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Spiritus Est Qui Vivificat: Mass Incarceration, Social Justice and the Spiritan Mission

The Elsinore Bennu Think Tank for Restorative Justice*

Duquesne University

INTRODUCTION

The Elsinore Bennu Think Tank for Restorative Justice at Duquesne University is comprised of activists, artists, police officers, political leaders, professors, returning citizens, and students who have come together in a prison, on campus or through virtual meetings almost every Friday morning since the Summer of 2013 to share their ideas and find partners for turning theory into practice[1]. Whether it is bringing police recruits into prisons to learn with incarcerated men, hosting events to honor victims of violent crime, publishing a book of essays written by our incarcerated members, pursuing grant funding, delivering food to senior high-rises during a pandemic, offering writing workshops or collectively authoring academic articles such as this, our members are constantly seeking to address the intractable damage of white supremacy within our community and ourselves.

This article is an attempt to unearth and explore connections between our work and the Spiritan university facilitating our accomplishments. After discovering that Duquesne was founded by six priests, Lou Gentile, a grizzled old cop who joined our group upon the passing of his dear friend Khalifa—one of the six original members of the EBTT—made it clear that he sees no coincidences in this work. Whether it is God, the universe, tradition, or simply a concern for the common good, our membership is, so moved by our deep love for one another that we are attempting to radiate against the malignant neglect and outright hatred at the root of so many social problems. Moreover, this article recognizes that this struggle is an ongoing evolution of what our Spiritan ancestors began and what our Spiritan contemporaries continue. The following pages acknowledge the Spiritan mission in Africa as inherently problematic because of its inextricable link to colonization. Despite this moral failure, we are asking readers to consider how contemporary

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…we are asking readers to consider how contemporary education and corrections will look two-hundred years from now.

education and corrections will look two-hundred years from now. Perhaps not as horrifying as colonialism but given the iatrogenic upon so many of our fellow citizens, history may well judge educators employed in or partnering with these institutions as harshly as we can judge the early Spiritans. Still, given the complexity of these systems, there are bright spots that will prove essential in their eventual evolution into something better. We contend that our efforts within the structural racism of education and justice systems functions in this way and extend that argument to the work of the Spiritans.

Spiritan History

The Congregation of the Holy Spirit exists as a Catholic religious community of priests, brothers, and lay people in over 60 countries on six continents. The order articulates its mission in the Spiritan Rule of Life as "service to those whose needs are the greatest and the oppressed" achieved through "the 'integral liberation' of people, action for justice and peace, and participation in development (Haas, pp 4, 14)." These objectives originate in 1703 with Spiritan founder Claude Poullart des Places renting accommodations at Rue des Cordiers, Paris, to live with twelve of his fellow seminarians from the Jesuit Collège Louis le Grand. The "poor scholars" had been living in squalid Parisian tenements until Des Places began supporting their growing community both materially and spiritually. While he did not describe this effort in terms of a "preferential option for the poor," the language common to Catholic Social Teaching and core to contemporary Spiritan mission today, there can be no doubting his intention when we read his condition for admission to the house, "On no pretext whatsoever may candidates be admitted who are able to pay elsewhere for their board and lodging (Koren, p 167)."

Twenty-five years after Poullart des Places' death, in 1734, the Holy Ghost Community received official recognition from the French government and the Archdiocese of Paris. It opened a seminary at rue Lhomond, Paris, to train priests for work in the French colonies. Thanks to unrelenting determination, hope, and perhaps a generous helping of good fortune, the seminary survived the 1764 expulsion of the Jesuits from France, the 1789 French Revolution, and the Reign of Terror. The Holy Ghost Seminary won a long-lasting struggle for state support in 1839, when, as part of a calamitous imperial project, it was entrusted with "the education, selection and general direction of the priests called to work at the delicate and laborious task of morally training the blacks in the colonies (Koren, p 138)."

