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EVANGELIZATION OF SLAVES: A MORAL MISSTEP?

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INTRODUCTION

Good afternoon. I'd like to first of all say how grateful I am to be here during Founders' Week at Duquesne, hosted by the Center for Spiritan Studies. I feel very much in debt to the Spiritans for generous hospitality shown me on three continents—in North America, Europe, and Africa. I've received kind welcomes at parishes, universities, retirement communities, archival centers, and administrative headquarters connected to the Congregation in 5 countries (the US, France, Kenya, Tanzania, and Italy). Without the cooperation of many members, as well as others who work with them, I would have never been able to do my work. In addition, US Spiritans generously sponsored the publication of my book with a generous subvention. So, thank you—and if today's talk disappoints, blame them!

I'm also glad to be here because I admire François-Jacob Libermann, the second founder of the Spiritans, honored during this Founders' Week along with the first founder, Claude Poullart des Places. Libermann's reinvigorating spirit prompted the growth of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit into eastern Africa, where my own research took me, and also here in the US, leading to Duquesne and other laudable undertakings.

Libermann, you likely know, first founded another missionary/apostolic society that later joined the existing Holy Spirit Congregation. Yet you might not know that *before* that he considered attaching his group to my religious congregation, the Congregation of Holy Cross, founded a few years earlier. Be assured that my own good fortune due to Spiritan generosity overcomes any hurt feelings at our having been spurned by the Venerable Libermann 160 years ago!

Today I would like to consider certain moral and ethical questions connected to missionary practice. The case I am going to discuss—the evangelization of slaves carried out by Holy Spirit missionaries in eastern Africa in the latter 19th century—is unusual. Yet I believe it raises general questions for any missionary undertaking—indeed all sorts of humanitarian or helping intervention. Thus while considering the ethics of this Spiritan work, I will also use it to address ethical questions associated with missionary activity more generally.

An anecdote to begin. In 1882, two male African Catholic Christians at a Holy Ghost mission in today's Tanzania fled their mission on the mainland, seeking sanctuary and assistance at the French consulate in Zanzibar (Kollman 2005, 2-3, 253-256). Zanzibar, located some fifty miles off the coast of mainland Tanzania, is an island and has long been a regional and global trading center. Through most of the 19th century, Zanzibar was for all practical purposes the capital city of eastern Africa, a bustling cosmopolitan place with Arabs, Indians, Africans and Europeans interacting in a busy port. Ships left Zanzibar carrying ivory, spices, and slaves from mainland eastern Africa, embarking into the Indian Ocean and beyond. European countries and the US had consulates there, and the Spiritans had started their east African work in Zanzibar, and from there moved to the mainland. Now twenty years after the start, two Africans evangelized by the Spiritans had fled to the French consul for help.

One of the two had been with the Spiritans for nearly all the 20 years they had been in eastern Africa. His name was Léon, and he'd arrived as a child at the mission. By 1882 he was married and living at a Spiritan mission. We lack direct evidence of the thoughts of both escapees, and of the consul's reaction to their plea. We do have, however, Spiritan reactions to this event—and these are most telling. The Spiritans sweated as they awaited the outcome of the two Africans' appeal to the French consul. Much was at stake. The Spiritans, mostly French, had long relied on French government support for the mission—financially, but also politically. Now French sponsorship seemed at risk.

The Spiritans sweated as they awaited the outcome

...

...Spiritan missionary activity, which had focused on the evangelization of slaves.

And the complaint of these African Catholics—the actual content of their appeal—also gave cause for alarm. The reason? According to Spiritan accounts, these two African Catholics pleaded that the French consul provide them “*liberté*,” freedom, against the unjust demands of the mission. The plea for *liberté* had special resonance in light of Spiritan missionary activity, which had focused on the evangelization of slaves. Holy Ghost missionaries had pursued the making of Catholics from onetime slaves with great sacrifice of time and talent, not to mention money, for two decades, and had developed a much admired program for such formation. Despite their work with slaves, *liberté* was not a word that French Catholics like the Spiritans used in the 19th century in self-description of their goals, for it carried with it connotations of the French Revolution and resultant anti-Church sentiment. Now, with its use in the appeal to the consul—and a rash of other escapes and frustrating episodes

in the 1880s—the Spiritan mission in eastern Africa, centered on the evangelization of slaves for two decades, seemed in peril.

