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# SPIRITAN NEWS

March-April 1985

No. 56

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

## Spiritans in Algeria and Mauritania

There are some 700 million Muslims in the world today (about half the total number of Christians), and Islam has gained in strength and influence since the end of colonialism in the 1960s and the petrodollar boom of the 1970s. *Spiritan News*, No. 51, spoke last year of Spiritans in the Islamic state of Pakistan, but our commitment there is largely to non-Muslim Tribals. In other countries, such as Senegal and the Gambia, there are large Muslim populations but also ample scope for traditional missionary work. In this issue we take a look at two countries in which there is virtually no scope for such work, but where some of our confreres are engaged in Christian witness and dialogue with Islam, while looking after small, largely expatriate Christian communities.

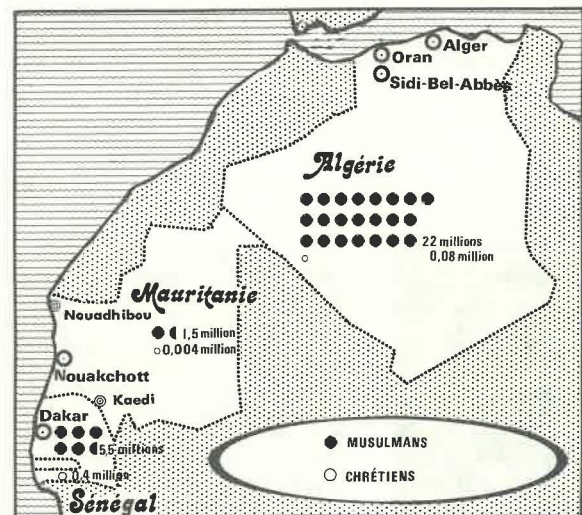
### Algeria

The Congregation's connection with Algeria began in 1901, when it undertook responsibility for the orphanage and agricultural school of Misserghin, near Oran. This had been run by a small congregation of Brothers of the Annunciation, which had been founded at Montpellier in 1840 and had come to Misserghin in 1849. At the end of the century the work had run into financial difficulties and the Holy Ghost Congregation was asked to take it over. The Congregation of the Annunciation was dissolved and about 20 of the Brothers became Spiritans. The name of one of these, Brother Clement, lives on in the 'clementine', a sort of tangerine that he developed at Misserghin and that is still appreciated today.

In 1903 the anticlerical Combes laws in France closed the orphanage and school at Misserghin, but it was allowed to continue as an agricultural property and a home for retired confreres. The orphanage was reopened in 1951, with an agricultural and technical school, and the Congregation continued to run them until they were nationalized in 1975. Apart from the work at Misserghin, Spiritans also staffed several parishes in the Oran area before the French withdrew from Algeria in the 1960s. The 1961 'Etat du Personnel' listed 9 Fathers and 9 Brothers at Misserghin and 8 parish priests. After the closing of Misserghin, a single Spiritan stayed on for three years as chaplain to a convent.

The Congregation's new commitment in Algeria began in 1978 with the return of Fr. Raymond Gonnet. He had been in Algeria from 1970-75 and had been the last superior of Misserghin. With Fr. René You he had volunteered for the Pakistan mission but they had been unable to obtain visas. He was followed in 1980 by Fr. Claude Brehm, ordained in 1977, and in 1981 by Fr. René You, who had been at Misserghin from 1964-73 and had been superior there when he was recalled to France for six years as Vicar Provincial. All three of them have studied Arabic and done Islamic studies in Rome as well as in Algeria.

At present Fr. You (the group superior) and Fr. Brehm live in community in a small house in Sidi-Bel-Abbès with a secular priest, Fr. Pierre Wallez. Fr. Wallez works as a male nurse and the two Spiritans work full-time as French teachers in secondary schools. They are also in charge of the Christian community in Sidi-Bel-Abbès, a fast-growing industrial town with a population of a quarter of a million, of whom fewer than 200 are Christians. Christians form a tiny, hardly visible minority in Algeria today (about 80,000 in a population of 22 million), and most of the large churches of



the past have been turned over to the Government for other uses. The Church has reasonably good relations with the Government. Cardinal Duval of Algiers had supported the movement for independence, and he and his Coadjutor, Archbishop Teissier, have Algerian nationality, as have others of the bishops. "Christians," says Archbishop Teissier, "are recognized as individuals and as a group, but on condition that they do not try to proselytize and are prepared to work for the development of the country as planned by the Government."

The weekend in Algeria, as in other Muslim countries, is Thursday-Friday, and the official 'Sunday' Mass in Sidi-bel-Abbès is held on Thursday evenings with a regular attendance of about 40. Some also attend Mass on Sunday, and there are meetings for Bible study and reflection. Some Sisters attend the daily evening Mass, incorporated with vespers and shared reflection on the word of God. The Spiritans do their own housework and cooking, and find the time too to give some lessons in Arabic to expatriates. The teaching in the 'lycées' serves not only as a means of earning their living but also as a means of contact and dialogue with Muslim teachers and students. The students know them as Catholic priests and seem particularly intrigued by their celibate lifestyle.

In a similar community in the parish of St. Eugene in Oran, Fr. Gonnet lives with the diocesan parish priest, Fr. Jo Abellan, and Mr. Yves Sauvet, a young Spiritan who has done his first-cycle studies and is doing his two-year missionary experience in Oran. Fr. Gonnet works full-time at a centre for the education of 60 difficult young people, of whom 15 are seriously handicapped. At the beginning his rosary used to be spat on, and children would draw a cross on the ground in front of him and stamp on it, but that has now stopped and he is very popular with them. Their only regret is that, as he is not a Muslim, he will not be able to go to paradise with them. Apart from work at this centre, Fr. Gonnet has started a centre for the physically handicapped and an association for the mentally handicapped, and he too gives lessons in Arabic. He has applied for Algerian citizenship. Yves Sauvet works at the diocesan cultural centre, which has a university library and is frequented by many students and professors from the University of Oran. Once a month he and Fr. Gonnet go to Sidi-Bel-Abbès for a weekend of reflection with the others.

Fr. General visited Algeria from 1-11 September last year, taking part first in a week-long national pastoral conference (held every three years), which brought together the bishops of the four dioceses, 100 priests, 30 sisters and some lay workers. It gave him an insight into the Church in a Muslim environment, and he had an opportunity to talk at length with Cardinal Duval, Archbishop Teissier and Bishop Claverie of Oran. After the conference, in Algiers, he visited Oran, Misserghin and Sidi-Bel-Abbès.

Fr. General was very impressed with the bishops and their friendly and easy relations with their clergy. Of the Church in Algeria he says: "Its style of humble presence, in the name of the Gospel and without structures of power, is impressive and refreshing... I was struck by the sincere interest it takes in the country and its future, its respect for



Frs. Wallez, Brehm and You and their house in Sidi-Bel-Abbès.

*Algerians and their culture, its desire to work with them for their development... I was also struck by the Spiritans' faith in their mission, the originality of their reflection, their knowledge of the country and of Arabic, their 'natural' way of living their missionary and religious vocation - the famous dichotomy between apostolic and religious life, that we hear so much about, seems to be no problem. On the whole it is a Church that reminds one of the Acts of the Apostles and I have been moved and impressed by it."*

To the Spiritans in Algeria he said: "You are a small group, engaged in a type of mission that we are not accustomed to, and which is not well understood by our confreres. Its ecclesial value is clear and I would like to affirm its value in the context of Spiritan mission. Your mission in Algeria is an expression of our Spiritan vocation that should not be lacking in the Congregation's commitments, whatever may be the calls for personnel elsewhere... Your experience helps us to understand mission as dialogue."

## Mauritania



Mgr. de Chevigny

Fr. General's remarks on the Church and Spiritans in Algeria apply equally well to Mauritania, which he visited from 27 December to 8 January. Here too he took part (31 Dec.-5 Jan.) in the annual pastoral meeting of the priests, sisters and lay workers with the Bishop, Mgr. Robert de Chevigny, C.S.Sp. After the meeting (in the capital, Nouakchott), he visited the mission of Kaedi, in the south of the country.

While Algeria is juridically a secular state, Mauritania proclaims itself an Islamic republic. It attained independence in 1960, two years before Algeria. All of its population of 1,500,000 are Muslims, the 4,000 Christians being expatriates (French, Senegalese, Brazilians working on road construction, Americans etc.). About 70% of the population is Berber and Arab, the remaining 30% belonging to the Toucouleur and other black ethnic groups who live in the south of the country, near the Senegal River. This is the only part of the land that is cultivable, as most of the north is sandy desert.

The Church's presence in Mauritania began as an extension of the Prefecture Apostolic of Saint Louis in Senegal, when Spiritans from Saint Louis served as military chaplains or made periodic visits to expatriate communities. In 1965 the Diocese of Nouakchott was erected, under the former Archbishop of Brazzaville, Mgr. Michel Bernard, C.S.Sp. He resigned in 1973 and was succeeded by the present Bishop, Mgr. de Chevigny, who had worked for 18 years in Guinea and two years in Senegal. He is helped in his ministry by ten priests (seven Spiritans, two seculars and a Benedictine), a Spiritan brother, 30 sisters and some lay workers involved in organizations such as Caritas.