Colonial Roots

In 1841, a recently ordained Catholic priest, Francis Libermann, founded a society of missionaries to work among the poorest and most abandoned people in the world. Libermann was a convert to Catholicism who had been born into the Jewish faith and had a deep empathy with the oppressed. He began his work with the formerly enslaved men and women in the French colonies and the peoples of Africa more generally. He claimed that, "providence gave us our work for the Blacks,

whether in Africa or in the colonies; incontestably, these are the most wretched and abandoned people down to our own day (Holy Ghost Fathers, p 170)." While we recognize the white supremacy in Libermann's language (i.e., the convictions that the Europeans could "cure" the "problems" of the people they colonized or had any justification for the colonization itself) still, his vision for the establishment of the church in Africa was powerful in its time. Especially, his commitment to a genuine inculturation of the Christian Gospel appropriate to the diverse cultures of the African continent. He, along with some other Catholic missionary leaders, were pioneers "stretching beyond the parameters of the official church in Europe in their time" by planning for an African church for Africans, rather than an imported European church (Bevans, p 235).

Libermann's 1846 *Memorandum to Propaganda Fide* in Rome, the Church body responsible for Catholic missions worldwide, "is now regarded as one of the greatest missionary texts of the 19th century (Mare, p 379)." In it, he pointed out the opposition this work faced. There were those within the Church who "tried to persuade us that our zeal and our efforts would all be in vain, and that we would never succeed in gaining favorable results (Holy Ghost Fathers, p 225)." He happily reported the contrary to the Roman church leaders as his missionaries were emboldened to encourage "African customs, formation of indigenous clergy and subsequently bishops, and evangelization of Africans by Africans (Bevans, p 224)." Outlining his missionary strategy, he wrote, "Our plan consists of paying special attention to the education of young people and the best social training that we can give them, the formation of a black clergy, of teachers, catechists and farmers and artisans skilled in a variety of trades (Mare, pp 380-1." A passion for justice and the integral development of people prompted Libermann to write to his missionaries in 1847 to rid themselves of their European customs and habits so that they could "...become Negro with the Negroes, to form them appropriately, not in the European fashion, but leaving them what belongs to them. Be to them as servants should be to their masters (Holy Ghost Fathers, 330)."[2] Again, while "becoming negro with the negroes" and "form[ing] them appropriately" are mortifying notions, we recognize the call for respectful service and cultural appreciation as early seeds for later progress.

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The following year, in 1848, Libermann's society joined with the Spiritans, as both had a similar commitment to Africa. This was a time of revolution in France resulting in the short-lived Second Republic and the proclamation of the abolition of slavery in the French colonies. We have no evidence that Libermann supported the movement for the abolition of slavery underway in France at that time. However, he believed that Africans "are made in the image of God just like everybody else and are disposed to receive the treasure of the Faith which they do not know about (Holy Ghost Fathers, p 223)." For him, Africans had the same dignity as other human beings, "they too are called to the faith, and are as well-disposed as others to receive it (Holy Ghost Fathers, p 223)." He did not believe "that Divine Wisdom and Goodness could have excluded so many people [that is, all people of African descent] from the immense benefits of the Redemption (Holy Ghost

[2] "Faites-vous nègres avec les nègres pour les former comme ils le doivent être, non à la façon de l'Europe, mais laissez-leur ce qui leur est propre; faites-vous à eux comme des serviteurs doivent se faire à leurs maîtres…" For commentary on this core Libermannian principle, see Coulon (1988) pp 489-546.

Fathers, p 226).” At a time when there is a global re-awakening to the fundamental truth that “Black Lives Matter,” we can recognize ways that Libermann speaks to and with us today, in asserting the inherent dignity of every human person.

Des Places and Libermann complement each other, forming the foundation for one Spiritan mission: des Places who crossed a cultural divide between rich and poor; and Libermann who crossed a racial divide between Black and white. Libermann spoke of the need “to identify the wounds of society and take every opportunity … to bring relief to these needs, remedy to these wounds (Holy Ghost Fathers, p 536),” and called upon the Spiritans to be “the advocates, the supporters and the defenders of the weak and the little ones against all who oppress them (Daly, p 119).” Libermann identified Africans, and particularly formerly enslaved men and women, as those most in need in his day. Since then, Spiritans have broadened their mission to places beyond Africa, where other groups of people have experienced abandonment, exclusion, and oppression. “As these frontiers and situations change, the front-line of mission must also move (The Spiritan Congregation, p 100).” However, the way of Spiritan mission has remained the same: not about completing tasks or achieving goals, but rather about being present with others, living with them, walking with them, listening to them and sharing faith with them (The Spiritan Congregation, p 99).

