

Duquesne University

Duquesne Scholarship Collection

A Spiritan Anthology

Anthologie Spiritaine

1-1-2011

04. Mission must be built up through dialogue

Christian de Mare CSSp

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dsc.duq.edu/anthologie-spiritaine-english>



Part of the [Catholic Studies Commons](#)

Repository Citation

de Mare, C. (2011). 04. Mission must be built up through dialogue. Retrieved from <https://dsc.duq.edu/anthologie-spiritaine-english/77>

This Chapter IV is brought to you for free and open access by the Anthologie Spiritaine at Duquesne Scholarship Collection. It has been accepted for inclusion in A Spiritan Anthology by an authorized administrator of Duquesne Scholarship Collection.

Mission must be built up through dialogue

To Fr. Bessieux¹

At the end of April, 1845, Libermann learnt that Fr. Bessieux² and Brother Grégoire, whom he was convinced had died in the "Guinea disaster", were both alive and living in Gabon. In this letter, he outlines his plan for saving Africa, informs him that Bishop Barron³ has resigned and that the Congregation is now responsible for Guinea. He asks Bessieux to send more details of their work in Gabon, and gives some advice on relations with the colonial authorities. Already, his advice on the best approach to the local African people was beginning to take shape.

La Neuville, May 4th, 1845

To Father Bessieux, apostolic missionary at the French station in Gabon

My very dear Confrere,

After a period of long and painful anxiety about you, I have finally learnt that God, in his great goodness, has preserved you and that you are living in Gabon. You can imagine my joy after so much suffering, and you must have gone through great anguish yourself, completely isolated and without any news.

I presume you must have written to me several times, and not receiving, or practically not receiving, any reply, you must have thought that you had been abandoned. I wrote to you several times but I only received two letters written by you. So I can only assume that my letters never reached you. Rejoice, because there is no way in which you were abandoned! We

¹ N.D. VII, pp. 159-162.

² See index

³ See index

are going to send two missionaries to Gorée to make a foundation on the coast. Later, if God continues to bless you, we hope to do good things in this country which is so unfortunate and so difficult to penetrate. I have sent a report to the Minister on the method we are suggesting to achieve good results, the only method, in my opinion, that has a chance of succeeding. Our project is considered to be important but I have had no immediate response; we will need to finish the details of this scheme for all the colonies before a decision can be reached on its implementation.

Meanwhile, I have been given passage for two missionaries and a Brother, who will leave for Gorée on the 15th of this month. You will have news of them when the dry season begins. Write to them as soon as you receive this letter to let them know the state of affairs in Gabon. Address your letter to Fr. Briot, who will be the superior of the group until further orders. Add to the address: *"In his absence, deliver to Fr. Arragon or Brother Pierre Mersy in Gorée"*. If you are in need of anything, let them know; perhaps they could bring you some small things by way of clothes, furnishings or food.

I have only sent two missionaries for the moment. If the Minister gives a favourable reply to my suggestion, I will send more. We must not move too quickly in this most difficult mission: *"Qui va piano, va lontano"* (He who goes slowly will go further).

Let me tell you, in a few words, about the plan I have suggested to the Minister in a much extended description:

We will set up houses where we will receive black children - first at Gorée, then in Gabon - to prepare them for a wider education than they could be given in their own countries. When they are ready, we will take them to Europe in an area, already chosen, where the climate is warm; we have sufficient resources to start erecting such an establishment. We will give

them a solid education and introduce them to the European way of doing things. Once they are sufficiently developed and we can assess their capacities, we will choose some for further studies and others for training in agriculture and various other practical skills. They will also receive a solid grounding in the truths of religion and they will be able to help the black priests as catechists and in building up the Christian religion in their countries. Later, when we have trained some in agriculture, we will set up agricultural centres in Gabon (I have been told that the land in Gabon is more fertile than in Senegal). I am sure that with the help of the French commanders and officers, merchants and sea captains, we will find some suitable children from the start. Once we have sent these young people back to their own countries, trained in the European way, the project will soon expand.

Please send me more news of yourself as soon as possible. I would like details on the state of the country where you are at present. It seems that the Protestants have succeeded very well there. Perhaps you would achieve more if you moved away from the military fortress, but this is just a conjecture, rather than an opinion. Let me know of the successes you have had, the difficulties you have met and the steps you have taken to overcome them. What is your position amongst the French people and your relations with those in charge? Perhaps you are too severe; you should always treat them with respect. Try to be gentle and polite, show concern, respect and deference to everybody. No doubt you will see them commit some serious sins, but it is never good to get angry with them. Follow the example of Jesus who was so gentle with sinners; you must be all things to all men, supporting the faults of others with no trace of bitterness or rigidity. You know that this is a general guideline that all our missionaries should observe – and observe through the mercy of God.

Follow the habits and conventions of all and do not expect others to adapt themselves to your own particular tastes and inclinations. Those who are seeking the salvation of others must learn to be flexible; otherwise they may hurt themselves or hurt others. As you know, your own temperament is rather difficult in this respect: ask the Lord to heal what is defective in you so that your character will not do harm to the poor Blacks because of the opposition that it may arouse. Maintain good relations with the authorities: this is what God wants and it is for the good of souls. Support their plans and give them your help, as long as these plans are not contrary to justice and truth, nor opposed to the spread of the faith and good morality. But do not go beyond what is right for a minister of the Gospel; the people must not see you as a political agent of the French government, but as a priest of God and a teacher of the truth.

Always show interest in the poor people and teach them how to be happy, not simply through the faith and devotion in which you will instruct them, but also through their overall development to which you are likewise committed.

Bishop Barron has left the mission of Guinea and the Holy See has asked us to take charge. Around October, we hope to appoint one of our members as Prefect Apostolic. The last thing I want to do is abandon Guinea. If the French government helps us as we have asked, those who know the coast well have assured me that we will succeed; if the government gives no help at all, we will be less successful but we will make some progress; if the government opposes us, we will have to abandon the idea, but I think this will not happen. I have not asked the Minister for very much so it would cost him little to grant everything I have requested.

I must leave you now. Our confreres will give you all the news of what is happening here.

My warmest greetings in the love of Jesus and Mary,

*F. Libermann,
Priest of the Holy Heart of Mary*