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## III. Community Life in the Spiritan Tradition

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Francis, the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life emphasizes that through prayer, especially the Eucharist, the members of the community can come to experience the humanizing power of the Gospel which is expressed through mutual respect, kindness and joy: “The community that sits at table and recognizes Jesus in the breaking of bread (cf. Lk 24:13-35) is also the place in which each one recognizes his frailty: Fraternity does not produce perfect relationships, but welcomes the limitations of all and takes them to heart and to prayer as a wound inflicted on the commandment of love (cf. Jn 13:31-35): a place where the pascal mystery brings healing and where unity grows.”<sup>17</sup>

*For reflection*

- a) *What do you learn from the community of Jesus and that of the first Christians?*
- b) *How do you handle the tension between unity and diversity in your communities and circumscriptions?*

### **III. COMMUNITY LIFE IN THE SPIRITAN TRADITION**

Claude Poullart des Places and Francis Libermann placed community at the centre of Spiritan life. While Poullart des Places sees community as the best place to form future apostolic workers, Libermann makes it the essential dimension of the apostolic missionary life.

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<sup>17</sup> Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Keep Watch, Year of Consecrated Life*, Rome 2014, p. 55.

### 3.1 POUILLART DES PLACES: THE FORMATIVE DIMENSION OF COMMUNITY LIFE

**P**oullart des Places started his work in 1703 with the foundation of a community designated as the Seminary of the Holy Spirit. He believed that it is in the experience of community that future ministers will develop the spirit of availability (*paratus ad omnia*). Community is thus a sort of laboratory of human and spiritual life, where the individual learns self-donation.

At the beginning of 1703, Claude signified the act of foundation of the community by leaving the comfort and isolation of his apartment in St Louis-le-Grand and joining the discomfort of the house he rented for the students in Gros Chapelet. This was a clear indication of the lifestyle that he wanted for his Congregation. At the consecration of the work to the Holy Spirit, at Pentecost 1703, the house becomes a “home of charity” where every member finds love and care.<sup>18</sup>

### 3.2 FRANÇOIS LIBERMANN: COMMUNITY FOR APOSTOLIC LIFE

**L**ibermann’s missionary project was the salvation of the most abandoned souls and the preaching of the gospel to those who have scarcely heard it. He stressed the centrality of community as the means by which this missionary project can be achieved.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. Joseph Michel, *Claude Poullart des Places*, p. 211.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Vincent O’Toole, “Libermann’s impossible dream?”, in *Spiritian Life, Apostolic Community Life*, n° 8, Rome, March 1999.

Libermann explains why he considered community life so important: When one lives in community and is directed in everything by the same superior, the good that is done is incomparably greater than if each worked in isolation from the other... Things are done with greater energy... everything is thought out better and properly put into effect... Since everyone is employed in the work for which he has the most aptitude, everything is carried out in a better way [ND II, 71]. More fundamentally he saw community life as essential for the stability and the extension of the works of the Congregation and for the personal holiness of each of its members upon which the effectiveness of the missionary task of the Congregation depends [ND X, 454]. However, he insisted that community life was not simply a physical coming together of people for greater effectiveness but a 'union of minds and hearts for a common purpose' [E.S. 141] and, towards the end of his life, he decried the tendency of some of the members of the Congregation to abandon community life for the sake of the apostolate, seeing it as an obstacle to mission, a practice which he considered to be a false missionary zeal ultimately undermining the unified missionary vision of the Congregation [ND XIII, 293-294].<sup>20</sup>

For Libermann, every other means adopted by the Spiritans for their apostolic life must be compatible with community life: "The means which the Congregation employs to attain its main aim are, in general, those which are not opposed to community life and which, by their nature, do not expose its members to the danger of laxity and of losing the spirit that should animate them."<sup>21</sup> He invited his confreres to make this clear to bishops

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<sup>20</sup> This paragraph was extracted from the Letter of the Superior General, John Fogarty, Message for Phase 3 of the Animation Plan, September 2016.

<sup>21</sup> *Règlements*, ND X 452.

who were inclined to dispersing confreres in parishes for the sake of the local needs of the mission. He allowed the taking up of parishes on the condition that community life is not endangered. A Spiritan “does not make his commitment with a bishop but with the Congregation represented by the Superior General. ..and so the superior cannot give subjects to a bishop except on that condition (community life), which is a real tacit contract.”<sup>22</sup>

The community superior has an important role in the construction of community life. He is responsible for the planning of projects and care of the brothers. He plays the role of animator and mobilizes the confreres for projects. Libermann gives details about the role of the superior in this context: He “will examine the project with his council, measure up the difficulties and prepare the necessary means to achieve success (...) Each would be employed according to his particular skills and this would make for greater efficiency.”<sup>23</sup>

Nevertheless, Libermann recognizes the fact that in some circumstances, a confrere can live alone. In that case, it should be for a brief period and care must be taken for the selection of the persons: “Although missionaries should live in community and be at least two together, nevertheless they can, if necessary, exercise the sacred ministry alone for a short period of time. Those who keep the rule exactly and who are most given to the interior life will be chosen for this kind of ministry. As far as possible, the same confreres should not always be sent out in this way and ordinarily, an interval shall be left so that they can take up again the habits of community life.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> ND IX, 99, 188.

<sup>23</sup> Memorandum to Secretary of Propaganda Fide. March 27, 1840. ND VI, 392-99; Cf. *Spiritans Anthology*, pp. 348-349.

<sup>24</sup> *Règlements* ND X, 469.

*For reflection*

- a) *As Spiritans coming from different cultures, what are the essential values that we share in common?*
- b) *How do we reach a common understanding of these values in our communities?*

## **IV. SPIRITAN COMMUNITY AND OUR MISSION OF EVANGELIZATION**

The renewal of our Spiritan identity demands that we reflect on the connection between mission and community in Spiritan life in the light of the experience of the Christian tradition and the teachings of our founders.

Community and mission are two inseparable and essential dimensions of Spiritan life. Communion in a Spiritan community is never an abstract reality lived for itself, it is mission-oriented. At the same time, we are not activists or employees of a non-governmental organization; we are witnesses to the possibility of the communion of humanity in Christ. Community is organized for mission and mission is an essential dimension of community life. Hence to sacrifice community life for mission is absurd.

### **4.1 CONSTITUTIVE ELEMENTS OF THE SPIRITAN MISSIONARY COMMUNITY**

Our community life is not a simple platform for logistics and the planning of projects to be executed. For authentic community life, the following elements have to be present: