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The Blessed Virgin in the Provisional Rule of Life for the Missionaries of the Holy Heart of Mary

In the final months of his stay in Rome, which took place from January 1840 to January 1841, Libermann wrote a provisional Rule for the young Congregation of the Holy Heart of Mary. He intended to present it for approval to the "Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide", now known as the Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples. This Rule of Life,¹ which was printed in 1845, never received Roman approbation. However, it expresses very well Libermann's insights into the missionary life. The extract below and the commentary which Libermann composed for his novices, explain the reasons for having Our Lady as patron of an apostolic Congregation.

Part One, Chapter II, article 3

What distinguishes us from all the other workers in the Lord's vineyard is a very special consecration which we make: we consecrate our whole Society, each one of its members and all their works and undertakings to the Holy Heart of Mary. Mary's Heart is eminently apostolic, and burns with desire for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. We look on Mary's Heart as a perfect model of that apostolic zeal which should burn within us, and as an abundant and ever flowing stream from which we can draw strength. We have recourse to that Holy Heart with the greatest confidence, so that it will open itself to us and show us the maternal tenderness which it feels

¹ N.D.II pp.235-365. It is good to consult the Synopsis of the two Rules of Libermann by A. Bouchard and F. Nicolas, (Paris, 1968), because the text in "Notes et Documents" is not always exact.

for us. Through it, we hope to obtain a great abundance of grace for each of us and for all our works.

(The following is a Commentary on the Rule given by Fr. Libermann. This gloss or explanation was taken down in note form by Fr. Lannurien, 1844-1845¹).

We make a total consecration to Mary. Firstly, the whole Society, with everything it may have or undertake; secondly, each of the members is consecrated together with all his works, actions, thoughts, feelings, and faculties. Our vocation makes us more like Our Lord and so we become, in a very special way, the children of Mary. By this total consecration of ourselves, we hope for special protection through her maternal love for each one of us. If every member of the Congregation enters fully into the spirit of this consecration, there is no doubt that Mary will help us to carry out the will of God for ourselves and for others and she will be the guardian of our Society.

We must not forget that that we have consecrated our Congregation not just to Mary but to the Holy Heart of Mary. This choice of devotion to the Heart of Mary did not come from some calculation or process of reason, but because of a very powerful attraction. Devotion to the Holy Heart of Mary gives us a greater motivation and a closer conformity to Jesus in our vocation. We are called to the apostolate. Now, to bear fruit in our apostolate, we must, of course, have an apostolic spirit. Where can we find that spirit more perfectly and more abundantly than in the Heart of Mary? Mary was totally filled with that spirit; her heart is eminently apostolic and burns with desire for the glory of God and the salvation of all people.

¹ Text and commentary taken down in manuscript form "Le Règle Provisoire des Missionnaires de Libermann", pp.17-19, 1845, by Father François Nicolas

Needless to say, Mary did not travel overseas or visit far off lands, like Peter, Paul and the other apostles. That was not God's plan for her: Mary was to stay quietly in the background, giving advice and help to the apostles and sharing her apostolic spirit with them. She taught them how to draw down graces of conversion and satisfaction for those to whom they were preaching. Now, in heaven, she continues to work for the spread of the Church as she did from its very beginnings. So in the Heart of Mary, we have a perfect model of that zeal with which we must be inflamed. It is also an abundant source from which we can unfailingly draw help.

The Holy Heart of Mary is our model; it is from that source that we learn what the spirit of our Society ought to be. It should be an interior spirit, and one of holiness. Genuine apostolic zeal, such as is found in the heart of Mary, cannot be present in a dissipated mind, or in a heart which is attached to creatures. Therefore, to imitate our model, we should develop a life of prayer, detachment from creatures and renunciation, so that our hearts may become like the heart of Mary, our mother. An apostolic life does not just consist in travelling aboard as the apostles did. Such outward activity has no point if it is not permeated by the apostolic spirit. All that restless activity would come under the heading of what theologians call "*actus hominis*" as opposed to human activity, because it acts independently of the intellect and will. As the heart is the source of all our interior feelings, we must strive to make them similar to the heart of Mary. If our hearts are on fire with that ardent love which burns in the heart of Mary, we will be able to spread that fire to the people with whom we come in contact. On the other hand, if we think only in terms of activity, without first conforming our interior lives to that of Mary, there will be no warmth in us and the good which we can do for others will be very much less than it should be.

Imagine that someone puts a stove into a room to make it warm. If we take each burning piece of coal and spread them around the room, they will not heat the room up very much: but if we keep them all together in the stove, the room will soon be warmed. So let us get down to modelling our interior spirit on that of Mary. Then when the time for action arrives, we will have no problem in following the example of the apostles. That is God's plan for us.

The heart of Mary is an ever-flowing source, from which we can draw the apostolic spirit I have been talking about. According to the Fathers of the Church, Mary is the canal through which God sends us all his graces. She is a mother full of love and tenderness for everyone and in our case, we have a special right to be confident of her help: we have made a total consecration of ourselves and our Society to the heart of Mary and we have made a special promise to follow in the footsteps of her Son. So Mary sees us as instruments she can use for the salvation of souls, which is her greatest desire.

Therefore, we can go with great confidence to draw encouragement from that inexhaustible source. We wish to obtain all the graces necessary for our own holiness and for that of others. The Holy Heart of Mary has been given as the light to guide us, and the strength to support us in all our works.