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LAUDATO SI'S INTEGRAL ECOLOGY
AND SPIRITAN SPIRITUALITY

Towards an Ecospirituality of Reconciliation*

SUMMARY — This article examines the conceptual and theological convergences between the Spiritan spirituality and the paradigm of integral ecology articulated in *Laudato Si'*. It argues that the Spiritan tradition, grounded in *kenosis*, inculturation, communal life, and radical docility to the Holy Spirit, provides a distinctive framework for rethinking ecology through reconciliation. Organised methodologically around the principal themes of *Laudato Si'*, namely relational ontology, critique of modern dualisms, and spiritual conversion, the study engages foundational Spiritan sources, including Poullart des Places's theology of poverty and Libermann's kenotic epistemology of dispossession. By placing the Spiritan charism in dialogue with contemporary debates on relational ontology, biopolitics, vulnerability, and planetary fragility, the article develops the notion of an 'ecospirituality of reconciliation' as a theological alternative to technocratic understandings of the human and its relation to environment. Consequently, it proposes an original philosophical and theological framework for ecological conversion within the wider Christian intellectual and spiritual tradition, addressing the contemporary ecological crisis.

KEYWORDS — Integral Ecology, Spiritan Spirituality, Relational Ontology, Ecospirituality of Reconciliation, *Laudato Si'*.

* This contribution is part of my postdoctoral research project funded by the Reiner Post Foundation at Radboud University. The project seeks to articulate the environmental crisis and rethink the human/nature relationship from a philosophical perspective, at the intersection of the frameworks of biopolitics, African philosophy and Catholic tradition in relation to the ecological crisis. An earlier version of this contribution was presented at a meeting of Europe's Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) Coordinators of the Catholic religious order called the Congregation of the Holy Spirit, commonly referred to as Spiritans. This meeting took place from 20th to 24th October 2025 at the Beukenhof-Stergroep Biezenmortel, The Netherlands. The theme of the meeting was 'Ecology: An Integral Part of Spiritan Spirituality'.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 *The Urgency of the Ecological Conundrum*

The contemporary ecological crisis, whether it concerns climate disruption, the collapse of biodiversity, or the depletion of natural resources, cannot be understood as only a *by-product* of technology or political regulation. Rather, the crisis calls for interpretation at the level of underlying epistemic and anthropological configurations that structure the contemporary relationship between humans and the world. As Pope Francis affirms in *Laudato Si'* (2015), the crisis points to a far more fundamental problem: the fracture of the anthropological order from the cosmic one.¹ What is described here as a ‘fracture’ cannot be interpreted merely as a moral failure inherent to humanity, but as a historical consequence of a specific way of relating to the world, progressively shaped by and within modernity. However, such a formulation must be approached with caution, as it risks presupposing a position external to the very configuration it describes. As Bruno Latour has shown, the ‘modern constitution’ produces the subject-world divide that it later assumes, making any purely external of this separation problematic.² The pope explains that this fracture is rooted in a worldview shaped by utilitarianism, the logic of performance, and the primacy of technical domination – all of which he defines as the ‘technocratic paradigm’.³ In line with Latour’s argument, this technocratic paradigm cannot be understood simply as a set of ethical deviations, but as a historically established configuration in the way instrumental rationality and technological mediation organise perception, action and forms of life.

Contrary to this paradigm, Pope Francis proposes a decisive alternative: that of ‘integral ecology’, which implies two things. First, the resistance to the fragmentation between the environmental, social, economic, cultural, and spiritual dimensions of existence.⁴ Second, a call for a genuine conversion, understood in this context as an existential *metanoia* that transforms not only the human

¹ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*, Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015. Hereafter, *Laudato Si'* will be referred to as *LS*.

² Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993, 12-15.

³ *LS*, no. 101.

⁴ In her latest publication, Professor Carmody Grey of Radboud University articulates the framework of integral ecology using comparable terminology. She asserts that it ‘aims to move past the zero-sum antinomies to which we have in the last centuries been beholden: antinomies of “nature” vs “society”, “science” vs “the humanities”, “secularity” vs “religion”. It mandates an integration of multiple domains; an effort to encompass the parts in light of the whole’. Carmody Grey, *Practices of Communion: The Task of an Integral Ecology*, Antwerp: Otheo, 2025, 15.

worldview, but also practices and desires in their relation to the Earth and to the rest of the living beings. In philosophical terms, this 'conversion' can be interpreted as a transformation in the underlying structures of perception, valuation, and practice, rather than as a purely moral appeal or exhortation. At the same time, it is important to recognise that such a critique cannot claim epistemic neutrality, since it remains entangled within the very historical and conceptual horizon that it interrogates. The task, therefore, is not to step outside the technocratic paradigm, but to question and render visible its internal limits and tensions.

The 'conversion' pope Francis advocates, however, cannot remain purely theoretical or a mere statement of abstract principles. It requires spiritual figures, concrete traditions, and embodied practices capable of giving flesh to this project. In this context, religious and spiritual traditions can be viewed not as external normative authorities standing outside modernity, but as historically grounded collections of practices and concepts that can contribute to reshaping contemporary modes of inhabiting the world. The Catholic tradition, in its millennial richness, offers numerous resources still insufficiently explored. These resources range both from patristic cosmologies to Franciscan theology of universal and cosmic fraternity, and from monastic practices of sobriety to the contemporary commitments of liberation theology. Among these resources, the Spiritan spirituality distinguishes itself by, as it will be discussed below, its ecological fecundity.

Structured around abandonment to the Holy Spirit, radical option for the poor, inculturation into local cultures, and community life, the Spiritan tradition can be interpreted as a *practical cosmology* – that is, a way of inhabiting the world that unites pastoral care, contemplation, social justice, and care for creation. More precisely, within a relational ontological framework, this tradition can be interpreted as articulating a mode of existence that resists the dualisms characteristic of modern thought. The practical cosmology in question is embodied in the Spiritan pastoral project of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC). Accordingly, this study aims at two things. First, to examine the ways in which the Spiritan spirituality may be mobilised to conceptualise and embody integral ecology, as defined by *LS*. Second, to how Pope Francis's understanding of integral ecology can enhance the appreciation of ecological themes present within the Spiritan spirituality.

To this end, this study puts forward a twofold thesis. On the one hand, the Spiritan spirituality offers a theological and existential matrix profoundly convergent with integral ecology. On the other hand, the integral ecology paradigm advanced by *LS* enables to (re)discover and develop a dimension often left implicit in the Spiritan experience: its cosmological and ecological dimensions. The encounter between these two dynamics – one inherited from a missionary

tradition, and the other arising from contemporary Catholic church's *magisterium* – opens a way towards what may be called an *ecospirituality of reconciliation*, potentially capable of addressing the planetary ecological challenges of our century. To put the same point differently, this article pursues a double objective: first, to illuminate the concept of integral ecology in its anthropological and theological scope, emphasising its character as both a critique of modern dualisms and a proposal for an ontology of relationality; and second, to revisit the Spiritan spirituality as a theological and practical 'reservoir' capable of nourishing an ecospirituality. By articulating these two perspectives, we will argue that Spiritan spirituality can contribute to a *praxis* of cosmic reconciliation, integrating the 'cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor', to cite Leonardo Boff's book title.⁵

1.2 Spiritan Spirituality – Its Meaning and Relevance to Integral Ecology

Before presenting the structure of this study, it is essential to briefly define Spiritan spirituality and discuss its relevance as an interlocutor for ecological theology.⁶ As a matter of fact, Spiritan spirituality pertains to the *ethos* and worldview of members of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit (popularly known as Spiritans), encompassing their approach to life and mission, their manner of engaging with the world, and their relationship with both the environment and the broader community of living beings.⁷ This *ethos* emerged within a specific historical and cultural configuration. It was first articulated by Claude-François Poullart des Places, who in 1703 gathered a community of poor seminarians in Paris under the patronage of the Holy Spirit. Their founding rule declared that 'all the students will worship especially the Holy Spirit, to whom they have been specially dedicated'.⁸ This gesture is at once social and mystical, thereby linking together the charismatic devotion to the Holy Spirit with radical solidarity with the poor. Poverty in this context was not perceived merely as an ascetical virtue but as a form of communion and, therefore, an entry into the concrete condition of the less privileged of society. Thus, from

⁵ Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, trans. Philip Berryman, New York: Orbis Books, 1997.

