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HOW CAN WE REMAIN FAITHFUL TO THE ORIGINAL RULE?

INTRODUCTION

THE REAL UNITY OF THE SPIRITAN VOCATION AS FATHER LIBERMANN SAW IT

The Provisional Rule of 1840 is the inspirational text to which many Spiritans have recourse to find Libermann's missionary idea in its original purity. The commentaries on it that he made to the novices, called the Gloss, are an informed way of understanding the spirit that guided our second founder as he penned each article of his rule¹.

After the Fusion of 1848 with the Holy Ghost Congregation, Libermann wrote what are called the "Regulations of 1849"². This document had a twofold advantage: it took account both of the first missionary experiences of the Holy Heart of Mary Congregation³ and of the rule inherited from Poullart des Places⁴. Libermann was doubly faithful to what his missionaries were living and to what the Holy Ghost missionaries had received in essence from Claude Poullart des Places. Moreover, despite the regrettable division between a juridical and a spiritual section, all the fundamental points of the 1840 rule are preserved in the regulations of 1849⁵, and the rule's outline gained in clarity, thanks to the fact that he adopted a tripartite arrangement: Apostolic Life, Community Life, Religious Life. It must be said, then, that the regulations

¹ *Règle Provisoire des Missionnaires de Libermann, avec la Glose du P. Lannurien*, Paris 1967.

² Notes et Documents, tome X, p. 450 ss.

³ ND XI 58, 88.

⁴ ND X 300.

⁵ Cf *Synopse des deux Règles de Libermann*, éd. Bouchard et Nicolas, Paris 1968.

of 1849 form a basic reference for any reworking of our Rules and Constitutions which would be faithful to our original rules, to Libermann as well as to Poullart des Places.

The draft of our new Rules and Constitutions which is proposed for the 1986 Chapter basically takes up Libermann's plan of 1849. Actually the three central chapters are entitled: Our Apostolic Life, Our Life in Community, Our Religious Life. They come in the same order as in Libermann's regulations — a significant point for understanding the aim of our Institute. This tripartite division is worked out so as to demonstrate the profound unity of the different forms of Spiritan commitment in the service of missionary work. To modify this trilogy, or even the order of the chapters, would be to interfere with the essentials of our Spiritan identity. It would be particularly bad for our rule to begin with any other chapter than that on apostolic life (that on "our Spiritan vocation" is simply an introductory chapter, giving the drift and style of the rule as a whole). Libermann, in point of fact, thinks of the Spiritan as an apostle before all else, who reproduces, with his brothers, in his life, the constant journeying of Jesus and his apostles for the salvation of all peoples, in particular the most abandoned.

Community life and religious life are not realities "in themselves", and furthermore they do not have to resemble those of Trappists or other religious. They are designed in function of our style of apostolic life and strongly coloured, specified, by that. We start from the apostolate, the great love of people and of the poor that inspired Jesus. If we insist on community life, if religious life seems to us indispensable, it is primarily for the good of those to whom we are sent. Libermann knew that "the apostolic life contains in itself the perfection of our Lord's life, on which ours is modelled. More than any other life, it gives us conformity to Jesus Christ"⁶. He thus finds it only right to define the Congregation by the apostolate, integrating religious life into it, that is to say, the practice of the evangelical counsels, in a community form of living — whence he sees the importance of placing the apostolate as chapter one of his rule. The priority he gives to

⁶Glose 7, 143; Conférences à ND du Gard 1851: ND XIII 708.

apostolic life is the pledge of the real unity obtaining between apostolic, community and religious life.

In a letter of November 1, 1851 to Bishop Kobès, Fr. Libermann reminds him of this unity for his missionaries between apostolic and religious life. He refers to some confreres who had set up an artificial dichotomy between these two aspects:

These poor young men, having left their countries to be missionaries, have always kept the notion: "I am a missionary above all". Consequently, and quite unawares, they do not attach enough importance to religious life and give themselves over too much, I believe, to an external life. Well then! If this conjecture is well founded, it is important to enlighten these confreres by getting them to see that in truth the mission is the goal but religious life is a means sine qua non, a means which must hold all their attention and be the object of all their concern. If they are holy religious they will save souls, if they are not they will do no good, because God's blessing is attached to their holiness and their holiness depends solely on fidelity to the practices of religious life⁷.

We will try to see how Libermann presents apostolic life, community life and religious life in his rule, by showing their complementarity and unity, such as our founder wanted them. At the same time we can make a brief comparison with the corresponding chapters of the draft of our new Rules and Constitutions.

I

APOSTOLIC LIFE

Notice first of all that Libermann speaks of "apostolic life" rather than "apostolate" (likewise, community and religious "life"); the new rule takes up this expression, rich in spiritual

⁷ ND XIII 353.

power. To speak only of apostolate would be to risk limiting oneself to activity, methods and means. If that were so it would be unsuitable to begin the rule with such a chapter, and the hesitations of those who do not wish the rule to start with the apostolate would be understandable. But Libermann understands apostolic life to express the core of our being, our identification with the person and even the life of Jesus. "The apostolic life is that life of love and holiness which the Son of Man lived on earth to save and sanctify people, and by which he is continually sacrificed to the glory of the Father for the world's salvation" (Rule of 1840 and of 1849)⁸. To lead the apostolic life: that for Libermann is the goal that brings us together in the very first place. There are two sides to it: 1) *A spirit* that animates us, Jesus' own spirit, a spirit of love for his Father and for people. (It is also Mary's spirit, that of her apostolic heart). It implies a particular need for holiness, that calls for a total self-giving and specifically apostolic qualities, like "zeal". 2) *A particular way of life* that was lived by Jesus among his apostles, entailing some specific elements, the chief of which are:

to proclaim the good news to the poor;
the fact of living in pioneering situations;
in apostolic availability.

