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SPIRITAN NEWS

January 1979

No. 19

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

SUMMARY

- EVENT: The 75th Anniversary of the Foundation of Gentinnes.
- DOCUMENTATION: MADAGASCAR: Its first Spiritan Chapter.
- NEWS: Generalate Team - Ghana - Kongolo - Sierra Leone - South Africa - Our Dead.

The Event:

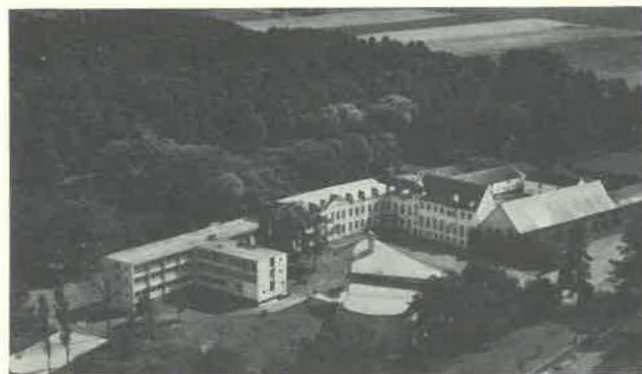
THE 75th ANNIVERSARY OF THE FOUNDATION OF GENTINNES (Belgium).

The Province of Belgium and the District of Bethlehem were both considered by the last Enlarged Council to be amongst the top priorities of the Congregation... In the NEWS rubric we touch on some of the difficulties of our District of Southern Africa. We avail of the opportunity given us by the 75th Anniversary of Gentinnes to speak of the development and present state of the Province of Belgium.

On December 29, 1903, there came to Belgium 5 Spiritan priests and 30 aspirants to the Congregation. Expelled from their homeland by the Anti-Clerical Laws of Emile Combes in France, they had left Cellule and Merville to settle in Gentinnes, in a gracious country-house donated by a wealthy merchant of Anvers. It was the same generous benefactor who had presented Mgr LE ROY with another of his properties at Lierre only three years before: that was in fact the first Spiritan Community in Belgium.

Less well-known than these facts is the interest LIBERMANN had in Belgium from the days of La Neuville. He had invited Mgr. COLLIER, Bishop of Port Louis (Mauritius) to explore the possibilities there in 1844, and the following year Fr TISSERANT, Prefect-Apostolic of Haiti, also tried: both had little or no success. In the same year, 1845, encouraged by Cardinal FRANSONI, Prefect of the S.C. of Propaganda, LIBERMANN himself went to Belgium. Armed with letters from Seminary Rectors on "The State of Religion in Haiti" and a plan to start a Novitiate in Belgium, he visited the different dioceses but received a negative reply in every case. Even though a copy of the Cardinal's letter had been sent to Liège, all his efforts were fruitless. Disillusioned, LIBERMANN said: "Belgium is not sufficiently prepared for the missions, to justify our opening a house there". (N.D. VII, 574).

It was a Spiritan from Normandy, Albert SEBIRE, a former missionary in Senegal, who had each year to visit Luxembourg for treatment of a liver-complaint, who was eventually to found the Province of Belgium-Holland, at the request of Mgr LE ROY. Instead of the "breach in the wall" hoped for this attempt was most successful. Between 1900 and 1933 Fr SEBIRE was to open 11 Spiritan Communities in Belgium and Holland. When he died in 1936, there



were more than 200 Spiritans and 500 aspirants in both Provinces!

With the coming of the group of young Frenchmen in 1903, it became necessary to extend the accommodation at Gentinnes. The invasion of Belgium in 1914 was a severe trial. During those four years of war, the community experienced all sorts of privation. Short of heat and light, food and clothing, health was undermined in many cases and 7 young members were to die.

After the Armistice, the French withdrew from Gentinnes, where more than 100 French missionaries had been trained. The house then became an "Apostolic School". In those years, Gentinnes gave to the Church 82 priests or religious, 56 of whom were Spiritans.