⁶ More details on the genesis, key features and integral ecology motifs of the Spiritan spirituality will be provided in the subsequent sections.

⁷ Anthony Gittings, "'Spiritan Spirituality'? Possibilities and Limitations', in: *Spiritan Horizons* 8 (2013) no. 8, 39-46.

⁸ Claude-François Poullart des Places, 'Règlements généraux et particuliers', in: Christian de Mare (Ed.), *Aux racines de l'arbre spiritain: Claude-François Poullart des Places (1679-1709). Écrits et Études*, Paris Congrégation du Saint Esprit, 1998, 367.

its inception, the Spiritan approach to life and relation to the other was marked by a movement of *kenosis* and proximity.

A century later, François Libermann refashioned Poullart des Places's intuition by infusing it with his own mystical and missionary experience. In his correspondence and *Écrits spirituels*, Libermann insists that Spiritan life be characterised by a theology of abandonment and inculturation that continues to speak to the problems of our time. 'Let us surrender ourselves into the hands of our divine Master (...) Let us immolate ourselves with a great fulness of his divine love', he wrote to his confrères.⁹ Missionary life, in his view, was not a matter of transplanting European religion and culture but a process of reciprocal transformation. He expressed this as follows: 'Strip yourselves of Europe (...) and become negroes with the negroes'. Today, these words might sound problematic or even racist. Nevertheless, it is important to consider them within the linguistic and cultural context of Libermann's era. It was the era of colonisation, especially the French colonial period in the mid-nineteenth century. From both philosophical and theological perspectives, they are revolutionary, as the exhortation expresses a deep philosophy and theology of cultural dispossession and hospitality – foreshadowing what later became known in theology as *inculturation*. The missionary, 'divested' of power and cultural superiority, becomes a guest in the world of the other, learning to perceive the values at play in unfamiliar forms of life.

Across its historical development, the Spiritan spirituality has developed a deep concern for the poor and solidarity with the Earth. The *Spiritan Rule of Life* insists that defending the poor and the vulnerable is the primary missionary task of Spiritans: 'The evangelisation of the "poor" is our purpose'.¹⁰ For the Spiritans, to live by, and to serve, the poor is to get committed to the good and 'integral liberation' of the vulnerable. It is equally to work for justice.¹¹ The Congregation's more recent General Chapters, particularly the Bagamoyo gatherings of 2012 and 2021, have deepened this understanding with an explicitly ecological terminology. They affirm that *justice, peace and the integrity of creation* (JPIC) are 'an integral part of our mission of evangelisation'. They call every Spiritan to an 'ecological conversion of lifestyle' that links care for the poor with care for the Earth.¹² In other words, in their life and relation with others, Spiritans should give special attention to not only to people, but also to

⁹ *Notes et Documents relatifs à la vie et à l'œuvre du Vénérable François Marie Paul Libermann*, Tome 10, Paris: Maison Mère, 1940, 13. Hereafter, the document will be referred to as *ND*.

¹⁰ Congregation of the Holy Spirit, *Spiritan Rule of Life*, Rome: Congregation of the Holy Spirit, 2022, no. 4. Hereafter referred to as *SRL*.

¹¹ *SRL*, no. 14.

¹² Congregation of the Holy Spirit, *Bagamoyo 2021: XXI General Chapter*, Rome: Spiritan Publications, 2021, 12-15. Hereafter *Bagamoyo II*.

the natural environment in which they live. It is therefore a call 'to develop a more holistic and ecology-minded spirituality'.¹³

Seen in the light of the ecological crisis, it could be argued that the Spiritan approach to life offers a distinctive mediation between missionary practice and ecological consciousness. Its method of insertion – that is, living among the less privileged and the vulnerable, learning their languages, and sharing their life – implies an ontological recognition of interdependence and an ecological commitment. To dwell with a people is also to dwell with their land, rivers, and climate. It can be said that the Spiritan tradition gestures towards a lifestyle that both resists the logic of domination and possession, and affirms the shared vulnerability of creation and of others. The Congregation's *Bagamoyo II* Chapter makes this link even more explicit. It writes: 'special attention will be paid to issues related to threats to the environment, nature and natural resources'.¹⁴ For these reasons, Spiritan spirituality constitutes more than a historical and missionary case study; it might represent a concrete instance of an eco-spiritual practice. Its anthropology – centred on receptivity rather than domination – prefigures the relational ontology that *LS* proposes. Besides, the *Bagamoyo II* document itself already initiates a dialogue with *LS*, which it describes a 'source of inspiration and a reference point for our [Spiritan] personal and community commitments to promote an integral ecology'.¹⁵

In recent scholarship, authors have examined the ecological shift initiated by *LS* in relation to the Spiritan tradition. However, these contributions largely remain pastoral and programmatic, rather than offering systematic or dialogical engagement. For example, Brian O'Toole's article, 'The Spiritan Option for the Poor and the Care of Creation', expands the Congregation's traditional focus on justice and peace to include environmental responsibility. But, this treatment considers ecology only as an extension of the Spiritan option for the poor, without addressing it as an intrinsic dimension of the Spiritan spirituality and societal engagement.¹⁶ Similarly, Eamonn Mulcahy's 'The Holy Spirit and the Future of Spiritan Mission' locates ecological conversion within the broader context of Spiritan mission renewal influenced by Pope Francis's vision but does not conduct a sustained theological comparison between Spiritan sources and *LS*.¹⁷ More recently, Chike Anyigbo's 'Laudato Si's Integral Ecology: The

¹³ Gittings, 'Spiritan Spirituality', 45.

¹⁴ *Bagamoyo II*, 12.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁶ Brian O'Toole, 'The Spiritan Option for the Poor and the Care of Creation', in: *Spiritan Horizons* 11 (2016) no. 11, 110-125.

¹⁷ Mulcahy Eamonn, 'The Holy Spirit and the Future of Spiritan Mission: What is the Spirit Saying to the Spiritans?', in: *Spiritan Horizons* 18 (2022), 10-22.

Heart of the Ethics of Spiritan Mission' analyses the social and political ramifications of the encyclical within the Nigerian Spiritan missionary context yet approaches the subject primarily from an ethical perspective.¹⁸ To date, a comprehensive study examining Spiritan spirituality itself (drawn from its founding sources through recent congregational documents) as a theological framework for integral ecology, or tracing its pneumatological, anthropological, and mystical dimensions in dialogue with *LS*, has not been undertaken. This article seeks, therefore, to fill this gap by providing a systematic comparison between the two traditions, positing that Spiritan spirituality – rooted in the poverty modelled by Poullart des Places, the *kenosis* and inculturation of Libermann, and communal life – not only anticipates but also enriches the integral ecology advanced by Pope Francis.

1.3 *Structure and Methodology*

The work unfolds in three complementary movements. The first analyses the ontological and anthropological significance of integral ecology as described in *LS*. This part seeks to show how the critique of the 'technocratic paradigm' finds an ontological depth in the notion of 'integral ecology'. The second part sets out the foundations of Spiritan spirituality, retracing its origins, its pneumatological theology, its missionary ethic, and its communal *praxis*. I examine how this tradition configures a relational anthropology, grounded in receptivity and in renunciation of every form of possession and domination. Finally, the third movement proposes a critical dialogue between *LS* and the Spiritan tradition, in order to sketch an *ecospirituality of reconciliation*, which is at the heart of the *LS*'s call for integral ecology and is capable of embodying a post-technocratic alternative: a *form of life* marked by cosmic reconciliation, attention to the poor, and care for the Earth.

