

Fall 2021

Apprentis D'Auteuil: A Place of Spiritan Mission

Marc Whelan C.S.Sp.

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dsc.duq.edu/spiritan-horizons>

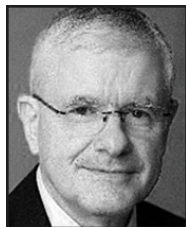


Part of the [Catholic Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Whelan, M. (2021). Apprentis D'Auteuil: A Place of Spiritan Mission. *Spiritan Horizons*, 17 (17). Retrieved from <https://dsc.duq.edu/spiritan-horizons/vol17/iss17/9>

This Wellsprings is brought to you for free and open access by the Spiritan Horizons (English, French, and Portuguese) at Duquesne Scholarship Collection. It has been accepted for inclusion in Spiritan Horizons by an authorized editor of Duquesne Scholarship Collection.



Marc Whelan,
C.S.Sp.

Fr. Marc Whelan,
C.S.Sp., has missioned
in Ghana, Reunion
Island, and Mauritius
Island.

He was provincial
of Ireland from 2012
to 2018.

He is currently
responsible for
oversight of the
pastoral program of
Apprentis d'Auteuil
and represents the
congregation in its
governance structure.

APPRENTIS D'AUTEUIL: A PLACE OF SPIRITAN MISSION

INTRODUCTION

On the feast of Saint Joseph, March 19, 2021, the Foundation *Apprentis d'Auteuil* celebrated its one hundred and fifty-fifth anniversary. Founded by Father Louis Roussel in 1866 as “The Work of Our Lady for First Communion” in the village of Auteuil, then a suburb of Paris, *Apprentis d'Auteuil* soon became an orphanage with the intention of giving street children not only a shelter but also training, and the possibility of obtaining an apprenticeship. The name of the work changed to *Orphelins Apprentis d'Auteuil* – Orphans and Apprentices of Auteuil. Fr. Roussel was to direct the work for over thirty years. However, over time, and especially after the First World War, the work was often in severe financial difficulty. In 2023, the Foundation will mark one hundred years since the Spiritans, with the appointment of Daniel Brottier and Yves Pichon, took over its direction from Father Mullet.

Auteuil has since entered the annals of the history of the congregation as a major educational work of the French province inspired by the example of Blessed Daniel Brottier. However, despite the presence of fifteen Spiritans currently ministering in the foundation, *Apprentis d'Auteuil* is not, strictly speaking, a Spiritan work. The *Fondation Apprentis d'Auteuil* is a catholic work of education of the Archdiocese of Paris and placed by the Archdiocese under the canonical, pastoral, and spiritual guardianship (*tutelle*) of the French province of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit.¹ The foundation also has the unique status of being not only an ecclesial work of the Archdiocese of Paris, but also a Public Service Organization (*Fondation Reconnue d'Utilité Publique*) recognized by the French State which appoints a commissioner to represent the state's interests at the highest level of the foundation's governance.

Currently the state provides for roughly fifty percent of the foundation's annual operational budget while fundraising and philanthropy provides the other fifty percent. The Spiritans, therefore, have a significant role to play in the mission of the foundation which, while often identified as a specifically Spiritan work within the congregation is, in fact, a partnership

His first mission brought him to work in St. Louis in the north of Senegal.

Brottier was resolutely committed to serving as a priest on the front lines.

of different actors who bring together their competence, resources, and gospel commitment. This partnership ensures that young people, whose educational opportunities are being blocked by failure and other obstacles, can be accompanied and given the appropriate training and skills to enable them take their place in society with confidence and dignity. In recent years, the foundation has enlarged its role to include accompaniment and support for families, the provision of childcare services in disadvantaged communities, and the provision of supports to enable young people to transition from professional training to the workplace.

The purpose of this article is to explore how this model of mission, at work in the *Fondation Apprentis d'Auteuil*, can be of real significance for how Spiritan mission engages in works of education whether they be formal or informal.

DANIEL BROTTIER: COURAGE AND UNITY

It is, therefore, not the purpose of this article to detail the life of Daniel Brottier.² We can rapidly trace his life from childhood in La Ferté Saint Cyr to the seminary of the diocese Blois. He was ordained for the diocese of Blois and appointed as teacher to the diocesan school at Pontlevoy. Having experienced a call to the missionary life, he entered the Congregation of the Holy Spirit. His first mission brought him to work in St. Louis in the north of Senegal. After a very brief stay in the monastery of Lerins in the south of France to help him discern a possible vocation to the Cistercian life (which he soon realised was not for him) he was tasked with the mission of raising funds for "*Le Souvenir africain*" in Dakar.³

This project to construct "*Le Souvenir africain*" gave Brottier the opportunity to display his creativity and business acumen by mobilizing different interest groups and donors in order to finance and build the new cathedral in Dakar. However, this project was abruptly interrupted by the First World War.

