

Spiritans

missionary news

Volume 19, No. 2, May 1995



Quebec



Province du Canada ... The Spiritans of Quebec

When the Spiritans came to Ontario in 1954 they were welcomed into the diocese of London by Bishop John Cody, one of their past students. "But we thought you had no schools in Canada until you opened Neil McNeil in 1958." We in Ontario didn't, but forty-six years earlier Spiritans re-entered Quebec through the door of education. In 1912 Les Pères du Saint-Esprit from France opened Collège Saint-Alexandre in the Gatineau just north of Ottawa. John Cody was one of its early graduates and the first of them to be ordained. The Ontario Spiritans benefited from their French connection.

It would be an overstatement to call the forty years since 1954 a case of two Spiritan solitudes existing side by side in Ontario and Quebec. There have been visits and many meetings. Some TransCanada Spiritans went to Quebec for their novitiate: Philip Forde to Lac-au-Saumon in the Gaspé; Bob Colburn, John van Dyk, Neal Shank and Paul McAuley to Farnham in the Eastern Townships. And, of course, Gerry Scott and Garry McCarthy were part of the North American International Novitiate there in the 1980s. Despite all this, Gerry FitzGerald speaks for many of us, "La Belle Province was something of an enigma, a terra incognita, a land I read about but did not know."

A rich benefactor's bequest enabled Les Pères du Saint-Esprit to purchase Alonzo Wright's 1600-acre estate on the banks of the Gatineau in 1904. The original hope that it would be an agricultural college for French immigrants to Canada never worked out. After seven lean years, it became what Alexandre Le Roy, Superior

General in Paris, had initially dreamt of — a seminary that would train young Canadians for the missions of "Northern Canada, the Southern United States among the blacks, or wherever these future priests would choose to work." Today — a sign of the times — it is a co-ed high school where its missionary work starts with its own students.

- We are happy to include a summary of Quebec Spiritan Maurice Gobeil's reflections on Spiritan Spirituality in this Pentecost issue. His interest in this topic is long-standing. He was for many years a leading member of the Spiritan Research and Animation Centre at the Generalate in Rome.

- Bishop Delisle recalls his missionary work on two continents. That overseas mission retains its strong attraction. But the Third World has come to Quebec, in particular to Montreal. The poor in their midst is an ongoing concern which Spiritans continue to address.

- Three articles focus our attention on young people: the life and work of Michel Last at In'Afu, Jean-Guy Gagnon at St-Alexandre, and Michael Brosnan at York University, Toronto. Youth and Church have separated in our day and seem to be moving further and further apart. It is good to see Spiritans refusing to believe that a permanent divorce is inevitable. They work to keep the relationship alive.

Patrick Fitzpatrick

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Cover: A view of Saint-Alexandre.
Photo by G. FitzGerald

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Mission-Air

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Under the Influence

Why did the liturgy planners for Pentecost get cold feet?
 Why did they cut the story at verse 11?
 Why is Luke censored?

We hear about the rush of a violent wind and the divided tongues of fire.
 We hear of the speaking in other languages.
 We hear that the crowd was bewildered, amazed and astonished.
 Why don't we hear verses 12-13?

*All were amazed and perplexed,
 saying to one another,
 "What does this mean?"
 But others sneered and said,
 "They are filled with new wine."*

They've been drinking too much new wine.
 They're under the influence.
 Does that shock us?
 Does a sober, serious church find talk of new wine
 more than it can stomach?
 If truth be known, are we more than a bit afraid
 of this intoxicating Spirit?

John Dalrymple writes, "When the Spirit came he came with wind and fire ... It is worth recalling that in modern life wind and fire are two of the things we take out insurance policies against."

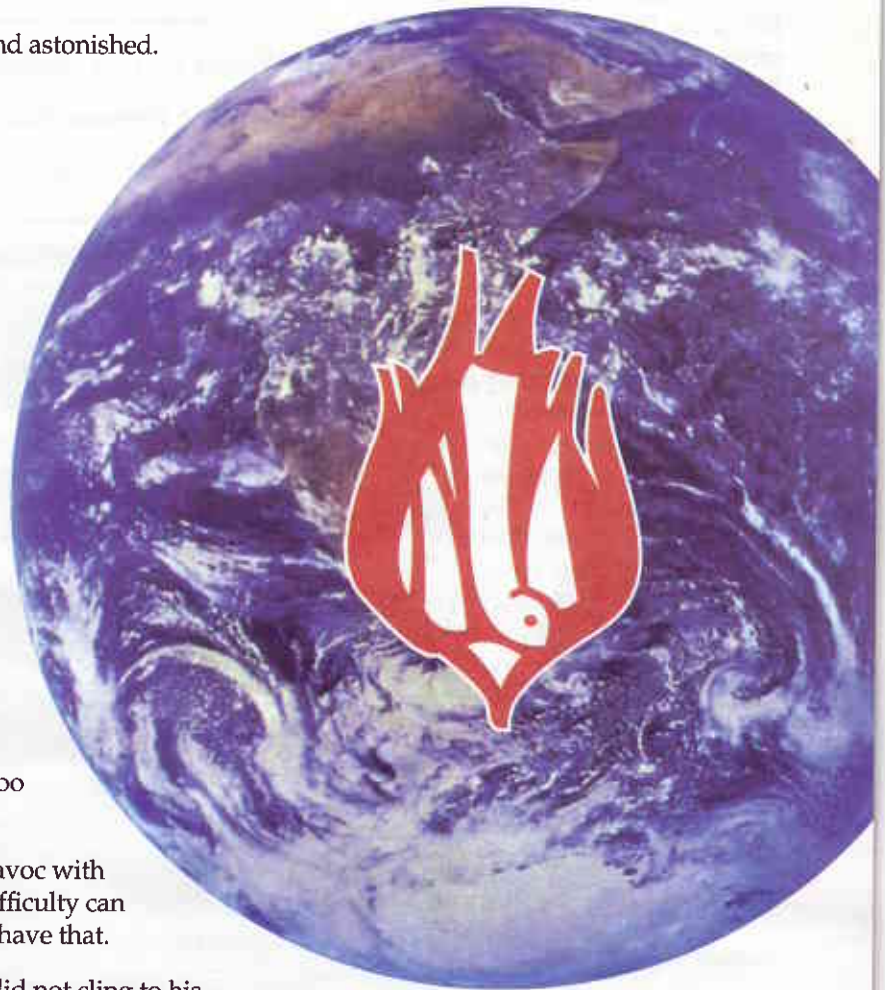
Wind and fire tear the roof off and blow the windows out. Contemporary and period furniture might end up on the street. We can't have that. It's too unsettling.

