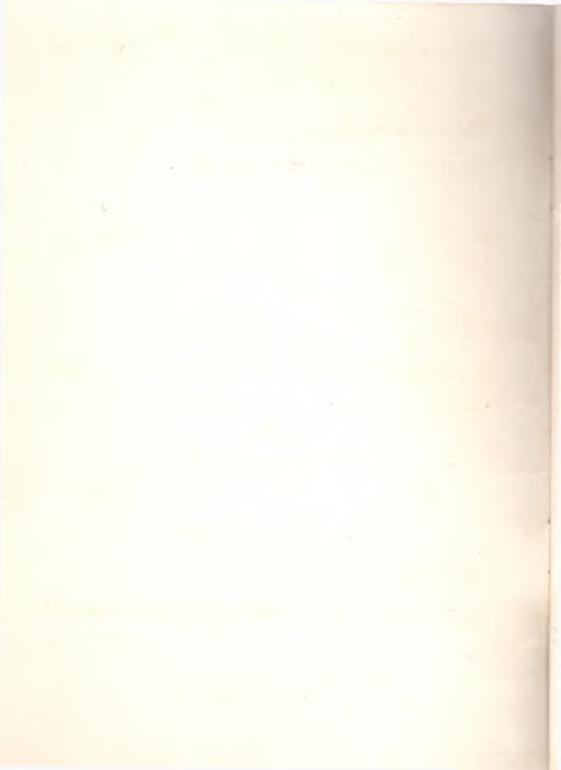
Spirituality Series N. 1
MARY MILLIGAN, R.S.H.M.

Principal Elements of GAILHAC'S SPIRITUALITY

das Fontes



SOURCES OF LIFE

Studies and reflections on the heritage of the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary

The Principal Elements of Gailhac's Spirituality

bу

Mary Milligan, RSHM

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I am happy to begin the series SOURCES OF LIFE with reflections on Father Gailhac's spirituality as a basis for greater understanding of our heritage as Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary. Such understanding of our spirituality will, I believe, help us to follow Jesus Christ more faithfully and will unite us as an apostolic community in the Church, in order to respond to needs in the spirit of our Institute. It will also enable us to give our lives so that all may have life.

The thesis presented here needs to be tested by your own experience and understanding of our tradition. Only together can we discover the expression of our heritage most appropriate to our own times. In my reflections, I will underline three characteristics of Father Gailhac's spirituality: its single two-fold axis; its Johannine christology and its incarnational quality. The consequences of this spirituality for our own times are many and will, I hope, be discovered in our common reflection.

The elements of our founder's spirituality I have chosen to underline in this article are not the only ones to be found there but seem to me to be crucial. There are many others - Mary, the Church, for example - which hopefully will be the basis of further reflection by others in the Institute.

Mary Milligan, RSHM January 25, 1983 The service of the se

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PRINCIPAL ELEMENTS OF GAILHAC'S SPIRITUALITY

A spirituality is a coherent and ordered whole of theological elements, expressed in life; it is a perception of the christian mystery realized in history. A spirituality can be lived by a person or, insofar as the elements are ordered in a similar way, by a group. To understand a spirituality is primarily to determine which are the central, organizing elements coloring the way all else is seen. It is to discover the "central vision" toward which all other elements converge. In any christian spirituality, it is also important to determine the aspect of Jesus Christ, which is most "attractive" in the literal sense of that word.

Ι

Two-fold axis

Father Gailhac had a particular intuition for what was essential. Many aspects of his life reflect this sensitivity to the essential, and it is especially evident in his spirituality. The summary of the Law and the Prophets made by Jesus could well serve as a resume of the principal lines of Gailhac's vision: Love God above all else and love one's neighbor as oneself. As Jesus unified and simplified all religious obligations in this double-faceted law, so did our founder unify all aspects of his own vision in this two-fold love. God and the human person: both must always be a focus of any expression of spirituality faithful to our heritage. A total commitment to God and a total gift of oneself to others are one reality for our founder.

This integral vision of the two fundamental lines of his spirituality is evident in the early formulations of the "end of the Institute" and in the statement of the spirit and mission of the Institute. In all these formulations, we see the two-fold focus on God and the world expressed as a single reality:

In the earliest versions of our Constitutions, Father Gailhac states the end of the Institute as follows:

- 1850 "... to undertake all the works which could contribute to the salvation of women."
- 1870 "... to undertake all the works of zeal which can contribute to the glory of God and the salvation of souls."

