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## 1983 Vol. 34: "Towards the Land that I will Show You" (Gen. 12:1)

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## “Towards the land that I will show you” (Gen. 12 : 1)

*“It was by faith that Abraham obeyed the call to set out for a country that was the inheritance given to him and his descendants, and that he set out without knowing where he was going. By faith he arrived, as a foreigner, in the promised Land, and lived there as if in a strange country, dwelling in tents...” (Heb. 11 : 8-9).*

*“It was by faith that Moses left Egypt and was not afraid of the king’s anger; he held to his purpose like a man who could see the Invisible... It was by faith that they crossed the Red Sea as easily as dry land, while the Egyptians, trying to do the same, were drowned” (Heb. 11 : 27,29).*

On the road to exile, having lost the security of their land and the temple, the Israelites wavered in their faith. In their distress in a foreign land, they recognized the One *“who leads you in the way that you must go”* (Is. 48 : 17), heard the call to *“widen the space of your tent”* (Is. 54 : 2) and opened themselves to the *“hope of the islands”* (Is. 51 : 5).

*“With so many witnesses in a great cloud on every side of us, we too, then, should throw off everything that hinders us, especially the sin that clings so easily, and keep running steadily in the race we have started. Let us not lose sight of Jesus, who leads us in our faith and brings it to perfection”* (Heb. 12 : 1-2).

### Walking in the strength of faith

Challenged by the developments of the past twenty years, the Congregation has started on a new journey, walking on a difficult road towards a still unknown country. *“Where are we heading for?”* is a question that confreres often put to us.

In reply, we would invite you as a start to accompany us through the different continents to discover the signs of this new Spiritan journey and get an idea of the direction it is taking.

In the diversity of its paths you will be able to discern with us some important signposts guiding us on our way, namely: a movement towards the periphery or frontier-situations, towards greater universality, towards renewal of life and towards the future.

Any look at the signs, even a detailed analysis of them, will not be complete if it does not at the same time look for the hand that *“leads you in the way that you must go”* (Is. 48 : 17) and does not fix itself on the *“Invisible”*. Any motivation for the journey will remain weak and fragile if it is not founded on *“the Word of the Lord, today”*, to help us to walk in the strength of faith. We will offer an attempt at this discernment, while fully aware that the ways of the Lord are inscrutable and full of surprises.

### Making a start...

We, who have the good fortune to be able to meet confreres in the various continents, invite you to discover with us some of the recent signs that allow us to say: *“The Congregation has made a start”*, even though there may be sluggishness and difficulties that impede progress.

#### A time of trial: an opportunity for renewal

In EUROPE, Provinces in difficulty are taking new initiatives. Holland has set up a new team for mis-

sionary animation at Eindhoven. Belgium is giving new impetus to the animation of young people at Gentinnes. Germany is welcoming, in the Province’s communities and on the missions, young people who want to be ‘missionaries for a time’. The Province of Poland is growing again and rejuvenating its membership with ordinations each year.

In France, the stress this year is on each community’s ‘project’. Portugal, Spain and Switzerland are renewing their missionary animation and vocation work. A centre for international Spiritan formation is developing in England, with students from the Indian

Ocean, Nigeria and Germany (there is an international centre also in Rome). Ireland has been undertaking commitments in poor urban areas.

In NORTH AMERICA, the four Provinces — Canada, Trans-Canada, USA East and USA West — are working more and more closely together, and the novitiate is held in common. Next summer, a congress entitled 'Spiritan in 1984' will bring together all the young members in formation. The Provinces have set up a joint committee on Justice and Peace, and work together for Haitian refugees. The orientation is towards 'poor and abandoned' minorities, and there are interesting experiments with new forms of membership. In Mexico, confreres are working among the Indians.

## **A time of growth in the young Churches: an opening to other horizons**

In the SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE, harvest time and seedtime coincide; the old and the new intermingle and interact in shaping the mission of the future.

In LATIN AMERICA, the six Districts of Brazil, formerly completely distinct, are opening up to each other. Formation in the Brazilian Foundation is becoming a common enterprise. Some local Spiritan priests are already at work in the country, and one will soon be going as a missionary to Angola. The movement towards the periphery is stimulating research on a spirituality of frontier situations. Thus our confreres in Paraguay give us the witness of a life lived poorly among the poor, in a spirit of solidarity with them.

In the WEST INDIES, Trinidad continues its effort at inculturation. Martinique, Guadeloupe and French Guiana reviewed their engagements with the Bishops in April 1983. The Puerto Rican Foundation will soon have its first ordinations and will thus start a new missionary venture.

How are we to sum up the developments experienced by our confreres in AFRICA in recent times? With the growth of the local Churches and the diminution of our personnel, we are handing over important responsibilities and cutting back on commitments. It is a time for reassessing and rejuvenating our missionary service in its various forms:

- helping the local Church towards self-sufficiency, as in Kwara-Benue. . .
- moving towards more difficult areas or areas of first evangelization within our circumscriptions: in Kenya, Tanzania, Yaoundé, Doumé, Kongolo. . .
- moving beyond the frontiers of a District towards areas of special need: from Senegal to Guinea-Bissau, from Makurdi to Yola. . .
- giving special attention to local Churches in difficult situations: in Gambia, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Ga-

bon (in the Central African Republic the signs are promising). . .

