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Poullart des Places at the age of 16.

SOME QUESTIONS ON LIBERMANN

These questions were put to the confreres in the Province of Spain by the scholastics at San Cugat, Barcelona.

1. In what situations in your life have you felt need to refer to Libermann?

1.1. In your work of missionary animation:

Libermann is present especially when there is reference to our objective of working for the poor; when we speak of the founder of the Congregation; in highest relief is the fact that he was a converted Jew and a man who, after making his act of faith, gave himself to the service of the poorest.

1.2. In your community life:

Libermann is present: when we focus our attention upon community and the apostolate. His life and his message are often taken as benchmarks for evaluating and planning for the activity of the group in its various aspects: community life, prayer, apostolic-missionary life.

1.3. In the discovery and affirmation of your vocation:

Libermann is also a point of reference when we make our choice in terms of religious life or service for the most abandoned. His spirituality of practical union is revered and taken as an ideal to be realized in our own joining of the contemplative and the missionary life.

2. What aspects of Libermann's life impress you most and have greatest influence upon you?

2.1. *In your work of missionary animation:*

Most impressed by:

- his patience in suffering,
- his simplicity in undertaking the work at hand,
- his interest in the marginalized,
- his life of prayer, sacrifice, self-denial,
- his tactfulness in directing the Congregation,
- his hope in the face of misfortune and his confidence in the face of disappointment,
- his way of always putting the preaching of the Gospel ahead of merely personal advancement,
- his respect for the dignity of the peoples to be evangelized,
- his preoccupation with the formation of a native clergy,
- his personal poverty which inspired confidence in the poorest,
- his concern for others and for the growth of the faith.

2.2. *In your community life:*

- his appreciation of community life and his way of living it in its component elements: service and availability, faith and prayer, cheerfulness and work,
- his ability to get people together in a spirit of brotherhood,
- his kindness and respectful acceptance of others,
- his calmness and tolerance,
- his capacity for suffering,
- his attention to what is positive and to the richness to be found in every member,
- his ability to forgive others.

2.3. *In the discovery and affirmation of your vocation:*

Influences us mostly by:

- his acceptance of himself,
- his Judeo-Christian pilgrimage,

- his idea of the "wall",¹
- his search for what God wanted of him and of every person,
- his strength of personality which enabled him to make decisions even when they were risky.

3. State simply, in your own words, what are the characteristic ideas:

3.1. Of Libermann's spirituality:

- to meet Christ and to live at peace in Him,
- self-denial and conformity with the Will of God,
- God is all; man is nothing,
- love for Jesus and Mary,
- participation in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ,
- peace towards all,
- to be like a toy in the hands of God,
- to be «saints»,
- abandonment to the Spirit,
- the Spirit of Truth in action,
- to sanctify work with prayer.

3.2. Of Libermann's apostolic-missionary vision:

- God wants the salvation of all men without exception,
- if the missionary does not identify himself with Christ, he can never be a workman in the Lord's vineyard,
- the Gospel we preach must be deeply engraved in our hearts,
- preaching the Gospel should come first in a life dedicated to zeal and charity,
- "leave aside your European ways",
- "become a negro with the negroes",
- advancement of the people so that they can be enlightened by new understanding,
- work in teams,
- incarnation of the missionaries and early incarna-

¹ Cf. *Spiritan Papers*, No. 2, p. 17, and *Notes et Documents*, II, pp. 170-171.

- tion of the Church itself,
- maintain a life in community with the local Church.

3.3. *Of Libermann's deepest intention in founding the Congregation:*

- to go out to meet the marginalized so as to help them to overcome their condition of human misery and experience the love of God;
- to accept works for which the Church has greatest difficulty in finding laborers, – faithful to, and in conformity with, the Gospel command to spread the Good News,
- to set up bases which will assure the work of evangelization: the missionary all by himself will fail; he needs the continuous support of the group; the group guarantees the bond between the particular work and the Universal Church.

3.4. *Of the religious dimension of our commitment:*

- the religious life supports and animates the “apostolic zeal for the salvation of souls and the Glory of God”,
- it is a means of giving expression to what we are doing in the missions,
- community life is a means of forming communities,
- a concrete need for the mission according to the style of Jesus,
- total commitment for the benefit of all,
- the salvation of those to be evangelized has a relation to the holiness of those who are sent.