Of the Spiritans, Frs. Paul Grasser and Istifane Stirnemann are at Nouakchott and are involved in contact with Muslims in and around the capital. Brother René Jacobé also works in the capital, as bursar and with Caritas. In the south, on the Senegal River, Fr. Jean Kerloc'h is parish priest at Kaedi, and Fr. Pierre Esvan at Rosso. Frs. Bernard Pelletier and Guy Daniel are at the northern port of Nouadhibou, and Fr. Pierre Veau is on a year's renewal course in Jordan at present, adding to his knowledge of Islam and of Arabic. Of the three diocesan priests, one is parish priest at Nouakchott, and the two others are at the interior mining towns of Atar and Zouerate. Many of the sisters are involved in medical and social work, and Caritas is active in projects dealing with health, agriculture and the distilling of fresh water from sea water.

The Mauritaniens are a religious people and are also proud and sure of themselves and of their Islamic faith. They are welcoming to foreigners. As Mgr. de Chevigny says: "We are the guests of people who are hospitable and proud of their liberty. And they willingly grant this liberty too to those who come to work in their country." Of the Church's presence he says:

*"The style of missionary work here is different. There is no question of direct preaching of the gospel or of conversions. However, we feel that there is place for another kind of mission: that of fraternal presence, of bearing witness in action, and of prayer. By our behaviour we can preach that God is love."*

(Map and Mauritania photographs courtesy of 'Pentecôte sur le Monde'.)



## News Items

### Decisions of the General Council

#### The General Council

- on 1 Feb., confirmed the election of Fr. Michel DE VERTEUIL as Provincial Superior of **Trinidad** for a third three-year term, as from 12 Dec. 1984;
- on 1 Feb., confirmed the election of Fr. Jacobus GORDIJN as District Superior of **Bagamoyo** for a second three-year term, beginning on 17 March;
- on 1 Feb., appointed Fr. Thomas FRIERY as Provincial Superior of **England** for a second three-year term, beginning on 1 May;
- on 1 Feb., appointed Fr. José PIRES as District Superior of **Cape Verde** for a second three-year term, beginning on 1 July;
- on 16 Feb., confirmed the election of Fr. Christopher O'BRIEN as District Superior of **Ghana** for a three-year term, as from 3 Jan.;
- on 6 March, appointed Fr. Marius PHILIPONA as District Superior of **Reunion** for a third three-year term, as from 1 March;
- on 15 March, appointed Fr. Lucien FISCHER as District Superior of **Gabon** for a second three-year term, beginning on 1 June;
- on 19 March, appointed Fr. Patrick HOLLANDE as District Superior of **Senegal** for a three-year term, beginning on 1 June.

### Visits

The following will be the absences of the Superior General and the General Assistants from Rome during the coming months:

- Fr. Timmermans** : 9-11 April (Belgian Chapter), 12-17 May (Duquesne Mission Congress), 4-14 June (Portugal), 20-23 June (Spain), 15-31 July (Brazil Meeting), 1-31 Aug. (Vacation).
- Fr. Gross** : 20 June-31 July (France), 1-31 Aug. (Vacation), 1-10 Sept. (France).
- Fr. Torres Neiva** : 15 May-15 June (Portugal), 15-30 July (Ministry), 1-31 Aug. (Vacation), 1-10 Sept. (Retreat).
- Fr. Trächtler** : 18-22 April (Switzerland), 10-15 June (German Enl. Council), 24-28 June (Polish Chapter), 12 Aug.-10 Sept. (Vacation).
- Fr. Bevan** : 12-17 May (Duquesne Mission Congress), 21-24 May (Canada Assembly), 17-21 June (USA/E Chapter), 1-5 July (Trans-Canada Chapter), 1-31 Aug. (Vacation).
- Fr. De Boer** : 12-19 April (Nigeria), 19-26 April (WAF Meeting, Ghana), 6-11 May (Dutch Chapter), 14-28 May (Canada and Trans-Canada), 28 May-10 June (USA/E), 11-24 June (USA/W), 25 June-4 July (USA/E), 15 Aug.-15 Sept. (Vacation).
- Fr. Watters** : 15 May-15 June (Portugal), 1-15 July (English Chapter), 16 July-16 Aug. (Vacation).

