suffering and the victims of injustice, and a passion to create a more equal, peaceful, and inclusive society have been hallmarks of the disciples of Poullart des Places and Libermann and these are clearly at the heart of Spiritan mission in South Africa today.

#### **Endnotes**

- <sup>1</sup> Napier, Cardinal Wilfrid, “SA Church’s Challenges in Democracy’s Second Decade,” in *The Southern Cross*, April 19-25, 2006, p.9.
- <sup>2</sup> Interview with South African Spiritan, Michael Nkosinathi, C.S.Sp., from the parish of Vrede, North Eastern Free State.
- <sup>3</sup> *Spiritans Rule of Life*, 1987, no. 4.
- <sup>4</sup> Brian J. & Denis P. (eds.), *The Catholic Church in Contemporary South Africa*, Cluster Publications, Pietermaritzburg, 1999, p.151.
- <sup>5</sup> Interview with Bernhard Wiederkehr, C.S.Sp., Glen Ash, June 12, 2006.
- <sup>6</sup> Quoted in *Spiritans Rule of Life*, 1987, no. 14.
- <sup>7</sup> Zaba Mbanjwa, “The Impact of Catholic Social Teaching on the Development of South African Black Theology: A Look at Three Theologians (Mokgethi Motlhabi, Buti Tlhangale and Mandelinkosi Zwane).” Unpublished dissertation submitted for Masters Degree at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, 2002, p.103.
- <sup>8</sup> Mbanjwa, Zaba, loc.cit.
- <sup>9</sup> Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, Little, Brown and Co., U.S.A.,1994, p.544
- <sup>10</sup> Cf. Homily of Pope Benedict XVI at the inaugural Mass of his pontificate, St. Peter’s Square, Sunday, April 24, 2005.
- <sup>11</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, op.cit.
- <sup>12</sup> Interview with Jude Nnorom, C.S.Sp., at Laval House, March 12, 2006.
- <sup>13</sup> Interview with Heinz Gibis, C.S.Sp., at Laval House, July 24, 2006.
- <sup>14</sup> Interview with Erick Ncengani, Kwa Mpumuza Parish, September 2, 2006. Kwa Mpumuza Parish is one of the parishes run by Spiritans in the Archdiocese of Durban.
- <sup>15</sup> Interview with Bernhard Wiederkehr, C.S.Sp., June 12, 2006.
- <sup>16</sup> Interview with Joseph Nnadi, C.S.Sp., at Laval House, Pietermaritzburg, July18, 2006.
- <sup>17</sup> Interview with Jude Nnorom, C.S.Sp., at Laval House, March 12, 2006.
- <sup>18</sup> Interview with Jude Nnorom, C.S.Sp., at Laval House, March 12, 2006.
- <sup>19</sup> Interview with Joseph Nnadi, C.S.Sp., at Laval House, July 18, 2006.
- <sup>20</sup> Interview with Stan Augustjins, C.S.Sp., in the form of a written questionnaire.
- <sup>21</sup> Interview with Fr. Peter Sodje, C.S.Sp., at Laval House, July 12, 2008.

## Jocelyn Gregoire, C.S.Sp.

Born in Mauritius, and ordained in 1986, Father Jocelyn Gregoire, C.S.Sp. has been involved in the evangelization and counseling field for many years. He is currently a professor in counseling at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA. After completing his studies in France and England, he worked as a missionary in Papua New Guinea for seven years. He has authored several books and articles and numerous albums of religious songs in pidgin English, Creole, French and English. Father Gregoire travels extensively around the world, leading retreats and parish missions, conducting workshops, seminars and delivering talks to scores of secular and religious organizations.

# CREOLE MISSION IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF BLESSED JACQUES DESIRE LAVAL

## Introduction

“Our life is paved with hopelessness  
As we tread highways of darkness  
Your finger points to Jesus our Way  
His Light beams a promising new day  
Laval, His face, help us to recognize  
May His presence not escape our eyes.”  
(Jocelyn Gregoire (1991): « Laval Ed Nou. » Audio Cassette :  
*Père Laval Dis Nous Comment*. Mauritius : Ste. Croix.)

