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Christian de Mare C.S.Sp.

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THE ORIGINS OF OUR CONSECRATION TO THE HOLY SPIRIT ON MAY 27, 1703

Christian de Mare,
C.S.Sp.

A member of the Province of France, Christian de Mare served for many years as a missionary in Senegal and Congo. He worked subsequently for some 14 years in Spiritan formation, after which he was appointed to the Spiritan Generalate in Rome. Christian has directed numerous retreats and workshops in the area of Spiritan spirituality, a ministry which he still continues from his community in Bordeaux. He has edited two important publications in this regard: "Aux Racines de l'Arbre Spiritain, Claude-François Poullart des Places" (*Mémoire Spiritaine* n°4, 30 rue Lhomond, Paris, 1998) and *Anthologie Spiritaine* (Congrégation du St Esprit, Rome, 2008).

(Translation: Vincent O'Toole,
C.S.Sp.)

The great work of Fr. Joseph Michel, "*Claude François Poullart des Places*"¹, includes a chapter on the origins of the consecration to the Holy Spirit chosen by Claude and his companions. They made this consecration on Pentecost Sunday, 1703, in the chapel dedicated to Our Lady of Rescue in the church of St. Etienne des Grès, situated next to their house. This is Chapter XIII of Michel's book and it goes under the title of "*Under the Sign of the Holy Spirit and the Immaculate Conception*". This is now part of the collective memory of the majority of Spiritans.

The re-evangelisation of Brittany was well underway when Claude was born in 1679. The main protagonists were Jesuit missionaries, partly through their parish missions, partly as a result of the follow-up retreats in which they deepened the doctrinal and spiritual contents of these missions. But they were not the only ones involved; through the initiative of Jesuit Frs. Rigoleuc, Surin, Huby, Le Grand and Maunoir, a good number of Breton secular priests joined them and were formed in their spirituality, especially in their retreat houses. We know of Fr. Michel Le Nobletz, perhaps the most influential, and Frs. Leduger and Julien Bellier.

These Jesuit priests mentioned above, plus Fr. Champion, were largely responsible for this reform and the re-evangelisation of the clergy. All of them were profoundly influenced by the guidance of Fr. Louis Lallement S.J., either directly, in the case of Rigoleuc and Surin, or indirectly by his disciples. Fr. Lallement was master of novices for four years and in charge of the second Jesuit novitiate for three years, from 1625-1632 at Rouen. But his teaching was so influential that he came to be recognised as the founder of a new school of spirituality, even though he himself was profoundly Ignatian in his outlook. As Michel puts it, his school was "*based on docility to the Holy Spirit and purity of heart, so as to be totally available to this same Spirit*".

So this focusing on the Holy Spirit characterised the whole work of re-evangelising Brittany by the Jesuits. The secular priests who joined them formed an association called "*The Priests of the Holy Spirit*", and their spirituality was laid out in a booklet named "*The Institution of the Congregation of Priests dedicated to the Holy Spirit under the title of his Holy Bride, the Blessed Virgin*".

The contents of this manual were in complete conformity with the teachings of the school of Fr. Lallement. Fr. Michel tells us that the Senior Seminary of Quimper, founded in 1678, was directed by these Priests of the Holy Spirit and concentrated on detachment from everything which could be an obstacle to their commitment:

They must see spiritual poverty as the foundation of the evangelical perfection that they must cultivate, hating not just avarice but all aspects of it. They must keep clear of all ambition and reject any desire to consider themselves better than others.

...there were retreat centres at Vannes, Rennes, Quimper and Nantes. The one at Rennes was opened four years before the birth of Claude...

We have already mentioned the practice of enclosed retreats; they were used particularly in forming the collaborators of the Jesuit missionaries and there were retreat centres at Vannes, Rennes, Quimper and Nantes. The one at Rennes was opened four years before the birth of Claude by Fr. Jégou, the rector of the college where Claude would do his studies, a man who had been greatly influenced by the teaching of Lallement. The centre at Nantes was run by Fr. Champion.