This episode condenses a number of questions about the Spiritan evangelization of slaves in 19th-century eastern Africa. To address them, today I will first outline the evangelization carried out by Spiritans between 1863 and 1890 in what is today eastern Tanzania. Second, I will review evaluations of the Spiritan work with slaves over the years. There have been many, often critical, and they began early. Finally, I will conclude with my own ethical reflection on this Spiritan work, acknowledging previous critiques while challenging common presuppositions.

This will be a cautionary tale...

This will be a cautionary tale, but cautionary in a double sense. First, we ought to be cautious of helping other people on terms we set ourselves—a conclusion very much at home in the contemporary secular world, which can be suspicious of supposed paternalistic undertakings like mission, and doubly suspicious of something as overtly paternalistic as mission directed at slaves. A second caution, however, should fall upon those inclined to condemn mission—or similar actions—in the past. Those with such inclinations ought to be cautious of how their present-day perspectives shape their view of the past. The challenge facing ethical judgments of past actors is first of all to gain a deep understanding of the worlds in which those we tend to judge acted, and not to let our quite proper moral opinions override that attempted understanding. Historians sometimes call this tendency to judge the past with the present-day perspectives “presentism,” but I prefer the phrasing of English historian E. P. Thompson, who decried the distortions arising from “*the enormous condescension of posterity*” (Kollman 2005, xxii, citing Thompson 1968, 13).

II.

Spiritans were a natural choice to take over a new mission in Zanzibar in 1863...

The Spiritan mission in eastern Africa began as part of the 19th-century Catholic missionary revival. With their history of serving in French islands in the Indian Ocean, the Spiritans were a natural choice to take over a new mission in Zanzibar in 1863, three years after it began. This mission initially covered a huge area—from Ethiopia to Mozambique, and inland across Africa. The 1850s influx of the Libermann-inspired priests and brothers—those guys who almost joined my Congregation of Holy Cross, but didn’t!—led to new Spiritan energy, and Zanzibar became a celebrated site of their work. They continued the emphasis on slaves begun three years before them under the direction of clergy from Réunion in the Indian Ocean.

...the British, who increasingly sought to stop the maritime slave trade from east Africa...

...Spiritans sights were set on the mainland and inland Africa.

Slaves came to the mission through several means. A few were abandoned by their masters, or escaped and found their way to the mission. Second, the Spiritans used monies from European Catholic donors to purchase slaves at the slave market in Zanzibar, which remained open until 1873. Third, the Spiritans received slaves freed at sea by the British, who increasingly sought to stop the maritime slave trade from east Africa the same way they had earlier done in west Africa—and had made treaties with the Sultan of Zanzibar allowing interdiction. Such freed slaves presented the British navy with a dilemma, and the Catholic mission looked a worthy outlet for those freed, for whom a return to their homes seemed an unaffordable and impractical extravagance.

Spiritans attention to slaves was certainly motivated by compassion. It was also central to their missionary strategy, which they thought of in two stages. As they considered the future, stage two, Spiritans sights were set on the mainland and inland Africa. There the population was perceived to be less shaped by Islam and more open to Christianity. The Spiritans dreamed of a day when their mission would flourish on the mainland, away from the coast where mosques and Islamic population centers impeded evangelization. In the short term, however, the Spiritans continued the evangelization of slaves that had preceded them—stage one—and even intensified the formative program. They foresaw these slaves becoming the foundation for the anticipated thriving church of the future. From the beginning, fully formed communities were their goal, and thus they sought to form differing groups—seminarians who would eventually become priests or men and women religious; skilled workers through training in trades; agricultural workers; and eventually married couples—to compose such fully formed communities. With formation their goal, they focused on children, for adults seemed to the missionaries to have been formed already—as pagans, or, less commonly, Muslims—and thus difficult to transform, while children seemed more pliable. A quote from the founder of the Spiritan mission in eastern Africa, Antoine Horner, captures the sentiment well: *"We must before everything work to create an enduring and solid foundation; trying to form children already advanced in age would be like wanting to bend large trees."* (Kollman 2005, 94)

