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The Generalate Team

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United in the service of the Kingdom

Introduction

The 1986 General Chapter had three objectives: to finalize the Spiritan Rule of Life, elect a Superior General and Council, and evolve guidelines for the next six years. Capitulants brought great application to these tasks, but found that they could not complete work on the guidelines within the time available. For the guidelines the Chapter divided itself into nine 'regions', of which the outgoing General Council was one.

A commission collated all the reports; there emerged five common concerns with different emphasis in different regions. These, however, could not be issued as guidelines or published as such because the Chapter could not round off its work on them. The five common concerns were:

- i. Foundations and new provinces
- ii. New forms of mission

- iii. Community renewal
- iv. Solidarity
- v. Justice and Peace.

On the morning of 1st August, after a debate in the General Assembly, the Chapter voted to hand over to the Superior General and Council the regional reports, the collation in five common concerns and the minutes of the debates in the General Assembly as a basis for evolving Guidelines for animation during the next six years. This mandate of the Chapter we are now carrying out. We have in numerous discernment sessions reflected on our Chapter experience and studied all the reports. In what follows, the five common concerns are subsumed under wider themes evoked by the Chapter, and certain recurrent themes of the Chapter have been recovered. We are confident that we have seized the spirit of the Chapter and therefore offer what follows as the guidelines of our animation.

1. Mission geared towards the Kingdom for the 'poor'

The evangelization of the 'poor' is our purpose (cf. Luke 4 : 18) — Rule 4.

a) The poor yearn for God's Reign

We can relate the above quotation to a dictum of Libermann cited in the Rule: they shall be the advocates, supporters and defenders of the weak and the little against those who oppress them (N.D. X, 517; Rule 14). Who are the poor and what is our commitment to them? The Chapter gave a clear answer by referring us to the biblical image of the poor and their expectation of God's reign — our commitment to the poor is one with our commitment to the coming Kingdom of God. But how is the coming of this Kingdom good news to the poor?

The biblical poor were poor, not just in an economic sense, but in the sense of definite oppressed groupings — they were the class without defence in a godless society, liable to be disinherited, at the mercy of the violent and the mighty. The biblical types of the poor were orphans, widows and strangers; and later with the growth of urbanization, beggars (cf. Lazarus, Luke 16). In society as it then was, there was no one to give them redress. Increasingly the poor looked forward to the coming of God's reign and the universal justice which would flow from it (Psalms 72 : 1-4; 146 : 6-8)¹. Often (cf. Isaiah 2 : 1-4) the Kingdom of God was represented as a city. Mount

Zion, towards which all the nations go on pilgrimage. There God is King, destroying all violence and oppression and establishing the cause of the poor. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, there will be no more training for war. Beasts of prey will eat grass: "they do no hurt nor harm on all my holy mountain" (Isaiah 11 : 6-9).

b) Justice for the poor in God's Kingdom

This kingdom is therefore characterized as a kingdom of peace and justice. 'Justice' in this connection does not refer to an act, but to a situation — that situation of perfect fulfilment of God's covenant in which as a result there is protection for the weak and triumph for the cause of the oppressed and powerless. Such a situation was not merely material or political; it was seen as flowing from the triumph of God's covenant. Israel herself, in her later history oppressed by the nations because of the covenant, saw herself as the poor on whose behalf God would act.

When, therefore, Jesus announced: the time is fulfilled, the Kingdom of God is close at hand (Mark 1 : 15), he was evoking a theme in the people's expectation. He called on them to turn to God and their neighbour in reconciliation and justice

c) Good News for the poor — our aim

The Church works in the world for the realization of the Kingdom. Within the Church, we Spiritans have committed ourselves to realizing one aspect of the Kingdom — as good news for the poor. We bear a particular concern for those who are disadvantaged materially or spiritually. We work to establish a kingdom of justice, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Romans 14:17). This has a wider context than the internal concerns of the Church.

