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ON RE-READING POULLART DES PLACES
(continued)

5 - GENERAL AND PARTICULAR RULES

The last writing of Poullart des Places that we have is found in a manuscript of 64 pages in-quarto: it is the first set of rules for the Holy Ghost Community. They were drawn up by the founder himself. He must have started them when the work began, but did not finish them, according to J. Michel, until the community was moved from its first abode in rue des Cordiers to a large house on rue Neuve-Saint-Etienne. This change took place at the end of the year 1705. Claude Francois had received Minor Orders a few months earlier, on June 6, the feast of his patron, Saint Claude, monk and archbishop of Besançon.

The Rule, as we have it, does not give the impression of being a finished work. It contains erasures, corrections, and the founder would no doubt have completed it and re-edited it carefully, if death had not taken him off so soon.

These Rules already suppose a fairly large community. It was precisely because of the increasing number of scholars that Poullart des Places had to make the change of residence. Here is what M. Besnard says in his Memorandum:

*The progress of every kind achieved by his first disciples was too remarkable not to attract other excellent candidates. So he thought of renting a house so that they could have more room. In a short time, there was formed a community of clerics, to whom he gave very wise rules, which he had examined and approved by persons of great experience. He was the first to practice himself what he recommended to others.*

1 Michel, p. 340. In these pages we often use the word community, which Claude Poullart des Places does not use. Louis XIV had formally forbidden the creation of new communities. Cf. Michel, pp. 213 ff.

2 Mémoire, by M. Besnard, in: Koren, Writings, p. 285. A note at the end of the manuscript of the Rules says the same thing: *All these rules were drawn up by the deceased Father des Places and written by his own hand, and put into practice by him and his students.* (Koren, Writings, p. 221).
This final sentence is important for us: we know that in the pages of his Rule we can get a look at the life of our founder during his last days, at the same time as we are able to discover the spirit he wanted to infuse into his work.

To tell the truth, a Rule never makes gripping reading. As we read the Rule of Poullart des Places, we are reminded first of all that he was a lawyer, that he knew the utility of giving details, of not leaving anything vague, and thus sometimes one gets the impression of a certain minutiæ. But we must also recall that it was written for students, most of whom did not have at first a habit of life in community and had to be trained in the meaning of common life. At first, the founder directed the community all by himself, and had the students help him with different tasks. However, at the beginning of 1705, he was joined by a priest, Michel-Vincent le Barbier. In October of the same year, there arrived a subdeacon, Jacques-Hyacinthe Garnier. Thus, little by little, the very demands of the work which had been undertaken led them to form a true community of formatores to direct the seminarians. But there was only one rule for everybody, directors and students, and it is by these first rules that the future Spiritan rule was directly inspired.

H. Koren makes another introductory remark which it may be useful to include here:

*Although the spirit dominating these rules undoubtedly is worthy of admiration and imitation in present-day seminaries, the same cannot be said of many of its prescriptions. They were good and wholesome for the time in which they were written but they would hardly be practical in any modern twentieth century seminary. What Libermann said about the training of aspirants to the priesthood in the nineteenth century applies a fortiori to*

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3 Michel, pp. 144-5 and p. 216. Probably from the very beginning of his work, Calude-François had a collaborator in the person of Jean Le Roy, who was born at Gourin in the parish next to the Abbey of Langonnet, and already well along in his theological studies so that he was able to be ordained in 1705. (J. Michel, pp. 142-3).

Jean Le Roy was probably directed to the rue des Cordiers by Claude de Marbeuf, a priest of Langonnet who exercised rights of seigneur over the parish of Gourin. (Ibid., p. 144). The bonds between the family de Marbeuf and that of Poullart were very close. The Abbe from Langonnet had been godfather to Calude-François' little sister in 1680. (Ibid., p. 15). Jean Le Roy was recalled to his diocese by the Bishop in 1707. (cf. J. Th. Rath, *Geschichte der Kongregation vom Heiligen Geist*, I, Knechtsteden, 1972, p. 119; Michel, pp. 184-185).
our time: 'these days the education of seminarians must be totally different from the methods in vogue before the Revolution of 1793. Experience shows that the old approach is no longer applicable'.

Now let us read Poullart des Places' Rules, trying to highlight the spirit which is still worth our attention.

A – A praying community

The Holy Ghost community creates a first impression of a community of spiritual life and of prayer. It is interesting to note some important aspects of it.

1) Consecration to the Holy Spirit

All the students will especially adore the Holy Spirit to whom they are particularly dedicated... This is how the first chapter begins.

How are we to explain this special consecration to the Holy Spirit? What does it mean? The research of Father Le Floch and of J. Michel give a good enough answer to the first question: Claude-François draws his devotion to the Holy Spirit from his native province. We don't need to go over the results of their historical research; it will suffice to recall that the founder had chosen the feast of Pentecost 1703 for the beginning of his work. It is not likely that it was by mere coincidence.

But what does this consecration mean? We get a first indication in Article 2, in which the feast of Pentecost is designated as one of the two principal feasts of the house, along with the Immaculate Conception. The students will celebrate the former in order to obtain from the Holy Spirit the fire of divine love, and the latter in order to obtain from the Most Holy Virgin an angelic purity, – two virtues which must be the foundation of all their piety.

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4 Koren, Writings, pp. 159-161; the citation from Father Libermann is in N.D., XII, p. 525.

5 The hand-written text of Poullart des Places is divided into chapters and articles. In Koren's edition, marginal numbers have been added which facilitate references; these are the numbers we use.

We shall return later to a consideration of the Immaculate Conception and deal now with the devotion to the Holy Spirit which was for obtaining the fire of divine love. This is the grace which Poullart des Places puts at the very origin of his work: charity, whose source is in God and which the Holy Spirit diffuses in the hearts of men.

Among the prayers prescribed by the Rule, we note that the students not only recited the Office of the Holy Spirit every day, but that before every study period or class, they will ask the Holy Spirit for light so that their work may be worth while: A Veni Sancte for that intention and an Ave Maria in honor of the Blessed Virgin to obtain enlightenment from her Spouse. The same prayer will be said at the beginning of spiritual reading... The Spirit, who is the source of divine love in our hearts (Rom 5:5) is also the Spirit of Truth (cf. John 14:17, 15:26), who leads us to all truth (John 16:13). The two aspects are inseparable and closely united in the prayer Veni Sancte Spiritus and in the prayer which usually follows it. The custom of reciting this prayer, followed by the Ave Maria, before all community exercises has remained alive in the Congregation of the Holy Ghost down to our own day. Let us hope that this frequent calling upon the presence and action of the Holy Spirit may never die out among us! But, above all, let us hope that there will always exist in the Congregation, under whatever formula, the desire expressed in the Veni Sancte: Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of thy faithful, and kindle in them the fire of thy love!

Poullart des Places points out another aspect of devotion to the Holy Spirit which he wishes to inculcate in his community: every Sunday they are to recite the prayer Ure igne Sancti Spiritus... This is a prayer from among the Orationes diversae in the Roman Missal. The first words are inspired by Psalm 25:2, and we can attempt to translate the prayer as follows. O Lord, may our loins and our hearts pass through the fire of the Holy Spirit, so that we may be able to serve You with a

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7 Règlements, no. 31.
8 Règlements, no. 30.
9 I think the reference is to the short prayer still found in the Missal for Pentecost Sunday immediately after the Gospel, and not to the sequence which begins with the same words.
10 Règlements, no. 40. See in the Roman Missal from before the latest liturgical reform Orationes Diversae, no. 26; in the Paris Missal of 1685, this prayer is found at the same place and with the same number.
chaste body and be pleasing to You by the purity of our heart. So it is purity of heart and body that they are to ask for through the action of the Holy Spirit. In the background there are surely the Old Testament images which represent God as a purifying fire (Malachy 3:2; Zachary 13:9) and also a reminder of the tongues of fire which at Pentecost symbolize the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Church. No doubt the purity thus prayed for is bodily chastity, but, in a much fuller way, it is total rectitude of intention, will and heart in the service of God,—in a word, the same grace as Claude-François asked for in his prayer to the Blessed Trinity: that his heart and his soul be filled with God alone.

The work of Poullart des Places, which was to become the Congregation of the Holy Ghost, had, therefore, as its first foundation stone, certitude of the presence and action in the Church and especially in those destined for its service in the priesthood, of the divine Person, sent by Christ at Pentecost, who brings the fire of divine love, the light for doing worthwhile work, and who purifies from anything that could be an obstacle to serving God alone and without reserve.

2) Devotion to the Immaculate Virgin

After mentioning the consecration to the Holy Spirit, from the very first article of the Rule Poullart des Places adds: They (the students) will also have a singular devotion to the Blessed Virgin, under whose protection they have been offered to the Holy Spirit.

The second article designates as principal feast, along with Pentecost, the feast of the Immaculate Conception, which the students will celebrate to obtain angelic purity from the Most Holy Virgin. The reasons for this choice and this devotion are to be found especially, as J. Michel proves, in the influence which the Jesuits, ardent defenders of the Immaculate Conception, had in the spiritual formation of Poullart des Places.

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11 Règlements, no. 2.
12 Règlements, no. 12. We can also recall the words from the Sequence for Pentecost: O lux beัสissima, reple cordis intima tuorum fidelium . . .
13 Cf. again the Sequence of Pentecost Lava quod est sordidum, riga quod est aridum, sana quod est sauciun . . .
In the formulation of the first article, we can notice the connection made between the Holy Spirit and Mary: it is under her protection that the students have been offered to the Holy Spirit. Could there be in these words an allusion to the location where the inauguration ceremony of the first community took place? According to oral tradition, it was in the Chapel of Our Lady of Rescue in the Church of St. Etienne-des-Grès . . .

It seems to me that the formula has a much deeper meaning: the founder has special confidence in the Virgin’s prayers for making the poor students become specially devoted (i.e. consecrated) to the Holy Spirit, or, in other words, for getting them to take full possession of their souls by setting them aglow with the fire of divine love.15

This connection between prayer to the Holy Spirit and the invocation of Mary is again clearly pointed out farther on. Article 30 of the Rules, which we have already seen, prescribes that before each study period or class there be a prayer to the Holy Spirit to ask for His light and an Ave Maria in honor of the Blessed Virgin to obtain light from her Spouse. We have underlined the last words: it could be thought astonishing to find in the Rules of Poullart des Places the statement that the Holy Spirit is the Spouse of Mary. The title is not very often found in theology and one might wonder what influenced Claude-Poullart to adopt it. We might think, first of all, of his friendship with Grignion de Montford who freely gives Mary the title of Spouse of the Holy Ghost.16 The Saint’s works had not yet been published, but we can imagine their conversations often touching upon such a subject.