- reassessing our presence in Churches that are becoming more able to organize themselves, such as the Congo. . .

- undertaking work for Justice and Peace, for slum dwellers in rapidly growing cities, and for dialogue, especially with Islam (Algeria, Mauritania). . .

In all these developments we can see a renewal of life, inspired by our Spiritan sources and by the concrete situations.

The Spiritan presence on the road to the future is seen even more clearly in the missionary awakening of local Churches. Our YOUNG PROVINCES and FOUNDATIONS are playing a decisive role in this.

- The Province of Nigeria is pursuing several aims: training leaders for itself; taking root in the country especially in poor parishes and areas of first evangelization; going out to other countries like Zambia and Zimbabwe, and even to other continents; inculturating the Spiritan charism; striving for financial self-sufficiency.

- The Province of Angola offers us the witness of its extraordinary courage and its fidelity to a people in distress.

- The Foundations continue to grow in the Districts. The East African Foundation has already sent several young Spiritans to Zambia, where, with some Irish confreres, they form an international group. The Central African Foundation has priests in Cameroon and Gabon. The more recent West African Foundation is growing, especially with vocations from Ghana.

The Spiritan missionary adventure is by no means over — it is changing and taking on a new form.

The same prospects are opening up in the INDIAN OCEAN — in Madagascar, Reunion and Mauritius. A new adventure is beginning with the Foundation, which, being at the crossroads of different continents, can envisage new directions, especially towards Asia.

In ASIA, our confreres are working for the "poorest and most abandoned" in Pakistan. Our entry into Asia marks our desire to engage ourselves in the continent that has been called "the greatest missionary challenge for the future". Finally, our 'tour' comes to an end with the group of Spiritans working among the poor in PAPUA NEW GUINEA.

For each of the circumscriptions we could have listed many other signs, and, of course, many of the initiatives and orientations are common to a great number of circumscriptions.

## **. . . on the road to the future**

Taking an overall look at the signs of our present commitments, there would seem to be four

important movements, which are also four ways towards the future.

## 1. Towards the periphery

We are all in solidarity with each other, and together we carry out our various commitments. All the steps on the road are important, the little as well as the great, and make possible our movement towards the periphery and frontier situations. These are to be found especially in:

- work in areas of first evangelization or in abandoned or difficult areas;
- work for migrants, refugees, marginalized people, and abandoned or oppressed minorities;
- commitment to the struggle for Justice and Peace;
- work to relieve distress caused by urbanization;
- work in the areas recognized as the four main activities of the mission of the future: proclamation, dialogue, liberation and inculturation (Sedos Seminar, 1981).

It is hoped that the movement towards the periphery, already visible in many of our commitments, will continue to grow in importance so as to meet the demands of our times, to rejuvenate the ideals of the Congregation and to confirm it in its special vocation.

## 2. Towards greater universality

The new missionary era, it is said, will be marked by a new sense of universality. Certain expressions already in circulation indicate this: "mission in all six continents", "mission from everywhere to everywhere", "mission as exchange between Churches", "the whole Church is missionary", "the young Churches missionary in their turn", "the four main activities of the mission of the future: proclamation, dialogue, liberation, inculturation".

We are on the road to greater universality in various ways, notably by:

- our movement towards the periphery and our attention to new situations;
- our opening to Asia. Aware of its importance for the future, we will continue to give consideration to it. Are we not called to take other steps in this direction?
- growing attention to dialogue, especially with Islam. Our reflection on this dialogue is still in its early stages, but there is certainly a new road for mission here;
- research on new forms of membership, which will facilitate contact with areas not easily accessible to priests;
- solidarity and coresponsibility between circumscriptions — this will help us to take up certain challenges on a joint basis;
- a growing openness to internationality in formation, so as to prepare for intercultural experiences.

A new spirit of universality is moving through the Congregation and will get stronger still because of the young Provinces and Foundations. Through them we will enter together into the new missionary era and we will see:

- the incarnation of the Spiritan charism in new cultures, giving the Congregation a new visage;
- more departures from the Southern Hemisphere for the universal mission — a movement that will keep on growing;
- more exchanges between Churches, indicating that mission is "from everywhere to everywhere", with missionaries being witnesses of their own local Church in another part of the universal Church;
- the diversification and internationalization of the Spiritan presence, which has already begun in certain places;
- a Congregation that has become more universal in its membership.

## 3. Towards renewal of life

"For new wine, new wineskins" (Mk 2 : 22). To meet the developments and changes in the world, the Church and its mission, there must be a renewal in religious and missionary life. For new situations, a new apostolic life. Every institute is challenged to this renewal, which will probably be either the stumbling block or the foundation stone for the institutes of the future.

