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# Introduction

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

In this second edition, **Jean-Savoie** outlines the history of the *cause for beatification* of the Spiritan founder, *Claude-François Poullart des Places*. **Christy Burke** reflects on the central role of *freedom* in the vision of Francis Libermann, the Congregation's second founder; **Arsène Aubert** looks at the relatively unknown *correspondence of Libermann with his family* and **Binh The Quach** opens up new horizons in investigating points of contact between the spirituality of Libermann and the *philosophy of Lao Tzu*. **Elochukwu Uzukwu** explores the notion of *inculturation* with particular reference to the Spiritan charism and **James Chukwuma Okoye** looks at the *mission of the Third Church in the First World* and its possibilities for a "mutual exchange of energies." **John Kilcrann**, JPIC Coordinator in Rome, develops a contemporary *Spiritan spirituality of Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation*. Theology professor at Duquesne University, **William Thompson-Uberuaga** explores the *role of the Holy Spirit in teaching* from the threefold perspective of student, teacher, and subject matter, relating his findings to the spirituality of Francis Libermann. **Thomas Farrelly** outlines current efforts to articulate *the mission and identity of Spiritan schools in Ireland* with reference to the inspiration of the Spiritan founders, the written, and the lived tradition. Lay Spiritan husband and wife, **Peter and Ann-Marie Fell**, reflect on the *identity and commitment of the lay Spiritan* and describe their involvement with REVIVE, a professional service of support and advocacy for refugees and asylum seekers in the Greater Manchester area in England. **José Altevir da Silva** tells us of the *impact of the Spiritan Year on young people in his native Brazil* and Mozambican Spiritan **João Luis Dimba** retraces his fascinating personal story *from refugee to Spiritan missionary*.

## THE CAUSE FOR THE BEATIFICATION OF THE SERVANT OF GOD CLAUDE-FRANÇOIS POUILLART DES PLACES<sup>1</sup>

Jean Savoie, C.S.Sp.

Jean Savoie is a former Provincial of his native Province of France. After seven years as a missionary in Cameroon, he served as Rector of the French Seminary in Rome and subsequently on the General Direction of the Orphelins Apprentis d'Auteuil in Paris. Fr. Savoie is currently editor of *Esprit Saint*, a French review of Spiritan spirituality, and Postulator for the Cause for Canonization of Claude Poullart des Places. He is author of numerous articles on the history and spirituality of the Spiritan Congregation and is a much sought-after retreat director.

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

*...one's gift of self for  
others and for the Church  
should provide a pathway  
to holiness that others can  
follow today.*

It is quite an exceptional experience for a religious to be able to submit his own founder to the judgment of the Church. I had the joy and responsibility of presenting the cause of our founder, Claude Poullart des Places, before the tribunal in Paris between 1988 and 2005, in the name of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit. This challenged me in many ways, especially in regard to the extent of my own knowledge of the person and life of our founder. I had many gaps to fill, but my reward has been great.

What the Church looks for primarily in the case of a beatification is holiness of life. One's personal fidelity to the interior action of the Holy Spirit, one's gift of self for others and for the Church, should provide a pathway to holiness that others can follow today. In this sense Claude's holiness had always been recognized within the Congregation he founded by the members who felt inspired by his life and example.

### 1. THE HISTORY OF THE CAUSE OF POUILLART DES PLACES

As soon as it was decided to propose Claude Poullart for the official recognition of the Church, two questions were immediately raised: what reputation for sanctity did he have within the universal Church, and why had the Congregation waited for 300 years to acknowledge his sanctity and to recommend him to the Church for beatification? Perhaps the most appropriate way to address these questions is to describe the different steps in his Cause.

#### **Poullart des Places in the Spiritan Congregation and in the Church**

Claude was greatly admired and respected during his life and in the years that followed his death. Many people testified to this, both in his own seminary and in the religious circles of Paris in his day. Even the virulent attacks against his seminary by the Jansenists did not point the finger at his own person. The "Placistes" were much maligned by the Gallicanists, but never Claude himself. The eulogies at the time of his death were very explicit. One of them concludes with these words: "*Thus was the saintly and renowned founder of the Séminaire du Saint Esprit in Paris, Monsieur Des Places.*"<sup>2</sup>

## The History of the Cause

The cause of Claude Poullart des Places, the Servant of God, was only introduced in 1988, virtually 280 years after his death – way beyond the regulatory five years. There are several reasons why the request for beatification was not submitted earlier:

- In the decades following his death, the Seminary of the Holy Spirit was living such a degree of spiritual poverty that nobody would have dared to seek such an honor for its founder.
- From 1805 to 1848, the Seminary did not raise the question because it was having so much trouble recovering its possessions after the French Revolution and carrying out its missionary work in the context of the new international situation.
- Between 1848 and 1901, the “fusion” of the Society of the Holy Heart of Mary with the Congregation of the Holy Spirit resulted in a great emphasis being put on the personality of Fr. Libermann as a master of spirituality. Little reference was made to Poullart des Places, although he continued to be regarded as the founder of the original Congregation of the Holy Spirit, so it did not seem appropriate to raise the question of his beatification at that time.
- In 1901, in order to avoid the dissolution of the Congregation, the exact text of the 1848 decree of “fusion” was again scrutinized; it became clear that only the Congregation of Poullart de Places, and not that of the Holy Heart of Mary, continued to exist juridically. However, this had no immediate impact on the spirit of the Congregation.
- From 1906, the question was raised explicitly in the Congregation with the publication of the book by Fr. Henri Le Floc’h.<sup>3</sup> The reactions to this work, addressed by Le Floc’h in the second edition,<sup>4</sup> cast no doubts on the person and holiness of the founder, but concentrate on the significance to be attached to the “fusion” of 1848 and the lack of knowledge amongst Spiritans of the true status of their Congregation. In 1915, there are still many misconceptions about this “fusion”; the resulting polemical atmosphere ruled out the possibility of a peaceful and unified examination of the question of the Cause.

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*Without one of them we would not have existed, without the other we would no longer be in existence.*

*A memorial to Poullart des Places was erected in the chapel of the Spiritans in rue Lhomond, Paris, facing the tomb of Francis Libermann.*

- In 1919, the General Chapter recognized Poullart des Places as the founder of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit and Libermann as “*the second founder and spiritual father.*” This was encapsulated by Mgr. Le Roy in his famous saying: “*Without one of them we would not have existed, without the other we would no longer be in existence.*”<sup>5</sup>
- On November 4<sup>th</sup>, 1959, the General Council of the Congregation asked the Spiritan Procurator in Rome to contact the Congregation of Rites with a view to introducing the Cause of Poullart des Places.<sup>6</sup> Fr. Antoine Soirat began to draw up a dossier on November 9<sup>th</sup>. However, he wrote to the Superior General that “*it would be prudent not to start anything before receiving the authorization of the Congregation of Rites.*” Fr. Joseph Michel, in turn, wrote to the Superior General on January 12<sup>th</sup>, 1960, as follows: “*While regretting the delay, any steps taken in the immediate future would run the risk of being premature and even of compromising the long-term prospects for success. It would be better to start by ensuring that our founder becomes better known.*”
- Several historical and spiritual researches were subsequently undertaken: the books and translations of Frs. Koren,<sup>7</sup> Carignan, Lécuyer, Michel,<sup>8</sup> and the conferences given on the occasion of the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Claude Poullart (1979). A memorial to Poullart des Places was erected in the chapel of the Spiritans in rue Lhomond, Paris, facing the tomb of Francis Libermann.
- At the 1986 General Chapter there was a motion to ask the General Council to commission competent confreres to undertake the necessary study for a better understanding of Claude Poullart des Places and the introduction of his Cause; the motion was adopted by 70 votes out of 81.<sup>9</sup>
- In August 1987, a brief enquiry by the Provincial of France concluded that the Congregation was ready to ask for his beatification. All that was known of Poullart des Places was collected and analyzed from the writings of Frs. Michel, Koren, Martin, Metzger, Riaud, Derrien, and Haas, the Superior General.

*He had founded a seminary that he directed for six years, but it had no official recognition or stability.*

- On November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1988, the General Council appointed Fr. Jean Savoie as the Postulator<sup>10</sup> for the Archdiocese of Paris. The request to introduce the Cause of Canonization of Poullart des Places was presented with the necessary documentation to the Archbishop of Paris on December 24<sup>th</sup>, 1988.
- Cardinal Lustiger signed the Decree for the opening of the canonical investigation on October 1<sup>st</sup>, 1989. The theological examiners of the works of Poullart des Places produced their report at the beginning of 2003. The Cardinal set up an historical commission on April 9<sup>th</sup>, 2003; it submitted its report on October 16<sup>th</sup>. On October 12<sup>th</sup>, 2004, the canonical tribunal was constituted to examine the Cause of des Places. The public session for the opening of the Cause was held on December 16<sup>th</sup>, 2004. There were 10 sessions of the tribunal in 2005 and finally the dossier was transferred to Rome on November 16<sup>th</sup>, 2005. The Roman process has now begun.

## **2. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE CHARISM OF POUILLART DES PLACES**

It seems to be providential that the foundation of Claude Poullart was able to survive for centuries, when one considers that it did not evolve naturally, either as a seminary or as a Congregation, which were subject in France to the royal decree of 1666. It was more than a century after his death that the work reached its full maturity. Fr. Joseph Michel refers to “*the great miracle of the survival of the Congregation.*”<sup>11</sup>

### **The apparent fragility of the work left behind by Claude Poullart**

The project should be assessed not by its beginnings but rather by its capacity to survive many changes of times and places. Libermann himself said: “*The way of educating young seminarians in our day must be completely different to that followed before the revolution of 1793. Experience shows that the old methods are no longer applicable.*”<sup>12</sup>

When he died, there was no great solidity in what Claude Poullart left behind. He had founded a seminary that he directed for six years, but it had no official recognition or stability. There was no structure that could steer it into the future. His team of formators grew smaller in number and had no guaranteed permanence; two

of his four companions were withdrawn in the same year as he died. Neither was there any financial stability since it was only seen as a charitable establishment for “poor scholars.” But it did answer an obvious need in the Church, so the institutional and financial means were eventually found.

This is a good illustration of the charism of Poullart des Places; he was so united to God and faithful to the Holy Spirit that he laid foundations which would give a lasting and important service to the Church. The strong convictions and dedication of the superiors who followed him ensured that the seminary founded by Poullart des Places would survive.

### **The exceptional influence of the work**

It took another 25 years or so before the work acquired official recognition and a permanent home (1732). For the next 60 years it functioned normally as a seminary for the poor (1732-1792). But with the coming of the French Revolution, there were several years of almost continuous exclusion, when the project remained alive but largely unproductive (1792-1832). These were followed by 15 years of increasing apostolic demands from both Rome and the French State (1832-1848). Consolidation then came in the form of the foundation of Francis Libermann, the Society of the Holy Heart of Mary, whose members entered the Congregation of the Holy Spirit in 1848.

The friendship between Poullart des Places and Grignon de Montfort led to a close collaboration between the two Congregations that they founded. Throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Seminary of the Holy Spirit trained two thirds of the members and three Superiors General of the Company of Mary.

From early on, the students of the Seminary went to missions abroad, especially to Canada, the Far East, Guyane, and Senegal. After the Revolution, the Congregation of Poullart des Places received permission from Napoleon and King Louis XVIII to function again for the sole purpose of providing priests for the French colonies.

There were constant references to Poullart des Places and his apostolic charism throughout the history of the Congregation. After his death, his enduring reputation attracted people to give their whole lives to fulfilling his vision.<sup>13</sup> His writings are not very voluminous, but they are highly spiritual and witness to his constant search for union with God. Taken together, they show him as the founder of a community of prayer and missionary apostolic action.

*The friendship between Poullart des Places and Grignon de Montfort led to a close collaboration between the two Congregations that they founded.*



### **The strength of the charism of Poullart des Places**

We can see a considerable evolution from what was started by Claude Poullart to what has become today of the Congregation that claims him for its founder. His charism is not limited to his personal role but extends to what God wished to do with his foundation. A founder's charism is personal but it radiates into all the action that it inspires.

The Spiritan historian, Fr. Henry Koren, speaks as follows regarding the strength of the charism of the founder:

*A founder's charism is personal but it radiates into all the action that it inspires.*

*Poullart des Places was, above all, a spiritual person, attentive to spiritual needs.*

*The strength, however, of Fr. des Places' foundation did not lie in its organization, but in its charism. All its graduates became known as Spiritans, but they had no other formal religious commitment than their ordination, and their common bond was the way they viewed their priesthood. . . Being a priest was for them an evangelical availability in obedience to the Spirit for the service of the poor and abandoned in voluntary personal poverty. If this conception of the priesthood did not suffice to make them live a truly religious life, so they must have thought, any additional reaffirmation of their commitment in vows or oaths would be rather useless or hypocritical.*

*What des Places wanted was real, not merely formal, identification with the poor through a frugal existence, and for him the Gospel option for the poor was fidelity to the Spirit. This was all the more urgent because in his time there was a great shortage of truly committed priests to serve such people. The same kind of shortage exists also today.<sup>14</sup>*

Poullart des Places was, above all, a spiritual person, attentive to spiritual needs. He did not see his seminary as a project to be accomplished but rather as a work to be performed in the service of God. He had no plans to found a religious Congregation.

*He was a spiritual person who abandoned himself to the Holy Spirit in the circumstances which life presented. He heard the Spirit call him through the people he met. He imitated Christ his master first of all. He imitated Michel Le Nobletz, the master of spiritual poverty. He imitated Father Gourdan de St. Victor. He imitated Mr. Chanciergues, who out of humility remained a permanent deacon and founded seminaries for the poor — he even copied his rule. Poullart did not spin theories — he lived. He is a witness more than a teacher. He is a spiritual man*

*He passed on to his  
followers a spirit of  
disinterested objectivity  
and thus prepared them  
for the unexpected  
evolution that lay ahead.*

*...his first concern was  
to find God and to be  
faithful to his love in  
whatever was asked of  
him.*

He followed his own vocation and the charism that was given to him to carry out his work. This is the source of his sanctity and effectiveness. He passed on to his followers a spirit of disinterested objectivity and thus prepared them for the unexpected evolution that lay ahead. To begin with, he followed his vocation to become a poor priest in the service of the poor. This led to the setting up of a seminary for the poor. After his death, the needs of the Church in France, of the colonies, and of the black races, directed his foundation to become a Congregation at the service of the Propagation of the Faith. Finally, the objective re-focused more clearly on the evangelization of the “poor” in the world.<sup>16</sup>

### **Conclusion: The spiritual personality of Claude Poullart**

The personality of Poullart des Places is seen, above all, in his search for a spiritual life and his fidelity to the Holy Spirit, to whom he consecrated his life. The different stages of his life were marked by an evolving clarification and concretization of the gift of himself to God. He started a work of great importance to the Church but this was not his priority; his first concern was to find God and to be faithful to his love in whatever was asked of him. The price he paid was high. He left his comfortable background and the refined society that he was used to. He abandoned his ambition to shine in the eyes of others to follow the light of the Holy Spirit in self-effacing service. In the short time allotted to him, he followed this disinterested itinerary of service in imitation of Jesus Christ. Poullart des Places shows us a way to sanctity. He shows it to us as a founding father who only had time to sow the seed. Others watered it and helped it grow, but it was God who produced the harvest. A similar message in today’s Church would surely produce the same fruit.

### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Claude Poullart des Places (1679-1709) is the founder of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit. Born into a noble family in Brittany, he was educated by the Jesuits and then decided to become a priest in Paris. He founded and directed a community to enable poor students to become priests. He died at the age of 30 and his seminary evolved into the Congregation of the Holy Spirit.

<sup>2</sup> Claude Besnard: *Vie de M. Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort, Centre Salésien*, Rome 1981, Documents IV, p.282 ; Christian de Mare : *Claude-François Poullart des Places (1679-1709), Ecrits et Etudes*, pp. 369-370.

<sup>3</sup> Henri Le Floc'h: *Claude François Poullart des Places, fondateur du Séminaire et de la Congrégation du Saint-Esprit*, Paris, Lethielleux, 1905.

<sup>4</sup> The second edition was published in 1915. Cf. also Henri Le Floc'h: *Note pour la nouvelle édition de la vie de Poullart des Places*, Rome, 1915, 35 pp.

<sup>5</sup> Acts of the Spiritan General Chapter of 1919.

<sup>6</sup> Letter S/1245/59 from the General Council to the Procurator General, Fr. Daniel Murphy.

<sup>7</sup> Henry Koren: *The Spiritans*, Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, Pa, 1958; *The Spiritual Writings of Claude-François Poullart des Places*, Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, Pa, 1959.

<sup>8</sup> Joseph Michel : *Claude François Poullart des Places, fondateur de la Congrégation du Saint Esprit, 1679-1709*, Editions St. Paul, Paris, 1962.

<sup>9</sup> Acts of the General Chapter, 1986

<sup>10</sup> Decision 81/88 of the General Council.

<sup>11</sup> Letter of January 12, 1960, to the Superior General.

<sup>12</sup> *Notes et Documents XII*, p. 525 (Translation : V. O'Toole)

<sup>13</sup> We can refer, amongst other examples, to the heroic perseverance of the Superior General, Monsieur Bertout.

<sup>14</sup> Henry J. Koren: *Essays on the Spiritan Charism and on Spiritan History*, Spiritus Press, Bethel Park, Pa, pp. 48-49

<sup>15</sup> J. Savoie: The Spiritual Personality of Claude Poullart des Places, *Spiritans Papers No. 10*, Sept.-Dec. 1979, Spiritan Generalate, Rome, p.23.

<sup>16</sup> Spiritan Rule of Life, 1987, no. 4: "The evangelisation of the 'poor' is our purpose..."

*The Vision of Francis Libermann*

Christy Burke, CSSp.

C. Burke is an Irish Spiritan who worked for many years as a missionary in Kenya. A graduate of University College, Dublin, and the Angelicum, Rome, he obtained his STD in 1977 at the Alfonsianum, Rome, with a thesis on the *Mission Methodology of Francis Libermann*. He taught at both junior and senior seminary level in Kenya and served as chaplain and lecturer at the University of Nairobi. Author of *Morality and Mission: Francis Libermann and Slavery* (1998), Christy is a founder member of WAJIBU, a Kenyan religious and social concerns magazine. He is currently chaplain at the National Rehabilitation Hospital in Dublin, Ireland.

*Freedom was not something that was given but something that had to be constantly striven for.*

During my first couple of months in Kenya in 1966 I became fascinated by the President and Father of the Nation, as he was called, Jomo Kenyatta. His presence at public rallies was magnificent. He would wave the fly whisk shout ‘HARAMBEE’ and hold the audience spellbound. “*What is the HARAMBEE?*” I asked. “*It is the call that goes out to a group of people when they are trying to move a load to get them to pull together,*” I was told. So this magic word was meant to get the forty or more tribes pulling or shoving together in order to get the country moving.

Another phrase that constantly came from Kenyatta and seemed to evoke a great response was “*Sisi hatukupewa uhuru, tulijinakulia uhuru.*” I knew this phrase before I knew what it meant - “*we were not given freedom, we had to snatch it for ourselves.*” Freedom was not something that was given by Britain, it was something that was won as a result of struggle. “*The struggle has to continue,*” the President would say, “*We have to struggle against the three major obstacles, poverty, illness, and ignorance.*”

Kenya had won its independence less than three years before and faced many problems. I had gone there to teach and to bring Good News. I found that there was a lot to learn. African traditional wisdom had much to offer. Freedom was not something that was given but something that had to be constantly striven for. Independence had to be seen as interdependence.

Recently, reading *The Evangelization of Slaves and Catholic Origins in Eastern Africa* by Paul V. Kollman,<sup>1</sup> the issue of freedom was raised again for me. I thought of that cry of Kenyatta about freedom not being given but fought for. The slaves were not really given freedom, they too had to struggle for it. Kollman, in a number of instances, showed how those who were bought out of slavery by the French Spiritans and settled in “Christian Communities” had to assert their independence, which led to the breakdown of the system. Of particular interest was Kollman’s assertion that the Spiritans who set up and supervised the communities of former slaves between 1860 and 1890 were not true to the missionary thinking of Libermann. I noted with some satisfaction that for Libermann’s ideas Kollman depended largely on Burke 1998!<sup>2</sup>

## EXPERIENCE OF CONSTRAINTS AND FREEDOM

It is interesting to find in the first letter we have from Libermann (to his brother Samson in 1826) that freedom is emphasized. Libermann at this time had moved from his home in Saverne to Metz where he experienced a sense of rejection and loneliness, on the one hand, but a sense of freedom also. “*God has given us the power to think. This should not be left idle but should be put to use.*”<sup>3</sup> He has moved from the ghetto of Saverne and the constricted atmosphere of rabbinical studies, he has begun to learn French and read French literature. He has broken a number of taboos and finds satisfaction in the new-found freedom. But he is still searching. He is about to break with his tradition but has not found a place where he can be at home. Freedom to think, he had discovered as something given by God.

*There can be no  
'Harambee,' no pulling  
together, if the individual  
does not belong  
somewhere.*

This kind of freedom and free thinking did not last for long. He was alone and lonely. He no longer had family. He was free from the restrictions of the ghetto but not free to be what he wanted to be. There can be no ‘Harambee,’ no pulling together, if the individual does not belong somewhere. Soon he found a place where he did belong - in the College of St Stanislas. From there he went to the Seminary of St Sulpice, then to Issy, and from there to the Eudist novitiate in Rennes. These changes were dictated more by events than by personal decision. In a sense he was travelling in the dark. His freedom was curtailed by his physical condition as an epileptic and his social condition as a seminarian and cleric in Minor Orders. He was in another ghetto-like environment.

*It would be far better  
to have a small united  
group than to have a  
large assorted mixture.*

In 1839, when giving advice to Le Vasseur and Tisserant who had consulted him about their missionary project to help the slaves, he is adamant that the mission they are considering should be the work of a community:

*No matter how this affair is carried out, you must live in community and have among you a stable manner of life. If there is a spirit of intolerance and pride among you this could destroy the whole project. It would be far better to have a small united group than to have a large assorted mixture.*<sup>4</sup>

Libermann here is supporting the initiative of the two seminarians. They have something worthwhile in view. They are allowed the freedom to follow through with their project. But this must not be a kind of ego-trip. It has to be tested and that requires some social structure. What sociology would recognize later was foreseen by Libermann:

*To have a conversion experience is nothing much. The real thing is to continue taking it seriously, to retain its sense of plausibility; this is where the religious community comes in.*<sup>5</sup>

I suspect that Libermann in the seminary, and especially in the novitiate in Rennes, was quite strict with the seminarians and the novices, and may not have always favored the freedom that he would approve of later. A confidant, Fr Galais, wrote to him in 1841:

*What impeded the success of your ministry in Rennes was that you pushed people beyond the grace they were getting at that time and were too much troubled by their imperfections.*<sup>6</sup>

*The novices had to be socialized into a religious community but their freedom had to be respected also.*

He probably realized that he had made mistakes and he had learned from having tried to put undue pressure on the novices in leading them in the spiritual life. The novices had to be socialized into a religious community but their freedom had to be respected also. When he took on the missionary apostolate his views changed quite radically. This 'conversion' to mission took place during the last three months of 1839.

A letter that is not typical of Libermann's gentleness and diplomacy, written shortly after he left Rennes, seems to point to recognition of his mistakes – mistakes quite common among spiritual directors. He writes to a director of a seminary, Fr. Feret, a priest of considerable standing in his diocese and who had sought his advice in the past, stressing that the freedom of seminarians has to be respected. The spiritual director ought not to take on the role of the Holy Spirit:

*I am not at all pleased with your methods of directing vocations. It seems you want to set yourself up as the one to decide on vocations. This is not a matter for the director at all. His job is to obey the will of God as this is revealed in the person. The director ought not to try to guide people. That is God's work. Rather he should try to provide the conditions so that God's will is not being opposed. A director with his own ideas, his own particular point of view, his own principles about what should be done, usually resists the working of the Holy Spirit. It is not for you to impose laws or mark out boundaries for Our Lord.*<sup>7</sup>

This letter, I would suspect, shows a definite development in Libermann's thinking. He has moved away from the quasi-ghetto of the seminary and has taken on a catholic and missionary outlook. His horizons have been greatly extended.

## SOCIAL FREEDOM AND CONSTRAINTS

Six years later Libermann had come to a certain philosophy regarding superiors and spiritual directors when he writes to a confrere:

*...nobody can force another's conscience, mind or will ...*

*If consciences could be forced to be pure, wills to be good, minds to accept the truth, then force might be used. Charity towards the neighbor would make this a duty. But nobody can force another's conscience, mind or will in these matters. God did not want to do so, so why should we? God has given people the freedom to know Him and the freedom to oppose Him. We should not want to compel people, nor should we be angry with them when we see that they are bad. We should be concerned, of course, we should show them that we love them and be free and open with them. We should seek to win their friendship and be well disposed to them.*<sup>8</sup>

Fifteen years before this was written, Pope Gregory XVI in his encyclical Mirari Vos had condemned “*the poisonous spring of indifferentism that has flowed from that absurd and erroneous doctrine, or rather delirium, that freedom of conscience is to be claimed and defended for all men.*”<sup>9</sup> Libermann's thinking was very much more in line with that of Lamennais and Montalambert, whose views were condemned by Pope Gregory. However, in order to get approval for his missionary project Libermann went to this Pope for approval. He was not to be a lone ranger. He belonged to the Church and would not act independently of the authorities. He might disagree with the Pope in what concerns freedom of conscience, but he had to accept the authority of the Pope while not changing his own stance.

*Libermann was aware of the difference between the role of government and the Church.*

The campaign of Lamennais and his publication *L'Avenir* was for ‘a Free Church in a Free State’ and this was roundly condemned by Mirari Vos. Libermann was aware of the difference between the role of government and the Church. It was not for the Church to dictate to government officials. These had their job to do and they worked with a different mindset. When a missionary in Senegal reported back to Libermann on how he had defended the dignity of the Church by preventing a Commissioner accompanied by Muslim and pagan soldiers from entering a church, Libermann was not impressed:

*It would be a great pity if government officials were given the impression that you were opposed to the government. Don't ever get involved in politics. If you have to disagree with something let this be known that it is a matter for your conscience. Avoid acting and speaking with authority, I mean an affected authority, and on no account humiliate*

*others. Soldiers normally act on impulse. It is normal for a soldier to use his authority with some degree of arrogance, violence and pride. They have not been trained to acquire evangelical perfection.*<sup>10</sup>

Freedom of conscience had to be defended at all times. But the conscience of others had to be respected also. Freedom was not just a matter for the individual; the social situation had to be considered too. If others seemed to be in error one must try and see their point of view. Libermann himself came up against much opposition in Rome, but he did not yield in his determination. While he found support from the Pope and from Cardinal Fransoni, Prefect of Propaganda Fide, he confided in a friend that

*...the most pious and the wisest among the (Roman officials) had a very bad opinion of me. They thought that my project was inspired by ambition and had many other suspicions.*<sup>11</sup>

*Conflict situations arise and intransigence is not the way to deal with them.*

The government officials, the military, Roman officials, all had their ways of judging. This had to be taken into account in dealings with them. Conflict situations arise and intransigence is not the way to deal with them.

When the Revolution broke out in Paris in February 1848, the King abdicated and a provisional regime took over power. Slavery was abolished in the French territories and universal suffrage introduced. A very close confidant of Libermann, Gamon, asked what he thought of the new situation. Libermann replied:

*I consider it an act of justice that God has brought about against a decadent dynasty that sought its own good rather than the good of the people entrusted to it. The regime demoralized the people to consolidate its power and moved more and more towards absolute authority. The autocrat of Russia will have his day too. Another category that will be caught up in the storm is that of the bourgeois aristocrats that arrogantly attacked the Church and deprived it of its just rights, who walked over the poor and sold their souls and their country with despicable egoism and for their own interests... You asked if the clergy ought to take part in the elections. They certainly should for the good of the Church and France. Tomorrow morning I am going to register with those who have a right to do so... I know that the elections are not an ecclesiastical affair, but we are no longer in the conditions of the past. The problem with the clergy is that they have remained in the past. The world has gone on ahead."*<sup>12</sup>

*The problem with the clergy is that they have remained in the past.*



The Revolution of 1848 brought about the abolition of slavery. But freedom could not just be handed out, it had to be won. The colonists would not just lie down under the decree. The black population may not act responsibly:

*The unfortunate white people will feel bitter and many of them won't understand what is happening. Let's hope that the black people will be prudent. They are not accustomed to freedom and they might go to extremes. I hope the white population does not provoke them. If they are provoked try to control them. Their reputation must be protected. They must not be thought of as unworthy of being liberated. Try to get them to preserve peace and dignity, to forgive those who have ill-treated them in the past... teach them to profit from their freedom and to use it with the dignity and nobility of those who are free.*<sup>13</sup>

*To be truly free demands a long process.*

To be truly free demands a long process. The missionary has to get involved in the process and gradually, by kindness and understanding, help the people to achieve true freedom. What is to be avoided is a situation that might seem to show that the people are not ready for freedom, when, in fact, this freedom is a God-given right to be exercised responsibly.