Libermann developed all these aspects of the apostolic life in his rule, that of 1840 as well as that of 1849.

1 - APOSTOLIC SPIRIT

a) *A Particular Need for Holiness*

In his rule and in the spiritual letters Libermann develops the reasons the missionary is called to holiness in a quite special way⁹.

As has been shown already, the missionary prolongs Jesus' mission. He is seized by God, sanctified like the pro-

⁸ Synopsis no. 251, 266, p. 95; Glose 2-13.

⁹ *Ecrits Spirituels* 356 ss.

phets, like Jesus in fulness. The missionary, like Jesus, must share the "abundance" of this life.

As people saw and heard the Father in Jesus, they must see Jesus in us.

It has to be remembered that the missionary works at the outposts and, like Jesus, he has to confront the Spirit of evil, who tries to defend the "strongholds" he possesses. He cannot be dislodged with human means but with Jesus' own Spirit and strength, that is to say, his holiness.

Besides, holiness alone can give the courage, calmness, fidelity in the necessarily difficult circumstances of missionary life. At the same time this life, by its witness, will be the best means of reaching and touching hearts. "An ordinary life would appear to the natural good sense of these peoples as a life in the European manner and not a holy life . . . When the missionary leads a really holy life, sooner or later they will see in him a man of God".

Holiness permits the missionary to draw down God's blessing on the peoples and communities he is to evangelize and fill up in his own body what is wanting to the sufferings of Christ.

In situations where the explicit proclamation of the good news is not possible, the missionary's holiness will be the essential part of his "mission" ¹⁰.

b) *A Call to Complete Self-Giving*

The twofold call to holiness and to the salvation of others is expressed for the Spiritan in the consecration ¹¹ of his whole being to God in the apostolate (which Libermann takes to include religious consecration) ¹². This is a covenant whereby God gives himself to us and we give ourselves completely to God in love. The word "consecration" has lost its dynamic, positive meaning in our day but it deserves to be maintained to express the very heart of our commitment; it is a term theologically and biblically rich. (The new rules only refer to it weakly, about Christ, in no. 8). The gift of self-giving is basi-

¹⁰ Lettre à M. Leray: ND XIII 142 ss.

¹¹ Lettre à M. Duret: ND XIII 147.

¹² ND XIII 708; Synopse 586b, 265b, p. 189.

cally "self-denial" of one's own autonomy, to live in the sweep of the relationship to the Father that animated the Spirit of Jesus.

Libermann founded his missionary spirituality on the gospel and St. Paul. The apostle of the gentiles met insurmountable difficulties in his missionary life and triumphed over them. "I have learnt to manage on whatever I have. I know how to be poor and I know how to be rich too. I have been through my initiation and now I am ready for anything, anywhere: full stomach or empty stomach, poverty or plenty"¹³. On this point St. Paul speaks of a veritable "initiation", by which one learns realities not known to all. Self-denial — that freedom in the face of everything — is one of the secrets of the Christian faith and, a fortiori, of the apostolic life. In putting his missionaries to the school of St. Paul, Libermann did not intend to destroy their personalities but to free them from its selfishness and different forms of slavery and dissipation. For the missionaries, as for us, the faith is a school of freedom¹⁴. The missionary ought to forget himself and all his temporal interests so as to live no more except for God and the salvation of souls, after the manner of Jesus. Besides, isn't this way of living — completely "for the other" rather than introverted into oneself — the only way for a person to mature really? Libermann goes into details. "Everything Jesus has given us must be consecrated to him with a view to this work of salvation: health, strength, mind, talents, thoughts, affections, resolutions — everything will become an instrument in his hands". If needs be, Libermann adds, "one will even be induced to sacrifice some spiritual interest (a particular devotional practice or means of perfection) when the good of souls demands it; we are not called to live as Carthusians"¹⁵. The point is that the missionary must let himself be guided by the Spirit and not by selfishness, which is the root of sin and negation of life. Without this attitude, "we may make some impression on the senses and imagination but nothing solid in hearts"¹⁶.

¹³ Phil 4. 12.

¹⁴ Lettre à M. Blanpin: ND X 231; *Commentaire de S. Jean* 418-419; ND VIII 64,65; Glose 97.

¹⁵ Glose 6.

¹⁶ Glose 10.

c) Specific Qualities of the Apostle; "Zeal"

Libermann makes it clear from the start that there are many people in the Church who are zealous but few who are truly so for the love of God. Zeal is often accompanied by a sort of self-seeking which tempers every apostolic activity¹⁷. Zeal is primarily an affair of the "heart", in the biblical sense of the term, an attitude of faith which wells up from the depths of a person to place him first of all confidently before God for the success of his apostolate, whatever the appearances of failure may be. This deep faith allows the missionary to live in the difficult conditions which are often his, in steadfastness and peace¹⁸. The missionary will bide his time and await God's moment. Every exaggerated kind of eagerness, rush and worry is a sign that one is working for oneself and not for God¹⁹.

The missionary will love people and pray for them, instead of being impatient with their faults; he will never act with violence but with gentleness and patience²⁰. The faithful must never have to fear disturbing the missionary; they must be able to come freely — especially the poorest among them — to ask his services. The missionary will adapt to the tastes and character of each one, and avoid looking at things speculatively. His tact will not consist in natural diplomacy, but will come from a true supernatural ability to listen²¹. Zeal will demand strength and prudence in equal measure. This strength has its foundation in God rather than in imagination and character²². Prudence will also have its source in the spirit of faith: "to succeed in mathematics you have to have a mathematical mind; to succeed in the things of God you have to have the mind of God"²³. Finally, the missionary's zeal will be backed up by an even temper and a balanced character; people must not be made to suffer from one's little foibles and quirks²⁴!

¹⁷ Glose 145.

¹⁸ Glose 149, 150.

¹⁹ Glose 151.

²⁰ Glose 152 ss.

²¹ Glose 157.

²² Glose 160 ss.

²³ Glose 165.

²⁴ Glose 162.

When we look at the way Libermann described the different aspects of zeal we notice that he was in fact outlining what are known as the gifts of the Holy Spirit: Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, and so on. When placed at the service of the apostolate, these gifts become true charisms enabling one to touch hearts and found the Church. One might say that zeal is the missionary's charism, that by which he acts on people, in the manner of the Spirit. All these qualities make the missionary act in the image of Jesus Servant. The missionary will become the servant of slaves, as Jesus did. This attitude of service will sharpen his attention to discover and reveal the genuine qualities and aptitudes of the peoples he is serving. Avoiding judgement at first glance, he will seek to know his brothers from within, "making himself negro with the negroes"²⁵.

It is obvious that this description of the apostolic spirit holds a considerable place in Libermann's rule. The chapter on apostolic zeal, in particular, is one of the finest chapters of the rule; it contains the foundation of our spirituality and particular spirit. It is to be desired that the forthcoming rule will dilate more on this aspect of our apostolic spirit. The essentials are there, in nos. 8 and 9, and especially 37 to 40, but it is little in comparison with the many articles Libermann consecrated to the point in his rule. A choice could also be made to put this description of apostolic zeal at the start of the chapter on our apostolic life and not at the end; it would leave less danger of voiding this chapter of its spiritual orientation, so fundamental for us.

2 - OUR PARTICULAR FORM OF APOSTOLIC LIFE

a) *To Proclaim the Good News to the Poor*

By giving his Congregation a primarily apostolic end, Libermann had entered the modern current of religious life, which, since St. Ignatius, is oriented towards missionary work. In Libermann priority is given to the explicit²⁶ proclaim-

²⁵ Glose 169 ss.

²⁶ Glose 198.

ing of the gospel, the good news reaching all people in their spiritual and human existence. "The blind see again, and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised to life, and the Good News is proclaimed to the poor"²⁷. The poor whom Libermann was thinking of are the economically most deprived, the disadvantaged personally or socially, but also the furthest off and most abandoned with regard to the Church²⁸. In large part, their misery accentuates the indifference and injustices that we live in with regard to them; their poverty accentuates our own²⁹. At the time the Work of the Blacks was founded, the most abandoned for Libermann were the slaves of the Islands. Afterwards he would discover the immense call of Africa. When he wrote the rule of 1849 he thought also of Europe³⁰, becoming aware of the increase in misery in the big cities, the ports in particular, in the industrial and commercial world of the nineteenth century.

In certain cases the missionary will have not only to bring human and material help to the deprived but also to defend them against injustice. "They will be the advocates, support and defenders of the weak and helpless against all their oppressors; these are the circumstances in which our Lord's charity and power will appear in them"³¹. Incidentally, Libermann considers that this defence of the poorest must not lead the missionary (at least if a priest) to enter politics. "Whatever side one takes, one will always have people in the other party, and yet we belong to everyone"³².

The proclamation of the good news, Libermann understands, is the business of both priests and laity³³. While remaining within the thought-patterns marked by the theology of his time, he well grasped the implications of the apostolate of the laity.

²⁷ Mt 11.2-5.

²⁸ Glose 5, 23, 25.

²⁹ Mémoire à la Propagande, 1846, ND VIII 227 ss; Glose 25.

³⁰ Lettre à Don Salier: ND XIII 170.

³¹ Glose 50; Synopse 53.

³² ND X 109.

³³ Glose 2.

The Brothers had a particular responsibility for "development". "They will be employed in agriculture and other works which are not only necessary for the missionaries but also useful for teaching the local people"³⁴. At the same time, Libermann declined to give Brothers purely material tasks³⁵, and he asked that lay people in charge of Christian communities be ordained to certain ministries³⁶.

The present draft of the rules takes up this fundamental theme of proclaiming the good news to the poor. It refers explicitly to the ecclesial context of mission [8-13] in order to take account of the gains of Vatican II. The diversity of ministries (priests, lay people) is recalled, refined and placed in context, emphasizing that all work together at one mission and the building up of communities [17]. The notion of "the poor", often misunderstood today, particularly in Africa, is taken either in the biblical spiritual sense [8], or in the social sense, where the notion of collective injustice holds a more important place [33-36].

b) *To Live in Pioneering Conditions*

Libermann sees us having a role of founding in the Church rather than finishing. It is not for us to undertake ministries "for the upkeep or improving of the faith"³⁷. Indeed if the faith has been awakened or revived one can no longer speak of "abandoned souls". A link has been established with the Church, with the Christian community, and we must leave to others, as far as possible, the care of developing that faith and those links. The missionary should have the aptitude and taste for living in pioneer situations. He has to undertake the responsibility of a particularly important spiritual paternity. He can wield a negative influence over a whole future (the famous "original sin" that Libermann speaks of³⁸), but he can also pave the way for an abundant harvest. "If a missionary in Guinea were to convert only ten people, he would do incalcul-

³⁴ ND IX 268, 269.

³⁵ ND XIII 33; ND VI 119 ss.

³⁶ Mémoire 1846: ND VIII 246.

³⁷ Règle 1849: ND X 450.

³⁸ ND IX 324-325; XII 24-25; XIII 342; VIII 398.

able good, for he would have planted the faith in a country; these ten would hand it on to others — and a Church has been founded. How glorious for a missionary to be the founder of a Church! What reward is reserved for him³⁹! The missionary exercises a real role of founder by training responsible lay people⁴⁰ and indigenous priests⁴¹.

Being the founder of a Church or particular community, the missionary must be at his ease with the whole Church, from which he gets his mission, and with the local Church, which he serves. He learns to be self-effacing while bringing growth about, applying John the Baptist's words to his life: "He must increase and I must decrease". He has to live a spirituality of self-denial and hope, that of the sower who will only rarely see the harvest. It is understandable that Libermann would give his missionaries the model of the "apostolic heart of Mary"⁴². Mary was at the origins of the Church, accepting that her Son be taken from her and that her role, always discreet and hidden, should reach its climax on Calvary. At Pentecost Mary is still present, discreetly assisting the activity of the apostles, the leaders of the Church. Libermann's allusion to the fact that those to whom we hand on the faith would in turn hand it on to others indicates that our role in a Church is not just to allow it to grow through different structures but to have it give witness to the faith in its own missionary role.

c) *In Apostolic Availability*

The apostolic life of Jesus and his apostles was primarily one of moving from place to place. Jesus had nowhere to lay his head, because he made himself available to all, especially the poorest. Libermann foresaw that our life and attitude would be like those of Jesus, either in the framework of established Churches (the Islands) or of first evangelization. This thorough availability for missionary work is twofold:

a) It is first of all a journeying towards the other, who is different from us, a journeying largely cultural and even geo-

³⁹ Glose 5.

⁴⁰ ND VIII 246.

⁴¹ Glose 45 ss; Règle 1849: ND X 519 ss.

⁴² Glose 17 ss.

graphical, drawing us to set out towards those who are furthest off. This attitude, which continues the Incarnation approach, will drive us to adapt to the real needs and aspirations of people. "They will consider carefully among usages and customs what is proper to the character of the people and the nature of the country. They will take care to avoid disturbing these habits when they are not opposed to the life of God, to try to train them to the European way of living. They will simply try to make them more perfect in their kind of life and ordinary habits"⁴³. To live this kind of journeying demands specific qualities, "charisms", which are certainly among the more important to be discerned in the missionary's vocation, to be trained and developed subsequently throughout a lifetime.

b) Our availability is at the same time a permanent readiness to leave the work to others, in places where we have finished our work of "foundation"⁴⁴ and to answer new and urgent calls which arise, whether they come from the local Church we happen to be in or from other parts of the Church universal. All his life Libermann had an ear for new needs and situations. If he remained faithful to the work undertaken in Africa, at the same time he turned his glance to the most missionary situations in Europe and other continents. The Spiritan's availability to entrust to others the mission he has contributed to creating, and to leave himself free for new tasks, will be, incidentally, another specific mark of his spirituality, his way of living evangelical poverty.

The new rules do stress the above-mentioned points. As we said before, it is desirable that the references to the spirituality they presume would be more clearly stated, without going into too much detail. Once more, it is essential that the chapter on apostolic life be perceived as the "foundation" on which all our Spiritan life and activity rests. The chapters on community life and religious life and, all the more so, on formation or prayer, will be elucidations, means we give ourselves to get our fundamental overall plan under way, contained completely in that chapter.

⁴³ Règle 1849: ND X 452, 511, 512, 518, 519, 544, 545; Glose 157 ss; Cf ND IX 330 (à la communauté de Dakar); Mémoire 1846: ND VIII 231; ND VI 282.

⁴⁴ A. M. Bessieux: ND XII 24-25; A. M. Luquet: ND Compl. 68-69.

II

COMMUNITY LIFE

1 - APOSTOLIC REASONS FOR COMMUNITY LIFE

Spiritan apostolic life is essentially built on the basis of community, so much so that Libermann gave this imperative law, "all our members will always live in community"⁴⁵. Libermann considered community indispensable for two reasons: the good of the apostolate (under its pastoral aspect) and the sanctification of the members of the Congregation (necessary for the fruitfulness of the apostolate). As regards the good of the apostolate, the founder went into details already in his Memorandum of 1840.

Living in community and being directed in everything by one superior, the good which will be done is incomparably more considerable than if each one acted in isolation. Enterprises can be more extensive, there is a well-thought-out plan and methods to follow; there is more energy in carrying out the plan, more accord and union in all activity; everything is more regular and better thought out. . . . Moreover since each one is engaged in the job he is best fitted for, things go better. Besides, since each one has only to concentrate on one responsibility, he will give himself to that. There are a host of advantages in favour of community life⁴⁶.

Libermann likewise considered community life indispensable for the sanctification of the apostles which his missionaries were. The founder began by recalling the danger of laxity, which arises when one is alone, especially on the missions (He considered that only one man in a hundred was capable of living alone)⁴⁷. Of course, living in community is much more

⁴⁵ Règle 1849: ND X 454; Glose 103 ss.

⁴⁶ Mémoire 1840: ND II 71.

⁴⁷ Glose 103.

than living in coexistence under the same roof or around the same table. Libermann made clear that the missionaries, after the fashion of the first Christian communities, will choose to live together so as to have all things in common, in particular "the use of their bodily, intellectual and moral faculties, to be used for the glory of God and the salvation of souls". The missionary's sanctification will always come from his apostolic life through the mediation of community.

The sacrifice of a certain individualism, even of some human satisfaction, will be largely compensated for by the witness of a more intense spiritual life. Besides, the history of the Congregation could show how much each Spiritan has found again in hundredfold what he was willing to share. On the other hand, how many failures have happened on the human and spiritual plane for want of having agreed to place things in common and trust one's brothers!

2 - THE COMMUNITY LIFE PROPER TO SPIRITANS

Libermann's first comment was that it is difficult for us to accept parishes, since these do not regularly allow of community life⁴⁸. The founder was thinking of truly missionary teams, travelling around, having a stable community for base. The missionaries could be separated for periods to go on journeys, but then they would come back to share what they had lived and to live with their brothers in community⁴⁹. Religious exercises would be sufficiently regular for the rhythm of community life to be a real support for each person⁵⁰. At the same time, enough elasticity would be needed to adapt to the places and circumstances of the mission⁵¹. Nevertheless, the community would never be sacrificed to the apostolate, since that would finally compromise the apostolate itself.

It is of interest to note how Libermann foresaw the functioning or rather the life of the great community which is the

⁴⁸ Règle 1849: ND X 455.

⁴⁹ Règle 1840; Glose 29 ss; Règle 1849: ND X 456.

⁵⁰ Règle 1849: ND X 452.

⁵¹ Glose 6.

Congregation. Its members being dispersed by force of circumstances into communities far from one another, a link would have to be found between themselves and with the Motherhouse. Libermann attached great importance to correspondence and newsletters between confreres themselves, between missions, and with the superiors of the Congregation. Improved forms of transport later on would allow for meetings at different levels⁵². By this frequent contact between all the members of the Congregation Libermann facilitated real participation by each one in the life of the whole. He was assiduous in looking for advice and suggestions, which he took into account in perfecting his missionary strategy. At the same time, knowing that the missionaries will not always be able to consult the Motherhouse in time, and also on principle, he often asks in the Rule that the principle of subsidiarity come into play. Even if a very widespread Congregation has need of a quite centralized organization, the apostolate also requires a minimum of independent decision-making at all levels.

The Function of Superior.

Whoever is in charge of a community of Spiritans must be an apostle before all else. He is not asked to be an administrator first, but to have an enlightened and balanced zeal. His role is to keep the missionary flame alive in each one, and for this he needs to have the spirit of the Congregation at its best. Libermann lists a whole series of character defects which make a person unsuitable for exercising posts of responsibility, especially in the missions. In this case too, gentleness, prudence, balance, ability to adapt and strength of character are the qualities which must particularly exist in superiors for the running of their community. Similarly, Libermann demands these qualities of the missionaries for exercising their apostolate⁵³.

⁵² Règle 1849: ND 470 ss.

⁵³ Règle 1849: ND X 543, 553.

3 - THE SPIRIT OF SPIRITAN COMMUNITY LIFE

One of the finest chapters of Libermann's Rule is where he outlines in detail the duties of members of the Congregation towards one another⁵⁴. He begins by recalling the sources of our unity. We are one same family, for we have the same faith; we all have a certain way of practising our love for one another in Christ's name; we have the same objectives in our work — the apostolate, the missions; we also have identical means for attaining these objectives, beginning with community and religious life; likewise we have the same models — Jesus, Mary, the apostles, our relationship to the Holy Spirit. These different facts, even when not made explicit in daily life, bring us to live together in closeness and depth.

