Spiritan Pedagogy of Evangelization in Tanzania

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SPRITAN PEDAGOGY OF EVANGELIZATION IN TANZANIA: FOCUS ON EDUCATION

Introduction

Last year we celebrated 150 years of Catholic evangelization in Tanzania. The history of Catholic evangelization of Tanzania is intrinsically connected with the Spiritans because they were the first Catholic missionaries to evangelize that country or even East Africa in modern era. Their methodology of evangelization set a pace for other Catholic missionary congregations which came later to eastern Africa. The main purpose of this paper is to examine the methodology of evangelization of our ancestors in faith who dedicated and sacrificed their lives for this beautiful country. We will focus on education as one of the major strategies our ancestors in faith used to evangelize eastern Africa.

Methodology of Early Spiritan Missionaries to Eastern Africa

The first Spiritan missionaries to East Africa arrived in 1863 in Zanzibar which was by then a flourishing slave trade centre, and on March 4, 1868 they arrived in Bagamoyo. The major Spiritan ministry at Zanzibar and later at Bagamoyo was to ransom slaves, teach them useful trades in life, and christen them.

Christian Villages

For early Spiritans to eastern Africa, the two main purposes of evangelization of the East Africans were anthropological, salus animarum (salvation of souls) and ecclesiological, establishment of the Catholic Church. The methodology they used to achieve both aims was the creation of Christian villages or “sacred space” which had been spearheaded by Jesuits in Latin America in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-centuries. Influenced by nineteenth-century theological anthropology and dominated by Catholic ecclesiocentricism that stipulated that proper human personhood was to be found within the confines of the Catholic Church outside of which there is no salvation, the Spiritans created Christian villages where they enclosed ransomed slaves in order to form them into Christians. They were convinced that Christian villages (for the Spiritans “freedom villages”) would help the ransomed slaves to deepen their faith. Like any European missionary during
that time, Spiritans had a patronizing and *tabula rasa* attitude to the ransomed slaves they evangelized.

Spiritans never attempted to evangelize the surrounding Muslim community even though they enjoyed good relations with their leaders. First, they did not want to imperil the permission given to them by the Sultan of Zanzibar to establish their mission; also they wanted to avoid awakening Muslim fanaticism when European presence and control in this region was thin on the ground. Second, Spiritan missionaries were aware of the fact that it was difficult to convert Muslims. Attempts to proselytize Muslims in North Africa had not achieved much success. Third, Spiritan missionaries looked at the surrounding Muslim environment with mistrust and disdain. It was unsafe for “liberated” slaves because they could easily be recaptured and be either reinserted into the slave trade circuit or taken in by slave owners at the coast. Some of those who tried to escape from the Spiritan enclave often turned back after realizing that it was safer and better to be in the hands of patronizing Spiritans than to be exposed to marauding Arab slave traders.

The Spiritan ministry won the admiration and praise of many people who visited Bagamoyo and Zanzibar missions, like Henry Stanley. The British who had ships in the Indian Ocean to monitor illegal shipment of slaves, gave the slaves they intercepted on high seas to the Spiritans rather than to the Anglican mission. Another unlikely source of support of Spiritan missionary activity came from Sultan Majid who gave Spiritans large estates of land (which they still own) on which they established Christian villages at Bagamoyo. He did this in recognition of the good work the Spiritans were doing.

**First Attempt to Train the Local Clergy**

Fr. Francis Mary Paul Libermann, one of the founders of the Spiritans, had insisted that the training of the local clergy was a “*sine qua non.*” This is what *Propaganda Fide* in Rome had recommended. In the beginning, Spiritans were very enthusiastic to train the local clergy and a seminary was built at Zanzibar, but this effort fizzled out, as Kieran reports:

There were eight students in the seminary in 1869 at the start of the project. By mid-1870, there were twelve, but Horner said he would be happy if four persevered. At the end of 1870, there were twenty and
this remained the figure throughout 1871 and 1872. On returning from France in 1876, Horner put out all the poor students, so then only ten were left who were reduced to four by June. That was the end of the attempt. Although in 1880 and 1881 Baur referred to thirty and forty in Zanzibar Seminary, these were really being trained as catechists.9