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Prison Ministry

With the global incarceration crisis of the last few decades, the Spiritans’ brotherhood with the oppressed has drawn them to men, women, and children trapped within carceral systems. For the past 20 years, Spiritans have devoted themselves to improving the health and living conditions of, and providing education and training initiatives for, the roughly 2,000 people in Arbu Minch prison, in the Southwestern part of Ethiopia. They have applied their deep commitment to grounding their ministry in the lived experience, dignity, and initiative of those they serve. Dr. Ian O’Donnell, researching this work in 2016, wrote, “What would prison look like if the prisoners devised their own rules, elected their own leaders, generated their own incomes and lived day-to-day largely in the absence of staff?” That is precisely what he found at Arbu Minch:

> Over several years, Paddy Moran, a Spiritan priest, has introduced a range of innovations to the town’s prison. Some have been practical, such as improved sanitary facilities and new classrooms. Others have focused on creative pursuits, such as painting and pottery ...There is order, humor and – despite the odds – dignity. … The prisoners elect representatives from each dormitory and appoint their own order-keepers who wear a distinctive purple hat. They have a chair and executive team who liaise with the prison authorities to ensure the regime operates smoothly. They have an agreed code of conduct, which covers everything from personal hygiene to fighting, and escape attempts... Violence, suicide and drug

> abuse do not appear to be prevalent. There is a sense of solidarity among the prisoners (O'Donnell).

Similarly, Spiritans in Taiwan have been engaged in prison ministry since arriving in the country twenty-two years ago. The Spiritans work with two prisons in the cities of Hsinchu and Taichung. Whereas in Ethiopia, the focus was on meeting the existential need to improve prison living conditions, in Taiwan, the focus is on meeting the existential needs of those exiting prison, helping them with accommodation, finding work, providing accompaniment and friendship. The Spiritans are part of a voluntary organization dedicated to providing a support structure for the released who often return to poverty and dysfunctional family situations. One success story of the group is that of the friendship between a woman named Mei Li who was working with the Spiritans and a sixteen-year-old girl who was in prison for selling drugs. After this young woman was released, Mei Li took her into her home where she stayed for twelve years, which allowed her to return to school, graduate from High School, and later get a job. This woman is now herself married with children and this outcome was only possible because of the love, compassion, generosity and sacrifice of Mei Li and her family (O'Leary).

THE INSIDE-OUT PRISON EXCHANGE PROGRAM

The Spiritan focus on ministry with those who are, or have been, incarcerated, has also powerfully manifested itself in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Duquesne University is a Catholic university in the Spiritan tradition, which has inherited the legacy of Des Places and Libermann. The university is religiously motivated in serving students, and seeks to inspire its graduates "to work collaboratively to build a more just and verdant world"[3] through the Spiritan objective of "making young people aware of the problems of poverty and unjust structures in their society and the world at large (The Spiritan Congregation, p 102)."

The Spiritan theology, and the University it fostered, created a rich environment for a powerful movement that emerged at the end of the Twentieth Century: Inside-Out. In 1997, Lori Pompa, an instructor at Temple University in Philadelphia, began The Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program, based on a suggestion from a man serving life in the Pennsylvania prison system. Inside-Out conducts university courses within correctional settings. Enrollees include traditional college students and an equivalent number of learners selected from prison populations. One of the program's goals is a shift in the consciousness of each participant, with reducing the stigmatization of incarcerated people central to the experiential process. Courses begin with a discussion of labels and a recommendation that negative terms, such as "inmate," be exchanged for "inside student," while the rest of the class is referred to as "outside students." Starting with this relabeling, participants start to realize that neither group can reduce the other to the one-dimensional image previously assumed.