For five years this program proceeded in fits and starts at Zanzibar. Then in 1868 the bulk of the operation moved to the mainland port of Bagamoyo where the Spiritans established a larger mission with more extensive plantations that would allow them to support themselves by raising crops. They also were

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able to remove their once-slave, now in-the-mission charges from the Islamic enclave at Zanzibar. Over time Bagamoyo grew into one of the most admired missions in eastern Africa, with a widespread reputation for order and missionary success. From there the Spiritans and African Catholics, mostly onetime slaves, founded other missions away from the coast: first in 1877, then 1880, 1883, and every few years after.

These inland foundations followed a typical pattern. Usually a few Spiritans went off with a dozen or so young men from Zanzibar or Bagamoyo to build huts on land granted by local authorities in places deemed desirable due to local ecology and politics. After completing preliminary dwellings, those men then returned to Bagamoyo to marry one of the young women at Bagamoyo. As Catholic couples they then returned to be “kernel” of the new church, inhabiting the huts, building new structures, and—the missionaries hoped—serving as a beacon of hope, faith, and civilization for the surrounding peoples.

Eventually this plan stood at the origins of the Catholic Church in both Tanzania and Kenya, with formidable growth in the region around Kilimanjaro, discussed in Matt Bender’s talk last year during Founders’ Week. Closer to Bagamoyo, such missions formed the earliest parishes in the current diocese of Morogoro in Tanzania. All in all, I believe around 4000 slaves came into Spiritan missions between 1863 and the early 1890s (Kollman 2005, 45).

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praise...*

III.

At first, Spiritan efforts received widespread praise from outsiders. The Sultan of Zanzibar, European explorers, European officials centered in Zanzibar, and other missionaries lauded their efforts. A common feature of such praise included an implicit contrast with other missionary activity in eastern Africa. Thus Henry Morton Stanley contrasted Catholic Spiritan work what he characterized as “*attempts to make gentlemen*” or to work for “*conversion*,” for like many European witnesses he felt that the so-called practical approach of the Spiritans was more effective than Protestant evangelization. Stanley belittled efforts like those of many Protestants as follows:

Instead of attempting to develop the qualities of this practical human being, [the missionary, in this case Anglican] instantly attempts his transformation by expounding to him the dogmas of the Christian Faith, the doctrine of transubstantiation and other difficult subjects, before the

barbarian has had time to articulate his necessities and to explain to him that he is a frail creature requiring to be fed with bread, and not with a stone. (Kollman 2005, 142, citing Stanley 1878, 80)

An official British visitor to the region appointed by Parliament in 1873 to investigate the slave trade, Sir Bartle Frere, belittled Protestant efforts in similar terms. In contrast, Frere wrote of Bagamoyo:

I can suggest no change in the general arrangements of the institution, with any view to increase its efficiency as an industrial and civilizing agency, and in that point of view I would recommend it as a model to be followed in any attempt to civilize or evangelize Africa. (Kollman 2005, 142, citing Frere 1873, 122)

...not long before such admiration, while not ceasing, was mixed with harsher questions.

But it was not long before such admiration, while not ceasing, was mixed with harsher questions. What in the 1860s and 70s looked like realistic work to civilize—a sensible contrast to Protestant attempts to make *gentlemen*—by the 1880s seemed to some too close to re-enslavement. Early in the 1880s the British consul ordered a stop to the practice of handing over freed slaves to the Catholic mission by the British navy, accusing the Spiritans of not paying their workers on their missions and thus continuing slave or slave-like status. Likely the extensive plantations at Bagamoyo, not to mention problems the missionaries were having with their Christians like the escape and appeal of Léon and his companion, encouraged suspicions that residents did not enjoy the freedom ostensibly sought by the British government for onetime slaves. Later accusations against the Spiritans asserted that their practice of purchasing slaves through various means (which continued after the 1873 closing of Zanzibar’s slave market) in fact encouraged the slave trade by maintaining a market. (Kollman 2005, 210-12)

...and differences of opinion among the Spiritans about missionary strategy...