Methodologically, this study adopts an immanent and interpretative approach. Rather than positioning itself outside the phenomena it analyses, it seeks to interrogate both *Laudato Si'* and the Spiritan tradition from within the historical, theological, and philosophical configurations that constitute them. This implies that the critique of the 'technocratic paradigm' is not treated as an external moral judgement, but as a reflection emerging from within the same epistemic horizon it seeks to render intelligible. In this sense, the analysis remains attentive to the risk – highlighted in contemporary philosophy – that

¹⁸ Anyigbo Chike, 'Laudato Si's Integral Ecology: The Heart of the Ethics of Spiritan Mission and the New Political Movement in Nigeria', in: *Spiritan Horizons* 19 (2023), 89-100.

any discourse critiquing modernity may inadvertently reproduce the very dualisms it seeks to overcome. The aim, therefore, is not to adopt a position of distance or superiority, but to articulate a reflexive critique capable of exposing internal tensions, limits, and possibilities within modern configurations of thought and practice. That is why, the analytical structure of this study is consonant with the internal logic of *LS* itself.

A close reading of the encyclical reveals three interwoven yet distinguishable dimensions, namely the anthropological, the ethical, and the spiritual that together constitute what Pope Francis calls *integral ecology*. The first (§§ 65-100) concerns an ontology of relation and critiques modern dualisms. The second (§§ 101-155) exposes the moral and socio-economic mechanisms of the technocratic paradigm. And the third (§§ 216-221) culminates in the invitation to 'ecological conversion', an interior transformation linking contemplation and *praxis*. These dimensions are not approached as normative prescriptions to be affirmed, but as conceptual articulations that can be analysed, interpreted, and brought into dialogue with other intellectual and spiritual traditions. Therefore, this study adopts these three dimensions not as abstract categories but as hermeneutical keys derived from the text itself. Each section of the analysis mirrors one of these levels, engaging it in dialogue with corresponding aspects of the Spiritan tradition – its anthropology of receptivity, its ethic of poverty and justice, and its theology of inculturation. This methodological choice ensures that the comparison remains immanent to both sources: *LS* provides the conceptual grammar, while Spiritan spirituality supplies its historical and experiential realisation. Accordingly, the dialogue established in this study does not aim to demonstrate the superiority of one framework over another, but to elucidate the conditions under which their convergence becomes intelligible within a shared horizon of relational ontology and ecological concern.

2. UNDERSTANDING *LS*'S INTEGRAL ECOLOGY – TOWARDS A COSMIC ANTHROPOLOGY

Pope Francis's *LS* encyclical constitutes an unprecedented synthesis of the achievements of Catholic social teaching, the insights of contemporary environmental sciences, the Christian spiritual heritage – particularly Franciscan – and a deeply relational Trinitarian vision. The 'integral ecology', which he proposes cannot be reduced either to a mere technical corrective to the excesses of modernity or to a 'green' updating of the Catholic social teaching. Rather, this ecological encyclical introduces a genuine anthropological and ontological shift, which rests on two distinct yet semantically complementary structuring axes: an ontology of relationality and a critique of modern dualism.

2.1 *Integral Ecology as An Ontology of Relationality*

At the heart of *LS* lies the affirmation that 'everything is closely interconnected'.¹⁹ This statement – occurring more than twelve times in the book – is not merely a moral maxim. It functions as an ontological and hermeneutical principle that expresses the conviction that the human being is neither a self-sufficient 'monad' nor a 'master' standing outside the world. Rather than treating this affirmation as a self-evident truth, it can be approached as a conceptual proposal that would reconfigure our understanding of the human-world relationship within the context of contemporary ecological thought. In fact, the point is to emphasise that the human being must be understood as a relational being, inscribed within a constitutive network of relations – with God, with others, with the Earth, and with time itself. To be human therefore means to be in relationship that presupposes a 'sustained mutual involvement and reciprocity'.²⁰ Such a relational account of the human being is not intended merely as an ontological given that simply replaces previous models. Instead, it is an interpretative framework that seeks to make intelligible the forms of interdependence that have become increasingly visible in the context of the ecological crisis.

This perspective resonates with diverse theological and philosophical traditions. In Orthodox theology, for instance, human identity is not conceived as a closed substance but as a relational *hypostasis*. The human being is the image of God insofar as he or she is a capacity for communion.²¹ Similarly, African and Oceanian cosmologies understand life as an interconnected community, a woven fabric of relationships in which each existence acquires meaning only through communion and interaction with others. However, these convergences should be not understood as the confirmation of a single universal ontology, but as indicating a set of relational frameworks that, despite their differences, challenge the dualistic assumptions of modern thought. This is particularly relevant to the context of the African *Ubuntu* ontology. The latter perceives all entities within the natural world as situated within a complex web of relationships. The Self is not regarded as an isolated entity; rather, it exists in relation to others, including the land, ecology, and various communities. Consequently, the human being is conceptualised in terms of 'wholeness' or 'completeness'.²² As Mbembe reminds us, all living beings 'form a web, better

¹⁹ *LS*, no. 16, 70, 91, 92, 137, 138.

²⁰ Grey, *Practices of Communion*, 41.

²¹ John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*, London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2006.

²² Mogobe B. Ramose, *African Philosophy Through Ubuntu*, Harare (Zimbabwe), Mond, 2005, 35.

still, a community: the community of the inhabitants of the Earth'.²³ Read in this light, the call for relationality does not simply oppose modernity from an external standpoint; instead it rearticulates, from within multiple traditions, alternative ways of conceptualising belonging, interdependence and coexistence.

This vision is diametrically different from the modern anthropocentrism inherited from a certain interpretation of both the Judaeo-Christian account of creation (Gn 1:28) and Cartesianism that set the human being apart from the rest of creation. Amplified by the industrialism of the nineteenth century, modern anthropocentrism set humans apart from the rest of creation, thereby placing them at the summit of a pyramid of life. Consequently, that led to the unlimited exploitation of a nature reduced to a 'stock of resources'.²⁴ Within the framework of integral ecology, by contrast, nature is neither a mere backdrop nor an utilitarian reservoir. Rather, nature is seen as a subject of relation and a *locus* of revelation. As Boff rightly observes, nature becomes a universal sacrament of the presence of God.²⁵ Such a perspective opens onto an ethic of care, sobriety, and contemplation, whereby to live no longer implies the logic of domination but 'a being-with in which I am all the more myself, manifested in terms of gratitude, co-responsibility, and communion'.²⁶ Mbembe echoes this ontology and ethic of care when he emphasises that in the context of the ecological crisis, care should neither be understood as, nor reduced to, a sentimental gesture or an abstract moral ideal. It is, rather, a political and ecological practice that consists in a radical form of resistance to the logic of disposability. To care, he argues, is to acknowledge the interdependence of all forms of life and to commit to preserving the biosphere rather than exploiting it – which is one of the direct consequences of modern dualism between humans and the rest of creation.²⁷

2.2 *Integral Ecology as A Critique of Modern Dualisms*

Integral ecology does not limit itself to proposing a new ecological sensibility. It also deconstructs the dualistic heritage of modernity. Pope Francis diagnoses a 'technocratic paradigm' that has become global and structuring. This paradigm consists in a way of thinking and living in which the subject arrogates mastery over an 'objectified' world, conceived as a formless matter available for manipulation.²⁸ Rather than taking this diagnosis as a purely normative

²³ Achille Mbembe, *La communauté terrestre*, Paris: Découverte, 2023, 17-18.

²⁴ *LS*, no. 106-109.

²⁵ Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, 127.

²⁶ Grey, *The Practices of Communion*, 43.

²⁷ Mbembe, *La communauté terrestre*, 90.

²⁸ *LS*, no. 106-108.

critique, it can also be considered as an attempt to explain and question a historical and metaphysical configuration in which the distinction between subject and object has become epistemically and practically operative. Far from being neutral, this regime has tremendously influenced and shaped the modern worldview; one which is dominated by an instrumental logic, whereby technology is no longer considered a tool but a cultural and anthropological matrix that determines lifestyles and horizons of meaning.²⁹ In this sense, the 'technocratic paradigm' does not simply denote an external deviation from an otherwise balanced order. On the contrary, the paradigm at issue names an immanent logic that organises modern forms of rationality and life.

