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The Holy Spirit in the Writings of Libermann (Part II)

Francis Xavier Malinowski C.S.Sp.

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Francis X. Malinowski, C.S.Sp.

Francis X. Malinowski, C.S.Sp. (1921-2006) had a 25-year tenure at Duquesne University (1967-92), part of which as chair of the theology department. After studies in Fribourg University, Switzerland, he was ordained priest in October 1950 in Chevilly, France. He taught sacred Scripture at St. Mary Seminary in Norwalk, Conn. (1959-67), was visiting scholar in Heidelberg, Germany (1969) and Cambridge University (1973), receiving the doctorate degree in New Testament studies at Duke University in 1973. Malinowski had deep reverence for Father Francis Libermann and wrote Newsletters and insightful monographs on his spirituality. He is buried in the Spiritan graveyard at Holy Ghost Prep School, Bensalem, Philadelphia.

THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE WRITINGS OF LIBERMANN

PART II: LED BY THE SPIRIT

B. The Spirit and Oraison [Prayer]

The Spirit starts his action in Baptism, clothing us in sanctifying grace that essentially connects us to the Trinity. But for this inchoate grace to blossom into conscious union with the Trinity, exposure to the Spirit is absolutely necessary. Libermann calls this intentional exposure “*oraison*,” which we translate as “prayer.”

Prayer [“*oraison*”] as Libermann meant is not “mental prayer.” He writes: “...ordinarily one starts with meditation which is not strictly speaking “*oraison*” [prayer] but a preparation for it ... “¹ Mental prayer is thinking about something, it is meditating for the purpose of exciting the will (ES 115); in “*oraison*” we do not merely think of God, but relate to him, are aware of him, look at him as it were face to face. It is a direct prayer, contrasted with meditation as indirect prayer. It is being present to God, aware that he is present to us. “*Oraison*” brings to bear the unitive virtues of faith, hope, and love, called theological because they touch on God immediately (ES 8), exercising these virtues like nothing else can. In this “theological” environment, the Holy Spirit, the giver of these virtues in Baptism, takes over because of our innate weakness and helplessness. It is he who prays in us, whose sole object is to make us adhere to Jesus in a faith excited by hope and energized with love.

Praying thus in the Spirit we assimilate some of his holiness and this triggers apostolic zeal; the Spirit so gives us a taste for the love that Jesus has for us that we understand better Paul’s “*caritas Christi urget nos*” (the love of Christ impels us, 2 Cor 5:14). Increasingly, the one who prays such “*oraison*” experiences the holiness of the Spirit seeping through soul and body. One effect is that increasingly the poor and the weak and the oppressed haunt one’s prayer and life.

Of course, prayer cannot be a substitute for the apostolic life of service to the poor and the oppressed nor can there be any apostolic excuse for neglecting prayer. Like Jesus, we desire in our prayer the realization of God’s plan of salvation for all and we work at it with him. Jesus’

prayer was rooted in his Trinitarian relationship radiating out into the world for its salvation. In that prayer-relationship was the only power that could realize God's plan of salvation. The power of the Spirit ("if it is by the Spirit of God I drive out demons," Matt 12:28) is a power which has to be to be prayed for and received.²

The important thing is reaching what Libermann calls a "*state of prayer*," an awareness not of the topics of prayer but of God himself to whom we attend wholeheartedly. We know we don't need to go here or there or anywhere to engage in such communion with God. We need only look within.

Descend deeply into your innermost self and never come out. If you do that, your joy will be full and the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ will flood your soul ... For as long as you remain withdrawn into your heart of hearts you will always find the Holy Spirit there, who will lift you up and transport you to the top of that mountain of love which our Lord has built for his elect, and he will fill you with his graces, lights, beauty and happiness.³

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Libermann allows no justification for neglecting prayer. "There is definitely no relation with God without prayer [*oraison*]" (ES 212). Pope Saint John Paul II writes of religious life: "No movement of religious life has any importance unless it is also movement inward to the "*still center*" of your existence, where Christ is."⁴ Libermann too writes about the "still center":

May Jesus be everything in you, and may his Spirit be the unique life of your soul. Always go your way, or rather, let the divine guide lead you, who dwells in the center of your soul.⁵

Prayer is where the Spirit forges a sweet and peaceful soul, *fixing* our eyes on Jesus in union with the Father.

