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# In Lockstep with Père Charles Duparquet— Synodality as the Catholic Missionary Insertion within Novel Sociality



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Memorializing the Unsung Slaves of the Church: Ecclesiological Investigations from the underside of History.

HOW DOES ONE BEGIN to discuss this Spiritan of Spiritans, the self-made, self-willed, tempestuous, and yet purposeful Père Charles Duparquet, dominated by a profound Spiritan evangelical fervor?

This brief reflection on synodality in lockstep with Charles Duparquet intends to stress that one could gain insight into Duparquet as listener and partner in the synodal process, capturing, in the third quarter of the nineteenth century, the synodal insight of Pope Francis in the twenty-first century. In his speech marking the fiftieth anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops, Pope Francis teaches: “A synodal Church is a Church which listens, which realizes that listening ‘is more than simply hearing.’” For the pope, the synod is a school of “mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn.” The image of church is crucial for the style and focus of mission.<sup>1</sup> Rather than the top-down clericalist pre-Vatican II performance of Catholicism (a mistaken instrumentalist definition of the church that Yves Congar called “hierarchology”) Pope Francis insists that in synodality, “The faithful people, the College of Bishops, the Bishop of Rome [are] all listening to each other, and all listening to the Holy

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1. See Gerhard Lohfink, *L'Église que voulait Jésus*. (Paris: Cerf, 1985).

Spirit, the ‘Spirit of truth,’ (John 14:17), in order to know what he ‘says to the Churches’ (Rev 2:7).”<sup>2</sup> Duparquet and nineteenth century Spiritans were, in their field of Spiritan mission and pastoral ministry, actually experimenting in synodality.

Père Duparquet (1830-1888) is, was, an embodiment of the Libermann ethos. Duparquet followed closely the evangelizing mission focus and ecclesiology of Francis Libermann (1802-1852). This has as “cornerstone” (cf. Matt 21:42) the emergence of the local or indigenous clergy—the assured “constant” in the rootedness of the church in every “context.”<sup>3</sup> To ensure this “cornerstone” is embraced, never “rejected,” Duparquet professed deep faith in the educability of the African, of *les Noirs*, the Blacks, and pursued it to realization. The *Noirs* form full partners of *les Oeuvres des Noirs* (the Work of/for/with the Blacks) emblematic of the Spiritan mission.

The ineluctable participation of *les Noirs* in this mission was for Duparquet, as for Libermann, the way to realize the “church” willed by Jesus.<sup>4</sup> Both would embrace what Augustine of Hippo was at pains to explain to Hesychius of Salona (in Dalmatia) clarifying that “all nations,” not just “the Romans,” will become “the offspring of Abraham!” Augustine queried: “But how will that prophecy otherwise be fulfilled, *All the nations you have made shall come to bow before you, O Lord* (Ps 86:9)?” Augustine’s unequivocal response transmits for all times an ecclesiological and missiological insight: “For they will not come by migrating from their own places but by believing in their own places.”<sup>5</sup> By raising the indigenous church leadership “in their own places,” Libermann-Duparquet, over a millennium and half after Augustine, were in lockstep with that African genius of Western theology. Indeed, Duparquet rhetorically queried, “Should

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2. Address of Pope Francis, Ceremony Commemorating the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops, Saturday, October 17, 2015, at [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco\\_20151017\\_50-anniversario-sinodo.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151017_50-anniversario-sinodo.html). See also Yves Congar, *Lay People in the Church: A Study for a Theology of the Laity* (trans. Donald Attwater; London: Bloomsbury, 1957), 45, 47.

3. Following the suggestive work of Stephen B. Bevans and Roger Schroeder, *Constants in Context: a Theology of Mission for Today* (American Society of Missiology series; Maryknoll: Orbis, 2004).

4. In the 1846 *Memoir* that Libermann did not submit to the Propaganda Fide (hereinafter, Propaganda), he followed the theology of his friend, Jean Luquet, to argue for an indigenous clergy and an indigenous episcopacy. See Paul Coulon, “Un mémoire secret de Libermann a la Propagande en 1846? Enquête et suspense,” *Mémoire Spiritaine* 3 (1e Semestre 1996), 41.

5. See St. Augustine, *Letters 156-210: Epistulae. The Works of Saint Augustine—A Translation for the Twenty-First Century* (vol. II/3; ed. Boniface Ramsey; New York: New York City Press, 1990) Letter 199: 12, 47 (page 350).

the missions themselves create an indigenous clergy?"<sup>6</sup> His response was categorical: 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).<sup>7</sup> Curiously, the majority of Spiritans (mid-nineteenth to early-twentieth century) had deep doubts about this project. They were in disbelief that the proclamation-reception of the faith could be achieved in collaboration with empowered *Noirs*. Duparquet not only believed in the Libermann-Spiritans insight, but saw it through in West Central Africa.

