

# CLARETIAN MISSIONARIES

## OUR MISSIONARY SPIRITUALITY ALONG THE JOURNEY OF GOD'S PEOPLE



### DOCUMENT

Rome, 2002

## **FREQUENTLY USED ABBREVIATIONS**

- AA = Apostolicam Actuositatem, Vatican II.
- Aut = Autobiography of St. Anthony M. Claret.
- CC = Constitutions, 1986.
- ChL = Christifideles laici, Post-synod Exhortation of John Paul II (1988).
- CPR = The Claretian in the Process of Congregational Renewal, 20<sup>th</sup> Claretian General Chapter (1985).
- Dir = Claretian Directory (1999).
- EA = Autobiographical Writings of St. Anthony Mary Claret, BAC, Madrid, 1980.
- EC = Letters of Claret (3 vols.), ed. José M<sup>a</sup> Gil, CMF. (1970-1987).
- GPF = General Plan of Formation (1994).
- IPM = In Prophetic Mission, 22<sup>nd</sup> Claretian General Chapter (1997)
- MCT = The Mission of the Claretian Today, 19<sup>th</sup> Claretian General Chapter (1979).
- MR = Mutuae relationes, Congregations for Bishops and for Religious (1978).
- NMI = Novo Millenio Ineunte, John Paul II (2000)
- PE = Spiritual Patrimony, Claretian General Chapter (1967).
- PO = Presbyterorum Ordinis, Vatican II.
- RMi = Redemptoris Missio, Encyclical Letter of John Paul II (1990).
- SC = Sacrosantum Concilium (On the Sacred Liturgy), Vatican II.
- SW = Servants of the Word, 21<sup>st</sup> Claretian General Chapter (1991).
- VC = Vita Consecrata, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of John Paul II (1996)

## FOREWORD

The Missionary Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (Claretian Missionaries), between April 1999 and July 2000, spent time reflecting and sharing on our missionary spirituality on the journey of the People of God. On various occasions the Congregation was informed about what was done in the different stages of the process, and, at greater length, of the celebration of the Congress that took place in Majadahonda (Madrid, Spain) from 9 to 17 July 2001.

At the end of this Congress a Committee was set up to gather and synthesize the contributions made during it. The Committee was composed of Frs. Félix Eduardo Cisterna (Argentina), José Cristo Rey García Paredes (Spain), Santiago González Silva (Italy) and Lawrence V. (India). This Committee worked at the General Curia during the month of September and presented the results of its work to the General Government.

At its Council meeting on 22 December 2001, the General Government, after studying the content of the draft prepared by the Committee and weighing the suggestions received from the participants in the Congress, approved the publication of the text. At the same time, it considered it appropriate to include in an appendix the message of the Congress, the speeches of Fr. General (both his introductory and concluding remarks), and a selected bibliography of the sources for our Claretian missionary life.

The topic of our missionary spirituality awakened much interest within the Congregation and the Congress raised great expectations. It was the culminating moment of the dialogue begun and carried on within the community of the Congregation, inspired and animated by the Spirit and driven to proclaim the Kingdom of God. During the Congress it was possible to observe the joy the participants experienced at feeling themselves deeply united to, and at the same time challenged by, the missionary and prophetic charism of St. Anthony Mary Claret. The message of the Congress notes that this was an expression of communion in diversity and of the confluence of a desire to clarify and answer the question: What does it mean to be a Claretian in each cultural context in which the Missionaries live and work? The document we are presenting here gathers together the key concepts and points of convergence that will help us to keep on expressing that spirituality of communion that impels us *to think, speak and work* as a World-wide Missionary Community that continually recreates its unity in plurality and tries to advance in the creative fidelity it is called upon to cultivate.

The value and scope of this document will depend on the extent to which all of us accept it, reflect on it, share it and use it as a reference for growing in our missionary life. We hope it will be an instrument that helps open our eyes and hearts to all the dimensions in which our following of Jesus, Son of the Father and consecrated by the Spirit to proclaim the Good News to the poor (cf. Lk. 4: 18), must be situated and develop. It is not exhaustive, but it can be a fitting starting point for other initiatives. The plurality of situations of persons and

communities in the Congregation obliges us to enter into a process of authentic inculturation. At the same time that we deepen our knowledge of the essential content of our charisma, we also have to keep alive dialogue and discernment to assume other authentic values from social and cultural contexts that without doubt can enrich our spirituality. The ecclesial traditions, rites, and diverse customs give rise to new ways of life and help open new pastoral paths that will benefit the entire Congregation.

Both in the earlier stages of the inquiry and also during the Congress, while the common values of our Claretian missionary spirituality were affirmed, proposals kept arising for promoting research, shared reflection and the living out of specifically Claretian values. One of the first groups of proposals, and perhaps the most insistent, was directed toward initial and continuing formation. Among other things they pointed out the need to prepare people with competence in this area of our spirituality, to organize workshops that take into account individuals, their contexts, their levels and the demands of their mission. They ask for the continuing translation of the sources of our spirituality into the various languages of the Congregation. A second category of proposals is of a doctrinal or topical nature. Concretely they suggest that we continue to delve into and deepen our knowledge of the various aspects of our spirituality. Among these aspects is the role of Mary in our missionary life, the person of St. Anthony Mary Claret, the biographies of our brothers who are saints, the differences and complementarity among Missionary Deacons and Priests and Missionary Brothers, etc. Finally, proposals were also made that would facilitate the personal encounter with God. To foster this they asked for promoting experiences of missionary life in lands of the “foreign missions” or in areas that are marginated and poor, and, likewise, to provide opportunities to experience inter-cultural living and inter-religious dialogue.

Each Claretian Missionary is called to deepen and enrich the spirituality proper to our vocation in the Church and in today’s world. We need to return again and again to the sources of our particular way of being missionaries. In Claret we have a paradigm for listening, interiorizing and serving the Word of God, a man with acute sensitivity to human and social problems and with deep love for the people, a model for being attentive to the challenges of the times and for discerning the meaning of historical events, a model for constantly seeking the will of God and of dedication to the Father’s business, a man of deeply Eucharistic life and of full surrender to the motherly action of Mary. The complexity that envelops the path of spirituality today demands more study, more contemplation, and real commitment to the poor and excluded. From this perspective we will give meaning, substance and hope to our Claretian missionary life with a prophetic character.

In publishing this document, the General Government strongly recommends that Presidents of Conferences, Major Superiors, local Superiors and, especially, Formators take advantage of every opportunity to organize workshops, encounters, study weeks, spiritual exercises and retreats that encourage the assimilation and deepening of our Claretian missionary spirituality.

In this foreword I want to clearly express the deep gratitude that is due to all those who collaborated in the process of reflection over the course of these years. Thanks to each one of the Missionaries, to the communities, to the Governments of the Major Organisms and, especially, to the various working committees who rendered their special services with

generosity and enthusiasm.

May the Spirit of the Lord and the protection of Mary guide our path in fidelity to Jesus Christ, who keeps on calling us to live together with Him and keeps sending us to proclaim the Gospel (cf. Mk. 3: 13).

Rome, 24 December 2001.

Aquilino Bocos Merino, C.M.F.  
Superior General

## INTRODUCTION

The last General Chapter invited us to be, more and more, a school of authentic missionary spirituality under the inspiration of Claret and of our tradition. It asked the General Government to “continue animating the knowledge of our spirituality and its configuration as an authentic way of life”<sup>[1]</sup>. Thus, in recent years we have been reflecting on our Spirituality, following an interactive process.

A simple questionnaire was sent to the entire Congregation. The responses received were synthesized and evaluated. Out of them a study text (*Lineamenta*) was put together that was sent to all the Organisms. With their contributions and comments on this study text the working paper, *Instrumentum Laboris*, was developed that served as material for reflection during the Congress that was held during July 2001 in Majadahonda (Madrid, Spain) and in which, besides the General Government, representatives from all the Organisms of the Congregation participated. The present text takes into account the contributions of the Congress and integrates them with the complex of data from the earlier process.

The Spirituality Congress asked us to take the Gospel text of Jesus in the synagogue in Nazareth (cf. Lk. 4: 16-30) as the image of our missionary spirituality. In this story, so decisive in the spiritual experience of our Founder, we ourselves also discover the symbol of what our spirituality should be at the beginning of a new millennium. In this scene we primarily see the missionary condition of the Prophet of good news, presented by Isaiah. In him the Spirit of Lord, i.e., that God and Lord who takes on the face of God the Father and Mother in different cultures, acts with all his power. The prophet proclaims the Kingdom of God for all. According to the evangelist Luke, Jesus reinterprets this text: he shows how God is already acting “today” and how he himself is the definitive prophet of the Kingdom. Jesus

also evokes the prophet Elijah (Lk. 4: 25), whose vocation was transmitted to Elisha (1 K 19: 16) and Jesus suggests—based on this—that his evangelizing and prophetic vocation can be transmitted; in fact, we, starting with our Father Founder, Anthony Mary Claret, consider ourselves heirs and sharers of this vocation. Thus our vocation is to follow Jesus: imitating Him, identifying with Him and conforming ourselves to Him.

Like Jesus, we too feel called to proclaim the universal nature of the Kingdom, beyond the limitations of our own people. This universality is expressed and manifested as preference and compassion for all those who are denigrated in prevailing social structures: the poor, prisoners, the blind, the oppressed, debtors or strangers (the widow and the leper). This missionary compassion joins us to the weak, the little and the vulnerable; it becomes for us a maternal tenderness, like that of Mary who in her heart welcomed the Word, expressed in the cry of the poor.

We turn to this proclamation of “a year of favor from the Lord” and find that the inspiration for our missionary spirituality has three aspects:

- The experience of Jesus—anoointed by the Spirit to evangelize—is situated in a place (Galilee, Nazareth) and time (“today”, “is fulfilled”).
- It shows everything that happens in Jesus when the Spirit is poured out upon Him or the spiritual characteristics of Jesus the evangelizer.
- Lastly, we see how the spiritual experience of Jesus contrasts with that of his contemporaries produces different reactions and inspires in Jesus the journey he must make until he reaches Jerusalem.

The pages that follow refer to these three aspects. In three sections—situation, prophecy, journey—we see reflected the dynamic of our spirituality:

- The historical setting of our Spirituality: situating it in space and time is essential so that we do not live a disembodied, and ultimately non-Christian, spirituality.
- The characteristics of our missionary spirituality, in the style of Jesus who proclaims the Gospel of the Kingdom.
- Spirituality as a journey we have to undertake in our time and place.

## **I. THE NEW CONTEXT OF OUR SPIRITUALITY**

*“He came to Nazareth where he had been reared... Today this Scripture is fulfilled”  
(Cf. Lk. 4: 16, 21; 22-24)*

The spiritual life of our Congregation at the beginning of the new millennium is profoundly marked by the historical moment in which we are living. A spirituality that is missionary and prophetic is called upon to respond to the great challenges of our time and to insert itself into

the spiritual movements, which the Spirit is bestowing on humanity today.

Thus, we first want to examine the reality in which the coming and the anointing of the Spirit takes place and in which the “year of favor from the Lord” is proclaimed. Our vision of the present situation is filled with joyous hope for the “today” of fulfillment, but, at the same time, darkened by the threats from the resistance caused by the general sinfulness of human nature and our own particular sins that keep hindering its complete realization.

## **1. spirituality during a change in epochs**

Our time is not that of the early Church, nor that of Claret. Not only are we in an epoch of changes, we also find ourselves at a change of epochs. A particular experience of God, a new spirituality, goes along with this situation.

The change of epochs is seen in certain phenomena that we now allude to.

### **a) New Technologies**

We live in a society of communication and awareness. This profoundly affects our way of being. We live in an impressive network of relationships. New technologies, arising from the creative ability of the human person, are also transforming us. It is not easy to integrate such complexity into the unity of the human person. Thus we feel more fragmented, disoriented, confronted than in other times. The longing for an integrating spirituality is very strong; the desire for intimacy clashes with the superficiality that we are being asked to buy into. We feel strongly globalized, but at the same time long to cultivate our own individuality.

Technological advances in the area of genetics, knowledge of the brain, etc., pose challenges to the traditional understanding of what it means to be human. We ask ourselves, more radically than in times past, what is the body, what is the spirit, on what do the relationships between them depend, what underlies the passions and the virtues, reactions more spontaneous or less determined. Traditional anthropology and ethics are inundated with new challenges. Spirituality is looking for a new face.

### **b) Globalization**

The phenomenon of globalization is an inescapable fact. It has many aspects and many faces. In its negative aspect, the globalization of the marketplace (economics) distorts the possibilities for the exchange and communication of the goods of the world. Neoliberal ideology—which inspires this type of globalization—condemns the greater part of the world’s population to powerlessness, poverty and death and for the rest proposes a model of the human being marked by a self-centered hedonism and a frenzy of consumerism. Neoliberal ideology and the kind of globalization that flows from it lies in wait for us and even ensnares us: it blocks a spirituality of sharing, of solidarity, of efficacious love and tempts us to a lifestyle that is conformist and bourgeois. It alienates us from the world of the poor and from the spirituality of Gospel poverty and turns us into people who demand what we consider necessities.

Another perverted form of globalization is that which is manifested in forms of external violence (organized crime, new forms of the slave trade, arms and drug trafficking, terrorism)

and internal violence as well (excessive aggressiveness, sacred violence, exacerbated opposition, systematic criticism...). This situation makes us live lacking security and closed to hope.

Nonetheless, there are very positive kinds of globalization: the Spirit impels individuals and groups to integrate, to combine their efforts and take on concrete commitments on behalf of peace, justice, the wholeness of creation, and dialogue in all its forms...From this new forms of shared spirituality are emerging.

### **c) Interculturality**

The context of interculturality that is slowly taking shape also is part of this deep desire for spirituality. Technological advances in the area of communications, along with the displacement of people for various reasons, make possible the coming together of various ways of understanding the human condition. This rich cultural diversity, nevertheless, has often resulted in conflicts arising from a lack of understanding of those who differ from us. Also, the means different human groups have at their disposal are not the same and thus dominant cultures often attempt to exterminate cultural differences and make them disappear, resulting in a uniformity that comes from cultural impoverishment.

If the Spirit is expressed in cultures, spirituality grows when we learn the art of communicating ourselves culturally. This is never easy to do. Thus intercultural spirituality is a new challenge that we missionaries cannot avoid because it involves us. The gradual displacement of the members of Claretian communities away from their countries of origin creates new challenges and tensions in areas where the Congregation has newly arrived. They are also great opportunities offered to us for mutual enrichment in communion and mission.

## **2. A new context for the experience of god**

The experience of God today has new characteristics. The passionate atheisms of Western cultures, but that have also affected other cultures, have noticeably purified religious attitudes, concepts of God and the very experience of God. We are also facilitating a kind of globalization of religious beliefs and interconnectedness by means of inter-religious dialogue. The movement away from a patriarchal anthropology toward an inclusive one has deeply affected our understanding of the divine and the integration of the non-ordained, especially women, into the religious context.