Wind and fire are often uncontrollable. They play havoc with or ignite whatever stands in their way. Only with difficulty can they be tamed and brought under control. We can't have that.

A Church that draws its inspiration from him who did not cling to his equality with God, who did not insist on being treated divinely — such a Church should expect to be fired up and shaken loose from time to time. Such a Church should expect to be a bit unsure of itself and even a bit unsteady on its feet.

A respectable group attracting only respectable people — is that what he had in mind, he who was friend of tax collectors and sinners, who was turned off by the respectable religious people of his time?

His spirit-filled followers were accused of being drunk that Pentecost morning. Are we under the influence of his Spirit? Will the wind and fire of Pentecost invade our lives? ☩



The Spiritan Way of Being Christian

Spirituality is a slippery word; it can scoot off in many directions. For some people it is all about the next world — the only one that counts, they say. The holy is about the things of heaven. Others have a down-to-earth spirituality. For them, the holy and the human intertwine; this world matters.

Christian spirituality is slippery too: there is no one brand. Followers of Jesus believe that the fullness of life is to be found in him. But because the life he offers is so abundant, we select some aspects of it according to our taste. Down through the years different Christian spiritualities have come on the market: the early desert monks emphasized withdrawal from the world, St. Benedict emphasized a combination of prayer and work, St. Francis of Assisi poverty, St. Ignatius obedience, St. Francis de Sales love. Is there a Spiritan emphasis, a Spiritan spirituality, a Spiritan way of being Christian?

Quebec Spiritan, **Father Maurice Gobeil**, has spent many years living, praying, studying, talking and writing about Spiritan spirituality. We met him soon after his return from a week-long meeting on this topic with the European Spiritan formation directors. For him, the Spiritan way of being Christian emphasizes the power and

presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives and in our world. It highlights the importance of our particular life experiences. It is not meant for Spiritans only.

Don't just learn to pray; learn to pray your life.

Consecrated by the Spirit, Consecrated to the Spirit

Many Catholics associate the word "consecration" with the central part of the Mass. Many Spiritans associate it with the end of their formation, their "consecration to the apostolate". Maurice Gobeil wants us to rediscover its connection to our baptism.

Just as the Holy Spirit came down upon Jesus at his baptism, the same Spirit consecrates us at our baptism. We come out of the water dripping with the Spirit, oiled with God's seal of approval: "You too are my beloved son/daughter," God says to us. With Jesus we dare to say, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour" (Luke 4:18-19). This was the founding text of the Spiritans on Pentecost Sunday 1703, later engraved on the dedication stone in the chapel of the Spiritan motherhouse in Paris in 1777.

"We are like a wind surfer," says Maurice, "going nowhere unless the Wind of God, the Spirit, is blowing. It may blow from any direction. It may suddenly change direction. Can we adjust



New shoots from the old stump

our steering to take advantage of its power and presence?" Can we, like Mary, accept the advances of the Spirit and be at the disposal of the Spirit? Will we consecrate ourselves to the Spirit?

The gift of the Spirit is more than a keepsake. Jesus was anointed to bring good news to others. He was sent to the poor, the captives, the blind and the oppressed. He, in turn, sends his followers to such people. They are to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth. The "driving force of God" that comes upon us is for

**We don't pray so as
to be united with God.
We pray because
we realize we are
united with God.**

the benefit of others. "The Spirit is actively present inside and outside the Church, urging us to respond to the needs of our time in a creative way," says Maurice.

Our consecration to the Spirit takes precedence over our consecration to the apostolate. The long-standing emphasis given to this secondary consecration by Spiritans has had two unfortunate results, according to Maurice. "Spiritans have neglected their basic consecration by and to the Holy Spirit. They have become identified with their apostolate, and value themselves according to the work they do. Deep down they have said to themselves,

"Keep working, keep working, keep working."

Grounded in experience

The Spirit meets people where they are — at work, at home, in churches and synagogues and temples and mosques, as teenagers, as adults, as senior citizens. As a result, our daily activities, our story, the events of our lives — all the things that happen to us — become important. We meet God in and through life. The everyday contains God's hide-and-seek approach to us. Maurice Gobeil reminds us of the Book of Deuteronomy: "Remember the long way the Lord your God has led you." He encourages us to become attentive to where God has been in our life. He recalls the advice Francis Libermann used to give about prayer: "Don't just learn to pray; learn to pray your life."

Pray your experiences — get in touch with God in your life and in the life of the world around you. "Where is God in the experiences of young people, of single mothers, of those on drugs, of the people in Haiti or Rwanda or Somalia, of the victims of violence? God is in what happens to us. God is to be found in what takes place," Maurice says. He approves wholeheartedly of Blessed Daniel Brottier's statement: "In order to think of God, we don't have to distance ourselves from any detail of our life". And he agrees with John Tauler (14th century mystic): "God visits us frequently, but most of the time we're not at home."

