

10-1-1981

## 1981 Vol 29: Spiritans for Tomorrow

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### Repository Citation

The Generalate Team. (1981). 1981 Vol 29: Spiritans for Tomorrow. Retrieved from <https://dsc.duq.edu/id/31>

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## Spiritans for Tomorrow

**We have a dream.** To take up the area of Formation is to speak of our dreams, our visions for the future. It is to move beyond the reality of what we are to the hope of what we can be, of who we are becoming. It is more than that. It is to accept the challenge of tracing the hidden lines of a new world struggling to come to birth. It is indeed presumptuous, for there is too much of prophetic pretension in all this, but speak we must.

### A dialogue of hope

The Chapter of 1980, in its conscious movement towards the future, placed formation as a major priority of the animation of the General Council. Convinced of the ultimate seriousness of the enterprise and with great admiration for the enormous amount of progress which has been made in programs of formation throughout the Congregation, we propose to initiate an ongoing dialogue of hope, first of all with those who continue to devote themselves to the work of formation, and then with all the confreres. It is a dialogue which must look ahead to the year 2000 and far beyond. It is a dialogue which cannot rest comfortably in the false securities of history or in present achievements, but which must increase the momentum of our communal conversion to the one security, the one absolute: the Gospel Kingdom of Jesus, the Lord of history.

Over the past 15 years those close to formation work as well as interested observers from a distance have experienced deaths too numerous to capture in print: the loss of venerable and revered institutions, the confusion over values, the questioning of everything, drastic reductions in the numbers of our students, confrontations between authorities and students, between 'them' and 'us', departures of formation personnel.

But we have survived. There has been a pass-over to new life. We have not resolved all problems nor have we arrived at the Promised Land, but we do have formation programs throughout the Congregation today where there is an environment of serious pursuit of Spiritan values on the part of students and formation personnel working together in mutual respect and fraternity. What is more, there is a joyful presence to the One Master in an attitude of prayerful and open discernment of His will for the community.

With regard to the value of community, there is a quiet revolution taking place among younger confreres which holds a challenge for all of us. Ideals of community life which have been held in theory are taking on flesh among the young of today.

Christ's preferential option for the poor and the oppressed is taken seriously into account in the lifestyle and environment of houses of formation. Those responsible for formation are at ease in their role of brother as well as guide, with a specific role of servant authority (we no longer fear the word) in the community (cf. SL, 189).

And the new Foundations are a sign of hope holding special challenges to rethink, reevaluate and redo what to the Western mind has been taken too much for granted.

### Some lessons we have learned

Would it not be correct to say that the pain of the last fifteen years has been an opportunity for learning: for learning that formation is more concerned with 'being' than with 'doing'; that conversion takes place within, in the internal acceptance of values rather than in external conformity to a rule; for learning that the spirit of God speaks in the voice of the young as well as in the voice of authorities, and needs to be tested no less. Have we not learned that formation is person-centred and not structure-centred? Is not each candidate a gift from God to the Congregation? Have we not learned that his needs must be recognized, that he must be appreciated and affirmed in his uniqueness, personality, background, talents, values and aspirations, that his affective development must be given greater attention.

For the most part formation has followed the pattern of the Paschal Mystery of death and resurrection. "For the most part," because all is not sweetness and light. There are pockets of the Congregation where death is the reality and the tomb has not been emptied. There are areas where the suffering is great and the best efforts at vocation ministry and formation have only frustration to show for their efforts. There are formation personnel and major superiors who sense isolation and clouds of darkness in their struggle to revitalize and give new life to a Province.

There is another reality which we must face. There are confreres who for a variety of reasons have been wounded both psychologically and spiritually, whose response is to die inside to all that is alive and vital, who have lost their enthusiasm for

the Kingdom, for the mission of the Church, and for a joyful dwelling with others in community. Far from assigning blame, the Congregation must respond with compassionate concern.