For us, therefore, mission is everywhere, and it would be quite wrong to suggest that Christianity is more or less ill at ease (that is, still poorly inculturated) in the Third World countries, but is, on the other hand well integrated in Europe². The poor are everywhere with us. For us they are:

- those who have not yet heard the gospel message or have scarcely heard it; the oppressed and disadvantaged, individually and collectively; groups, including Churches, whose needs are greatest, or for whom it is difficult to find workers (Rules 4 and 12).

Today's changing world and Church reveal to us new faces of the poor and challenge us to respond in a creative manner. These challenges we have outlined in the section on renewal in apostolic life (4b). With these in mind, each circumscription will carry out a discernment to evaluate its mission, always in dialogue with the General Council and along the general lines decided by the Chapter. One final point: since our mission is directed to that 'civilization of love' which is God's intention for human society, it follows that justice and peace is one of the vital dimensions of our Spiritan life, a criterion for our choice of engagements. We shall later respond in greater detail to the 'desire expressed during the Chapter that we clarify 'justice and peace'.

Reflection

- *How does your community understand mission and what options are open to you?*
- *What are Spiritans doing about justice and peace in your area?*

2. Mission as Communion

*"The local Church is not a Church if it is not Catholic, neither is there a Church Catholic except in the local Churches"*³.

a) The local Church is a communion

The local Church is above all a communion of those united in the confession of the one Lord, Jesus Christ, a communion which expresses itself in the common sharing at the eucharist. Often the local Church gathers within itself peoples of diverse tongues and ways of life, thus already foreshadowing the universal reconciliation brought by Christ. The local Church is called to mission, to attend to the needs of all, both within and without itself.

b) The communion of local Churches

Each local Church, with its presbyterium around its bishop, is both particular and universal, and all are united with one another and with Peter in a bond of faith and love. All share in the task of proclaiming the gospel everywhere, and are obliged to enter into a community of effort for this (LG, 23). Fidei Donum priests and other groups have in recent times originated from this combined effort.

Each individual part of the Church contributes through its special gifts to the good of the other parts and of the whole Church (LG, 13). The diverse riches of the Churches are therefore to be fostered; they manifest the catholicity of the Church (AG, 6).

c) The Congregation is a communion

The Congregation is also a communion. Coming from different cultures, continents and ways of life, we have been gathered together by the Spirit of Pentecost (Rule 35). As the General wrote in his Christmas Message: "Our differences are not obstacles to

unity, but can on the contrary become a way to achieving a unity that is living and dynamic, if they allow us to challenge each other and lead to conversion and a deepening of our life and activity".

In a communion of ideas, we are willing to listen to and accept the different perspectives on mission and life of confreres who live in situations different from our own. This is not easy and will always demand an effort on the part of all.

d) The Congregation in communion with local Churches

The Spiritan community lives and works in close communion with the local Churches (Rule 30). To them we bring the testimony of our religious apostolic life in community. We inspire them to look beyond the needs of their own sacramental life and to respond to the needs of the wider Church and of the world. We participate in the elaboration of goals, offering ourselves for those tasks which conform to our particular vocation. "Be yourselves, but always in relation to others", said an African bishop to one of our district chapters.

From the local Churches we receive the riches of their proper manner of experiencing and confessing Christ. They sometimes reveal to us new ways of living our apostolic life, new tasks and new possibilities, which after due discernment are taken up into our patrimony.

Reflection

- *Examine critically your relationships with the local Church and your engagement in it.*
- *Have you any proposals about unity and diversity in the Congregation?*

3. Mission as Dialogue

a) Dialogue permeates our apostolic life

The Spiritan Rule of Life presents dialogue as one of the essential dimensions of our apostolic life. It is mentioned apropos of community living. It should mark our relationships with local Churches. It is prescribed in our meeting with cultures, the world religions and other Christian bodies. There are even situations where confreres live mission only as dialogue (Pakistan, Ethiopia, Algeria). A recent example of dialogue in act was the World Day of Prayer for Peace by all religions at Assisi, 27th October 1986.