My dear confrere Jacques Desiré Laval,  
In the summer of 1841, after twenty one days of excruciating travel on board “*Le Tanjora*” (Farragher, 2007), you became the very first Spiritan missionary sent by Venerable Francis Libermann to have left your native Normandy and set foot on Ile de France. In your heart was a deep love for Jesus Christ and an incredible zeal to set free from any spiritual bondage the captive black slaves of the colony among whom, unbeknownst to you, were my ancestors. You knew them as your ‘poor Blacks’ with whom you spent your entire life being the doctor of their souls (Bernier, 1978; Michel, 1976). Your missionary zeal, the sanctity of your life, and your genuine eagerness to win as many souls as you possibly could for Jesus Christ were so wondrous that they won you the title of Apostle of Mauritius and led the Church to beatify you in 1979.

As you can observe from where you are, Ile de France has surrendered its name to Mauritius and is often lauded as one of the few African countries with continuous economic success as well as peaceful co-existence among its multiracial, multiethnic citizens. However, behind the appearance of success, is a record of slavery, marginalization, and discrimination, especially against the descendents of your “poor and dear Blacks” (Lecuyer, 1978, p.43), the Creole community. Today, the population of Mauritius is comprised of 51% of people of Indian origin, 27% of Creole, 17% of Muslim, 3% of Chinese, and 2% of White (Harmon, 2008). The constitution of Mauritius names and formally recognizes three groups of people: individuals of Indian origin, or the Hindus, individuals who are Muslim, and individuals who are Chinese. In this same document, though, the Creole are non-existent, classified instead as “General Population,” which is a conglomerate group of ‘every person who does not appear, from

*...the Creole community seems to have been left behind by the high speed train of social, economical, political and academic development.*

*...there is among the Creole community a feeling of being abandoned...*

his way of life, to belong to one or other of those [previously listed] three communities' (The Constitution of the Republic of Mauritius, 1992).

### **Creole Reality**

Even though there is no historical evidence that you could have been interested in the political life of the Mauritian society during the 23 years you toiled there, I nevertheless dare to assume that you will be happy to know that a little more than one hundred years after you left for the Father's home, Mauritius became an independent nation, thus breaking loose from the yoke of British occupation. Proudly we can brag about the fact that since the dawn of its Independence on March 12, 1968, the Island has risen from the ashes of an underdeveloped country to become one of the most successful developed nations within the African continent. However, during that process, the Creole community seems to have been left behind by the high speed train of social, economical, political and academic development. Among the various components of the Mauritian nation, the Creole can be considered as the poorest of all. It would seem that the social, political, economic, academic and even spiritual landscape of the Creole community still parallels the situation of the "80,000 forsaken (Blacks)" to whom you dedicated your apostolic work from 1841 through 1864 (Michel, 1988; p. 19). Indeed, it is within this community that we find today the highest number of drug addicts, prostitutes, academic failures, HIV/AIDS, jailed men and women, squatters and street children. The population of the Catholic Church in Mauritius is mainly Creole -- something that has not changed since your time -- and even though the Church is very much involved in both primary and secondary levels of education in Mauritius, yet, only a little few of its Creole members have access to these schools. Most of the Creole children fail their basic primary education, which explains the high rate of illiteracy within the Creole community.

### ***Feeling of forsakenness***

I am sure that, on account of your own personal experience with the forsaken Blacks of your time you will empathically understand why there is among the Creole community a feeling of being abandoned by politicians and the government in general, by the Catholic Church, by the private sector, and by their own fellow middle-class Creole. The Creole feel that they have been forsaken by politicians and the government in general. Out of twenty-two ministers, only three Creoles have a ministerial portfolio in today's government. They feel forsaken by the church of which they are the majority. The chances for

JOCELYN GREGOIRE,  
C.S.SP.

*...the jobs associated with  
Creole genius are facing  
extinction...*

most of our children to enroll in a Catholic primary or secondary school are very lean. They feel forsaken by the private sector, which for economic or even political reasons has preferred to give more support to the other components of the Mauritian community, namely the Hindus. They feel forsaken by their own fellow middle-class Creole who have chosen to immigrate instead of staying behind to help make a difference. Most of the jobs associated with Creole genius are facing extinction and thus point to a gradual genocide of the Creole community, since the job market for the Mauritius of the future will require candidates with university degrees, something that is very scarce among the Creole.