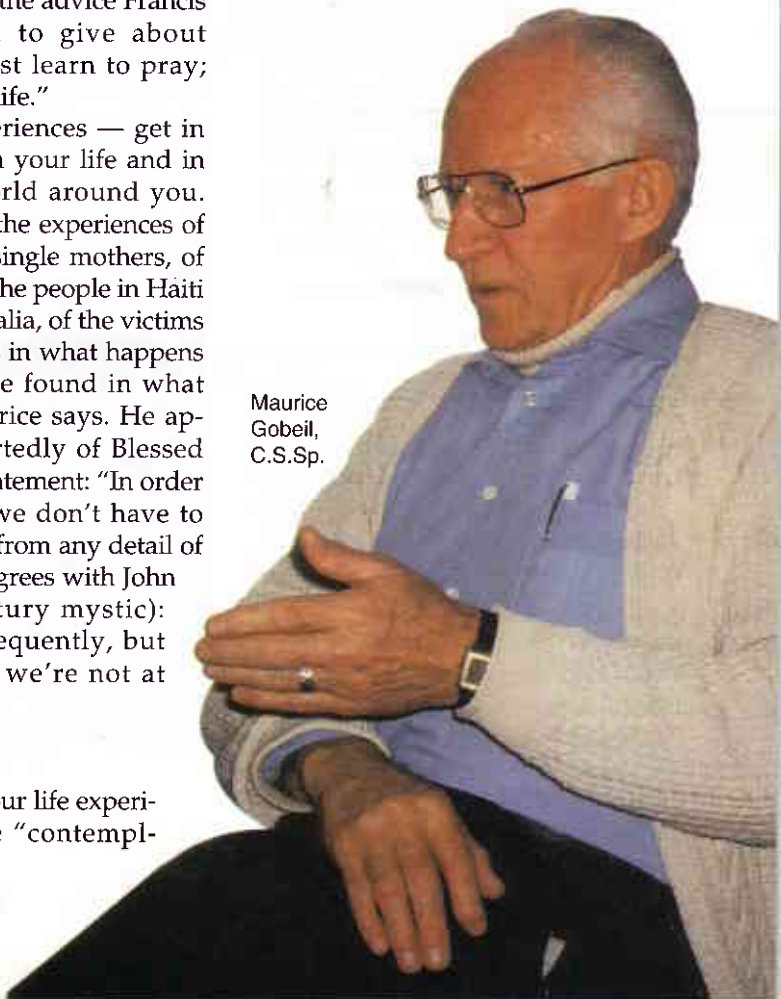
Contempl-action

When we pray our life experiences we practise "contempl-

action". Maurice Gobeil coins this word to emphasize how Spiritan spirituality wishes to integrate all of life. In doing so, he updates what Francis Libermann, towards the end of his life, called Practical Union. The Spiritan approach encourages us to come into the presence of God within and around us. It does not tell us to renounce the world so as to be with God, but it warns us to beware of giving ourselves so completely to work, career, activity or busy-ness that we are in danger of losing ourselves in the process.

So, like Jesus, we take time out to reflect and pray. To become skilled

Maurice
Gobeil,
C.S.Sp.





at “contempl-action” we need to practise silence and prayer.

Prayer

Spiritán spirituality likes Saint Theresa of Avila’s description of prayer: “an intimate friendship, a

tics that haven’t yet found a theory and never will,” says Maurice. Repetition of words and formulas leads to monotony. Just be together, God and you. Experience each other’s presence. Spend time together. Maurice is quite definite about one thing: “We don’t pray so as to be united with God. We pray because we realize we are united with God.”

Our ready-to-wear, ready-to-eat,

ready-to-go culture tempts us to look for a ready-to-pray technique; anything to speed up the time needed to be patient and inventive before God. Prayer doesn’t come from technique, but from life. We pray our experiences of life, because God is there.

Leave God for God

Then the time comes to “leave God for God.” We leave God in prayer to meet God in others. We meet him in the practical details of living: feeding, clothing, visiting, welcoming, laughing. Living for the glory of God involves living for the happiness of others. God loves us through the people who love us. We become holy with them, through them and for them. Maurice quotes the Spiritán Rule of Life: “We endeavour to live every experience in the Spirit of God — our joys, our hardships and our pain, the works we undertake, and even our failures.”

The human and the holy go hand in hand. ☪

**We leave God
in prayer
to meet God
in others.**

heart to heart conversation with God who, we’re sure, loves us.” Maurice Gobeil believes St. John Vianney captured the core of Spiritán prayer when he said, “I look at God and God looks at me.” Francis Libermann had talked of prayer as “a time of peace and quiet, full of confidence before our Lord, that’s all”

The Spiritán approach distrusts methods of prayer and systems of spirituality. “There are theories that don’t match any practice and prac-

A Spiritán Prayer

*O Divine Spirit,
I wish to be like a feather before you,
so that your breath may carry me
wherever it pleases,
and I may never offer it any resistance.*

Francis Libermann

Hospitalité Spoken Here

For me it was more than a six day trip to visit the Spiritans in the province of Quebec. It was a true odyssey, a journey of adventure and enlightenment. Because Quebec had become for me in the past thirty years a *terra incognita*, a land I read about but did not know.

It was mostly my fault that things were so. My education included instruction in English, Latin and Gaelic, but no other language. So the key to the francophone world, its literature, its culture, its personality, was largely denied me. I came to know and love its music, its art, its cuisine, but too many doors were locked. I had visited the Spiritans in Quebec in the sixties but did not feel at home. The Quiet Revolution was taking place and I was conscious that I



Roland Rivard, Gaétan Renaud, and Michel Last

was seen as "*anglais*"; one who did not understand, did not sympathize, one who was a symbol of the problem rather than a friend, colleague and confrère.

So as I wheeled the car eastward along highway 401 on a crisp afternoon in early winter, I did so with some trepidation. In the thirty years since I had visited our Spiritan houses in Quebec I had driven through the province many times en route to Nova Scotia, P.E.I., Newfoundland and even Vermont and Maine. But *La Belle Province* was something of an enigma.

I was glad to be travelling with my co-editor, Pat Fitzpatrick, fluently bilingual, who

had maintained close personal friendship with the French-speaking Spiritans of Quebec. And yet, as we pulled into Maison Le Roy on the Boulevard in Montreal, I still had apprehensions.

My fears were dissipated immediately when Gaétan Renaud and Gérard Fournier welcomed us to a residence which instantly changed from being 'theirs' to 'ours'. Everyone recognized my unilingual handicap and included me in conversation that was linguistically undefinable but truly Spiritan. The message I received loud and clear was "*Hospitalité* spoken here".

Our visit to the office of the Provincial Superior Roland Rivard, the next day, only confirmed my impressions. As Roland, Jean Labrèche, Pat and I lunched together talking animatedly of mutual friends and future plans, I felt like one of Dumas'



Montmorency Falls, Quebec

Three Musketeers who lived their motto of "All for one and one for all." Pat and I then spent the afternoon in Maison Spes, a hive of missionary animation and activity, where André Vigneault produces the French language equivalent of *Spiritan Missionary News* called *Mission-Air*. I hope that many cooperative ventures will come from this meeting.

Quebec city beckoned. Here Maurice Gobeil, Antonio Massé and Robert Thériault repeated the welcome we had received in Montreal.

In icy cold we toured this historic city: the Plains of Abraham, the Château Frontenac, the Grand Séminaire, Laval University, the Falls of Montmorency. I thought of the Spiritans of previous centuries who served the early settlers here, who taught in the seminary, and felt very close to them especially when Maurice pointed across the river to a church where one of the earliest Spiritans in Canada had built a community in the eighteenth century.

But time waits for no one, and after a wonderful evening talking to Maurice about his researches into Spiritan Spirituality and about his counselling work with women drug addicts and alcoholics, Pat and I headed for Centre In'Afu in the little village of Saint-Esprit in rural Quebec, in the foothills of the Laurentians.

Here the hospitality was warm and spontaneous. I was very impressed by what Michael Last, André Bédard, Benoit Audet and Elzéar Soucy are doing in the area of youth ministry. The work being done in their large retreat centre is of the highest quality, and the philosophy of service which is its inspiration was beautifully articulated as we sat around the table sharing our Spiritan heritage.