We must also remember the influence upon both of them of the Doctrine Spirituelle of Father Lallemant which had been published by Father Champion in 1694. The great Jesuit wrote: Mary is unique in her quality as spouse of the Holy Spirit, since only she contracted a sacred marriage with Him, in the name of all human nature, to become Mother of a Man-God without ever ceasing to be a virgin.17

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15 All these expressions are in the first lines of the Règlements.
In any case, it was that very special dignity as spouse of the Holy Spirit that Claude-François had in mind when he placed his work under her special protection, confident that his prayers to her under that title would surely be heard. They invoke her, therefore, to obtain the light of the Holy Spirit, but also to obtain an angelic purity; for this intention they were to celebrate solemnly the feast of the Immaculate Conception, and they were to say the Angelus three times a day with the prayer per sanctam in order to be always kept in the greatest purity of heart and of body.

We could repeat here what we said above: the purity desired and asked for is not only corporal chastity, but a purity which imitates as far as possible Mary’s purity venerated under the title of her Immaculate Conception: a turning away from all stain of sin, from all compromise, in order to be able to give themselves wholly to God.

In the life of the community, Mary will often be brought to mind. In addition to daily prayers, whenever they leave the house to go anywhere, they will assemble together in the chapel to place themselves under the protection of the most holy Virgin Mary. They will fast on the vigil of the Immaculate Conception; every Sunday, feast day and walk-day, they will say the rosary alternately; on class days they will recite the rosary, three by three, coming back from class.

Reading through the inevitable dryness of a text of rules, we easily see a profound atmosphere of Marial piety, a lively awareness of a constant presence of the Virgin Mary in the daily life of the community.

3) The Eucharist and Liturgical Life

Poullart des Places, as we said above, had a great devotion to the Eucharist. M. Thomas, his first biographer, goes so far as to say: It was especially towards the Sacrament of the Altar that he directed his devotion,—or, to say it better—his most

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18 Règlements, no. 2.
19 Règlements, no. 28. I have not been able to identify the prayer Per sanctam...
20 Règlements, no. 2; cf. no. 68.
21 Règlements, no. 21.
22 Ibid., no. 22.
23 Ibid., no. 41.
24 Ibid., no. 82; cf. no. 255.
ardent passion. The Holy Ghost Community will, therefore, be marked by this devotion also: There is nothing we can recommend more insistently than respectful assistance at Holy Mass, never missing except if one is too sick to go out. So everybody should participate in the Mass every day, without excepting even the tailor and the cook.

On the other hand, our mentality of today is apt to be surprised at the rules and recommendations given for the reception of communion. Here is the general rule: They will receive the sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist every two weeks—the same frequency is prescribed for the tailor and the cook.

But we must remember that, in the mentality and customs of the time, this degree of frequency was generally considered to be a favor reserved to the most fervent. Even the Jesuits did not dare to go beyond it, except in exceptional cases. We had to wait until the time of Pius X for frequent and even daily communion to be considered normal. The formula of Poullart des Places could even have seemed daring to many of his contemporaries. In fact, Rule No. 37 continues: Individuals are strongly exhorted to approach (the Eucharist) even more often but always obedient to the advice of their directors. The words even more often, which we have underlined, give the impression that the two-week rule is already considered to be a favor. In addition, one day a month will be set aside for serious meditation on death, and on the day before, they will receive communion as if it were the last day of their life. Finally, every month they will make a little pilgrimage of devotion and on that occasion those who wish to do so are exhorted to approach the Holy Table.

Thus, while keeping the general rule based upon the customs of the time, there is in practice an opening up of broader

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26 Règlements, no. 36.
27 Ibid., no. 20.
28 Ibid., nos. 223, 230.
29 Ibid., no. 30.
30 Ibid., no. 223, 230.
32 Règlements, no. 43.
33 Ibid., no. 44.
possibilities which take into account personal attractions and
the prudence of directors of conscience.

Assistance at Mass and communion require a personal ef-
fort at devotion. The rules give a reminder:

On feast days and free days, as they return from Mass, wher-
ever they may assist at it, they are not to talk to one another, but
rather converse interiorly with God about the greatness of the
Sacrifice of Holy Mass or about the happiness it has been for them
to receive communion if they have done so.\footnote{Ibid., no. 250.} On feast days and
on Sundays, after Mass and communion, they will make their
thanksgiving in the Church for about a quarter of an hour.\footnote{Ibid., no. 38.} On
days of pilgrimage they will walk in silence in order to make a bet-
ter preparation for Holy Mass.\footnote{Ibid., no. 84.}

Devotion to the Eucharist is maintained outside assist-
ance at Mass by frequent visits to the Blessed Sacra-
ment,—every time they go out into the city to go to class or
elsewhere and when they return to the house after
class.\footnote{Ibid., no. 42.} The rules mention the attitudes and postures sui-
table for these occasions.\footnote{Ibid., nos. 87-91.}

But liturgical life is more than a matter of personal devo-
tion. The rule provides for classes and regular rehearsals for
learning the ceremonies: a half-hour every Tuesday and Sat-
urday, a whole hour on feast days.\footnote{Ibid., no. 55.} Masters of singing will
\textit{teach plain chant to the members of the house...}, and notify the
students ahead of time what antiphons, hymns and psalms they
will have to sing at Vespers the following Sunday. This is con-
sidered so important that the masters of singing \textit{will notify the}
\textit{Superior if somebody doesn't sing}.\footnote{Ibid., nos. 202-203.}

\section*{4) Other Prayers and Exercises of Piety}

Other vocal or mental prayers are provided for by the
Rules: morning and night prayers, meditation, particular exa-
men, prayers for benefactors, recitation of the \textit{De Profundis}
while going down to the refectory, short reading from the

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item \footnotetext{34} Ibid., no. 250.
\item \footnotetext{35} Ibid., no. 38.
\item \footnotetext{36} Ibid., no. 84.
\item \footnotetext{37} Ibid., no. 42.
\item \footnotetext{38} Ibid., nos. 87-91.
\item \footnotetext{39} Ibid., no. 55.
\item \footnotetext{40} Ibid., nos. 202-203.
\end{itemize}
saint of the following day after supper, a quarter of an hour of spiritual reading every day, etc.

All this can appear to be a rather heavy accumulation of devotional practices and a bit artificial. If we compare it with the rules of other seminaries of the time, we find that it was quite normal. Also, in our Congregation, there are many of us who lived for many years with a daily rule which greatly resembled that which Poullart des Places demanded of his community: prayer and meditation in common, recitation of the Angelus three times a day, Veni Creator and Ave Maria before every exercise in common, particular examen, visit to the Blessed Sacrament, daily rosary, office, etc. As a matter of fact, almost everything laid down for the Seminary was practiced by the whole Congregation for more than 250 years. Is not this long usage in itself a sign of the value of those Rules? A common spirituality cannot be maintained without a minimum of common observances. These observances can and must evolve, but it always remains true that, in a Christian community and a fortiori in a religious community, the warning of the Epistle to the Hebrews is a valid one: Let us be concerned for each other, to stir a response in love and good works. Do not stay away from the meetings of the community, as some do, but encourage each other... (Heb. 10: 24-25). This concern for the community is not limited to exercises of piety, as we shall see.

B – A community of poor men

The Holy Ghost house forms a community intended for young men who are preparing for the priesthood and have not the material means to pay their board anywhere else. It is the poorest that are to be accepted by preference.41

Des Places himself was not a poor man, strictly speaking. After the month of August 1706, he had a life annuity of 60 pounds (in Tours currency). That was the minimum required by the Bishop of Rennes for him to be ordained. But

41 Ibid., nos. 5-6. It is not inappropriate to recall that this disposition corresponds exactly to what was demanded by the Council of Trent in its Decree on Seminaries: The Council wishes that the sons of the poor be chosen by preference; still, the sons of the rich are not to be excluded, on condition that they look after their sustenance and manifest the intention of serving God and the Church. (Council of Trent, Session XXIII, De Reformatione, can. XVIII).
he had refused any other benefice and the little he had was entirely given over to maintain the community he had founded.42

The Rules specify that the Superior will share the life of the students in every way: Everybody must regard it as a pleasure to be looked upon as poor men to whom Providence supplies the food that is placed before them in the refectory.43 Manual labor was done by everybody in turn without anybody being exempted;44 we know from M. Thomas45 that Poullart des Places did not exempt himself, but washed dishes,46 cleaned the students’ shoes,47 took his turn in running messages and doing the shopping.48

I shall not enter into the details of little and big work projects which kept the house going materially and which we sometimes find it hard today to appreciate as being as important as they were: cleaning, acting as bursar, cooking, looking after the lights, washing clothes, taking care of the heating, taking care of material possessions, etc.

The students (often enough the text of the Rules calls them the individuals) are not religious. They have small sums of money with which they can buy extra wine,49 pay for the laundering of personal linen,50 and have fixed any windows they may break51 . . . The house furnishes the necessary food, clothing and shoes for all.52

The personnel attached to the house is truly for the service of the students. It consists, first of all, of Poullart des Places who has the title of Superior. He is truly the head of the house, presiding at common exercises, and it is he to whom they go for permissions, exceptions, little daily prob-

42 J. Michel, pp. 181-183.
43 Règlements, no. 67.
44 Ibid., no. 23; cf. no. 140.
46 Règlements, no. 213-215.
50 Règlements, no. 181-183.
51 Ibid., no. 197.
52 Ibid., no. 66, 222, 263.
lems, accounts, etc... His tasks are so numerous that one wonders how he was able to combine them with the study of theology, at least in the beginning. Sometimes there is reference to **Superiors** in the plural, and on one occasion to **those who govern**. No doubt the reference is to the first collaborators of Poullart des Places, Michel-Vincent Le Barbier (his **right arm** from early 1705 until June 1709) and Jacques-Hyacinthe Garnier, who arrived in October 1705 and succeeded him in October 1709. There is also mention of **répétiteurs** about whom we have very little information. Finally, the tailor and the cook participate fully in the life of the house. Are we to see in these first collaborators the seed of the future institute which will carry on the work of the founder after his untimely death? In any case, without having the title or canonical status of religious, they already have the characteristics of religious.

They all live like poor men, eating at the same table and having the same food—of which a part is leftovers from the Jesuits. Only the sick can have special consideration. Anything elaborate in the way of dress is forbidden. Tobacco (for snuff) is considered to be an intolerable luxury. But this poverty has to be accepted freely: everybody **must always eat with thankfulness what is placed before him**; they will be content with what is served them and will not go looking for something better; they will never talk about what they like or don’t like. They will neither praise nor criticize what they have had to eat. It is unworthy of a true Christian to think too much about all these things, to enjoy them or to complain

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56 J. Michel, pp. 144, 236.
58 *Règlements*, no. 53, 131-137, 169.
61 *Règlements*, no. 227.
about them, but for a religious or a cleric it is much more unmortified to fall into these faults. They will not ask the bursar to buy such or such a thing... They will never complain that things are badly prepared, that such or such a seasoning is missing... A man who is a little bit mortified, of the type we should have here, eats with indifference whatever he is given. He finds everything good when he recalls that his God quenched his thirst with gall and vinegar.

We get a ray of light in these last words: it is not only because of necessity, because of destitution, that Claude Poullart wants to live in poverty and demands that his followers do likewise; it is in order to imitate God Himself who humbled Himself voluntarily to accept the poverty and destitution of the Cross. This example is greatly prized by every Christian, but still more by a religious or a cleric; i.e. by the priests he wants to form.