### **Evangelization**

Following in your footsteps, I left Mauritius in 1989 to embark on a missionary adventure that would have me work in Papua New Guinea for nearly seven years. There I ministered to the tribal people and learned the art of communicating the Word of God in simple, colorful language in order to make it come alive in their own language and culture. At the same time, I was gradually awakened to the fact that from the beginning of French colonization until the nineteen sixties, the liturgical celebrations in Mauritius, such as the mass and the sacraments, were mostly done in Latin. While you had set the tone with your creation of a *Little Catechism* in the Creole language that your “poor blacks” could easily understand (Delaplace, 1932; Michel, 1988), no one seems to have picked up the momentum you set. As of today, apart from some isolated initiatives by some priests and lay people, neither the Bible nor the basic catechetical literature for faith instruction has ever been translated into Creole. You will be surprised to learn that when the ecumenical council of Vatican II opened the doors for the use of the vernacular in the celebration of the liturgies, the Roman Catholic Church in Mauritius opted for the French language instead of Creole, which was spoken and understood by all of her congregants. The Creole Catholics had to listen to Sunday sermons and homilies, attempt to read the Word of God, pray and worship, and be catechized all in a language that was foreign to them. As you can surely imagine, to most Creole people, Latin and French are foreign languages that have been barriers to faith literacy, since a large majority of its members cannot read or write with proficiency.

*...to most Creole people,  
Latin and French are  
foreign languages...*

### **Session Gregoire**

Drawing heavily on your missionary approach that targeted the adults and the insight you had about the use of Creole language in your apostolic works among the Blacks in Mauritius (Michel,



*Session Gregoire can be visualized as a three-phased catechumenal journey towards a greater knowledge, appreciation and intimacy with the Holy Trinity, the Catholic Church and the world.*

1988), I started in 1996 an evangelization program which is commonly referred to as “*session Gregoire*.” It can be visualized as a three-phased catechumenal journey towards a greater knowledge, appreciation and intimacy with the Holy Trinity, the Catholic Church and the world. It takes its inspiration from the final commissions of Jesus to his disciples in the Synoptic Gospels which can be succinctly outlined thus:

**Phase 1: Mark 16, 15:** “*Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel.*”

What is that Gospel or Good News that we have to proclaim to the people of Mauritius, more particularly to the Creole who make up the large majority of the Catholic population? It is the Good News of freedom and liberty that has been won for them through the death and resurrection of Jesus. It is a Gospel that frees them from their fears, their sins and oppression. It is the proclamation of the Good News that they are children of God endowed with the dignity of priest, prophet, and king, heirs of a Spirit that frees them from the grip of sorcerers, charms, hexes, curses, witchcraft, and other spiritual bondage.

**Phase 2: Matthew 28, 19-20:** “*Go ... and make disciples of all nations... teaching them...*”

After the Good News of freedom from fear and bondage has been proclaimed, people need to encounter the author of their liberation – Jesus Christ. An anthropological study done in 1990 arrived at a very disturbing conclusion that, because of their practices and the way they relate to God, the Creole in Mauritius would be shocked to learn that they are not fully Catholic (Zimmermann, 1995). Through storytelling, Scripture reading, sermons and homilies I taught them about God being a God of love, who sent His only son Jesus Christ to redeem us and to give us new life in the Holy Spirit. We are freed by Jesus Christ who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life and in whose Name we have the power to conquer our fears and break away from evil’s bondage.

**Phase 3: Luke 24, 48:** “*You are witnesses of these things.*”

Once the sense of freedom has been acquired and a genuine encounter with Jesus Christ has been made, those touched cannot help but witness to their newfound life and renewed faith. Family life starts changing for the better and people are not afraid to talk about their faith to members of their family, colleagues and friends, or even to testify publicly about their relationship with Jesus and the Church in the media. What once was taboo and practiced secretly as the “religion of the night” (Zimmerman,



JOCELYN GREGOIRE,  
C.S.SP.