Lay open your inner being before our Lord so that you can sweetly [*doucement*] fix it on him, unite your heart to God; sometimes, keep it in repose, in his holy presence, looking at him thus with an eye of love, without effort, without forced attentiveness, but rather with sweetness [*douceur*] and suavity; sometimes, allow your soul to flow sweetly [*doucement*] into the bosom

Libermann speaks here in the language of lovers, not the cool and objective language of the philosopher or businessman. It's reminiscent of childlike simplicity.

Prayer [*oraison*] is... a very simple matter... It should consist in a repose which is simple, peaceful, and full of confidence before our Lord; that is all. There is no need to look for many reflections or produce many acts of the will. Force nothing. Stand before Jesus like a needy and helpless child before his father, nothing more. Desire to be at his service. Be content with an interior glance towards him from time to time, with that intention. Do the same thing in the course of the day; from time to time an effortless glance, aware of belonging to him and aware of our own inability, b u t always with peace and in the calm desire to belong to him as you are. Look for nothing more.⁷

“Prayer reforms faults of character. If we want to know if we have made true progress .in prayer [oraison], see if our faults perceptibly diminish...”

Libermann knew that praying like this would surely permeate the practical living out of life, changing profoundly the one praying. “The more we are men of prayer [*oraison*], the more our soul with its faculties and senses is perfected in the natural order and in the supernatural order” (ES 212). “Prayer reforms faults of character. If we want to know if we have made true progress in prayer [*oraison*], see if our faults perceptibly diminish. Natural faults cannot hold out against true *oraison*” (ES 107). “Prayer is one of the most powerful means and even perhaps unique means for surmounting our bad inclinations because it puts us in rapport with God” (ES 216). Life lived this way keeps the one praying in constant contact with Jesus, in “*practical union*.” In the praying person the Spirit finds room, opportunity, and liberty to be the Spirit of holiness who produces “the greatest marvels of his grace.”

C. Oraison and Douceur

Prayer in awareness of God gives rise to inner calm, contentment and peace.”⁸ Libermann calls this array of attitudes “sweetness” (*douceur*), which also defines his notion of how holiness comes to be. It is not a state of being that launches out into a self-activating holiness

but a readiness to be impressed by the Holy Spirit. It is a condition of passiveness and receptivity that attracts to itself rather than reaching out to make or change this or that. It is like a magnet that attracts the Holy Spirit.

True to biblical teaching, Libermann regards the Spirit as the one who breathes life into us in a noiseless, invisible, and creative way. The Spirit is the creator of the life of Jesus in us into whose image he intends to make us. This life of Jesus is a total supernatural life, a life only possible through the Spirit who gave purpose to the death and resurrection of Jesus. It is a life, something that can grow. It surges up (John 4:13) to eternal fullness. It is no automatic growth nor a blind surge, but effected by the Spirit acting within our total humanness. Libermann insists on the necessity of a *favorable climate* in which the Spirit can be powerfully active. Attitudes of anxiety, grouchiness, surliness, sullenness, impetuosity, impatience, e.t.c., disturb this climate and cause the Spirit to be null and without effect.

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Commentators on Libermann's spirituality focus on this "climate" differently. Some see it as a *peaceful soul*, others as *abandonment*, others as *self-denial*—attitudes that occur frequently in Libermann's exhortations. He did not mean muscular effort or mental strain. "Never strain with head or heart to maintain recollection or arouse good feelings towards our Lord." "In order for God to act in us, it is extremely important to keep oneself in continual peace before him; it is even the unique means of arriving at the interior spirit" (ESS 47).

Libermann thus often warns against "*contention*." In his last conferences in 1851, he defined contention as straining in an aggressive manner to be virtuous and prayerful by one's own natural efforts. Libermann saw a lot of this among seminarians. Not a few of his associates suffered incapacitating headaches, namely, Beauchef, Bureau, Roussel, Lannurien, Briot, Regnier. F. X. Libermann (his nephew), even Frédéric Levavasseur who for four years was not able to read even a few lines in a book or pray a decade of the rosary. Libermann was horrified by the violent and futile struggle these young men engaged in. He warned of the devastation: "All this was really spiritual sensuality" (ESS 180), the cultivation of self-love (ND 4.229). For it was a denial of the supernatural character of holiness; it wanted what it could see and feel, it was confident in human muscular

power to produce the physical signs of holiness. But only the Holy Spirit can sanctify and create union with God.

