



CARDINAL AQUILINO BOCOS MERINO

ROOTED RISK-TAKERS

Following in Claret's Footsteps
on the 150th Anniversary of His Death

General Government
CMF
Rome



Cardinal Aquilino Bocos Merino, CMF, was the spiritual director of the Maronite College (Salamanca), formator in the Claretian Theologate (Salamanca and Madrid), director of the magazine *Vida Religiosa*, initiator of the National Weeks of Religious Life in Spain, Provincial Superior of the Claretian province

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He has authored several books (some translated into several languages) and numerous specialized articles in magazines in different countries.

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FOREWORD

This book, *Rooted Risk-Takers*, is a worthy tribute to St. Anthony Mary Claret on the 150th anniversary of the end of his mission on earth, which occurred on October 24, 1870. It is the mature fruit of the many years of life and mission of a Claretian missionary, Cardinal Aquilino Bocos Merino. The following pages not only bring to light the beauty of missionary life and its foundations, which Fr. Aquilino has discovered in the life and works of our Founder and has applied to his own life but also provide a relevant guide to the challenges faced by missionaries in the modern age. This book is a testament to the enduring relevance of St. Anthony Mary Claret's teachings and the Claretian mission.

Being rooted in the Spirit of Christ is an indispensable condition for the missionary to risk taking the Gospel message to the periphery where human battles are being waged. Human and spiritual maturity is the necessary foundation for facing the challenges and dangers of life with the equanimity and resistance of a disciple of Christ. Claret's life in Cuba and Madrid was subject to many risks. He was in danger of being killed by his adversaries, which could have happened in any of the fourteen attacks he suffered, including the one in Holguín, Cuba, on February 1, 1856. On all these occasions, Claret remained rooted in his life's mission and discerned his response in prayer and through the wise counsel of trusted people. The saint compared himself to a compass, with the pointer—his heart—fixed on Jesus and the needle moving freely in the fulfillment of his duties and responsibilities.

In our age, the Church is facing a difficult time because of its stance on moral issues. Some secular forces take advantage of any means possible to discredit her spiritual and moral authority. The scandals produced by some of her ministers who have failed to live out their vocation of being rooted in Christ and serving God's people with the love of Christ himself have also damaged her credibility as an institution. Without being rooted in Christ, a missionary runs the dangerous risk of falling into selfishness and spiritual sloth, into sterile pessimism, into spiritual worldliness, and unproductive divisions.¹

Our Founder has offered us a beautiful "definition of the missionary." He wanted all the missionaries to copy it and carry it with them. The definition describes our missionary identity in its two inseparable dimensions. The first is the inner dimension, the experience of being on fire with God's love, accompanied by a dynamic outward movement to set the whole world on fire with God's love. The second dimension refers to how one faces the challenges of this movement: privations, work, sacrifices, slander, and suffering, which are consequences of following Christ and have as their

¹ Pope Francis lists these temptations of pastoral workers in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, nos. 7-109.

goal the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls. The best tribute we can pay to our Founder is to internalize this "definition" and to live our life and mission as "men on fire with love."

This book effectively explains the profound impact of the two dimensions in the 'definition of the missionary' on various areas of our Claretian life. It traces our path of holiness and serves as a source of inspiration and motivation for our mission. Pope Francis describes holiness as 'experiencing, in union with Christ, the mysteries of his life' and 'uniting ourselves to the Lord's death and resurrection in a unique and personal way.' Holiness also involves 'reproducing in our own lives various aspects of Jesus' earthly life.'² Christ, the missionary of the Father who proclaimed the Good News of the Kingdom, is the source of our missionary vocation. Our Founder beautifully lived his vocation as an apostolic missionary, configuring himself to Christ the evangelizer. The introduction and the ten chapters of the book offer extensive spiritual and theological reflections appropriate to the distinct moments of a missionary's life and serve as a source of inspiration and motivation for our Claretian life. I am grateful to Cardinal Aquilino Bocos for his presence in my life as an older brother and mentor. He has encouraged me to deepen our spiritual heritage and draw water from the well of our charism on numerous occasions. Through these lines, I would like to express my appreciation for this unique contribution during this Claretian Year.

I present this book not just as a tribute to our Founder but as a valuable tool for all Claretians and those who share our Lord's evangelizing mission. It is a guide, a compass, to deepen your missionary vocation, always rooted in Christ and ready to risk everything out of love for him. I want to reiterate my endorsement and encouragement for all Claretians and individuals involved in evangelizing missions. Your work is invaluable, and this book is a testament to the importance and impact of your mission. Now it is up to us to make St. Paul's words – 'the love of Christ impels us' – take on meaning in our life and mission, just like in the life of the great missionary born in Sallent.

Fr. Mathew Vattamattam CMF

Rome, January 8, 2020

COMMON ABBREVIATIONS

² Gaudete et exsultate, no. 20.

- 1 RL Decree on the Religious Life, XVII General Chapter, 1967
- AA Apostolicam Actuositatem, Decree, 1965
- AAS Acta Apostolicae Sedis [Acts of the Apostolic See]
- ACW Autobiography and Complementary Writings, St. Anthony Mary Claret, Bicentennial edition prepared by J. M. Viñas and J. Bermejo, Translated by Joseph Daries and James Overend, Claretian Publications, Bangalore 2011
- AG Ad Gentes, Decree, 1965
- BAC Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos [Library of Christian Authors]
- CC Claretian Constitutions
- CELAM General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean
- CESC Centro de Espiritualidad Claretiana [Center for Claretian Spirituality], Vic, Spain
- CIC Code of Canon Law
- CICLSAL Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life
- C.M.F. Cordis Mariae Filius [Son of the Heart of Mary]
- CPR The Claretian in the Process of Congregational Renewal, Document of the XX General Chapter, 1985
- DV Dei Verbum, Dogmatic Constitution, 1965
- EA Escritos Autobiográficos [Autobiographical writings], St. Anthony Mary Claret, prepared by José María Viñas and Jesús Bermejo, BAC, Madrid, 1981
- EC Epistolario Claretiano, three volumes prepared by José María Gil CMF, 1970 and 1987
- EN Evangelii Nuntiandi, Apostolic Exhortation, 1975EV Evangelium Vitae, Encyclical, 1995
- FLC Fraternal Life in Community, CICLSAL, 1994
- GS Gaudium et spes, Pastoral Constitution, 1965
- IPM In Prophetic Mission, Document of the XXII General Chapter, 1997
- LG Lumen Gentium, Dogmatic Constitution, 1964
- MCT The Mission of the Claretian Today, Document of the XIX General Chapter, 1979
- MFL Men on Fire With Love, Document of the XXIV General Chapter, 2009
- MI Decree on Missions to Non-Christians, XVII General Chapter, 1967
- MS Witnesses and Messengers of the Joy of the Gospel, Declaration of the XXV General Chapter, 2015
- MV Misericordiae Vultus, Bull, 2015
- PC Perfectae Caritatis, Decree, 1965
- SAfC Starting Afresh from Christ, Instruction, CICLSAL, 2002
- SAO The Service of Authority and Obedience, Instruction, CICLSAL, 2008
- SC Sacrosanctum Concilium, Constitution, 1963
- SCRIS Sacred Congregation for Religious
- SRS Sollicitudo rei socialis, Encyclical, 1987
- SSW Selected Spiritual Writings, Works of St. Anthony Mary Claret, Volume III, prepared by Jesús Bermejo, 1991
- SW Servants of the Word, Document of the XXI General Chapter, 1991
- TMHL That They May Have Life, Document of the XXIII General Chapter, 2003
- VC Vita Consecrata, Apostolic Exhortation, 1996

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INTRODUCTION

"So, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, walk in him, rooted in him and built upon him and established in the faith as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving."
(Colossians 2:6-7).

"For the love of Christ impels us." (2 Corinthians 5:14).

"Rooted" and "risk-takers" are the two words that frame the chapters of this book that I present to my brother Claretian Missionaries on the 150th anniversary of the death of our holy Founder. Although the texts were written for different circumstances, they share a common message: the invitation to rekindle our missionary vocation.

Claret was born to evangelize,¹ and one of his virtues was universality. "My spirit goes out to all the world."² Shortly before he died, he asked Fr. Clotet if we were already in the United States.³ And Fr. Josep Xifré wrote to the superior of the house of Vic that, in the last moments of his life, Xifré asked Fr. Claret for a blessing for the entire Congregation, which he was glad to give, adding that he would serve us in heaven just as he had done on earth.⁴ Today, the Congregation is found in 68 nations on five continents. Claret's dreams are being fulfilled and will continue to be fulfilled. We count on his blessing, which continues to have perennial value because, as the Book of Sirach says: "A father's blessing gives a person firm roots" (Sirach 3:9).

It is good to remember this blessing on the 150th anniversary of his death. It gives us confidence, for what Jeremiah says is produced in us: "You planted them; they have taken root, they flourish and bear fruit as well" (Jer 12:2). This has been fulfilled in the Congregation. Therefore, we do not celebrate a date but a path of grace and a generous response. This jubilee moment is a time of thanksgiving.

"*Rooted*" and "*risk-takers*" are words that go hand in hand. They evoke the call and the response, the vocation and the mission. They are colored by lucidity and audacity and energized by contemplation and commitment. Just as they marked Claret's path, they have guided our journey in his footsteps. Rooted in who we are and risk-takers in what we do. *Rooted* in the apostolic charity that flows from Trinitarian love, which is nourished by the Word of God and shaped in the Immaculate Heart of Mary. And *risk-takers* in proclaiming the integral mystery of Christ to the people of our time in whatever situation they may find themselves. There is only one preference: the poor and excluded. Among them are our frontiers.

Our Claretian missionary life is authentic to the extent that it is lived from its charismatic roots and maintains our hearts lucid, available, and bold for the mission. Love for God and neighbor is at its core. That is why it harmoniously combines the experience of grace and apostolic dynamism in the face of

¹"*Born to Evangelize*" was the title given by the Center for Claretian Spirituality (CESC) to the materials for the celebration of the bicentenary of the birth of Fr. Claret (Vic 2007).

² St. Anthony Mary Claret, *Letter to the Nuncio*, Vic, August 12, 1849.

³ Cf. Letter from Fr. Jaime Clotet to Fr. Josep Xifré from Fontfroide on October 20, 1870.

⁴ Cf. Letter from Fr. Josep Xifré to Fr. Félix Bruch, October 25, 1870.

"whatever is most urgent, opportune, and effective."⁵ It updates the image of the compass, the simile that Claret used to honor the use of one's time. He knew, and we must know, how to combine *mysticism* and *prophecy* to ensure progress in the spiritual and apostolic life.

VALUE THE ROOTS

Pope Francis has affirmed: "For me, the great revolution is going to the roots, recognizing them, and seeing what those roots have to say to us today."⁶ To live in the roots is not to refer to the past or be anchored down but rather to be placed in the inner core where the present is projected into the future. It is to live from the wellspring, where everything becomes a river toward hope. It is to savor the imprint of the divine in humanity and to be immersed in the creativity of the Spirit, to collaborate in the construction of a new humanity.

Who dares to define our cultural, social, economic, political, and religious context? We are in a situation that is too complex. Nevertheless, many diagnoses are offered: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Church documents, especially the post-synodal exhortations, and the documents of our General Chapters that deal with the volatile environment. They also reflect the rays of hope that bring us light. We are going through hyper-postmodern times, which are fragile, fluid, inconsistent, full of variables, and difficult to foresee. The digital world, which contributes so much and is disturbing, increases the change in daily life. Serious thought loses its influence, opinions are multiplied, sometimes contradictory, and many are based on economic interests. It is the age in which feelings dominate. Relationships are flexible and short-lasting. Tradition is discredited, and bonds are short-lived. A new era is dawning: the post-human era.

But no matter how dark the view seems, light is still shining, even if it is not as bright as one may hope. Children display their delight, and young people share their dreams. Many organizations are led by people who work in solidarity and defend human rights and the environment. Anthropology is becoming more integral and promotes relationships, dialogue, and encounters. There are new spaces of fellowship. Scientists are amazed,⁷ and poets, painters, musicians, etc., offer us their glimpses of being inhabited by beauty. Tender gestures are suddenly made for those who sleep on the sidewalk, ignored, and discarded. Among us are sensible, responsible people who are very committed to various fields of solidarity. There is no shortage of martyrs, able to offer their witness that there is nothing more significant than God and his creatures – people – for whom they give their lives.

It is not surprising to insist on discernment because it is increasingly necessary to stop to think and let the beautiful, the true, and the just prevail. It is only lived from the roots. Those who lose their roots end up burned out and die. And even though it sounds like a paradox, living without roots is to live without a future.⁸

To return to the roots is to return to the community. Who is not amazed to see how one clings to the roots, especially when the wind shakes the branches? All the roots nourish the trunk and strengthen the branches, making them flourish and bear fruit. Fruitfulness begins in the roots.

⁵ *Constitutions*, no. 48. Cf. *C.M.F. Documentos Capitulares*, 1967. Patrimonio espiritual, no. 50, Cocusa, Madrid 1968, p. 71.

⁶ Pope Francis, in H. Cymerman, "Interview with Pope Francis," *L'Osservatore Romano*, Spanish ed., June 20, 2014, p. 6. English quote from <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/29852/full-text-of-pope-francis-interview-with-la-vanguardia>. Cf. *Christus vivit*, no. 200, and also, *ibid.* All of Chapter Six, "Young People with Roots".

⁷ Cf. M. Bersanelli - M. Gargantini, *Solo el asombro conoce. La aventura de la investigación científica*, Encuentro, Madrid 2006.

⁸ Cf. Pope Francis, *Christus vivit*, Ch. 6.

CLARETIAN ROOTS

I will confine myself to what happened in the second half of the twentieth century and up to this point in the twenty-first. We have been fortunate in the Congregation to have studied the life and writings of our Founder calmly and in-depth. We had a wealth of knowledge when we arrived at the Second Vatican Council. The canonization of Fr. Claret (1950) had a profound influence. The studies on the essential subjects of his writings and, above all, of his *Autobiography* enabled the 17th General Chapter of 1967, following the guidelines of the Second Vatican Council, to offer the Congregation the *Declaration on the Charism of Saint Anthony Mary Claret as the Founder of our Congregation* and the *Declaration on the Spiritual Heritage of the Congregation*. The roots – the essential and fundamental elements of the Claretian vocation – are very explicit in the *Constitutions* of 1986 (last edition).⁹ They have been evoked in subsequent General Chapters. They have been made clear by commentaries of the *Constitutions*, published under the title "Our Project of Missionary Life";¹⁰ the works of Fr. Jesus Alvarez and Fr. Gustavo Alonso,¹¹ the General Chapters, the Magisterium of the General Superiors, the document on "Our Missionary Spirituality on the Path of the People of God," the materials of ongoing formation: "Word-Mission" and "The Forge" and so many writings coming from meetings led by the General Government¹² or carried out by the *Center for Claretian Spirituality* (CESC) or from contributions from our brothers.¹³ Cf. Pope Francis, *Christus vivit*, Ch. 6.

In this valuing and reviving of our roots, our brother Martyrs have a special place. Those who have already been beatified and those others who gave their lives with joy for the Gospel and for peace among people show us the value of faithfulness to the end.

The roots of our Claretian vocation, which is a community vocation because of the charism that calls us together and sends us, will dry up if our relationships with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are not cultivated; if we fail to represent in the Church the same kind of life that Jesus chose for himself, giving witness to the Gospel;¹⁴ if we do not cultivate the Spirit of communion with all the People of God from the perspective of the theological life; if we do not listen to and keep God's Word and celebrate the mystery of the Eucharist; if we fail to correspond to the filial love of Mary to whose heart we have given ourselves especially;¹⁵ if we do not remain close but rather disconnect ourselves from the people and the poor.

Good roots result in security, firmness, courage, determination, commitment, and consistency. When the roots are healthy, there is a guarantee of life. Living memory contains hope. When an Institute knows

⁹ On May 15, 1986, the Congregation received the Pontifical Approval of the *Constitutions*. In no. 158 it says: "to base our earnest search for the vigour of our missionary life on the *Constitutions*."

¹⁰ The three volumes were published in Rome between 1989 and 1997 in Spanish and between 1992 and 2000 in English.

¹¹ J. Álvarez, *Claretian Missionaries, Return to Origins, Vol. I, Transmission and Reception of the Claretian Charism, Vol II*. Trans. By J. Daries of 1997 original, Claretian Publications, 2000; G. Alonso, *Misioneros Claretianos, III, La renovación conciliar*, Ed. Claretiana, Buenos Aires 2007. (Publication of 2024 English translation pending).

¹² These were special occasions to revitalize the roots of the Congregation: The celebration of the 150th anniversary of the founding of the Congregation and the bicentenary of the birth of Fr. Claret.

¹³ Cf. The writings appearing in *St. Anthony Mary Claret, Autobiography and Complementary Writings*, Bicentennial edition prepared by J. M. Viñas and J. Bermejo, Translated by Joseph Daries and James Overend, Claretian Publications, Bangalore 2011 (from now on ACW). See also what has been published by the magazine *Studia Claretiana*.

¹⁴ CC, 3.

¹⁵ The General Chapter of 1967 stated: "Our Sonship in the Heart of Mary is a proper note of our spirituality and apostolate. It has penetrated the life of the Congregation and sustained its energy in the pursuit of the purposes of our Institute... It was characteristic of our holy Founder that he powerfully exemplified his relationship as Son of the Heart of Mary. He recognized himself as a Son of the Blessed Virgin, as one formed by her in the furnace of her love (Autob. II, c. 16)." *Declaration on the Spiritual Heritage of the Congregation*, nos. 17-19. See also CC 8 and 159.

where it has come from, it knows where it is going. And if, for whatever reason, it suffers a lapse, eventually, it will find the right path for the future. The roots seek light. They want to be fruitful. Their vigor tends to flourish and bear fruit. In the most intimate part of us, as missionaries, Jesus' words resound: "It was...I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain." (Jn 15:16).

Once again, the Claretian simile: The fixed pointer of the compass is worship and praise, which allows the circle to be perfect. "It is only possible to go to the limits of the world if we are centered in God!"¹⁶

RISK-TAKERS

Risk-takers because we are rooted. Our vocation is missionary. The love of Christ, which the Spirit has placed in us, impels us (cf. 2 Cor 5:14). It asks us to be always open and available. It does not leave us indifferent to social, cultural, and religious realities. It asks us to scan the horizon, to identify the challenges, and to face them with joyful hope. Boldness and courage are needed to propose and proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom. The Spirit always puts us at the forefront. Our mission cannot succumb to fear or cowardice. Centered on the experience of Christ's love, we sow the Word and wait for it to mature and bear fruit in the hearts of our brothers and sisters.