We left In'Afu glistening



Robert Thériault and Antonio Massé

in its coating of fresh snow, and made our way up the Ottawa river, through Lachute and Montebello to Gatineau. And there, majestic on the banks of the Gatineau river, Collège Saint-Alexandre, the cornerstone of the modern Spiritan Province of Canada. Here the Spiritans returned to Canada ninety years ago, here they have been involved in the education of youth ever since. Here we had the privilege of spending a few hours with Bishop Delisle, whose energy, insights and optimism were an inspiration to me. Far from meeting a man in retirement in his declining years, I met a man impatient to get on with the Spiritan mission to all who are "displaced"; people whose natural support structures have been taken away or have fallen apart. He talked of work in Cameroon, Nigeria and Chile, of work in inner-city neighbourhoods in Montreal. Also living in the Saint-Alexandre community is Jean-Guy Gagnon who explained how the students of Saint-

Alexandre were being evangelized during their years of adolescence.

As one who has spent over thirty years in the education ministry to teenagers, I was delighted to have an opportunity to tour the facilities, visit some classrooms and talk to students, staff and administration. The pride of the students in their school, its traditions and accomplishments, was obvious.

The religious education program had indeed a strong missionary component and contained compulsory units of service to the disadvantaged of Gatineau, as Jean-Guy had mentioned. Some student groups have even travelled to Mexico to work with mission teams there.

As I walked around the neighbourhood I was delighted to discover that the local streets were named after Spiritans who were associated with Saint-Alexandre in its early years: rue Limbour, rue Le Roy, Chemin Lebaudy, rue Père Bériault, Place Lutz, etc.

Next day before Pat and I drove away from Saint-Alexandre's I took out my camera for one last photo to capture a memory I never want to forget.

When I got back to Toronto and had the photos developed, I discovered that in the photo which you have seen on the front cover of this

issue, a ray of sunlight was reflected from an upper storey window-pane. That ray of light, that sign of home, that expression of favour, spoke of my experiences in *La Belle Province* better than any words of mine can do.

As we crossed the river from Hull to Ottawa the Quebec car in front of us carried the slogan "*Je me souviens*". I can assure the Spiritans of the Province of Canada, that I always will. ☩

Fr. Gerald FitzGerald



St. Joseph's Oratory, Montreal

Photo courtesy Tourisme Québec

The Return of the Spiritans

French Spiritans worked in Quebec from 1732 to 1835. When the last of them died, 70 years was to elapse before they returned. Not because they were unwelcome.

"As early as 1862 the Congregation was offered the mission of Sandwich, (Windsor), but lack of personnel prevented acceptance of this offer. In 1865 and again in 1870 the same fate befell a proposed College-Seminary (Regiopoli) in Kingston. Cardinal Taschereau, Archbishop of Quebec, in particular made several tempting offers to induce the Spiritans to settle in Canada. He went so far as to offer them the famous shrine of Ste Anne de Beaupré, but to his surprise and pain, even this was turned down." Henry Koren.

The Spiritan French connection was responsible for these offers. Bishop Pinsonnault of London, Ontario, had been in Saint Sulpice with Francis Libermann and wanted his missionaries to look after the black slaves making use of the underground railway to escape to Canada through Windsor during the American Civil War. Cardinal Taschereau was one of the first students in the French Seminary, Rome, when the Spiritans

took it over in 1853. All of the offers were turned down. What if one or more of them had been accepted?

In 1901 an anti-clerical French Government forbade religious congregations to teach in France. Twelve Spiritan houses were closed, putting about 300 priests and brothers out of work. Alexandre Le Roy, the Superior General, felt the congregation needed a school abroad if it was to continue its teaching and training of missionaries. He sent Fr. Amet Limbour to Canada to find one.

The Gatineau Farm

At the same time, a wealthy Frenchwoman, Mme Le Baudy, became interested in the large number of emigrants to Canada and wished

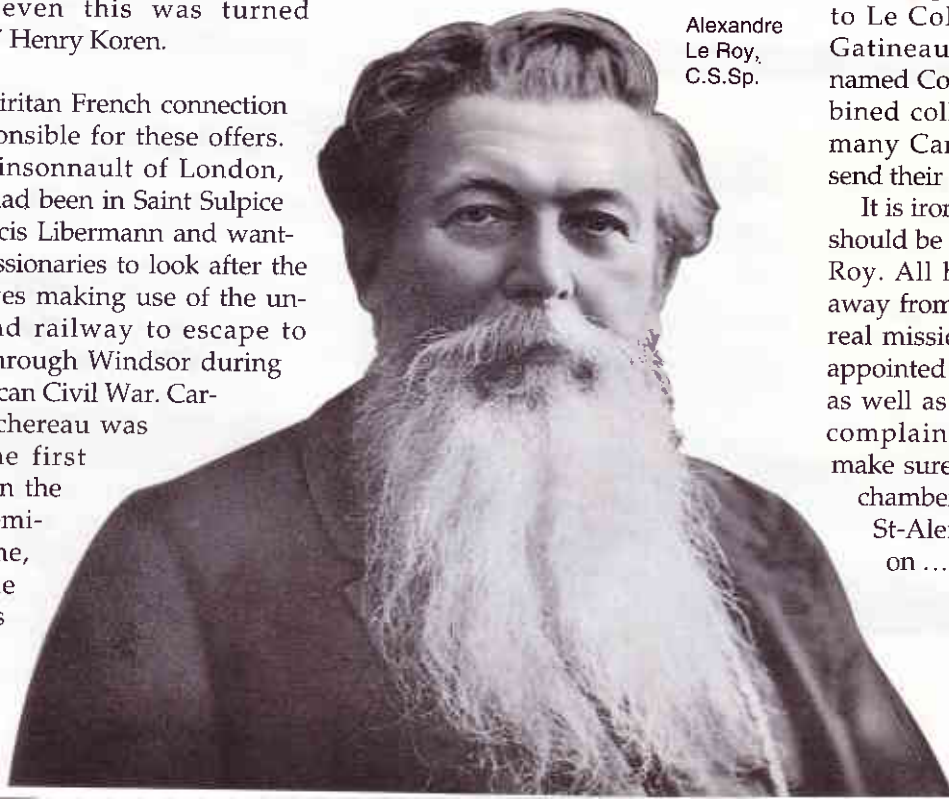
to fund a charitable organization for them in their new country. Respecting a wealthy woman's wishes, Fr. Limbour began looking for a farm. He bought the Alonzo Wright estate on the banks of the Gatineau River, north east of Hull, and renamed it the *French-Canadian Colonial Institute*. When they realized the valuable property with its famous maple trees had been sold to a Catholic institution, some local Orangemen offered to buy it back at twice the price!

