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Introduction

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Introduction

THE ENTIRE CHURCH, LED BY POPE FRANCIS, is in the midst of a synodal process. The synod is a process of listening to the Holy Spirit and to one another to hear “what the Spirit is saying to the churches” (Rev 2:29). The Spiritan Congregation, one of the first to engage in the evangelization of Blacks, has, for the first time, elected an African Superior General, Very Reverend Father Alain Mayama, CSSp, a milestone in mission history. This 2022 edition of *Spiritan Horizons* celebrates synodality while honoring some Spiritan stalwarts of the mission to Africa.

François Nicolas, CSSp, opens the Wellsprings with an insight into Bishop “*Jean-Remi Bessieux (1803-1876) and the Founding of the Catholic Church in Gabon.*” Bessieux joined the second novitiate of Father Libermann’s Holy Heart of Mary Congregation at the start of the school year, September 1842; he was appointed Apostolic Vicar of the “Two Guineas” on May 20, 1848. He was known for apostolic zeal and speedy mastery of the local languages. **John McFadden, CSSp**, took up the exploits of “*Jacques Madeleine Bertout, CSSp: Restorer of the Seminary of the Holy Spirit and Sixth Superior General of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit.*” He showed why Henry Koren said of him that “it may be said without contradiction that the Congregation of the Holy Spirit would have perished if it had not been for the courage of one man— Father James Bertout.” In “*In Lockstep with Père Charles Duparquet— Synodality as the Catholic Missionary Insertion within Novel Sociality,*” **Eugene Elochukwu Uzukwu, CSSp**, takes a measure of the man. While many doubted that newly evangelized Africans would be ready for priesthood in centuries, Duparquet, in the wake of Father Libermann, was categorical that mission in the key center areas must produce indigenous clergy to expand mission into secondary locations (i.e., each church must become missionary by its very nature). Long before the theology of the local church, Duparquet was advocating that mission must be informed by decentralization. He engineered an Assembly of the missionaries at Bagamoyo (1870) that “presumed the permission of the Mother House” to call itself a Vice-Provincial Chapter (Duparquet as Secretary), the first such in the Congregation. It focused on education, adopting French as the language of instruction, preparing prospective seminarians (the seeds of the indigenous clergy) and nuns, and the evangelization of the interior.

Tony Neves, CSSp, reflecting on the 150th Anniversary of the arrival of Spiritans in Portugal (1866-2016), sketched a portrait of Spiritan spirituality as lived and experienced in Portugal and the lusophone world, “*From Ginkgo Biloba to the Almond Tree in Blossom Spiritan Spirituality in Portugal.*” Notable is the zeal to deepen Spiritan spirituality and share it, especially among the laity and youth. The province’s Youth Without Borders is committed to mission in Portugal (they have held ninety-five Missionary Weeks up to 2020) and abroad (they have “built” thirty bridges, that is, missionary experiences with groups of young people during the summer holidays).

James Chukwuma Okoye, CSSp, kicks off the Soundings with “*For a Synodal Church: To Live Communion, Achieve Participation, to Open Herself to Mission.*” He lays out the synod process and what it might mean for the church. Some hoped-for goals are being enacted, for example, the reform of the Curia to make it more service- and mission-oriented and the appointment of a few laity to important positions in the Curia. He discussed some difficulties along the way, for example, the fears of some particular churches about the German Synodal Way. The Orthodox Churches have better preserved the ancient synodal processes than the Catholic Church. **Rev. Dr. Radu Bordeianu**, an Orthodox priest and professor of theology at Duquesne University, tells the Orthodox story in, “*Universal Synodality: An Orthodox Experience.*” He spotlights the distinction between consensus and unanimity as a condition for the reception of a Council, so no one bishop or a few can hold all to ransom. However, in distinction from the current Catholic synodal process, still only bishops can vote in the Orthodox synod. Yet, reception is important: the inner authority of the entire church encompasses all its members, i.e., clergy and the people alike, its history, interior life, synods, and their reception. He alludes to some difficulties of a synodal church, especially it tends to devolve into national churches (a case in point: the relations between President Putin of Russia and the Russian Orthodox Patriarch—see further below). **Dr. Shaun Blanchard** is convinced that Pope Francis’s emphasis on the consultation of the laity as a constitutive element of a healthy ecclesiology is inspired by Saint John Henry Newman (1801–1890) in general, and his work, *On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine*, in particular. In “*Consulting the Faithful: John Henry Newman’s Relevance for a Fully Catholic Synodality,*” he teases out the implications of such a demarche. While the Magisterium alone can “promulgate” or “enforce” a doctrine, Newman lays “great stress on the *consensus fidelium*” (the “consensus” or “consent” of all the baptized faithful), making “the body of

the faithful” a locus of infallible teaching alongside the pope and the bishops gathered in an ecumenical council. Lest an aspect of Pope Francis’s *Vademecum* and the *Preparatory Document* for the Synod be forgotten, **Prof. George Wor-gul, Jr.**, reminds us of the emphasis on the poor and marginalized in “*Synod for a Poor Church: Francis, the Poor, and the Synod.*” Pope Francis insists that Jesus is really present in poverty, Jesus’s flesh is present, Jesus’s body. In a real sense then, the encounter with poverty is a Eucharistic encounter. Among the voices being raised in today’s world, which we cannot ignore, and which implore our churches to live deeply our identity as disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, the first of these voices is that of the poor. Francis distinguishes almsgiving from mutual sharing. Mutual sharing strengthens solidarity and builds comradeship, avoiding the pitfall of idolization wherein the almsgiver takes undue satisfaction in the gift and the receiver feels inadequate or a failure in accepting the gift. In the *Vademecum* (1.5), he insists that it is of fundamental importance that the voice of the poor and excluded also find a place, not only that of those who have some role or responsibility within the [local] churches.

On Education, **Chris McDermott, CSSp**, who teaches at the Spiritan Holy Ghost Prep in Bensalem, Philadelphia, reflects on “*The Life of François Poullart des Places as a Paradigm for a Spiritan Boys’ School Education.*” Part of the work of a Spiritan educator, following on the steps of Poullart des Places is to induct the youth into really seeing the poor in their midst and being genuinely bothered by them. Poullart’s act of solidarity with the poor made him “cross the street,” an act of solidarity that led directly to the foundation of the Seminary of the Holy Spirit and the Congregation of the Holy Spirit. The deepest desire and prayer of a Spiritan educator is to plant the seeds that would allow his wards to completely “cross the street” and live lives dedicated fully to the poor of this world.

For Lived Experience, **sixty-five Orthodox theologians** of East and West call on us to meditate on their, “*A Declaration on the “Russian World” (Russkii Mir) Teaching: For the peace of the whole world, for the stability of the holy churches of God, and for the unity of all, let us pray to the Lord.*” This is a response to the unholy alliance between President Putin of Russia and the Russian Orthodox Patriarch in Moscow. The Declaration pinpoints the delicacy of any synodal movement and the need to safeguard unity even while enhancing subsidiarity.

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