*...convincing those who  
are still involved in occult  
practices to reconvert their  
life to Jesus Christ.*

*Most of the requests for  
a session come from lay  
people...*

1990) is denounced openly and publicly by former practitioners in the aim of convincing those who are still involved in occult practices to reconvert their life to Jesus Christ. It is also during this phase that eyes are opened to issues of social justice and the need for Christians to take a preferential option for the poor and most vulnerable members of our Mauritian society.

### ***Session's Format***

Typically, all “sessions” have a three evening, three hour and three stage format consisting of praise and worship in the first hour, preaching and teaching in the second hour, and individual testimonies in the last hour. They are held on a site, a village or area in a parish with the explicit authorization of the parish priest. While the principle of getting a pastor’s permission to hold a session can be lauded as a “best practice” in terms of boundary respect and reverence of church authority, it also has its drawbacks. Most of the requests for a session come from lay people who either have been to one of my sessions or who have had someone witness to them about a session and the change that he or she experienced because of participation in it. When they contact my office to schedule a session, they are always sent back to their parish priest in order to get his approval for me to come and hold a session in his parish. Unfortunately, most priests who refuse to authorize a session in their parish seem to overlook these facts:

- Laypeople are taking responsibility for their spiritual needs and are taking the necessary steps to have their faith be fed;
- The need to embark on this catechumenal journey is more necessary for the parishioners than for the parish priest per se;
- It costs the parish practically nothing to stage a session since the parishioners themselves take over the logistical and financial aspects of the session;
- Every session always brings a renewal in the life of the parishioner and thus in the life of the parish on which the parish priest can easily capitalize for his own pastoral plan;
- Involvement of the laity is very consequential and many people who normally are not even seen at the doorsteps of the parish church

commit their time, talents and energy in the preparation for the session;

- The sessions are normally held in areas within a parish where most of the poignant social evils, such as drugs, prostitution, abject poverty and gangs are nested.

I believe from where you are, dear confrere (and I will not be surprised to learn if you somehow have your hand in it), you must have witnessed that many lapsed Catholics are returning to the Church through participation in the session. The use of the Creole language contributed a lot to helping all those who participated to have a better understanding of their practice of the Catholic faith. Moreover, since 1986, I have been writing hymns in the Creole language based on biblical passages and the Psalms and have recorded and produced more than 130 songs to be used in the celebration of the liturgy and as media for catechism and evangelization. The response to this endeavor has been very positive, and there seems to be a rejuvenation of the faith and a better understanding among Creole Catholics of their relationship with God because they now can sing, worship, pray and enter into intimacy with Him in a language, music, and culture they know and are at ease with. Over time, as churches began to get overcrowded during the sessions, we had to move outside in the church's yard or utilize stadiums in order to accommodate the crowds.

*The use of the Creole language contributed a lot...*

*...churches began to get overcrowded during the sessions...*

### **The Need to Incarnate the Gospel**

The Creoles' journey to renewed faith and relationship with God and the Church through the sessions gradually became an evident success, which prompted Cardinal Jean Margéot to publicly declare, "Jocelyn, you have succeeded where for thirty some years we older priests have tried hard but have failed. Through your songs, you have put the Bible in Creole and placed the Creole into the Bible." As reassuring as those words may be, they also called for a further pursuit of the journey, which is well in line with the third phase of the evangelization process. The sessions in the different parts of the country brought me to a front-row encounter with poverty as it is being experienced and lived by a multitude of Creole families in areas infested by drugs, prostitution, academic failure, sexual abuse, economic and social deprivation. The peace and solace that most of these Creole families were taking out of the sessions also called for a concrete incarnation of the Gospel in their daily existence, much like you tried so hard to do in your time with them. From the bosom

JOCELYN GREGOIRE,  
C.S.SP.

*...was emerging an  
agonizing cry for more social  
justice.*

*...the divide between the  
haves and the have-nots is  
becoming more and more  
abysmal...*

of the inhuman conditions in which practically most Creoles in Mauritius found themselves was emerging an agonizing cry for more social justice.