*...education...is a vital element in promoting true liberty and freedom.*

The education of the people is a vital element in promoting true liberty and freedom. Writing to a missionary involved in education in 1847, Libermann gives some interesting instructions on how to treat the first batch of students to be brought into a school system:

*It seems to me absolutely essential to help them overcome their weakness of character. Inspire them to have self-respect and help them to understand and appreciate that they are free. Help them to realize the beauty of the freedom and equality which they share with all the children of God. We must try to erase from their minds any idea of inferiority. This leads to weakness of character and debases them in their own estimation.*<sup>14</sup>

Libermann's successor as Superior General, Ignatius Schwindenhammer, seems to have taken a totally different approach to the exercise of authority. Koren points out that "he governed by issuing decrees. They came from his office by hundreds, sometimes in solemn form."<sup>15</sup> He obviously did not take to heart what Libermann had written to him in 1849:

*The spirit of centralization introduced into ecclesiastical administration I regard as unfortunate. It is a tendency that is damaging the work of God and the general welfare of the*

*Libermann's philosophy... developed from his experience and from a very deep respect for people.*

*He tried to harmonize personal charism and the call to unity and communion.*

*Church. It is destructive of unity and of its very nature tends to divide into parties that which, according to the institution of Our Lord Jesus Christ, ought to form a united whole. It is clear that Our Lord never wished to have centralization to such a degree.*<sup>16</sup>

Libermann's philosophy, if it can be called such, developed from his experience and from a very deep respect for people. As we have seen, freedom, equality, and fraternity were highly prized by him, despite the ravages of the French Revolution of 1789. He campaigned vigorously for the establishment of local Churches with legitimate autonomy but integral parts of the Catholic Church. In a rather uncharacteristic philosophical tone he sets out his views on freedom and independence in a letter to a missionary in 1848:

*Freedom is given to the person by the Creator. Independence is contrary to nature and destructive of all principles of the Christian faith. The violent trend to independence, a product of Protestantism and modern philosophy, has led to violence and the terrible egoism of the last century and even to barbarity. Christianity has come to bring freedom to the world and at the same time to wage war on independence.*<sup>17</sup>

Now looking back over the forty years that have passed since the slogans of Kenyatta were laying the foundation of a new nation, I find much can be learned from those who were pioneers in affecting the destiny of many African countries. Missionaries played a significant role in these developments. Libermann spearheaded a movement. He was convinced that the Holy Spirit had called him to the missionary apostolate. With little by way of human resources he responded to the promptings of the Spirit. He tried to harmonize personal charism and the call to unity and communion. He still has a message for us.

#### **Footnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Orbis, New York, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Burke, C., *Morality and Mission: Francis Libermann and Slavery (1840 – 1850)*, Pauline Publications, Nairobi, 1998.

<sup>3</sup> N.D. I, p. 52 (author's translation).

<sup>4</sup> L.S. IV, p. 8 (author's translation).

<sup>5</sup> Berger, P. and Luckmann, T., *The Social Construction of Reality*, Anchor, 1967.

<sup>6</sup> N.D. II, p. 396 (author's translation).

<sup>7</sup> L.S. II, p. 307 – 318 (author's translation). This is a very long letter and a very important one. It is in response to a remark that Feret was said to have made about Libermann sending men of high caliber to be butchered in Africa.

There is a letter in similar vein to the Superior of the Sisters of Castres. Some members of the Congregation had volunteered for missions abroad and had entered with that understanding. Libermann clearly tells the Superior that she is wrong to prevent them from going. (cf. N.D. IV, pp. 358 – 367)

<sup>8</sup> N.D. IX, p. 248–249 (author’s translation).

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Duffy, E., *Saints and Sinners*, Yale University Press, 1997, p.283.

<sup>10</sup> N.D. IX, p. 239 (author’s translation)

<sup>11</sup> Cf. L.S. II, pp.455–460. A letter to a Carthusian monk, Salier, one of Libermann’s close confidants. (author’s translation).

<sup>12</sup> Cf. N.D. X, pp. 145–153 (author’s translation). A few weeks later, when socialism was very much in the air and was seen as a threat to many, he wrote to a confrere: “*Communism is not to be feared. It attacks the accumulation of riches and attempts to displace it. Religion will have to suffer but only for a time from the system itself or from the despotism of some of its leaders. The system is not opposed directly to Christianity.*” (Cf. ND. X, 182 -183, author’s translation).

<sup>13</sup> N.D. X, pp. 125 – 126 (author’s translation).

<sup>14</sup> Cf. N.D. IX, pp. 359 – 361 (author’s translation).

<sup>15</sup> Koren, H. *To the Ends of the Earth*. Duquesne University Press, 1983, p.305

<sup>16</sup> N.D. XI, p. 97 (author’s translation). The centralization in question mainly concerns the Roman tendency to try to exercise control over the whole Church and not recognize the legitimate autonomy of bishops. It refers to bishops likewise who do not allow freedom of action to others. This is a letter I have not seen quoted. It is not likely to help the cause of Libermann’s beatification!

<sup>17</sup> N.D. X, p. 231 (author’s translation).

## FRANÇOIS LIBERMANN AND HIS FAMILY

### Arsène Aubert, C.S.Sp.

Arsène Aubert is a French Spiritan who worked for several years as a missionary in Africa and in Guadeloupe. A former Vicar-Provincial of the Province of France, he has been involved over many years in the biblical formation of future Spiritans and of laypeople. Currently resident in Paris, he continues to animate retreats centered on Scripture and on the spirituality of Francis Libermann. He is author of *Prier 15 Jours avec François Libermann*. (Montrouge: Nouvelle Cité, 2003).

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

*...he was always close to his family, especially his brother Samson and his nephews and nieces.*

François Libermann is known as a spiritual director and the second founder of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit. Less is known about his relations with his family, apart from the fact that his father, Lazar, was a rabbi at Saverne. But he was always close to his family, especially his brother Samson and his nephews and nieces. The family kept 155 of the letters he wrote to them. Despite his epilepsy and his missionary responsibilities, he wrote long letters, full of humor and obvious affection, showing concern for the human and spiritual growth of each one of them. This correspondence with his family throws revealing light on his own personality and spirituality.

Frédérique Le Vavasseur, a fellow Spiritan and one of his closest collaborators, spoke of the great affection that François had for his family: *"It was only with the greatest difficulty that he agreed for the Congregation to make a gift of about 100 francs to one of his sisters-in-law, who was old and sick and abandoned by public charity. But he did everything he could to help his family in other ways. He was deeply affected by their sufferings. Although he was so strong in other ways, he could be overwhelmed by their troubles; you could tell by his expression when he had received news that one of the family had problems."*

### FRANÇOIS AND HIS BROTHER SAMSON

#### **Two future rabbis facing the same cultural shock**

Lazar, the much esteemed rabbi of Saverne, ensured that his two sons, Samson (1790-1860) and Jacob (1802-1852), received a strict and closeted education, based solidly on the Talmud, with a view to them both being future rabbis. But once they had left the ghetto, they discovered a Judaism divided between traditional Jews (Talmudists) and the enlightened Jews who were followers of *haskala* (*sekhel* in Hebrew, meaning 'reason'). This was a social and cultural movement which sought to return to Moses and to integrate Judaism into a Europe that was under the influence of a philosophy of enlightenment and reason. Jews became French citizens in 1792. Napoleon created the Consistory in 1807 and obliged all future rabbis to have a knowledge of the French language and culture. This was the context that favored the growth of *haskala*, which ironically turned out to be a stepping stone towards faith in Christ for both Samson and Jacob.

*Samson recommended Jacob to M. Drach, a Jew who had been baptized in Paris, and it was there that Jacob discovered the light of Christ.*

*Both Samson and François would suffer because of their Jewish origins.*

Samson was the secretary to the “first Jewish primary school in Strasbourg,” which, in the words of Samson himself, taught the Bible, Hebrew, and French, instead of the “Hebro-Germanic jargon,” in spite of the “ignorant teachers.” Samson and a friend, who wanted to start a society led by a priest, which would preach Christianity among the Jews, wrote to the bishop: “*Jews recognize a Supreme Being and the religion of Moses contains general precepts of a sublime morality, but the great truths contained in this religion are lost for them because they are drowned in a flood of bizarre ceremonies... The rabbinic religion is basically anti-social. The Jewish people, despite their decadence, still cling to the ancient fantasy that they are the chosen people, the favorites of God!*” The bishops are sending missionaries to evangelize “*the savages living on the banks of the Mississippi*”; could they not do the same for the French Jews? Samson and his wife, Babette, were baptized in 1825.

Jacob wrote to Samson from Metz on January 6, 1826: “*I have based my religion on my own reason... We say that God chose the Jews to give them his sacred laws. What does this mean? ... Were all the other peoples not just as much his creatures as the Israelites?... I have come to the conclusion that all God wants from man is that he recognizes him and that he lives in a just and human way. Moses played his role like all the law-givers... but I can assure you that I would be a no better Christian than I am a Jew.*” Referring to the difficulties that Jews were experiencing in 19<sup>th</sup>-century France, he wonders why, if God had done so much for their fathers, he did nothing to help their children.

Samson recommended Jacob to M. Drach, a Jew who had been baptized in Paris, and it was there that Jacob discovered the light of Christ. “*Turning to the God of my fathers, I threw myself on my knees and begged him to enlighten me about the true religion. I prayed that he would let me know if the beliefs of Christians were true, but that if they were false, he would remove them from me at once. The Lord, who is close to those who invoke him from the bottom of their hearts, heard my prayer. I was immediately enlightened and saw the truth. Faith penetrated the depths of my heart and my spirit.*” He was baptized on Christmas Eve, 1826, and took the name François.

Both Samson and François would suffer because of their Jewish origins. In 1825, Samson (who was also a doctor) was appointed mayor of Illkirch, but the people were slow to accept a Jewish mayor, even if he was baptized. At his baptism, François had to reply to the questions in the ritual: “*Do you renounce the hard-hearted blindness of the Jewish people, who refused to recognize our*

*Lord, Jesus Christ? ...I do! Do you believe that, by his death, the divine Savior abrogated the ceremonies of the Law of Moses, and that being abolished, they can no longer be carried out without sin? ...I do!"*<sup>21</sup> David Libermann, another brother, invited only a few people to his baptism because "he wanted to make his abjuration without too much fuss." When François went to Rome in 1840 to present his plan for a missionary society, one of the main obstacles to his success was "that he was a convert Jew, something that they were very wary of in that city."

*...one of the main obstacles to his success was "that he was a convert Jew, something that they were very wary of in that city."*

*François asks them to live with that total trust in God that he himself had learnt through his sickness...*

### **Human trials – a path that can lead to total trust in God**

Samson lost his Jewish clients when he was baptized and, in 1830, he was also deprived of his position as mayor. He continued to be a doctor for religious communities, but more often than not they paid him with prayers rather than money! His wife, Babette, who was the niece of Rothschild, also lost the support of her family. So they both began to worry about the future of their children. They felt that if only François was a priest he would be able to help them, but ordination was now impossible because of his epilepsy. François asks them to live with that total trust in God that he himself had learnt through his sickness: "All those sufferings with which God seems to inflict us are really blessings; a Christian for whom everything works out according to his own wishes has not been favored by God... My own sickness is a great treasure for me... Are you frightened that I will die of starvation? The Lord feeds the birds in the fields – and he loves me much more than the birds! You may say that if I were a priest, I would be able to help my family, but whether I am a millionaire or a beggar, all that I am, all that I possess, belongs to God... It makes me sad when I see you pursuing the vanities of this miserable world." (letter of July 8, 1830).

### **New Year's greetings to Babette, inspired by his reflections on Christmas**

*"I beg you not to seek to be esteemed by this miserable world... Look at how the child Jesus was ignored and despised... and the Blessed Virgin was not exactly inundated by the good things of this world, even though she was Queen of heaven and earth... From the beginning of his life until his death, Jesus, who was so loveable, lived a life of poverty, ignored and despised. That is why I cannot wish you things that will suit or please you according to nature; that would be more of a curse than good wishes for the New Year." (December 27, 1836). Babette finds her life too austere, while François invites her to live the poverty of the Christmas they have just celebrated.*

### **The sacred mission of parents**

*François had a high regard for the wonderful vocation of parents, always concerned for the future of their children.*

On January 3, 1835, François wrote to Samson and Babette after the birth of their sixth son, Henri: *“The eternal Father brought about the birth of his only Son for our salvation; so you must try, in your turn, to present him with children for his greater glory... The care that a father takes in bringing up his children in a Christian way allows him participate in the life and merits of our Lord Jesus Christ on this earth... Jesus came into the world, lived and died to fulfill his ardent desire for the salvation of his children; you should try to cooperate with this grace from God which he gained for you, so as to contribute to the completion of this desire. Remember that you carry out the role of priest, missionary, and guardian angel for your children, so that you can lead them to a happy eternity... The six children that God has given you are like six talents that he has placed in your care; it is up to you to make them flourish and increase... It will be a great joy to find yourself surrounded by six chosen ones in heaven!... So don't worry if you cannot (or fear you cannot) leave them as many worldly goods as you would like; they were not created for this. Besides, their Father in heaven loves them and will take greater care of them than you could ever do. You are only their father and mother in a passing way, but God will be their parent for ever, provided they want him to be. Give them a good example of fervor and Christian life; this will be of greater value to them than millions in gold or silver. In this way you will sanctify them - and you will be sanctified with them.”*

Are these just the pious musings of a seminarian or the fruit of deep contemplation - human paternity flowing from the paternity of the Father of Jesus, the parents sharing in the mission of Jesus, their children as “talents” that need to bear fruit, and all the family looking forward to the riches that will be theirs in heaven? François had a high regard for the wonderful vocation of parents, always concerned for the future of their children.

### **François recommends prayer and the Eucharist to his brother Samson**

*Try to be more aware of the presence of the Holy Spirit who is in the depths of your soul...*

François is delighted to hear of his brother's desire to live a fully committed Christian life. He suggests an “infallible way” to reach that goal: a half hour of prayer each day (letter of May 21, 1832). In another letter, of November 25, 1836, he goes into more detail: *“Your longings are important, so take courage... Ask for the grace to have greater trust in future... Trust only in God... Try to be more aware of the presence of the Holy Spirit who is in the depths of your soul, by the power of Jesus; it is the Spirit who is encouraging you to give yourself completely to God. He wants to work in you, but you have tied his arms and legs with your hesitations*

*If you give the Spirit complete freedom to act, you will see what wonderful things he will do within you...*

*We must leave something to divine Providence which will provide for all our needs as long as we have trust.*

*and fears. He is urging you on with great love but you are blocking his action. If you give the Spirit complete freedom to act, you will see what wonderful things he will do within you... Go to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and you will have everything, because you will have life – not just ordinary life, but the life of God himself, which contains all light, all greatness, all glory, all strength, and all love.”* This intimate sharing between the two brothers reveals a love that is both human and spiritual.

### **The love of François for his brothers and sisters**

Felix, a brother of François running a bookshop in Paris, was planning to marry Adèle Berger. Samson felt she was too poor, but François thought otherwise. On September 12, 1830, he wrote to Samson: *“Would you be happier if Felix was marrying a girl who was well off but lacking in virtue? This would make him miserable for the rest of his life...Perhaps you feel he should wait for a suitable person who has some money. I think you are wrong, because Felix is living in a city where there are great dangers which could easily set him on the wrong track...Moreover, I don’t see that he has a great need of money; I don’t even know what he would do with it. He is a very good worker and he could easily take on three more employees and two servants. I think that is enough to feed a wife. We must leave something to divine Providence which will provide for all our needs as long as we have trust.”*

David (Christophe), another brother, was baptized on May 28, 1830. François wrote to Samson: *“I found him very well disposed, much better than I was when I was baptized... At this time, I dined with Felix three times a week and it almost ruined him!”*

With tongue in cheek, François told Samson what happened to Felix when the Revolution broke out in 1848 (letter of March 6, 1848): *“What a hero Uncle Felix is! I am convinced that as soon as he heard the drums begin to beat, he grabbed his uniform and put it on (probably backwards, he was in such a hurry!), seized his rifle with the ferocious looking bayonet attached, and ran as fast as he could, carrying baggage and arms, to hide under his bed! At least, this is what I told him he would do the week before the revolution and he seemed to accept it as good advice!”* He said something similar regarding his nephew Xavier, when writing to his father: *“When he was called up, having escaped with difficulty from the arms of his wife, he threw himself, like a ferocious and intrepid lion, into the midst of the enemy ranks (having first gone to confession!). Then after countless brave actions in defense of his country (which my poor pen is incapable of describing), he returned safely and without wounds, to resume his normal duties. Glory and honor to the blood that courses through the veins of our family!”*



*Despite his sickness...  
he played the role of  
advocate for his niece  
with realism and  
perseverance.*

François sent Albertine (the daughter of Adèle, widow of his brother Felix) to learn embroidery at one of the best workshops in Paris, but Adèle took her out again after two days. Writing to Samson on December 8, 1850, he asks him to persuade Adèle that Albertine will need a skill to assure her future: “*Perhaps you could refer to the considerable sacrifices that you yourself made to prepare your children for the future. It is important for your letter to reach poor Adèle before the first day of the New Year so that I can add my voice to it when I go to dine with her on that day.*” Despite his sickness (this was just 14 months before he died) and his many worries about the Congregation, he played the role of advocate for his niece with realism and perseverance.

### **François tells Samson about the future missionary society**

In 1839, François left Rennes for Rome to submit a plan for a mission to black slaves to the Pope. Leaving Rennes involved “great suffering,” but in the church of Fourvière at Lyons, “*Mary poured balm on the wound.*” He wrote to Samson on December 12, 1839: “*I have left Rennes for ever. It is very imprudent, if not foolish...I have nothing, I don’t know what will become of me, I have no idea how I will survive. I will be despised, forgotten, lost to the eyes of the world. Many of those who have loved and appreciated me up till now will disapprove of my action. Perhaps they will think I have gone out of my mind or that I am acting through pride...But rest assured that I am the happiest man in the world, because I now have only God, with Jesus and Mary.*”

*I have nothing, I don’t  
know what will become  
of me, I have no idea how  
I will survive.*

In January 1840, François told Samson that he was in Rome because of a plan to create a society of priests to help the black slaves: “*This news will make you anxious...But if I have to leave, I want you to thank Our Lord and never think of trying to dissuade me. I hope you will share the same concern for these poor and neglected people. If you think back to the sad state in which you and Babette were before God, in his mercy, revealed himself to you, if you consider that what you are today is entirely the result of his goodness and mercy, then you will surely be prepared to offer the greatest sacrifices so that this same mercy will be shown to others who are much poorer and worse off than you were, so that they also can come to experience the goodness of God.*” So François is asking Samson to support his plans because of the goodness that God has shown to his own family!

In April, 1840, he writes of his joy in visiting the churches of Rome: “*When you get to the Confession of St. Peter’s, you can’t avoid feeling a special devotion for the two holy Apostles, Peter and Paul. It is so encouraging to see how prominent people have devoted their talents and money to embellish the tomb of these two poor Jews*

*François had left  
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*If we can find enough  
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and Madagascar too...*

*so magnificently, who were so unimportant in the eyes of the world.”*  
‘Two poor Jews’: is François also thinking about himself and his brother?

In another letter (July 16, 1840), he thanks Samson for having used the services of a friend to ensure that the future Coadjutor Bishop of Strasbourg would ordain him: *“You are often frightened that pride will enter into plans and spoil everything – and you are quite right. If I was guilty of this in the past without knowing it, I have had plenty of time and opportunities to correct it, because since I left Rennes my self-interest has had nothing whatsoever to feed on. God will help me despite my shortcomings, so don’t worry about it. Leave it all to Our Lord because it’s his business, not ours.”* Samson is worried that his little brother will succumb to pride! But François was saved from this by the many trials that he does not mention: slander by a friend, abandonment by a confrere, rejection because of his Jewish origins, uncertainty about the future. All that can be left to the Lord.

From January to August 1841, François was in Strasbourg preparing for his ordination, so he saw a lot of his brother. The ordination took place at Amiens on September 18, and his first letter afterwards was to Samson and Babette: *“I have just been ordained this morning! Please ask Our Lord to sacrifice me for his glory, for this must be my first concern from now on.”* He described the novitiate, the chapel, and the help given by the sisters... *“In short, the Lord has favored us so far beyond all expectation.”* François had left Strasbourg with regret, but he was optimistic about the future.

### **François interests his brother in the missionary project**

François asked Samson for vegetable seeds for the novitiate at La Neuville (August 4, 1842) and for fruit and cabbage seeds “if they are not too dear” (October 24, 1843). He adds: *“As usual, I forgot to thank my dear sister-in-law for the gift of plums she sent me – they were very fine. I hope she will find me some more of the same type. I am sorry in advance for all the trouble this will cause her, but what is done out of love comes easily.”*

On November 2, 1843, he told Samson of the agreement he had reached with officials of the Ministry of the Navy regarding Africa: *“They do not hide their political views, but they are interested in the spread of religion... You can see how the good Lord is blessing us, even though we do not deserve it... If we can find enough people, we will take on the whole of West Africa and Madagascar too, which is also being offered to us by the Admiralty. The harvest is enormous but the laborers are few... For your part, you must pray*

*for us because, as you can see, the difficulties are great, but the good that can be done is also very great; the crop is abundant but there are not many pairs of hands to work at it.”*

In December, 1844, Samson complained of the lack of news, so François sent him an update on the work. He spoke of the missionaries who had died in Guinea, the missions of Haiti, Reunion, and Mauritius, and the building work going on at the novitiate. Samson congratulated him, but François then sent a more somber reply: *“You haven’t seen the other side of the coin. You would hardly believe the heartaches and disappointments that such a huge and difficult undertaking brings. Crosses and sufferings normally sanctify people but these huge ventures tend to dissipate the soul.”* He compares himself to an employee in a bank; much money passes through his hands during the day, but when he goes home in the evening, his own pockets are empty. But even though he is not rich, whatever money he has belongs to himself. (January 1, 1845).

*You would hardly believe the heartaches and disappointments that such a huge and difficult undertaking brings.*

In May, 1846, François dropped in on Samson with a confrere, M. Blanpin. Blanpin admired the “good-humored kindness” of François with his family; *“He makes everybody feel at ease and forgoes his special diet so as not to cause any extra trouble... Seeing and listening to their uncle-priest, his nieces and nephews almost forgot to eat. They are so happy to see him smile and receive his blessing.”*

*Blanpin admired the “good-humored kindness” of François with his family*

In July, 1848, he told Samson about the ‘fusion’ with the Spiritans: *“Don’t be afraid – our good Father and dear Mother are looking after us... Anyhow, things are not yet completed.”* Then, changing subjects rather rapidly, he adds: *“The little bottle of kirsch that my kind sister sent me has done a lot of good, so I would like you to get me two liters of it.”*

Later in the year (October 7, 1848), he spoke further about the fusion: *“Our meeting with the Spiritans involved a great deal of extra work, but my health stood up well to it. The work was finished in two months, but it would have taken a whole year if not for the deadline of this meeting. There was a rumor that we were bankrupt and this was why we wanted to merge with the Community of the Holy Spirit. This was totally false.”* He then went on to ask his brother’s advice about the menus for the community.

### **François comes to the aid of his brother and sister-in-law**

Samson was worried about the future of his children. The support that François gave was not just spiritual; in return for the help he had given to the Sisters of Louvencourt, the Mother Superior took his nieces into their school without payment.

She concealed this gift by getting the two girls to give piano and German lessons. François took his nephew François-Xavier into La Neuville, got him entrance to the school at Amiens, and found him a private tutor. His nephew Henri also came to do his baccalaureate. When Samson fell into debt in 1846, François lent him some money: *"I have borrowed these 2,000 francs for two years."* In fact it was the same Mother Superior who had come to his aid again!

His brother Christophe got married to a girl called Julie in the United States. François got the impression that she was not a very reputable person. *"Christophe now believes she was already married in France; if so, he would be able to extricate himself."* But after the death of Christophe, François wrote to Samson: *"The wife of poor Christophe is now with us at Gard. She is a very good and well-behaved person."* Encouraged by his confreres, he helped her financially and after searching for two years found her a place with the Little Sisters of the Poor at Dinan.

François was very affected by the death of his brother Felix on May 8, 1849, and needed a period of rest to get over it. But by June 12 he was able to write to Samson: *"At last, I am well enough to write to you. The fever left me a few days ago and I am now well on the road to recovery."* On August 16, he wrote again to say that he was coming to see him: *"The doctors made me agree to spend my holidays in my own area, and I am now nearly ready to travel."* The break seems to have done him good. In December he wrote: *"I am surprised at how well my health is holding up, seeing the amount of work I have had since October. I am making up for the time I lost during the five months I was sick. Many things needed my attention."*

Samson, who was a doctor, was asked to come during his brother's final sickness and he stayed with him until his death on February 2, 1852.

### **Samson – a 'Spiritan Associate'?**

After the death of his wife, Babette, in 1856, Samson retired to the Spiritan house at Langonnet. He joined the confreres in their prayers and gave medical care to the poor of the area without any payment. In 1859 he went to Paris to help his daughter who was dying. She was only 30 years old. Three months later, Samson himself died at Langonnet and his sons built him a tomb in the cemetery of the community.

Samson surely has a place in the Spiritan family. He and François shared their lives with each other – the one, a father of a family, the other, a missionary and spiritual guide. The closeness of

*François was very affected by the death of his brother Felix on May 8, 1849...*

*Samson surely has a place in the Spiritan family.*

François to Samson, and to his family in general, was both a human and a spiritual duty. Perhaps Samson could be regarded as a ‘Spiritan Associate.’

#### FRANÇOIS AND HIS NIECES AND NEPHEWS

Samson Libermann and his wife Babette had seven children:

- Pauline (1824-1891) who became Sister Saint Léopold with the Sisters of Louvencourt at Amiens;
- Caroline (1827-1867) who became Sister Agnès with the Sisters of Louvencourt;
- Marie (1829-1859), the god-child of François, who remained single;
- François Xavier (1830-1907) who became a Spiritan;
- Théodora (1831-1919) who became Sister Marie-Thérèse with the Sisters of Louvencourt;
- Henri (1834-1890) who was a military doctor;
- Léon (1837-1923) who was a General in the army and a Grand Officer of the Légion d’honneur.

#### Pauline—“naïve simplicity, but slow to make up her mind”

... ‘Big’ Christophe  
converted before he left  
for America, where he  
joined Uncle Alphonse...

After the baptism of his brother, David-Christophe, on May 28, 1837, François wrote to his niece Pauline: *“You know very well how irreverent your uncle used to be. When he came to Illkirch, he never went to church and he could not be persuaded to pray. He always wanted to eat well on Fridays and Saturdays... and he was inclined to tell lies... Caroline tried everything to make him say the rosary... and all the other children pressed him to recite grace before and after meals, but all in vain. He was hardened in his bad behavior and stubbornness and neither wanted to serve the Lord nor pray to him... Then ‘Big’ Christophe converted before he left for America, where he joined Uncle Alphonse... Thank the good Lord and the Blessed Virgin for the conversion of your uncle, and promise that you will be even more dedicated to them since they were so good as to convert him.”*

Somebody who belongs to  
Our Lord should be filled  
with joy and serenity.

Pauline was thinking of becoming a religious but could not make up her mind. On November 14, 1843, François wrote: *“This indecision is harmful for the soul and makes you upset. I want to see you living with an untroubled conscience and enjoying the peace of the children of God. Somebody who belongs to Our Lord should be filled with joy and serenity. It all depends on you. Be determined and hesitate no longer. Don’t be afraid that you will upset your mother and godfather... when they see you are happy, they will be happy too.”*

She continued to ask his advice. On April 14, 1844, he writes: *“You are not made for this world...After a month of community life, you would feel at home as a religious...Do you remember when your father called you ‘eine dumme Gans’ (a silly goose!)? Look at the difference between yourself and your dear mother...She was called to live in the world. You know her devotion and fervor. If one day as a religious you reach her degree of piety and fervor, faith and love of God, you will have become a saint! And she had a simple and upright heart to go with it.”* Shortly after this, Pauline entered the convent, taking the name of Sister Saint-Léopold.

She was troubled by what she saw as her excessively human affection for her Superior. Writing on February 1, 1849, her uncle reassures her: *“Get rid of fear and live only by love... When receiving communion, don’t let these worries bother you but go to the altar in simplicity and confidence... When these troubling moments come, don’t try to think them through; you are not capable of reason or reflection at such a moment... As regards temptations, treat them with disdain... And why do you get so worked up about your faults? If the good Lord loves you despite them, what more is there to say? You are frightened that you have faults, but who doesn’t?”*

*Get rid of fear and live only by love...*

At one period, she would only eat jam! Her uncle, who was sick and burdened with many worries about the missions, wrote to Samson about this on April 23, 1851: *“I went to Dunkerque... Little Sister Saint-Léopold was eating nothing but jam, but I managed to set her right again. When she was at table with me, she ate meat and other things and they seemed to go down very well.”* She was so happy to be with her uncle that she ate everything without realizing it, and he made her promise that she would continue like that and eat whatever the Superior gave her. François was aware of her “naïve simplicity” and helped her overcome her indecisiveness through love, humor, and patience – without making a fuss about it.

*François...helped her overcome her indecisiveness through love, humor, and patience...*

### **Caroline – “a shining-light, but serious”**

Caroline was full of energy and so gifted that she won several first prizes in class. But she knew it, and sometimes displayed her talents with pride.

In 1836, his nieces were very happy when François spent several days with Samson. In 1837, Caroline, aged 10, dreamed of being a religious at Rennes, near her uncle. François asked her to be patient, and recommended prayer, obedience to her mother, kindness towards her brothers and sisters, and humility! He has nothing against dreaming of the future, but for the moment it is the present which matters. *“You must be patient for a few more*

years... *Do not think that you are better than other people and never think of yourself as superior to them... . . . If you have any problems, write to me.*"

*Do not think that you are better than other people and never think of yourself as superior to them...*

When she reached adolescence, her thoughts of religious life gave way to a longing to shine in the world. François wrote to her (February 16, 1842): *"The only thing I worry about for you is your love of this world and a taste for its pleasures and vanities."* He invites her to direct her energies towards holiness of life: *"It seems that all your efforts are simply directed towards getting to heaven and that you do not think about being a saint. But I'll go further, my dear child: I firmly believe that God will sanctify you. I am convinced that you would never be satisfied with a half-way point, somewhere between this world and God; you will either give yourself to this world and lose your soul, or surrender to God and become a saint. It is a question of choosing between life and death, my dear child. The choice is yours!"*

Caroline went to study with the sisters at Amiens. François wrote to Samson on October 24, 1843: *"Caroline is homesick... When the school mistress saw her suffering on Sunday, she told her to cry as much as she wanted and this seemed to help. I went to see her the following day. She was certainly crying, but it was a pleasure to see her, because she was crying and laughing at the same time! She spent the evening with me today and things are much better. She has a lot to do, so she will not even think of crying tomorrow."*

M. Schwindenhammer, a confrere of François, was on his way to Rome so he asked him to find a place for Caroline. But the Mother Superior kept Caroline at Louvencourt because she was sure she would find a position for her when her studies were finished. At the age of 18, she informed her parents that she wanted to be a religious. François supported her request in a letter to her father on November 11, 1845: *"As you know, she has had a strong desire to enter religious life, and these feelings seem to come from God... Caroline was attracted to an austere order, the Trappistines or the Carmelites. M. de Brandt and I gave it serious thought, each in our own way, and we felt that she was rather called to a less strict teaching order."*<sup>2</sup> She finally joined the same convent as her sister Pauline, taking the name of Sister Agnès.