The theme of “*douceur*” is increasingly seen as a central element in Libermann’s spiritual insight and missionary spirituality. But “*douceur*” is not “meekness” and “gentleness.” James C. Okoye, C.S.Sp.¹⁰ translated “*doux*” as “meek” of the Beatitudes. But “meekness” evokes non-violence, nonresistance, both negative attitudes whereas “sweetness” [*douceur*] is positive, like goodness, mildness, tenderness, affection, all in the one word. A woman might call a man “sweet” meaning tender, concerned, thoughtful, loving; she certainly wouldn’t use “meek” in that context. Adrian van Kaam, C.S.Sp.¹¹ uses “gentleness,” but acknowledges it does not do justice to Libermann’s conception of *douceur* which defies translation in English. Some find the translation “sweetness” archaic, even repulsive. Others combine words, for example, “loving gentleness,” avoiding the saccharine taste suggested by “sweetness,” but retaining the element of love missing from “gentleness” and “meekness.”

The context of the word “*douceur*” and its cognates (“*doux*” “*doucement*”) often leaves little room for limiting Libermann’s understanding of the word to “gentleness” and “meekness.”

Sweetness [*douceur*]... one of the most beautiful virtues that our Lord brought to earth is not only practiced towards others, it first touches ourselves. It proceeds directly from our union with God, it is a ray of Jesus’ love flowing into our souls to refine them by removing uncouthness and harshness of which they are full. This ray of love gives off a suavity which is felt in all our actions. Those who possess lovable sweetness [*douceur*] open themselves up before God with tenderness and receive everything from his love with suavity, joys as well as sufferings. In peaceful humiliation of heart they patiently put up with their own troubles and imperfections. They maintain with their neighbor and with themselves such suavity and tenderness of heart that they win over everybody and diffuse God’s blessing on all capable of it (ESS 39).

So more than gentleness and meekness we are dealing with union with God, with Jesus' love for us. "*Douceur*" flows from that union and love. It is an integral element of loving union. Love does not exist without it.

It is the life of Jesus that Libermann wants to see reproduced in us through the Spirit.

Be careful, friends, that it doesn't become your sweetness [*douceur*]. It isn't a question of your being sweet [*doux*], but that Jesus living in you lives there with his Spirit of sweetness [*douceur*] and suavity.¹²

Hence, Jesus in his Spirit is the source of our "sweetness." Its nature is divine, celestial and irresistible. It proceeds from the Spirit who unites us in love with Jesus and makes us experience within ourselves the sweetness of Jesus. In this sense, a "sweet" person is not just a gentle person, but loving and tender, caring, warm, pleasant, accessible, pliable, mild, compassionate, kind, sympathetic, and empathetic, devoid of harshness, bitterness, and vengefulness. There's a beauty in such people that even an ugly physique cannot conceal. Jesus is the original sweet person, it is his sweetness that makes us sweet and can create the climate for authentic growth in holiness by the Holy Spirit.

Libermann's teaching on "*douceur*" depends on biblical imagery. Jesus said, "Learn of me for I am "*doux* [sweet] *et humble de coeur*" (Libermann's French text of Matt 11:29). He "grew in grace before God and man" (Luke 2:52). He was easy to approach. Children saw he liked them and they found him likeable.

The Tradition of the Church has retained the meaning of "*douceur*" as "sweetness" in its devotion to Mary, the Mother of Jesus. It likes to call her "*Dulcis Virgo Maria*" (sweet Virgin Mary), "*Dulcedo Nostra*" (our sweetness). We mean much more than gentleness, rather loveliness, tenderness, responsiveness, warm embrace.