The outbreak of hostilities put an end to Brottier's fundraising. From the moment the French nation was mobilized on 2 August 1914, Brottier was resolutely committed to serving as a priest on the front lines. A French government noted for its anti-clericalism had only recently legalized military chaplains. While Brottier could have joined the military chaplaincy with its extremely formal and rigid command structure, this was not the path he wanted to go. The principal reason being that the chaplains were not allowed at the front lines and therefore inaccessible to the soldiers in the trenches.

He was cited many times for his courage and bravery and was awarded France's highest award – the Legion of Honour.

Instead, Brottier chose to form with other like-minded priests the “Voluntary Chaplain’s Corps” which allowed for a greater mobility and flexibility in the movement of chaplains on the battlefields. At thirty-eight years of age, Brottier was no longer subject to conscription. However, despite the anti-clericalism that was rife in the French Republic and that he had already experienced in faraway Saint Louis in Senegal, he decided that there was something greater at stake, and he wanted to be present and minister to the thousands of men conscripted to fight the brutal and murderous war in the fields of northern France.

Brottier’s correspondence during this time remained relatively sober despite the horrendous situation in which he and his fellow troops found themselves. He was cited many times for his courage and bravery and was awarded France’s highest award – the Legion of Honour. Because of his devotion to his ministry and helping soldiers maintain contact with their families, the troops held him, not only in high esteem, but also with great affection. His unflinching service earned him the nickname “the varnished chaplain” because, despite his constant presence in the trenches of the front line and the constant danger and horror of a merciless war, he escaped any harm. Brottier himself attributes this protection to Thérèse of Lisieux, the recently canonized saint who would be a major figure in his work and mission at *Apprentis d’Auteuil*.

Brottier’s concern for the enlisted service men did not end with the Armistice in 1919. He recognized that they would need help and care after being demobilized, but there was very little in the form of support coming from the military. To this end, he founded the National Union of Veterans (UNC) with the help of the head of government and notoriously anti-Catholic Georges Clemenceau.

The latter part of the nineteenth century in France was marked by a radical split between conservative Catholicism and radical left politics culminating in the anti-Semitic Dreyfus affair engineered by right wing Catholics and the eventual separation of Church and State, the confiscation of church property, and the expulsion of religious orders in 1905.⁴

French politics was polarized between the Curé (parish priest) on one hand and the Maire (Mayor) on the other; not unlike Don Camillo and Peppone across the Alps in Italy. Nevertheless, these opposing sides were brought together in the trenches of the First World War, where diehard anti-clerical republicans found themselves to be comrades in arms with seminarians preparing for ordination. Out of the

Brottier was not driven by rigid ideology but rather by faith and confidence in his fellow humans.

carnage that was the First World War, one positive effect was a certain healing in the rift between the Catholic Church and the Republican State. Daniel Brottier played an important role in this reconciliation by his, not only faithful presence and ministry to the troops on the front line, but also by establishing the UNC as a support group to help the veterans of the war. His motto was “United as on the Front Line!” Even Georges Clemenceau, known as the Tiger, recognized this priest for who he was, and both became friends. When Clemenceau died, Brottier had the honour of blessing the coffin of this avowed anti-clerical politician.

Why is this part of Daniel Brottier’s life so significant for us today? Whatever about the possible justification for the war, Daniel Brottier, supported by the then superior general Mgr. Le Roy, saw the importance of being present to provide pastoral help and support to those condemned to fight in the trenches. Despite different political views and sometimes a mistrust built on years of prejudice, Brottier recognized a common humanity and the need to attend to the needs, not only of the foot soldiers, but also their families back home. Brottier was not driven by rigid ideology but rather by faith and confidence in his fellow humans. He knew that despite political and religious differences, shared values and convictions could bring people together to work for the common good.

A CHURCH-STATE PARTNERSHIP IN THE PROVISION OF SOCIAL SERVICES

No doubt, Daniel Brottier would remember this experience of a shared common cause when six years after his arrival at Auteuil he sought to establish the work formally under French Law as a Public Service Organization (Fondation d’Utilité Publique). This was a significant, if not controversial, move as it placed this Catholic work within a formal legal framework that was subject to approval by the Council of State of the French Republic. This meant that while remaining a work of the diocese of Paris the status of Foundation would ensure a continuity of mission for the work according to the spirit of its founders and, at the same time, provide it with a solid juridical framework.