C – A community of future priests

We must not forget that this is the first objective Poullart des Places had in view: to prepare future priests. The Rules, as we have them in his own handwriting, speak very little of this purpose, but it is always understood, and the whole thing is unintelligible outside of that perspective.

All the relevant documents add this important qualification: Poullart des Places also wanted by means of this establishment to train, for a hard and laborious life and in perfect disinterestedness, curates, missionaries and clerics to serve in poor parishes and in abandoned posts for which the Bishops could scarcely find anyone... They are destined to fill the lowest positions in the Church. This will be made explicit in the Latin Rule approved by the Cardinal of Paris on February 2, 1734.

Thus the poor, humble and laborious life of the Holy Ghost House was not solely, nor even principally, due to the real poverty of the students and their superiors; it was due to

67 Ibid., nos. 72-78.
68 Lettres patentes de confirmation d'établissement d'une Communauté d'Étudiants sous le titre du Saint Esprit et de l'Immaculée Conception, dated May 2, 1726. Text in: Le Floch, pp. 574-575.
69 Lettres Royales du 17 décembre 1726, ibid., p. 578.
70 Ibid., p. 586.
the very clear desire to prepare priests who would be dis-
posed to maintain all during their lives that attitude of detach-
ment from riches, devotion to the humblest and most obscure
tasks of sacerdotal ministry. That is what Bishop Beaumont
of Paris will say in 1762:

It is the special purpose of this Seminary to train young cler-
ics, deprived of and detached from the goods of this world, and to
dispose them to go wherever their bishops may send them, and to
choose by preference the most difficult places, the most aban-
donied ministries and, by that very fact, the most difficult to
fill . . . The spirit of the Institute . . . is to fear and run away from
lucrative and honorable assignments in the Church, to be devoted
to the most obscure and wearisome tasks, like evangelizing the
poor in the country, the sick in the hospitals, the soldiers in the
army, the pagans in the New World.\(^{71}\)

These testimonies—we could easily add others—throw
much light upon the details of the Rules which we are study-
ing, in particular the voluntary seeking of a life of poverty and
working at the humblest tasks. In a period of history when
the clergy allowed itself to be too easily taken up with person-
al ambition, worldly success, or riches, one could easily un-
derstand the following:

They will be especially careful never to gaze at magnificently
dressed people, at furniture, at carriages, or at worldly conveni-
ences. Letting the eyes wander too easily over such things
causes thoughts of pleasure, of the world, of vanity.\(^ {72}\)

It is probably in the same spirit that they were not to work
for university degrees or diplomas. However, an exception is
foreseen for students who have already finished their theology
and who could continue to study Moral and Canon Law for
two years, during which they could graduate.\(^ {73}\) One of the rea-
sons for this, according to Le Floch and J. Michel, must have
been that the Faculty of Canon Law, unlike that of Theology,
only demanded a modest sum for conferring degrees, and
sometimes even did so gratis. We might add that going to
the university for only two years did not suffice for obtaining

\(^{71}\) J. Michel, pp. 195-196, quoting a manuscript from the Bibliothèque
Nationale de Paris.

\(^{72}\) Règlements, no. 98.

\(^{73}\) Ibid., no. 11.
Thus the gaining of diplomas in Canon Law could not be a temptation later to seek lucrative assignments, which would have been against the very purpose of the foundation.

However, apart from the seeking of diplomas, the Rules show that Poullart des Places attached great importance to study: 8 hours and a half of study on class days, 6 hours on Sundays,—these hours included the time spent in class, the ‘rепétitions’ and the preparations of Sacred Scripture. Volume VII of the collection Gallia Christiana which appeared in 1744, tells us that Pouillard des Places used to say: A pious cleric without knowledge has a blind zeal, and a learned cleric without piety is exposed to the danger of becoming a heretic and a rebel against the Church. The founder has this latter point very much at heart. He begs his students to be always attached, in all points of doctrine, to the decisions of the Church, to which they must be totally submissive. That is most likely the reason why, instead of sending his students to the University which all too often was Gallican and Jansenist, Claude-François had them do their courses of philosophy and theology with the Jesuits.

D — A community of fraternal charity

My reading of the Rules revealed to me, among many details, one aspect which I think it important to emphasize: Poullart des Places wants there to reign in the house he founded a profound atmosphere of charity for one another, of mutual respect, of attention to others.

Everybody knows that it is not enough to make a rule: We shall all love one another, truly and very tenderly. That love has to show itself in one’s whole attitude and conduct. It is in that spirit that Claude-François requires his students to have a gentle, modest and reserved bearing to con-

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74 Le Floch, p. 345; Michel, pp. 203-204.
75 Règlements, no. 45.
77 Règlements, no. 54.
78 I don’t want to enter into the details of the study; Fathers Le Floch and Michel have shown sufficiently well the importance given to them in the Holy Ghost community. Le Floch, pp. 344 ff.; Michel, pp. 197 ff.
79 Règlements, no. 16.
80 Ibid., no. 9.
duct themselves at table as courtesy would have it; i.e. good upbringing, \textsuperscript{81} and to treat one another always with much courtesy, looking out for one another, as the Apostle says, with all sorts of respect. \textsuperscript{82}

In conformity with that prescription of St. Paul (Rom. 12:10), when we meet one another on the stairs, in the garden or elsewhere, we shall not fail to greet one another. When one gives something to another, or receives something from him, we shall not forget to recognize the person and to give and receive with a certain courtesy which a Christian upbringing should have taught us. \textsuperscript{83} Politeness, properly understood, is an exercise of fraternal charity. Its external forms may change, and many of the prescribed details in the Rules would not be easy to apply today, \textsuperscript{84} but, here again, the spirit remains.

It is thus that the rules about silence are justified by the need not to disturb the peace that ought to reign in the house; \textsuperscript{85} it is a matter of respecting the need for study and recollection in a seminary and hence of avoiding useless noise. \textsuperscript{86} We have to understand in the same way the prohibition against ever making faces to get others to laugh, \textsuperscript{87} showing oneself in public without being properly dressed; \textsuperscript{88} making improper jokes or using vulgar expressions, using base and popular proverbs, or nicknames or humor which is in bad taste. \textsuperscript{89}

All this may seem out of style for our days when we take pride in speaking of everything openly, when a certain slovenliness of manner and speech is accepted, and when a certain vulgarity of language is appreciated. Is it sure that this is a sign of progress? Whatever about changing customs, the concern about respect for others in one’s bearing, attitudes and words seems to me to remain an essential requirement for any life in common. That is what we need to keep from the Rules of Poullart des Places.

\textsuperscript{81} \textit{Ibid.}, no. 76; cf. nos. 101-102.
\textsuperscript{82} \textit{Ibid.}, no. 238.
\textsuperscript{83} \textit{Ibid.}, no. 256-257.
\textsuperscript{84} See, for example: no. 238, 92, etc.
\textsuperscript{85} \textit{Ibid.}, no. 117.
\textsuperscript{86} \textit{Ibid.}, nos. 116-124.
\textsuperscript{87} \textit{Ibid.}, no. 103.
\textsuperscript{88} \textit{Ibid.}, nos. 107-108.
\textsuperscript{89} \textit{Ibid.}, nos. 109-110.
These are many other details which would be worth our attention. I only want to retain what is said about the care of the sick:

The infirmarian will notify the Superior as soon as he learns that someone is sick. He will try to find it out quickly. He will be careful to give the sick what they need. He will urge them to bear their sickness for the love of Jesus Christ. He will not be put out by the little annoyances that go with his function, such as emptying chamber pots, making beds, etc., but he will bear them with good humor for the love of God. He will wait on the sick as if it were Jesus Christ Himself he had to take care of.

There follow details about cleanliness and exact following of doctors' orders. The infirmarian must also see to the spiritual needs of the sick: when they are able to go, he will take them to Mass at a suitable time and will read to them from spiritual books; but he will be careful not to let anyone go out who has taken medicine that day, but will keep them warm and quiet in their rooms.

Also on the subject of the sick, the great principle is that we must serve them as if it were Jesus Christ Himself. In reality, this principle flows directly from the Gospel (Matt. 25:40 ff), and inspires the entire Rule of Poullart des Places. It is in that light that it must be read. It was in that light that he practiced it himself.

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90 Ibid., nos. 185-186.
91 Ibid., no. 87.
92 Ibid., nos. 188, 190.
LIBERMANN'S RESPECT FOR PERSONS*
(continued)

LIBERMANN, LEADER OF MEN

I believe that what I have told you... will suffice for you to conclude that Libermann really knew and practiced the 'holy art of directing the things of God', of which things man is the principal one, 'gloria dei vivens homo'.

That was how I ended my conference at the Generalate on February 2, 1977. I could have finished in the same way my article on Libermann's Respect for Persons, but, in the life of Libermann, there is such a riches of texts and abundance of facts that I thought it would be good to present more, so as to give a better knowledge of his personality and to enrich our own. That is why I decided to add this third part.

1 – RESPECT FOR PERSONS IN SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

Libermann is without doubt one of the greatest spiritual directors in the church. He was convinced that God had given him this charism.

You can... without fear, have full confidence in what concerns direction; for, in addition to the general rules which should be enough to put aside our fears, there is something special: I believe that it has pleased God to give me a particular grace for the truths of salvation and the direction of souls.

Libermann expressed himself this way in a letter of June 21, 1846 to Father Jerome Schwindenhammer. Taking advantage of the occasion, he goes on:

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1 Spiritan Papers, No. 3, p. 45.
This is what fools people in my regard, and allows them to take me for what I am not...; it is a grace which is only for others and from which I get nothing for myself...

In the letter which accompanied the "Instructions Missionnaires" he speaks in a similar way to his dear confreres:

You know that God varies His favors according to the diversity of His merciful plans... in order to reach the end He has in view: the sanctification of His creatures. From all eternity He has picked you out as victims, ...immolated for the salvation of souls...; I was not judged worthy of that grace... But, even though it did not please God to give me the inestimable grace of suffering for His well-beloved Son..., He gave me the grace of directing in His way those servants whom He has chosen for this purpose, and whom He wants so to sanctify for the salvation of those poor souls.

If one considers the order of grace in this world, I am greater than you, and you must listen to my voice as to that of God; for it is He who speaks to you through me. His divine grace is with me and animates my words, and all this is for the same purpose, for your sanctification and that of the souls for whose salvation He immolates you...

From these texts, we can already see what the role of a spiritual director is: an instrument in the hands of God. Libermann's great principle is that the true director of souls is the Holy Spirit whom he frequently calls The Divine Leader. It is He, not man, who must direct souls, even if man presents himself under the title of spiritual director in the conviction that he has this charism.

A director, writes Libermann, still only an acolyte, on December 15, 1839 to Father Féret, the Director of a seminary in France, must guard against wanting to lead a soul; it is God who is to lead, and the director is to bring the person to the point of not placing any obstacles to that leadership. He must never seek to inspire a soul according to his own tastes..., nor to lead it according to his way of seeing things...