Our founder understood that the gift of oneself to others is, in itself, an act of worship of God. From his letters, it is clear that he uses the term "glory of God" to include complete dedication both to God and to others. For the founder, the "glory of God" was a way of expressing the unique and burning love of God and others which led him to pour out his life in single-hearted prayer and service. In his last letter to the sisters, dated October 1888, he wrote:

For me, I have only one desire: to seek God's glory, and, in heaven, to meet my children who have gone there before me and to wait for all the others who will bring with them all those they have

acquired for God's glory. 1

So intimately is God's glory associated with the salvation of others — of his "children" as well as of those whom they served — that Father Gailhac could ill imagine an eternity where he contemplated God alone. He truly grasped the unity of the great commandment and understood that God's glory is the salvation of the world.

The same unity of two poles is evident in the spirit of the congregation. It is not faith or zeal but faith and zeal. In this expression, taken from the constitutions of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, our founder saw a way to verbalize the double commitment of the Institute to God and other people. Faith, for him, was total commitment to the Absolute of God in one's life; zeal, an expression of that total commitment in the service of others. A single love expressed itself in union with God in Jesus Christ and in laying one's life down for others. All elements of our religious life were meant to deepen this spirit within us and to integrate our consecration to God and our dedication to the mission of Christ. "Prayer, virtue and constant application", an attention to the present moment and to God in the present moment: these are enumerated as means to acquire this one spirit.

The <u>mission</u> which the founder gave us as a Community likewise has a double focus. It is perhaps here that we can best see the interrelatedness of the two aspects which are fundamental to his spirituality. The Institute of the Sacred Heart of Mary exists to know and

love God, to make God known and loved. Personal knowledge and love of God is integral to our mission; making God known and loved is a necessary outflow of our contemplation and interior knowledge. Just as faith without zeal is inauthentic and zeal without faith is activism, so knowing and loving God without expressing that knowledge is an illusion, and making God known and loved to others without a personal knowledge is both hypocritical and impossible.

The model for the unity of the two axes of our life is Jesus Christ himself. Throughout our founder's letters, imitation of Jesus in his one, all-embracing love of God and others is a theme. In 1877, he wrote:

Study Jesus, his entire life, everything he did... He sought only two things: the glory of his Father, the salvation of persons. May your attitudes be his.

Our present constitutions echo this need to find the integration of the double axis of our life in Jesus Christ: "We integrate our lives by centering them in Jesus Christ whose love in us is the source of our faith and zeal". (no. 9)

Father Gailhac's ability to capture what was essential and to relativize non-essentials has situated us in the heart of the Christian mystery. Jesus' closest disciples were called to integrate, to live as one reality their utter attachment to their Lord and their proclamation of the gospel. Whether in Mark's remembrance that the disciples of Jesus were called to be his companions and to be sent

out (3:14), or in John's terminology that they were called to remain in him and to go bear much fruit (15:4,16), the dynamic is the same. They were to live their commitment in faith to Jesus and to the world in a single movement of love of God and desire to establish God's reign in this world. As a congregation, we are able to identify our spirituality with nothing less than the heart of this love which all disciples of Jesus are called to live.

ΙI

Our Founder's Christology

All christian spiritualities are rooted in a christology, an experience of salvation in Jesus Christ which colors all elements of one's life. An experience, an understanding of Christ, gives rise to a particular way of following Him. A second characteristic of Gailhac's spirituality is, therefore, that it will always be consistent with a certain christology. We will see here that the operative image of Jesus for our founder was that of John's gospel, a christology which was summed up for him in the parable of the Good Shepherd.

The name of Jesus is a constant refrain in the writings of our founder and the images he presents of Jesus are many and varied. He speaks, for example, of Jesus as Incarnate Word, the Beloved, our Brother, only true Foundation, Leader, Restorer of all things. He sees him "seated at the right hand of the Heavenly Father," growing in age and wisdom, "in our midst," as well

as in the gospel. Jesus is guide, support, light, nourishment, consolation, the gate. Underlying all these images and titles, we discover Jesus "who desired, who sought only two things: the glory of his Father and the salvation of persons."

It is, in fact, the Jesus of John's gospel on which our founder's christology is based. In the fourth gospel, Jesus' deepest self-understanding is as the One sent by God. When he speaks of God, it is most often as "the One who has sent me" (6:57; 7:16,33; 12:44, 45 etc.). Of himself, he can do nothing at all (5:19) but only what the Father gives him to do (5:20, 26; 14:7,9,10,11).

Although the title does not often appear in Gailhac's writings, the image of Jesus sent by his Father best summarizes all other images and titles we find there. The "One sent by the Father" accents both Jesus' intimacy with the Father who sends ("The life of Jesus Christ is the life of the Father...", and those to whom Jesus , and those to whom Jesus is sent ("Jesus came to reyeal to the world the charity of the Father"). Jesus is the perfect image of his Father and has become flesh to do the work of God in the world. "Jesus loved his Father and loved us. It is love for his Father and for our sąlvation which motivates all his works." The emphasis of this title is, therefore, on relationships.