By adopting this legal structure, Daniel Brottier was aware that he was strengthening the role of the board (Conseil d’Administration), while limiting somewhat the control of the diocese of Paris (and the Congregation of the Holy Spirit). Positively, he recognized that the net effect was setting in stone the religious and ecclesial nature of the work. Brottier’s expert networking skills allowed him to employ the

The work of Auteuil was never an exclusively Spiritan work.

relationships and contacts he had already developed through his work in building the “Souvenir Africain” and establishing the UNC to reinforce the membership of the board and further develop and extend the work beyond the confines of the neighbourhood of Auteuil.⁵

As already mentioned, the work of Auteuil was never an exclusively Spiritan work and the congregation was never ultimately responsible for its financial well-being. Yet the initiative taken by Brottier to establish the work of Auteuil within the legal framework of a Public Service Organization anticipated the direction the congregation is currently taking with regard to its educational apostolate. The Guide for Spiritan Education, promulgated after the 2012 chapter at Bagamoyo, insists on the fact that “(educational) works will be established in such a way that they are not unduly dependent on the circumscription, but are legal entities in their own right that are financially self-sustainable” (5.5).⁶

The economic model of religious life is no longer tenable in the provision of social works.

There is no such thing as free education. Education, like the provision of all social services, requires investment, human and financial resources, and time. The economic model of religious life is no longer tenable in the provision of social works. Salaries have to be paid and plant requires maintenance. The change in the economic model that seeks to sustain these works can lead to a change in the fundamental mission for the founding of these works in the first place. Educational and health institutions founded by religious have often become privatized to ensure financial stability but with the result that the institutions are preserved but not necessarily the guiding inspiration that founded them. The Guide for Spiritan Education underlines this point very clearly when it states that certain institutions have fulfilled their mission and that it is sometimes necessary to move on.⁷

Part of the problem here is also the categorization by religious groups of the works they have founded with a certain proprietorial possessiveness that inhibits necessary change. Surely when religious groups talk about “our works” and assets they do not just mean items on a financial spreadsheet.

This is not to say that close involvement with the state does not involve huge risk. It can lead to a dilution of the ecclesial character of the work and seek to remove any reference to gospel or religious values. Accepting significant amounts of public funding can also leave the work vulnerable to the acceptance of certain conditions alien to the religious group’s understanding of the human person.

Despite many obstacles and crises over the years, the fact that Daniel Brottier insisted on a structured legal framework that placed

Daniel
Brottier
insisted
on a structured
legal
framework
that placed
Apprentis
d'Auteuil
under strict
oversight
by the state.

Apprentis d'Auteuil under strict oversight by the state it has also ensured that it remained faithful to its founding mission still inscribed in the statutes of the foundation:

The Foundation Apprentis d'Auteuil is a catholic work of education of the Archdiocese of Paris placed under the pastoral responsibility of the French Province of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit

It is animated and motivated by:

- the demands of justice that call it never to leave young people and families by the side of the road;
- the ties of solidarity and fraternity that are essential to its relationship with young people and families;
- the willingness to cooperate with other actors, here in France or elsewhere, (to create) a more just and humane society that is welcoming of all young people;
- a sense of confidence in young people, families, benefactors, and partners that ensures transparency and a qualitative response in all its actions.⁸

AN EVOLVING MISSION IN CREATIVE TENSION WITH ITS ORIGINS

In France, and elsewhere, *Apprentis d'Auteuil* is often referred to as *Orphelins Apprentis d'Auteuil*. When Daniel Brottier arrived in Auteuil, the work was still composed mainly of orphans. This would remain the case for the next few decades. However, as society evolved so too did the mission and outreach of *Apprentis d'Auteuil*.

In 2002, the name of the foundation was changed to *Fondation Apprentis d'Auteuil*. This reflected the fact that only 10% of the young people then cared for by the foundation were actually orphans. The majority of the young people within the foundation were present because of family or social difficulties, had dropped out of education, or found themselves excluded from the educational system. In 2010, the name changed again to *Apprentis d'Auteuil* to underline the different apprenticeships that are necessary to grow into adult life.

Today, *Apprentis d'Auteuil*, inspired by its founders, continues to seek creative and practical responses to the situation of young people in difficulty.

Ninety-thousand young people exit the education system each year without any diploma.

In 2020 in France, one in ten young people are born into a family that lives below the poverty line. Ninety-thousand young people exit the education system each year without any diploma. This leaves 1.6 million young people unemployed.

