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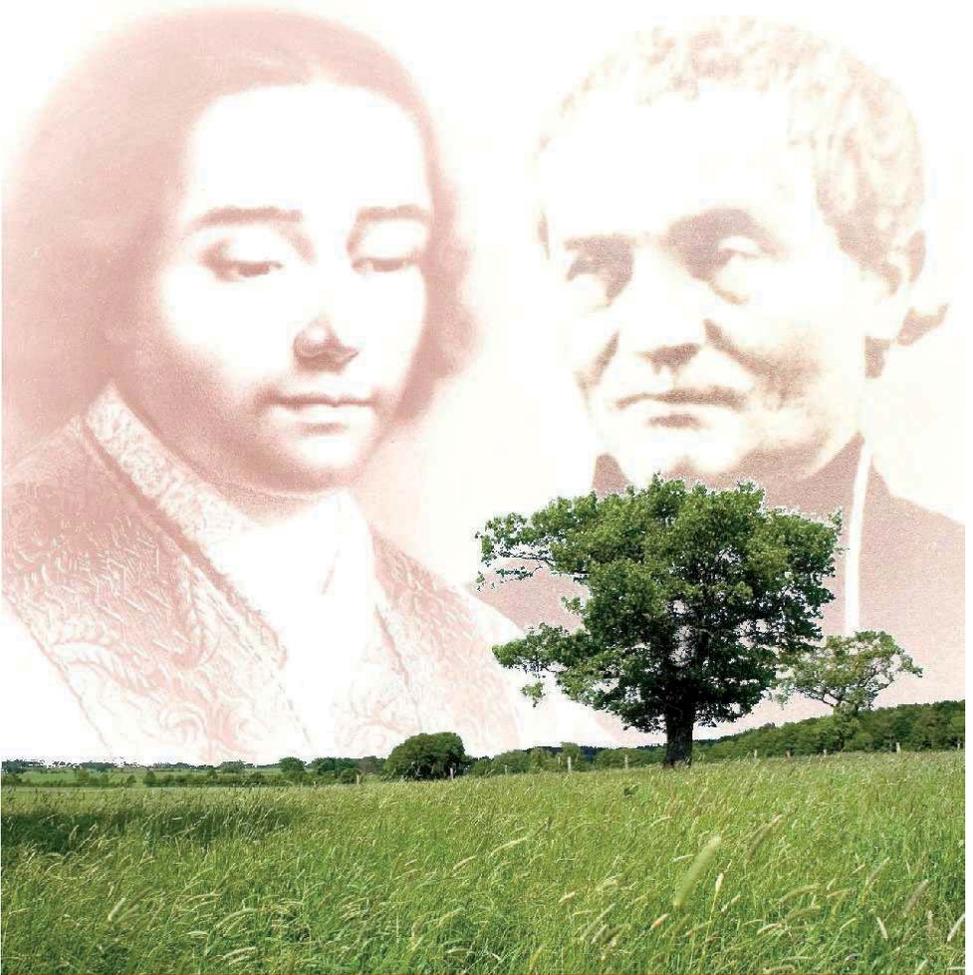
ANIMA UNA

CONGREGATION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

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LIVING THE VOW OF POVERTY TODAY

“Information Documentation” (I/D)
is now
“Anima Una”

“Information Documentation”, the I/D, as we have known it in our Spiritan family, is a tool for ongoing formation and animation. It is prepared by members of General Council and deals with wide range of topics which are neither for information nor just for documentation, but for ongoing formation and animation.

As a tool for ongoing formation and animation, General Council thinks that the name “Information Documentation” does not reflect the content of the production. For this reason we have decided to adopt the name “*Anima Una*”. The advantage of the name “*Anima Una*” is that it indicates that the goal of the document is to reinforce our sense of belonging to the same Congregation and our commitment to mission. Again “*Anima Una*”, taken from our motto, clearly indicates the aim of all our formation programmes (initial and ongoing) and our task of animating the Congregation – to arrive at that unity to which Jesus calls his disciples. This new name takes effect with this production. For easy reference, continuity with “Information Documentation” (I/D) will be kept by preserving the numeration.

LIVING THE VOW OF POVERTY TODAY

*I*t was in 1987 that the new edition of the Rule of Life was adopted. After a long process, Spiritans wanted to re-state who they were and how they wanted to live. Twenty years have gone by since then. While our Gospel ideals remain the same, the world has changed a lot and Spiritans need to realise this in the living out of their commitments. One of the most sensitive areas here is the practice of the vow of poverty.

Reflecting on the spiritual renewal of the Congregation, the General Chapter of Torre d'Aguilha distinguished between "poverty suffered", which is an objective evil, and "poverty chosen", which is a way of following Christ. The latter cannot be imposed from outside, neither can it be a flight from reality. In taking the vow of poverty, Spiritans wish only to follow Christ and live the values of the Reign of God which he proclaimed. In this perspective the present number of "*Anima Una*" deepens one particular aspect of the preceding number entitled "Living Spiritan Spirituality"¹.

¹ Cf. I/D No.60.

