

## XXIII

## AN APOSTOLIC SPIRITUALITY

If the sons of Poullart des Places are still known today as “*Spiritans*”, it is not because they dedicated their hall of residence in the rue des Cordiers to the Holy Spirit. The consecration made at Pentecost, 1703, was not that of a house but of 12 young clerics who were to be the forerunners of a large family of priests. Consecrated to the Holy Spirit, the Spiritans would adore Him in a special way. At the same time, they would have a deep devotion to the Virgin conceived without sin, because it was under her protection that their founder offered them to the Holy Spirit. So there is a direct link between their cult of the third Person of the Blessed Trinity and their Marian devotion. They were to be the “*Oblates*” of the Holy Spirit but only because they would be presented to Him by the Immaculate Virgin.

This double devotion of the Spiritans runs through the whole of their spirituality. The common prayers chosen by Poullart des Places were obviously those of a community dedicated to the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary. The “*Office of the Holy Spirit*”, and the Marian prayers known as “*Litanies, Inviolata, The Little Crown of the Immaculate Conception*” were the principal ones. According to their Rule, the Spiritans would celebrate yearly the feasts of Pentecost and the Immaculate Conception, “*the first to obtain the fire of God’s love from the Holy Spirit and the second to obtain the purity of angels through the intercession of Our Lady – two virtues which will be the foundation of all their devotions*”.<sup>1</sup>

The same inspiration can be found in the Rule of the Daughters of the Holy Spirit:

*“To be received into this house, the young ladies must be full of charity so as to be able to carry out their duties; they will honour, as perfectly as possible, the three adorable Persons of the Blessed Trinity, but they will have a particular devotion to the Holy Spirit, the love of the Father and the Son, whom they will see as their father in a special way. So their principal feast day will be the day of Pentecost... Purity is the characteristic virtue of both the Daughters of the Holy Spirit and the Blessed Virgin”.*

All the other virtues can be built on the same foundation. For example, Fr. de la Ville-Angevin introduces his chapter on poverty with the following words:

*“The Daughters who consecrate themselves to God in this house will remember that by taking the Holy Spirit as their Father and the Blessed Virgin as their Mother, they are giving up all desire for possessions...”*

On May 27<sup>th</sup>, 1703, kneeling before the statue of the *Black Virgin of Paris*, Poullart des Places offered all his disciples, both present and to come, to the Holy Spirit. Each year, on the feasts of Pentecost and the Immaculate Conception, the Spiritans would gather round a statue of Our Lady and repeat this offering in a solemn consecration of themselves:

*“Holy Mary, my mother and my queen, prostrate at your feet I implore your assistance. Help me, your unworthy servant, to dedicate myself to the Holy Spirit, your divine spouse, in whose honour, despite my fragility, I wish to make a very*

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<sup>1</sup> Règlements, no 2. Cf. Koren, p. 165.

*important commitment. Listen to me, my loving mother; all powerful Holy Spirit, listen to my mother and through her intercession, enlighten my mind with your brightness and enfold my heart with the fire of your love, so that in this house which is consecrated to you, I might only do what you want and everything that will lead to your glory, my sanctification and the edification of my brothers”.*<sup>1</sup>

The texts of two sermons given in the chapel of the rue Lhomond by Fr. Warnet, the 7<sup>th</sup> Superior General, can be found in the General Archives of the Spiritans at Chevilly-Larue. A few quotations will show the extent to which devotion to the Holy Spirit and the Blessed Virgin formed the bedrock of spiritan spirituality:

*“This ceremony (of consecration) is an act by which we give ourselves to the Holy Spirit, under the invocation of Mary conceived without sin, and to Mary herself through the grace and inspiration of the Holy Spirit.*

*This consecration is an essential part of the spirit of our constitutions; the promises that we make are part of the inheritance that our forefathers have left us. They were poor as regards the goods of this world, but the gifts of the Holy Spirit were the treasure that they really valued.*

*As children of Mary and the Holy Spirit, we shall strive by our example and our words to make them known, loved and served. In this way, we will follow in the footsteps of our fathers, knowing that this is the best way for us to fulfil the wishes of the Holy Spirit; let us try to imitate them and so be the true heirs of their virtues as well as their name. In that way, we can call Mary ‘our Mother’ in a special way; we will be part of her family and the Holy Spirit will look upon us as His children”.*<sup>2</sup>

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For the Congregation of the Holy Heart of Mary founded in 1841, Fr. Francis Libermann foresaw a triple consecration:

*“First of all, the Congregation is consecrated to the Blessed Trinity; the whole point of its existence is to seek the glory of God in all things.*

*Secondly, we belong to and are entirely consecrated to Our Lord Jesus Christ. We have been given to him by his Father for the work that he wants us to do. These two consecrations are essential for any apostolate. But what distinguishes us from all the other workers in the Lord’s vineyard is the consecration that we make of our whole Society, of each of its members and of all their works and undertakings to the Holy*