The Spiritan focus on ministry with those who are, or have been, incarcerated, has also powerfully manifested itself in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

[3] https://www.duq.edu/academics/community-engaged-teaching-and-research/what-we-do/community-engaged-teaching-and-learning

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As students interact over the course of a semester, their views of each other change. Incarcerated persons no longer appear as the misfits and monsters portrayed in popular culture, but as people with lives and families beyond prison walls. College students become something more than "children of privilege" incapable of understanding why individuals succumb to the culture of street crime. In time, initial changes in how people see one another affect how participants view themselves, their futures, and their potential impact on society. Most Inside-Out instructors will readily explain that it is, by far, the single most engaged learning process in which they have ever taken part. What has often been most surprising are the many levels of learning that take place—people learning about themselves, about other people, about how they are both different and alike, about communication and working through conflict, and about the systems that impact their lives—and their relationship to those systems, as individuals and as a community.

Paulo Freire's pedagogy offers an important framework for interpreting the nature of such deep, multilayered, and lasting learning. In Freire's terms, the pedagogical dynamics of Inside-Out can be considered intentional *conscientização* ("conscientization") that emphasizes not only personal agency, but the possibilities of mutual transformation through mutual learning. "Education makes sense because women and men learn that through learning they can make and remake themselves, because women and men are able to take responsibility for themselves as capable of knowing—of knowing that they know and of knowing that they don't (Freire, p 15)." Through creating a space in which insiders and outsiders learn about one another through engaging together in learning activities, they examine and change their perspectives on the "other," acknowledging that each group's perspective is insufficient and that freedom comes through dialectical engagement.

As Freire would insist, true praxis is accomplished only through the interplay of "word" and "work"—reflective processes of educational study and dialogue must be accompanied by action, or else our conversation becomes mere verbalism (Freire, pp 75-6). Faithful to this imperative, the Inside-Out curriculum includes a number of modules on restorative justice (i.e., a model of justice that emphasizes repairing the harm caused or revealed by criminal behavior and then repairing that harm in a process that includes all stakeholders). They begin with a series of self-reflection exercises where students reflect upon their experiences of causing and experiencing harm. They are asked to consider moments when they suffered as well as moments when they caused suffering. They summarize how they felt and what they lost in these experiences into single word responses that are anonymously listed before the class. Students then make connections and recognize the similarities between both victimization and harming others. In this moment, they realize that offenders are frequently the victims of some individual or social harm.

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From this awakening, they move on to case studies of individual offenders presented in narrative form. Students are asked to come up with some means for dealing with the harms described in the narratives in a world without a criminal justice system (i.e., harms caused as well as suffered by the characters in the case studies). This exercise is useful for separating the concepts of justice and punishment. Once the students realize that justice does not necessitate punishment, they begin reading on the topic of restorative justice to participate in an exercise that develops one of the case studies into a role-play of a "peacemaking circle" in which several students are given character backgrounds and asked to use them as a grounding for their parts in the activity.

These class projects function as vivid examples of how restorative justice can be used to resolve real world problems, offering the opportunity for the deep dialogue and imaginative re-creating of interpersonal and societal relationships that lead to transformative liberation. In such efforts we also hear the echo of the Spiritan Rule of Life: "We count the following as constitutive parts of our mission of evangelization: the 'integral liberation' of people, action for justice and peace, and participation in development... In order to contribute effectively to promoting justice, we make every effort to analyze situations, to lay bare the relationship of individual cases to structural causes (Haas, p 23)."

In the summer of 2007, Norman Conti, a sociology professor, set up Duquesne's first Inside-Out course at SCI-Cresson. Although the prison was a two-hour drive from campus, he and sixteen dedicated students leapt at the opportunity. Following that pilot, Conti next taught several classes at the Allegheny County Jail, and then moved the program to SCI-Pittsburgh for two semesters. The University integrated these classes into its curriculum as part of the Justitia Learning Community, established around the guiding principles of justice and community engagement.[4] Since its inception, the Justitia community has functioned as a primary driver for Inside-Out at Duquesne.