## The future

But we must also ask hard questions about formation, so that we may do our very best to instill joy and enthusiasm and zest for living in the environment of our formation communities. With all the qualities of the younger generation, it has been remarked that there is a fragility and sensitivity which must draw our attention. Is this capacity to be wounded that of the compassionate Christ and which we sum up in the word 'vulnerability', or is it a fragility which needs to be integrated with a fortitude and courageous boldness which will stand up to the inevitable cross of daily living?

The insights for formation which come from the Chapter of 1980 have great value because they come from the experience of those who have borne the burden and the joy of formation work. They give expression to a consensus over some hard learned truths, some vital truths about life and humanity. The agenda for formation must be given the context of the entire agenda of Spiritans 1980: Mission today, the universal mission of the Church and the common project of the Congregation; commitment to the poor and to work for Justice and Peace; the new Foundations; life in community and new forms of membership; internationality.

**Let the world write the agenda.** Above all the Chapter had its eyes turned toward the future. It would be contrary to the spirit of the Chapter to treat any of its documents as inscribed permanently in monumental marble. The formation document gives us a dynamic plan for the future, a presentation of where we have arrived in the formation experience in order to lead us to a new destiny. There are criteria which are crucial in the discernment of the way towards that future. There are signposts which give us direction toward the world of tomorrow, the traces of which are already with us, the ultimate form of which remains unknown to the most perceptive futurologist.

**Formation for the future** was a concern of the SEDOS Seminar on the Future of Mission this year: *"Formation programs should not alienate candidates from the people with whom they are to work, especially the poor, by accommodating them to a more affluent class . . . Formation for leadership of communities should stress skills which facilitate communion, inaugurate social analysis, and empower people in the local Church. A new spirituality for mission will be needed to meet the challenges of the future . . . (This) includes not only individual practices of spirituality . . . but also the societal dimension of all these practices, particularly as they relate to justice."*

And the World Council of Churches, in 1979, gave us a description of today's missionary as a *"person of dialogue"* who *"listens to the other side, enters completely into the real life situations of people to discover their own questions, not ours; is ready and willing to give up our power and to give up the temptation to impose what we have to offer; sets aside our projects in order to discover with people their own projects; accepts the fact that we do not possess all the truth; has the ability to say yes to people in a creative and salvific way"*.

It is true that in the midst of much world confusion **the young are searching for something**, something which will challenge their idealism, their sense of the transcendent and their commitment to the creation of a better world. Even if the quest is often unrealistic and confused with countervalues, it is nonetheless a powerful force for the coming of the Kingdom. Even if we are referring to a minority, the young fishermen chosen by Jesus were a minority of twelve and were as confused as any generation which followed. In St. Luke we find the process of their formation. Jesus first places the disciples in contact with the world as it is, with its problems, with its situations of poverty and oppression, with the sin of the world. Then He places them in contact with Himself, the Way, the Truth and the Life.

## We are all involved

If we do not respond to the deep thirst of today's generation for authentic communities, authentic communities will rise up without us. It would be wrong to believe that the Congregation can be renewed by formation alone. The renewal of every community must go hand in hand with the renewal of formation communities or we shall find ourselves in a dead-end situation doomed to frustration.

The formation community, **and all communities**, must be concerned with LISTENING as well as tell-

ing. Each student and each confrere carries his own sacred, private personal mystery which cannot be violated. At the same time we must offer a place to tell our stories, our stories which need to be told. When the community is rooted in Christ, when He is at the centre of the community, then there is true freedom, maturity and self-reliance. Only in Him are the tensions between intimacy and openness, between the personal and the hospitable, between a nurturing community and an apostolic community, harmonized and reconciled.

The formation community, **and all communities**, must allow QUESTIONING. In a world used to satellites, microscopes and computer technology, if we avoid questions about the core values, we take the risk of fostering unhappy geniuses who know everything except why they live. We must offer a place where the right questions, the critical questions of life and death, are raised. Our communities can become gathering places where the great question raisers can search out meaning without fear.