This essay, in three segments, addresses, firstly, the Spiritan insight into localization—enabling the emergence of "an indigenous clergy" assures the performing and free functioning local church. This was Duparquet's passion. Secondly, the essay will address the complex creative exchange, no matter how difficult to embrace or realize (in the nineteenth century) where the guest (French missionary), moved not only along the coastlands, but deep into the hinterland of Africa, as Duparquet did. This *experiment in synodality*, which I view as a walk toward the reinvention of sociality, generates admiration. The interface between the host and the guest is revealed in fascinating missionary notes. However, the experiment also calls for critical pause and critical comments, as the guest becomes the advance guard of colonization and exploitation. Thirdly, and finally, the humanum that must never be lost sight of as the criterion of the truth of the Gospel and of Spiritan evangelism critiques the Spiritan ministry of evangelization. The complex story of nineteenth century Spiritan mission reveals achievements of unparalleled "promotion" of the humanum and its "betrayal." Its promotion empowered the progress of peoples, the advancement of the church and of evangelization. The betrayal, especially the unconscionable involvement in slavery and even the slave trade, however, must be indexed and denounced so that such catastrophic confounding of the "Good News" with human depredation never be repeated.<sup>8</sup>

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6. "Que les Missions doivent se créer elles-mêmes un clergé indigène?" (1877 Letter to the Superior General, Ignatius Schwindenhammer).

7. Charles Duparquet and Gérard Vieira, *Le Père Duparquet: Début de l'exploration en Afrique australe* (vol. IV, 1877-February 1879 : From Landana to Omaruru; ed. Paul Coulon; Paris: Karthala, 2017), 59–60.

8. See Johann Baptist Metz "Communicating a Dangerous Memory." In *Communicating a Dangerous Memory: Soundings in Political Theology: Supplementary Issue of Lonergan Workshop Journal, Volume 6* (ed. Fred Lawrence; Atlanta, Ga: Scholars Press, 1987), 37–54, here 42. Metz developed his practical fundamental theology in Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology* (Crossroads, 1980).

## A. DUPARQUET AND EVANGELIZATION—TOWARD THE PROMOTION OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

The first and unforgettable conflict of interpretation of the Libermann legacy on the local church, through raising an indigenous clergy, professing and inspiring the faith “in their own places,” happened during Duparquet’s first appointment to Gabon, West Central Africa (1857). After this conflict, and subsequent return to France, Duparquet prepared a memorandum—a Letter to the Superior General—on the organization of Spiritan mission, in the spirit of Libermann, in the “Two Guineas.”<sup>9</sup> Mission must be informed by decentralization (Pope Francis’s synodality; Augustine’s argument on believing “in their own places”) so that crucial decisions may not require recurrent appeals to the Superior General.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, it was in southeastern Africa, Bagamoyo–Zanzibar (1870–72), the place of Duparquet’s second appointment and where he ministered for two fruitful years, that the Spiritan pastoral-missionary plan was laid out in great detail by any Spiritan community of the time. The Spiritan group there constituted the inaugural of the local church in action through the convocation of the mission’s Vice-Provincial Chapter: a sixteen-session Assembly held between June 2 and June 20, 1870. Participating were Antoine Horner (superior, presiding), Charles Duparquet (secretary), Etienne Baur and Pierre Machon (members). The event was unique; it was momentous. During the first session (June 2), the first resolution adopted on the very first day of the meeting gave legal teeth to the entire Assembly. All the members of the East African Mission “*presumed the consent of the Mother House*” to unanimously “declare” the General Assembly “a Vice-Provincial Chapter,”<sup>11</sup> the first of its type in the Spiritan Congregation. The concluding decision of the Chapter, during the sixteenth and final session, June 20, 1870, was remarkable. It accorded the highest ecclesiastical recognition

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9. “The Two Guineas” encompassed three areas of enormous geographical extension: (1) Senegambia, i.e., from Senegal to Sierra Leone; (2) Septentrional Guinea, north of the equator; and (3) meridional Guinea, or Guinea as such, from the Kongo down to the Cape. Duparquet proposed to break them up into three. See Letter of February 15, 1862, 320–321.

10. Duparquet’s Letter of February 15, 1862 (26 pages in A4) details the mission plan for the whole of Africa. Levavasseur read the letter with pleasure and approval; note added. See Duparquet and Vieira, *Le Père Duparquet, missionnaire ou explorateur? Lettres et écrits*. Tome I : 1852–1865, *L’Obsession des colonies portugaises* (Paris: Karthala, 2012), 315–337.

11. Duparquet and Gérard, *Le Père Duparquet, Lettres et Écrits*. Tome III : 1870–1876, *De l’Exil à Bagamoyo au succès de Landana* (Paris: Karthala, 2014), 16. Henceforth *Duparquet, Lettres et Écrits: De l’Exil*, 16.

to the leadership of the mission group: the Superior and Head of the mission group should be a bishop. The pomp, pageantry, and high respect accorded to the bishop would compare, in their place of mission, like Zanzibar, to the palace dress code, where the Sultan, garbed in silver and gold, was brilliant. This final decision is not extraordinary. It aligned with the instruction of the Propaganda Fide that “recommended and prescribed increase of [the number of] Bishops, as far as possible, in the mission.”<sup>12</sup> Duparquet, Secretary of the Vice-Provincial Chapter, was instrumental in demanding legal teeth for decisions taken by the regional community in Bagamoyo-Zanzibar; the realization of decentralization, a successful experiment in synodality.