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2 Notes et Documents (henceforth listed as N.D.), VIII, pp. 177-178.
3 N.D., XIII, pp. 404-405.
4 Only lead is underlined by Libermann. Unless otherwise indicated, all texts in this article have been underlined by the author.
A director who has his own ideas . . ., principles, according to which he moves himself, often resists the leadership of the Holy Spirit in souls. It is not our place to impose laws or limits upon Our Lord . . .

Libermann is opposed to any systematization of spiritual direction: it would do harm to souls. The director must leave great freedom for the action of grace; i.e. of God:

\[ \text{\ldots the important thing is to let God act in souls, to follow His action and strive to make souls faithful to the divine workings, leaving God free to act and not hindering Him by detours, imperfections, or his own over-energetic action.} \]

There is nothing more intimate than God's relation with souls. Spiritual authors compare it to marriage. The soul is the bride, Jesus is the bridegroom. The director has no right to go into the bridal chamber: he is only the friend of the bridegrooms (Libermann is familiar with the Gospel expression amicus sponsi).

Yes, he writes to Miss Louise des Loges—later Sister Aurelia—, with all my heart I am willing . . . to direct your soul in the way of the divine love of our gentle Lord Jesus . . . Open your soul with freedom and gentleness; . . . have confidence in my words and my leadership, for you can be assured that I enter fully into the plans of the divine Master for your sanctification and I hope that He will give me the grace of His divine light . . . I shall always try not to look into your interior, nor to enter into your soul, but to lead it only by divine grace.

Then Libermann asks her always to have an outlook of faith and never to become attached to him, for he is nothing but a poor man, a simple tool of Jesus, even though His image and His mouth.

\[ \text{\ldots be pure in your outlook, \ldots in your sentiments. . . Don't get attached to this poor man . . ., but only to Jesus . . . When I speak gentle words to you, don't say that I am good. When it pleases God to let you find some light, don't say that I am enlightened; it is Jesus who gives you light. When my words cause} \]

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5 Lettres Spirituelles, II, pp. 311-315; N.D., I, p. 673.
7 Lettres Spirituelles, II, p. 388. Letter to a director of a Seminary, 1839.
8 John 3: 29.
you to desire the good, don’t say that I am holy. It is Jesus alone
who is the holiness of your soul. Belong to Jesus alone, love Je-
sus alone, live for Jesus alone. But be docile to my direction;
see Jesus in me; may every word of mine be for you the
word of our gentle Jesus...9

In the letter to Father Jerome Schwindenhammer quoted
above, Libermann compares himself to a *telegraph between
God and the souls* whom he is called to direct in the ways of
salvation. His charism is a *grace, which is purely for others,
and from which he gets nothing (for himself), like the men who
send very important messages by telegraph, for which they
receive only a small recompense and of which they understand
nothing at all...*10

The telegraph and the telephone are beautiful examples
for explaining the role of the spiritual director! As a matter of
fact, the director is a simple instrument, like the telegraph
which does not transmit its own messages, but those of
others. The spiritual director too should transmit only God’s
messages.

The role of the spiritual director is to help souls to follow
God’s ways. If he does this, he will respect souls and be
faithful to God. If he does not do it, he is only a pseudo-di-
rector.

In the letter to Father Féret quoted above, Libermann
blames him for the kind of direction he is giving his seminar-
ians:

*I don’t like your principles for directing vocations... It
seems to me that you want to set yourself up as the judge of vo-
cations... whereas that is not the job of a director at all; the di-
rector has only to obey the will of God as it is made known in
a soul...*

*It is certain that, in directing souls, we must ceaselessly con-
sider the call of God’s grace in them, and a director who is not on
the lookout for that will never do very much for their sanctifica-
tion... The director, once he has discerned that God is acting
in a soul, has no other function but to guide that soul to fol-
low grace and be faithful to it*11.

10 *N.D.*, VIII, pp. 177-178.
Fidelity to what God points out to the soul and to what God points out to the director. The director must seek only God's will in souls, by prayer and every form of union with God, especially by practical union. What then, Libermann asks, is the means the director should use to recognize God's general line of conduct in a soul . . . if not the light from God alone which he has to receive in prayer and in his habitual union with Our Lord?

In this respect, the words of St. Paul are very applicable: As, in human affairs, only the human spirit can judge; so also, in divine things, only the Spirit of God can discern; and if we are really united to that Spirit, He will get us to penetrate right into the profundities of the Divinity whenever this is useful for the salvation of souls.¹²

We can conclude, therefore, that a director who does not live in intimate union with God cannot be a true director because he will not have God's light for leading souls along the paths of holiness.

2 – RESPECT FOR PERSONS REQUIRED OF SUPERIORS

Even though men are equal by their nature, there are diverse capabilities, there are different roles in society. In the human community there is a hierarchy,—there are those who command and those who obey. God wants everybody to obey his superiors: omnis potestas a Deo (Rom. 13:1). Hence, when authority is legitimate and laws are just, citizens are bound in conscience to obey. From this spring the responsibility, the dignity and the importance of those who govern.

This is what Vatican II reminds us of in the Constitution Gaudium et Spes.¹³ And the decree Perfectae Caritatis, referring to religious superiors, has this to say: As to superiors, . . . docile to the will of God in the accomplishment of their task, they will exercise authority in a spirit of service to their brethren, in such a way as to express the love which the Lord has for them. May they govern those under their charge as the children

¹² Lettres Spirituelles, II, p. 312.
¹³ Gaudium et Spes, No. 74, 4.
of God, with respect for the human personality and by inspiring their voluntary obedience... 

In a spirit of service. On this theme, Libermann gives us a real *Magna Charta* in his letter of August 8, 1843 to Mother Marie Villeneuve, Superior of the Convent of the Immaculate Conception of Castres. I shall quote a short extract, inviting all who can do so to read it in its entirety.

He writes: *As to the office of superior, a general rule which includes all others is that we come not to be served, but to serve.* From this general rule Libermann goes on to its practical applications: *You are the first servant of your community.* The difference between your service and that of the domestics is that you must sacrifice yourself for your mistresses; a domestic only has to do her work. Our Master has said: I have come not to be served, but to serve and to lay down my life. These words contain all the duties of a superior, for it is to superiors that they are addressed...

Then he enumerates the demands of this service: *Hence, your regime must be one of gentleness and humility; you must not have your orders carried out, but the orders of the Master whose servants you all are. You are a domestic in the house of Jesus Christ, charged with having His children carry out His will. The domestic is a servant both of the children and of the master; she owes all her care to those dear children; she must respect them in heart, she must carry out and have carried out the Master's wishes, but she must not put on the airs of a mistress...* 

**Benevolence, a necessary virtue for superiors**

According to Libermann, always the friend of the poor, the unhappy and the weak, benevolence must be one of the great virtues of superiors.

In the letter about Miss Morillon already quoted, he writes to the same superior about some sisters who are preparing to leave for the mission to the Blacks:

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14 *Perfectae Caritatis*, No. 14 c.
15 *N.D.*, VI, p. 293.
16 *Spiritan Papers*, No. 2, p. 38.
Don't be astonished to see that our sisters are still imperfect. Where will you find a perfect soul? We must... not always take as a misfortune what is sometimes only a temptation. If I may be permitted to give you a bit of advice, I should like to stress what I already told you: let there be a great liberty of spirit in your house...  

Liberty of spirit. How greatly Libermann appreciates it and always recommends it to his correspondents, even—or especially—in their relations with God! Belong to God alone... but with freedom; make use of creatures... as if you did not make use of them; he wrote to M. Clair, but not, he wrote to M. Casteilla, with a liberty other than that of the children of God, the freedom of divine love... The more a soul has attained interior purity, the more it will have that holy freedom which excludes sadness, trouble, worry, contentiousness... of mind and heart  

Souls undergoing temptation should merit especially great respect and attention from superiors. It is wrong always to take for misfortune what is often only a temptation. Libermann writes to the Superior of Castres: ... I must warn you against something which ordinarily happens when one has to do with souls which are greatly tempted: we always tend to make an unfavorable judgment of what went before... We must be filled with charity and simplicity as arms against suspicion... and try to have great charity and compassion for these persons...: always tend to judge them favorably..., to treat them with tender affection... and to treat their temptations as one treats a sickness...  

And, after speaking of the development of several cases of souls undergoing temptation which he had treated, Libermann continues: 

Learn... from this bit of experience I have shown you, that you must not be so quick to condemn tempted souls easily, nor to judge them rigorously, or to despair of their becoming virtuous in the future. You must support them with the charity and humility of Jesus Christ... We are much more unbearable to Him than these poor souls are to us, and still He puts up with us!

17 March 20, 1844. N.D., VI, p. 128.  
18 N.D., VI, p. 13.  
19 June 12, 1842. N.D., III, p. 211.
And he concludes: *We cannot save souls without being crucified*—an echo of the Letter to the Hebrews: *Without shedding of blood, there is no pardon.*

*Our poor nature...*, Libermann writes to Father Dupont, always tends to see evil and to punish and detest it in others, ... The grace and the light of the Holy Spirit do just the contrary. *This divine Spirit is all charity. It does not criticize and does not have a tendency to criticize; ... (it) inclines us to believe the good more easily than the evil; when it makes us see evil in our neighbor, ... we are moved... by tender affection, and we tend to remedy our brothers' ills with gentleness and kindness.*

Evidently this benevolence does not dispense superiors from the duty of correcting faults at the opportune time and place; but *they must do it with a great spirit of gentleness and in a manner which will console the persons corrected. Every correction which causes pain, which causes commotion and bitterness, is a correction badly made, and usually produces only harm...*  

Libermann points out to Father Le Vavasseur how he ought to deal with Father Blanpin who was going through a bad spell:  

*There is more error than bad will in him... You must help him...; treat him as if were sick, with kindness; don't give him orders with an imperious air...; act... gently... with him, and at the same time don't give in on important points. It is good not to seem too attentive to little things. Don't ever authorize what is not good... but don't give the appearance of always noticing what is not right...*  

**Gentleness, always...**

Libermann could be called the *doctor of gentleness.* He recommends it incessantly: gentleness, calmness, moderation.

*Always remember that gentleness and persuasion penetrate souls, whereas firmness and rigorousness only bring about an ex-
ternal change. Thus, for the external order of the house, firmness (but a gentle and calm firmness); for the interior direction of souls, gentleness and kindness (This was his advice to the Superior of Castres). You must know how to bend and be very supple in directing souls, ... spare them, ... in order to support them, to encourage them endlessly according to the different states they are in. This is what St. Paul called being all things to all men.

Note well, he continues, that rigor, direct resistance to souls in bad dispositions, will break them, but will never cure them. Put up with what is wrong for a long time; and, if you sometimes think you can’t put up with it any longer, put up with it some more and you will finally see that you have done the right thing ...

Sometimes we reprove and persecute a poor soul who is doing wrong under the pretense of preventing an offense against God; and often this is not true,—we are acting out of impatience ...

