

1978

Re-Reading Poullart des Places (continued)

Joseph Lécuyer

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dsc.duq.edu/spiritan-papers>



Part of the [Catholic Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Lécuyer, J. (1978). Re-Reading Poullart des Places (continued). *Spiritan Papers*, 5 (5). Retrieved from <https://dsc.duq.edu/spiritan-papers/vol5/iss5/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Spiritan Collection at Duquesne Scholarship Collection. It has been accepted for inclusion in Spiritan Papers by an authorized editor of Duquesne Scholarship Collection.

ON RE-READING POUILLART DES PLACES

(continued)

5 - GENERAL AND PARTICULAR RULES

The last writing of Poullart des Places that we have is found in a manuscript of 64 pages in-quarto: it is the first set of rules for the Holy Ghost Community. They were drawn up by the founder himself. He must have started them when the work began, but did not finish them, according to J. Michel,¹ until the community was moved from its first abode in rue des Cordiers to a large house on rue Neuve-Saint-Etienne. This change took place at the end of the year 1705. Claude François had received Minor Orders a few months earlier, on June 6, the feast of his patron, Saint Claude, monk and archbishop of Besançon.

The Rule, as we have it, does not give the impression of being a finished work. It contains erasures, corrections, and the founder would no doubt have completed it and re-edited it carefully, if death had not taken him off so soon.

These Rules already suppose a fairly large community. It was precisely because of the increasing number of *scholars* that Poullart des Places had to make the change of residence. Here is what M. Besnard says in his Memorandum:

*The progress of every kind achieved by his first disciples was too remarkable not to attract other excellent candidates. So he thought of renting a house so that they could have more room. In a short time, there was formed a community of clerics, to whom he gave very wise rules, which he had examined and approved by persons of great experience. He was the first to practice himself what he recommended to others.*²

¹ Michel, p. 340. In these pages we often use the word *community*, which Claude Poullart des Places does not use. Louis XIV had formally forbid the creation of new communities. Cf. Michel, pp. 213 ff.

² *Mémoire*, by M. Besnard, in: Koren, *Writings*, p. 285. A note at the end of the manuscript of the Rules says the same thing *All these rules were drawn up by the deceased Father des Places and written by his own hand, and put into practice by him and his students.* (Koren, *Writings*, p. 221).

This final sentence is important for us: we know that in the pages of his Rule we can get a look at the life of our founder during his last days, at the same time as we are able to discover the spirit he wanted to infuse into his work.

To tell the truth, a Rule never makes gripping reading. As we read the Rule of Poullart des Places, we are reminded first of all that he was a lawyer, that he knew the utility of giving details, of not leaving anything vague, and thus sometimes one gets the impression of a certain *minutiae*. But we must also recall that it was written for students, most of whom did not have at first a habit of life in community and had to be trained in the meaning of common life. At first, the founder directed the community all by himself, and had the students help him with different tasks. However, at the beginning of 1705, he was joined by a priest, Michel-Vincent le Barbier. In October of the same year, there arrived a subdeacon, Jacques-Hyacinthe Garnier.³ Thus, little by little, the very demands of the work which had been undertaken led them to form a true community of *formatores* to direct the seminarians. But there was only one rule for everybody, directors and students, and it is by these first rules that the future Spiritan rule was directly inspired.

H. Koren makes another introductory remark which it may be useful to include here:

Although the spirit dominating these rules undoubtedly is worthy of admiration and imitation in present-day seminaries, the same cannot be said of many of its prescriptions. They were good and wholesome for the time in which they were written but they would hardly be practical in any modern twentieth century seminary. What Libermann said about the training of aspirants to the priesthood in the nineteenth century applies a fortiori to

³ Michel, pp. 144-5 and p. 216. Probably from the very beginning of his work, Calude-François had a collaborator in the person of Jean Le Roy, who was born at Gourin in the parish next to the Abbey of Langonnet, and already well along in his theological studies so that he was able to be ordained in 1705. (J. Michel, pp. 142-3).