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Elsinore Bennu Think Tank for Restorative Justice

Critical to the Inside-Out movement has been the creation of think tanks, through which various combinations of insiders and outsiders (including returning citizens) come together for joint projects that continue the commitment to the liberating, reflection-action dynamic of praxis.[5] In our context, this germinated as a core group of men within SCI-Pittsburgh enrolled in all three of the Inside-Out classes offered through Duquesne. In 2013, wanting to push the collaborative learning model even further, the men, together with Norm, formed an Inside-Out think tank to meet weekly and develop policy solutions to address the carceral state and the injustice of race.

[4] At Duquesne University, "Learning Communities" are required for all first-year students in the College of Liberal Arts. Each community is organized around a core theme and its student members take three courses together in their first semester. Course instructors design coordinated learning outcomes and class activities to emphasize the theme and offer interdisciplinary connections. Some form of community engagement is typically required.

[5] For more on Inside-Out think tanks, see: http://www.insideoutcenter.org/history-inside-out.html

They named it the Elsinore Bennu Think Tank for Restorative Justice. In the collaborative spirit of the group, "Elsinore" (the cursed castle in Hamlet) was Norm's idea, and "Bennu" (an Egyption symbol of rebirth) was proposed by Ralph Malakki Bolden, an inside member. Most of these founding members had been convicted of murder. The oldest two had been incarcerated since the 1970s and the youngest for just over a decade. While all of them passionately hoped for eventual parole or commutation, none had concrete grounds to ever expect release. Nevertheless, they saw one of their major roles as supporting other incarcerated men in their preparations for reentry. Duquesne students, other faculty, and community members regularly came to these weekly meetings inside the facility, many of them ultimately joining the think tank themselves.

From 2013 to 2017, the think tank produced many programs, publications, and events, all of which were meant to foster the recognition of the common humanity of those inside and outside carceral facilities, and to use the mutual recognition to build a collaborative process of restorative justice. This took the form of programming inside SCI-Pittsburgh: the EBTT developed events like a "Victim's Day" in which men inside that prison could come together to consider how they had victimized others, and also, how they themselves had suffered victimization, with the goal of brainstorming strategies to stop this cycle. We sponsored the showing of Etty, a powerful play about the Holocaust inside the facility.[6] Members also sent their voices over prison walls through projects like an art fair at Duquesne's gallery space featuring work created by the incarcerated, and a book of writings by EBTT members called Life Sentences: Writings from an American Prison (Belt Press, 2019).

When SCI-Pittsburgh closed in 2017 and inside members were moved to facilities throughout Western Pennsylvania, the EBTT took on a new form, meeting outside of a prison setting, at Duquesne University itself, and bringing together returning citizens with activists, artists, police officers, political leaders, professors and students. At the same time, three of our original inside members, with the help of Gannon and Mercyhurst Universities, formed a new think tank within SCI-Albion in northwestern Pennsylvania. As the New Destiny Think Tank for Restorative Justice, they have created a series of events and programs focused on juvenile offenders and support for young people in general.

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Police Training Inside-Out

One of our most ambitious initiatives is a learning exchange with incarcerated men and Pittsburgh Police officers. The six original inside members at SCI-Pittsburgh and Norm spent years developing an ancillary curriculum for police academy training. The three-credit course, which uses a modified version of the Inside-Out curriculum, brings police recruits together with incarcerated men to study criminal justice policy. Adding this new curriculum to traditional academy training is intended to help recruits develop a more nuanced professional vision. For the incarcerated students, their coursework also empowers them to see the humanity in a group of people—the police—whom they had seen only as adversaries. The Pittsburgh Bureau of Police

[6] http://www.ettyplay.org

partnered with the EBTT on this course, and now, working with Duquesne University and the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections, their police recruits go through it as a regular part of their academy training.

Police Training Inside-Out (PTI-O) is a response to the widely accepted finding that traditional training methods are failing new officers and their departments. Traditional training promotes the type of *us vs. them* mentality that undermines the best efforts of law enforcement within the communities they serve. PTI-O approaches policing from a social problems perspective, emphasizing the problems that police respond to, the problems that they create, the problems that they suffer from and how their professional vision contributes to each of these problems. The curriculum allows the two groups to see each other—and themselves—as people with vested interests in their shared communities.