The current response of *Apprentis d'Auteuil* to these challenges is to focus its field of action around four major activities:

1. The care of young people (including many non-accompanied minors who have been trafficked into the European Union) confided to the work by family courts or social services.
2. First and second level educational establishments that are directed principally toward young people who have given up or been given up by the school system. This involves a particular expertise and often the need for very small class sizes.
3. Professional training centred on apprenticeship and on-going training accompanied by supports to aid the young person find their place in the workplace and in society.
4. Family support systems in areas of social disadvantage.

The foundation has evolved into an outreach where the presence of Islam and other religions is a significant reality for its different establishments.

A PASTORAL OUTREACH FOR ALL

French legislation does not allow the collection of personal information based on religious criteria, so it is difficult to ascertain in detail the religious makeup of the young people accessing the foundation's services. However, it is clear that from its inception in 1866 as the Work for First Holy Communion, it was destined to provide religious education for street children in Paris. Today, the foundation has evolved into an outreach where the presence of Islam and other religions is a significant reality for its different establishments. This is due to migration patterns and current demographic trends. Many of the young people are without any religious culture or background. Sacramental preparation involves a very small number of young people.⁹

So what does it mean for *Apprentis d'Auteuil* to be "a work of the church"? It certainly does not mean that Auteuil provides a Catholic education for Catholic students but nor does it hide its Catholic identity. All young people are welcomed without regard to their religious conviction. While there is catechetical instruction provided for those who seek it, this is not the main thrust of its pastoral outreach.

What brings unity to the diversity of *Apprentis d'Auteuil* is its educational project or mission. No matter what type of outreach is involved, the age group of the young people, or families engaged in this outreach, four fundamental pillars articulate the project or mission of *Apprentis d'Auteuil*:

1. The PERSON: *Apprentis d'Auteuil* takes into account the person in all the dimensions that make up their humanity.
2. An ENCOUNTER: The educational approach is a dynamic one that allows each person to experience the rich diversity of their humanity through encounter with others.
3. A PATH: Journeying together on a path through different educational possibilities allows each person to discover the value of their own lives and that of the lives of their companions on the journey.
4. The COMMUNITY: Fostering an educational community that thinks and acts together – youth, young adults, families, professionals.

*The
foundation
employs
pastoral
workers
in its different
sites.*

Working in relationship with these four pillars is the “Pastoral Orientation” given to the Foundation by the Spiritan Congregation. It is currently under review and elaboration according to the methodology of “Thinking and Acting Together” which grounds all the activities of the Foundation. This involves a time of listening and observing the signs of the times, engaging with young people and families, educators and social workers, managers, pastoral assistants, chaplains, and other organizations of Christian outreach. This work of listening will result in a pastoral orientation that grounds and gives meaning to the educational project. It is a pastoral outreach for all irrespective of religious convictions but grounded in the Gospel and the core values of Spiritan education.

The Foundation employs pastoral workers in its different sites. However, the primary responsibility for pastoral care in any establishment lies with the director of the site. Each director receives from the Spiritans a Letter of Mission exhorting them to live their work and commitment to the mission of Auteuil according to the Light of the Gospel. This means, of course, that directors must have the faith, the capacity, and the willingness not only to receive the letter of mission but also to apply it to their work at the service of those confided to their care.

As *Apprentis d'Auteuil* has evolved and developed this has also

led to a new understanding of the role of the Spiritan chaplain. Previously, a Spiritan managed each house of the foundation, and chaplains cared for the spiritual needs of the young people. Today, the role of the Spiritan chaplain is not so much to accompany the young people in the care of the foundation as it is to accompany senior management in their mission to educate and accompany young men and women who, for whatever reason, struggle to find their place in society. In this way, one hundred and fifty-five years after the story of Auteuil began, *Apprentis d'Auteuil* seeks to continue to find its inspiration in the gospel of Jesus.

AUTEUIL IN A TIME OF GLOBAL CRISIS

Since the start of the crisis, the way the foundation functions has adapted to the new situation.

On March 17, 2020, the French state entered into lockdown in order to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The social residences of the foundation and the structures that house young people at risk have remained operational, as did the crèches and educational works attended by children of health care professionals. All the other activities of the foundation continue their mission through distance learning.

There is no space in this article for an exhaustive treatment on how the COVID-19 virus has affected the Foundation. Indeed, at the time of writing, the crisis is still ongoing, as the measures France introduced to slow down the spread of the virus seem to have little effect on the number of infections.

