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The Holy Spirit in Spiritan Life and Mission

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Translated from French by Richard Fagah, retouched by Vincent O'Toole, C.S.Sp.

OUR SPIRITAN IDENTITY: WE ARE RELIGIOUS MISSIONARIES CONSECRATED TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

At the beginning of the third session of the Second Vatican Council, Ignatius Ziade, Maronite Archbishop of Beirut, reacting against the absence of specific mention of the Holy Spirit in the drafts, mustered the courage to challenge the Council Fathers: "*Latin Ecclesiology has only developed in its Christological dimension; it is still an adolescent in terms of Pneumatology.*" The Council experienced a process of awakening, a progression in the re-discovery of the Holy Spirit. Undoubtedly, our Congregation is currently going through the same maturation process.

Our last General Chapter in Bagamoyo, Tanzania (24th June – 22nd July, 2012), raised the question of our Spiritan identity. Our initial answers to this question are often general and only with regard to what we do: we are simple people, frontier-crossers who live out internationality and cross-cultural experience, evangelizers of the poor and builders of churches... These are true, but more profoundly we belong to a Congregation with a name, a history, a missionary charism: we are religious missionaries, members of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit. This consecration to the Holy Spirit is appearing more and more fundamental to a good number of us. Some "prophetic" voices are emphatically reminding us of that; they invite us to go back to the wellspring of our foundation, to the time of Poullart des Places. We need also to verify how the founding charism has been engraved into our various Constitutions and the current *Rule of Life*, thereby setting the pattern of our Spiritan tradition. To continue the reflection, we will try to specify the difference between consecration *by* the Holy Spirit and consecration *to* the Holy Spirit.

I. "Prophetic" Spiritan Calls to rediscover the Holy Spirit

Since the year 2000, various Spiritan voices have been inviting us to rediscover the Holy Spirit.

1) *The Message for the Spiritan Year*

In 2003, for the 300th anniversary of Claude-François Poullart des Places (1703-2003), the Superior General, Fr. Pierre Schouwer, in his "*Message to All Members of the Congregation for the Spiritan Year*" entitled "*With the Power of the Spirit*," invited us to "rediscover the inspiration of our origins." He wrote:

*...prepare ourselves, by
the power of the Spirit,
to set out into the deep...*

This special Year, decided upon by the Chapter of Maynooth, presents us with a unique opportunity for spiritual renewal. We attempt to rediscover the inspiration of our beginnings by responding creatively to the challenges of our own day. The meaning of this sort of re-foundation is encapsulated in this logo. It refers us back to the boat on the cover of the Maynooth document, inviting us to get on board for a new voyage. The sail is filled with the breath of the Spirit. We are not leaving for a cruise among our archives; if we revisit our past, it is to prepare ourselves, by the power of the Spirit, to set out into the deep for a long journey ahead. [...] We discover the strength of the Spirit of Christ in the lived experience of those who have made our history up to the present day. Libermann and Poullart are examples of total trust in God and docility to the Holy Spirit.

The power of the Spirit of Christ amongst us today

Although the Congregation is faced with numerous difficulties, as well as its own limitations and weaknesses, we witness the calm strength of many confreres, their perseverance and the initiatives they undertake despite obstacles and disappointments, their simple presence amongst the people, their fraternal life amongst different cultures, their sense of responsibility and deep concern for spiritual renewal. These tangible fruits of the Spirit are convincing evidence of the enduring presence of the Master with us throughout the storm.

We also recognize the presence of his Spirit beyond the frontiers of the Church before the Gospel is ever preached. [...] the Spirit speaks to us through other peoples [...] in the guise of the poorest of people ...²

2) The 2006 Christmas Letter of Jean-Paul Hoch

The Superior General, Fr. Jean-Paul Hoch, in his 2006 Christmas letter (December 8, 2006), “*Our Congregation, a Gift of the Holy Spirit,*” underscored a particular aspect of our charism:

We are all agreed that the charism of our founders is a gift, and that the mission confided to us, as well as our confreres... are also a kind of gift. But are we sufficiently aware of the fact that the Congregation itself is truly a gift of the Spirit to the Church and, through the Church, a gift to the world and especially to the poorest?

3) *The 2011 Pentecost Message*

More recently, in his 2011 Pentecost Message, “*Towards the Bagamoyo General Chapter – 2012, ‘Simply Spiritans,’*” Fr. Jean-Paul Hoch humbly admitted:

A late awakening: I have to admit that it took me a long time to fully appreciate the importance of our common consecration to the Holy Spirit. In the past, I regarded the title of “The Congregation of the Holy Spirit” as simply a name without any great significance. Any other title would have served equally well! It is only in the last six or seven years that I have come to understand the importance of our belonging to the Holy Spirit. I have become aware, sometimes painfully, of the great weaknesses and even the sins of our Congregation, both now and in the past; but I have also learnt to admire the energy and holiness of many of our confreres, communities and circumscriptions. How can it be that the same group of people can be both “a bunch of nobodies” (as Libermann put it) and a community of genuine witnesses to Christ – sometimes even at the price of martyrdom, as we will recall next year at the 50th anniversary of the Kongolo massacre (January 1st, 1962)?

Fr. Jean-Paul Hoch confided to us his new conviction:

I am convinced that such things can only be the work of the Holy Spirit, which is exactly what we ask for in the second epiclesis of Eucharistic Prayer II: “May all of us who share in the body and blood of Christ be brought together in unity by the Holy Spirit.” Is this not as extraordinary a ‘miracle’ as is brought about in the first epiclesis when we ask that the Spirit, who has come down upon our gifts, should make them become “the body and blood of our Lord, Jesus Christ?”