### **a) The Practice of Religion in the Context of Post-Modernity and Religious Pluralism**

The intellectual realism of our times demands that we renounce inordinate worship of instrumental reason and open ourselves to emotional, communicative, esthetic and symbolic reasoning. Strongly dogmatic systems appear to us to be the presumptuous creation of some human beings; today we prefer a more modest and complex approach to reality. Thus we are more open to a pluralism of values. We adopt an “ethics for the journey”—contextualized in each moment—and make use of a humble and malleable way of thinking. And in all this we perceive a strong desire for spirituality, without knowing how to configure it. It is because of this that inter-religious dialogue has become an indispensable tool for knowing how to discern



the winds and whisperings of the Spirit within humankind. The new places where Claretians are present bring us in contact with other religious traditions (e.g., the great religions of Asia, the traditional religions of Africa) and other religious searching (e.g., intellectual groups, religious movements...) that imperil all dogmatism, but which demand at the same time a discernment that is capable of overcoming all ambiguity and opening us to the future with feeling and creative power.

Nevertheless, along with this readiness to dialogue, fundamentalist and preservationist movements arise time and again, from which we are not completely exempt. Moreover, these movements place a greater number of Claretians in situations of martyrdom in which their witness to the faith demands the offering of their own lives.

## **b) A Relational and Inclusive Understanding of the Human Being**

The spirituality that our time longs for must take into account the relational concept of the human being: male and female. The spiritual conception of the human being requires the interrelatedness and integration of the masculine and the feminine. This has new implications for the configuration of personal and collective spirituality, in the way we live in communion and in mission. When we “include”—masculine and feminine, lay and ordained, secular and consecrated—spirituality grows in its most natural ecosystem. When we “exclude”, human spirituality is perverted.

Speaking of spirituality and shared mission expresses a new context that affects us and which we are trying to respond to.

This context, where light and shadow intermingle, is the locus of the consoling proclamation that makes true for all humankind the plan for a Jubilee year (or year “of grace”) without limitations of time.

## **3. Deficiencies and aspirations that can be detected**

While analyzing our spiritual life, we formulated some questions about our deficiencies and aspirations. As we delve more deeply into a “spirituality for our time”, we see how questions and answers become more complex. In fact, as we have been examining our spiritual life in recent years, we have detected some deficiencies and some aspirations.

We discover four obstacles on the individual level: excessive activity, individualism, personal immaturity and, above all, lack of a living faith. Two serious obstacles are emphasized on the community level: lack of communication (which is especially involved in conflicts of generations and ideologies) and a bourgeois lifestyle (which desensitizes us to the demands of the Gospel). There are also two structural obstacles that are highlighted: lack of integration of cultural differences and, to a lesser extent, some structures of the Congregation that do not encourage spiritual growth.

The reality of the world and of the Congregation in which we live gives rise to some aspirations: 1) We are committed to living an integral and integrated spirituality. 2) To creating favorable environments for spiritual growth. 3) To emphasizing more and more the prophetic, inculturated and dialogical character. 4) To deepening our knowledge of the teaching in our spiritual sources. 5) To promoting a community living plan (itinerary) that

helps us overcome individualism.

#### 4. Christian spirituality in our time

The context we have referred to indicates to us that we need “a new spirituality” for our time. The causes of this are not trite, but because the signs of the times and places demand it, because human beings need it, because Revelation requires it from us “today”. Many of our missionaries perceive the same need. They understand that spirituality must be incarnated in a new time, in new cultures and in new human contexts.

Spirituality responds to a need for global meaning, a need for a constant and organic coincidence of the human spirit and the Spirit of God. To talk about “spirituality” is, above all, to refer to the Holy Spirit, “the Lord and Giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son...and who has spoken through the prophets”. This mysterious Person is the great Agent of all spirituality. When we are aware that the Spirit has been given to us and dwells within us, it is easier to allow ourselves to be carried by the Spirit’s force and creativity. The Spirit inspires us and brings our projects to fulfillment, gives rise to our dreams and makes them reality. Although we tend to designate as spirituality times of prayer, meditation, etc., we know that authentic spirituality permeates and involves our whole life and its entire network of relationships.

Understood this way, spirituality is not the property of religious elites, but the prerogative of the People of God. Among us who believe in Jesus and follow Him until we identify ourselves with Him, spirituality has some particular characteristics. Thus it is:

- *biblical*: sustained by the continuous reading of the Word of God;
- *liturgical*: nourished by the liturgy of the Church;
- *christocentric*: its objective is “union with Jesus” in his love relationship with the Father, in his anointing by the Holy Spirit and in his salvific and redeeming love for humankind;
- *ecclesial-communitarian*: it develops when it is lived in deep communion with all the members of the Church, open to other believers and to the whole human race;
- *missionary*: sent to give witness and to exercise the service of love wherever human beings live, work, suffer and rejoice, dream and are discouraged.
- *Incarnated in peoples and cultures and inserted among the poor*: authentic spirituality is rooted in the soul of the people which is their culture; Christian life keeps on being configured to the life of the poor—not the bourgeoisie—and in solidarity with the poor of the earth, committed to justice, peace and the wholeness of creation, because it discovers in communion the privileged space in which to experience the Christian God.

“Life in the Spirit” is subject to time, to evolution. Thus we also speak of the “path of

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spirituality”, or of the different historical or cultural configurations of spirituality . In our time, we are involved, on the one hand, with a kind of globalization of spirituality. There is a great awakening of the Spirit in many places in the world. This is perceived as the first step

toward a worldwide spirituality. Nevertheless, there is the danger of imposing the hegemony of predetermined models through the influence of powerful communications and transmission media. On the other hand, we are involved in a powerful resurgence of particular ways of spirituality, especially those connected to places and their cultures and religious traditions. Spirituality happens when the basic dynamics of knowing, feeling and desiring (mind, heart and will) are integrated. Thus spirituality uses the different means that exist: physical exercise, silence, meditation, personal prayer, contemplation, creative study, challenging apostolic services, great causes, solidarity networks, spiritual accompaniment, the personal project, etc. All these require conviction, dedication and creativity.

## II. Characteristics of our missionary spirituality

*“The Spirit is upon me...He has sent me” (Lk. 4: 18-21)*

The Congregation is very sensitive when it comes to the delicate subject of its spirituality. We are looking for a new dynamic center. Along with many other individuals and groups in the Church we are longing for a spiritual renaissance. But this desire requires a restatement. In order to shed light on this we are going to briefly allude to: 1) how the Congregation has understood its spirituality in recent years; and 2) what perspectives or directions are presented to our spirituality today, taking into account what has been presented earlier.

### 1. How have we understood our spirituality in recent years?

Although great stimulus for our spirituality comes from Holy Mother Church and from the movement of peoples toward the Kingdom of God, nonetheless, we cannot forget that we are, in the Church, a “Congregation of Missionaries”, graced with a charism. This collective charism gives a particular stamp to our Christian spirituality and makes us develop it—in ourselves and in others—from perspectives to which we are particularly sensitive. What are these perspectives? Our answer lies, first of all, in our Father Founder, Anthony Mary Claret, and in the path the Congregation has been traveling over the course of its history. We of the present generation are particularly interested in the path of spirituality that the Congregation has been laying out in recent years <sup>[3]</sup>.

#### a) The Spiritual Experience of Anthony Mary Claret

Our Father Founder matured in his Christian experience through a process that gave characteristic features to his spiritual physiognomy <sup>[4]</sup>. Four expressions, drawn from his particular reading of the Word of God, indicate the pillars on which his spiritual path is based: “What profit” (Mt. 16: 26), “Of my Father” (Lk. 2: 49), “The love of Christ” (2 Cor. 5:14),

“The Spirit of the Lord” (Lk. 4: 18; Is. 61: 1). The first expression tells us about his human experience and the other three describe his Trinitarian experience of God.

*WHAT PROFIT.* This deals with his initial experience, or his experience of the threshold. The phrase is taken from the text of Mt 16: 26 that played such a decisive role in the life of Claret: “What profit would a man show if he were to gain the whole world and destroy himself in the process?” Although this was a constant theme throughout his life, it is especially prominent at decisive moments and comes to be the touchstone of his fidelity to his vocation. In Claret it is manifested, above all, at the great crossroads that elicited his conversion and his basic options.

*OF MY FATHER.* This expresses Claret’s relationship to God the Father. It refers to an experience of God’s love—communicated through the Spirit—that inflames him and disposes him to receive the image of a missionary. It is the equivalent of “being about my Father’s business” like Jesus in Lk. 2: 49. It is then, as the basis for his missionary life, the experience without which there can be no process of configuration. As in Jesus, sonship and mission are two inseparable dimensions of this spirituality.

*THE LOVE OF CHRIST.* The life of Claret is a life that can only be understood from the perspective of Jesus Christ, whose name cannot be invoked without God’s help <sup>[5]</sup>. Jesus Christ is the center of his life around which everything else revolves. This centrality is reflected in the Pauline text of 2 Cor. 5:14 that was the motto on his episcopal coat of arms: “The love of Christ impels us”. It is the Claretian experience of the imitation, following and configuration to the Son sent by the Father, born of Mary, and anointed by the Spirit.

*THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD.* This is the deepest key to the configuring process. When Claret wants to interpret his evangelizing vocation, he understands “in a very special way” the words “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me and he has sent me to proclaim the Good News to the poor” (cf. Lk. 4: 18; Is 61: 1). These words summarize his experience of being anointed and sent by the Spirit to proclaim, like Jesus, the Gospel to the poor <sup>[6]</sup>.

## **b) Our Spiritual Heritage**

The gift received by Claret is continued and developed in this Congregation of ours that he founded. Citing our most recent documents, we note some essential consistencies:

*The Organizing Principle:* Our Father Founder recognized in the missionary vocation the motivation that guided his entire life and apostolic activity <sup>[7]</sup>. “His calling to the apostolate opened his eyes and his heart to perceive and discern the ills of the Church and society...but it also suggested to him the resources and means through which they could be remedied” <sup>[8]</sup>. In the word *missionary* we sum up our charismatic patrimony <sup>[9]</sup>. We feel the community is called together by the Spirit for the proclamation of the Word <sup>[10]</sup>; we know we are called to live as “apostolic missionaries” in the style of the Apostles. This involves living the evangelical counsels in a community of life with Jesus and with our brothers, in order to be

sent and to proclaim to the entire world the Good News of the Kingdom <sup>[11]</sup>. Our options for evangelization <sup>[12]</sup> are an integrating factor in Claretian spirituality; they configure it as a spirituality that is missionary, inculturated, prophetic, identified with the poor and multiplying evangelizers. These very demands awaken in us attitudes of availability, exodus, itinerancy and docility to the Spirit <sup>[13]</sup>.

*The Primacy of the Word of God:* Claret discovered “his radical experience of God in Christ by persistent meditation on the Scriptures...He kept alive his keen awareness and grasp of what was most urgent for the Church and the society of his times in relation to God’s plan of salvation” <sup>[14]</sup>. We have inherited from him a spirituality of *hearers and servants of the Word*. Welcoming the Word that makes us disciples, proclaiming it and being witnesses to it is our way of following Jesus <sup>[15]</sup>. We contemplate the Master and listen to his Word in order to proclaim the Kingdom, opening our hearts and sharing the anxieties and hopes of our brothers and sisters <sup>[16]</sup>.

*The Centrality of Christ:* Claret lived his spirituality in a process that began with “a deep sense of friendship with Christ (above all in the sacrament of the Eucharist), in whose deep sense of Sonship Claret gradually came to discover God the Father, who sent Jesus because he loves the world” <sup>[17]</sup>. He shapes his ideal out of “conformity with Christ, *consecrated and sent* by the Father for the world’s redemption” through “external imitation of Christ’s apostolic virtues and the living experience of his interior attitudes...and full transformation... it is *Christ who*

*lives in me*” <sup>[18]</sup>. The Father Founder identifies Christ as: a) the Son who is concerned about his Father’s interests <sup>[19]</sup>; b) The Son anointed in order to evangelize the poor <sup>[20]</sup>; c) The Son of Man who has no place to lay his head <sup>[21]</sup>; d) A sign of contradiction <sup>[22]</sup>; e) Son of Mary <sup>[23]</sup>; f) Sent by the Father and anointed by the Spirit, sharing his life and mission with the

Apostles <sup>[24]</sup>. We also define our being missionary as identification with Christ the Evangelizer. From our celebration of the Eucharist, we live in intimate communion with Him. It is there that all we are and do has its origin <sup>[25]</sup>.

*The Inescapable Mediation of Mary:* “A very important influence both on his closeness to Christ and his grasp of the ways of salvation for the world was the presence of Mary, with whom he sensed that his own mission, in its origin and exercise, was closely linked” <sup>[26]</sup>. The loving and filial communion with Mary reaches its supreme expression when Claret says: “Mary Most Holy [is] my mother, my patroness, my mistress, my directress and my all, after

Jesus” . A Cordi-Marian spirituality is found in both the Founder and in ourselves . Claret presented the Heart of Mary to us as the burning forge in which we are formed for ministry. The community discovers and learns the way to listen in the Heart of Mary. By the indwelling of the Word, we will not live divided, nor insensitive to God’s crying out to us in

men and women . “Our prophetic lifestyle receives a distinctive imprint from the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Mother of the Congregation. She teaches us that without heart, without tenderness, without love, there is no credible prophecy” .

*An Integrating Spirituality:* In the Autobiography our Father Founder exemplifies his spirituality by using symbolism drawn from the world of objects and animals, open to the saving presence in the harmony of creation. Thus Claret shows himself to be a follow of Jesus, the Teller of Parables, which he proposes to us as a model for ministry.

*The synthesis of the spirituality that we receive from Claret* is this: “The Spirit of the Father and the Son—and also the Spirit of our Mother—is the integrating center of all the dimensions

of our life and mission” . Out of the Spirit we consecrate ourselves “to Christ and to the Heart of Mary, in a perfect apostolic and evangelical life of prayer and suffering for the

salvation of humankind, to the glory of God the Father” .

This experience of grace, shared from the outset with a group of companions to whom the

Lord had given the same spirit , is the basis for our charismatic existence in the Church .

### c) In Creative Fidelity

In order to carry out the Council’s demand for renewal, we have reinterpreted our own

history. During the course of this we have been experiencing the presence of the Spirit . Each General Chapter has been a time for evaluation, synthesis and projection. This ongoing process has allowed us to discover new characteristics that also make up our spiritual identity:

*A Prophetic Spirituality:* involves *cultivating* a deep experience of God, *listening to the Word*, discerning by the light of the Spirit the challenges of our time and *translating them* boldly and courageously into options and projects that are both consistent with our original charism and

the demands of our concrete historical situation . “Prophecy only becomes persuasive when

there is a coherence between our announcement and our life” .

*A Community Spirituality and a Spirituality of Communion:* The person grows and is fulfilled by opening himself to communion, entering into his moment in history. Thus, through

communion and community mission, we develop our personhood as Claretians .

*A Spirituality Rooted in the People of God:* We press for the living of a spirituality that is more



committed to and shared with the People of God and with the agents of evangelization, allowing ourselves to be evangelized by the poor and by the religious and cultural values of the peoples [39]. Like Claret, we know that our mission binds us in a special way to simple people, to ‘the needy and the poor’ [40]. All this makes us insert ourselves more and more into the local churches and the universal Church, collaborating with them [41].

