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OUR RULES AND CONSTITUTIONS THROUGHOUT THE COURSE OF OUR HISTORY

PART I - THE SEMINARY AND THE
CONGREGATION OF THE HOLY GHOST
(1703-1848)

CLAUDE FRANÇOIS POUILLART DES PLACES

In establishing his work, Claude-François Poullart des Places was pursuing a very definite objective: to come to the aid of "poor students" aspiring to the clerical state but obliged to work for their livelihood while trying to follow their courses. The original element of our founder's effort lay in the fact that, although he had arrived only at tonsure, he had gathered around him some of the poor students to share their life and to help them from his own modest resources and by means of the alms which he collected for them. The remarkable feature was that he had given up the security provided him in the Collège Louis-le-Grand where, as a boarder, he was free of all worry, to set out, out of love for his brothers in need, on a new venture. Henceforth he will accept responsibility for their material support and for helping them to become priests, while preparing for the priesthood himself. He thus became a true "primus inter pares". From the beginning his was a modest enterprise, a simple community of students, not even claiming the title of seminary and leaving to Providence the task of determining its future. Little by little, however, the community assumed a certain structure. In 1705 the young founder appealed to Father Michael Vincent Le Barbier to help in the direction of the house. During the same period he composed his "General and Particular Regulations", a veritable seminary rule. (Text in H. Koren, *The Spiritual Writings of*

M. Claude François Poullart des Places, Pittsburg, 1959, pp. 165-221). The objectives sought by Poullart des Places are evident from the conditions laid down in Art. II of Chapter I. (Koren, *op. cit.*, p. 166).

After the premature death of Claude-François Poullart des Places, his work continued. The rule was established to choose the superior and directors from former students of the institution. The Regulations of the seminary were also, in a certain way, applicable to the directors; there seemed to be no need to establish a special code for them.

M. BOUIC AND THE RULES AND CONSTITUTIONS OF 1734

Father Bouic, who entered the seminary as a deacon in December, 1709, was chosen, three months later, to succeed Father Garnier, who had been struck down by death just five months after being named superior. During a term of office which lasted nearly fifty three years, he was to be the instrument of Providence to consolidate the work of Father des Places. It is to him that we owe the legal recognition of the Community of the Holy Ghost, the Rules and Constitutions and the definitely missionary orientation of the Seminary.

In 1726 a priest of the parish of St. Medard left a rather important legacy to the Community. But to inherit, one must first exist. Yet the institute for poor students had no legal existence, neither ecclesiastic nor civil. A long drawn-out process, the many ups and downs of which it would be useless to record here, was undertaken on this occasion. Before registering the letters patent of the king, that is, before giving them the force of law, the Chamber of Accounts in Parliament demanded the presentation, after approbation by the Archbishop of Paris, of the statutes and the Regulations of the Community.

In 1733 Father Bouic, assisted by four other directors of the Seminary, including Fathers Caris and Thomas, who had been at the Seminary since 1704, first as students, then later as directors, undertook the task of composing these rules. Their aim was to combine with the already existing general and particular Regulations of the Seminary the unwritten prac-

tices which had become established during the lifetime of the founder or in the course of the last twenty years. They were determined to remain faithful to the spirit of Claude François Poullart des Places.

These statutes were approved by Archbishop de Vintimille, of Paris, on January 2, 1734, under the title *Regulae et Constitutiones Sodalitii et Seminarii Sancti Spiritus sub Immaculatae Virginis Tutela*. (Text in Le Floch, *Claude François Poullart des Places*, Paris, 1906, p. 534ss; and Paris, 1915, p. 586ss.).

On July 30, 1734, the Chamber of Accounts registered the letters patent of the king and thus recognized the legal existence of the community. In the Rules, Chapter I, the end of the institute is defined as follow:

Sodalitium pro fine habet in ecclesiasticae disciplinae zelo et amore virtutum, obedientiae praesertim ac paupertatis, pauperes clericos educare qui sint in manu Praelatorum parati ad omnia: Xenodochiis inservire, pauperibus et etiam infidelibus evangelizare, munia Ecclesiae infirma (sic) et laboriosa magis, pro quibus ministri difficile reperiuntur, non modo suscipere sed etiam toto corde amare et prae ceteris diligere.