Jean Le Roy was probably directed to the rue des Cordiers by Claude de Marbeuf, a priest of Langonnet who exercised rights of seigneurie over the parish of Gourin. (*Ibid.*, p. 144). The bonds between the family de Marbeuf and that of Poullart were very close. The Abbe from Langonnet had been godfather to Claude-François' little sister in 1680. (*Ibid.*, p. 15). Jean Le Roy was recalled to his diocese by the Bishop in 1707. (cf. J. Th. Rath, *Geschichte der Kongregation vom Heiligen Geist*, I, Knechtsteden, 1972, p. 119; Michel, pp. 184-185).

*our time : 'these days the education of seminarians must be totally different from the methods in vogue before the Revolution of 1793. Experience shows that the old approach is no longer applicable.'*⁴

Now let us read Poullart des Places' *Rules*, trying to highlight the *spirit* which is still worth our attention.

A – A praying community

The Holy Ghost community creates a first impression of a community of spiritual life and of prayer. It is interesting to note some important aspects of it.

1) Consecration to the Holy Spirit

All the students will especially adore the Holy Spirit to whom they are particularly dedicated... This is how the first chapter begins.⁵

How are we to explain this special consecration to the Holy Spirit? What does it mean? The research of Father Le Floch and of J. Michel give a good enough answer to the first question: Claude-François draws his devotion to the Holy Spirit from his native province. We don't need to go over the results of their historical research; it will suffice to recall that the founder had chosen the feast of Pentecost 1703 for the beginning of his work. It is not likely that it was by mere coincidence.⁶

But what does this consecration mean? We get a first indication in Article 2, in which the feast of Pentecost is designated as one of the two principal feasts of the house, along with the Immaculate Conception. The students *will celebrate the former in order to obtain from the Holy Spirit the fire of divine love, and the latter in order to obtain from the Most Holy Virgin an angelic purity, – two virtues which must be the foundation of all their piety.*

⁴ Koren, *Writings*, pp. 159-161; the citation from Father Libermann is in *N.D.*, XII, p. 525.

⁵ The hand-written text of Poullart des Places is divided into chapters and articles. In Koren's edition, marginal numbers have been added which facilitate references; these are the numbers we use.

⁶ Cf. H. Le Floch, *Claude François Poullart des Places...*, pp. 291-292; especially see J. Michel, pp. 148-157; J. Th. Rath, *Geschichte der Kongregation vom Heiligen Geist*, I, Knechtsteden, 1972, pp. 114-118.

We shall return later to a consideration of the Immaculate Conception and deal now with the devotion to the Holy Spirit which was for obtaining *the fire of divine love*. This is the grace which Poullart des Places puts at the very origin of his work: charity, whose source is in God and which the Holy Spirit diffuses in the hearts of men.

Among the prayers prescribed by the Rule, we note that the students not only recited the Office of the Holy Spirit every day,⁷ but that *before every study period or class, they will ask the Holy Spirit for light so that their work may be worth while: A Veni Sancte for that intention and an Ave Maria in honor of the Blessed Virgin to obtain enlightenment from her Spouse. The same prayer will be said at the beginning of spiritual reading...*⁸ The Spirit, who is the source of divine love in our hearts (Rom 5 : 5) is also the Spirit of Truth (cf. John 14 : 17, 15 : 26), who leads us to *all truth* (John 16 : 13). The two aspects are inseparable and closely united in the prayer *Veni Sancte Spiritus* and in the prayer which usually follows it.⁹ The custom of reciting this prayer, followed by the *Ave Maria*, before all community exercises has remained alive in the Congregation of the Holy Ghost down to our own day. Let us hope that this frequent calling upon the presence and action of the Holy Spirit may never die out among us! But, above all, let us hope that there will always exist in the Congregation, under whatever formula, the desire expressed in the *Veni Sancte : Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of thy faithful, and kindle in them the fire of thy love!*

Poullart des Places points out another aspect of devotion to the Holy Spirit which he wishes to inculcate in his community : every Sunday they are to recite the prayer *Ure igne Sancti Spiritus...*¹⁰ This is a prayer from among the *Orationes diversae* in the Roman Missal. The first words are inspired by Psalm 25 : 2, and we can attempt to translate the prayer as follows. *O Lord, may our loins and our hearts pass through the fire of the Holy Spirit, so that we may be able to serve You with a*

⁷ *Règlements*, no. 31.

⁸ *Règlements*, no. 30.

⁹ I think the reference is to the short prayer still found in the Missal for Pentecost Sunday immediately after the Gospel, and not to the sequence which begins with the same words.