The consequences of this modern dualism are at least twofold. On the one hand, there is a drive for unlimited economic and technological domination that weighs upon the environment/the natural world. On the other, an existential alienation, whereby humans – considering themselves detached from the cosmic fabric – become estranged both from themselves and from the Earth upon which they depend. However, such consequences should not be seen as effects attributed to a single cause, but as the unfolding of tensions internal to this configuration, whereby the very attempt to secure mastery over the world generates new forms division and separation between humans and the world. To quote Grey's formulation, 'the modern is characterised by the loss of the connection between God and creation on the one hand, and between self and the world on the other'.³⁰ Yet, as it is emphasised in contemporary philosophy, the 'loss' at stake here cannot be simply reversed by returning to pre-modern unity but requires a critical engagement with the conditions that produced it. In this sense, the encyclical joins contemporary philosophical critiques, such as those of Hans Jonas and Bruno Latour. Jonas, in *Le principe responsabilité*, calls for a 'heuristics of fear', reminding us that human survival is inseparable from the safeguarding of the biosphere.³¹ Latour, for his part, dismantles the modern fiction of a subject separated from nature and invites us to 'inhabit the critical zone', that is, to recognise our earthly embeddedness and our constitutive interdependencies.

From this standpoint, integral ecology can be regarded as a process of reconciliation aimed at reintegrating humanity within the broader community of life. This approach seeks to restore connections among ethics, culture, economy, politics, and spirituality, thereby fostering both individual and collective ecological transformation. Rather than signalling only technological, political, or economic adjustments – often associated with the prevalent concept of

²⁹ *LS*, no. 107-109.

³⁰ Grey, *The Practices of Communion*, 19.

³¹ Hans Jonas, *Le principe responsabilité*, Paris: Cerf, 1990, 30-31.

ecological transition in public discourse – this ecological conversion entails an anthropological and theological *metanoia*. It marks a shift from perceiving humanity as the master and possessor of nature to recognising humanity as an integral part of a universal community. This universal community and cosmic fellowship are key features emphasised in the Spiritan general theoretical and practical approach to life. From this perspective, the critique of the technocratic paradigm emerges not as an external denunciation, but as an immanent reconfiguration of the relationship between humans, technology and the Earth.

3. THE SPIRITAN SPIRITUALITY – ORIGINS AND MISSIONARY PRAXIS

3.1 *The Emergence of a Pneumatological Missionary Identity*

The genealogy of Spiritan spirituality, as already mentioned, lies in the encounter between two successive but complementary founders, Claude-François Poullart des Places (1679–1709) and François Marie-Paul Libermann (1802–1852). Their respective intuitions and experiences (though separated by a century yet united by a common breath, that is, care for the poor and the vulnerable) shaped a distinctive charism, giving rise to a missionary tradition defined by poverty, docility (or obedience) to the Holy Spirit, and proximity to the margins of society. This tradition, transmitted through the Catholic religious order called the *Congregation of the Holy Spirit*, whose members (religious priests and brothers) are popularly known as *Spiritans*, has come to be known as *Spiritane spirituality*: not a doctrinal system but a form of life – that is, a way of living and habiting the world.³²

Although born in different contexts – Poullart’s in post-Tridentine France and Libermann’s in the colonial nineteenth century – their insights converge in a dynamic of *kenosis* and solidarity, whose relevance extends far beyond their historical and religious moment. Rooted in a profound theology of the Holy Spirit, the Spiritane spirituality has consistently united missionary evangelisation and commitment to social engagement in favour of the poor and the vulnerable.³³ This unity highlights its relevance and potentiality to illuminate contemporary ecological and anthropological questions. What began as a concrete response to poverty and exclusion may now serve as a resource for rethinking the relationship between humanity and the world – what, following Boff, we

³² On the history, cultural, religious and societal background of the congregation, see de Mare, *Aux racines de l'arbre spiritain*; Paul Coulon (Ed.), *Claude-François Poullart des Places et les spiritains: De la fondation en 1703 à la restauration par Libermann en 1848*. Vol. 1, Paris: Karthala, 2009.

³³ *Bagamoyo* II, no. 61.

refer to as the 'vulnerable Earth'. Because, as Jiji Chen observes, 'environmental issues cannot ignore the fundamental rights of the poor or the vulnerable group'.³⁴

3.1.1 Claude-François Poullart des Places – Poverty as Theological Communion

Born into the Rennes bourgeoisie, Poullart des Places had a promising legal career. But he decided to abandon that path so as to share life with destitute students excluded from priestly formation for lack of means. In 1703 he founded, in Paris, *Le Séminaire du Saint Esprit* (the Seminary of the Holy Spirit), a small community dedicated to the formation of poor clerics under the invocation of the Holy Spirit and the protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary. As already mentioned, his *Règlements généraux et particuliers* specified that 'all the students shall adore especially the Holy Spirit, to whom they have been particularly dedicated'.³⁵ This statement, both programmatic and contemplative, reveals a spirituality grounded in dependence upon divine initiative and openness to the movements of the Spirit.

Thus, from the outset, Poullart des Places's *House of the Holy Spirit* was intended for 'those whose poverty, conduct, and aptitude for study are well known'.³⁶ Such a choice was not philanthropic but theological. Poverty became the criterium for joining the formation house. Also, Poullart des Places considered poverty a sacrament of presence, a locus of communion in which God's action is discerned within human fragility. The poor were not treated as recipients of charity but as partners in the Holy Spirit's work – a perception that anticipates what liberation theology would later articulate as 'the preferential option for the poor'.³⁷ Poullart's vision, thus, paved the way to the foundations of a relational anthropology that privileges interdependence over hierarchy and shared vulnerability over domination.

Reconsidered through the lens of ecological reflection, Poullart des Places's founding gesture may disclose new meaning. Today, as *LS* reminds us, 'there are not two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but a single complex crisis which is both social and environmental'.³⁸ To choose the poor can, therefore, also mean to choose the Earth, as both are subjected to the same

³⁴ Jiji Chen, 'A Comparison between Pope Francis and Leonardo Boff's Views on the Ecological Crisis', in: *International Journal of Public Theology* 18 (2024) no. 2, 236.

³⁵ Claude-François Poullart des Places, *Règlements généraux et particuliers* (1703), ed. Joseph Michel, Paris: Spiritan Publications, 1990.

³⁶ Poullart des Places, *Règlements généraux et particuliers*, 340.

³⁷ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Théologie de la libération*, Paris: Cerf, 1971, 204.

³⁸ *LS*, no. 139.

logic of exploitation and domination, and both cry out for liberation and protection. The Spiritan commitment to poverty – that is, the religious vow of poverty and a lifestyle marked by simplicity and detachment from material consumption – and community living prefigure in this sense what Pope Francis calls *integral ecology*: a way of life that unites concern for human dignity with the care of creation. In this context, it can be said that from its origin, the Spiritan charism carried within it a quiet critique of the technocratic and utilitarian mindset that now impacts violently and negatively both humanity and the planet.

3.1.2 François Libermann – Kenotic Mission and the Ecology of Inculturation

A century after Poullart des Places, François Libermann reinterpreted this spiritual inheritance in a radically different world and way. A convert from Judaism who experienced profound physical suffering and interior trial, Libermann founded in 1841 *La société du Saint Coeur de Marie* (the Society of the Holy Heart of Mary), dedicated to the evangelisation of enslaved and marginalised people of African descent. Later, in 1848, this society merged with the order founded by Poullart des Places and gave birth to the current Congregation of the Holy Spirit, under the Protection of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.³⁹ Libermann's celebrated injunction – 'Strip yourselves of Europe and make yourselves negroes with the negroes'⁴⁰ – summarises and anticipates a theology of *kenosis*, understood in this context as a call to cultural dispossession and humble solidarity with the poor and vulnerable, namely the enslaved and marginalised.

In his correspondence, Libermann defined mission not primarily as a geographical and demographic expansion but as a conversion through encounter.⁴¹ And again, addressing his missionaries in Dakar, he insisted that the people they served should 'feel that they are free (...) and share that equality which they have with all the children of God'.⁴² His approach is best understood not only as a *pneumatological* but also as an *existential pedagogy*. It expresses the idea that the Holy Spirit educates by means of relationship, drawing the missionary into a mutual transformation that restores dignity to the oppressed.