The formation community, **and all communities**, must be PLACES OF BROTHERHOOD: *"To have companions of any kind suggests that a journey is being made, as indeed with all of us there is. It should be travelling toward gentleness, integrity and joyfulness, a destiny all of us long for but hesitate to imagine ourselves reaching, lest on arrival we be given new obligations to love. But, if we can travel with a band of inner companions, what tests can prove too demanding? It is not that the companions of our interior are meant to teach us matters of power and might. Instead we need them to share with us the wisdom of the obvious, to repeat and repeat for our stubborn minds what we never quite get right – that all of us are fragile, that the wealth of the planet should be shared justly and that nothing matters unless it is done with a perpetual fidelity to love"* (James Dunning). The more stress-filled, competitive and intense the situations of today's world, the more difficult it is for one to find real communion with another person. But if the young do not find community during the years when they are trying to find their place and their vision in life, the life search may well be bitter instead of exciting, narrow-minded instead of mature, cold and calculating instead of open and receptive.

The Spiritan community of formation, **and all communities**, must strive with all haste and energy to offer COMMUNITY IN CHRIST, neither a hotel nor a

human-relations board. Closeness can be experienced as fearful and demands a careful guide to find the vital balance which can lead to life at the service of the world, in which one can be committed and open-minded at the same time, in which the missionary commitment and Spiritan availability will mean leaving people with whom real community has been shared.

The formation community, **and all communities**, must be a PLACE OF TRADITION. We must distinguish, with Jarislov Pelikan, traditions which are the dead faith of living people from traditions which are the living faith of dead people. We must share the 'where from' of our common story, our roots, the accumulated wisdom of our forebears. We must gather around the fire and share the inspiration of our Scriptures, of our ancestors: Des Places, Libermann, Laval and others. With so many views competing for our allegiance, we need our tradition and we need each other to tell us that it isn't crazy to believe that the good life for us is founded on poverty of spirit, purity of life, the listening to God's word enfleshed in the community, the fulness of mercy, hunger for justice and the making of peace. Our traditions will give us a clear-eyed view of today and will carry us with confidence into the world about to be born.

Our formation communities, **and all communities**, must be a GATHERING IN FAITH, a place where God's presence is seen in the personal story of the community and of each of its members, a place where the pains of the present are the birth pangs of the mystery of a new creation.

Finally, our formation communities, **and all communities**, are called to be a PLACE OF CELEBRATION, a place where we rejoice in the Good News for the world and a place where we rejoice over the gifts that God has given to each one of us.

## Some concerns for formation

**The overseas, or crosscultural, experience** is a reality in almost all of the Provinces and has been of enormous benefit. Is there need for more guided reflection on the experience? Is there not the possibility of international collaboration to provide higher quality programs and more adequate structures? Let us think about it together.

**Spiritual direction:** the Chapter is not ambivalent (SL, 163). Each student should have a spiritual director (and is this not true for all of us?). Have not many previous experiences of spiritual direction been negative experiences to such an extent that they have become blocks to the exploration of present-day experiences of finding direction in the ways of God and a deeper faith insight into the needs of the world around us. The role of spiritual director differs significantly from the experiences which many Spiritans have had in the past. The spiritual director is the one who assists in the understanding, the objectifying and the articulating of the student's living of faith, hope and love, enabling him as a consequence to discern and respond to the motions from God experienced in

his own life within the context of the development of the Christian community. It is an indispensable aid to a deeper awareness of the world and its direction as a call to the student's faith and action. Skilled spiritual directors, trained in contemporary models of spiritual direction, are needed for our movement into the future.

**Specialization.** Each member of the Congregation is a precious gift whose richness of personality and human potential must be allowed to develop to the full. Diversification in the fulfilment of our common project seems to be a sign for the future. Is there not need for more flexibility and fresher approaches to the fostering of personal talents and gifts which are to be placed at the service of the Congregation in its carrying out of its mission?