True dialogue is difficult, a goal to be worked at, not a given fact. Sometimes we ourselves or our partners in dialogue are not sincere enough or open enough. Nor does dialogue prohibit or inhibit clear conviction and commitment on the one hand, or formal presentation and evangelization on the other, when this is possible.

b) At the heart of dialogue

An authentic life based on the gospel must for us be at the basis of every dialogue. Such a life is in itself invitation and proposition in terms of deep and lived human values. Dialogue presupposes respect for the dignity of every person, constant effort to detach ourselves from our own culture as a norm in order to enter into the depths of another's experience and aspirations. It implies self-criticism and the ability to let oneself be challenged by the lived experience of another. It is depth speaking to depth in a mutually fruitful exchange.

"Dialogue is thus the norm and necessary manner of every form of Christian mission, as well as of every aspect of it, whether one speaks of simple presence and witness, service or direct proclamation (cf. CIC, 787, 1). Any sense of mission not permeated by such a dialogal spirit would go against the demands of true humanity and against the teachings of the Gospel"⁴.

c) Dialogue and culture

The Spiritan Rule of Life underlines this. It prescribes that we learn the language of our hosts and seek to understand their customs and usages; that we accept with respect the depths of their human and religious experience and seek a fruitful encounter between the Gospel and their tradition of life (Rule 16, 1, 2).

Since no one possesses the truth in a perfect and total way, "mutual affirmation, reciprocal correction and fraternal exchange lead partners in dialogue to an ever greater maturity which in turn generates interpersonal communion. Religious experiences and outlooks can themselves be purified and enriched in this process of encounter"⁵.

Reflection

- *Examine dialogue within your community.*
- *What is happening in your community about inculturation and acculturation?*

4. The Spiritan community in mission

a) Dynamic fidelity to the founders

"That is why loyal recognition should be accorded to the spirit of the founders, as also to all the particular goals and wholesome traditions which constitute the heritage of each community" (PC, 2).

Poullart des Places and Libermann, each in his own way, announced good news to the poor. Each was marked by apostolic zeal, utter gift of self, pliability in the hands of the Holy Spirit, deep interior life and a great sensitivity to the needs of the time. Multitudes of Spiritans in many lands and epochs have built on this patrimony. Fidelity to our founders invites us in our turn to respond in a creative manner to the needs of our time (Rule 2).

b) A renewed apostolic life

We are not 'service stations', but the 'cutting edge' of the Church. Everywhere new needs make fresh calls on us in the places where we work: the overcrowded and uprooted people in the great cities, the problems of youth especially in the towns, refugees, immigrants, exploitation of rural populations, racial discrimination, injustice and war, oppression of the Third World, lack of dialogue between the great religions . . . We need a change in our vision of the Church and world, a change of methods (anthropology, social analysis . . .). We must try to respond

creatively to these new situations, even with the shortage of personnel in some places.

The laity have been called 'the sleeping giant'. In view of the proposed Synod on the Mission of the Laity, it is providential that our Rule should so emphasize our work in the formation of, and collaboration with, the laity. Circumscriptions disengaging from traditional parishes in developed local Churches should consider this apostolate a priority. Please send us reports about programs and experiments in this area.

c) Renewal in religious life

The world is experiencing a spiritual hunger. Many are searching for ways of prayer and the interior life. To them we should bring a heart each day renewed in Christ (Rule 50) and our particular tradition of 'practical union', always bearing in mind that true evangelizing zeal does not spring from impulsiveness of character but from union with the Lord. Our very religious life in community is itself a means of evangelization, an invitation.

d) Community renewal

A great yearning for community is one of the marks of our times. Many new communities are

springing up in the Church. The Church, especially in her eucharistic community, is the sign and instrument of the community of all humankind (cf. LG, 1). Our religious community within the Church is an intensification of this unity and reconciliation. Nevertheless, true community is always a goal for which we strive. It demands a common vision, common goals, self-denial in the service of others and adequate structures for sharing and support.