Young French immigrants, however, did not come to Canada to spend more time in school. So the French-Canadian Colonial Institute started with a great location, a wonderful programme, a devoted and competent staff, but only five students.

The agricultural school gave way to Le Collège Apostolique de la Gatineau (1912), subsequently named Collège St-Alexandre, a combined college/seminary to which many Canadian dioceses were to send their students.

It is ironic that a secondary school should be named after Alexandre Le Roy. All his life he wanted to get away from education and "do some real missionary work." Yet he was appointed to three different schools as well as an orphanage, where he complained that his job was "to make sure that each little boy has a chamber pot." And now, Collège St-Alexandre — his name lives on ... in education. ❖

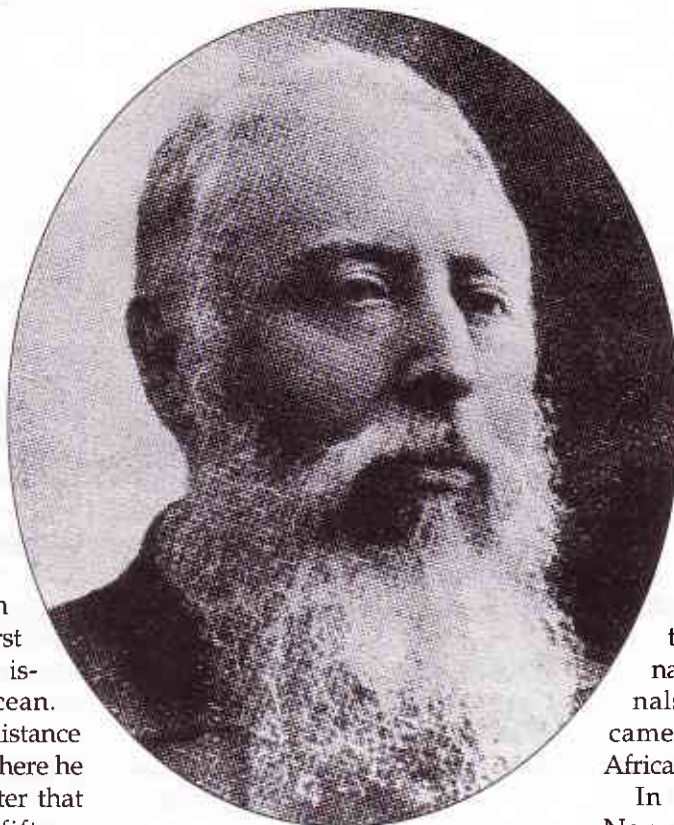
Alexandre
Le Roy,
C.S.Sp.



Constantly on the Road

Spiritan historian, Fr. Henry Koren, calls him "a man of vision to whom his superiors entrusted many important undertakings." He also seems to have been a man who was constantly on the road.

Amet Limbour, born in Brittany in 1841, spent his first five years as a priest on the island of Reunion, Indian Ocean. Then he travelled the short distance to neighbouring Mauritius, where he remained for three years. After that he returned to France for fifteen



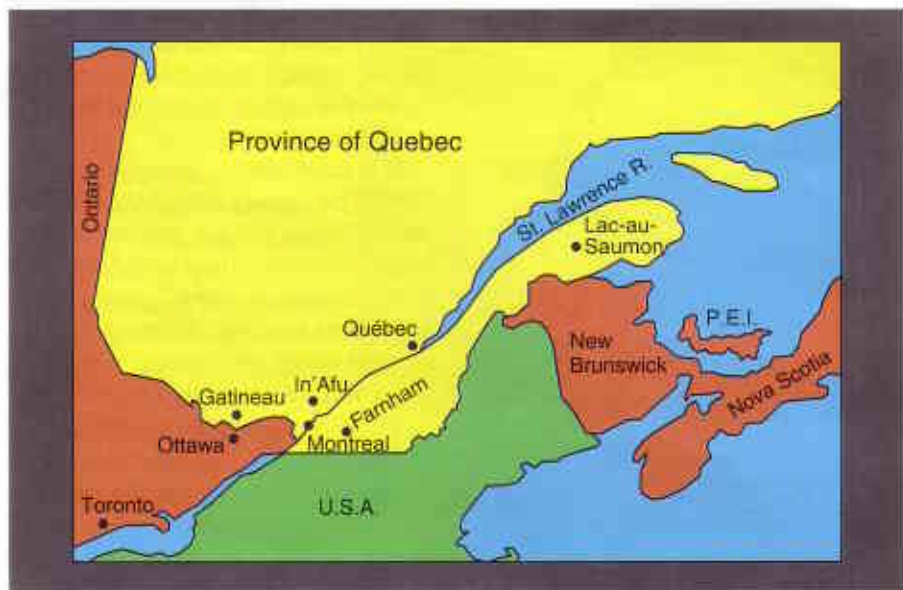
Amet Limbour, C.S.Sp.

years, went to Ireland for six years (where he became superior of the "French College" i.e. Blackrock). On the high seas again in 1894, he went to Haiti to organize the trade and agricultural schools which the government had given to the Spiritans. Three years later he was back in France teaching at the Spiritan Seminary in Paris and editing the *Annals of the Congregation*. Then came a journey to Senegal, West Africa.

In 1904, aged 63, he sailed for New York en route to Quebec in search of a suitable Spiritan property in Canada. He criss-crossed the country from St. John's to Winnipeg, opted for the Ottawa area, and eventually bought the run-down Alonzo Wright estate in Gatineau.

Never a settler, Amet Limbour returned to France, became editor of the *General Bulletin of the Congregation* and resumed his career as a Seminary professor. Then at the age of 71, he went to Senegal for the second time. He died there four years later in 1916.

France, Reunion, Mauritius, Ireland, Haiti, Canada, Senegal — had he been born a century later, how many Frequent Flier points would this much-travelled Spiritan have accumulated? ☪



Saint-Alexandre — majestic on the banks of the Gatineau



The plaque hanging in the main hallway was awarded because St-Alexandre was the secondary school that had contributed most to Quebec student sport in 1993-94.

Ottawa newspaper *Le Droit* that December day had a front-page colour photograph of four of its students under the heading "The Geniuses of St-Alexandre". They had just become national champions of *Génies en herbe*, the French-language CBC equivalent of *Reach for the Top*.

Fr. Jean-Guy Gagnon, C.S.Sp., the College President, was returning with some senior students from a 48-hour retreat at Oka's Cistercian Monastery.

College St-Alexandre, 83 years old, continues to live up to its stated mission of forming skilled human beings, committed Christians and responsible citizens with particular reference to their academic, social and religious education.

