

1979

## Annual Meeting of the Spiritan Studies Group

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dsc.duq.edu/spiritan-papers>



Part of the [Catholic Studies Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

(1979). Annual Meeting of the Spiritan Studies Group. *Spiritan Papers*, 8 (8). Retrieved from <https://dsc.duq.edu/spiritan-papers/vol8/iss8/5>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Spiritan Collection at Duquesne Scholarship Collection. It has been accepted for inclusion in Spiritan Papers by an authorized editor of Duquesne Scholarship Collection.

## **ANNUAL MEETING OF THE SPIRITAN STUDIES GROUP**

The Annual Meeting of the Spiritan Studies Group (known as GES) was held in the Generalate, Rome, from Dec. 29 until Dec. 31, 1978.

The following were present: Frs Joseph LECUYER, Chairman; Amadeu MARTINS, Secretary; Joseph BOUCHAUD, Myles FAY, Bernard KELLY, François NICOLAS, Joaquim R. SEIXAS, Paul SIGRIST, Bernard TENAILLEAU. Father Henricus KOREN was absent because of indifferent health. The General Council was represented by Father Adélio TORRES NEIVA.

### **FRIDAY, DECEMBER 29: MORNING SESSION**

Father Lécuyer opened the proceedings by congratulating Father BOUCHAUD on his recovery after his long illness and by welcoming Frs NICOLAS and TENAILLEAU, who were attending for the first time. He then presented the proposed programme of work:

- 1) Report on the activities of the members of the Group during 1978.
- 2) Examination and study of the two first sections of the DIRECTORY already prepared by Fr SIGRIST.
- 3) Study of a question raised by a member of the Group concerning the specific aim or end of the Congregation.
- 4) Project of activities of the Group for 1979.
- 5) Some Recommendations to be placed before the General Council.

### Activities of the Group during 1978

Fr. MARTINS had obtained micro-filmed copies of the more important discoveries made by Fr BRASIO and himself in the Archives of Propaganda Fide: these covered some thousands of pages. He had also collated the texts of letters of Libermann found in these Archives with those which appear in NOTES AND DOCUMENTS. He had also collaborated in the choice of texts concerning Fr LIBERMANN, (*Thou hast . . . laid Thy hand upon me*) prepared by Frs GILBERT and GODARD. He also typed some of the documents referred to above, in particular 159 letters written by Superiors-General before the "Fusion". His principal work was the publication of the *Spiritan Papers* (*Cahiers Spiritains* In French).

Fr LECUYER presented a voluminous work of revision of the *Commentary of the Gospel according to St. John*, which had been typed by Fr BESNIER before he left Rome. He also edited some *Extracts from the correspondence of Father Laval*, and intends also to publish his sermons. He has gathered and studied the writings of M. Claude POUILLART DES PLACES with a view to publication at some future date. He pointed out some letters not yet published which Fr KOREN had found.

Fr SEIXAS had successfully concentrated upon stimulating interest in LIBERMANN among the scholastics of the Province of Spain, several members of which are asking for a modern presentation of the Venerable Father. At the same time, the *Cuadernos Espiritanos* continue to be published: they draw their inspiration from *Spiritus* and from *Spiritan Papers*. A Spanish translation of the writings of Libermann is highly desirable.

Fr FAY continues to spread interest in Libermann and his doctrine both inside and outside the Congregation: in Sierra Leone where every confrere gets a copy of *Spiritan Papers*, in Canada, the United States, and during the summer recess amongst novices and scholastics in Ireland.

Fr TENAILLEAU gave a talk on Libermann to the novices at Saverne: next February, he will preach a retreat on the same subject to the novices of the Province of France. He is preparing a thesis on the Spiritual Direction of Libermann, which will be especially sensitive to his own personal development and the personality of those to whom he wrote.

Fr NICOLAS is striving to train aspirants in the spirit of Libermann and to awaken their interest in the history of the Congregation. He has suggested that they jointly produce a work on the mission of Mauritius and has organised spiritual week-ends with discussion of the texts studied. He has given a commented film-slide show at the College Stanislas.

