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SPIRITAN NEWS

November, 1978

Number 17

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

SUMMARY

EVENT/DOCUMENTATION: The Superior General's visit to Brazil.

NEWS: Kwara-Benue - Nominations - Rome - East African Foundation - Francophone African Foundation - France - Equatorial Guinea - Guinea Conakry - Our Jubilarians - Our Dead - Beatification.

Event/Documentation.

THE SUPERIOR GENERAL IN BRAZIL: A two-month visit.

This is the fourth visit of a Spiritan Superior General to Brazil. The importance of this event is emphasised by two facts:

- the duration of the visit: two months (July and August) spent in various Spiritan Districts in Brazil;
- the presence there also of two General Assistants: Father General was preceded by Father TORRES NEIVA, June to mid-July; Father THEILMEIER then accompanied the General throughout his visit.

We considered it interesting and useful to treat at length of the the general direction being taken as a result of these visits and to put this in the context of the development of our Spiritan endeavour in Brazil from the beginning.

"... The Standard of the Congregation ..."

These were the words of the first Spiritans to set out in November, 1885, for Amazonia. They were 11 in number, all Frenchmen: 7 Fathers, 3 Brothers, 1 Scholastic. They described themselves as:

"the young colony appointed to plant the standard of the Congregation on Brazilian soil for the first time" (Bulletin of the Cong., Vol. 13, Page 1360, Nov 1886).

The phrase is reminiscent of the triumphalist spirit of the times but the underlying reality is quite different: it draws our attention to the fact that in that vast territory of the Amazon (almost 1900,000 miles) only 6 or 7 priests remained.

The work of evangelization had begun two centuries earlier, about 1660, with a few Carmelites or Jesuits: these were followed by Franciscans and Fathers of Our Lady of Mercy. It was the old Bishop of Belem (Amazonia) who, with the approval of Rome, invited the Congregation to take over the Seminary of his immense diocese. The General Council decided to accept.

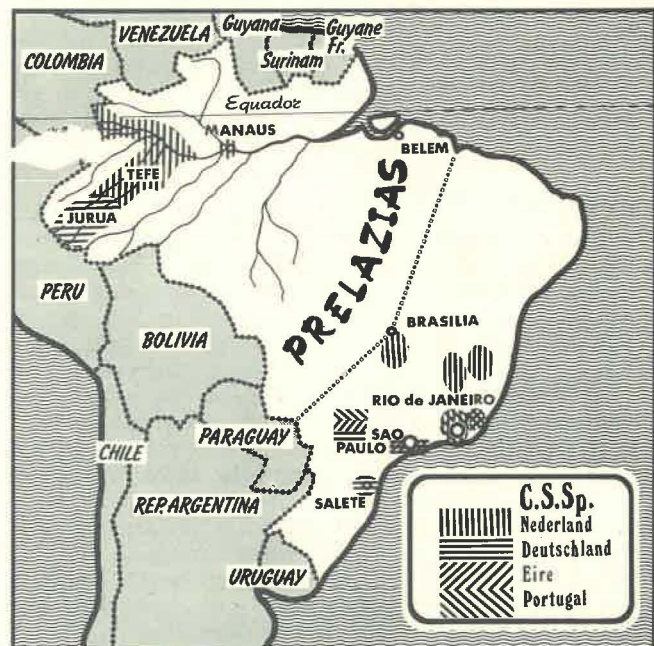
Twelve years later the Spiritans left the Seminary for Manaus and Tefe, on the Amazon, some six hundred miles to the west of Belem. Difficulties were not lacking: bad health, great distances, a sparse population scattered over a wide area. In spite of

In 1978/79, the General Council intends to visit the four Provinces numerically the largest. These visits have been preceded by a lengthy visit to Brazil of Father General and two General Assistants.

It is the intention of the Information Service to give an account of these visits for the benefit of the Congregation at large, under the heading, "EVENT". In each instance, it will devote its "DOCUMENTATION" also to one or other aspect of the missionary endeavour of the Province or of the territory being spoken of, to complete the picture. We wish to make this clear so that our readers may not be surprised by the prominence given to a single Province in one and the same issue.

