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Spiritans and Education: An Overview

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Introduction

The 2012 Bagamoyo General Chapter (1.1 – 1.32) stated the current emphases of Spiritan mission as **evangelization of the poor, interreligious dialogue, promotion of justice, peace, and the integrity of creation** (JPIC), and **education**. Bagamoyo, as symbolic of the enslavement of black peoples for centuries, challenged Spiritans to ever greater dedication to the Gospel of justice, peace and reconciliation. Education appears in this light: “We renew once more our focus on education as a way to the integral liberation of individuals and peoples to whom we are sent” (1.4). As the SRL 14 (**Spiritan Rule of Life**) says, we make ourselves “the advocates, the supporters and the defenders of the weak and the little ones against all who oppress them” (citing Rule of 1849; **ND X**, 517).

Each religious Order validates all aspects of mission (education included) according to its charism and history. Jesuits run 189 institutions of higher learning throughout the world, 28 of them in the United States. Spiritans, on the other hand, have sometimes in their history debated the place of (higher) education in the Spiritan mission. Spiritans are constantly reevaluating their mission priorities attending to the “signs of the times.” The current evaluation is that education is a mission priority, especially in poor and developing nations.

**Poullart Des Places**

Poullart des Places founded the Seminary of the Holy Spirit in Paris on Pentecost Day, May 27, 1703 for the education of the clergy. His Rules, drawn up circa 1706, legislate (nos. 5-8):

> In this house we shall accept only persons who are known for their poverty, their good morals, and their aptitude for the sciences. On no pretext whatsoever may candidates be admitted who are able to pay elsewhere for their board and lodging … No one shall be accepted … who has not finished his classical studies and is not capable of starting either philosophy or theology… If they want to enter theology, they shall be examined in logic and physics.

Newtonian physics was new (Isaac Newton formulated his laws in 1687), but Poullart, himself a brilliant lawyer, wanted the broadest education possible for his clerics. His seminary was dedicated to excellence and orthodoxy. The average stay in
the seminary of Saint Sulpice was a year and half; for Poullart’s
Seminary, like the Jesuits, it was three years of philosophy and
four of theology. For a degree in canon law a student could
stay an additional two years.\textsuperscript{5} Several bishops in France drew
dtheir seminary rectors and faculty from the Spiritans. St. Louis
Grignion de Montfort (died 1716) reached an understanding
with Poullart des Places to draw his priests (Society of Mary)
from the Spiritan Seminary\textsuperscript{6}; by 1800, at least two thirds of these
priests were formed by Spiritans.\textsuperscript{7} Poullart des Places died in
1709 and was succeeded by Father Louis Bouic (1710-1763). In
the 1734 contract that gave State recognition to the Seminary,
Bouic for the first time included a missionary purpose, the
preparation of priests for the foreign missions, among the goals
of the Seminary.\textsuperscript{8} The 1734 Rules (I.2) read:

\begin{quote}
...to educate poor clerics ... who will be ready for
everything in the hands of prelates, to serve in hospices,
to evangelize the poor and infidels, and not only to
undertake but to love wholeheartedly and to prefer
to everything else the meanest and most toil[some]
ecclesiastical duties for which ministers are found only
with difficulty.\textsuperscript{9}
\end{quote}

In 1737 the dioceses of Meaux and Verdun invited the
Spiritans to run their seminaries; in 1746 they had to withdraw
from the latter due to a storm raised by Jansenists.\textsuperscript{10} By 1753,
Spiritans were a sizeable portion of the faculty in the seminary of
Quebec (Canada). By 1792, the Seminary of the Holy Spirit had
formed about 1,200 priests.\textsuperscript{11} Father Jacques Bertout was superior
general from 1805 to 1832. The Concordat with Napoleon
(July 15, 1801) provided diocesan seminaries with scholarships
for poor students. Fr. Bertout turned the Seminary toward the
education of missionaries for the French colonies, so retaining
legal recognition in France.\textsuperscript{12} This move was providential for the
later merger with Libermann’s group: priests of the Seminary
were active in areas to which Libermann’s priests of the Holy
Heart of Mary would come. The education of the clergy, at home
and abroad, has been a Spiritan charism ever since Poullart des
Places founded the Seminary of the Holy Spirit.