Fr KELLY has conducted Libermann retreats and given conferences on Libermann at the international novitiate at Ferndale (U.S.A.); as well as to the confreres in Puerto Rico, the Western U.S. Province and that of Trans Canada. He organised a meeting to honour Fr Laval at which Fr Henri LESTAGE outlined the history of the Spiritans in Canada<sup>1</sup> and Fr Michel DE VERTEUIL spoke of the role of a missionary Congregation in our day. Above all, he defended a brilliant thesis at the Institut Catholique in Paris on *The Second Conversion of Francis Libermann*.

Fr BOUCHAUD had collaborated in the editing of the bulletin (articles, translations, proof-reading) and had been responsible for the Bibliography at the end of each issue of the Papers.

Fr SIGRIST had made contact with some Swiss and German Seminarians but had principally devoted his attention to the composition of the "Directory", of which he has already prepared the first part on *The Ends of the Congregation* and the second part on *The Mission*. These texts were approved with the following remarks:

- the title of "Directory" would need to be replaced by another, e.g. "Spiritans Yesterday and To-Day".

- the work should begin with an introduction on the past and present work of the Congregation: This would precede the texts quoted, which would be presented in chronological order.

- the texts would be drawn exclusively from Libermann, from Chapters or from Superiors-General. They should have a brief introduction in each case, to put them in context, and should not be too long.

---

<sup>1</sup> N. B. Fr H. KOREN has lately discovered several documents on this subject.

- principal stress should be put upon the *Spiritan Charism* in our times.
- not only Spiritans but all who wish to have a true view of the Congregation should be envisaged throughout.
- the publication should be treated as a matter of urgency.

### FRIDAY, DECEMBER 29: SECOND SESSION

This Session was given over to a study of the second part of Fr SIGRIST's work: THE MISSION.

Several remarks were made but we retain only some of them here:

- concerning the plan of the Chapter which could have treated of *a)* Spiritan vocation; *b)* Apostolic Life; *c)* Mission according to the mind of the Church and of Libermann; *d)* Basic missionary dispositions; *e)* Consecration to the Apostolate by Religious Profession and Community Life.

- concerning choice of texts: *a)* the texts of those in immediate contact with Libermann should be retained, the others suppressed and replaced by further quotations from Libermann; *b)* since the end of the Congregation was not exclusively missionary, a choice of some texts not directly referring to the Mission might be made or of texts referring to Mission in the broad sense: care must be taken not to offend confreres not directly employed in missionary work.

- quoted as most typical texts were those concerning the missionary project of 1846, the instructions to missionaries, the letter to the king of Dakar (concerning Mussulmen), those concerning the Junior Seminary (Dakar); the Provisional Rule, etc.

- there followed a reflection on the expression used by our Founders: *the care of the poor and most abandoned*. In general, this has reference to those most poor spiritually and materially and those most neglected in the Church: we are called to give witness to the rich in living poorly amongst the poor. It should be noted that care of the poor figures in the ends of a great many Congregations, but that the seeking of the most humble posts *for which the Church has difficulty in*

*finding workers*<sup>2</sup> appears much less frequently. For Libermann, poverty consists in detachment from material goods, total availability and the pooling of resources and efforts . . . It is not an end in itself but a means to a more efficacious apostolate.

– in the past as at present, the activities desired by and undertaken in the Congregation have been varied: training of priests, foreign missions, colonial ministry, evangelisation of black people, colleges and various other works both in Europe and America, etc. The problem is to discern which are essential and which are accessory works: all should not be treated as if on the same level. There has been, there still is, a development in the activities of the Congregation as happened in the case of Libermann himself. The vital thing is that his spirit be preserved and be made manifest in our own day.

– there is need to distinguish between The MISSION and THE MISSIONS and to remember that especially to-day to go on mission is to pass from one culture to another.

Fr SIGRIST mentioned that questions concerning Spirituality and Community Life would be dealt with in the third part of his work. He asked that the observations made on the texts quoted in the first two parts be submitted to him in writing as well as other new quotations for inclusion, but within limits.

As to the style, the expression should be modern in order to stimulate interest in renewal and should avoid any impression of seeking to present a thesis.

### **SATURDAY, DECEMBER 30: MORNING SESSION**

The Session opened with reading of a letter from a member of the Group which re-opened again the question of Spiritan poverty (Cf. Appendix).