Father Gravière, who had been named superior of the community of Bordeaux, reproached Libermann for easily making excuses for inferiors against their superiors. The Venerable Father wrote to him shortly before he died:

You are still convinced that I easily take sides with inferiors against superiors. That idea is totally wrong ...

a) I do not, and I have never, condemned superiors, even when they were wrong. But neither do I approve of them when they are wrong; i.e. I do not approve the wrong they do ...

b) I use precaution with confreres who are imperfect, stiff, or tempted. I speak with moderation, gentleness and care ...

To this first complaint you add that I listen too much to those who are discontented ...; but I must listen to all who complain; if I were unwilling to listen to complaints, I would close my heart to all who are in trouble, their condition would get worse and I would no longer be able to help them ...

Above all, weak souls should not be submitted to trials beyond their strength.

25 August 8, 1843; N.D., IV, pp. 295-296.
26 October 22, 1851; N.D., XIII, pp. 332-333.
We must always proportion trials according to the persons, and never impose a trial unless we are morally certain that the trial will succeed. Take care: you will never find very many perfect people.\textsuperscript{27}

On another occasion, he wrote to the Superior of Castres:

Avoid contradicting people as much as you can. Trials are for perfect people. We lead the imperfect as best we can, and try, by gentleness, to have them do what they are able to do.\textsuperscript{28}

To Father Duby, appointed superior of a community in Africa, Libermann recommends that he not make a big show of being superior, be firm and gentle at the same time.\textsuperscript{29}

In his letter of March 4, 1843 Father Libermann tells Le Vavasseur how to deal with Father Collin—that very simple person, of great piety, with burning zeal, very courageous and constant, of good judgment, who has great firmness and, if he is faithful to grace, great gentleness, but also very stiff, hard, obstinate, argumentative with and against everybody, if he follows his natural inclinations . . . You must not resist him to his face . . . with stiffness. Let the difficult moment pass by, and then when things are going better, reason with him gently. In that way you will be sure of getting him to go the way you want him to.\textsuperscript{30}

In a letter to the Superior of Castres, Libermann speaks of the enormous burden of the care of souls and especially the heavy burden of imperfect souls who must be supported with humility, love, confidence in God.

Put up with them as Jesus puts up with them. Lead them as Jesus leads them. Show them consolation, gentleness, peace, as He does.\textsuperscript{31}

Very often "to love" means "to put up with" . . .

At a time when Father Lossedat, a missionary in Haiti, was greatly troubled by the abuses among the Island's clergy and wanted Father Tisserant, the Prefect Apostolic, to take strong measures to deal with them, Libermann wrote to him:

\textsuperscript{27} Letter to the Superior of Castres, September 1853; \textit{N.D.}, IV, pp. 368-369.
\textsuperscript{28} August 25, 1843; \textit{N.D.}, IV, p. 325.
\textsuperscript{29} May 8, 1851; \textit{N.D.}, XIII, pp. 141-142.
\textsuperscript{30} \textit{N.D.}, IV, p. 129.
Don’t torment yourself about all those abuses. Abuses can never be cleared up all at once... when they are ingrained; ...Have patience; you will see that you will gain ground little by little... 32

Really to do good requires heroic patience, and not a premature eagerness which causes all to be lost.33

Weak souls cannot correct their faults in one sweep; what they need is good will, docility to the Holy Spirit and encouragement. If all these are present, they will change little by little.

But it is not enough just to put up with others; we have to put up with ourselves. Father Collin was a very sensitive man who did not get on well with his companion, Father Blanpin. In a letter to Libermann, he admits that he is at fault and talks about breaking his character. Libermann replies:

Get used little by little to living at peace with your enemy...; you have a temperament which gives you a lot of trouble; don’t get it into your head that you absolutely have to get rid of it; rather convince yourself that it is the divine will that you live with this enemy... Put up with it with patience and gentleness...

Don’t be talking about breaking your character... We don’t break iron, we soften it with fire...; give yourself peacefully to the divine love with confidence, humility, abandon... and talk with confidence to Our Lord... 34

"Don’t judge".—"Love" 35

Sometimes superiors have to pass judgement. Libermann speaks of this in a long letter to Father Dupont, dated August 9, 1842.

Superiors, who often have to pass judgement, must empty their will of all malice so that there may be no malice toward those they judge and, on the contrary, they may love them with great tenderness...

In general, those who pass judgement are not capable of doing so, and those who could judge don’t want to do it... And, without doubt, making allusion to himself, he continues:

32 December 27, 1844. N.D., VI, p. 506.
33 September 17, 1844 to the same Father Lossedat; N.D., VI, p. 342.
34 January 29, 1845. N.D., VII, pp. 34, 36-37.
35 Letter to Father Jerome Schwindenhammer; N.D., IX, p. 298.
Those who, after twenty years of fervor, have arrived at a degree of perfection where they are solidly at peace, and where the light of faith illumines things for them a little,—these have no great desire to pass judgement. I say twenty years, because for fifteen years now, I have been trying to get somewhere, and I assure you . . . that I am still far away from it . . .

When you examine your sisters and pass judgement upon them, Libermann wrote to the Superior of Castres, never let any sharpness into your spirit; charity must fill your being and be the soul of this activity . . . your spirit must be free of prejudices and observe peacefully what is happening in the soul it is trying to understand . . . Seeing evil, the will must remain charitable and tender towards the soul . . . In a second action, the spirit must consider, in peace and before God, the remedies for curing that soul . . . and always make use of them with the same charity and under the guidance of the Spirit of God who enlightens the intelligence . . .

Utopian perfection: a great danger

One of the temptations Libermann had to fight in many of his correspondents — and especially his collaborators — was that of an idealism in perfection and in the administration of the things of God.

Le Vavasseur was, without doubt, very generous, but too absolute and idealistic. Libermann asked him to be more realistic.

You want everything to be perfect immediately, without taking any account of the perplexities which are always met with at the start of a work . . . You see the ancient Orders and you demand that everything among us be put on the same perfectly regular footing as in those old Orders; but I tell you that this is impossible . . .

At the beginning of a work, there is a whole crowd of circumstances which cannot be forced into the rigor of general rules . . . Oh, how important it is to have discretion in the direction of God's works! You are lacking in this virtue . . .

Father Lossedat, back from Haiti and gone out to Guinea, wrote to Libermann to point out to him the qualities needed in

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36 From his conversion, Christmas 1826, to 1842.
37 N.D., III, pp. 272-274.
38 August 8, 1843; N.D., IV, pp. 296-297.
39 January 28, 1846; N.D., VIII, pp. 33-34.
the successor of Tisserant as Prefect Apostolic of Guinea. He received the following reply:

It is difficult for me to send you the kind of man you ask for... I don't have him just now... I well know that the Mission is difficult, but I believe you exaggerate certain difficulties...

You form a perfectionist's idea of things and you want that perfect conception to be realized in its entirety. That is not, and that never has been, the way Divine Providence works... It wants there to be some imperfections at the start... It is the part of the greatest wisdom (even human wisdom) in these cases to yield a little bit on one's point of view and manage with people the best one can...

Then Libermann draws his attention to a very important principle of action: Be on your guard against ideal perfection. And he goes on:

It is good to be able to conceive how things ought to be;... but it is even more important to be able to modify,... to accommodate to persons, things, circumstances...

You can be sure that you will never be able to carry things out just as you would wish... It is of the greatest importance... to adapt to everything, if you want to succeed; otherwise, you will be shattered against the difficulties...; learn how to put up with something being half done, even badly done. In order to have peace of mind, in order to be able to accomplish great and important things, you must at all cost acquire a certain indifference towards the evils which you cannot clear up...

By means of a tolerant way of acting... you will necessarily acquire a certain influence over spirits, ... you will be a great help to others... If, on the contrary, you cannot remain silent about the smallest faults you see in the way your confreres act..., you will be almost always in opposition to them, because it will almost never happen that you find men exactly as you would like them to be.40

Shortly before this, Libermann had already explained the same thing to Fathers Collin and Le Vavasseur.

In April 1845, Libermann sent Fathers Lambert and Plesisis to Réunion (Bourbon) as reinforcements to the three first missionaries of the Holy Heart of Mary. Soon Collin and Le

40 April 15, 1846; N.D., VIII, pp. 110-113.
Vavasseur realized that Father Plessis was not suitable at all. They both wrote letters of complaint to Libermann. Le Vavasseur even threatened to leave the Congregation. Their Superior replied to them individually on January 28, 1846.

To Collin he wrote: The two of you are tearing my heart out. And you are right: I deserve it, because I am to blame. But what can we do now? I made a mistake in admitting such a subject. I committed a fault, I deserve to suffer for it and I must offer expiation.

After this humble avowal of his error, Libermann goes over to the attack: But be at ease, dear Brother,—things are going better than you think.

Then, passing in review several proposals that Collin had made, Libermann continues:

Your views on administration and on how to run a congregation are about as practical as mine would be. For the political strategies of Louis-Philippe. If I had followed the path traced out for me in your letters, the Congregation would already be dead and buried. Let me do my job.

He writes in similar vein to La Vavasseur the same day: If I had taken the unyielding line you wanted me to adopt, there would not be a stone left upon a stone in our work.

Four and a half years later, in similar circumstances, he wrote him these still more grave words:

At times... I say to myself: what will become of the Congregation if Father Le Vavasseur is placed at its head as I would like him to be. If he continues along his present line, two months after my death this poor Congregation will be dead.

Those who find it surprising that Libermann chose Father Schwindenhammer as his successor, would do well to meditate upon these words written such a short time before his death! Libermann could never choose Le Vavasseur. Between Le Vavasseur and Schwindenhammer, the latter was in Libermann’s eyes the better choice after all.

41 N.D., VIII, pp. 40-42.
42 N.D., VIII, p. 34.
43 N.D., VIII, pp. 40-42.
But Libermann’s letter to Collin continues:

You are bad philosophers, you reason from the particular to the general. An unworthy subject has been admitted, therefore all is lost; therefore we have acted in a light-headed manner...

Don’t be so severe in your judgments... If you had been in my place, you would perhaps have made greater mistakes than I did, and in much greater number...

You judge things a bit too speculatively; on the subject of religious life, you are so optimistic that there does not exist a religious society which could justify your judgment, because it is impossible in practice for a community to be made up of men as perfect as you would like to have them.43

In his letter to Le Vavasseur, Libermann gives a concrete example of this rigoristic idealism in religious life:

You propose... a principle so rigoristic that it is absolutely impractical. You would like all the members of a congregation to be so perfect, and of such a degree of renunciation that they could be worked like a set of marionettes. No doubt that would be very pretty, but it has never existed in the Church and it never will.