Thus, the consuming passion that is driving me to tread daily in the footsteps of Jesus also brought me to a confrontation with his whiplashing proclamation: “Blessed are you who are poor for yours is the kingdom of God” (Luke 6, 20. NRSV). God once “observed the misery of (his) people who are in Egypt; ... heard their cry on account of their taskmasters” (Exodus 3, 7, NRSV) and called Moses to go and set his people free. Similarly, he observed the misery and heard the cry of my poor Creole ancestors on account of their slave masters, and sent you, Jacques Laval, to be an instrument of their deliverance. And today, in contemporary Mauritius, the certitude that the cry of the Creole is still being heard by the Lord and the pangs of their sufferings are known to Him, prompt me to realize that He has not disincarnated Himself from their daily life. As the divide between the haves and the have-nots is becoming more and more abysmal in Mauritius, I have no other choice than to push myself to take, in the name of Jesus, a stand for more social justice in favor of the poorest and most vulnerable members of our Mauritian society, in the same way you did for the 80,000 poor blacks despite the virulent oppositions you had to face from the white colonists and members of the clergy.

### ***The Birth of the FCM and its Vision for the Creole***

So, in September of 2007, I initiated the emergence of the Federation of Mauritian Creole (FCM) as a political voice and grassroots advocate for the Creole, working to increase public awareness of the community’s diverse economic and social problems. Since then, the *FCM* has engaged in numerous endeavors to advance consciousness of Creole issues, promote changes in governmental policy that disadvantage the Creole, and mobilize the Creole community to take an active part in changing its status as the poorest and most under-educated ethnic group on the island. In our 2008 Global Vision, the *FCM* noted its four primary goals: a) to assist the Creole community to take responsibility for its own advancement, b) to restore pride in and recognition of the economic, historic, and social contribution made by Creoles to Mauritius, c) to work fully and conjointly with other ethnic groups for the development of the country, and d) to advocate for a constitutional change that will officially recognize the Creole community as a national ethnic group (*Federation Creoles Mauriciens*, 2008). In the name of the common good, and on the basis of the solemn principle

that recognizes the fundamental rights and dignity of every human person, I sincerely believe that one of the tasks of the *FCM* is to call out and confront the deafness and blindness of every political, social, and religious institution to the desolate situations of the Creole. My unshakable willingness to remain faithful to my vocation as a missionary priest intertwined with my resolute choice to heed the commission of Jesus to take a preferential option for the poor, drives me to ask: WHY is it that after 40 years of independence, the present state of the Creole community in Mauritius is still gloomy? WHY are there so little employment opportunities for the Creole in the public sector? WHY is there a perceived institutionalized discrimination against the Creole when it comes to promotion processes in the government? WHY are the Creole denied official recognition as a racial and ethnic group by the Constitution while the Hindus, Muslims and Chinese are officially recognized?

*....dreadful bruises of slavery  
from which the Creole in  
Mauritius have not yet fully  
recovered...*

It is my belief that there is a need for rigorous work aimed at healing the traumatic scars of slavery that brand the Mauritian Creole community even today. Such a healing can only be achieved if all of the ethnic, racial and cultural groups that comprise the Mauritian pluralistic society, as well as every secular and religious institution, work hand in hand towards the fulfillment of this process. The dreadful bruises of slavery from which the Creole in Mauritius have not yet fully recovered are not mere illusions of a fictitious novel, but they are deep psychological, social, cultural, spiritual, economic, academic and human traumas that continue to throb in the Creole community. Attempting to deny this painful reality, or even to minimize the very fact of its existence, would be equal to enslaving the Creole once again under the yoke of a new slave master I would name a *hypocritical and indifferent false Mauricianism*. True Mauricianism can only be achieved when the Creoles in Mauritius are incorporated more fully into mainstream society. While the momentum must be created by the Creoles themselves, the rest of the country must react to our claims with tolerance and generosity (Carroll & Carroll, 2000).