¹⁰ *Règlements*, no. 40. See in the Roman Missal from before the latest liturgical reform *Orationes Diversae*, no. 26; in the Paris Missal of 1685, this prayer is found at the same place and with the same number.

chaste body and be pleasing to You by the purity of our heart. So it is purity of heart and body that they are to ask for through the action of the Holy Spirit. In the background there are surely the Old Testament images which represent God as a purifying fire (Malachy 3 : 2; Zachary 13 : 9) and also a reminder of the tongues of fire which at Pentecost symbolize the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Church. No doubt the purity thus prayed for is bodily chastity, but, in a much fuller way, it is total rectitude of intention, will and heart in the service of God,—in a word, the same grace as Claude-François asked for in his prayer to the Blessed Trinity: that his heart and his soul be filled with God alone.

The work of Poullart des Places, which was to become the Congregation of the Holy Ghost, had, therefore, as its first foundation stone, certitude of the presence and action in the Church and especially in those destined for its service in the priesthood, of the divine Person, sent by Christ at Pentecost, who brings *the fire of divine love*,¹¹ *the light for doing worthwhile work*,¹² and who purifies from anything that could be an obstacle to serving God alone and without reserve.¹³

2) Devotion to the Immaculate Virgin

After mentioning the consecration to the Holy Spirit, from the very first article of the Rule Poullart des Places adds: *They (the students) will also have a singular devotion to the Blessed Virgin, under whose protection they have been offered to the Holy Spirit.*

The second article designates as principal feast, along with Pentecost, the feast of the Immaculate Conception, which the students will celebrate *to obtain angelic purity from the Most Holy Virgin.* The reasons for this choice and this devotion are to be found especially, as J. Michel proves, in the influence which the Jesuits, ardent defenders of the Immaculate Conception, had in the spiritual formation of Poullart des Places.¹⁴

¹¹ *Règlements*, no. 2.

¹² *Règlements*, no. 12. We can also recall the words from the Sequence for Pentecost: *O lux beatissima, reple cordis intima tuorum fidelium . . .*

¹³ Cf. again the Sequence of Pentecost *Lava quod est sordidum, riga quod est aridum, sana quod est saucium . . .*

¹⁴ J. Michel, pp. 157-160.

In the formulation of the first article, we can notice the connection made between the Holy Spirit and Mary: it is *under her protection* that the students have been *offered to the Holy Spirit*. Could there be in these words an allusion to the location where the inauguration ceremony of the first community took place? According to oral tradition, it was in the Chapel of Our Lady of Rescue in the Church of St. Etienne-des-Grès...

It seems to me that the formula has a much deeper meaning: the founder has special confidence in the Virgin's prayers for making the *poor students* become *especially devoted* (i.e. consecrated) to the Holy Spirit, or, in other words, for getting them to take full possession of their souls by setting them aglow with *the fire of divine love*.¹⁵

This connection between prayer to the Holy Spirit and the invocation of Mary is again clearly pointed out farther on. Article 30 of the Rules, which we have already seen, prescribes that before each study period or class there be a prayer to the Holy Spirit to ask for His light and an *Ave Maria* in honor of the Blessed Virgin *to obtain light from her Spouse*. We have underlined the last words: it could be thought astonishing to find in the Rules of Poullart des Places the statement that the Holy Spirit is the Spouse of Mary. The title is not very often found in theology and one might wonder what influenced Claude-Poullart to adopt it. We might think, first of all, of his friendship with Grignon de Montford who freely gives Mary the title of Spouse of the Holy Ghost.¹⁶ The Saint's works had not yet been published, but we can imagine their conversations often touching upon such a subject.

We must also remember the influence upon both of them of the *Doctrine Spirituelle* of Father Lallemand which had been published by Father Champion in 1694. The great Jesuit wrote: *Mary is unique in her quality as spouse of the Holy Spirit, since only she contracted a sacred marriage with Him, in the name of all human nature, to become Mother of a Man-God without ever ceasing to be a virgin*.¹⁷

¹⁵ All these expressions are in the first lines of the *Règlements*.

¹⁶ Cf. *Le Secret de Marie*, no. 13; *Traité de la Vraie Dévotion*, nos. 35-36 (*Œuvres Complètes de L. M. Grignon de Montford*, Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1966, pp. 447, 506-507).