What should characterize the priests trained in the Seminary was to be the total committment with which they placed themselves in the hands of the Ordinaries (*parati ad omnia*). This availability must make them ready not only to accept but even to love with all their hearts and to prefer above all others the most humble and painful assignments, the posts in the Church most difficult to fill. The text specifies these assignments: service in hospitals, preaching the gospel to the poor and even to infidels.

MISSIONARY ORIENTATION OF THE SEMINARY

These aims established for the Seminary are in accord with what we know were the objectives proposed by our founder. Mention of the evangelization of infidels is, howev-

er, new. This can be explained by the fact that the Bishop of Quebec, in 1732, asked for some priests from the Seminary of the Holy Ghost. The same year one of the first products of the Seminary entered the Foreign Mission Society at rue du Bac to pass the year of initiation required before setting out for the missions. All during the eighteenth century there were other priests who, after finishing their studies at the Seminary, left to work in Canada or the Far East, six of them later becoming bishops. However, it is difficult to ascertain exactly the number of these first Spiritan missionaries.

After the turbulence of the Revolution, Louis XVII charged the Congregation of the Holy Ghost — the name given the Seminary in the royal enactments of the period — “to supply the priests necessary for serving the parishes in the colonies”. (*op. cit.*, p. 34) Thus all of the French colonies of the time—St. Pierre et Miquelon, Martinique, Guadeloupe, Guiana, St. Louis in Senegal, Bourbon (Reunion) and Pondichery—were entrusted to the nascent Congregation. From 1817 to 1832 Father Bertout was able to send out 97 missionaries, either from the Seminary or from various dioceses of France.

As a consequence of this enlarging of the Congregation’s field of apostolic labors, the Holy See asked to see its Rules and Constitutions. This provided an opportunity to ask for pontifical approval, which was granted on January 11, 1824. Just one modification was made: instead of depending solely on the Archbishop of Paris, as was the case in 1734, the Congregation from now on depended on the Propaganda for all that pertained to the missions.

Nothing was changed in the paragraph concerning the end of the society, which remained “*pauperes clericos educare*”. It is to be presumed, however, that, an exclusively missionary orientation having been given to the Seminary, this clause about poverty was more or less ignored. Even in the Rules of 1734 poverty had become the last of the three conditions of admission, after aptitude for study and good morals. An abridged edition of the Rules, published in 1845, carries an unofficial note:

It is now the duty of the society to look after the French colonial missions by means of its members and the priests trained for this in its Seminary.

ATTEMPT AT REORGANIZATION
AND THE RULES OF 1848

The organization of the French colonial missions, nevertheless, left much to be desired. The Seminary had the responsibility of supplying priests to the colonies. However, once having left the Seminary its former students ceased to be under the Holy Ghost superior. He had no authority over them, yet he was responsible for them. In addition, often he was obliged, because of a lack of subjects, to send to the colonies priests who came directly from their dioceses and whom their bishops were glad to see depart. The superior was reduced to the rank of a personnel agent. If some of those sent to the missions didn't give satisfaction he was sure to be blamed, yet he was completely helpless about correcting the situation; he couldn't change or recall anyone. Deprived of the means of carrying out his responsibilities, he was tied down to "a terrible drudgery", as Father Libermann put it. (N. D., IX, p. 134).

Father Fourdinier, elected superior in 1832, made it his primary concern to reform the colonial clergy and he conceived a project of associating all the priests with the Congregation. Because of the opposition of the prefects apostolic, hardly anxious to see another authority superimposed on theirs, and because of the reticence of the priests themselves, the project got nowhere. It was taken up again, in modified form, by Father Leguay in 1845; henceforth the Seminary would accept only aspirants to the Spiritans, and the priests in the colonies would be invited to affiliate with the Congregation. To facilitate this regrouping, a Second Order would be instituted whose members would be joined to the Congregation only by spiritual bonds. Members of the First Order, after taking what they needed, although without giving any account of their expenses, would turn over the remainder to a common treasury. This was a grave distortion of the Rule of 1734, which provided for all these funds to be put in common, the society taking on the responsibility of supplying each member with all necessities in health and in sickness. This project, adopted by the General Council of the Congregation on December 14, 1847, was submitted to Rome. The reformed Rules were approved on March 11, 1848.