Spiritans writings display awareness of the potential for such accusations. Arguments over missionary strategy revealed internal disagreements that suggested sensitivity to the opprobrium under which their work with former slaves could fall. Revealing comments arose early, for example when Horner complained to his superiors in Paris that if subsidies were cut then the mission risked treating its Christians “like ordinary slaves.” Others expressed misgivings at the hard work that the mission mandated from its Africans, and differences of opinion among the Spiritans about missionary strategy traded accusations that one strategy or another amounted to re-enslavement.

Attempted reforms by the Spiritans, discussed in local meetings and in formal chapters in 1870 and 1884, also show awareness of the possibility that their work might be seen as ongoing enslavement. They mandated minimum ages at which children could leave school and proceed to work exclusively in the plantations of the mission, for example, suggesting that otherwise such labor would be merely exploited (Kollman 2005, 150-51, 220-23).

Other evidence is also telling. In 1892, a letter describing the mission's work to the Paris motherhouse was revised in Paris in a revealing way. The reporting Spiritan missionary spoke of slave *rachats* or "ransoms," but the Paris-based scribe (likely a Spiritan whose job was filtering and prioritizing correspondence from overseas missions received by the mother house) crossed out the "r" to make it *achats*, "purchases." (Kollman 2005, 34, n. 73)

Influentially, Vincent Donovan's account of his mission among the Maasai mostly in the 1960s, *Christianity Rediscovered*, begins with an account of Spiritan slave evangelization at Bagamoyo in the nineteenth century, repeating suspicions about its dubiousness first made in the nineteenth century. For Donovan—as for most observers—evangelizing slaves was not a good idea, for all sorts of reasons. It was unfair to foist the faith on those unable to voluntarily accept it, and whatever converts ensued thus made bad and unreliable Christians. Moreover, very few Christians actually resulted from those decades of effort. (Donovan 2003, 4ff)

...very few Christians actually resulted from those decades of effort.

IV.

Without denying the accuracy of some of the accusations leveled against this early Spiritan work—though I would be quick to add that growth in the church in Africa in the last three decades has made Donovan's assessment of the evangelization of slaves as "sheer folly" seem premature, to say the least—I want to reassess the evangelization of slaves. In particular, I want to underscore the need for better historical awareness prior to easy condemnation. Historical understanding must locate and appreciate the worldviews of those it wants to understand prior to moral judgment, otherwise it risks not being properly historical. Such appreciation for nineteenth-century missionaries is not easy from our twenty-first century vantage. To reconsider Spiritan slave evangelization through an historical appreciation more sensitive to past actors' horizons, three areas seem especially relevant. First, what practices did the Spiritans pursue, and why? Second, how did they represent their evangelization and those evangelized, and why? In evaluating the Spiritan efforts, one must attend to both the

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ethics of their practices with slaves and the ethics of representation of those efforts. Third I believe that proper moral evaluation of slave evangelization depends on appreciating the responses of those evangelized.

Spiritans Practices

In reading analyses of missionary activity, I am often struck by the lack of attention to what missionaries actually do or did. Even less time is spent discerning why they chose to do what they did. Lack of interest in such questions often, I believe, goes along with easy condemnation of what missionaries are presumed to have done, even when this is left unspecified. In this case, several questions need to be examined in particular in order to appreciate what the Spiritans did and why.

...why did the Spiritans focus on slaves in their mission in eastern Africa?

First, why did the Spiritans focus on slaves in their mission in eastern Africa? Why did they not evangelize free people? The answer derives in part from their perceptions of the Islamic regime in Zanzibar, which traced its origins to the Persian Gulf state of Oman in the earlier 19th century and assumed political control, not only in Zanzibar but also—incompletely, but at times effectively—over much of eastern Africa, especially the Indian Ocean coastal areas. After refusing several times in the 1850s, the Sultan of Zanzibar (who sometimes was also the Sultan of the Oman, though other times the roles were separate) had given Catholics permission to establish the mission in 1860, and the implicit understanding was that the missionaries would not carry out public preaching or other overt evangelization with the local Muslim non-slave populace. Upon assuming the mission, the Spiritans feared, not unreasonably, that public preaching would undo the Sultan's permission. Moreover they doubted that many converts would come from among Muslims—long missionary experience had suggested the difficulty. This presence of a recognized Muslim overlord distinguished the earliest Catholic mission work in eastern Africa from similar efforts in southern and western Africa.