*I am delighted to have a baby daughter in Jesus Christ!*

### **Marie – his god-daughter, a “woman of the world!”**

*"You have made me very happy by asking me to be godfather to my little niece who has just been born. I am delighted to have a baby daughter in Jesus Christ!"* So wrote François to Samson and Babette on April 8, 1829. Marie laughed a lot, sometimes at others, but the laughter often quickly turned to sadness. When

*The young girl of 12 years old must have wondered how her old uncle knew all this!*

*Laugh when you feel like laughing...*

she was growing up, François wrote to her (November 20, 1841): *“I was very sad to see you upset when you would not tell me the reason. I cannot help or console you if I don’t know what is wrong... As regards the way you relate to your friends, always try to say good things, but never gossip. I repeat, never gossip!...Don’t speak badly of your teachers. By this, I don’t just mean what comes out of your mouth but also what you convey by your signs, gestures, or smiles. We can put on an expression which says clearly what we mean without saying a word!”* The young girl of 12 years old must have wondered how her old uncle knew all this!

On February 8, 1842, he wrote: *“I like the honest way you tell me that you do not obey the rules, but you don’t tell me why, or what it is you find difficult...Don’t worry about wanting to laugh at times – that is nothing. Laugh when you feel like laughing, but avoid flippancy... Jesus knows what is in your heart; as long as you think of him and want to please him, nothing else matters.”* On June 10, 1845, he says: *“Write to me every month. Take a few moments each day to examine your life – in this way, you will be able to tell me the important things...”* Later the same year he wrote: *“Try not to show it when you are sad or suffering, but look happy as much as you can. Sometimes, when we are fed up, we try to make sure that everybody knows about it so that they will give us their attention; we don’t complain, but we make others aware by the tone of our voice, our looks and the way we behave.”*

On December 21, 1847, François informed her that *“M. de Brandt feels you should become a religious.”* She refused, point blank! François replied in February, *“Don’t get on your high horse!... For a long time, you have spoken to me about vocation, but I have never heard anything decisive from you. I felt you should make up your mind, yes or no. So stay a ‘woman of the world,’ but make sure you become not just a little but a great saint! Be a lily in the middle of the thorns! Your Mother, Mary, also lived in the world, so don’t be afraid – be good, like she was. Religious life makes it easier to grow in virtue, but a good life lived in the world is also meritorious.”*

Writing to Samson, he said (March 4, 1847): *“A big hug to dear Marie. She will no doubt tell you that I am nicer to her in my letters than when I am with her. When she was here, I didn’t want to hug her, but I do in my letters. This is not surprising. When she came, she could see me and this was enough, but now she cannot see me because she is far away. So she deserves something more.”* Libermann stopped using the familiar ‘tu’ with his nieces once they reached the age of 14 or 15; this was the convention of the time.

Marie hesitated to write to her godfather because he had so much to do. But François encourages her to do so: *“Don’t punish me*



*Reading your letter gives me a short break and then I can take another short break to reply to you!*

*Let him come quickly and we will try to make him into a good missionary.*

*by not writing so I will not have to waste time reading your letters! Don't I deserve a bit of rest sometimes? Reading your letter gives me a short break and then I can take another short break to reply to you!"*  
(May 17, 1850)

### **François Xavier – a courageous man, except with the girls!**

From the age of 8, François Xavier wanted to be a priest. His uncle encouraged him in a letter of May 18, 1838, and recommended prayer, catechism, and hard work at school: *"If you do all that, the Lord will be able to make you into a good priest."* At 15 years of age, he was worried about making a 'lukewarm' communion, and compared himself to Judas. François reassures him: *"You exaggerate even more when you compare yourself to Judas... A lukewarm soul seeks only pleasure, not caring whether it pleases God or not... Is this how you are? Such a person is not troubled by committing venial sins and sometimes even exposes himself to mortal sins...he is negligent, distracted, seeking only amusement. Are you like that?... He is incapable of making any sacrifice for God... is satisfied if he does nothing bad, especially grave sin, but he does not seek to do good. Does this sound like you?... You are not lukewarm; persevere in your good will and in the fervent desire to please God."*  
(March 22, 1845).

On November 10, 1846, he asked Samson to *"send young François to La Neuville. He can stay with us and go as a day boy to the Collège Royal. Let him come quickly and we will try to make him into a good missionary. You could also put Marie in the bottom of his trunk and no one would see her!"*

In a letter of April 5, 1847, he wrote to Samson: *"By his prayers and fasting, François has managed to get to Gard!...He ran into my room, put his arms around my neck and said 'I have done it!' I embraced him and said that was because the Blessed Virgin had listened to him. I added: 'But do you realize that it was you who made M. Thiékoro ill? To meet your wishes, Our Lady arranged for M. Thiékoro to fall sick.' These joking words upset him so much that he went pale and his joy turned to sadness. Since then, he has not ceased praying for the cure of this poor fellow who is in a very serious state."* Thiékoro was a black slave who had been bought by a white man and Libermann had taken him into Gard. By means of a joke, François taught a lesson to his nephew who was giving orders to heaven.

We see from a letter of François to Samson that 17-year-old François Xavier was rather shy with girls: *"I recently took him to Louvencourt to visit his sisters and I noticed his embarrassment. Théodora, happy as ever, was teasing him and he replied light-*

*heartedly, but without lifting his eyes to her or to his other sisters.”* (August 27, 1847). In a subsequent letter he told Samson that he had appointed François Xavier as a catechist to a girls’ orphanage, to help him unwind a little and overcome his natural timidity. *“The first time he talked, he was trembling all over, but he gradually mastered his excessive shyness and was eventually able to speak without any problem.”* (March 9, 1850)

### **Théodora – “scatter-brained, petulant and impatient”**

Her uncle wrote to Théodora on February 17, 1843, when she was 12 years old: *“I was delighted with the lovely letter you sent me... It was very well written. There were a few spelling mistakes, but not very many. You are making progress. Well done! ... I am sure you can be one of the first in the class if you are patient and have courage... As for losing your temper, that is because you have a very lively personality – but that doesn’t excuse you with God!...If you give in to discouragement, you will be like a man with bad eyesight who is always falling in the mud. Does he just stay there? It would be very stupid if he said to himself, ‘I am always falling in the mud. I have now done it three times, so I won’t get up any more!’ This is how you would be if you let yourself get discouraged. You must get up as many times as you fall down, correct yourself and ask forgiveness.”*

*You must get up as many times as you fall down...*

On March 30, 1845, François told Samson: *“Théodora is very happy and is working well. She is docile and pious and is very frightened of her class teacher – who is solemn and serious, not a bit like Théodora! She has a likable character that is sensitive and attractive. She is very resourceful but not at all difficult. An open and loving child like her is easy to teach. She can be a bit scatter-brained but has excellent qualities. What is strange is that during recreation she can be very jovial, yet a few moments later she is a little saint in the chapel! Sister Léopold gives her good advice. Caroline is serious and collected, but this does not go down too well with her scatter-brained sister - ‘I have had enough of your sermons, why don’t you leave me alone?’ That’s the way she usually replies to Caroline ...No need to reproach her for that, and don’t let on that you know. She loves and admires Caroline, but she is so whimsical that, despite her love, she finds it difficult to listen to her sister’s corrections.”* François shows great insight in observing his niece and delicacy in writing about her to her father.

*François shows great insight in observing his niece and delicacy in writing about her to her father.*

At the age of 14, she was frightened of losing her religious sisters. François wrote to her on November 25, 1845: *“My dear friend, with things like this, you must trust the decisions of wise and experienced directors. I think you are wrong, because you are judging by your feelings; it is your generous heart that is talking, but your judgment is set to one side... If God wants Caroline to be a religious*

*you will be the first to say that she should stay in the novitiate; if this is not what God wants, she will certainly not remain there.”*

He wrote about her to her sister Marie on June 15, 1847: “*Théodora ... takes after your father. To know what she really feels, you have to look at her eyes and gestures, not very expressive in themselves but quite revealing when you get to know her. Your mother, who is very expansive herself, looks for something more in her, but anything more from Théodora would savor of affectation. She is very turned off by affected behavior. Her greatest fault is impatience... You have to approach her through her feelings and then she will do anything for you. Tell your father not to scold her when he writes. She needs encouragement, but also sensitivity to her feelings.*”

*She needs encouragement,  
but also sensitivity to her  
feelings.*

### **Henri – “brilliant, imperturbable”**

On August 23, 1850, François wrote to Samson: “*Henri is at Gard. I will buy him the books that he needs for his baccalaureate... If God wishes to give him a vocation to be a priest, that would be better, but I rather doubt it.*” On January 17, 1851, he wrote to Henri’s sisters, Léopold and Agnès: “*Henri is doing very well... To enter the Polytechnic he would have to find a preparatory school in which to study for two years... I am looking for some way of getting him special tuition without him having to go to a school.*” To Samson he wrote in April: “*Our dear Henri is not as depressed as you seem to think. He is not one to let things get him down, so he will soon get over this problem regarding his future admission.*”

François wrote to Marie on May 15, 1851: “*Henri gives the appearance of getting on well, but if he stays in Paris, he will surely get into trouble and there is no way that I can keep an eye on him. I know for a fact that he has been to the theatre several times (What does he do for money?)... So I think it would be better if your father were to call him back to Strasbourg.*” A few days later, François wrote to Samson, “*Henri is not really a bad lad. He is basically sound and has plenty of faith. His problem is that he has a superficial and simplistic character... Poor chap, it’s not really his fault; with his good looks, easy conversation, and youthful high spirits, how could he escape trouble?... I understand the family difficulties, so having discussed the situation with M. Le Vavasseur, I have decided to try once more.*”

*It is time to forget the  
past...*

In a later letter to Samson (July 18, 1851) François adds: “*I almost forgot to tell you that Henri is now a Bachelor of Arts... It is time to forget the past and see him as a fine son who was a victim of his goodness of heart.*” To Marie he wrote: “*He is a good-hearted man, but his superficiality, excessive self-confidence, easy-going character, and need to be recognized, all exposed him to great danger when he*

*was in Paris...He needs to be treated firmly but reasonably, with great kindness.”*

### **Léon – the “dear little bambino”!**

Born in 1837, Léon was 13 years old when he received a letter from his uncle: *“This is to prove that I am not above writing to my dear little bambino! My letter will be short, but it’s a way of letting you know that I think about you more than you realize...I hope to find you a place by October, but at present, I am not sure where it will be... I will do what I can to help our dear Henri as well... The good Lord is looking after us, so we will surely succeed. Meanwhile, pray for these things and be a good boy so that God will bless our efforts. Goodbye, my dear friend. Give Henri a hug for me, but don’t bite his ear while doing so! No more fighting, and show love and respect for your sisters.”*

*He loved friendship and humor, happiness and the joy of life.*

### **Conclusion**

The letters of Libermann to his family show what a caricature it would be to see him as somebody who was always sad, speaking only of death and renunciation. He loved friendship and humor, happiness and the joy of life. His letters, far from being full of spiritual theory, are a heart to heart chat, perfectly adapted to the needs of each one, full of humor and affection. His relations with his family are marked with the warmth and humor typical of the Jewish family circle and bring out new aspects of his personality and spirituality. *“He puts everybody at their ease.”* For his nephews and nieces, he is a trustful and interested friend with whom they can share all their joys and sorrows in full confidence.

*For his nephews and nieces, he is a trustful and interested friend...*

Despite his illness and the many demands on his time and energy he remained close to his family. Several of his letters were written in the same week so as not to interfere with his duties as Superior. He would not accept Christophe into the community: “Big Christophe” would always be on their backs, getting involved with everything. Nor would he take money from the community to help him. But at the request of his confreres, he did eventually give financial help to his widow, Julie. Also in agreement with his confreres, he took François Xavier and Henri into the community while they were doing their studies. And he accepted the help of Mother Saint-Bernard, the Superior of his nieces, when Samson fell into debt. Finally, he did not keep his relations to himself but shared them with his confreres, who would often visit them on their travels. With François Libermann, everything was done openly, in a spirit of trust and sharing.

**Footnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Paul Coulon in *Mémoire Spiritaine*, no. 24, 2006, p. 162.

<sup>2</sup> M. de Brandt was a priest and a friend of Libermann. He was spiritual director to the Sisters of Louvencourt

## LAO TZU AND FRANCIS LIBERMANN ON LIVING THE MYSTERY

### Binh The Quach, C.S.Sp.

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*The Christian of the future will be a mystic or he or she will not exist at all.*

### MYSTICISM

Contemporary uses of the term ‘mysticism’ include the whole gamut of experiences, teachings, techniques, lifestyles, etc., of ‘mystics.’ One of the clearest definitions of ‘mysticism’ is that of William Johnston. He defines it as the “*wisdom or knowledge that is found through love; it is loving knowledge.*”<sup>1</sup> He further asserts, “*Mysticism is the core of authentic religious experience.*”<sup>2</sup> This loving knowledge is efficacious because it leads to the transformation of the individual. With this understanding of mystical theology as transforming mystical experience, we can eliminate those contemporary usages that equate mystical theology with mere doctrines and theories of mystical experience, ignoring its transforming effect. Mystical experience stands in awe of the Mystery that is beyond human conception and at the same time closer to the person than the person is to the self.

Johnson’s understanding of mysticism is rooted solidly in the Christian mystical tradition, yet it remains open to a variety of lifestyles and great world religions that also are rooted in similar experiences. It is not limited to monastic asceticism and formal prayer. What is of the essence of mystical experience is the self-surrender required for authentic love in daily hectic, secular life. By defining mysticism as “*the core of authentic religious experience,*” Johnson can satisfy both those scholars who insist that only infused religious experience is mystical and those who contend that all genuine religious experience has a mystical aspect. His emphasis upon the universal call to mysticism removes it from the realm of the esoteric or that which is reserved only for an elite. Karl Rahner makes the same point:

*The Christian of the future will be a mystic or he or she will not exist at all. If by mysticism we mean, not singular parapsychological phenomena, but a genuine experience of God emerging from the heart of existence, this statement is very true and its truth and importance will become still clearer in the spirituality of the future.*<sup>3</sup>

With this working definition of mysticism, we can proceed to examine how it applies to the writing of Lao Tzu and the life and writings of Francis Libermann, and their respective approaches to the spiritual life. In this article I would like to consider how the experience of Mystery is described in the writings of Lao Tzu and Francis Libermann. There are certainly profound differences in

their understanding of the Mystery itself, but there are similarities in their experiences of its transcendent and immanent qualities, the fundamental dispositions they consider necessary for entering into it, and the harmony and peace to which it leads. Having reflected on some of their insights we will attempt to draw some conclusions with regard to our call as missionaries and as apostles of the Mystery in today's context.

*...there are similarities in their experiences of its transcendent and immanent qualities, the fundamental dispositions they consider necessary for entering into it, and the harmony and peace to which it leads.*

### LAO TZU AND THE EXPERIENCE OF TAO

Taoism, both philosophically and religiously, draws its main source of inspiration from Lao Tzu's *Tao Tè Ching*. In this book, Lao Tzu developed the first brief system of metaphysics in Chinese intellectual history which concentrates on the concept of *Tao*. *Tao* literally means a 'way' and is often extended to connote a political or moral principle by which different schools express various ideas. However, Lao Tzu gave it a totally new meaning. He regarded it as the general source and origin of the universe. It is the Ultimate Reality, as well as the first principle underlying form, substance, being, and change; nevertheless, it is nameless, formless, and transcending all categories. In chapter 25 of the *Tao Tè Ching*, Lao Tzu wrote:

*There was a thing, formless yet complete in itself, born prior to heaven and earth. Silent! Empty! Existing by itself, it remains unchanging. Pervading everywhere, it is inexhaustible. One may think of it as the mother of all beneath heaven. We do not know its name, but we term it Tao.*

The idea of *Tao* as ineffable and nameless is also emphasized in the opening chapter: "*Tao that can be spoken of is not the everlasting Tao. Name that can be named is not the everlasting name.*" In addition, *Tao* is called "*mystery*" or "*mystery upon mystery*" (chapter 1), which is at once transcendent and immanent. The transcendent character of *Tao* can be seen in the description given in chapter 25 quoted above; whereas, the immanent aspect of *Tao* is expressed by the term *Tè* which is presented in the second half of the book *Tao Tè Ching*.

*Tè* is said to be the "*dwelling place of Tao*," that is, *Tè* is *Tao* "*dwelling*" in realities. In other words, *Tè* is *Tao* concretized in time and space. Thus, *Tè* is what individual objects obtain from *Tao* and thereby become what they are. *Tè* is described in chapter 51 as a mother nurturing all things: "*It is Tao that gives them life. It is Tè that nurses them, grows them, fosters them, shelters them, comforts them, nourishes them, and covers them under her wings.*" While the *Tao* is a force beyond all creation, the *Tè* is

*Lao Tzu introduces a new way of living which is applicable, not only to his contemporaries, but also to the people today ...*

*It is this trust in Tao that makes all learning, relationship, and love possible.*

the expression of the *Tao* as the creative force or energy in people and things.

### ***Two Central Concepts***

This leads us directly into two of the central concepts of the philosophical system of Taoism, that is, *Zi-ran* and *Wu-wei*. Philosophically, *Tao* is the highest concept in Taoism that gives the metaphysical support to both *Zi-ran* (naturalness or spontaneity) and *Wu-wei* (non-action). These concepts or principles are not only profoundly simple but also very challenging. Through them, Lao Tzu introduces a new way of living which is applicable, not only to his contemporaries, but also to the people today who are commonly described by psychologists and existentialist philosophers as disoriented and suffering identity-crises. These existential crises are caused by an individual experience of being disconnected with the world. To deal with these crises, Lao Tzu's philosophical concept of *Tao*, and its mutual relationship with the whole world through the principles of *Zi-ran* and *Wu-wei*, may shed light for people today enabling them to be reoriented and find a 'way' back to the *Tao*--the Mother of all things--to be nurtured and brought to maturity in a *Zi-ran* way through the path of *Wu-wei*.

### ***Zi-ran***

*Zi-ran* is the central value in Taoism. *Zi-ran* is the fundamental characteristic of *Tao* and the guiding principle of all things: "*Man models himself on earth, earth on heaven, heaven on Tao, and Tao on that which is naturally so.*" (chapter 25) *Zi-ran*, naturalness or spontaneity, is based on a deep trust in *Tao* that constantly manifests itself in and through the inherent wisdom of people and in the natural world that produced them. In *Tao, The Watercourse Way*, Alan Watts describes the situation as follows:

*If there is anything basic to Chinese culture, it is an attitude of respectful trust towards nature and human nature... a basic premise that if you cannot trust nature and other people, you cannot trust yourself. If you cannot trust yourself, you cannot even trust your mistrust of yourself...<sup>4</sup>*

It is this trust in *Tao* that makes all learning, relationship, and love possible. Without it a human person will experience meaninglessness and disorientation because his existence has no foundation or purpose. This experience of meaninglessness and disorientation is the result of a lack of trust in the *Tao*, the Way. Without trust, naturalness and spontaneity are stifled and a person grows up unable to relate to anyone in a healthy way because they have never learned to trust themselves. Therefore, adults, without this inherent and pervasive sense of trust, could



not take the personal or social risk of being wholly honest with themselves, others and the Divine Being. Such a trust, which lies at the heart of Taoism, authorizes spontaneity, that is *Zi-ran*.

*Lao Tzu invites followers of the Tao to the freedom that results from detachment from self.*

*...detachment from oneself and one's fixed ideas liberates one to be open to greater possibilities in life.*

Lao Tzu also points out that *Zi-ran* (spontaneity) does not arise from an attitude of reckless disregard for either oneself or the world. It is neither casual nor negligent. It comes instead from a disciplined yet easy following of one's own intrinsic intuition of a larger wisdom—the wisdom of *Tao*. To do this, all individual activity must be attuned to the natural unfolding of this larger wisdom. The person must be receptive to its movement by letting the uncontrived self function in accord with the larger nature of things. As soon as self-conscious deliberation appears, natural spontaneity or *Zi-ran* begins to disappear. Thus, *Zi-ran* happens when there is no interference with this larger wisdom. Lao Tzu in chapter 64 says, [a person] “*Learns to be without learning and makes good the mistakes of the multitude in order to help the myriad creatures to be natural and to refrain from daring to act.*” Lao Tzu invites followers of the *Tao* to the freedom that results from detachment from self. Thus, we need to learn through unlearning and to will through non-willing: “*Therefore, the sage, because he does nothing, never ruins anything; and, because he does not lay hold of anything, loses nothing.*” (chapter 64) This kind of detachment from oneself and one's fixed ideas liberates one to be open to greater possibilities in life. Accomplished artists, scientists, and holy people, who can create masterpieces of art, generate new insights and ideas, and accomplish extraordinary humanitarian acts, are those who are willing to transcend or even, at times, transgress the so-called conventional norms and their own ideas, in order to let themselves be directed by a larger wisdom.

### **Wu-wei**

*Wu-wei*, therefore, is the practice of non-action through detachment by which the disciple of *Tao* is to realize the central value of *Zi-ran*. In Chinese, *Wu-wei* literally means “no behavior” or “doing nothing.” However, it is not absolute non-action:

*Wu-wei is, rather, a concept or idea that is used to negate or restrict human action. In other words, Wu-wei means the cancellation or limitation of human behavior, particularly social activities. There are a number of gradations in the Taoist theories of Wu-wei: Wu-wei is a non-behavior or doing nothing; Wu-wei is taking as little action as possible; Wu-wei is taking actions spontaneously or naturally; Wu-wei is waiting for the spontaneous transformation of things; and Wu-wei is taking action according to objective conditions and the nature of things, namely, acting naturally.*<sup>5</sup>

*...people in general have a tendency to overdo; therefore, they interfere with the natural process of life.*

Lao Tzu believed that *Wu-wei* could lead to a peaceful and harmonious society because people in general have a tendency to overdo; therefore, they interfere with the natural process of life. *Wu-wei* also can help to attain an inner peace that serves as a solid foundation for living, even when one's life-journey is shaken by unpleasant experiences. It also enables one to react appropriately to the circumstances of the moment like the movement of water because a *Wu-wei* action arises spontaneously out of the flowing continuity of events. Through *Wu-wei*, one attains an inner balance and equilibrium that does not disturb the harmonious momentum of spontaneous happening. With this inner balance, one can naturally accomplish what normally would not be possible for the person: "*One does less and less until one does nothing at all, and when one does nothing at all there is nothing that is undone.*" (chapter 48)

Furthermore, from this inner balance of dynamically moving stillness comes an intuitive, purposeless, selfless doing. This is experienced as a charged emptiness in which both action and inaction are spontaneous and unconsidered. Everything and nothing become the same. Everything is crucially important yet not one thing matters. Changing becomes still and stillness moves. And from this condition *Wu-wei* happens of itself. As Lao Tzu explains: "*The heavy is the root of the light; the still is the lord of the restless.*" (chapter 26)

### **Principle of Dialectics**

In Taoism, as one seeks harmony, the principle of dialectics is central to the reconciliation of opposites. The paradoxes of life can only be resolved through holding them in dialectical tension. The opposites of any duality are identified within themselves and there is no need to seek a higher synthesis. There is a simultaneous occurrence and acceptance of difference and identity: "*Great music is without sound. Great form has no shape.*" (chapter 41) It is in dialectic that unity is found between the subjectivity of human beings and the objectivity of things. This is the most important aspect because, through it, one is simultaneously freed from the objectivity of the known and from the subjectivity of the self as knower: "*Therefore, the sage keeps to the deed that consists in taking no action and practices the teaching that uses no words.*" (chapter 2)

Lao Tzu's dialectics are the ways in which a person embraces the tension between opposites that seem to be irreconcilable. By emphasizing interdependence, reversibility, and complementarity, Lao Tzu avoids the dualism that has often afflicted Western

*The spirituality of systemlessness creates an environment where dialogue among cultures and religious traditions is possible.*

*One needs to see life as a journey full of paradoxes.*

metaphysical and philosophical thinking. By embracing the tension that exists between opposites without eliminating their distinctions, a follower of *Tao* is able to discover the creativity of the way of interdependence. Lao Tzu creates a process that goes beyond system. In other words, this process is not closed-in and its boundary remains open. The process enables persons to avoid the rigidity of bias and enter in a larger dialogue. The spirituality of systemlessness creates an environment where dialogue among cultures and religious traditions is possible. Therefore, the well of knowledge and insights will be shared among all people of different paths and traditions. For Lao Tzu, no one tradition or culture can claim the possession of all the truth. It becomes possible for us to overcome the anxiety created by any philosophical system that calls for a selection of one polarity over another. One needs to see life as a journey full of paradoxes. Once one wants to eliminate paradoxes, one becomes off-balance. And once one centers in a closed-in system, one becomes off-center. In order to regain a balance in one's life, Lao Tzu tends to underline the supreme importance of certain personal qualities such as stillness (chapter 26, 45), softness (chapter 43), weakness (chapter 36, 76, 78), and femininity (chapters 20, 28). These qualities are pictured as "conquering" all contrasting qualities opposed to them. This is because people generally seem to lean toward those qualities that are conventionally viewed as being desirable, such as strength, power, masculinity, activity, etc.

### **A Process of Liberation**

Through the concepts of *Tao*, *Tē*, *Zi-ran*, *Wu-wei*, and dialectics, Lao Tzu provides a process whereby his followers learn to liberate themselves from intellectual patterns or practices that impede the experience of harmony or right relationship with nature, the self, others, and *Tao*. Through this process, one is at home and at ease within the *Tao*'s ever-changing flow. One's actions are at once power-filled and efficacious, unhindered by daily worries, and thus focused as an embodiment of *Tao*, that is, *Tē*. If *Tē* is *Tao* "dwelling" in realities, individuals who embody *Tao* will be agents of *Tao* nurturing and fostering the development of *Tē*, that is, harmony in the world. *Tē*, as we have seen, is described by Lao Tzu as a mother nurturing all things. It is, therefore, through the practice of *Wu-wei*, *Zi-ran*, and dialectics, that the followers of Lao Tzu experience true freedom through the state of being in union with *Tao*. This state of union with *Tao* enables them to entrust themselves to *Tao* as the guiding and nurturing force of all things and, therefore, to become embodiments (*Tē*) of virtue, harmony, and justice. Trust is the essential virtue of the followers of *Tao*.

Similar to Lao Tzu's concept of *Tao* as both transcendent and immanent, Libermann understands God both as infinitely and essentially holy and as immanently experienced as mercy and justice:

*God is infinitely and essentially holy. The holiness of God in his dealings with his creatures appears in two ways: through his mercy it transmits itself to creatures; then through his justice, it rejects them. Nevertheless, God only created us in a design of mercy and in order to communicate himself to us in his holiness. Thus his mercy is never withdrawn; it always far surpasses justice in God's dealings with us. Moreover, God's justice only acts when forced to, that is to say, when the creature refuses mercy.*<sup>6</sup>

*While Tao is impersonal, Libermann's God is the God of the Old Testament who repeatedly shows his Hesed and Emeth to his people.*

However, Lao Tzu's concept of *Tao* is different from Libermann's understanding of God. While *Tao* is impersonal, Libermann's God is the God of the Old Testament who repeatedly shows his *Hesed* and *Emeth* to his people. His *Hesed* is rooted in his *Emeth*, his fidelity, and his faithfulness in their time of need. *Emeth* is translated as *Aletheia* in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) and is used in the New Testament for *Truth* by Jesus (John 14:6). It is the truth that brings to right relationship (justice). It is ultimately the truth given by God in Christ and the truth that will make all relationships right. Jesus is the epitome of God's *Hesed* and *Emeth* (John 1:14). Jesus is the incarnate *Hesed* that makes it possible for us to be progressively led to all truth (John 16:13). While Lao Tzu poetically and philosophically uses the concept of *Tè* to describe the immanent nature of *Tao*, Libermann, with both his Jewish understanding of the transcendent God, Yahweh, and the Christian understanding of Jesus as the Incarnate Word, and the Spirit who dwells in our hearts, joins the two aspects of the mystery: God-beyond and God-within.

### **Libermann and the Experience of Mystery**

Libermann's understanding of spirituality – life in the Spirit – is totally rooted in the human experience of the Mystery of God – God the origin of all, God enfleshed with us and God who indwells our hearts. It is in this God, who is both beyond and within, that Libermann puts his trust. Trust is, therefore, foundational to Libermann's understanding of spirituality.