I. THE VOW OF POVERTY AS A MEANS TO OVERCOME POVERTY

1.1 Intolerable Situations of Poverty

The experience of many Spiritans brings them into numerous situations around the world where they see millions of people living in insufferable situations. Beside the rich residential areas of big towns immense shanty towns spread out. Everywhere it is the same situation: the people crammed into them lack the necessities of life. The level of unemployment is high and violence is a daily reality. From time to time the suburbs explode and urban guerrillas terrorise the inhabitants. But poverty is not only an urban phenomenon for it is found also in the rural areas. Because they are far from the centres there is no access to basic amenities. Even finding drinkable water becomes difficult. Children do not go to school and in many countries lack of educational opportunity is a serious problem.

Health matters are becoming a major issue; figures speak for themselves. In 2005 there were 15 million AIDS orphans; in 2007, 2.5 million people were infected by the virus. Each day 3,000 children die from malaria. Some recent statistics show that 9 million people are infected by a more resistant strain of tuberculosis which is difficult to cure. The majority of victims are from poor countries, prompting Kofi Annan to remark: "the greatest danger to health in developing countries is poverty".

War situations and economic crises force thousands of people to leave their region of origin or their own country, in the process losing most of their belongings and often their own lives.

Globalisation has no doubt liberalised the markets, but the gap between rich and poor widens every day. Today the hike in the price of basic foodstuffs like cereals and sugar leaves the most vulnerable behind. The dignity of the human person is totally disregarded. Who can accept such a situation? Poverty suffered is a revolting evil which cannot be ignored.

1.2 In the light of the Gospel and our Founders

When Jesus of Nazareth began his ministry, he was able to observe his contemporaries. The parables of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk. 16:19-25) and of the Last Judgement (Mt. 25:31-46), reflect a society riddled with inequalities. Jesus not only announces a Kingdom where there is a place for all and no distinction based on wealth, but he comes close to the lepers rejected from their villages and to the blind whom he presses to keep quiet. He understood that the battle against poverty begins necessarily by being close to people so as to understand their suffering. The parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:29-37) reflects his own attitude of compassion and care in the face of distressing situations, not worrying about or being limited by social or racial differences. His enemies drew attention to his scandalous behaviour: here is a man of God full of wisdom who does not respect the Law on the pretext of being on the side of outcasts. From the beginning of his ministry Jesus chose to be in solidarity with the weakest members of society (Lk. 4:16-21).

The prophetic life of Jesus has influenced thousands of men and women of all times, of all culture and of all religions, people like Mahatma Ghandi and Mother Teresa of Calcutta. The little-known story of **Father Jacques Laval** could

be usefully meditated upon. He was a man who had all that was needed to succeed in life. As a doctor he was of a privileged class, but he decided to devote his life completely to the service of the poor. As a diocesan priest he generously shared what he received. Arriving on the island of Mauritius, he chose to live as a poor man and devote himself exclusively to the most impoverished inhabitants; he lived close to them, welcoming them into his house and visiting them in theirs. This approach attracted bitter criticisms and obstruction from the authorities. But in this way he had opened a way to the hearts of many people who were able to recover some of their lost dignity.

Daniel Brottier on his part, did not remain inactive when faced with the distressing conditions of abandoned children reduced to begging for a living. Not only did he receive them, but through the Auteuil Organisation, he offered the necessary means for training, educating and finding a place in society for them. He realised it was not enough to give them a roof over their heads and three meals a day. They needed also to have the skills necessary to assure their future, help them find their dignity again and, more than that, open them up to the God of love. Such is the final goal of Spiritan presence among the poor; it is similar to the paralysed man at the Temple door – healed by Peter and John he recovers his dignity as a fit man and is thus able to join the believing community from which he had been excluded (Ac. 3:7-8).

The battle against poverty begins, in effect, with the humble step of coming close to the poor in order to break down the wide gap created by inequalities. This was the step taken by Fr. Angelo van Kempen in Brazil – he chose to live among

the poor as one of them². It is a necessary step towards understanding and analysing with those most affected the structures which have created the situations which oppress them.

1.3 The Struggle against Poverty

In many situations we feel that we can do nothing. But lack of means should not be an excuse for doing nothing or not trying to do something.

Need for Closeness

How to engage in the struggle against poverty? From the beginning our Founders, inspired by the Gospel, understood that the important thing was not to weigh in with heavy resources, but to accept a certain vulnerability and to actually live with those most deprived. Sometimes this closeness took the form of the duty of hospitality or of sharing financial resources. Did Fr. Libermann not say that we must be among them as “*servants to their masters*”³? Without this need for closeness, to be poor among the poor becomes an empty slogan, as useless as it is harmful.

Need for Consistency

Concretely, we need to ask ourselves where our commitments are... Our chapter texts have plenty to say about our desire to be committed to peoples in need. In reality our choices for missionary activity speak for themselves and indicate our priorities. But the fact that certain circumscrip-

² Cf. the moving and outstanding account given by Fr. Antonio Gruyters “Contemplation and Action” given at the General Chapter of Torre d’Aguilha, reprinted in ‘Spiritan Life’ No.15 pp.129-132.