This theology, which can be seen as a prelude to inculturation, converges strikingly with the ecological *ethos* of LS. The encyclical commends the *wisdom of Indigenous peoples*, whose traditions embody alternative ways of inhabiting

³⁹ Coulon, *Claude-François Poullart des Places et les spiritains*, 301.

⁴⁰ Libermann, cited in Congregation of the Holy Spirit, *Bagamoyo 2012: XX^e Chapitre général*, Paris: Spiritan Publications, 2012, no. 1.8. Hereafter *Bagamoyo* I.

⁴¹ *ND*, 9: 334.

⁴² *Ibidem*.

the Earth.⁴³ Libermann's own injunction to 'study their language and their customs, and by degrees enter into their spirit' exemplifies precisely such an epistemology of humility.⁴⁴ To 'strip oneself of Europe', as he admonishes his missionaries, implies to become attuned to the rhythms of another world, human and non-human alike. Accordingly, this admonishment gestures towards a posture of contemplative listening and cohabitation rather than control. In this light, inculturation assumes ecological significance. That is to say that inculturation becomes both a site and a call of attention to place, to culture, and to the living environment in which the Holy Spirit continually creates.

3.2 *Key Dimensions of Spiritan Spirituality – Poverty, Inculturation, and Community*

There are three fundamental and interdependent pillars that broadly structure the Spiritan spirituality, namely evangelical poverty, inculturation, and community life. These pillars are relevant to *LS*'s integral ecology in the sense that each of them expresses respectively a particular mode of resistance to the culture of possession and domination, which *LS* criticises. Together, they seem to outline a path towards a new and reconciled relationship between humans and the Earth. When reread in the light of *LS* these features embody a shift of existential perspective: from mastery to communion, and from exploitation to shared life.

3.2.1 Evangelical Poverty – A Theology of Dependence and Solidarity

Evangelical poverty occupies a central place in the way Spiritans understand mission. For them, poverty is not an ascetic ideal but a theological and existential disposition. It is a way of being in the world that mirrors the kenotic movement and solidarity with the less privileged. From the beginning, Poullart des Places enjoined his community 'to live in community, sharing what little they have, trusting in divine Providence'.⁴⁵ Poverty thus signifies more than material deprivation; it becomes an existential stance of trust and receptivity. The *Bagamoyo I* Chapter reaffirms this insight, calling Spiritans to 'share the life and insecurity of the poor' and to embody simplicity 'as a prophetic sign in a world obsessed with consumption'.⁴⁶

Philosophically, such poverty can be read as an act of resistance. It subverts the logic of accumulation and mastery that *LS* identifies as the root of

⁴³ *LS*, no. 146.

⁴⁴ *ND*, 8: 239.

⁴⁵ Poullart des Places, *Règlements généraux et particuliers*, 338.

⁴⁶ *Bagamoyo I*, no. 1.6.

ecological and social degradation. What Pope Francis diagnoses as the ‘technocratic paradigm’⁴⁷ finds its antidote in the Spiritan vow of co-dependence and poverty. By embracing voluntary limitation, Spiritans witness that freedom does not arise from possession but from participation in the reciprocal generosity. Their lifestyle becomes a critique of the economic model that commodifies both human labour and the natural world. To live poorly, for the Spiritans, is to live interdependently – with the poor, and with the Earth.

In this sense, evangelical poverty functions also as an ecological virtue. It cultivates gratitude, attentiveness, and restraint; all of which are habits that directly counter the extractive and wasteful tendencies of modern culture. The Spiritan missionary’s choice ‘to be content with what Providence sends without seeking superfluity’ is not an expression of romantic asceticism but a concrete enactment of what *LS* calls ‘joyful sobriety’.⁴⁸ This is a reminder that reconciliation with creation begins with conversion of desire, with a relinquishment of the will to dominate.

3.2.2 Inculturation – *Kenosis* and Ecological Hospitality

Another important pillar of the Spiritan spirituality is inculturation. It emerges above all from Libermann’s reflection on mission. He urged his missionaries to learn languages, study customs, and ‘form an alliance with the peoples to whom they were sent’.⁴⁹ This statement expresses more than a pastoral strategy. It also articulates a theology of *kenosis*, that is, a voluntary dispossession through which the Spiritan missionary allows himself to speak and fit in within another’s world. In his *Mémoire sur les missions des noirs*, Libermann insists that evangelisation must never impose foreign categories, but should ‘enter into the spirit’ of the people, receiving the Gospel as it takes flesh within their culture.⁵⁰

Read in the context of the ecological discourse, such inculturation may today be read as a form of ecological hospitality. *LS* similarly calls upon us to listen to ‘the wisdom of Indigenous peoples’, whose cosmologies often preserve a non-dualistic relationship with nature.⁵¹ Libermann’s call to ‘strip yourselves of Europe’⁵² thus resonates as a summons to decolonise both mission and our relationship to the Earth. It asks the Spiritan missionary – and, by extension, the modern world – to renounce the posture of mastery and learn again to receive. Inculturation, then, becomes a school of ecological humility and hospitality. It teaches that revelation occurs through encounter, and that truth

⁴⁷ *LS*, no. 106-109.

⁴⁸ Poullart des Places, *Règlements généraux et particuliers*, 339; *LS*, no. 223.

⁴⁹ *ND*, 10: 22-24.

⁵⁰ *ND*, 8: 239.

⁵¹ *LS*, no. 146.

⁵² *Bagamoyo* I, no. 1.8.

cannot be confined within any single culture or epistemology. The Bagamoyo documents interpret this tradition as the 'Spiritan way of presence', grounded in listening and collaboration rather than control.⁵³ In ecological terms, such a way of presence implies an ethics of attention to place: to inhabit the Earth *with* rather than to command *over* it. Libermann's cultural *kenosis* thus prefigures the ecological conversion that *LS* demands and entails the passage from domination to participation, from extraction to communion.

3.2.3 Community Life – The Trinitarian Form of Existence

If poverty and inculturation define the Spiritan missionary's outward stance, community life (*vita communis*) constitutes the inner form of that vocation. As already indicated, from the outset, Poullart des Places envisaged community as both the setting and the sacrament of mission. His *Règlements* prescribe and insist on common prayer, shared labour and mutual obedience as conditions of belonging to the congregation. As he writes: 'they shall live in common under the same rule, with one heart and one soul'.⁵⁴ This insistence on fraternity was not merely disciplinary; it was also theological and existential. Community embodies the Trinitarian rhythm of giving and receiving, of diversity reconciled in unity.

In recent years, the Congregation's General Chapters, especially *Bagamoyo I* and *II* respectively have reaffirmed the fact that community life, as far as Spiritans are concerned, is a criterion for missionary authenticity and presence in the world. They also emphasise that for Spiritans, 'simple and ecological communities' should be marked by shared goods, collaborative ministry, and solidarity with the laity.⁵⁵ Communal life thus becomes not an inward retreat but a prophetic sign of resistance against the isolation and consumerism of contemporary culture.

Read through the lens of *LS*, this Spiritan vision of *vita communis* acquires an unmistakably ecological resonance. The encyclical speaks of the world itself as a 'common home' where 'everything is interconnected'.⁵⁶ With its *ethos* of shared resources and mutual care, the Spiritan community mirrors this cosmic communion on a human scale. In this context, it exemplifies what Francis describes as 'social love', signifying a form of love that embodies civic and ecological responsibility. In our contemporary fragmented and individualistic society, the Spiritan community may serve both as a symbol and a practical model of the reconciled creation envisaged by integral ecology.

⁵³ Ibid., no. 1.6.

⁵⁴ Poullart des Places, *Règlements généraux et particuliers*, 340.

⁵⁵ *Bagamoyo II*, no. 8-11.

⁵⁶ *LS*, no. 16; 91.