Then Libermann gives two fundamental rules for living according to this unity, two rules which are found in the Congregation's motto, "Cor Unum et Anima Una"⁵⁵: we should have unity of mind and unity of heart. Unity of mind means that we listen to each other so intently that we readily put ourselves in the other's place and see his views; in a way, it is the spirit of dialogue. Unity of heart consists in developing a genuine mutual affection (and not simply a pacific coexistence) between members of the Congregation, in all simplicity. Charity must flourish, towards God and towards the brethren, by going beyond the deceptive and superficial variations of the moment's feelings. This witness to unity will be an important element in our apostolate. Read in detail the very precise recommendations Libermann gives for a community life exercised in optimal conditions: everyone will control his vivaciousness, rejoice in the good done his brothers, refrain from interfering in others' work and apostolate, avoid judging what they do, avoid belittling and being uninterested, maintain a welcoming smile even when tired and overworked, take the initiative in rendering service to the community, discreetly seek the spiritual well-being of one's brothers, be in solidarity with the Congregation as a whole, such as it is, present and past, old

⁵⁴ Règle 1849: ND X 537 ss; Glose 124 ss.

⁵⁵ Glose 125.

members and young. At the same time, the affection we have for one another will not become inbred and beget a kind of jealousy with regard to other Congregations.

*
* *

The new rule takes up Libermann's aim fairly well when it puts community life as one of the very first requirements of the Institute (whence the need to distinguish it from religious life, properly so called, which is called for on other grounds). It also takes up Libermann's exhortation, inviting us to place ourselves "at one another's service, in charity, in unity and peace". In the 1849 rule, Libermann had put the chapters on government in the Congregation into that of community life. It was a way of demonstrating that the Congregation is one big community and that the service of authority is truly an element of our fraternal life. Libermann's commentaries on the passages of the rule that deal with the superior's role are, as we have seen, among Libermann's finest texts (as are those on the attitude we should have towards one another).

The document of the new rule shows equally well that authority is "at the service of fellowship" [62-68], but it places greater emphasis on coresponsibility. The superior's rule is more to encourage "consensus" [65]. While remaining the leader, he ought to use his authority as little as possible.

It might be questioned whether the new document is not too restrictive in all that concerns authority. It is true that Libermann, when he spoke to superiors, used wording close to what is found in the present rules. Moreover, in his own way of governing he was able to take decisions when that was called for, and he was also able to explain things in a way to arrive at "consensus" as far as possible.

III

RELIGIOUS LIFE

1 - THE MEANING OF CONSECRATION

Libermann considered consecration to God by religious life as the normal sequel to consecration to God by an apostolic life, at least by the missionary apostolic life such as he conceived it to the most abandoned, especially in far countries. Libermann's sons were to live the fulness of charity, as much in their contact with God as in their service of their most deprived brothers. Each one was somehow to be completely "vowed", in one same movement, both to God and to the apostolate. In Libermann's time it was not yet possible for all to take vows⁵⁶, but religious "life" was no less demanded of all. The act of consecration was the expression of commitment to that life; it summarized what the Spiritans committed themselves publicly to living, before God and people⁵⁷. To know what the Spiritan's "profession" is, what he takes responsibility for before the Church, why he calls on the support of God's grace for it all his life, this act of consecration must be read in detail. It is really a sort of biography of the Spiritan's life: apostolate, common life in poverty and obedience, unreserved love for God, the facing of trials, consciousness of one's weaknesses. It is clear that this act is much more than a personal commitment. It is also a covenant, for in the terms chosen by Libermann there is an appeal to God's commitment towards those who consecrate themselves. God will clothe with his own fidelity those who give themselves, and he will also give them the support of his Mother, Mary.

On the day of his profession the religious missionary receives in some way a "blessing" from God. To him who commits himself never to say, "that is enough", God promises the fruitfulness of the apostolate. The same formula also

⁵⁶ Règle 1849: ND X 556 ss; Glose 61.

⁵⁷ Règle 1849: ND X 498 ss.

makes it clear that he who commits himself gives up ownership of himself in some fashion in order to put on Christ with his sentiments (as he makes Mary's sentiments his own too), especially at the moment of the cross, the greatest expression of Jesus' love for all. Both consecration and vows are not primarily an act of ours towards God but God's movement towards us, a movement which found expression in Jesus' life and death, in which we are joined. He who has made "profession" commits himself no longer to live two lives, one for himself and one for God. He has chosen no longer to belong to himself but to belong to Christ. Experience shows that in fact whoever makes such a commitment and lives it out truthfully will come to a personal maturity and experience a rich apostolate. The source of life being God alone, whoever agrees to become completely rooted in him will draw abundantly from the sap which enables him to bring forth much fruit. Face to face with God, dependence is the source of freedom.

This consecration is made to God "under the care of the Holy Spirit and invocation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary". Libermann repeated this in the first and second article on religious life. At the top of the Provisional Rule of 1840 he had put this simple dedication:

All for the greater glory of our heavenly Father, in our Lord Jesus Christ, through his Holy Spirit, in union with the holy heart of Mary.

Immediately after the union of the two Societies, he clarified, so to speak, his thought in the last chapter of the rule, on devotions:

The Congregation . . . especially consecrates (its members) to the Holy Spirit, author and finisher of all holiness, and inspirer of the apostolic spirit, and to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, filled abundantly by the divine Spirit with the fulness of holiness and of the apostolate, and sharing perfectly in Jesus Christ, her son's, life and sacrifice for the world's redemption⁵⁸.

They will look on the Immaculate Heart of Mary as the perfect model of fidelity to the divine Spirit's holy inspira-

⁵⁸ ND X 568.

tions and of a sincere living of the virtues of the religious and apostolic life. They will find in it a refuge to have recourse to in their labours and pains⁵⁹.