Many are pleading for a re-discovery of our common consecration to the Holy Spirit...

He added:

Many are pleading for a re-discovery of our common consecration to the Holy Spirit and, as a result, for a better celebration of the feast of Pentecost as the principal feast of the Congregation³

At the end of his letter, he made a point of recalling the full title of the Congregation, “*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’ (SRL 6).*” He then added, “*Our consecration to the Holy Spirit is inseparable from our devotion to the Virgin Mary.*”⁴

Faithful to these convictions and these wishes, the General Council put forward Saint Paul's exhortation as a biblical theme for the Chapter: "Be fervent in the Spirit" (Rm 12:11). The preparatory prayer asked for the outpouring of the Spirit on the Chapter:

*...to better hear the calls
of our time!*

Father, in times past you sent the Spirit of your Son upon our founding fathers, Claude Poullart des Places and Francis Libermann. Thanks to them and to generations of Spiritans, our Congregation has not ceased to dedicate itself to the evangelization of the poor. As we prepare ourselves to celebrate our XXth General Chapter at Bagamoyo, we ask you to spread your Spirit anew on the whole Congregation. May your Spirit gather us as one big family, to better hear the calls of our time! May we be given a new fervor to deepen in your Church our missionary consecration and witness! Following Mary's example and by the power of the Spirit, may we continue to give birth to your Son for your glory and the life of this world that you created and liberated. Amen.⁵

At the beginning of the General Chapter, Fr. James Chukwuma Okoye, invited as theologian and spiritual director, strongly underscored the importance of the Holy Spirit and Pentecost during the first conference of the recollection that he preached. He called on the capitulants to return to the wellspring of our founders. Poullart des Places founded the Congregation of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost Day, the 27th of May, 1703. Libermann laid much emphasis on docility to the Holy Spirit, on listening to the Spirit (Letter to Colin, 1845). Fr. Okoye cited the chapter of the *Instrumentum Laboris* which deals with Spiritan identity: "Our family is called the 'Congregation of the Holy Spirit,' emphasizing our special dedication to the Holy Spirit (SRL 6)." [...] It is important to "help confreres tune in to 'practical union' and also the place of the Holy Spirit at the heart of our missionary spirituality."⁶ Fr. Okoye affirmed his conviction that "This Chapter will be a Chapter of the Holy Spirit."

*The Holy Spirit
has his place at
the very heart of
our missionary
spirituality.*

During the Chapter itself, various speeches recalled that the Holy Spirit is at the heart of our Spiritan life:

- **In the Congregation:** a Congregation's name is a vocation. We are dedicated to the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Pentecost. Do we speak about it? Do we witness to it? Our Spiritan identity

is sometimes diluted: membership of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit is rarely known or mentioned with regard to our great figures (Blessed Daniel Brottier, Blessed James Laval, Bishop Jalabert, Bishop Shanahan, Bishop Tchidimbo ...).

- **In our personal and prayer life:** Libermann emphasized the action of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, spiritual discernment, *docility to the Holy Spirit*, “author of all holiness” (SRL 6), formation of holy missionaries.⁷
- **In our community life:** only the Spirit of Pentecost can really give us “*cor unum et anima una*” (one heart and one soul), pour out God’s love into our hearts (Rm 5:5), help us transcend our narrow-mindedness and misunderstandings, and transform our international and cultural diversity into a rich fraternal communion.⁸
- **In our missionary activity:** only the Spirit of Pentecost, “source of the apostolic spirit” (SRL 6), can give us the missionary inspiration, the audacity of the Apostles, a true apostolic zeal.⁹ The Spirit precedes us in the hearts of “the pagans” (Acts 10 -11), calls on us to let go of certain missions so as to live out our charism more effectively (Acts 13:1-3), shuts certain doors and opens others (Acts 16: 6-7). The Holy Spirit is the mission strategist: we are “ministers of the Spirit.”
- **In our formation program:** the discovery of the Spirit of Pentecost and attention to the Holy Spirit ought to be special features of Spiritan formation. All our students should take a course in Pneumatology.

Among other decisions, the Chapter retained and voted on some proposals pertaining to the topic “Spiritan Vocation and Identity”:

Our family is called the ‘Congregation of the Holy Spirit,’ emphasizing our special dedication to the Holy Spirit (SRL 6)...¹⁰ We will include biblical, theological and missionary studies on the Holy Spirit in our animation.¹¹

II. At the Wellsprings of our Consecration to the Holy Spirit

To deepen our Spiritan identity, we need to return to the wellsprings of the foundation of our Congregation. A file in the Spiritan archives bears this witness:

*Master Claude-François Poullart des Places, in the year one thousand seven hundred and three, on the feast of Pentecost, while still only an aspirant to the clerical state, started establishing the said community and seminary dedicated to the Holy Spirit, under the invocation of the Blessed Virgin conceived without sin ...*¹²

That was on the 27th of May, 1703, the feast of Pentecost, in the chapel of Notre-Dame de Bonne Délivrance, inside the church of Saint-Étienne-des-Grès in Paris. Claude Poullart des Places had eleven poor students around him. This celebration is considered to be the foundation of the Seminary of the Holy Spirit. We can draw several fundamental elements from this founding grace.

