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DANIEL BROTTIER, THE HOLY GHOST FATHER

Those among the Spiritans, mostly French, who knew Fr. Brottier personally are few in number today, and all are over sixty years of age. They would have known him only from the Orly novitiate or Chevilly scholasticate. They would hardly have known him outside Auteuil, for he seldom left it except for meetings of the general council at the Motherhouse on Rue Lhomond, where most were of an age then not to be living now. Younger confreres, scholastics, might have met him at Auteuil at a "Good Cinema" show, an original idea of Fr. Brottier's, appreciated by the orphans and by all who liked a good moment of healthy relaxation. Personally I recall his tall figure in the Chevilly chapel. I think it was July 1935 at the solemn consecration to the apostolate: a glorious summer's day, confrere-friends leaving for the missions they were appointed to on that day — some part of the African world, the West Indies, or alas! only France! Everything was excitement in that house some would never see again. "We promise to meet around the Venerable Father". In those rows of white surplices over the black Spiritan soutane I can still see Fr. Brottier's radiant peaceful face, his beard flowing down over the strings of the surplice, his eyes flashing around or hidden in recollected prayer. He incarnated a type of missionary of the heroic mould, although we knew he had never been a missionary except in Senegal, which we felt was close to Paris. Wasn't Dakar a suburb of Marseilles? Even though he was not a Bishop Augouard he knew he was no second-class missionary. His health had not allowed him venture all the way to the equator, but at Dakar and St. Louis he had worked hard, sweated, shaken with fever and suffered migraines enough to have to come home.

After his heroic and legendary dedication as a chaplain during the great war, he "lighted" at Auteuil, to rescue the colossal organization of the orphan-apprentices from near-

extinction. I admit it never dawned on me that he might be a Saint and I would be promoting his cause! The circumstances of his death some months later, in February 1936, shed more light on his personality. It was a big sacrifice to die without being able to attend the consecration of the cathedral at Dakar, the African Memorial. From his sick-room he radiated the happiness of a job well done, blessed by God, which he would never see with his eyes even though it was he who had drawn up the plans and financed the construction by his alms, his calls to generosity and the support of many people, Christians and non-Christians. Cardinal Verdier, just back from consecrating the cathedral, officiated at his funeral and declared him a man of great virtue. It is to the honour of his confreres around him, and of his superiors, that they preserved and nourished the *fama sanctitatis*, the reputation for holiness, that is quite in place.

The human successes of Fr. Brottier, his great work as builder, director, after his years of zeal and courage in the dangers of war, are explained by his charity. From 1946 to 1952 the first process for his beatification took place in Paris, with ancillary ones at Blois and Dakar. The apostolic process took place at Paris from 1962 to 1963. 116 witnesses testified. It may not be realized that few Spiritans made depositions. One of the Consultors on the Virtues wrote:

“Practically all the witnesses were eye-witnesses, although two or three had only occasional contact with him. Almost all these witnesses were of great value because of their knowledge; among them were three bishops of the Holy Ghost Congregation and a member of the French Academy, Henri Bordeaux. It is strange that for this religious most witnesses were outsiders and not confreres; of the latter there were ten. This is understandable from Fr. Brottier’s kind of activity, as a missionary, as a military chaplain, as director of Auteuil, where almost all his colleagues were not confreres. This gives more weight to the witnesses, greater objectivity, since they could observe him over many years”.

Frs Yves Pichon and Emile Herbinière, and later Frs Marc Duval and Joseph Boegly, in conformity with the desires of the Motherhouse, undertook or continued the steps of his cause. Any delays were not their fault. Besides, we have arrived at the end too soon — the required fifty years between death and beatification are not complete. In the report of one of the

six Consultors on the heroicity of his virtues I read the following unsigned lines with pleasure; the writer spoke from his heart.

“One memory is that when the seminarians of St. Sulpice asked permission to visit Auteuil, the permission was always granted. The superior would say, Go, you have in Fr. Brottier the example of a faithful and total priesthood”.

Isn't that our ideal?

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