

A SPIRITUALITY OF YESTERDAY AND TODAY

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I would like to indicate immediately the limits of my presentation:

I have not had direct access to the writings of Père Gailhac. I have simply been able to read Sister Mary Milligan's booklet: PRINCIPAL ELEMENTS OF GAILHAC'S SPIRITUALITY, (Spirituality Series N.1, Sources of Life, 1983). That booklet seems to me to be an important contribution in the context and I shall have occasion to refer to it.

I have read and carefully worked through the CONSTITUTIONS OF THE INSTITUTE OF THE RELIGIOUS OF THE SACRED HEART OF MARY IMMACULATE VIRGIN.

It is the spirituality that shows through in these Constitutions that will be the object of my reflection here, this evening. It seems to me that there we have something important on which to focus.

These Constitutions were approved by the Sacred Congregation for Religious and for Secular Institutes on February 24, 1983. They constitute a reformation and updating of the Constitutions which received approval at diocesan level in 1850 and at pontifical level in 1899. I think that one of the criteria for evaluating a spirituality is its capacity for adaptability. The foundational institution gives an élan and creates a dynamism. And it is this that must be taken up, resumed and continually actualised.

- Fidelity to the first intuition, which in itself immerses its roots in the gospel
- Fidelity to history which does not stand still at any given moment, but moves ahead.

The founding institution must permit the religious to live the today of mankind, which is also the today of God; to live today in authentic communities that radiate. A community is not alive and does not remain so unless being faithful to the intuition of its origins and therefore to the Gospel which is its source; it knows how to adapt to the present.

I believe that the current constitutions correspond well to this twofold exigency of fidelity and adaptation; of adaptation in fidelity.

I. But: What is Spirituality ?

It isn't easy to answer this question.

In a broad yet fundamental sense, one can say that spirituality is simply a serious manner of being Christian; or in other words a certain manner of following Christ. It is to make real and concrete the commitment to follow Christ.

To put it more precisely, spirituality is the life and action of the spirit of the Lord within us. It is for us to welcome him, to let him accomplish his work within us – which consists in transforming us, fashioning us, modelling us; according to the image of Jesus Christ.

In the dynamism of the Spirit, it is a certain manner of ordering one's life according to an orientation, an inspiration. What is at stake then is a certain way of being, which is breathed into us by the Holy Spirit.

When the Constitutions state (Const. 6) that "the spirit of faith and zeal manifests itself in our lives by ... a renunciation which liberates us to respond to God's call ... an active love for God's people or again (Const. 7). Our mission is to know and love God, to make God known and loved, to proclaim that Jesus Christ has come in order that all may have life," the constitutions witness to a deep accord with the teaching of the New Testament and in particular Paul and John.

Yes, spirituality, the path of unity in our lives, is a path of liberty oriented toward love. For the just one (in biblical language the person adjusted to God) there is no longer any law except the New Law of Christ. John of the Cross says "There is no route" (an expression repeated in (The magnificent poem of Antonio Machado; "Caminante; no hay camino; el camino se hace el andar"; "Walking you have no path, the path is made by walking)... There is no route traced in advance because love is always attentive and inventive; free for the unexpected.

II THE PRINCIPAL ELEMENTS OF THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE RELIGIOUS OF THE SACRED HEART OF MARY

Unit now I have not spoken of the spirituality of the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary except indirectly and on the basis of true Christian spirituality. That method seemed to me indispensable in order to verify its profound quality. The fact is that within Christian spirituality and based on its baptismal origin; there exist various spiritualities.

Once and for all, baptism has made us die with Jesus Christ in order to live a new life, like the risen Christ. We have become one with Christ (cf Romans, 6, 3-11). Every true spirituality is grafted onto that. "This commitment (to follow Christ in the total sense) rooted in our baptism, is expressed by vows." (Const.2)

This reference to baptism, the sacrament that makes us Christians, happily situates the spirituality proper to the Institute within Christian spirituality in general. If baptism calls us all to follow Christ, to live the Paschal Mystery with him in order to render us free to love, he calls us to do so at the very heart of human history, within such and such an era. At such and such a given moment, we are going to highlight such and such aspects of the Gospel, which appear to be the most appropriate for following Jesus in the context of given time and circumstances.

Every true spirituality corresponds to a historical situation a given historical context. There is nothing surprising in the fact that the great spiritualities are born at turning points of history.

For this reason, within Christian spirituality there are diverse spiritualities. This is quite legitimate because the response to the call of Jesus Christ: "If you want to, come, follow me" does not involve moving along a way completely opened up ahead of time and which would be identical for all.