³ ND. IX p.330.

tions cannot find confreres for difficult situations, questions our real availability and desire to combat poverty.

Need for Adaptation

Situations evolve rapidly. When a war or tensions break out inside a country or natural disasters occur, we see thousands of people taking to the roads carrying with them only what they can. Our Spiritan history is not lacking examples of where confreres, often endangering their own lives, have been there when most needed to come to the spiritual and material aid of refugees or displaced peoples⁴. We need to recognise the courage shown by these confreres. New situations are appearing today because of the distress caused by the AIDS epidemic. Adapting to an attitude in favour of such issues of JPIC, calls on our reserves of energy. In his own way, Libermann recommended this, noting that each one *“must study the needs, discover society’s wounds, and seize every opportunity offered in one’s position to bring a remedy and healing for such needs and wounds”*⁵.

Spiritual Needs

Concern for the most deprived is not the monopoly of Spiritans. Thousands of other organisations pursue the same ends and often with extraordinary efficiency. If we had been only a Non-Governmental Organisation, we would no doubt have achieved great things, but would we have in fact realised our aim? It is not necessary to be a Spiritan or even a Christian to give a glass of water to someone in need. But we do this *“in the name”* of Christ himself (Mk. 10:37). It is this spiritual aspect which helps us recognise Christ in the most deprived (Mt. 25:31-46).

⁴ Examples are numerous, for example in Nigeria, Angola, Croatia, Congo-Brazzaville, Congo-Kinshasa, Sierra Leone, Pakistan etc...

⁵ ND XI p.536.

Need for Competence

We are aware however, that in so many cases, good will is not enough. So as to avoid mistakes due to harmful paternalistic attitudes, it is urgent that we acquire appropriate qualifications. No-one can improvise when it comes to being a teacher, a headmaster, a doctor, a nurse, a social worker or a carer for street-children. Real credibility comes from proper training. Our work among the poor brings us into contact with other groups which undertake lobbying of international organisations. To get involved in this requires preparation and a lot of experience. It must be accepted that the parameters of the Spiritan vocation cannot be reduced to parish administration. In some situations a brother would be better suited than a priest – the spiritual motivation for mission is the same but the way of carrying it out is different.

Family Needs

In the same spirit, another questions sometimes crops up: what can we do, or must we do, when confreres' parents need help or ask us for support? For many confreres family concerns are a constant worry and a responsibility they have to face up to. This is not a new problem. It needs to be stated that some confreres manage as best they can without saying anything about how they resolve such dilemmas. The time is right to look again at SRL 40.1: "Our charity too is expressed in the interest that we take in our own families and in our attentiveness to them. Each circumscription 'of origin' decides upon the manner of hospitality to them and the help it will offer them should the need arise". Nothing can be properly set up unless there is a discussion within each circumscription and an attitude of complete transparency on the part of all Spiritans.

1.4 Where are we?

The General Chapter of Torre d’Aguilha reminded us of the concern of our founders for the poor and most abandoned; it is “an important criterion for our lifestyle and discerning the works we take on” (TA 1.1.4). This statement needs to be understood in the light of the milieu in which we find ourselves. In effect, Spiritans are living in such diverse situations that they must learn how to adapt their response to the implications of their vow of poverty.

1.4.1 On a Personal Level

Availability involves more than just a vague sense of charity. Most of us have to change our social and cultural status to be on the side of the poor (SRL 70.2).

- What kind of people do I willingly associate with?
- Do I take time to visit the poor?

1.4.2 On a Community Level

- What situations of poverty do we see close to our community?
- What are we doing practically to combat such poverty?
- What means are at our disposal?
- How much of our budget do we put aside to show our solidarity with the poor (SRL 71.1)?
- Have we undertaken any dialogue in community to discuss the situation of our families?

1.4.3 At Circumscription Level

In general, circumscriptions decide how to combat the scourge of poverty during their assemblies; they also

know that a commitment to JPIC issues is a priority (TA 3).

- What practical efforts have been made to carry out circumscription decisions?
- Has our circumscription worked out its JPIC programme (TA 3.2)? If this has been done, has it been implemented? If not, what is blocking it?
- What areas will we need to think about in the future? What orientations would circumscriptions need to take to combat poverty?
- Does the circumscription have any kind of plan to help our families in emergency cases?

For Reflection and Sharing

Out of concern for simplicity of life, a confrere who was a chaplain to young people in a large African town, was happy to have only a small two-door car. Thus he was limited in the number of young people he could carry when it came time to go away on retreat, for example. Very quickly the young people dubbed the car that of a selfish man. What do you think? Would you have advised the chaplain to buy a bigger car?

II. TAKING THE VOW OF POVERTY TO BE LIKE CHRIST

2.1 How do people look upon us?

*I*n comparison to deprived peoples, can we in fact say we are poor? How can we seriously say that at our

profession we are taking a vow of poverty? Appearances sometimes suggest the contrary.