The "*douceur*" that proceeds from union with God and is a ray of Jesus' love for us is beyond our control. It is pure gift, grace. It is something that the Spirit wraps us up in, clothes us with, soaks us in, to use common similes of Libermann. We become meek, gentle, and "sweet" with a sense of being loved that leads to fulfillment, contentment, expanding affection.

D. Douceur and Self-Denial

Through the sweet serenity of soul produced by the Holy Spirit in prayer we find ourselves wanting to repudiate anything that disturbs it (=self-denial) so that union with God remains the one absolute good of Jesus' love. Self-denial finds its *raison d'être* in the experience of sweetness that "proceeds directly from our union with God" (ESS 39).

Libermann affirmed the absolute necessity of self-denial: "The true means of preparing yourself for a great gift of prayer is the most perfect self-denial ... Once entirely empty of every creature and yourself, you will be disposed and ready to receive the Spirit of God with abundance" (ibid).

His idea of self-denial is expressed in shocking imagery and language: "annihilate one's own faculties," "desire to be nothing and abject before God and man," "beat yourself down," "crush the old man." Libermann was a man of his time. P. Blanchard¹³ ties Libermann's strong insistence on self-denial to his long exposure to the French School: "The principle [of self-denial] is the object of penetrating and prolonged reflection in the perspectives offered by the French School."

Libermann's language discloses a gospel urgency¹⁴ and clarifies the memorable saying he uttered not long before he died: "God is all, man is nothing," an expression totally biblical and profoundly exposing the spiritual thrust of the Bible. Libermann insists that the Spirit operates best when the human being realizes he is poor and nothing by himself.¹⁴ It's not a question of self-humiliation, rather of experiencing our desperate need to rely on the Spirit. This is the core of how the Spirit fashions a person in holiness as he marvelously did in the Virgin Mary.

Holiness as the work of the Holy Spirit should guide us in assessing Libermann's "dark side" of self-denial. He is not recommending psychical stamina or a future without laughter, rather something like Thérèse of Lisieux experienced. When her sister marveled that she must have suffered a great deal and given up a lot to have reached sanctity, Thérèse answered, "No, it isn't that!" She is not denying the mortification and suffering she endured. She is saying that looking at them as the painful cause of her holiness misses the point; love came

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first and total love means total and exclusive self-gift that is joyful.

Libermann is not proposing an active and *afflictive* program of mortification, rather a *passive* stance, a kind of negative (*privative*) mortification in which we give up our own planning and choosing and accept what happens to us in everyday living, seeing in the present moment the hand of Providence. “The most sanctifying crosses are those that come to us independently of our willing them,”¹⁶ he writes. Both P. Blanchard and Liagre see Libermann as close in this to Saint Thérèse.¹⁷ However, some “afflictive mortification” may help prime the pump, as it were, for better discernment of the Spirit’s call to “privative mortification.” Moreover, such “afflictive mortification” can be expressive of a deep sense of Jesus’ love and sacrifice for us, filling the need to respond to his love and sacrifice. And in some cases Libermann did allow it for a short time,¹⁸ as long as it emanates from divine attraction and from a calm interior attraction without anxiety and tenseness.

E. Self-Denial and Divine Providence¹⁹

For Libermann, privative self-denial protects and nurtures sweetness [*douceur*]. It accepts the privations occurring in daily life (which he calls “providential”). His missionaries will have enough suffering without looking for it in bodily self-affliction. He presupposes God is actively engaged in bringing everything that is happening into such a harmonious interplay to achieve his purposes in creating and redeeming. Divine Providence runs things sweetly and effectively. We have no control over this “sweet and effective” action of Providence, but are players in the game, consciously or unconsciously, because our decisions and actions are taken up into this divine plan. For our own good, we can be a contributor and enjoy a glimpse of how nicely things turn out in the long run. This means waiting for the right time to do something or recognizing the right time in what is happening around us.

Libermann waited confidently for the signs and actions of God’s moment.

It seems to me that anyone ... who counts on his own forces can be stopped before an obstacle; but when one counts on our adorable Master alone, what difficulty need be feared? We

His missionaries will have enough suffering without looking for it in bodily self-affliction.