For Libermann, trust in the experience of the Mystery is at the center of life in the Spirit. The trust he calls for is as radical as that found in the faith of Abraham. Libermann is very conscious

of the Mystery as both transcendent and immanent in human experience of it. At the heart of his spirituality is trust in following the way where the Spirit leads. He points to two indispensable conditions for allowing the Holy Spirit to act in us and bring about right relationship with God, oneself and others: 1) trust in the merciful love of the Father for oneself and for all people, a love which comes first and which is gratuitous and indefectible; 2) trust in the active presence of the Holy Spirit within us, the sole author of our holiness. Thus, he writes:

*At the heart of his spirituality is trust in following the way where the Spirit leads.*

*If you give in to anxiety and distress, the Holy Spirit won't be able to act in you as he would wish. He won't be able to make himself the absolute master of your soul. Soften, soothe, ease and calm down your imagination. Let us never be concerned about the future, nor tormented about the past. Let us place our soul in the present moment in the hands of God with peace, humility and gentleness.<sup>7</sup>*

*...let everything be natural in you and come from the Holy Spirit.*

Therefore, the goal of a Christian is to “*let everything be natural in you and come from the Holy Spirit.*” He further explains: “*Everything which flows from this Spirit is gentle, mild, modest and humble. Strength and mildness, that is the divine action; it is also a summary of all apostolic action.*”<sup>8</sup>

Since trust in the merciful God who is both above and within is at the heart of Libermann's experience, he thus builds his spirituality on the two foundations: **faith in God's love** and **faith in the Holy Spirit**. His faith in God is the faith in the God of tenderness and mercy revealed in the Sacred Scriptures. He advised his confreres:

*You are a child of God; live as such. You are even a privileged and favored child; be tranquil and peaceful before your heavenly Father, who loves you with so much tenderness. True love of God will never establish itself in your soul if you accustom yourself to entertain fears and apprehensions.<sup>9</sup>*

With regard to faith in the Holy Spirit, he distinguishes two sources of activity in us. On the one hand, the self, with its natural faculties: intelligence, will, and affectivity. Libermann, following St. John and St. Paul, views these faculties as distorted and undependable because, insofar as our activity issues from this source, it is spoiled by self-seeking, egoism, and self-love wrongly understood. This defective or perverted love taints even our best efforts to live a life of love.

On the other the hand, the Holy Spirit who is given to us by the resurrected Jesus Christ, the full revelation of *Hesed* and *Emeth*, will lead believers to all truth (John 16:13). For that

reason, Libermann constantly directs his friends and conferees to submit themselves to the Holy Spirit. As Libermann wrote to a seminarian in December 1837: *“All you have to do is to keep yourself docile and pliable in the hands of the Spirit of life, whom our Lord has placed in your soul to be your all.”*<sup>10</sup>

*...detachment from self and attachment to a larger wisdom is the antidote to the meaninglessness and disorientation in human experience.*

In order to remain pliable and docile to the Holy Spirit who gives life, Libermann further points out the necessity of remaining detached and calm regarding personal inclinations or egoistic passion, and of submitting to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This process of detachment from self and attachment to a larger wisdom is the antidote to the meaninglessness and disorientation in human experience. It demands that we put aside the illusion that we control our lives and our natural world. What is required is that we let things unfold in their own time. This process, consequently, will generate in us an inner tranquility to perceive everything happening around us with a sense of trust and objectivity. We will respond to them naturally through non-interference that is similar to *Wu-wei* of the *Tao*. With regard to this process, Libermann also advises:

*Never want to advance further than is given you from on high. Be content to aim at renouncing yourself in everything and having a peaceful desire to live for God alone; then wait in all tranquility until it pleases him to give you what he thinks fit. Make no demands on him or on yourself either. Say calmly: My Jesus, you know well that I am nothing, that I can do nothing, that I am worth nothing. Here I am as you find me, that is, a poor nobody. Take me, if you are good enough to show that mercy. I abandon myself and hand over myself into your hands and I ask for nothing more.*<sup>11</sup>

Henry Koren<sup>12</sup> points out that Libermann’s spirituality is ‘God-anchored.’ Such a spirituality is fundamental for the apostolic life. It is when we are able to detach from self-centered desires that we can learn to accept ourselves and to remain docile and pliable in the hands of the Spirit, the Divine Energy who gives life and shows the way. Thus, we do not get in the way of God’s using us as a means to further reveal his loving fidelity (*Emeth*) and his loving merciful faithfulness (*Hesed*) in bringing about reconciliation and harmony, that is, justice. He writes:

*When we enter this way of pure faith disengaged from the senses, we see ourselves as a heap of misery. For all that, we must not trouble ourselves or get agitated but wait until it pleases God to deliver us. If he does not judge that opportune, we content ourselves with being poor people before him,*

*knowing that nothing we do is worth anything but, at the same time, that he will do everything in us. In this way, we come little by little to act no more by our own movement; it is the Spirit of our Lord who then does everything in us, and gradually we acquire a supernatural force in all our activity. Nothing can stop us, and our activity becomes activity wholly divine, because nothing more of ourselves is found in it and the Spirit of our Lord alone carries it out in us, at least in great part.*<sup>13</sup>

While Lao Tzu relies on *Wu-wei*, *Zi-ran*, and dialectics, to be in the state of union with *Tao* and to experience harmony and true freedom, Libermann stresses the necessity of abandonment to God's love dwelling within us, the Spirit, who gifts us with holiness:

*Christian perfection does not consist in a certain more or less elevated state of prayer, but in a union of perfect love with our Lord, founded on a complete renouncement of ourselves, our self-love, our will, our ease, our satisfaction, and everything we prize. The more perfect our renouncement the more perfect is our love.*<sup>14</sup>

A disciple of the way of abandonment is likened to a ship that submits itself to be spontaneously directed by the wind of the Holy Spirit:

*A ship has sails and a rudder; the wind blows into the sail, getting the ship to proceed as it should, so it advances by its sails and takes its general direction. Yet this direction could be too vague and could lead the ship astray at times. So there is the rudder, to guide it exactly in its due course without straying in any way. Your soul is the ship, your heart represents the sail, the Holy Spirit is the wind; he blows into your will and your soul goes forward, proceeding towards the goal God proposes for it. Your mind is the rudder to prevent you, in the strength and vivacity of the movement given to your heart, from departing from the straight line determined by the divine goodness.*<sup>15</sup>

*Your soul is the ship, your heart represents the sail, the Holy Spirit is the wind*

Therefore, for Libermann the act of abandonment to the Divine Love is the means whereby one can transcend one's limited and miserable condition to open oneself to receive the unmerited grace-love of God, the Holy Spirit.

## CONCLUSION

Having reflected on the *Tao Te Ching* and the insights of Father Libermann, we can see certain similarities in their experience of Mystery:

*Committed Spiritans who practice abandonment or Wu-wei and Zi-ran will be creative and generative in their ministries...*

- They both describe transcendent and immanent dimensions of the Mystery.
- They both understand that by following the way we come to know harmony and peace in relationship with the Mystery, within ourselves, with others, and with creation. This interior right relationship leads us to seek exterior right relationships (justice) in all aspects of life.
- For both, trust and submission are essential human attitudes necessary for following the way and coming to harmony and peace.
- Radical trust leads to freedom that is manifested in spontaneity and 'naturalness' in the everyday flow of life.
- Both understand that non-action and receptivity, or a greater wisdom in the face of paradox, is the way to reconciliation and harmony.

For Spiritan missionaries working in an Asian context, these are some of the essential elements of lived experience of Mystery that can allow us to introduce the fullness of the Christian message and the principles inherent in Libermann's understanding of life in the Spirit to the culture. More importantly, it is how they are a part of our lives that will speak most convincingly to the hearts of our Asian brothers and sisters. Committed Spiritans who practice abandonment or *Wu-wei* and *Zi-ran* will be creative and generative in their ministries that seek to reconcile the fragmented lives of the individuals and communities we serve. Rooted in right relationship with God, God's justice, we will be ministers of *Hesed* and *Emeth*, and thus of reconciliation, peace, and justice.

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**Footnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Johnson, *The Inner Eye of Love: Mysticism and Religion*, p. 20.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>3</sup> Rahner, "Spirituality of the Church of the Future," *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 20, p. 149. Also cf. Louis Bouyer, *Introduction to Spirituality*, p. 124.

<sup>4</sup> Watts, *Tao, The Watercourse Way*, p.32.

<sup>5</sup> Liu, "Taoism," p. 243.

<sup>6</sup> Gilbert, *A Gentle Way to God*, p. 8.

<sup>7</sup> Libermann, L.S. I, p. 167 (author's translation).

<sup>8</sup> Gilbert, *You have laid your hand on me*, p. 123.

<sup>9</sup> Libermann, L.S. II, p. 77 (author's translation).

<sup>10</sup> Gilbert, *You have laid your hand on me*, p. 39.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p. 53.

<sup>12</sup> Koren, *Essays on the Spiritan Charism*, pp. 53-54.

<sup>13</sup> Gilbert, *You have laid your hands on me*, pp. 38-39.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, pp. 120-121.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p. 41.

## INCULTURATION AND THE SPIRITAN CHARISM

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*The charism of a  
particular religious  
congregation emerges  
from the insight of its  
founder/s...*

Inculturation is popularly associated with the incarnation of the Gospel in a particular sociocultural setting. It involves a two-way process. First, there is the intimate penetration or “taking flesh” of the Christian Gospel in a novel setting, the Gospel proclaimed by missionaries who themselves come from a particular Church. Second, it is a process of the receiving community being empowered by the energy of the Gospel. The particular community responds to the actual or novel questions that only their context can raise and thereby enriches profoundly the Christian tradition.

The charism of a particular religious congregation emerges from the insight of its founder/s, who are profoundly grasped by the gift-giving Holy Spirit of God that enables them to read the signs of the times, discern the passage or traces of the passage of God, lay hold of it, and convince others to re-explore life and the world through this insight. My focus is the Spiritan charism.

### **In the Footsteps of the Founders**

Spiritane mission and Spiritane charism are marked by the visionary praxis of Claude Poullart des Places (1679-1709) and Venerable Francis Libermann (1802-1852). Both had a passion for the poor.

Claude’s original or natural cultural home was the French middle class—the embodiment of high culture that transmitted the dominant ideology of culture as “formal and articulate systems of meanings.” While retaining the finer humane or life-enhancing aspects of this culture for the common good (communicated through universalistic evangelism), he abandoned totally the discriminatory, alienating, and arrogant self-perception of the middle class. He welcomed the world and culture of the poor—the “mixed and inarticulate consciousness of marginalized peoples.”<sup>1</sup> This enabled him to engineer his men to embrace his creative focus, reinvest agency in the poor in order to redeem them from their coarseness and from those limitations that keep them from experiencing full dignified humanity.

Francis Libermann, on his part, emerged from and was nurtured within a despised ethnic group (European Jewry). He assimilated and was profoundly soaked in the spiritual depth of his Jewish cultural matrix. He struggled with and transcended his ghettoized ancestry, to guide, with what amounted to a touch of genius, an amorphous group called to mission to the most despised or

marginalized of his time. He affirmed the humanity and cultural world of Black Slaves, assumed the task of opening them up, through “civilization” permeated by a universalist evangelism, to the project of self-transcendence. Black Slaves draw from the wealth of their particularity—those humane qualities nurtured from their African ancestry and forged in the heat of inhuman oppression—to set aside their particularist limitations so as to share in the wider project of a new humanity.

The heart and inspiration of these two great men are at the root of the Spiritan charism. Their commitment to mission was a cultural action of liberation. Spiritan charism and the Spiritan evangelistic project are only an expansion of the initial vision of the founders.

### **Claude Poullart des Places**

Claude’s initial commitment to the ‘Savoyards’ (chimney sweepers) prepared the ground for developing the project of building community with indigent seminarians—that is seminarians unable to pay for their board. The new Spiritan seminary founded on the Feast of Pentecost, May 27, 1703, refused up-front to accept seminarians who were able to pay for their keep. The readjustments required of Claude, to leave aside material comfort and his middle class cultural environment, could justifiably be described today as “culture shock.”<sup>2</sup>

Claude had faith in the human dignity of indigent seminarians as well as the value of their culture-world for humanizing the wider world. From their experience of having little, and strengthened by the integral and demanding formation they had to undergo, they would overflow with the spirit of respect and honor for the person and world of the poor and despised. The first official Rule of the Holy Spirit Seminary, written by Louis Bouic (1734), embodied this kenotic missionary spirituality and focus. Their pastoral activity would focus on caring for inmates of hospices; the preferential direction of evangelism was towards the poor and infidels, and towards those duties for which ministers are difficult to find.

The “cultural revolution” that Claude initiated had the intention of assembling personnel for mission that could not be described as “celestial cannon fodder.” Andrew F. Walls believes that 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century Christian mission to Africa was dominated by those with brawn as opposed to brain. This cultural peculiarity contrasted sharply with the requirements of those missionaries sent to Asia that were equipped with “superior academic or intellectual credentials.”<sup>3</sup> Claude’s program of missionary formation was integral—piety suffused with learning. Therefore

*The new Spiritan seminary...refused up-front to accept seminarians who were able to pay for their keep.*

*Claude’s program of missionary formation was integral—piety suffused with learning.*

he would not do business with pious but ignorant priests or with learned priests who disdained virtue.<sup>4</sup> The humble conditions of his seminarians were seen as an advantage to be committed to the poor, to develop profound piety, and to acquire the necessary learning for mission. Ironically, priests trained in the Holy Spirit Seminary were later sent to the colonies and more often than not failed to embody Claude's ideal. They shared the colonial prejudice against the colonized. Libermann considered them an obstacle to the radical evangelism required for the Black Slaves.

The initial focus of Poullart des Places on the education of indigent seminarians, who would learn from the culture-world of the marginalized in order to evangelize them, still constitutes a key dimension of Spiritan charism today. It challenges, and perhaps haunts, Spiritan educational ministry from Duquesne University, Pittsburgh (USA), through Blackrock College, Dublin (Ireland), to the Holy Ghost Juniorate, Ihiala (Nigeria).

*A visionary and mystic,  
he was penetrated  
and grasped by the  
humanum...*

### **Francis Libermann**

Libermann, founder and guide of the missionaries of the Holy Heart of Mary, was dominated by the passion to mission to the Blacks (*l'Œuvre des Noirs*). A visionary and mystic, he was penetrated and grasped by the humanum; this led him to have profound trust in the value and giftedness of each human group, especially the most oppressed Blacks. *This formed the centerpiece as well as the measure of the truth of Spiritan mission. It embodies the depth of Spiritan charism and missionary spirituality that Spiritans aspire to but hardly ever attain.*

Long before Vatican II moved away from the classicist view of culture to the anthropological view that each human group is nurtured in culture ("Man comes to a true and full humanity only through culture, that is through the cultivation of the goods and values of nature"), Libermann and his collaborators Eugene Tisserant and Frederick Le Vasseur went through an agonizing "dark night" that structurally redefined their horizon of understanding reality. It was a creative "dark night," spent in contemplating the horror of Black Slavery that contrasts sharply with the truth of all humans as image of God, and the Pauline evangelistic challenge of being all things to all people (cf. 1Cor 9:19-23). Their journey was nourished on the one hand by kenotic spirituality—the embodiment of "the crucified mind" that is the polar opposite of the "crusading mind"<sup>6</sup> (cf. Phil 2:5-8). On the other hand, the human tragedy of Black Slavery was the immediate cause of their overhaul of the Western jaundiced view of the other. Their conversion was both a spiritual and cultural revolution. Where else would Libermann draw the confidence to

*Their conversion was  
both a spiritual and  
cultural revolution.*

reject the prevailing prejudices of the West if not from a profound discovery of an alternative worldview and an alternate horizon of understanding? Without having ever set foot on the West coast of Africa, he wrote to his communities:

*A final observation: do not listen easily to the stories of those travelers around the coast when they speak to you about the small tribes they have visited, even if they have stayed there for a number of years. Hear what they say to you, but let their words not have any influence on your judgment. Scrutinize things in the spirit of Jesus Christ, free from all impressions, prejudices, but filled and animated by the charity of God and the pure zeal that his Spirit gives you. I am sure that you would be able to judge quite differently our poor blacks than those who speak to you about them....* (Letter to the Community in Dakar and Gabon, November 19, 1847).

The *defining experience* of Black Slavery—guided by the *practical liberating mystical rapture in the “Spirit of Jesus Christ”*—encouraged him to state in the same letter without equivocation: *“Strip yourself of Europe, its customs and its mentality; make yourselves Negro with the Negroes in order to form them as they ought to be, not in the European manner, but leave to them what is their own.”*

The school of formation, or the wellsprings of Spiritan charism, was so intimately connected with *Work for the Blacks* (*l’Œuvre des Noirs*) that some Spiritans argue passionately that undertaking any other work is unfaithful to the Spiritan vocation.<sup>7</sup> While this view misses the spirit of Libermann, who even contemplated ministry in marginalized subcultures of France, one would also miss the spirit of the founder by pretending that today the *Work for the Blacks* would take backstage. Today more than ever, from the USA where systemic racism racializes identity, to the global market place where Africa remains marginalized, the passion of the founders for the poor keeps the *Work for the Blacks* on the front burner.

*Today more than ever...  
the passion of the  
founders for the poor  
keeps the Work for the  
Blacks on the front  
burner.*

### **Spiritans Life Challenged by the Absolute of Spiritan Charism**

The focus of both Poullart des Places and Francis Libermann is without doubt the poor and marginalized. The *Work for the Blacks* became self-defining for Libermann. The *Spiritans Rule of Life* (1987) specifically states that, in faithfulness to the intuitions of our founders, we give preference to an apostolate that takes us to those oppressed and most disadvantaged as a group or as individuals.<sup>8</sup> The style and strategy of the founders

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way of mission.*

for realizing the vision are not incidental to their intuitions or charism. If one wants to find out how Spiritans differ from, for example, Sulpicians or Jesuits, in other words what constitutes the driving force or specificity of Spiritan charism, one might find Libermann's comments on the Sulpician way and the Jesuit educational focus very interesting.

Saint Sulpice nurtured Libermann. He imbibed and transmitted Sulpician spirituality. However, despite the undeniable importance of Sulpicians in seminary formation, they were, in Libermann's view, inward looking and ill-equipped to handle issues outside their houses.<sup>9</sup> They would therefore lack the *flexibility and freedom* demanded by the new *Work for the Blacks*. One could, of course, contest Libermann's opinion. But it highlights the role freedom and flexibility play in appreciating Spiritan charism or spirituality. Secondly, though Libermann would reject the hostility of his friend Mgr Jean Luquet towards the Jesuits, yet he shared his convictions on the local clergy, local agency, and residential bishops. Libermann had great esteem for the Jesuits' giftedness in educational work; they would be more competent than his own Society in the formation of the "Black child." However, the Jesuits cannot "establish an indigenous clergy; this is totally at variance with their system of mission." Furthermore, the Jesuit esprit de corps favors centralization that will complicate the consuming focus of the *Work for the Blacks* that has local agency as its foundation.<sup>10</sup> The strong statement about a highly esteemed group does not appear to come from prejudice. Libermann was firmly convinced that decentralization rather than centralization is the way of mission. Secondly, Libermann's vision of the Church was reinforced by the profound convictions of Jean Luquet anchored on the episcopacy—the recognition of the authority of the residential bishop over his Church rather than dependency on the metropolitan (e.g. in Paris). Luquet, in his diatribe against the Jesuits, pointed to their mission in Paraguay and Asia as producing no episcopacy. Decentralization is good for the Church and highlights the specific orientation of Spiritan charism on the ground; it is a key molding block of the Spiritan missionary strategy. Indeed it is the key to inculturation.

Fidelity to the charism of the founders implies that Spiritans must embrace at least two missionary absolutes: [1] freedom, flexibility, and openness to change; and [2] the spirit of decentralization necessary for the emergence of a true local Church.

### **Freedom, Flexibility, and Openness to Change**

The life and vocation of Libermann before and after ordination were a great struggle to get his community's project understood and approved. The new and urgent *Work for the Blacks* needed

*Openness to change is of the nature of Spiritan missionary vocation...*

*...missionaries must be firmly schooled in the social, economic, political, and ideological realities of the time.*

people open to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and therefore enjoying the creative freedom of the children of God. Openness to change is of the nature of Spiritan missionary vocation; it is the very opposite of being closed up within one's tradition, ways, and times.

Spiritan mission, open to change, is fundamentally attentive to the "signs of the times"—remarkable events that reveal the "hand of God," or at least traces of the "passage of God," those events that reveal the challenge of God's freedom addressing human freedom. Nigerian novelist, Chinua Achebe, captures the attentiveness to change in an Igbo aphorism, "a man must dance the dance prevailing in his time."<sup>11</sup> Igbo world, constructed on flexibility and relationality, understands *change* as implacable, respecting neither individuals, nor community, nor divinities. Nnolim insists, "The forces of change are the modern Fates, the Nemesis that must forcefully tame the stubborn individual."<sup>12</sup>

Libermann wanted the new missionaries to respond holistically to the changing world, take advantage of its possibilities in the mission for the Blacks. Deeply spiritual and focused on mission to the Blacks, missionaries must be firmly schooled in the social, economic, political, and ideological realities of the time. First, ***Work for the Blacks*** *reveals the challenge of God's freedom addressing human freedom*, requiring total commitment to God who created all humans in God's image. Aware of the prejudiced judgments against Blacks prevalent in the colonies and French society, Libermann rallied to their defense. Black Slaves are not profoundly "perverted"! Nurtured and purified in the *via crucis* and convinced that the Calvary of slavery was wrongheaded, he boldly challenged the missionary Church to learn from the Black culture (incarnation) and honor the legacy of the virtues of the "destroyed, unfortunate, and crushed souls" (1846 Memoir to the Propaganda). Blacks like all humans have their weaknesses. But Black cultural resources did not lack the refinement, intelligence, or determination to competently strategize, manage, realize freedom, and administer their communities, Church or State. Libermann proudly pointed to their organizational abilities in mobilizing revolt, as well as the experience of the Black republic of Haiti. Second, attentiveness to the signs of the times made Libermann seek out Isaac Louverture, son of Toussaint Louverture (ex-slave and father of independent Haiti), ask for his advice over his vision and strategy for holistic education in the colonies and Africa, and share with him his idea of a true local Church in Haiti that would be independent of the metropolitan archbishop of Paris. The system of education envisaged would spread "civilization" through formation in the arts, technical education,



and agriculture, as well as the special formation of indigenous clergy and the upbringing of catechists in minor orders.<sup>13</sup> “Civilization”—humane Christian formation—would seize the historical opportunities created by the work of abolitionists, the cooperation of France and England to put an end to slavery, and especially create an environment where Blacks would not feel inferior to those who despise them, nor would one class among them look down on the other.

Today, Spiritans in Ethiopia where Christianity dates to Patristic times, in Papua New Guinea where a local Church is being born, or in Ireland, which like France of the 1930s is mission country, must embody freedom, flexibility, and openness to change. This involves being schooled in and being deeply challenged by the ambient cultures, the rapid political, social, religious, and economic changes, globalization and the impact of secularism in Europe and the wider world. Only in openness and flexibility to change would Spiritans be faithful to the charism of the founders. The orientating intuition of the *Work for the Blacks* imposes itself as the self-defining prism through which Spiritans engage in and evaluate *other works* in Asia, the Americas, Europe, and Africa. Scores of African Spiritans are today missionaries in Europe, Asia, and the Americas. Learning, listening, and receiving—the incarnational and kenotic principles lived in attentiveness to the promptings of the Spirit of freedom—are imperative for being faithful to the Spiritan charism.

*Learning, listening, and receiving...are imperative for being faithful to the Spiritan charism.*

### **The Local Church**

Libermann’s perception of the centrality of the local Church in the *Work for the Blacks* was certainly ahead of his time. Freedom and flexibility, the domain of the Holy Spirit, enable openness to diversity and the ability to train a local clergy. Libermann’s exercise of freedom against the ecclesiastical odds was nothing short of heroism. His wider horizon, ability to consult and get good information, and especially his capacity to digest the views of others and make these bear the stamp of his mystic insight, mark his originality. Spiritan historian, Paul Coulon, discovered Libermann’s original (“secret”?) 1846 Memoir to the Propaganda that contrasts with the received 1846 Memoir. The “secret” or suppressed Memoir, neatly overlaid with the received text,<sup>14</sup> fully reveals Libermann’s radical viewpoint on mission and his inspirational vision of true local Churches based on the episcopacy. The ecclesiological conviction of Luquet (contained in his *Clarifications* of the decisions of the Synod of Pondicherry presented to the Propaganda) certainly formed the backbone of (or reinforced) Libermann’s vision.<sup>15</sup> They became so natural to

Libermann that he incorporated them into the original Memoir without acknowledging his sources.

*Having a true clergy is the sign [of the presence] of a Church; it is a Church with a bishop acting freely and fully by virtue of the grace reserved to the episcopal consecration. [p. 8]*

*The episcopacy, an indigenous episcopacy, is therefore the true foundation of those Churches that our Lord reserves to be enduring. One may assemble all sorts of objections against the application of this principle in the present mission countries, but it remains incontestable that the episcopacy is established as the base of the Churches by our savior Jesus Christ. [p. 81].<sup>16</sup>*

Libermann was unable to carry this project through. He bowed to the advice of the secretary to the Propaganda and requested only for a Vicariate Apostolic.<sup>17</sup> Libermann's dream would have created Churches perhaps similar to those of apostolic times, instead of extraverted missions turned towards the metropolis like the colonial administration. It was intolerable and harmful to the Church that the archbishop of Paris should preside over the Church of Haiti. It was intolerable that Vicars be appointed in Dakar and Gabon instead of a true indigenous episcopacy. Only Rome should supervise centralization, but not in every detail. The ultramontane wing of French Catholicism that accorded a special place to the Pope and the Church of Rome influenced Libermann and his bishops, like Benôit Truffet of Dakar, as well as founders like Marion de Bréssillac (founder of the Society of African Missions). They believed that fidelity to the Pope and to Rome protected the new Churches from the influence of the French or other European monarchs. It was beneficial at the time.<sup>18</sup>

The structure of the Church Libermann hoped to establish was revolutionary at the time, though based on sound Catholic ecclesiology. It was in accord with the 1845 instruction of Gregory XVI on mission, *Neminem Profecto*, which insisted on instituting and forming the local clergy. It re-appropriated the focus of the 1659 instruction of Propaganda Fide to give full value to local agency. One had to wait for Vatican II for its approximate realization. His vision would have laid the foundation for true incarnation in the new Churches; an incarnational dimension that makes the local Church the agent of inculturation. Libermann would agree with Bréssillac that,

*According to the ways established in the order of grace, missionaries are so useful everywhere that it may be said they are everywhere necessary. Nevertheless, in the work of*

*Libermann's dream would have created Churches perhaps similar to those of apostolic times...*

*The structure of the Church Libermann hoped to establish was revolutionary at the time...*

*sanctifying souls, they should everywhere be only auxiliary. Unhappy the country where the voice of a missionary is never heard. But still more unhappy is the country that has only missionaries to look at.*<sup>19</sup>

*...once the missionary begins preaching s/he prepares his/her handover note...*

This is to say that once the missionary begins preaching s/he prepares his/her handover note; or effects, in Henry Venn's words, the "euthanasia of mission!"<sup>20</sup> This can be realized only by instituting local Churches with true episcopacy. Fidelity to the Spiritan charism is fidelity to this insight. The Spiritan policy of supporting the choice of bishops from the local clergy, as opposed to choosing Spiritan missionaries as bishops, is faithful to the imperatives of the Spiritan charism.

The Spiritan orientation finds a kindred spirit in the Evangelical Church of England's (CMS) General Secretary (1841-1872), Henry Venn—a passionate proponent of local agency. Venn hinged his ecclesiology on a "three self policy": self-government, self-support, and self-propagation. This would yield a "Native Church under Native Pastors and a Native Episcopate."<sup>21</sup> Libermann, Luquet, and Bréssillac (ultramontanes that regarded Protestants as heretics) could not have imagined that their views were shared by Protestant contemporaries. Ironically, neither Spiritan confreres in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century nor the CMS collaborators of Venn approved of local agency. Spiritan confreres in Gabon found the idea intolerable. According to the report of Charles Duparquet, the idea of local clergy sounded like heresy to the confreres in Gabon (1857). They felt that "the Venerated Father was hugely mistaken" on the matter.<sup>22</sup> White CMS missionaries in West Africa reacted exactly the same way to Henry Venn's views. Vatican II secured this ecclesiology.

*Libermann's Memoir... was the first of its type in Catholic mission to Africa.*

Libermann's Memoir outlining the focus of his community's mission was the first of its type in Catholic mission to Africa. It is the embodiment of Spiritan charism that Spiritans and the local Churches aspire to without ever completely attaining. Fidelity to Spiritan charism is enabling this vision to prosper. The Association of Member Episcopal Conferences of Eastern Africa (AMECEA) decided in 1973 to restructure their Church and re-orientate pastoral activity based on local agency and patterned on Small Christian Communities. Their statement on local agency integrates the Catholic (Libermann) and Protestant (Venn) viewpoints: "We are convinced that in these countries of Eastern Africa it is time for the Church to become really 'local', that is: self-ministering, self-propagating and self-supporting. Our plan is aimed at building such local Churches for the coming years."<sup>23</sup>

*Poullart des Places and Francis Libermann bequeathed to Spiritans a way that is challenging and pertinent for mission in the contemporary world.*

*Spiritans charism testifies to the truth that mission belongs to God.*

## Concluding Remarks

Poullart des Places and Francis Libermann bequeathed to Spiritans a way that is challenging and pertinent for mission in the contemporary world. Their focus on education that empowers the weak, that acknowledges the value of their culture-world, endows the weak with self-confidence to transform the world as free children of God. The cultural action of education liberates them from any complexes of inferiority. The foundational link between the origin of Libermann's vocation and the *Work for the Blacks* opens a *palace* of freedom and creativity for mission in the most difficult areas of our world. Mission eschews paternalism and focuses on the establishment of real local Churches equal in all respects to the Churches that send missionaries. It is never a question of superior and inferior Churches. Mission that waits on the providential grace of the Holy Spirit is mission in weakness and therefore firmly secured in the Lord. The evaluation of Spiritan mission in Ethiopia in 1993 by Pierre Schouver and his visitation team captures the potency and actuality of Spiritan charism that delights in flexibility, openness, and a spirit of decentralization. The report says, Spiritans "go to work outside, in activities, projects, structures which are not their own. They have their place, their inspiration and their area of influence, but they have practically no works of their own." Spiritan charism testifies to the truth that mission belongs to God.

