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# SPIRITAN NEWS

JANUARY 1978

Number 11

CONGREGAZIONE DELLO SPIRITO SANTO - CLIVO DI CINNA, 195 - 00136 ROMA

## SUMMARY

An Event: Centenary of the Church in Guinea  
Documentation: Spiritan Poverty  
News: A letter to the Holy Father - Official -  
Sierra Leone - Spain - France -  
Brazil - Cameroons - Our Dead

## An Event : 1877-1977

### The Church in Guinea is 100 years old

For three days, November 25, 26, 27, Catholic Guinea celebrated its centenary. We have tried to get some news of the celebration. Up to the moment of going to press, we hoped to have something. But it was not possible. Lacking any up-to-date news, we have to be satisfied with recalling the founding of that Church, as recorded in the *General Bulletin of the Congregation* (Vol. XI, pp. 363-375), and adding a few facts given in a recent circular from the Province of France (1977).

The first Catholic Mission in Guinea was begun at the end of November 1877 at Boffa, on the banks of the Rio Pongo, thirty-four years after Libermann had sent his first missionaries to the shores of Africa. Unlike many other missionary beginnings, this one was due to an appeal from the local chiefs. The plan dates back to the early part of 1875. The King of Thiã had just died. His successor, John KATTY, had three brothers, all Catholics and former students at the mission of Dakar. One of them wrote to Bishop DURET of Sierra Leone to have missionaries come to Rio Pongo, near present-day Boffa, an hour's walk from Thiã, the capital. Father MULLER came from Sierra Leone and met the king and his court in December 1875. The king's brothers used their influence and, according to the *Community Journal*, spoke "with dignity, warmth and conviction".

In spite of that, the year 1876 was difficult and trying: difficulty in getting help to cut and transport wood; European merchants who went back on their promise to supply necessary materials; illness of Father MULLER who "was sometimes obliged to stay in bed in his hut for days, fighting violent attacks of fever." He wrote: "The roof of my dwelling lets the water come in as if through a basket... To protect myself the best I could, I gathered around me all the furniture and utensils I had and, in addition, kept my umbrella open over me. But all that was of little use; and in an instant I was flooded."

Father had to leave for Sierra Leone and, while there, he heard that a tornado had destroyed everything at Boffa. When he returned, he had to begin all over again; even the wood had been stolen.

Work was begun again early in 1877. On June 17 the chapel was blessed and the mission dedicated to

St. Joseph. At the end of November, there were sent from Sierra Leone all the materials needed by the new mission...



... "furniture, vestments, library, various tools... But, by a piece of unimaginable negligence, the captain of the ship had not taken on enough water. The winds turned against them and they made little or no progress. The water gave out and for two days the passengers suffered cruelly from thirst. When they came close to the Loss Islands, the Blacks, in desperation to get water,

approached the shore without sufficient caution and caused the ship to be broken up on the rocks. All the furniture was lost. The case of vestments was found two hours later. It had broken open and the colors of the vestments had all run together."

The expedition set out again and in February 1878 there were thirty children at the mission. The *Journal* continues: "On Christmas Night (1878) we celebrated solemn mass at midnight and the children sang perfectly the plain chant of Dumont's Mass in Tone I. We were astonished at how much had been accomplished in so short a time... One advantage of the village of Boffa is that it is central, which makes it easy to work out from there to the surrounding area."

The Boffa mission remained rather poor, but very rich in its attachment to the faith. Guinea became a Prefecture Apostolic in 1897, then a Vicariate Apostolic in 1920. There were hardly more than 4,000 Catholics at that time. There are now ten times that number, but even that is only 2% of the population.

When Guinea became independent in 1958, there began a rapid Africanization of the Church. In 1967, the non-African missionaries had to leave the country and on Christmas Eve 1970 our confrere, Archbishop Raymond-Marie TCHIDIMBO of Conakry, was arrested. Since then, he has been enduring heavy trials with courage and strength. The Archdiocese of Conakry and the Prefecture of Kankan are temporarily being looked after by Bishop BARRY and the Diocese of Nzérékoré by Bishop TEA, acting as Apostolic Administrators.

About twenty African priests and an equal number of sisters, almost all Guineans, are continuing the apostolic work, aided by very devoted catechists. This may be the only case of its kind in the world where professional catechists have founded and direct their own school for catechists in the Diocese of Nzérékoré.

The Church in Guinea, especially when it is undergoing tribulation, is very dear to us. It is our duty to keep it in mind with that union of friendship prayer and sacrifice, which is the source of unity in the Universal Church.