First East African Spiritans

The second attempt was to train Spiritan Brothers, and on November 1, 1875, Brother Philip Mzuako became the first native born East African to be professed in the Congregation.10 However, one major setback was that East African professed members were not treated as members, rather had an intermediate status between professed Brothers and laity. Baur, the Superior, suggested to the Spiritan generalate in France that Africans who were professed should be given an intermediate status, because he had problems in putting them on the same footing with the Europeans. In response, the congregation said that those admitted should do the novitiate and be allowed to take vows renewable every year, and should be given the title agregés.11 Agregés means “associates,” not full Brothers; at the same time they were supposed to keep the vows of poverty, obedience, and chastity. Those who were professed in this arrangement were frustrated and left the congregation.

The initial failure to train priests and brothers to join the congregation frustrated the Spiritans so much that it took them many decades to recover; instead they concentrated on the training of catechists. The first priest to be ordained in Spiritan mission territory was Alfonse Mtana from Moshi diocese, Tanzania in 1939.12 By contrast, other groups of missionaries that came to East Africa later were more successful in training the local clergy. For instance, the Missionaries of Africa, who arrived in Uganda in 1879 via Bagamoyo where they were facilitated by the Spiritans, ordained the first two indigenous priests, Basil Lumu and Victor Mukasa in 1913, and by 1935 there were 122 African Missionaries of Africa.13 The Consolata missionaries who arrived in Kenya in 1902 ordained two local priests, Giacomo Camisassa and Tommaso Kimangu in 1927.

Education: A Cherished Evangelization Strategy

Education had played an important part in the evangelization pedagogy of the early Spiritan missionaries
to East Africa. With the closure of Christian villages and the advent of the German colonialists after the Berlin Conference (1884-5) which partitioned Africa, education became even more important. The purpose remained the same: to win converts to the Catholic faith and for the salvation of souls. Schools also were meant to instil Christian morals and to compete with other religions, for instance, the Muslim and Protestant faiths. Again, like the evangelization of the slaves, children were the main target for education. Since the purpose of schools was to convert people to Christianity, the teaching of the catechism was part and parcel of the school curriculum. Donovan rightly observes:

It is no exaggeration to say that the school became the missionary method of East Africa. This was a policy eagerly backed by Rome. In 1928, Monsignor Hinsley, Apostolic Visitor to East Africa, told the gathering of bishops in Dar-es-Salaam: ‘Where it is impossible for you to carry on both the immediate task of evangelization and your education work, neglect your churches in order to perfect your schools.’

Schools were opened rapidly: “The twentieth-century saw a great development of schools which were increasingly accepted as the best hope and the future of the mission.” The schools taught religion which gave a place of prominence to the catechist at the mission compound. Furthermore, mission schools taught the 3Rs (Reading, Writing and Arithmetic). However, as Kieran reports, “[t]he teaching of agriculture and trades was the most characteristic aspect of the Spiritan schools, as it had been with freed slaves in Bagamoyo.” There was a lot school enrolment around Kilimanjaro region where it is reported that by 1898, there were already 2,000 children attending schools run by the Kibosho mission.

Kieran continues to report that the numbers kept on increasing with leaps and bounds, so much so that by 1912 the Vicariate of Kilimanjaro reported 150 schools with 16,000 pupils. Schools were very attractive for the Chaggas (natives of the Kilimanjoro region) but were also a prerogative for Catholics and prospective Catholics.

Spiritans felt incompetent in the education of girls and for that reason invited Sisters to help them in this noble task. By 1903, there were 2,160 girls in Kibosho schools. Spiritans were disappointed by the government’s refusal of
financial support and reluctance to make school attendance compulsory. There was also a felt need to train future leaders, and for that reason Spiritans built St. Francis, Pugu. Among the prominent leaders who were taught at Pugu is former President of Tanzania, Benjamin Mkapa. Mwalimu Julius Nyerere also taught at the school.

**New Efforts to Revitalize Education**

There are now new efforts by Spiritans to revitalize education after the nationalization policy was abandoned. The Spiritans together with other Catholic Congregations have not opted to reclaim the old schools which were confiscated by the government, rather to construct new ones with Christian ethos.

