Third Meeting of the Spiritan Studies Group

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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.
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