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REPORT ON THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE SPIRITAN STUDIES' GROUP

The Annual Meeting of the Spiritan Studies' Group, 1980, took place at the Generalate from Dec. 29-31, a date that has now become traditional.

Members present were: Fathers Lécuyer, Martins, Fay, O'Carroll, Nesti, Nicolas, Ramos Seixas and Sigrist. Father N. Bevan, delegated by the General Council, was present at all meetings: he was by general consent invited to take the chair. At some of the meetings were also present: Fathers Gross and Torres Neiva.

Father Lécuyer, President of the Group, opened the discussions with a brief introduction. He pointed out that the Group was now six years in existence. Some might think that there was too much travel and too much expenditure with no visible result other than the Spiritan Papers. True, nothing else had so far appeared but several works were now in an advanced stage of preparation for publication: THE DIRECTORY (Fr Sigrist) and THE WRITINGS OF CLAUDE POUILLART DES PLACES; the second revised edition of THE SPIRITANS (Fr Koren), which is being translated into French by Father Bouchaud: THE COMMENTARY ON ST JOHN, the text of which has been compared with Libermann's own manuscript (Frs Lécuyer and Martins) and a SUPPLEMENT TO NOTES AND DOCUMENTS which contains letters of former Superiors-General, discovered in the Archives of Propaganda by Fathers Brásio and Martins.

The President re-asserted that, in spite of this, the principal purpose of the Group is not to publish books but to stimulate interest in our Founders, especially in Libermann, and in our Spiritan spirituality. He was convinced that in this area something of value had been achieved.

The Group had been asked to produce answers to contemporary problems. The General Council had indicated a certain number of such points to be treated. These the Group would try to provide as far as was possible. It will also try to weigh

what the Group has so far achieved against the goals initially proposed to it.

The Group would also direct its research to the application of the doctrine of Libermann to the problems of our own day. This did not mean abandoning historical research but applying it practically to the contemporary world.

The President then proposed the Agenda for discussion at this meeting as follows:

A. Work proper to the group.

1. Animation: how to intensify contact with Provinces and Districts: Correspondents: Secretariate.

2. Spiritan Papers: frequency of publication: contents: editing: collaborators.

3. Other publications: the Directory: texts of founders: history (Koren); possibly, Selections.

B. Collaboration with other projects.

International Spiritan Congress: Institute of Spiritan Spirituality: Renewal Courses: Revision of Constitutions: deeper study of questions/problems raised by the General Council.

C. The composition of the group.

Limited periods of appointments: method of appointment: Correspondents.

D. Meetings.

Frequency; venue; duration.

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GROUP ACTIVITIES

Each member of the Group then reported on what he had done for Spiritan animation in the last year. Thus, we learned of Retreats, Conferences, Courses on Spiritan Spirituality, given in particular to Novices and scholastics of the Congregation in Spain and France, by Fr Ramos Seixas and Fr Nicolas respectively. Fr O'Carroll had written a pamphlet on Libermann: he is also supervising the English text of Fr Koren's

HISTORY, which he called a "monumental work". Fr Nesti had translated Libermann's Instructions to Missionaries. Fr Ramos Seixas had drawn up five schemas on the priesthood according to Libermann, for the benefit of our Spanish Scholastics, who are genuine Libermann-enthusiasts. He also informed the Group of the translations at present under way for the use of the Province: Mgr Gay's LIBERMANN: JEW, ACCORDING TO THE GOSPEL and THE PROVISIONAL RULE. Besides spirituality courses given to novices and members of the local Centre, Fr Nicolas also gave a conference on Libermann to the Jesuit Centre at Sèvres, in the context of the history of spirituality. In this conference he proposed Libermann with Charles de Foucauld and St Teresa of the Child Jesus as three masters of modern spiritual life. He also gave several other conferences and on July 28 will address the Session on Spiritan Spirituality, organised by the Holy Ghost Sisters. In collaboration with the editorial staff of the ANNALES DE ST JOSEPH, he is also preparing a pamphlet on SPIRITAN IDENTITY especially addressed to young people.

To intensify and improve the efficacy of the work of Animation, the Group proposes to invite all Major Superiors to appoint correspondents for their Districts or Provinces, in accordance with the language spoken. This task is to be apportioned as follows:

GROUP CORRESPONDENT: Territories.

Fr Nesti: North America (U.S.A., Canada, TransCanada, Trinidad);

Fr O'Carroll: Ireland, England;

Fr Ramos Seixas: Spain, Paraguay, Puerto Rico;

Fr Nicolas: France, Guadeloupe, Reunion, Martinique, St Pierre-et-Miquelon, Haiti, French-speaking Africa;

Fr Fay: English-speaking Africa, Mauritius;

Fr Sigrist: Germany, Switzerland, Holland, Belgium, Poland;

Fr Martins: Portugal, Brazil, Angola and Cape Verde.