*An Integral Spirituality:* We must live a spirituality that is one of both prayer and contemplation and of apostolic activity, the way Claret did. In order to do this, we must ask the Spirit for the grace to be contemplatives in mission and avail ourselves of means like spiritual accompaniment that fosters progress in the missionary life [42]. Care for and development of the human dimension makes us joyful, kind, understanding evangelizers, with a positive view of life, who manifest “outwardly the inner fullness of grace” [43].

*A Convergent Spirituality:* Not all of us express the missionary vocation in the same way: we are missionaries who are priests, deacons, brothers and students. Thus, missionary spirituality is manifested in some as *priestly or diaconal spirituality and in others as a spirituality of non-ordained ministers or consecrated lay spirituality* [44]. Differences also arise from the cultures, peoples and particular churches in which we are inserted. Empowering these distinctive characteristics within a single missionary spirituality benefits mission and communion because they tend toward a more complete display of the possibilities latent within the charism. The Missionary Priests help us with their ordained ministry to live our common condition of servants and to empower the charisms of all the members of the Christian community with their experience of communion and mission. The Missionary Brothers, for their part, express the fellowship that must characterize our missionary life, as well as the lay dimension of our shared mission [45].

## **2. Orientations for our spirituality “today”**

Among us missionaries there are different positions and perspectives when it comes to understanding spirituality. Thus we feel it is appropriate to offer some suggestions to channel our efforts in a promising direction.

### **a) Along the Journey of the People of God**

We understand our missionary spirituality not as something separate, but as our particular way of participating in the spirituality of the People of God. We form part of a great community guided by the Spirit and where the Spirit acts within a diversity of peoples and cultures, but engenders a wondrous communion of heart, soul and goods. We humbly believe that our charism contributes to empowering the prophetic aspect of the People of God. Thus, we deem it important and decisive that our spirituality finds nourishment from the spirituality journey of our peoples, from the historical reality that challenges and stimulates us. The locus of our life

and mission is among the people whom God chooses to inherit his Kingdom, where miracles happen, where parables find their meaning, where the prophetic word illumines the course of history.

### **b) Always Out of Love**

Our spirituality attests to the fact that love gives it its basic impulse: “*charitas Christi urget nos*” (“the love of Christ impels us”). The “today” of love is a *kairos*, a decisive moment, that summons us to: 1) be faithful to reality and to collaborate with the Spirit of Jesus—the Messiah—in the liberation of the poor, the oppressed and the excluded (cf. Lk. 4), promoting human rights and the culture of peace and proclaiming justice against every injustice; 2) to go out with the People of God from among the Egyptians who today enslave us in order to go into the deserts of history as witnesses of the Covenant and of the Kingdom of God, already granted to the poor, with a patient wisdom that protects and guides creation in the spirit of the Beatitudes; 3) to be personally trained through the virtues (faith, hope, love, prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance), which today find new meaning in the militant spirituality that aims at transforming an unjust world.

### **c) Spirituality in the Context of Post-Modernity**

Post-Modernity criticizes utopias (both of the right and left) and the great myths of modernity (reason, progress, revolution, liberty and history) and prefers to revel in immediate experience, with no other norm than a vague tolerance disposed to effectively disregard values even so far as overcoming the limit of contradiction.

Confronted with this social and cultural post-modern situation, our total dedication to mission must be manifested as belief in the God who offers us his fullness and also as a gesture of fellowship to those we look upon as sons and daughters of a common Father and Mother.

### **d) An Apocalyptic Perspective**

The Claretian Missionaries want to watch diligently for the working of the Spirit in different times and situations. Our Father Founder was an example of attentiveness to the signs of the times. Moreover, he infused us with a spirituality that has strongly apocalyptic overtones. “Apocalyptic” here does not mean catastrophic, but revelatory of the Grand Design of God in the midst of a time of contradiction, struggle and injustice.

Watchfulness makes us live our spirituality in: 1) situations of martyrdom, where passion, rather than action, may characterize our ministry; 2) contexts of inter-religious dialogue, in which we know how to welcome the presence of the Spirit in those we are talking with, where we succeed in communicating our faith in Jesus, our Lord and the Servant of all, the Body handed over, and where we act out of an attitude of kenosis, humility and meekness—qualities so characteristic of our Master; 3) a strong consciousness of justice and of commitment to peace, that makes us messengers and witnesses in difficult and conflictive situations.

### **e) An “Open” Spirituality**

We understand that our spirituality is not a closed reality that has to be repeated by rote. It is



always in the process of being realized, of connecting with different forces that animate and enrich it.

Within the Congregation one can see a strong pluralism in the area of spirituality. We do not all have the same rhythm, nor do we all color our spirituality the same way, nor do we all emphasize the same values. The spirituality of liberation is very strong in many of our missionaries in America, as well as in Asia (the Philippines) and Europe. In Asia, especially in India, Japan and Korea, the spirituality that is emerging must very much be seen as a *dialogue of life*; the experiences of the ashrams or contacts with Hinduism and Buddhism, emerging theologies (Dalit, tribal, etc.) shape an inter-religious model of spirituality. In Africa as well, our missionaries are feeling the pull of a spirituality strongly linked to the its great religious traditions; the Claretians of Africa are living this spirituality out of a commitment to peace and justice in a context of truncated democracy, war, tribalism, etc. In Europe a rebirth of spirituality is going on after the purification it has undergone from suspect philosophies (Nietzsche, Marx, Freud), atheism and unbelief; it is recovering its mystical traditions, but reinterpreted from the perspective of solidarity, incarnation, commitment to the world.

These processes dispose us to complementarity and reciprocity. In a Church that looks for

heaven and for an earth where justice dwells <sup>[46]</sup>, the laity not only contributes new ministerial presences, but also gifts of the Spirit to share through the grace of encounter. This particularly demands that we accept the full integration of women both in society and in Christian

communities, since without it a new evangelization is unthinkable <sup>[47]</sup> as is a response of all humanity to the plan that saves us.

As the third millennium begins, it is imperative to extend the dominion of love throughout the

world <sup>[48]</sup>, promoting it on all levels out of a sincere esteem for the various rites of the Church and a deep respect for all religions and beliefs.

### **III. A way of missionary spirituality for today**

*“And passing through the midst of them, He went his way” (Lk. 4: 30)*

The anointing of the Spirit, which we have received in order to evangelize, turns our life story into a spiritual journey <sup>[49]</sup>. That journey has an objective: to configure us to the ideal of a missionary that our Father Founder proposed in the definition of the Son of the Immaculate Heart of Mary and that the Constitutions and the Statements of our internal magisterium also express. That journey—inspired by the Spirit—has different stages, employing different strategies and means. It is unpredictable, although it is dependent on our way of being human and keeps on taking shape as a spiritual biography.

After exploring the state of the world at the beginning of this new millennium and how this

Congregation understands its missionary spirituality today, we dedicate this third part to describing our Way of missionary Spirituality for today.

## **1. The path of a MISSIONARY: a life at the service of the kingdom**

Our spiritual journey is, above all, the path of a missionary<sup>[50]</sup>. This is not something laid out in advance, nor does it follow predetermined rules. It is the mission and its demands that mark out and defines our agenda, our days and months and years. The path of the first evangelizers according to the Acts of the Apostles can serve as our paradigm. The Holy Spirit guided them and they lived moved by Spirit's inspiration. That is also our path. That was the paradigmatic path of our Founder<sup>[51]</sup>.

### **a) The Life Journey of the Missionary**

A missionary's life in the Spirit is adapted to the life stages of every adult human being: discovery of vocation, activity in response to this discovery, crisis and a final stage of serenity and greater passivity. In each of these stages, the human being encounters possibilities and difficulties, prospects and limitations.

The adult life stages of our Founder, Anthony Mary Claret, can be summarized by three verbs that were so meaningful: *pray, work and suffer*<sup>[52]</sup>. There was an initial stage for him of discovery, prayer, vocational exploration; during this stage he had his experience of "quid prodest"<sup>[53]</sup>. After this he intuited another stage in which, impelled by the Love of Christ, he dedicated himself unreservedly to missionary activity and the search for his authentic place in the Church<sup>[54]</sup>. The last stage of his life was marked by a great crisis in which he experienced passion, suffering, and persecution but, at the same time, felt himself graced with the gift of love for his enemies and a more intense identification with Jesus in the Eucharist<sup>[55]</sup>.

All of us missionaries pass through these stages that are paradigmatic and not merely successive. They correspond to our life cycles; in them God's will for us is revealed. Through initial formation, missionaries are fully inserted into apostolic activity. In it they have to learn to fully live their youthful love and enthusiasm for Christ. In middle age we run the risk of routine and annoyance at the scarcity or lack of results. This is the time to renew our initial love, our original vocation, in light of the Gospel and of our charism. We find new impetus and new reasons to persevere in our vocation. In this stage one feels bidden to concentrate on what is essential. Late middle age (maturity) carries the risk of falling into individualism, into close-mindedness and into laxity. The spiritual path helps us to restore our vitality, to purify ourselves and surrender ourselves in generous self-giving. This age presents us with the possibility of maturing in the gift and the experience of spiritual paternity. Old age is characterized by a progressive withdrawal from activity, or by illness or enforced inactivity. Although it is often a sad time, it gives the aged missionary the chance to mold himself to the Passover (Pasch) of the Lord. In these circumstances mission takes on the overtones of passion, a passion that identifies us with the passion of the Lord. Thus, in each missionary the

mysterious process that began years before reaches fulfillment. Death is then awaited and prepared for as an act of supreme love and of the total giving of oneself<sup>[56]</sup>.

## **b) The Dynamic of Growth in the Spirit**

Within the dynamic of life in the Spirit there is also a triadic structure, “purification-enlightenment-union”, that characterizes the internal dynamism of each of the life stages of a missionary.

Sin dwells within us, or at least the proclivity to sin does<sup>[57]</sup>. The ascetical means that are typical of the Church’s spiritual tradition help us to control and correct the tendencies of our nature that is wounded by sin. The path that leads to holiness brings with it the acceptance of spiritual combat. Our Father Founder impels us to marshal the virtues within ourselves and fight against evil tendencies<sup>[58]</sup>. The masters of the spirit teach us how it is necessary to learn the art of self-control and self-integration in order to satisfactorily live the gift we have received.

Listening to the Word, prayer, contemplation, study, insertion into reality, enlighten our life and give it new energies for progressing in the way of the Lord<sup>[59]</sup>. The Spirit grants us his inspirations that make possible what seems impossible for our own unaided efforts<sup>[60]</sup>.

Growing docility to the Spirit deepens our experience of union with Jesus Christ and enables us to avail ourselves of it. Conformation to Jesus Christ is presented by our Constitutions as the goal of our spiritual journey<sup>[61]</sup>.

## **c) The “Mystery” of Apostolic Activity**

To be a missionary is to share in the “*missio Dei*” (the mission of God). Thus our apostolic activity is holy. God is the primary subject of our action. Our Founder expressed it this way after his preaching in Andalusia: “The Lord has always been my fuel”<sup>[62]</sup>. Our apostolic activity is, likewise, the action of a body and not only of a member. We make up a “*congregational we*”—and, even more, an “*ecclesial we*”—that is the authentic subject of every missionary enterprise: “*in the Church there is a unity of mission but a plurality of ministries*”<sup>[63]</sup>.

With this awareness we overcome any individualistic vision of our ministry and we feel connected with the history of Salvation in our time<sup>[64]</sup>. When our missionary service is born from zeal and charity, it allows our greatest possibilities to be realized, it establishes our personality and composes the story of our life.

Apostolic action is not merely external activity. It is the sacramentalization of the mission of the Spirit and of the Risen Lord<sup>[65]</sup>, and of the mission of the Church and of the Congregation within it. From this we can understand that there is a wondrous inequality between our missionary commitment and its accomplishments. The accomplishment is always greater than

the effort. During the mission we are in God and in the Church, we are their instruments and thus their action is present in our own activity<sup>[66]</sup>.

This requires us to integrate interiority and activity. In the mission we go out of ourselves to be with Christ. What is more, we are united with Him in a very special way<sup>[67]</sup>. The preparation of each one of our ministries, especially the proclamation of the Word and the celebration of the Sacraments, is a constitutive moment for our spirituality<sup>[68]</sup>.

#### **d) Evangelized in Order to Evangelize**

Evangelizing activity is, therefore, for us the main source of our spirituality, not only because through it we evangelize others, but also because through it we are evangelized<sup>[69]</sup>. This occurs under certain conditions:

- When we are disposed to *listen* and to *welcome* and not only to speak and act.<sup>[70]</sup> The “seeds of the Word” (*semina Verbi*) have been sown in every human being, in every human community. These seeds are the “word of God” for us, a word with which we have to dialogue and to which we must listen. Attention to the Word of God is, for the missionary, the presupposition that allows him to then be a good minister of the Word.
- When *we value* what is different. Discovering the values that reside in different human groups and individuals, allowing ourselves to be affected and enriched by them, is a wellspring of spirituality. The consequences of this are unpredictable, just as the Spirit is unpredictable.
- *When we turn to the other*: listening to and welcoming the other fosters a process of personal change that is expressed in incarnation or insertion. The missionary shares the life of the recipients of his evangelizing mission. He lives with them and in them he finds one of the wellsprings of his vitality.

#### **e) The Ability To Do Battle: Creative Imagination and Martyrdom**

There are many obstacles, difficulties and tests on the path of each missionary’s life. Unpredictable, crucial and decisive moments also arise. External factors (like an assignment, a failure, an historical event) or internal factors (such as an illness or depression, a loss, a friendship, or a crisis of faith or identity) produce an enormous tension in his life. The missionary will discover the meaning of his vocation if he avails himself of spiritual accompaniment, from the brothers around him who welcome him, from friends that counsel and comfort him<sup>[71]</sup>. There are also many who oppose the establishment of the Kingdom<sup>[72]</sup>. Nevertheless, for the missionary “nothing deters him; he rejoices in privations; embraces sacrifices”. Within him the virtues of perseverance and constancy, fortitude and prudence, are active.

Faced with difficulties, the missionary demonstrates his prophetic imagination and his creative ability...Lack of Spirit leads to routine, to monotony, to mere repetition. The presence of the Spirit is a fire that animates and recreates everything. A missionary can never be complacent. He is always discovering the newness of the Kingdom of God in everything he is doing.

At the limits of the life of an authentic missionary always lies the possibility of martyrdom, the “limit case” of self-giving, of love, of confessing the faith and of proclaiming hope.

Martyrdom is a gift. And it always must be recognized as such. It is a gift for the martyr and also for the Church and the Congregation. It is a paradoxical gift, but a real one. We can flee from it beforehand, if we escape danger, if we seek security, if we avoid any type of risk.

Martyrdom on the horizon gives a distinctive coloration to the missionary life <sup>[73]</sup>.

Among the kinds of martyrdom are those commitments to evangelization, to others, to the People of God, that involve marginalization, isolation, condemnation. It is when the missionary can say: “I was in jail”, “I was expelled”...Initial and continuing formation thus become “a school for martyrdom”.

## **2. On the spiritual and sacramental journey of the church**

When we state that our vocation—as consecrated people and as missionaries—is founded on baptism and confirmation, we make reference to what is at the core of our being, what establishes us. We do not have a vocation that makes us superior to others, but a particular vocation that enables us to truly be Christians. Thus the basic element in our spirituality is that which we share with all our brothers and sisters, *christifideles* (Christ’s faithful).