***1) The Consecration of the Work to the Holy Spirit:
the “Seminary of the Holy Spirit”***

Young Poullart des Places, still a seminarian himself, began to gather and help some unfortunate poor students without means. Four or five in the beginning, their number increased rapidly. Poullart rented a house, *le Gros Chapelet, rue des Cordiers*. At the beginning of Lent 1703, Claude-François left his lodgings at Louis-le-Grand to join these students in the *Gros Chapelet*.¹³ This little group, according to *Gallia Christiana*,¹⁴ had expressed the desire to set up a clerical association out of their small community. That was the greatest wish of their benefactor.

Poullart des Places accomplished this wish on Pentecost Day, 1703. He consecrated the nascent work of the Seminary to the Holy Spirit. Such a consecration is surprising within the spiritual context of Paris at that period; it deserves further attention. The sources of such an inspiration appeared to have come from Brittany. Research works by Frs. Henri Le Floch and Joseph Michel (in his first book¹⁵) “have shown that Claude-François drew his devotion to the Holy Spirit from his home province of Brittany. Under the influence of the disciples of Fr. Lallement, S.J.,¹⁶ a very strong current of this devotion was widespread right from the middle of the 16th century and had reached Nantes and Rennes.¹⁷ Poullart des Place, just like Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort, his spiritual friend, was certainly influenced by this spiritual current of docility to the Holy Spirit.

Rennes, the city of young Poullart, saw a rise in the devotion to the Holy Spirit at the time Claude was growing up there. Confraternities of the Holy Spirit were set up in several parishes of the city. In 1698, a chapel in the church of Saint-

Yves-Marie Fradet, C.S.Sp. Germain's was even dedicated to the Holy Spirit.¹⁸ In the street where he spent his adolescence, a house, "probably the one he lived in with his parents,"¹⁹ was commonly called "*Holy Spirit House*." His spiritual director, Fr. Julien Bellier, "the most holy priest in Rennes,"²⁰ was he not one of the representatives of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit founded by Fr. Le Grand, S.J.?"²¹ In Nantes, during his legal studies, Poullart certainly visited the retreat center directed by a Jesuit, disciple of Fr. Lallemand.²²

In the street where he spent his adolescence, a house, "probably the one he lived in with his parents," was commonly called "Holy Spirit House."

The remark by Michel, namely, that no allusion to the Holy Spirit is to be found in Poullart's writings while in Rennes (see note 22), makes us look rather towards Claude's stay in Paris at Louis-le-Grand College run by the Jesuits. Poullart discovered there the *AA* (*Association des Amis* – Association of Friends), a secret, pious association founded by two Bretons, spiritual disciples of Fr. Lallemand.²³ Michel compares the texts of the *AA* with Poullart's writings while he was in Paris: the parallelism is striking and the spiritual likeness quite evident. From there he draws the conclusion that the consecration of the Seminary to the Holy Spirit comes from the deep influence of the *AA* of Louis-le-Grand on Poullart.²⁴

Which was the most determining factor for the choice of the Holy Spirit? Without doubt, it is the convergence of all these influences that oriented Poullart's mind towards the consecration of his "house of students" to the Holy Spirit. At that time in his life, Poullart was experiencing a significant spiritual growth. He had an intensive experience of affective prayer and of devotion to the Holy Spirit. Joseph Michel speaks of a "*spiritual surge*."²⁵ It was thus deep down in his heart that Poullart personally received the inspiration of personal consecration to the Holy Spirit and the designation of his work as the *Seminary of the Holy Spirit*.

In the beginning, Poullart never spoke of community and seminarians but of a house of students. Nevertheless, the study of the oldest documents to have come down to us confirm that Poullart was not only the founder of a seminary, but also of a new religious society, "the father and the head of a priestly family"²⁶ which will later adopt, after the French Revolution, the name of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit.

2) The Consecration of Each One of the Members to the Holy Spirit

The register of associates, cited above, speaks of a Seminary "*consecrated to the Holy Spirit*." Unfortunately, we have neither the text of this consecration nor the account of the little celebration.

In the absence of any documentation, Henri Le Floch has tried to reconstitute the unfolding of the scene, putting together a sermon by Poullart based on the words of Isaiah which Jesus applied to himself: “*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me ...*”²⁷

We can only make suppositions based on the meetings of the AA. As in the celebration of admission of a new member into the AA,²⁸ we may imagine that this consecration was recited by all the poor students. Michel and Farragher have researched into the prayer handbooks of the AA. For the Pentecost Novena, the handbook presents each day a commentary on a verse of the sequence *Veni Sancte Spiritus*.²⁹

Joseph Michel cites the first two pages of chapter seven in the handbook “*Pratique des vertus chrétiennes*” (*The Practice of Christian Virtues*), which certainly caught Poullart’s attention and which has a strong Libermannian flavour:

...I shall open my heart to the Holy Spirit so that he will fill it, will possess it intimately and will be the spirit of my spirit, the heart of my heart.

*The day of Pentecost and for the whole week, I shall open my heart to the Holy Spirit so that he will fill it, will possess it intimately and will be the spirit of my spirit, the heart of my heart. I shall present it to him so that he can consume it like a victim in the flames of his love, and thus the whole week shall be spent in the exercise of charity [...] The practice must be to make me used to considering the Spirit of God as living intimately within me; that this Spirit is a Spirit of love who asks of me nothing more than to light up in my heart the flames wherewith the Spirit burns in the Father and the Son, and thereby to abandon entirely to him one’s heart and soul, so that it breathes only the love of God.*³⁰

The spirituality of Pentecost thus marks forever the charism of our foundation.