The programme of publication we anticipate, therefore, will be as follows: Nov, BRAZIL; Feb/March, HOLLAND; April, FRANCE; May/June, IRELAND; July/Aug, PORTUGAL.

that priority, was always given to training of local priests on the spot. There were in fact, several such, as well as 7 or 8 Brazilian Spiritans, trained



Of 194 Spiritans in Brazil, 18 are natives of the country. These Spiritans are dispersed over five Districts as follows: Amazonia, 25, mostly Dutch; Upper Jura, 21, mostly German and including 1 Brazilian; Central Brazil, 46, mostly Dutch but including 5 Brazilians; Southern Brazil, 33, mostly Germans with 5 Brazilians; South-West Brazil, 42, all Irish. We should add to these a sixth group composed of 20 Portuguese, formerly for the most part from Angola, and 7 professed Scholastics studying Theology in South Brazil: there are 8 other non-professed Scholastics in Philosophy, who will enter the Novitiate next February.

in Europe: 5 of the latter, in their sixties, are still at work in Brazil.

The extension of the apostolate to Teffe (1897) and later to Upper Jura led to the establishment of new fields of evangelisation: the Prelacies. That of Teffe (1910) was given into the care of French Spiritans: in 1947 it was transferred to the Province of Holland. That of Upper Jura (1935) was confided to the Province of Germany.

To bring missionaries from Europe or to train a local clergy: were these the only solutions possible? Already other Congregations, established in almost all the Prelacies, had directed their attention to the South Coast. Implanting themselves solidly there, they found religious vocations for "their" Prelacies. While it is true that as early as 1915 a Portuguese Spiritan of Brazilian ancestry, a former missionary in Angola, had founded a "School for Abandoned Children" in Rio, the experiment was a personal one and was not followed up.

After Twenty-five Years Delay.

It was only after the Second World War that the Spiritans settled in Central and South Brazil. In 1950, Dutch Spiritans were in Teresopolis (Rio) and Germans in Sao Paulo. In the beginning Teffe and Central Brazil (Rio-Teresopolis) were a single District: since they were more than 1700 miles apart, this was merely a legal fiction. A similar relationship obtained between Jura and South Brazil (Sao Paulo). These new Districts were commissioned by the General Chapter of 1950 to each prepare to become a "Brazilian Province" with a view to recruiting vocations for the service of the Prelacies and the Congregation in general.

It was only in 1963 that four truly distinct Districts could be seen to exist. The arrival of other Spiritans – Irish (1960) and Portuguese (1976) – and the fact that they settled in the same coastal areas, explains the complexity of Spiritan presence in Brazil.

Juxta-position of Districts.

These "groups" very quickly developed on lines different and distinct from each other. The Dutch, striving to meet the needs of widely-differing areas, insisted on the apostolate of the family or the service of the poor or the developing of basic communities. The Germans, working in more traditional areas, directed their attention to the recruitment and training of priests and used parish ministry as a help to that end. The Irish, the last to arrive and mostly young, sought to define more precisely their policy of Apostolate. The immediate concern of all, at least in the beginning, was for vocations: in fact, in 1966 and 1967 several Brazilians were ordained. Unfortunately, the world crisis of vocations in the troubled years of the sixties made such effort largely fruitless. Other Congregations also had similar experiences but being longer established found it easier to face and overcome the difficulties. As a re-action to these setbacks, many Spiritans dedicated themselves almost exclusively to the formation of the laity, in the hope of a later "flowering" of vocations. By contrast, the worst of the crisis was over when the German confreres began their work of formation for the Priesthood. They held on to their seminary almost stubbornly and it is there that new hope for the Congregation in Brazil has sprung up. Already, there are 15 scholastics in training in Sao Paulo and on the coming February 2nd, the Novitiate will open its doors anew at Salete (about 300 miles from Sao Paulo).

"PRELACIES" IN BRAZIL

There are 40 Prelacies in Brazil: they are ecclesiastical districts each with its own Bishop, and they cover the most thinly-populated and least developed areas of the country. The other half of Brazil is divided into 181 dioceses (1977 figures).

The title itself is a survival from the past, a diplomatic ploy, in an era when it was not becoming to admit that "the land of the Holy Cross and the greatest Catholic nation in the world" had so many "mission territories". Quite apart from this, the juridical consequences of this were, and indeed still are, most inconvenient at the least. Though their problems were typically missionary, the Prelacies did not depend upon what we now call "The Congregation for the Evangelisation of the Peoples."

