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Spiritans and Education

This ID was originally planned to include both Education and the wider Youth apostolate but it was found impossible to compress such a vast field into the relatively confined space of an ID. In view of the extensive material available from the Symposium which took place at Duquesne University in June 1991 it was decided to concentrate on education in this publication.

The first ever worldwide symposium of Spiritan Educators, held at Duquesne University from June 24th to 28th 1991, attracted a registration of 98 delegates from 24 Spiritan circumscriptions in 20 countries. The response far exceeded the expectations of the organisers and indicated a widespread interest in education in its multiple forms throughout the Congregation. In fact it was these "multiple forms" that proved to be the highlight of the symposium. From Brazil the conference was reminded that "for each age the Church elaborates a different theoretical approach for the evangelisation of youth. Approaches that worked in the past frequently fail to respond to a modern need." Spiritan educators from TransCanada echoed the sentiment: "If anyone wishes to be in touch with people who have scarcely heard the Gospel message let him choose a Toronto school.... Here is a "tribe" to whom the marvelous works of God must be proclaimed in their own language". Similar comments were heard from Auteuil which has adjusted its program to current realities, from the relatively new initiatives of Servol in the Caribbean to improve the quality of family life, and from Spiritan educators in universities, secondary schools and other forms of education throughout the world.

Historical Perspective

Spiritans have been involved in education for a long time. The rather loose association founded by Claude Poullart des Places concerned itself at first

with the rescue of young chimney sweeps and then with the education of poor clerics. After the death of the founder his work progressed along similar lines. Later preparation of seminarians for priesthood was widened to include foreign missionary service.

At first Libermann insisted that all should serve in "foreign and distant missions"; he did not see any members of the society remaining in Europe solely for the purpose of saving souls. "It is only for the benefit of our missions", he reminded his confreres "that a few may live there" (N.D. 2, 240). However he later modified this view and in 1841 wrote to Levasseur explaining that the formation of German clergy could be undertaken without betraying the purposes of the Congregation. He stated in a memorandum to *Propaganda Fide* in 1846 that it was the duty of the missionary to work at the "intellectual and physical aspects of civilization i.e. in education, agriculture and technical knowledge" (N.D. 8, 248). When some of the missionaries objected he insisted that "to abandon the schools is to destroy the future of the missions" (N.D. 9, 44).

Libermann's policy continued to evolve after his death. In 1853 the Congregation took charge of the French Seminary in Rome and then during the 30 years of Schwindenhammer's administration a total of 31 seminaries and colleges (not to mention trade and agricultural schools) were added. Among those dating from this period are Beauvais and Mesnières in France, Rockwell and Blackrock in Ireland, Holy Spirit in Portugal, Duquesne in the US, St. Martials in Haiti and St. Mary's in Trinidad.

During the Generalate of Archbishop Le Roy the educational apostolate was more muted and in fact Spiritans withdrew from a number of schools. However in the first half of the present century education became especially important as an instrument of evangelisation in many countries of continental Africa. Colleges reopened in Reunion and Mauritius and new ones were established in Trinidad, Brazil, USA, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Ghana, Kenya, Germany, Angola and Canada. In 1958 of the 74 educational establishments operated

by Spiritans and open to all qualified applicants 9 were in the Americas, 5 in the Caribbean, 7 in Europe, 4 in the Indian Ocean and 49 in Africa (17 in Nigeria alone). There were also 47 seminaries at different levels.

In 1986 the Spiritan Rule of Life (18,1), when dealing with "service of local churches", incorporated education as one of our valid apostolates. SRL speaks three times of education: in connection with the preparation of laity, as an apostolate in its own right, and as a response to the needs of youth. With regard to the latter the statistics are mind boggling. In the Nigerian population of 119 million 71.9% are younger than 29 (43% are 14 or under); in Brazil 67.7% of 150 million are under 29; in Kenya 76.2% of 25 million (51.4% under 14); in Madagascar 70.1% of 11 million, (Encyclopedia Britannica Year Book, 1990). One does not have to be an expert on statistics to realise that mission to youth will demand considerable attention and energy for the foreseeable future.

Varieties of Spiritan Education

Frequently one hears "Spiritans Education" referred to in a manner that suggests that it is a monolithic or homogeneous entity. If the conference at Duquesne accomplished nothing else it dispelled this inaccurate image. While all our educational enterprises share a commitment to gospel values, integral human development, excellence in learning, sound moral principles, and, from a Spiritan point of view, a certain world vision and missionary outlook, nevertheless the approach to this ministry varies greatly. The following is an arbitrary (and probably inadequate) descriptive classification:

1. **Non Formal Education.** This comprises special ministry to youth as in SERVOL (Trinidad), Capacitacao da Juventude (a national program of youth ministry developed by our confreres in Brazil), and Casa dos Rapazes (Angola) together with adult education in the fields of Development (Kimmage Institute) and catechetics (C.I.M., Paris). A number of confreres also conduct Justice and Peace training programmes in several countries.
2. **Education at the Tertiary level.** While Duquesne University, the only Spiritan institution at this level, takes pride of place many confreres also minister in a variety of capacities at other universities, institutes of technology, teachers' colleges both Catholic and secular: for instance (the list is partial) Catholic University of Puerto-Rico (President); Catholic Institute, Paris, University of Sierra Leone, Institute of Higher Studies, Mexico, Salve Regina College, U.S.A. (Professors); College of Surgeons, Dublin, and York

University, Toronto (Chaplains).