3.5. *Of the necessary dispositions of those who are sent:*

- the missionary must be united to Christ and be listening to the Spirit,
- seeking the interests of the Kingdom and not the particular interests of men,
- not doing, or understanding, his work as *his* work, but as God's task for the Congregation,
- zealous for the faith and strict in his way of living it,
- having given up all things: concern about any kind of prominence, about his own ideas, etc.,

- the one who has most committed himself to the message of Jesus will be the most eligible to be sent,
- willingness to let the local people be in command.

3.6. *Of the proper attitude for the members in time of crisis:*

- forgiveness,
- confidence,
- recognition of other people's values,
- prudence,
- prayer for enlightenment,
- overcome the crisis by means of the family spirit.

3.7. *Of the proper attitude towards those who leave the Congregation:*

- not cutting ourselves off from them,
- not considering them as enemies, or as strangers,
- helping them to find their place in society and making them aware of our care for them as persons we accept and hold dear.

4. In your work and your contacts with other people who are not Spiritans, have you ever talked or do you usually talk about Libermann? What do you say about him:

Talk mostly about:

- his faith, as a pilgrimage in search of truth,
- the sincerity and consistency he maintained,
- his deep religious experience,
- his great confidence in God,
- his perseverance and serenity in face of many adverse situations,
- his deep insight into the missionary reality,
- his personal depth, which made of him a man who transcends history.

5. What message can be drawn from what you say about Libermann?

5.1. *for young people:*

- his enthusiasm as a seminarian for a great project in behalf of the most forgotten,
- his attention to the social aspect in his view of the commitment of faith,

- his availability and generosity vis-à-vis first evangelization,
 - his constancy and perseverance in the face of difficulties,
 - his conversion.
- 5.2. *for religious:*
- his ability to see God in everyday occurrences,
 - his vision of the future,
 - his patience on the long road to his vocation,
 - his acceptance of the Rules of another Congregation for his own society,
 - his availability, his humility and spirituality.
- 5.3. *for others*
- the fact of his being a radically poor man and that his poverty raised him up to wonderful heights,
 - his simplicity and self-abandonment into the hands of God.

6. Is Libermann alive or dead? In what way?

- 6.1. *As a vivid message for our times:*
- It is a message very up-to-date and relevant to today's mission call: "The most oppressed," this is the slogan most often repeated these days; the world of the poor is becoming universal.
- 6.2. *As a writer who represents the thinking of his time:*
- he wrote in his time and in its culture and language.
- 6.3. *As a spirit whose characteristics are creativity and faithfulness to God and man in his time:*
- his missionary insight and projects lift him out of his time and bring him forward to our own day,
 - as a spirit, he is capable of new vitality; many have the intention of incarnating his view and making it more fruitful and dynamic.
- 6.4. *As an almost biblical personality gifted with a specifically divine forcefulness:*
- I consider Libermann as a prophet of the "Age of the Church," and I place him side by side with

biblical figures like Paul, Baruch, Peter, Samuel, Elijah. I feel no repugnance in calling him “the Moses of African liberation”; as a man who wrote new pages about the relation of God to men; a personage in the history of salvation.

- 6.5. *As related to the family/community founded in faith:*
- for Libermann, the community was the center of life for Spiritans. It is also the community which possesses Libermann’s spirit and is capable of loyalty and creativity.
- 6.6. *As a relevant answer or as one more edifying example for us from the past:*
- the replies are unanimous in considering him a relevant answer in the Church as mission; even though sometimes it does not seem to be his example which inspires our actions.

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PRAYER TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN¹

"O my good Mother, you have known for a long time that I am your child and that I love you. See how great are my needs, and I find help nowhere but in you. I have a consuming thirst; give me to drink from that life-giving water of salvation which can make me pleasing to my Savior. Give me the kiss of peace. You see how earthly mothers, when their children are sad, kiss them and thus make them joyful and happy again. Well, my good Mother, you love me thousands and thousands of times more than those mothers love their children, and would you leave me in sadness without coming to help me? It is not possible! Show that you are my dear Mother and I am your child: *Monstra te esse matrem.*"

¹ Composed by Father Libermann on Octobre 23, 1830 for the seminarian Edward de Farcy – N.D. I, p. 143.