3) *The day of Pentecost*

...it is not the date of Pentecost which explains the consecration of the Congregation to the Holy Spirit, but rather the reverse.

The Seminary had already been in existence for several months and Poullart des Places could easily have put off the inauguration to a later feast or to the start of the following academic year; he chose the feast of Pentecost because of his desire to consecrate the nascent work to the Holy Spirit. So contrary to a popular idea, it is not the date of Pentecost which explains the consecration of the Congregation to the Holy Spirit, but rather the reverse.

The choice of Pentecost was also an inspiration from God, and this has deep significance for all Spiritans: the feast of Pentecost gives a missionary orientation to the nascent work.

Yves-Marie Fradet, C.S.Sp.

*It is the Spirit of
Pentecost who guides
our mission.*

Docility to the Holy Spirit is fundamental for the sanctification of the person—and this perspective is an abiding theme in the letters of Saint Paul, which Fr. Lallemand and his disciples had spread among the Christian elite in Brittany. It counts as much for missionary activity—Saint Luke’s dynamic perspective in the Acts of the Apostles. For Poullart des Places and his “poor students,” consecration to the Holy Spirit is consecration to the Spirit of Pentecost, the missionary breath of the Church. The history of the Seminary of the Holy Spirit, of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit, is marked by the departure of its members, the *Messieurs du Saint-Esprit* (Gentlemen of the Holy Spirit), then the Spiritans, sons of Libermann, to distant lands to preach the Gospel of the Lord. Missionary activity everywhere is at the heart of our Spiritan identity. Docility to the Spirit of Pentecost is without doubt lived out for us Spiritans primarily with regard to mission, its calls and choices. It is the Spirit of Pentecost who guides our mission. In order to be docile to him, there is a need for a life of holiness. Poullart demanded of his “students” a consecration to the Holy Spirit; Libermann wanted religious life for his missionaries. Spiritans are religious missionaries consecrated to the Holy Spirit.

Pentecost was a solemn celebration at the College of Louis-le-Grand. On Saturday morning, a solemn exhortation prepared the way for the big liturgical feast which began on Saturday evening with the vigil liturgy of the Office. Poullart took advantage of Saturday afternoon to preach a short retreat to his poor students, whose theme announced the missionary orientation of his work: “*Evangelizare pauperibus misit me.*” (He sent me to preach the good news to the poor, Lk 4:18). According to the words of Jesus in this passage of Saint Luke’s Gospel, it is the Holy Spirit who consecrates and sends.

4) With the Immaculate Virgin Mary

The Virgin Mary was present at the founding act of the Seminary of the Holy Spirit: it was at the feet of the statue of the Black Virgin, Notre-Dame de Bonne Délivrance, in a chapel in the church of Saint Étienne-des-Grés, that the poor students did their consecration “under the invocation of the Blessed Virgin conceived without sin.” The mediation of Mary in the consecration to the Holy Spirit is characteristic of Poullart’s piety.

Seán P. Farragher adds: “We can be sure that Claude included his favorite short prayer to Our Lady, *Per Sanctam*: [...] Through your holy virginity and your Immaculate Conception, O most pure Virgin, cleanse my heart and my flesh.”³¹

Mary has a catalyzing role both at Pentecost and at the beginning of the Seminary of the Holy Spirit.

Anima Una, no. 60 (2007), *Living Spiritan Spirituality*, evokes the scene of Pentecost when it speaks of us as being “*with a single heart, with Mary Mother of Jesus*” (Acts 1:14). One can imagine a photo montage with super-impression. In the background, we have the Jerusalem community in prayer, waiting for the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:14). In the foreground are twelve men, eleven students and Poullart des Places, during the Pentecost of 1703, at the feet of Notre-Dame de Bonne Délivrance. Both narratives – the one from the Acts of Apostles and that concerning the beginning of the Seminary of the Holy Spirit – accord to Mary a kind of catalyzing role. She orients hearts towards the Holy Spirit who inspires prayer, nudges into action and unifies the community. Spiritan spirituality recognizes itself in the explicit link which the New Testament establishes between Mary and the Holy Spirit.³²

On September 24, 1841, in the church of Our Lady of Victories in Paris, Libermann continued to follow the same Marian line as Poullart des Places, calling his new missionary community the “Society of the Holy Heart of Mary.” In the 1849 Rule, he stated clearly how Mary inspires missionary life: Mary’s heart is “like a perfect model of fidelity to all the holy inspirations of the divine Spirit and of the interior practice of the virtues of the religious, apostolic, life” (ND X, p. 568).³³ J.-P. Hoch comments that “*our consecration to the Holy Spirit is inseparable from our filial devotion to the Virgin Mary.*”³⁴

III. The founding Charism engraved into the Regulations and the Rule of Life

In its beginnings, the work of the Seminary of the Holy Spirit was “*more a movement than an institution,*”³⁵ a spirit than a structure: the vigor of Poullart des Places’ foundation did not come from his organization but from his charism.³⁶

1) The General and Particular Regulations of Poullart des Places

Poullart des Places inscribed the charism of the foundation into his *General and Particular Regulations*. The commentaries of Fr. Lécuyer, given as footnotes in Christian de Mare’s book (footnotes which we reproduce here), are particularly important for understanding the power of Poullart’s words:

*CHAPTER ONE: FUNDAMENTAL RULES*³⁷

Article one: The House, Its Consecration and Its Directors

1. *All the students will adore in a special way the Holy Spirit, to whom they have been particularly consecrated.³⁸ To this they will add a personal devotion to the Blessed Virgin, through whose protection they have been offered to the Holy Spirit.³⁹*

2. *As their two principal feasts, they will choose Pentecost and the Immaculate Conception. The first they will celebrate to obtain from the Holy Spirit the fire of divine love,⁴⁰ the second to obtain from the Most Blessed Virgin angelic purity.⁴¹ Their piety will be grounded in these two virtues.*

With Fr. Lécuyer, it is important to underscore the power of words: the members of the Seminary of the Holy Spirit are “*specially consecrated to the Holy Spirit*”; they have been “*offered to the Holy Spirit ... under the protection of the Blessed Virgin.*” The Virgin Mary is to protect Spiritans so they would belong entirely to the Holy Spirit to whom they have been offered.

The double devotion of Spiritans will inform their spirituality. Their prayers will be those of a community devoted to the Holy Spirit and to the Virgin conceived without sin...

Michel affirms this spiritual allegiance to the Spirit and to Mary: “*The double devotion of Spiritans will inform their spirituality. Their prayers will be those of a community devoted to the Holy Spirit and to the Virgin conceived without sin, the Office of the Holy Spirit and Marian prayers, among which the ‘Per Sanctam’, so dear to Poullart des Places.*”⁴² On the feast of Pentecost, Poullart’s disciples used to renew their consecration to the Holy Spirit.

2) The Spiritan Rule of Life (SRL)

The *Spiritan Rule of Life* is faithful to the founding charism:

SRL 5: We live out our mission in willing obedience to the Holy Spirit, taking Mary as our model. This condition of habitual fidelity to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is the “practical union” of which Libermann speaks (*N.D.* XIII, 699-706). It is the wellspring of our apostolic zeal and leads us to being completely available and making a complete gift of ourselves.

SRL 6: We are *dedicated to the Holy Spirit*, author of all holiness and “source of the apostolic spirit” (*N.D.* X, 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” (*N.D.* X, 568).

*...availability and the
total gift of ourselves...*

Poullart's fundamental emphases and those of the Seminary of the Holy Spirit are found in our *Spiritans Rule of Life*: “*dedicated to the Holy Spirit,*” “*protection of the Immaculate Heart of Mary,*” Mary’s heart “*filled by the same Spirit,*” “*model... in docility to the Holy Spirit.*” This consecration to the Holy Spirit and the protection of Mary, concern in an indissoluble manner the two sides of our religious missionary life. First, *our religious life of holiness*: “availability and the total gift of ourselves,” “the Holy Spirit, source of all holiness,” “the Immaculate Heart of Mary, filled by the same Spirit with the fullness of holiness.” Then, *our missionary life*: “mission in docility to the Holy Spirit,” “fidelity to the inspirations of the Spirit... source of our apostolic zeal,” “consecrated to the Holy Spirit... inspirer of the apostolic spirit,” “the Immaculate Heart of Mary, filled by the same Spirit with the fullness of ... the apostolate.” The Holy Spirit and Mary, holiness and mission—we touch here our Spiritan identity as religious missionaries consecrated to the Holy Spirit under the protection of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

IV. Deepening the Reflection: Consecrated by the Holy Spirit and Consecrated to the Holy Spirit

Poullart des Places’ founding charism, taken up by the *Spiritans Rule of Life*, does not only speak of consecration *by* the Holy Spirit, but also of consecration *to* the Holy Spirit. Is there any difference between these two Christian spiritual realities?

1) Consecrated by the Holy Spirit

SRL chapter 1, “Our Spiritan Vocation,” puts in high relief the passage from the Gospel of Saint Luke, the prophetic words of Isaiah 65, which Poullart des Places commented upon on the eve of the foundation: “*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me, to bring the glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord*” (Lk 4:18-19). In fact, these are the very first words of our *Spiritans Rule of Life*. This passage speaks of consecration by the Holy Spirit. Jesus applies it to himself in the same missionary perspective. Filled with holiness in his humanity right from the instant of his conception by the Holy Spirit, Jesus receives, on the occasion of his baptism on the verge of his public ministry, a new anointing of the Holy Spirit which consecrates his entire being and all his faculties for a new mission, his public ministry as prophet—to evangelize, announce, proclaim—and as priest and king, to free captives. *SRL* n° 1 explicitly underlines this missionary consecration of Jesus: “*Sent by the Father and*

Yves-Marie Fradet, C.S.Sp. *consecrated by the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ came to save all people.*”
Jesus is entirely consecrated by the Spirit to his Father, to his will to reveal and save. Every consecration by the Holy Spirit is a sharing in this consecration of Jesus to his Father.

Every consecration by the Holy Spirit is a sharing in this consecration of Jesus to his Father.

Jesus’ mission continues in the mission of the Church and in our Spiritan mission: *“He continues in the world of today this mission of salvation of which the Church is the sacrament. In the midst of God’s people, among the numerous and varied vocations which the Holy Spirit inspires, we Spiritans are called by the Father and ‘set apart’ (Acts 13:2) to follow Jesus and to announce the Good News of the Kingdom.”*

For any mission in the Church and in the world, the Holy Spirit consecrates the being of a person in view of action; this consecration by the Holy Spirit concerns

- the baptized, for their life of sanctity, their prayer life and their life as God’s children;
- the confirmed, for their fundamental mission of witness and apostolate;
- all the members of the Church, each according to their calling: the religious in view of witness to consecrated life; the married faithful in view of their mission of witness and as parents; priests in view of their priestly ministry; missionaries of the Gospel in view of their mission of evangelization.