...why did the Spiritans target children for evangelization?

Second, why did the Spiritans target children for evangelization? Children, especially slave children, seemed the right sorts of people for the formative program they wanted, allowing them to form children in the Catholic faith. Slavery was thus, though regrettable, an opportunity. Having come from a world in which they themselves were subjected to intense practices of social formation in schools and seminaries, the Spiritans trusted their capacity to form the young through such practices, especially if they could establish an enclosed environment, shaped by a timetable, education, regular worship, and the encouragement of

proper work habits. Far from considering their evangelizing task as presenting the truth of the Gospel to people who could in freedom (understood in a modern sense) choose to accept it or reject it, the Holy Ghost missionaries wanted to form young people into the faith. They only rarely called the children at the mission “free,” instead preferring a paternalistic idiom like “our children” even if those discussed were adults. And often they *were* children, for, as noted already, the Spiritans preferred to receive children rather than adults.

*...why did the Spiritans
not pursue slavery's end...*

Third, why did the Spiritans not pursue slavery's end like so many other missionaries in the later 19th century? Their desire not to upset the Sultan of Zanzibar, whose revenues and authority depended on slavery, was one reason. In addition, Spiritan wariness about abolitionism reflected their social identity. In the first place, they were mostly French, and abolition was linked to Great Britain and Protestantism in a time of Anglo-French rivalry. Abolition even was suspected by Spiritans and others as a pretext for British political ambitions—a harsh but in retrospect not unrealistic suspicion even if overt political goals were absent among most British anti-slavery activists. Second, abolition was linked to the French Revolution, an event seen as profoundly anti-Catholic by Spiritans and many other Catholics. Thus the Spiritans emphasized the gradual abolition that would come with Christian and European civilization, but did not push for abolition with much energy, thus not following Libermann's example. In addition, the Spiritans had views about salvation in which proper membership in the Catholic Church was, if not mandatory for salvation, nearly so. In such a case, enslavement as a social condition was not nearly as important for eternal life as belonging to the church, and could even be seen as a providential opportunity allowing the enslaved to be saved.

*...the growing dependence
on the labor of their
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If these considerations explain why the Spiritans did what they did, such choices had consequences that in retrospect look morally dubious, for example the Spiritan willingness to confine those who wanted to leave their missions. The background to this lies in the first place in their religious convictions about the need to be in the church for salvation. Also, however, such confinement derived from the growing dependence on the labor of their African Christians experienced by the Spiritans in eastern Africa, due to the near-constant financial constraints faced by the mission. Physical work on plantations began as an important element in the process of formation that the Spiritans sought to establish for those they were evangelizing, but over time their mission became dependent on such labor for the agricultural surpluses that they sold to support the mission's work.

Did the Spiritans keep slaves? Certainly the mission's growth, coupled with their efforts to evangelize former slaves through processes involving an enclosed, disciplined, and spiritualized social environment, eventually led them to be accused of ongoing enslavement of those at the mission. This the missionaries would have denied, and I believe such denials were sincere. Their words suggest that they were wary of their mission practices turning into re-enslavement. But clearly they did not accept the presuppositions about freedom and personhood that underlay abolitionist rhetoric, and over time their religious convictions and economic strictures encouraged restrictive measures.

Spiritans Representations.

Another set of moral questions can be asked about Spiritan practices of representation of their work and those they evangelized. Here again it is worth acknowledging the historical circumstances that shaped their writings—in particular, the wide variety of audiences for whom they described what they were doing (the Vatican, their own religious superiors, national and regional political authorities of various sorts, local bishops, funding agencies, friends and family), and the differing purposes of such representations (to raise money, defend their actions, fulfill religious obedience). In this area, too, Spiritan actions face moral questions.