After the Second World War there was a marked decline in vocations. Gentinnes felt the back-lash and ceased to be an "Apostolic School". From 1945 until 1969 it operated as a boarding-school only, and at that time trained 18 priests or religious; 11 of these were Spiritans.

Since 1969, Gentinnes has become a "Centre for Spiritual and Missionary Animation", around the Memorial opened in 1967 to the memory of 217 missionaries, Catholic and Protestant, killed in Zaire since independence. This number includes, more especially, the 20 Spiritans martyred in Kongolo on January 1, 1962. The Centre receives some 2,500 people on retreat each year; yet, there has been little success in arousing vocations to the religious life: amongst those who did respond was a Spiritan Sister and a Spiritan Brother, a former doctor.

This is the background to the determination of the General Council, and of the Provinces and Districts, all of whom share the common projects, to provide as soon as possible an international team for Gentinnes. This gesture will be a concrete expression of hope in the future, not only of the Province of Belgium, but of the whole Congregation.

Opposite: "The Missionary": Memorial-Statue to Kongolo Martyrs.



Documentation :

MADAGASCAR: FIRST SPIRITAN CHAPTER A Realistic and Courageous Study.

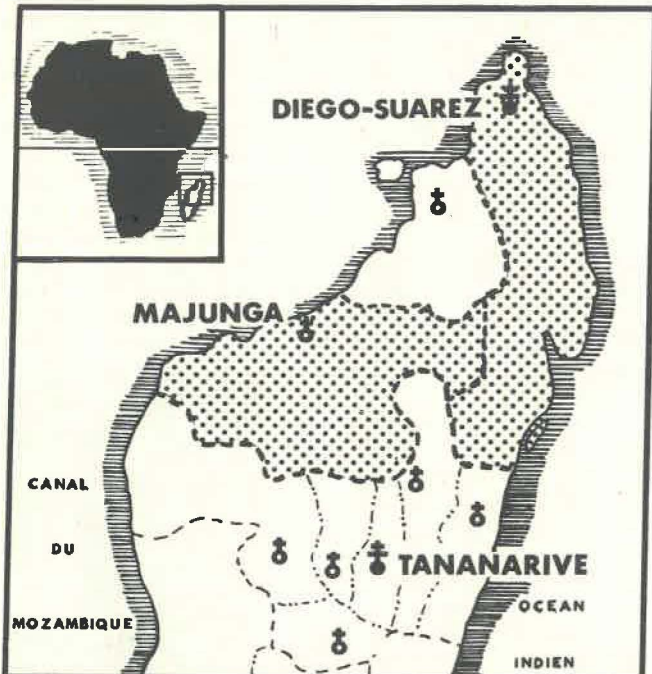
The document in question begins with a history of the development of the Church of Madagascar and of the part played in it by the Congregation. It places itself at the stand-point of the growth of a people as People of God. There follows a long section on "The Situation To-Day". This shows what the "missionary vocation" of the Spiritan is in Madagascar at the present time.

Community of Destiny.

We are urged to link our destiny to that of the people of Madagascar, not for ideological reasons but because of loyalty to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which makes us ever sensitive to the lives and aspirations of individuals and of groups of our fellow-men.

In our day the life of the people of Madagascar is affected in two ways: by the search of the people for cultural identity and by the adoption of socialism as a political system.

- Our desire to share the destiny of the people of Madagascar, therefore, encourages us to enter more fully into their culture: this will prepare the soil better for the planting of the Gospel seed. It obliges us, also, in the interests of the Gospel, to have clear ideas on what should be our attitude to the political system of the country. Finally, it demands that we learn to appreciate the positive elements in the life-style of the people "in order to recognise in them evangelical values to be encouraged" (G.A. No. 7.)
- In order to rid ourselves of any irrational fears or suspicions, as individuals and as a group, we



Means of communication between the two dioceses where Spiritans work (26 in Diego; 39 in Majunga) are not at all easy. Although the map might lead one to think differently, there are in fact no roads directly linking these two parts of the same District.