In the proclamation of the Gospel, there are beautiful and joyful moments and moments of darkness and suffering. Jesus experienced joy in the conversion of sinners and wanted the apostles to ask for a joy that was complete (cf. Jn 16:24). Jesus himself, being the Son of the Father, became man, passed through the world as one of many, accepted his passion and death on the cross, wants us to be the light of the world, the salt of the earth and leaven in the dough. He tells us: "Go on your way; behold, I am sending you like lambs among wolves" (Lk 10:3). And, if we were to be brought before the courts, we need not worry, "For it will not be you who speak but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you" (Mt 10:20).

St. Paul recounts his sufferings as an apostle: "On frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my own race, dangers from Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers at sea, dangers among false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many sleepless nights, through hunger and thirst, through frequent fasting, through cold and exposure. And apart from these things, there is the daily pressure upon me of my anxiety for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is led to sin, and I am not indignant?" (2 Cor 11:26-29). We know how much Claret had to endure in his missionary pursuits, mainly because of persecution and slander. He gave his witness unequivocally and risked his life for truth and justice. He always had Jesus leading him.¹⁷ The resolutions, lights, and graces of the last years of his life and the testimonies of those who met him highlight the value of meekness in apostolic ministry.¹⁸

When we contemplate the violence suffered for the sake of the Gospel, we encounter the definition of the Missionary Son of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, and we are obliged to conjugate all the verbs that appear in the Claretian Memorial (cf. *Aut.*494 and CC 9).¹⁹ It is a solid invitation to abandon all

¹⁶ Pope Francis, *Homily in the Church of the Gesù*, January 3, 2014.

¹⁷ "What could Jesus have done for the glory of his Father and the salvation of souls that He did not do? Ah, I can see Him hanging dead upon the cross, scorned by all. For this very reason, I, even I, with the help of his grace, am resolved to suffer pains, fatigue, contempt, mockery, complaints, slanders, persecution--even death." (*Autobiography of Saint Anthony Mary Claret* [from now on *Aut*] 752).

¹⁸ That is what he asked the missionary in the "Letter to the Missionary Theophilus," *Works of Saint Anthony Mary Claret*, Vol. III. *Selected Spiritual Writings*, Claretian Publications, 1991, p. 411 et seq. Before that, he had asked it of the priests, op. cit. pp. 363 et seq.

¹⁹ See "The 'Model' of the Missionary" in *Our Project of Missionary Life: Commentary on the Constitutions*, vol. II, Rome, 1992, p. 151 et seq. Let us remember these verbs and, when pronouncing them, let us internalize the complements: *be on fire, spread, desire, strive, set on fire, daunt, delight, welcome, embrace, smile, rejoice, suffer, glory, follow, imitate, pray, work, endure and, again, strive* (taken

security and exercise our prophetic mission out of love, to draw from within ourselves the best we can offer others. This definition is the most concentrated expression of what can be said about apostolic risk-taking. The verbs, names, and expressions are a precious collection that allows the missionary to know he is guided and strengthened by the Spirit. And so, he risks his life without fear but instead with joy, decisiveness, boldness, and audacity.²⁰

What does it mean for a Claretian to be a man on fire? Father Claret was devoured by the fire of love, which he fed with prayer and work and pushed him to what he saw as the greater glory of God and the salvation of humankind. The best indicator for authenticating our missionary passion and risk-taking is whether it is motivated and driven by seeking and striving in all things for the glory of God and whether we place ourselves in God's orbit to bring peace and love to all humankind.

The Congregation comprises men who have risked their health, well-being, personal plans, desires, and dreams. They have embarked on a journey toward diverse existential peripheries, both socially and culturally. We have examples driven by pastoral conversion in all latitudes and in the same Organism to which they belong. We have only to listen to what each one carries within themselves. We would be amazed by those who started missions and crossed borders, who left everything and followed the voice of the call. "Only those who will risk going too far can possibly find out how far one can go." (T. S. Eliot) Those who can deny themselves to keep their faith alive with a silent but effective witness are equally admirable. They have a clear awareness that "A ship is safe in harbor, but that's not what ships are for." (William G. T. Shedd) The whole life of a Claretian, whatever he does and whatever age he is, must always be missionary.

CULTIVATE THE ROOTS AND TAKE RISKS

It is right to cultivate the roots of one's vocation and to promote risk for the mission for one who has let himself be seduced and moved by the power of the Holy Spirit who invades the missionary in the grace of our origins and makes him restless until the plan of salvation has been fulfilled. Let us remember Pope Francis's invitation to us at our last General Chapter: "Adore: 'Only Him you shall worship,'... That spending time without asking, without thanking, even without praising, only adoring, only worship with the prostrate soul."²¹ It is the first attitude that allows our regeneration.

The Claretian missionary wilts if he does not take care of his relationship with the Father if he does not maintain his friendship, his intimacy with Christ, and if he does not rekindle the anointing and sending of the Spirit. The presence and mysterious action of the Risen One and his Spirit is transformative and offers us a new vision, a restlessness, and a tension that relaunches us further, to other frontiers, to other settings where the family of God's children must grow.

from the definition as it appears in the text of CC 9). Fr. Gonzalo Fernández has a beautiful commentary on the definition of the missionary. Finally, he comments on the four verbs: *Pray*, *work*, *endure*, and *strive* (pamphlet from the Prefecture of Spirituality, Rome, 2012).

²⁰ Regarding the definition of a missionary, Pope Saint Paul VI said to the General Chapter of 1973: "See here, projected towards you, a whole program of holiness, based on courageous renunciation of oneself, the fruit of its fertile evangelical vitality. It points out to you clearly, with expressions of clear Pauline dynamism, the good to which your personal and community life must aspire; the following and imitation of Christ to impulses of charity that is always operative." *Declarations and Decrees of XVII and XVIII Claretian General Chapters*, Claretian Publications, Bangalore, India, p. 5. Cf. A. Cupini, «La definición del misionero. Una lectio desde el hoy de Europa», en: *Nacido para evangelizar*, *op. cit.* pp. 75 et seq.

²¹ Months before, he had said: "What does it mean to worship God? To worship the Lord means to give Him the proper place; to worship the Lord means to affirm, believe – but not simply in word – that only He truly guides our life; To worship the Lord means that we are convinced before him that he is the only God, the God of our life, the God of our history"—Homily at *St. Paul Outside the Walls*, January 25, 2015.

In our missionary life, Mary plays a vital role. She is full of grace, the Bride of the Holy Spirit, who savors the Word and offers it by singing the *Magnificat*, always inviting us to see the hungry and needy and continues to say to us: "They have no wine... Do whatever he tells you." She is the Victorious Woman, and she does not leave our side in any of our struggles. She prevents us from succumbing and revives us in our fatigue. She is always within our reach through prayer. Thus, she enlivens love and longing, fidelity and audacity.

Today, our mission must be proactive and, therefore, should offer light, truth, and a consistent life amid a changing and quite ambiguous society in which the scale of values is unscrupulously bartered. Many want to tarnish us with relativism, Gnosticism, and Pelagianism.²² The best antidote to these tendencies is the joy born of faith, hope, and the praxis of mercy. Our lifestyle must be our first prophetic expression. It is our duty, through our behavior, to bear witness to and preach the heart of the Gospel, even if it is counter-cultural. We must demonstrate a Samaritan life (calling to mind the Samaritan woman and the Good Samaritan) with our gestures and attitudes, proclaiming the Beatitudes and conducting works of mercy. As God's pilgrim people, we stand on the side of the excluded and at the service of the poorest. We run the risk of being misunderstood to be authentic. We are urged to "wake up the world!"²³

And, if we want to live up to the demands of our times, we must prepare ourselves through studies. In addition, we must have a particular sensitivity to encourage young people and adults by offering them a vision of life with meaning and hope. We are asked to be well-prepared for personal relationships and to build bridges that facilitate encounters to foster communion and solidarity. This behavior involves taking the risk of leaving our closed and comfortable lives and being able to place ourselves on the frontier of truth and justice. A significant challenge for the life of the Congregation, as it is for all of consecrated life, is intercultural reconciliation, as the Father General²⁴ has reminded us.

Another challenge is the one that Pope Francis frequently repeats: To stand on the periphery, that is, where what prevails is abandonment, a lack of attention, and defenselessness, where everything remains to be done. In the peripheries, people live out in the open without protection. Here is where the defenseless live and where the excluded, the hungry, and the homeless walk. Since we are so used to security, order, and stability, we are asked to get out of ourselves, seek conversion, and take risks. Proximity is created from Bethlehem's manger, Golgotha, and the garden where Jesus was buried. In the peripheries, angels sing peace and love, the poor feel redeemed, and we are all reborn to the joy of resurrection.



The 150th anniversary of the death of St. Anthony Mary Claret, Founder of our Congregation of Missionary Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, is a magnificent opportunity to remember, celebrate, and commit ourselves to the project of missionary life that he initiated, encouraged, and has accompanied during this century and a half. This project of missionary life is marked by being rooted in the divine, in the fire of the Spirit's love, and the courage in preaching the Word of God, which is the word of light and of life. That word is also of reconciliation and solidarity with those most in need and a word of salvation for the whole human family, the family of God.

²² Cf. Pope Francis, *Gaudete et exsultate*, March 19, 2018.

²³ Cf. Pope Francis, Letter to All Consecrated People on the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life (November 14, 2014), no. 2.

²⁴ Fr. M. Vattamattam, "My Spirit is for all the world" Called and sent as missionaries in an intercultural world. Rome, October 15, 2019.

1. INITIAL INTERNALIZATION

With this invocation begins the so-called “Apostolic Prayer” of St. Anthony Mary Claret, Founder of the Missionary Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (Claretian Missionaries), found in no. 233 of his *Autobiography*.

This exclamation reveals his deep religious sentiment and his ardent apostolic charity. He exclaimed this from a heart completely in love with God who is his Lord and Father. The exclamation “O my God and my Father” must be understood in the entirety of the prayer and this, in turn, in the broader context of his missionary biography. To avoid simplifications, which sometimes occur in those who have not carefully read his works, we must broaden our gaze and contemplate Claret’s understanding of the relationship between God, man and the world.²⁵

If we were to consider Fr. Claret as if he were a man of our time, living amidst secularism and postmodernity, it would be difficult to affirm his deeply religious spirit, expressed already in his early years of life, cultivated by his parents and parish life, and increased through the reading of the Word of God, personal prayer, the associations to which he belonged and his vocational fidelity to ministry. His environment was marked by signs of belief and Christian convictions were prominent. Everything in his environment was theocentric. Man, the cosmos, and history had God as their origin and their end. Claret contemplated his own existence as a journey guided by divine providence. “Divine Providence has always watched over me in a special way...” (*Aut.*7). “My God, how good you are! How rich in mercy you have been to me!” (*Aut.* 21). “Yes, how many thanks I owe God. My Father, may you be blessed for the great providence and care you have always shown me wherever I have been” (*Aut.* 125).

The interjection “Oh” is the expression of a pure emotion of wonder and admiration. Exclamations, with interjections, support the language of the heart. They were common in the saints and in pious books of the 19th and 20th centuries before Vatican II. Today they are not used as often. But we should not underestimate them because they are part of the fabric of religious sentiment and Christian spirituality, based on the Old Testament and the New Testament. Jesus on the cross cries to the Father: “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?” referring to Psalm 22:2. Thomas confesses before the Risen Jesus: “My Lord and my God!” (Jn 20:28).

* Published in Alabar, servir, amar y conocer. La oración apostólica. Meditaciones, Provincia de Santiago, Madrid 2016. (English translation soon to be published.)

²⁵ When I wrote this commentary, this book was not published: A. de Prado Postigo, *Con infinito exceso. La fe cristiana a la luz de un Amor sobreabundante*. Sal Terrae, Santander 2016. The author devotes an initial meditation with the title *Oh!* (pp. 27-30). I recommend reading this beautiful meditation from St. John of the Cross, since it supports what I indicate in this text.

2. CLARET'S JOURNEY OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Today we have many studies about Claretian spirituality. We see how God's grace is revealed in Claret, witness, missionary and apostle. I suggest doing this simple work on your own: take the *Autobiography*, the autobiographical documents, the resolutions and spiritual notes from the Founder and carefully examine Claret's progressive growth by looking at the dates and texts and comparing the expressions he used. As has happened to others, you will see very clearly these three stages:

1. The years before the foundation, characterized by the outward imitation of the apostolic virtues of Jesus, Mary, the prophets, the apostles, and the saints.
2. The years in Cuba and the first years in Madrid, characterized by the internalization of the presence of God through the experience of the theological virtues and the passive virtues.
3. The years after the reception of the grace of the conservation of the sacramental species until his death, which are years of transformation in Christ. "It is Christ who lives in me."

In *The Mission of the Claretian Today* (MCT) it says: "Imitating, reliving and allowing himself to be interiorly transformed by Christ, Claret, driven by the dynamism and urgency of his apostolic zeal, lived a life of abnegation, poverty and meekness, cultivating all those virtues which would dispose him to become an adequate instrument in extending the Reign of God. The title, APOSTOLIC MISSIONARY, sums up his essential definition" (MCT 56).

The *Apostolic Prayer*, which he had been reciting in his heart, may be placed in the third stage. Claret had lived intensely the outward imitation of Jesus, had experienced slander and persecution, had shed his blood, had experienced deeply the presence of God in his life, had been stirred up by apostolic charity, and was now free for total surrender in service of God's glory.

3. THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY AS A REFERENCE

In commenting on the first exclamation of the *Apostolic Prayer*, I do so from perspective of the *Autobiography*. Only occasionally is a reference made to Claret's Resolutions and Spiritual Notes. But it would be well worth commenting on it from these personal writings and the Lights and Graces.

3.1. Claret Writes for Us

Pedro Laín Entralgo conceives of autobiographies as a broad personal frame of reference; where confessions, intimate diaries and memoirs can be included. He says:

Take into your hand any autobiographical account. Isn't it amazing for a man to take up a pen and tell others the story of his own life? Why does the man surrender to such a pilgrim task? We may be able to answer this provocative question by asking ourselves another related question: To whom does a man talk about his life when he really wants to talk about it? Three possible answers: Man can talk about his life to God, himself, and other men. Thus, three literary genres are born, distinct in human and literary terms: 'Confessions,' 'Intimate Diaries,' and 'Memoirs.'

Let us be clear. If a man writes his memoirs for someone to read, it is to men, to other men, to whom he directly addresses his narrative. But, speaking to men, the narrator himself can address the personal God in whom he believes, a God who hears and judges whatever men do. This is the case of St. Augustine. St. Augustine 'confesses' his life to God, and through his confession and praise, he tries to 'justify' himself before Him. When such is the intention of the writer, men are 'witnesses' to the

confession, which, consequently, is directed to its potential readers with a rigorously indoctrinating, edifying plan. Therefore, confessions are never cynical, even if they sometimes become terribly sincere.²⁶

These considerations give rise to the value of Fr. Claret's *Autobiography* as a confession of how he lived his relationship with God in missionary service. The Colloquies with God – Lord and Father – with Jesus and with Mary, which are often interspersed in his narratives and at the end of the chapters, are confessions of faith and encouragement to those who read them.

The *Apostolic Prayer* corresponds to no. 233 from the *Autobiography* of our Holy Founder. It is the conclusion of chapter XII of Part Two, in which Fr. Claret describes the inspirations that led him to preach missions, which were the examples of the Prophets, Jesus Christ, the Apostles, the Holy Fathers and other Saints.

To deal with the deep and extensive content of this prayer, we must appreciate Claret's apostolic spirituality, whose journey is reflected in the *Autobiography*. Also, of course, in his letters and many spiritual and apostolic writings. Here we will pay special attention to the *Autobiography* because it is entirely a confession of how he understood and lived his vocation as an apostle. It was written between 1861 and 1862. He then lengthened it in 1865. These were the years of his human, spiritual and pastoral maturity. He wrote it following the order of his spiritual director, Fr. Josep Xifré, and he does it with a certain repugnance. It was embarrassing for him (cf. *Aut.* 1).²⁷ Those who knew him closely came to confess that he had omitted much of the extraordinary things God had done in him. Fr. Paladio Currius wrote: "As for what he himself says about himself, we are witnesses from what we have seen, that it is much truer than he says; much more than what he does not say, perhaps out of his great humility. If only we knew how to imitate him!"²⁸

For Claretian Missionaries, the *Autobiography* has a foundational value. It points to the rock from which we were hewn (cf. Is 51:1b). It is the basic text for inspiring and shaping our missionary life. It has paradigmatic value, for in it we discover the process of a life dedicated to the Gospel. It emphasizes the spirituality of those who are passionate about the cause of Jesus and let themselves be moved by the Spirit so that all humankind may live as children of God and be happy.

3.2. The "Apostolic Prayer"

Leaving aside the question of whether it is original, what can be said with certainty is that it is a prayer applied to himself, it reflects very well his concerns, aspirations, desires and is consistent with his way of living his missionary life. At the end of the narrative of his first trip to Rome, during which he tried to make himself available to the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith for them to send him anywhere in the world, he made this prayer:

How good you are, my Father. Let me serve you always with fidelity and love. Give me your constant grace to know what pleases you and the will power to put it into effect. My Lord and Father, I want nothing more than to know your holy will, so that I may do it; nothing more than to love you with all my heart and serve you with all fidelity. My Mother, Mother of Fair Love, help me! (*Aut.* 136).

²⁶ P. Laín Entralgo, *Vestigios. Ensayos de crítica y amistad*. Madrid 1948, 367.

²⁷ The General Plan of Formation of the Congregation includes this topic in no. 120. "Claret wrote his *Autobiography* at the express command of Fr. Xifré, his spiritual director and then Superior General of the Congregation (cf. *Aut.* 1; EA p. 102). Without such a command, it would never have occurred to him to do so, since a work of this sort was quite alien to his character and temperament. Once he had begun the work, it dawned on him that it could be helpful for his missionary sons. He wrote it, then, with a deliberately formative intention. He wrote it as a Founder, for the missionaries of his Congregation (cf EA pp. 77-99). It is, then, both a testimonial and pedagogical document (cf EA p. XVII)."

²⁸ *Carta de Paladio Currius a Claret*, Valls, 6 de enero de 1880. Photocopy: General Archives CMF: GC 19, 29. St. Ignatius said that all the saints of the Church were more filled with grace, and favors from God, than their historians say about them.

In the Spiritual Exercises of 1849 he made no resolutions, but he wrote this thought on a small piece of paper:

In this world, a person can say he loves God, provided he is pleased that God is God and that He is loved and served by everyone and is pained to know that God is offended and grieved. And he strives to make Him known, loved and served by all, and to prevent all the sins he can.²⁹

In no. 42 of the *Autobiography*, he had already written this exclamation: “My God, make all creatures come to know, love, and serve you with full faith and fervor. Give glory to the Lord, for he is good: for his mercy endures forever.”