The titles "Savior" and "Model", which are most frequent in Gailhac's writings, also accent Jesus' relationships. If he is Savior, it is precisely because he was sent

by the Father and was faithful to the Father's will at all times. As Savior, he is the link between God and humanity. And Jesus becomes "Model" of this relationship to God and humanity. In his obedience to the One who sent him, in his gift of his life to all those to whom he is sent he becomes "Model" for his disciples.

Other characteristics of the fourth gospel also mark our founder's christology. It is remarkable that, in this gospel which so stresses mission, the object of the sending is not specified. Jesus is sent "to the world", to save the world (3:17) but never does the fourth evangelist specify what Jesus will do to save the world. This nonspecificity of Jesus' work corresponds very well with Father Gailhac's own vision that the Institute of the Sacred Heart of Mary would undertake any work which would save. Again, he uses a variety of terms to describe the object of Jesus' mission, for what he was sent: to reveal the mercy of God, to obey the Father, to make God known, loved, and glorified, to make the Father known and to establish his reign, to reunite what is separated; to bring peace and charity. Basically, Father Gailhac would say what the fourth gospel says - that Jesus came that the world might be saved (3:17), that all might have life and have it abundantly (19:10).

For John's gospel, it is belief in Jesus Christ which saves. The entire fourth gospel insists on faith — its object, its importance. To believe in Jesus is to have eternal life. Indeed, the one who believes in Jesus will not be judged (5:24),

is already risen (11:25), walks in the light (12:46) and has eternal life (3:16, 6:47). And to believe in Jesus is to recognize in him the glory of God; it is, through seeing and hearing what he says and does, coming to believe that he is the one sent by God (5:24; 6:29,40,69). To believe in him is to become a disciple.

In sharing the fundamental vision of Jesus which was that of the evangelist John, Father Gailhac likewise stresses the key themes of the gospel, one of which is "believing". It is not merely accidental, then, that faith as a total commitment to Jesus is a keystone of our own spirituality as an institute. In the encounter with Jesus and his call to us, we are faced with a choice which will affect our entire life, all our choices, all aspects of our existence. Will we follow Jesus Christ totally and completely? Will we, like him, lay down our life for the life of the world? Will we become true disciples? In a word, will we truly believe in Jesus? The spirit of faith and zeal which characterizes our Institute arises from our YES to these questions.

Because the christology of the fourth gospel is the source of Father Gailhac's own, the terms "glory" and "works" can be better understood by comparing them with the way they are used in the fourth gospel. For John, "glory" is "the very being of God as actively concerned for humanity", and revealed in history. God's glory is manifested in Jesus Christ and "we have seen his glory". (Jn 1:14) For Gailhac too, to do all for the "glory of God" is to make known through one's life - words, deeds

and works - the very nature of God as actively concerned for humanity. To make God known is to witness to the saving presence and action of God in history - his "glory".

For John, Jesus' works are revelatory of the fact that he was sent by God. They are a "symbolic manifestation of God's glory and can be understood only by one who believes". For our founder as well, the "works" are meant to reveal God and therefore are to accomplish the fundamental Work which is redemption. The Johannine Jesus likewise makes the distinction between the "works" and the Work: "Then they said to Him, 'What must we do, to be doing the works of God?' Jesus answered them, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent'". (6:28-29) For our Institute, a diversity of works is a way of accomplishing the one Work for which we are sent (mission): to make God known and loved, that is, to reveal God and call others to recognize God's glory in Jesus Christ. This is what it means to come to believe and to have eternal life.

Because the fourth gospel constantly nourished his spiritual experience, we could underline other aspects of Gailhac's theological synthesis which are reflected there. Returning more specifically to our founder's christology, however, it is in the tenth chapter of John's gospel that we discover the main elements of that christology. Any one of these elements can be found throughout Father Gailhac's spiritual doctrine.

In John 10, we find the image of the

Good Shepherd. In the few writings where Gailhac mentions the Good Shepherd, his development of this figure is minimal. Volume VIII of his writings contains seven retreat conferences/prayers/notes on the Good Shepherd. In only two of these does he elaborate on the parable, and in both he follows the same basic outline: the Good Shepherd 1) knows his sheep, 2) leads his sheep, 3) defends and protects his sheep to the point of giving his life for them. He sees in the image of the Good Shepherd an expression of "mercy and love for humanity which is the great work of God".