This consecration by the Holy Spirit makes Christ present through the members of the Church and gives divine efficacy to their human action. For us Spiritans, religious profession is consecration: *“Members of each institute should recall first of all that by professing the evangelical counsels [...] they live for God alone. They have dedicated their entire lives to his service. This constitutes a special consecration, which is deeply rooted in that of baptism and expresses it more fully.”*⁴³ We read also in SRL, 133: *“Our final consecration to the apostolate gives its full expression to the intention that we were keeping in the depths of our hearts, the day of our first profession, of devoting ourselves completely to God in the family of the Spiritans.”*

2) *Consecrated to the Holy Spirit*

In the history of the Church, we find different kinds of consecration of the faithful or of Congregations to Christ, to the Virgin Mary. In response to God's call, Poullart des Places desired a consecration to the Holy Spirit. What can our consecration to the Holy Spirit mean within the Church?

The formulas of consecration to Christ or to the Virgin Mary always include, as a fundamental element, the total gift of oneself; the offering of one's whole being—one's person and life, body and soul, actions, worries and sufferings. The same is true for *consecration to the Holy Spirit*, as the formula of an Act of Consecration to the Holy Spirit puts it:

O Holy Spirit, divine Spirit of light and love, I consecrate to You my intelligence, my heart and my will, my whole being, for this time and for eternity.

May my intelligence always be docile to your inspirations and to the teaching of the Holy Catholic Church, for whom You are the infallible guide; may my heart always be inflamed with love for God and for neighbour; may my will always conform to your divine will, and may all my life be a faithful imitation of the life and virtues of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, to whom, with the Father and with You, O Holy Spirit, be glory and honor for ever and ever. Amen.

This consecration, if it is truly lived out, has little to do with mere pious devotion. It mobilizes the person's entire energy to place it at the service of the Holy Spirit, according to the scope and the riches of the work of the Spirit in the world and in the Church. The Spirit is breath of life, energy for a world of justice and peace, boldness in bearing witness even up to martyrdom, the missionary spirit to announce the Gospel to all people, burning seal of holiness, fire of love and communion, wellspring of vocations and charisms.

Libermann insisted a great deal on this attitude for his missionaries: letting oneself be guided by the Spirit, to be carried along by his breath...

Consecration to the Holy Spirit, under the protection of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, leads to *the fundamental attitude of docility*. Poullart des Places lived this out. Libermann insisted a great deal on this attitude for his missionaries: letting oneself be guided by the Spirit, to be carried along by his breath, obeying in submission to his inspirations, discerning and welcoming his movements—as much within the ambit of the filial life of prayer and holiness as in the exercise of the charisms and the apostolic

Yves-Marie Fradet, C.S.Sp. life, and in our missionary and religious life.⁴⁴ The intimate experience of the Holy Spirit leads to *an interior knowledge⁴⁵ of what the Spirit is and what the Spirit does*. This experiential knowledge allows us to recognize him wherever he is active. Consecration to the Holy Spirit leads necessarily to engagement in the areas where the Spirit is at work:

– in creation: the protection of life, the respect of human dignity, commitment to human development, the struggle for justice, the search for peace;

– in the Spirit’s supernatural work in the New Covenant: the asceticism of dying to oneself in order to rise with Christ, the struggle of the flesh and the spirit, the search for truth, fraternal life of communion, active and joyous participation in liturgical celebrations, animation of Christian communities, dialogue with all men and women, the engagement of Christians in the world.

Consecration to the Holy Spirit necessarily renders one *attentive to the Spirit’s new calls and unforeseen irruptions*. It makes us watchmen and women on the lookout for the Spirit who works in the heart of all men and women and in the midst of the world. We missionaries know that the Spirit precedes us in the hearts of the “pagans” and in the richness of their ancestral traditions, but also that the Spirit urges us and accompanies us in all our missionary activity: evangelization of the poor, announcing the Gospel to all nations. The Spirit is the missionary strategist of the Church’s mission, we are in the service of his plan of action.⁴⁶

...The Spirit is the missionary strategist of the Church’s mission...

In fidelity to Poullart des Places’ Regulation for all his “students,” *Pentecost* ought to be the very heart of our Spiritan life in order “*to obtain from the Holy Spirit the fire of divine love*.”⁴⁷ Without doubt, we need, at the level of the whole Congregation, to deepen our reception of the Pentecost narrative (Acts 2)—its biblical, theological and missionary implications—using the commentaries of our founders, papal writings, and spiritual authors.

The Immaculate Heart of Mary was “*filled beyond measure by the same Spirit with the fullness of holiness and apostolic zeal*” (SRL 6). “*We live our mission in willing obedience to the Holy Spirit, taking Mary as our model*” (SRL 5). Like the Virgin Mary, Spiritan missionaries ought to become experts of the Spirit, who know how to watch out for the “signs of the Spirit” in the hearts of men and

women, in the world, in the Church and in our mission. In order to be faithful to our founding charism and to the name of the Congregation, we need to restore to the Holy Spirit the key role in our Spiritan religious and missionary life.