Insofar as possible the members of the Group will place themselves at the disposition of the Province and Districts to guide retreats on the spirituality of our Founders, and will have particularly in mind to make Libermann known throughout the Congregation. The truth is, he is not sufficiently well

known. All confreres in a position to do so are asked to co-operate with the Group in this matter.

We shall also aim at presenting Libermann doctrine more attractively and to stress the more positive aspects of it rather than the negative ones. LOVE, which is always a question of choice; renunciation: a condition of love, will be proposed to Provinces and Districts as topics of Retreat, in order to discover those who might be willing to preach them along these lines.

Spiritan Papers

There are amongst Spiritans two opposing reactions to the SPIRITAN PAPERS: on the one hand, approval; on the other, lack of enthusiasm for what is not adapted to contemporary need. We need articles, argue the latter, to help us live Spiritan Spirituality TO-DAY, and they suggest the revival of the former SUPPLEMENTS to SPIRITUS.

It would appear that in the big Communities, the PAPERS are read by few, possibly because of the wide range of reading-matter available to them. In smaller Communities, especially on the mission, they are and on the whole appreciated fairly well.

In the light of this we asked ourselves whether the PAPERS should be continued or not. While we agreed that they should be, we decided that a certain modification was necessary. We shall therefore in future produce one or two issues each year as heretofore. Another, special issue, shall appear, larger and treating of contemporary problems. Subjects could be Poverty, the poor to-day, common life, justice and peace, formation, foundations, religious life, the essential qualities of a contemporary Spiritan, the spirit of renunciation in time of trial, how to transform trials into part of the life of faith, a presentation of Libermann's doctrinal development over the years.

Other subjects proposed were: In some places, mission ends; Community and Apostolic Life; the ambiguity of the term "religious life": openness to UNIVERSAL MISSION: What is the significance to-day of the expression "rag-pickers of the Church": Adaptability-What it means to be BLACK WITH THE BLACKS.

Collaborators would be members of the Group or others whom they might discover suitable. An effort should be made

to give to this new venture a more modern and attractive appearance.

A desire was also expressed that Major Superiors should encourage the reading of this new production. It was suggested, for example, that they might run competitions to interest those in formation and that they might also draw the attention of other reviews to the articles written, in view of reproduction. Correspondents in each Province would moreover be asked to provide "feed-back" on how the articles had been received.

In the special issues the General Council would be invited to make a study of some particular subject they considered important for the nourishment of the spiritual life of our confreres. This study would also be sent to Scholasticates. Some issues of more general interest could be offered to a wider public. Care should be taken to quote Libermann correctly and not attribute to him things he never said.

While realising the difficulty of producing such special issues, the Group recognised them as necessary and felt they should be tried, at least as an experiment. They therefore asked the General Council to institute a study in view of a special number and to assume responsibility for it. It would be limited to a restricted number of people. They were also asked to find specialists to work seriously on these subjects.

Here Fr Torres Neiva intervened to say that the General Council had already considered issuing a special number each year treating a topic, based on the main points of the General Chapter, 1980.

For his part, Fr Nesti insisted on the need to make the basic texts of our Founders known. Moreover, these texts should be interpreted in the light of our own times, showing how we modern Spiritans can live their inspiration to-day.

Other publications.

THE DIRECTORY (Fr Sigrist). There is evident need for such a work.

All are agreed that this should be published: it contains texts that are basic and that should be available to all, as food for the spiritual well-being of the Congregation. Fr O'Carroll undertook to find an English translator: Fr Martins a Portuguese one.

THE WRITINGS OF POUILLART DES PLACES. Fr Lécuyer has the original ready for some time: it only remains to find a publisher.

THE SPIRITANS (Fr Koren). The second edition is ready for publication: Fr Bouchaud has almost finished the French translation.

Suggestions of other publications.

A new edition of Libermann's letters, according to the new criteria; published perhaps in small volumes, with a short introduction on each of Libermann's correspondents. The first step in this undertaking would be the control of the texts. Perhaps, Fr Nicolas could undertake this with the help of the French scholastics.

Publication of Instructions to Missionaries in a separate volume with other texts of the same kind and period?

The publication of the treatise on the Episcopacy, with other kindred subjects?

THE COMMENTARY ON ST JOHN has been ready for some time. Frs Sigrist and Nicolas will accept responsibility for finding a possible publisher.

The publication of SELECTIONS, on for example the priesthood, the religious life, etc. ?

B. Collaboration with other projects.

A Spiritan Congress.

The Group proposes that a Spiritan Congress be called from time to time on the Spirituality of the Congregation. Its form would be determined by the General Council:

- International Congresses with Sisters of the Holy Ghost taking part?

- International Congresses closed to all except members of the Congregation for two days and open to others after that?

- For the first time, limit to members of the Congregation? This could be a first step to the Renewal asked for by the Chapter of 1980.

- A suitable date for the first Congress might be the Centenary of Fr Le Vavasseur's death in 1982;

- Possible venues suggested: Chevilly, Paris, Saverne, Ireland?