The pastoral-missionary program adopted in Bagamoyo-Zanzibar (1870) had three key elements:

- Focus on education (French adopted as language of instruction)
- Preparing prospective seminarians (the seeds of the indigenous clergy) and nuns
- The evangelization of the interior

The above program puts in better perspective the solitary stance of Duparquet on the indigenous clergy during his first appointment to central Africa (Gabon). In the Letters between 1852 and 1865 he frequently expressed firm conviction in the imperative necessity of the formation of the local clergy. He also clarified, in his Letter to the Superior General, Ignatius Schwindenhammer (September 28, 1857), why he was the solitary voice defending this missiology and ecclesiology from the earliest days of his appointment to West Central Africa. He provided insight into the radically divergent ecclesiological and missiological views among the Spiritans:

One evening, I took the liberty to say a few words on the plan of the Venerable Father on the question of the possibility of an indigenous clergy. Immediately everyone turned against me as if I was uttering heresy. They claimed it was an impossible idea. And that the Venerable Father was greatly mistaken (on the matter).<sup>13</sup>

Duparquet’s deep faith in the educability of *les Noirs* for the priesthood, in

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12. Duparquet, *Lettres et Écrits: De l’Exil*, 41.

13. Le Père Duparquet, *Missionnaire Ou Explorateur?* 82–83.

sharp contrast with the disbelief of his confreres, is memorable. It is comparable to the profound faith of Anne Marie Javouhey (a friend of Libermann), whose example will sharpen the understanding of the firm position of Duparquet. The indefatigable French nun, and Foundress of the Sisters of St Joseph of Cluny, crossed the difficult “gender line in the French church,” as Sarah Curtis notes, to intervene directly “in the sacerdotal terrain.” From St. Louis, Senegal, in 1840, she sent three or four young Africans to be trained in the Holy Ghost Seminary in Paris—the seed of the indigenous clergy. The then Spiritan Superior, Aimable Fourdinier, had high hopes that the Africans when ordained would “bring the Faith to the interior of Africa by travelling up the Senegal river to lands which white people can hardly enter because of the heat.”<sup>14</sup> The success was partial, racism made it impossible for the Africans to survive in the midst of the colonial clergy.

What should not be lost to the observer is that Duparquet, like Javouhey (who sojourned in West Africa for two years) arrived the coastal areas of Africa at that horrendous juncture, the nadir of the dominance of the Euro-American definition and prosecution of the *Noirs*, of the African, as *Nègres*, the Slave-subhuman. Rabid racism ensured the failure in ministry of the three Javouhey priests from St Louis. Even Koren, Spiritan historian, was insensitive to the racism that dogged the ministry of these Javouhey African priests. Father Moussa, the only one that stayed in the Isle of Gorée (Senegal), Koren claims, “slowly returned to the life of a savage.” Then, “After his recall to France, he went to Haiti, which at that time was the last refuge of troublesome priests.”<sup>15</sup> Javouhey’s historian, Sarah Curtis, notes that the Apostolic Prefect in Saint Louis “had only contempt for indigenous priests.” Father Moussa was detested by the colonial clergy “for his taste in African music...for teaching the catechism to slaves (in Wolof no less).” Father Moussa, Curtis concludes, excommunicated, left for Haiti in 1853 and died there “embittered in 1860.”<sup>16</sup>

The above only confirms the challenging juncture at which Duparquet, the disciple of Libermann, found himself. One must applaud his stubborn embrace of the task of readying the African indigenous clergy as “cornerstone” of the local church, no matter how “rejected” by fellow Spiritans. In his understanding

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14. Sarah Ann Curtis, *Civilizing Habits: Women Missionaries and the Revival of French Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 206–207.

15. Henry J. Koren, CSSp, *The Spiritans; a History of the Congregation of the Holy Ghost*, (Duquesne Studies Spiritan series; Pittsburgh: Duquesne University, 1958), 77–78, note 15.

16. Curtis, *Civilizing Habits*, 206–207.

of *les Oeuvres des Noirs*, the purchase or repurchase of child slaves, and their education, were directed toward “planting” and “watering,” to await God’s “increase” (1 Cor 3:6), the emergence of the local church. An illustration of the success of this policy are the first two priests raised and educated in the Spiritan mission center in Landana. Originally, of the two, one was a repurchased slave (more about this category in the next section) and the other a mulatto, born from liaison between an African woman and a European man. The mulatto, Louis de Gourlet, and the repurchased slave, Charles Maondé, were ordained, on December 17, 1892 by the Apostolic Prefect of Loango, Bishop Hyppolyte Carrie, the friend and close collaborator of Duparquet. While Louis de Gourlet was appointed to Landana, where he ministered for only two years, having been carried away by tuberculosis, Charles Maondé labored in Loango for fifteen years. He subsequently became ill, underwent a procedure in Paris, and died June 20, 1907. He was buried in the Spiritan cemetery at Chevilly-Larue.<sup>17</sup>