And Libermann, alluding to Le Vavasseur’s leaning towards the Jesuits, continues:

The Jesuit Fathers are certainly at least one of the most fervent religious societies in the Church; still, with the rigorous principles you propose, you would have to dismiss at least half of their number... Don’t be making juvenile judgements in such grave matters...44

When we compare these words with those in his letter of October 28, 1839 to the same Le Vavasseur on the subject of the members who would make up the Work for the Blacks, we would be tempted to say that at that time Libermann was an idealist himself:

I want something solid, fervent, apostolic: all or nothing. But “all” is asking a lot, and weak souls will not want to give or to do so much. That can only make us happy.—we can’t have weak souls in this wholly apostolic Congregation; we only want fervent and generous souls who give themselves entirely and are ready to

44 N.D., VIII, pp. 34-36.
undertake anything and suffer anything for the great glory of our adorable Master... 45

Was Libermann an idealist himself in those days? Maybe not. A few months later he wrote to Father Luquet, one of the supporters of the Work for the Blacks who, perhaps influenced by Father de la Brunière, proposed leaving the work to go to the missions in China. As the principal motive for this project, Luquet mentioned his fear of causing trouble in the community. Libermann wrote:

That is a reason you could attribute to the devil... you will cause trouble? but that will be the field of battle where you must often win the victory. But our confreres? What wonderful compassion the demon can inspire in you! ... Do you believe that there is a community without temptations against charity? There does not exist a single one. In fervent communities, however, people put up a fight and win the victory. But the disorders which result from the time of battle before the victory is won? I am not afraid of them and I shall not take the demon as my adviser in the matter... 46

Was Libermann an idealist in 1839? Perhaps... but in 1840 he no longer was.

His letter to Le Vavasseur ends with these words full of tenderness:

Sometimes I say rather severe things to you. Don’t be troubled by them. I don’t want to cause you trouble, and I assure you that, if there is some severity in the words I use, there is no place for it in my heart. May God’s peace be with you... 47

3 – THE SECRET OF LIBERMANN’S BENEVOLENCE

What was the secret, the source, of Libermann’s benevolence? Without wanting to speak about himself explicitly, he explains it to the Superior of Castres:

The more you advance in solid perfection, the more you will become indulgent of the weaknesses and miseries of your sisters,

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45 N.D., I, p. 662.
47 N.D., VIII, pp. 34-36.
and the more you will become gentle with them and at peace within yourself... This is the secret and source of Libermann's benevolence: his solid perfection.

And Libermann continues:

Already one superior of a convent has told me that I was too gentle in direction and that you have to be more severe in dealing with women. Another person told me that I did not understand what goes on inside women. If I am wrong, I accept the condemnation willingly, But I find it hard to leave aside the spirit of Our Lord in His dealings with souls... Do, in your case, ...what God inspires you to do. My way is the opposite. I spare women even more than I spare men... I don't give in to their imaginings, but I do spare them. Up to now, the results speak in my favor... 48

According to Libermann himself, Father Dalmond, the Prefect Apostolic of Bourbon, must have taken him for simple-minded, because (he said) I have never spoken to him except with moderation and concern for his feelings, even when I was telling him about things I was displeased with.

I see clearly that what you tell me in other circumstances is true; we have to be a little annoying and speak out to get what we want, but I cannot follow that method; I prefer to maintain a gentle manner, and state my case. If I am placed in an unacceptable situation, I simply refuse to go along, and that's that.49

In his letter to Mother Javouhey, he speaks about the conduct of the Minister of French Colonies in dealing with the Missions, and expresses a similar idea!

The conduct of the Minister in our regard strikes me as so astonishing that I cannot go along with him... I thought that, if I had made use of intrigue, I might have gotten on better. They are not accustomed to having people deal frankly with them. But I could never adopt those ways; I shall never put aside the simplicity of the Gospel, if God gives me the grace... I am not a hireling...50

Libermann was gentle, but also strong . . .

_Fortiter et suaviter:_ that was Libermann’s procedure with those whom he directed. When he had to be firm, he did so, but always gently.

He was firm with Father Arragon, ordering him under the vow of obedience to accept Father Gravière as his superior:

_I command you . . . in the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ to receive Father Gravière with affability, charity and all the sentiments one must have towards his superior._

He spoke firmly with Father Vaugeois whose obedience to his superior was less than exemplary:

_You don’t have with your superior the union of charity which must exist in the family of our Heavenly Father. Neither do you have the spirit of obedience and submission worthy of a child of God. Now, without this union of charity and this holy obedience, you cannot possibly be pleasing to God . . . _ Then Libermann softens his expression a bit, but without weakening it:

_These are hard things I am saying. However, it is my heart that says them to your heart and with great affection and a great desire for your sanctification. Go back to the source, enter into yourself and you will see that the problem is there and not in Father Gravière._

His 1843 letter to Miss Guillarme about her over-human attachment to her spiritual directors is firm, extraordinarily firm:

_You poor soul, stop being the slave of men and become rather the slave of Jesus . . . _ Spouse of Christ, what would you think if a queen, who received all kinds of tenderness from the king her husband, would leave that dear husband to go and throw herself into the arms of a beggar . . . dressed in rags and tatters . . . and embrace him and kiss him? . . .

_You are the spouse of the King of kings, . . . and your heart wants to leave that divine Bridegroom . . . , the fairest of the children of men, and go and throw itself into the arms of these vile beggars! Do you really think that way? Are you insane? All your mortifications are worthless, all your meditations are meaningless, all your good deeds are without value; these are not . . .

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51 Letter of May 8, 1846; _N.D.,_ VIII, p. 144.
52 The same Father Gravière, then Superior of the Bordeaux community.
53 Letter to Father Vaugeois, October 25, 1851; _N.D.,_ VIII, pp. 338-339.
what the divine Bridegroom asks of you: it is your heart—all of it, without any sharing or any holding back.

I mock your good works. . .; I ask you for only one thing, your heart,—not for me, I despise it and want only Jesus, . . . but for this divine Jesus Himself. He wants it, He demands it imperiously . . .

You will say, my poor child, that I am impossible to deal with. Yes, impossible to deal with, hard as iron and marble, because I know that you can hope for no truce, no peace, except in immolating all your affection for creatures, every desire to live with them and enjoy them . . .

The letter goes on in the same tone. At a certain point, he says:

But you will be in desolation over what I am saying and the way I am pursuing your poor heart. It seems to me that I am reaching for a light which is only half burning; i.e. that I am crushing a poor heart which is already far too troubled. Oh, no! That is not it at all; just the contrary. This is solid, serious, vigorous direction which I am giving you, which will lift up your broken heart and fix it in Jesus alone . . . Don’t think that I am angry with you . . . The charity of Jesus Christ is in my heart. I hold out for one thing only, I have only one desire in the relationship with your soul which our good Master has confided to me. It is to make of you, and present to the divine Master, a virgin pure and spotless, worthy to be His holy spouse and to rejoice in divine union with Him.54

Probably these words were enough to bind up the wounds which Libermann had inflicted upon his correspondent. Still, when he went to Paris a few days later, he went to see her.

I am coming to see you to console you in the name of our Blessed Mother for the great pain caused you by my words, to which you gave a meaning I had not intended. Calm yourself. I am leaving you this note in case I don’t find you at home . . . I said those things to you . . . to inspire in you fear of sin and greater reserve; but it must be a loving fear and a gentle and modest reserve . . .

Vigilance . . . gentle, holy, peaceful, loving . . . in the presence of Jesus and Mary is very pleasing to the divine Bride-

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54 Letter with no date, but surely from 1843; N.D., IV, pp. 315-317.
groom. May He alone be your guardian, your love and your all! Live only for him in Mary, by Mary, and with Mary.\textsuperscript{55}

4 – THE HOLY ART OF DIRECTING THE THINGS OF GOD

On May 7, 1850, Le Vavasseur came back from Bourbon to France to help Libermann in the direction of the Congregation. He made a tour of many of the seminaries of France to make known the works of the Congregation.

No doubt he heard a lot of criticism of the priests trained and sent out by the Holy Ghost Seminary. These priests, once so highly esteemed, had enjoyed a bad reputation for some time. Some went so far as to advise La Vavasseur that the best thing the Congregation could do would be to close the Holy Ghost Seminary.

Le Vavasseur, forceful, radical, impressionable as always, wrote to Libermann proposing the dissolution of the Seminary... and the abandonment of the Colonies.

Libermann sent a first reply on «the holy feast of Pentecost» 1850:

I believe that we cannot, without gravely failing the divine will, either leave the Seminary or abandon the Colonies... The Seminary work is difficult... but is that a good reason for giving it up? It is my opinion, therefore, that we must remain in charge of this house... and take all possible means to make it a holy house...\textsuperscript{56}

Since that letter did not calm Le Vavasseur’s imagination, Libermann wrote to him again on July 17:

... I shall speak frankly to you, you ought to expect that of a poor man who loves you tenderly and who is filled with consolation by your presence...

There are moments when discouragement comes over me, not discouragement about our work for God... and the task He has given us... on the contrary, as soon as I see the difficulties and the troubles, it seems as if the Divine Goodness gives me new strength;... So don’t have any fears for me; God is my strength; nothing in the world frightens me.

\textsuperscript{55} Letter to the same person, perhaps from the end of June 1843; N.D., VII, pp. XI-XIII.

\textsuperscript{56} Letter to Le Vavasseur; N.D., XII, pp. 198-200.
I have examined what you told me and meditated upon it before God... I find energy in it, far too much energy; but I do not find there either wisdom, or experience, or anything of that would indicate the working of the Spirit of God. I see an unshakeable will to do good and to do it perfectly, but it is the will of a fervent seminarian who has no practical idea of the things of God, and, thinking it is abandoning itself to the love and the action of God, it lets itself be taken over by its effervescent nature...

Libermann goes on in the same vein, what he had already referred to as his counter-attack. He said some hard things to Le Vavasseur, but things that unfortunately were true:

... Your worries appear to me to be the worries of a child who has no knowledge of men or of affairs... If there were no difficulty, what would we have to do in God's work? ...I am a very weak and miserable man; but surely you are more so. With all your energy and your indomitable courage, you have weakened... before men... You have a strong and vigorous heart, and still that heart... has been... influenced, won over by men's words and arguments... You are on the wrong road, outside the ways of God, even outside the ways of sound reason... You rely upon the experience of the men who talked to you... We shall discuss openly both men and affairs, and we shall see whether they are really men of experience and whether their experience has any weight in the matter we are concerned with...

Then Libermann gives him some good advice:

Here is my advice to you:

1) Become child-like, convince yourself that... you need to learn more about how the works of God are to be directed, how to direct men and affairs in relationship with our works.

2) Don't take up ideas with such enthusiasm..., always be suspicious of ideas... which take such violent hold over you...

3) Beware of that illusion of wanting absolute perfection in men, in institutions, and in things in general... We must... be fully convinced that wherever there are men, there will be imperfection. We have to attain to what we can without shattering... I have noticed that the real saints have always acted in the way I am describing, and the little saints... act in the opposite way.

4) Convince yourself that, if you want to insure failure in the administration and direction of the works of God, you
have only to take this course of action: I shall go straight towards my goal and I shall never bend; I shall act with energy and vigor; I shall act with frankness and tell people exactly what I think of them.

Go straight towards the goal, when there are no obstacles in your path; if there are obstacles, you will shatter yourself and others... and you will destroy instead of building up.

Finally Libermann criticizes Le Vavasseur's impetuous frankness:

Your energy has three faults: the first is in your manner of considering things... You always get them wrong... You generally see things from only one angle, you consider only one principle, and as a consequence of such a half-blind vision, you end up in theory; you are not capable of seeing the other principles which run counter to yours and modify them, nor the circumstances which change the situation.