So as not to lose the essentials of this school of spirituality, Champion was asked to draw up a record of its main elements, making use of the notes of two of Lallement's immediate disciples, Frs. Rigoleuc and Surin. The result was a book entitled "*The Life and Spiritual Doctrine of Fr. Lallement*", which was published in 1694, 60 years after the death of the Master. Fr. Michel quotes an extract from this book, which gives a good idea of its tone:

Once we have worked for a considerable time to achieve purity of heart, our aim must be to be so possessed and governed by the Holy Spirit that he alone will control our forces and senses and all our internal and external movements of soul. We will renounce ourselves totally – our will and all our personal satisfaction. In this way, we will live no longer in ourselves but in Jesus Christ, by faithfully cooperating with all the promptings of his divine spirit.

Jesuit spirituality greatly encouraged devotion to Mary, free from all sin (the Immaculate Conception), most probably stemming from its insistence on the need of purity to distinguish the workings of the good spirit and the spirit of the Adversary. The only reference we can find to this in the doctrine of Lallement is the following passage, quoted in Champion's "*Spiritual Doctrine*":

Anyone who wishes to make progress in his spiritual life must try to excel in his devotion to Our Lord and the Holy Spirit, as well as Mary and St. Joseph in the hope of attaining, humility, through the abasement of the Word incarnate, purity, through the kindness of Our Lady, the purest of creatures, and guidance of the Holy Spirit, through the intercession of St. Joseph. (Doct. Spir VI, III, IX)

Fr. Surin recommended and spread devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary in words very similar to those used by Claude Poullart des Places in the opening articles of his “*General and Particular Rules for the Community of the Holy Spirit*”. It was in searching for purity linked to openness to the Holy Spirit that the Jesuits founded their Marian Congregations, not just in their schools but wherever they were called to direct groups of committed lay people;

The wonderful purity of the Queen of Angels must be in the forefront of our minds on this feast of her Immaculate Conception. Those who belong to her must share in the same purity. It is through the great mercy of God that we are led by our faith and our sufferings in this direction. Finally, the fire of God’s love will purify us, just as ordinary fire purifies whatever it comes in contact with”. (Fr. Surin, “Spiritual Letters).

...but there are several other things that we would like to know.

What Fr. Michel has told us is very important, but there are several other things that we would like to know. For example,

- What was the origin of this spirituality that is so strongly focused on the Holy Spirit and which Claude Poullart des Places put at the centre of his work?
- What were the sources that Fr. Louis Lallement used, so that he can be placed, even among the Jesuits, as the founder of a school?

To take our researches further, we can learn much from the edition of “*Doctrine Spirituelle*” by Fr. François Courel S.J.², himself a formator, as can be seen from his well documented introduction to the work.

It was Henri Brémond who revived interest in the importance of the school of Lallement³, which seems to have been somewhat forgotten by subsequent generations of Jesuits, possibly because it was so radical. For the 300th anniversary of his death, a first

*A few words about
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Lallement.*

edition was prepared in 1936 of Champion's works by Fr. Pottier S.J. The publication of Fr. Courel, which follows the original text more closely, appeared in 1959. It is not a critical edition of the original instructions of Lallement since we only know about them through Champion, who reproduced the notes taken by Rigoleuc and Surin; but the correspondence of doctrine and style shows that Lallement was in no way misrepresented by his disciples.

A few words about the person of Louis Lallement. He was born at Chalons/Marne in Champagne in 1587, where his father was in the legal profession. When he was still young, he was sent away to the college at Bourges, run by the Jesuits. He was a very intelligent child and showed a spiritual sensitivity from his early years. He was accorded the gift of an intimate experience of life in the Holy Spirit and a great attraction to Mary; he belonged to the Marian Congregation⁴. He felt a deep need of silence and recollection and responded to it generously, forgetful of himself. He was a real fighter.

He studied rhetoric at Bourges and Verdun to good effect, then he entered the Jesuit novitiate at Nancy, at the age of 18. He lapped up the insights of Ignatius, above all the combat against the spirit of evil so as to live uniquely according to the "good spirit". He resolved to become exclusively dependent on the Holy Spirit.