### **a) The Cycle of the Liturgical Year, “Our” Path of Spirituality**

Holy Mother Church offers all Christians, and thus us missionaries as well, an outstanding path of spirituality: the cycle of the liturgical year. It is a cycle of waiting and preparation (Advent), generation and birth (Christmas), initiation and purification (Lent), death and resurrection (Easter) and day-to-day life <sup>[74]</sup>. Through it we relive, year after year, all the mysteries of Christian life and integrate into our life, in a progressive and pedagogical way, the food of God’s Word and the spiritual teaching of the Church.

We live the cycle of the Liturgical Year day after day, at the various moments that fill our day with spiritual meaning: the celebration of the Eucharist, the Office of Readings, the celebration of Lauds and Vespers, the praying of the Daytime Hour and Compline <sup>[75]</sup>.

Our integration into the mystery of the Church’s liturgy is the best path of spirituality for us.

We travel it along with the People of God, some as ordained ministers <sup>[76]</sup>, others as missionary brothers.

### **b) In the Heart of the Eucharistic Church**

For us Claretian Missionaries, the celebration of the Eucharist and the worship of the Presence of the Lord is the axis on which our spirituality revolves and the source of our strength for the journey. And we have inherited it this way from our Father Founder. His whole life revolved around this mystery and out of it he realized his project, until he ended in his mysterious identification with the Lord (the grace of the sacramental species) <sup>[77]</sup>.

This basic Eucharistic experience of Claret today finds a wonderful continuity and deepening



in the so-called “Eucharistic ecclesiology”, going beyond mere Eucharistic devotionism. It means being aware and living out the mystery of the Church from its wellspring and culmination, from its source and summit, which is the Eucharistic presence of the Lord <sup>[78]</sup>.

Thus for us the Eucharist is not merely a devotion, but the generative center of our missionary and community life, where the Body of Christ, which is the Church, is created and recreated, where the Revelation of the Word occurs most intensely and efficaciously. The Word we listen to and proclaim really is, for others, and us a summons to the table of the Eucharist. In the Eucharist the Word takes on its full sacramental force in relationship to the Body of Christ, while at the same time revealing the deeper meaning of the internal Church community, in which the members share in the breaking of the bread, the sacrificial attitude and the solidarity with which they will then go out as servants of the Word to encounter their brothers and sisters.

Like Claret, we live the mystery of the Eucharist from season to season. It acquires different overtones, different meanings, as our life goes on. We cannot live the mystery all at once, and thus we ask our Father for “our daily bread”. Even though we celebrate only a single mystery, the experience of the Eucharist differs for each of us. We want to reach the point of identification and conformation to Christ so that we can say, “It is no longer I that live, but Christ who lives in me”, and, along with Him, to make our life a gift “so that all may have life and have it in abundance” (cf. Jn. 10: 10).

Gathered around the table of the Lord, who shares his life with his disciples, we experience the sorrow of the exclusion of so many people from that other table the Lord has prepared for his sons and daughters: the good things of Creation entrusted to the human family. The Eucharist is a powerful call to work together to transform the world according to God’s plan.

### **c) Praying in and from the Eucharistic Presence**

Along with our Father Founder, we understand that the Eucharist is the nucleus of all Christian prayer. The Eucharistic celebration shows us that we pray “through Christ, with Him and in Him”. The Church is not the author of her own prayer, but receives the prayer of Jesus and of the Spirit, which she offers back to Him. The Jesus who called the Twelve “to be with Him” (Mk. 3:14) wants to be with us “forever” in a perfect communion of life and prayer. The Jesus who gives his Body and Blood to us as his Bride, the Church, also gives us his prayer, his intercession, his praise and adoration.

The Eucharist is the prayer that the Church proclaims “through our Lord Jesus Christ”. The Eucharistic Church never prays alone. The Church and her Lord are united in the same flesh (cf. Ep. 5: 31), in the same word, in the same passion; they are one body, in one and the same prayer <sup>[79]</sup>. As Bride, the Church shares in the prayer of the Bridegroom. Making Eucharist, the Church creates itself. “The Church makes the Eucharist...the Eucharist makes the Church”.

United to Christ, we intercede for the men and women of the earth. We beg the Father to send his Spirit to create the Messianic signs of the Kingdom. In prayer we unite ourselves to all the conflictive situations in the world. We allow the tears and cries of the suffering of humanity

and nature to penetrate us, so that they may be converted in petition, in intercession <sup>[80]</sup>. We only pray in the Spirit, like Jesus, when the cries of the people, which come before God's throne, are mixed with our voice raised in supplication. Prayer creates solidarity, spiritual communion with all people... "Pray for your enemies", Jesus told us. The Eucharist, then, becomes the sacrament par excellence for reuniting the dispersed, "sacramentum mundi" (the "sacrament of the world"). At the same time, contemplation of Jesus in the Eucharist liberates our hearts from fear and from self-centeredness and leads us inexorably to a decided commitment on behalf of our brothers and sisters who are oppressed.

#### **d) Welcoming the Gift of the Word**

"The Word of God is the primary source of all Christian spirituality. It nourishes a personal relationship with the living God and with his saving and sanctifying will" <sup>[81]</sup>. The Chapter document "Servants of the Word" offers us an important spiritual perspective for developing the dimension of "hearers of the Word" <sup>[82]</sup>. Only passion for the Word nourishes us and impels us to give ourselves to others. We are "servants of the Word in community" <sup>[83]</sup>. Without a deep passion for the Word we are nothing. Through diligent reading of the Word we solidify our identity as disciples of Jesus and we rediscover the mission that He entrusts to us of proclaiming the Kingdom. Our communities are called to be true schools of spirituality where, as Mary did, the Word is listened to, welcomed and shared. The Word-Mission Project, which the Congregation has proposed, helps us deepen our individual and community encounter with the Word and aids us to understand it in its contexts and translate it into our missionary life.

#### **e) Prayer as Remembrance, especially of Mary Most Holy**

The communion of the Church with human beings is not restricted to those who are alive today. The Church feels united also to those who have "gone before". It recalls those who have preceded us, calls upon them, convokes them in its faith and creates a universal community. Certain holy people, like Joseph, the husband of Mary, Anthony Mary Claret, Ignatius Loyola, Alphonsus Liguori, Dominic Guzmán, Teresa of Jesus, Catharine of Siena, our Martyrs of Barbastro, etc., but especially the Blessed Virgin Mary, are very much present in our collective memory as we pray. Our spirituality is nourished and configured starting from their missionary lives and their intercession.

Mary, Mother of Jesus, Mother of our Congregation, is for us a memory and an abiding presence. We call ourselves "sons of her Heart"; we call upon her as formatrix, directress and, above all, as spiritual mother. Our missionary spirituality has an irreplaceable Cordi-Marian imprint <sup>[84]</sup>. We experience that, as in Jesus, our mission has to be seen in conjunction with our status as sons.

The remembrance of those who have passed through the world marked with the sign of faith or in the universal hope of the Kingdom becomes subversive prayer, imperiling the status quo.

The story of the vanquished, the losers, those who lived their lives anonymously, those who suffered the consequences of injustice, lives once more and is internalized as a transforming power.

Besides the remembrances of the canonized saints, we recall our deceased living in communion with us, our roots, our fathers and mothers in the faith, learning from them and resolving not to repeat the mistakes they made. And all this takes place in the presence of God who has lovingly received them and shed his light upon them: “Bring them into the light of your presence” (Eucharistic Prayer II).

### **f) Healing Grace: Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick**

Holy Mother Church offers the believer who is ill in spirit or in body healing processes that culminate in the sacraments of reconciliation and anointing of the sick. We missionaries also, suffer from the effects of our sins or from the things that happen to our bodies. We too have recourse to penitential or healing processes and we fittingly celebrate the sacraments of healing grace. St. Paul understood his mission of reconciliation from his own experience of having been reconciled by the grace of the Lord (cf. 2Co. 5: 18-19).

In especially serious cases we recognize the need to live times of Christian and missionary re-initiation <sup>[85]</sup>. Only in that context does the sacramental celebration, which the Church offers, acquire its full power and recuperative meaning. In those moments, spiritual accompaniment and the closeness of the community are of great importance.

## **3. In community of life**

The life of our communities revolves around life together and prayer; but the mission is at the heart of every community. The brothers are a source of sanctification because they are the places where God acts.

### **a) Inserted into Our Spiritual Tradition**

Spirituality is transmitted among us through life together and through communion.

To enter into the community of the Congregation is to become part of a great spiritual tradition and to commit oneself to it with creative fidelity. The older members of the Congregation and the older Organisms take on a new prominence in this context. They are the ones who bear witness, the ministers of the spiritual tradition. Their presence and influence are especially important in those places where young missionaries live in order for the inheritance to become prophecy. It is fitting for the older members to exercise a role of spiritual paternity <sup>[86]</sup>.

To enter into the community of the Congregation means to be reciprocally open to a future in which new generations will play a decisive role in the spiritual regeneration and its transmission <sup>[87]</sup>.

### **b) In a Community That Is a Family in the Spirit**

We live our spirituality in a community, a family in the Spirit. This requires communication



of faith, traveling the road together, mutual help, fraternal correction, the sharing of resources and experiences as authentic brothers in the Lord <sup>[88]</sup>.

Communion in the spirit is necessary. Community meetings have to become settings for communication and dialogue—especially in the elaboration of the community project—and less forums for debate or the mere programming of activities <sup>[89]</sup>.

One of the most negative effects of secularization and fragmentation in society is the loss of social identity on the part of religious in our society. And this is a basic need. Everyone in the world needs to feel he or she belongs, to feel socially accepted. Because of this we suffer the lack of a sense of belonging and identity. Obviously the best place to find that defense of our identity is the community we live in. The community offers support for that deep vocational reason for our existence as consecrated people. Our belonging to a community makes us understand that we are important, not only because of what we do, but especially because of what we are. Our fellowship of love is the best sign for our society: “fraternal communion, before being an instrument for a determined mission, is a theological space in which we can experience the mystical presence of the Risen Lord (Mt. 18: 20)” <sup>[90]</sup>. But this is not possible if our community does not touch our spiritual life, because our fraternal life is “participation in the communion of the Trinity” <sup>[91]</sup> and this model demands that nothing be held back.

Missionary community—among us—is in need of thorough renovation. The “mission house” of these new times must be regenerated in the different surrounding of the Congregation. Our local community is called to be a school of missionary spirituality <sup>[92]</sup>. Our Claretian community is missionary and not monastic. Living religious and missionary fellowship among the people and going forth on mission out of this experience is a path that gives a new air to our spirituality. Inserted fellowship uncovers the deepest meaning of the Word <sup>[93]</sup>, lives the Eucharist in a special way and collaborates closely with the local Church and with the culture of each people <sup>[94]</sup>.

Multi-cultural Claretian communities are arising among us; intercultural communion presents us with new challenges.

In this same context the Encounters and Workshops held by the Claretians can and do take on a new importance as focal points for spiritual animation and regenerative encounter.

### **c) Community Discernment of the Spirit**

A missionary community is, in a revealing way, a community adept at spiritual discernment. This may be one of the aspects where we need the most growth in the future. Discerning the good spirit is something that goes beyond mere intellectuality acuity. Thus no one can consider himself superior to anyone else. In discernment a community places itself humbly before God with the desire to discover God’s will <sup>[95]</sup>. Thus discernment demands: prayer, listening to God and to the brothers, awareness that God usually reveals his mysteries to those who are the simplest, poorest and most child-like.

The human traits presupposed for all authentic discernment are: knowing how to dialogue, how to work out solutions, how to accept or treat personality conflicts.

#### **d) Community Appealing for the Kingdom of God in the Church**

Everything in our life centers on the Kingdom of God that is coming <sup>[96]</sup>. Thus we live like the Apostles and in the style of the Apostles

Emphasizing the prophetic dimension of our charism affects our personal and community spirituality <sup>[97]</sup>. We belong to a people chosen by God to inherit his Kingdom, where the prophetic word illumines the course of history, fosters a just and dignified life for every human being and promotes the fellowship beloved by the Father.

We must never forget that we form communities that belong to the great community that is the Church and the particular churches with their Shepherds. Our Father Founder wanted us to be deeply inserted into the spiritual dynamism of the Church <sup>[98]</sup>. We cannot understand what it means to carry out ministry without being rooted in the Church. Thus we must allow ourselves to be borne by the Church's great currents of spirituality, by its teachings, by the unpredictable action of the Spirit in the Church and, above all, by the Church's Liturgy. Our love for the Church must sometimes be manifested in a healthy criticism and a humble defense of Gospel values.

#### **4. The personal path of missionary spirituality**

Each missionary responds to his vocation when he develops his own path of spirituality in a personal life project and commits himself seriously and faithfully to it. Although our works do not justify us—only the action of the Spirit within us does that! – nevertheless, it belongs to us to be aware of the gift, with which we have been graced, to actualize it and to care for it. It belongs to each of us to believe in the possibilities that the Spirit grants us and to allow ourselves to be borne by the Spirit in our individual lives <sup>[99]</sup>. Spirituality must be seen above all as faith in Jesus, the Son of God, as trust in Him and in his Spirit, as love of friendship and gratitude and, because of Him, as our fidelity to the Covenant.

#### **a) Fidelity to Our Covenant and Its Commitments**

In Jesus God the Father offered us a new and everlasting Covenant. We have accepted the call to follow Jesus and imitate his fidelity and commitment. The charism of the evangelical counsels (obedience, chastity and poverty), which we receive as gift and task, express our commitment to the Covenant and make us its servants in this world. The faithful living of the three evangelical counsels configures our personal, community and missionary spirituality <sup>[100]</sup>. Through the evangelical counsels the Spirit liberates us from all inordinate sexuality, possessiveness and control and makes us fit to turn these basic realities into avenues for expressing love of God and of the brothers, expressions and paths of apostolic love. To live the

evangelical counsels is to live like Jesus. Through a journey made on the basis of calls, gifts and renunciations, we die to ourselves and experience the mysterious power of God in the weakness of our human lives.

When we allow ourselves to be counseled by the Gospel of Jesus and by his Spirit, and we are docile—in our hearts and in our works—we enter into a state of deep happiness and we transmit it along with peace. The Gospel counsels us above all to live in keeping with the poor, the weakest, the most excluded from the table of love. The evangelical counsels are a path of personal and community integration in a world where disintegrating forces are often present. To the extent that we develop our lives according to the Gospel's demands we experience the joy of those who follow the Lord. This joy often contradicts the criteria for happiness that are widely spread by the social communications media. Thus the evangelical counsels have a tremendous counter-cultural, prophetic impact.

The historical and cultural context we live in offers new possibilities for better shaping our living of obedience, poverty and chastity. But at the same time the neoliberal ideology that is so omnipresent threatens us and taints us. Chastity is called upon to display the sacrificial and redeeming ability of love. Missionary poverty must shine forth as a parable of the living action and presence of Jesus, who made himself poor and lived among us. The option for the poor must, today more than ever, be a realistic incarnation of solidarity and prophetism [\[101\]](#). In a world where the face of Christ has been multiplied by the increasing number of poor people, missionary life is impossible without a personal relationship and a serious commitment to these brothers and sisters of Christ, God's special children. Obedience disposes us to seek the ways of God and commit ourselves in concerted action.