The Venerable Father Francis Libermann

Father Libermann founded the Congregation of the Holy
Heart of Mary in Paris on Christmas Day, 1841. The immediate
goal was to evangelize the freed slaves in Santo Domingo (Haiti)
and Bourbon (Reunion) as envisaged by Eugene Tisserant and
Frederic Le Vavasseur respectively in their “Work for the Blacks”
which each crafted independently. Libermann’s 1840 “Brief
Report on Foreign Missions" pointed out that the salvation of Negroes who, according to the theology of the time, were "in a position of necessary and eternal damnation"; it did not mention schools. The 1840 Provisional Rule (chapter 8, art. 2) charged the missionaries of the Holy Heart to do their utmost to establish an indigenous clergy, but they should never themselves assume the responsibility of teaching the youth letters, rather prepare them for theology and form them to clerical piety.

Libermann soon began to link evangelization more closely with the education of the natives. In a letter to Mother Javouhey, he revealed that the Ministry for the Navy and the Colonies charged him with the civilization of the African peoples. For him, this could only mean a “Christian civilization,” in which missionaries would both teach the Christian religion and run schools for the arts, agriculture, and the trades. It was imperative to train a native clergy. He mused about finding Brothers to run the schools and workshops. These ideas recur in his 1844 “Project for the Salvation of the Peoples of the Coasts of Africa.” Meantime, news had come of the death of five of his men who left with Mgr. Edward Barron for West Africa in September 1843. If Africa would be evangelized, it would be by her own; the terrain was too inhospitable for Europeans. He would select young Blacks for a seminary he would found in Rome. The most pious and gifted would be trained for the native clergy, the others in agriculture and the mechanical arts. His 1846 Memorandum insisted on a native clergy right from the start. Schools and central houses are to be built in each mission location. Those who have the ability and necessary character are to be prepared for the native clergy. Others are to be trained as catechists and teachers, the former receiving tonsure and minor orders and allowed to wear clerical dress! A third class would be trained in agriculture, the arts and crafts. Again appears an intimate link between evangelization and civilization, religion and science/crafts.

A civilization which only learns to use a spade and tools to a basic level will have little effect in improving the behavior of a people. It is not sufficient to show them the practical side of work; they must also learn the theory behind it so that gradually they will no longer need the help of the missionaries to continue with it and they cease to be dependent ... it is the task of the missionary to work towards it [the faith], not just concentrating on morality, but also on the intellectual and physical side, that is to say, instruction in agriculture and crafts...
Father Libermann wanted the African peoples to become masters of their own destiny through in-depth education and training in the crafts. His men on the ground in Africa pushed back. For them, the schools would detract from evangelization: “the missionary is not a school master.” They did not have sufficient means to maintain Brothers who might run schools. Libermann promised to send Brothers in due course, meantime he was sending two clerics to take charge of the schools; they could later be ordained, if found worthy. In a letter to Fr. Arragon, he wrote:

I was very happy with what you wrote about the schools, especially as I was rather alarmed at the reasoning in a letter of Fr. Bessieux and which Fr. Graviere supported. This reasoning tended towards abandoning the schools. My opinion is that to abandon the schools is to destroy the future of the mission. One could say, “but we could take that up later.” This is a farce: a mission badly begun is difficult to end well. As much as the work of the schools is slow and difficult, so much more is it important to take it up right from the start.

In 1848, Libermann’s missionary Congregation of the Holy Heart of Mary fused with the educational Congregation of the Holy Spirit. He fully embraced the original inspiration of the Holy Spirit Seminary, listing among the four works of the Congregation the direction of seminaries and teaching in them: “the society wishes to train specialists in the ecclesiastical sciences.” He accepted the direction of the inter-diocesan seminary of Cincinnati of which Fr. Schwindenhammer was to be rector, though the plan fell through. Le Vavasseur himself had in 1849 founded trade schools for the freed slaves in Reunion, a novitiate for Spiritan Brothers who would teach in these schools, and the Daughters of Mary for the training of women and girls. Back in France, he (1854) converted the 12th century Cistercian Abbey of Langonnet into a combined college and minor seminary.

After the Venerable Father Libermann

When Libermann died in 1852, Father Schwindenhammer became superior general (1852-1881). During his long term Spiritan colleges and seminaries flourished everywhere, 31 in all. These were intended not only to serve particular needs in the countries of foundation, but also to afford the Congregation in each place a home base that could continue to send out missionaries and attend to the sick and the retired. The number of Brothers meant for educational and technical training, at home
and in the missions, nearly equaled that of the priests. In 1853, the French bishops invited the Spiritans to run their French Seminary in Rome. Fr. Louis-Marie Lannurien, Libermann’s secretary, became its founder and first director. Spiritans ran this seminary until 2003. Of its 4,800 seminarians (from 1853 to 2003), 195 were consecrated bishops and 23 made cardinals. In 1859, the Congregation accepted the direction of a college and junior seminary in Martinique. In 1860, it opened a school of trades and agriculture in Chandernagor, India, the seminary and college of St. Martial, Haiti, and a seminary and college in Blackrock, Ireland. The latter boasts among famous past students Eamon de Valera, the 3rd President of Ireland, and Frank Duff, founder of the Legion of Mary. In 1863, St. Mary’s College opened in Trinidad, the next year it was the turn of Rockwell seminary and college in Tipperary (Ireland). Holy Ghost College opened in Braga in 1872 and St. Mary’s at Porto in 1886, both in Portugal, and so on. Chancellor Bismarck after the success of his Kulturkampf expelled Spiritans from Germany (1872-73); the United States was one of the places to which German Spiritans went. On March 1, 1874, Schwindenhammer made the United States a Vice-Province and appointed Fr. Joseph Strub its superior. In 1878 Fr. Strub founded a college in Pittsburgh that in 1911 became Duquesne University of the Holy Spirit, the only Spiritan University in the United States. Duquesne is no longer the only Spiritan university. The Spiritan University of Nneochi, Nigeria (SUN), opens this October (2014) as a work of the Spiritan Province of South-East Nigeria. Since 2010 the Spiritan University College of Ejisu, Ghana, awards degrees and diplomas from Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi (Ghana).

It was under Schwindenhammer that the first Spiritans arrived in Zanzibar (1863) and from there to Bagamoyo (1868), the first Catholic missionaries on the eastern mainland of Africa. They redeemed slaves and set up “freedom villages” (the members of which would help evangelize the interior). They expanded the carpentry and forge workshop built by Fava, adding lathes, a grain mill, and a creamery. Spiritan Brothers educated boys in the primary school (by 1868 there were 128 boys), the Daughters of Mary from Reunion taught the girls sewing and housekeeping. In Bagamoyo they opened workshops and schools, emphasizing agriculture. They developed a horticultural nursery with over a hundred species to be transplanted to other missions inland. The minor seminary started in Zanzibar moved to Bagamoyo in February 1870 with 12 students! Spiritans spearheaded western education in Eastern Africa. Among the fruits of Spiritan education are the late Julius Nyerere, the first President...
of Tanzania, who taught at the Spiritan Pugu Secondary School and whose cause for canonization has been introduced, and the current and third President of Tanzania, Benjamin Mkapa, himself a Muslim and native of Bagamoyo, also of Pugu.

In the first half of the 20th century education became especially important as an instrument of evangelization. Spiritans had arrived in Onitsha, Eastern Nigeria in 1885 as the first Catholic preachers in this area; from there they crossed over to Cameroun. In these new missions, education became an effective handmaid of the Spiritan mission. At Onitsha, Fr. Lejeune moved to abandon the redemption of slaves and “Christian villages” for evangelization through schools. On October 24, 1901 he wrote the superior general: “il faut des écoles; c’est le plus sûr moyen d’évangélisation” (“There is need for schools; this is the surer means of evangelization”). It was left to his successor, Bishop Joseph Shanahan (1905-1931), to execute the plan. Shanahan founded the first Teacher Training College and Seminary at Igbaram in 1913. Primary schools began to proliferate. Secondary schools were built at strategic points, beginning with Christ the King College, Onitsha (C.K.C.) in 1933. There was a phenomenal increase in the number of Catholics. Catholic leaders of thought were trained, giving the Catholic Church the great influence it maintains today in this part of the country. Attempts in the 1950s to set up a Catholic university in Nsukka were quashed by the government who eventually opened the State University of Nigeria, Nsukka in October 1960.

Education as a means of evangelization and liberation is not evenly embraced in the Congregation. This depends on realities on the ground and particularly what the government is doing or not doing in the realm of education. So, currently education ranks very high among Spiritan priorities in African Provinces, precisely because in many African nations the State has allowed education for the masses to collapse, while the elite send their children overseas or to exclusive schools in the country. The education of the poor is one way to promote social mobility and influence social development.

Because Spiritan mission is generally at the grassroots, many Spiritans are engaged in various types of informal education both at the parish and institutional levels. Some world famous ones are SERVOL, Trinidad (Service Volunteered for All) founded in the early 1970s by Fr. Gerard Pantin for the transformation of under-privileged teens, The Apprentices of Auteuil, a work of the archdiocese of Paris founded in 1866 by diocesan Fr. Louis Roussel, but given new life in 1932 by the Blessed Daniel Chukwuma Okoye, C.S.Sp.
Brottier, C.S.Sp. Fr. George Boran, C.S.Sp. is a world renowned educationist, founder of the National Youth Training Center in Sao Paolo, Brazil. There is also the Foyer Energie (Tananarive, Madagascar) where dropouts and marginalized youth are given free training in various careers and practical skills.