He studied philosophy and theology at Pont-à-Mousson (between Metz and Nancy) and made his solemn profession in 1621. He was successively professor of philosophy, mathematics, moral theology and scholastic philosophy in various Jesuit colleges. He was subsequently master of novices for four years then a teacher in the second novitiate for three years. He gave himself up to this work to such a degree that his health became impaired. His short life came to an end at Bourges where he was teaching. He had a happy death in 1635 at the age of 48, highly esteemed for his teaching and his religious and priestly devotion in forming his confreres.

Champion gives this general appreciation of Lallement's teaching:

The Holy Spirit wished to produce a superior and director who was eminently qualified to train a large number of people. The Spirit always guided him and instructed him in the spiritual life from his earliest years; he bound him

to himself with a special devotion for his adorable Person. He showed him the most profound mysteries of grace and guided him to a knowledge of his gifts and gave them to him with a generosity that he only shows to those he wants to raise to the heights of sanctity.

This assessment could give an impression of Lallement as a self-taught person, who founded a school of spirituality apart from his Ignatian formation and convictions, developing, above all, his own personal mystical experience of life in the Holy Spirit. In fact, his originality is rooted in the Ignatian tradition:

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- First of all, in the discernment of spirits, as taught by Ignatius in the 2nd and 3rd Weeks of the Exercises (consolation; desolation; signs of the active presence of the good spirit; signs of the action of the bad angel; the spiritual combat; etc.). As Courel puts it,

The Exercises are conceived to conquer myself, to recognise that I am a sinner in the sight of God and to allow myself to be cleansed from sin and from all attachment to sin. Having re-discovered this purity of heart, I have to re-orientate my whole life by the direction of the Holy Spirit. This is a protracted work, undertaken in the light of the examples of Christ that must be followed step by step in his public life, his suffering and his glorious life right up to his Ascension into the glory of his Father. And this final contemplation of Christ returning to his Father spurs us on to find God in everything and everything in God. The imitation of Christ and docility to the light of the Holy Spirit go together throughout the three final Weeks of the Exercises. (Fr. François Courel S.J.: "Doctrine Spirituelle")

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- Secondly, his Ignatian thought pervades all his work as an Instructor in the Second Novitiate. His task was to complete the formation of religious who had already been in the Company for about 15 years and who, for the most part, were serious practitioners of the "Principal and Foundation" of the first Week of the Exercises and the other teachings of St. Ignatius. Lallement always saw the second conversion as a re-appropriation of Ignatian spirituality.

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...ultimate target for the whole formation programme: to produce men of action...

- Finally, his own personal charism and experience enabled him to elaborate in his teaching a 4th and long principle of fidelity to the Ignatian vocation in docility to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is the 4th Principle of his “*Doctrine Spirituelle*”, which is divided into five chapters and stretches over 73 pages, with a long elaboration of the gifts of the Holy Spirit and their importance.

*Here are the means by which we progress towards this docility: the two elements of the spiritual life are the cleansing of the heart and the direction of the Holy Spirit. In short, spiritual life can be summed up as identifying the ways and movements of the Holy Spirit working in our souls. Our greatest perfection lies in following the interior attractions of the Spirit and allowing ourselves to be directed by His inspirations. Once we have spent some time seeking purity of heart, we must aim to be so possessed and governed by the Holy Spirit that He alone will direct all our powers and senses and control all our interior and exterior movement, so that we will totally abandon ourselves by renouncing our own wishes and satisfactions. Thus, we will live no longer in ourselves but in Jesus Christ, faithfully following the working of his Spirit within us and subjecting ourselves and all our rebellious tendencies to the strength of his grace. (Courel: “*Doctrine Spirituelle*”).*

Courel believes that what is said above epitomises all the originality of Lallement’s School.