The Virgin Mary, with an Immaculate Heart, present in the Upper Room, calls on today's apostles to prepare and celebrate the Solemnity of Pentecost. She will lead us, with all the members of the Spiritan family, to a renewed experience of the outpouring of the Spirit of Pentecost. The Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception helps us to contemplate the perfection of this outpouring in Mary's heart, "*woman in grace at last restored*."⁴⁸

V. Conclusion

We began this article with Pierre Schouver's 2003 text and the Maynooth picture – the ship with its sails blown by the breath of the Spirit. I wish to end with the picture which we pondered every day during our Chapter in Bagamoyo: the picture of a Tanzanian boat, going offshore to fish – quite a symbol! It is difficult not to recall this text from Libermann:

A word of advice on how to live and work. A ship has its sails and a rudder. The wind blows into the sails and pushes the boat forward in the general direction in which it should be going. But this is not accurate enough and eventually the boat could end up way off course. Your soul is the boat, your heart the sail. The Holy Spirit is the wind and he blows on your will and your soul in the direction that God wants you to go. Your spirit is the rudder and its role is to make sure that you do not deviate from the direct path determined by the goodness of God. (N. D., VII, 148. See Spiritan Anthology, 2011, 197).

Throughout the Chapter, we repaired our nets, loaded our ship, decided on the plan and destination of our journey in the next eight years. We may try to reach that destination by the force of our arms and our oars. We may make progress, albeit slowly and with difficulty. Libermann calls us to set the sails of our hearts so that the breath of the Spirit can carry and push us. We will then surely advance faster and go much further.⁴⁹

¹Mgr ZIADE, 15 September 1964, *La Documentation Catholique* 61 (1964) 1239.

²Fr. Pierre SCHOUVER, *Message to All Members of the Congregation for the Spiritan Year*, 2003.

³Cf. *Towards the 20th General Chapter*, Rome, December 8, 2010, 1.3.1: “Confreres suggested the need for a deep reflection on the place of the Holy Spirit in the Congregation, personal and community life, our activities, formation program, prayer life etc.”

⁴Pentecost Letter, May 16, 2011, “Towards the Bagamoyo General Chapter – 2012: ‘Simply Spiritans.’”

⁵Prayer for the Chapter, *Spiritan Newsflash* n° 276, October 26, 2011.

⁶*Instrumentum Laboris*, Bagamoyo Chapter 2012, n° 2.1 b & b.

⁷*Towards the XXth General Chapter*, 1.4: Formation of holy missionaries.

⁸*Ibid.*, 4.5.

⁹*Ibid.*, 2.1.

¹⁰*Instrumentum Laboris*, Bagamoyo Chapter 2012, n° 2.1, b.

¹¹Formulation as put forward by the Chapter, though it may be modified in the process of approval.

¹²Spiritan General Archives, Roll of associates begun in 1734, which reproduces an “older register.” See Seán P. FARRAGHER, “*Led by the Spirit, the life and work of Claude-François Poullart des Places*”, Dublin, Paraclete Press, 1992, p. 126

¹³Joseph MICHEL, « Genèse de l’œuvre de Poullart des Places et sources de sa spiritualité » in Paul COULON (dir.), *Claude-François Poullart des Places et les Spiritains, De la fondation en 1703 à la restauration par Libermann en 1848*, Paris, Éditions Karthala, coll. « Mémoire d’Églises », 2009, p. 65.

¹⁴*Gallia Christiana*, vol. VII, 1744, col. 1042.

¹⁵Henri LE FLOCH, *Claude-François Poullart des Places, Fondateur du Séminaire et de la Congrégation du Saint-Esprit*, Paris, Éditions Lethielleux, 1915; Joseph MICHEL, *Claude-François Poullart des Places*, Paris, Éditions St Paul, 1962, p. 147-156. See Seán P. FARRAGHER, *Led by the Spirit*, p. 54-57.

¹⁶Fr Lallemand, from the French region of Champagne, founded a school of spirituality which put much emphasis on docility to the Holy Spirit. His essential work, *La doctrine spirituelle (Spiritual Doctrine)* was put together under Louis XIII between 1620 and 1630, but was only published at the end of the 17th century. His conferences had been collected by one of his disciples, Fr. Rigoleuc. It was much later, in 1694, sixty years after the death of Lallemand, that Fr. Champion discovered the file and decided to publish it. Lallemand never came to Brittany but he had Jesuit disciples, mission and retreat preachers, writers and spiritual directors, who spread the devotion to the Holy Spirit all over Brittany. They got help from parish priests whom they united in a “kind of confederation,” *The Association of Priests of the Holy Spirit*, which had up to a thousand members in 1683. In Quimper, the Major Seminary, founded in 1678, was entrusted to a team of priests, members of this association, and took the name of the Holy Spirit. See Joseph MICHEL, *Claude-François Poullart des Places*, 1962, p. 148.

¹⁷Joseph LÉCUYER, in *Cahier Spiritain*, Spiritan Centre, Rome, 1988,

p. 79 with reference to Joseph MICHEL, *Claude-François Poullart des Places*, 1962, p. 147-156.

¹⁸J. MICHEL, *Claude-François Poullart des Places*, p. 156.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 157.

²⁰Christian DE MARE, *Aux racines de l'arbre spiritain, Claude-François Poullart des Places (1679-1709), Ecrits et Etudes*, Collection Mémoires Spiritaine Études et Documents, n° 4, Paris, Congr. du St Esprit, 1998, p. 88 ff.

²¹J. MICHEL, *Claude-François Poullart des Places*, p. 157; the term “Congregation” here designates “a kind of federation,” the “Association of Priests of the Holy Spirit”, see above note 16.