**Nationalization of Schools and its Aftermath**

Spiritans involvement in schools continued until after independence when the government by the *Arusha Declaration* of 1967 nationalized all the schools. When the government abandoned the nationalization of schools policy and was ready to give them back to the church, many Religious Congregations were caught off guard and turned down the offer, because they had not been sufficiently prepared to run them. In addition, the schools had been so much dilapidated that many congregations felt that they did not have enough resources to rehabilitate them and so opted to start afresh. However, it took time for Spiritans to go back to education after a period of recess.

The nationalization of schools policy did not affect seminaries. Usa River, a Spiritan Seminary which was a novitiate and then a pre-Philosophy training school became a Seminary (Forms V and VI), a status it has maintained up to date. Although the primary purpose of seminaries is to train future priests, yet, because of their academic excellence and the lack of alternative good secondary schools for boys in Tanzania, they became for many Catholics a viable option for quality education - no wonder that many high ranking officials in government and parastatal bodies in Tanzania passed through Catholic seminaries, President John Pombe Magufuli the current President of Tanzania being one of them.

**Bagamoyo, a Beacon of Spiritan Education**

After a slow start, Spiritans in Tanzania are prioritizing education again as an important evangelization strategy.
Bagamoyo is playing a leading role in this new venture. When Donavan visited Bagamoyo in the late 70s, he sarcastically and pessimistically described it as a “ghost town with a huge and empty cathedral … melancholy vineyard filled with remains of so many young missionaries with a sleep of a century upon them. Bwaga moyo indeed “leave here your hearts and hopes” a fitting symbol for the thousands of slaves, the many missionaries and half-century missionary work in Africa.”

Contrary to Donovan’s pessimistic view, Bagamoyo, is no longer a “ghost town” as it might have appeared to be thirty-five years ago, but rather a springboard blossoming with education. A Spiritan network of social and educational projects has brought a positive awakening to Bagamoyo in the last twenty-five years. The first Spiritan General Chapter on African soil was held at Bagamoyo in 2012.

At Bagamoyo, Spiritans run two secondary schools, one primary school, one vocational training school, a small catering school, two health centres, a dispensary and a university college. It is highly symbolic that where the former Marian freedom village was located, there stands today Marian Girls School, offering quality education to more than 800 high school level students from different social and religious backgrounds. Certainly, these girls are experiencing a new form of liberation and hopefully a nucleus of responsible citizens will emerge from them. Spiritans have built Libermann Primary School in Dar-es-Salaam, Tengeru Boys’ School in Arusha, Ngarenaro Secondary School (handed over to the Archdiocese of Arusha) and many others. With these new schools and institutions, Spiritans must remain focused on the original intention of education of their ancestors in faith.

Indispensable Lessons from our Ancestors in Faith

The lives of early Spiritan missionaries to eastern Africa are an indispensable example to all Spiritans to emulate. They sacrificed their lives for the mission. They worked with great zeal. Whatever strategy or methodology they employed was always aimed at empowering the poor and marginalized.

Education for the Liberation of the Poor

Early Spiritan missionaries to Tanzania prioritized the liberation of the slaves who were the poorest at the time. The Tanzania Province “Education Policy” provides principles and guidelines to those involved in education ministry. The
policy restates the congregation’s long-standing objective of prioritizing the poor in Spiritan education ministry. The primary objective of Jesus’ mission was to bring the good news to the poor. “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives.” (Luke 4:18; Isa 61:1-2; cf. Spiritan Rule of Life, no. 4).

Education for Spiritans has been a means to liberate the poor. Any institution founded or managed by the Spiritans has to make a preferential option for the poor.

Zeal for Mission

Bevans and Schroeder observe that the Spiritans were the leading missionaries in Africa. “While the Spiritans eventually involved in different activities, the focus of their missionary work, was Africa, to which they sent more missionaries than any other Catholic organization between 1860 and 1960.”21 The early Spiritan missionaries to eastern Africa, despite their shortcomings, were filled with zeal and love for Africa. Their lives are great examples to emulate. Many of the first missionaries buried at Bagamoyo died before their thirtieth birthday. Despite their shortcomings, Spiritan missionaries gave up their life for the mission. “There is no greater love than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (John 15:13) aptly applies to the early Spiritan missionaries to East Africa as well. They had boundless trust in the Lord and obeyed the great commission: “Go, therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit,” (Matt 28:28). It was the zeal for mission that enabled our ancestors in faith to do a wonderful work. Undertaking any education project in Tanzania today needs great zeal. The educational institutions which have been successful so far have been driven by the great zeal of Spiritans who have sacrificed their life, and not by selfish driven motives.