This clear text contains a number of ideas that are now familiar. We add the following one, which forms a link with the former "Spiritan" tradition, sowing the harmony between the two devotions.

Mary must guide the Holy Spirit in us, so that we may be filled with the abundance of his holiness⁶⁰.

"True devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary will lead us to know, in union with her, the Person of the Holy Spirit, and to become, like her, fully docile to his divine inspirations. Then the Holy Spirit will be able to help us with the fruits of holiness and apostolic spirit that he gave plentifully to Mary's holy and apostolic heart, which is the model and source of all apostolate. We owe this fine Marian spirituality to a convert Jew" (Henri Barré, C.S.Sp., 1954).

"This twofold devotion", concluded Libermann, "is special and distinctive of the Congregation". He spelt it out in the act of consecration:

Accept, O Mother, the offering I make of myself. Give me over to the Holy Spirit, your well-beloved Spouse. I wish to devote and consecrate myself entirely to the divine Spirit and entirely to your Immaculate Heart. I desire to live and die, to spend and sacrifice myself, in Jesus' footsteps, in this Society of missionaries which is dedicated to the omnipotent Source of life and consecrated to your Immaculate Heart . . .

I open my heart in surrender to the divine Spirit. May he fill it, possess it and act in it as sovereign Master. I wish, under his guidance, to spread his holy love in all the souls entrusted to me⁶¹.

⁵⁹ ND X 568.

⁶⁰ ND XII 716 (lettre 19:3:1851).

⁶¹ ND X 449.

2 - POVERTY, CHASTITY, OBEDIENCE

Poverty.

Libermann attached the greatest importance to the vow of poverty. "It is one of the most fundamental and important virtues of the religious life"⁶². Poverty is the sign of the total detachment we accept to follow Christ Jesus, our only riches. We choose to live poverty primarily for Christ, to share his love with our brothers. Spiritan poverty is marked by our type of apostolate. We are called to live in the midst of the poorest; God makes an act of extraordinary trust in us by confiding to us those who are close to him. If we appear rich on the outside, if we act as rich people, the poor will not dare to come near us; and we will be tempted ourselves to mix with the rich. Libermann remarks that it is a joy to be among the poor. The sacrifices we make are largely compensated for by a greater freedom in our relations with God and with our deprived brothers. The missionary who remains poor will not need to be dependent on the rich for goods, he will have more independence in his apostolate. If he owes a certain respect to the important people of the world, he must not bind himself to them. This attitude of closeness to the poor, and of distancing oneself prudently from the rich, at times can be a trial. In practice the missionary who shares the life of the poor will share also their insecurity and the disdain society has for them.

As regards the daily practice of poverty, the general rule is simplicity. "To be content with simple necessities". Our poverty must be always linked to its apostolic end; everything which could appear excessive to people outside and turn them from religion is to be rejected. In mission countries, "healthy and substantial" nourishment is needed, so as to safeguard one's health above all for the apostolate. If we grow food, or improve our living quarters, let it be only to show example to the people we are evangelizing, to teach them how to live better and take better nourishment. As regards ownership of

⁶² Règle 1849 ND X 558; Glose 62 ss.

goods, Libermann insists on putting everything in common, according to the vow of poverty. Thus all are equal when it comes to the apostolate: no one is privileged, and so no one is disadvantaged because others have more money or ways of getting it.

Chastity.

In Libermann's time many knowledgeable people thought that the atmosphere and climate of the "colonies" made the practice of celibacy highly doubtful. The founder had even been told that he was taking risks by sending young confreres to the missions. Libermann replied that their attachment to Christ and the zeal of the young missionaries would suffice to preserve them⁶³. He saw the practice of chastity as depending on the basic attitude of self-denial that each missionary should have thoroughly adopted from the time of the novitiate. This radicalness of Christ's love for all should suffice to take away the ambiguities which keep opening the door to temptations and weaknesses⁶⁴.

That much established, Libermann noted in his rule that celibacy would always constitute for his missionaries a choice to be remade ceaselessly in generosity and *prudence*. He insisted on the elementary rules of prudence, which would forestall in time sentiments or passions that could be difficult to control later on. "The fire once lighted is not easily extinguished". At the same time he says that under pretext of prudence people should not be "always thinking about that". We have to be peaceful and not let our imagination run away with us, be able to live a life temperamentally balanced as complete humans. Perhaps the witness of Libermann's life is the best commentary available on his rules about chastity. His correspondence shows that Libermann felt very free in his dealings with the women he met or corresponded with; he expressed a real affection for them which was quite devoid of nervous fear. He was at his ease, since his radical attachment to Christ saved him from having to act with affectation or rigidity.

⁶³ Règle 1849: ND X 560; Glose 75 ss.

⁶⁴ ND XI 203-204.

Obedience.