**After Vatican II**

We shall now examine the place of education in Spiritan mission since Vatican II. The 1968 chapter of renewal after Vatican II sharpened the missionary thrust of the Congregation. The purpose of the Congregation was preaching the Gospel to peoples and groups who have not yet heard it or who have largely lost it (nos. 3-4). Among the indivisible unities of the Spiritan apostolic life, it mentioned humanitarian and Christianizing aspects (no. 25). Development is not opposed to missionary activity but is an integral part of it (no. 390). By means of catechesis, education, and the teaching of social doctrine Spiritans are to raise up responsible Christians for the world (no. 391). Brothers are to be trained as experts and educators in the work of development; missionary priests shall not be primarily concerned with the technical and executive aspects of economic, social, and cultural development (no. 392; emphasis mine). In the section under Youth (no. 403), *Ad Gentes* (Vatican II Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church) 12 is cited: “schools should be considered not only as a privileged means of forming and developing Christian youth, but at the same time as a service of supreme value to men, especially in the developing countries…” And so, “where conditions allow and even demand it, the Spiritans, in keeping with their history, shall have recourse to this outstanding means.” They shall, however, regularly reexamine this commitment in the field of education and ensure that Spiritans so engaged participate in the overall pastoral plan of the diocese (emphasis mine). The overall impression is not that of an enthusiastic acceptance of education as mission, rather concern lest direct priestly engagement with education hurts the missionary ideal or removes priests too much from “pastoral” work.

The mass exodus of priests and religious and the decline of religious and priestly vocations in the late 1960s and 1970s forced debates about priorities in many religious and missionary congregations. Priorities receive the scarce resources, the rest may be let go. About the same time, missionary religious felt the urge to move into pastoral urgencies of the time created in part by the defection of so many priests. Direct engagement with education seemed more appropriate for the Christian laity. On June 24 1977, the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education...
countered with a document on Catholic Schools, *Malgré les déclarations* (Despite the Declarations). Objections to Catholic education are mentioned (nos. 17-23) and answered (no. 75). Among the objections are that Catholic schools seem to serve only the wealthy class. They use human institutions for religious and confessional purposes. There is the danger of proselytism and a one-sided outlook. They have outlived their time; now civil authority is responsible for education. The Church should direct her energy towards a more direct pastoral apostolate. The document concluded that whereas every school seeks to provide critical communication of human culture and the total formation of the individual, the Catholic school goes beyond this by affording a synthesis of culture and faith, of faith and life (no. 36; see also no. 49). As such, the Catholic school performs “an authentic apostolate” (no. 63).

Spiritans were not exempt from the currents of the time. In some places, like the United States Province, a vigorous debate ensued around the 1980s between the “missionaries” and the “educationists.” The 1986 general chapter and the consequent *Spiritan Rule of Life* had a mediating role in this debate. Among the types of activities Spiritans do in the local churches *SRL* 18 mentions “engaging in social and educational work in line with our Spiritan calling” (emphasis mine). The Congregation began to craft a new synthesis in a symposium of Spiritan educators at Duquesne University held June 24-28, 1991 and attended by 98 delegates from 24 Spiritan circumscriptions in 20 countries. It was the 1998 Maynooth (Ireland) chapter that finally arrived at a new synthesis. Outlining contemporary priorities as First Evangelization, Education, and Justice and Peace, it said (page 102): “formal and informal education is not something on the margins of our apostolate but is an integral part of our mission of evangelization (Cf. *Ecclesia in Africa*, nos 93, 102, 115).” The trend towards education for liberation and human promotion reflects, perhaps, the southern hemisphere tilt of the Congregation. More recently, 12 Spiritans representing Spiritan formal and informal educational works throughout the world met with the general council in Rome (July 3-9, 2011) in preparation for the 2012 Bagamoyo Chapter. They wrote (page 18): “we reaffirm educational works as an important priority in the Congregation”—an affirmation fully endorsed by the Bagamoyo Chapter. In true Spiritan fashion, each Province or circumscription will weight and engage this priority according what the Spirit is saying in their concrete circumstances.

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If God gives me the grace to succeed in this, you can count on missionaries. I will train them for you, and you will put them to work.

Endnotes

1"Overview" announces that this is no detailed treatment.

2We used to be called The Congregation of the Holy Ghost or The Holy Ghost Fathers. After Vatican II out of sensitivity to Brothers, the latter changed to Holy Ghost Fathers and Brothers. The word “Ghost” looked increasingly quaint, so Congregation of the Holy Ghost became Congregation of the Holy Spirit. Around 1980, the Germans began to call themselves Spiritaner (Spiritans) and slowly other parts of the world followed suit.

3The Council of Trent (Dec 13, 1545 to Dec 4, 1563) decreed the establishment of seminaries, but this slowly took root in places; even then only students from well-off families could afford boarding and many of these were more interested in benefice and career than ministry among the rural populations and the poor.

4Henry J. Koren, C.S.Sp., The Spiritual Writings of Father Claude Poullart des Places (Pittsburgh: Duquesne Studies, Spiritan Series, 3, 1959), 167

5Koren, To the Ends of the Earth, 18.

6In 1702, Saint Louis Grignon de Montfort visited his boyhood friend. Poullart des Places did not feel called to the preaching of missions, besides he had the project of his Seminary in mind. He promised his friend: “If God gives me the grace to succeed in this, you can count on missionaries. I will train them for you, and you will put them to work. In this way both you and I will be satisfied” (Koren, Spiritual Writings, 31).

7Henry Koren, C.S.Sp., To the Ends of the Earth, 23.

8Koren, To the Ends of the Earth, 27.


10Koren, To the Ends of the Earth, 32.


12Koren, Essays, 127.

13Report to the Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith. ND II, 68-76.

14ND II, 253-254. The 1845 Rule gave a reason: lest this absorbs too much of the precious time of the missionaries.


16Already On November 1, 1820, Fr. Bertout, superior of the Seminary of the Holy Spirit, sent Fr. Baradère to Saint Louis, Senegal where he was Prefect Apostolic for 18 months. Fr. Baradère wrote: "the only means to evangelize the blacks is to have indigenous priests. For this it would be necessary to establish a seminary in Saint Louis to train young blacks and people of color" (Rath, "Libermann, Promoteur et Père du Clergé Africain," 438). In 1824 Blessed Mother Anne Marie Jahouvey with the help of the French government founded a college for Senegalese boys and girls in the diocese of Beauvais in France in a

Libermann originally intended his Congregation for priests alone. In October 1842, a Mr. Ducournau asked if there was place for a cooper in the Guinea mission. Libermann answered he could render whatever help the missionaries needed, though not by exercising his trade. That fell through. Mgr. Edward Barron impressed Libermann with the idea that lay Brothers would greatly advance the mission by teaching natives the mechanical arts and preparing them for career positions in society. When Barron embarked for West Africa on September 13, 1843, he had with him seven Holy Heart priests and three lay volunteers. In 1851 Libermann wrote a Rule for Brothers. Guellec, “La Mission du Frere d’Apres Libermann,” 398; Koren, *To the Ends of the Earth*, 192.

18 *ND* VI, 274-279: October 23, 1844.
22 Letter to Bessieux of February 12, 1847, *ND* IX, 50: “Vous dites que le missionnaire n’est pas un maître d’école” (you [people] say the missionary is no school master).
24 February 12, 1847. *ND* IX, 44.
25 The others were: mission in lands where the Gospel has not yet been preached; mission in the Colonies; and works for the poor in Europe. This is found in a document of around Pentecost 1850 drawn up for a recruitment tour of major seminaries in France by Le Vavasseur. *A Spiritan Anthology*, 612-613, 615. Cf. Paul Coulon and Paule Brasseur, *Libermann (1802-1852) : une pensée et une mystique missionnaires*. (Paris: Edition du Cerf, 1988), 661-669.
26 Koren, *To the Ends of the Earth*, 218.
27 Ibid., 236.
28 Ibid., 237.
29 Ibid., 266, 275.
32 Ibid., 275.
34 Koren, *To the Ends of the Earth*, 293.
35 Ibid., 294.
36 Bishop Armand René Maupoint, bishop of St. Denis, in 1860 sent his Vicar General, Father Fava, to scout Bagamoyo for purposes of evangelization. His proposal was “to fight slavery at the grassroots, to ransom as many slaves as possible, to train them in schools, to form agricultural settlements and to lead them to Christianity” (Congregazione dello Spirito Santo, *Brief History of Tanzania and the Coming of Spiritans to East Africa*, 2012), 5.
39 *Spiritan Life*, no 23: *Spiritans in Education* (September 2013), 86-87.
41 Text in *Documentation Catholique* (August 1977), 7-21.
42 See *ID* 49 (January 1992).
43 The full report can be read in *Spiritans in Education*. Their “Reflections on Educational Commitments in the Congregation of the Holy Spirit” (pages 14-22) is published below.