All the Prelacies are in the care of Religious Institutes most of whose members are "foreigners". It is not surprising therefore that they are strongly influenced by the cultural and religious spirit of the various countries of origin of the clergy: U.S.A. Germany, Austria, Holland, France, Italy, Spain, etc. Popular devotions too in each correspond with those of particular Institutes or cultures.

The Challenge of the young Brazilian Spiritans.

About 100 Spiritans from the Coastal Districts met with Father General in Sao Paulo: each group gave a short history of its beginnings and subsequent development. In each case, this proved to be something of a revelation to the other groups, absorbed as they were in their own undertakings. At the level of District Superiors, it is true, an effort had been made to harmonise the activities of all. The new and hopeful fruit of this meeting however was, on the instance of the young Spiritans of Brazil, the will expressed to collaborate more closely in the future – and that not merely at the level of those in charge. A request for other meetings of this kind, including representatives of the distant Prelacies was also strongly supported. To give practical and immediate expression to this new spirit, it was resolved: that no District would begin a new enterprise in its own area without having previously discussed it with the other Districts.

This determination to exchange views and collaborate more closely finds expression in a Brazilian neologism: "A interdistrictalidade", which we might best translate by the word "interdistrictality", as representing the idea it seeks to convey.

It did not stop there.

THE SISTER CHURCHES

Since 1968, the Episcopal Conference of Brazil has rallied to the assistance of the Prelacies. The term "Sister-Church" is used to describe a Prelacy adopted by one of the dioceses in the South, which undertakes to help, not only materially but by an exchange of personnel, priests, religious and lay-people. While praising highly this laudable effort, we may not forget that many Southern dioceses are themselves heavily dependent on outside aid.

Over-all statistics for Brazil in 1975 show: 25% of the Bishops are from abroad; of 12,600 priests, 5,200 are foreigners. 40% of male religious and 10% female religious (out of 59,000) were also from abroad.

While not the the ultimate answer to the problem, this twinning of "Sister-Churches" is a very definite expression of the missionary spirit of the Brazilian Church. But, further progress will come only when these "Prelacies" themselves become dioceses with their own Brazilian Bishops and Religious Congregations ready to serve them, with the help of the other Bishops of the country.

The Priorities of the Congregation are our Priorities.

The young Brazilians present threw out a challenge to all the groups: thrilled as they were by the Missionary Project of the Congregation, their vision of the future looked to horizons greater than those contained in the narrow spectrum of the separate Spiritan groups. Was it so important to be associated with a particular grouping, be it German, Dutch, Irish, or Portuguese? What in their view was important was that, above the barriers separating group from group, we close our ranks about the options proposed by the Institute. The logical consequence of this would be, when the time seems ripe, to set up juridically a single province of Brazil.

It is not their desire to be "stop-gaps" in the different Districts. They wish to give vital witness to the ideal of the Congregation in the service of the Mission to Brazil. These young Brazilians want, certainly, to be missionaries in Brazil; even more, they wish to be at the service of the Congregation for all the priorities adopted by her. And so, they are ready also to serve outside Brazil. In these terms then they shared with all their Spiritan brethren present, the questions that agitated them, the aspirations that motivated them and their hopes for the future.



Renewal of Vows at Vila Mangalot: Feb 2, 1976.

Vila Mangalot.

Vila Mangalot is a very real sign of that hope. It is situated in Sao Paulo and has only recently been acquired by the Congregation. It is intended as a residence for our young Brazilian Spiritans and each of the Districts has undertaken to co-operate to

A MEETING OF 100 SPIRITANS IN SAO PAULO

A great moment in the history of the Congregation in Brazil was the coming together of 100 Spiritans in Sao Paulo from July 24-27. It was the first meeting of its kind and takes its place among the many meetings of this nature taking place in the Spiritan world these days: thus, ARANDA (Spain) in August 1977 with 134 present, KENYA (East Africa), 130; not to mention the "Annual Congress" of 110-140 missionaries on leave each year in the Province of France (Chevilly).

make it a success. This is not a Foundation such as those we know in Africa but that is the optic in which it begins: and in the hope that ultimately, when unity around the ideal desired by the General Council has become reality for all working in the Districts, the Province of Brazil will come to be.

