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Epilogue

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EPILOGUE

Daniel Brottier's greatness is something that non-French-speaking sectors of the Congregation may learn to their surprise from this issue. Hardly anything has been written on him heretofore except in French. When his name appeared in the *Osservatore Romano* in January 1983, as a Holy Ghost Father whose virtues are recognized as "heroic" by the Holy See, it was time to know him and make him known. Unlike the situation of Fr. Libermann and Blessed Fr. Laval, most of us in the Congregation are contemporaries of Fr. Brottier, in the sense that we were born, and many were professed, before his death in 1936.

Exceptional though he was among us, his life might be termed typically "Holy Ghost" or Spiritan in an ideal way. After a willing spell of seven years in West Africa that damaged his health to the extent that he could never go back to the missions, he, a man of intense energy, threw himself into working with, and living among, the most abandoned of Paris. He created a "Boys' Town" of bricks and mortar, of waifs and raggamuffins, that multiplied itself throughout France and did, in the simplest phrase, much good. But the *mystique* of Auteuil goes further than buildings and past-students. The influence of the man Brottier took on an autonomy from his work in the little campus — already in his life and increasingly after his death — to find a target in the physical and spiritual misery of various strata of Paris's poor and abandoned. The people's recognition of this is the "popular devotion" that is at work towards having him canonized. His remains, lying inconspicuously in the right transept of the church he built, is at the heart of the Auteuil enterprise in many senses.

Every Spiritan will think of his pet comparisons with Fr. Brottier, confreres whose memory he venerates and whose parallel with Brottier is an endorsement that the Spiritan charism is workable in flesh and blood. I think of Bishop Joseph Shanahan. They were born and died within a few years of each other. According to photos and eye-witness descrip-

tions, they had similar temperament, physique and even looks, flowing beard included. Both were consumed with Libermanian zeal, and both had an extraordinary devotion to St. Thérèse of Lisieux. Shanahan prayed at her grave in Lisieux, and spoke with her four sisters at the Carmel, as early as 1920, some months before being ordained bishop. As Fr. Brottier prepared his orphans for first communion, Bishop Shanahan prepared his people for baptism. "Magnificent people", he would say of the Africans, "a shame to see them without the faith". Neither man seems to quote Fr. Libermann expressly, but both of them lived his ideals both in the missionary apostolate and in spirituality.

Spiritan zeal will go on finding new outlets. Auteuil is in competent hands now without too much Spiritan commitment in personnel, while the holiness of Fr. Brottier continues to radiate from it. The poor and abandoned, "magnificent people without the faith", will always attract young Spiritans, works "for which the Church has difficulty in finding apostolic labourers", as our Rule puts it. The foregoing pages on Fr. Brottier show what Spiritan spirituality and zeal have in fact been able to accomplish. Within the same traditions stemming from the same founders, the rest of us will not put Auteuil on a pedestal and leave Fr. Brottier in stained glass, but will humbly acknowledge the power for good in the providential vocation God has given us.

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