In spite of the minimal reference and development of this theme in Gailhac's writings, a closer look at John 10 reveals fundamental elements of Gailhac's spirituality which are reflected in his christology:

- a) mutual knowledge. The sheep follow the shepherd because they know his voice. Likewise the shepherd knows them. This mutual knowledge "a knowledge of love", says Gailhac is the basis of a deep relationship of imitation. To know God in Jesus Christ and to make God known is the mission that Father Gailhac will give to the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary.
- b) unity and universality. The Good Shepherd must bring into the one fold under the leadership of the sole shepherd those who are not of the flock. His call goes beyond those who are immediately at hand to include all those whom the Father has given him. Our founder's concern for revealing God in all nations, to all classes of people, through any appropriate work

surely reflects this universality. And we know his efforts to unify the congregation through a common spirit, a common spirituality, a genuine and effective love. He knew that "it is love which brings unity to birth and to completion." 12

- c) obedience. The Good Shepherd gives his life for his sheep because "this is the charge I have received from my Father."
 Obedience is at the heart of his mission.
 Come to do God's will, he does it to the point of laying down his life. Father Gail-hac speaks of the vow of obedience as the essence and perfection of the religious life.
 "The vow of obedience is above all the others."
- d) to lay down one's life. "I lay down my life" is a constant refrain in John 10. The shepherd lays down his life willingly so that the sheep may have life abundantly. This commitment to the sheep to the point of losing one's own life is the measure of the zeal, the "devotion" which we are to have.

Other parallels between Father Gailhac's christology and that of the fourth gospel could be indicated. What seems clear is that his experience of Jesus Christ, the One sent by the Father to make God known and to bring life to the world through this revelation, was capital. This experience affected him profoundly and inspired him to give his own life so that the world might be saved. Every one of the works he created was in some way meant to bring abundant life to persons — to the young, the poor, the wealthy, to women and men, lay and religious, to Protestants and Catholics, to all persons — through revealing to them the mercy and charity of God.

An incarnational spirituality

A third characteristic of our founder spirituality - again one which we might underline in the fourth gospel - is its incarnational quality. This can be seen first of all in what he says about faith. To him, the test of one's faith was its "visibility" in one's life, in "works." A faith which did not act was, at least, open to question. It is significant, for example, that in formulating the spirit of our Institute, he changed the text which he borrowed from the constitutions of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. Where they were asked to have a "faith which sees all with the eyes of faith...", our spirit was to be a "faith which should be manifested" in life. This adaptation of the FSC text reveals our founder's concern for the expression of our faith-conviction in the choices, actions and attitudes of our life. Likewise, in his treatises on faith. he always emphasizes the manifestation of faith in practice. Indeed, he speaks most often of "practical faith," that is, of faith which acts. The practice of virtue, for example, was a proof of one's faith, of one's desire to follow Jesus Christ. He writes:

To respond to the unspeakable love of the Father and the marvelous dedication of Jesus Christ for us, two things are necessary: faith and practice. 14

Faith must produce humility and conversion, and if these are not evident in our life, then our faith is false and without value. He ends his treatise on the life of

faith with the following prayer: "O God, with all your Church, we ask you to give us a deep and strong faith and to add to our faith both determination and action. Amen".

In many of his letters, Gailhac exhorts the sisters to manifest their convictions in life and to reflect on their life as a test of their convictions. In a letter of June 26, 1880, for example, he writes:

The true Christian is not one who thinks he/she has fulfilled all justice by believing in the gospel, but the one who believes and conforms her/his conduct to the teachings of the gospel. 16

To underline this authenticity, he continues with a sort of examination of conscience regarding the vows:

You have made a vow of poverty. Are you really poor in spirit? in heart? Do you like to feel poverty?... Does your heart regret what you have already left? Does it wish to take it all back? Does it not seek to enjoy the memory of what you have left?... Don't you fear too much to lack what can be useful but which is not absolutely necessary? Have you not desired the superfluous?

Challenging questions on chastity, obedience and zeal follow, always to help the sisters narrow the gap between their words and their lives. And he reminds them:

The lesson (to others) is only effective when one does what one teaches.