On the other hand, we have the so-called *Definition of the Missionary* or “Reminder” – two coinciding texts³⁰ – which are a compact synthesis of the spirit of Claret, reflecting his inner personality and the strength of his apostolic zeal.³¹ These texts are contemporary to the Apostolic Prayer. Paul VI, commenting on this definition at the General Chapter in 1973, said: “See here, projected towards you, a whole program of holiness, based on courageous renunciation of oneself, the fruit of its fertile evangelical vitality. It points out to you clearly, with expressions of clear Pauline dynamism, the good to which your personal and community life must aspire; the following and imitation of Christ to impulses of charity that is always operative.”³²

4. BACKGROUND OF THE EXCLAMATION “O MY GOD AND MY FATHER!”

4.1. *Seeking the Glory of God*

Claret was a believer and an apostle who was concerned about the glory of God. Only if God is God will everything be in order. God is infinitely good, and he is Father. He is our creator, and everything must be directed toward his glory. It hurt Claret that men are far from God, that they go against His will. He had compassion on them and sought ways to bring them to a knowledge of His beauty, of His wisdom, of His love.

When he began his missionary journeys throughout Catalonia he did so with this goal in mind: the greatest glory of God and the salvation of souls (*Aut.* 199). In his resolutions from his Spiritual Exercises, he renewed this goal: “I will direct and do everything for God” (1843). “I resolve to...direct all things to Him, not seeking in anything my own glory, but only the glory of God” (1850). “I will do everything for the greater glory of God,” he repeated that same year. “I will do each thing with the greatest care...and I will say: *Ad majorem Dei gloriam*. For you, Lord” (1860).

It is no wonder, then, that in explaining the reason for his preaching, he said:

My aim is to make God better known, loved, and served by everyone. If only I had all human hearts, with which to love God! My God, people do not know you! If they did, you would be loved far more than you are. If people only knew your wisdom, power, goodness, beauty, and all your divine attributes, they would all have become seraphim consumed with the fire of your divine love. This is my aim: to make God known, so that He may be loved and served by all (*Aut.* 202).

²⁹ *Mss. Claret*, II, 10. Cited in ACW, p. 763.

³⁰ Cf. *Aut.* 494 and *Mss. Claret*, X, 87.

³¹ Cf. ACW, p. 410-412. Footnote 563. Fr. Clotet wrote: “No one was better suited to the definition than to our beloved Father” (J. Clotet, *Vida edificante del Padre Claret, Misionero y Fundador*. Transcription, revision and notes by Jesús Bermejo, Claretian Publications, Madrid 2000, p. 261).

³² Paul VI, Speech to the General Chapter, Declarations and Decrees of XVII and XVIII Claretian General Chapters [Claretian Publications, Bangalore, India, n.d.] p. 5).

He then added:

Another of my aims is to prevent all the sins and offenses that are being committed against God--that same God who is loved by seraphim, served by angels, feared by powers, adored by principalities--that God who is offended by a vile earthworm, man. Be astonished at this, you heavens! If a noble knight saw an innocent damsel being outraged and in distress, he could not contain himself but would rush to her aid. How, then, can I do enough when I see God offended and outraged? (*Aut.* 203).

In the *Definition of the Missionary*, Claret will say that he thinks only of how he will imitate and follow Jesus Christ in seeking always and only the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls (*Aut.* 494). It coincides with the aim he pointed out to the Congregation of Missionary Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in the *Constitutions* of 1862: To seek in all things the glory of God. At the end of his life, Claret will write this gift: "All things that I do, I will do, every one of them, as perfectly as possible. The impelling cause will be the Love of God. The intentional cause will be the greater glory of God. The final cause will be to do the will of God."³³

4.2. *God Is my Father*

When Claret spoke *about* God a set of divine attributes appears: He is the Lord, the absolute good, most perfect, eternal, all-powerful, most gracious, omnipotent, compassionate, merciful, provident, and several others he employed in his Catechism and in different writings. When he spoke *to* God, he related to him with reverence, admiration, veneration, praise, thanksgiving, filiation, intimacy, tenderness, trust, strength, availability and surrender. The Holy Spirit taught him to praise God continually.³⁴ He called him *God* and called him *Father*. He often repeated blessings: "Blessed be you, my God."³⁵ On one occasion he said: "My Father, may you be blessed..." (*Aut.* 125). Sometimes he said God, and he added "who is my Father." I have extracted some texts from the *Autobiography* where he referred to the invocation of God as Father:

"...sin not only condemns my neighbor but is mostly an offense against God, my Father. This idea breaks my heart with pain and makes me want to run like... And I tell myself, 'If a sin is infinitely malicious, then preventing a sin is preventing an infinite offense against my God, against my good Father'" (*Aut.* 16).

"My God, my Father! Help me to prevent all sins, or at least one sin, even if I should be cut into pieces in the attempt" (*Aut.* 17).

"Yes, how many thanks I owe God. My Father, may you be blessed for the great providence and care you have always shown me wherever I have been" (*Aut.* 125).

"Wouldn't I be the greatest criminal in the world if I didn't try to prevent the outrages that men are perpetrating against God, who is my Father? My Father, I shall defend you, although it should cost me my life" (*Aut.* 204).

"Lord, I want to know nothing but your holy will, that I may do it, and do it, Lord, as perfectly as possible. I want nothing but you yourself, Lord, and in you--and only through and for you--all other things. For you are all I need. You are my Father, my friend, my brother, my spouse, my all. I love you, my Father, my strength, my refuge, and my consoler. Make me love you, Father, as you love me and wish me to love you. I know, my Father, that I do not love you as I ought, but I am quite sure that a day will

³³ ACW, pp. 854-855.

³⁴ Cf., ACW, p. 773.

³⁵ Cf. *Aut.* 82, 152, 169, 250, 299, 305, 322, 324, 354, 356, 492, 613, 703. Sometimes this expression is the fruit of the feeling of veneration and gratitude.

come when I will love you as much as I desire to because you will grant me this love I ask through Jesus and Mary” (*Aut.* 445).

Through these examples, he manifested his filial relationship with God, who was his Father, to whom he entrusted himself and from whom he expected everything. He was everything: Friend, brother, spouse. Tenderness is evident and underlying the exclamations are the burning embers of the Spirit. It is neither fictitious nor intimist. It is a pure and elevated love. It has echoes of a unique mystical experience, proper to the saints who are entrapped by the You who possess them and they feel that it is more than sufficient for them.

It may be appropriate to clarify, for those whose personal relationship with God becomes familiar through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, that in Fr. Claret this relationship with the Father happened simultaneously with the three persons of the one God. The *Autobiography* is loaded, of course, with references to Jesus Christ and not so many – it is true – to the Holy Spirit.

Claret’s filial attitude was based on his configuration with Christ, the one anointed by the Holy Spirit (Lk 4:18; *Aut.* 118).³⁶

4.3. My Father and Father of all Humankind

Claret understands we have been created to know, love, and serve God (cf. *Aut.* 327). But what should we make of his using the possessive “my” pronounced in the *Apostolic Prayer* and on so many other occasions when referring to God and Father? It is a way of emphasizing the relationship between God and the chosen soul, in this case the apostolic missionary. The mother who has several children, when she takes the little one in her arms, exclaims “My child, my love!” But she does not exclude her other children. Claret was not a solitary man, nor did he have a solipsistic vision of life, but he felt he was a missionary in the Church, the Body of Christ, with a universal vision.

Even since childhood, he manifested an unbounded zeal in the form of compassion. Later, filial love for the Father kindled his zeal for the salvation of all his scattered children. As a seminarian, he identified with the Servant to be the light to all the nations. The parish seemed narrow to him for his mission. He did not want to be a bishop so that he would not be tied to one place because “My spirit goes out to all the world.” While in the royal court he showed his desire to travel throughout the world preaching the Holy Gospel. He dreamed of his Congregation spreading throughout the world.

His goal was very clear, and he will remember this:

The Lord made me understand that I would not only have to preach to sinners but that I would also have to preach to and catechize simple farmers and villagers. Hence, He said to me, The poor and needy ask for water, and there is none, their tongue is parched with thirst. I, Yahweh, will answer them. I, the God of Israel, will not abandon them (*ibid.*, 17). I will make rivers well up on barren heights, and fountains amid valleys; turn the wilderness into a lake, and dry ground into a water spring (*ibid.*,18). And

³⁶ Fr. Claret spoke of the Holy Spirit in the *Catecismo explicado* [*The Catechism Explained*] and in *Colegial instruido* [*The Well-Instructed Seminarian*] when writing about the sacraments of baptism, confirmation and orders. In the *Autobiography* see these texts: Nos. 118, 156, 439, 440, 443, 653, 664. The key text is no. 687: “The Lord told me both for myself and for all these missionary companions of mine, *Non vos estis qui loquimini sed Spiritus Patris vestri, et Matris vestrae qui loquitur in vobis* [It is not you who speaks, but the Spirit of your Father and of your Mother who speaks in you]. So true is this that each one of us will be able to say: *Spiritus Domini super me, propter quod unxit me, evangelizare pauperibus misit me, sanare contritos corde* [The Spirit of the Lord upon me, because he anointed me, sent me to preach the good news to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted]. This text about love for enemies is the same: “*Vivo ego, iam non ego, vivit vero in me Christus* (Ga 2:20) [I live no longer, but Christ lives in me]. Anyone with the Spirit of Christ understands and fulfills this precept [love of enemies] well. Whoever does not have the Spirit of Christ neither understands nor practices it” (ACW p. 910). On the spirituality of the divine sonship of Jesus, cf. G. Uríbarri Bilbao, *La mística de Jesús, Desafío y propuesta*, Sal Terrae, Santander 2018, especially Chapter 6.

God our Lord made me to understand in a special way those words: *Spiritus Dominis super me et evangelizare pauperibus misit me Dominus et sanare contritos corde* (Is 61:1). (*Aut.* 118)

The apostolic missionary had received as gifts his own vocation and the four cardinal points, five talents, to be always available to proclaim the Gospel throughout the world.³⁷

If he turned in prayer to the Father whom he loved, he knew that he was the Father of all humankind. He lived centered on and enamored by the love that had set him on fire and spread his own experience of salvation to others. He did not stop on the way; he was not interested in things that could disrupt his mission. He served all kinds of people, and he had the same message for everyone: To live as children of the Father.

5. ECHOES IN OUR MISSIONARY LIFE

The exclamation: “O my God and my Father” does not leave us and cannot leave us indifferent. It questions our sensitivity before God, before our Father. It asks us to examine our intimacy, that is, our close and trusting relationship with the one who loves us and is more than enough. It suggests that we rekindle our passion for God, for people who cry out to us from their poverty, and for all things, that is, the whole of creation.

This exclamation warns us that before entering the content of the *Apostolic Prayer* our hearts must be prepared. No one can turn to God, who is our Father, from a place of distraction, frivolity, dispersion, tiredness, or disinterest. And even less from the oblivion of our sins. It asks us to be in tune and this requires observing how we are doing in these aspects, among others:

5.1. *The Image of God*

We have been created in the image of God and He wants to relate to us. For Claret, God was Father, and he maintained a relationship of sonship throughout his life. He tried to identify himself with Christ, the Son of the Father, for the greater glory of his name. Can we say the same thing? Does our relationship with the Creator, the savior, the Sanctifier, spring from an open, rooted, and passionate heart?

Our relationship with God depends on our image of Him.³⁸ As does our indifference or our fervor for his glory. Have you ever wondered why, sometimes, you do not even dare say “O my God and my Father”? We are not talking about sentimentality, but rather about a deep faith in the one who is the source of life and love. A Claretian, called to be on fire with love, cannot but feel deep tenderness before the Father, the God of love. He feels impelled to love his neighbor (cf. *Aut.* 448). “Anyone who has the Spirit of Christ loves God, and from this same branch sprouts the love of his neighbor, whom he regards as the son of God, the image of God, redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ, and destined for heaven.”³⁹

5.2. *Humility and Recognition*

The invocation here, at the beginning of the prayer, springs from a humble heart that recognizes where all the benefits of which he enjoys come from and how they have been given to him to serve. The present age is a challenging time for humility. There is too much egocentricity and, therefore, forgetting about God and neighbor. Humility is a humble virtue, but it is not lowliness. Humility is linked to truth and

³⁷ Cf. SSW, p. 312.

³⁸ I strongly suggest reading two monographic issues of the magazine *Vida Religiosa* devoted to *Images of God*, books 2 and 3 from 2010.

³⁹ ACW, p. 910.

charity. Humility gives us the exact measure of who we are. It is essential for us to accept our own earthly condition. When there is no humility, there is the risk of hogging, manipulating the image of God in our own favor or of shady interests; the truth is not accepted and limits are not discovered, the reasons behind sadness and the dark areas of human interior life.

Humility springs from recognition and is therefore an insightful virtue. It is the virtue of the saints. If humility is to walk in truth, we see that there is proportion between God and man, between our heavenly Father and us, limited creatures. Fr. Claret considered this virtue to be the first and most essential in order for the missionary to bear fruit.

I have come to know that the virtue of humility consists in this: in realizing that I am nothing, can do nothing but sin, and depend on God in everything--being, conservation, movement, and grace--and I am most happy to be dependent on God rather than on myself. (*Aut.* 347)

One of the most genuine feelings of Claret's spirit was recognition and gratitude to God for the benefits he had received. That is why the exclamation must be seen as a going out of himself, as a permanent emanation toward the One who had given him so many good things. Among the many texts, I will share these two: "My God, you have been so good to me! I have been late in understanding the many great graces you have given me" (*Aut.* 35). "May you be blessed, my God, for enriching me with this gift, for it is yours, not mine. I know that of my own initiative I cannot say a word or have a single good thought! May it all be to your greater glory!" (*Aut.* 299).

Claret identified with what St. Augustine said: Humility is "a sign of Christ" and a sign of Christians, because "where there is humility, there is charity." A Claretian who says in his heart: "O my God and my Father" is making a confession about God's sovereignty and is accepting His infinite goodness. It is an act of veneration and praise.

5.3. *Compassion and Apostolic Zeal*

The experience of God's tenderness and of his liberating power from limitations, from sin, led to compassionate love and apostolic zeal. Claret always had his eyes fixed on Jesus, the Son of the Father, our savior. He turned toward God, the compassionate and merciful Father. When he invoked him in his *Apostolic Prayer*, his interior exuded compassion toward his neighbor who is unhappy, who may be lost and who cannot enjoy divine goodness. These were his words:

I am by nature very compassionate. The idea of an eternity of torment made such a deep impression on me, either because of the tenderness it evoked in me or because of the many times I thought about it, that it is surely the thing that to this day I remember best. This same idea has made me work in the past, still makes me work, and will make me work as long as I live, in converting sinners, in preaching, in hearing confessions, in writing books, in distributing holy cards and pamphlets, and in having familiar conversations, etc. (*Aut.* 9)

And in the following paragraph he added:

The reason is that, as I have said, I am so soft-hearted and compassionate that I can't bear seeing misfortune or misery without doing something to help. I would take the bread out of my own mouth to give it to the poor. In fact, I would abstain from putting it into my mouth to have something to give to those who are asking for it. I am even scrupulous about spending anything at all on myself when I think of the needs I can remedy. Well, then, if these momentary physical misfortunes affect me so much, it is understandable what I feel in my heart at the thought of the everlasting pains of hell – not for me, but for all those who willingly live in mortal sin. (*Aut.* 10)

This leads us to think that, to conjugate the verbs, *know, love, serve and praise*, which appear in the *Apostolic Prayer*, compassion and apostolic charity are required as a predisposition. Compassion leads to a

passionate commitment to one's neighbor. The Good Samaritan was moved by compassion and did everything that could be done to heal the injured man (Lk 10:33-35). Claret continues to invite us to clothe ourselves with the feelings of Christ who became one of us, sought out the lost sheep and took pity on the exhausted crowd. The exclamation "O my God and my Father" makes us come out of ourselves, be aware of the real needs of the world and share our spiritual and material goods.

5.4. *Trust and Surrender*

The invocation "O my God and my Father" came from Claret's trust in God the Father. He knew that He embraced him as he was, with his limitations and weaknesses, and this gave him confidence and security, in missionary service. His surrender was the fruit of the trust that enveloped Claret's relationship with the Father. He would do anything that was for His greater glory out of love. He no longer cared about slander or persecution. He bore everything out of the love for those who were chosen, so that they too may obtain the salvation and eternal glory in Christ (cf. 2 Tim 2:10).

Claret devoted chapter XXX of the first part of the *Autobiography* to the virtue of love of God and neighbor. He began by saying:

Love is the most necessary of all the virtues. Yes, I say it and will say it a thousand times: the virtue an apostolic missionary needs most of all is love. He must love God, Jesus Christ, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and his neighbors. If he lacks this love, all his talents, however fine in themselves, are for nothing. But if, together with his natural endowments, he has much love, he has everything. (*Aut.* 438)

Later, he emphasized the missionary service of the Word.

The Word of God brought all things out of nothingness. The divine Word of Jesus Christ restored all things. Christ told his Apostles: *Euntes in mundum universum, praedicate evangelium omni creaturae* [Go into the whole world, preach the gospel to every creature]. St. Paul told his disciple Timothy, *Praedica Verbum*. Society is perishing for no other reason than that it has withdrawn from the Church's Word, which is the Word of life and the Word of God. Societies have become weak and are starving because they have ceased to receive the daily bread of God's Word. Every plan of salvation will be sterile unless there is a return to the fullness of the great, catholic Word. (*Aut.* 450)

Today the missionary service of the Word is especially in need of trust and surrender. We need witnesses. In the words of Paul VI:

The world which, paradoxically, despite innumerable signs of the denial of God, is nevertheless searching for Him in unexpected ways and painfully experiencing the need of Him- the world is calling for evangelizers to speak to it of a God whom the evangelists themselves should know and be familiar with as if they could see the invisible (EN 76).

Is this not what is hidden behind Claret's exclamation at the beginning of his *Apostolic Prayer*?

OUR MISSIONARY PASSION

TO SEEK AND STRIVE IN ALL THINGS FOR THE GLORY OF GOD*

The title for this reflection is: “To Seek in all Things the Glory of God.” This expression, which is so profound in Christian spirituality, has for us Claretian missionaries a special resonance because “the aim of our Congregation is to seek in all things the glory of God, the sanctification of our members and the salvation of people throughout the world, in keeping with our missionary charism in the Church” (CC 2).

For Fr. Claret, the two words “seek” and “strive” express the basic attitude of his passion to evangelize: *Seek* the glory of God and *strive* for the glory of God. In the apostolic institutions which he founded or created he included in their sole *aim* three aspects: The glory of God, the sanctification of its members and the salvation of humankind.⁴⁰ These three aspects of the same aim have different resonances in each of the institutions. They determine our way of being, our sense of meaning and our way of acting. We must pay attention to what is added: “in keeping with our missionary charism in the Church.”

The understanding of this aim has been clear for us, in light of the charism of the Founder and of his intention in founding the missionary Congregation according to his apostolic experience. In the *Autobiography* he says: “I talked with a number of priests whom the Lord had given the same spirit that motivated me” (*Aut.* 489).

1. SEEK, STRIVE, GLORY OF GOD

The first things to clarify are the questions:

Who seeks and strives? What do they seek and strive for? And why seek and strive?

We are Missionary Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary who seek and strive.