In his work as a formator, Lallement used other sources of spirituality apart from Ignatius: Laurence Justinian, Vincent Ferrier, Gregory Nazianzen, Basil, Jerome, Ambrose, Bonaventure, Augustine, Pseudo-Denis, Richard of St. Victor, Bernard, Thomas Aquinas, Theresa, Isidore of Saville, Francis de Sales, Francis Xavier, Lainez, Suarez... And surely we must add to this list St. John of the Cross with his “nada” (the emptiness of all that is not God within us), his long nights of the soul, Mount Carmel...

Another characteristic of the school of Lallement is its great insistence on the interior life (living in the Holy Spirit) and its ultimate target for the whole formation programme: to produce men of action:

As a spiritual master and the head of a school, with the responsibility of forming men of both action and prayer, it is hardly surprising that Lallement engendered a double posterity (Courel).

According to Brémond, Lallement's spiritual doctrine can be summarised under four principles: the second conversion, the critique of action, the vigilance of the heart and the direction of the Holy Spirit. It is aimed at religious men already journeying on the road to perfection, men of action and men of discernment:

...with contemplation, one can achieve more for oneself and others in one month than would be possible in ten years without it.

We must join together action and contemplation to such an extent that we no longer give ourselves more to one than to the other. For we who are called to an apostolic Order, where action and contemplation go hand in hand, must aspire to the highest degree of excellence in both. The two support each other: with contemplation, one can achieve more for oneself and others in one month than would be possible in ten years without it. ("Doctrine Spirituelle").

Before launching into his favourite lessons on docility to the Holy Spirit, Lallement had plenty to say about purity of heart. Purity as regards mortal sin went without saying, but this was also true of deliberate venial sin:

All this must be accomplished gently...

The way to proceed with the cleansing of the heart is, first of all, to identify venial sins and correct them. The second step is to rectify uncontrolled movements of the heart and the third, to guard one's thoughts and put them in order. Lastly, one must detect the inspirations coming from God, his plans and wishes, and take steps to carry them out. All this must be accomplished gently, making it part of one's commitment to the Lord. ("Doctrine Spirituelle").

The heart has to be purified of the following: venial sins, passions, pride and the slightest imperfections. We must oppose our inclinations and arrive at a holy indifference. We must not go chasing after special graces. The heart must also be purified in our active life, and our intellect needs to be cleansed of errors, false principles, and ignorance (*nescientia veri et falsi, boni et mali, commode et noxii*). We must eliminate particular friendships, foolish conversations and useless visits.

Noting how many of his confreres were only loosely committed to being guided by the Holy Spirit, Louis Lallement had this to say:

If religious turn their minds to purity of heart, love steadily grows within them and the gifts of the Holy Spirit are clearly seen in their conduct; but this will never happen without recollection and concentration on the interior life, or if they are always led by their inclinations, avoiding only the greatest sins while neglecting things of less importance. Those who are sensual, full of earthly thoughts, desires and affections quench the spirit of God within them. They are very few who give themselves up completely to God and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to the point where He alone lives within them and is the principle of all their actions". And Lallement adds, "the number of fools to be found is infinite! ("Doctrine Spirituelle").

These were the convictions that the Jesuit missionaries took away with them from their second novitiate. They had forged a link between purity and devotion to the Immaculate Conception and this was widely spread by the Company through their Marian Congregations. In their turn, the Breton "Priests of the Holy Spirit" adopted the same ideas through parish missions and retreats, and Claude Poullart des Places, at Nantes and Rennes, came into contact with this same spirituality of the Holy Spirit through his teachers and directors, like Fr. Julien Belier.

So this should give us a clearer idea of the origins of our consecration to the Holy Spirit. We thank the Lord for all those who have led us along this path, because it shows that our commitment to the Holy Spirit does not have its roots in a period not particularly renowned in the history of spirituality: we are born from a great river of spirituality that flows directly from the words and sacrifice of Jesus Christ. We are particularly indebted to the zeal of these Jesuit missionaries, the forceful personality of Louis Lallement and, above all, to Saint Ignatius of Loyola.