We will now present some means that allow us to advance on the path of spirituality and to overcome our evil tendencies and roadblocks.

## **b) Physical Exercise**

Care of the body also forms part of the spiritual process. As is becoming clearer every day, psychosomatic unity indicates that that we cannot have spirituality that has no reference to the body, nor real bodily health that neglects the spirit. When our body is out of balance our spirit tends to be out of balance as well.

The most well rounded spiritual traditions pay great attention to the body and its asceticism. This is emphasized by those of our brothers who are in contact with Hindu or Buddhist spirituality. When this is recognized, we rediscover the meaning of fasting and abstinence, of regular physical exercise, healthy and sensible eating, sports. Especially in Eastern spirituality—more and more valued and welcomed among us—this is a key aspect. We are becoming more and more convinced that psychosomatic balance and the spiritual life are interrelated.

The various types of imbalances or dependencies that we can suffer from [\[102\]](#) find their best remedy here.

Our body is the temple of the Spirit and a member of the Body of Christ; its mission is to glorify God. In our body, our history, our deepest memories, is etched. The body is the setting of the adventure of our life. It has a Eucharistic vocation to become a body handed

over. The virtue of chastity must keep on progressively integrating everything in the bodily dimension.

Our body is very closely linked to nature. It is the part of nature that we have tamed the best. Our spirituality takes on deep ecological overtones that we cannot disregard. Many of our brothers are living the spirituality of nature, of passion for ecology [\[103\]](#). It is an excellent trend [\[104\]](#)

This sensitivity makes us better perceive the possibilities for all human bodies, but also their shame and degradation. Many of our missionaries—as part of their spirituality—find themselves drawing near to human bodies in order to cure them from evil—as Jesus did, in order to restore their dignity and make them worthy settings for religious and Christian experience.

### **c) Personal Prayer**

Prayer has dynamic meaning in our spirituality. Claret's missionary zeal was enkindled during prayer: "*in meditatione mea, exardescit ignis*" ("in my meditation, a fire blazed forth") (Ps 38: 4 – cf. Vg) was one of his most cherished texts. The chapter of the Constitutions that deals with prayer says, above all, our prayer is "missionary prayer"; it has to be open to the reality of creation and of history. It is constant recognition, adoration, intercession and praise of the presence of God in our world and in our history, the echo of a life united with the brothers and sisters, especially the poor and those who suffer. Our most intimate relationship with God "Abba" is marked—as in Jesus—by awareness of the mission we share and by prophetic intercession [\[105\]](#).

We know full well the importance of personal prayer in our lives; but there is the general complaint that we do not know how offer resistance to the frenetic pace we keep and we show no willingness to regularly find the time off we need and time set aside for prayer. If the desire is strong, undoubtedly one can find a way to make it a reality. Personal prayer has to come from a daily commitment in our lives. It is the best way of celebrating our covenant with the Lord, the Bridegroom of the Church, so that our mission may bear fruit. This personal encounter with the Lord gives meaning to everything that happens and to everything we do. Fostering the prayer of our brothers—individually and in community—is to care for their spiritual health. The Claretian Directory offers some practical guidelines we should not ignore [\[106\]](#)

It is appropriate to give special emphasis among us to a ministry of personal prayer that takes into account cultural differences. In the Congregation today different sensibilities are shown in this respect: one has an Asian sensibility, another an African one, another a European one, another an American one. In every case, those who have the gift of mastery in prayer and in life in the Spirit—masters of prayer! —must find a welcome among us.

### **d) Contemplation and Art**

The contemplative ability—so necessary for living the spiritual life—is not reduced to study. It is expressed in other ways. Our Abba and Creator has endowed us with senses, sensitivity, a capacity for symbolism and transcendence. The development of these abilities empowers our spirituality in unexpected ways. We cannot forget that in the “*Veni Creator*” we call upon the Spirit to enkindle the light of the senses (“*accende lumen sensibus*”). Empowered by the presence of the Spirit, our senses perceive reality better and take advantage of it; they are the best preamble to religious experience. When we develop in ourselves the ability to see, hear, smell, touch and taste, our spirit finds the best preparation for becoming active and encountering the meaning of reality. The asceticism of the senses has no other goal than this:

“to hear, see, touch, smell, taste” in the most enlightened way [\[107\]](#). The contemplation of art prepares us to journey to our limits and from there to attain a transcendence over all that exists. Con-templation reminds us of the word “temple”. A contemplative is one who is able to discover in everything its symbolic, transcendent dimension and convert reality into a place of the epiphany (manifestation) of the Glory of God (cf. Ps. 19: 1-7), into an authentic “temple”. Contemplation of art and of creation (God’s artwork) empowers our symbolic and sacramental vision.

A very important element in spirituality—to a large extent dependent on contemplation—is creative ability, the ability to be a creator. God has created us as creators. The ability to create is an expression of spirituality. Only the Spirit creates. Those who are borne by the Spirit perceive in themselves a strong creative ability in all the areas of being human.

We are convinced that all the instances of creativity that have been produced among us have been authentic instances of the Spirit, regardless of the area in which they have taken place. This is how the Spirit is manifested in the human being: as Spiritus Creator (Creator-Spirit).

### **e) Spiritual Reading and Study**

Our charism as hearers and servants of the Word demands that we cultivate the contemplative dimension in a special way. Study belongs to that dimension—as Thomas Aquinas told us long ago. The contemplative dimension is developed in us through regular study, reading, and reflecting on our thoughts and feelings [\[108\]](#).

Today we have vast amounts of information at our disposal. But what purpose does it serve if it is not translated into formation? All information is potential nourishment for our spirit and our mission; it passes from potentiality to reality through the “power of conceptualizing”, through the discipline of study and meditation. Information that forms us allows us to have a more open, more catholic mind. It prepares us to live with greater intensity and greater realism. Intellectual curiosity opens us to the world of the spirit and displays in us that innate philosophical and theological ability with which we have been graced [\[109\]](#).

A community of missionaries that is excessively pragmatic, mere workers, which does not cultivate its spirit, its intellectual capacity, cannot exercise a ministry that helps their brothers and sisters.

Besides information in newspapers, there is another level of information that has withstood the



test of time: the reading of the works of great thinkers, of literature, and of art. The lack of spiritual depth that we sometimes detect among us finds one of its main causes here.

### **f) Spiritual Accompaniment and the Personal Project**

Many missionaries recognize the importance of spiritual accompaniment for our journey of spirituality, not only in youth, but also at every age. We need to communicate ourselves on the deepest level with a brother or sister experienced in the way of the Lord <sup>[110]</sup>. This serves as a point of reference for us, a means of contrast, and a stimulus. Part of the duties of our superiors is a service of spiritual animation in relation to the community and, from this, to each of the brothers in the community <sup>[111]</sup>. Today thoughts are interestingly turning toward shared accompaniment in a life renewal group, even though the group consists of members from different communities and even includes other members of the Claretian Family.

The personal project is an expression of responsibility for our vocation <sup>[112]</sup>. Thus it expresses the commitment of each one of us to the Covenant with God. The elaboration of the personal project only has meaning when it is done in response to God's grace and the presence of God in our life.

Fraternal correction has always been important in the Church's spirituality and that of religious. Jesus asks us not to criticize our brothers and sisters, but, out of the primacy of love and respect, to work together for personal and community growth (cf. Mt. 18).

## **CONCLUSION**

If we missionaries allow ourselves to experience the thirst for spirituality that dwells within us, we will have to watch out for the Spirit's surprises. Something new will be born in us. Barriers will fall. The impossible will be possible. Our deserts will burst into bloom. Our thirst will be quenched. We will be joyful messengers, elated over the Good News. Mary, the prophetess of a new world, the Mother of the new and eternal Covenant, will act through us, her sons, and "will engender new sons and daughters through the Gospel". She will inspire in us the type of spirituality that, as our Foundress, she wants us to have.

The People of God need us, and at the same time we need them. During our Spirituality Congress and in the contributions from our missionaries to this process, we have been impressed by the force and energy that comes to us through God's holy people. Thus we believe that contact with them, God's Church, the assembly of the holy ones, makes us holy; that living the liturgy of God's people consecrates us; that the mission we share with them dignifies us; that the spirituality we live with them sanctifies us.

As Missionaries of the Kingdom, animated by the spirit of Claret, we welcome the invitation that, at the beginning of this third millennium, John Paul II makes in the letter *Novo millennio*

ineunte: “Duc in altum! Let us journey with hope!”<sup>[113]</sup>. We rely on the motherly protection of Mary, the prototype of a life fulfilled by traveling the pathways of faith, hope and love. In her Heart are found concentrated all the expectations of humankind. She shows us Christ Jesus, our hope (1 Tm. 1: 1), and nourishes our faithfulness on the prophetic mission.

## MESSAGE FROM THE CONGRESS TO THE WHOLE CONGREGATION

*«The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor...” Lk 4: 18*

*«My spirit is for the whole world...” (St. Anthony Mary Claret, Letter to the Apostolic Nuncio, August 12, 1849).*

We, fifty-five Claretians from different parts of the world, have met in Majadahonda, Madrid (Spain) to deepen and celebrate our common missionary spirituality. Representatives of three branches of the Claretian Family founded by St. Anthony Mary Claret have also participated. During these days, we have experienced intense communion in plurality. We live and work in distinct cultures and feel that this reality is at the same time a richness and a challenge; A richness because the missionary dream of St. Anthony Mary Claret is being realized in different geographical areas; A challenge because it urges us to continually discern what it means to be Claretians in very distinct historical and cultural situations. The different contexts of our origins have become a richness for us thanks to an openness to dialogue which has characterised this very important gathering.

### **Preparation**

This dialogue had already started at the meeting of Major Superiors in Bangalore, India, in 1998. There was a proposal of the XXII General Chapter to which we are called to respond with fidelity: *our Congregation has to be ever more a school of authentic missionary spirituality inspired by Claret and our tradition.* The Chapter entrusted to the General Government to continue *animating the knowledge of our spirituality and its configuration as an authentic way of life.* (IPM 23). Hence, the necessity to deepen the missionary character of

this spirituality, in dialogue with the signs of times and places, as a requirement of our condition as 'prophets of the Kingdom' and 'servants of the Word'. The process, participated in by the entire Congregation, in its preparatory stage, leading to this Congress has had this objective. The reflexion and dialogue of these days has taken as its starting point the life and experiences collected through the questionnaires.

## **Celebration**

The Congress has been, in the words of many, a grace filled experience, a refreshing breath of the Spirit. That is how we have lived it already from the very beginning when Fr. General proposed to us these objectives:

§ To appreciate the gift of the Spirit to the Church in the life and work of St. Anthony Claret.

§ To celebrate the Claretian life spread by and followed by the distinct generations in their different social and cultural contexts.

§ To promote faithfulness to the foundational charism, as a response to the challenges of the mission that come to us in the signs of the times and places.

Perhaps we have not been able to come up with complete answers to all of our concerns on this topic during these days. Nor have we attempted this. Inspired by the evangelical and missionary experience of Claret, we have tried rather to establish a dialogue between the tradition of the Congregation and its present missionary life in different contexts where the Congregation is present today.

There are many challenges that present themselves to our missionary spirituality in different parts of the world. We have wanted to be sensitive to all of them. Within the most significant "sign of the times" which we call globalisation, full of enormous possibilities for a more profound universal solidarity, we would like to be especially attentive to its negative characteristics which, are oppose the values of the Reign of God: economic neoliberalism which causes much suffering in many countries; the lack of respect for indigenous cultures; the assaults on peace, justice, life, and integrity of creation; as well as some aspects of the post-modern culture and of all the forms of fundamentalism, even within Christianity. Before all this, we cannot remain silent.

All of this affects us as citizens of the world and challenges us as missionaries 'anointed by the Spirit to announce the Good News'. At the same time, it raises in us, with new strength, some concerns:

§ How should be the prayer of the missionary and his community?

§ How can we articulate action and contemplation, from the perspective of mission, which is the central point of our life?

§ How can we, from the perspective of faith and life in the Spirit, situate ourselves before historic situations?

§ How can we make contact with the reality of our people become the source of sustenance and meaning for our missionary life?

§ How can we foster a spiritual harmony that integrates the bodily and cosmic



dimension?

§ How can we translate these challenges into a life style and concrete commitments?

The missionary vocation implies being in union with God's passion for his people. The problems of the world find a resonance in the totality of our life, beyond the concrete pastoral commitments. The questions raised demonstrate this. They also show that our spirituality is marked by contradictions that are a source of concern for all.

## **Some key elements of our spirituality**

Through an intense shared prayer and fraternal dialogue, we have discerned elements, which ought not to be lacking in our missionary spirituality today:

We are convinced of the call of the Spirit to make more space in our personal and communitarian lives for prayer, integrating the challenges we discover in the exercise of our ministry.

Each one of us, priest, deacon, brother, or student, through the expressions inherent in our unique missionary vocation, needs to journey together with all God's People, contributing our charism and collaborating with them in the difficult and joyful task of building the Kingdom.

Contact with cultures and religious traditions of people whom we meet on our journey, has helped us to discover the action of the Spirit beyond the confines of the Church. This invites us to enter into a dialogue in which the announcement of the Gospel finds its place and from which flows the collaboration to create a more just and fraternal world.

We reaffirm the importance of regular listening to the Word of God, which we have been sent to announce. There, we find the key to understanding reality and discerning ways of replying to God's plan, which it passes on to us.

The Eucharist, a recurrent theme of our meeting, was one of the fundamental points in the spiritual experience of Fr. Founder. We remembered this in the Eucharistic act that we celebrated in the Church of the Rosary of St. Ildephonse at La Granja near Segovia. As Claretians we feel seriously challenged to live out this element of our spirituality. How does the celebration of the Eucharist configure us with Jesus 'who gives his life so that all may have life?' From here comes the importance of the Eucharist as the foundation of our communion and indispensable food for the missionary task.

Mary, listener and servant of the Word, is a significant presence in our lives. In her Magnificat we find a powerful inspiration to live the prophetic mission of our charism: from her Heart, Mary teaches us to live the prophetic life with tenderness and compassion.

Today, more than ever in our history, we need a renewed awareness of the plurality of peoples and cultures present in our Congregation. Despite the difficulties implied in harmonising this diversity, we need greater openness to the reality of others, accompanied by a growing respect for their values.

Spiritual accompaniment, which is often neglected, continues to be a useful means to journey towards true personal integration that helps us to live all the dimensions of our life in harmony. We see also the usefulness of the help offered to us by psychology, for example, professional

counselling when needed

## **Implications for the ongoing journey of our Congregation**

The entire process of preparation and celebration of the Congress has left us an abundant supply of materials for reflection that is now in the hands of the General Government. A commission –already appointed- will be responsible to prepare a document with these materials that will help us to renew and deepen our prophetic missionary spirituality.

We return to our communities with the hope that the realization of this Congress may contribute to create a future full of that spiritual vigour which characterised our Father Founder. For us, the work done, rather than a conclusion is a starting point and a new thrust forward.

We feel called to live now the prophesy of ordinary life, to make each of our lives and communities an expression of those new and better times that, as persons renewed by the Spirit who “makes all things new,” contributes in showing the Way.