We seek the glory of God. And we seek and strive for the salvation of people throughout the world. It is the reason for our project of missionary life. We have three reference points:

- 1) Jesus seeks and strives in all things the glory of God. Jesus does not live unconsciously or like a robot programmed by the Father and thrown into the world. He was sent and lived among men, felt worried, astonished and he sought the Father’s will, he asked— and asked a lot— and praised and glorified the Father who had sent him. I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly (Jn 10:10).

* *Lecture to Claretian Students* at the Claretian Seminary of Colmenar Viejo, Madrid, 2017.

⁴⁰ In the aims of these Claretian institutions: *Hermanidad del Santísimo e Inmaculado Corazón de María; Conferencias de San Vicente de Paúl; Plan de la Academia de la buena prensa; Academia de San Miguel; Apuntes de un plan; Comunidad del Escorial, etc.*

- 2) Mary, our Mother and Foundress. She was the first woman who knew how to unite, with wisdom and fullness, “seeking and striving for the greater glory of God.” She listened to the Word and sought the will of God, sought and strove to help Elizabeth, sought Jesus in the temple and among the people, strove to help a young couple, sang the Magnificat, remained faithful at the foot of the cross and prayed with the community that awaited the Spirit of her Son, the Holy Spirit.
- 3) Anthony M. Claret, apostolic missionary, who sought and strove for the glory of God through missionary service of the spoken, written and taught word. Faithful follower of Jesus and faithful Son of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Mary’s example enlightens and invigorates Claret’s life and ours. The missionaries are forged in her Mother’s Heart as sharp arrows of the Word to glorify the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Today we are missionaries in this Church which seeks, which is going forth to the peripheries and which calls for pastoral conversion to be available to bring the Gospel to the entire world and to grow the family of the children of God for the glory of his name.

But, before that, let me clarify the terms that explain our missionary passion, proper to the man who is on fire with love.

1.1. *Seek*

St. Augustine, in his treatise on the Trinity, has this timely advice: “Let us therefore so seek as if we should find, and so find as if we were about to seek. For ‘when a man has done, then he begins’ (Sirach 18:7).”⁴¹ To seek is to open oneself to the mystery to go forth to encounter the One who is coming.

In the seeking, *restlessness* and *awe* come together. They are interrelated.

Restlessness is that condition, not so much psychological as entitative, in which man feels obliged to have to determine his *being*, to configure his self, assuming his own responsibility. *Restlessness* is expressed as an impetus that brings us to the need to ask, to observe, to realize what situation we are in, to take seriously the things and destiny of people, especially the poor, the excluded, those who suffer injustice, the sick and sinners (the glory of God, the image of God, in them is disfigured).

Awe, which is loaded with *admiration*, is an inner excitement, a kind of soul shaking, an almost religious tremor. We are awed by the grandiose, things that surpass us and go beyond us. Awe is very close to religious faith. It is man’s first reaction when faced with mystery. Seeking arouses admiration for everything that is good, just, beautiful, sublime, fascinating, kind and true. To truly live is to be in awe. To be in awe of that permanent miracle that is life itself and that are all things. To believe entails being in awe. It is to be shaken by a reality that overwhelms us. Although not all awe is faith, every true faith has some awe. Therefore, when, by custom, routine or banality, awe disappears, faith also vanishes: “You who seek God, take heart!” (Ps 69:33); “Seek me, that you may live” (Amos 5:4).

Seeking is full of silence and words, of lights and shadows, of voids and assurances, of fears and hopes, of trembling and serenity, of supplications and praises. One seeks by feeling things out, venturing, walking, discerning, deciding. When we seek God, we make room to find Him and we enter into communion with all beings and all humankind, particularly the most lost.

1.2. *Strive*

⁴¹ Saint Augustine, *On the Trinity*, IX, 1, 1.

The word Claret used in Spanish is ‘procurar’ which comes from the Latin ‘procurare’ and its meaning is *to provide a necessary thing*. The first connotation is related to the action to be taken. It is equivalent to try, aim, strain, endeavor, work for.

Strive is a verb that implies application, surrender, toil, to go to great lengths (*desvivir* in Spanish).

I believe that to apply it to our subject it is fitting to correlate *strive* and *to go to great lengths*.

The philosopher Julián Marías offered a substantial commentary on the Spanish word “*desvivirse*,” which could be translated “to go to great lengths,” from which I extracted these words:

While the verb *vivir* [to live] is, as they say, intransitive and remains calmly in itself without passing on to anything else, *desvivirse* [literally to un-live] is always an outward motion of going to great lengths for something. When something calls us and pulls us out of ourselves, it pulls us out of our peaceful center and shakes us up, when we feel a very lively eagerness and we do not suffice for ourselves, we go to great lengths (*nos desvivimos*). It is the supreme form of interest. But what is interest other than *inter esse*, to be between things? When we are interested, we are there, between things, going to great lengths. And if *vivir* [to live] is to be between things that surround us and ask something of us, in our circumstances, is there another way of living other than to be interested, in other words, *desvivirse* [to go to great lengths]? Will it not happen that the one who does not go to great lengths does not live either?⁴²

1.3. *Glory of God*

It is an expression that puts God at the center of creation and human life. “The heavens declare the glory of God; the firmament proclaims the works of his hands” (Ps 19:1). Glory is the weight, the importance and the respect that inspires. Glory is the splendor of the one who reigns. God manifests Himself in His glory with power and majesty. Moses asks him: “Please let me see your glory” (Ex 33:18). In God resides the basis of all glory, also expressed as honor in some scripture translations: “My deliverance and honor are with God, my strong rock; my refuge is with God” (Ps 62:8). “With your counsel you guide me, and at the end receive me with honor” (Ps 73:24).

The entire Old Testament is full of gestures and appearances of the glory of God. The invitation to “give glory to God” is frequent (cf. Jr 13:16; Ps 29:1; 96:7; 115:1; etc.) which means not only recognizing, with all its consequences, his divinity, power, competence, holiness, beauty, etc., but also *to get involved* in the occasion of glory.

In the New Testament, Jesus is the revelation of God’s glory; he is the splendor of his glory, the effigy of his substance (cf. Heb 1:3). In his flesh dwells and reveals the glory of the only Son of God (cf. Jn 1:14-18). The glory of God shone “on the face of Christ” (2 Cor 4:6). He is the Lord of glory (cf. 1 Cor 2:8). All the ministerial, paschal and eschatological aspects are concentrated in Jesus. The life that Jesus begins in the incarnation and which is consumed in his death-resurrection is entirely a progressive existence glorifying the Father (cf. Jn 13:31).

In the face of the manifestation of glory, which, before power and splendor, is benevolence and love that dignifies, St. Paul sings “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion” (2 Cor 1:3). “For from him and through him and for him are all things. To him be glory forever” (Rom 11:36).

⁴² Julián Marías, *Breve tratado de la ilusión*, Alianza Editorial, Madrid 1984, p. 137.

2. HARMONIZING THE TERMS ACCORDING TO THE PRIMACY OF THE MISSION

The terms, which evoke the three aspects of the aim of the Congregation cannot be separated. They ask for harmony and unity according to the mission.

The missionary character of the Congregation was clear in the minds and expressions of the Founder and his successors Fr. Josep Xifré, Fr. Martin Alsina, Fr. Nicolás García, etc.⁴³ On the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Congregation, the Apostolic See wrote a letter to the Fr. General and said:

You heirs *in solidum* of his double spirit, ascetic and apostolic, like Elisha from Elijah (2 Ki 2:9), bear an integrated image of his life. In it was found the origin of that innate and strong unity of life, because of the close and harmonious fusion of intimate and perfect contemplation with ardent action. By virtue of this compact union, your Blessed Father, impelled by love for Christ and for souls, was always and everywhere holy even to the smallest detail, always and in all things a completely selfless apostle, offering everything with simplicity of heart and with joy, and he encouraged and convinced others by his example of the same offering of love (cf. 1 Chr 29:17).

Never forget that this total dedication and consecration must penetrate and inform in depth the life and work of the Congregation and of each of its members, since it, as proclaimed in the solemn and approved formula of the profession, is ordered to the triple aspect of the single aim (CC. I^a, n. 2), for which the Congregation has been constituted, namely to seek and strive for the greater glory of God, the religious perfection of the life and the salvation of the souls of the whole world and the spiritual good in all and by all means.⁴⁴

The special General Chapter (1967), following the conciliar doctrine of Vatican II, made two statements: One on *the Charism of Saint Anthony Mary Claret as the Founder of our Congregation* and the other on *the Spiritual Heritage of the Congregation*. In both cases, the charism and missionary spirit of the Congregation, which has its expression in the service or ministry of the Word, was recognized and reaffirmed.

Indeed, the missionary status of the Congregation comes from the missionary spirit (the charism) that we received in the Church through the presence and mediation of St. Anthony M. Claret. The renewed *Constitutions* speak of our mission in these terms:

The ministry of the word, through which we communicate the total mystery of Christ to humanity, is our special calling among the People of God. For we have been sent to proclaim the Lord's life, death and resurrection, until he comes, so that all who believe in him may be saved. (CC 46)

And on the missionary community:

Both in their lifestyle and in the way they perform their ministry, our local communities should so develop and unfold our original gift for serving the Church and the world that they become truly rooted in the conditions and needs of the local Church and of the world around them. (CC 14)

It has always been fruitful to return to the aim of the Congregation. It is like returning to our origins, experiencing the freshness of the charismatic experience and relaunching our missionary life. The Commentary on the Constitutions states:

⁴³ Cf. J. M. Lozano, *Misión y espíritu del claretiano en la Iglesia*, Roma, 1967, pp, 134 et seq.

⁴⁴ CMF. *Annales Congregationis*, 29 (1949-1950), pp. 283 y 284, translator's version.

The Congregation has a social structure with proportionate ends and means, but its being has deeper roots: it is a gift within the mystery of the Church and from this dimension its very being and life *is* glory, sanctification and mission.⁴⁵

Fr. Gustavo Alonso elaborated on this matter writing:

The fuller sense of ‘*obiectum*’ is obtained by proposing it as *a reality of grace*, as a vocational gift that has a consistency prior to our own operational choices. It cannot be understood in a voluntarist sense, as if it were an endeavor that our human group is going to carry out. It is, rather, a space in which we move, hand in hand with the dynamics established by Jesus, in the sense that the *Constitutions* will say beginning in no. 3.

For the Claretian, the glory of God, our sanctification in community and the salvation of people throughout the world certainly propose three different concepts, but they are a single *aim of charismatic experience*, according to which one’s own life is unified.⁴⁶

This leads us to conclude that the three aspects of the single aim are constantly overlapping and that “seeking and striving for the greater glory of God” does not acquire in us full meaning without configuring ourselves with Christ and without living the mission that has been entrusted to us in the Church. We must always bear in mind the definition of the missionary (*Aut.* 494 and CC 9) and what it means for us to be “missionaries.” According to the Directory:

The word “missionary,” understood in the light of the spiritual experience of St. Anthony Mary Claret, defines our charismatic identity. The title of “Apostolic Missionary” which he received, synthesizes his ideal of life according to the style of the apostles. This way of life implies being disciples and to follow the Master, to live the evangelical counsels in a community of life with Jesus and the group of those who are called, to be sent and to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom to the whole world.

The anointing of the Spirit to announce the Good News and the communion with Christ, the prophet par excellence, render us sharers of his prophetic function (cf. VC 48; SW 6; IPM 1; MFL 42).⁴⁷

EXCURSUS: “AIM” OR “PURPOSE” OF THE CONGREGATION

In the first editions of the *Constitutions* (1857 and 1864) in no. 2 it said: “The aim of the Congregation...” When accommodating the *Constitutions* to the Code of Canon Law of 1917⁴⁸ it said: “The purpose of the Congregation.”⁴⁹ After the Council, in the renewed *Constitutions* the term “aim” was again used.

Apparently, given that *aim* and *purpose* have a lot of similarity in meaning, this change of words should not be given great importance. But there was a change of perspective in understanding an institute in the Church. When the 1917 Code was published, religious life was spoken of as a “state of perfection” and of a “religion” which, to be approved, must have a clear founder, purpose, name, habit, laws and norms.⁵⁰ The legal, institutional and societal elements were emphasized. After Vatican II, religious life has not been spoken of as a “religion” but of “institutes” with all the variants (orders, congregations, societies of apostolic life, new forms) that are part of a Church of mystery, communion and mission and that

⁴⁵ CMF, *Our Project of Missionary Life: Commentary on the Constitutions*, Vol II, Rome, 1992, p. 55.

⁴⁶ Gustavo Alonso, *Notas sobre las Constituciones Claretianas*, Ed. Claretiana, Buenos Aires, 2012, pp. 29-30, translator’s version.

⁴⁷ CMF, *Directory*, Rome, 2011, no.26. MCT, 51 et seq. can now be added to the list.

⁴⁸ It was promulgated by Benedict XV on May 27, 1917.

⁴⁹ Not only in the 1924 *Constitutions*. Cf. CMF *Codex Juris Additicii*, 1925, no. 50. In the 1940 edition (no. 48) and 1953 (no. 50).

⁵⁰ Cf. A. Tabera Araoz, *Derecho de Religiosos*, Ed. Cocala, Madrid 1952, pp. 36 y ss.

emphasizes more the charismatic, evangelical, Christological and eschatological. The following of Christ, the community dimension and the apostolic mission are harmoniously emphasized. The words “religion” or “institute,” “aim” or “purpose” should be interpreted according to the assumptions from which they are pronounced.

There have been those among us who, maintaining the legal and moral vision of religious life as a state of perfection, have thought that evangelical perfection or personal sanctification was the primary purpose of the Congregation and have given more importance to the means than to the aim of the Congregation which reveals its distinctly missionary nature. Who has not seen such an emphasis placed on giving missions, spiritual exercises, teaching, parish life, tasks of human development, etc., that the missionary condition of one’s vocation is postponed?

A few years ago, Fr. Pere Franquesa asked: Are Claretian constitutions missionary? And he wrote:

The aim of the Congregation is one, even if it has different modalities. The aim of the Congregation is the salvation of humankind through the “Service of the Word.” By serving the Word, in preaching, we sanctify ourselves and give glory to God if we accept all the consequences that come from the “Service of the Word.” If the wording of the *Constitutions* is consistent, the chapters that follow must specify and present the consequences, means and possibilities of this purpose. The background will be the image of Christ who, preaching and fulfilling his mission, accepted the consequences that preaching the Kingdom brought upon him. Through it he fulfilled the Father’s will, because of it they condemned him to death and he suffered the personal, family and social consequences that the preaching brought on him. The same can be said of Paul.

For Claret, preaching was the motive of his sanctification and through it he glorified God. I do not think we should insist on what the “glory of God” or “personal sanctification” in the abstract may mean. These realities must be considered according to the fulfillment of one’s own mission in the world and in the Church. The Claretian mission is ‘to be servants of the Word’ and not in whichever manner or according to the current trends. It is not a question of glorifying God, of sanctifying or saving souls in the abstract or intellectually, but of carrying out this mission in the concrete circumstances in which they live according to the Claretian demands.

Claret does not aspire to a holiness that is abstract and perfectionist. His holiness was always framed in his missionary vocation, a following--configuration with Christ the evangelizer. He understood that he should not spend his life looking at his own sanctification but that he should sanctify his life by looking at others, giving himself to apostolic ministry.⁵¹

It is easy to see that the current *Constitutions*, especially if the General Chapters are taken into account,⁵² are missionary and respond to Claret’s missionary charism.

3. TO SEEK AND STRIVE FOR THE GLORY OF GOD IN CLARET

It is imperative for us, rooted in the spirit of Claret, to delve deeper into these words that he so often uses in his *autobiographical writings*: “Seek”, “strive” and “glory of God”. But the expressions that attest to his missionary passion are more numerous, even if he does not use these words. This is particularly

⁵¹ Pere Franquesa, *¿Las Constituciones Claretianas son misioneras? Análisis de los textos bíblicos*, Barcelona, 1997, pp. 129-130, translator’s version.

⁵² “Chapter Documents, besides the properly so-called norms collected in our legislation, contain evaluations and guidelines on the being and task of the Congregation. Hence, we should hold these documents in high esteem and strive to know and assimilate them as the authorised way of thinking of the whole Congregation and as the best commentary on the Constitutions.” CMF. *Directory*, Rome, 2011, no. 16. In Vol I of CMF. *Our Project of Missionary Life: Commentary on the Constitutions*, there is an appendix about the history of our *Constitutions* entitled: *Mission: the Pivotal Core of our Constitutional Texts*. It is written by Fr. Macario Díez Presa based on materials from Fr. Pere Franquesa. This appendix highlights with data the missionary character of the *Claretian Constitutions*. Cf. pp. 115-130.

appreciated by rereading the *Letter to the Missionary Theophilus*, *Selfishness Overcome*, *Ascetical Letter*, the Appendix in *Advice to a Priest*, etc.⁵³ References are also found in the *Epistolario Claretiano (EC)*, especially in letters written to the members of the Congregation or about the Congregation. But here I will define the scope, with some exceptions, to *autobiographical writings*.

3.1. *Seek in all Things*

Every person seeks their existential fullness and, in principle, seeks the common good. The “seek in all things” that marked Claret’s life and work had nothing to do with aseptic curiosity, mere fantasy, or the anxiety of wanting to know.

What defined and characterized Claret was to be an apostolic missionary. He felt he was continuing the mission of Jesus Christ, the Son sent by the Father, anointed by the Spirit to proclaim the Good News to the poor.

The Lord made me understand that I would not only have to preach to sinners but that I would also have to preach to and catechize simple farmers and villagers. Hence He said to me, *The poor and needy ask for water, and there is none, their tongue is parched with thirst. I, Yahweh, will answer them. I, the God of Israel, will not abandon them (Is 41:17). I will make rivers well up on barren heights, and fountains in the midst of valleys; turn the wilderness into a lake, and dry ground into a water spring (Is 41:18).*

And God our Lord made me to understand in a very special way those words: *Spiritus Dominis super me et evangelizare pauperibus misit me Dominus et sanare contritos corde (Is 61:1). (Aut. 118)*

In the speech Pope Benedict XVI gave to the Bernardines of Paris, he spoke of “seeking God.” He made some statements about the culture that the monks created in their search for God, but in this case, they apply to Claret’s missionary life:

Amid the confusion of the times, in which nothing seemed permanent, they wanted to do the essential – to make an effort to find what was perennially valid and lasting, life itself. They were searching for God. They wanted to go from the inessential to the essential, to the only truly important and reliable thing there is. (...) We could describe this as the truly philosophical attitude: looking beyond the penultimate, and setting out in search of the ultimate and the true. By becoming a monk, a man set out on a broad and noble path, but he had already found the direction he needed: the word of the Bible, in which he heard God himself speaking. Now he had to try to understand him, so as to be able to approach him. So the monastic journey is indeed a journey into the inner world of the received word, even if an infinite distance is involved.⁵⁴

Claret’s seeking was rooted in the fruitful strength of God’s Word. As a student, he felt the vocation to the apostolate inspired by some passages from Isaiah,⁵⁵ among which verse 3 of chapter 49 should be noted: “And he said to me: ‘You are my servant, Israel, for in you will I be glorified.’” He also experienced this call from the words of Jesus who answers his parents: “Did you not know that I must be about my Father’s business?” (cf. Lk 2:48). The Spirit and the Word took possession of Claret’s heart and made him restless about what is most essential. He lived the experience of the prophets and the apostles.⁵⁶

As a missionary, he felt possessed by the Spirit, which had consecrated him to evangelize the poor and heal those of a contrite heart. This possession was so full, that he felt like an instrument—arrow, horn—; from another came the strength and the drive, or the wind; at times, up to the roar of thunder.