Between December 1977 and September 1978, 11 Chapters took place: 4 in the Provinces and 7 in the Districts. The Information Office has so far received and carefully studied the texts of 7 of these. Our first intention was to publish some of the more characteristic features of each. All reflect a serious consideration of our Spiritan Life, Prayer and Community to-day and are therefore valuable contributions to the work to be done in preparation for the Chapter of 1980. Indeed, had space allowed, each would have merited in itself to be treated in our Documentation.

However, faced with such an abundance of texts to be quoted if we were to be sufficiently complete, we decided that it would be preferable to limit ourselves to presenting one of these Chapters more fully. Our choice finally fell upon the Chapter of Madagascar, held in Majunga from April 10 to April 17 1978. Our principal reason was the realistic way in which it examined our Spiritan mission in the context of a Socialist political system.

should try to study and analyse objectively questions raised for the Faith by the political system adopted. We should likewise respect the system whether we are in agreement or not: "You must respect the Government chosen, even though it be Marxist" (Fr Timmermanns. Jan. 1977).

- We must identify with our people not only when things go well but even when all is not perfect and avoid anything that savours of pity or condescension in our attitudes and the temptation to take the easy way out when things are difficult.
- We should not seek to compete with the public authority in works undertaken by them, even if in the past we were justified in being concerned in these fields.
- Bearing in mind that we are in the service of a Church which wishes to be a witness to Christ, the poor servant of the poor, we should be careful of the means we adopt to further our apostolate and see that our standards of living are more in keeping with those of the people we serve.

This Community of Destiny is limited only by the fact that we are foreigners. We should live it humbly, in the Church, and in communion with the local Christian communities.

In brief, we must accept things as they are to-day and stop living in the past. As Libermann expressed it, "The world moves on and we remain behind: We should keep up with it, while always remaining faithful to the spirit of the Gospel" (N.D. X, 151).

New Attitudes Called For.

This obliges us to bear in mind what is happening in the country at this time: the introduction to Madagascar of a form of socialism intended to change society, to free "every man and the whole of man".

The document states what are the objectives of the régime: to change present habits of thought and action in view of making men more responsible and the adoption of practical means to this end. This entails new structures, new methods and programmes of Education, the use of Radio and Press and the establishment of training courses.

That will certainly upset some of our own pre-conceived notions and ways of acting. At the same time it will make us pay more attention to new calls upon us: to remain close to the people and groups called to set up these new structures, to purify our Faith by facing up to the questions these new and rapid changes pose – and those awakened in ourselves by the criticisms we hear of religion, or at least of the way it is lived, and denial even of the very existence of God. All that will require, too, a better understanding on our part of the language of modern man in Madagascar, in order that we may ourselves be the better understood when we talk of “the things of God”.

Libermann.

The capitulants sought to clarify their own thoughts by setting them against those of Libermann. This for many was a happy and welcome re-discovery of the original insights of the Founder, and gave rise to a better appreciation of his missionary priorities. These were seen indeed as providing a sound basis for present renewal.

Some of Libermann's Priorities.

The document then sets down some of Libermann's priorities: his call to the service of the most abandoned, the close links that should exist between “Christianising and humanising”, his opposition to all forms of oppression, his insistence on forming a local clergy and training lay-leaders. It also points out the importance he attached to religious life in community and his refusal to admit any dichotomy between prayer and action, faith and life. It speaks too of his doctrine of trust in God and of frequent recourse to the Scriptures, if one is to understand better God's Plan for men.

Libermann “Always Up-To-Date”.

The document goes on to point out how Libermann challenges us on the way we live out our community of destiny with the poor to-day.

Do we respect the dignity, the personality and cultural background of each?

It claims that the present policy of being sensitive to and of co-operating with the liberation movement in Madagascar is a fairly adequate response to the Founder's will “to liberate the whole man” and reflects the connection he saw between Liberation and Evangelisation: the Faith is not something we superimpose on those liberated but the source itself which gives to liberation its full meaning. This requires of us that we “shed Europe” and rid ourselves of all our prejudices (N.D. IX, 330).