To appreciate the increase God bequeathed to the dogged faith of the Spiritans, of the Duparquet-Libermann School, one can only compare Landana with Eastern Africa. Bagamoyo-Zanzibar, where, in 1870, the detailed plan for pastoral missionary operations was laid out, had to wait for over half a century after Landana for its first indigenous priests. In 1946, they had the first two African priests (Landana had theirs in 1896). Florentine Mallya writes with flourish: The two “pure products” of junior and senior seminaries in Bagamoyo were ordained to the priesthood by Bishop Hilhorst. In this way, Spiritans fulfilled one of the basic missionary principles dear to Libermann, which was to found a local church by training the local clergy and as soon as possible have local Ordinaries [Apostolic Prefect, Bishop or Superior].<sup>18</sup>

## B. CREATIVE EXCHANGE: MISSION AS CHALLENGING DIALOGUE—TOWARD A NEW SOCIALITY

The deep faith and commitment to walk toward the emergence of an indigenous local church, a synodal process, the collaboration between diverse interlocutors struggling to be in harmony with the divine plan in the obedience of faith, is interwoven, in Duparquet, with the keenest attention to the ecology.

17. See the biography of *Charles Maondé* in *Dictionnaire Biographique des Chrétiens d'Afrique*, <https://dacb.org/fr/stories/congo/maonde-charles/>, accessed May 23, 2022.

18. Florentine Mallya, “Bagamoyo and the Spiritans,” *Spiritan Horizons*, 6 (2011), 13–24, here 18.



Duparquet did not consider ecological salubrity incidental to the realization of *les Oeuvres des Noirs*. It was imperative to identify the supremely healthy spots of West, West central, Eastern, and Southern Africa suitable either as residential or recuperation centers for the European missionary, instructor/formator of the leadership of the emergent church. The drive to identify and/or occupy these spots became the source of priceless information on the climatic conditions of locations such as Grand Bassam (Cote d'Ivoire), Cape Coast and Accra (Gold Coast), Dahomey, Congo, Angola, southwest Africa, as well as the fauna and flora of these nations.

In narrating the diverse experiences during his trip to Gabon through coastal villages and towns such as Grand Bassam (Ivory Coast), Duparquet, the tourist-explorer, detailed the peoples, the customs, music and dance, the musical instruments from elephant tusks, the abundance of fascinating artwork, and the artistic productions that he wished were purchased for the museum in Paris. He noted the dangers of the country. Very attentive to security—some of the kings/chiefs were friendly, others were hostile to the French or other Europeans—Duparquet provides useful information on the military arsenal of the kingdoms. He was captivated by the gigantic combat dugout canoes, “*des pirogues de guerres gigantesques*” (dug out, each from the trunk of a single tree). Each of these could hold 250 fighting men. Of the vegetation, the cereal and root crops retained his attention. There is an interesting vignette on the breadfruit tree, highly productive, yet requiring little human labor. “Seven of this tree planted at the birth of a child, will nourish it all lifelong.” French farmers, he enthused, should be jealous of this Africa; the Africa that travelers, nevertheless, denigrate as God’s work of creation achieved (begun) only when God was tired from God’s other labors of creation.<sup>19</sup>

In his Letters from Mossamédès (focusing on the Angolan hinterland), the appreciation of extraordinary natural beauty and healthy spots for European missionaries is profuse. The botanist in Duparquet, a subject he taught in France, explains his being enchanted by the flora of west central and southwestern Africa, identifying what should be transplanted to his mother country. Vieira, editor of the Duparquet Letters, notes the botanical formation and the exceptional interest of Duparquet in botany. The captivating narrative of the location of natural

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19. Duparquet and Vieira, *Le Père Duparquet, missionnaire ou explorateur?* Tome I : 45, 48 (Letter from Gabon, June 10, 1857).

beauty beyond compare is reserved to his ascent of the heights of Mount Chella. There, natural beauty is on display: the most surprising and diverse flora that a botanist could have imagined. In the valley track, the flourishing diverse flowers transform into “a terrestrial paradise for botanists.” An enchanted Duparquet goes lyrical: the location is “*le plus enchanteur et le plus pittoresque que j’aie rencontré en ma vie.*”<sup>20</sup> Without surprise, in describing the climate of Huila kingdom, the hinterland, expressions typical of Duparquet abound: “It is a perfectly healthy place” or “This countryside is perfectly healthy.” He considered Huila far better than Mossamédès, and any other location of West Africa, even the rest of Africa, with the exception of the country of the Gallas.<sup>21</sup> Such admiration, such canticles to beauty by the visitor/guest, arouse emotions of recognition and gratitude in the reader, for the invaluable field notes that were happily preserved. Though one may disagree with Anne Hilton that the most reliable account of sixteenth and seventeenth century Kongo were field reports sent back home by Italian Capuchins, she has a point that “Some of the fullest and most reliable information was written in letters to close friends in convents at home.”<sup>22</sup> In the case of Duparquet, the detailed report sent to the Superior General and friends in France, a diary of the day-to-day experiences, inform and enchant.