Intermezzo

Taken together, these three pillars – poverty, inculturation, and community – outline a coherent spirituality of reconciliation. Each embodies a refusal of the possessive and technocratic anthropology that fractures both human societies and the natural world. Evangelical poverty witnesses to dependence rather than domination; inculturation values difference as the space of divine revelation; community life makes visible the Trinitarian communion of creation itself. Within the horizon of *LS*, the Spiritan spirituality thus emerges as both historical witness and prophetic resource that potentially becomes a spirituality of the Earth.

To live as a Spiritan is to consent to the natural rhythm of giving and receiving, and to learn interdependence from the poor and from the Earth alike. It is, in Francis's terms, to allow ecological conversion to become 'a community conversion', that is, a way of being in which the cry of the poor and the cry of the Earth are heard as a single appeal to compassion.⁵⁷ In this perspective, the Spiritan tradition offers not merely an example from the past but a *praxis for the future*: a lived theology capable of sustaining an integral ecology in the twenty-first century.

The theological and existential contours traced above reveal that the Spiritan spirituality is not an inward-looking devotional system but a form of life in which the ecological activism becomes tangible through poverty, inculturation, and community. These elements together configure an anthropology of interdependence and an ethic of communion. When viewed through the lens of the ecological crisis, they also disclose a broader cosmological resonance: to live is to live *with* the Earth. The Spiritan charism thus anticipates, in its own ways, the very intuitions, which *LS* will later articulate in a magisterial form. Both traditions arise from a single theological conviction, that is, the healing of humanity and the healing of creation are inseparable dimensions of one divine reconciliation. The following section therefore undertakes a dialogue between these two sources, examining how the Spiritan experience and *LS*'s vision of integral ecology illuminate, challenge, and enrich one another.

4. DIALOGUE BETWEEN SPIRITAN SPIRITUALITY AND INTEGRAL ECOLOGY

The articulation between the Spiritan spirituality and integral ecology does not result from an artificial construction but from a critical mutual recognition. The Spiritan intuition – born in the seventeenth century (Poullart des Places)

⁵⁷ *LS*, no. 219.

and reformulated in the nineteenth (Libermann), as already explained above – unfolds as both an ecclesial and existential praxis of solidarity and docility to the Holy Spirit. On its part, the encyclical *LS* systematises a theological and anthropological vision capable of embracing the planetary challenges of our time. Their dialogue may bring forth a paradigm that may be called an *ecospirituality of reconciliation*. This ecospirituality rests upon three structuring and complementary axes: anthropological, ethical, and spiritual.⁵⁸

4.1 *Anthropological Convergences – Relationality, Dependence, and Vulnerability*

The first point of convergence concerns the understanding of the human being as a relational creature. As highlighted above, the central affirmation of *LS*, ‘everything is interconnected’, is not merely descriptive.⁵⁹ It proposes an ontology of mutual dependence that we have termed an *ontologie du lien* (ontology of relationality). One of the salient implications of this ontology is that the human being cannot be understood as an autonomous subject standing over against an objected-world. On the contrary, humans are constitutively bound to the web of life. This intuition resonates with the Spiritan tradition, where the missionary’s identity is defined not by self-sufficiency but by dispossession and availability. Libermann’s exhortation, ‘to become negroes with the negroes’, expresses both a cultural *kenosis* and a recognition of vulnerability as a locus of truth.⁶⁰

Philosophically, this convergence may be illuminated by Agamben’s critique of ‘bare life’. In the modern biopolitical dispositif, he argues, life is divided into natural life (*zōē*) and political life (*bios*), with the former being reduced to its sheer biological survival, stripped of its relational and symbolic dimensions.⁶¹ The Spiritan tradition, by embracing poverty and fragility as theological and existential *loci*, inverts this paradigm. It proclaims that abundant life, of which Jesus speaks about in John’s gospel, unfolds not in the division of life and cultures, and in the accumulation of power but in shared vulnerability and co-belongingness (Jn 10:10). In this sense, integral ecology extends and clarifies the Spiritan intuition by inscribing human vulnerability and belongingness within the greater vulnerability and community of the Earth.

⁵⁸ A detailed definition of this paradigm is provided in section 4.4.

⁵⁹ *LS*, no. 91.

⁶⁰ Libermann, cited in *Bagamoyo* I, no. 1.8.

⁶¹ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer I: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998, 8–12.

4.2 *Ethical Convergences – Poverty, Sobriety, and Justice*

The second convergence concerns the ethic of lifestyle. *LS* insists on the unity of the anthropological, social and ecological crises. Pope Francis affirms that ‘there are not two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but a single complex socio-environmental crisis’.⁶² This implies that any spirituality and any definition of the human being that separates social justice from care for the Earth would therefore miss the essential. From Poullart des Places to Libermann, the Spiritan tradition has consistently linked poverty and mission: to live poorly – that is assuming a lifestyle marked by moderation and simplicity – is to share the condition of the most vulnerable so as to defend them and to manifest the gratuity of the Spirit and of life.⁶³

Recent General Chapters of the Spiritans have extended this orientation by integrating the ecological dimension into the mission of the congregation. For instance, *Bagamoyo II* underscores that the commitment to justice, peace, and the integrity of creation (JPIC) is not an appendage but a constitutive element of evangelisation and Spiritan mission.⁶⁴ The Spiritan ethic of sobriety thus finds direct resonance in *LS*’s call ‘to pause to appreciate the small things, to be grateful for the opportunities that life offers, without clinging to what we have or grieving over what we lack. This entails avoiding the logic of domination and accumulation of pleasures’.⁶⁵ Sobriety and justice thus appear as two inseparable dimensions or faces of a double conversion: the one interior, and the other structural.

4.3 *Spiritual Convergences – Docility to the Spirit and Ecological Conversion*

On the spiritual level, docility to the Holy Spirit lies at the very heart of the Spiritan tradition. As already pointed out, Poullart des Places founded his community under the explicit invocation of the Holy Spirit. Libermann also consistently taught that mission is not primarily a human strategy but a disposition of availability to the movements of the Holy Spirit. The *Bagamoyo* Chapters extend this logic by describing mission as a permanent discernment ‘attentive to the signs of the Holy Spirit’.⁶⁶

This is precisely what *LS* names ‘ecological conversion’. It implies an interior transformation that frees humans from the logic of possession, domination and

⁶² Francis, *LS*, no. 139.

⁶³ Poullart des Places, *Règlements généraux et particuliers*, 336–338.

⁶⁴ *Bagamoyo II*, no. 12 and 15.

⁶⁵ *LS*, no. 222.

⁶⁶ *Bagamoyo I*, no. 2.2.

exploitation. It opens to a spirituality of gratitude and praise.⁶⁷ Spiritan abandonment and ecological conversion thus mutually illuminate each other: The former incarnates within the missionary tradition what the latter proposes as a planetary horizon.

4.4 *Towards An Ecospirituality of Reconciliation*

From these convergences emerges a constructive proposal: an *ecospirituality of reconciliation*. By ecospirituality of reconciliation, I refer to a spiritual-ethical paradigm in which ecological conversion is understood as a process of healing the fractured relationships between humanity, cultures, and the Earth. Rooted in a relational anthropology that acknowledges the inseparability of the cries of the poor and the cries of the Earth, this paradigm integrates a contemplative openness to the Spirit with concrete practices of justice, inculturation, and ecological responsibility. Consequently, it articulates ecological transformation not merely as a technical or behavioural adjustment, but as an existential and cultural *metanoia* that reorients humanity towards interdependence and cosmic belonging.⁶⁸

This understanding draws upon Boff's vision of *integral liberation*, which encompasses both human communities and ecosystems, and aligns with Zizioulas's ontology of communion, as discussed above.⁶⁹ Both perspectives illuminate the Spiritan *form of life*, demonstrating how its commitments to poverty, cultural hospitality, and community life constitute privileged loci for a praxis of cosmic reconciliation. In the context of our reflection, this ecospirituality of reconciliation unfolds in three different steps.

- a) *Reconciliation with the Poor*. As it has been explained, the Spiritan congregation makes the option for the poor an essential component of her mission of evangelisation.⁷⁰ Within the context of integral ecology, this means that the fight against poverty and the struggle for the protection of the environment are part of the same responsibility. As already noted, for Poullart des Places, this choice was foundational: He left the bourgeoisie of his family to live with young poor clerics, sharing their lodging, food, and formation. This gesture, far beyond mere philanthropy, was prophetic and theological, expressing the conviction that the Gospel can only be understood from the standpoint of the poor. Libermann radicalised

⁶⁷ LS, no. 216-221.