Recruits enter our classroom as a unit, having heard from some senior officers that this sort of thing would make them "soft" and could be dangerous. They encounter their inside classmates, and, after a series of icebreaker activities, their excitement becomes visible as they take part in the joy of learning across boundaries. As SCI- Pittsburgh was closing, the police department made PTI-O a permanent component of its academy training and agreed to send all future recruits to course meetings at another institution. Moreover, administrators from several local facilities were clamoring for the program, and we have since facilitated six PTI-O courses at SCI-Fayette, a facility one hour south of Pittsburgh.

Outside-In

After the EBTT migrated to its new on-campus home, Conti leveraged the success the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program to bring five returned citizens into Duquesne University's classrooms. In Fall 2019, five returned citizens from EBTT (including one of the founding members of EBBT on the "inside"), enrolled in Conti's Correctional Policy and Practice course. Two of the five non-traditional students are currently enrolled in degree programs on campus. The other three are older adults, who enrolled in Appelt's and Baltimore's community-engaged Sociology of Aging course in Spring 2020.

Outside On-Campus. After the Covid-19 pandemic necessitated the re-formation of the course in virtual spaces, the three men initiated a socially distanced community-engaged class project. Three traditional undergraduate students joined their community-engaged initiative to support elders living in high-rise apartment buildings during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The Spring 2020 course project has become the foundation for a new workgroup within the EBTT, the "Big Idea Team." The Big Idea Team brings together older, adult returned citizens from EBTT and traditional Duquesne students an ongoing intergenerational learning experience.

Currently, the three older adult learners are earning credits in the College of Liberal Arts' Teaching Assistant (TA) Course supervised by Appelt. Their TA learning experience is associated with Appelt's Sociology of Aging and Mental Health course. As part of this course, the TAs are receiving guidance from traditional students on a set of basic computing skills they identified as necessary to support them in their new roles as students and community-based social activists.

Simultaneously, the TAs are providing critical feedback to students and engaging in guided reflective exercises with students who are working to meet a set of learning objectives related to cross-generational communication skills. Under the direction of co-instructors Appelt and Baltimore, TAs and students are using this foundational co-learning experience to create novel, virtual programming for a local senior program that was forced to close in-person programming due to the pandemic.

At the conclusion of the Fall 2020 Term, the Big Idea Team will implement the virtual programming products into an app that they have developed for residents in local high-rise buildings, who EBTT members are currently supporting through weekly food deliveries. The longer-term (post-pandemic) objective of the Big Idea Team is to leverage lessons from its cross-generational learning and collaborative work to improve quality of life in local, urban communities of color by implementing creative initiatives to "bridge the generational gap." Through its collaborative learning and social action, the Big Idea Team has intertwined the University's Spiritan Mission and ethos with the EBTT's steadfast commitment to the critical role of "remade persons" in the process of restorative social justice. Older adult returned citizens, as remade persons, share with young university students their perspectives and hard-won insights beyond those of traditional university educators and in doing so, can extend their reach to educate our region's future business leaders, health care workers, and social policy makers who can exemplify the unique Spiritan Mission of the University.

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The House of Life. One of the founding members of our think tank, Ralph Malakki Bolden, maintains an interest in Egyptian mythology that brought us the Bennu (a symbol of rebirth) in our name, as well as a number of other important guiding metaphors for our work.

The Duat, the underworld (i.e., the realm of the dead) has become essential for our understanding of the potential that men and women facing life sentences have for changing the world.[7] The Duat is a place of judgment where souls cross over to learn, face challenges and potentially be assessed for resurrection. Some souls become trapped in the Duat: providing an opportunity for them to serve as teachers to others in their ordeals. This is an obvious parallel to the struggle accepted by many people facing life sentences without the possibility of parole. Through the adversities of confinement, the lives of these men and women gain greater meaning and allow them to make a positive impact on the larger world. The Duat-like existence of a life sentence, in Freirean consciousness, could easily become a realm of "silence" for those fatalistically resigned to it. Instead, it has become a "generative theme" through which the incarcerated people achieve a kind of liberation through their teaching and mentoring role (Freire, 2017).