Francis X. Malinowski,
C.S.Sp.

stop only when there is a wall in front of us, waiting patiently and confidently until there is an opening, then we pass through as if nothing had happened.²⁰

Libermann was conscious that his plans never turned out the way he expected, that divine Providence brought about results that exceeded his hopes. His confidant, Frédéric Levavasseur, wrote:

...our dear Father took great pains to wait for the moment of God when he had some good work to do. He was not slow to act when it was necessary, but he knew how to wait a long time for indications of the will of God and his moments; this dependence on the conduct of God, this fidelity to observe his moments, he carried over to the least circumstance (ND 1.339-331).

Waiting for God's moment appears frequently in Libermann's recommendations regarding apostolic work. He knew how to wait for things to mature before making decisions and taking action. He excelled in discerning this "moment" when dealing with his missionaries in Africa, despite having to wait months, sometimes many months, for events to gel and personnel to measure up to his expectations.

... "waiting for God's moment"...

The word "moment" appears for the first time in his Rennes' correspondence (1837-39) when apparent lack of success, feelings of uselessness, re-emerging epileptic seizures, and perhaps, unexplainable to him, absence of God ravaged his physical and emotional being.²¹ He had nothing to rely on except God who would act only in his own time. This could explain why from then on "waiting for God's moment" occurs increasingly in his letters until the end of his life.

Libermann often referred to the divine management of affairs in Wisdom 8:1, "*Attingit a fine usque ad finem fortiter, et disponit omnia suaviter*" (which he translated, "*La Sagesse atteint avec force d'un bout a l'autre, et dispose tout avec douceur*" – wisdom reaches with force from one end to the other and disposes everything sweetly). He saw this passage as biblical justification for his exhortations to nurture sweetness [*douceur*] interiorly and exteriorly, so that the Spirit can operate more easily within the person

and that apostolic action proceed effectively in imitation of Jesus.²² The missionary is not discouraged by lack of success or emotional satisfaction in his prayer or absence of human comfort.

F. Practical Union: The Goal of the Holy Spirit's Actions

According to Libermann the Spirit of God is a Holy Spirit, who starts the process of holiness in Baptism and intends that it be finished. The human being, when aware in faith that the Spirit is present within him, responds in the only "logical" way possible: he lets the Spirit in a climate of sweetness lead him into the holiness of living for God and for others, holiness and zeal being integrated, each in the other, each unable to do without the other. This integration Libermann calls *practical union*.

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Practical union offers a *new way of looking* at the holiness for which his missionaries willingly undertook difficult and dangerous works. This was not a new secret for achieving holiness. There is nothing in his explanations of practical union that cannot be found in his earlier writings.²³ Nor does he give the impression of discovering something new.

As far as we know, he first used the expression in 1851 the year before his death (February 2, 1852). The expression does not appear in his letters. It is only found in his *Instructions for Missionaries* (ES 480-96, 1851) and in the notes Father Lannurien took at Libermann's conferences (ND 13.697-702). Hence, it is used in situations where Libermann can give it special attention. Father Jean Le Meste, C.S.Sp.²⁴ thinks that the formula, "practical union," was too loaded with meaning to be treated informally in a letter. He wrote:

perhaps this new expression, which served to bring together his thought on a crucial point, appeared to Libermann too complex and too rich to be grasped on the fly, when he had no leisure to explain it. For the expression contains, it seems, the last stage of a doctrine which needed a concise and significant formula.

It seems to have been forged out of awareness of his missionaries' experiences in equatorial Africa where they labored in enervating climates, crude living conditions, and exhausting apostolic endeavors. Prayer

Francis X. Malinowski,
C.S.Sp.

proved to be difficult and unattractive. Yet they knew, as Libermann taught them, that without prayer there was not much chance of growing in holiness which, in turn, was absolutely necessary if they were going to be effective missionaries. Libermann urged them to persevere in prayer despite the lack of feeling or consciousness of union.