It might be useful also to hold such Congresses within Provinces for three days;

– Method to follow: Conferences well prepared and small studies on clearly defined subjects? Include pilgrimages to the sources? Talks more pastoral than scientific? To be followed by Renewal Course?

After discussion of these points the Group agreed upon the following text:

1. The Spiritan Study Group registers its desire to have a Spiritan Spirituality Congress called for 1982;

2. This Congress would last for three days and would have for object the deepening of our awareness of the spirituality of our Founders and of our consecration to the Holy Spirit. It would help us to discern more clearly what unites us as Spiritans. It would also be an experiment in internationality;

3. The subject proposed for such a Congress should be made known by the General Council as soon as possible, so that those taking part can begin to prepare well in advance;

4. All confreres interested in Spiritan Spirituality should be invited, especially those in formation and those responsible for them. Should also be invited: religious sisters – either of the Holy Ghost or of the Holy Heart of Mary (founded by Fr Le Vavasseur): specialists not of the Congregation whose contributions might enrich our research (specialists on Religious Life, e.g. Fr Tillard; on Libermann, e.g. Fr Blanchard; on Jewry, on the French School of Spirituality, etc.);

5. A condition of acceptance for the Congress would be the serious anterior preparation of aspiring participants. The number should be limited to fifty persons (specialists or delegates) sent by the Provinces;

6. Provision should be made during the Congress not merely for interventions by specialists in debates or in smaller study-groups but also for prayer-sessions and celebrations well prepared beforehand;

7. The findings of the Congress should be published in Spiritan Papers;

8. The Congress should be open on the last day to a wider public, with talks and celebrations adapted to the friends of the Congregation and with a view to making it better known.

9. The Group proposes as suitable venues:

a) Ireland, given its facilities for welcoming large numbers, and the significant influence of the Spiritans in the country. It

might further be possible to get a grant-in-aid from the Government;

b) Chevilly or Saverne.

It might be followed on another occasion by a pilgrimage to places associated with our beginnings (Paris, Saverne, Amiens, Rennes . . .) and would be an opportunity to rally both Spiritans and Spiritan friends representative of the whole country.

A Spiritan Institute of Spirituality.

It was also suggested that A Spiritan Institute of Spirituality should be set up. Already last year Fr Fay had put forward this proposition.

Questions arising were, how could this be done, and should it be a permanent Centre or only one that operated periodically? It was agreed to ask the General Council to consider this suggestion at the same time as that of the Congress.

The Renewal of members of the Congregation could take place at this Centre, and would be "a total immersion of a month's duration in Spiritan Spirituality", (Fr Fay).

OTHER WISHES OF THE GROUP.

- That translations of Libermann be brought up to date.
- That an Assistant be appointed to Fr Noel for the Archives at the Mother-House, with a view to eventual succession.
- That the old tradition of keeping a "Community Journal" be continued in our Communities.
- That insofar as it is possible, all Communities should have the collection NOTES AND DOCUMENTS and that of GENERAL BULLETINS. Enquiries should be made to ascertain who already have them. Again the GROUP drew attention to the fact that, in Libermann, the priest-missionary and the lay-missionary were not on the same footing. Historically, Mission was confided to the Apostles. To reduce all to the same level is to find the L.C.M. of all.

Recasting the constitutions.

Fr Bevan informed the GROUP that all the Congregation would be consulted on the Recasting of the Constitutions. For its part, the Group could perhaps make its own particular contribution. They could be consulted on certain practical

points. The new Constitutions would consist of two documents, one juridical, the other pastoral. The Group expressed the desire that the basic texts of Libermann be retained and invites each member to examine the PROVISIONAL RULE and the REGULATIONS OF 1849 to see what was essential and to be retained; and what was accidental and to be eliminated.

Fr Bevan would ask Fr Thibault to assist at the next Annual Meeting of the GROUP.

C. Composition of the Group.

Fr Bevan said that the General Council and the Congregation as a whole had need of the Group . . . on three different levels:

- a) that of members, for Renewal;
- b) that of the General Council, for information;
- c) that of the Commission on the Constitutions, in the coming years.

But, it would probably be better if these different fields were clearly defined beforehand.

In future, members of the Group would be appointed for a five-year period. At the end of their term of office they should tender their resignation and, if possible, propose the names of likely successors. It would be for the General Council to ensure a certain continuity of spirit. A liaison between the Group and retiring members should be maintained. They should be kept informed of Group activities and should be willing to collaborate with the Group.

Those responsible for Formation, especially Masters of Novices, should be de jure correspondents to the Group.

An Executive Committee was also set up. It consists of the President, the Secretary and the delegate of the General Council, Fr Torres Neiva.

The Group will continue to meet once a year. On the insistent invitation of Fr Nesti the next Meeting will take place at Duquesne University, the week after Christmas, 1981.

A. M.