In a letter written for Easter, he again stresses that the genuineness of our love is seen in our lives:

"Your love for Jesus Christ must not remain a vague feeling. Jesus Christ did not just seem to be risen, he is truly risen and he showed himself to be truly risen... You also, to prove that you have truly risen, that your love is authentic, live and act in a way that is coherent with your vocation... Give all your attention to loving God and making him loved, glorifying him by your life and making him glorified." 17

Another facet of Gailhac's incarnational spirituality is his own attention to reality, to the revelation of God in the human. The "will of God" for him was never abstract but something he discerned in the events of his own life. These events were kept in his heart and weighed. They revealed God's word to him. In the establishment of new foundations, for example, Father Gailhac looked at the needs of a locality and at the possibilities - the health and the talents - of the sisters. But he was also sensitive to unforeseen events in daily life. Mother St. Thomas' visit to an old friend led us to Lisburn; a chance meeting with Mme. Peter during a trip to Rome brought the Institute to the United States of America.

When he urges the sisters to "watch over themselves and walk in the presence of God" in order to live the spirit of faith, Gailhac exhorts them to be attentive to the present

moment. To live in faith is to have a discerning attitude in the concrete events of life in order to discover there the will and action of God. It is, like Mary, to keep all things in one's heart, meditating on them, learning to sift internal and external events in the light of faith. "Follow the light which enlightens you." 18

Because of his attentiveness to events and his ability to "read" them in faith, Father Gailhac saw that we could live our mission always and everywhere. To know and love God, to make God known and loved does not require a particular activity or a particular location. In both good health and sickness, youth and old age, the mission of the Institute could be lived. "Let us profit of everything for our sanctification and for the good of God's work." 19

The spirit of the Institute witnesses to the incarnational character of our founder's spirituality. For him, zeal was to be an expression of that faith which is knowledge and love of Jesus Christ. By our zeal, our faith was to be concretized in daily life and was to be in itself a way of making God known and loved.

CONCLUSION

I have emphasized here three characteristics of Gailhac's spirituality: the unity of his two-fold vision, his Johannine christology, and his incarnational theology. Each of these has, I believe, a particular relevance for us who live almost a century after

our founder's death, in an age extraordinarily blessed by the event of Vatican II, extraordinarily challenged by the immense and complex problems of our times.

Religious women in the past two decades have embarked on a search for an apostolic spirituality capable of sustaining a contemplative commitment to the justice which must mark all we do. That search has been for integration, for a vital synthesis of our commitment to the Absolute of God and to the dignity of our brothers and sisters. It is a spirituality based on the experience of God in history. The unified vision with which Gailhac was graced contains the elements of such a synthesis. One has the impression that he never had to struggle to harmonize the diverse elements of his vision. Rather, their unity was in the person of Jesus Christ who was the center of Gailhac's life and vision.

The unity of John's christology reinforced this grace of integration. Jesus as the One sent stands as one with the Father who sends and with those to whom he is sent. His mission of revelation is at one and the same time of the Father and to humanity. A response to Jesus plunges the disciple into the mystery of filiation at the same time as it introduces her/him into a community os sisters/brothers. To be a disciple of Jesus is to be in communion at one and the same time with God and with the community of disciples.

If there is a particular challenge to the Church today, it is to be authentic, to live as disciples of the One Who lays down

his life for his brothers and sisters. In many countries of our world, Christians are literally giving their lives for the cause of human dignity — which is God's cause. They are reading the events, the movements of their own times, the social, economic, political and ecclesial reality, and are discovering there the voice of God. They discern those elements of injustice which must be denounced, those life-giving realities which must be fostered. And their authentic living of their faith is creating a Church which is truly a community of disciples of a poor, loving and merciful Lord.

Because of its focus on the central "law of the gospel", the spirituality of our founder, of our Institute is one which weathers well the changes of our world. From its riches, we are well able to respond to the needs of our times, so unlike those of our founder and foundresses. We have been mandated by the Church to make God known and loved through a diversity of ministries, always in a spirit of faith and zeal. To meet the needs of men and women of our time, our Institute possesses the grace of mobility and a spirituality which calls us to a life totally committed to God and to the dignity of those created in God's image. In the writings of Father Gailhac and the history of our Institute, we have the seeds of an apostolic spirituality able to motivate us to give our lives so that all might have life. The integration of our tradition is truly exceptional. But, somewhat like a treasure hidden in a field, it needs a bit of digging to be uncovered. And that digging must be done together. The treasure hidden in our sources can free us to minister to those most

in need in our suffering and broken world; it can sustain a persevering commitment to human dignity and social justice in the face of the difficulties and persecution which such a commitment necessarily entails. Rediscovery of our own spirituality will enable us to lay down our lives in joy only to take them up again in fullness.

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FOOTNOTES

- 1. Ecrits, p.4044.
- 2. Ecrits, p.3349, 3879, 4510, etc.
- 3. Ecrits, p.3376.
- 4. Ecrits, p.3376.
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- 9. Ibid, p.12.
- 10. Ecrits, p.4510.
- 11. <u>Ecrits</u>, p.2646.
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