¹⁷ *Doctrine Spirituelle*, VI, sect. I, chap. 4, art. 2; Editions Christus, Paris, 1959, p. 295.

In any case, it was that very special dignity as spouse of the Holy Spirit that Claude-François had in mind when he placed his work under her special protection, confident that his prayers to her under that title would surely be heard. They invoke her, therefore, to obtain the light of the Holy Spirit, but also to *obtain an angelic purity*; for this intention they were to celebrate solemnly the feast of the Immaculate Conception,¹⁸ and they were to *say the Angelus three times a day with the prayer per sanctam in order to be always kept in the greatest purity of heart and of body.*¹⁹

We could repeat here what we said above: the purity desired and asked for is not only corporal chastity, but a purity which imitates as far as possible Mary's purity venerated under the title of her Immaculate Conception:²⁰ *a turning away from all stain of sin, from all compromise, in order to be able to give themselves wholly to God.*

In the life of the community, Mary will often be brought to mind. In addition to daily prayers, *whenever they leave the house to go anywhere, they will assemble together in the chapel to place themselves under the protection of the most holy Virgin Mary.*²¹ *They will fast on the vigil of the Immaculate Conception;*²² *every Sunday, feast day and walk-day, they will say the rosary alternately,*²³ *on class days they will recite the rosary, three by three, coming back from class.*²⁴

Reading through the inevitable dryness of a text of rules, we easily see a profound atmosphere of Marial piety, a lively awareness of a constant presence of the Virgin Mary in the daily life of the community.

3) The Eucharist and Liturgical Life

Poullart des Places, as we said above, had a great devotion to the Eucharist. M. Thomas, his first biographer, goes so far as to say: *It was especially towards the Sacrament of the Altar that he directed his devotion,—or, to say it better—his most*

¹⁸ *Règlements*, no. 2.

¹⁹ *Règlements*, no. 28. I have not been able to identify the prayer *Per sanctam* . . .

²⁰ *Règlements*, no. 2; cf. no. 68.

²¹ *Règlements*, no. 21.

²² *Ibid.*, no. 22.

²³ *Ibid.*, no. 41.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 82; cf. no. 255.

*ardent passion.*²⁵ The Holy Ghost Community will, therefore, be marked by this devotion also: *There is nothing we can recommend more insistently than respectful assistance at Holy Mass, never missing except if one is too sick to go out.*²⁶ So everybody should participate in the Mass every day,²⁷ without excepting even the tailor and the cook.²⁸

On the other hand, our mentality of today is apt to be surprised at the rules and recommendations given for the reception of communion. Here is the general rule: *They will receive the sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist every two weeks,*²⁹—the same frequency is prescribed for the tailor and the cook.³⁰

But we must remember that, in the mentality and customs of the time, this degree of frequency was generally considered to be a favor reserved to the most fervent. Even the Jesuits did not dare to go beyond it, except in exceptional cases. We had to wait until the time of Pius X for frequent and even daily communion to be considered normal.³¹ The formula of Poullart des Places could even have seemed daring to many of his contemporaries. In fact, Rule No. 37 continues: *Individuals are strongly exhorted to approach (the Eucharist) even more often but always obedient to the advice of their directors.* The words *even more often*, which we have underlined, give the impression that the two-week rule is already considered to be a favor. In addition, one day a month will be set aside *for serious meditation on death, and on the day before, they will receive communion as if it were the last day of their life.*³² Finally, *every month they will make a little pilgrimage of devotion and on that occasion those who wish to do so are exhorted to approach the Holy Table.*³³

Thus, while keeping the general rule based upon the customs of the time, there is in practice an opening up of broader

²⁵ *Mémoire* of M. Thomas, in: Koren, *Writings*, p. 265. The underlining is mine.

²⁶ *Règlements*, no. 36.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 20.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, nos. 223, 230.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, no. 30.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 223, 230.

³¹ Cf. J. Duhr, art. *Communion Fréquente* in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, II, col. 1273-1282.

³² *Règlements*, no. 43.

³³ *Ibid.*, no. 44.

possibilities which take into account personal attractions and the prudence of directors of conscience.