That is why the Rule prescribes the vision statement (*projet communautaire*, Rule 41.3) elaborated by the community at every level. It specifies the aims and services of the community, its apostolate and methods, also the material means (including the rhythm of prayer, the style and quality of common living . . .) to achieve its goals. These are regularly evaluated by the community.

5. Solidarity

a) Solidarity in mission

All that has been said concerning mission as dialogue, mission as communion, true community life, find expression in a reality to which the Chapter attached great importance: solidarity. It is a 'spirit' to be developed; the future of the Congregation may depend on it. We are all conscious of sharing in the one mission, each member taking charge of a different aspect of it. To say that there is solidarity between the circumscriptions is to say that the older provinces feel responsible for the future of the foundations and young provinces, but also that the foundations and young provinces are concerned about the future of the older provinces: at the level of sharing and exchange we are all equal. We are all concerned that some old provinces are in danger of phasing out. The future will probably see an increase in exchanges and in internationality within the Congregation. Modifications may be called for in our present organization. Already regional cooperation is a fact in some areas, and there are suggestions about formal regionalization. Solidarity in formation and in the other forms of animation within the Congregation may demand concerted planning and exchange of qualified personnel.

b) The Foundations and young Provinces

Having stressed that solidarity is incumbent on all and extends to all, we would want to draw attention to the great need of the foundations and young provinces. We must, however, first thank all the circumscriptions for the very generous donations to Cor Unum in recent years. We encourage you to give even more. We are having to set up formation structures in many foundations because of the abundant vocations. Buildings are in progress in the Spiritan International School of Theology, Enugu, and work will soon begin on extensions in Brazzaville for a theologium to be fully independent by 1988. A philosophicum is underway in Arusha, and construction will start in 1987 on a novitiate and philosophicum in Kumasi. Foyers for candidates are foreseen in the Indian Ocean, Puerto Rico and Spain.

For some time in the future these foundations will depend on your solidarity for formation and animation personnel.

Local communities are to be promoted and strengthened wherever possible. Regional communities, where they have proved useful, are equally to be given better structures according to Rule 30.4. We propose, for the use of all, the document *Experiencing Community*, presented (in French) at the Chapter. (The English translation will be sent out later.)

Reflection

- ✦ Give two or three urgent needs of renewal in your area.
- What is needed to create true community in your area?

c) Solidarity with the General Council

May we add that, with the present style of government in the Congregation, the Superior General and Council cannot fulfil their role of coordination and animation unless the Congregation lives at all levels this spirit of solidarity. Each circumscription should, for example, feel itself jointly responsible for projects of the Congregation decided by the General Chapter.

Reflection

- How do you see regionalization?
- How can we promote solidarity within the Congregation?

Conclusion

The General Council considers it important for its style of animation to be in constant touch with life at the grassroots. It is important that we work together to give concrete expression to these guidelines in the different aspects of our mission. By exchanging our experiences and evaluating them together, we enrich one another with what the Spirit does in us within the different cultures and local Churches.

THE GENERAL COUNCIL

References

- ¹ See J. Dupont, *Les Beatitudes*, t. 2, (J. Gabalda, Paris, 1969), 70 ff.
 - ² Jean-Yves Calvez, *Lumen Vitae*, XL (1985), 72.
 - ³ J. Komonchak, *Sedos Bulletin* 86, no. 10 (15 Nov. 1986), 283.
 - ⁴ *Dialogue and Mission*. Statement of the Cong. for Non-Christian Religions, in their *Bulletin*, 1984, XIX/2, 56, n. 29.
 - ⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 21.
- AG — *Ad Gentes*. Vat. II Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity.
LG — *Lumen Gentium*. Vat. II Dogmatic Constitution on the Church.
PC — *Perfectae Caritatis*. Vat. II Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of Religious Life.
Rule - *Spiritian Rule of Life*, 1986.