Tell our beloved brothers not to be at all discouraged if they feel no sensible piety, if they experience a certain lassitude due to the heat and difficulty in praying well. They are not children any more: so they have to be vigorous in walking in God's ways without bodily enjoyment. They must seek God for God himself and in God.²⁵

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Libermann studied the nature of prayer all his life—people who knew him said “he had an answer for every difficulty in prayer.” He learned that many people desired a life of solitude and contemplative prayer which he himself longed for. But, for him, this was not the superior form of prayer and life, because that was not the way Jesus lived. Jesus didn't remain in the mountains to pray or in less populated places to get away from the people but exposed himself to the public at large. He worked for his Father and nothing other than that. “I always do what is pleasing to him” (John 8:29) denotes active ministry and connotes unbroken union with God his Father. His life was the complete blending of prayer and action. The example of Jesus himself should convince them that the integration of prayer and ministry through practical union was possible and necessary.

The apostolic life is that life of love and holiness the Son of God led on earth in order to save and sanctify people, and by which he continually sacrificed himself for the glory of God and the salvation of the world (ND 10.505, *Règlement* of 1849).

Libermann knew that his missionaries will have more than enough work. They will not easily find the satisfaction of being successful nor of enjoying what they are doing for God. The climate and work will see to that. They will not “feel” holy. But the process of holiness is going on in profound ways and with startling effectiveness, because they have entrusted themselves

to God. “The soul is directed towards God and that renders its actions holy” (ES 96). The attestation of one of his former novices at Rennes (M. Mangot) shows how Libermann realized this teaching in his own life:

One day I made this observation to him [Libermann]: It seems to me that your very busy life opposes habitual union with God. He answered: on the contrary, as each new duty rises, I appeal to God for his assistance, and then it happens that the more I have to do the more my union with God is strengthened (ND 1.521).

Libermann sees his missionaries as men of action (often he calls practical union “*active union*”). He expects them to be busy people, engrossed in apostolic tasks (preaching, establishing churches, liberating people from ignorance, poverty, and oppression). The experience of his missionaries compelled him to think in terms of practical union. That teaching, in his mind, belongs naturally in a missionary world.

Libermann calls this union “practical” because it relates to “the ordinary habits of life” (ES 496). In these daily experiences he talks of “directing ourselves towards God” (ES 96), “tending towards God” (ES 491), “being inclined towards God” (ES 447), “being attached to God” (ES 448). Practical union is initiated and developed in tending towards God, intending God as the purpose of our actions.

He describes practical union in various ways, all reminiscent of biblical teaching and experience.²⁶

It is a question of living and acting practically under the influence of and in dependence on Jesus Christ who lives [in us] (ND 13.684).

To attain a habitual tendency towards practical union with God it is necessary to be zealous in adhering practically to all that pleases him (ES 486).

...the soul inspired by grace is united to God in the acts and ordinary habits of life by faith, hope and love ... In that is the foundation of the union of the soul and the essence of its holiness (ND 13.410).

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"In such a union [practical] the soul is faithful to God's grace in all the big and little circumstances of everyday life and sees everything in its relationship to God and God alone."

Practical union is what Paul means when he says "that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised" (2 Cor 5:15). This Pauline text, among others, shows how traditional Libermann's teaching is and easy to hand. Practical union touches on everything we do and experience, "the acts and ordinary habits of life." James Okoye²⁷ says that it "describes...a total relationship, a spirituality." Alphonse Gilbert²⁸ comments: "in order to describe the way of practical union the entire spirituality of Libermann needs to be summarized." Henry Koren goes simply to its essential nature: "In such a union [practical] the soul is faithful to God's grace in all the big and little circumstances of everyday life and sees everything in its relationship to God and God alone."²⁹

These authors stress the all-embracing nature of Libermann's conception of practical union, which he also calls "*active union*" and "*habitual union*," both synonyms stressing the pervasiveness of this union throughout human life. It is a union that comes to terms with a busy apostolic life and finds in that apostolic life the expression of its relationship with Christ, rooted and developed in prayer, initiated and sustained by the Holy Spirit. The interplay of prayer and apostolic activity becomes a fertile field for the Holy Spirit, the same Spirit who is "the author and consummator of all holiness and inspirer of the apostolic spirit (ND 10.568; *Règlements* 1849).

