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SPIRITAN NEWS

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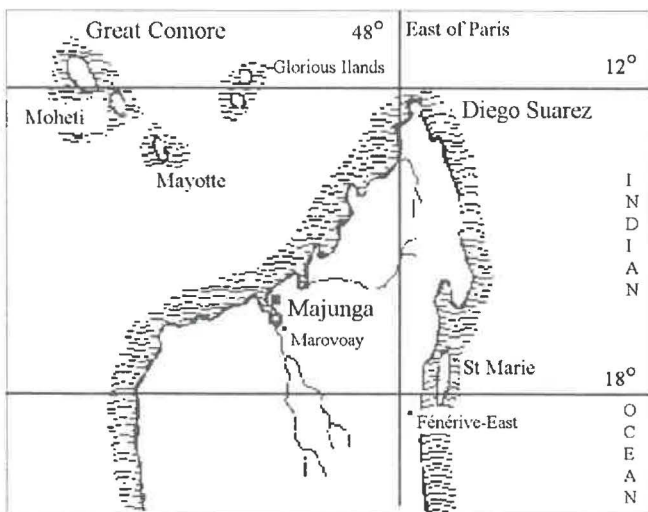
A hundred years of Spiritan presence in Madagascar

There is no doubt that the church in Madagascar is one of the success stories of the Catholic missions, and the Congregation can be grateful to God for the substantial role it was called upon to play in this story – a role which is by no means over today, with the call to continue the work of Christ in the world and in the great island.

The Spiritans in Madagascar have modestly celebrated the centenary of their arrival and uninterrupted presence in the North West of the island. On 5th April 1898, Mgr Alexander Le Roy, Superior General of the Spiritans since 24th May 1896, agreed to send missionaries to Madagascar following long discussions which had begun before his mandate and lasted for a total of 4 years.

Following the reply of Mgr Le Roy decisions were quickly implemented. On 5th July 1898, three briefs signed by Leo X111 gave birth to the Vicariate Apostolic of Northern Madagascar which was confided to the Congregation of the Holy Spirit:

- the first brief erected the boundaries of the Vicariate of the Northern third of the island from the 18th to the 12th parallel;
- a second brief named Mgr Francis-Xavier Corbet, as bishop of Obba;
- a third brief named Mgr Corbet as the Vicar Apostolic of North Madagascar.



APOSTOLIC VICARIATE OF NORTH MADAGASCAR

The setting up of the missionary work of the Spiritans began shortly after following the arrival of the first missionaries: Fr Antoine Decressol for Majunga on 3rd October 1898, followed by Fr Brunetti who knew Fr Libermann, and who was assigned to Diego Suarez on 5th October. On 13th December 1898, Mgr Corbet and his Vicar General, Fr George Leportier, arrived at Majunga.

Soon after their arrival Mgr Corbet and Fr Leportier began their trek, by steamboat or sedan chair, through this Vicariate which extended over a third of the island, in order to establish schools and



Mgr François-Xavier Corbet

mission outposts: at Fénérive-East (1899), Analava (1901), Marovoay, ancient capital of ethnic Sakalava (1902). At the time of Mgr Corbet's death in 1914, twelve missions depended on the Vicariate Apostolic of Diego Suarez.

Progress continued, so much so, that in 1923 the Holy See decided to split up the Vicariate and to create the new Vicariate Apostolic of Majunga (more than 100,000 km²). Mgr Paul Pichot, the first Vicar Apostolic, founded the Junior Seminary in 1927 and invited, that same year, the Spiritan Missionary Sisters to prepare the establishment of a local diocesan Congregation of Sisters. Five candidates made first profession on 16th May 1907; the first Malagasy priest was ordained on 15th August 1943. From that date to the present a total of 38 have been ordained to the priesthood.

Strongly supported by committed Spiritan Brothers and lay persons from the Plateau, the Spiritan mission, after a period of outstanding growth, led to the creation of new ecclesiastical territories which were given to other religious or to the secular clergy. The 30 or so confreres who still work on the island render a back-up service for diverse ministries demanded of them. To be noted are two significant works – the centre for street children at Antanarivo, and that of the Indian Ocean Foundation for the training of Spiritan missionaries.

In keeping with the spirit of Fr Antoine Decressol who on his death bed, seven month following his arrival in Mahajanga said "At my death, please tell the Superior General that I do so, attached with all my heart to the Congregation".

Province of Central Africa - PAC and passage, Birth and pains

In December 1998, the General Council took a decision to create, at Pentecost 1999, the new Province of Central Africa (PAC), deriving from the Foundation of Central Africa and the four Districts of Cameroon, Congo, Gabon, and Bangui. The first Chapter has been convoked for June 1999. (See decisions of the General Council in this newsletter).