Our aim is Evangelisation: the means, Community. Community is for us a place of witness, of renewal of our force (through prayer, Scripture, fraternal sharing and exchange, and the continuous formation it provides), and is the source of efficacious apostolic work. A missionary cannot live in isolation: it is with others that he shares responsibility for the evangelisation of the world of his day (Cf. 1849 Rule, 15 & 16.).

Through others, in Community life, we are made more sensitive to the calls, ever new, of the Holy Spirit. It also enables us to respond to such calls with greater audacity, greater creativity and disponibility, even if that means turning away from the well-beaten paths we know. This spirituality, so

close to the heart of Libermann, is most in harmony with a life of apostolate: it alone can make of our common and apostolic life something that is truly living, in the deepest sense.

The time spent in a serious investigation of the insights of Libermann, and in seeking to integrate them into their own lives, led the capitulants to say that they had all together been led to a “re-discovery” of Libermann and a better understanding of the “up-dating” being attempted in the Institute to-day. In their view, Libermann was a precious gift to the Congregation as a whole, and they considered it the duty of each and every one of us to make this bear fruit, so that we might share with others the rich heritage we had received from him. They had also discovered the dynamic power of a spirituality of active apostolate that was forward-looking and supported by an indefectible spirit of hope.

If, they conclude, we knew our Founder and his spirit better, we would better understand what it means to be in the service of Mission To-Day and be better able to discern what it requires of us.

There follow three short quotations from Libermann, of which we retain one: “*We should have an affectionate interest in all our fellow-men, whatever their views on religion or on ourselves: we should also respect their freedom to think and act as they think fit*” (N.D. IX, 248).

Looking to the FUTURE, the Chapter of Madagascar recalls the importance of Continuous Formation, of Renewal at District level and of financial solidarity. A long Appendix on “Spiritans and Money” seeks to establish a system of “pooling” monetary aid from abroad. Some may consider the proposals rather daring but they at least show how seriously the members of the Chapter sought to associate themselves with the political and Christian choices of the inhabitants.

Sharing: Spiritans and Money.

Realistically, the Chapter acknowledges the importance of money to the apostolate but points out that the fact that Spiritans have resources not available to local priests is a source of malaise: priests of the same diocese should be on an equal footing. New factors challenge our present situation: the plans for a new society gradually being implemented in the country; and the discussion of the material welfare of priests at the Synod of Priests.

The Chapter then goes on to express its aspirations: –

to live community of destiny with the people who receive us but bearing in mind that this community of destiny has its limitations. In part, it depends on us to change this, in particular in the matter of money and our use of it. Our will to live in community includes the will to share, financial resources included, in the community at local, regional, diocesan level, and inside the Spiritan District.

In consequence, the Chapter reminds the members of the District that, except in extraordinary circumstances (after reference to those with whom one lives and the District Superior), no Spiritan can have an account in his own name either in Madagascar or Europe.

As to necessary aid from outside in present circumstances, two cases are envisaged: a) Gifts for a specific purpose, which should correspond to the policy of the diocese and have the approval of all concerned, should be likewise used with the active interest of all concerned, in accordance with the intentions of the donors. b) Gifts received through us but unspecified. It was concerning the latter that many confreres sought a ruling which would give

practical expression to solidarity in the context of the Universal Church. The point in question is, the quality of our witness to poverty and our desire to free ourselves both of individualism and of paternalism.

If we wish to share as we claim, the argument goes, we should be open with each other and know exactly how much we really have to share. That calls for the loyal collaboration of all the members.

**An EXCERPT from the OBSERVATIONS of the MADAGASCAN PRIESTS
and RELIGIOUS invited to the CHAPTER of the DISTRICT**

"... Having assisted at your Chapter, we wish to express to you, our Spiritan brothers, our appreciation and thanks. (...). You did not choose to hold this reflection between yourselves, alone, but welcomed the views of others with whom you examined in depth the various questions proposed for your consideration. It was your desire not to work behind closed doors, relying only on yourselves: you did not exclude us but asked us to share with you..."