Assistance at Mass and communion require a personal effort at devotion. The rules give a reminder :

On feast days and free days, as they return from Mass, wherever they may assist at it, they are not to talk to one another, but rather converse interiorly with God about the greatness of the Sacrifice of Holy Mass or about the happiness it has been for them to receive communion if they have done so.³⁴ On feast days and on Sundays, after Mass and communion, they will make their thanksgiving in the Church for about a quarter of an hour.³⁵ On days of pilgrimage they will walk in silence in order to make a better preparation for Holy Mass.³⁶

Devotion to the Eucharist is maintained outside assistance at Mass by frequent visits to the Blessed Sacrament,—every time they go out into the city to go to class or elsewhere and when they return to the house after class.³⁷ The rules mention the attitudes and postures suitable for these occasions.³⁸

But liturgical life is more than a matter of personal devotion. The rule provides for classes and regular rehearsals for learning the ceremonies : a half-hour every Tuesday and Saturday, a whole hour on feast days.³⁹ *Masters of singing will teach plain chant to the members of the house . . . , and notify the students ahead of time what antiphons, hymns and psalms they will have to sing at Vespers the following Sunday.* This is considered so important that the masters of singing *will notify the Superior if somebody doesn't sing.*⁴⁰

4) Other Prayers and Exercises of Piety

Other vocal or mental prayers are provided for by the Rules: morning and night prayers, meditation, particular examen, prayers for benefactors, recitation of the *De Profundis* while going down to the refectory, short reading from the

³⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 250.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 38.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 84.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 42.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, nos. 87-91.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, no. 55.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, nos. 202-203.

saint of the following day after supper, a quarter of an hour of spiritual reading every day, etc . . .

All this can appear to be a rather heavy accumulation of devotional practices and a bit artificial. If we compare it with the rules of other seminaries of the time, we find that it was quite normal. Also, in our Congregation, there are many of us who lived for many years with a daily rule which greatly resembled that which Poullart des Places demanded of his community: prayer and meditation in common, recitation of the *Angelus* three times a day, *Veni Creator* and *Ave Maria* before every exercise in common, particular examen, visit to the Blessed Sacrament, daily rosary, office, etc . . . As a matter of fact, almost everything laid down for the Seminary was practiced by the whole Congregation for more than 250 years. Is not this long usage in itself a sign of the value of those Rules? A common spirituality cannot be maintained without a minimum of common observances. These observances can and must evolve, but it always remains true that, in a Christian community and *a fortiori* in a religious community, the warning of the Epistle to the Hebrews is a valid one: *Let us be concerned for each other, to stir a response in love and good works. Do not stay away from the meetings of the community, as some do, but encourage each other . . .* (Heb. 10 : 24-25). This concern for the community is not limited to exercises of piety, as we shall see.

B – A community of poor men

The Holy Ghost house forms a community intended for young men who are preparing for the priesthood and have not the material means to pay their board anywhere else. It is *the poorest that are to be accepted by preference*.⁴¹

Des Places himself was not a poor man, strictly speaking. After the month of August 1706, he had a life annuity of 60 pounds (in Tours currency). That was the minimum required by the Bishop of Rennes for him to be ordained. But

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, nos. 5-6. It is not inappropriate to recall that this disposition corresponds exactly to what was demanded by the Council of Trent in its Decree on Seminaries: *The Council wishes that the sons of the poor be chosen by preference; still, the sons of the rich are not to be excluded, on condition that they look after their sustenance and manifest the intention of serving God and the Church.* (Council of Trent, Session XXIII, *De Reformatione*, can. XVIII).

he had refused any other benefice and the little he had was entirely given over to maintain the community he had founded.⁴²

The Rules specify that the Superior will share the life of the students in every way: *Everybody must regard it as a pleasure to be looked upon as poor men to whom Providence supplies the food that is placed before them in the refectory.*⁴³ Manual labor was done by everybody in turn *without anybody being exempted*;⁴⁴ we know from M. Thomas⁴⁵ that Poullart des Places did not exempt himself, but washed dishes,⁴⁶ cleaned the students' shoes,⁴⁷ took his turn in running messages and doing the shopping.⁴⁸

I shall not enter into the details of little and big work projects which kept the house going materially and which we sometimes find it hard today to appreciate as being as important as they were: cleaning, acting as bursar, cooking, looking after the lights, washing clothes, taking care of the heating, taking care of material possessions, etc.