[7] http://anthropology.msu.edu/anp455-fs14/2014/10/28/duat/

This metaphor is also observed in the widely praised work of the Fortune Society, in New York City.[8] Inspired by a series of dialogues following a performance of John Herbert's *The Fortune in Men's Eyes* in the late 1960s, a group of people impacted by our criminal justice system began a campaign for public education, human rights and direct services for returning citizens and their families. Since the late 1960s, the Fortune Society has grown into one of our nation's premier reentry services organizations, serving 7,000 of New York City's returning citizens every year. The most tangible element of their success can be observed in their temporary and permanent housing facilities in West Harlem, which accept men and women upon release. Housed in a gothic building that had once been a girls' school, staffed in part by people with a history of incarceration, and fondly referred to as "the Castle," the facility neither looks nor feels like a conventional half-way house or reentry center. Additionally, the Fortune Society built an environmentally sustainable, mixed-use building to house justice-involved citizens as well as community members facing homelessness. The staff helps to mediate between landlords and formerly incarcerated people to ensure access to safe, stable and affordable housing for those leaving their facilities. Moreover, the Academy holds Thursday night community meetings very similar to our own think tank meetings.

The EBTT proposes to create our own version of The Fortune Society's endeavor that would make greater use of our deep connections to both those who have served life and universities. Malakki once noted that major ancient Egyptian cities included temples called "The House of Life," essentially libraries, staffed by high priests, containing all of the accumulated cultural knowledge. We are offering a contemporary reimagining of these sites as brick-and-mortar think tanks that house commuted lifers and serve as key impact points for community development initiatives undertaken in partnership with universities, local government and other civically engaged organizations. These commuted lifers, like the Spiritans before them, as frontline activists, would also work in collaboration with the committed men and women who remain teachers with those who are currently passing through a carceral experience.

There are Lifers on both sides of prison walls who are as committed to ending mass incarceration as were abolitionists to ending the horrors of slavery.

There are lifers on both sides of prison walls who are as committed to ending mass incarceration as were abolitionists to ending the horrors of slavery.[9] With or without an eye toward their own potential commutation, hundreds of life and long-term sentenced men and women would work to actively recruit and educate the most promising of their shorter-term fellow incarcerated citizens in preparation for eventual careers on the outside with the House of Life. The House of Life is just a step toward formalizing and therefore strengthening the role that so many lifers already play within prisons.

[8] https://fortunesociety.org.

[9] Tyrone Werts, a central figure in Inside-Out and commuted Lifer offers a premier example of this sort of career. See: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GB6Hzu2hBio

CONCLUSION

Duquesne University's version of Inside-Out, along with EBTT and the proposed House of Life, offer abundant evidence of a unique combination of Spiritan and Freirean sensibilities in service of education and justice. This is especially evident in the following dimensions.

An Open-Ended, Missional Priority for Liberation from Oppression

Core to the Spiritan mission is openness to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, and led by these promptings, their founders and members continually have promoted efforts to enculturate the Christian gospel in diverse settings. Since it is a gospel proclaiming, "glad tidings to the poor" and "liberation to captives," Spiritans are drawn into those settings where great poverty and oppression exist. Spiritan lore abounds with stories of congregation members setting out into new endeavors with minimal planning and resources, zealous to serve.

One such setting are the favelas (low-income slum neighborhoods) of Brazil where the Spiritan approach to mission and Freirean methodology come together. One Spiritan, Pat Clark, became friends Paulo Freire in 1974, went to Brazil two years later as a newly ordained priest and lived in one of these favelas, Vila Prudente, in Sao Paulo city. Pat remembered Freire's advice, "Don't begin with ready-made answers and ready-made projects. Be a fly on the wall until you know what the people are talking about. Then use your teacher-learner skills to help them become empowered (P, Clark, personal communicationn)." Rather than responding to the immediate demands for a soup kitchen and food handouts, "Pat hit upon the idea that transformation had to begin not only from without, but also and fundamentally, from within (Clark)." He recognized "that culture was food too. Food for the heart and the soul." He founded a Center for Culture and the Arts, now over forty years in existence, providing an oasis of affirmation for the youth of Vila Prudente. Here they learn self-respect and respect for others and develop a sense of dignity and self-worth.