If in today's world, many Spiritans are happy with what is strictly necessary, none of them lack the basic necessities. What is more, our houses, the number of cars we have and the expensive make of some of them, the ease with which we travel about and the modern means of communication we use, offer us possibilities which millions of people just do not have. These things and the level of education we have received give us in fact a high social status. Some people resent this contradiction and consider that we are not credible. For them, the vow of poverty needs to be seen differently, so as not to confuse real poverty with a voluntary simplicity of means. This gives rise to the following four observations.

- Ancient Biblical tradition regarded the possession of earthly goods as a blessing; it was up to the possessor to help all those who depended on him.
- Wise men denounced the risks of wealth: "The rich man lords it over the poor and the debtor is the slave of his creditor" (Pr. 22.7; cf. 28.11). Jesus gave similar warnings about wealth (Lk. 12:13-21) concluding: "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Lk. 12.34) - this is an invitation to be careful not to get attached to our possessions.
- On another level, not all members of the Congregation have access to the same resources; whereas some give little witness to their vow of poverty, others live frugally, either because they do not have sufficient means, or, like our founders, they have made the choice to make do with the basic necessities

- Finally we are aware of what it means to be involved in missionary activity in these times and the ambivalence it implies: we can bring great benefits to people, but also create too much dependence and waste a lot of our time.

2.2 Evangelical Self-emptying

Poverty chosen, in itself, would have no sense unless Jesus had first of all chosen it. Was he materially poor? The Gospel says little on this but his itinerant ministry made him dependent on the support of others. Very early on though, the early Church reflected on the way he had given up his whole life. The hymn in the letter to the Philipians summarises in a few verses how he “became as men are”: “He did not cling to his equality with God “. This goes to show that he did not count on what was his real richness – the Father’s glory. In accepting for himself to be “emptied”, he consented to give up his place as “lord and master”, making himself a servant and sharing our condition (Ph. 2:6-8). Thus he became a “brother” to us all “able to help those who are in any kind of need” (Heb. 2:17-18). In Jesus, God lowered himself in order to bring life, love and reconciliation.

Poullart des Places is clearly among those who lived this self-emptying. From a comfortable background, destined for honours and a brilliant career, he voluntarily gave up his wealth and lived the life of a poor student, accepting the harsh rule of his community. He only accepted his life annuity required by the bishop for ordination, an annuity which he shared with the whole community. In the end he died in Paris and was buried in a pauper’s grave.

Such a way of life is completely in line with a person who has made a deliberate choice. He was well aware of the

dangers of a desire for fame and *“all that raises a man above others due to merit”*. One of his prayers illustrates this: *“Destroy in me all the worldly attachments which follow me everywhere”*⁶. He would repeat this in 1702: *“Grant me the grace of total detachment from all creatures and from self”*⁷. Such a renunciation was clearly the fruit of prayer. Is it not here that every human being comes to understand God’s will for them? Poullart des Places wanted to be free to be at all times in the presence of God and to do his will.

2.3 Choosing to live in simplicity

The link between Poullart des Places and Christ is that of apostolic availability. It is still a matter today of losing one’s life so as to attain greater interior freedom and brotherly love. Because of this, the commitment to following Christ goes hand in hand with taking on a lifestyle which does not make us slaves of material goods, but opens us up to a greater solidarity (SRL 71).

In choosing to do this, we are making a decision in complete contrast to society around us, where publicity posters promote consumerism, and the attractions of wealth and success. By choosing a simple and modest lifestyle we are being counter-cultural. We are saying to our contemporaries that the ultimate goal of man does not lie in material wealth (Lk. 12.15). Poverty chosen thus challenges the tendency to consumerism. This is also reflected in the letter of Libermann to the confreres on the island of Bourbon: *“Do not seek the things the world seeks, giving a life of ease and an external impression of wealth”*⁸.

⁶ “Choice of a State of Life”.

⁷ “Particular Rule”.

⁸ ND IX p.15.

This choice takes us even further. The majority of confreres, from all continents, are called to leave their families and their countries - to lose their basic security and become one with those who have nothing. There are numerous confreres who have lost everything they had because they stayed right to the end with peoples affected by wars. Others in this situation of insecurity have paid with their lives. So as to live this extreme form of renunciation, one has to be imbued with the spiritual strength which empowered Jesus who, "though he was rich, became poor in order that we might become rich" (2 Cor. 8:9; SRL 61).

2.4 Where are we?

No-one can say that it is easy just to content oneself with what is necessary and to be done with anything superfluous. Fifty years ago to have a personal transistor radio could be considered a luxury, today it is something very ordinary. In a world where information is so important, it is a duty to be aware of what is happening around the world and sometimes to be able to respond quickly. Our Rule of Life however, still enjoins on us simplicity and modesty (SRL 71).

2.4.1 On a Personal Level

The spiritual experience of the novitiate is already something of the past; it is on the basis of this experience that we committed ourselves to following Christ in his poverty.

- Each one of us remembers the steps which led us to take the vow of poverty. Which of them can be considered decisive?