### First Appointments

On 8 March, the General Council made the following first appointments (all from the Province of Ireland):

Colm EARLY to Angola

Michael KILKENNY to Angola  
Vincent DEELY to Brazil South-West  
Niall COLGAN to Ghana  
Oliver RYAN to Kenya

### Preparation of the Constitutions

In our last issue we reported on the work of a special committee in January, which collated and analysed the comments that had come in from the confreres on the second draft of the Constitutions. The General Council took cognizance of this work and made its own comments, and from 27 Feb. to 1 March the General Bursar, Fr. J. de Boer, met at the Generalate with three Provincial Bursars (Frs. Bazin of France, Moreira Dias of Portugal and Reetz of Germany) to make recommendations for the section on Temporal Goods.

On 11 March, a new committee began work on the drawing up of a third draft in the light of all these comments, and this draft will go out to the delegates named for next year's General Chapter. It is hoped that it will be sufficiently acceptable to be passed by the Chapter, with whatever modifications are voted at it. The four members of the present committee are: Fr. Albert Le Floch of France (the only one who was also on the January committee) and Frs. James Okoye (Nigeria), Manuel Gonçalves (Portugal) and Tony Geoghegan (Ireland). They were joined on 22 March by Fr. René You from Algeria, who will see to the literary style of the French text, which will be the official text from which translations will be made into the other languages. The English translation will be by Fr. Geoghegan, and the Portuguese by Fr. Gonçalves.

### Meeting of European Formators

At the first International Congress of Spiritan formation personnel, held in Saverne in July 1982 (cf. *Spiritan News* No. 43), one of the points decided on was that there would be regional meetings of formators from time to time. The first European meeting was held at Knechtsteden, Germany, from 17-21 Dec. last, and brought together 16 formators from 9 Provinces. The General Council was represented by Fr. Norman Bevan.

The total number in training from the European Provinces at present is 164, of whom 44 are from Poland, 40 from Ireland and 37 from France. These figures include novices and first-cycle students. Poland, Ireland and Portugal are the only Provinces that start formation with the novitiate, the others preferring to leave it until after the first cycle or the missionary experience.

The main point on the agenda was internationality, and in particular whether an international novitiate or theologate should be set up. While there was some support for one or both of these, there did not seem to be enough support for concrete steps to be taken at the moment. Several felt that it was important that the novitiate should be done in one's own language, and some of the Provinces are committed to maintaining theological structures already in existence. Some also felt that it was important to have the younger members of the Province at home to maintain a youthful atmosphere and attract other young people. All felt, however, that internationality should be an important element in formation, and there were various suggestions as to how it could be strengthened. A concrete decision was that there would be a month's retreat in Saverne this summer for those making perpetual vows during the coming year. It was agreed "that the existing communities should take the necessary steps to become international by exchanging students and formators where possible". Other suggestions included more stress on language study; international participation in summer activities such as youth assemblies, camps, pilgrimages, pastoral work or Spiritan courses; and the setting up of a permanent Spiritan house for renewal

studies. The formators decided to meet again in December this year to continue their consultation on these and other points of interest.

## Spiritans Justice and Peace Congress

Thirty confreres took part in a Spiritan congress on Justice and Peace organized by Fr. Bruno Trächtler of the General Council in São Paulo, Brazil, from 22 Feb. to 6 March. The choice of São Paulo was partly to mark the centenary this year of the Spiritans in Brazil and also to give participants an insight into the Church's option for the poor in a South American context. Of the participants, 7 were from Europe, 3 from North America, 3 from the Caribbean, 4 from Africa and 13 from South America. They had an opportunity on both weekends to visit basic Christian communities, 'favelas' and pastoral movements, and as guest speakers they had Cardinal Arnos of São Paulo, Bishop Luciano Mendes, Secretary of the Bishops' Conference, and Sister Michael, an American Sister who has qualified as a Brazilian lawyer.

It was a fortnight that all found enriching through contact with the world of the oppressed, and prayer and discussion on how to help this world achieve liberation through the gospel. They examined issues such as unjust economic structures, confrontation, non-violence, personal engagement and Spiritan lifestyle, and made specific recommendations such as: a special office at the Generalate for Justice and Peace; an issue of *Spiritans Papers* on the subject; the drawing-up of a list of confreres directly involved in the struggle for justice; and greater solidarity and support for those involved. Letters were sent to President Duvalier of Haiti, the OAS and the UN Human Rights Commission on the recent wave of arrests in Haiti; to the Christians of Nicaragua; and to US Senator Clairborne Bell on his efforts for a negotiated settlement in Nicaragua.