A step forward has been taken: the barriers inherited from the past begin to fall. This meeting with the Superior General in Sao Paulo has opened up fresh perspectives, initiated a new policy which will in time become more definite, take root and develop with promise of a rich harvest.

SOME IMPRESSIONS GATHERED BY THE SUPERIOR GENERAL

"... Brazil is a land of contrasts: exteriorly, thanks to a remarkable infrastructure, a strong industrialisation, it appears very rich; but, when one examines closer, one becomes aware of great poverty and the most shameful exploitation of many in most obnoxious form by the forces of Capitalism, both National and Multi-National..."

"... There is also a marked contrast between the North and the South. Those in the Prelacies live under very difficult conditions: they are very isolated from each other by the immense distances that separate them and an absence of roads enabling them to meet more easily..."

"... Both the Bishops' Conference and the Conference of Religious are very influential and work together to an admirable degree. The Bishops, for the most part, are very committed to the defence of the interests of the poor, and their attitude is reflected in the realistic vision and clear pastoral approach of the Church in general. The Religious, on their side, provide a very wide range of service, including the widest possible diversity of opportunities for renewal..."

"... Great importance is attached to basic communities, to a liturgy that is lively and well-adapted, to the laity and to interventions in favour of justice..."

"... The Church in Brazil becomes more and more mission-conscious. Besides its commitment to the Prelacies, it seeks to open up dialogue with the African Church for an exchange of view and joint reflection on the Mission To-Day..."

NEWS

We sometimes receive letters reproaching us for not giving certain items of news or for not publishing certain statistics.

It is true that in estimating what is likely to be of most interest to our readers we have sometimes to set aside some of the information we have received. Nonetheless, frequently the complaints refer to news or statistics of which we are not aware in the Information Service. We make our selection only from what has been received directly by us or indirectly through the General Secretariate.

District of Kwara-Benue (formerly Kabba).

The District of Kabba, where 24 Canadian Spiritans and 1 Nigerian Spiritan work, has been re-named KWARA-BENUE, the names of the two Nigerian States so called.

Father Rhéaume SAINT-LOUIS has entered into his second three-year period as District Superior. (Dec. Gen Council: 17 April, 1978).

Address: P.O. Box 2, Kabba (Kwari State), Nigeria.

Nominations of Superiors.

On Sept 11, the General Council confirmed the two elections below: Principal Superior, South Brazil: Father

Bruno TRACHTLER (with effect, 6/8/78); Provincial of Trinidad: Father Michel de VERTEUIL (with effect, 12/12/78).

Rome.

Fr Roland Quesnel, C.S.Sp., of the Province of Trinidad has been Editor of the English Edition of International Fides Service for the past 11 years. With a very limited budget and working virtually single-handed, he has rendered sterling service to the Church and its missions. As he leaves to take up a teaching post in Blackrock College shortly, we take the opportunity to say: thank you, Roland for your work and fraternal example: all happiness and success in facing this new challenge. We look forward to your return.

East African Foundation

The East Africa Foundation began in 1970. In 1973, a Novitiate was established in Tanzania, at Usa River. Since that time 15 novices have made profession, 4 of whom have since left. At the time we write there are 5 in the novitiate. Of 5 ordained to the priesthood so far, 3 are already working as missionaries in nearby Zambia. Several ordinations annually are foreseen for the years to come.

Recently, to relieve pressure of numbers at Usa River, a new property has been purchased for the novices, aged 23-30 years. It is situated at Lushito in the Usumbara Mountains, "the Switzerland of East Africa". It stands in 22 acres of mostly fertile land, which it is hoped will enable the community to be self-sufficient.

French-speaking African Foundation.

The first year of the Francophone African Foundation ended on Sept 23 with three Professions: one from each of the following countries - The Cameroons, Gabon and Senegal. The Novitiate will open again in a year or two (Cf. INFORM. SPIR., May-June, 1978).

France

Four of the Regional Directors of The Pontifical Aid Societies in France are Spiritans. Another Spiritan is National Director for the Holy Childhood. Most of these are at home from the missions for a time and hope to return: they are aged 39-51.