This missionary as botanist, as ethnographer (le Roy will say anthropologist),<sup>23</sup> gives us invaluable notes on nineteenth century Africa for the benefit of Africa and humanity. True, at the back of Duparquet’s mind was the health and security of the European, i.e., the suitability of the locations for Europeans. For example, Duparquet had to modify his idealization of Grand Bassam (Ivory Coast) following the high mortality of European sailors from yellow fever, supplicating: “May God preserve us from setting up residence there [Grand Bassam].” For, “It appears, indeed, that this country is uninhabitable for Europeans.”<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, locations such as Cape Coast and Accra are identified as very healthy. During the second journey to West central Africa, he insisted that Cape Coast and Accra are the most suitable locations to set up Spiritan mission

20. “The most picturesque and enchanting I ever met in life.”

21. *Le Père Duparquet, Missionnaire Ou Explorateur? Lettres Et Écrits*. Tome II: 1866-1869, *Espoirs et échec: de la mission en terre portugaise* (Paris: Karthala, 2013), 141, 140–141 (Letter of February 3, 1867, from Mossamédès); 87 (Letter of October 20, 1866 from Capangombé).

22. Anne Hilton, “European Sources for the Study of Religious Change in Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century Kongo,” *Paideuma: Mitteilungen zur Kulturkunde* 33 (1987), 303.

23. Alexandre Le Roy, “Le rôle scientifique du missionnaire,” *Anthropos* 1/1 (1906), 3–10.

24. Duparquet and Vieira, *Le Père Duparquet, missionnaire ou explorateur?* Tome I: 56–57, 58–63 (Letter from Ste Marie de Gabon, Sept 28, 1857).

or recuperation centers in the Gold Coast (Ghana) region. Onboard the ship, he gave a detailed description of the Gold Coast and the Swiss Protestant pastor Zimmerman and family already in residence in Accra for close to twenty-five years.<sup>25</sup>

Here one must pause to reflect on the challenge of encounter as “creative exchange.” The Spiritan evangelizing idealism, *les Oeuvres des Noirs*—promoting, through dialogue-listening, a new sociality—was being drowned by competing interests. Duparquet’s narrative is too closely conjoined with colonization, its successes, or the lack thereof, its benefits for evangelization. To keep in perspective the human promotion, in the Spiritan mission, of a synodal process, the Spiritan could take to heart Franz Fanon’s words, “Each generation must discover its mission, fulfill it or betray it, in relative opacity.”<sup>26</sup> Clarity and transparency, with regard to mission, are tied to the struggle for the full humanity of the *Noirs*, with and by the *Noirs*, as will be discussed in the next section.

Duparquet’s narrative, closely tied to colonization and nationalist control, took care to note:

- places of White settlement such as Mossamédès (with 2000 white residents), or even Landana, with many French residents, and suggesting Landana as center for the French geographical society;
- the chiefs and kings friendly or savagely opposed to the European colonizer;
- beautiful mountain passes, secured with Portuguese military guide, a check on the Mondombe savages who massacre isolated travelers.<sup>27</sup>

The reality of the colonial zones of influence along the extensive geographical and ethnographic region stretching from the Congo to the Cape, informed Duparquet’s mapping of Spiritan mission territory into three zones—the Congo (French), Angola (Portuguese), Cimbebasie (Portuguese and Cape colony).<sup>28</sup>

The missionary notes consider colonization as close cousins with evangelization. West central, southwestern, and eastern Africa were more a theater of

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25. *Le Père Duparquet*. Tome III : 185–190, 191–193 (Sudan, August 21 and 22, 1873, respectively).

26. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (trans. Richard Philcox ; New York: Grove Press, 2004), 145.

27. “Sauvages Mondombes qui massacrent les voyageurs isolés.” Duparquet and Vieira, *Le Père Duparquet*, Tome II : 104, 136.

28. Duparquet and Vieira, *Le Père Duparquet: Début de l’exploration en Afrique australe*, IV, 60–61.

conflicting interests, of violence, than of creative exchange. The necessary cooperation with the Portuguese in their areas of influence never transformed to taking sides with them. The Portuguese claim to west central and southwestern Africa from Luanda (Angola) up to the Spiritan center in Landana, which Duparquet identified as French, was frustrating. To the Superior General (Letter of January 27, 1877), he describes the Portuguese in unflattering terms, as “*les démons de l’Afrique*.” This complicates Spiritan mission, making it imperative to open a Spiritan formation house in Portugal. The pretensions of Portugal were, however, doomed, thanks to the presence of the English, the French, and the Dutch military.<sup>29</sup>

In his careful study of the colonization of the “east African coast and hinterland,” Tanzanian historian, Kimambo, indexes “four activities [that] were interlinked.” They were “a product of the European capitalist expansion coming out of the Industrial Revolution”:

- the missionary investment in “the abolition of the slave trade” (where this was the case);
- the “propagation of Christianity”;
- “geographical exploration”; and
- “the establishment of ‘legitimate commerce.’”<sup>30</sup>

While one admires the deployment of scientific training in exploration and mapping, in the detailed description of the vegetation, the climate, the fauna and flora, one must not ignore their connection with oppression and colonization. The missionary more often than not preceded the trader-colonizer. Spiritan historian, Paul Coulon, is unequivocal. Before ever Henry Morton Stanley arrived in the Congo (Stanley Pool), before Savorgnan de Brazza stepped into the central African interior (Congo Brazzaville), Fathers Hippolyte Carrie, Charles Duparquet, and Brother Fortunatus Engel, were exploring, mapping, and ministering around the coastlands and hinterland of west central Africa. Mgr. Prosper Augouard, the indefatigable Spiritan missionary-colonialist, Apostolic Pre-

29. Duparquet and Vieira, *Le Père Duparquet: Début de l’exploration en Afrique australe*, IV, 41, 39-41.

30. Isaria N. Kimambo, “The East African Coast and Hinterland, 1845–80,” in *Africa in the Nineteenth Century until the 1880s. General History of Africa* (Volume VI; ed. J. F. Ade Ajayi and Unesco International Scientific Committee for the Drafting of a General History of Africa; Oxford; Berkeley, U.S.A.; Paris: Heinemann, University of California Press and Unesco, 1989), 234–269, here, 262.

fect of French Congo, carried the project to an extreme.<sup>31</sup>

The times were complex, at times desperate. The missionary, inserted within contending and conflicting interests, willing and unwilling players, negotiates space for evangelism. The Spiritan, passionate about “salvation of souls,” was at the crossfire of the competing interests, so as to save some in any and every way? (cf. 1 Cor 9:22). How is the twenty-first century critic not justified in asking whether the Spiritan *les Oeuvres des Noirs* included those carriers in the caravans, the slaves, the bound captured and defeated kings, mentioned in travel notes alongside the enchantment of southwest African flora and fauna? How does one untangle the intermeshed social, religious, liberational-humanitarian, and the abrasive colonial exploitation?<sup>32</sup>

### C. MISSION AND HUMAN PROMOTION: DUPARQUET AND SPIRITAN “MISSION ON TRIAL”

When the conversation on synodality, in lockstep with Charles Duparquet, turns to the driving force of the Spiritan mission, the overriding or guiding spirituality of the Spiritan evangelizing ministry, the discussion becomes complexified. The Libermann-Duparquet synodal process attends with the “listening ear” to what is on the ground. The missionary must not be distracted by the disparaging travelers’ tales on the Africa that Never Was.<sup>33</sup>

Francis Libermann, in the foundational Letter to his missionaries (November 19, 1847), instructed: “Do not listen easily to the stories of those travelers around the coast when they speak to you about the small tribes they had visited, even if they have stayed there for a number of years.”

As a traveler-missionary, Duparquet had alternative tales that ridiculed the conversations in the metropole on Africa as created when God was tired. Duparquet’s tales provide insight into nineteenth century west central and southwestern Africa. However, the most halting or arresting of phrases in the Libermann

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31. Paul Coulon, “La « guerre des deux France » exportée aux colonies à travers l’exemple du Congo français (1890-1921),” in *L’anticléricalisme dans les colonies françaises sous la Troisième République: enjeux, acteurs et discours* (ed. Philippe Delisle; Paris: Les Indes Savantes, 2007), 85–155, here 90–91.

32. See Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa* (vol. 1; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); *Of Revelation and Revolution: The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier* (vol. 2; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

33. See Dorothy Hammond and Alta Jablow, *The Africa That Never Was; Four Centuries of British Writing About Africa* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1970).

instruction—perhaps with no parallels in any missionary manifesto of the nineteenth century—the most challenging for Libermann-Duparquet and the Spiritans, is:

Strip yourself of Europe, its customs and its mentality. *Faites-vous nègres avec les nègres* (be Negro-[Nigger] with the Negro-[Nigger]) in order to form them as they ought to be, not in the European manner, but leave to them what is their own. Treat them as servants ought to treat their masters, according to the customs, manners and habits of their masters.<sup>34</sup>