The aim of the Congregation as it appears from these Rules is, apart from a few changes, that set forth in the documents of 1734 and 1824. A small word was, nevertheless, added: "ubicumque". The Congregation was to evangelize the poor and infidels *everywhere*. This gave the Institute a universal evangelizing vocation; wherever the poor and infidels were to be found a Spiritan should be concerned for them. There is no longer question of a fixed territory. There is no mention of the French colonies though their spiritual care is confided to the Institute.

The paragraph ends with a new sentence: "Finally, the Congregation will accept the direction of diocesan seminaries when requested to do so by the bishops".

PART II - THE CONGREGATION OF THE HOLY HEART OF MARY (1841-1848)

ORIGIN OF THE PROVISIONAL RULE

At Rome Father Libermann used his spare moments to write a Rule for a congregation of which the beginning was still in doubt, a rare if not unique case in the history of religious Rules. Ordinarily these are the fruit of a more or less long experience during which several individuals work together, guided by certain basic ideas which they have in common. The composition of the Provisional Rule, on the contrary, preceded by a year the birth of the congregation of which it was to be a way of life.

We don't have the very first text of this Rule. In the autumn of 1841, at the novitiate in La Neuville, Father Libermann, with Fathers Le Vasseur and Collin, established the text which we have. This was a painful period for Father Libermann because Father Le Vasseur wanted to rewrite the whole thing, thought the Rule insufficiently severe, quibbled over words. Judged by his unrealistic ideas of perfection, nothing was of value, whereas Father Libermann's ideas tended towards moderation and prudence. We don't know to what extent he had to give in to Father Le Vasseur. In any case the latter, when he left for Bourbon in February,

1842, after having seen his temptation against our Venerable Father disappear during the night of February 2, passed in prayer at Our Lady of Victories, made his apostolic consecration "according to the rules as completed at the end of 1841". (N.D. III, p. 10).

The missionaries of the Holy Heart of Mary worked on these principles till their fusion with the old Congregation of the Holy Ghost in 1848.

PART III - THE MERGER OF 1848 AND THE REGULATIONS OF 1849

The very act of merger, by suppressing the Congregation of the Holy Heart of Mary, put an end to the Provisional Rule. Ghost Rules and Constitutions of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit became the constitutive Rules for all the members.

From the time of the preliminary negotiations, Father Libermann had accepted these, except for some changes with regard to poverty and the deletion of the provision for the admission of members of second degree. He accepted them all the more readily since the ends therein expressed were the same as those of the Provisional Rule (we indicated above these similarities). On December 20, he wrote to the communities: "Our two Societies are committed to the same work, they are headed in the same direction. Divine Providence does not raise up two societies for a special work if only one would suffice". (N. D. X, p. 339) And he added: "Live just as you did in the past, because there will not even be the smallest change in the way of life of the missionaries". (*Ibid.*, p. 341).

And he thus announced the explanatory Regulations for the Spiritan Rule:

I have full power to draw up the Regulations for the implementation of the Constitutions (of the Congregation of the Holy Ghost) . . . You know that I have for a long time intended to correct the Provisional Rule of the Congregation of the Holy Heart of Mary . . . Well, this is nothing else than I had intended . . . You will

see that you are not losing anything that is necessary to maintain the fervor, regularity and spirit of the Congregation. (N.D., X, p. 342).

On May 26, 1849, the Venerable Father could write to Le Vavasseur: "My work on the Rule is finished. I gave it to the Council, and everything was well received; I did not have to change a syllable. It is really our own Rules under the name of Regulations". (N. D., XI, p. 87).

The volume appeared in printed form in October of 1849, under the complete title, "Regulations of the Congregation of the Holy Ghost, under the invocation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, intended to explain the spirit of our Constitutions, to assure the perfect fulfillment of the duties they impose on its members and to determine the details of its organization and administration". (The full text is given in N. D., X, pp. 450-569).