In the first place, despite their reluctance to embrace abolition, it is clear that the Spiritans depicted the cruelties of slavery to attract funding for their mission. In so doing, they took part in a complex and longstanding European tradition of representing Africa as prone to and in need of outside intervention. A crucial part of that process in the 19th century meant presenting Africa as a *slave-ridden continent*, an image that was a *major component of the knowledge of Africa available to the reading publics of Europe* (Cooper 2000, 115). Spiritan accounts of their work in eastern Africa epitomized such a history of representation. Their descriptions of their missionary work commonly featured the misery at the customs house of Zanzibar or the slave market, both contrasted with the bustling harmony of the mission's schools, workshops, and plantations. Such descriptions—even if not, strictly speaking, false—are not unproblematic, for they cannot be extricated from what looks in retrospect as the inexorable European attempt to draw Africa into a moral context where the case for systematic intervention "religious and political" could be made.

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Second, the Spiritans generated a complicated and contradictory discourse about Africans in which descriptions could be harsh or flattering, shaped by the needs for the writing in question. Part of the reason for the contradictions lay in the conditions that produced such writing, which were often shaped by the need to legitimate their missionary work. Thus when describing the Africans they were evangelizing, Spiritans had to make their mission worthy of financial assistance from Europeans, and that goal could generate negative descriptions of African neediness or more positive portrayals emphasizing the likelihood that any contributions would be well-used. The rhetorical mode of the discourse, if such a thing could be named, is often *conditional*: if the help requested comes, *then* our Africans—whose potential we believe to be extraordinary—will flourish. On the other hand, if hoped for assistance is not forthcoming, then they will suffer—often because they have predilections to suffer without the intervention of outsiders. Again, this was not a coherent representation of Africans, but one that oscillated due to perceptions of the need for legitimation.

A third feature related to Spiritan representations of Africans that arose in connection to slave evangelization is that over time Spiritans paid little attention to the cultural features of those evangelized. Since the Africans at their first missions came from a variety of places in eastern and central Africa, “adapting” or “inculturating” the message made little sense as a programmatic gesture. In the long term, however, the learned inattention to culture fostered by slave evangelization shaped the ways that Spiritans represented the Africans whose evangelization they depicted. Growing nineteenth-century racism, increasingly supplemented by what we now see as pseudo-science, though sometimes resisted by Spiritans, only encouraged such default inattention to African cultural particularities.

African Responses to Evangelization.

A final consideration in examining moral aspects of the Spiritan evangelization of slaves lies in African Catholic/ex-slave behavior itself, which can be interpreted in different ways and which bears upon the moral evaluation of the practices that targeted such people for evangelization and the ways such work was represented. The escape and appeal of Léon and his companion in 1882 and 1883 were only part of larger set of difficulties the Spiritans faced with those who underwent their missionary evangelization. Such difficulties led Spiritans to denigrate their African Christians in unprecedentedly harsh ways. Yet I am wary

of accepting Spiritan frustrations and accusations of ingratitude that they leveled at these Africans as the last word, or even the most important evaluation. In fact, many of the actions by their Christians that disappointed or angered the Spiritans in fact reveal missionary success at some level rather than missionary failure, even if it was a success the missionaries themselves were inclined to misrecognize.

Escapes like Léon's should not be seen as a pursuit of "freedom" in some modern sense. It is better to situate such actions in the settings in which they occurred. The most encompassing and relevant situating context was the complex world of eastern Africa—broadly, if incompletely, Islamized and soon to be colonized by Europeans. Those evangelized by the Spiritans thus lived within changing circumstances, and their actions bear comparing with others facing the same social transformations, especially those who faced overt enslavement. Recent research shows that such people pursued their interests through various means. Jonathan Glassman argues that slaves at the Swahili coast, even at their most rebellious, did not strive after something like Western freedom:

Theirs were not struggles to escape slavery and become "free"; in societies such as those of pre-conquest East Africa, where most people relied on ties of personal dependency to provide social security and social identity, it would be difficult to find an equivalent of the modern Western concept of "freedom."
(Glassman 1995, 94)

In such a world, the ideal self, especially for Africans who were not native to the coast, was not the free autonomous individual, but rather one with a considerate patron...