⁵³ Cf. SSW.

⁵⁴ Benedict XVI, *Address to the World of Culture*, Sept 12, 2008.

⁵⁵ Cf. Is 41:8-17; 48:10-11. See the texts in *Saint Anthony Mary Claret, Autobiography and Complementary Writings*, Buenos Aires 2008, pp. 381-382.

⁵⁶ To see the extent of this, cf. J. M. Viñas, “El primado de la Palabra en la vida y escritos del P. Claret”, en: *Servidores de la Palabra. III Semana Sacerdotal Claretiana, Vic 1990*, Publicaciones Claretianas, Madrid 1991. The entire volume is interesting.

The spirit was the charity of Christ, which stirred in him the intimacy of the Father or pushed him in all directions in search of sinners who had gone astray.⁵⁷

He was very explicit: “The same Holy Spirit, by appearing in the form of tongues of fire above the Apostles on Pentecost, showed us this truth quite clearly: an apostolic missionary must have both heart and tongue ablaze with charity” (*Aut.* 440). And, therefore, he asks for this love:

My Jesus, there is one thing I ask that I know you will grant me. Yes, my Jesus, I ask you for love, for great flames of that fire you brought down from heaven to earth. Come, divine fire; Come, divine fire; come sacred fire enkindle, burn, melt, and pour me into the mold of God’s will. (*Aut.* 446)

My mother, I am hungry and thirsty for love; help me, satisfy my need. O Heart of Mary, forge and instrument of love, kindle in me the love of God and neighbor. (*Aut.* 447)

In *Selfishness Overcome* he devoted a chapter to On the Zeal We Ought to Have for the Greater Glory of God and the Good of our Neighbor. I extracted these thoughts:

Love of God and neighbor produces an effect much like that of fire. As fired gunpowder blasts anything pressed against it into the air, propelling bullets and bombshells aloft, or as fire-heated vapor sends trains racing along the rails and boats skimming over the waves, even so, the fire of the Holy Spirit sent the holy Apostles racing throughout the world...

Aflame with this same love, apostolic missionaries have reached, are reaching and will continue to reach to the ends of earth, to preach the word of God.⁵⁸ Thus they can rightly apply to 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.

A truly loving person loves both God and neighbor. The truly zealous person is also a lover, but in higher degree of love. Indeed, the greater one’s love, the more he is compelled by zeal; and, if a person has no zeal, it is a sure sign that the fire of love or charity has gone out in his heart. A person who has zeal is always yearning and striving by all means possible to make God better known, loved and served both in this life and in the next, since this sacred love knows no bounds.⁵⁹

The centrality of love for God and neighbor made Claret express himself in this way: “Thoroughly convinced that to be a good missionary it is both useful and essential to have love, I have searched for this hidden treasure and would sell everything to find it” (*Aut.* 442). “Lord, I want to know nothing but your holy will, that I may do it, and do it, Lord, as perfectly as possible. I want nothing but you yourself, Lord, and in you-and only through and for you--all other things” (*Aut.* 445).

On the other hand, looking at his initiatives and his writings, his openness and sensitivity were noteworthy because he was aware of others, all kinds of people in different situations.

Seeing that our Lord, out of sheer good will and no merit on my part, was calling me to stem the torrent of corruption and cure the ills of a moribund society, I thought that I should dedicate myself to studying and gaining a thorough knowledge of the maladies of this social body. I did so, in fact, and found that this world is nothing but the love of riches, the love of honor, and the love of sensual pleasure. (*Aut.* 357)

And he did so from a radical religious experience, from a knowledge that he was loved, created and redeemed by God. Wonder and admiration before the goodness of God stirred him to seek that God would be praised, blessed and loved by everyone. The prayers he wrote at the end of the chapters in the first part of the *Autobiography* reveal all his capacity for wonder, admiration and praise.

⁵⁷ “The ‘Apostolic Mission’ of Saint Anthony Mary Claret,” in ACW, p. 7.

⁵⁸ Elsewhere Claret wrote that “an apostolic missionary must have heart and tongue ablaze with charity” (*Aut.* 440).

⁵⁹ SSW, pp. 492-493.

In explaining the reason for his missionary travels, he added:

Another force that drives me to preach and hear confessions is my desire to make my neighbors happy. Oh, what great joy there is in healing the sick, freeing the prisoner, consoling the afflicted, and cheering the sad. All this and much more is done in bringing one's neighbors to the glory of heaven. It means saving them from every evil and bringing them to the enjoyment of every good--and for all eternity. Mortals cannot understand this just now, but when they are in glory they will know the great good that was offered them and that they will have, happily, attained. Then they will sing the everlasting mercies of the Lord and bless those who have been merciful to them. (*Aut.* 213)

In explaining the reasons for his preaching, he said:

No, I repeat, I have no mere earthly aim but a far nobler one. My aim is to make God better known, loved, and served by everyone. If only I had all human hearts, with which to love God! My God, people do not know you! If they did, you would be loved far more than you are. ... This is my aim: to make God known, so that He may be loved and served by all. (*Aut.* 202)

And in his *Self-Portrait* he noted as the first point:

The aim of my preaching is the glory of God and the good of souls. I preach the Holy Gospel, avail myself of its comparisons and use its style. I make people see the obligations they have towards God, themselves and their neighbor, and how they are to fulfill them.⁶⁰

At the heart of his life and missionary activity was Jesus. The outward imitation of Jesus, to whom he devoted many pages looking at his way of acting and speaking. But it was at the center because everything moved him toward his total configuration with Christ, who appeared in a clear way once he received the great grace of the conservation of the sacramental species. He could say, and ended up saying in the last year of his life, with St. Paul: "And I live, now not I; but Christ lives in me" (Gal 2:20).⁶¹

He imitated Jesus and, looking toward him, he made this consideration: "*He sought not his own glory*, but that of his heavenly Father. Everything He did was done to fulfill his Father's will and to save souls, the beloved sheep for whom He, their Good Shepherd, gave his life" (*Aut.* 436). Claret sought out, just as the good shepherd *seeks* out, the lost or stray sheep (cf. Jn 10:1-16).

3.2. *Strive for the Glory of God*

For Fr. Claret, the glory of God was at the same time the glory of the human person, because it is about man living⁶² as a child of God, with the dignity that Jesus acquired with his death and resurrection. To strive for the glory of God is to carry out the necessary diligences so that the messianic project of salvation that Jesus realized in the world may be fulfilled: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor..." (Lk 4:18). Where the glory of the human person is mistreated and denied, the glory of God is obscured and denied. All his evangelization begins from "we have been created not only to know, love, and serve God but also to praise Him" (*Aut.* 327).

For Claret, to strive for the glory of God is to enter into the saving dynamism of Jesus who came into the world to give us the glory that the Father had given him (cf. Jn 17:22). Jesus is our glory because he is God's life communicated to man. In the Word made human, we have seen the glory of the Father (cf. Jn 1:14). Through the outpouring of the Spirit, we are graced and glorified in Christ and in Him we have

⁶⁰ "Apostolic Missionary: Self Portrait, (1840-1846)," in ACW, p. 610.

⁶¹ Op. cit. "Lights and Graces from 1869," p. 967.

⁶² Following the comment of St. Irenaeus: "For the glory of God is a living man; and the life of man consists in beholding God. For if the manifestation of God which is made by means of the creation, affords life to all living in the earth, much more does that revelation of the Father which comes through the Word, give life to those who see God." *Against Heresies*. Book IV, Ch. 20, no. 7.

a path open to glorify the Father. This is how Claret considered that every man and woman is called to glorify God who has created and redeemed them.

Claret's holistic view of humankind made him care for their happiness and well-being in this world. He would not express it as we do today, but he organized and carried out works for this purpose. It is enough to remember his reflections on agriculture, in which he spoke of his love and desire for the well-being and happiness of the men entrusted to him and proposed as models Bartolomé de las Casas and Cardinal Cisneros.⁶³

What is the basis of this excessive eagerness? "To strive" for the glory of God is the attitude of those who are passionate about the Kingdom of God and its justice (cf. Mk 6:12). This is the rereading we need to do today of Claret's intense passion to work and make others work for the greater glory of God and the good of their brothers and sisters.⁶⁴ He sought the glory of God in the face of the poor, of the defenseless, of the sinners with whom Christ had identified himself in order to establish the Kingdom of God, which begins in this world.

In the *Ascetical Letter ... to the President of One of the Choirs of the Academy of Saint Michael*, he wrote about the love of God in an ardent and passionate way. He said:

Love your neighbors as you love yourself. Love them not for your own use and advantage, but in God, for God and for your neighbor's own good. Love means wishing someone well. Love your neighbors, then, and do all the good you can for them. Love or charity is patient; hence you should patiently put up with your neighbors whenever they bother or pester you.⁶⁵

"To strive" in Claret was a true "*desvivirse*" (go to great lengths), which is the supreme form of interest and surrender. It is not an expression of voluntarism, but rather a sign of docility to that love of Christ which impelled him (cf. 2 Cor 5:14). He reflected how he went to great lengths in the definition of the missionary,⁶⁶ which is the definition of his life, according to Fr. Jaime Clotet. He repeats twice *strive*, which meant nothing less than to exert himself and put all his effort into supporting that which the love for God and neighbor impelled him.

The affection and adherence that the Congregation has had throughout its history for this definition of the missionary is a clear sign of having found in it the most genuine spirit of Claret and our own. This "reminder" or "memorial" that he sent to Fr. Xifré and left written with its variants⁶⁷ in *Aut.* 494, has

⁶³ San Antonio María Claret, *Escritos Pastorales*, BAC, Madrid 1997, pp. 298-299. In the introductory words to: *Delicias del campo*, he said: "The aim is the physical and moral good, temporal and eternal." In the third edition, Barcelona, 1860, p. IV

⁶⁴ In a letter to Fr. Josep Caixal, he asked them to work for the glory of God, for he does not know what else he can do, because he is exposed to dangers and deprives himself of all rest day and night. *Carta a D. José Caixal* (5 de agosto de 1848), EC, I, pp. 275-276.

⁶⁵ SSW p. 144.

⁶⁶ Here are some references to delve further into this topic: J. Melé, *Humilde obsequio de un Hijo agradecido a su querida Madre Congregación*, Ed. Corazón de María, Madrid, 1925; J. M. Lozano, *Misión y espíritu del claretiano en la Iglesia*, Roma, 1967 (See also his english edited edition, *The Claretians. Their Mission and Spirit in the Church*, Transl. by J. Daries (Chicago 1980); J. M. Bermejo, «La definición del Misionero», *Noticias de Bética (CMF)* 53 (1973) 78-82; J. M. Viñas, *Nuestro ser claretiano en las Constituciones. Constitución fundamental. Curso espiritualidad claretiana*, Roma 1982; J. M. Viñas-J. C. R. García Paredes, *Our Project of Missionary Life: Commentary on the Constitutions*, vol. II, Rome, 1992, pp. 56 et seq. On this point, cf. J. Álvarez, *Claretian Missionaries, Return to Origins, Vol. I, Transmission and Reception of the Claretian Charism, Vol II*. Trans. By J. Daries of 1997 original, Claretian Publications, 2000, p. 94-119; P. Franquesa, *¿Las Constituciones Claretianas son misioneras? Análisis de los textos bíblicos*, Barcelona 1997; G. Alonso, *Notas sobre las Constituciones Claretianas*, Editorial Claretiana, Buenos Aires 2012 (English translation pending).

⁶⁷ Cf. J. Sidera, "La definición del misionero en la tradición manuscrita", *Studia Claretiana* 29 (2014) 86-132.

resonances in other passages of the same *Autobiography* that evoke the figures of the prophets (*Aut.* 215-220); of Jesus Christ (*Aut.* 221-222); of the Apostles (*Aut.* 223-224)⁶⁸ and of the saints (*Aut.* 225-226).

In the course of meditating on the lives and works of these saints, I used to feel such a burning within me that I couldn't sit still. I had to get up and run from one place to another, preaching continually. I can't describe what I felt inside me. Nothing tired me; I wasn't terrified at the awful calumnies being leveled against me, or afraid of the greatest persecutions. Everything was sweet to me, as long as I could win souls for Jesus Christ and heaven and save them from hell. (*Aut.* 227)

I emphasize especially his mention of Saint Paul:

Also the zeal of St. Paul has always awakened my deepest enthusiasm. He went from place to place, a chosen vessel, carrying the teaching of Jesus Christ. He preached, wrote, and taught in synagogues, prisons--everywhere. He worked and made others work, in season and out of season. He suffered scourging, stoning, persecutions of all sorts, as well as the fiercest calumnies, but he was never daunted; on the contrary, he so rejoiced in tribulations that he could say that he did not wish to glory, save in the cross of Jesus Christ. (*Aut.* 224)

And because of this zeal, as the culmination of what it means to strive for the glory of God, he closed the chapter with the Apostolic Prayer:

O my God and my Father, may I know you and make you known; love you and make you loved; serve you and make you served; praise you and make all creatures praise you. Grant, my Father, that all sinners be converted, all the just persevere in grace, and all of us attain to eternal glory. Amen. (*Aut.* 233)

When he was going to be consecrated bishop, Claret wrote a rule of life. Later he reformulated it. In it is this resolution: "I resolve always to walk in God's presence, referring all things to Him, never seeking my own praise, but only greater grace to imitate Jesus. I will always try to ask myself how Jesus would have acted under similar circumstances" (*Aut.* 648).

Whoever strives for the glory of God does not rest until he achieves the glorification of God the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit. To glorify is to give glory, and it involves acknowledging, thanking, serving, and praising. The people in the Old Testament were asked to "give glory to God," which was translated into recognition and adherence to God for his omnipotence, for his wisdom, for his beauty, for his fidelity and for his mercy. Jesus glorified the Father with his life, fulfilling his will, in solidarity with the weak and the poor, being on the side of the excluded, seeking what was lost, dying and rising for all humankind. We glorify God by following Jesus and prolonging His saving mission. He left us his example: "I glorified you on earth by accomplishing the work that you gave me to do" (Jn 17:4); and he also said to us: "By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples" (Jn 15:8). In short, configured with Christ, we glorify God by living the mission entrusted to us according to the choices that derive from our missionary charism in the Church. The Founder reminded us of the words of Jesus: "*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven*" (Mt 5:16).

4. THE CONSTITUTIONS TELL THE CONGREGATION HOW TO SEEK AND STRIVE FOR THE GLORY OF GOD

The *Constitutions* express the identity of an institute, reflect the founding spirit and that of the Founder, and at the same time send forth this same charism once again in service of the Church. The *Constitutions* are not mere norms or guidelines for the congregational community, because, above all, they are

⁶⁸ "With great concern and zeal they rushed from one kingdom to another, preaching zealously and without human fears or concerns (...)! Scourging could not intimidate them into giving up their preaching; on the contrary, they counted themselves fortunate to be able to suffer something for [the love] of Jesus Christ" (*Aut.* 223).

indicative of an evangelical and evangelizing life. Through them we are offered a renewal of the original charism of the Congregation. And so, by approving them the Church recognizes them with her authority.

Our *Constitutions*, as I have said, include these expressions: *to seek in all things the glory of God...and the salvation of people throughout the world*. They are evoking Claret's missionary style. At the same time, they provide a series of indications for reaching this aim.

I have gathered here the times that the words "seek", "strive" and "glory of God" appear in the *Constitutions*.⁶⁹ When reviewing the documents and paragraphs where these words appear, they speak for themselves. We are sufficiently prepared to draw the appropriate conclusions about our personal and community life.

4.1. *Glory of God*

We are missionaries by grace. Called to the style of the Apostles, we have also been granted the gift to follow Jesus (CC 4). Jesus possesses the glory of the Father (Heb 1:13). The whole life of Jesus is a glorification of the Father (cf. Jn 13:31). Therefore, our configuration with Jesus, as I have indicated, leads us to be "the praise of glory" (Eph 1:6) and a manifestation of glory (cf. 1 Cor 6:20; Phil 1:20). "By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples" (Jn 15:8; cf. Mt 5:16; Rom 7:4).

The thoughtful reading of the *Constitutions* makes us think about our involvement in the glorification of God in this world.

When we open the *Constitutions*, we find the Decree of Approval that says:

The Congregation of Missionaries, Sons of the Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary, whose Generalate is located in this beloved City, was founded by St. Anthony Mary Claret. Their aim is to seek in all things the greater glory of God, the sanctification of their members and the salvation of people throughout the world. (p. 4)

Fr. Gustavo Alonso, Superior General, in presenting the *Constitutions* exhorts:

Let us receive this rule of life with a Gospel-inspired willingness to learn, for it would have no meaning at all unless it sprang from the Gospel itself. Let us direct all our efforts toward this rule as the point where all our longings come together. Let this rule be a word (...) that shapes apostles in the spirit of St. Anthony Mary Claret: apostles joined in a plan of life and mission aimed at achieving the glory of God, the sanctification of our members and the salvation of people throughout the world. (p. 6)

Within the text of the *Constitutions* there are references in these paragraphs:

2. When pointing out the aim of the Congregation.
9. In the Memorial of the Missionary.
20. Speaking of the gift of chastity from which the Lord Jesus manifests the power of His glory. Cf. on rejoicing in poverty (CC 26).
41. In considering humility from all gifts we may have received to give glory to God alone.
44. In inviting us to rejoice in hardship and scarcity: To boast only in the Cross of Jesus Christ (cf. Gal 6:14).
52. In considering progress in missionary life, setting our hearts on God, toward the glory to come.

⁶⁹ The references made here are where the words "*buscar*" [seek], "*procurar*" [strive] and "*la gloria de Dios*" [the glory of God] appear in the Spanish text of the *Constitutions*. Sometimes the terms used in English translation of the *Constitutions* will vary. Obviously, there are other paragraphs where these three phrases are implied or explained, in one way or another.

66. When speaking of novices. I copy here the full paragraph:

In everything they do, whether it be studying, eating or simply relaxing, God's glory should be the aim and wellspring of their action (cf. 1 Cor 10:31). For this reason, they should cultivate prayer without ceasing or lukewarmness. Thus, by the time they leave their year of probation, they will have made real progress.⁷⁰

81. Speaking of deacons bearing witness to his glory (cf. Acts 7:55-57).

159. In the formula of religious profession, as in synthesis, it says: "In answer to God's call, I, ... desire to seek his glory more earnestly, to devote myself to him more fully, and to follow Christ more closely, as the Apostles did, in the ministry of Salvation throughout the world."