This instruction was revolutionary for the time, and for all times. Indeed, it is an ideal that neither Libermann and the pioneers, nor successive Spiritan missionaries ever realized. It is an insight into the intimate connection between the Good News and human freedom (Isa 52:7). Libermann-Duparquet and generations of Spiritans struggle to see it to its ultimate realization. They contemplate! They never arrive! Empathy, sympathy, for the *Nègres*, was/is unquestionably Spiritan. However, the full humanity of the *Nègres*, their freedom, especially through emancipation (abolition of slavery), guarantor of civism and authentic Catholicism (as Alexandre Monnet argued in Bourbon),<sup>35</sup> was difficult to accept. It was dangerous. Bemoaning the miserable lot of the *Noirs* (who constitute more than half the population of Bourbon, currently Réunion), Levavasseur, writing to Libermann,<sup>36</sup> stated that their eventual freedom rather than reducing “moral misery” would increase it. For, “No one ever thinks of the salvation of their souls.” A similar preoccupation informed Libermann’s cautioning of Levavasseur (1844) in his controversy with the Minister of the Interior in Reunion. Levavasseur should not give the impression of supporting “slave revolt” and “emancipation:” “*Je suis sûr que vous n’avez jamais rien dit qui puisse faire soupçonner que vous voulez révolter les esclaves et prêcher l’émancipation. Nos Règles sont trop formelles là-dessus.*”<sup>37</sup> It is not surprising that in his 1846 *Memorandum*

34. My translation. See also *A Spiritan Anthology: Writings of Claude-François Poullart des Places (1679-1709) and François Marie-Paul Libermann (1802-1852)* (Chosen and presented by Christian de Mare, CSSp; Rome; Enugu: 2011), 281-287, here 287.

35. See Prosper Ève, “Mgr. Alexandre Monnet (1812–1849) dans le concert abolitionniste océano-indien,” *Mémoire Spiritaine* 21 (2005), 23–54, here 43.

36. “Rennes, March 8, 1839” *Notes et Documents* I, 635.

37. “I am sure that you have never said anything that could lead to the suspicion that you would want the slaves to revolt and preach emancipation. On the matter, our Rules are clear and formal.” Arsène Aubert, “Libermann et les Maîtres d’Esclaves!,” (2001). [https://digital.library.duq.edu/digital/api/collection/spiritan-articles/id/2679/page/0/inline/spiritan-articles\\_2679\\_0](https://digital.library.duq.edu/digital/api/collection/spiritan-articles/id/2679/page/0/inline/spiritan-articles_2679_0) [Citing, Fr. Libermann, Letter to Frederick LeVavasseur, May 26, 1845 (*Notes et Documents* VI, 203-204).]

to the Propaganda Fide, Libermann, while acknowledging the positive effects of movements in Europe in favor of the *Noirs* (abolition presumed though not mentioned), was rather skeptical about movements that bring relief to the body and not the soul. God's providential hand (*"l'action de Dieu lui-même"*) is seen in these movements. Nevertheless, such relief directed toward their happiness (*bonheur*), directed by humanitarian and commercial societies, with enemies of the church, operating side by side with the *Noirs*, could be "damning and disastrous for their [slaves'] souls."<sup>38</sup> The mission priority is the salvation of their souls. Duparquet, in the Libermann tradition, could be disturbed that the obdurate British navy, in pursuit of abolition, in southeastern Africa, was endangering *les Oeuvres des Noirs* (inflation in the price of slaves).<sup>39</sup>

The rootedness of Duparquet in the Libermann legacy merits more reflection. Despite the changed attitude to "abolition" by nineteenth century French Catholicism—with "hundreds of the Catholic clergy, including three bishops," signing on to the abolitionist tract of the Martinican, Auguste Bissette<sup>40</sup>—Libermann remained stolidly sympathetic, but unbending. He readily distributed the tract but resisted signing on to it. With the exception of Alexandre Monnet (ninth superior general of the Spiritans) Spiritans and Duparquet never embraced abolition.

Duparquet, ears to the ground (in west central, southwestern, and eastern Africa), was walking the walk (in synodal style) to raise the local/indigenous agents of evangelization. Child slaves were purchased and educated in Landana, as in Bagamoyo-Zanzibar. Schools in Landana enrolled "freeborn," "mulattos," and "child slaves." "Purchasing" or "repurchasing" children up for sale (numerous in Boma region of Congo), repurchasing child-slaves from traders (*achat, acheter, rachat, racheter, vendre* were the terms used by Carrie and Duparquet) constituted the benchmark of *les Oeuvres des Noirs*. This Spiritan policy of purchasing child-slaves raised eyebrows—a cautionary remark from the Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda Fide, Mieczyslaw Halka Ledochowski, captured the concerns. To Hippolyte Carrie, the Apostolic Prefect of French Congo, on *ad limina* visit to Rome in April 1896, the Cardinal wondered whether purchasing child-slaves

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38. Paul Coulon and Paule Brasseur, eds., *Libermann (1802–1852): une pensée et une mystique missionnaires* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1988), 231–232. [« pourrait devenir pernicieux et désastreux pour leurs âmes. »]

39. Duparquet and Vieira, *Le Père Duparquet*. Tome III, 80.

40. See Seymour Drescher, "British Way, French Way: Opinion Building and Revolution in the Second French Slave Emancipation," *The American Historical Review* 96, 3 (June 1991) 721.

gave the impression of involvement in the slave trade. He advised Carrie on how to avoid such impressions.<sup>41</sup> Savorgnan de Brazza, colonial administrator of French Congo, no friend of Spiritans, was categorical: Spiritan “humanitarianism” is indistinguishable from the slave trade. All involved in the matter—the child-slaves, the traders, and the purchasers—had no illusions. It was “*un changement de maître et non pas un changement de condition*” (change of masters rather than the change of condition). To support “purchasing” child slaves, prevents “the people we encounter from understanding the fruitful idea of human freedom.”<sup>42</sup> The minister of the colonies, he argued, should withhold financial aid (for steamers) to the Spiritan Bishop, Prosper Augouard.