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#### Footnotes

- <sup>1</sup> See Daniel Franklin Pilario, "Politics of 'Culture' and the Project of Inculturation," in *Jahrbuch Für Kontextuelle Theologien 1999* (Frankfurt: IKO - Verlag für Interkulturelle Kommunikation, 1999), 178-180.
- <sup>2</sup> Christian de Mare believes it was a "culture shock." See his "Plan for Our Journey Across Spiritan Spirituality." Lecture Notes on Formation of Formators, SIST, 1999.
- <sup>3</sup> Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith* (New York & Edinburgh: Orbis and T. & T. Clark, 2002). According to Walls "Africa saw no equivalent of the medical missionary investment that produced entire medical faculties for the Chinese Empire." (p.117.)
- <sup>4</sup> Gallia Christiana, t.7, col. 1045; cited in Christian de Mare, Lecture Notes, SIST, 1999.
- <sup>5</sup> Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 53
- <sup>6</sup> See Kosuke Koyama, *No Handle on the Cross - an Asian Meditation on the Crucified Mind* (London: SCM, 1976). Mgr Benôit Truffet of Dakar used a similar expression to describe the mysticism that evangelization presents to the slaves—they are empowered to realise that "they are *children* and *brothers* of a crucified God to whom they should offer, with resignation and confidence, their tears, their hard labour and their prayers." This text was sent to the Annals of the Archconfraternity of Our Lady of Victories

but was never published. See Paul Coulon and Paule Brasseur, eds., *Liebermann 1802-1852. Une pensée et une mystique missionnaires* (Paris: Cerf, 1988), 410-411.

<sup>7</sup> This is the controversial position of Lucien Laverdière of the Province of Canada. See the collection of his views printed and distributed as typescript (over 300 pages)—Lucien Laverdière, “Grandeur et décadence d’une province spiritaine (Véridique histoire édifiante et stupéfiante à maints égards).” (Montréal - Centre de Documentation: nd).

<sup>8</sup> Spiritan Rule of Life, no 12.

<sup>9</sup> Letter to Le Vasseur, March 10, 1844, A. Cabon, ed., *Notes et Documents relatifs à la vie et à l’œuvre du Vénérable François-Marie-Paul Liebermann*, vol. VI (Paris: 1937), p. 118; See Christy Burke, *Morality and Mission - a Case Study: Francis Liebermann and Slavery (1802-1852)* (Nairobi: Pauline Publications Africa, 1998), 46.

<sup>10</sup> See Letter to Le Vasseur, April 9, 1845, A. Cabon, ed., *Notes et Documents relatifs à la vie et à l’œuvre du Vénérable François-Marie-Paul Liebermann*, vol. VII (Paris: 1938), 132, where Liebermann discusses the Jesuits’ competence in education and incompetence regarding local clergy. See also his letter to Mother Javouhey in Cabon, ed., *Notes et Documents relatifs à la vie et à l’œuvre du Vénérable François-Marie-Paul Liebermann*, VII, p. 227, where he makes remarks about the Jesuit penchant for centralization. The frequent temptations of Le Vasseur to join the Jesuits were burdensome for Liebermann. This was finally resolved, see *Notes et Documents IX*, pp. 282-294. Christy Burke believes Liebermann’s statement about Jesuits may be exaggerated, cf. Burke, *Morality and Mission - a Case Study: Francis Liebermann and Slavery (1802-1852)*, pp. 68-69. Coulon discusses Luquet’s influence on Liebermann, cf. Paul Coulon and Paule Brasseur, eds., *Liebermann 1802-1852. Une pensée et une mystique missionnaires*, pp. 412-429, 444-448.

<sup>11</sup> See Chinua Achebe, *Arrow of God*, [1st American. ed.] (New York: J. Day, 1967).

<sup>12</sup> Charles Nnolim, *Approaches to the African Novel: Essays in Analysis*, 1999 ed. (Owerri, Nigeria: Ihem Davis Press, 1992). See especially the chapter with title “Technique and Meaning in Achebe’s *Arrow of God*”, pp.209-233, p.210.

<sup>13</sup> See Le Mémoire, pp. 17-18. See Paul Coulon and Paule Brasseur, eds., *Liebermann 1802-1852. Une pensée et une mystique missionnaires*, pp.239-240, 246-247, 556-558 ; Burke, *Morality and Mission - a Case Study: Francis Liebermann and Slavery (1802-1852)*, p. 61. For an illustration of the potency of Black cultural resources see Anthony B. Pinn, *Terror and Triumph - the Nature of Black Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003).

<sup>14</sup> Paul Coulon, “Un mémoire secret de Liebermann à la Propagande en 1846? Enquête et suspense,” *Mémoire Spiritaine 3*, no. 1e Semestre (1996). Coulon had to get special clearance to get the Vatican librarian take the dossier to the bindery and peel off the top layer containing the received text in order to reveal the suppressed text.

<sup>15</sup> Coulon and Brasseur, eds., *Liebermann 1802-1852. Une pensée et une mystique missionnaires*, pp.422, 442. Luquet was mandated to transmit to Rome the Acts of the Synod of Pondicherry (1844) that was firmly committed to establishing true local Churches, i.e. dioceses with residential bishops.

<sup>16</sup> Coulon, “Un Mémoire Secret de Liebermann à la Propagande en 1846? Enquête et suspense,” p. 41. (my translation)

<sup>17</sup> 1846 Memoir, p.37.

<sup>18</sup> See comments of Coulon and Brasseur on ultramontanism in reference to Mgr Jean Benoît Truffet in Coulon and Brasseur, eds., *Libermann 1802-1852. Une pensée et une mystique missionnaires*, pp.404-408, 476. See also Michael McCabe, "The Missionary Vision of Bishop De Marion Bréssillac," *Society of African Missions, [Irish Province] Bulletin*, no. Summer (1996), 4-5; and Michael McCabe, "The Relevance and Limits of De Bressillac's Missionary Vision Today," *Society of African Missions, [Irish Province] Bulletin*, no. Christmas (1996).

<sup>19</sup> Bréssillac "My Thoughts on the Mission" [c. 1855], see Marion de Bréssillac, *Mission and Foundation Documents nd.*, trans. Bob Hales SMA (Paris: Mediaspaul, 1986), no.5.

<sup>20</sup> See Adrian Hastings, *The Church in Africa 1450-1950* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 294.

<sup>21</sup> See *Ibid.*, p.294; see also Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 36.

<sup>22</sup> Coulon and Brasseur, eds., *Libermann 1802-1852. Une pensée et une mystique missionnaires*, p. 454.

<sup>23</sup> AMECEA Bishops, «Planning for the Church in Eastern Africa in the 1980s....» *AFER* 16/1&2, 1974.

## “THIRD CHURCH” MISSION IN THE “FIRST WORLD”

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*...the true point of arrival will be when such developments are no longer seen as newsworthy.*

“The Third Church”<sup>1</sup> is a term used by Walbert Bülmann in the 1970’s for the then emerging Churches of Africa, Latin America, and Asia, as over against the established Churches of the West and the East. Although people now prefer to speak of “Majority World” or “Two-Thirds World” in relation to “First World,” I have chosen the above title because the mission of the Third Church is spotlighting residues of the mentality of First World and Third World, and these demand examination.

### **How’s the Mission?**

It can be said that Third Church mission has begun well. The majority of the agents have been well received; some have become deans, pastors, administrators and professors in seminaries and higher institutions of learning. Their presence in the First World has inspired greater interest in their backgrounds and led to increased visits to the Third Church on the part of First World Christians. Such visits are forging bonds of solidarity across the Atlantic and the Pacific oceans and leading to better mutual understanding. Members of the Third Church now serve in general and provincial administrations of missionary congregations and in their formation programs located in the First World. Some presidents and important officers of dicasteries of the Roman Curia are from the Third Church. These are important steps in the right direction, but the true point of arrival will be when such developments are no longer seen as newsworthy. As the entire Church integrates the fairly new experience of Third Church mission, crises of growth can only be expected. A missionary congregation was on the point of electing a Sri Lankan as Superior General when rules changed in mid-course and frustrated the election of the Sri Lankan. The Sri Lankan province of that order was not going to take this lying down; it decided to pursue independent identity and has remained so to-date.

### **What is the Mission?**

Immigration is a global fact and immigrants in the First World need pastoral attention and services. So, a large part of the mission of the Third Church consists in helping the Churches of the First World cater to the needs of migrants.

There is also the issue of faith growing cold, especially in its institutional dimension. In most of Europe the attachment to



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the Church is loose and Sunday attendance very low. Mulemfo, who went to Sweden in 1996 on “mission in return,” had this to say:

*Statistics show that only 5 percent of the overall population attend church every week ... Secularisation is seen also in more specific things that Swedes believe: Only fifteen percent believe in a personal God; twenty percent in the resurrection of the dead – about as many as believe in reincarnation and transmigration of souls.<sup>2</sup>*

Leonidas Kalugila of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania was a pastor in Denmark from 1966. He noted that, though most people were baptized, very few were active and many people said that they did not believe in God. In one case an immigrant attended a Sunday service which was not held: the pastor told him that there was no service because no parishioner came.<sup>3</sup>

*In the U.S. and Canada, secularization takes a different turn.*

In the U.S. and Canada, secularization takes a different turn. The problem is not the coldness of faith but the lack of ordained ministers, both for the American-born and for immigrants of various languages and cultures who have arrived since 1965 when Congress widened the door for immigration. A 1999 CARA study found that 16% of priests in U.S. were foreign-born.<sup>4</sup> Surveys of new ordinands found that in 2004 31% of them were foreign-born; in 2005 the figure was 27%.<sup>5</sup> This year the Archdiocese of Chicago ordained 13 priests, only one of whom was native to Chicago and five of whom were East Africans being ordained for Chicago Archdiocese.

*Some dioceses...reject the option of inviting “foreign” ordained ministers.*

Some dioceses, however, reject the option of inviting “foreign” ordained ministers. They reason that each local Church should be able to generate ministers from within as fruit of the Eucharistic assembly. Should a lack of ordained ministry occur, this should be an invitation to explore other models of Church and pastoral practice better adapted to the situation of the Church. Hoge and Okure<sup>6</sup> outline other arguments gleaned from interviews. Language and culture barriers top the list. A different ecclesiology that tends towards the conservative is also mentioned. Often cited was discomfort with the high degree of lay involvement in ministry, especially by women. A complaint from Australia gives vent to the feeling that

*These migrant priests also come with culturally filtered interpretations of Catholic teaching that do not always*

*accord with Western readings ... [they] do not have a relevant cultural bank from which they can draw pastoral sensitivities.*<sup>7</sup>

To put things into perspective, it should be remembered that missionaries to the Third Church also came with their cultural baggage; it could not be otherwise. Many of them preached through interpreters all their stay on the mission. The people nevertheless received them graciously as guests and interacted meaningfully with them. Acculturation is a mutual process,<sup>8</sup> of missionary and people. Mission is intercultural exchange, as the evolving theology and practice of mission shows.

### **Evolving Theology of Mission**

Mission used to be a one-way street, from Europe and North America to Africa, Latin America, and Asia. Many of those missionaries saw themselves and were seen as heroes whose mission was to “civilize and Christianize.” No one denied that the natives being missioned to had their own wisdom and venerable cultures, some even older than Christianity. However, they needed to be inducted into the culture of the colonial powers and this was also considered as *praeparatio evangelica* (preparation for the faith). Missionaries brought money and material from their home Churches to help build churches, schools, hospitals, and other institutions. Mission was done from an assumption of cultural and religious superiority.

*Mission transmuted into a “mutual exchange of energies” in which all have something to give and something to receive.*

All that began to change in 1963 at the World Mission and Evangelism Conference in Mexico. This conference introduced the concept of “Mission in Six Continents.” Mission transmuted into a “mutual exchange of energies”<sup>9</sup> in which all have something to give and something to receive.

The 1964 Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, 13, asserted that

*in virtue of this catholicity each individual part of the Church contributes through its special gifts to the good of the other parts and of the whole Church ... Between all the parts of the Church there remains a bond of close communion with respect to spiritual riches, apostolic workers, and temporal resources.*

The 1965 Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church, *Ad gentes*, 20, followed, exhorting that

*It is fitting that the young Churches should participate as soon as possible in the universal missionary work of the*

*Church. Let them send their own missionaries **to proclaim the gospel all over the world**, even though they themselves are suffering from a shortage of clergy.<sup>10</sup>[emphasis mine].*

No. 2 of the same document clinched it all when it said that

*The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature. For it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she takes her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father.*

*...mission is universal  
and intrinsic to each local  
Church...*

So mission is universal and intrinsic to each local Church: all Churches must be ready to share and receive something of “that fountain of love” (*Ad gentes*, 2) flowing from the Trinity. Each Church must offer others what it has and gladly receive help and support from other Churches. Nothing in this exchange between sister Churches should create either slavish dependence or inferiority-superiority complexes, only love and solidarity in faith.

*Third Church mission is  
done in humility.*

### **What can Third Church Mission bring to the “Mutual Exchange of Energies”?**

Third Church mission is done in humility. It is occasional that one is required to build monuments or establish institutions afresh, but this does not rob Third Church mission of contributions. In fact, except for the brief colonial period, the Church’s mission has always been in humility, the direct sharing of faith, and with the Cross as the only power behind it.

In an earlier reflection,<sup>11</sup> I outlined the following possible contributions of Third Church mission:

*African solidarity, love for community, and respect for the aged as the most honored members of the family could be significant contributions. Family values can blossom only if people are willing to reorient their lives toward greater solidarity.*

Further,

***Mmadu ka uba** (possessions cannot be compared with people, life first) ... The quality of life does not consist in having, but in harmony and concord among people and between them and the spirit world.*

The success of Pentecostal and Charismatic groups from the Third Church is showing that there is receptivity in the First World to Third Church values. For example, Stephen Gyermeh, a Ghanaian, started the Church of the Living God in Hyattsville, Maryland, in 1983 with 15 converts; the Church has now 1,500

members. The Nigerian-based Christ Apostolic Church already has 15 churches across the U.S.<sup>12</sup> These groups bring to mission their own way of being Christian, with emphasis on prayer and the Holy Spirit, communal and vibrant worship.

*The Spiritan  
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*95% of such mission  
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from the Third Church.*

It should be noted that liberation theology and basic Christian communities are gifts to the entire Church from Latin America; South African Christians led the way in raising the consciousness of Christians all over the world to the incompatibility of faith with apartheid and racism.

### **Third Church Mission and the Congregation**

The Spiritan Congregation is on the verge of being caught up in the ferment. The recent *Spiritana Newsflash* (SpN 183, May 2, 2007) gave the figure of 944 candidates in initial formation, 816 of whom are from Africa, 49 from Latin America, 37 from Europe, 32 from the Indian Ocean and Asia, and 10 from North America. That means that the First World, the erstwhile base of the Congregation and home of Spiritan mission, counts only 5% (47) of the next generation of Spiritan missionaries. 95% of such mission will rest squarely on the shoulders of members from the Third Church.

Unless I am mistaken, the appointment of an experienced Nigerian Spiritan to work with youth in Knechtsteden in the early 1980's was the first instance of reverse Third Church Spiritan mission. The trend has continued. First appointments to the First World are already being made. Spiritans on first appointment from the Nigerian Province alone are now working in France, Holland, Ireland, TransCanada, and Puerto Rico. Casualties have been few, but even those few may need to be reexamined for possible lessons. In the present situation, the provinces of the First World face the choice of accepting new life from the younger provinces and foundations or they will with time slowly wind down. Here is an opportunity for the Congregation to actually live our motto, "*cor unum et anima una*" (one heart and one soul). And should this happen, a point may be reached in the not too distant future when the majority of members of First World provinces will be from the Third Church.

### **Issues to be Faced**

The primary issue is that of a change of perspectives on mission, among Spiritans and those to whom they minister. Most people in the First World still do not accept that they can be receivers of mission. In their mind, missionaries go from the First World,

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*Third Church Spiritan  
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“migrant priests” move from the Third Church and these are either refugees or suspected of looking for greener pastures like the immigrants (legal and illegal) who are receiving negative press in many nations of the West. Kalugila mentions how a fellow pastor continued arguing, even on T.V., that there was Danish Christianity which a foreigner could not understand or minister to, for “God would not play on black keys in Denmark as [God] could in Africa.”<sup>13</sup> Before a Third Church missionary begins his mandate the entire community should join him in a mutual acculturation process. Expectations should be mutual as well as openness to receive. An interviewer put it succinctly:

*The priest may preach differently, teach differently, introduce new music, experiment with new programs, or portray a different spirituality.*<sup>14</sup>

Third Church Spiritan mission in the First World needs closer planning. What seems to be happening (obviously not everywhere) is that individual Spiritans are often sent to fill gaps in the service station. We need well-articulated and challenging missions, like vocation ministry, youth chaplaincy, and the defense and pastoral care of illegal immigrants, to give examples. People would have to be trained specifically for such ministries and commit to them for the long haul. Other groups are discovering fresh and fruitful fields of mission and evangelism in the First World and they challenge us to be more creative in designing the mission of Third Church Spiritans.

People designated should take the time it requires for language and culture training and should become members of the circumscription of ministry with all rights and duties. Third Church Spiritans sometimes feel (rightly or wrongly) that relationships are patronizing and less than mutual. International communities have become the buzz word, but how intercultural are they? A proverb has it that if the king visits, you give him a goat, and if you visit the king, you still give him a goat – reciprocity is not to be expected. The distinction of “province of origin” and “province of appointment” will have to be reviewed, in the sense that some of the matters now devolving on province of origin (further studies, retirement, pension, etc.) should accrue to the province of work. That way, every Spiritan is a full citizen of the Congregation where he is. It would be best if people were sent for further studies in the place of their future assignment so that the time for studies would also serve acculturation purposes, and these studies should be paid for by the province of their future mission. After all, the Third Church provinces and foundations

have borne the brunt of their formation for several years. Some older provinces have begun handing over their Spiritan works to the laity; that is good as these laity commit to preserve the Spiritan charism. But a gradual handing over to fellow Spiritans is even better. In the 1980's the foundations were formally established as a channel of love and solidarity within the Congregation. These foundations have grown of age and are in a position to make a return, in solidarity and mutual respect.

What I saw recently at a wedding in a parish in Barrington, Illinois, filled me with hope for the future of Third Church mission. Members of the parish sponsored the wedding as they have some projects in Zaire, the home of the groom; he found acceptance in bringing who he was to his pastoral work in the parish. On a mission appeal in St. Paul Minnesota I found the pastor away in Ghana with a team of parishioners visiting a twin parish whose church they had built. The exchanges were mutual and concerned the cultural and religious as well as the financial.

*Something exciting is happening in mission today.*

Something exciting is happening in mission today. The mission of the Third Church in the First World is laying the foundations for that mutual respect and solidarity that will change the face of the present world order.<sup>15</sup>

#### **Footnotes**

<sup>1</sup> *The Coming of the Third Church: An Analysis of the Present and Future of the Church* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1977).

<sup>2</sup> Mukanda M. Mulemfo. "An African Missionary in Return. Reflections on a Visit to Sweden." *Missionalia* 25/1 (April 1997) 100-123, 106. The citation is from Carl Brakenheim. "Christianity and Swedish Culture: A Case Study." *International Review of Mission* 84 (Jan-April 1995) 91-105, 92.

<sup>3</sup> Rev. Leonidas Kalugila. "Experiences of an African Missionary in Western Countries." Lutheran World Federation, Department of Church Cooperation. *All Africa Lutheran Consultation on Christian Theology and Strategy for Mission* (Liberia, Monrovia, 1980) 51.

<sup>4</sup> Froehle, Bryan T., et al. *Priest Personnel Profile and Diocesan Pastoral Strategies*. Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (Washington DC: Georgetown University, 1999.)

<sup>5</sup> Dean R. Hoge and Aniedi Okure, *International Priests in America: Challenges and Opportunities* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2006) 11.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 50-68.

<sup>7</sup> Jane Anderson. "Migrant Priests?" at <http://www.sedos.org/english/anderson.htm> created on 12-31-2004, accessed 7-27-2007.

<sup>8</sup> Fact stressed by Seung Ai Yabg, "Commentary," Hoge and Okure. *International Priests in America*, 132.

<sup>9</sup> James Chukwuma Okoye. "Mutual Exchange of Energies: Mission in Cross-Cultural Perspective. An African Point of View," *Missiology* 25/4 (October 1997) 467-497

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<sup>10</sup> Translation from Walter Abbot and Joseph Gallagher, eds. *Documents of Vatican II* (London-Dublin: Geoffrey Chapman, 1966).

<sup>11</sup> Okoye, "Mutual Exchange of Energies," 474.

<sup>12</sup> *Christian Century* 114.23, page 719, at <http://search.atlaonline.com/pls/eli>, accessed 8/30/2007.

<sup>13</sup> Rev. Leonidas Kalugila. "Experiences of an African Missionary in Western Countries." Lutheran World Federation, Department of Church Cooperation. *All Africa Lutheran Consultation on Christian Theology and Strategy for Mission* (Liberia, Monrovia, 1980) 50.

<sup>14</sup> Hoge and Okure. *International Priests in America*, 47.

<sup>15</sup> I thank Very Rev. Father Gabriel Ezewudo, Professor Paulinus Odozor, and Rev. Father Eze Venantius, who read the first draft of this paper and proffered comments. The shortcomings, of course, remain mine.

## CONSTRUCTING A SPIRITAN SPIRITUALITY OF JUSTICE, PEACE, AND THE INTEGRITY OF CREATION

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A native of Ireland, John Kilcrann joined the Spiritans in 1966. Following ordination in 1976, he worked in Brazil for 20 years where he was actively engaged at local and national levels in various Church-linked Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation organizations and projects. He graduated with a Masters degree from Fordham University, New York, and a doctorate from the Catholic Theological Union, Chicago. He is currently Coordinator for JPIC at the Spiritan Generalate in Rome.

*Spiritans spirituality and mission are very closely connected...*

### *A mission-based spirituality*

Because of our charism, Spiritan spirituality and mission are very closely connected. We can only analyze our spirituality, and specifically a Spiritan spirituality of Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation (JPIC), in the context of Spiritan mission. In recent decades a more concentrated reflection on the spirituality of mission generally has taken place. This, without doubt, has helped us to search deeper and to articulate the salient characteristics of our own Spiritan spirituality. The I/D (No. 60), published by the General Council in February 2007, points to the principal sources of this spirituality: the legacy left us by our founders and “*our response to mission situations over the generations.*”<sup>1</sup> While drawing from, and building on, the richness of what we have inherited from des Places and Libermann, the concrete situations in which Spiritans have ministered and are currently ministering continue to be a source of a dynamic, challenging, and life-giving spirituality. Only very gradually are we becoming aware of how much a Spiritan face this spirituality really has.

Over the last forty years or so, we have also gradually become very conscious of how central JPIC is in mission. Much has been written and said on this topic. An emerging Spiritan JPIC spirituality also owes much to advances in theological thinking on mission over this time span. The official document of the 1971 Synod of Bishops gave an authoritative stamp of approval to the principle of the centrality of JPIC to mission. Specifically, it commented that “*action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, or, in other words, of the Church’s mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation.*”<sup>2</sup> At the nearer end of the time-scale in question, theologians such as Bevens and Schroeder show how generally unanimous this thinking is today: “*... working for justice in the world is an integral part of the church’s missionary work, equal in importance to witnessing to and proclaiming the gospel and to establishing Christian communities of shared faith, friendship and worship... Like the prophets of the Hebrew scriptures, and like Jesus’ ministry in the New Testament, the church’s mission is about cooperating with God in the call of all people always and everywhere, to justice, peace and the integrity of creation.*”<sup>3</sup>



*An emerging Spiritan JPIC spirituality*

*There are very definite milestones which can be pointed to along the road.*

*...one of our most valuable discoveries... has been the methodology used during the last three General Chapters.*

It is in this context that we can observe the gradual emergence and ongoing construction in recent years of a Spiritan JPIC spirituality. There are very definite milestones which can be pointed to along the road. Without doubt, the publication of the Spiritan Rule of Life [SRL (1987)] and the General Chapters of Itaicí (1992), Maynooth (1998), and Torre d'Aguilha (2004) made a very specific contribution to the development and gradual growth of a Spiritan JPIC spirituality. We will have an opportunity to look at this in greater detail later. Other international meetings promoted by the Congregation also made a significant contribution in this area - two examples, amongst several others, include the meeting for Spiritans working among Muslims, which took place in Banjul, the Gambia, in June 2002, and the meeting for Spiritans working with Refugees, Asylum Seekers, and Displaced Peoples, which took place in Durban, South Africa, last April. At the level of provinces and circumscriptions, chapters and meetings likewise have made an important contribution to the development of a JPIC spirituality. Courses and sabbaticals undertaken by confreres also helped significantly within the Congregation to propagate an understanding of the outlines of such a spirituality.

Perhaps one of our most valuable discoveries during recent decades, which helped to develop a Spiritan JPIC spirituality, has been the methodology used during the last three General Chapters. This placed a special emphasis on the grass-roots experience in mission of Spiritans today, and especially so of confreres working in what is frequently described as frontier situations. Such situations are usually characterized by injustice, oppression, marginalization, and great human suffering and deprivation. Since Itaicí, the first part of the General Chapters has been given over to the presentation of "significant experiences" by Chapter delegates. Such presentations brought the context in which Spiritans work right into the center of the Chapter. As each Chapter unfolded, these experiences have been reflected on in small groups, discussed in plenary sessions, and fed into proposals for principles and directives which were subsequently voted upon by the Chapter members. In other words, what is voted on is not something theoretical but springs from our lived experience with the poor and marginalized. Following the General Chapters, many provinces, groups, and communities have used this same methodology to reflect on their mission commitment.

***Themes in Spiritan JPIC spirituality***

*This is a constantly  
changing and growing  
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suffering...*

This General Chapter methodology has provided us also with the opportunity to read and reread our charism in the light of the contexts in which we find ourselves today. It has encouraged us in our search for a relevant spirituality for today's frontier situations of mission, beginning with the lived reality of Spiritans, our faith insights, and what our charism and history offer us. This is a constantly changing and growing spirituality which anchors its roots in the soil of contemporary human suffering and marginalization. The Maynooth document underlined how enriching this methodology is, commenting that *"the most important thing for the Congregation is to tap into the living sources where it is once more seeking meaning and energy for a difficult mission."*<sup>4</sup>

When we examine our recent documents, it is apparent that this General Chapter methodology, alongside our SRL, has helped to promote the emergence of a Spiritan JPIC spirituality. Five themes can be easily identified. These include, in the first instance, an option for the poor, or "the little ones" in Libermann's terminology. In making and living this option, the documents frequently speak of the importance of "pilgrimage," the pilgrimage made by Spiritans to the world and into the lived reality of the poor. A third identifiable theme speaks about Spiritan presence amongst the poor. Two further themes are also very clear in the documents: our service of the poor and solidarity.

***A Spiritan option for the poor***

A detailed examination of these five themes is not within the scope of the present article. Instead a brief description of each will be outlined. Our Rule of Life (SRL) underlines the centrality of an option for the poor for Spiritans. The evangelization of the poor is our purpose (SRL 4), especially of those who are oppressed and most disadvantaged (SRL 12). Integral liberation of the marginalized from oppression is central (SRL 11 and 14). In fact Libermann's definition in the Rule of 1848 of how this should be lived out by Spiritans is reproduced in SRL 14. There we are called to make ourselves *"the advocates, the supporters and the defenders of the weak and the little ones against all who oppress them."* It would be difficult to find anywhere a more succinct yet complete description of the essentials of a JPIC commitment!

But how do these beautiful but lofty principles become a lived spirituality? The Itaicí, Maynooth, and Torre d'Aguilha documents, in presenting the "significant experiences," bring

*...such a spirituality is fundamentally a lived experience.*

*...our spirituality is based not on a “poverty suffered” but a “poverty chosen”...*

us into direct contact with confreres living this spirituality in very concrete situations: with refugees, on the peripheries of large cities with their large slums, favelas, and pervading violence, in situations of conflict and war, in situations of racial tension and unrest, with oppressed indigenous people, with disadvantaged youth ... in short, with the poor and oppressed in their very diverse contemporary circumstances and contexts. The Torre d’Aguilha documents express well how, in fact, such a spirituality is fundamentally a lived experience. They remind us that a contemporary Spiritan option for the poor is inspired by and imitates such a concrete option made by des Places and Libermann: *“It is the option for the poor that makes us different in a society that excludes large sectors of the population ... The option for the poor means allowing these intuitions of the founders to challenge our attitudes, the choices we make and the work we do, while, at the same time, integrating important insights of modern social sciences with regard to poverty.”* The documents go on to point out that here our spirituality is based not on a “poverty suffered” but a “poverty chosen” and continue by describing some of the characteristics of this option. It *“is a virtue that involves the choice of a simple lifestyle as a sign of solidarity with the poor in their struggle to transform their situation ... To empower poor people we need to avoid creating situations of paternalism and dependency.”*<sup>5</sup> The cultivation of such a spirituality then is seen as something dynamic; it affects our attitudes, our ways of acting and lifestyle, our style of ministry and mission, our choices, and generally our way of being in the world.

### ***A Spiritan pilgrimage***

The concrete living of an option for the poor also requires, according to Spiritan documents, that we undertake a “pilgrimage” or holy journey into the world of the poor. The Maynooth Chapter describes this journey in very concrete terms as *“a crossing of cultural boundaries and a reaching out to groups of people who are abandoned, excluded and oppressed.”*<sup>6</sup> This journey involves a radical move from where we are to where the poor are. It emulates the Incarnation journey made by Jesus who *“made himself nothing, taking the very form of a servant, being made in human likeness.”* (Philippians 2:5-11).