Mary who was overshadowed by the Holy Spirit lived to perfection "in the ordinary habits of living" the faith, hope and love that brings to fruition practical union. The Magnificat (Luke 1: 46-55) reveals that she could rejoice in God her Savior in ecstatic prayer and at the same time be concerned about the hungry, the oppressed and the weak and conscious of her people Israel. In her decisions she always says, "Be it done to me according to thy word." Her Son remembered best about her that "Blessed rather is she [they] who hears the word of God and keeps it." That is why the *Spiritian Rule of Life* asserts that "we live out our mission in willing obedience to the Holy Spirit, taking Mary as our Model."

Conclusion

Practical union is the summit of the life of grace given by the Holy Spirit in Baptism. It shows that that

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life was meant to affect human life in all its ordinary habits and acts. Noteworthy in Libermann's teaching about practical union is the apostolic emphasis this expression evokes. Tending towards God must reach out to all human beings; pleasing God in every way includes all human beings, particularly those who are in misery and are abandoned. The Spirit is a power and energy, but a "sweet" Spirit who accomplishes his purposes in practical union in a smooth and solid way. The Baptism Spirit is an "*apostolic Spirit*" bent on comforting poor human beings through the vibrant apostolic effort of those deep into practical union. It is the sweet and gentle Jesus that the missionary works for and sweet union with him provides the space and freedom for the Holy Spirit to accomplish the salvific economy of the Father.

Francis X. Malinowski, C.S.Sp.

Endnotes

¹*Notes et Documents XIII*, 698: Libermann's last conferences based on Fr. Lannurien's notes. The references are as follows: CSJ: *Commentaire de L'Evangile de saint Jean*; DS: *Directoire spirituel*; ES: *Ecrits spirituels*; ESS: *Ecrits spirituels supplements*; RP: *Règle provisoire*; IM: *Instructions aux missionnaires*; LS: *Lettres spirituelles*; ND: *Notes et Documents*.

²All the Gospels speak of Jesus praying often and exhorting to prayer. Luke in particular gives the most emphasis: 3:21; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18, 28, 29; 11:1; 22:32, 41, 45, etc.

³LS 1.386, Jan 1838, to M. Tisserant, seminarian; ND 1.495.

⁴*John Paul II Speaks to Religious: 1978-1980*, ed. Jean Beyer, S.J., no. 375. Recently, well-known Trappists (T. Keating, B. Pennington, both influenced by Thomas Merton) have been propagating the practice of Centering Prayer. This type of prayer absorbs input from Oriental mysticism, especially in the use of the body, and the rich Catholic tradition of mystical experience as represented in books, like *The Cloud of Unknowing*. It is based on the belief, like that of Libermann on prayer, that the Holy Spirit is present and always operative in the soul and seeking to open up space for God in it.

⁵LS 1.386, Jan 1838, to M. Tisserant, seminarian; ND

Francis X. Malinowski,
C.S.Sp.

1.495.

⁶LS 3.166, Dec 1842, to M. Guédant, seminarian; ND 3.351.

⁷ND 7.37-38, Jan 1845, to M. Collin; LS 3.462-63. See LS 3.479.

⁸In the New Testament writings “peace” is the most prized effect of believing in Christ and being laid hold of by the Spirit: “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, endurance, kindness, generosity, faith, mildness and chastity” (Gal 5:22-23). The first word of the risen Christ was *SHALOM* (peace). Libermann not only exhorted to peace but also tried to show the “logical” connection between peace of soul and holiness. “In order for God to act in us, it is extremely important to keep oneself in continual peace before him; it is even the unique means of arriving at the interior spirit” (ESS 47).

⁹LS 3.254, May 1843, to a novice, Sister Paule.

¹⁰*Spiritan Papers*, no. 20 (Dec 1986), 93. n.8.

¹¹*A Light to the Gentiles: the Life Story of the Venerable Francis Libermann* (Lanham, University Press of America, 1985), 275.

¹²LS 2.28-29, Jul 1838, to several seminarians per M. Leray; ND 1.431.

¹³*Le Vénérable Libermann, 1802-1852*, I. 428.

¹⁴Jesus’ lack of interest in family (Mark 3:31-35), politics (Mark 12:13-17), property rights (Luke 12:13-15), man-made beauty (Mark 13:1-2) underlines his passion for the “one thing necessary,” namely, the will of his Father. He translates this into his teaching on human ‘inability to serve two Masters (Luke 16:13).