4.2. *To Seek*

The verb *buscar* (to strive) is mentioned, as we have seen, in the Decree of Approval and in the paragraphs:

1. When pointing out the aim of the Congregation.

24. When speaking about poverty: "Placing all our trust in the Lord and not at in domination or wealth, we seek before all else the kingdom of God, which belongs to the poor."

29. When speaking about obedience: "Since a true missionary may be known by his obedience, all of us, sharing as we do in the same vocation, jointly seek to know and do God's will so that we may be able to fulfill our common mission in the Church amid the changing circumstances of times, places and persons."

46. When referring to the mission: "Sharing the hopes and joys, the sorrows and trials of the people, especially those of the poor, we readily offer to join efforts with all who are striving to transform the world according to God's plan."

60. When discerning God's will with regard to one's vocation.

104/2. When considering the governance of the community: "By jointly seeking and discerning God's will for the community and for each of his brothers..."

4.3. *To Strive*

The journey that the *Constitutions* invite us to undertake is that of *praise, transparency* and *action with deliberation* (which is to strive).

The verb *procurar* (to strive) is used in *Constitutions* with some insistence. Remember that it is equivalent to try, aim, strain, endeavor, work for, do what one can, take care to, see to, seek, etc. It implies application, surrender, going to great lengths, toil. Not alone, but as a Congregation.⁷¹ This verb is not often commented upon, but it is revealing of zeal, of missionary passion, of apostolic charity. At its heart are imitation and configuration with Christ, apostolic fraternity, a life of prayer, living out the vows, the theological virtues and apostolic virtues.

It appears in the Decree of Approval and in the presentation of the approved text.

⁷⁰ The appendix to the *Constitutions* of 1964 stated: "The new Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary must always have the glory of God as their guide and as a final end. This must be their entire purpose to which they must direct all their actions. Having the right intention is at the heart of the works. So whether they preach, study, pray, eat, or recreate, they should always aim toward the glory of God, thereby growing in merit and holiness and making themselves worthy of His grace" (no. 20), translator's version.

⁷¹ I invite the reader to re-read the *Constitutions* and check the times when "our Congregation" or "our" is used.

In the constitutional text, the verb *procurar* is used in paragraphs:

9. Twice in the definition of the missionary.
18. Alluding to the elderly: “In turn, these veteran missionaries should always strive to show that they are ever young at heart.”
26. In addressing poverty: “Our missionaries should aim at being truly poor both in reality and in spirit.”
35. On prayer: “During sacred seasons and on feast days, we should try to attune our prayers to the spirit of the Church, which offers the faithful a portrayal of the total mystery of Christ in the liturgy.”
40. In conformity with Christ: “Driven by apostolic zeal and the joy of the Spirit, we too should bend every effort toward making God known, loved and served by everyone. We should love each and every human being, longing and working for the day when all may come to share the blessedness of the kingdom already begun here on earth.”
41. (Twice), in the same paragraph: “If we are to experience within us the attitude of Christ Jesus, who emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, we must seek humility, which prepares us to receive God’s grace, is the foundation of Christian perfection, and is thus an absolutely necessary virtue for any minister of the gospel. Let us give all glory to God for any gifts we may have received, and through them bear much fruit.”
43. In the same chapter: “As associates in the work of Redemption, we should strive to be conformed to Christ, who said: ‘If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross.’”
44. In the same chapter: “We should bear in mind that the Lord has told us: ‘Anyone who loses his life for my sake and for the sake of the Gospel will save it’ (Mc 8:35). It is, then, most fitting that we strive to rejoice in all sorts of hardship: hunger, thirst, nakedness, hard work, slander, persecution and every tribulation (cf. 2 Cor 11:16-33; Rom 5:3), so that we may be able to say with the Apostle Paul: ‘It is out of the question that I should boast at all, except of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.’ (Gal 6:14).”
60. On helping those who leave: “Out of Christian charity, all our missionaries, but especially superiors, should do what they can to help one who was left or been dismissed to be able to lead a decent secular life.”
61. The novices: “Since the novices are preparing for profession in our Congregation, they should take care to lay the foundations for a missionary life, acquire a knowledge of its main elements and begin to practice the evangelical counsels.”
64. The novices: “They should safeguard their missionary vocation with Gospel humility remembering that they have nothing except what they have received from God or for which they will not have to render an account (cf. Mt 12:36; Lk 16:2). Therefore, let them acknowledge the gifts they have received and, by putting them at the service of all people, let them see to it that these gifts bear fruit (Mt 25:14-30).”
66. The novices: “In everything they do, whether it be studying, eating or simply relaxing, God’s glory should be the aim and wellspring of their action (cf. 1 Cor 10:31). For this reason, they should cultivate prayer without ceasing or lukewarmness. Thus, by the time they leave their year of probation, they will have made real progress.”
72. The students: “Besides this basic training, each student should receive special preparation to fulfill his priestly, diaconal or lay function in the Church, each in his own way and according to his own gift seeking to share in one and the same spirit of Christ” (cf. 1 Cor 12:4-11).

77. Prefect of Students: “the one entrusted with such a momentous office must be well instructed in his duties and perform them with utmost care.”

84. Priests: “They should ask the Lord for, and strive to practice, the kind of pastoral charity that will make them ready to lay down their lives for their brothers and sisters” (cf. Jn 10:11-17; 1 Jn 3:16).

159. In the profession: “In answer to God’s call, I, ... desire to seek his glory more earnestly, to devote myself to him more fully, and to follow Christ more closely, as the Apostles did, in the ministry of Salvation throughout the world.”

5. “SEEK” AND “STRIVE”, VERBS THAT ARE CONJUGATED TOGETHER AND IN FIRST PERSON PLURAL.

These verbs are interrelated both in the writings of the Founder and in the *Constitutions*. Seeking leads to striving. At other times, when striving, there is still seeking.

They appear in the fundamental Constitution (nos. 2 and 9) and this gives rise to interpreting and living together the entire project offered by the *Constitutions*, while living in community, in the praxis of the vows, in the path of growth or progress in missionary life, as well as in carrying out the mission through the service of the Word.⁷²

To conjugate these verbs by interrelating them leads us, like Claret, to live:

- 1) *From the experience of the Spirit, of following Jesus and in the image of Mary.* Therefore: With poverty, humility, right intention and praise.⁷³ The glory of God does not appear where one is vain, idolizes him or herself or wants to take God’s place. It is an antidote to being self-referential and desiring notoriety.
- 2) *From the manifestation of divine glory* in his configuration with Christ.⁷⁴ We must create a culture in which, through the glory of man, what makes him truly free and responsible for his destiny before God and before his fellow human beings is evident.
- 3) *From the ardent apostolic charity* for souls, reflected in the definition of the missionary. Today to speak of souls is to speak of people who suffer, who are poor, who are lost or have lost the meaning of life, who suffer exclusion because of their origin, their race, their social condition, and who suffer loneliness. They thirst for the Word of God and cannot quench it because there is no one who provides it.

The Congregation, in the footsteps of Claret, has learned to be attentive, to understand, discern and take on the challenges that have been presented to it. The *principle of analyzing the reality* has been at work, which is not only a merely sociological principle, but also a theological and pastoral principle. It suffices to review the most recent General Chapters, especially since 1979, in which appeared *The Mission of the Claretian Today* (MCT). In these years, Pope Francis, the General Chapter and the Fr. General make constant calls to us for pastoral conversion and ecological conversion. To seek paths, to initiate processes of personal, community and pastoral transformation.

⁷² The Founder qualified a service of the Word in this way: “If God’s Word is spoken only naturally, it does very little; but if it is spoken by a priest who is filled with the fire of charity-- the fire of love of God and neighbor--it will wound vices, kill sins, convert sinners, and work wonders. We can see this in the case of St. Peter, who walked out of the upper room afire with the love he had received from the Holy Spirit, with the result that through just two sermons he converted 8,000 people, three in the first sermon and five in the second” (*Aut.* 439).

⁷³ This is well noted in the concern he shows when writing the resolutions of his spiritual exercises. See years 1843, 1850, 1859, 1860. Also in the *Autobiography*, cf. nos. 328, 391, 436, 445, etc. With regard to the praise of the Father’s glory, cf. *Aut.* 299, 309, 458.

⁷⁴ He reflects this in the Memorial of the Missionary: *Aut.* 494. And above all, after receiving the grace of the conservation of the sacramental species (1861), he reflects it in *Aut.* 694, 754-756.

“Like the Church (cf. *EN* 14), we have meaning only in relation to Mission: to seek and ensure that God the Father is known, loved, served and praised by all⁷⁵ and that the Kingdom – his plan of love for humanity and Creation – is fully realized.”⁷⁶

On the other hand, these verbs have *the same subject* in their conjugation, which is the Congregation as a community of people who have been called together, who believe, who live together and who carry out the mission together. Let us remember the words of the Founder:

The Lord told me both for myself and for all these missionary companions of mine, *Non vos estis qui loquimini sed Spiritus Patris vestri, et Matris vestrae qui loquitur in vobis* (Mt 10:20). So true is this that each one of us will be able to say: *Spiritus Domini super me, propter quod unxit me, evangelizare pauperibus misit me, sanare contritos corde.* (*Aut.* 687)

The Constitutions are written in plural. They begin by saying “Our Congregation of Missionaries.” And in no. 4: *We, the Sons of the Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary, have also received a calling like that of the Apostles and have been granted the gift to follow Christ in a communion of life and to go out into the whole world to proclaim the good news to every creature* (cf. Mk 16:15).

All of us who have professed in the Congregation are called to carry forward its project of missionary life. A project that is open to the signs of the times and places, that calls for sensitivity, being in tune, compassion, constant conversion, availability, enthusiasm and capacity for sacrifice. Claretians cannot lose the custom of conjugating the verbs of missionary life with the plural first person pronoun: We! This is how the dynamism of the congregational community is assured in the fulfillment of its threefold aim: proclaiming the Gospel, being servants of the Word, we sanctify ourselves and give glory to God.

Our spirituality is missionary, in the style of Claret. By making his journey our own, we learn to seek and strive for the glory of God and to be Missionaries of the Spirit; we will live in the style of the Apostles; we will let Mary be our model in her heart; and we will truly be men on fire with love. Let us capture the Memorial of the Missionary in our lives:

Nothing daunts him: he delights in privations, welcomes work, embraces sacrifices, smiles at slander, rejoices in all the torments and sorrows he suffers, and glories in the cross of Jesus Christ. His only concern is how he may follow Christ and imitate him in praying, working, enduring and striving constantly and solely for the greater glory of God and the salvation of humankind. (CC 9)

In the growth of our missionary life, it will help us to become familiar with the autobiographical writings of the Founder, his letters, his most important works in order to better understand the *Constitutions* and to reread them in the light of the calls that God makes to us today (cf. MS 5-33).

Joy and collaboration are unequivocal signs of our missionary passion.⁷⁷ Our proclamation of the Gospel is choral, symphonic. It carries the spirit of a beehive (*Aut.* 608). That is the value of integration, synergy. They are essential conditions for initiating and continuing the processes of transformation that open us to new scenarios of evangelization. Without forgetting that this passion begins with *seeking* and *striving*.

CONCLUSION

Seek and strive in all things for the glory of God:

1. They contain an entire program of missionary life with human, Christian and charismatic roots.

⁷⁵ Cf. CC 40; *Aut.* 233.

⁷⁶ The Chapter Document from 2015 *Witnesses and Messengers of the Joy of the Gospel* (MS), no. 2 reminds us of this.

⁷⁷ He reflected this in nos. 608 and 609 of the *Autobiography*.

2. They look to the heavens: “God is greater” without losing contact with what is human.
3. They arouse praise and commitment to glorifying God.
4. They are nourished by listening to the Word of God, by imitating Jesus and in prayer.
5. They reveal a permanent availability, full of vigilance and compassion.
6. They encourage people to walk in hope and commitment to the poorest and most needy.
7. They ask for an analysis of the reality, study and boldness to build the Kingdom.
8. They demand the ability to constantly review internally and take risks in the face of the future.
9. They bring strength in the face of difficulties, setbacks and persecutions.
10. Remember: We are Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, evangelizers of tenderness.

Among the *Spiritual Notes* from Fr. Claret, there is one with two emblematic texts: The first is “An Offering to Suffer.” The other is the definition of the missionary, which is already well-known. I have extracted the final part of the offering:

And to fulfill your eternal and holy will, I offer myself, to suffer and to sacrifice my life in confessing your holy faith by teaching and preaching it throughout the world. I do not wish to spare myself any work, trouble or tribulation that I may have to suffer for this work, including death itself. But mistrusting my own frailty, I beseech you, my Lord and God, to send upon me your Holy Spirit, to enlighten and set me afire with divine love, and to guide, send and govern me along the straight path of my divine Master Jesus Christ and of the Virgin Mary, Mother of God and my Mother, whom I desire to serve and please, both here on earth and later there in heaven for all eternity. Amen.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ ACW, p. 902.

CLARET, A MAN OF SOLIDARITY*

INTRODUCTION

IS IT POSSIBLE TO SPEAK OF SOLIDARITY IN FR. CLARET?

The *Ideario del Colegio Claretiano* [Claretian College's Statement of Principles] has three references to solidarity. Two are mentioned when talking about social values⁷⁹ and the other when dealing with methodological and pedagogical options.⁸⁰

This statement of principles is inspired by the way St. Anthony Mary Claret saw, lived and worked. But is it possible to speak of solidarity in Fr. Claret? Because Fr. Claret did not speak of solidarity in his *Autobiography*. The category of *solidarity* has its noble origin in Roman law and is entrenched in the chosen people (Israel) from the perspective of a strength that comes from having the same origin in their common father. However, if Claret he had spoken about it, surely he would have criticized it, because during Claret's time it was being used by positivism and secularism as a substitute for Christian justice and charity. Consider Pierre Leroux, Auguste Comte, the fellow believers of Saint-Simonianism and Encyclopedism.

Later on, *solidarism* appeared as a social system that sought to overcome individualism and collectivism at the same time. This system emphasizes the mutual corporate involvement of men who, occupying different positions and performing different jobs, collaborate in seeking the common good (against individualism); and at the same time, it emphasizes the freedom of each person and the harmony of the parts within the whole (against collectivism).

The notion of "solidarity" was a notorious force within the workers' movement, which advocated a concept of the nature of man based on hostility and competition. That is why the defense of mutual support arose in "opposition." But in recent years, displays of and exercises in solidarity are emerging through the activity of numerous cooperating and helping organizations.

* Lecture at Colegio Askartza, Leioa, (Biscay), April 14, 2008.

⁷⁹ "The social sense of goods and the awareness of the responsibility to share with those who have less or have nothing. Justice and solidarity as an option for the poor, the marginalized and the excluded, especially with people in need and migrants" (18.3). "Opening up to the peoples of Europe, creating bonds of mutual enrichment and a new awareness of responsible and supportive citizenship in the new world framework" (18.3), translator's version.

⁸⁰ "On the basis of reading and analyzing reality, the College prepares the future citizen for their active and committed insertion in the construction of a more just society. It promotes teamwork in its various forms, encourages involvement in the life of the Center and its surroundings, and encourages work in the cooperation and solidarity initiatives" (19.7), translator's version.

When we speak today of *Claret, a man of solidarity*, we do so from the understanding that Christians have of solidarity. This word, contrary to what has been happening with other words,⁸¹ has grown in acceptance and use by the Church, who has given it such depth and density as to consider it a moral virtue.

WHAT SCOPE DO WE GIVE TO THE WORD SOLIDARITY?

It is refreshing to ask this basic question, because whether we feel joyful or have a guilty conscience all depends on how we respond to it. Solidarity is challenging, it is a wake-up call in the face of what is established and what is right, and it forces us to take a position and to mobilize ourselves. Solidarity recalls Mario Benedetti's refrain: "It all depends on the pain with which it is seen."

The word "solidarity" is one of the most widely used in our language.

It is a word that captivates. It is a very fortunate word of great social prestige in the civil vocabulary. Currently, "solidarity" is in danger of becoming a stereotype that we make fit everything and thus wear it out. And a word that is worn out is that which, in the euphoria of its discovery, does not follow realities that authenticate it.⁸²

It helps to free us from a guilty conscience produced by the endless situations of suffering, hunger, thirst, poverty and injustice that continually bombard us through the media. Solidarity has created the so-called "solidarity marketing," which includes credit cards, luxury dinners, investment funds, trade unions, political parties, concerts, fashion shows, sports teams, volunteering during free time, etc. But, when solidarity does not exceed the merely occasional or private sphere, it is an analgesic that calms or numbs the deep concerns of the human being who perceives, in their own depths, their obligation to do more for those who need it most. Nobody walks indifferently by a beggar unless he is callous. It is easy to silence our conscience by saying that he should work, that others will have pity on him, that he should go to social security, or that he should use established centers.

When we want to take solidarity seriously, we must take it on according to all its aspects: anthropological, sociological, ethical and, for us Christians, from the perspective of the light offered to us by the person of Jesus.

1. SOLIDARITY IN A PERSON'S CORE

Solidarity, before being considered an activity, must be seen as a way of being. We are people in the world coexisting with others. To live is to live-with. The fact that "we are, because we are with others" makes us committed to them. Because we commune in human existence, the other affects me, belongs to me and I belong to them. Society, thus, is a community of people who are free and accountable to others. Hence, we are truly human, insofar as we respond not only to the other, but from the other, from their life and death, from their fragility and happiness. "Self-realization cannot be pursued; it must ensue, and it only does so as the unintended side effect of one's personal dedication to altruistic goals and acts."⁸³

It is true that solidarity is marked by a difference: ourselves and others. Sometimes, because they are not "ours," we think that only a simple extrinsic relationship binds us together. We give them something, (money, time, food, etc.) but we don't make them part of our lives. But "never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee" (John Donne).

With good reason Z. Bauman ended up saying:

⁸¹ Words like charisma, community, seminary, etc. have been secularized. Solidarity, however, has become Christianized or, better yet, has been returning to its Judeo-Christian origins.

⁸² J. Bestard, *Diez valores éticos*, PPC, Madrid 2004, p. 138, translator's version.

⁸³ V. Frankl, *La psicoterapia y la dignidad de la existencia*, Buenos Aires 1992, 17-18, translator's version.

Accepting the precept of loving one's neighbor is the birth act of humanity. All other routines of human cohabitation, as well as their predesigned or retrospectively discovered rules, are but a (never complete) list of footnotes to that precept. Were this precept to be ignored or thrown away, there would be no one to make that list or ponder its completeness.⁸⁴

Rarely, solidarity is spoken of in its original and deeper sense, such as when it is defined as "sharing even what is necessary to live."⁸⁵ The hard part begins when we are faced with the dilemma of helping without receiving anything in return; of helping even if no one knows, not even the person we help. Solidarity can only be achieved through a true conviction of equality and justice.