Torre d’Aguilha sees pilgrimage spirituality as central in mission and as an opportunity for very personal contact with God’s Spirit: *“Conscious that Christ’s Spirit is already present and active in the cultures to which we are sent, mission becomes a pilgrimage of mutual enrichment, where together we identify and seek liberation from the chains that impede the full realization of God’s Kingdom...”*

*...our experiences show us that our spirituality is deepened by the people we minister to.*

*A strong bond and relationship grows between us and the people we serve...*

*This understanding of mission today requires of missionaries a deeper, more contemplative spirituality.”<sup>7</sup> Similar ideas about mission as a pilgrimage to the world of the poor, bringing about mutual enrichment, where liberation is central and where God’s Spirit is encountered in a special way, are repeated later in the same Chapter documents. The text then goes on to underline an important principle in the construction of a JPIC spirituality – “our experiences show us that our spirituality is deepened by the people we minister to.”<sup>8</sup>*

### ***Spiritans presence with the poor***

Our documents speak frequently of how our presence in the world of the poor is not something nebulous or vague; rather it brings us into very close contact with the huge segments of suffering humanity which are found there. Here a process that could be described as “mutual endearment” takes place. A strong bond and relationship grows between us and the people we serve: “*Through our presence with migrants and refugees, we come close to the oppressed and disadvantaged ...our outreach makes them feel at home, our advice and training eases the pain of their transition.*” Our presence there “*is a small voice calling for genuine human equality. We speak with and on behalf of the victims of gender and racial inequality, overlooked in a prevailing atmosphere of individualism, materialism and rampant consumerism.*”<sup>9</sup> Indeed our presence in this world encourages us to raise and voice questions of current relevancy to the people we meet on mission. Torre d’Aquilha, for example, points to our role in questioning the “*military, political and social solutions put forward to solve problems faced by men and women and the young in the countries to which we have been sent.*”<sup>10</sup>

Presence permits Spiritans to hear the cry of the poor (Exodus 3:7). The Maynooth documents, in presenting Spiritan ministry with refugees, emphasize that presence is at the heart of our mission: “*Our confreres see the deprivations, misery, confusion, the hopelessness, and they listen to the cries of distress ... Presence is the essence of this ministry.*”<sup>11</sup> From the experience of the 27-year-long Angolan war, it was pointed out that Spiritans “*gave witness by the simple fact of remaining with and sharing in the conditions of their people (the apostolate of presence). They stayed when everybody advised them to leave and flee...*”<sup>12</sup>

Torre d’Aquilha, in referring to mission as an “*attentive presence,*” describes how this is lived out in practice in being available day by day to so many who are victims and in pain.<sup>13</sup> Presence makes significant demands and challenges on Spiritans. It requires

*...community life is a very essential support...*

*...we need...to cultivate an attitude of service...*

patience and the ability to start again from zero. Loneliness and rejection can frequently be part of the experience. Because of this, community life is a very essential support here (SRL 30). SRL 24.1 very realistically points out how this call can be translated into a spirituality: humanly speaking we can only live this style of mission if *“our closeness to the poor brings us to hear afresh the gospel that we are preaching.”* This hearing of the gospel in a new and fresh way calls to conversion and to a simple lifestyle.

### ***Serving others***

Presence and serving others are closely linked in our documents and our spirituality. In terms of a lived spirituality, Maynooth uses a very descriptive and attractive language to describe what serving others means: *“... just like the ‘Servant of God’ in the Bible, the missionary opts to carry the sin and hurt of the people.... Being with and among the people is an invitation to personal emptying and the discovery that the grace of God comes to us through the poor, the great sacrament of God. Giving of oneself to the service of our brother and sister, assuming the attitude of a servant, admitting to weakness and failure (a kind of martyrdom) creates in us patience, respect, fidelity and compassion.”*<sup>14</sup>

Torre d’Aguilha emphasizes that we not only need to respect others but we need also to cultivate an attitude of service. Even though the Christian notion of power is service, we may be tempted to minister from a position of authoritarianism and paternalism by abusing the ‘sacred powers’ attached to priesthood.<sup>15</sup> This follows very much the spirit of SRL 82 which points out that service and power are at two opposite extremes in that *“our consecrated obedience gradually frees us from the urge to hold power and puts us at the service of the poor ...”* SRL 10 reminds us that humanly speaking the strength to serve others is not possible; it comes from the Spirit. The Maynooth documents are more explicit on the role of Spirit as we develop a spirituality of serving others: *“the Spirit leads us to be at the service of all people, especially the poor, the excluded and the marginalized, to support them, to live and work with them, to bring about a realization of the Kingdom of God in works of justice, peace and reconciliation.”*<sup>16</sup>

### ***Lived solidarity***

In a Spiritan JPIC spirituality, solidarity is another lived consequence of our choice to journey to and take up our residence in the world of the poor. What is called for here is the ability to develop a spirituality for a style of life and mission lived in a frontier situation. Being present and participating in the daily lives of the poor implies living solidarity in very concrete, practical, and frequently demanding ways (SRL 16.2 and SRL

*...solidarity is central to the fabric of lifestyle and mission...*

30.1). Thus the marginalized and the poor are seen not as objects of the worthy pity or the concerned charity of Spiritans. Rather SRL 16.2 reminds us that solidarity is central to the fabric of lifestyle and mission: “*we participate in solidarity with their [the people we work with] joys and sorrows.*” Maynooth reinforces this by reminding us that this solidarity is something very specific with the people and in the situations in which we minister: “*We are called to a practical solidarity with the people among whom we live, especially those who are most poor, vulnerable and excluded from society.*”<sup>17</sup> Here solidarity takes on features which are life-promoting and probably can best be described by the “binding of wounds” imagery of Ezekiel 34.

Itaici and Maynooth see solidarity as a consequence of a lifestyle we have chosen by our consecrated life.<sup>18</sup> It is a Good-Samaritan-like (Luke 10:29-37) solidarity which does not count the cost or risk. We believe that our efforts, however small, make an important contribution. With so many other individuals and organizations today, our faith-inspired solidarity tells us that another world is indeed possible.

***Conclusion: “Every tree is known by its own fruit.” (Luke 7:44)***

Obviously, a key question in regard to Spiritan JPIC spirituality is whether what we include in documents will have any practical implications for our day-to-day living. Will daily living and our commitment to mission in difficult situations be nourished by this spirituality? In many ways this is the typical chicken and egg question. Which came first: a ready-made spirituality that was life-giving to Spiritans working in frontier situations, or a reflected faith experience inspired by our charism in such difficult situations, which was gradually articulated into a spirituality that could be recognized as having a Spiritan face and feel about it? This brings us back to where we started in this reflection. An authentic Spiritan JPIC spirituality travels and gains its identity on a two-way highway. The inspiration and heritage left us by our founders is enriched, expanded, and developed by Spiritans as they live the call to mission in situations of human suffering, pain, injustice, and brokenness.

*This is lived rather than a theoretical spirituality...*

This is a lived rather than a theoretical spirituality then which owes much to faith reflection and to the contexts in which Spiritans find themselves today. To bring faith and context into this dialogue, social analysis is one of the essential tools used today in the construction of this spirituality. Such an analysis is used sometimes in a more formal way, other times less so. Indeed, a consciousness continues to grow amongst Spiritans

of the importance of the use of social analysis.<sup>19</sup> This is a rich process which helps us understand our charism more profoundly and re-read it in the light of today's call to mission. The vibrancy of the resulting spirituality has become more obvious in recent years. Such an emerging JPIC spirituality helps significantly to give meaning, energy, and direction to our Spiritan calling.

#### **Footnotes**

<sup>1</sup> "Living Spiritan Spirituality." *Information and Documentation*, February 2007, p.5. This is an internal publication of the Spiritan Generalate in Rome.

<sup>2</sup> Synod of Bishops (1971), *Justice in the World*, paragraph 6.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 2004, p. 369.

<sup>4</sup> Maynooth, p. 7.

<sup>5</sup> Torre d'Aguilha, p.35.

<sup>6</sup> Maynooth, p. 100.

<sup>7</sup> Torre d'Aguilha, p.18.

<sup>8</sup> Torre d'Aguilha, p. 34 -35.

<sup>9</sup> Torre d'Aguilha, p. 58.

<sup>10</sup> Torre d'Aguilha, p. 106.

<sup>11</sup> Maynooth, p. 39.

<sup>12</sup> Maynooth, p. 47.

<sup>13</sup> "Torre d'Aguilha 2004." *Spiritan Life*, No. 15, January 2006, p. 22.

<sup>14</sup> Maynooth, p. 53 – 54.

<sup>15</sup> Torre d'Aguilha, p. 36.

<sup>16</sup> Maynooth, p.10.

<sup>17</sup> Maynooth, p. 99.

<sup>18</sup> Itaicí, p. 79; Maynooth, p.126.

<sup>19</sup> See for example SRL 14.1; Maynooth p. 99; Maynooth p. 102; Torre d'Aguilha p.35.

**William Thompson-  
Uberuaga**

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*The Holy Spirit ought to be relevant to the teaching in which we... engage.*

The Holy Spirit ought to be relevant to the teaching in which we university professors and teachers engage. After all, both biblical and theological tradition associate learning and knowledge in a special way with the Spirit. Likewise, we speak of “inspired” and “inspiring” teachers, thus witnessing to something of a certain “spirit” which animates the really fine teachers, for they are “in-spir(it)ed.” So what follows will be something of a meditative experiment on what we will likely agree are three central components of the teaching process, namely, the student, the teacher, and the connective between these, the particular subject matter under concern. In a wide sense, we are all to one another always engaged in some kind of teaching experience, at least potentially, but I am focusing here upon the university teacher. As I understand it, it is the university teacher’s dedication to his or her particular area of concern (the “subject matter”) which distinguishes the university professor/teacher from others on the university campus. In the first instance, students do not enroll in our classes because of our personalities, but because of our competence in a particular subject matter.

***Spirit and Student***

How might a theology of the Spirit be relevant to our understanding of the student, and to the student’s own self-understanding? If we bear in mind how the New Testament frequently associates the Spirit with the mission and power of making connections, then we gain a certain point of entry here: How might the Spirit enable the student to “connect,” not precisely with the teacher, but with the subject matter of a particular course, naturally by means of the teacher? The Spirit of truth (Jn 14.17), who is present in the truth of reality, to whom that truth is utterly transparent, is also somehow present in the student, we believe. If this be so, then a connection already exists between the student and the truth available within the subject matter. In the first instance, this connection does not have to be created. It already is. Let us circle around this somewhat.

Perhaps the notion of “resonance” might help. The subject matter being offered by the teacher ought to resonate with the student, for the Spirit of truth mediated by the teacher ought to harmoniously resonate with the Spirit indwelling the student. The truth of the one finds an “echo” in the other. It is as if there is a potential alertness in the student, on the look for what is in harmony with the truth of existence, through the power of the Spirit. Teachers have often experienced this sense of the student



*The key of the door is the  
Holy Spirit...*

*...the truth of oneself is  
at stake in the teaching  
process.*

being suddenly alert, awake, keenly following the curve of what is being said and discussed. The student in this case is inspired, inspired, offering no resistance, but in the current of the Spirit's mission of witnessing to the truth. Students experience this as a kind of "it fits" experience: Somehow, sometimes despite a certain resistance, they find something in class fitting with their experience, attractive to it. In our theological tradition, this inner capacity for learning is often associated with the anointing in the Spirit by Christ: "...the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and so you do not need anyone to teach you" (1 Jn 2.27[NRSV]). Through this anointing, information is transformed into something meaningful, enriching, challenging, and formative of our character. St. Simeon the New Theologian (d. 1022), along these lines, described Christ as "the door," and the Holy Spirit as the giver of the "key" to that door, the door opening out onto knowledge. "What in fact is the key of knowledge other than the grace of the Holy Spirit bestowed by faith which by illumination really produces knowledge and full knowledge...The door is the Son – 'I am,' he says, 'the door' (Jn 10.7-9). The key of the door is the Holy Spirit..."<sup>1</sup>

If all of this be so, then the student ought not to sense an alienation from the subject matter. The too common complaint of the "irrelevancy" of what is being taught ought not to arise. If the Spirit present to the subject matter is speaking to the Spirit indwelling the student, so to speak, then somehow the truth of oneself is at stake in the teaching process. The student is engaged in a process of self-discovery, being led to encounter and participate in dimensions of his or her own deepest self. The Spirit, so subtle and non-violent, knows us better than we know ourselves. More intimate to us than we are to ourselves, said St. Augustine (*Confessions*, 3, 6). Closer to us than our own jugular veins, the Quran (50.16) tells us. "...the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God...that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God," wrote St. Paul (I Cor 2.10, 12). Of course, this can be challenging, and even scary for the student, as if we are somehow afraid to own up to our own deepest potential, but that is quite different from alienation and irrelevancy. Likewise, a certain deep down confidence and hopefulness ought to accompany this process of self-discovery, for we are both exploring and being carried along at the same time, carried by the Spirit's power.

We have mentioned the notion of resistance, and naturally we encounter subtle and not so subtle forms of resistance in the teaching process, from all sides. The Christian tradition is a soteriological tradition, that is, it is a tradition that is realistic,

“mugged by reality.” That tradition knows that we have to contend with error, imperfection, and forms of sin, both personal, historical, and collective. All of this interferes with our capacities for resonance. We do believe in salvation, however, that is, a healing process at work in reality through Christ and his Spirit, enabling us to work through our resistances, whatever they may be, although some of this remains very mysterious and only finally resolvable in eternity.

Thus it may well be that particular students do experience a certain kind of alienation from the subject matter of a particular class. The resonance capacity is cramped, at least temporarily. This can be painful for teachers, and it can have very negative effects upon other students, but it is also, like all forms of alienation, a painful and deadening experience for the student undergoing it as well. Think of how long fifty minutes can seem to be when there is little or no “connect” with the subject matter.

*...the spirit is inventive  
and imaginative...*

But the spirit is inventive and imaginative, two traits also commonly associated with the Holy Spirit. Perhaps the Spirit will work through some of the other students in the class: their inspirited capacities for resonance may be active and firm, and through their responses the students who are cramped might be suddenly or gradually, but always nonviolently, lifted from their stasis. The Spirit is, we believe, the glue -- “glue of love,” wrote Gertrud of Helfta (d. 1301/2)<sup>2</sup> -- connecting us with others, and these other students become co-mediators and in a way co-teachers with the primary teacher in the class. I recently noticed this at work in a powerful way while attending a colleague’s class as a part of her peer evaluation. The students simply seemed cramped, when it came to responding to her questions. She then, in what seemed like an inspired move, asked each student to dialogue briefly with a near student on the questions posed. Somehow the safety of the more private dialogue, and the teacher’s trust that the Spirit was at work in the students and that in that power they could themselves break free of their “cramp,” was all that was needed. This process of activation of our capacities for resonance is mysterious and profound, naturally, and it may even occur outside the classroom by means of other acquaintances, and sometimes even years later.

*O divine Spirit, I want  
to be before you like a  
light feather...*

***A prayer for/by the student:*** “O most holy and adorable Spirit of my Jesus, let me hear your sweet voice. Refresh me with your precious inspiration. O divine Spirit, I want to be before you like a light feather, so that your breath may carry me where it will and that I may not offer the least resistance to it.”

*The Gospel of John speaks  
of the Spirit as a teacher...*

*Something of the Spirit-  
Teacher should be  
reflected in the human  
teacher...*

(Ven. Francis Libermann, *Commentaire du S. Évangile selon S. Jean*, 2, Francis X. Malinowski, C.S.Sp., “Multiple Facets of Libermann’s Charism [4],” Oct. 15, 1996, in his “The Holy Spirit in Francis Libermann,” unpub. ms)

### ***Spirit and Teacher***

The Gospel of John speaks of the Spirit as a teacher: “I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you” (14.25-26). Here we are seeking some insight into what it is that characterizes a Spirit-oriented view of the teacher. Something of the Spirit-Teacher should be reflected in the human teacher, if the Spirit dwells in him or her.

Might popularity be a significant sign of the inspired (in-Spirited) teacher? Perhaps. It is possible that simply good teaching sparks a blessed popularity among students. In the sense that students find in a particular class, with a particular teacher, the flame of their own Spirit-indwelt spirits sparked and aroused, to such an extent that the class is almost a bit like the recovery of paradise, a blessed place to be, in which somehow the way creation is meant to be is reflected and experienced. Why not?

On the other hand, we all know of popular classes with their popular teachers, but on a closer look, this popularity properly arouses our suspicion. The teacher may have an attractive personality; or a forceful and somewhat manipulative one, yet somewhat disguised; but the competency of what is communicated is deficient, or the requirements of the course are very lax. An “easy pass,” the students say.

So popularity would seem to be a possible sign of the Spirit-inspired teacher, but not a necessary one. A certain discernment is needed, which forces us to a deeper level of understanding of what the in-Spirited teacher is.

Related to popularity, and in a way a new form of it today, would be a competent and even clever expertise in teacher technology, namely, computers, and audio-visual aids. An older but still related form of popularity would be that coming from oratorical, rhetorical skills, which enable a person to be persuasive and impressive. Like popularity in general, the popularity stemming from these is ambiguous. Rhetorical skills can easily be used in subtly invasive and violent ways, manipulating students so that they will “come around” to the teacher’s point of view, regardless of the authenticity and truth of that point of view. The same

*Teaching, it seems, can be  
a form of dialogue...*

*Spirit-inspired teachers  
are also students.*

holds for computer expertise, perhaps even more problematically. For computer technology can be interactive and in this sense participative on so many levels, thus masking its potential to be a tool of manipulation as well. The student can feel he or she is enjoying the freedom of true interactive dialogue, when in fact he or she is being manipulated. Philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer provides us with a bridge to our following observations when, in writing of the nature of dialogue, he notes that “it is not the art of arguing (which can make a strong case out of a weak one) but the art of thinking (which can strengthen objections by referring to the subject matter).”<sup>3</sup> Teaching, it seems, can be a form of dialogue, and likely ought to always be an appeal to a possible dialogue. And the dialogue is not manipulation, Gadamer is saying. Note how he refers to the notion of the “subject matter.” The dialoguers are united by attunement to that.

Attunement to the subject matter, let us suggest, brings us much closer to what a Spirit-inspired teacher is all about. What is involved in “attunement” and how might the Spirit be involved in this? We wrote earlier of the student’s capacity for resonance; similarly, attunement on the part of the teacher requires such resonance. Perhaps we might say, if we want a bit more of a distinction between student and teacher here, that the student begins with resonance and hopefully comes to attunement, while the teacher, because he or she has grown through resonance in a more developed manner, begins with a somewhat more full-throttled attunement. But given this qualification, we can thus just as easily speak of teacher resonance, if we are so inclined. And this has the advantage of indicating that Spirit-inspired teachers are also students. Like them, their attunement to the subject matter involves the activation of their capacities for resonating with the subject matter; the subject matter finds in the good teacher a form of transparency. The teacher is transparent of the subject matter. Inasmuch as the subject matter is a reflection of the truth of reality, the Spirit of truth, it would seem, is there, attracting the teacher and enabling the teacher to submit to its challenge. The teacher participates in the Spirit’s witness to truth through attunement and resonance. And, we need to add, the Spirit has the ability to “convince us,” giving us a sense of a certain helpful (not pathological) guilt, should we refuse the drawing of the Spirit. The Spirit would seem to want us to live up to our potential. John 16.8-18, is a key text in this regard, noting how Jesus speaks of the Spirit’s power of illuminating us on issues of sin and failure and misjudgment.<sup>4</sup>

Because the teacher’s form of attunement is a form of student-resonance as well, good teachers experience a form of solidarity

*...good teachers experience  
a form of solidarity with  
students...*

with students. In a way, in the Spirit, they are in communion with their students on this deepest of levels – the bond of the Spirit – and through the Spirit’s gifts of attunement and resonance they can identify with their students. Their knowledge of their students is something of a knowledge from within rather than from without. As the students experience wonder and excitement at the prospect of new insights and discoveries, so does the teacher. As the students struggle through to an integration of these with their other levels of knowledge, so does the teacher, albeit on his or her likely more complexified level. As the students experience at times a certain fear of the challenges involved in new learning, with their accompanying responsibilities, so does the teacher. So, paradoxically, in placing his or her focus upon transparency to the subject matter, the teacher is not sidelining the students or giving them second rate status, but finding an appropriate way to honor his or her service role on their behalf.

The Gospel of John describes the function of the Spirit as one of witness or testimony: “When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will also testify on my behalf. You also are to testify...” (15.26-27). This is a particularly helpful notion for our purposes here, since, as we think about it, the act of witnessing is at least a threefold one. There is the witness him/herself. And the witness does so in the presence of and to others. But the witness remains in a posture of pointing away from him/herself and toward that to which he or she witnesses. The Spirit, then, knows a thing or two about witnessing, and inasmuch as the teacher participates in the Spirit’s mission of witness, he or she also will likely manifest this threefold movement: he or she points to and guides toward the subject matter on behalf of the student, without disappearing, it is true, but also through a certain form of decentering the self (the teacher in pointing toward the subject matter points away from him/herself).

*...the teacher is  
attempting to witness to  
the truth of reality...*

Decentering the self, something non-violently enabled by the Spirit, has its way of breaking down our egotistical resistances to the Spirit’s inflow. Echoing Gadamer, the teacher is not out to manipulate the students by “bringing them around” to his or her point of view, making a strong case out of what is really a weak one (the sophist’s trick), but rather the teacher is attempting to witness to the truth of reality inasmuch as that may be reflected in the appropriate subject matter of his or her field of competency. As the teacher’s self is decentered, then the chances of an appropriate form of “popularity,” and an appropriate use of teaching technology, along with an appropriate form of rhetorical skillfulness, become a more likely possibility.

As is well known, St. Paul taught us that “to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (1 Cor 12.7). He then went on to offer examples of the different kinds of gifts bestowed: wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discernment, the gifts of tongues, and interpretation of tongues (12.8-10). “All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses” (12.11). For myself, it is difficult to think that St. Paul is being exhaustive, given the infinite possibilities open to the Spirit. Perhaps we can say he is offering representative and particularly illuminating examples of the Spirit’s gifts. Paul very likely was aware of Jesus’ teaching about the surprising ways of the Spirit. He knew it quite concretely from his own surprising conversion. “The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit” (Jn 3.8). Likewise, every teacher has had the experience of the amazing variety of talents and aptitudes – charisms, we say in theology – of his or her students. Like the wind, they blow where they will, and it is one of the teacher’s supreme responsibilities not to stifle these talents, but to nurture them, respect them, and allow oneself to be enriched and challenged by them. This would seem to be an important aspect of the decentering of the teacher’s self in the Spirit. The Spirit, who knows our depths better than we know ourselves, knows these talents in our students, as the Spirit knows them in the teacher. It would seem that inasmuch as the Spirit indwells the teacher, and inasmuch as the teacher is attuned to that, a certain capacity of recognition of the unique talents and capacities of students would characterize that teacher. He or she would resist the cookie-cutter approach to teaching, where one shape or size fits all, even if that is a particular challenge to the teacher, who might on some levels resist this recognition out of fear or other inadequacies. At the same time, Paul is confident that our unique talents, if given by the Spirit, will ultimately foster the common good, building true community. In Paul this is expressed especially in his great hymn of love in First Corinthians 13. Our talents are to be used in the service of love, for that is what builds community. So the “common good” exists where love is happening. It is a bit more complicated than some understandings of the common good. Love ought not to entail the smothering and destruction of unique talent, but the loving embrace of it, in a kind of wave of love spilling out on behalf of others. In any case, the in-Spirited teacher would seem to be on the lookout for these two realities, seeking to foster the student’s unique talents in such a way that they build up the love which creates community.

*Love ought not to entail  
the smothering and  
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embrace of it...*

***A suggestion for the teacher from Father Libermann:*** “Descend deeply into your inmost self... If you do that, your joy will be full and the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ will flood your soul... For as long as you remain withdrawn into your heart of hearts you will always find the Holy Spirit there, who will lift you up and transport you to the top of that mountain of love which our Lord has built for his elect, and he will fill you with his graces, lights, beauty and happiness.”

*The image coming to mind here is of...both together “facing” the subject matter...*

(Ven. Francis Libermann, *Lettres spirituelles*, 1.126 [1835], Malinowski, “Praying in the Holy Spirit [3],” Sept. 15, 1998, in his “The Holy Spirit in Francis Libermann”)

### ***Spirit and Subject Matter***

We have been led to place a significant emphasis upon the centrality of the subject matter in our approach to a Spirit-centered view of the teaching process. The image coming to mind here is of teaching characterized principally not so much as teachers and students facing one another, but rather as both together “facing” the subject matter. In a way, the subject matter becomes the bond between them. The image is useful in distinguishing the teaching process from other kinds of relationships, for example, counseling, or certain forms of friendship, or intimate relationships, all of which are rather more “face to face” relationships. True, this image runs the risk of depersonalizing the teaching process, so I am somewhat hesitant about it. Perhaps we will need to complement and correct this image with some qualifications. But let us work with it, keeping this hesitancy in mind.

*...the curricular subject matter ought to be a helpful map opening teacher and students alike to dimensions of the truth of existence...*

The subject matter of the university curriculum is, from the point of view of a Spirit-centered perspective, an expression of the university’s mission of witnessing to the truth of existence in its amplitude. Pope John Paul II called this the “*diakonia* of the truth,” a mission making “the believing community a partner in humanity’s shared struggle to arrive at truth” and one obliging it “to proclaim the certitudes arrived at, albeit with a sense that every truth attained is but a step toward the fullness of truth which will appear with the final revelation of God: ‘For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully’ (1 Cor 13.12).”<sup>5</sup> Obviously not everything making up the “subject matter” of the curriculum is an expression of truth. On the journey to truth we wade through much untruth. Yet, at its best the curricular subject matter ought to be a helpful map opening teacher and students alike to dimensions of the truth of existence. On the most general level, then, the subject matter participates in the Spirit’s mission of witnessing to the truth, albeit amidst the debris of untruth

stemming from humanity's imperfection and hostile resistance to the truth as well.

*...God is inviting  
humanity into a  
dialogue...*

In our Christian tradition, "truth" has been most commonly associated with Christ, the *Logos* or "Word" of the Father, reflected in creation on the one hand (Jn 1.3) and historical experience and revelation on the other (Jn 1.14). Thinking of the divine Word at the appropriate time becoming flesh in the human Jesus makes us think of God as one who wishes to share and communicate, or dialogue with, humanity about the nature and truth of it all. So God is inviting humanity into a dialogue, part of whose goal is the acquisition of truth. "Truth" needs to be understood here in a rather ample manner. It is not first and foremost a series of propositions telling us this or that, but rather the disclosure of reality itself, its unveiling. In classical Greek tradition, truth ("aletheia") bears the double meaning of reality and reality's manifestation, while the biblical tradition adds to this the notion of the reliability of that manifestation, for God is faithful and can be trusted. <sup>6</sup>

*This dialogue, when  
guided by the Spirit, is  
non-invasive, gentle, yet  
still strong.*

Likewise, as we have seen, the Spirit is commonly associated with witnessing to the truth by guiding and attracting humanity thereto. It is as if God both offers us the truth in dialogue and gives us the loving support we need to keep the dialogue alive. Father Libermann wrote that "the Spirit of God acts, it is true, strongly, but He always disposes matters with suavity." <sup>7</sup> Like that, perhaps, the Spirit draws us into dialogue, strongly, but without forcing us. A gentle strength. "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth," the Jesus of John's Gospel says. But that Gospel importantly adds that the Spirit "will not speak on his own." (Jn 16.13). There is nothing of the manipulating ego at work in the Spirit. This dialogue, when guided by the Spirit, is non-invasive, gentle, yet still strong. A Spirit-guided approach to teaching ought to reflect something of this as well, it would seem.

From this perspective, what makes a "university" literally what it claims to be, a witness to the "whole," to the universe of truth, is its sharing in this *diakonia* of the truth of creation and historical experience and revelation. Ignore one or the other of these, and we do not have a true university, for part of the "whole" has been amputated and suppressed. Both the lessons of creation in general and historical existence (among which are the historical revelations at the origins of the religions) form the subject matter of a Christian, Spirit-guided view of education.

There ought to be, then, a deep down oneness in a university, because the truth is one. The God of creation "doth not speak with



forked tongue,” one way in creation and contrariwise in history and historical revelation. This is an aspect of the *Shema* taught by Judaism and received by Christianity and Islam: The Lord is one, there is but one (Deut 6.4). The Spirit, then, guides us into this oneness, fostering the deep down bond which transforms a university into a true “collegium,” a site of dialogue between colleagues (among whom are students). Something of the Spirit’s refreshing dynamism is cramped when signs of this collegiality are missing. This does not mean that all subjects are ultimately teaching the same thing; that would be a difficult thesis to sustain. However, it might mean that, whatever the discipline, should one “dig down” deeply enough, one will stumble across the opening to the transcendent characteristic of all non-superficial learning. This openness to the transcendent “ground” of existence is not first the result of learning, but the reality making learning possible in the first place.<sup>8</sup> It likely would also mean as well that we need to keep struggling our way through to the deep down harmony between the various disciplines, a harmony that at times is more promise than realized acquisition.

*...we need to keep  
struggling our way  
through to the deep down  
harmony between the  
various disciplines...*

*...diversity can be a  
pathway into the richness  
of existence itself.*

So the Spirit unifies. But the Spirit also diversifies. The truth is many-layered, for there are many mansions in the Father’s house (Jn 14.2). The diversity of disciplines, with their diverse subject matters, at their optimal best reflect the richness of the truth, and witness to that. The frequent biblical references to the unique gifts bestowed on each by the Spirit, and perhaps most famously, the Pentecost text in which the many tongues and cultures of the world are so many manifestations of the Spirit’s gifts at work (Acts 2), are indicative of this diversifying work of the Spirit. Thus another sign of the Spirit at work in the educational effort is this respect for diversity and plurality. Apart from the Spirit, it is true, it can be so much babel, locking people up in little empires, and impeding collegiality. We all recall the tower of Babel story (Gen 11). But in the Spirit diversity can be a pathway into the richness of existence itself.