- What more do I need to give up today to re-discover the enthusiasm of my first commitment?
- How much time do I spend watching television, talking on the telephone, using the internet? Are these part of my work or formation or are they forms of escapism or pleasure?
- How do I spend my annual holidays? Do they resemble those of a rich person or a poor one?
- Do I manage my patrimony in conformity with SRL (SRL 64, 66, 67)?

2.4.2 On a Community Level

Our daily choices of food and drink, our cars and houses, give a real indication of how faithful we are to the demands of SRL.

- Do we consider our style of community life to be simple? What signs of wealth are there?
- Are our possessions in proportion to our needs?
- What kind of social environment do we live in?

2.4.3 On a Circumscription Level

- Has our circumscription seriously reflected on the vow of poverty?
- What are our collective signs of wealth?
- Are our collective goods proportionate to our needs?
- Is our common property well used and well-maintained?

For Reflection and Sharing

A confrere has a friend who is very wealthy and who offers to pay for him to go on a luxury cruise. Neither the confrere, his community or his circumscription need to pay anything. Should he accept or not?

III. TAKING THE VOW OF POVERTY SO AS TO LIVE TOGETHER AS A CONGREGATION

3.1 Between Individualism and Sharing

*I*t is enough to re-read our chapter texts to see the number of times when calls have been made for sharing and transparency. The last one to do so was Torre d'Aguilha: "Amongst us there will be openness, honesty and transparency and a real willingness to share in all matters relating to finance" (TA 7.5). No doubt we have to read between the lines to see the difficulties facing us; in financial matters there is a certain individualism which is leading to serious inequalities. Possession of private means leads to mistaken attitudes. Some confreres have large amounts at their disposal allowing them to have a high standard of living, while others have to be content with the basic minimum. Others feel they have the right to impose their own views and project attitudes of self-sufficiency with regard to those who are not in a position to contribute. More serious again, are confreres who fraudulently use money to their own profit. Such things discourage confreres and bring a lot of mistrust into community life. What has happened to the promises we made when we pronounced our vows?

We would become unhealthily pessimistic if we stopped at this statement of failure however. Various communities and circumscriptions are putting structures for solidarity in place so that confreres may have the wherewithal to live and carry out their missionary work. The fact that few confreres actually receive any remuneration for the services they provide obliges us to promote greater sharing. The whole Congregation supports formation and mission thanks to funds such as Cor Unum. Other circumscriptions unite their efforts to respond to requests for aid. So, our internal sharing, at all levels, helps us to counteract the wave of individualism which is contrary to our religious commitment.

3.2 Sharing Was Necessary From the Beginnings of the Church

Interdependence is not a new thing. From the beginning, Christian communities had to organise themselves so that all their members could live in a dignified way. We know that St. Paul arranged for a collection for the poorest in the community of Jerusalem; it was not just out of a sense of philanthropy that he did this. For him it was a question of “communion”, which on many occasions he mentions in his letters (2 Cor. 8:16; 9:13; Rm. 12:13; 15:26). It was not possible for him to keep saying they were all brothers without creating the conditions for a real brotherhood. In writing that “no-one was in want” (Ac. 4:34), Luke wanted to show that the new community, born of faith in the resurrection, reflected the ancient community in the desert (Dt. 6:15). It is precisely from the description of this sharing and solidarity that the Congregation takes its motto: “*Cor unum et anima una*” (Ac. 4:32).

Maybe you could say this is an ideal that has never been attained! It is an accurate observation. Immediately after the

gift of Barnabas (Ac. 4:36-37) came the counter-witness of Ananias and Sapphira (Ac. 5:1-11) and, later on, the complaints of a group of widows who were being forgotten in the daily distribution of food (Ac. 6:1-6). Already, discrimination and lack of transparency nearly undermined the constant efforts at sharing. These early communities had to learn that a true communion depends on a just sharing.

When he began his work for the blacks, **Fr. Libermann** understood that he would have to struggle to find the means necessary for this. For him, money was not a taboo subject. On the contrary, from his correspondence we can see the problems he had seeking the necessary funds. His own idea was that missionaries should lead a life which was *“poor but not to extremes”*⁹. If he said he had what was necessary, he recognises that, without being *“miserable”*, the community lived *“modestly”*, a word frequently used by him. But Libermann had on several occasions to sound the alarm: *“Our income is not enough”*¹⁰. On occasion he wrote with a sense of humour: *“I do not know if we will reach the end of the year. We will do so, I expect, but our money-box will not”*¹¹

Is there a magic formula to reverse this common trend? Going through his numerous letters there are five which, though not offering miracles, lead us to solutions of a kind and are relevant to our present preoccupations.

- The basic rule is that everything is held in common and for that *“it is crucial to divest oneself of the habit of owning things and of seeking one’s own comfort”*¹²

⁹ ND III p.181.

¹⁰ ND VI p.78; ND VII p.120.

¹¹ ND VI p.425.

¹² ND X p.354.