NEWS

STOP PRESS: The Beatification of Fr LAVAL and of Fr COLL, O.P., will take place on April 29, 1979

The Generalate Team.

Once the visits to Holland (1-31 Dec.) and France (Dec. 1 - Jan. 27), are completed, all the members of the General Council will be together again in Rome, from Jan. 29 to Feb. 4. Father General will continue in residence until March 4.

From Feb. 5 to March 15, Frs VAN SONSBECK and TORRES NEIVA will visit Portugal. From March 5-15, Frs GENERAL and SOUCY will join them; and Fr WALSH from March 11-15.

From Feb. 5 to April 11, Frs GROSS and DALY will visit the Province of Ireland. Frs GENERAL and WALSH will join them, from Portugal, on March 16 and will remain until April 11.

The whole of the General Council will be together again in Rome from April 12 until the end of May.

A new Spiritan District: Ghana.

On November 13, the General Council erected Ghana into a District. There are 19 Spiritans working there. After consultation, Fr Vincent MURPHY was appointed Principal Superiors. His address is: P.O. Box 4, Jamasi, Ashanti; Ghana.

Kongolo.

On November 8, the General Council appointed Fr Frans AUGUSTIJNS to be Principal Superior of Kongolo. His address is: B.P. 1212, Lubumbashi, Zaire.

Sierra Leone.

For the past 25 years, the apostolate in Sierra Leone has been shared by Spiritans (mostly Irish) and Xaverians (mostly Italian). Each group had its own area of the country to evangelise and contact between the missionaries was only occasional.

After both Congregations had completed visits to their respective confreres in Sierra Leone, their General Councils met in Rome, on April 29, and expressed regret that there was not more contact between their members on the mission-field.

Both Superiors-General sent a joint letter to their Principal Superiors in Sierra Leone inviting them to meet more frequently, and to encourage greater co-operation and communication between the two Congregations at

local level. They suggested common retreats, refresher-courses and courses of initiation for new missionaries, and exchanges of view on pastoral problems common to both. Ideally, this increased exchange should take place with the approval of the local Ordinaries. It is in collaboration with the local Church that collaboration of the missionaries of both Congregations with each other should take place. It is with the local Church also, and especially with the local clergy, that new pastoral strategies should be considered.

Both Generalates wish to be kept informed of the efforts made in this direction by confreres, and of the success or difficulties encountered.

Such a development is an expression of the common search to realise Mission To-Day: it would be desirable in many other countries as well as in Sierra Leone. In the name of internationality and of a more "ecumenical" orchestration of the efforts of all religious Congregations, this would give a better missionary witness to the local Churches and to the universal Church.

South Africa.

Mgr Hubert BUCHER, Bishop of Bethlehem since 1976, worked in South Africa as a Fidei Donum priest for several years before his appointment. Recently, he spent ten days at the Generalate. All his priests are Spiritans of the Province of Germany. They are 21 in number and their average age is 55 years: almost half are over 56.

At the District Chapter, last June, one of the youngest priests of the District was elected Principal Superior. He died before he could take office. He was only 39 years of age. The new Superior is Father JEHLE, aged 45.

This District is one of the first priorities of the Congregation. The Enlarged General Council decided to help provide personnel for the On-Going Formation of lay-leaders and catechists and for vocation-work, as there is not a single Senior Seminarist in the diocese. Given visa-restrictions, it is not easy to meet this commitment. Already three or four confreres have volunteered but were refused admission.

Our Dead.

Oct. 29: Br Alberic HEMON (France), aged 66 years.
Nov. 2: Br Lambertus BUYNSTERS (Holland), aged 67 years.
Nov. 11: Br Michel DREZEN (France), aged 81 years.
Nov. 13: Br Vital FERNANDES (Portugal), aged 64 years.