The second fault is in the way you apply principles. You either push them too far or else you apply them badly.

The third fault is in your being unmethodical and misdirected; unmethodical: beating the air, this way and every way; and tearing, bruising, brawling at things that need to be handled delicately and with care; misdirected: often striking what should not be struck and may sometimes even merit praise.

That energy of yours also has this other fault: it tends towards a particular liking for the most radical means and methods. Now, radicalism... is hateful, destructive of any good in the administration and direction of holy things. Do you know what I called you when I read your letter?... a revolutionary and a radical who builds upon errors... which he mistakes for principles...

As for frankness... we have to be frank and simple, but according to the prudence of the Spirit of God... We have to know how to discern good and evil... know how to speak and how to keep quiet, to act and to refrain from acting, all the while maintaining simplicity in word and action towards our neighbor, without which we will never be able to deal with his weaknesses, his passions, and his sensibilities...

The frankness of Le Vavasseur seems to have been that of Rousseau. But this is not the frankness that God expects of us, nor men either; it is not the frankness of Libermann.

57 Letter to Le Vavasseur; N.D., XII, pp. 316-321.
In a moment of difficulty in the Dakar community in 1846, Libermann speaks of his way of action with frankness:

If sometimes... I address to you words which are not in conformity with your ideas and tastes..., don't be unhappy, don't judge me harshly. It happens sometimes that, in spite of my desire to please you, in spite of the certitude that my words are not exactly what they should and could be, I am obliged to be satisfied with motives of prudence... I am often obliged to weigh my words, to keep silent about one thing, to modify another...; you can be quite sure that in these cases I suffer more than you... 58

True frankness does not consist in opening one's mouth and emptying one's heart without any restraint. It is always allied with prudence and charity.

Libermann ends his letter to Le Vavasseur with a summary of what he had told him:

Briefly, ... if you do not correct yourself..., you will never be more than a good assault soldier, or at most a captain capable of directing his company during the fight... God wants you to be more than that...; So become child-like in the direction of holy things...; learn like a schoolboy the holy art of directing the things of God. I am sorry to be such a poor teacher for you... listen to God who speaks to your heart...; be simple, humble, calm, independent of impressions and faithful to God, and even with a poor teacher you will be a good pupil.59

These words, addressed first to Le Vavasseur, are also for all of us, because Libermann is a universal man. He wrote these prophetic words himself:

I am only the servant of all, I cannot pretend to any rights over myself, over my words, or my writings. I belong to everybody and everybody has the right to make use of me according to God's good pleasure... the word of God belongs to all His children.60

Truly, Libermann is a universal man, an author whom everybody can consult with profit.

Amadeus MARTINS

58 Letter to the Community of Dakar and Gorée, December 27, 1846; N.D., VIII, p. 397.
59 N.D., XII, p. 321.
60 N.D., III, p. 100; Letter to Father Dupont, January 1842.
When I was at Usa River at our Novitiate, I had occasion to read the Venerable Francis Libermann’s *Écrits Spirituels*. I also translated a few passages from it, one of which is on his *Instructions to Missionaries*.

Today, I am attempting to comment on these instructions as contained in Chapter 1, which carries the title: Holiness of our Vocation - Need for us to respond to it worthily.

To be able to appreciate well Fr. Libermann’s exhortations, it is good to remember a few points about his character. We have to keep in mind all the time that Fr. Libermann was the son of a strict Jewish Rabbi, and himself had the training for a Rabbi. The Old Testament tradition was in his blood. Hence, we notice in his writings, the OT prophetic style of now warning, now cajoling, then praising and promising.

He starts the *Instructions* with the statement that God wills to save the world through his Son:

*When it pleased God to send his Son to save the world, from afar he prepared the sacred humanity which was to bring about the salvation of humankind. He sanctified his Victim before immolating Him.*

But, our dear Father points out, God does not want to achieve the salvation of man without man’s co-operation. In this co-operation, he has chosen, in a special way, the priest, taking him out from his lowly state:

*God is great and mighty in his compassion towards us. Let each one of us measure the depth of his own nonentity, examine his weakness, his poverty, his unworthiness, look back on his past*.

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1 *Écrits Spirituels du Vénérable Libermann*, p. 386.
and consider where God has searched for him, to raise him up to a vocation which places him among the number of Jesus Christ’s apostles, if we are faithful to his grace.\(^2\)

Certainly we are reminded here of the Deutoronomy passage.

*He found him in a desert land, and in the howling waste of the wilderness: he encircled him, he cared for him, he kept him as the apple of his eye. Like an eagle that stirs up its nest, that flutters over its young, spreading out its wings, catching them, bearing them on its pinions, the Lord alone did lead him...* \(^3\)

Then Fr. Libermann goes on:

*We were prostrated on the ground, weak and feeble, hardly having the strength to crawl into the last ranks of the servants of our God. His compassion lifted us up and made us stand upright. Immersed as we were in the dunghill of our pride, of our evil nature, and of our sins we were pulled out from there, to become not just ordinary servers, but to be placed in the ranks of the princes of God’s people: What have we done to merit this immense favour?* \(^4\)

Fr. Francis seems rather pessimistic of human nature. This facet of his character, which probably arose from his Jewish background, abided with him to the end, giving him that unfeigned humility which was so remarkable in a man of such learning, as he possesses, and also, later on, of such power, as the Superior General of the Holy Ghost Congregation enjoyed in those days. Francis Libermann, at his deathbed, would still say with simplicity and conviction: *God is all, man is nothing.*

But Francis Libermann’s life was one, continuous challenge, and so now he throws the gauntlet to the priest:

*What then, do we wish to confound God’s plans and put Christ to shame on account of us? My dear brothers, that would indeed be a shame and a profound embarrassment for us and our divine Master...* \(^5\)

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\(^2\) É. S. du V. Libermann, p. 365.

\(^3\) Deut. 32, 10-12.

\(^4\) É. S. du V. Libermann, pp. 365-366.

\(^5\) É. S. du V. Libermann, p. 366.
The OT technique now comes into play forcefully, as Fr. Libermann continues passionately:

*Jesus has chosen us, he has made us his partners in order that we chase the devil and destroy his rule over souls. He arms us with power over hell.*

However, the call is only the beginning of the apostolic endeavour. The response to the call starts a long process of growing in Christ, which will continue to the last days of the apostle. Fr. Libermann pertinently asks:

*But, how shall we be able to act in Jesus Christ's name, if he does not reign in us? How shall we be able to destroy the devil’s power, if he has still authority over our own soul? We cannot be at the same time the devil’s masters and his servants. Let us ponder on the fact that our vocation is the greatest good that God accords a creature. But this favour demands of the creature a sanctity in keeping with the designs of the divine compassion, which makes the call, and the vocation to which it calls.*

Fr. Libermann points out the need for formation for the arduous task ahead, and says that Jesus himself, the first priest, the first missionary, sets the example:

*The Son of God, seeing the abyss of corruption and perversion into which the souls were immersed, has become man so as to come to their rescue. He spent 33 years on earth, he made himself an example, he taught the holy doctrine of his Father, he suffered and he died so as to pull out souls from the pit of evil, in which they were immersed, and in which they would stay immersed for eternity.*

So, too, Christ prepared his disciples, setting an example of formation for the future missionaries:

*We can see with what great care Our Lord Jesus prepared his apostles for this great ministry. He kept them close to himself during three full years, he manifested himself to them, he instructed them, he strengthened them after his resurrection, and lastly, he sanctified them by sending the Holy Spirit. If Christ took so much trouble over the formation of his apostles in holi-

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6 É. S. du V. Libermann, p. 366.
7 É. S. du V. Libermann, pp. 366-367.
8 É. S. du V. Libermann, p. 368.
ness, would it be right for us to be satisfied with a natural type of life, full of faults and imperfections?  

Father Libermann insists that holiness in the priest is a ‘sine qua non’ for his apostolic ministry:

He has shown us by his example and by his words, that one cannot take an active part in his work of redemption, except in sanctifying oneself, that is to say, in living in a saintly manner. And this holiness of our life must have the same goal as that of the divine model.  

Again and again he will return to this demand which becomes a refrain in his holy exhortation.

What is the mission of Christ's disciple?

To bring the free but perverted will of men to a return to God and to make them accept the merits of their Saviour to be offered to God as ransom for their sins.

This return to God, and this acceptance of the merits of the divine Saviour, should be effected by the associates of Jesus Christ, and those who are to continue his mission on earth.

But Jesus Christ does not send his disciples into the battlefield without power:

And it is because of this, that their Master communicates to their souls his divine Spirit, he clothes them with his priestly character, to make them like unto himself, he puts into their hearts his divine faculty. Having thus transformed them, armed with his power, and filled with his divine doctrine and his holiness, he sends them, by virtue of his Infinite Power to spread out in the world, to teach the people the doctrine of sanctity of which they themselves are filled: Data est mini omnis potestas in caelo et in terra, euntes ergo docete etc. (All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me, going therefore teach etc.).

Thus ordinary men, weak and imperfect as they are, he transforms them and makes them completely different ones. Men of nature, he makes into men of grace. Weak and infirm men he makes powerful in a saintly way, obscure men he transforms into men of eternal light.

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9 É. S. du V. Libermann, p. 369.
10 É. S. du V. Libermann, pp. 369-370.
11 É. S. du V. Libermann, p. 370.
12 Mt. 28, 18-20 et É. S. du V. Libermann, pp. 370-371.
Father Libermann then asks:

*Why this wonderful transformation?* And goes on with the same breath to give the reply *The reason is that this is necessary to draw sinful men to Christ, so that he can apply to them (i.e. his disciples) his divine merits and through them save sinful men and sanctify them. These sinful men cannot come to him of their own: 'Quomodo audient sine praedicante? Quomodo praebunt nisi mittantur?'. (How will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach without being sent) there must be apostles of Jesus to hold them by the hand and to lead them to their Master. But, for this it is necessary that these apostles be themselves transformed, they must be holy.*

Our Venerable Father then explains in detail the various means the devil employs to keep sinful men tied fast to their forlorn state, and how difficult it is to bring them back to God through repentance. He stresses their near inability to rise from the pit into which they have fallen.