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Our Consecration to the Holy Spirit in our Rule of Life

1709

1. All the students will have a special devotion to the Holy Spirit to whom they have been consecrated. They will also pray frequently to the Blessed Virgin, under whose protection they have been offered to the Holy Spirit.
2. They will observe Pentecost and the Immaculate Conception as their principle feasts. They will celebrate the first to obtain the fire of God's love from the Holy

Spirit, and the second to acquire an angelic⁵ purity from the Immaculate Conception – two virtues which will be the foundation of all their spiritual life.

1734

1. This Congregation is consecrated to the Holy Spirit under the invocation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, conceived without sin. It will therefore celebrate in a special way the feasts of Pentecost and the Immaculate Conception, so that all the members may be filled with the fire of divine love and obtain a perfect purity of heart and body.

In the Provisional Rule, drawn up by Libermann between 1841 and 1845, there is no mention of the Holy Spirit in the life and work of the missionaries of the Holy Heart of Mary. But just before the “fusion” in 1848, he wrote to his confreres that he found no contradiction between consecration to the Holy Spirit and their gift of themselves to the Holy Heart of Mary. He made this more explicit in the Rule of 1849 when he unified the Rules of the two Congregations.

1849

Devotions of the Congregation⁶

1. To help the members to enter into this fundamental devotion, so full of holiness, and to give them a powerful source of sanctification for the accomplishment of their duties of private, common and apostolic life, the Congregation consecrates them in a special way to the Holy Spirit, the author and guide of all sanctity and the inspiration of the apostolic spirit, and to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, filled abundantly, by the Holy Spirit with the fullness of holiness and the apostolic spirit and sharing perfectly in the life and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, her Son, for the redemption of the world. This double dedication is the special and distinctive devotion of the Congregation.
2. They will discover in the Holy Spirit, who lives in their souls, a source for their interior and religious life and a powerful spring of that perfect love which is the soul of zeal and all the other apostolic virtues. They will regard the Immaculate Heart of Mary as a perfect model of fidelity to all the inspirations of the Holy Spirit and the interior practice of the virtues of the religious and apostolic life. They will find in her heart a refuge to which they can turn in their work and their sufferings

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Mary...*

and they will open themselves to her with the confidence of a child in all their weaknesses and temptations.

3. The holy day of Pentecost and that of the Holy and Immaculate Heart of Mary will be the principal feasts of the Congregation.

1987

1. We are dedicated to the Holy Spirit, author of all holiness and “*source of the apostolic spirit*” (N.D. X p. 568). We place ourselves under the protection of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, who was filled beyond measure by the same Spirit “*with the fullness of holiness and apostolic zeal*” (ibid.).

Successive Spiritan Rules of Life proclaim the central place of the Holy Spirit and of Mary. Still today, consecration to the Holy Spirit involves closeness to Mary and deep involvement in the mission of her son.

Endnotes

¹ Editions Saint-Paul, Paris, 1962.

² “Louis Lallement, *Doctrine Spirituelle*”, coll. Christus no. 3, 413 pages, Desclée de Brouwer, Paris, 1959.

³ Henri Brémond “A literary history of religious thought in France” Volume V: “The Mystical Conquest: the school of Fr. Lallement and the mystical tradition in the Company of Jesus”, Bloud and Gay, Paris, 1920

⁴ From the start, the Jesuits adopted a Marian devotion, which they spread through their colleges. Their attraction to the Immaculate Conception fits in perfectly with their search for purification of the heart.

⁵ The feast of the Immaculate Conception is one of the two principal celebrations of the house. Once again, we can see the influence of the Jesuits (who were staunch defenders of the Immaculate Conception) on the spiritual formation of Claude Poullart des Places. The “angelic purity” that is spoken of here does not just refer to corporal chastity but also to a purity that imitates, as far as possible, that of Mary, exempt from all stain of sin.

⁶ Cf. *Spiritan Wellsprings* (1986), ed. John Doly C.S.Sp., Dublin: Paraclete Press pp. 156-157 (The Devotions of the Congregation, Pt. II Section 3, Ch. VI, Articles III, IV and VI)