Majadahonda, July 17, 2001

## **INTRODUCTORY REFLECTIONS TO THE CONGRESS**

Greetings to each and every one of the participants in this Claretian Spirituality Congress. And a special welcome to our Sisters of the Claretian Family who happily accepted our invitation. Thank you for your availability and the effort you made to get here, especially those of you who came from a great distance. Welcome, welcome, and during these days may we be able to enjoy the Spirit’s presence among us, the Spirit who has called us together to follow Jesus in the style of Claret as missionaries who are eager to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom. We are from different places and we do a variety of things, but one and the same ideal unites us all!

The General Government wanted to give special emphasis to this Congress in which we will concern ourselves with our Claretian spirituality at the beginning of the third millennium. A topic of such transcendent importance demands the participation of the whole General Government and, likewise, that there be representatives from all the Organisms and the various new Missions of the Congregation. Despite the fact that from the beginning we have had to set a limit to the number of participants, we at least wanted to have representatives from the direct branches of the Claretian Family. They will be the living reminder of one of the signs of our times in the Church: the call to share spirituality and mission.

## **1. When We Talk About Spirituality, What Are We Trying to Say?**

This is a question that seems unnecessary and yet, according to the answer we give, we reveal how we situate ourselves before God, before other people, and before the historical reality in which we live.

At the beginning of the third millennium it is clear that throughout the entire world, among Christians and non-Christians, there is “a widespread demand for spirituality”. Many men and women do not know what to rely on in the face of this broad, sweeping movement that extends spirituality to others, often equated with beauty, liberation, happiness, ecstasy and solidarity among the peoples of the world. Even within the Church, that has exhibited the operative presence of the Spirit is a multiplicity of manifestations, that has seen flourish in the 20<sup>th</sup> century outstanding figures of holiness and has made great studies of schools and systems of spirituality, that has experienced within itself the theoretical and practical demand for renewal, there are Catholics who are unsure of how to arrive at an adequate theological understanding of Christian experience, that allows them to embark on the path of dialogue with God, with people and with the whole of creation. The wind and whispering of the Spirit in humankind requires a continuous discernment so as not to be confused with the voices of idols. Only the cultivation of calm discernment, that presupposes study and responsibility, will allow us to overcome any temptation toward dogmatism, toward ambiguity, and to always be open to the future with meaning and creative power.

Vatican II caused the opening of a new era in spirituality. Its way of thinking about human beings in the world and in history, its reflection on the mystery of the Church and the leading role of the Holy Spirit within it, the emphasis given to the Word of God and the Liturgy, the impulse given in the missionary and ecumenical dimensions, etc., are elements that have made understanding possible and have encouraged the living of the Christian faith in a more mature and integrated way. Today we cannot think about spirituality without taking into account its Trinitarian dimension (which includes Christology and Pneumatology), as well as its ecclesial, Marian, anthropological (cultural, social and historical), contemplative and liturgical (inspired and nourished by the Word of God and by the Sacraments), missionary and eschatological dimensions. Spirituality in our day has special implications and resonances for community. The Spirit provides the guideline that promotes in the Christian the following of Jesus, the living of the Paschal Mystery, the practice of the Beatitudes, prayer, spiritual combat, silence, asceticism, etc.

In recent years, the spiritual life and mission of Christians, and also of consecrated men and women, have been challenged and enriched by the Church’s concerns regarding the laity and, in a special way, by the role of women; the poor and human rights; justice, peace and the safeguarding of creation; globalization and cultures; communitarian movements, ecumenical, inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue, etc. But spirituality in the future will not be generic or abstract. The theologian Von Balthasar said that spirituality is the subjective face of theology. Thus, after a period of reflection comes a time of praxis, of living out the fruit of reflection. The development of the theology of the Kingdom of God, of charisms and ministries, of forms of Christian life and the inculturation of the Christian life, give a precise outline to spirituality and emphasize the need for commitment in cultural and social contexts.

The word spirituality implies the “*lifestyle*” we live as human beings, Christians, religious, and missionaries. For the Christian, spirituality is “*life according to the Spirit*”; “walking in the Spirit” (cf. Rom. 8: 1-17). It is the process or way of holiness and perfection, that involves “*motivation, impulse, utopia, a cause for which to live and struggle*” and it is translated into attitudes of fidelity, generosity and the commitment of one’s whole life. But always with the Spirit of Jesus. Spirituality is a special way of following Jesus, of living in Jesus according to the Spirit, which at every moment and in every circumstance of history leads us to live the fullness of sonship, fellowship and mission.

The post-synodal Exhortation *Christifideles laici* offered this summary of the elements included in a life of holiness: “*Life according to the Spirit, whose fruit is sanctification (cf. Rm. 6:22; Ga. 5: 22), encourages and demands from each and every one of the baptized the following and imitation of Jesus Christ, by accepting his Beatitudes, in listening and meditating on the Word of God, by conscious and active participation in the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church, by individual, family and community prayer, in hungering and thirsting for justice, in practicing the commandment of love in all the circumstances of life and in service to our brothers and sisters, especially the littlest ones, the poor and those who suffer*” [\[114\]](#)

The Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* defines the role of the consecrated: “*We can say that the spiritual life, understood as life in Christ, life according to the Spirit, is like a journey of greater and greater fidelity, in which the consecrated person is guided by the Spirit and conformed to Christ, in a total communion of love and service in the Church.*

*All these elements, deeply permeating the various forms of consecrated life, generate a particular spirituality, that is, a precise project of relationship to God and to the world around us, characterized by particular spiritual dynamisms and by operative options that highlight and represent one or another aspect of the one Mystery of Christ. When the Church recognizes a form of consecrated life or an institute, it guarantees that its spiritual and apostolic charism meets all the required criteria to attain personal and community evangelical perfection*” [\[115\]](#).

The final words of this section points out the importance we give to spirituality in Religious Families: on it “*depends the apostolic fruitfulness, the generosity of love for the poor and the very vocational attractiveness for new generations*”.

## **2. The Objectives of This Congress**

In accord with what we have said, the objectives of this Congress are encapsulated in this basic conviction: we are members of the Church graced with a particular gift of the Spirit, we journey with the People of God and we are sharers of their sufferings and hopes and our mission is to proclaim, through the ministry of the Word, the whole Mystery of Christ and to collaborate with all people of good will in transforming the world according to God’s plan (cf. CC 46). With this basic premise, we propose:

1) *To give thanks for the Spirit’s gift to the Church in the life and work of St. Anthony Mary Claret.* In his experience of the Spirit we, the Claretian Family and, in particular, the

Missionary Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, find inspiration and stimulus for our spirituality and apostolate.

2) *To celebrate the Claretian life propagated and followed by different generations in various social and cultural contexts.* The spiritual charism of Claret introduced into the Church the living of sonship out of conformity to Christ and his love for the poor, has re-created fellowship as a sign and witness of communion and solidarity, and has given impetus to mission from a prophetic perspective.

3) *To promote fidelity to the founding charism and to the consequent spiritual patrimony, which presupposes conversion, discernment, boldness, creativity and holiness, as a response to the challenges of the mission that comes to us from the signs of the times and places.* We want to progress in the missionary life and in deepening our understanding of the gift we have received and reviving dynamic, creative fidelity to the evangelizing mission we have inherited, by letting ourselves be possessed by the Spirit and traveling the roads that open to us in solidarity with the nations of peoples and cultures where we do our apostolic work.

### **3. Our Missionary Spirituality**

How this project arose and what has gone on in preparing this Congress has been explained to us. I just want to add a brief reflection on the pertinence and the urgency that brings us to concern ourselves with Claretian spirituality at the beginning of the third millennium.

The last General Chapter said that *our Congregation must always be a school of authentic missionary spirituality inspired in Claret and our tradition* and enjoined the General Government to continue “*animating the knowledge of our spirituality and its configuration as an authentic way of life*” (IPM, 23). In order to understand the reason why and the progress of all this it is necessary to read the Chapter’s statement, and I would even say it is necessary to situate ourselves precisely at the point where we find the life and mission of the Congregation in the present situation of the Church and the world.

3.1. The Congregation, with a special emphasis since the time of the Council, has tried to seek in life and in the path of humanity the signs and the voice of the God of the Kingdom (cf. IPM, 4). And it continues busying itself with listening to the Word of God “*in the events of history, in cultures and the life of the people, in their silences and in their outcries*” (SW, 16.1). Both the reality of our world, as well as the Church, with all its challenges, stimulates the prophetic dimension of our missionary service of the Word, understood as *a way of being, acting and signifying* (cf. SW, 21).

We are citizens of a complex and contradictory world. Rich in possibilities due to economic, cultural and technological progress, and yet continually deteriorating and being degraded by the exclusion of the vast majority of human beings who suffer from hunger, thirst, poverty, total lack of the most basic necessities of health care, education, housing, work, etc. The process of globalization concerns us by the questions it poses and, especially, by the fact it is necessarily dehumanizing. We are members of the Church, which has just finished celebrating the Jubilee of Jesus’ birth and which, at the beginning of the third millennium, continues to feel strongly called to holiness and to evangelization. John Paul II invites us to journey out of Christ (cf. NMI, 29-41), to look to the future (*led from on high!*) and to be witnesses of love

and hope (Ibid., 42-59). We are members of an apostolic community, whose road to sanctity is marked by missionary boldness, inventiveness, prophecy and martyrdom. During our Congregation's Jubilee, by giving thanks for the gift we have received, for the missionary life carried on by succeeding generations on different continents, by seeing the vast riches of our charism and noting the many different ways it is expressed, the following question strongly resounds: what are we going to do with the inheritance we have received? And the answer is clear: convert it into existential prophecy out of love for the poor, dialogue of life, tenderness in the way we evangelize, the spirituality of communion, and, on every occasion, creative fidelity ( HP, 70 and ff.).

3.2. Along with all this we want to remember the requirements of the General Chapter to care for, stimulate and re-create our missionary spirituality that arise from our condition of being prophets of the Kingdom [\[116\]](#). In reality this means merely that we continue to affirm the centrality of mission in our personal and community life at all levels. Nevertheless, perhaps not all Claretians have uppermost in their minds the position the Congregation has taken repeatedly on what our spirituality entails. When the Chapter insisted on the need to empower our missionary spirituality from the prophetic dimension of the service of the Word, it opted for a way of spirituality that differs from what many propose.

During the preparations for the last General Chapter a deep concern was noted in the Congregation over the disproportion that existed between the values we professed and the values we lived. We were not immersed in our Constitutions and Chapter Documents, which are the most secure guides for our missionary life. They lamented the failures in keeping the vows and in the life of prayer, the departures and leaves of absence, the entrenchment and bourgeoisization, individualism and apathy in life and ministry, etc. There was a deep desire to improve the quality of our missionary life. On the other hand, they considered the new challenges to our missionary evangelization in the various contexts in which the Congregation was working particularly pressing. These demanded a new sensibility, greater ability and ardent apostolic love. From another point of view, at the same time as we acknowledged as a great gift from God the geographical spread and increase of vocations to the Congregation, especially in Asia and Africa, it showed the need to promote knowledge of our charism and spiritual patrimony.

The post-synodal Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* offered us enlightenment and opened the road to follow. The Chapter opted for giving a single response to the problem, the challenges and the new situations, focusing on the service of animation in the prophetic dimension that is also emphasized by *Vita Consecrata*. This is clear if one reads the Exhortation starting with the third part, that is, from the perspective of mission and this starting point reveals the prophetic sense of our lifestyle, the vows, fellowship, the solidarity of the Congregation, and initial and continuing formation.

I hasten to clarify that mission is not merely activity. It is witness and suffering. Thus, young people, the aged, the sick, and so many other Claretians who do not exercise "direct apostolic activities", are on mission giving joyful witness to the power of the risen Jesus and making up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ for the sake of his body, the Church (Col. 1: 24).



The change from the proposals that came to the Chapter and the chapter's response was the following. Instead of insisting on consistency in the life of those who follow the evangelical counsels and who have committed themselves to keeping some Constitutions, it emphasizes the prophetic dimension of our vocation and apostolic mission. At the very beginning it says: *"We consider the prophetic aspect to be one dimension of our missionary life; it likens us to the biblical prophets and above all to Jesus the Prophet. The prophets are persons seduced by God (cf. Jer. 20: 7), impassioned by Him and his Covenant, partakers of his compassion for the poor and the people. They see historical reality with the eyes of God; they feel with his heart (cf. 1 Sam. 12: 7-25) and proclaim a message of renewal with the authority of his Word. This message is at once consoling and challenging, hence it creates hope and arouses rejection. This vocation alters their lives and transforms them into a sign; authentic prophets are faithful to the ultimate consequences. Anointed by the power of the Spirit, Jesus was the definitive prophet of God and the fullness of Old Testament prophecy (Lk. 14: 21; Mt. 5: 17; CC 3 and 40). The "prophetic dimension" of our missionary service of the Word should be understood as deriving from Him"* (IPM, 2).

3.3. Everything the IPM goes on to say flows out of this initial description. The vows, fraternal life in community, apostolic work are not primarily things we have to live in order to be good Claretian missionaries, but rather express our response to the prophetic vocation we have received. In other words, our spirituality is not going to be a matter of formal ethics, but of mysticism [\[117\]](#). There are no paradigms that have to be imitated, but rather values that need to be revived. It is not enough to conform our lives to some model, to some customs or traditions objectively proposed or automatically repeated. It is necessary to live out of the Spirit those values that lead us to respond to the needs of men and women today. More than once I have heard that there are Claretians whose only concern and engagement is to be good and to take no risks, nor be committed to anything else. We are asked to be good missionaries in order to be saints [\[118\]](#). Our spirituality presupposes confronting challenges that involve great risk and "knowing how to be" in extreme situations like illness, solitude, abandonment and persecution. Let us closely read the Autobiography, let us meditate attentively on the Constitutions, let us make our own "the image of the missionary"—the pen-picture or definition of the Missionary--, the inherited jewel of Claretian spirituality. How can we be fantasizing a formal, essentialist, moralizing spirituality, not taking into account that ours is to go beyond, to risk our lives continually, to hand them over, on journey with the people and for the people?

In the IPM the sections are drawn up with citations from, or references to, the Constitutions. This is done intentionally. The Constitutions are the bridge between the prophetic lifestyle and ministry of Claret and those of the community that has followed him. Thus, they are not an endpoint for us, some dispositions or norms to which we have to conform our lives, but an inspiring and dynamic beginning out of which we have to orient our lives and confront the future. They are the expression of a "covenant", of a "creed", that, if lived, assures the credibility of our witness, the fruitfulness of our inventiveness and the joyful search for new paths in our missionary life that are not free of risks and difficulties and which require interior freedom, availability, the ability to deny oneself, self-discipline, boldness and commitment

#### **4. Some Suggestions for Re-Creating Our Spirituality at the Beginning of the third Millennium**

One can see in the contributions received for improving the basic text offered to the communities the desire for a clarification of terms and making concepts more precise. This is good and that, so far as you are able, is what you will have to do. It would be a great achievement of the Congress to harmonize the core concepts and dynamisms that configure the spiritual path of the individuals and communities in the Congregation. But that would not be enough. In these times no one can be content merely to describe a well organized, standardized, exact spirituality. We live in an era of the ephemeral, of fragmentation, of the unforeseen and thus we need some power that allows us to constantly reconstruct unity amidst diversity and complexity. If we content ourselves with affirming what we already have and know as a spiritual path, we will not have achieved what I consider most important: to place ourselves in the current of life that originated through the Spirit in the missionary heart of Claret, in the primitive community through which he transmitted it up to the present as a prophetic and eschatological impulse, loving and serving the Gospel unto the end. I insist that our vocation requires radicalism and generosity (the fruits of apostolic love) without limit and that it cannot be responded to except by those who are filled with the fiery word of the prophets, who possess the Apostles' ability to let go and who have the boldness of the martyrs. This is very important in screening vocations and for discernment with those in formation before perpetual profession and ordination.