Here we come upon certain interplaying tensions between the oneness and diversity in the subject matters of the university. These tensions are well known: between the physical (natural and environmental) and the humane sciences; the tension within each between the various specialized subdisciplines; the tensions between the liberal arts and sciences on the one hand, and the professional schools on the other (business, education, music, medicine/health/pharmacy, law, leadership and professional advancement, etc.); the tension between learning and careerism; and more. These tensions can be productive and creative, albeit also arduous and challenging.

*...tensions remain as  
fruitful challenges...*

At times, we are able to work our way through to a certain resolution of these tensions, for example, between reason and faith, evolutionary theory and faith, the classical-medieval heritages and Christian revelation vis-à-vis the challenges posed by modernity, late modernity with its various advocacy critiques (social, liberationist, eco-feminist, gender, etc.), postmodernity, postcolonial theory, globalization, etc. But at times we are not so able. The tensions remain as fruitful challenges, an in-between patch of spaces demanding imagination and openness and a certain measure of experimentation. Not unlike the Spirit, who is also in-between: between Father and Son, and between both of them and creation, in an unending series of waves. The Spirit is at home in the in-between, helping us to build bridges (connections), and keeping what seem like exceedingly distant polarities somehow one on a very deep level.<sup>9</sup>

### *Three Potentially Creative Tensions “in the Spirit”*

**Truth as Manifest and as Mystery:** The truth, we believe, is one, for ultimately it is God, the fullness of reality itself. This does not exclude us, for created reality is embraced within the reality of God the Creator. To some extent, this truth is manifest to us in creation and history, and we trust that it is true, because God is a firm foundation upon whom we may rely. But likewise the divine Ground is a mystery exceedingly bright, the famous “known Unknown.” As the Spirit guides us into the truth, we are being led into the depths of mystery as well, a mystery always ever greater. So the Spirit wants to nudge us, to stretch us, to keep us open and on the alert for the “more,” some of which is found expressed by the voices hitherto silenced by injustices and other inadequacies of the past. This is what might be called the “prophetic edge” of the Spirit. Sometimes what is called “relativism” is not really relativism at all; rather is it the attempt of an hitherto mute voice striving to receive a hearing, even if it means the certainties of the past may need some further refinement, complexification, and correction. Such is what it means to plunge ever more profoundly into the Mystery. Relativism is a matter worth worrying about, for it is one of those dogmatisms it argues against, and it leads in the end to replacing allegiance to the truth with subservience to whatever power currently is in vogue. But, as one of my colleagues suggested to me, also worth worrying over is a too speedy naming of unheard voices as forms of relativism. Such accusations can mask a fear of openness to the mysterious depths of truth, and in that sense represent an attempt to “stifle the Spirit” (1 Thes 5.19).<sup>10</sup>

*Sometimes what is called  
“relativism” is not really  
relativism at all...*

*What begins as  
information slowly  
becomes formative of our  
characters...*

*As the Spirit bears witness  
with our spirit, we find  
ourselves coming to life...*

**Information and Formation:** As we, students and teachers, grapple with the subject matter of our disciplines, we potentially travel a path from surface to deeper depths. What begins as information slowly becomes formative of our characters as we more profoundly sound the depths of what we are learning, participating in its meaning ever more deeply, and integrating it into the deeper fabric of our lives. This is what happens in our personal relationships, and in an analogous manner it seems to happen in our educational experience in general. Sometimes we allow the subject matter to remain mere information. Perhaps we are not ready to integrate it; or we find it boring; or we are in subtle ways afraid of its challenge and accompanying responsibilities. Perhaps, too, we reject it, for we might find it profoundly mistaken, our spirits not resonating with it. Myriad possibilities present themselves. The Spirit is the sounder of the depths: The Spirit bears witness with our spirit (Rom 8.16), searching everything, even the depths of God (1 Cor 2.10). Plausibly, then, as we allow the Spirit to indwell us, we ought to experience something of this movement from surface information to formative depth, which can include a rejection of what is really not formative but deformative. This is another way of saying that the Spirit helps us transform our knowledge into wisdom (1 Cor 12.8), that special gift by which our knowledge is truly formative not only of ourselves, but of human society itself. Here perhaps is one way in which a Spirit-guided approach to the subject matter of the various disciplines avoids an impersonal approach to education. The Spirit is formative of the personal and even interpersonal.

**Self-regard and Mission:** As the Spirit bears witness with our spirit, we find ourselves coming to life, our God-given potential unfolding. The Spirit, breathing over the waters of creation (Gen 1.2), bringing them to life, brings us to life as well. In this sense, there ought not to be a sense that our personal gifts and dignity are denigrated in the educational process. The Spirit may well challenge us through our teachers and fellow students, but that ought to be quite different from any form of denigration of our selfhoods. Where we find a teacher or student denigrating anyone, even in subtle ways, such as through camouflaging the denigration through humor, we can be sure that the Spirit has nothing to do with it. This is not to say that the Spirit does not have a sense of humor, but it is wholesome humor. “Good fun,” we like to say.<sup>11</sup> Joy is, after all, one of the Spirit’s gifts (Gal 5.22).

On the other hand, it is one of those Gospel paradoxes that we lose our lives to find them (Matt 10.39), which might be another

*...a significant dimension of a Spirit-guided form of education would be...the willingness to be in some way a missionary...*

way of saying that the Spirit, in witnessing to Christ Jesus, brings us into that witness as well, a witness moving us beyond our narrow worlds, and to the world to which Jesus went: the land of those who have not heard the good news of the Gospel, the land of the hurting, the poor, the victims. “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses...to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1.8). Thus Peter, appropriately at his Pentecostal sermon, cites Joel’s prophecy that the Spirit will be poured out upon the young, the old, and the slaves, whether female or male (Acts 2.17-18). The Spirit, then, is a missionary, and a significant dimension of a Spirit-guided form of education would be, then, the willingness to be in some way a missionary as well.

The two founders of the Spiritan Congregation, Claude-François Poullart des Places (d. 1709) and François-Marie-Paul Libermann (d. 1852), were profoundly stamped by this Spirit-guided missionary dynamism, and they remain primary paradigms for us in our educational endeavors. Father Poullart des Places dedicated his Congregation on the Feast of Pentecost, and it was stamped from the beginning with a special sensitivity to the poor. Father Libermann, as is well known, was especially attuned to the African world. His words remain prophetic to this day: “Make yourselves Negroes with the Negroes to form them as they ought to be, not in European ways, but leaving what is natural to them. Be to them like servants towards their masters...”<sup>12</sup>

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Father (“Monsieur”) Jean-Jacques Olier (d. 1657), the founder of the priests of St. Sulpice, diocesan priests dedicated to ministry formation, was in varying ways a formative influence upon both Father Libermann, and Father Poullart des Places. M. Olier, saturated by the Christological and trinitarian spirituality of the French School, has a remarkable meditative prayer which he offers us upon entering into any conversation. In it he writes of adoring “the communication of spirit and openness of heart which the three divine persons of the Trinity have with one another.” He then passes to consider the “perfect truth and love” uniting the triune persons into one society. From there he prayerfully regards Jesus’ own conversations with his Mother, with St. Joseph, and with his disciples, all of these in some way participations in the trinitarian conversation.

We should add that we ought not to romanticize these representative biblical conversations noted by M. Olier. For example, in his conversation with the Syrophenician woman

(Mk 7.24-30/Matt 15.21-28), Jesus seems to be brought up short by her questioning, and it would seem that his own view of his mission is stretched by her aid. Through her, he seems to recognize his call to all, even beyond the frontiers of Judaism. Mary, to note the woman to whom the Spiritan Congregation is especially dedicated, was open and receptive, for example, in her conversation with the angelic messenger, but she was also perplexed and an active questioner in regards to her vocation to be Jesus' mother, in the end coming to her own free decision (Lk. 1.26-38). She truly dialogued, in other words; she was not inertly mute. Such give and take is the reality of conversations echoing the trinitarian conversation, it would seem.

Father Olier concludes his meditation by praying for the gift of the Spirit, asking that the Spirit dwell in us and enable us to be filled with the characteristics of this trinitarian form of conversation.<sup>13</sup> M. Olier is suggesting a dialogue model of the Trinity: God is a dialoguing reality, a Holy Mystery sharing the Word with each divine person and with us in the Spirit. Mystery (a Father with an infinite, Mother's Womb) – Sharable (the Divine Word) – and Shared (the Spirit), Father Olier is suggesting. In its own modest way, and in the power of the Spirit, teaching itself is an icon of this kind of dialogue.

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dialogue.*

<sup>1</sup> *Catéchèse* 33, as cited in Yves Congar, *The Word and the Spirit*, trans. David Smith (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1986), 27.

<sup>2</sup> Gertrud the Great of Helfta, *Spiritual Exercises*, 3d exercise, Cistercian Fathers Series, vol. 49, trans. and intro. Gertrud Jaron Lewis and Jack Lewis (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1989), 45.

<sup>3</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2d rev. ed., trans. rev. by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 367.

<sup>4</sup> Particularly helpful on this is Pope John Paul II, *On the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church and the World*, encyclical letter *Dominum et Vivificantem*, May 18, 1986, no. 35 (Boston: St. Paul Books & Media), 56: "The Spirit...who 'searches everything, even the depths of God,' knows... 'the secrets of man.' For this reason he alone *can fully 'convince concerning the sin' that happened at the beginning*, that sin which is the root of all other sins... The Holy Spirit therefore convinces the world of sin ...by constantly *guiding toward the 'righteousness'* that has been revealed to man..." Nos. 27-48 form one long meditation by the Pope on John 16.8-10.

<sup>5</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, encyclical letter, Sept. 14, 1998, no. 2 (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 1998), 10-11.

<sup>6</sup> E.g., the Hebrew "emeth" and "emunah," as in Hos. 2.20 and Deut. 32.4; see E. C. Blackman, "Truth," in Alan Richardson, ed., *A Theological Word Book of the Bible* (New York: Macmillan, 1950), 269.

<sup>7</sup> Ven. Francis Libermann, *Lettres spirituelles*, 3.504 (Sept. 15, 1845), cited in Francis X. Malinowski, C.S.Sp., "In the Years 1844-1847 (21)," April

15, 2000, in his “The Holy Spirit in Francis Libermann,” unpublished ms.

<sup>8</sup> See Eric Voegelin, *Anamnesis: On the Theory of History and Politics*, Collected Works, vol. 6, trans. M. J. Hanak and Gerhart Niemeyer, ed. David Walsh (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 353-54.

<sup>9</sup> Robert Davis Hughes III, “The Holy Spirit in Christian Spirituality,” in Arthur Holder, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Spirituality* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 211-212, considers Paul Tillich the giant on the issue of how “the Holy Spirit (Tillich’s ‘spiritual presence’) is always incarnated in ongoing history, resolving its ambiguities...and making Christians responsible for the culture in which they live, including the ‘higher’ culture of literature, art, and music.” See Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, ed. R. C. Kimball (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), and *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963). Ambiguities, however, will always remain in history, and thus, rather than resolutions, we have something like the mystic’s sense of the cloud of unknowing quite often.

<sup>10</sup> See Karl Rahner’s celebrated text, “Do Not Stifle the Spirit!” in his *Theological Investigations*, vol. 7, trans. David Bourke (New York: Seabury, 1971), 72-87.

<sup>11</sup> Meister Eckhart had this to say: “When God laughs at the soul and the soul laughs back to God, the persons of the Trinity are begotten. To speak in hyperbole, when the Father laughs to the Son and the Son laughs back to the Father, that laughter gives pleasure, that pleasure gives joy, that joy gives love, and love gives the persons [of the Trinity in the soul], of which the Holy Spirit is one” (*Meister Eckhart: A Modern Translation*, trans. Raymond Blackney [New York: Harper Torchbook, 1941], 245).

<sup>12</sup> See Joseph Michel, “Poullart des Places,” and Paul Sigrist, “Libermann,” in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, vols. 12/2 and 9 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1986, 1976), 2027-35, 764-80; Malinowski, “Francis Libermann, In the Years 1844-1847 (4),” Feb. 15, 1999, in his “The Holy Spirit in Francis Libermann.”

<sup>13</sup> Jean-Jacques Olier, “Actes pour faire avant la conversation,” in his *La Journée Chrétienne*, ed. François Amiot (Paris: Rameau, 1953), 206-7 (published with his *Catéchisme Chrétien pour la Vie Intérieure* in one volume).

# THE MISSION AND IDENTITY OF SPIRITAN SCHOOLS IN IRELAND

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Currently the Congregation of the Holy Spirit has trusteeship of five secondary schools (high schools) in Ireland, three of which have primary schools associated with them, giving a total enrollment of 4,600 students. While the main focus of this article is on elementary and secondary education, it may be noted that the Congregation in Ireland also has trusteeship of three third-level institutions and three institutes of community education.

## *ETHOS AND VISION*

Any discussion of mission and identity in the field of education must take into consideration the problem of differences in terminology. In the United States the terms "mission" and "identity" are commonly used, whereas in Ireland "ethos" and "vision" are more frequently used, although other terms are also found. Some educators speak of "ethos and educational philosophy." The Government of Ireland Education Act, 1998, refers to school ethos as "the characteristic spirit" of a school. The Irish Spiritan Province normally uses the terms "ethos and vision."

Ethos and vision are two sides of the same coin. In any organization "vision" refers to how the leadership sees the role and purpose of the organization, whereas "ethos" refers to how the vision is lived out in daily practice. Whatever words are used, the ethos and vision of an organization are central to its identity and work, because they give it inspiration and direction. The purpose of this essay is to explore the ethos and vision of the Spiritan schools in Ireland.

## *STRUCTURES*

The maintenance of the ethos and vision of any organization requires the support of suitable structures. In the field of education the key structures are trusteeship, management, and administration. The year 1988 was a pivotal year for the Irish Province of the Congregation as trustees of schools. In that year the Provincial Chapter gave a clear assurance of the continuing educational mission of the Congregation through its schools in Ireland. Following wide-ranging consultation with all those concerned, in January 1998 the Provincial Council decided to establish a governing body with a company structure for the schools, consisting of the Provincial Council and a Board of

Directors which includes Spiritans and men and women lay members. The company is named after Fr. Claude Poullart des Places, “The Des Places Educational Association Limited” (DEA). The Association was registered in September 1999.

The Memorandum and Articles of Association of the DEA indicate clearly its role as promoter of the ethos and vision of the Congregation in education. The Memorandum begins with two main objects to which the Association is committed (Section A1). The first is “to ensure and foster the advancement of education.” The second is “to further the aims and purposes of Roman Catholic education.” The Memorandum further directs that these main objects are to be pursued “in accordance with the ethos and educational philosophy of the Congregation.” It is clear from the Memorandum, therefore, that the Association shares the ethos and vision of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit. In the Irish context we can say that the Association and its schools share the national educational ethos, the Catholic ethos, and the Spiritan ethos.

#### **SOURCES**

It will not be possible in this short essay to explore all three aspects of the schools’ ethos. Only the Spiritan ethos and vision will be considered, by investigating three important sources: the inspiration of the founders of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit, the lived tradition, and the written tradition, represented particularly by the Spiritan Rule of Life.

*...three important sources:  
the inspiration of the  
founders...the lived  
tradition, and the written  
tradition...*

#### **1. The Inspiration of the Founders**

The Spiritan education story begins with Claude Francis Poullart des Places, after whom our Association has been named. He was born in Rennes, Brittany, on February 26, 1679. He studied theology in Paris, where he founded a house for poor students while still a student himself. It was not just a hostel, but a community. This was to be the main achievement of his short life. He was ordained priest on December 17, 1707. Two years later, worn out with his efforts on behalf of his community, he died on October 2, 1709, at the age of 30 years and seven months. His community developed into a seminary, and later the international Congregation of the Holy Spirit (Farragher, 1992).

The second outstanding personality in the Spiritan story is Francis Libermann. He was born Jacob Libermann in 1802 in Saverne, Alsace, the son of a Jewish rabbi. He studied first



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in Metz and later in Paris, where he was baptized into the Catholic Church in 1826. Soon afterwards, he experienced the call to become a priest and in 1827 entered the seminary of St. Sulpice. However, the onset of epilepsy in 1828 meant that Francis' ordination was postponed indefinitely. In 1839, at the age of thirty-seven, he undertook the task of founding a missionary congregation. Having received papal approval for the new congregation, named the "Society of the Holy Heart of Mary," he was ordained at Amiens in 1841. Seven years later, his society merged with the Congregation of the Holy Spirit founded by Fr. Poullart des Places and Fr. Libermann became Superior General. He died in 1852 at the Mother House in Paris (Kelly, 1983).

The inspiration provided by Fr. des Places and by Fr. Libermann for education may best be appreciated by considering some of the values which they passed on to their Congregation and which have become central to its education ethos and vision.

***Openness to the Spirit:*** An important core value in the Spiritan heritage is openness to the Spirit. Des Places dedicated his community to the Holy Spirit. Libermann regarded openness to the Spirit as the guiding principle of his life. Two examples of his openness to the Spirit are adaptability to change, and respect for each person's uniqueness. In an educational context this means respect for each individual's personality and talents.

***A Sense of Community:*** The motto of the Congregation is "one heart and one soul," evoking the first Christian community in Jerusalem. A sense of community was a basic principle for both des Places and Libermann. In education, a sense of community translates into closeness to the students, a family spirit, and accessibility.

***Concern for the Poor:*** It was his concern for the poor that led des Places to found his community for poor students. Libermann focused attention on the most needy people of his day. Education is a potent means of translating that concern into action.

***Global Vision:*** The missionary outlook of the Congregation has given us a global vision which inspires hope for the realization of one world united in peace and justice in the Kingdom of God. In education, it means working for the empowerment of peoples and their liberation from injustice, poverty, and ignorance.

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***Commitment to Service:*** Des Places devoted himself completely to the service of his community. Libermann continually emphasized the spirit of service in his instructions to his missionaries. He put service to others before his own health and welfare. He saw education as service to the Church and to people in need.

***High Educational Standards:*** Des Places insisted on high educational standards with the students in his community, even insisting on the study of science in addition to theology—a new idea at the time. Under the influence of Fr. Gaultier, who was widely respected in academic circles in Paris, Libermann adopted a policy of encouragement for higher studies which was to provide the Congregation with a number of experts and specialists in various fields.

***Personal Development:*** The Congregation of the Holy Spirit inherited from its founders a respect for the Holy Spirit guiding each person's development, as the Spirit guided Jesus our teacher and model. The concern of Spiritan schools for their students is to promote their moral, spiritual, intellectual, physical, social, cultural, and overall personal development.

The foregoing brief survey shows some of the basic values flowing from the living heritage left to us by des Places and Libermann which inspire Spiritan education down to the present day.

## **2. The Lived Tradition**

The first new educational project undertaken following Libermann's death was the establishment of a national seminary for the French clergy in Rome in 1853. The educational work of the Congregation expanded during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries from seminaries into second-level colleges and primary schools, including the Irish schools. The number of schools grew to thousands, particularly in Africa, from 1927 onwards.

Duquesne University opened as the Pittsburgh Catholic College of the Holy Ghost in 1878 and was raised to university status in 1911. Duquesne University has always had close connections with Ireland. In June 1991 Duquesne hosted an international symposium of Spiritan educators and their lay colleagues which underlined the broad scope of the Congregation's involvement in education. A survey conducted on that occasion indicated that the Congregation had responsibility for 222 schools with 141,000 students and 7,000 teachers.

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### 3. The Written Tradition

The written tradition as a source of the Spiritan ethos and vision is exemplified in the Spiritan Rule of Life. The Rule has been updated at intervals to meet changing conditions in the religious and secular world. In addition to providing religious motivation for education as a means of “announcing the Good News of the Kingdom,” the Rule of Life refers to education specifically in Constitution 18, highlighting the various types of educational services which the Congregation contributes to the local Churches. The written tradition is continually being added to in the form of biographies, histories, and theological and philosophical works.

One form of written source is of particular interest. I am referring to the mission statements of the schools. It will be helpful, therefore, to take a brief look at these mission statements to see how they have interpreted the ethos and educational philosophy of the Congregation. The format of the mission statements is in two parts: a preamble, and the statement of mission either as a continuous text or as a list of aims and goals. The preamble refers to the history of the school and its commitment to the ethos and vision of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit. The second part, containing the statement of mission, varies somewhat from school to school in emphasis and to a lesser extent in content. The following list shows the main aims mentioned in the mission statements:

- An environment supportive of the Christian faith*
- Harmonious development of the whole person*
- A caring community environment*
- High academic standards*
- Social and moral development*
- Community service and social justice*
- Preparation for a career*
- Cultural and physical education*
- Partnership of parents, teachers, and community*
- Global concerns and the mission of the Church*

It is clear that the mission statements include most of the values mentioned in the section on the inspiration of our founders and they can be developed still further. The school mission statements are important means for the Des Places Educational Association in promoting the ethos and educational philosophy of the Congregation.

**CONCLUSION**

This essay has attempted to explore the main sources of the ethos and vision (mission and identity) of the Irish schools conducted by the Congregation of the Holy Spirit. Attention has been focused in particular on the inspiration of the founders, the lived tradition, and the written tradition. We have attempted to show the rich heritage of ethos and vision which inspires the Irish schools of the Congregation.

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# ON THE ROYAL ROAD

## CONSIDERATIONS ON LAY SPIRITAN IDENTITY AND MISSION

Ann-Marie and  
Peter Fell

Ann-Marie and Peter Fell are two Lay Spiritans of the Province of England. Graduates of Manchester University, they both taught for many years prior to founding REVIVE, an agency that provides advocacy and support services for asylum seekers and refugees in the Greater Manchester area. Ann-Marie, a qualified counselor, and Peter, a trained social worker, have been married for 34 years; they have three children and one grandchild. Peter co-authored the recent book *What are they doing here? A Critical Guide to Asylum and Immigration* (Birmingham: Venture Press, 2007)

### **Role of Laity in the Church**

It seems to have been Clement of Rome who first used the Greek adjective *laikos* when referring to the participation of non-deacons or non-presbyters in the liturgy (Williams, 1963). The same author notes that the term was commonly used in Greek to distinguish the mass of the people from their leaders. Although, as Congar (1957) asserts, it is rather *laos*, “people,” which is the common Biblical term, there is evidence, by the very use of differentiated terminology, of an incipient division of ecclesial labors and responsibilities between the priestly and the non-priestly in primitive liturgical practices. At a much later period, the rise of monasticism embodies the distinction between the sacred and the secular with a physical enclosure and the separation of prayerful communities from the “world.” There is, however, the proviso that lay men could become members of monastic orders and exercise their lay state in a role, which although consecrated, was auxiliary to that of their ordained brethren.

In 1859 J.H. Newman offered a fluid and inclusive view of the sources of Catholic tradition as emanating “variously at various times” from the episcopacy, the doctors of the Church, the *people* and other “events, disputes and movements...which are comprised under the name of history.” (Newman, 1961, my emphasis).

Doohan (1984) views the Second Vatican Council as the moment when “communication, incarnation and ministry” were embodied as a theology of Catholic lay participation in the mission of the Church, with the people of God “called to be sacrament of the world in the circumstances of their own lives.” (p. 44)

Vatican II’s “Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People” depicts the action of lay people as being “so necessary that without it, the apostolate of the pastors will frequently be unable to obtain its full effect” (Chapter 3 [10]), a formulation which perhaps evokes the unfortunate analogy of a dog needing a tail in order to wag in the most dog-like way and be acknowledged for what it truly is. However, the recognition that there existed a theology of the Catholic laity, and that the laity, through their very life in the world, are thus consecrated into holiness through the sacredness

*...called to be sacrament  
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circumstances of their  
own lives...*

of the world as the very work of God, must have come as a startling revelation to the person in the pew and one that, in the twenty-first century, perhaps remains somewhat removed from the consciousness of many lay Catholics.

Henry Koren, the Spiritan academic and historian of the Congregation, follows and develops the insights of Vatican II:

*...we can now assert that the laity's role is not just limited to helping priests and bishops in **their** mission, but demands that the lay-people put into effect their **own** royal mission. Because bishops and priests also belong to God's laity – the people – there is no inherent conflict between the ordained priest mission and the non-priest mission.* (Koren, 1990).

Koren seems to imply a re-orientation of the meaning of the “sacred” away from a preoccupation with what is done at the altar – the sacerdotal actions of the Eucharistic celebrant, for example – towards an inclusive theology of intentionality, in which the life and witness of all, whether ordained or not, are of equal existential importance within the community of believers.

*...the life and witness of all, whether ordained or not, are of equal existential importance within the community of believers.*

If this is so, then a burning question must be: to what extent does formal participation in the lay apostolate of a religious congregation imply an attentiveness to and an expression of the sacredness of everyday life? Or is it merely a misguided attempt to reproduce or imitate the obligations of ordained ministry in an inauthentic context? Does the act – recognized through public assent, although not by the taking of binding vows – of lay associate membership of a religious order impose an obligation to undertake works which are in accordance with and further the missionary aims of the congregation in a concrete form, or does one understand the lay apostolate as a kind of “business as usual” in the affairs of daily life whilst wearing a spiritual identity tag?

### **Lay Spiritans and Mission**

Where groups of lay Spiritans exist there is a danger that a quest for identity, and the desire to formulate it in a kind of user's manual, can consume all of its energies and deflect attention away from more pressing matters. It can be an excuse, in other words, for inward-looking, hand-wringing procrastination during which any notions of missionary *purpose* become lost.

At the meeting of European lay Spiritans held in Gemert, the Netherlands, in 2007, we listened to a story told by one of the delegates:

*A newly formed lay group affiliated to a religious congregation decided that it must first of all decide its defining characteristics and then set these down in the form of a document which would describe what this group was about. So, in the first year of its existence, it devoted its monthly meetings to doing precisely that; each point was carefully elaborated and typed up after discussion and a manual was produced comprising over a hundred numbered paragraphs, some with sub-sections and even sub-sub-sections. This was printed and its appearance was marked by a joyous celebration. It duly took its place in the library of the religious house where the lay people held their meeting. At the next monthly meeting, the group gathered in a self-congratulatory mood and wondered what they should do next.*

The problem was this: no-one had the faintest idea what the group should do – how their meticulously formulated “identity” was to be transformed into the apostolic and missionary praxis which had been stated as its main objective.

*...the group had attempted to define its essence before examining the conditions of its existence.*

To borrow the terms of Jean-Paul Sartre, the group had attempted to define its *essence* before examining the conditions of its *existence*. The formulation of the group’s identity did not flow from its actions in the world but was expressed only at the level of discourse - a set of propositions which idealized the group’s perceptions of itself and which only served to mystify and perpetuate a narcissistic ritual of revisiting and admiring the reflection that it had created.

By contrast, the documents of Torre d’Aguilha reflect positively the experience of the lay delegates whose testimony was heard at that Chapter:

*The personal story of each lay Spiritan shows us that there are three essential elements in their desire to drink from the richness of our charism: spiritual experience, specific mission and life in community. In general, the decisive factors are basic contact with one or more confreres or a community, knowledge of the evangelising impact of some of our older missionaries, direct contact with our founders and sources. We listened to these lay people spontaneously telling us how their spiritual life, lived according to their own lay vocation, is marked by the importance given to prayer, the action of the Spirit in daily life, ‘practical union’ with God, an attitude of availability, and the confident waiting for the ‘moment of God.’ (Torre d’Aguilha 11.1)*

Many lay Spiritans will recognize themselves in these accounts. But we must be aware of the dangers which I have described above - the temptation to hide behind a label and be unable to proclaim who we are *on the basis of our actions in furthering the missionary aims of the Congregation*.

*The “poor” exist by  
contrast with the rich...*

Let us be open to identifying spheres of action amongst those whom we recognize as the poor and marginalized in our midst, remembering that those whom we identify thus do not exist as some kind of convenient backdrop against which we can undertake noble or “preferential” actions. The “poor” exist by contrast with the rich; the “marginalized” exist in opposition to those who participate in the fullness of a society’s bounties. It is insufficient to speak in such generalized terms, which, with repetition, become meaningless and only serve to perpetuate the mystifying discourses of comfortable containment that I have already mentioned.

*...we need to put faces to  
names...*

We are talking about structural and personal inequalities and injustices and we need to put faces to names: homeless men and women; prisoners; people seeking asylum; refugees; abused men, women, and children; disenchanting young people; sex offenders. We are also talking about the global scope of so many contemporary problems, but without ascribing such problems to distant anonymous forces and ignoring human agency and responsibility. (Hornsby-Smith, 2006, p. 279).

In the inaugural issue of *Spiritan Horizons*, Fr Anthony Gittins wrote:

*“The poor” and “the most abandoned” are abstractions, categories; but there really is no such thing as “the poor” in the abstract. God does not make abstractions, or generic creatures: God’s creation is always specific, and every human person is individuated and identifiable by name. In order, therefore, to be really committed to the poor and most abandoned people, we must endeavor to know them by name, to identify and relate to them in a personal way.* (Gittins, 2006, p. 34 – emphasis in original).

### **Our Personal Journey**

Both of us had been high school teachers until health-related reasons forced us to abandon our careers in the early 1990’s. We already had two teenage children and our youngest son, Nicholas, was born in 1990, just around the time when our previous professional identities had begun to crumble. We spent



our newfound free time in childcare, but with the suspicion that there was still something unknown around the corner which might engage our skills and other attributes.