The students (often enough the text of the Rules calls them the *individuals*) are not religious. They have small sums of money with which they can buy extra wine,⁴⁹ pay for the laundering of personal linen,⁵⁰ and have fixed any windows they may break⁵¹ ... The house furnishes the necessary food, clothing and shoes for all.⁵²

The personnel attached to the house is truly for the service of the students. It consists, first of all, of Poullart des Places who has the title of *Superior*. He is truly the head of the house, presiding at common exercises, and it is he to whom they go for permissions, exceptions, little daily prob-

⁴² J. Michel, pp. 181-183.

⁴³ *Règlements*, no. 67.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 23; cf. no. 140.

⁴⁵ *Mémoire* of M. Thomas, in: Koren, *Writings*, pp. 273-275.

⁴⁶ *Règlements*, no. 213-215.

⁴⁷ *Mémoire*, of M. Thomas, in: Koren, *Writings*, p. 275; cf. *Règlements*, no. 199, 248.

⁴⁸ *Mémoire* of M. Thomas, in: Koren, *Writings*, pp. 272-274.

⁴⁹ *Règlements*, no. 169-170. We know from Father Picot de Clorivière that Poullart des Places never drank wine. Cf. J. Picot de Clorivière, *La Vie de M. Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort*, Paris, 1785, p. 312.

⁵⁰ *Règlements*, no. 181-183.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, no. 197.

⁵² *Ibid.*, no. 66, 222, 263.

lems, accounts, etc . . .⁵³ His tasks are so numerous that one wonders how he was able to combine them with the study of theology, at least in the beginning. Sometimes there is reference to *Superiors* in the plural,⁵⁴ and on one occasion to *those who govern*.⁵⁵ No doubt the reference is to the first collaborators of Poullart des Places, Michel-Vincent Le Barbier (his *right arm* from early 1705 until June 1709)⁵⁶ and Jacques-Hyacinthe Garnier, who arrived in October 1705 and succeeded him in October 1709.⁵⁷ There is also mention of *répétiteurs* about whom we have very little information.⁵⁸ Finally, the tailor and the cook participate fully in the life of the house.⁵⁹ Are we to see in these first collaborators the seed of the future institute which will carry on the work of the founder after his untimely death? In any case, without having the title or canonical status of religious, they already have the characteristics of religious.⁶⁰

They all live like poor men, eating at the same table and having the same food—of which a part is leftovers from the Jesuits.⁶¹ Only the sick can have special consideration.⁶² Anything elaborate in the way of dress is forbidden.⁶³ Tobacco (for snuff) is considered to be an intolerable luxury.⁶⁴ But this poverty has to be accepted freely: *everybody must always eat with thankfulness what is placed before him;⁶⁵ they will be content with what is served them and will not go looking for something better;⁶⁶ they will never talk about what they like or don't like. They will neither praise nor criticize what they have had to eat. It is unworthy of a true Christian to think too much about all these things, to enjoy them or to complain*

⁵³ *Ibid.*, nos. 13, 18, 34, 47, 57, 60, 65, 66, 78, 82, 84, 130, 141, 155, 156, 165, 183, 185, 203, 217, 218, 219, 234, 236, 237, 240, 242, 244, 258.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 114, 142, 169, 263.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 25.

⁵⁶ J. Michel, pp. 144, 236.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 144, 250.

⁵⁸ *Règlements*, no. 53, 131-137, 169.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, nos. 221-224, 225.

⁶⁰ Cf. J. Michel, pp. 217-218.

⁶¹ *Règlements*, no. 227.

⁶² *Ibid.*, no. 58, 78.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, no. 105-106, 111-112.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 114.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 66.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 70.

*about them, but for a religious or a cleric it is much more unmortified to fall into these faults. They will not ask the bursar to buy such or such a thing . . . They will never complain that things are badly prepared, that such or such a seasoning is missing . . . A man who is a little bit mortified, of the type we should have here, eats with indifference whatever he is given. He finds everything good when he recalls that his God quenched his thirst with gall and vinegar.*⁶⁷

We get a ray of light in these last words: it is not only because of necessity, because of destitution, that Claude Poullart wants to live in poverty and demands that his followers do likewise; it is in order to imitate God Himself who humbled Himself voluntarily to accept the poverty and destitution of the Cross. This example is greatly prized by every Christian, but still more by *a religious or a cleric*; i.e. by the priests he wants to form.