Father René CHARRIER, Principal Superior of Congo (Maison Libermann, B.P. 1524, Brazzaville, People's Republic of Congo), has published in the August 1977 Bulletin of the District a five-page article entitled "Poverty of Dependence or Poverty of Co-Responsibility". He bases himself upon Chapter texts and upon his experience as Principal Superior. We give here a summary of his article. Naturally it lacks many of his nuances and the many quotations from Chapter documents.

Nowadays we are far removed in practice from the kind of poverty they taught us in the novitiate.

### Yesterday . . .

Everything was so clear then. We accepted, sometimes not without pain, that the poverty we freely chose placed us in a state of real dependence. We would never, or hardly ever, have questioned that material and psychological dependence which, while sometimes humiliating us, gave us rather total security. *The virtue of poverty, "one of the most important of the religious and apostolic life" (Const. 247),* was closely bound up with community life. We were all agreed in giving it a subtle, but also a wise, formulation "a fair and proper medium between abundance and want" (Const. 248). We excluded the superfluous and the luxurious, — nothing could be more normal, in spite of the relativity of those terms. But we also excluded the search for well-being (*Ibid.*), and that has a meaning. We agreed in admitting that we could not "dispose of any temporal goods without the permission of the legitimate superior" (Const. 239).

The spirit which kept guard over our poverty seemed to be a broad concept of medium poverty, respect for others, a poverty closely linked to obedience.

### . . . and Today

Things have been shaken up by our reading, by our study, by the Council, by our openness to certain currents of thought, by our apostolic work in a changing world, by our renewal programs. Our old convictions have been undermined and have been either modified or replaced by others.

When I re-read what the 1974 Chapter had to say on the subject, I see that a new direction was taken. It goes beyond respect for community goods and looks for a poverty which is a true sharing on every level, a throwing in of one's lot with those who are fighting for justice. It is no longer a question of depriving myself reasonably, but of trying to belong to Christ more fully and radically by means of poverty. (G.A., Nos. 40-41). Thus, since the recent Chapters, the key words have changed, to the point where the word SHARING practically replaces POVERTY. In our Provincial Chapters we speak of SHARING, of ACCEPTING, of SERVICE, of SOLIDARITY. We give, as examples of an attitude of poverty, the service of the Churches, accepting others, accepting material poverty, faith in the use of means which are poor.

So it is now a matter of sharing what we are, what we receive, what we do. We get beyond the strict limits of the community and think of the relatives of confreres, of other Provinces, of other

## Documentation : Spiritual Poverty Yesterday and Today

communities (C.D.D., No. 109), of the poor among whom we live (C.D.D., No. 93). The dimensions are no longer juridical and static, but mystical and dynamic. It is less a question of a vow, or even of a "virtue", of poverty, than of a spirit, an attitude, an attempt at faithful poverty which has to be constantly renewed. The 1968-9 Chapter defined Spiritual poverty as:

*"An interior detachment from material goods which leads us to an attitude of spiritual poverty before God and dependence on Him. From this flows a liberty of spirit that results in our complete dedication to the apostolate."* (C.D.D., No. 89).

In military affairs, when a strategy has been adopted, the service cadres simply have to go along as best they can. It is no longer possible to delay over picayune details. But we seem — and this is surely something new — to go so far as to include under poverty the disengagement from our works, planned or otherwise (C.D.D., No. 106).

The older way of looking at things placed poverty in linkage with obedience. It came more under the idea of religious authority. It was a poverty of dependence. Nowadays, we recognize the control of superiors, of course, but we say that it is not in this control that poverty consists (C.D.D., No. 99). Community poverty is no longer the sum of the poverty of the individuals with no other binding force than the role of the superior or the bursar. It is communication and exchange, giving and true, willing, sharing.

This seems to be today's ideal, always linked to our faith in Jesus Christ, always referred to the Gospel.

### In practice

How do we live that ideal as it is defined in today's terms? With our automobiles and our cameras, looked upon as necessary tools for our work or our necessary relaxation, we have entered fully into the civilization of consumerism and accumulation. We have lost the "working-class status" which used to give us our poverty of dependence. We even come to think that "it is better to be envied than to be pitied" in our efforts to be agents of progress.

We have been quick to realize that the medium standard of living has gone up and that this permits our standard of living to go up too. We have been quick to understand the demands of development which provides us with the opportunity to run big businesses for the benefit of those with whom we are sworn to make common cause. We have been quick to grasp the subtle play of "accounts for this" and "accounts for that" which permit us to have the goods of the Kingdom increase and multiply with the wisdom of the serpent and the simplicity of the dove. We have been quick to appreciate the value of charisms and quick to apply the principle of subsidiarity which permits us to keep our own account books without referral or accountability to anyone over us or to other members of the community.