There is no solidarity in indifference because solidarity reveals a high degree of internal integration and stability; it is the unlimited and total adherence to a cause, situation or circumstance, which involves taking and sharing benefits and risks for it. Solidarity evokes a common effort in multiple directions, a breadth of combinations within the same action to achieve the same objective. Its call arouses the human masses, provokes working groups and struggles, brings people from around the world closer together and unites them in action almost spontaneously.

Solidarity is practiced without distinction to creed, sex, race, nationality or political affiliation. The distances that separate them, the diverse conditions of their life or culture that make them different, do not matter. There are motives, events and interests that magically unite people and make them live in solidarity in common action.

That is why solidarity also includes an ethics, a commitment within the group of solidarity. Men and women of solidarity forget themselves and integrate themselves into common action, devoting themselves voluntarily to it, making their own intellectual, physical, moral and spiritual gifts available to their "companions".

The construction of a new humanity necessarily involves solidarity among all people. Only universal solidarity can serve as the basis for a new society. Solidarity based on private interests is particularistic, belligerent. Therefore, the demands of solidarity today are numerous and no one can honestly exempt themselves from them.

2. "SOLIDARITY" IN CHRISTIAN THOUGHT

In the 19th century, while Comte and Èmile Durkheim knew how to make a sociology based on solidarity according to the values of universality and co-responsibility, Christians did not succeed until very late in composing a sociology of justice and evangelical love.

It was Leo XIII who, with his great encyclical *Rerum novarum* (1891), began a path of social doctrine that the successive pontiffs have followed until today. Pius XII, from the beginning of his pontificate (1939), used the term "solidarity." John XXIII, in *Mater et magistra* (1961), calls upon human solidarity and Christian brotherhood as principles governing relations between workers and employers (cf. nos. 23, 155) and between nations (cf. no. 158⁸⁶).

The Second Vatican Council enshrined the use of the word "solidarity." It mentions the word nine times and places the incarnation of Christ as the ultimate, vital and generating foundation of it.⁸⁷ It thus breaks all privatization of love and justice and opens all people and nations to interrelation and universal

⁸⁴ Z. Bauman, *Amor líquido. Acerca de la fragilidad de los vínculos humanos*. Fondo de Cultura Económica, Madrid 2005, p. 106. (For English version see *Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds* Polity Press, Cambridge 2003).

⁸⁵ The expression is from John Paul II, who is considered the Pope of solidarity. Every day history is driven by millions of acts of solidarity in the midst of a world at war. Solidarity is the engine of history.

⁸⁶ In this paragraph he cites what he had already said: "We are all equally responsible for the undernourished peoples." (*Address from May 3, 1960*; cf. *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* (AAS) 52 [1960] 465).

⁸⁷ Cf. Apostolicam Actuositatem (AA) 6, Gaudium et spes (GS) 22 and 32, Ad Gentes (AG) 21.

co-responsibility.⁸⁸ Above all, John Paul II has been the great promoter of solidarity, particularly since his encyclical *Sollicitudo rei socialis* (SRS). I have gathered here the fundamental affirmations of the Church's social doctrine⁸⁹ on solidarity:

1. *Solidarity has its deep roots in the life and in the message of Jesus of Nazareth*, a man of solidarity with all men even unto "death on the cross" (Phil 2:8). Jesus of Nazareth makes the connection between solidarity and charity shine before the eyes of all men and women, illuminating its full meaning:⁹⁰ "In the light of faith...one's neighbor is then not only a human being with his or her own rights and a fundamental equality with everyone else, but becomes the living image of God the Father, redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ and placed under the permanent action of the Holy Spirit" (SRS 40).
2. *Solidarity is a social principle and moral virtue*. The new relationships of interdependence between individuals and peoples, which are, in fact, forms of solidarity, must be transformed into relationships that tend toward a true and proper ethical-social solidarity, which is the moral requirement that is inherent in all human relations. Solidarity is therefore presented under two complementary aspects: as a *social principle*⁹¹ and as a *moral virtue*.⁹²

Solidarity is also a true and proper moral virtue, not "a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all."⁹³

3. *Solidarity is related to the common growth of humankind*. There are close links between solidarity and the common good, solidarity and the universal destiny of goods, solidarity and equality between individuals and peoples, solidarity and peace in the world.

3. KEYS TO UNDERSTANDING CLARET AS A MAN OF SOLIDARITY

We therefore place ourselves within this Christian perspective of solidarity. Claret, as the slogan of the bicentenary recalls, was born to evangelize. His vocation was defined by the noun 'apostolic missionary.'

3.1. *The Foundation of Solidarity in Claret*

Those that followed the French revolution developed *freedom* and *equality* extensively, but not *brotherhood*. It has become obscured, both in thought and in action. It demands too much commitment. For Christians, Jesus makes us *free* and makes us *equal* and makes us *brothers and sisters*. In the

⁸⁸ GS 57 speaks of the sense of international solidarity and GS 90 speaks of the participation of the Christian in international institutions, which both develop the universal sense and promote the formation of a consciousness of genuine universal solidarity and responsibility. From an ethical point of view, solidarity has been a virtue that has been under suspicion and considered second-class. However, our society would not work well if it did not have solidarity as a basis for mutual understanding and appreciation, such as a concern for the weakest and a focus on everyone's causes, both private and public. Cf. V. Camps, *Virtudes públicas*, Espasa Calpe, Madrid 1990, pp. 33-54.

⁸⁹ Cf., Pontificio Consejo de Justicia y Paz, *Compendio de la doctrina social de la Iglesia*, BAC, Madrid 2005, pp. 193-196. Note that the order is reversed. For the English version see Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, USCCB, Washington DC 2005.

⁹⁰ Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo rei socialis* (SRS), 40: AAS 80 (1988) 568: "Solidarity is undoubtedly a Christian virtue. In what has been said so far it has been possible to identify many points of contact between solidarity and charity, which is the distinguishing mark of Christ's disciples (cf. Jn 13:35)."

⁹¹ Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1939-1941.

⁹² Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1942.

⁹³ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter SRS, 38: AAS 80 (1988), 565-566.

brotherhood acquired by the shedding of his blood, with which he seals the new covenant with the Father and with humankind, solidarity concentrates all the bonds and responsibilities that we can imagine. In Christ we all depend on each other. This is what St. Paul expresses in the doctrine on the Mystical Body.

Claret had a Christian view of the world and of men and women. They are God's creation. Claret called, felt and lived as the brother of all men and women.

Everything that has been written about Fr. Claret's Christocentric spirituality⁹⁴ has to be remembered to understand the reason behind his solidarity. Claret contemplated Christ, followed in his footsteps, imitated his way of life and his way of evangelizing and, at the end of his life, said that he "lives in Christ."⁹⁵

It is against this Christological and fraternal background that we should read the activities that he undertook to help his fellow human beings, his brothers and sisters. As we can see, it was a far more serious and decisive foundation than that offered by simple sociology. For Claret, solidarity was both a gift and a task. He embraced freedom, solidarity and justice.

3.2. Three Words that Explain Claret's Dynamic of Solidarity

- a) *Mercy*. Claret made frequent reference to it in the *Autobiography*.⁹⁶ Generally praising, thanking and, in every case, always acknowledging God's mercy toward men and women, the poor, sinners and himself. By extension he applied it to Mary, the Mother of Mercy. In the entire process of the mystery of salvation is found God's mercy, tenderness and compassion, in short, the love of God for humankind, whom he has created in his image and likeness.

The mercy that God is and spreads is his goodness and, therefore, the counterpoint of all evil. Jesus showed the merciful face of the Father. He was the season of mercy. He moved from and through mercy to care for the little ones, the sick, the possessed, women, and the excluded.

Claret's spontaneous invocation to the Father of mercy, to the merciful Jesus, to Mary the Mother of Mercy, sprang forth from a heart enlivened by the experience of the divine and the plan of salvation.

- b) *Compassion*, which becomes the response to the experience of such mercy. Like Jesus' compassion on the crowds because they were like sheep without a shepherd, because he did not want to see them starve to death. It is not possible to contemplate the face of Jesus without perceiving in his eyes a look of tenderness and compassion toward the world, toward the crowd, toward every man and woman. There are more than a few scenes in the gospel where explicit reference is made to this compassion that flowed from his heart; sometimes at the sight of the crowd because they were "troubled and abandoned" (Mt 9:36), and sometimes at seeing a poor widow weeping inconsolably at the death of her only son (Lk 7:11-15).

Compassion is a quality that accompanied Claret in his life and ministry. In his *Autobiography* he returned to this very characteristic feeling of his character eight times. He left us this confession: "For my greater embarrassment I should like to quote the words of the author of the Book of Wisdom (8:19): *I was a boy of happy disposition. I had received a good soul as my lot.* That is, I received a good nature or disposition

⁹⁴ Cf. J. M. Lozano, *Mystic and Man of Action, Saint Anthony Mary Claret*, trans. J. Davies, Claretian Publications, Chicago, 1977. J. M. Viñas, «Introducción», *Escritos autobiográficos de San Antonio María Claret*, BAC, Madrid 1981 (2ª ed); A. Andrés Ortega, *Escritos teológicos y filosóficos*, Vol. II, BAC, Madrid 2006. This volume contains the author's reflections on the Mystical Body and Solidarity (pp. 116 et seq.) and the writings on the spirituality of Fr. Claret.

⁹⁵ He ultimately followed his process of imitation, internalization and transformation in Christ.

⁹⁶ *Aut.* nos. 21, 39, 42, 43, 65, 76, 136, 154, 156, 160, 236 (bis), 248, 269, 270, 296, 320, 346, 364, 414, 532, 533, 536, 609, 660, 766 (bis), *Merciful*, nos. 152, 830.

from God, out of his sheer goodness.”⁹⁷ In the first paragraphs of his *Autobiography* he recorded his deep concern for the eternal salvation of souls, which accompanied him all his life, in which he tells us:

This troubled me deeply, for I am by nature very compassionate. The idea of an eternity of torment made such a deep impression on me, either because of the tenderness it evoked in me or because of the many times I thought about it, that it is surely the thing that to this day I remember best. This same idea has made me work in the past, still makes me work, and will make me work as long as I live, in converting sinners, in preaching, in hearing confessions, in writing books, in distributing holy cards and pamphlets, and in having familiar conversations, etc.

The reason is that, as I have said, I am so soft-hearted and compassionate that I can't bear seeing misfortune or misery without doing something to help. I would take the bread out of my own mouth to give it to the poor. In fact, I would abstain from putting it into my mouth to have something to give to those who are asking for it. I am even scrupulous about spending anything at all on myself when I think of the needs I can remedy. Well, then, if these momentary physical misfortunes affect me so much, it is understandable what I feel in my heart at the thought of the everlasting pains of hell – not for me, but for all those who willingly live in mortal sin.⁹⁸

When we speak of compassion in Claret, we can assume this going out of oneself, of one's own plans, and placing oneself in the path of the other by acknowledging their actual dire situation. It involves feeling affected, moved, and accompanying the one who suffers. Compassion induces a responsible connection by moving toward people who are suffering, establishing one's abode among them and assuming responsibility unconditionally. This responsibility does not end with an analysis of the causes of suffering or marginalization, but it forces one to accompany the other and to take decisive steps toward their full liberation. The journey of the one who becomes a neighbor out of compassion shapes their way of thinking, feeling and acting. Underlying this journey is always the conviction that the world can change and the hope for the possibility of change.⁹⁹

The compassion that is spoken of:

has nothing to do with either affectation or permissiveness, but with the burning of embers: If it touches you, it sets you ablaze. It is not possible to experience it without feeling inspired to live in another way. To feel it is to enter a current that carries you to become a neighbor to the one who is farthest away, because it carries within itself the breath of a revolution: The revolution of tenderness.¹⁰⁰

We are not evangelically compassionate if we provide partial services, if we give something from what is left over, if we keep accounts of the good that we do. Our compassion, and the way Claret lived it, implies giving of ourselves unconditionally and without reservation.

c) *Pastoral charity* (love of neighbor and apostolic zeal). By meditating on the Word of God, especially of the prophets and the gospels, Claret discovered his missionary vocation. The text of Isaiah, which Jesus then repeats in the synagogue of Nazareth, filled his entire apostolic life with meaning:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord (Lk 4:18-19).

⁹⁷ *Aut.* 18.

⁹⁸ *Aut.* 9-10.

⁹⁹ Cf. L. A. Aranguren, «Compassión», en *Diccionario de pensamiento contemporáneo*, Madrid 1997, pp. 195-199.

¹⁰⁰ E. Leclerc dedicates a chapter in his book *El Reino escondido* (Santander, 1997) to the revolution of tenderness. He equates tenderness with compassion. See pp. 105-117, translator's version.

This text is very present in Claret's missionary work throughout all the years of his life. Therefore, as we will see later, he tried to support the prophecy by proclaiming liberty to captives and the oppressed, healing the sick and seeking the salvation of all. Claret experienced in his heart and voice the demand for justice that cries out from the place and situation of the weak, the poor, the excluded.

He devoted Chapter XXX of the first part of the *Autobiography* to "The Virtue of Love of God and Neighbor." Before concluding, he remembered:

Here I hear a voice that says, "Man needs someone to help him understand his being, to instruct him in his duties, to guide him in virtue, to renew his heart, to restore him to his dignity and, to some extent, his rights, and all this is done through the Word." The Word has been, is, and will always be queen of the world.¹⁰¹

The motto of his archbishop's shield contained his aspiration, his concern, his pretense: "The love of Christ impels us." On the other hand, when, after so much preaching through Catalonia and the Canary Islands, he saw that more missionaries were needed and that he alone could not cope with so many pressing needs, he founded the Congregation of Missionaries to which he offered this portrait of himself:

"I tell myself: A Son of the Immaculate Heart of Mary is a man on fire with love, who spreads its flames wherever he goes. He desires mightily and strives by all means possible to set the whole world on fire with God's love."¹⁰²

Perhaps the most beautiful pages from Fr. Claret are those he devoted to the zeal of the apostolic missionary. They were written from the perspective of someone who felt deeply inspired by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus, who filled him with longing, on the one hand to run and fly all over the world so that God the Father may be known, loved and served; and, on the other hand, to seek in all things that men may be happy in this world and in the next.¹⁰³ He experienced true passion for Christ and for humanity. Universality and integrity, outreach and intensity were united in the pressure he felt for the sake of the good of his brothers and sisters.

3.3. *Awareness of the Suffering Reality of his Time and Proposed Responses*

The three key words we have analyzed: *mercy*, *compassion* and *pastoral charity* are interrelated and invigorated Claret's missionary life. But, before pointing out Claret's concrete actions of solidarity, it is appropriate to highlight the consciousness and urgency that he experienced interiorly in the face of the reality of suffering.

- a) *Awareness from the Analysis of Reality.* A characteristic note in all stages of his life as a pastor, missionary, archbishop in Cuba, royal confessor and in exile was Claret's ability to observe what was happening in the context in which he lived and carried out missions. Reading the writings of Fr. Claret, especially the *Autobiography* and his letters, his openness and sensitivity to the reality is surprising, which he analyzed with an evangelical gaze and tried to position himself to be leaven and to help his neighbor in need. As he detected dark points, he noted them and sought to remedy them. When warning of the bad state of society and the Church, he not only denounced the defects, but also sought ways to remedy them. Let us let him speak:

Seeing that our Lord, out of sheer good will and no merit on my part, was calling me to stem the torrent of corruption and cure the ills of a moribund society, I thought that I should dedicate myself

¹⁰¹ *Aut.* 449.

¹⁰² *Aut.* 494.

¹⁰³ Cf. Works of Saint Anthony Mary Claret, Vol. III, Selected Spiritual Writings, Claretian Publications 1991, p. 443 et seq.

to studying and gaining a thorough knowledge of the maladies of this social body. I did so, in fact, and found that this world is nothing but the love of riches, the love of honor, and the love of sensual pleasure. The human race has always been bent on this threefold lust, but in our day the thirst for material things is drying up the heart and bowels of modern societies.

I see that we live in a century that not only adores the golden calf as did the Hebrews but also worships gold so avidly that it has pulled down the most generous of all virtues from their sacred pedestals. I have seen this era as one in which selfishness has made men forget their most sacred duties to their neighbors and brothers--for all of us are images of God, children of God, redeemed by the Precious Blood of Jesus Christ, and destined for heaven.¹⁰⁴

Can there be anything that hinders solidarity more than these social vices? Are these vices not the ones that lead to what the Church's social doctrine has spoken of as "structures of sin"?

- b) *Witness*. In the face of the diverse needs he found, his first response was his witness of wanting to imitate Jesus: "Jesus was the friend of children, the poor, the sick, and sinners."¹⁰⁵ It is surprising that, in the face of the many evils he detected in society, his poverty intensified more and more. He told us: "I believed that this dreadful giant, which worldlings call all-powerful, had to be confronted with the holy virtue of poverty. So wherever I encountered greed, I countered it with poverty."¹⁰⁶ Obviously, always following the example of Jesus: "I always remembered that Jesus had become poor Himself; he chose to be born, to live, and to die in the utmost poverty. I thought of how Mary, too, had always wanted to be poor."¹⁰⁷ And he understood poverty as having nothing for himself and offering everything he had to others.¹⁰⁸

This position of Claret is expressed in the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* when it says:

Solidarity rises to the rank of fundamental social virtue since it places itself in the sphere of justice. It is a virtue directed par excellence to the common good, and is found in 'a commitment to the good of one's neighbour with the readiness, in the Gospel sense, to 'lose oneself' for the sake of the other instead of exploiting him, and to 'serve him' instead of oppressing him for one's own advantage (cf. Mt 10:40-42, 20:25; Mk 10:42-45; Lk 22:25-27).¹⁰⁹

- c) *Collaboration*. We have already seen that Claret's actions of solidarity were not expressed in terms of pure or naked spirituality. More than logical reasons to convince, he contributed concrete activities that can be confirmed at the various stages of his life and with different types of people. He sought, above all, to involve other members of the Church and of society. His activity with associations was intense. Throughout his life, Claret founded institutions, congregations, prayer groups and support groups. When he narrated his activities, he used "we", the first-person plural, which is not the royal we, but an expression of cooperation with others. He referred to the names of his collaborators and of the people who were, in one way or another, involved in the works he was carrying out.

4. CLARET'S ACTIONS OF SOLIDARITY

¹⁰⁴ *Aut.* 357-358.

¹⁰⁵ *Aut.* 435.

¹⁰⁶ *Aut.* 359.

¹⁰⁷ *Aut.* 363.

¹⁰⁸ *Aut.* 133-134.

¹⁰⁹ *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 193 citing *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, 38: AAS 80 (1988) 566. Cf. also: John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Laborem exercens*, 8: AAS 73 (1981) 594-598; Id., Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus*, 57: AAS 83 (1991) 862-863.

Reviewing the journey of Claret's life, it is easy to find facts that reveal his generous dedication to the most needy. Here I recall some of them.