⁶⁸ Rosi Braidotti, 'Animals, Anomalies, and Inorganic Others', in: *Modern Language Association* 124 (2009) no. 2, 526-532.

⁶⁹ Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, 221-223; *Ecology and Liberation: A New Paradigm*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995, 51-72; Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 27-30.

⁷⁰ SRL, no. 14; *Bagamoyo* II, no. 12.

this principle by directing missionary activities towards freed slaves, considering that the Gospel found there a privileged terrain of incarnation. This theology of the poor is not marginal; it constitutes a hermeneutic of the universal. In a world marked by ecological and social exclusions, this intuition becomes a key to a Christian ecological ethic. The inseparability between the cry of the poor and the cry of the Earth finds in the Spiritan tradition a *locus* of practical unification. To put it differently, human poverty and the poverty of the Earth thus appear indissociable, whereby the poorest are the first victims of ecological catastrophes, and simultaneously fragile ecosystems suffer predation and exploitation that reflect the same logics of exclusion and domination inherent in modernity.⁷¹

- b) *Reconciliation with Cultures*. As already indicated, Libermann invited to a genuine inculturation, a cultural *kenosis* in which the Spiritan missionary allows himself to be transformed by otherness.⁷² This corresponds to the ecological requirement of recognising the plurality of cosmologies and knowledges as one of the conditions of a truly integral ecology.⁷³ Already in the nineteenth century, Spiritan missionaries, sent to Africa, the Caribbean, Latin America, or the Indian Ocean, chose to learn local languages, to respect traditions, and to enter into the symbolic systems of the cultures they evangelised. This was not a strategy of efficiency but a fundamental theological attitude, grounded in the conviction that the Word of God becomes incarnate not from above but within history and cultures. In this sense, Spiritan inculturation may be read as a spiritual ecology of place. It resists every logic of abstraction, homogeneous universalisation, or spiritual colonialism. It requires, on the contrary, *situatedness*, which means both to dwell in the world and to enter into a slow and respectful relation with a human and natural territory. The missionary encounter becomes, therefore, a school of humility and dispossession. According to Libermann, the Spiritan must not impose his own views, but *become all things to all people*, in the image of Christ the servant. This logic resonates with the principle of cultural ecology developed in *LS*. Pope Francis stresses that every ecological destruction is also an assault upon local cultures. The homogenisation of lifestyles, uncontrolled development, and unbridled urbanisation destroy not only ecosystems, but also human identities rooted in the land.⁷⁴ By their immersion into other cultures, Spiritans have learnt to recognise the organic ties linking peoples, land,

⁷¹ *LS*, no. 42.

⁷² *ND*, 10, no. 22-24.

⁷³ *LS*, no. 146.

⁷⁴ *LS*, no. 143-146.

myths, and ritual practices. Inculturation thus becomes an ecological epistemology, that is to say, a way of knowing and serving from a situated, relational position, rather than a technocratic one.

- c) *Reconciliation with Creation*. Simplicity of life, proximity to the Earth, and solidarity with fragile ecosystems become *loci* of contemplation and gratitude. Here the theology of creation meets relational anthropology. In this context, the earth is perceived as common home and sacrament of divine presence.⁷⁵ Mission is lived not in solitude but within a missionary body, marked by communal life, sharing of resources, and mutual support. This dimension is at once evangelical – ‘they were of one heart and one soul’ (Acts 4:32) and pragmatic, for it allows missionaries to endure harsh conditions together. But it is also prophetic, for it proposes an alternative model of life in contrast to the individualistic and consumerist lifestyle dominant in modern societies.

We have seen that in *LS* Pope Francis insists on the importance of *joyful sobriety*.⁷⁶ It is about rediscovering the joy of what is essential, the beauty of simplicity, and the fruitfulness of sharing. This dimension was already present in the earliest regulations of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit which, as already indicated above, stressed the sharing of goods, trust in Providence, and fraternal life, all of which are considered signs of the Kingdom. The Spiritan missionary is called to live poorly among the poor, not by ideology, but by evangelical love, as the life of Poullart des Places himself shows.

This way of living has direct ecological, ethical, and political import. It contradicts the logic of accumulation, unlimited growth, and possession as identity. From this perspective, the Spiritan tradition offers an existential alternative. The latter consists in living with less in order to be freer, more solidaristic, and more human. In this sense, this spirituality can be read as a theology of sufficiency, in which being human and wellbeing (*or happiness*) is not indexed to consumption but to the quality of relationships and care: Relationship with, and care for, the Self, others and the Earth.⁷⁷ Spiritan communal life becomes, therefore, both a concrete ecological praxis and a laboratory of sustainable, equitable, and evangelical lifestyles.

⁷⁵ Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, 127.

⁷⁶ *LS*, no. 223.

⁷⁷ Alphée Mpassi, *The Management of Happiness: Economy and Ethics in Giorgio Agamben's Account of Biopolitics*, Nijmegen: Radboud University Press, 2024, 214-216; Braidotti, ‘Animals, Anomalies, and Inorganic Others’, 528.

Moreover, the Spiritan community is not closed in upon itself. It is oriented towards the world, animated by a dynamic of being sent-forth. It is a missionary community, which distinguishes it from a mere alternative lifestyle. It is a sign and instrument of a Church 'going forth', that is, going outside herself to meet and live among others, as Pope Francis proposes.⁷⁸ In this respect, the Spiritan conception of communal life, with its emphasis on communion and sharing, anticipates the universal communion of creation. It becomes an *icon* of the reconciled world, called to live in cosmic fraternity just like the example of Saint Francis of Assisi does show. In sum, the Spiritan spirituality, through its preferential option for the poor, and inculturation, already embodies what *LS* today calls us to think and to live: an integral conversion in which reconciliation with God passes through reconciliation with humanity and with the earth.⁷⁹

5. TOWARDS A SPIRITAN *PRAXIS* OF INTEGRAL ECOLOGY

If Spiritan spirituality offers a theological and mystical matrix profoundly convergent with integral ecology, this convergence must nonetheless be translated into a concrete praxis. The current challenge is to transform the Spiritan charism and intuition into embodied practices capable of responding to the contemporary planetary emergencies. The Spiritan commitment to Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation (JPIC) provides precisely such a structuring framework, within which Spiritan ecospirituality can unfold coherently and performatively.

5.1 *JPIC as a Constitutive Axis of Spiritan Mission*

The *Spiritan JPIC Handbook* underlines that Spiritan mission is not reducible to the verbal proclamation of the Gospel: 'JPIC is an integral part of our mission of evangelisation'.⁸⁰ This affirmation carries profound consequences. As a matter of fact, it situates evangelisation not in a separate sphere, but at the intersection of struggles for human dignity, social justice, and care for creation. In other words, it makes socio-ecological engagement not a mere humanitarian extension of mission but a sacramental dimension of the Good News itself. This conviction is rooted in the founding experiences of Poullart and Libermann as already explained. In the contemporary context, where new forms of

⁷⁸ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, nos. 20-24.

⁷⁹ *LS*, no. 70.

⁸⁰ *Spiritan JPIC Handbook*, Rome: Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Office, Congregation of the Holy Spirit, 2019, 1.

poverty are often linked to ecological devastation, Spiritan mission can be understood as participation in a global struggle against what pope Francis calls a 'single complex socio-environmental crisis'.⁸¹ The Spiritan JPIC movement is, therefore, not merely a missionary priority but also a hermeneutical key to Spiritan identity and ecological consciousness. It compels a rethinking of evangelisation as a praxis of reconciliation and as spiritual resistance against the logics of domination that simultaneously destroy both the Earth and the poor (or the most vulnerable populations).