Duparquet and community took extraordinary steps in Landana to remove all ambiguity as to their involvement in the slave trade. In addition to the “free-born,” the “mulattos,” and the “child slaves,” in the mission enclosure, they also purchased adults—“slaves of the mission,” treated literally as such. Those who attempted flight, “*ceux qui se sauvent*,” recaptured, with the help of the locals (handsomely paid), were put in stocks (iron chains, *libambou* or *libambo* in Portuguese). They could be resold or exchanged with child-slaves of other white colonist-slavers. In addition to working in their farms and the mission farms, they could also serve as vigilante or police to protect the Spiritan colonist-missionary-slavers.<sup>43</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The evangelizing performance of Charles Duparquet and his close collaborators (Hyppolyte Carrie and others) calls for a critical reevaluation of the Spiritan missionary experiment, particularly a rethinking of sociality.

Duparquet and colleagues were passionately committed to evangelization, in the Libermann tradition, the “salvation of souls.” To realize this, Duparquet embraced the synodal process—educating the *Noirs* (at times in sharp disagreement with other confreres), enabling the emergence of the indigenous clergy, who in turn evangelize the interior (“the pilgrim church,” says Vatican II, “is missionary by her very nature.”)<sup>44</sup> This performance, focused on the emergence

41. Coulon, “La « guerre des deux France, » 100-101, note 256.

42. Coulon, “La « guerre des deux France, » 100. My translation.

43. Duparquet and Vieira, *Le Père Duparquet*. Tome III : 375-387. Duparquet had difficulty explaining the use of funds for *les Oeuvres des Noirs* for this category.

44. *Ad gentes* 2.



of an indigenous clergy and local church, assured the empowerment of the *Noirs*.

Next, Duparquet was radically open, purposefully vulnerable to the impact of Africa. Ministering in the beloved Congo was his passion. The ministry expanded to the Cape and up to Zanzibar-Bagamoyo. The evidence of vulnerability to African geographical locations is the enviable imagistic throve on the flora and fauna—entrancing nineteenth century canticles to the earth, “our common home.”<sup>45</sup> Spiritans reinvent this vulnerability in their twenty-first-century commitment to the integrity of creation. This honoring the earth leads to vignettes on peoples, diversity of customs and arts that Spiritans still perform in their numerous places of ministry.

Nevertheless, like the nineteenth century Enlightenment Euro-American counterparts, Duparquet failed to extend the canticles, in praise of the picturesque African locations, to the *Noirs*. Full “honor and dignity,” full humanity was denied to the *Noirs*, denied to Black Bodies. Their melanin defined them as *Nègres* (Slave-Subhuman).<sup>46</sup> Partial recognition of humanity, empathy, or pity, in pursuit of the Spiritan *les Oeuvres des Noirs*, was unacceptable to the *Noirs*. To make the point, some of them fled to other zones of freedom while remaining Catholic but independent.<sup>47</sup>

Finally, today, the synodal process, in lockstep with Charles Duparquet, commands deep listening to one another in the Spirit, to learn what the Spirit is saying to the churches. The election of a mu-Kongo, Father Alain Mayama, as twenty-fifth Spiritan superior general, in the typical Spiritan Synod-Chapter, calls for a rethinking of sociality, searching for radical humane living. All Spiritans, ears to the ground, in communities and diverse places of ministry (among the diminished, those denied of “honor and dignity”), discern, through intensive listening, what the Spirit is saying to them, to the churches, to the world. For the exercise to be transformative, it is embraced as a conversion process. Spiritans, gradually and clear-headedly, bring the totality of their history, the entirety of the “already existing” in their collective memory to “new account.”

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45. Pope Francis’s *Laudato Si’*.

46. On the Enlightenment representation of Blacks as subhuman, see Andrew S. Curran, *The Anatomy of Blackness: Science & Slavery in an Age of Enlightenment* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011). Also Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1st ed.; New York; Berkeley: Grove Press, 2008), 128.

47. See the interesting study of Paul V. Kollman, *The Evangelization of Slaves and Catholic Origins in Eastern Africa* (Maryknoll, Orbis, 2005), 253–256. Forthcoming is my monograph on the matter: *Memorializing the Unsung Slaves of the Church—Ecclesiological Investigations from the Underside of History*.

Spiritans believe in and trust the Holy Spirit! Perhaps mission historian, Andrew Walls, has a point: this process “has a beginning,” today, albeit a new beginning; but as work of the Spirit, “we cannot presume to posit an [its] end.”<sup>48</sup>

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48. Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (New York & Edinburgh: Orbis; T & T Clark, 1996), 28.