In our spirituality we cannot give up any of the details that characterize our charism nor the radical options the Congregations keeps on maintaining as the expression of its evangelizing path and among which we must emphasize the option for the poor and the promotion of justice. We are not going to make our spirituality credible if we forget these options. They are already taken into account in the Working Document. But without forgetting them, or even more, to support them, we must emphasize especially:

*1) The primacy of the Spirit in our personal and community missionary life.* The Spirit anointed Christ to proclaim the Good News to the poor. Through the action of the Spirit the prophets, the apostles, Claret, the great missionaries all renewed their call. It is the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life who enlightens, orients, impels, renews, comforts, transforms and brings to fulfillment in Christ Jesus. He makes us witnesses and prophets, he reveals to us the complete truth and announces the things to come (cf. Jn. 16:13), transfigures our existence, calls us together and makes us brothers, whatever our birthplace and culture might be, he gives us a contemplative and compassionate vision in the face of a reality that breaks our hearts and enkindles in us the fire of Christ's love to go beyond ourselves and be closer to the excluded. The Spirit is the agent of internal unification, so eagerly desired by the human person, and the promoter of fraternal communion. Let us hope that this Congress will be a step forward in the growth of the communion in which the Spirit's gifts may always be recognized in their diversity and complementarity for the universal mission.



The individual, the community, that gives primacy to the Spirit is transfigured. It becomes docile and recovers its interiority; it prays, meditates and celebrates; it makes the Eucharist the center of its life. It becomes a transparent sign of new life and adopts a way of thinking, speaking, and acting that is more Gospel-oriented and less dependent on human calculation and pretensions. It breaks down all the defenses for mediocrity, apathy and disenchantment. It always opens its eyes and heart to welcome what is new and remains hopeful even in the face of the most difficult challenges. What is more, it eagerly longs to be in the vanguard, taking risks, because it has mastered how to discern where the truth and value in life lie.

2) *Dialogue, Communion and Solidarity*. A Congregation like ours whose origin lies in collaboration for the missionary service of the Word (cf. CC, 13), cannot do less than cultivate a spirituality of dialogue, communion and solidarity. And if this has been one of our special characteristics, today it is especially needed. It is enough to see how our communities are being shaped, the new settings of our mission, so culturally, ethnically and religiously diverse, not to mention the variety of options that our prophetic ministry allows. Dialogue, communion and solidarity <sup>[120]</sup> evoke the roots of the Trinitarian mystery in our life and in salvation history. They are dynamisms that spread out in concentric circles: community, province, congregation, church, continent, world. They demand openness, welcome, collaboration and sharing. They reveal a path of on-going detachment and of a new asceticism, which cannot be traveled without a great generosity, without apostolic love. Let us translate this and see what it means today, for example, for confronting the tensions and internal conflicts within communities, between particular churches and their Bishops and in social and cultural contexts. Without a large dose of spirituality (love without limits) it is very difficult to make them opportunities for everyone's growth. To love the other, to love the community, to love the Church, to love the people. There is no other way.

3) *The Dynamism of Inculturation*. The Kingdom of God comes to a people linked to a culture. The Gospel and culture are not identical, but they are strongly interrelated. The Church is demanding the contextualization of evangelizing action and our Congregation, at the same time as it is opening itself to new cultures it is receiving the gift of new vocations from among these same peoples. Two reasons that, taken together, highlight the need to take inculturation seriously. Inculturation is a challenge, a demand and a path for evangelization and for spirituality. It is the continuation of the dialogue of salvation in each culture and in each moment of history established by God in Christ through the Holy Spirit.

The Claretian community, besides making sure it is a watchtower with high antennas and a wide range in order to catch in depth the cultural movements of the times and the contexts in which they are found, feels urged to progressively express its own Christian experience in original ways and models. It is the exponent of a collective force in which the genuine characteristics of the Claretian charism are lived in communion with the local Church and the values of the people. It is not a matter of importing traditions and models from other places, but of giving rise to them out of the innovating and liberating power of the Gospel and of our own charism, a new way of living the gift of God to the Church. Thus the Congregation must be open and docile to the action of the Spirit that is going on now, as it was in the time of the early Church, welcoming what is different and making the Kingdom of God explicit by its

transforming action. At the beginning of the third millennium, we are summoned to cultivate a spirituality of awe in light of new symbol systems; recognition, respect and Gospel discernment of values that come to us from new rites and new cultures; humility, tolerance and generous support in opening paths for new languages and new symbols. The diversity within the Congregation alters the thought patterns of those accustomed to only one way of thinking, to uniformity, and to “doing things the way we always have”. No one is going to deny the value of the path followed by the Congregation, but life keeps bringing novelty. Let us look forward with hope.

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The Congregation is looking forward to the Congress these days with hope. I must confess to you that more than once I have been afraid that we will not fulfill the expectations of our brothers. Some of them feel uncomfortable in this plural world that is complex and filled with contrasts; they want to heal their wounds, their lack of dreams and enthusiasm, their lack of understanding in the light of new challenges. Others, the majority, feel deep aspirations to respond to the demands of the Gospel and of mission that spring from their vocation. They want to get out of their own little world; they want help to link evangelization and spirituality and thus be able to be equal to the times (cf. CC, 56). They are looking for paths of conversion, of reconciliation and of empowerment that often are united with the transformation of institutions and structures. Let us consider how this Congress can help mark the dawn of hope for the Congregation in its evangelizing mission at the beginning of the third millennium.

A familiar sight in the Congregation is the painting of Pentecost done by Fr. Maximino Cerezo Barredo in the chapel of the General Curia. This mural captures the thoughts of our Father Founder on the function of Mary as Mother and Teacher of the Apostles. So we want to contemplate it. The painter has gone further and has placed Mary, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, beckoning with her hand to the Apostles to send them on their mission and taking the first step herself. With her other hand she holds her heart, making us understand the grace we need to carry out our mission: with love, mercy and tenderness. On the sides there are hands of different colors, some of them wounded, extended toward the apostles. They are a symbol of all peoples, of the universal mission. In the lower part, surrounding the tabernacle, there are an ear of corn and an olive branch that join and are united in the Eucharist. How many times, looking at this mural, have I thought of this Congress! It can be a little Pentecost in which diversity and unity, witness and missionary impulse are joined.

I trust that Mary will make her presence here among us felt during these days in order to discover what the Spirit wants to tell us through so many eyes, so many cries, so many hands held out, that we have encountered in the people where we have come from and who wait for an answer from us to the question: what have you done to help us live with dignity as sons and daughters of God the Father?

Majadahonda (Madrid), 9 July 2001.

Aquilino Bocos Merino, C.M.F.  
Superior General.

## Conclusion of the Congress

The concluding words of our Claretian Spirituality Congress will, above all, be spoken in today's Eucharist of Jesus, the anointed and sent from the Father to announce the Good News to the poor. He, having explained to us the meaning of the scriptures and shared with us the bread, sends us his Spirit and we return to our communities to be witnesses and to announce the power of his resurrection.

Having concluded our sessions of meetings and work, I wish to interpret the common feelings of all and express out loud the sense of satisfaction that fills us for having celebrated the Congress and the way that it has gone. I believe that all are in agreement as to the appropriateness and usefulness of this celebration, and the hope that it may be an important point of reference for the missionary life of our Congregation, which wishes to progress constantly in faithfulness to the gift and the mission it has received. Although there is always room for improvement, we have seen that the objectives, which we proposed, have been sufficiently achieved. We can say with the Psalmist: "*Yes, Yahweh did great deeds for us, and we were overjoyed.*" (Ps 126: 3)

The presence of Mary, mother and foundress of the Congregation, has been for us throughout these days an inspiration, sign of hope, model and stimulus for listening to the Word and to communicating it with urgency. It comforts us to be in her motherly heart. With her, we have learnt to be disciples of her Son and missionaries of the Kingdom. We continue fulfilling the canticle of the Magnificat from generation to generation.

I offer you some reflections on the Congress.

### 1. The experience of communion.

The Congress has been the fruit of a communitarian and congregational effort with many forms of participation during its various stages, which were summarized at the beginning. To the congregational 'we', in a relatively short time, new agents have been incorporated who are making their voice heard, as well as their sensibilities, their traditions and their customs. During these days there has been an obvious climate of communion in the diversity of aspects, which constitute and articulate the missionary life of our Institute. Since we are so used to experiencing serenity and harmony among us despite the peculiarities and differences, we might not appreciate sufficiently the gift of God in our being, sharing and planning together. It is my hoped that the Congress harvest other fruits but that of communion in missionary

brotherhood is one which we are obliged to tell others about because we have felt it and enjoyed it here. Is it not beautiful to see that despite some being priests and others brothers, some from the east and others from the west, some from the north and others from the south, that although we come from such different places, we speak such different languages, we work in such different ministries and yet we all see ourselves as moved by the same ideal of missionary life and in agreement with regard the inspirational nuclei, dynamisms and means of growth? The openness, the acknowledgement of diverse contributions, the respectful acceptance of other sensibilities and nuances in understanding and expressing the same project of life, are signs of maturity which comes to us from on high as a gift. For this we have to give thanks to the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ who has made us feel the fraternity and the desire to grow in the service of the Kingdom of God.

*Without any special effort, the interest of all to integrate and not exclude has been noteworthy.* I highlight this fact because it confirms the process of renewal in the Congregation which, guided by the Holy Spirit, has been progressively growing in reconciliation and communion, so decisive for evangelization. 1) We were able to reconcile ourselves with the name: Missionaries, Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary – Claretian Missionaries. We saw that one cannot be Claretian without being a Son of the Heart of Mary, just as it was understood and lived by Fr. Founder. 2) We reconciled ourselves in fraternity and mission of all the members of the Congregation: priests, deacons, students and brothers 3) We reconciled ourselves in the diversity of apostolates: we are all missionaries. 4) We have been reconciled with the fundamental options of our missionary life. It was not actually brought into discussion. Interculturality is presented today as a special challenge. Here, during these days we have had a powerful experience of this fact and we have been able to figure out where we have to go in the future to progress in communion in this area without exceptions. The future of the mission of the Congregation will depend a lot on the capacity to make real among us the reciprocity of gifts, which presupposes decentralization and accepting differences.

## **2. The centrality of mission in our spirituality and the prophetic cry of own who cannot be silent.**

Our encounter here has not been simply a fraternal gathering, but a resolve to renew our missionary commitment. In this sense, it cannot be considered as an isolated happening in the journey of the congregation. If, as Claretians, we are concerned about our spirituality, it is because, being missionaries of the Reign of God, we want to respond to the challenges that face us in the beginning of this new era. Spirituality and Mission, we have verified in these days, are the two faces of our missionary vocation.

The Congress has been a shared experience of the concern that we carry within us to give response to the challenges, which we as missionaries of the Reign face, from the world, the Church and the Congregation. In our prayers, celebrations and deliberations, we have been able to appreciate how the Spirit, in the beginning of this era, moves us to prophetic service lived out in the witness of our lives and the proclamation of the Gospel. We have asked ourselves if we are up to the challenge to synthesize, put ourselves in solidarity and collaborate in the transformation of our contemporary world.

Our spirituality is missionary and in the future we have to give emphasis more and more to mission as the center for life and live this out in all its aspects. Passion for the Reign of God, which suffers so many setbacks, and where there is so much evidence of signs against God's reign, bring us to make radical choices on the side of the poor, non-violence, defending life, dialogue with religions and cultures, and of being present in the new '*areopagos*'. We are urged to exercise our prophetic function and become "*voice for those who are voiceless*".

We need to cultivate the unity of life, avoiding any dispersion and dichotomy that make our ministry lifeless. It is necessary to recuperate and keep alive the original experience of our call, which is fruit of the Spirit. If we do not have this experience of the Spirit, who empowers us for the proclamation of the Reign of God and who gives us comfort in moments of difficulties, the mission remains reduced to a simple human activity and lifeless for service of the Gospel. When the mission is the "*cantus firmus*" in our missionary life, the coherence between our style of life, our universal brotherhood, our dialogue, our solidarity, our government and our formation is assured.

If we review the known frustrations, lack of fulfillment and escapisms produced by the cult of the immediate, the efficacious activity and the instant success, we find also the invitation to think deeply and extensively about *the mission* in order to make of it the key and cornerstone of our life, since everything else revolves around it. Experience tells us that the measure of our *quality of life* is in the mission and everything that it brings, like assignments, revision of positions and ministries, etc. We can have long and nice talks about acts of piety and fraternal relationships but the true test comes when we are given a new assignment or experience changes in structures in which we are very much involved. When asked to break attachments and be free for tasks judged to be more urgent, the deep motivations that move our life come out. It is then at the crossroads of a decision when the radical following of Jesus becomes clear.

### **3. The day after, the re-founding.**

We end our Congress the day after we have celebrated the anniversary of our Congregation's foundation. This coincidence makes us look towards the future. Be aware that the **day after the foundation** implies discovering in the today of God the destiny of our Congregation that was not born for itself but to serve and make the Kingdom grow. After the past 152 years, we are invited to open ourselves to new horizons and called to new challenges.

The **day after the foundation**, today, asks us to speak of re-foundation, understood as "deep personal and community conversion to the Claretian mission, here and now, and as sincere and courageous revision of those positions that cut the wings of our missionary spirit. Re-founding asks from us to drink with greater enthusiasm from the congregational sources and to respond swiftly to the prompts of the Spirit who is always engaged 'in making all things new' (Ap 21,5")<sup>[121]</sup>.

Based on what we have observed during the Congress, re-foundation demands a solid and rich spirituality. In order that a community emerge united, in solidarity, enthusiastic and available, it is not enough to share ideas in common; it is necessary that the charismatic gift, the interior energy, enter into the movement that makes our life in common come true. Only the Spirit

liberates us from attachments, make us able to transform structures, induces us to start new projects. When we put in common the Spirit that motivates us, it is easy to overcome crisis, to solve conflicts, to remove obstacles; in short, to make it possible that the glory of God shine brightly.

Everything that our lips have said came up from the heart of men filled with the missionary spirit in harmony with Claret. It has been a constant affirmation and profession of faith in the spirit that animated the first Claretian community. Based on what we have heard and shared, we can say that in the beginning of the third millennium the sons of Claret feel animated by the same spirit, as he used to say about his co-founders (cf. Aut. 489). This is the secret of our hope and joy. As long as we keep alive this spirit we can trust in the future of our living together and working united for the Gospel.