The Holy Spirit, who is the source of communion is also the source of differences. He distributes his gifts to each as he chooses, but in view of the common good. (cf Cor. 12, 7-11)

What counts for individual persons applies also for communities. No individual community is in a position to be able to live all the richness of Christ. It is only together, as Church that we form the Body of Christ. A particular spirituality highlights- in order to witness to it- one or another aspect of the Gospel, of the life of Christ. But there are certain constants, certain specific features which mark an authentically Christian spirituality: How does this apply

But first I want to make one remark. Anyone who is spiritually inserted in his or her times is also a little ahead of those times. He or she notices what is about to 'sprout.' This dimension of the incarnation of spirituality into life, of attention to reality, re-read in the light of faith, of necessary discernment, is already that current that will give birth in subsequent decades to Catholic action and, in a broader sense, to many spiritualities of lay people. This leads me to say that if religious life radicalises baptismal commitment and mobilizes the entire person for the service of the kingdom of God, every Christian is called to live out, in his or her setting and in another manner, similar demands. The constitutions, at least in the first chapters, could furnish for all Christians some good paths for reflection and application in their life.

I will now place before you certain aspects which caught my attention.

III STRONG POINTS

1) The place of Mary:

We are talking about Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary. Indeed one could not really say that too great an importance is given to Mary in the constitutions. But I believe that she is in her just place. Jean Gailhac presents her as the person who cooperated intimately in the work of redemption. Her daughters, following her example, are to "cooperate in the salvation of souls, for the glory of God." (Const. P.1)

It is necessary that "you, in turn the cherished family of Mary, must by your life, be the image of this incomparable Virgin and give birth spiritually to Jesus Christ in all hearts (Jean Gailhac (Const. P.42). Mary is always situated as disciple of her son and as his co-operator, as a woman of deep faith, deep enough to enable her to have confidence in God in face of the unexpected, the unforeseen and even the impossible and to say a "yes" that commits her to give herself totally, like her son (Const. 3).

In the formula for first commitment as well as that of perpetual profession, we find the expression "in imitation of Mary faithful disciple of her son." (Const. 68, 73) What a beautiful mariological balance that knows how to go to the essential (N.B. Const. 56).

2) The realism of the spiritual journey:

To follow Jesus means responding to a call that passes by way of conversion. The call of the Lord is not addressed only at the outset but is ongoing. Baptism places our lives under the sign of urgency of this: this time is precious, it is a gift of God and not to be wasted. It is a time for loving. God never stops signalling to us. The spiritual person is a night watchman on the lookout for the signals of God. From this comes the importance –as already mentioned – of attention to events, of looking at reality in the light of faith, an attitude of contemplative discernment. And that is many, many times

underlined in the context of community eg Const. 27, 33, 34, 36, 37 including the level of general government, cf Const. 53.

Conversion also, must be ongoing. It is a matter of re-orientation with sin, with the life of non-loving, to take a new route, that of love, even to the point of self-giving. A decisive criterion is attention to the poor, the very existence of whom is a challenge to love.

A religious community strains – stretches forward toward the kingdom of God. Its task is to discern the indications for thanksgiving, but also to struggle against the diabolical power of division, which operates in the world and puts obstacles in the way of the Kingdom.

The religious community is meant to work positively for the coming of the Kingdom in engaging itself in the transformation of the world; in anticipating the Kingdom by its quality of life. This bears itself out in a special way in its manner of serving the poor who are the privileged of the Kingdom, given that they are the rejected of this world, and while there are excluded people, the kingdom of God has not been accomplished.

In all sincerity, I believe that these diverse aspects are to be found in the constitutions. The entire section entitled: “In Community for Mission” is quite remarkable: Community not only at the local level, which comes first, but also in a more general sense, Community called to be prophetic by its entire life:

-Internal life, where unity does not work without recognition of the gifts of each for the good of the whole, all of which implies legitimate differences. Unity is not uniformity. Ministries themselves are diverse. Life open to others in the service of life.

The community is called to practice discernment of calls, of needs and therefore of ministries which can respond in each context; and all this to the point of development of a critical consciences in relation to political, social, economical contexts.

Each one is called to consider herself responsible, in a concrete sense, and in all areas including what has to do with authority.

But the communitarian dimension, with necessary and responsible commitment of each member, irrigates the entire text. I find particularly remarkable the way in which this dimension is taken up again and again in connection with the three vows of poverty chastity and obedience, which cannot be lived faithfully without the perspective of fraternal support. (Const. 25)

Why then should we be surprised therefore that prayer has both its personal and community dimension, that the Eucharist is the center and the heart of community and that pardon and reconciliation can blossom there.

4 Ecclesial Sense

A true spirituality implies a deep ecclesial sense, even a passion for the Church, a lively desire to renew it and make it a Gospel Church. This Institution, which sometimes makes us suffer, is also a mystery that makes us live. She is the Body of

which Christ is the Head. From very first states that the constitutions call us to enthusiasm for the mission of the Church. The Institute desires to be at the service of the Church for the life of the world. The community life of the Institute witnesses to ecclesial communion and nourishes itself out of the treasures, which the church holds at the disposition of the world: The Word of God, the liturgy, the sacraments and; in particular, the Eucharist.

In assuming its prophetic role in the Church, in collaboration with its mission, the Institute will be attentive to new orientations of the Church and of religious life. (Const. 53)