**Community with the laity and other religious.** The major superiors of North America meeting in Puerto Rico this past January, reflecting on the Inter-American Conference of Major Superiors in

Chile, made the following statement: "We wish to draw special attention to the question of the liberation movement as it applies to women, and we propose that this topic receive attention at the various levels throughout the Congregation. . . . With regard to formation programs, the specific aspect of the issue is to ensure the ability of our members to work with women as equals." In the new world we simply must learn to enter with full enthusiasm into the great egalitarian movements of our time and bring to them the leaven of the Gospel. Surely our dreams for the future envisage Spiritans fully respecting the variety of vocations within the Church, in harmony and mutual respect collaborating for the building of God's Kingdom, ministering and missioning with Christians, men and women of other religious faiths, and all women and men of good will, willing to play a subordinate, supportive, anonymous role; and willing to learn how to serve from those we seek to serve. And surely this has implications for our formation communities.

**Internationality.** The Chapter saw internationality as the way into our future, but it left it up to all of us to translate this desire into programs and action.

First, we must clarify in dialogue the motives for internationality lest it become a slogan without content. We must deepen our understanding of the Gospel as the breaking down of all barriers of race, nation and culture. The new Foundations are signals of a new Spring within the Congregation, but, if we

do not learn to look at formation and indeed all reality through the eyes of our brothers in the Foundations, the promise of a new Spring will turn into division and polarization. A conversion is demanded – the same conversion of death to oneself in order to rise enriched by the beauty and dignity of the culture of the other.

Yet there is a subtle truth which we must not lose in our working towards internationality. Is it possible to be men without frontiers without being steeped in our own culture and without an intelligent direct concern for and insertion into the local Church of our origin. We must own our own culture in order to open ourselves to the culture of the other. There are two values to be balanced and integrated. But, in our journey towards the future, together we can and we must find a way of offering a variety of international experiences both to the formators and the students, to awaken and to foster an international spirit of openness and willingness to learn from the other. The quality of our missionary presence as well as the Gospel demands it. The future depends on it.

We have no wish to impose a uniform process of internationalization which will place all in the same mould, but we will offer opportunities, hopefully many opportunities, to respond to the desires of confreres both young and old, as well as to the demands of the Gospel, for the creation of a true community of brothers who are attentive to the subtle marks of the coming age and who discern the movement across frontiers as a sign of our times.

## The role of the Generalate Team

In these early days of the present administration of the General Council we wish to encourage all those directly involved in the work of formation. We depend on you for our future. Together with you we will aggressively move toward that future with confidence.

We commit ourselves to the work of animation, coordination and communication for the unity of all, with deep respect for the rich variety of cultures which define who we are for the Church and for the coming world of tomorrow.

We commit ourselves to come to the aid of those Provinces and Foundations which are most in need, those who feel the Chapter did not go far enough with regard to internationalization, those who because of their situation feel abandoned, those who lack personnel for formation, those who fear the death of their Provinces. We call upon the entire Congregation to reach out to those in need in a spirit of international collaboration.

In a spirit of dialogue and knowing that we share with you the moments of doubt and blindness, we call the entire Congregation to a living hope in our

future. Yet a living hope requires as well that we exert all our energy and invest all our resources in an unknown future with the knowledge that formation today requires an extraordinary sensitivity to something new coming into existence.

### The way ahead

One thing is clear: that we must all follow the way of the Gospel, the way of *kenosis*, the giving of self into the cycle of human problems – this being simply and profoundly the price of love. Formation for freedom is the only adequate response to the difficult and death-dealing situations of mission today, in which one may have to work without any visible success, standing up against injustice, and living side by side with the outcasts of society. Formation must prepare us for the forces which seek to diminish all who minister and mission in these in-between times. Perhaps the answer lies in the awareness that all has been given in Christ. If all is given, there is nothing to lose. If there is nothing to lose, there is nothing to fear.

**THE GENERALATE TEAM**