#### **4. Some virtues we should cultivate**

Besides the evangelical counsels and the virtues indicated in our Constitutions, there are other dynamisms, which spring up from our charism, and should be especially cultivated if we want our ministry to be prophetic. They have been mentioned with different words during the Congress. I will just list them.

*a) Vigilance or “seek in all things”.* To live with our eyes open according to what is happening in our world, keeping our eyes and hearts open according to what is emerging as the most urgent for the Kingdom and its justice, in order to save, what is exposed to danger or to loss, to accomplish the will of God our Father. How could we be good missionaries without perceiving the cries and the murmurs of the surrounding reality? This seek in all things implies a double attitude: that of contemplation and compassion, as was highlighted during these days. Those, seeking sincerely, will end up being converted and taking on new initiatives.

*b) Interior freedom, selflessness and availability for the mission.* No one is able to fly without the wings free, if he has tied himself by egoistic concerns. Great aspirations come from hearts that are free. The prophets were the freest men in their hearts. Missionaries who are free are always ready to leave what prevents them from undertaking new paths: the prophecy of renewal calls for itinerancy.

*c) Generosity and commitment to the cause of Jesus.* It is the missionary ardor, the apostolic charity, which we will meditate in the Eucharist. I recall here just two texts of the Founder.

In the pastoral Letter that he directs to the people of Santiago, Cuba he writes: “Do not doubt, children, in the Bishop who takes care, as he should, to meditate on what Jesus Christ did and suffered to save souls, it enkindles in his heart such a fire, by means of this meditation, that it does not allow him to be at peace or rest; and just as fire to powder gives force to a bomb or bullet, and makes it forget its natural gravity and tendency to be at rest and quiet, thus, and even more so, the fire that is enkindled in meditation in this way impels the Bishop, who forgets himself and goes to where the Spirit of the Lord directs him...”<sup>2</sup>

Almost at the end of his life, he writes: “Aflame with this same love, apostolic missionaries have reached, are reaching and will continue to reach to the ends of the earth, in order to preach the word of God; thus they can rightly apply themselves the words of the Apostle Paul:



*Charitas Christi urget nos (2 Cor. 5: 14).. The charity or love of Christ spurs and impels us to run and fly on the wings of holy zeal”<sup>3</sup>.*

*d) Collaboration, working together, sharing the mission.* It is not a matter of strategy for efficiency; it is dynamism, a virtue proper to any Claretian. The best way to root out individualism is to promote collaboration that presupposes openness, dialogue, tolerance and generosity in order to sustain all that is positive in our life and work.

*e) Our fortitude and persevering fidelity.* Our mission is filled with risks and difficulties. It presupposes much renouncing and a lot of courage. A strong missionary is somebody who has his face turned to the future, knowing where he is going, not being stopped in the face of risks and traps. He tackles them with earnest mind and hope. The perseverance to which I refer to is in relationship to creative fidelity, which helps us to give priority to what is essential and to try to obtain it. What is important for our world is the prophesy of fidelity.

I am sure that you have your own considerations about this Congress. I think we all agree that what we have seen and heard helps the whole Congregation grow in its missionary life at the beginning of this third millennium. May the Holy Spirit who has enlightened our mind and enkindled the hearts of our brothers in order to share their spiritual experiences, continue helping us to journey with the People of God among whom we want to be witnesses and servants of the Reign. The Congress comes to an end but the task to renew our spirituality goes on.

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I conclude with a word of sincere thanks to those who have made the Congress possible. First of all, we have to thank the cooperation of those who, in a spontaneous manner, shared experiences about their spiritual life while answering the questionnaire. Thanks to the members of the First International Commission who gathered and articulated the data given. Thanks to Fr. Jose Cristo Rey García Paredes for the text presented to the communities for further reflection. Thanks to the Major Organisms and all the persons who have sent their contributions. Thanks to the Second International Commission that prepared the Working Document for the Congress and the members of the General Curia who have collaborated with Fr. José Felix Valderrábano, Executive Secretary of the Congress, who carried out so many and detailed works.

The Buen Suceso community and the Province of Castilla have been very cooperative, from the very moment the General Government asked for their help, in looking for the venue and organizing the welcome, means of transportation, visits and everything needed by the Secretariat. We mention especially Frs. Vicente Sanz and Justino Martínez, and Bros. Mariano Martín and Eduardo Avila of the Curia of Castilla and the members of the Segovia Community. Within the Congress itself, besides giving thanks to the Salesian Sisters for their exquisite attention, we thank each and every participant for the exemplary participation and for their valuable contributions. Thanks, members of the Claretian Family for accompanying us during these days and being united with us in prayer, in fraternal life and reflection. Thanks to those who prepared the Liturgical celebrations and moments of prayer. Thanks to the efficient moderators, secretaries and the members of the different commissions: drafting, message,

communications and recreation commissions. Thanks to the hard working translators. Finally, I would like to mention the valuable contribution of Fr. Gustavo Alonso and Msgr. Luis Gutierrez, Bishop of Segovia, and thank them for their availability and enlightenment. Therefore, I, together with all the members of the General Government, thank all of you and pray that you have a safe trip back home. To you and your respective Organisms, I wish peace, joy and hope in the future as foreseen here.

Majadahonda, July 17, 2001

Aquilino Bocos Merino, CMF  
Superior General

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[1] IMP. 23

[2] In recent years the Church has been living its spirituality from various perspectives: secularization, liberation, inter-confessional and inter-religious ecumenism, new religious movements.

[3] It is sufficient to recall the many Missionary Encounters held on different continents, the Priest Weeks in Vic,

Workshops on Cordi-Marian and missionary spirituality, etc. Two very important workshops were recently held: “*Justice, Peace and the Wholeness of Creation*” (Bilbao, 3-13 December 1999) and “*The Prophetic Dimension of Our Missionary Service of the Word*” (Manila, 24-31 January 2000).

[4] This experience is found expressed in the *General Plan of Formation* (GPF) of the Congregation starting with the joy of the Forge and is offered as a proposed pedagogy: cf. GPF, Rome 1994, nn. 123-127.

[5] Cf. Aut 345.

[6] Cf. Aut 687.

[7] Cf. MCT 52.

[8] Cf. MCT 63.

[9] Cf. Dir 26.

[10] Cf. SW 7; CC 46.

[11] Cf. Dir 26.

[12] Cf. MCT 142-179.

[13] Cf. CPR 52.

[14] Cf. MCT 53.

[15] Cf. SW 13.

[16] Cf. SW 15.

[17] Cf. MCT 53.

[18] MCT 55.

[19] Cf. MCT 57a.

[20] Cf. MCT 58b.

[21] Cf. MCT 59c.

[22] Cf. MCT 60d.

[23] Cf. MCT 61e.

[24] Cf. MCT 62f.

[25] Cf. Dir 94.

[26] Cf. MCT 53.

[27] Aut 5.

[28] This dimension of our spirituality brings us to the wellspring of Maria’s interior life: prepared body and soul to be the Mother of God’s Son (cf. PE 17, based on LG 65, 60, 62). When we penetrate Mary’s Heart, we find a unique form of the

presence of God. Our communion with the spirit of Mary leads us to participate much better in the mysteries of Christ, because, when Mary is known and loved, she always leads us to the Lord (cf. LG 65). The Heart of Mary and our relationship to it is the context, the climate and the atmosphere in which our spirituality must be developed (cf. PE 19). “To be devoted to Mary means, above all, to be her son and her minister, cultivating a relationship of filial intimacy and placing all our energies at the service of the Gospel: in short, it means reproducing the image of Jesus the missionary of the Father and the son of Mary” (J. Bermejo, *La figura de María en los escritos del P. Claret*, in: Various. 2<sup>nd</sup> Symposium of the Claretian Family, *Studia Claretiana* VII, Rome 1989, p. 64; cf. also J. M. Hernández: *Ex abundantia cordis*. Estudio de la espiritualidad cordimariana de los Misioneros Claretianos. Secretariado Corazón de María, PCI, Madrid 1991, pp. 59-92).

[29]

Cf. SW 7.

[30]

IPM 20.

[31]

SW 13.

[32]

MCT 54.

[33]

Cf. Aut 489.

[34]

Cf. MCT 70; CPR 9; Dir 21.

[35]

Cf. CPR 10.

[36]

Cf. IPM 22.

[37]

Cf. IPM 19.

[38]

Cf. CPR 49b.

[39]

Cf. CPR 53.

[40]

Cf. Aut 118.

[41]

Cf. CC 6.

[42]

Cf. CPR 56.

[43]

Dir 95.

[44]

Cf. CC 78-85.

[45]

Cf. Circular Letter of Fr. Aquilino Bocos Merino, “*The Missionary Brothers: A Challenge for the Life and Mission of the Congregation*”, Rome 1997, p. 46.

[46]

Cf. 2P 3,13.

[47]

Cf. VC 57.

[48]

St. Augustine, Sermon 69: PL 38, 440-441.

[49]

Cf. IPM 16.

[50]

Cf. SW 13.

[51]

Cf. IPM 17.

[52] Cf. EA 619.

[53] Cf. Aut 68.

[54] Cf. Aut 212.

[55] Cf. EA 663.

[56] Cf. VC 70.

[57] Capital sins.

[58] Cf. Aut 340; 424.

[59] Cf. CPR 54.

[60] Cf. MCT 146.

[61] Cf. CC 51.

[62] “May the Lord be blessed for stooping to use such a miserable person as myself to do such great things. May God’s be the glory and mine the confusion I deserve. Everything I have I owe to God; He has given me health, energy, words, and all the rest besides. I have always known that the Lord was my fuel; but on this trip all the rest knew it too. They could see that I hardly ate or drank anything all day, except a potato and a glass of water. I never ate meat, fish or eggs, or drank wine. I was always happy and they never saw me tired, despite the fact that some days I preached as many as 12 sermons” (Aut 703).

[63] AA 2.

[64] Cf. SW 16.

[65] “It is not a matter of the male or female religious doing what he or she pleases. The Council speaks of “apostolic and charitable activity” originating in and animated by the Holy Spirit. Only this kind of activity fits into the very nature of religious life, insofar as it constitutes a sacred ministry and a particular work of charity that has been entrusted to religious by the Church and that must be exercised in its name” (*Contemplative Dimension*, 4). “It is urgent to increase individual and community consciousness of the primary origin of apostolic and charitable activity, as living participation in that mission of Christ and the Church, which has its origin in the Father and demands that all those who are sent employ a consciousness of love in the dialogue of prayer” (*Contemplative Dimension*, 4).

[66] Cf. IPM 38.

[67] Cf. PO 13-14; AA 4.

[68] Cf. SW 11.3.

[69] Cf. SW 13.

[70] Cf. SW 15.

[71] Cf. IPM 21.

[72] Cf. CC 46.

[73] Cf. SW 17.

[74] Ordinary Time.

[75] Cf. CC 35.

[76] Priests and deacons.

[77] Cf. PE 14.

[78] Cf. SC 10.

[79] Cf. SC 7.

[80] Cf. SW 16.1.

[81] VC 94.

[82] SW, 13-17.

[83] SW, 6-9.

[84] Cf. IPM 20.

[85] Cf. IPM 21.4.

[86] Cf. IPM 18.

[87] Cf. IPM 36.

[88] Cf. SW 7.

[89] Cf. IPM 28.

[90] VC 42.

[91] VC 41.

[92] Cf. IPM 23.

[93] Cf. SW 16. 4.

[94] Cf. SW 9.1.

[95] Cf. CPR 61.

[96] Cf. IPM 42.

[97] Cf. SW 10.1.

[98] Cf. SW 19.2.

[99] Cf. CPR 52.

[100] Cf. CC 36.

[101] Cf. IPM 44.



[102] Drinking, eating, smoking, sex, etc.

[103] Defense of the earth and its creatures.

[104] Cf. IPM 50.3.

[105] Cf. CC 33.34.37.

[106] Cf. Dir 84-93.

[107] Architecture and music are environmental arts that place us at the limits of the world. Architecture gives form to space and music gives form to time. They create the environment that enfolds us; they give form and meaning at the limit of the world. Painting, sculpture, dance, theater, and cinema give form and depiction to everything that dwells in the world.

[108] Cf. IPM 34.

[109] Cf. IPM 34.

[110] Cf. IPM 21.2.

[111] The exhortation “Mutuae Relationes” thus expresses it when it says: “Their authority comes from the Spirit of the Lord in conjunction with the sacred Hierarchy... Religious superiors have the mission and authority of being *teacher of the spirit* relating to the evangelical content of their own Institute; within this ambit, then, they should exercise a true *spiritual direction* of the whole Congregation and its communities. Through it they assure a practice that is in sincere harmony with the authentic magisterium of the Hierarchy, aware they are fulfilling a mandate of grave responsibility within the ambit of the evangelical area indicated by their Founder” (MR 13, a)

[112] Cf. SW 13.3.

[113] NMI 58.

[114] ChL, 16.

[115] VC, 93.

[116] Prior to the recommendation on the promoting of spirituality it says: “The prophetic character of our missionary service of the Word has to drink from *‘the wellsprings of a deep and solid spirituality (VC, 93)’* (IPM, 23).

[117] Spirituality, holiness, is not some timeless matter adjusted to the canons of behavior of each era. Nor is it reducible to some times or actions, a facet of life. We can spend many hours in prayer and works of penance, along with much work and sacrifice, and yet they are devoid of spirit. Spirituality refers basically to the action of the Spirit within us, which attempts to conform us to Christ, and the response that “here and now” we give to the primordial and all-embracing love of God.

[118] At the very beginning of the spiritual exercises connected with the founding of the Congregation, Fr. Claret spoke to the primitive community about “*vocació y missió. bontat de vida*” [sic]. First he speaks of vocation-mission and then he speaks of spirituality as an indispensable condition for mission. The Congregation’s objective (CC 2) has a three-fold reference and has to know how to harmonize at one and the same time the glory of God, one’s own sanctification and the salvation of the souls of the entire world according to our missionary charism in the Church.

[119] Some years ago I wrote: “Our Constitutions demand and invite us to a Gospel radicalism that presupposes renouncing for the sake of Jesus one’s own culture, country, family... everything. They lead us into a continual process of renewal of the ways we think and act and open us to a horizon of the continual overcoming of self where freedom and creativity are bound up with the living of the Beatitudes. Thus, they do <sup>not</sup> allow ambiguity, mediocrity, bourgeoisization, pettiness or individualism. They continually open us to new perspectives and they launch us on a mission more and more shared. Living the Constitutions

robs us of our securities and gets us out of our ruts spiritually and, at times, materially. They make us suited for our prophetic ministry in this secular world, with so many imbalances, injustices and its culture of death. They enable us to be ready to occupy positions in the missionary vanguard, there where the Son of the Heart of Mary is afraid of nothing and, with patience, prepares the way of the Lord ". *Circular Letter on the Occasion of the 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Approval of the Constitutions*. AC, 62 (1995) 20-21.

[120]

John Paul II has described the spirituality of communion in NMI, 43.

[121]

Cf. CICLA Boletin, 8, p. 2.

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CLARET, A.M.: *Carta pastoral al pueblo*. Escritos Pastorales. BAC, Madrid, 1997, p.198.

3

CLARET, A.M.: *Selfishness Overcome*, Works of Saint Anthony Claret: Volume III, Spiritual Writings, Claretian Publications, Quezon City, Philippines, 1991, p. 493.