Libermann understood obedience as the very foundation of the apostolic life⁶⁵; it is at the heart of "missionary work". Obedience is the only way of undertaking a unified enterprise; otherwise there would be as many wills as persons and an equal number of different judgements, and the result would be chaos! To understand the basis for the virtue of obedience, we have to go back to what Libermann said about the apostolic life: we are called to share in Christ's mission for the salvation of all. So we enter into the stream of Jesus' own obedience, which was in view of coming to save us. To obey is to put oneself completely at the service of God's plan in operation today in the Congregation. The rule speaks of superiors as mediators of obedience. Libermann adds that the other confreres can also be. One could say that the Church, the Christian community and even the human community are also mediators of the obedience we owe to God. The community, under the superior's leadership, is the place where all these calls to missionary work are heard and discerned.

Analysing the practical aspects of obedience, Libermann asks that it be prompt, not after the fashion of soldiers but by reason of the faith that we bring to bear on it. He leaves place for dialogue, but demands that one avoid "forcing" the decisions of superiors, either in discussion or in presenting them with the accomplished deed in one way or another. A superior who is too restrained by his brothers cannot accomplish the good he wants to and the activity of the community will lack wholeness. On the contrary, "if the missionaries enter into the intentions of their superior, these intentions will be better carried out than if he had thought them out by himself". Libermann recommended the members of a community to anticipate somewhat the superior's intentions, to try to help and enter into his views rather than spend time emphasizing the weaknesses of his decisions or manner. If a superior was guiding his community badly, Libermann provided remedies, the most normal being non re-election.

⁶⁵ Règle 1849: ND X 564 ss; Glose 90 ss.

The missionaries were to avoid undertaking ministries or initiatives on their own authority. Superiors, for their part, will make efforts to take account of each one's tastes and aptitudes. For both, the ultimate criterion is the apostolate, for the good of which each one will be always ready to sacrifice himself freely for Christ's love.

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The draft of the new Rules and Constitutions deals with religious life in its relationship with baptismal life and apostolic life. At one and the same time it is a call and gift of the Spirit urging us to the complete donation of ourselves. The rule insists, as Libermann did, that religious life is first of all an act of adoration, of religion, in view of God's glory. The apostolate itself has no other end. If Libermann dwelt more on the apostolic fruitfulness that flows from religious life, we dwell more clearly on the fact that it is a source of joy and expansiveness for people. (There are many passages indeed in Libermann's writings where he describes the peace and joy of the apostle who lives out his ministry in holiness).

In the list of vows, the rule places celibacy for the Kingdom first, in order to make quite clear that religious life has its source in the radical transformation of our capacity to love. The references to fraternal community, and to Mary, are Libermannian. While having a positive understanding of chastity as a virtue, Libermann also pointed out the negative elements in ourselves that make perpetual celibacy difficult. Some articles of his rule are given over to prudence and to control of the imagination. Without exaggerating, it might be good to recall the need of a certain asceticism of vigilance.

The texts on poverty for the Kingdom appeal largely to biblical references. As in Libermann, the new rule has the practice of poverty start from self-denial in everything that could impede our availability towards God and people. The Spiritan way of living poverty remains the same as that foreseen by Fr. Libermann: our poverty is specified by our apostolic life above all, with family and cultural uprooting, and even at times the insecurity that characterizes the missionary situation. The demands of the apostolate will determine that our poverty take account of the real conditions of the people

among whom we live [90]. Article 91 [and 91.1], speaking of solidarity with the poorest (in particular the ear-marking of a portion of the budget for the poor), renews a custom asked for by Libermann in the Provisional Rule⁶⁶.

Obedience for the Kingdom means prolonging the Son's availability for the mission received from his Father. In this the theological base is the same in the new rule as it was in Libermann. Yet in the new texts one senses that the concept of obedience has developed since Libermann. It appears more in the reference to discernment and community planning than in the reference to a single superior. Yet it would be interesting to quote some excellent texts in which Libermann encourages the members of the Congregation to enter willingly into the views and intentions of their superiors⁶⁷.

CONCLUSION

A Summary of the Comparison of the 1840 and 1849 Rules with the Draft for 1986.

A comparison of the draft of the new rules with those written by Libermann certainly shows the essentials of his spirit and, through him, of Poullart des Places's. Libermann often used biblical references, at least in the commentaries. It is only right that in our days these biblical references be given prominence. Libermann always tried to make a rule which would be "a rule of life", a spiritual power. This is clear in the Provisional Rule, and the second part of the 1849 rule was written with this aim. If the rules written since Libermann sacrificed too much to legalism, we can say that the new draft returns to Libermann's original rapture. Many of the texts take their inspiration from him, but he is rarely quoted in the new draft, too rarely. It will be noticed that the new draft has a chapter which was not in Libermann, that on prayer. Libermann had laid down our prayer patterns in the chapters on

⁶⁶ Glose 70.

⁶⁷ Glose 92 ss.

community⁶⁸. He did not feel the need to write a special chapter on prayer, even though he was a master of it. Libermann's rules on prayer are not found in his rule but in the *Spiritual Writings*. In our days perhaps it is not a bad thing, in composing a special chapter on prayer, to insist on an essential point of our life that was less threatened in Libermann's time. It would be desirable that our new rules, after publication, be followed by a spiritual commentary based largely on texts of Libermann and Poullart des Places (and indeed other important texts of the Spiritan tradition). This commentary, on the lines of our former "Directory", would facilitate both a meditative reading of the rule and an understanding of our founders' spirituality.

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⁶⁸ Glose 103, 110.