Education to Address the Challenges of Anthropological Poverty

The poor and most abandoned in the latter half of the nineteenth-century were the slaves for whom early Spiritan missionaries dedicated and sacrificed their lives. Slavery during their time was overt and crude but today it is covert and subtle. There are a number ways in which the African person has been impoverished and reduced to a slave. One of these is anthropological poverty.
The Assembly of Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) that met in Dar-es-Salaam in 1976 succinctly said that the common denominator to all African reality has been the “pauperization of the African person: political, social and economic known as anthropological poverty.” It is basically manifested in disdaining what is really African and embracing whole-heartedly what is European. Early Spiritan missionaries to eastern Africa addressed this challenge by empowering ex-slaves with liberating education which helped them to be masters of their own destiny. With acquired skills, ransomed slaves catechized the interior of Africa and brought social development to the Africans who had been stigmatized by slavery.

Spiritan educational institutions in Tanzania carry an onerous task of addressing the challenges of anthropological poverty that have acquired a variety of forms. This involves instilling in students a sense of belonging and a genuine love for their culture, and continent. Being black is not a curse, but a blessing.

**Education for Self-Reliance**

One of the cherished objectives of education is self-reliance. On *Education for Self Reliance*, Mwalimu Julius Nyerere says that the purpose of education is not to train for the skills required to earn high salaries, as the colonial system of education had advocated. Rather, the purpose is “to transmit from one generation to the next the accumulated wisdom and knowledge of the society, and to prepare the young people for their future membership of the society and active participation in its maintenance or development.”

Early Spiritan missionaries empowered the Africans to be self-reliant. They could open and manage Christian villages in the interior of eastern Africa, utilize the trades learnt to sustain their lives and the lives of those who depended on them and be a valuable source of support to their community.

Likewise, Spiritan pedagogy for education must not just focus on academic excellence but rather empower students to be self-reliant. Above all, education must focus on the Christian ethos - honesty, integrity, respect for human dignity, and tolerance in a world full of corruption, greed, hatred, murder and many forms of injustices.
Conclusion

The avowed purpose of this paper has been to review the Spiritan pedagogy of evangelization with particular focus on education as the Catholic Church in Tanzania celebrates 150 years since the first Catholic missionaries (who were Spiritans) arrived in Tanzania. We have noted that education for the poor has been part and parcel of the evangelization strategy of the early Spiritan missionaries to Tanzania and for that reason the poor must have a privileged position in Spiritan institutions.

Abbreviations


References


**Endnotes**

1. Zanzibar, which is infamous in history as one of the greatest slave markets in the world, sold between 50,000 and 60,000 slaves per annum in its markets during the second half of the nineteenth-century. This city, whose center is known as Stone Town, exchanged hands between the Portuguese and Arabs; when the Portuguese left in the late seventeenth-century, it fell into Persian hands. By mid-nineteenth-century, a BuSaidi dynasty originally from Oman at the Persian Gulf was in full control. One of the powerful rulers, Said Said (1804-1856) moved his capital from Muscat to Zanzibar in 1840. From Zanzibar, the Sultan controlled the entrance into the interior of Eastern Africa as far as the Great Lakes region. By the time the Spiritans arrived at Zanzibar, large quantities of slaves, ivory and spices were traded there. See Kollman, *Evangelization of Slaves*, 37-38.

2. Bagamoyo on the Tanzania mainland was not strictly speaking a slave trade market but since it was a main destination point of slaves en route to Zanzibar, some slaves exchanged hands for local needs, between dealers and local slave masters. Bagamoyo, it is said, is derived from two Swahili words, bwaga and moyo. Bwaga means “to throw down” or “put down.” Moyo as we have hinted in the last chapter means “heart” or “soul.” Bagamoyo then was a place where captured slaves after a long journey from the interior, would put down their hearts, lay down the burden of their hearts, give up hope because it was the last contact with the mainland before a trip to Zanzibar where misery and desperation awaited them. An alternative meaning of Bagamoyo is derived from the Swahili word ku-aga, meaning “bid farewell,” which means that Bagamoyo was a place where slaves after going through hardships and looking ahead at the Indian ocean with more despair, resignation and uncertainty, bid farewell to their heart or soul. See Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered*, 4.

points out that the Spiritans believed that Africans had a soul and were so zealous for the salvation of souls that they employed someone to watch cemeteries for people thrown there still alive whom they could baptize. Kollman also mentions a special group of women who visited the sick and baptized them. In a Muslim society, these women “baptiseuses” often went to homes where priests could not be allowed to go; they assisted the sick but their real intention was to baptize them. See Kieran, “The Holy Ghost Fathers in East Africa,” 146.

Baur, 2000 Years of Christianity in Africa, 230. The Jesuits referred to Christian villages among the Indios of Paraguay during the seventeenth- and eighteenth-centuries as reductions, because they were intended to “reduce” the Indios to a deeper understanding of the faith.

Kieran, “The Holy Ghost Fathers in East Africa,” 120. The first Christian village at Bagamoyo received the name St. Joseph in 1873: forty families were living there in 1876, seventy in 1878 and sixty in 1880. The village was organized like a religious community based on ora et labora “work and pray.” They had to be indoors by 10 p.m. A bell called the villagers to morning and evening prayers. All villagers worked for the mission for five days a week and in return were given the weekly food and clothing they needed. Each household had a piece of land to cultivate, but if one neglected his field, it was given away to another.

Kieran, “The Holy Ghost Fathers in East Africa,” 95. Sultan Sayyid Majid allowed the Spiritans to establish their mission in Zanzibar and Bagamoyo and gave them material support after realizing that in Zanzibar they were not a threat to the Muslim community and taught practical and useful skills to ex-slaves.

Faupel, The African Holocaust, 15. Cardinal Lavigerie, founder of the Missionaries of Africa, attempted to convert Arabs in Algeria without any success, and this prompted him to turn his attention to the south and particularly to Uganda.


Kieran enumerates some of the major reasons for the failure of the first seminary in East Africa. First, the teaching method and curriculum was too strenuous: the medium of instruction was French and subjects taught included Greek, Latin, Arithmetic, Vocal and Instrumental Music. There was no effort to incorporate
local languages, like Swahili, into the curriculum. Second, there were disagreements among Spiritans about the training of clerical students; some wanted them to be allowed more latitude, whilst others like Horner were for confinement. Third and worst of all, Spiritans felt that Africans lacked the ability and had no true vocation, celibacy being the major obstacle.

10 Nnamunga–Onyalla, *25 Years of the East African Province*, 24. Brother Philip Mzuako was born in Malawi, brought to Zanzibar as a slave and ransomed by Horner for fifty francs. He was christened before he was sent to France where he did his novitiate and then was professed in the congregation in 1875. He came back to East Africa and worked at Mhonda before he left the congregation in 1880 after a quarrel with the Spiritans.

11 Kieran, “The Holy Ghost Fathers in East Africa,” 140. Kieran says that when Phillippe and Dieudonné were admitted into the congregation, the problem of their status was discussed until they settled for the title agregés. Other missionaries, like Le Roy, however, wanted the establishment of a local congregation of lay Brothers rather than have Africans admitted in the congregation.


21 Bevans and Schroeder, *Constants in Context*, 224.


23 Nyerere, *Ujamaa*, 45. This book is a collection of essays and speeches by Julius Nyerere on Ujamaa or familyhood. According to Nyerere these essays are mainly intended
to be a resource for leaders and educators and also to promote further discussion about the relevance and requirements of socialism. The three main essays are: 1) The Arusha Declaration; 2) Education for Self Reliance; and 3) Socialism and Rural Development. These essays outline the policy which Tanzania consistently attempted to apply, a system of rural socialism and village re-groupment, state control of the economy and schools, a stress upon self-help, local and national, in preference to reliance upon the assistance of international agencies, a deliberate restriction of affluence of the elite, the primacy of the interests of the masses, especially the rural masses, and a working democracy structured upon one party rule.