The Venerable Father was aware of the provisional character of his revision of the rules of 1849. On March 26, 1849, he wrote to Le Vavasseur: "In a few years, after we have acquired some practical experience in their execution, we will recast them again together with the old Constitutions of the Congregation of the Holy Ghost. We will correct these same and form them into a unity that we will propose for the approbation of the Holy See". (N.D., XI, p. 89). This was to be the work of his successor, Father Schwindenhammer, who carried it out in two stages, in 1853-1855, and then in 1875-1878.

PART IV - THE CONSTITUTIONS OF FATHER SCHWINDENHAMMER

THE MEETING AT GARD, OCTOBER, 1853

Ignace Schwindenhammer was on the eve of his thirty-fourth birthday when, on February 10, 1842, he was chosen to succeed Father Libermann, first as Vicar General and, a year later, as Superior General, in conformity with the Rules, which required an intermediary government for one year.

His objective during his twenty nine years in office was to complete the work of Father Libermann and, above all, to give the Congregation a solid organization. As in the case of many newly founded institutes, to the prophet (who was the founder) there succeeded the jurist. A start was given to the reform of the Constitutions from October 3 to 6, 1853, at the end of the annual retreat at Gard. In the course of this retreat the Superior General, seeing the large number of confreres gathered for the occasion (twenty nine out of the sixty seven Fathers who made up the Congregation were present) had the inspiration to hold a general meeting. In his Circular No. 2 of March 25, 1854, Father Schwindenhammer assures us that "this sort of Chapter had neither been foreseen nor prepared for in advance. It was literally and verily an act of improvisation" (p. 1-2).

He informed the "capitulants" of a discovery he had made which called into doubt the juridical value of the Regulations of 1849. These, in point of fact, contradicted or overreached the Rules and Constitutions of 1848, which, since the fusion, were the genuine Rules and Constitutions approved by Rome. For example, life in common and the possibility of the clerics taking vows if they so desired are not mentioned in the Rules. The Brothers are ignored; *a fortiori*, the requirement that they pronounce the vows of religion. "Neither our venerated Father nor any one of us had noticed this irregularity" (*Ibid.*, p. 14).

All agreed that the Regulations were not to be touched, but that the Rules should be made to conform to them. It was also agreed that the two documents should be kept distinct and not combined into one, as had been the idea of Father Libermann, for the good reason that the combining of two would require the approval of the Holy See and after that they could not be altered. Instead, it was decided to amend the Rules and ask of Rome certain modifications.

THE RULES AND CONSTITUTIONS OF 1855

Upon returning to Paris, Father Schwindenhammer set to work, but very soon he went beyond the framework which he had established for himself. Instead of simply drawing up a list of amendments to the Rules to submit to the Holy See, he

re-arranged and enlarged the material. As for the constitutive Regulations, he did the same thing and produced a completely new document out of them. In his Circular No. 11 of December 27, 1855, Father Schwindenhammer sets forth the principles which guided him in his work, and comments on and explains the different chapters of the Rules and the new Constitutions, promulgated by this very Circular.

The Rules, approved by Propaganda on May 6, 1855, repeated the text of 1848 concerning the end, with a slight variation because of the change in the nature of the institute, it having become a religious congregation.

The Constitutions of 1855 are found in two separate lithographs of 112 and 128 pages, respectively. Unlike the constitutive Regulations their plan follows that of the Rules in their new version.

In short, despite a difference in expression, the Constitutions of 1855 do not differ essentially from the Regulations of Father Libermann.

TOWARDS THE CONSTITUTIONS OF 1878

In the thought of Father Schwindenhammer these Constitutions of 1855 were to be only one step; the definitive Constitutions would come later.