According to the writings of Libermann, his attention was fixed on poverty in the world and in the Church: an apostolate to those *who were not poor* never entered into his calculations

---

<sup>2</sup> Rule of 1734.

though at times he approached those better-off for help for the poor.

That however does not mean that we should not approach those who have power or influential bodies, or that we should not be inside them. All "competition" between "civil power" and missionaries is to be avoided: collaboration is essential to evangelisation. This should not be limited to what is merely technical or economic. There should also be an attitude, an approach of faith. Like David face to face with Goliath, we must oppose the power of human resources with the humble power of faith.

Concerning the poverty of means, Libermann has often been blamed for his under-estimation of knowledge. In fact, what he warned against was the knowledge that nurtured pride and was inimical to holiness.

The question remains: who are the truly poor. They are not lacking and are of many kinds: *the poor you will always have with you*. Evangelisation of the poor comes first but is not exclusive. The poor which are our concern will always be those given us by the Church: *Those for whom she cannot, or only with great difficulty, find workers*. In all circumstances, personal poverty is always important as a concrete witness and for apostolic efficacy.

A Team of three members was appointed to edit the final text, drawn up by the President, to draw general conclusions from our deliberations.

After a recess of a quarter of an hour, the meeting resumed the consideration of certain projects.

**SPIRITAN PAPERS.** They have on the whole received a favourable welcome and it is only to be regretted that they are not more widely distributed. Some would criticise them for being too much given to history and research and not sufficiently actual: the style is not vivid or modern enough. Some would like them to follow a general plan of development and to have an index of articles already published. There is a request that the General Chapter of next year be borne in mind. The collaboration of those not of the Group would be welcomed.

The subjects to be treated were decided upon and the research of eventual articles sought for Papers 9.10.11.

It was asked if a special number of the SPIRITAN PAPERS could not be issued for the third centenary of the birth

of Claude POUILLART DES PLACES, which would present a new edition of his writings.

Would it not also be possible to edit the COMMENTARY ON ST. JOHN, revised after the original text by Frs LECUYER and MARTINS. This would be a volume of considerable weight.

Fr KOREN is working on a new edition of THE SPIRITANS. Someone is required to translate a French edition. There is also a problem of translators for the SPIRITAN PAPERS.

### SUNDAY, DECEMBER 31

The Group continued their examination of projects:

- an anthology of the writings of Libermann, in particular of texts on prayer for the use of those making a Retreat. This could be either a book or a pamphlet, with or without a record or cassette;

- the publication of the theses presented on LIBERMANN by Frs C. BURKE and B. KELLY;

- a new edition of Fr LIAGRE's *Retreat with Libermann*.

These projects are still under consideration and will be submitted to the General Council before a final decision is taken. While it is relatively easy to produce such works, their distribution is more difficult as we are not equipped for that.

After some discussion on the date and place of the next meeting of the Group, it was decided to have it in the last days of 1979 and if possible at Kimmage, Dublin, Ireland.

Towards the end of the morning session, Fr Alphonse GILBERT was invited to speak of the record on Libermann produced by Fr DARRICAUD with the help of some confreres at present in Rome. The record is addressed to a large public and recalls the life and spiritual odyssey of LIBERMANN. It will be sold with a companion pamphlet entitled: *Thou hast . . . laid Thy hand upon me*. Fr GODARD played for us a cassette-version of this record. It made a very favourable impression on us.

The session was later honoured by a visit from the Superior-General. He was given a brief run-down on matters treated during our meeting: the end of the Congregation, the

poor and direct and indirect apostolate to them, our part in Evangelisation, the need for individual and collective conversion, our specific place in the Church, the development of doctrine in Libermann and its adaptation to the situation of our day.

The Superior-General thanked the members of the Group, and especially their devoted Secretary, for their work and encouraged them to work towards the realisation of these projects. He asked them to concentrate their attention, in particular, on arousing interest amongst our young men in formation.

During a short afternoon meeting, Fr LECUYER read a summary of the points made in the discussion of the expression: *the poorest and most abandoned*. All approved the text which appears in the Appendix.

Several subjects were proposed as themes for the 1979 Meeting: none was adopted definitively. It was however agreed that the Meeting should have reference to the preparation of the General Chapter.