Since the start of the crisis, the way the Foundation functions has adapted to the new situation. The use of social networks, distance-learning programs, and videoconferencing have helped to keep us all connected and in touch. Contacts have increased and intensified with families of our students through social media and internet. The pastoral outreach of the Foundation has continued in our residences to keep the students active and occupied while also accompanying them in their anxiety and loneliness. Although our family support structures have closed due to health guidelines, daily contact with the families through telephone and visits has ensured continuity of service. During the crisis, the Foundation is able to mobilize its staff, donors, students, and families to stay focussed on the mission.

While we have learned to be creative in our responses and to use technology to our advantage, there is no denying the fatigue and uncertainty now prevalent among staff and students. In a recent survey of young people in the Foundation, the two main causes of anxiety as we face into the future are the fear of poverty and loneliness and the fear of illness and another pandemic.

It is still too early to evaluate what the impact of this crisis will have on the Foundation, how well prepared we will be to face into a post COVID-19 world, and the challenges that it will bring to our young people and their families. We can draw strength from knowing that global crises and pandemics are not new for the foundation. The newsletter for January-March 1920 related that since the outbreak of the influenza pandemic in 1918, two adults and one young person in the Foundation had died. Also in the archives, there is a photograph dating from 1939 of a Spiritan confrere with a group of students all wearing facemasks. It was an exercise in defence preparation at the beginning of the Second World War. We go forward encouraged by the memory of Daniel Brottier and the long history of *Apprentis d'Auteuil* in meeting challenges and overcoming difficulties.

*“My son
and I were
at the bottom
of a hole.
Auteuil
got us out.
You saved us.”*

CONCLUSION

The mission of *Auteuil* continues to be lived each day according to the rhythm of the enormous transitions and transformations that are happening in the world. Mission – “to be sent,” and Education – “to go forth from,” are the two movements at the heart of Pope Francis’ exhortation, *The Joy of the Gospel*. The actuality of our Spiritan Rule of Life remains ever relevant to us today as it seeks to guide us, in the living out of the Gospel, to accomplish two especially important tasks for our times. These are (1) the youth apostolate, because the present situation of young people is crying out more than ever for social and educational works; and (2) work with refugees, immigrants, and those who are on the margins of society.¹⁰ These are two core components of the mission of *Apprentis d'Auteuil*.

Nicolas Truelle, the Director General of *Apprentis d'Auteuil* relates an encounter he had during Holy Week when a mother told him, “My son and I were at the bottom of a hole. Auteuil got us out. You saved us.” This living out of the paschal mystery is the fruit of a covenant of relationships and partnerships by many people of different religious convictions (or none), different political colours (or none), and different backgrounds and origins. In this daily weaving together of different strands and threads, a seamless garment is woven that seeks to protect the most vulnerable from the terrible social fractures that even today, one hundred and fifty-five years after Father Roussel, continue to confront us and our world in 2021.

*Marc Whelan, C.S.Sp.,
Apprentis d'Auteuil, Paris.*

ENDNOTES

1. *Convention Tripartite entre l'Archevêché de Paris, la Province de France de la Congrégation du Saint-Esprit, et la Fondation Apprentis d'Auteuil*. Paris. 2019.
2. The most comprehensive biography of Daniel Brottier is that of GRACH, A., *Le Bienheureux Père Daniel Brottier 1876-1936: Du Sénégal à l'œuvre d'Auteuil*, Paris: Karthala, 2006.
3. The “*Souvenir Africain*” is the cathedral of Dakar in Senegal and was built to honour the memory of all those “heroes” who died in Africa in the service of France: explorers, missionaries, military, sailors, administrators, traders.
4. The Spiritans were able to claim legal privilege dating back to the time of the monarchy, along with three other French congregations – the Eudists, Sulpicians, and Lazarists (Vincentians) and thus were spared the excesses of expulsion and confiscation.
5. See Gardet, M. and Vilbrod, A. *Les Orphelins-Apprentis d'Auteuil : Histoire d'une œuvre*, Belin. Paris 2000, 55-59.
6. Congregation of the Holy Spirit, *Spiritan Guide for Education*, Rome. 2016. Available at <https://dsc.duq.edu/spiritan-education/10/>
7. *Ibid.*, No 5.9.
8. Statutes of the Foundation, modified 31 March 2020 and approved by the Ministry of the Interior 4 May 2020.
9. In 2020, approximately 30,000 young people and 6,000 families accessed the services of *Apprentis d'Auteuil*. The *Rapport d'Activité de la Direction de l'Animation Pastorale* of the Foundation indicates that within the Foundation there were fifty-nine baptisms, forty-seven celebrations of First Communion, and fourteen confirmations for the years 2019–2021.
10. SRL 18.1.