The movement towards a renewal of life shows itself in different signs, notably in :

- a return to our sources, and especially to our Founders. More and more we see Spiritan sessions and days of recollection being held for the study of our Founders;
- the search for Spiritan identity. What is our place and our role in these changes and in these new situations?
- community renewal, especially at regional level. In most places there is a search for a deepening of community life, in which the members share in each other's life and apostolate;
- spiritual and religious renewal. More and more confreres are working towards this. Personal and community prayer is taking on new importance. Apostolic life and religious life are becoming better integrated.

(N.B.: The next I/D will take up in more detail the question of renewal of life.)

## 4. Towards the future

We believe that the start that has already been made and the important movements that are taking place are leading us on to the future. The 'signs' that have been referred to briefly above are so many words of encouragement and hope that we speak to each other. We do not think that we are being deceived when we say that the signs of life seem to be stronger than the signs of death and that our progress is keeping step with developments in the world.

Our optimism does not, however, make us ignore the shadows that there are nor the conversions that still have to be made. We are still at an early stage in the renewal of institutes, and of our own in particular. That is why it is important to fix our gaze on the vitality that is being shown, so as to move with it and reinforce it.

## **“Your word is a light for my path” (Ps. 118 : 105)**

The words of hope that we have found among our confreres assume their full meaning when the Word of God shines on them, when we try to understand them in the light of faith, putting them in the context of God's dealings with his chosen people and the ways in which He leads those who listen to Him. The words of our confreres will thus become “words of God for us today” and help us to walk in faith. We may be mistaken at times but we must hold on to the essential and be determined to move forward in a spirit of faith.

Let us, then, listen to what the Lord could be saying to us today:

### **A call**

*You have seen for yourselves by many signs what I have done for you (cf. Ex. 19 : 4 ff). Changes and developments have set you on your way. Recognize my call in them as once I called my servant Abraham: “Leave your country for the land that I will show you” (Gen. 12 : 1).*

### **Leave your country for. . .**

*I have uprooted you, I have made you leave the country you were living in, I have invited you to leave the familiar ways and structures and security that were yours until now. You know that, when I act like this, it is not through some whim but because I have a definite plan. See how I made Abraham leave his country, and led the people of Israel out of Egypt and later into exile. I uprooted Peter and Paul and so many others so as to make them free for a new adventure.*

### **By unexpected paths**

*Just as you have begun to do, on the strength of my word, so, on the strength of my word, did they leave everything, “not knowing where they were going” (Heb. 11 : 8). See too how I revealed my plan to them little by little, one day at a time, by unexpected paths, sometimes with great detours and through many trials. They experienced weariness, darkness and nostalgia for the past. I allowed that so as to respect their liberty and bring them to recognize the hand that led them on their way (cf. Is. 48 : 17) and have them walk in faith like people who have “seen the Invisible” (cf. Heb. 11 : 27). In a diversity and multiplicity of ways, you too have followed this call.*

### **Through the desert**

*I know, it is difficult to leave one's country for a new adventure. That is why I draw near to those whom I call for a new mission and invite them to draw near to me. I led my people through the desert; I made Jeremiah my intimate friend; I allowed the Israelites to be exiled from their land so as to open up new missionary perspectives to them; I led my Son out into the desert to prepare Him for his mission; I sent Paul into Arabia for him to open himself still more to the mission that I had allowed him to glimpse on the road to Damascus. See what I have done for you too: I have awakened you to a renewal of life; I am leading you into the desert, and there I will speak to your heart (cf. Hos. 2 : 14); you will give yourself more fully to me, to find the strength and courage to enter the land that I will show you.*

### **God gives us brothers**

*Here is another word for the future. You have seen how I invite young people to join your ranks, even in continents that are in crisis. And lift up your eyes and see: from far-off lands they come to you (cf. Is. 49 : 18). By calling young people to you from the Southern Hemisphere as well, I am preparing you for the new missionary era.*

### **Signs of hope and conversion**

*Rejoice at all the signs of hope for the future that I have shown you in your life in different parts of the world. Take heart and continue on the road you have set out on in my name. It is a long road that leads to the land that I will show you, but you must walk in the strength of faith. There are many steps that you still have to take, and that is why my promises for the future are always accompanied by a call to conversion. “Seek me and you will live” (Amos 5 : 4).*

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Words of hope that we think we see in the present life of the Congregation! Words of encouragement to help us undertake the necessary conversions. If we have wished to address this message to you, it is because we seem to be at a point that calls for a ‘second conversion’ (a theme that will be taken up in the next I/D).

THE GENERALATE TEAM

**“If only easy things were to be undertaken in the Church, what would have become of the Church? St. Peter and St. John would have continued fishing on Lake Tiberias and St. Paul would never have left Jerusalem. I can fancy that someone who thinks himself something and counts on his own powers may be stopped before an obstacle, but when we count on our Master alone what difficulty can we fear?”**

*Libermann, L.S. II, 457.*