Most of those evangelized by the Spiritans were either already at least partly socialized into the Swahili world as slaves, or they grew up in the mission as dependents on the missionaries. Though not "ordinary slaves," their self-perceptions were shaped partly by this larger environment and its attendant social expectations. In such a world, the ideal self, especially for Africans who were not native to the coast, was not the free autonomous individual, but rather one with a considerate patron who abided by the coastal codes of proper behavior in relations with his clients. And since these earliest east African Catholics had also undergone extensive evangelization in the mission, it was natural for them to consider the Spiritans as their patrons, as well as religious leaders of a pastoral sort. In addition, Catholic families at the missions grew increasingly peasantized, partly through the actions of the missionaries who gave land to married couples but also demanded work from them on the mission's own lands.

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Such contextualizing factors mean that in escaping and appealing, people like Léon, therefore, were seeking to pursue their interests in the larger world of eastern Africa, and in relation to the mission. Instead of indicating only ingratitude, as the Spiritans often said, such actions give evidence of real changes of consciousness due to evangelization. Among many possible ways to show this, allow me to mention two. First, as revealing as the content of their appeals is the nature of the authorities to whom escapees made their appeals. These Christians did not appeal to the Sultan of Zanzibar, as they might have, given that he was the obvious political authority in the region until the late 1880s. After all, the Sultan was the authority to whom slaves in revolt, both in 1873 and later in 1888-89, appealed (Glassman 1995, 111-113, 267), and even during the Maji Maji rebellion beginning in 1905 those who protested German colonialism appealed to the Sultan (Iliffe 1979). Christians like Léon instead appealed to authorities much more in line with social hierarchies that the missionaries themselves lived within. After being rebuffed at the level most immediate to their experiences (their local superior at the mission in question) and by the Spiritan superior at Bagamoyo or Zanzibar, they appealed to the perceived higher authority, the French consul. Second, those fleeing often did so not in order to sever relations with the mission in some decisive way. Instead, they often returned after having received promised concessions, or sometimes without such concessions. Over time it becomes clear that their flights and protests were part of efforts to enhance their position within the faith as they had come to know it—in relation to the mission—rather than to flee it.

In acting this way, I would argue, these people were loyal to the mission at a profound level, but were pursuing the interests generated by their social experiences at the mission, especially their evolution into peasant-like local producers with patronal ties. Such clients have long known the strategy of appealing above the head of their local patron to his superior, until they receive the justice they seek. Their actions also suggest some understanding of the missionaries' own predicaments. Might not Léon and his companion have known the vulnerability of the missionary regime to accusations couched in the idiom of other European ideas? Of course, this is difficult to prove. But an appeal to liberty from a mission Christian, to the consul of the nation with the closest links to that mission and with a complex history of church relations over the concept of liberty, might indicate insight into the contradictions and discrepancies between different European authorities. Regardless, even the Spiritans at the time recognized that those whose escapes and

protests most frustrated them were those who had been under missionary direction the longest. Spiritan responses too often were frustration and accusations of ingratitude—occasionally even violent restraint and punishment—but I believe this showed a fundamental misrecognition of the effects of their evangelization, not the overt failure of that evangelization.

In the event, Léon and his fellow escapee were ordered back to the mission by the French consul. Much to the relief of the Spiritans, the consul accepted that they “belonged” at the mission in some sense, and that the freedom they sought—whatever it meant—was not the consul’s responsibility to confer over Spiritan wishes. Léon died a few years later, once again part of the mission, and is buried in its cemetery.

V.

I have tried here to situate Spiritans actions, both in their practices of evangelization and in the ways they depicted their work and those they evangelized. I would contend that they acted with a great deal of creativity and zeal given the circumstances in which they were acting and the worldview they brought with them. With the benefit of hindsight, we can see that some of their choices were regrettable. In addition, their own social conditioning poorly predisposed them to appreciate the fruits of their work, for they did not easily recognize as “good Catholics” the first African Catholics in eastern Africa, the products of their missionary zeal. In looking at today’s east African Catholic Church, burgeoning with vitality, I am grateful for the Spiritan work then, which I’ve so much enjoyed learning about, and for Spiritans of more recent vintage, whose generosity has helped me uncover the too-often overlooked successes of those earliest efforts.

...their own social conditioning poorly predisposed them to appreciate the fruits of their work...

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