*Empowerment is the key  
concept here.*

Far from taking a stand of political demagoguery that would promise false hope of change for the Creole's life, my honest and transparent motives boldly cry out to the Creole that they cannot just sit and wait for the government, the Church, the private sector or even for a charismatic leader to come and take them out of their misfortune. They have to roll up their sleeves, stand on their own feet and get to work very hard in order to achieve the advancement for which they are aspiring. **Empowerment** is the key concept here. Moreover, since it is the belief of the *FCM*

JOCELYN GREGOIRE,  
C.S.SP.

that education is the key for our future, we are working towards the principle of a second-chance education, which calls us to work with the government, the church, and the private sector to develop various adult education programs. We also are seeking to develop better housing situations for the poor squatters, shelter for the street children, and training and formation programs for Creole men and women in the various parts and slums of the island.

### **Conclusion**

*...to row against the social,  
political and even ecclesial  
tides...*

Dear confrere, the moment you set foot on the island of Mauritius more than one and a half centuries ago, you were moved to establish the *black mission* against all odds. Your courage and perseverance but most uniquely, your uncompromising belief that these “poor and dear children” of yours had the absolute right to encounter Jesus who loved them and died for them prompted you to row against the social, political and even ecclesial tides of your day. Nearly one hundred and fifty years after your death, your memory is still very much alive in the collective consciousness of the Mauritian people of every racial, cultural, ethnic and religious background. Day after day, the shrine in St. Croix, where your body has found its last abode, is visited by hundreds of people seeking physical or spiritual comfort, healing, reassurance, or even a miracle. They believe their fervent prayers will be heard through your intercession. However, while the sanctity of your life is greatly and justly extolled, as a confrere and fellow missionary, who timidly is trying to tread in your footsteps, I believe that your apostolic genius and missionary vision have been somewhat overlooked. Somehow, the missionary momentum that you set in process with the *black mission* has been allowed to die to such an extent that talking about Creole mission in Mauritius today makes many Catholics and even some members of the clergy cringe. Moreover, the laity is still struggling to find its rightful place in the apostolic and administrative life of the Church in contrast to the army of catechists and lay collaborators that were the backbone of your pastoral success. The Creole language is still painfully elbowing its way into the official liturgical celebrations and translations of the main books, rituals, and even the scripture in usage in the Catholic Church in Mauritius. I bring all these now to your attention and the intercessions of your prayers. Your poor children still need you. The Creole in Mauritius still need you, and I definitely need you. Thank you for praying for us.

*The Creole language is still  
painfully elbowing its way...*

In Jesus and in Mary, your brother,  
Jocelyn Gregoire, CSSp.

### **References**

Bernier, P. (1978). *Père Laval*. Rome: Congregation of the Holy Ghost.  
Carroll B., Carroll, T. (2000). Trouble in paradise: ethnic conflict in Mauritius. *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 28:2, July.

Delaplace, F. (1932). *Le P. Jacques-Desiré Laval : Apôtre de l'Île Maurice (1830 – 1864)*. Paris : Beauchesne.

Farragher, S. CSSp. (2007). *Spiritun people and places*. Paraclete Press. Blackrock, Co Dublin.

Government of Mauritius. (1992). *The Constitution of the Republic of Mauritius*. Port-Louis: Government of Mauritius Printer , (Schedule 1, section 3, paragraph 4)

Harmon, J. (2008). *L'Espérance créole : progrès et dignité*. Ile Maurice: Editions Marye-Pike.

Lecuyer, J. (1978). *Jacques Laval ; extraits de sa correspondance*. Paris : Beauchesne.

Michel, J. (1988). *Les auxiliaires laïcs du Bienheureux Jacques Laval Apôtre de l'Île Maurice*. Paris : Beauchesne.

Michel, J. (1976). *Le Père Jacques Laval le saint de l'Île Maurice 1803 – 1864*. Paris : Beauchesne.

Zimmermann, R. (1990). *La sorcellerie à l'Île Maurice : voyage dans l'irrationnel et le magique*. Pont Praslin.

Zimmermann, R. (1995). *Mo pa kroir dan sa bann zafer la, me lemal ekzis : Etude des comportements religieux en monde populaire Créole. Rapport final*. Diocèse de Port-Louis.