### A definition which needs constant re-adjustment

In a world which is always trying to make progress and to expand (that seems to be a law of Creation), poverty is a quite relative term, at least in its applications, as everybody recognizes (C.D.D., No. 92). This is even more so in Africa: a low level poverty which might seem more evangelical reveals itself in fact as a humiliation, as a being held down. In a developing world, poverty cannot be taken as a lasting condition. To want at any price to present such a poverty as a model would be contrary to the tradition which runs all through the Bible from the "have dominion over the earth" of Genesis to the "everything is yours" of St. Paul (C.D.D., No. 93). We always have to come back to the Gospel and to Jesus Christ who promised the Kingdom to the poor.

The poor are those who give first place to unfailing confidence in Providence; those who do not store things up, who want to share what they have, even if it is very little. Poverty is not synonymous with under-development, but rather the antithesis of profit, of accumulation, of collecting things. Consummation, yes; but not storing up. Making use of, yes; but not capitalization. Sharing, yes; but not appropriation.

Poverty is only a means. Libermann liked to give a reminder of this:

*"We have not vowed a cult of poverty like the followers of St. Francis of Assisi. Our objective is the apostolic life; poverty for us is a consequence and a necessity of our religious and apostolic life" (N.D., XIII, p. 678).*

The 1968 Chapter stressed this also:

*"Spiritual poverty, ordained to union with Christ, the source and model of the missionary apostolate, gives rise to essentially apostolic virtues" (C.D.D., p. 49).*

Our poverty is at the same time renouncement and sharing. Can it have value as a sign if our life does not let something else show through it, — a vision of something beyond material goods, the revelation of the great Poor Man, Jesus Christ, the Son of God made man?

### Shadows . . .

We sometimes need to re-examine our attitudes with respect to that great Poor Man. Certainly we have to live, and to keep the works alive that we have begun or taken over. But periodically, as a

sort of retreat of conversion, we need to re-examine, to question, our poverty, as we practice it.

I need to re-examine, to question, the work that takes up three-quarters of my time and satisfies my taste for activity and turns me into a big business man. We need to re-examine, to question, the extent of our property of which a good portion is unused or unusable. We need to re-examine, to question, the relative portions of our life given over to material work and to apostolic work; the time given over to machines or to farming as against the time spent in study and prayer. I need to re-examine, to question, my individualism which I modestly call respect for others but which cloaks an ownership mentality and keeps me from sharing with others in prayer, discussion, decision-making.

I need to re-examine, to question, my attachment to my assignment and my function to the point of beginning to feel, in one way or another, as if I owned it and could never accept a change (C.D.D., No. 95). We need to re-examine, to question, our presence in a place where we are established when it is high time we passed the torch on to somebody else. We need to re-examine, to question, our cultural prejudices, our Western predominance. We need to re-examine, to question, our conversations in which the subject is so often money and business and the condition of the roads. We need to re-examine, to question, words and attitudes which keep us in the role of impenitent lords in a country which we have doubtless adopted but where, in spite of everything, we are only travellers, in a Church which we have made to increase but where we find it hard to decrease ourselves.

To be poor is to attain a certain state of serenity and an absolute confidence in the Spirit who is in us, to occupy ourselves about the present with assurance and not be too anxious about the future.

### . . . but bright spots also

We must also recognize that we have made progress in solidarity on the level of our communities and our Provinces, on the level of aid to the poorest and of cooperation in development ( . . . ).

Our poverty has its shadows, but it also has its bright spots. It is this that can give us hope and serenity.

But we have not yet reached the end of the Gospel road.

## NEWS

### A Letter to the Holy Father

At the end of the Synod (October 28), Father GENERAL wrote to the Pope to assure him of the attachment and loyalty of all Spiritans, to deplore "the regrettable obstinacy of Archbishop LEFEBVRE" and "the division he is causing in the Church". Father TIMMERMANS stressed the spiritual renewal which he finds in the Congregation and "the greater attention being given to new missionary situations". He asked for a special blessing for the young

Spiritans who are leaving for Pakistan as an international missionary team.

On November 10, Cardinal VILLOT replied:

*"Pope Paul VI was very happy to receive your filial message of October 28. He thanks you for having confided to him your worries and your hopes, and for assuring him of the very loyal attachment of the Congregation to his person and to his ministry. The Holy Father wishes with all his heart that the trial you referred to may become more and more a source of fidelity to the Church and of apostolic generosity among his dear Spiritan sons. He is happy to hear the good news you write about their*



spiritual tone, and their attention to new missionary situations. To all, and to each one individually, beginning with yourself – their Father who is so attentive to understanding and encouraging them – the Pope gives new assurance of his affection and his confidence and he grants a special Apostolic Benediction . . .”