¹⁵Jean le Meste on Libermann’s “practical union,” *Spiritus*, no. 22, 6 (1965), p. 31 so summarizes Libermann’s spirituality: “simple in his direction, Father Libermann had only one aim: to give his own people the haunting sense of their absolute poverty before a work taken up and to provoke in them an unquenchable thirst for living water which resumes the entire prayer of the missionary.”

¹⁶LS 2. 92. Aug 1838, to Paul Carron, seminarian; ND 1.511.

“In order for God to act in us, it is extremely important to keep oneself in continual peace before him;...”

¹⁷Blanchard says: “One has claimed that Saint Thérèse had effected... a real revolution in substituting for an asceticism of grandeur that emphasized crucifying performances an asceticism of littleness that preferred interior mortifications. From 1835 to 1850, in France, the Venerable P. Libermann had begun this revolution in his direction of innumerable people who entrusted themselves to him” (I. 436). Louis Liagre, “*Saint Thérèse de l’Enfant Jésus et le vénérable père Libermann*,” Conference, Feb 2, 1926 at Blanche de Mortain Abbey, 1936 on the spirituality of Thérèse and Libermann, singled out profound similarities between them, especially in the priority of love.

¹⁸LS 2.135, Dec 1838, to M. de Goy; ND 1.438; LS 3.29-30, Feb 1842, to M. Lannurien. This kind of mortification would consist in fasting, long prayers, discipline, wearing hair shirts, anything that would inflict pain on the body (ND 13.72, Mar 1851, to M. Collin) and block the emergence of a sweet disposition essential to the Spirit working in us.

¹⁹[I heavily abridged this section; readers very interested in this topic may want to consult the original. Editor].

²⁰LS 2.476, Aug 1840, to E. Dupont, seminarian; ND 2.171.

²¹Authors consider the Rennes experience (July 1837-Dec 1839) pivotal in his spiritual development. The excruciating desolation and sense of personal uselessness and failure echoed the classic experience of “the dark night of the soul” so impressively described by John of the Cross.

²²LS 3.17, Jan 1842, to Ign. Schwindenhammer (ND 3.104); LS 3.73, Jul 1842, to L. Levavasseur (ND 3.226); LS 3.180, Jan 1843 (Dec 1843?), to Louise des Loges (Sr. Aurelie); ND 11.317, Dec 1849, to M. Fridoli. For Libermann’s usage of Wisdom 8:1 see Joseph Lecuyer, “Libermann’s Commentary of Wisdom VIII, 1,” *Spiritual Papers*, vol. 13 (Sept-Dec, 1980), 4-31.

²³In 1829 (ND 1.134-35) he urged M. Viot to the “holy practice” of doing nothing without raising the mind to Jesus and asking for help which is the same as living in God’s presence; in 1836 (LS 1.163-64) he explained to M. Mangat that continual prayer consists in the unique desire of pleasing God in everything; in 1845 (ND 7.213) he tried to encourage M. Perée to be attached to Jesus in everything and united to him in action; in 1847 (LS

Francis X. Malinowski,
C.S.Sp.

4.547) he counselled J. Schwindenhammer to have a sincere intention (a key word in Libermann's elaboration of his thought on practical union) to be for God. Similar ideas occur in the materials he prepared for discussion in the "Bands of Piety" at Issy and St. Sulpice (ESS 1-57).

²⁴"Libermann et 'union pratique,'" *Spiritus 6* (1965), 29-43, here 34.

²⁵LS 4.59-60, April 1842, to Fr. Levavasseur; ND 4.198.

²⁶He knows what has been the practice of the biblical saints. Adam, Henoah and Abraham "walked before God." Micah (6:8) counselled: "what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" Jesus taught that God blesses those who do his word like Mary who, completely trustful of God, was ready for the word to be done in her life. The essence of this biblical experience can be summed up in memorable Pauline statements: "If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's" (Rom 14:8). "And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Col 3:17).

²⁷*Spiritans Papers*, no. 20 (Dec 1986), 91.

²⁸*Le feu sur la terre*, 182.

²⁹*The Spiritans: a History of the Congregation of the Holy Ghost*. 1958, p. 158.