In the mid-nineties, Ann-Marie became involved in the small group of volunteers who visited people detained by the UK immigration service at Manchester Airport. Dermot McNulty, who coordinated the group, was a lay Spiritan and it was he who introduced us to the Salford community. We started to attend meetings and made our commitment to the lay Spiritans of the English Province in 1998. We then spent a period of discernment as to the direction in which our commitment could be worked out in a concrete form.

In 1999, Peter explored the possibility of undertaking a Masters degree in social work, inspired largely by the example of our eldest son, Ben, who is now a lecturer in social work at the University of Hull. Around this time, the British government, concerned about the increasing numbers of people arriving in the UK to seek asylum, enacted legislation which would forcibly disperse newly-arrived asylum seekers from London and south-east England – where most of them first set foot and tended to cluster around pre-existing ethnic communities – to the several large conurbations around the rest of the UK. It was calculated that doing so would ease the fiscal burden on local authorities who, at that time, were responsible for the housing and support of asylum seekers.

Ann-Marie had already begun to see the need for some kind of service to welcome, support, and accompany the asylum seekers who would soon be arriving in the Greater Manchester area where we live. Coupled with her experience of work at Manchester Airport, she started to work as a volunteer for the Diocese of Salford in outreach work with this group of people.

In 2001, Peter finished his social work training and we both envisaged a project which would provide a professional service of support and advocacy for asylum seekers and also for those people given refugee status and allowed to remain in the UK. We approached the then Provincial Superior of the English Province, Fr. John McFadden, with our plans. Both he and Fr. Mark Connolly, at that time Provincial Bursar, were enthusiastic about our plans and agreed to fund the project - which we called REVIVE - for two years initially. We were fortunate to be given two rooms in the presbytery of St. Boniface's parish in Salford, by

the parish priest, Fr. Peter Kinsella, where we remain today and attempt to squeeze our expanding activities into the same space.

## REVIVE

From the beginnings of REVIVE, we have had arrangements with local universities to offer placements to social work students who are interested in our work. This serves both the training needs of the universities and the needs of REVIVE for trained workers who can offer professional social advocacy to those who increasingly use our services. Additionally, this brings funds to REVIVE from our partner teaching institutions.

In 2004 we started working with the British Red Cross in a project to relieve hardship amongst those asylum seekers whose claims had been refused and whose support had been terminated by the Home Office, the government department responsible for deciding asylum applications. This is a growing area of concern for all agencies working with asylum seekers in the UK and is leading to an increasing number of truly marginalized people who have no income, no housing, no right to employment, and no stable sense of identity within our community.

In 2005, we received funding from the Tudor Trust, a charity which lends support to projects working to lessen the effects of social deprivation and exclusion. This has enabled us to appoint a part-time caseworker whose remit is to work specifically with destitute former asylum seekers, Britain's *sans papiers* (without documents). The continuing commitment of the English Province to our work means that we will shortly be able to appoint another full-time caseworker who will be able to share our workload.

Many of the referrals for our support services come increasingly from the Manchester branch of the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture. They see REVIVE as ideally placed to offer frequent-contact social support for those clients who may also be receiving counseling from the Medical Foundation or those for whom direct therapeutic services may be judged inappropriate.

In a typical week's work we may see between fifty and sixty people, comprising those who are part of our outreach casework and whom we visit regularly in their home or accompany on appointments to lawyers and hospitals, for example. Perhaps our work might be taking someone to see a movie or going for a coffee, or any other activity that will reduce social isolation and

*They see REVIVE as ideally placed to offer frequent-contact social support...*

*In a typical week's work we may see between fifty and sixty people...*

the sense of uncertainty that is part of everyday life for people seeking asylum.

We also work with people given permission to remain in the UK, assisting with obtaining social housing, employment, education, and access to social security payments. Awareness raising amongst local faith groups is also an important part of our work and, as a result of talks given by Ann-Marie, we enjoy the support of several local parishes, both Catholic and Anglican, who are regular donors of both money and food for our drop-in program. As part of this awareness raising, Peter has recently jointly authored a critical guide to asylum and immigration issues in the UK. His co-author, Debra Hayes, was Peter's social work tutor at Manchester Metropolitan University and a member of REVIVE's management committee since the inception of the project. (Fell and Hayes, 2007).

### **A Reciprocal Process**

We believe strongly that the "helping" relationship can be highly complex in practice and hope that our working methods embody a recognition that our brothers and sisters are not merely the passive recipients of our actions, but join with us in a reciprocal process of accompaniment and empowerment. We too are "poor" by comparison with the qualities of resistance, resilience, and hope which they demonstrate and teach to us continuously.

*...the "helping"  
relationship can be highly  
complex in practice...*

*We too are "poor"...*

However, this does not mean that we adopt an uncritical and romanticized attitude to those we meet. We have to express honestly the scope, possibilities, and limitations of our work. In the words of Paolo Freire,

*there is no true word that is not at the same time a praxis. To speak a true word is to transform the world.* (Freire, 1996, p.68).

That "world," we would suggest, may simply be the consciousness of the individual that he or she is not alone in a time of difficulty and struggle.

### **"Who do you say that I am?" (Mt 16:15)**

Undertaking a commitment to lay Spiritan membership and involvement in the life of a Spiritan community; making a significant change in professional career orientation; a major development in legislation affecting people seeking asylum in Britain: it would be tempting to dismiss this conjunction of events as merely co-incidental, an accident of time and place. Whether these events were a sign of the call of the Spirit is not

*...lay Spiritan  
commitment must mean  
an engagement with both  
reflection and action.*

for us to judge, but there is no doubt in our minds that, as lay Spiritans, we would be required to be open to the workings of the Spirit, to be available to act upon our analysis of the signs of the times, and to respond to our observations.

This has brought us to believe that lay Spiritan commitment must mean an engagement with both reflection *and* action. Lay people can and should participate fully in the missionary charism of the founders and walk alongside our professed confreres on the “Royal Road” that we both share, sustained by prayer and community, and informed by analysis of the needs of the world.

Let the willingness to undertake such work be a condition of our identity and commitment as lay Spiritans. Let it *be* our identity.

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## YOUTH EVANGELIZING YOUTH - THE SPIRITAN CHARISM IN BRAZIL

José Altevir da Silva,  
C.S.Sp.

Born in the State of Amazonas, Brazil, José Altevir da Silva was ordained a Spiritan priest in 1992. He has worked principally in formation, serving most recently as Director of the Theology community in São Paulo for 5 years. José is currently Vice-Provincial of the Spiritan Brazilian Province.

*(Translation:  
Brian McLaughlin, C.S.Sp.)*

*We adopted the theme,  
“Our Evangelizing  
Mission in Latin  
America,”...*

### THE “SPIRITAN YEAR” IN BRAZIL

Mission has its roots in the mystery of Christ, present in the Church through the action of the Holy Spirit. By his calling the Spiritan participates in this mission. Four years ago, the Congregation of the Holy Spirit, present today in five continents, celebrated 300 years of mission in the world. A special effort was made to mark this great occasion in all countries where Spiritans live and work. We in Brazil joined in spirit with all other Spiritans throughout the world to joyfully celebrate Jesus Christ in different cultures, with different faces, with the same desire: “...*that all may have life.*” While this dream is beyond our own capacities, it is assured by the action of the Holy Spirit, present in all peoples and cultures.

Preparations for the celebration of the Spiritan Year in Brazil commenced at the beginning of the year 2000, and with such thoroughness that the event still lives in the memory of many people. We adopted the theme, “*Our Evangelizing Mission in Latin America,*” and set three objectives:

- **To celebrate three important dates in the Congregation**
  - the third centenary of the founding of the Congregation by Claude Poullart des Places in 1703;
  - the second centenary of the birth of Francis Libermann in 1802;
  - the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death in 1852. Libermann was responsible for a new phase of growth in the Congregation at a time of crisis, and, therefore, he is considered its “second” founder, being responsible for its revitalization.
- **To make ourselves better known** – who we are and where we are working;

*It was decided from the outset to focus primarily on youth...*

*The voice of youth is the great instrument of transformation in society...*

- **To strengthen the missionary identity** of the youth in our communities, reinforcing the principle that it is the youth themselves who are the most influential apostles of their fellow youth.

#### FOCUS ON YOUTH

It was decided from the outset to focus primarily on youth and a **congress of youth**, involving young people from Brazil and Paraguay, was planned. After two years of preparation, the congress took place in 2002. Spread over three days, it involved 275 young people from these two countries. This international gathering really marked the life of the Congregation in the region and especially the lives of the many young people who participated. It provided a space where they could *look at* the reality of life around them, *judge* this in the light of their Christian faith and with the creativity that is specific to youth, *act* prophetically, inspired by the example of so many martyrs in their own countries, and *celebrate* with true missionary zeal the presence of the Spirit of God in our midst. The central theme of the congress was “*Youth Evangelizing Youth in a Continent of Oppression.*” In his address to the young people present, the local bishop of the Belem Region of São Paulo, Dom Pedro Luiz Stringhini, challenged them in the following words: “*The voice of youth is the great instrument of transformation in society...its presence in the Church, in the parish, and in the basic Christian community, is vitally important. We have a future to discern together. Linking with a religious congregation that makes an option for the poor is an indication of young people that are active and engaged... Today the mission of young people is to communicate dreams and hopes for a better world.*”

Spiritans bishop, Dom Sergio Castriani, from Tefé in Amazonas, where Spiritans have worked without interruption for more than a hundred years, was also present at the congress. Dom Sergio is responsible for the missionary dimension of the Church in Brazil at the level of the National Conference of Bishops (CNBB). He began his input by speaking about the presence and identity of young Spiritans and the challenges they face in the contemporary world. He underlined the need to reinterpret the charism of the founders in the context and culture of today's reality. Dom Sergio told the youth: “*The Church ought to be a place that offers an identity and a direction to youth... a link to their dreams and hopes.*” He challenged those present: “*Do you want to be the youth of the Church? If so, your faith needs to have a missionary dimension, and Libermann has the charism to help you.*”

## SEE, JUDGE, ACT AND CELEBRATE

The congress was centered on a sharing of youthful values, hopes, and dreams in the struggle for the building of the Kingdom of God. As intimated above, the methodology adopted was that of *see, judge, act, and celebrate*:

**See** – The contemporary lived reality. “*What are you seeing and hearing?*” (Lk. 7, 22). We reflected on the lights and shadows that surround the dreams of Latin American youth today.

**Judge** – Listen to the Spirit. “*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me*” (Lk. 4, 18). Here the young people linked the options of Poullart des Places and Libermann to their lived reality. They noticed their capacity for renunciation in order to be present with the most needy, to change situations of oppression, and to announce the Good News in different cultural contexts.

**Act** – Lines of action. “*Go, make disciples of all nations*” (Mt. 29, 19). In this context, the focus was on assisting young people to be initiators in regard to the evangelization of their peers, and to develop a spirituality that links their concrete lives to their Christian faith.

**Celebrate** – the entire meeting was effectively a true celebration.

## FOLLOW UP

The congress for youth was probably the single most important event in Brazil marking the celebration of the Spiritan Year. From the outset it was realized that follow-up would be essential to its success. A post-jubilee committee was established which has been very active over the past four years. It has been instrumental in organizing several events related to the Spiritan charism, not only in the city of São Paulo, but also at a national level in the various places where Spiritans are working. Regional groups have been set up with the members meeting together periodically to develop an ongoing Spiritan training program for youth. A special group for Spiritan youth is currently being set up in São Paulo with the aim of living and spreading the Spiritan charism and spirituality. New groups of lay Spiritans have also been created. These commit themselves, in a more radical way, to Spiritan spirituality and to the mission of our Congregation. A website of Spiritans in Brazil has been established, and a calendar, highlighting Spiritan mission in Mexico, Paraguay, Bolivia, and Brazil has been published. All this has been done in a spirit of

*The congress for youth was probably the single most important event in Brazil marking the celebration of the Spiritan Year.*



*...we are effectively affirming the hope that the Catholic Church in Brazil has placed in the youth of today.*

*...you will be signs of God's love, credible witnesses of the loving presence of Christ.*

partnership between the Brazilian Province, the South-Western District (the Irish Spiritans working in Brazil), the Spiritan Sisters, and the Sisters of the Holy Rosary.

In a very real way we are effectively affirming the hope that the Catholic Church in Brazil has placed in the youth of today. At the General Assembly of the CNBB in May 2006, the bishops clearly stated their wish “*to be on the side of young people as they search for meaning in life, liberty, happiness, true love, affection, and tenderness.*” In their message to youth, entitled “**Evangelization of Youth,**” the 320 bishops stated that youth is at the heart of the Church; it gives the Church a jovial face, because its presence, creativity, and missionary dynamism contribute greatly to a more dynamic and prophetic Church. The episcopate called young people to be disciples and missionaries of Jesus Christ, to be leaders in the defense of life from conception to its natural end, and in the construction of a peaceful society, the fruit of justice and love. The CNBB offers formation and accompaniment to young people in order that they may have a critical vision of reality and not merely be victims of the forces of secularization in society. In this context, Pope John Paul II addressed young people during the 17<sup>th</sup> World Youth Day in the following way: “*In the present context of secularization, when many of our contemporaries think and live as if God did not exist or are attracted to irrational forms of religiosity, it is necessary that precisely you, beloved youth, must reaffirm your faith as a personal decision that involves your whole existence. May the Gospel be the great criterion which guides the options and directions of your life. Thus you will become missionaries in actions and words; you will be signs of God's love, credible witnesses of the loving presence of Christ.*”

#### **HANDING ON THE SPIRITAN CHARISM**

The Spiritan General Chapter of Torre D’Aguilha in 2004 spoke in the following way regarding the transmission of our charism: “*The handing on of the charism of the Congregation is the transmission of a gift from God, given to us through our founders. It is passed on in a style of living together and working for the Kingdom, by study of its foundation and history applied to our way of life and spirituality, and by a variety of creative means, some of which were used during our Jubilee celebrations.*” (1.2)

A way of life that involves generosity, commitment, and witness is a powerful means of inspiring young people today. Interestingly, the young people here in Brazil singled out the following aspects

of the Spiritan charism as being particularly significant for them:

- *The dream of a more just, fraternal, and inclusive world*
- *Self-sacrifice, sharing what one has, in order to attend to the most needy*
- *Working to change situations of oppression, bringing the Good News to the poor*
- *Changing history*
- *Passion in what one does*

One 25-year old put the challenge this way: *“Let us have courage. The mission is difficult and the challenges are many, but the love of God continues alive among us. Let us be a little ‘spark of God’ that lightens up and nourishes the dreams of so many brothers and sisters who wish to struggle for a more just, united, and fraternal world.”*

*Let us have courage...*

The fruits of the Spiritan Year continue to appear. Most importantly perhaps, it has given rise to new hope and a new dynamism for the Congregation and the Church in Brazil and Latin America.

## FROM MOZAMBICAN REFUGEE TO A SPIRITAN MISSIONARY

João Luis Dimba,  
C.S.Sp.

Forced to flee his war-torn native country of Mozambique in 1986, João Luis Dimba became the first Mozambican Spiritan priest on May 18, 2002. He returned to Malawi where he had lived as a refugee to take up pastoral ministry in the parish of Thunga, later serving as Vocations and Postulancy Director, and Councillor for Formation in the South Central African Foundation (SCAF). On December 12, 2006, he was appointed Superior of SCAF by the Spiritan General Council and is now based in South Africa.

*Several of my relatives,  
friends, and teachers were  
murdered.*

### *EARLY YEARS*

I am João Luis Dimba, a Mozambican by nationality, and I was born 38 years ago in the Angonia district of the north-western province of Mozambique called Tete. I was born of Maria Inez Abel and Luis Matias Dimba.

I started school at the tender age of five. My father, a teacher by profession, was keen to have his own children begin school at an early age and set the example in the local community. I completed my secondary school education when I was just seventeen and was ready to go to pre-university. The thought of priesthood had bothered me for some time. Perhaps it was more than just a thought; a desire to become a priest had entered my heart on seeing the splendid outfit of the bishop on the day of my First Communion.

In 1986, the civil war between the ruling FRELIMO<sup>1</sup> government and the rebel group RENAMO<sup>2</sup> reached our district and many people were killed. The rebels attacked small towns and villages, pillaging and looting as they went. They even attacked schools, killing many school children and teachers. Several of my relatives, friends, and teachers were murdered. Statistics indicate that more than a million people died during the seventeen-year civil war in Mozambique. Many Mozambicans were forced to flee to the neighboring countries of South Africa, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, and Tanzania. In a bid to protect the nation, the FRELIMO had resorted to recruiting and training school children and college students as soldiers. While at secondary school, I received military training myself and became familiar with machine guns and other weapons of war.

### *SEPARATION FROM MY FAMILY*

When I finished my school exams in 1986 I was unable to return home to my parents. Our village was about 80 km from the school and it had already been visited and vandalized several times by the RENAMO rebels. My parents had fled to Malawi desperately seeking asylum and many of my relatives and friends in neighboring villages had been killed. I was to be separated from my family for three years. I did not know it then, but my next reunion with my parents and siblings would take place in a

refugee camp in Malawi, the country of refuge for half a million Mozambicans.

*I fled through the forest  
for three days and nights.*

*Very few wanted to hear  
my story...*

Eventually, Villa Ulongue, the small town where our school was located, came under attack. Several innocent people were killed; others were forced to carry the spoils from the town to rebel military bases, never to return. There were rumors that some government forces had killed two Jesuit priests, Frs. João de Deus Kamtedza and Silvio Morreira. In fear for my safety I fled through the forest for three days and nights. Finally, I arrived in Malawi with nothing but a pair of trousers and a shirt. I managed to get occasional work to help me survive but suffered the rejection and discrimination well known to those who have found themselves refugees in a foreign country. Very few wanted to hear my story but I was sure that the wise and reflective could read the misery written on my face. The kindness of three people in Dedza West, Ceasario Kabango, Boniface Kunyengana, and Malisela Kalasa, will remain with me for ever. They understood exactly what I was suffering and gave me courage and hope. I shared my story and my shattered dreams with them and felt accepted and understood. It was through chatting with them that the idea of learning English with a view to joining religious life matured.

#### **CULTURE SHOCK**

James W. Gibson defines culture shock as “the psychological reaction of stress that sometimes occurs when an individual enters a culture very different from their own.”<sup>3</sup> Malawi was a British protectorate while Mozambique had been a Portuguese colony. The former had been a capitalist country since its independence, while the latter, under Samora Machel,<sup>4</sup> became a communist country. Despite the fact that the people of these neighboring countries were basically *Bantu*,<sup>5</sup> the two countries held two different socio-political and religious world-views. Culture shock describes well the experience of those early years in Malawi. I found myself in a foreign land without any prior preparation, unable to communicate adequately, worn down by the sense of loss of family, friends, relatives, hopes, possessions, national and personal pride. I knew no English and could only speak a few words and phrases in the Nyanja language. Eventually, encouraged by my three newfound friends, I contacted the headmaster of a local school, Mr. Dondwe, to see if I could enroll for English classes. But the problem was where to get the money needed for the course. “Where there is a will there is a way,” the saying goes. I went into the forests on the frontier of Mozambique, five km from the refugee camp, where I collected firewood which I sold to

the teachers in the local schools. After I had done this a number of times I eventually managed to put together the required \$8.00 for enrolment.

*As a refugee I had no documentation, no study permit, and no defense.*

Six months into my English studies at Chimphalika, the Malawi police seized me and demanded my documents and a study permit. As a refugee I had no documentation, no study permit, and no defense. Consequently, I was removed from the school and sent back to the camp where I stayed for five months, wondering what the future would hold. I heard people speak of a Spiritan priest, Fr. Conor Kennedy, who was involved in advocacy work on behalf of refugees. I was told that for close to three years he had single-handedly solicited funds for feeding them and tried to give them back their human dignity. I decided to meet this man and tell him my story. He managed to get me a study permit and soon I was back to my English classes, this time in a school built by the same Fr. Kennedy.

*...a person is a person because of other persons.*

This was to mark the beginning of a slow but sure resettlement. During school holidays I obtained some work from the Marist Brothers at Mtendere Secondary School, mostly sweeping classrooms and dusting library shelves. It was there that I met a fellow Mozambican refugee, a student called Semente, who had an odyssey similar to mine. My joy was unimaginable. As the Zulu proverb wisely says, “*umuntu ngumuntu, ngabantu,*” which can be translated as “*a person is a person because of other persons.*” Semente suggested to me to go to Lilongwe, the capital city, to meet the resident representative of the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) and see if he could provide funds for my English studies and upkeep. I did this with maximum haste and within days I was on the list of refugee students who enjoyed all the support of the UNHCR. They sponsored me in a correspondence course in English with the Rapid Results College of London; they paid my rent, gave me food and clothing, and made me feel human again. Eventually, with the help of Fr. Kennedy and that of the UNHCR, I managed to trace my family and siblings and I was reunited with them after three years of separation.

#### **ENTERING THE SPIRITAN FAMILY**

I had admired the vestments of the bishop on the day of my First Communion back home in Mozambique, but little did I imagine that this seemingly childish admiration would, after a long journey over violent waters, translate into a desire to join the Spiritan family. Dreams can start in such simple and unsophisticated ways! In my youth I was not aware of the fact

that there are many religious congregations; indeed I hardly knew of the distinction between diocesan and religious priesthood. It seems rather humorous now but I had always thought that Catholic priests were called Jesuits. I had wrongly deduced this from the fact that Jesuits were the missionaries who evangelized our area in Mozambique. It was the war and the chance encounter with Fr. Conor Kennedy that would eventually lead me to the Spiritan family. As St Paul wrote to the Romans: “We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called to his purpose.”<sup>6</sup> In particular, it was Fr. Kennedy’s untiring and dedicated service to the refugees from my native country and to the poor in his own parish that inspired and attracted me.

*...after eight months I was more convinced than ever that I wanted to become a Spiritan.*

In 1988 I decided go and meet Fr. Kennedy, this time not as a refugee needing help to survive my ordeal but as a young man aspiring to join the congregation to which he belonged. Fr. Kennedy did not immediately encourage me to join the Spiritans. Rather, he gave me a list of other congregations and told me to study their various charisms and give it a plenty of thought before coming to see him again. I did as he asked, but after eight months I was more convinced than ever that I wanted to become a Spiritan. It was not merely because Fr. Kennedy had helped me but because I wanted to be as helpful to others, in a Spiritan way, as he was to so many suffering people that had been squeezed to society’s periphery. Fr. Kennedy then began to take my request seriously and invited me to various “Come and See” gatherings with other young Malawian men who were also aspiring to join the Spiritans. I submitted my official application to the Vocations Director in 1990 and was accepted into the Spiritan formation program.

#### ***ANOTHER ARDUOUS JOURNEY***

*I had to learn anew the meaning of community living.*

In 1991 I was sent to South Africa for a two-year pre-novitiate program designed to help young men from Lesotho, South Africa, and Malawi to discern their vocation to the missionary life. Turning a refugee into a missionary needed the patience of my formators, my own pliability, and especially the help of God’s grace. I had to learn anew the meaning of community living after years of fending for myself in order to survive. My greatest hope lay in the encouraging attitude of those entrusted with my formation: Frs. John Moriarty, Bernhard Wiederkehr, Helmut Gerads, Heinz Kuckertz, Alberto dos Anjos Coelho, and the late Muziwakhe Michael Sibeko. I also drew encouragement from the biblical stories of the call of Moses, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and the like.

*It was not an easy road.*

It was not an easy road. During my years of formation I met many different personalities. Some of them were suspicious of my call, wondering if I had joined the Spiritans in search of security. Others seemed to interpret everything I did in the light of the fact that I was a refugee and somehow they ensured that I would never forget my background. Some asked questions about my ordeal but more out of intrusive curiosity, it seemed, than genuine interest. On many occasions I felt insecure and unaccepted and sometimes reacted with anger and frustration. But I had learnt from my previous hardships that self-pity would not take me anywhere. Real self-affirmation and a positive regard of myself had come only after repeated failure to understand that, although people had the right to hold whatever opinions they wished of me, in the final analysis it was I alone who had the choice of becoming the person I wanted to be. I knew I wanted to be a Spiritan and so obstacles on the road were both tests of my humility and challenges to overcome.

*João Luis Dimba...  
the first Mozambican  
Spiritan.*

Overall, I spent six years in formation in South Africa, two years of pre-novitiate, a year of novitiate, two years of Philosophy and a year of pastoral experience. I went to Tangaza College, Nairobi, Kenya, for four years of Theology and, in March 2001, I was sent to Zambia where I served as a deacon for close to a year. Altogether, my journey to becoming a Spiritan missionary took me eleven years. Finally, on May 18, 2002, I was ordained as a Spiritan religious priest by Bishop Rémi Ste-Marie of Dedza diocese in the frontier parish of Mzama, in the presence of my family members. It was a very emotional day. My Superior, Fr. Kuckertz, pointed out that “God can write straight on crooked lines,” but it was Fr. Kennedy who touched the deepest chord in my heart when he announced to the assembly that João Luis Dimba had become the first Mozambican Spiritan.

#### **Footnotes**

<sup>1</sup> The Mozambican Liberation Front.

<sup>2</sup> The Mozambican National Resistance.

<sup>3</sup> James W. Gibson and Michael S Hanna, *Introduction to Human Communication* (Dubuque: WC. Brown Publishers, 1992), 417.

<sup>4</sup> Samora Moisés Machel was the first President of the independent Mozambique.

<sup>5</sup> Bantu: a group of people believed to have originated from the Congo basin and to have migrated into Central, Eastern, and Southern Africa. Their languages have a common root and their cultures suggest a common origin.

<sup>6</sup> The Bible, Revised Standard Version, Rom 8:26.

Maxime Fumagalli  
(1940-2001)

An Aboriginal woman of the Nyoongar people, Maxime Johns was born in Woodanilling, South Western Australia. She was educated at the girls' boarding school of the New Norcia Mission and became an accomplished artist and poet at an early age. Married to an Italian immigrant, Maxime's aboriginal culture shines through her poetry and painting, expressing her love of the land and of nature, and the pain of her people.

*The poem expresses eloquently the call of the people and of the lake itself to the Spiritans...*

*In 1997 the 150th anniversary of the "failed" mission to Australia<sup>2</sup> was fittingly celebrated by a Spiritan pilgrimage to the site of the Sancta Maria Mission on the shore of Lake Mollyalup in Western Australia.*

*Providentially, the first Assembly of the Spiritan Oceania Region (comprising the Spiritan International Australia and Papua New Guinea Groups) was taking place in Perth at the time. The Assembly, which included the Superior General, the Provincial Superiors of several Spiritan circumscriptions, the local Bishop, and members of the clergy and laity, undertook a pilgrimage to Albany and Lake Mollyalup. A peak moment of the celebration was the reading by Mrs. Maxime Fumagalli of the poem she composed for the occasion, "Lake Mollyalup." The poem expresses eloquently the call of the people and of the lake itself to the Spiritans "to take up the challenge of where they begun."*

*The site of the Sancta Maria mission was rediscovered in 1960 thanks to the painstaking work of local priests, Frs. Noel Fitzsimons and Bernie Dwyer. After extensive archival research, enquiries made in the local area led the amateur archaeologists to Mr. Parsons, an elderly man of 90 years of age who still had a memory of the "holy place." It had been pointed out to him as a boy by the Aboriginal people of the time – "the place where the holy men with the long black frocks lived." An excavation of the site revealed the foundations of the stone fireplace and the wooden wall-posts. The foundations yielded up the remains of cooking pots and the remnants of two rosary beads, which carried the inscription of Libermann's Society "Sainte Marie, priez pour nous."*

*Lake Mollyalup, still a government reserve in pristine condition, is marked by a fitting monument to the missionaries erected in 1976 and a large cross from the 1997 pilgrimage. It continues as an annual place of pilgrimage for the local Church. Today Spiritans minister once again to the people of the area in the parishes of Albany and Mount Barker. Ministry to the Aboriginal people was declared a priority commitment of the Spiritan International Australia Group at its most recent Chapter.*



LAKE MOLLYALUP

From far off places, they had Journeyed  
Those Gentle servants of God Appeared  
Forsaking personal homes and Comforts  
Their commitment to love  
In the service of needs.

The lake is still calling  
It beckons and sighs  
Rekindles our spirits  
Like sparks in a fire

They came and they suffered  
It seems to say  
But I have been waiting  
To greet you today.

The prayers of those faithful  
Encompass my shores  
And call through the night  
To their God, and yours.

In their spirit of Commitment  
I implore, you to Come  
To take up the Challenge  
Of where they begun

Take up our Lords Cross  
That was their hearts, Desire.  
For miracles await  
That are ours to inspire

**Footnotes**

<sup>1</sup> We are indebted to Fr. Walter McNamara, C.S.Sp., for the text and background to this poem. It was carefully copied from the original respecting the grammatical construction, including capitalization.

<sup>2</sup> In September 1845, five members of Fr. Libermann's Society of the Holy Heart of Mary set sail for Western Australia at the invitation of Bishop Brady of Perth to undertake the evangelization of the Aboriginal people. From the outset the mission was marked by tragedy and disaster. One of the group, Fr. Maurice Bouchet, died about two weeks after arrival and the others were victims of Bishop Brady's unstable personality and administrative ineptitude. Forced to live in appalling conditions with no resources, the two remaining members, Frs. Thiersé and Thévaux, finally abandoned the small mission of Sancta Maria on the edge of Lake Mollyalup and set sail in September 1848 to join their community in Mauritius. A more detailed account of the failure of the Australian venture can be found in Henry J. Koren, *To the Ends of the Earth, A General History of the Congregation of the Holy Ghost*. Duquesne University Press, Pittsburgh PA, 1983, pp. 195-199.







*Spiritan Horizons* seeks to further research into the history, spirituality, and tradition of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit. In line with the aims of the Center for Spiritan Studies at Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, its overall goal is to promote creative fidelity to the Spiritan charism in the contemporary world. The journal includes articles of a scholarly nature as well as others related to the praxis of the Spiritan charism in a wide variety of cultural 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.

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