J. B.

## APPENDIX TO REPORT ON THE MEETING OF THE SPIRITAN STUDY GROUP

The Group discussed the following question raised by one of the members: *the expression 'apostolate to the poor and most abandoned peoples' can be easily misunderstood. The misunderstanding turns on the idea that this apostolate should be directed exclusively to the poor. This view is in contradiction with the facts. As the Good News of Redemption is not concerned exclusively with life after death but with that life already begun in time, so too apostolate implies social betterment or even the removal of all earthly sufferings by the practice of charity. To-day, the most efficacious means of improving the lot of the poor is to be found most often in scientific research. Whoever discovers a cure for leprosy, for example, does more for the lepers than anything Fr DAMIEN could achieve. So, someone who can arouse people to an awareness of the social dimension of man or who can formulate or articulate a theology of liberation can exercise a most efficacious apostolate in favour of the poor . . . Briefly, indirect apostolate, through science in its broadest sense, has a place in a Congregation dedicated to the service of the poor.*

The discussion that followed was lively and rewarding. While it is not possible to record all, it seems useful to set down the points on which there was general agreement:

1) According to the mind of the Founders, the Congregation is at the service of the Church, and is so for a task which is principally a mission of EVANGELISATION.

*This does not however exclude our undertaking tasks not directly evangelical: development, social and economic liberation, conscientisation, education, etc . . . All these are part of our mission insofar as they help to evangelisation and in subordination to it.*

2) Inside the general mission of evangelisation proper to the whole Church and to every man, the Congregation was

founded for the evangelisation of the poorest and most abandoned. We are called to the service of those who, even in the Church are most neglected because "the Church has difficulty in finding workers" for this ministry (Cf. First Spiritan Rule, 1754, Ch ), No. 3).

*This does not mean that Spiritans are excused from concerning themselves with the salvation of all men they meet, including the rich, the powerful, the learned . . . BUT, the Congregation was not founded as such for these categories.*

3) If, at first, the Congregation turned its attention to "The Blacks", it was because at that time these people seemed to be the poorest, most neglected, etc . . . (in accordance therefore with the expression of our ends already quoted above.) Nonetheless, from the time of Libermann our field of apostolate was enlarged to embrace also other most abandoned categories: prisoners, convicts, revolutionary workers, beggars, etc . . . Cf. N.D. IX, pp. 288-291; IX, p. 314; X, pp. 450-451; XIII, pp. 170-171.

4) Not only by his writings but also by his way of acting, Fr Libermann compels us to be attentive to these calls coming to us from the poorest and most abandoned . . . For him, God's Will and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit are constantly revealed in the changing circumstances of history: the Congregation should always be sensitive to these.

*Very quickly the Seminary of the Holy Ghost already looked to distant missions: the Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary was also very quick to extend its original fields of Apostolate (Africa, Australia, etc.)*

5) This original dedication to the evangelical service of the poorest and most abandoned . . . has implications for the Congregation itself which cannot be overlooked. It demands poverty, humility accepted and experienced" whatever the cost, for we are not sheltered from all the sufferings, humiliations and annoyances . . . that have to be endured in this holy work (Memorandum of 1840: N.D. II, p. 69). In consequence, "we should be filled with a great spirit of humility, self-abasement, love of contempt, for . . . the contempt showered on these poor people falls in part on those who take an interest in them, or they are at least looked upon as people of inferior rank." (Commentary on the Provisional Rule, p. 24, art. 5, 6.)

*This does not and should not exclude the use of the best talent, the most perfect means . . . But, that must not be the principal source of our hope but the Cross of Jesus Christ: Cf. especially, PROVISIONAL RULE, Part II, Ch. 9 (N.D. II, pp. 290-299.)*

6) Since the Congregation is at the service of the poor, it should respect them as a servant respects a master. Anything that savours of paternalism, of racial or cultural superiority should be excluded as foreign to us (Cf. in particular, the Letter to the Communities of Dakar and Gabon, 19 Nov. 1947: N.D. IX, p. 330; see also, N.D. IX, pp. 333-334, 359-361.)

*This does not mean that we should not communicate that in our own culture which can help others to improve the quality of their lives. It does mean however that we should recognise in these others and accept from them values lacking to us or that we ourselves have perhaps lost.*