On the occasion of this passage and following a process of discernment with the General Council, several confreres who up to now belonged to FAC (Foundation of Central Africa) have taken the logical decision to belong from now on to the Foundation linked with their country of origin: for three confreres this will be the Foundation of Congo-Kinshasa, ten others from Senegal or Guinea have opted for the new Foundation to come into existence shortly, from the District of Senegal. On the day of its birth the new Province will have 95 confreres by origin, working either in the Province itself or working 'ad extra', as well as about 120 others appointed to the circumscription. A consultation of these 215 confreres is in process to prepare for the nomination, by the General Council, of the first Provincial Superior.

By way of a long term arrangement, a final preparatory meeting to plan this passage had been fixed for the start of January 1999, at Brazzaville, in the Congo. But the renewed outbreak of violence in Brazzaville, some days before Christmas obliged us to go to Douala in the Cameroons. Thus, from 05-09 January 1999, fifteen confreres gathered at the Spiritan Procure, Douala: this included the five members of the Council of FAC, the four Superiors of the Districts that will merge, each accompanied by a member of his District Council, together with a representative of the French Province and two members of the General Council, G. Mbilingi and J.M. Jolibois.

The first objective of the meeting was to plan for the Provincial Chapter, the date of which was fixed for 20 - 30 June 1999: working out the representation of all the confreres

concerned and finalising the six pre-Capitular texts. It was impossible to leave the events in Congo-Brazzaville out of account. Pain and sadness in face of so many murders, lootings and general mess. There was comfort however, deriving from the courageous attitude of a number of our confreres in Brazzaville, through their concrete solidarity with thousands of homeless seeking refuge either in the compound of our houses of formation or parishes. There remained however a kind of silent unease for the future of the country and of its many people who are close to us.

Unease likewise concerning our faculty of Theology housed in one of the areas most afflicted by combat and looting. The provisional withdrawal of the 40 professed students to our first cycle house in Libreville seemed inevitable in order to facilitate somehow the completion of this academic year. This will demand a certain cramming, and as well, the books required for study will not be always ready to hand. But at least the students will be in a family environment and, hopefully, have a certain security. For the re-start of the next academic year in October, several hypothetical arrangements were envisaged and research will be undertaken in order to give a clearer view of the position over the next weeks.

"Exile" of a meeting in Douala; "exile" of a scholasticate in Libreville ... at a time when other confreres remained at their posts because of their fidelity to those who count on them... Difficult choices and never easy! A time of crisis and a time of exile... Perhaps a time of interior renewal? An opportune time to distinguish the essential from the incidental, to deepen our sense of commitment, our dedication to promote the Gospel of peace. The confreres gathered in Douala discerned an invitation to such a renewal; it is also a way, certainly not the worst one, to prepare the birth of the new Province...

Jean-Michel Jolibois

EAP CHAPTER STRESSES LIBERATION THROUGH EDUCATION

The triennial Chapter of the East African Province (EAP) held from 3rd - 11th January at the Spiritan Missionary Seminary on the outskirts of Arusha highlighted the importance of keeping education in all its forms to the forefront of our apostolate.

It was felt opportune to re-emphasize education since many members in East Africa had experienced the nationalization of most of the Catholic schools. This resulted in the loss of the enthusiasm they formerly had for expanding education at all levels which can now be done once again in most cases.

Julius Nyerere, who was guest speaker at the opening of the Chapter had been a staff member of the Spiritan Secondary School at Pugu before becoming the first President of the country, stressed empowerment and liberation through education especially for the marginalized and others suffering from the imbalance of power. The second Tanzanian guest speaker, Mrs. Gertrude Mongella who was Secretary Gen-

eral of the world conference of women in Beijing, accented overcoming the marginalization of women through education.

Education played a role in many of the other points raised during the Chapter especially in the expansion of the Province's houses of formation to cater to an increasing number of candidates. The Chapter members were determined to implement the report on Formation from the Maynooth General Chapter and the "New Guide for Formation". They also resolved to promote vocations for Brothers.

The delegates elected the new Provincial, Fr Gerard Nnamunga, and also members of his Council. They renewed their commitment to the health services they have undertaken, to the refugees in Tanzania, to their apostolate in war situations in Congo-Kinshasa and Guinea-Bissau and in First Evangelization. In all their assignments they are determined to strive for self-reliance and financial accountability. The Finance Committee will be revived for projects of the Province.