Academic

From the very beginning St-Alexandre has prided itself on its reputation for academic excellence. As a classical college affiliated with the Arts Department of Laval University, as a junior seminary cum high school, as a boarding and now a day school, as an all boys and now a co-ed school, its students have always reached for the top.



Jean-Guy Gagnon, C.S.Sp.

Social

A reorganization in 1991-92 put particular emphasis on the school as a learning community, that encourages a collective sense of responsibility for its well-being.

"The presence of girls (now 1/3 of the students) has brought a gentleness and a courtesy to the school that

well-off families so we have to ask ourselves if, at the end of five years, they will have developed a social conscience that hears the cry of the poor," insists Jean-Guy. "When 85% of them come from non-church-going families, we have to ask ourselves what type of pastoral approach will both reach and challenge them."

An approach that relies heavily on sacramental celebration is suitable for practising Catholics. When your "congregation" is baptized but non-practising, the emphasis must be on evangelization. "We try to develop the social conscience of the students and their involvement in their milieu so that they can be introduced to this important dimension of being Chris-

itized and the displaced they are meeting the Jesus of the gospel who identifies himself with such people."

Socio-pastorale

A Workshop in Gospel Living is offered to each student each year. It includes:

Preparation — preparatory discussion of a contemporary social situation; Involvement — meeting with people in that situation; Reflection — looking back on their experience. As a result the students identify their personal strengths and weaknesses and evaluate their inner motivations, as well as their hopes and values.

Each year focuses on a particular situation. Year 1 — the elderly; Year 2 — the homeless, single mothers, physically handicapped; Year 3 — the environment and poverty; Year 4 — mentally handicapped, prisoners, immigrants, street youth; Year 5 — Native People, AIDS.

Native people

Some of the 5th Year students reflected on their weekend with Native families:

"All along the way we met very pleasant people who spoke to us openly as if we were part of their life and their family."

"I discovered a people with great spiritual richness. They were very hospitable ... I learned many hunting techniques."

Will they develop a social conscience that hears the cry of the poor?

was not always there among the boys," said Jean-Guy. "The past few years have seen a better social atmosphere and a more studious environment."

Each of the 5 Years has its own special location. Each has its own coordinator and all the teachers of that year share the same staff room. This has provided much more interaction among students and staff.

When Members of the JEC (Young Christian Students) at St-Alexandre conducted a survey, both students and staff told them they wanted a non-violent school characterized by tolerance, justice and a sense of safety; a school where everyone felt they belonged; a school that valued each person's strengths and did not crush the weak.

Religious

St-Alexandre is a private school "Nearly all our students come from

tian," says Jean-Guy. "Young people are particularly open to questions of justice and injustice. Middle-class youth have not had the opportunity of meeting the poor. When they come in contact with the marginal-

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When they come in contact
with the marginalized and the displaced
they are meeting the Jesus of the gospel.

"I appreciated their lack of materialism ... Family is very important to them."

"I really liked walking in the forest. That did me a lot of good. In the woods I felt at peace."

Silent retreats

Jean-Guy and a group of seniors had just returned from 48 hours with the Cistercians. He realizes that most of the students prefer the forest to the monastery at Oka. "The high vaulted church and monastic prayer is a bit too much for them," he said. "Spirituality and religion are not the same thing for them. Spirituality is their relationship to God. Religion is Church ritual and they're not 'into that'."

Two of the retreat group commented:

"As soon as we got there we felt enveloped by its calm and peace. And then the atmosphere of prayer that's there."

"Silence is a source of interior exploration. What I'm looking for is to discover my inner being."

70 out of 150 senior students chose to go to the Eudist Retreat Centre at Champboisé near Buckingham, Quebec. They were invited to spend 24 hours by themselves, each in his or her own log hermitage. Jean-Guy does admit, "We had to keep an eye on them". Some were tempted to visit the other hermitages from time to time. But the experience obviously affected them.

"I really appreciated the contact I had with nature during

those twenty-four hours. What better than to sit on the steps of my log cabin and look at the birds around me, listen to nature, listen to the silence."

"It gave us time to think about our future, about who



we are, what we do that's correct or incorrect, what we ought to improve."

"Life goes by too quickly and if nobody gives us the opportunity to spend some precious moments like these, you could never make it."

Faith and life

A visitor is amazed at the comprehensive nature of this Socio-Pastorale. Jean-Guy believes it answers the call of the prophets and of Jesus to intertwine faith and life: "Isaiah says that real fasting means loosing the bonds of wickedness, undoing the thongs of the yoke, letting the oppressed go free, sharing your bread with the hungry, bringing the homeless poor into your house, covering the naked and not hiding yourself from your own flesh and blood. Jesus reminds us that just saying 'Lord, Lord' won't get us into the kingdom and James challenges us to be doers of the word and not hearers only."

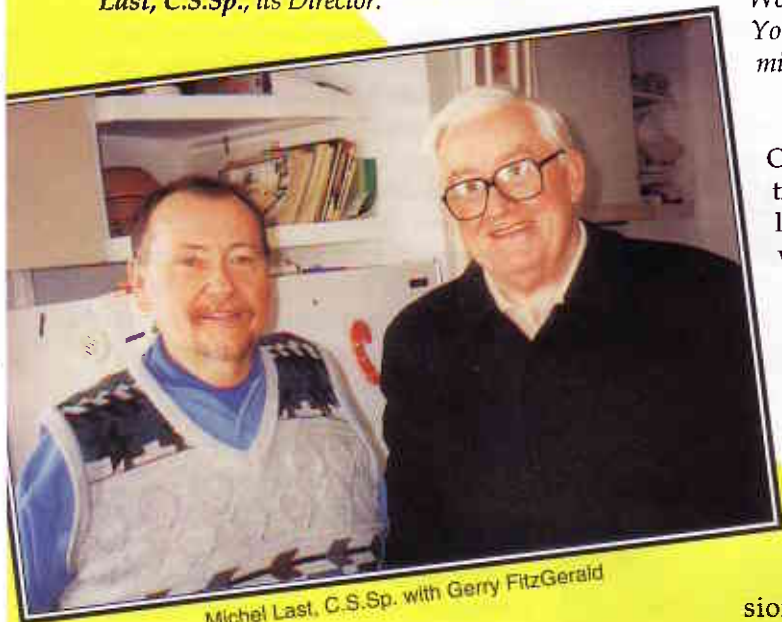
A visitor is impressed by other groups and classes within the school: *Jeunesse du Monde* (World Youth) and their concern for 3rd World issues; Young Christian Students and their annual project to improve school life; Amnesty International and Project Mexico (hands-on experience of what Quebec Spiritans are doing there); the economics class that wrote to the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund urging them to be accountable for how their money is spent and questioning why interest rates on loans to developing countries are so high.