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<sup>1</sup> *“O Mater et Domine mea, sancta Maria, mater Dei, virgo sancta, dulce peccatorum refugium, efficax pauperum consolatrix; in hac lacrymarum valle, suavis spes mea ego humili ac devoto corde coram te prostrates, ad tuam clementiam recurro, ut tuum adjuves servulum se dedicantem, consecrantem et voventem augustissimo sponso Spiritui Sancto, propter cuius honorem, infirmus licet valde, aliquid prestantissimum hodie polliceri desidero.*

*Audi me, Mater benigna; audi matrem benignam, Spiritus omnipotens ut, sub auspiciis tantae matris, digneris lumen tuum menti meae infundere, et ignem tui amoris in corde meo accendere; ut quae in hac domo, Virgine favente, tuo cultui dicata, tibi placita sunt; quaeque vel ad tuum honorem vel ad mei sanctificationem, vel ad fratrum aedificationem spectant, exsequi fideliter possim. Eia ergo. (From “Preces diurnae”, p. 83).*

<sup>2</sup> Arch. C.S.Sp. Extracts from the homilies of Fr. Warnet, given on December 8<sup>th</sup>, 1837 and May 26<sup>th</sup>, 1839.

*Heart of Mary, a heart that is eminently apostolic and burning with a desire for the glory of God and the salvation of souls”.*<sup>1</sup>

The formula of consecration for the Missionaries of the Holy Heart of Mary can be found in the *Provisional Rule*, drawn up at the very start of his congregation:

*“O my mother, the Queen of my soul, come to my help; remember all those souls I must save from eternal misery. If I am left to my own weakness, they will surely perish; but if you take me under your protection, I will be capable of anything!*

*So please accept me into the number of those privileged children of your merciful heart. Mother of my God, if you will grant me this great favour, if through my superior you will receive me into the Society of missionaries of your holy Heart, I promise that I will serve your beloved Son there for the rest of my life with the greatest fidelity. I give you my soul so that it may belong to you as a child belongs to its mother. I will love you all my life with a tender and filial love. I will preach your glory everywhere and I will try to engrave your love and that of Jesus into people’s hearts”.*<sup>2</sup>

But the founder of this new congregation had been providentially prepared to become the successor of Poullart des Places and to embrace his ideas. Libermann had been greatly influenced by the spirituality of Fr. Louis Lallemand, the master of the *School of the Holy Spirit*, and it has been shown how *“all his spiritual doctrine could be called a ‘school’ of docility to the Holy Spirit”*.<sup>3</sup> When one of his early collaborators complained that the proposed union with the Congregation of Poullart des Places would inevitably lead to a lessening of their devotion to the Holy Heart of Mary, he wrote to reassure him:

*“You belong to the Holy Heart of Mary and always will do. Our union with the Community of the Holy Spirit can only increase our devotion and love for this Heart which gave birth to our little Society. We have always found our peace and fulfilment in the Heart of Mary, so full of the overflowing generosity of the Holy Spirit and if we have not so far expressed this fullness of the Holy Spirit in the Heart of Mary in words, it was already the essence of our devotion towards her. So we are not changing anything; we are simply putting down on paper what we already believed”.*<sup>4</sup>

Having become the 10<sup>th</sup> successor of Poullart des Places, Libermann lost no time in updating the Act of Consecration quoted above, written 7 or 8 years previously, to the new circumstances. The first paragraph was not altered in the revised version, but this is what follows:

*“Please accept, my Mother, the offering that I make to you of my whole self, and offer me in your turn to the Holy Spirit, your beloved spouse. All I desire is to devote and consecrate myself entirely to the Holy Spirit and to your Immaculate Heart. In the footsteps of Jesus, I want to live and die, dedicate and immolate myself in this Society*

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<sup>1</sup> N.D. II, pp. 237-238.

<sup>2</sup> N.D. II, p. 358.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph Lecuyer c.s.sp.; *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, Volume III, Column 1494.

<sup>4</sup> N.D. Vol XII, p. 133.

*of Missionaries which is totally consecrated to the Holy Spirit and your Immaculate Heart.*

*Holy Mother of God, if I am granted this special favour and am received into this Society, I will make a firm and irrevocable resolution that this is where I will serve your beloved Son, Jesus Christ, my Lord, for the rest of my life. I give you my soul so that it will belong to you as a child belongs to its mother; I will serve with a tender and filial love and I will preach your glory everywhere.*

*I open my heart and abandon it to the Divine Spirit; may He fill and possess it and act within it as my sovereign master. Under his guidance, I want to pour his love into those souls who will be confided to my care through the goodness of your well-beloved Son”.<sup>1</sup>*

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We have seen that the religious of Fr. de la Ville-Angevin “took the Holy Spirit as their Father and the Blessed Virgin as their mother”. Later, Fr. Warnet would say of the Spiritans: “It is a family feast which has brought us together; a father in the person of the Holy Spirit and a mother who is the Virgin Mary”.

So the two-fold devotion to the Holy Spirit and the Blessed Virgin, adopted by Poullart des Places, was the expression of a spirituality which is eminently apostolic. Fidelity to the Holy Spirit and the imitation of Mary have the same objective: an ever more perfect formation of Christ within ourselves and our brothers, for the greater glory of the Father.

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<sup>1</sup> N.D. X, p. 499.