C – A community of future priests

We must not forget that this is the first objective Poullart des Places had in view: to prepare future priests. The *Rules*, as we have them in his own handwriting, speak very little of this purpose, but it is always understood, and the whole thing is unintelligible outside of that perspective.

All the relevant documents add this important qualification: Poullart des Places also *wanted by means of this establishment to train, for a hard and laborious life and in perfect disinterestedness, curates, missionaries and clerics to serve in poor parishes and in abandoned posts for which the Bishops could scarcely find anyone . . .*⁶⁸ They are destined to fill the lowest positions in the Church.⁶⁹ This will be made explicit in the Latin Rule approved by the Cardinal of Paris on February 2, 1734.⁷⁰

Thus the poor, humble and laborious life of the Holy Ghost House was not solely, nor even principally, due to the real poverty of the students and their *superiors*; it was due to

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, nos. 72–78.

⁶⁸ *Lettres patentes de confirmation d'établissement d'une Communauté d'Étudiants sous le titre du Saint Esprit et de l'Immaculée Conception*, dated May 2, 1726. Text in: Le Floch, pp. 574–575.

⁶⁹ *Lettres Royales du 17 décembre 1726, ibid.*, p. 578.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 586.

the very clear desire to prepare priests who would be disposed to maintain all during their lives that attitude of detachment from riches, devotion to the humblest and most obscure tasks of sacerdotal ministry. That is what Bishop Beaumont of Paris will say in 1762:

It is the special purpose of this Seminary to train young clerics, deprived of and detached from the goods of this world, and to dispose them to go wherever their bishops may send them, and to choose by preference the most difficult places, the most abandoned ministries and, by that very fact, the most difficult to fill . . . The spirit of the Institute . . . is to fear and run away from lucrative and honorable assignments in the Church, to be devoted to the most obscure and wearisome tasks, like evangelizing the poor in the country, the sick in the hospitals, the soldiers in the army, the pagans in the New World.⁷¹

These testimonies—we could easily add others—throw much light upon the details of the Rules which we are studying, in particular the voluntary seeking of a life of poverty and working at the humblest tasks. In a period of history when the clergy allowed itself to be too easily taken up with personal ambition, worldly success, or riches, one could easily understand the following:

They will be especially careful never to gaze at magnificently dressed people, at furniture, at carriages, or at worldly conveniences. Letting the eyes wander too easily over such things causes thoughts of pleasure, of the world, of vanity.⁷²

It is probably in the same spirit that they were not to work for university degrees or diplomas. However, an exception is foreseen for students who have already finished their theology and who could continue to study Moral and Canon Law for two years, *during which they could graduate.*⁷³ One of the reasons for this, according to Le Floch and J. Michel, must have been that the Faculty of Canon Law, unlike that of Theology, only demanded a modest sum for conferring degrees, and sometimes even did so gratis. We might add that going to the university for only two years did not suffice for obtaining

⁷¹ J. Michel, pp. 195-196, quoting a manuscript from the Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris.

⁷² *Règlements*, no. 98.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, no. 11.

vacant benefices.⁷⁴ Thus the gaining of diplomas in Canon Law could not be a temptation later to seek lucrative assignments, which would have been against the very purpose of the foundation.

However, apart from the seeking of diplomas, the Rules show that Poullart des Places attached great importance to study: 8 hours and a half of study on class days, 6 hours on Sundays,—these hours included *the time spent in class, the 'répétitions' and the preparations of Sacred Scripture*.⁷⁵ Volume VII of the collection *Gallia Christiana* which appeared in 1744, tells us that Poullard des Places used to say: *A pious cleric without knowledge has a blind zeal, and a learned cleric without piety is exposed to the danger of becoming a heretic and a rebel against the Church*.⁷⁶ The founder has this latter point very much at heart. He begs his students *to be always attached, in all points of doctrine, to the decisions of the Church, to which they must be totally submissive*.⁷⁷ That is most likely the reason why, instead of sending his students to the University which all too often was Gallican and Jansenist, Claude-François had them do their courses of philosophy and theology with the Jesuits.⁷⁸

D – A community of fraternal charity

My reading of the *Rules* revealed to me, among many details, one aspect which I think it important to emphasize: Poullart des Places wants there to reign in the house he founded a profound atmosphere of charity for one another, of mutual respect, of attention to others.