The Spiritans are no longer sole owners of St. Alexandre. They belong to its Board of Directors. The day may come when no more Spiritans will be on staff. What then? "*Nous avons semé; laissons pousser la semence*", says Jean-Guy. "We have sown; let's leave the seed to sprout." ❖

Youth — Another Culture, Another Way of Thinking

The Igala people of Nigeria call the Holy Spirit "Ina Afu". The Spiritans chose that name for their Centre for Growth and Life Orientation, situated near the village of St-Esprit, 50 kms north of Montreal.

The editors interviewed Fr. Michel Last, C.S.Sp., its Director.



Michel Last, C.S.Sp. with Gerry FitzGerald

How did In' Afu get started?

It began as an extension of our vocation ministry. Youth Ministry

had always been important to us as Spiritans, so in 1972 In' Afu became a Centre where we welcome youth, listen to them and accept them as they are. We try to help these young people appreciate themselves as human beings and as Christians.

Would you consider Youth Ministry to be missionary work?

Very much so. Our Spiritan tradition of first evangelization continues with these young people. Being a missionary always meant meeting other cultures. Youth is another culture, another language, another way of thinking. Mis-

sionaries should be among the first to go out to them on their territory.

For a missionary, the Incarnation is very important: Christ "became flesh". For me to "become flesh" as a missionary is to enter almost into the

other person's space, to understand that other person as he or she is, to become Christ for them. Sometimes they say to me, "You must be crazy to spend your time here as a priest." I tell them, "But for me you're important, so I'm here." Very often they come here and they don't even know what a priest is.

They ask me what I do with my day. So I talk about meditation and prayer. They want to know a lot about that.

What do you feel young people need most?

To be themselves. We say our door is open 24 hours a day and we'll sit down with them and listen. If they come in a group it's the same thing. They're allowed to be young, to be dressed the way they're dressed, to talk the way they talk, to be welcomed as they are.

If I encourage them to be themselves, I must be myself with them. Some of the problems in the parishes are due to the fact that priests are not themselves. They are very formal. They have to live up to the expectations of people about priests. They have to play a role. Maybe if people saw priests as more themselves, a lot

of things would change. Young people have helped me to be myself.

Many parishes have difficulty relating to youth.

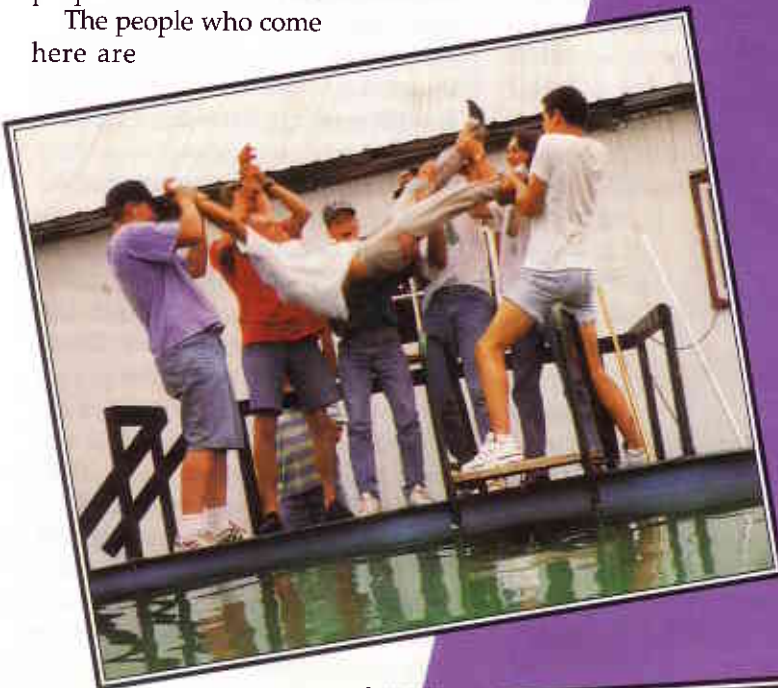
In general, among the youth I know, the Church means nothing. Christ, yes; community and a celebration of their faith, yes. But not in a traditional way.

How do we get the Church down to earth? We've a lot of work ahead of us. In church it's easy to become sophisticated and speak another language. Our theology and our spirituality need to be brought down to earth. Otherwise we'll lose the people.

The people who come here are



Being a missionary always meant meeting other cultures. Youth is another culture, another language, another way of thinking.



not churchgoers. We want to tell them that they're worthwhile, that God loves them. We want them to be the Church rather than try to bring them into church. For many people, if you're not trying to bring youth back to Mass on Sunday, you're not doing the right thing.

I try to keep in touch with the diocese, but many of them don't see us as part of their work, other than as stopgaps plugging holes. That's O.K. I'm a missionary and so my mission is not to those within but to those outside. I'm called to be a prophet as well as a priest — that's my charism. I'm called to those outside. Part of



that involves not always being accepted by those inside, not being considered part of the structure.

What church do you introduce them to if it's not their local church? What awaits them apart from that?

Here we live an experience of church at different levels depending on the group. For a long time I wondered if we had the right to do what we're doing, when they don't find the same thing back home. But then the bishop reminded us it's seed for something new.

Sometimes I hear myself say, "What's the use?" Then I think it's worthwhile to be with young people. When we talk about the future of the Centre, everyone says don't let go of it, let it continue.

When you celebrate Mass with them or when you share around the Word of God, they have to see it through their daily life, not as

something that's separate. Faith and life together.

You said earlier on, "The Church, no; but Christ, yes." What aspects of Christ do they say yes to?

The Christ that gives a lot of importance to human beings, to the needs of people, to those who suffer, to those who need to be listened to; the caring, compassionate Christ. The suffering Christ too. Young people suffer and we need to give them hope.

We have to make young people realize that they are worthwhile and that the Lord is with them and that many of their values are important values. Honesty, truth, not playing games are in fact gospel values. "Don't try to play games,

don't be hypocritical or phony", they tell us. "If you do have difficulties, say so. If you have problems with this or that aspect of Church, say so. Don't be afraid to say it. Don't make us believe you're perfect. At the same time don't condemn those who fail to measure up. Challenge us not to be phony and don't be phony yourself. If at times you are weak, O.K., fine. We can grow together."