*And thus immersed in their ignorance and in their sins, they have no merit to offer to obtain the first grace for their return.*

Here then, is the need of the apostle of Jesus Christ to come to the rescue of these unfortunates:

*It is necessary that another merit this grace, on behalf of them and draw it on them. This other is the one who is sent to them. So he must be holy. This holiness is part of his mission.*

The man sent by Jesus Christ fails in his mission if he does not work seriously for his own sanctification. Here is the warning again for the disciple not to fail Jesus Christ. But if he does avail himself of the means given by the master for his own sanctification, then Jesus will definitely help his disciples:

*Jesus Christ sends us as he had been sent. Our mission is his mission. It is Jesus who lives in his apostles, who suffers in them, who draws souls to God his Father, and gives them the graces through his apostles. But, for Jesus to live in the apostles and to do everything in them and through them, it is necessary*
that the apostles live in him, that they be united with him in their life, their sufferings, and their apostolic work.\textsuperscript{17} We must be true apostles as Christ himself showed us the way:

If that is not the case, they are apostles of Jesus Christ only in name, not in fact. Jesus was sent by his Father, not as a figure-head, but having in him the substantial life of the Father. Very well. He sends us as he was sent. His Holy Humanity was marked with the substantial character of the Word, and it had in it the life and merits of the Word. In the same way, in sending us, Jesus Christ has marked us with the sacramental character. He lives in us and in our apostolic works to which he communicates his merits. Thus, our life and our works have become his. But, for that, our life and our works must resemble his, and his merits are not communicated to him.\textsuperscript{18}

Knowing full well the pitfalls of either triumphalism (I have done this, I have done that) or disappointment (I am useless, I can’t achieve anything), into which a missionary can easily fall, the Venerable stresses that the mission of the apostle is for God’s glory not his own:

Finally Jesus, coming into the world, sent by his Father to save men, did not come to seek his own glory. Non quaero gloriam meam (I do not seek my own glory). He did not come to seek his own satisfaction or self delight: ‘Nunquam sibi placuit’ (He never pleased himself). He did not come to judge and condemn: ‘Non venit Filius hominis ut judicet mundum’ (The Son of Man did not come to judge the world). He did not come to do his own will: Descendi de caelo non ut faciam voluntatem meam (I came down from heaven not do do my own will). His Father sent him, and he did not live except for his Father, and for the accomplishment of the mission which he had received.\textsuperscript{19}

So the disciple of Jesus Christ is to carry out his mission, to do the will of the heavenly Father, not his own:

Woe to us, if we live our own selves, if we are proud, if we are stiff-necked, and do not wish to bow with suppleness and love under the sweet and light yoke of the divine will, if we have a

\textsuperscript{17} É. S. du V. Libermann, p. 374.
\textsuperscript{18} É. S. du V. Libermann, pp. 374-375.
\textsuperscript{19} É. S. du V. Libermann, p. 377.
spirit of severity, of hardness and of judging. Then we are nothing more than abortions of apostles. Our apostolate will not only be sterile, but it will be dead and the life of Jesus will not be in us.\(^{20}\)

This is not a reprimand to the missionary and it is not meant to discourage him, but it is a warning to him of the dangers that beset his path of being a true apostle. Immediately, therefore, there follows some consolation to the harassed missionary trying to do his best for the Lord:

*But how happy shall we be, a thousand times happy, if we empty ourselves of the malice of pride of our evil nature, so that we may be vivified by the spirit of Jesus who has sent us. Our sufferings, our sweat and our labours will make us shine forth in the midst of angels and saints like suns in the sky. All our actions will be full of grace and will be blessed by God, and we shall populate heaven with the blessed.*\(^ {21}\)

In developing further the theme of Christ setting us an example to follow, the Venerable makes an interesting point. He says that, although Our Lord spent three years going up and down the length and breadth of the Holy Land teaching and doing wonders, ending up with his death and resurrection, yet the number of people who came to believe in him then was infinitesimal!

Was his mission a failure? he asks, and replies straightaway. *Not at all!* Jesus set us the example of doing the Father’s will no matter what the outcome. His was not the intention of total conversion of the people. This he could have achieved, if he desired, most easily, with the divine virtue residing in him.

This is a comforting thought for the missionary who has to work for years in a territory where hardly any conversions take place, and yet he has to carry on the Lord’s work with zeal and enthusiasm, as it behooves a man of God.

The last part of the chapter is a real clarion call from the commander to his troops, and I would like to end this paper quoting for you that invigorating summons:

*Let us take our position seriously, and let us not reduce the standard of our ideas. We have made a contract with Our Lord*

\(^{20}\)É. S. du V. Libermann, p. 378.  
\(^{21}\)É. S. du V. Libermann, p. 378.
Jesus Christ. We have accepted the charge that he has given us. We have entered into the holy militia of the conquerors of souls. There is no room to draw back, we have to fulfill the duties of this wonderful army. Marked with the seal of Jesus Christ for that end, we can no more withdraw. That seal is indelible. If we abandoned his standard, we would be recognized by him as deserters. Well, to remain under our flag, under the apostolic flag of Jesus, it is necessary that our souls be clothed in the uniform of Jesus' sanctity.22

Moreover, consecrated as we are to God through baptism, consecrated through the religious promises, consecrated through the apostolate, of necessity we must fulfill this triple commitment. Should we be satisfied in being only Christians, when we should be religious and apostles? And if we had this idea of being satisfied being Christians only, let us find out whether we do not lack Christian virtues. If we do lack them, then we are three times blameworthy.

If we do possess these virtues, we shall not lack the religious and apostolic virtues, for, we cannot have Christian virtues without the action of grace in us, and if the grace of God is master of our soul, it will inevitably make us religious and apostles.

If we are not faithful to grace in the matter of sanctity of religious life and apostolic life, it will not give us any more holiness of the Christian life. There is no middle way for us; either we become imitators of the Master in the religious and apostolic life, or we shall be poor Christians. Well, it is a great misfortune for an apostolic man to be nothing more than a poor and weak Christian: Cui multum datum est, multum quaeretur ab eo. (Much will be asked of him who has been given much.)

22 É. S. du V. Libermann, pp. 380-381.
THIRD MEETING
OF SPIRITAN STUDIES GROUP
29-31 December 1977

As already decided on the occasion of the second meeting of the Group in Rome in 1976, the third meeting took place in the Mother House of the Congregation in Paris from 29th to 31st December 1977.

The first session began at 10.00 a.m. on the 29th. All the members were present except Fr. H. Koren. He had been engaged in the celebration of the golden jubilee of Religious Profession of his sister, when, just before the date of the meeting, he underwent a heart attack. Fr. J. Bouchaud, recovering from a long and very serious illness, was only able to attend some of the sessions.

After the invocation of the Holy Spirit and of our Lady, Fr. Lécuyer announced the agenda for the meeting:

1) An account of work done by each member of the Group during the year.
2) Discussion of the plan prepared by Fr. Sigrist for the production of a new Spiritual Directory (Directoire Spirituel) considerably different from the old model.
3) The choice of possible new members of the Group.
4) Suggestions for a work-plan for 1978.

The Secretary of the Group, Fr. A. Martins, then gave an account of his activities as follows.

a) From the beginning of January 1977 until the middle of June he had carried out research in the Archives of Propaganda, from 8.00 a.m. to 12.30 p.m. on the available days. He discovered about 2,000 documents directly or indirectly connected with the history of the Congregation. Amongst these were twenty autograph letters of M. Becquet, two or three of M. Duflos and forty of M. Bertout and the other Superiors General who succeeded him, until 1877. He obtained microfilms of more than 800 of these
documents and is engaged on their transcription, having bought a special projector for this purpose.

b) The publication of «Spiritan Papers», of which, up to now, four numbers have appeared.

c) The Portuguese translation of I/D and Spiritan News.

Fr. B. Kelly was engaged in making Libermann's doctrine known by means of retreats preached in Trinidad and the United States, while continuing his work on a thesis on Libermann.

Fr. M. Fay was principally concerned with arousing interest amongst the authorities in the Irish Province and in the Provinces and Districts connected with it, especially amongst the confreres engaged in Formation, in our Founders and their doctrine.

Fr. R. Seixas gave courses in Spiritan spirituality to the Spanish novices. In a retreat preached to the Province of Portugal he gave particular prominence to the doctrine of Libermann and to the Spiritan charism.

Fr. H. Koren, according to his letters to Frs. Lécuyer and Martins, is actively engaged on a new edition of his book The Spiritans. He has completed the revision of the first three chapters, amounting to one hundred pages of typescript. Let us hope the Lord will grant him the health to complete this work.

Fr. J. Lécuyer, in addition to his collaboration in the publication of Spiritan Papers, conferred with Fr. Martins each Saturday on subjects connected with the activities of the Group. They spent the greater part of August 1977 at the General Archives in the Mother House in Paris, comparing the printed text of Libermann's Commentary on St. John, with the original manuscript. From the beginning of October Fr. Lécuyer gave much of his time to correction of the printed text following the abundant notes he had taken in Paris.

He also suggested that the recent publication by Mgr. Gay, Libermann - Juif selon l'Evangile (Paris: Editions Beauchesne, 1977), should be translated into the principal languages used in the Congregation.

Fr. J. Bouchaud, ill throughout almost the whole year and not yet fully recovered, was not able to contribute to the work. We hope he will be able to resume his valuable collaboration in the future.
Fr. P. Sigrist gave his time to the projected *Spiritual Directory*. His plan, which he had made available in August, was discussed at length at the working sessions. It will contain texts from Claude Poullart des Places, from some of the Superiors General of the old Congregation, from the Rule of 1734, but especially from the writings of Fr. Libermann and of the Superiors General after him, as well as quotations from the last General Chapters. In this way, the new Directory should help us to become aware of our origins and of the subsequent development of a spirit and of a spirituality which are really our own.

During the discussion of the advisability of enlarging and rejuvenating the Group, several names were proposed. The confreres in question will be contacted personally and in agreement with their Superiors.

**Spiritan Papers**

For the future we shall try to improve the external presentation while keeping the present format, which is that of the *General Bulletin*. We should like also to include a Readers' Forum to provide an opportunity for the expression of confreres' reactions.

The Group is happy to acknowledge a considerable renewal of interest, from within the Congregation, in our Founders and their teaching, as well as in the history of the Congregation. It is desirable however that there should be closer and more frequent contact between the Group and the Formation sectors in the Congregation. We would gladly receive any practical suggestions or offers of help. In particular, all are asked to let Fr. Sigrist know of texts which they feel should be included in the Directory. A letter is to be sent to the Major Superiors asking their help in promoting cooperation.

As a fitting conclusion to the Meeting of 1977 it was decided to go on pilgrimage to La Neuville and l'Abbaye du Gard, both situated near Amiens and both rich with memories of the life and death of our Venerable Father. This took place on the 2nd January 1978, with Fr. Riaud as guide and Brother Médard at the wheel. At La Neuville, where the traces of the novitiate of the Congregation of the Holy Heart of Mary have been piously preserved by the Sisters of Sainte-Marie-le-Forêt, the memory of the Founder and of his first disciples
was brought alive at a concelebrated Mass. At Le Gard, where the Frères Auxiliaires du Clergé have carried out a surprisingly successful restoration of the buildings, we were reminded of the first scholasticate and the first burial place of Fr. Libermann, from which his remains were later transferred to Chevilly. We are particularly grateful to the Brothers and to their Founder, Canon Dentin – still very alert in spite of his 81 years – for their wonderful welcome. On our way back to Paris there was time for a short visit to the magnificent cathedral of Amiens. How many times our Venerable Father must have repeated the trip from La Neuville and Le Gard to the house in the Foubourg Noyon which has since disappeared!

It was agreed to keep the same dates for the 1978 meeting: 29-31 December. The venue has not yet been decided.
la etruschi.