## Official

- The General Council has appointed for second terms: Father Paul ROPTIN, Principal Superior of Madagascar, effective January 18 (Council Meeting of November 11); and Father René CHARRIER, Principal Superior of Congo, effective November 11 (Council Meeting of November 29).
- After visiting Angola and Canada and going to Germany after Christmas, Father GENERAL will visit Senegal, Mauritania and Sierra Leone during the month of February.
- New address of the Principal Superior of Cabo Verde: Rua Tenente Valadim, PRAIA, Republic of Cabo Verde.
- New telephone numbers:
  - Spiritan House in Dakar (Senegal), residence of the Principal Superior: 246-98.
  - Spiritan House in Bangui (E.C.A.), residence of the Principal Superior: 61, 00, 02.

## Sierra Leone

The District Chapter was held from December 12 to 17. It was preceded by “renewal days” animated, at the request of the confreres, by Fathers GROSS and DALY who were visiting the District. At two-day meetings in Kenema, Freetown, and Bo, they each gave a conference, stressing our Spiritan vocation today. It was not so much a matter of “holding discussions” as of living together in a spirit of prayer.

## Spain

The Spiritans in Spain present a weekly radio program over RADIO INTERCONTINENTAL. It is heard on Saturdays and is called “Missionary Time”. A man and a woman announcer speak alternately, dealing with the situation in the Third World today, Today’s Mission, and the possibility of the hearers taking an active part in it in conjunction with the Spiritans either in Spain or in the Third World.

Some of the themes treated: The Church in the Third World; the Meeting of Young Spiritans in Aranda; the commitment of four young Spanish Spiritans to missionary work; the Church in Africa today; how to live our faith on a universal level . . . (from “Conducteurs d’émission” received at the Generalate).

## France

There is nothing exceptional in three Brothers making profession, nor in two of them taking perpetual vows. What was exceptional in Chevilly on October 8 was that, for the first time, the vows were received in the name of the Congregation by Brother Jean-Pierre DELSARTE, Delegate of the Brothers on the Provincial Council of France. The exceptional indult given by the Sacred Congregation for Religious for this occasion points up for everybody the importance, the riches, and, at the same time, the place held in the Congregation today by the religious Consecration of lay people.

(Province et Mission, Paris, November 1977)

## Brazil

● The second meeting for Spiritan Formation in Brazil was held at Villa Alpina (Sao Paulo) on October 4. There were 11 confreres present, all with various responsibilities for the animation and formation of vocations, or for youth and family pastoral care. The pooling of experiences showed that vocations come from quite different environments, the condition being that there be openness to the diversification of ministries inspired by the Spirit in the Church.

Three decisions were made:

- that the Portuguese confreres should participate in future meetings;
- that Father Mario Clemente NETO (rua Mangalot, 353 Vila Mangalot, C.P. 11877, 05132 Sao Paulo – S.P. – Brazil) be named coordinator of all activity and publicity concerning vocations and formation, including that done for other congregations; that he be in charge of informing the confreres in Brazil of all such matters. It is hoped that he will be able to take part in the meetings of the different Spiritan Districts;
- that more time (2 days, instead of only 1) be given for future meetings, beginning with the next one in July 1978. That meeting will be especially devoted to a study of the new ministries in the Church.

● On December 4, the first Brazilian of the District of South Brazil, Pedro K, IWASHITA, was ordained priest by the Cardinal Archbishop of Sao Paulo in the Spiritan parish of Vila Mangalot.

## “Ad limina” visit of the Bishops of Cameroons

The 17 Bishops of Cameroons (11 of them natives of Cameroons) came to Rome in mid-November. After 87 years of apostolate, the Church in Cameroons is solidly established with its 13 dioceses and 1,630,000 faithful.

Bishop VERDZEKOV, President of the Episcopal Conference, reported to the Pope on the principal problems of the Church in Cameroons: sacerdotal and religious vocations, pastoral care of the young and the formation of the laity. He also spoke of the pastoral care of the family, of the problems posed by urbanization, of the lack of means of social communication (EFFORT CAMEROUNAIS, a national Catholic newspaper, has ceased publication). He stressed the need for a biblical approach to pastoral work and the efforts at dialogue with Moslems.

In his reply, the Pope touched upon 4 aspects of the ministry of the Bishops:

- the solid formation of future priests,
- Access to the World of God,
- Creation of Christian communities which are alive, welcoming, and able to face the problems posed by urbanization,
- Civil and religious education.

## Our Dead

- Oct. 29: Fr. Francis TROTTER (USA/W) 70 yrs.
- Nov. 16: Fr. Josephus van de VEN (Holland) 62 yrs.
- Nov. 27: Fr. Henricus GROENSMIT (Holland) 60 yrs.
- Nov. 29: Fr. Antonius de WINTER (Holland) 63 yrs.
- Dec. 2: Bishop Emile VERHILLE (France) 74 yrs., former Bishop of Fort-Rousset (Congo).