In 1862 he launched a new revision of the Constitutions. Circulars succeeded one another. An organization was set up, *ad experimentum*, completing and sometimes modifying the Constitutions. Everyone was asked to collaborate. In every community, within a period of three years, all the Constitutions were to be studied, analysed and discussed, and reports of these meetings were to be sent to Paris regularly. Each member was invited on his own accord to submit to the Motherhouse "the doubts, difficulties, questions to be settled" and to "suggest practices, customs and usages which he thought useful or opportune". (Circular No. 20, June 8, 1862). These appeals and invitations had a moderate success. (Circular No. 48, 1873, p. 3). The work went ahead slowly, being held up in 1868 by the serious illness of the Superior General, then by Vatican Council I, and finally by the War of 1870. Following the war, Father Schwindenhammer once more took up the task, working regularly with the aid of

some Fathers. The system followed is described for us in Circular No. 48, pp. 10-11: first draft by Father Schwindenhammer; individual examination of this text by certain Fathers at the Motherhouse, by the superiors and the older Fathers who happened to have returned to France. "I propose to submit it finally to the General Council, especially for the most important or the most embarrassing and difficult points. In this way it won't be my personal work which is presented to the Chapter". The Chapter was convoked for 1875. It was the first regular General Chapter since the Constitutions of 1855.

The Chapter discussion lasted for nineteen days; at the last session the capitulants left it up to the Superior General and his Council, assisted by a special commission, to prepare a definitive text, which then had to be sent to Rome. It was only on July 31, 1878 that Circular No. 51, the last of Father Schwindenhammer's, promulgated the new Constitutions, "the great work of his life". (Circular No. 48, p. 5). At last the complete Constitutions (354 pages) were available, well adapted, clear and precise in their presentation. At last they had been approved by Rome.

PART V - FROM ARCHBISHOP LE ROY TO OUR TIMES

TOWARDS A REVISION OF THE CONSTITUTIONS

In his second circular letter, Archbishop Le Roy, elected Superior General in May, 1896, after having recalled the purpose of the Congregation — the apostolate of the most abandoned souls — stated the necessity of developing our foundations in the missions, the continuation of our European undertakings for the poor, the lowly and the neglected, "which we can consider our own"; but he foresaw a progressive disengagement of certain houses of education. "Thus let us never lose sight of our goal: the apostolate of abandoned souls".

The Chapter of 1896 had established a permanent commission for revising the Constitutions, composed of the General Council and six other Fathers. Work continued on the project for ten years and it was presented to the General

Chapter of 1906. After discussions and a final draft, it was sent to Rome and approved by the S. C. of Religious on August 17, 1909. On the same occasion some slight alterations were made in the Rules.

THE CONSTITUTIONS OF 1909

According to Archbishop Le Roy, promulgating the new Constitutions by means of his circular letter of February 2, 1910: "The nature and the purposes of the Congregation have not been changed, but they are made more precise, given a more clearly apostolic direction".

This was practically a translation of our Rules, the spirit of which is retained.

We find ourselves once more in the climate of the Regulations of 1849.

THE CONSTITUTIONS OF 1922

The appearance of the Code of Canon Law in 1917 made it necessary to bring up to date the Constitutions of all religious institutes. In his circular of promulgation in January, 1920, Archbishop Le Roy points out that the apostolic end of the Congregation has been more clearly affirmed in the different articles each time that the occasion has arisen.

This same text is to be found unchanged in the Constitutions of 1956.

CONCLUSION

In the course of this historic survey, we have brought out the persistence of one constant element: our proper and distinctive end is the care of poor and abandoned souls, especially among the infidels. It is the only element which is found in all of our Rules and in all of the successive editions of the Constitutions, without exception, from 1734 to our own day.

What is important is the pursuit of our aim in the Spiritan way; that is, in fidelity to the intuitions of our Founders and according to our authentic traditions. It is these intuitions and these traditions which Vatican II invites us to bring out in their full meaning and to establish as our way of life in a rejuvenated Congregation.

Among all the documents which we have been studying, it seems that the Regulations of 1849 occupy a privileged place where we can find the combined thought of our Founders. They are meant to be a commentary on the Spiritan Rules, which are, in turn, a reflection of the thought of Claude-François Poullart des Places. Father Libermann made it a point to respect, very loyally and scrupulously, the ends established for the institute in the Spiritan Rules. Moreover, therein is found what is best of the Provisional Rule. Hence, representing the combined thought of our Fondateurs, these Regulations of 1849 can be, obviously without prejudice to the other writings of Father Libermann, account being taken of our best traditions and in the light of Vatican II, a worthwhile point of departure for *aggiornamento* in our Congregation.

Henri Littner, C.S.Sp.,
Rome, October 1984