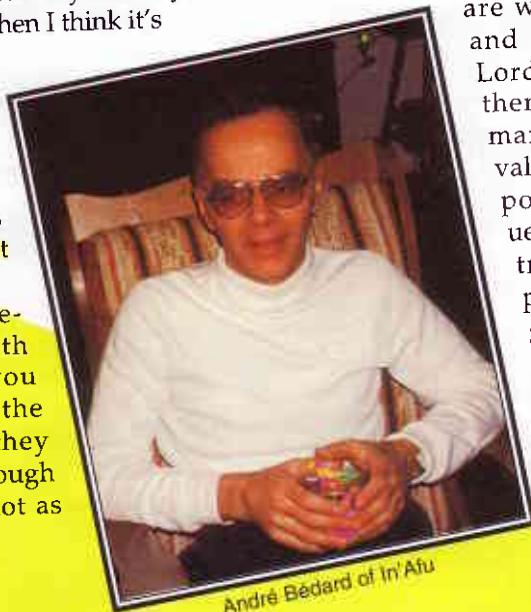
Sometimes the message in church is "Do this, do that" and nothing more. When they can get together and say, "This I accept, that I don't accept", then there's a dialogue. They need to be challenged too. It's very easy for them to talk about the hypocrites who go to church — isn't that judging people?

You'll often find them spending up to two hours around a bible text and then we celebrate the Eucharist together without any problem. It's a sign of real communion. It's not because the Eucharist is not important that they don't take part in it more frequently. To have the desire and to feel the need for frequent Eucharist is the result of a long journey. To expect a 15-year-old to voluntarily get up for Sunday Mass is unreal.

Many of the young people who come here seek love above all. Their families give them everything. They love them, yes, but they find it difficult to sit down and talk with them, to accept them as they are. Teenage years are not easy years. It's not an easy period of life.

Finally, would you say something about your youth leaders, your core group?

Some are in college and some in university. We have a group of about 15 alumni who come back three times a year. A girl in this group recalled how when she first started coming to In'Afu we were the father she never had. She has told us, "I'm not sure I would be here today and doing what I'm doing if I hadn't come to In'Afu then." And she was someone who never appeared to have any problems. She is now working with abused women. She got her vocation here. ☩



André Bédard of In'Afu

They say,
"You could be so many other places."
"Yes," I tell them,
"but for me you're important,
so I'm here."



In'Afu
in summer

Away from Home

We arrived just in time to catch Roland Rivard, the Provincial Superior. The following day he was en route to Kogi State, Nigeria, to spend Christmas with Spiritans in the two dioceses of Lokoja and Idah.

Forty years ago Bishop Delisle was given "the tail end of three dioceses" at the junction of the Niger and Benue rivers. Then called Kabba, his diocese divided into Lokoja and Idah in 1968. In the 1970s Nigerian bishops replaced Canadians, but the Quebec Spiritans continue to work there.

Last summer the first Nigerian Spiritan from that area was ordained. Quebec gave him a chalice as a symbol of continuity between the original Canadian missionaries and his own appointment as a missionary in South Africa.

The first Quebec Spiritans went overseas to Cameroon in 1925. Because of a common language and a common training, they also worked with their French confrères in Martinique, Guadeloupe, Haiti, Guinée, Gabon, and Congo.

They were even daring enough to work with the Irish in Mauritius and the English in Benue, Nigeria.

Roland Rivard volunteered to go to Zaire to help replace the 20 Belgian Spiritans who were shot to death in Kongolo in 1962. Now if he wishes to continue spending Christmas with confrères away from home he has four additional choices:

Mexico, Paraguay, New Orleans and Cameroon.

In Mexico an international group from the U.S.A., Ireland, France and Quebec "is on the way to being a united team", according to Antoine Mercier. He and Gérard Duchesne are the Canadian members of that team. On any given day Antoine can be seen wearing one of his many hats; professor at Tampico University, Director of Formation of Spiritan candidates (mainly Nahuatl and Huasteco Indians), in charge of pontifical missionary works or ministering in a poor parish. Chapeau, Antoine!

Another international team in Paraguay — French, Portuguese, Spanish and Canadian. Pierre Jubinville has been there for quite some time and last year Serge Hogue joined him. With the frustrations of learning a new language behind them, they now visit villagers, campesinos and the Guarani Indians. Their desire is to form a joint lay-priest group for the work.

The most recently ordained Spiritan, Michel Boutot, is working in an African-American parish in New Orleans with confrères from the United States. And in Cameroon, Spiritan Associates Tom and Micheline van Lier have worked with the Baka pygmies. ❖

Photos (from top to bottom, left to right): Antoine Mercier, C.S.Sp. (wearing one of his many hats); Michel Boutot, C.S.Sp.; Pierre Jubinville, C.S.Sp.; Lyzette and Ricky visit their parents Tom and Micheline van Lier in Cameroon; Charles Mackay, C.S.Sp.



Mexico



New Orleans



Paraguay



Cameroon



Nigeria

Cameroon, Nigeria, Chile — Where Next?

We caught up with him at Saint-Alexandre. Three days before, we had caught a glimpse of him at The Boulevard in Montreal where he's supposed to be living in retirement. He has a room there — he drops in from time to time, but he's liable to be anywhere on any given day. He is a man whose restless energy keeps him on the go. Yet, get him reminiscing about Cameroon, Nigeria or Chile, get him dreaming about what he might yet be able to do in the Montreal church, and you've got a man who is willing to sit and talk with you for hours. **Mgr**

Auguste Delisle C.S.Sp., "retired" bishop of Lokoja, Nigeria, former missionary in Cameroon, recent missionary in Chile, is a man of action.

"When I retired as bishop I did intend settling down in Montreal. I even asked my brother to get a place for me — I thought I was a bishop, someone important, so I asked him to prepare two rooms for me! The Archbishop offered me the Holy Childhood Association. I said yes, but there was a catch to it. He would have to present the plan to the Priests' Council. Some of them thought it would be a nice job for Cardinal Leger, expected back from Africa. This committee approach to things drove me to Chile. While I was there the bishop offered me a parish and I took it."

Working by committee is not Auguste Delisle's way. "Consensus means the lowest common denominator," he asserts. "If you know what should be done, why not do it? The final decision belongs to the person in authority. Otherwise you get nowhere."

Cameroon

His early missionary years in Cameroon seem to have influenced him greatly. He recalls the forced labour of the people: "They were

very badly treated by the white colonials who used them to build roads and bridges and railways. Many of the workers were beaten and even chained together so they wouldn't run away. There were no machines then, just pick and shovel and baskets full of earth on their heads; running with one load, running back for another."

By the time he left for Nigeria in 1952, there was just about enough education in the country to see that the "boy" would be able to wash and iron the white man's clothes, clean his shoes and be able to understand the command, "Bring me whiskey." Those who went to the



in the early '60s
with Pope John XXIII



in the
late '80s