Equatorial Guinea

There were 50 Claretians working in Equatorial Guinea in 1965. Since last July, there remains only one old man of 85. His last six remaining confreres, aged 57-82, were expelled at that time; three of them had spent more than 45 years in Guinea. All were accused of plotting against the State because they learnt secrets in the confessional! Almost all the local-born priests, thirty in number, are in prison.

This expulsion coincided with a ban on Catholic worship. Macias, the President, objected to full Churches, especially as the people came without compulsion, because they wanted to. He thinks in this way to put an end to the Catholic Church.

"Life President... and Unique Miracle of Equatorial Guinea", Macias lives in isolation in his palace at Bata, which was built by French labour and decorated to excess to gratify his obsession. He has long since given up

visiting the capital, Malabo, because the people of the former Fernando Po are so hostile to him.

Earlier on, the President had tried to undermine the Church by introducing a cult of his own person in a mixture of religiosity and idolatry. Thus, "In the name of the Father" was replaced by "In the name of Macias". He introduced by force into the liturgical action expressions praising him and condemning imperialism. He even decreed that during the Eucharist a proclamation be made as follows: "Nothing without Macias: all through Macias".

Sisters living in the country have also been imprisoned or expelled. Eight of them, teachers, were driven out last June, on the grounds that they were spying for the Spanish Government. They were allowed only 10 minutes to pack.

At the time of Independence in 1968, there were 300,000 people in Equatorial Guinea. Since then, a quarter of the population has fled into neighbouring countries. Christians represent 90% of the population and 80% of these are Catholics.

By destroying the economy, by imprisonments, massacres and expulsions, Macias has reduce his country to be nothing more than a head on a body that is falling apart. How can a country in such a state ever be restored?

The President is protected from any attempts to overthrow him by 400 Cubans, half of whom are "military advisers". The regime is supported by the U.R.S.S. principally and by other "socialist" countries. It takes advantage of general indifference to pursue a policy of brutality and extortion. The mass-media of the world can find little or no time and then only rarely to give the little news that filters through. Governments, African and others, will not break a lance in support of such a small people and the emigrants themselves have not the means to make their voices heard.

(Based on "Pueblos del Tercer Mondo", L'Année Politique Africaine, 1977, and International "Fides" News).

Guinea-Conakry.

President SEKOU TOURE of Guinea has made known to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kurt WALDHEIM, his desire to address the General Assembly of U.N.O. during October. He wishes also to be received by President Carter in Washington on the occasion of this visit and has informed the President that all political prisoners still detained in Guinea will be freed beforehand. Cf. the review, JEUNE AFRIQUE, 6/9/78, page 27).

Our Jubilarians.

70 Years of Priesthood: Mgr Moises Alves de Pinho, Portugal. DATE: Dec. 19.
50 Years of Priesthood: Fr John M. Lundergan and Fr Joseph A. Rossenbach, U.S.A./East. DATE: November 15.
50 Years of Profession: Br Lucien Dreau and Br Eustache Undreiner, France. DATE: Dec. 8.

Our Dead.

21 August : Br Laurent BANGRATZ (France), aged 72 years.
28 August : Fr Jerome DOODY (Kenya), aged 69 years.
3 Sept. : Br Laetantius TOUSAIN (Belgium), 67 years.
7 Sept. : Fr Antoine STIEGLER (France), aged 82 years.
11 Sept. : Fr Paul SCHOLL (Germany), aged 79 years.
13 Sept. : Fr Gerlacus REINTJENS (France), aged 83 years.
25 Sept. : Fr Jacobus van der LUBBE (Holland), aged 65 years.
30 Sept. : Fr Gaston COSSE (France), aged 78 years.

POSTPONEMENT OF FATHER LAVAL'S BEATIFICATION

Pope John Paul I had confirmed October 22 as the Beatification Day of our Father Laval and the Dominican, Father Coll. In consequence of the sudden death of the new Pope, the Beatification has had to be postponed to a later date, not yet fixed but probably in the Spring of 1979. Provincial and District Superiors have been notified to this effect by the General Council. As soon as the new date has been finally decided, it will be announced without delay so that pilgrimages already planned and cancelled may be organised anew. The next issue of "I/D" will be devoted to Father Laval and the SPIRITAN NEWS will list as far as possible books, pamphlets, etc, concerning him, available in the various Provinces and Districts.