5.2 *Mission to the Peripheries – The Migrants and the Refugees*

Recent documents of the Congregation emphasise that Spiritans are sent to the peripheries, namely the migrants, the refugees, the indigenous peoples, and the new urban poor.⁸² This orientation is not only a contextual strategy but also an expression of a constant charismatic choice. It entails being present where humanity is stripped 'bare', wounded, and exposed, thereby becoming disposable. In political modernity, the refugee, the stateless person, and the undocumented migrants have become paradigmatic figures. Hannah Arendt already noted that refugees are those who lose 'the right to have rights' and so become subjects of political and societal exclusion.⁸³ She argues that their existence exposes the foundational paradox of the nation-state and of the notion of 'human rights', which are proclaimed universally but paradoxically guaranteed only within the confines of citizenship. The refugee thus lays bare the fragility of every political order founded on territoriality and sovereignty.

Agamben extends this reflection by considering the refugee as the embodiment of 'bare life'. By bare life, he means a biological existence stripped of political significance, thereby exposed to sovereign power, which may decide on their inclusion or exclusion, and ultimately on their life or death. Refugee camps thus become, in this perspective, paradigmatic spaces of modern biopolitics, where life is administered but not recognised.⁸⁴ In this context, Spiritan mission among refugees and migrants acquires a particular theological, political, and ethical significance. This mission is not merely humanitarian assistance. Rather, it is a proclamation of subjecthood: to recognise as 'children of God' those whom modernity reduces to bare life. Spiritan missionary praxis thus becomes an act of resistance against the biopolitical reduction of existence. Spiritans stand not on the side of migration management, but on the side of fraternity that makes refugees and migrants exist politically and ecclesially as

⁸¹ *LS*, no. 139.

⁸² *Bagamoyo* I, no. 1.25; *Bagamoyo* II, no. 1.3 and 2.17.

⁸³ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, New York: Harcourt Brace, 1951, 296.

⁸⁴ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 132-135.

members of a communion. One may say, in a Libermannian perspective, that ‘to become poor with the poor’ today means to share the biopolitical condition of the excluded, transforming it into a *locus* of revelation and grace. The Spiritan hospitality is therefore radical: not mere tolerance but allowing the other to exist and to redefine the contours of the community itself. The periphery thus becomes a theological space where the Holy Spirit renews the Church and the society at large, and where ecospirituality takes concrete shape in solidarity with the exiles of the Earth.

5.3 *Advocacy and Militancy – Towards A Universal Horizon of Mission*

The *Spiritan JPIC Handbook* insists also on the structural dimension of advocacy. This is not merely about local gestures, but about coordinated action within international networks, such as *VIVAT International* at the level of the UN organisations.⁸⁵ Spiritan advocacy thus aims to inscribe it within a dynamic of global transformation. To understand theologically and philosophically this passage from local proximity to universal action, Badiou’s reading of Paul proves in this context illuminating. In *Saint Paul: la fondation de l’universalisme*, Badiou shows that Paul invents a new figure of the subject: the subject is not pre-given but arises from fidelity to an event (the resurrection of Christ) that disrupts established belongings. The ‘militant subject’ is the one who remains faithful to this event, resisting logics of exclusion.⁸⁶

Transposed to the Spiritan and integral ecological context, Badiou’s insight implies that socio-ecological advocacy cannot be understood as a mere political strategy. It is fidelity to the event of the Holy Spirit, which propels the Congregation towards the poor and towards a wounded creation. To be a ‘militant subject’ in the Spiritan perspective is to extend the event of the Spirit into the public sphere, contesting destructive economic and political structures as is clearly stated in the constitution of the Congregation: ‘We work with them (the poor) too to change unjust social structures which victimise them’.⁸⁷

This perspective opens-up a critical and fertile tension. On the one hand, the Spiritan missionary remains bound to the field, close to local communities and to the minorities in particular. On the other hand, the missionary becomes an actor of concrete universalism, capable of carrying the voice of the excluded into international arenas. This passage from the local to the global is not

⁸⁵ *Spiritan JPIC Handbook*, no. 28.

⁸⁶ Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: La fondation de l’universalisme*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1997, 14-18; Alphée C.S. Mpasi, ‘Au-delà du biblique et du théologique: Saint Paul en philosophie politique contemporaine’, in: *Spiritus: Revue d’Expériences et de Recherches Missionnaires* 259 (2025), 215-222.

⁸⁷ *SRL*, no. 71.

a contradiction but an extension. As Libermann says, it is the same Spirit who calls one 'to become all things to all people'.⁸⁸ And the same Spirit calls Spiritans – and the entire humanity – today to become advocates of the Earth and of the poor or the less privileged in the spaces where their future is decided. Spiritan advocacy should, therefore, not be perceived as a 'political add-on' to spiritual mission. It is rather the contemporary manifestation of the missionary logic itself: A militant fidelity to the paschal event; an event that proclaims and rises to the universal what the society confines to marginality.

6. GENERAL CONCLUSION – TOWARDS AN ECOSPIRITUALITY OF RECONCILIATION

The analysis carried out throughout this study aimed to show that the encounter between Spiritan spirituality and integral ecology is not coincidental. It rather results from the recognition of a profound affinity between both traditions. The intuitions of Poullart des Places and Libermann – radical docility to the Spirit, preferential option for the poor, simple communal life, respectful inculturation – already anticipated what *LS* calls 'ecological conversion'. Conversely, integral ecology sheds light upon the ecological resources of the Spiritan spirituality, which had hitherto remained implicit and largely unexplored. The central task has been to propose an ecospirituality of reconciliation.

Five main lines have structured this rapprochement and dialogue:

- **Relational anthropology:** the person is not an isolated subject but a *being-in-relation*. Here the Spiritan tradition converges with the central intuition of *LS* in its affirmation that 'everything is interconnected' and with theological visions of being-as-communion. By recognising vulnerability as a *locus* of the Spirit, both the Spiritan spirituality and *LS* offer an ontology and an anthropology capable of subverting modern dualisms and reinserting humanity within the broader cosmic fabric.
- **The praxis of JPIC:** the commitment to justice, peace, and the integrity of creation, affirmed by recent Spiritan documents constitutes a direct extension of the congregation's founding option for the poor. This choice expresses the conviction that the struggle against human poverty and the struggle for the safeguarding of our *oikos* ('common home') are inseparable dimensions of a single combat for life.
- **Mission to the peripheries:** among migrants, refugees, and environmental displaced persons, Spiritans stand alongside those, whom modernity

⁸⁸ *ND*, 10, no. 517.

reduces to bare life. Through this solidarity, they resist the biopolitical logic that denies refugees 'the right to have rights', thereby proclaiming their dignity as children of God and as 'true' subjects. This mission thus becomes a theological locus where the universality of the Spirit manifests itself in and from the margins.

- **Community lifestyle:** in fruitful tension with the Franciscanism, as described by Agamben in *The Highest Poverty*, Spiritan sobriety constitutes a way of living which, without fleeing institutions, seeks to embody symbolic and practical resistance to the technocratic paradigm. It turns simplicity and moderation into a theological proclamation: to live by the Spirit and moderation rather than by accumulation.
- **Militant advocacy:** through its international networks (such as, *VIVAT International*), the Congregation participates in the structural transformation of societies. The Spiritan becomes a militant subject not by strategy but by fidelity to an event – the event of the Spirit – that calls him to proclaim universality where the world confines to marginality

From these lines emerges the notion of an *ecospirituality of reconciliation*. This is not a spiritual supplement to integral ecology, but its charismatic translation within Spiritan experience. It articulates:

- reconciliation with the poor, by fighting against the injustices that afflict the most vulnerable
- reconciliation with cultures, by living inculturation as hospitality and mutual learning
- reconciliation with creation, by adopting sober and contemplative lifestyles
- reconciliation with God, by allowing oneself to be led by the Spirit along a path of docility and gratitude.

In a world marked by fragmentation, exploitation, and exclusion, Spiritan ecospirituality offers an alternative vision: a Trinitarian horizon of universal communion in which mission is defined as service of life, fidelity to the event of the Holy Spirit, and prophetic resistance to the logics of domination. In this way, it constitutes an original contribution – both theological and practical – to the contemporary project of integral ecology as envisaged by *Laudato Si'*.

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