Everybody knows that it is not enough to make a rule: *We shall all love one another, truly and very tenderly*.⁷⁹ That love has to show itself in one's whole attitude and conduct. It is in that spirit that Claude-François requires his students to have *a gentle, modest and reserved bearing*,⁸⁰ to con-

⁷⁴ Le Floch, p. 345; Michel, pp. 203-204.

⁷⁵ *Règlements*, no. 45.

⁷⁶ *Gallia Christiana*, Vol. VII, col. 1043.

⁷⁷ *Règlements*, no. 54.

⁷⁸ I don't want to enter into the details of the study; Fathers Le Floch and Michel have shown sufficiently well the importance given to them in the Holy Ghost community. Le Floch, pp. 344 ff.; Michel, pp. 197 ff.

⁷⁹ *Règlements*, no. 16.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 9.

duct themselves at table *as courtesy would have it*; i.e. good upbringing,⁸¹ and to treat one another *always with much courtesy, looking out for one another, as the Apostle says, with all sorts of respect.*⁸²

In conformity with that prescription of St. Paul (Rom. 12 : 10), *when we meet one another on the stairs, in the garden or elsewhere, we shall not fail to greet one another. When one gives something to another, or receives something from him, we shall not forget to recognize the person and to give and receive with a certain courtesy which a Christian upbringing should have taught us.*⁸³ Politeness, properly understood, is an exercise of fraternal charity. Its external forms may change, and many of the prescribed details in the Rules would not be easy to apply today,⁸⁴ but, here again, the spirit remains.

It is thus that the rules about silence are justified by the need *not to disturb the peace that ought to reign in the house;*⁸⁵ it is a matter of respecting the need for study and recollection in a seminary and hence of avoiding useless noise.⁸⁶ We have to understand in the same way the prohibition against *ever making faces to get others to laugh,*⁸⁷ showing oneself in public without being properly dressed;⁸⁸ making improper jokes or using vulgar expressions, using *base and popular proverbs, or nicknames or humor which is in bad taste.*⁸⁹

All this may seem out of style for our days when we take pride in speaking of everything openly, when a certain slovenliness of manner and speech is accepted, and when a certain vulgarity of language is appreciated. Is it sure that this is a sign of progress? Whatever about changing customs, the concern about respect for others in one's bearing, attitudes and words seems to me to remain an essential requirement for any life in common. That is what we need to keep from the Rules of Poullart des Places.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, no. 76; cf. nos. 101-102.

⁸² *Ibid.*, no. 238.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, no. 256-257.

⁸⁴ See, for example: no. 238, 92, etc.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 117.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, nos. 116-124.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 103.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, nos. 107-108.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, nos. 109-110.

These are many other details which would be worth our attention. I only want to retain what is said about the care of the sick:

*The infirmarian will notify the Superior as soon as he learns that someone is sick. He will try to find it out quickly. He will be careful to give the sick what they need. He will urge them to bear their sickness for the love of Jesus Christ. He will not be put out by the little annoyances that go with his function, such as emptying chamber pots, making beds, etc., but he will bear them with good humor for the love of God. He will wait on the sick as if it were Jesus Christ Himself he had to take care of.*⁹⁰

There follow details about cleanliness and exact following of doctors' orders.⁹¹ The infirmarian must also see to the spiritual needs of the sick: when they are able to go, he will take them to Mass at a suitable time and will read to them from spiritual books; but *he will be careful not to let anyone go out who has taken medicine that day, but will keep them warm and quiet in their rooms.*⁹²

Also on the subject of the sick, the great principle is that we must serve them *as if it were Jesus Christ Himself*. In reality, this principle flows directly from the Gospel (Matt. 25:40 ff), and inspires the entire Rule of Poullart des Places. It is in that light that it must be read. It was in that light that he practiced it himself.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, nos. 185-186.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, no. 87.

⁹² *Ibid.*, nos. 188, 190.