Duquesne already has several initiatives underway - a moral education program, outreach to overseas students, intercultural experience for teachers in training, links with Spiritan institutes in Africa and a campus ministry geared to promoting sensitivity towards the poor. It can go much further and become noted for its peace studies, its justice curriculum, its research on international development and for its practical interest in the vision and objectives of the Spiritan family to which it owes its existence.

Also falling within this category, but beyond the scope of this paper, are the many confreres teaching in formation programmes both within and outside the Spiritan context.

3. **The Secondary School level** is the most extensive institutional education ministry of Spiritans encompassing schools in Europe, North America, the Caribbean and Africa. These institutions can be further sub-divided:
 - A. Schools in "mission" countries where education has been an important instrument of evangelisation and the establishment of local churches. These schools cater for first or second generation Catholics but also offer educational opportunities to a significant number of non-Christian students. Their ecumenical record is impressive. As the report from Sierra Leone to the symposium put it: "Reflecting on the educational work carried out by missionaries over the past 70 years Spiritans are appreciating more and more its value and the contribution it has made to the building up of the local church. If this local church is to be further developed both *ad extra* and *ad intra* it is becoming increasingly evident that missionaries and local priests, brothers and sisters must have a presence in secondary schools". Recently bishops in Nigeria and Ghana, alarmed at declining standards, have pressed Spiritans to become more involved in education. Given the acute economic, political and social problems facing many third world countries a positive response to such appeals would seem to be in accord with our commitment to "the most disadvantaged".
 - B. Secondary Schools which, whatever their origins, today cater for the most part to middle and upper middle class students. These are found principally, but not exclusively, in first world countries. In the past they have been a plentiful source of missionary vocations and have contributed significantly to the preparation of leaders in Church and State. These schools face a stiff challenge as they develop coordinated pastoral programmes and foster "a

faith that does justice". As the Irish delegation to the symposium stated "... part of the programme should be a critical analysis of society and of the consumerist/secularist values it portrays; students and staff should be involved at a practical level in the promotion of a just society..... Missionary awareness too will be continued in line with the healthy traditions of our colleges." Interesting initiatives have been undertaken (again the list is partial) at Blackrock (Dublin, Ireland), Holy Ghost College (Broich, Germany), and St. Joseph's (Trinidad).

- C. **Non Fee Paying Schools** which are open to all students and frequently provide special services for new immigrants, refugees, slow learners and the handicapped. Examples are the Spiritan schools in Canada, and the many centres initiated by Spiritans to take care of drop outs and marginalised youth such as the Foyer Energie (Tananarive), St. Joseph's (Philadelphia), and Kituo Chavijana Mt. Fillipi Neri (Tanzania).

Changing Times

There seems little need to describe again the changing world in which we live. In the last few decades we have split the atom, pierced the veil of space, cracked the genetic code and learned to communicate through a host of new instruments. We have seen the collapse of communism, the rise of powerful business and monied classes and a growing disparity between northern and southern hemispheres.

In the Church, too, significant developments are underway. In this (1991), the centenary year of "*Rerum Novarum*", awareness is growing of the increasing emphasis on the social ministry of the Church, illustrated in a number of Papal and Episcopal documents. Our present Holy Father was quite emphatic in "*Centesimus Annus*" that "as far as the Church is concerned the social message of the gospel must not be considered a theory but above all else a basis and a motivation for action" (CA 57) and again "... it (justice) requires above all a change of lifestyle, of models of production and consumption and of the established structures of power which today govern societies" (CA 58).

Challenge

Our mission requires of us commitment to the poor and we take as constitutive of evangelisation the "integral liberation of people, action for Justice and Peace and participation in development" (SRL 14). This is the context in which, and against which, the quality of all our apostolates, including education, must be judged.

And who are the poor? Sometimes religious have difficulty with this question, a difficulty rarely experienced by government institutions, social agencies or the poor themselves. The poor? They are the economically disadvantaged materially deprived, the powerless, the exploited, the oppressed; the poor are those who are hungry, without decent shelter or clothes, who lack educational and health care opportunities, are unemployed and feel excluded from the decisions that affect them.