- Very early on Libermann tried to arrange some sharing and asked the well-off communities to “*donate their surplus, or at least a part of it, to general funds*”¹³. He turned to confreres by name asking them to “*come to our aid*”¹⁴. Thus he approached Frs. Blanpin, Le Vavasseur, Laval, and Dossat.
- Libermann did not refuse any gifts given¹⁵ and carefully kept a list of donors¹⁶.
- But he knew that gifts would not be enough. He tried what we today called projects for self-sufficiency, trying first of all managing a merchant ship. But this experience did not work out: “*The Blessed Virgin does not want to make us into sailors or traders*”¹⁷. But he was not put off the idea and indicates that other efforts, like the farm producing food for the community, were crowned with success¹⁸.
- Finally he did the work of an accountant: “*I calculate, I speculate, I work out what you earn*” he wrote to Mr. Blanpin¹⁹. He kept up with the accounts remembering when promised amounts did not arrive on time²⁰. He could foresee shortages and expected confreres to be thrifty and “*to be ready for anything*”²¹. He mistrusted risky

¹³ ND VI p.426.

¹⁴ ND VII p.120; IX p.208; XII p.141.

¹⁵ ND VI p.426; IX p.210.

¹⁶ ND III p.390-392.

¹⁷ ND VII p.120.

¹⁸ ND VII p.121.

¹⁹ ND VII p.147.

²⁰ ND VIII p.80.

²¹ ND XIII p.102.

speculations and expected confreres to have good control of expenditure²².

Maybe this portrait of Libermann is disturbing, but it illustrates that poverty chosen in the service of mission does not mean a flight from reality; it requires us to face up to economic facts and find solutions to our needs. At the same time however, Libermann does not cease repeating that we depend on Providence, calling the Blessed Virgin "*our bursar*"²³. He advocated the evangelical attitude of trusting in the Lord and "*not worrying about our food or our clothing*"²⁴.

It is not easy to find the balance which poverty chosen actually means: on one hand there is the spiritual attitude of unselfishness and on the other the need to find funds and manage them conscientiously for our living expenses and missionary commitments.

3.3 Efforts at Realising Interdependence

From experience we know that many tensions arise between us because of financial or material questions. Sometimes there are cases where there is an impression that common resources have been wasted. Then again, mistrust enters into community life when there is no equality between confreres. Evangelical poverty means a brotherly openness with each other, with all our faults and weaknesses. How many communities take time to sit down with a newly-arrived confrere to get to know him and make sure his material needs are taken care of? How many confreres coming in to a new community take some time to understand their situation, before making demands and setting

²² ND VII p.432.

²³ ND VI p.425.

²⁴ ND VIII p.15; cf. Mt.6:24-25.

ultimatums? Mutual respect and confidence brings availability, solidarity, sharing and co-responsibility. At all levels we are invited to make five efforts:

Effort at Transparency

It is not possible for us to live the vow of poverty positively if no-one makes the demanding effort to be transparent. This effort, probably the most difficult because it goes against our natural desire for freedom, is basic to a renewal of our Congregation in terms of finances. It has two aspects:

- On the individual level each one gives an accurate account of his income and expenditure; this can be tedious but it is necessary. This is so important if a confrere gets involved in a commercial enterprise or borrows money irresponsibly. Some confreres have got their circumscriptions heavily into debt in this way. Eventually they will have to answer for their actions and bear the consequences.
- On the collective level, it is becoming urgent for us to manage our goods carefully and transparently; bursars have an important role here. They know that accurate accounts facilitate sharing; they know equally well that the opposite causes serious imbalances. Since the Chapter of Torre d'Aguilha, the General Council has taken steps in the training of bursars and procurators, with a view to helping circumscriptions to keep their accounts accurately. This is the case for our financial management in general and for the financial state of our circumscriptions.

Effort at dialogue

Transparency leads to dialogue; this does not only mean asking for money when needed, but presupposes mutual

listening in order to assess the needs of all. Here we do need to re-affirm the role of the Superior. He is the one we must refer to first, before going to the bursar, regarding expenditure or important loans (SRL 68). He is also the one to render account (SRL 69; 72.6).

Effort at Sharing

Transparency opens us up to sharing and putting our goods in common: “Whatever we receive as a gift or in payment for our work – gifts, salaries, pensions, grants, insurance benefits, mass stipends and every other income we may derive from our work – belongs to the Congregation” (SRL 65). Whether we bring in to the community more than another confrere or receive a salary does not put us in a privileged position; Spiritans can only live together in confidence if all that is received from ministry or from benefactors is put into the common fund. Confreres having private means create suspicion and difficulties in relationships. So often dissensions arise in community when there is no sharing. Faced with an individualistic world, religious life dares to propose the sharing of goods and dependence on one another. This is a challenge for our times, forming a part of our religious commitment, leading to a conversion of heart and the rejection of personal financial independence and individualism.

Effort at Solidarity

It is our belief as Spiritans that we cannot carry out our commitments if there is no solidarity among us (cf. SRL 70.1). For many years now we have been trying to organise this. The last General Chapter went into more details concerning finance than did Itaici or Maynooth (TA 7) in order to reduce the gulf between rich and poor circumscriptions. There was a call on the responsibility of everyone in this domain, even if situations differ a lot.