The Center's artists have exhibited in galleries throughout Brazil, as well as in Hong Kong, the USA, and Ireland. "They are able to tap the creative mystery that is in everybody, the dream to be able to believe in and feel and express their worth as human beings (Clark, p 10)." Initiatives such as Inside-Out at Duquesne, the EBTT and the House of Life show a similar energy and determination to focus on areas of greatest need and allow creative efforts to grow organically through the participation of diverse stakeholders.

Praxis-Oriented Interplay of Reflection, Dialogue, Study and Action

Duquesne University offers many opportunities for community-engaged learning and action partnerships.[10] As evident in the initiatives discussed in this article, educational models that bring

[10] See, for example, listings of active partnerships supported by the Duquesne University Center for Community-Engaged Teaching and Research at https://duq.edu/academics/community-engaged-teaching-and-research/partnerships.

together incarcerated people and returning citizens with university faculty and students can yield rich fruits. Freire offered a hopeful vision in which revolutionary leader-educators could sponsor "educational projects" to be "carried out *with* the oppressed in the process of organizing them (Freire, p 40)." In so doing, the pedagogy of the oppressed could move from its initial stage of liberating the oppressed themselves to a second stage in which it "becomes a pedagogy of all [people] in the process of permanent liberation (Freire, p 40)." The initiatives described in this article embody such efforts.

Creation of Educational Spaces in which "Privileged" and "Marginalized" People Learn from One Another and Become Open to Transformation

In a 1983 conversation with United States religious educators, Freire spoke of the fatalism that often characterizes the ideology of the "non-poor" as much as the "poor"—and of its twin, despair, with cynicism and immobilization as frequent outcomes (Evans, p 222). Spiritan and Freirean-influenced strategies for pedagogy and action offer a way beyond such immobilization, as they are characterized by efforts to create spaces of hospitality and mutuality "in which obedience to truth is practiced (Palmer, p 69)." Inside-Out and the EBTT are powerful examples of such spaces.

In the legacy of Claude Poullart des Places and Francis Libermann, the inherent dignity and life-situation of each participant is honored, while recognizing that the transformational callings of various groups will differ (Conti, p 134). A strong culture is fostered in group meetings of mutual welcome and attentive listening to each person's contributions. As practiced within the Spiritan ethos of Duquesne University, Freire's hope in the growth of mutual love can be concretely realized: "Founding itself upon love, humility, and faith, dialogue becomes a horizontal relationship of which mutual trust between the dialoguers is the logical consequence."

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And in the messy, dialectical exchanges that result, the effect is an effort toward Freire's epistemological vision, deeply consonant with the Christian Gospel's hopeful message as Spiritans seek to embody it: as participants engage together in "[c]ritically reading the world," a new world becomes imaginable: "With the advent of the existence men and women created with the materials life provided them, it became impossible for them to be present in the world without *reference to a tomorrow*."

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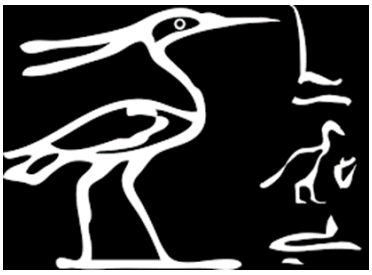

The Elsinore Bennu Think Tank for Restorative Justice: The six men—Fly, Faruq, Khalifa, Malakki, Oscar, and Shawn—met at the State Correctional Institution in Pittsburgh and came together in 2013 to form the Elsinore Bennu Think Tank for Restorative Justice (EBTT). Centered around the principles of restorative justice, which aims to heal communities broken by criminal and state violence through collective action, the EBTT has grown beyond prison walls to the campus of Duquesne University and across the country through weekly online meetings, workshops and events.