The challenge posed by the option for the poor in the fields of education and youth ministry is not peculiar to the Spiritans. Fr. Kolvenbach, Superior General of the Jesuits, had this to say to 900 of his confreres gathered at Georgetown University in 1989: "the promotion of justice is the *forma omnium* that must be integrated as a priority into every one of our apostolates. This change of priority in our Society in no way calls into question the value of education as such". Accepting commitment to justice in the name of the gospel as a challenge to the Society to evaluate its educational programmes, he continues: "the option (for the Poor) is far more comprehensive and demanding for it calls upon us to educate all - rich, middle class and poor - **from a perspective of justice**". He sees a real danger that some schools will not continue in the "Ignatian Tradition" if they lack a clear statement of this mission and a willingness to commit themselves to it.

Works which cater for middle and upper class students face a particularly difficult task. They will find their efforts to approach education from the **perspective of the poor** or in the **interests of justice** often misunderstood by fellow Spiritans, staff members, and above all, by parents. When a school does a good job as a result of which parents are able to move up the economic ladder they want their old teachers to be available in turn for their children and so the school community is caught in the upward spiral. Parents who are happy with a school wish everything to remain as it was and often have difficulty accepting developments in Catholic social doctrine that may challenge some of the assumptions of the society to which they belong. To be counter cultural in these circumstances demands courage, tenacity, and patience.

Involvement of Laity

It is quite clear that the diminishing number of Spiritans in many parts of the world make it essential that youth work and educational institutions be staffed largely by Lay people. Quite apart from necessity this should be seen as a normal development. It will also mean that Spiritans commit a significant part of their energy to the selection, formation and accompaniment of those involved in programmes for youth and in teaching. Clearly the co-operators should be aware of our

goals, participate actively in the formulation of vision statements and be given the opportunity to reflect with us on the nature and direction of the Spiritan mission. Thus will develop a true partnership striving to be one in faith, heart and vision. Recently Duquesne installed its first lay President and there are lay Principals guiding St. Mary's and Templeogue (Ireland), Fatima College (Trinidad), and Neil McNeil (Canada).

An important aspect of the involvement of laity is the need to establish structures to ensure the continuance of a Spiritan ethos in our schools when the Spiritan presence has declined numerically or has disappeared altogether. The evolution of Auteuil (France) is an excellent example. The direction of its 25 houses is entirely in the hands of a Lay Director General and Staff while a Spiritan Assistant Director General, two Spiritans on the administrative Council and some Spiritans engaged full-time in pastoral work ensure the Spiritan continuity.

St. Alexandre (Quebec) after several years of discernment has handed over the entire work and property to a Corporation. The agreement has built-in conditions to ensure Spiritan presence and influence.

Spiritans schools in Canada have worked for years under elected School Boards, Templeogue (Dublin) has an established Board of Trustees, and Holy Spirit (Mauritius) has been in lay hands for 15 years without any apparent diminution of its academic and spiritual life.

Other institutions are still struggling with the issue, conscious of a certain urgency. The Enlarged Provincial Council of Ireland, for example, has established as a deadline the Provincial Chapter of 1994.

The Way ahead

The delegates at the Spiritan Education Symposium committed themselves to "our Spiritan Educational Apostolate, both formal and non-formal, inspired by our Spiritan Rule of Life facing the many challenges that place us at a crucial turning point in our history".

They added "In this information age we work to bring education and access to knowledge to all, but especially to the poorest".

"We will promote in more effective ways an awareness of and respect for the diverse ethnic cultural and racial groups which make up the societies in which we work".

Our Foundations and new provinces are facing populations teeming with youth in need of guidance and the acquisition of those skills that will enable them to take their place in a just and equitable society. Without some measure of education or training their chances of achieving this are slim indeed. Furthermore the young Churches need leadership to enable them to accomplish the integration of the gospel message with local cultures.

In the Western world, too, the call has gone out for re-evangelisation. It is difficult to see how this can be promoted without serious contact with the "tribe" of youth. Where can such a meeting be achieved? To a limited degree only in the churches for youth are not attending in big numbers; scarcely to any great extent through the media which are often hostile. Is there perhaps a hope to make some impact through specialised youth programmes, through schools, and through universities?

And then there is that vast, largely untouched multitude of the handicapped, refugees, drop outs, and the marginalised. Who will bring them the Good News; who will give them the tools to cope with an increasingly complex society? Here is a challenge worthy of our missionary vocation.

Conclusion

Involvement of Spiritans in education goes back to the very beginnings of our religious family. The ministry developed in different ways responding to the signs of the times in various countries and in diverse circumstances. It has enjoyed success and known failure. It has been loudly praised and seriously questioned. But always Spiritans participating in this apostolate have striven, within the limits of their capacities, to meet the challenges of the day.

Now as we stand on the brink of the third millennium the Congregation is once again gearing itself to respond to the exigencies of the moment. Facing the often bewildering complexities of to-day's societies, Spiritan educators concluded their Conference at Duquesne by expressing confidence "that, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the charisms bequeathed to us by Poullart des Places and Francis Libermann will enable us, religious and laity, to adapt our educational mission to the challenges of a changing world which seeks global peace and communication across cultural diversity, where poor and marginalised seek a share in global prosperity and a say in decisions which affect their future, and where education becomes a continuing and life-long project".