## Development Courses in Kimmage

The Spiritan Centre for Development Studies in Kimmage, Ireland, will be running a five-day workshop in July on 'Spirituality for Activists'. It will be led by two Associate Spiritans, Dr. Dermot McLoughlin and his wife Deirdre, who for the past few years have given a lot of their time to working among Indians and Eskimos in Canada. The dates are 15-19 July, and the fee (which includes lunch) is £55. There will be a maximum of 30 participants.

The main course at the Centre is the annual course from October to May, leading to a national Diploma in Development Studies. It is designed for missionaries in developing countries and is a broadly based course, including studies in economics, sociology, anthropology, communications, group dynamics, counselling, spirituality, Scripture, liturgy and liberation theology. The tuition fee for this course is £975. Applications for the workshop or the year's course may be sent to: Fr. Richard Quinn, Development Studies Centre, Kimmage Manor, Dublin 12, Ireland.

## Audio-visual material for Africa

Over the past 20 years, Fr. Armel Duteil of Senegal has cooperated with groups of adults and young people in several African countries to produce a series of books and audio-visual programs (slides), dealing with such subjects as growing up, sexuality, marriage, the education of children, suffering and other aspects of Christian life. At present there are about 30 books in the series, and for each of them there is a slide-show available to accompany the study of it and stimulate discussion. Those who have made use of the series are very happy with the results and feel that it should be more widely known by confreres involved in pastoral work or education in Africa. The materials are published by

REDAJA ('Research for the Affective Education of the Young in Africa') and the prices are very modest. The full catalogue is available from C.I.M., 30 Rue Lhomond, 75005 Paris, and the books and slides can also be obtained from there in French. In the English version the slides are available from Sonolux, Pettenkofenstr. 26, D-8000 München 2, West Germany. As for the books, only three are so far available in English: *Girl, Prepare for your Marriage* (IPCT, P.O. Box 71581, Ndola, Zambia) and *Love, Friendship and Girls and Boy, Prepare your Future* (St. Paul Publications, P.O. Box 4392, Kampala, Uganda). If there are any confreres who could help in translating others into English, Fr. Duteil would be grateful if they would contact him (B.P. 160, Saint-Louis, Senegal).

## Mass Intentions

The Generalate has recently been finding itself short of Mass Intentions. If there are any circumscriptions or confreres who have Intentions to spare, the bursar at the Generalate would be glad to receive them. Please send them to: Fr. Joseph Burgraff, Clivo di Cinna 195, 00136 Rome.

## Jubilarians

### 70 Years of Profession

21 Aug. : Fr. Charles A. KAPP and Br. Cantius SZURSZEWSKI (USA/E).

### 65 Years of Profession

16 Aug. : Fr. Stanislaus M. ZABOROWSKI (USA/E).

### 60 Years of Profession

2 Aug. : Br. Albin THOMAS (France).  
24 Aug. : Frs. James GILTINAN, William HIGGINS, John JORDAN, John O'NEILL and Peter WHITE (Ireland).  
31 Aug. : Fr. Thomas MAHER (Ireland).

### 50 Years of Priesthood

7 July : Frs. Félix DECHAMBRE, Paul MAILLEUX and Joseph WINAND (Belgium), Fr. Frans PROOST (Kongolo).  
14 July : Fr. Jean ROZO (France).  
21 July : Fr. Michael HARKINS (Ireland).  
24 July : Fr. Philippe GAGNON (Canada).  
25 July : Frs. Johannes de BOER, Philippus van ESCH, Jozef POELL, Gerardus SCHRAMA and Antonius VERSTEGEN (Holland).

### 35 Years a Bishop

24 Aug. : Mgr. Gustave BOUVE (Belgium).

## Our Dead

3 Feb. : Mr. Gabriel HUBSCHWERLIN (France), 26.  
5 Feb. : Br. Gabriel FARRELL (Ireland), 79.  
7 Feb. : Fr. Claude DELAITRE (France), 72.  
12 Feb. : Fr. Henricus van PUTTEN (Holland), 68.  
16 Feb. : Fr. Philipp PLATZ (Germany), 78.  
17 Feb. : Fr. Eugène ANDLAUER (Canada), 82.  
17 Feb. : Br. Franciscus NIEUWENHUIZEN (Holland), 67.  
21 Feb. : Fr. Josef STELLBERG (Germany), 73.  
20 Mar. : Fr. Jacques DUPONT (Yaoundé), 69.  
20 Mar. : Br. Aloyse ROUILLARD (France), 63.  
23 Mar. : Fr. Séraphin MASSY (Yaoundé), 76.  
26 Mar. : Fr. Joseph BORTEYROU (France), 78.  
29 Mar. : Fr. Candido FERREIRA DA COSTA (Brazil S.E.), 90.