- in some circumscriptions, confreres cannot realise anything tangible without external help, because of the economic failures in their countries (TA 4.3);
- in others, care for the elderly confreres who gave of their healthy years in the service of mission, has heavy financial implications;
- others again have the heavy responsibility of training the younger ones who wish to join us; this is costly and efforts at self-sufficiency do not produce enough (TA 4.10).

In the end, circumscriptions turn to the solidarity of the whole Congregation when they fail to organise this among the confreres of the same circumscription.

Learning to be interdependent is not easy, because we do not always have a good knowledge of each others' needs or the efforts they are making. Lack of mutual understanding follows whereas, as ultimate goal, solidarity is supposed to increase fraternity and communion within the Congregation, and by this means, assure a better service for mission.

Effort at Co-responsibility

Like the members of one family, we are all responsible for the goods of the Congregation; perhaps we need to promote a maintenance culture wherever we are appointed. To help us in this, each circumscription has been asked to make an inventory of its movable and immovable goods (TA 7.3).

3.4 Where are we?

To realise interdependence and develop a culture of sharing among us "... we are called by the Spirit to correct irregularities such as individualism, inappropriate relationships, and the lack of transparency and accountabil-

ity in the use of money and inequalities between confreres, communities and circumscriptions" (TA 1.1.1).

3.4.1 On a Personal Level

- Am I honest and open in financial matters?
- Do I give a regular account of what I receive (gifts, mass intentions etc...) and what I spend?
- Do I agree with interdependence as a way of living community life?

3.4.2 On a Community Level

The quality of relationships in a community often depends on the level of sharing of material resources of the community.

- In financial and material matters, what are the respective roles of the superior and bursar?
- Does the community discuss the budget at the beginning of each financial year? Does the bursar give a report of the expenditure (SRL 175.3)?
- Are the community's accounts separate from those of the works or projects?

3.4.3 On a Circumscription Level

- How does our circumscription express internal solidarity?
- How does our circumscription express solidarity with other circumscriptions?
- Does our circumscription send in its contributions to the General Administration and Cor Unum?
- Are the circumscription accounts sufficiently clear?

- Has the circumscription decided on a policy in serious cases of diversion of funds?

For Reflection and Sharing

A confrere becomes seriously indebted to someone. Since he cannot pay the debt on time, his creditor contacts the circumscription Superior threatening to take him to court. The Council holds a meeting but opinions are divided. Some think that for justice's sake and for the good name of the Congregation the amount owed should be paid on the confrere's behalf. Others however, think that to act like this would just encourage others to behave similarly. What do you think?

IV. FORMING ONESELF IN THE VOW OF POVERTY

4.1 From Enthusiasm to Learning to Live As a Spiritan

When a young person asks to enter the Congregation, he shows a great enthusiasm. He has been deeply impressed by an elderly priest he met in a parish or while on retreat and his generous intentions know no bounds. He wants to be like that elderly priest whose life is worth emulating.

If there is ever a sad moment in a candidate's formation, it is the moment when he loses his first enthusiasm. With time his fervour is tempered and the long training in living in community - "condition sine qua non" of the missionary life - must be faced. The candidate learns about the implications of religious life: the struggle against latent individualism,

the difficult passage from saying “I” to “we”²⁵ and the sharing of material and spiritual goods; he also discovers that Spiritan mission is “to the poorest souls”²⁶.

This is a learning process which in fact lasts a lifetime and involves initial formation as well as in-service training. Some confreres seem to forget everything as soon as they have completed initial formation. Sometimes the enthusiasm of going on mission vanishes on contact with the reality. The young confreres observe angrily that individualism is still present in communities and that some confreres share very little. Some situations demand re-thinking to adjust the sharing of goods and make the clear commitment to serve the poor.

4.2 “Sell What You Have and Give To the Poor”

The basis for the call to live the vow of poverty has often been found in the meeting with the rich young man. Jesus met a man whom he thought capable of following him and whom he invited to sell all his property and give the money to the poor. But the man turned away from him sad because he could not take that step (Mk. 10:17-22). Later on, Jesus proposes to the disciples that they should leave everything and follow him (Mk. 10:30). However, this episode is not addressed especially to future religious, but to all disciples who want to enter the Kingdom of God (Mk. 10:24-25). The call to the fishermen beside the lake is of a similar nature (Mk. 1:16-20) and illustrates clearly the radical nature of ‘following Christ’.

Being formed to live the vow of poverty means above all deepening one’s baptismal calling in order to enter the

²⁵ Cf. “Fraternal Life in Community” Vatican (1994), no.39.

²⁶ ND II p.236.

Kingdom of God. Do we accept joyfully and with simplicity the reversal of values pronounced in the Beatitudes? This is the basic question put to each one. Every new candidate must hear this and say whether he accepts the radical conversion inherent in the religious life “for the sake of Jesus and the Gospel” (Mk. 10:30).

From the beginning **Poullart des Places** adopted for himself and his students a poor way of life. The rules of the seminary were such that one accepted whatever was served. There were no special arrangements, even for the community superior; the reason being that poverty was the fundamental virtue to develop in preparation for future ministry.