²²Seán P. FARRAGHER, *Led by the Spirit*, p. 53. The author consecrates an entire chapter to the stay in Nantes; *ch. 5, Nantes Law student (1698-1701)*, p. 51-61. However, Joseph Michel remarks that “in Claude Poullart des Places’ writings while in Rennes... one does not come across the slightest allusion to the Holy Spirit.” J. MICHEL, *Aux origines de la Congrégation du Saint-Esprit, L'influence de l'AA association secrète de piété sur Claude François Poullart des Places*, Paris, Beauchesne, 1992, p. 66.

²³MICHEL, *Aux origines*, p. 66.

²⁴Joseph MICHEL, *Aux origines*, p.110. He takes up the same in « Genèse de l'œuvre de Poullart des Places et sources de sa spiritualité » (see note 13 above) p. 55-82. See also Seán P. FARRAGHER, *Led by the Spirit*, p. 92 ff.

²⁵J. MICHEL, in COULON, *Claude-François Poullart des Places et les Spiritains*, p. 67 (see note 13 above).

²⁶J. MICHEL, *Aux origines*, p. 90. See also Paul COULON, *Claude-François Poullart des Places et les Spiritains*, p. 70-71. “With Pierre Caris [...] chosen by Poullart des Places ‘to be a member of his community and associated with the management of the seminarians,’ Le Barbier, Garnier et Bouic formed the core-group of a new religious family, the Congregation of the Holy Spirit.”

²⁷Henri LE FLOCH, *Claude-François Poullart des Places*, p. 284-285. In fact, Poullart commented upon the text of Isaiah during the short retreat he preached on the eve of Pentecost. See below.

²⁸This is how J. MICHEL (*Aux origines*, p. 44) describes the liturgy for the admissions of Claude Poullart: singing of *Veni Creator*; the recitation of the *Ave Maris Stella*, then with a candle in his hand in front of all the kneeling confreres, Claude recites in Latin the four prayers of the AA – to the Guardian Angel, to Saint Joseph, to the Blessed Virgin and the prayer of Saint Ignatius (sacrifice of oneself to God).

²⁹J. MICHEL, *Aux origines*, p. 67-69. Handbook *Pratique des vertus chrétiennes*, ch. VII; FARRAGHER, *Led by the Spirit*, p. 126.

³⁰J. MICHEL, *op. cit.*, p. 69-70. The text is reproduced in Paul COULON, *Claude-François Poullart des Places et les Spiritains*, p. 73.

³¹Seán P. FARRAGHER, *Led by the Spirit*, p.128. The author suggests that Grignon de Montfort might well have been present at the celebration of the consecration.

³²*Anima Una*, No. 60 (2007), *Living the Spiritan Spirituality*, part IV.

³³*Ibid.*

³⁴Pentecost Letter of May 16, 2011.

³⁵H. KOREN, *Essays on the Spiritan Charism and on Spiritan History*, 1990, 10.

³⁶C. DE MARE, *Aux racines de l'arbre spiritain*, p. 173.

³⁷Joseph MICHEL, *Claude-François Poullart des Places*, Paris Editions St Paul, 1962, p. 147; Henri KOREN, *The Spiritans: A History of the Congregation of the Holy Ghost*, Pittsburg, PA., Duquesne University, 1958, p. 9-11; Paul COULON, *Claude-François Poullart des Places et les Spiritains, De la fondation en 1703 à la restauration par Libermann en 1848*, Paris, Karthala, 2009, p. 73.

³⁸Consecrated. The special consecration to the Holy Spirit refers to the inauguration at Pentecost, but means much more than this (Lécuyer).

³⁹There is perhaps an allusion here to the place where the ceremony of the inauguration of the community took place. According to an oral tradition, this was in the chapel of Notre-Dame de Bonne Délivrance inside the church of Saint-Etienne-des-Grès. However, the formula goes much farther: the founder counts on the protection of the Virgin to make sure that all his students belong entirely to the Holy Spirit to whom he has *offered* them. (Lécuyer).

⁴⁰Such is the grace that Poullart des Places makes the very principle of his work: charity which the Holy Spirit spreads among souls like a devouring fire and whose source is in God (Lécuyer).

⁴¹In the choice of the Immaculate Conception, Poullart evinces the influence of the Jesuits, ardent defenders of the Immaculate Conception against the Jansenists and others. The *angelic purity* desired here is not simply corporal chastity, but purity that imitates as closely as possible Mary who was exempt from the least stain of sin (Lécuyer).

⁴²J. MICHEL, « Du nouveau sur les sources de la spiritualité de Poullart des Places et sur la genèse de son œuvre », in C. DE MARE, « *Aux racines de l'arbre spiritain* », p. 117.

⁴³SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *Perfectae caritatis*, Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life, October 28, 1965, no. 5. See also n° 17.

⁴⁴Alphonse GILBERT, *Animés par l'Esprit de Dieu*, Paris, Éditions de l'Emmanuel, 2012, p.190.

⁴⁵The author wrote "*con-naissance*" which means "the being born together" (Translator's note).

⁴⁶JOHN-PAUL II, *Redemptoris Missio*, Encyclical Letter, December 7, 1990, chapter III: The Holy Spirit: Principal Agent of Mission.

⁴⁷General and Particular Regulations of Poullart des Places, article 2, see above.

⁴⁸From a poem by Charles Péguy.

⁴⁹Translated from the French by Fr. Richard Fagah, C.S.Sp. and streamlined by the editor, who also substituted English references when possible.