On his part, **Fr. Libermann** realised that living the vow of poverty could not be grasped all at once or by force. In his correspondence with Mr. Dupont to help him discern his vocation²⁷ he invited him to choose either life or death, which “meant a total dying to oneself”. In this perspective, training in the vow of poverty “is not finished after one session” but it is a long paschal-type journey in which Christ “purifies the senses and detaches you from things of the earth”.

The resulting spiritual freedom is not therefore acquired all of a sudden with the solemn declarations of religious profession. Identifying with the poor Christ begins with the slow recognition of one’s own limits and continues with a dying to oneself, until one is no longer controlled by desire for worldly goods. Having achieved this self-emptying, the Spiritan candidate is ready to undertake his mission.

²⁷ ND II p.169.

4.3 From Dependence to Responsibility

It is of no avail to quote to the letter the directives of our Founders. Times and methods have changed and so has the 'profile' of the candidates - Poullart des Places only accepted those who could produce a "certificate of poverty" for example.

When a Spiritan candidate begins his formation he owns very little. He learns very quickly that he has to be content with what the community provides, even if that is not enough. This state of dependence can be frustrating and lead some confreres to find well-off benefactors who will give them what they need. These are individual solutions which often form no part of the community sharing.

In fact initial formation is a privileged moment in which to overcome material dependence and to assume responsibility for community goods. Formation communities are able to operate thanks to what they receive from within a circumscription or from the wider Congregation, and from the different services offered by the members who make up the community. Some of their members have access to funds which help them to cover some of the costs. Whatever work is done by members of the community already gives an indication of the desire of a candidate to assume his responsibilities for participating in the material well-being of his future community of appointment.

This pedagogical aspect goes together with a knowledge of how to manage carefully the community's resources. It is not enough to give courses on economics. Little by little the candidates must get a clear picture of the income and expenditure of the community; transparency is also an important factor. No-one should use spirituality as an excuse for showing no interest in proper management of material

goods; on the contrary, a balanced outlook demands full responsibility from each one from the very beginning.

Finally, candidates will have a practical experience of mission among the poor. 'Stage' and pastoral activity during initial formation have an important place. Sometimes candidates themselves come from a background of real poverty. Accompaniment will consist in helping them, by means of their experiences, to reflect on these and analyse them so that they are open to being sent to work among the poor (TA 2.12; 4.7; 6.13).

4.4 Where are we?

Formation is a life-long affair. Initial formation represents a real break with the way of life which a candidate led previously. Some may end up completely rejecting the vow of poverty. On-going formation is a mental attitude consisting above all in taking time to evaluate our lives in terms of the experience we have had in the world.

4.4.1 On a Personal Level

- I get to the point with my spiritual director: what does Christ the poor man have to say to me?
- What is my experience of working among the poor? What reflection did I make on this experience?
- Do I carry out responsibly the duties I have been given?

4.4.2 On a Community Level

Community life demands responsibility from each constituent member.

- Does every member of the community (students, formators) have a good idea of the income and expenditure?
- Does the community have some means of self-support which brings in some income?
- Do the formation programmes include JPIC matters (TA 3.5.)?

4.4.3 On a Circumscription Level

Formation concerns all the confreres in a circumscription not just the superiors and formators.

- Do the communities which receive young confreres on 'stage' give them the chance of an experience among the poor?
- Does the circumscription facilitate a reflection on JPIC matters for the on-going formation of confreres (TA 3.5.)?

For Reflection and Sharing

In a second cycle formation community, all the students have to do several hours of manual work a week by way of contributing to self-sufficiency. During his early years Peter did this conscientiously, but after his ordination to the diaconate he suddenly changed. He refused completely from that time to do any manual work. The formators met to discuss his case. What brought about such a change in him? Should he be admitted to final vows? What do you think?

V. MARY, MOTHER OF THE POOR

Writing to the Philippians, St. Paul made the effort to create more communion in a community where some members counted themselves better than others (Ph. 2:1-3). He advised them not to get caught up in their own interests but to pay attention humbly to others (v. 4). Thus it is among us. The sense of belonging and love of the Congregation comes from this attention which excludes all personal vanity.

How can we not mention Mary, mother of the poor? At Cana she noticed that the wine was nearly finished and by a simple remark, almost like a prayer, she got a response from her son. She knew that Jesus could fill the emptiness and lead the assembled community to rejoice and believe in him (Jn. 2:1-11). Such are the dimensions of the love which *“seeks even to obtain material benefits, not for their sake alone which is nothing, but for the spiritual consolation of souls”*²⁸.

Only the completely unselfish and humble soul is capable of such attention. To live the vow of poverty today leads us to sing the Magnificat with Mary because, with her, we contemplate the mysteries of the Lord: “He casts the mighty from their thrones and raises the lowly; he fills the starving with good things and sends the rich away empty” (Lk. 1:52-53).

²⁸ Fr. Libermann “Commentary on the Gospel of St. John”, commentary Jn.2:3.



COR UNUM ET ANIMA UNA

**God's call to come and work for the Kingdom is not made to us just once
for all. Our response has to be updated continually.
(SRL 142)**

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