4.1. *Childhood and Teenage Years*

From his most early childhood he told us about the comfort he brought to his maternal grandfather when he accompanied him in the evacuation of the French and of the love he professed "all those who were elderly and disabled."¹¹⁰ "I couldn't stand for anyone to make fun of them."¹¹¹

From his time working in his family's factory, he left us this testimony: "What used to hurt me the most was to hear that my parents would have to scold a worker for not doing his job properly. I am sure that I suffered more than the one who was being corrected because I am so tender-hearted that when I see someone hurt I feel it more than he does."¹¹² Hence, the positive pedagogy that he used when correcting his co-workers.¹¹³

4.2. *Pastor and Missionary*

Since his first years as a priest, the sick and the poor had a special place in his pastoral care.¹¹⁴ He developed this service, primarily as regent in Viladrau and during his missionary travels, in which he performed many remarkable healings.¹¹⁵ He also dedicated his effort to calm and heal those who were possessed, although he stated that in quite a few of these diseases there were other physical or moral components.¹¹⁶

He walked the roads poor and on foot. He always tried to be in the middle of the town, to listen to what people said, thought, wanted and needed.

What stands out most during this period of his life is his dedication to preaching the Word of God in order that *God the Father may be known, loved and served*. His concern for the conversion of sinners, on which he insisted so much, flowed from a heart burning with love that impelled him to run from one town to another, as Jesus did, and to shout so that the people did not run the risk of condemnation.

In this ardent desire for men and women to live happily as children of God, he used various means: he wrote and published books and pamphlets, gathered and prepared missionaries, formed associations and, above all, he founded the Congregation of Missionary Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

4.3. *Missionary Bishop in Cuba*

This is the period of maturity and more commitment in his missionary life. He will manifest his prophetic witness and character of solidarity. His spiritual work and social action will appear so closely linked that it would be very difficult to distinguish one from the other. His mission would not be easy in any of these aspects, given the lamentable religious and social panorama of the island.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁰ *Aut.* 19.

¹¹¹ *Aut.* 20.

¹¹² *Aut.* 32.

¹¹³ Cf. *Aut.* 33.

¹¹⁴ Cf. *Aut.* 111.

¹¹⁵ Cf. *Aut.* 170-180.

¹¹⁶ Cf. *Aut.* 183-191.

¹¹⁷ R. Lebroc Martínez, *San Antonio María Claret arzobispo misionero de Cuba*, Madrid 1992, 301. Indeed, "Only a minority has the privilege of knowing the teachings of the Gospel. The bourgeoisie is indifferent, and the masses are plagued by

Always the realist, Claret begins by studying and getting to know in depth “the diseases of that social body.” In the year of his arrival on the island, he informed the queen that he had already traveled around much of his extensive diocese, feeling for himself “her wounds” and seeing “the evil in their results.”¹¹⁸ The new archbishop is therefore forced to do a job he himself would be the first to describe as “integral humanism.” With his initiatives in this regard, he will open new horizons to the exercise of solidarity and prepare the way for the Gospel.

- a) *Proposes another sensitivity.* A first and important sign – which is obvious today, but was not then – was the realization that America is not Europe.¹¹⁹ A second and no less important was his outreach to the people, his immediate and direct contact with them. And, although a small example, it is still an example, that he desired that the books printed in Spain and destined for Cuba be adapted to the Cuban sensibility.¹²⁰ His progressive assimilation of the language of the people, his concern for native vocations both religious and priestly, as well as the initiatives of social character to which I will refer shortly, can also be considered as examples of inculturation.
- b) *Priestly promotion.* He knew that the priest is a person who should be dedicated to others. The formation he intended was surprising: intellectual and scientific, with some programs in which modern languages, agriculture, mineralogy, domestic medicine, etc. had their place.
- c) *Promotion of children and youth.* For the good of the children wandering through the streets begging for alms, he conceived an original and revolutionary plan, a model in its kind. He acquired in Puerto del Príncipe (today Camaguey) a vast farm where he began the construction of a charitable and educational center. It would consist of two sections: One for boys and one for girls, with the church in between. On the ground floor, workshops, classrooms and libraries would be installed. On the other, the bedrooms. They would be given food and clothing. Primary education and education in a skill or trade would be provided. In addition, the farm would have a botanical garden for the study and use of the island flora.

Along with this concern for children and youth came the founding of the Sister Congregation of the Sisters of Mary Immaculate-Claretian Missionary Sisters. It was created for them to be educators and evangelizers. Claret and Antonia Paris were a living testimony in Cuba of how to unite evangelization and human promotion.

His commitment to education was intense. He had it very clear in his mind how important it was for the future of society. From Cuba, he wrote to his admired Abate Gaume: “I assure you without hesitation that I have expanded on your idea of de-paganizing education, literature, the sciences, politics and all the tendencies of the present age, because that is where the cancer lies that corrodes society.”¹²¹

- d) *Care for the poor.* Because of his vocation, personal conviction and even for reasons of social order, Claret made a radical choice for the poorest (cf. *Aut.* 562). There were months in which he spent more on the poor than on the sustenance of those in his own in palace. From the capital of Spain, on one occasion, Mother Sacramento asked him for financial assistance. And this was his answer:

superstitions.” (Translator’s version). Here are some of the problems that the new Archbishop Claret had to face: the slavery of blacks brought from Africa; racial discrimination that curtailed freedom of choice in marriage, leading to more co-habitation and giving rise to many children left by themselves; the abuse of power by the authorities and the landowners; licentiousness; illiteracy; the clandestine action of the sects; the degrading social situation; the separatist agents; moral decline in both the people and the clergy; a small and not very enlightened clergy; a distressing economic situation.

¹¹⁸ Carta a la Reina (24-V-1852), EC, I, 847, translator’s version.

¹¹⁹ Carta a D. José Caixal (11-II-1852), EC, I, 623. Id (24-IX-1853) EC, I, 891-892.

¹²⁰ Cartas a D. José Caixal (15-VI-1852), EC, I, 658-659 y (27-IV-1853), EC, III, 18.

¹²¹ EC, I, 625, translator’s version.

“My income is not for the poor and needy of Madrid, but for those of Cuba, who are numerous after the earthquakes and epidemics... These are the ones that the Lord has entrusted to me.”¹²²

To calculate his care for the poor we should speak of the houses of charity for the elderly, of home welfare, of works for abandoned children, of care for the imprisoned, of care for the sick, etc. Here we have his own words:

I was equally regular in visiting poor patients in the hospital and also gave them some help, especially those who were leaving as convalescents. I was president of the League of Friends of the Country. We met at my residence, and all of us took an active interest in any developments on the island. We procured a workshop for poor boys, and we saw to it that prisoners in jail were taught reading, writing, religion, and a trade of some sort. With this in mind we had workshops set up in jail; for experience had shown us that many men turn to crime because they have no trade and don't know how to make an honest living.¹²³

e) *Social promotion*. It is in Cuba that Fr. Claret most clearly perceives the need for a new social order. With his sensitivity and his realistic spirit, he discovered the close relationship between evangelization and human promotion, which the Church's teaching documents have so emphasized today.¹²⁴

In the face of a society of terrible imbalance between rich and poor – the former without consciences and the latter resigned – and in the face of a society that was discriminatory, oppressive and violating human dignity, Claret could not be silent. His preaching and writings were a powerful prophetic denunciation that could not fail to bear fruit. His own enemies acknowledged it when they confessed that “the Archbishop of Santiago did them more harm than the whole army,” which is why they tried to poison him (cf. *Aut.* 524) and murder him (cf. *Aut.* 574 et seq.). Claret, impelled by the charity of Christ and within his possibilities, did not hesitate to confront the authorities, especially mid-level authorities, and he defended truth and justice with great strength against any attempt to stifle them among ambitions that were poorly concealed or disguised. He fought hard, for example, to ensure that the laws of the Indies about marriages between different classes, which were falsified or misinterpreted by those authorities, were complied with without restrictions. He stood up against the country's slave owners and slave traders who reinforced the power of slavery as an element of political control or who sought only to save their own interests even at the expense of most basic justice.¹²⁵

But he did not limit himself to denouncing. Claret put into play a whole series of initiatives in favor of the poorest and most marginalized.

- Specifically, he was the one who introduced the *Cajas de ahorros* [credit unions] there. He created a parallel institution called *La Rosa de María* [Mary's Rose] to channel the profits of those funds to poor widows and to equip young women in need.
- He also organized a *Model Farm* for working with multiple and varied agriculture and livestock.
- In 1856 he wrote a precious agricultural manual of more than 300 pages, entitled *Las delicias del Campo y Reflexiones sobre la agricultura* [The Delights of the Country and Reflections on Agriculture], aimed at introducing new technical methods into the cultivation of fields, overcoming the farmers' routines.

¹²² Carta a la M. Sacramento (13 de mayo de 1853), EC, I, 815-816, translator's version.

¹²³ *Aut.* 571.

¹²⁴ Cf. EN, SRS, CA.

¹²⁵ Regarding the dark subject of the defense of slaves, see the note written by G. Alonso: *Hechos de signo profético en el apostolado de Claret y de la Congregación*, «Dimensión profética del servicio misionero de la Palabra», cuaderno 32 de Formación permanente de la Provincia de Colombia Oriental y Ecuador, Bogotá, 2000, pp.170-173.

- It must have been revolutionary for him to propose that the lands of the jurisdiction of Manzanillo, which had belonged to the regulars, be given to the poor who worked them: “They must,” he said, “be allotted with preference, if not exclusively, to the poor who have cultivated them or can cultivate them, as settlers, excluding the rich, or at least postponing them, from the few properties that are sold.”¹²⁶
- Getting out ahead of those who could accuse him of undue meddling in subjects outside his specific mission, after evoking the figure of Father Bartolomé de las Casas, Claret said in the aforementioned *Reflexiones sobre la agricultura*.

Perhaps someone will think it strange for me to talk about agriculture and say out of amazement: “Why would a prelate write about with these matters, when his subjects are sacred theology, canons, and Christian morality?” Certainly, that must be my main duty, but I do not think it is unreasonable for me to focus on the promotion and perfection of agriculture because it has a powerful influence on improving customs, which is my main mission and also on the abundance and happiness that it brings to men and women, whom I love so much, which I am obliged to seek for them as much as I can because I am their prelate and spiritual father.¹²⁷

4.4. *Solidarity from the Court*

Setting aside what he achieved or did not achieve for the spiritual good of the queen, we know that there was a great flowering in piety and honest customs in many other people during Claret’s period in the Court, with clear repercussions for the smooth functioning of the Church in Spain.¹²⁸ He always knew how to speak to the Queen with prophetic liberty for the good of the people and of the Church, just like at one time Isaiah and Elijah were able to do with the kings of their time, as well as Jeremiah with Josiah and Zedekiah, and Nathan with David.

The Queen’s confessor is the same missionary “poor and on foot” in Catalonia, the Canary Islands and Cuba. With the same customs of being among the people and for the people. When he was traveling by train, he would travel in third class and said: “I travel in third class in order to get in touch with the workers and people of the village [...], which is easier than in the first-class cars.”¹²⁹ The Archbishop’s housing and furniture were poor. His home was a place where beggars and the needy would go. The anecdotes of care for those who came to ask for his help are many.

On his journey from Cuba to Spain he finished the book *Apuntes de un plan para conservar la hermosura de la Iglesia* [Notes on a Plan to Preserve the Beauty of the Church]. It is a book for bishops and, in pointing out their obligations to lay people, Claret wrote:

The Prelate must procure the material and corporal goods that he can for his faithful as follows: 1. Visit and help the poor, sick and imprisoned. (...). 2. Attend to the poor, orphans, widows and elderly, even if they are healthy. (...). 3. Strive for orphans and abandoned children to be able to learn a skill or trade, considering that the Prelate is the Father of the poor. 4. Gladly host pilgrims, especially clerics or religious, as if you are receiving Jesus Christ.¹³⁰

¹²⁶ Carta al Capitán General (27-IV-1854), EC, I, 987, translator’s version.

¹²⁷ San Antonio María Claret, «Reflexiones sobre la agricultura», en *Escritos pastorales*, BAC, Madrid 1997, p. 298, translator’s version.

¹²⁸ Cf. *Aut.* 650. Historians acknowledged and openly proclaimed that Fr. Claret carried out his mission with unequalled zeal and discretion. They described his behavior as “a complete example of spiritual elevation and human status in the midst of the most difficult circumstances we can imagine”, R. de la Cierva, «Un santo en la corte de los milagros», *Diario YA* (10 diciembre 1982) 44.

¹²⁹ Revista *El Iris de paz* 35 (1918, I) 248, translator’s version.

¹³⁰ San Antonio María Claret, «Apuntes de un plan...», en *Escritos pastorales*, BAC, Madrid 1997, pp. 509-510, translator’s version.

On the other hand, whoever looks at the whole of Claret's life in Madrid from 1857 to 1868 will see that this is the most fulfilling time for him. Apparently, they had caged (or as he says, "tied him like a dog to a pole") this man accustomed to high and long flights. However, Madrid served as a vantage point where he could see the course of events in Spain as a whole. He wrote important works for priestly formation, to face the great risks posed by the new German and French ideologies.

In Madrid he set in motion the *Academy of St. Michael*. The "university question" was creating harsh clashes between Krausists, arm chair democrats and neo-Thomists. On the other hand, there was a clear opposition to God and the Church, which was accused of being obscurantist. Claret's zeal also led him to get involved here. How? Seeking the association of Catholic scholars and artists at the service of truth, beauty and virtue. Why should faith and reason divide people or pit them against each other? Were they not both aimed at helping them in their dramatic confrontation with this world?

Claret imagined a new *Renaissance* of science at the service of Truth, of the arts at the service of Beauty, of customs at the service of the Good. With this ideal the *Academy* was born. And its founder was careful to preserve it from political struggles: "Utterly divorced from politics, it will completely abstain from taking part, either directly or indirectly, in contentions between parties, and from becoming a tool for any of them... The Academy of St. Michael seeks only the kingdom of God and His justice" (SSW, p. 407). Pius IX will praise it in 1859. In the 1860's it came to acquire great prestige. Lafuente, Federico Madrazo, Carbonero y Sol, Gabino Tejada, José Güel, etc., were members of the *Academy*.

By will and appointment of the queen, in 1859 he had to take charge of the Royal Monastery of El Escorial. It was a national shame that such a wonder was about to be lost. What results did Claret achieve with his management here? The most important thing that can be said is that the pantheon of kings became a center of evangelization and culture.¹³¹

The prophecy of the culture, of the dignity of the person was very close to Fr. Claret's heart. Few know that Fr. Claret wrote the draft bills for the ministers Orovio and Catalina.¹³²

4.5. *Solidarity in Exile*

Claret, wherever he went, studied the urgent needs. He was in Paris for a short time, but soon he saw the situation of extreme necessity that the immigrants found themselves in. We have this testimony:

In this city (Paris), the foreigners need protection, or they will despair, they commit suicide (I was horrified the other day when I read that those who commit suicide in Paris are 1,200 per year). For now, there will be two conferences of the Holy Family: One for men and the other for ladies, whose objective is to help, protect, and to find housing for any Spaniards who present themselves. Everyone liked this plan. In the last spiritual conference or sermon that I gave them I explained the plan, we took up a collection to pay the expenses of the church, and I told them that whatever was left would be to begin the conferences of the Holy Family. A considerable sum was collected, and indeed that is what has happened.¹³³

¹³¹ One of his biographers added: "They only had a third of the Monastery's farms left, with whose rents the most urgent attentions of its ruins could hardly be remedied. However, Fr. Claret, after repopulating the Monastery with a community of chaplains, with a choir of singers, with a seminary and a college, and the necessary serving staff; after seeking all the school and household items that these functions required, such as a physics lab, which cost half a million *pesetas*, a modern library with 6,546 volumes, ornaments worth 6,000 *duros*, a gym, rooms for study, recreation, dorms and classes, 10,000 fruit trees and many ornamental ones; a pigeon loft with 15,000 nests, and a thousand other acquisitions, whose enumeration would be tedious; after one year, he made available to the queen a profit of 20,000 *duros*. Without any of these works, the queen paid 6,000 annually to cover the expenses which the rents did not cover." C. Fernández, *El Beato P. Antonio María Claret*, Madrid 1941, II, 109, translator's version.

¹³² Cf. J. Postius, *La pedagogía del P. Claret*. AC, 12 (1926). Apéndice, p. 23.

¹³³ *Carta a la señora doña Jacoba Balzola*, París, 28 de marzo de 1869. EC, II, p. 1375, translator's version.

5. CLARET, A MODEL FOR SOLIDARITY TODAY

5.1. *Claret as a Contemporary Figure*

St. Anthony Mary Claret was a typical man of the 19th century. But his figure seems to enlarge as it is seen in the light of our time. For the lifestyle that he led, for the multiple and such diverse endeavors that he undertook, as well as for the risks they entailed, and for the means that he used, he can be considered as an authentic model in our time.

He tried to stifle evil with the abundance of good. Here we find the secret of the admiration he has awakened today, as an echo of the admiration he awakened during his time. Today Claret remains contemporary in the way proper of men who throughout history have been faithful to God and to the men of their historical moment.

Claret is a beacon, a visible indicator who teaches from where and how to be in solidarity today. Authentic solidarity can only arise from the unconditional love of one's neighbor. When you think of the other, you look at the other, you welcome the other, and you treat them like a brother.

5.2. *Model of Solidarity*

We are in a very different historical moment from that of Fr. Claret, especially in that we are in the era of globalization. We live in the “net”, in information, in the economy, in politics, in all spheres of human life. Vicente Verdú spoke of “the orgy of connection.”¹³⁴ In this world of liberty, interaction, reciprocity, Claret provides a point of convergence that brings harmony: passion for man, the son of God. But, because we live anesthetized, we forget that today the man of flesh and bone also suffers, endures and experiences serious difficulties. He is not happy. And we are getting used to it.

Pedro Laín Entralgo wrote:

Moltmann heard a friend say in New York: “The worst thing is that you get used to everything little by little.” And Moltmann adds: “The worst is not evil in itself, but the fact that we get used to it, and then nothing really matters to us. There are young people who are in the prime of life that are permanently out of work. But we get used to things being that way. Hopelessness makes them turn into drug addicts. But we get used to finding that out. To buy drugs that provide them illusion, they need money and become thieves. But we get used to it. People are robbed and beaten on the street in broad daylight. And we get used to it.” I add: Television shows us how thousands of people are still dying from starvation. And we are getting used to this too, unless we are fed up or upset and we just turn off the TV. In short: we have a duty to “not get used to it”; nonconformity as a moral obligation; mental, affective and operative responses to the social reality of iniquity, each of us in whatever we can and however we can.¹³⁵

In this world of ours, thus accustomed and insensitive, the figure of Claret is presented to us as a model of solidarity, whose features to highlight are the following:

- Vigilance, openness to reality, critical eye toward reality and awakening people's numb consciences in the face of the real needs of people who suffer for any reason.
- Love of the people, love of neighbor with their real needs for food, shelter, work and dignity.

¹³⁴ V. Verdú, *Yo y tú, objetos de lujo. El personismo: la primera revolución cultural del siglo XXI*, Debate, Barcelona 2005. pp.184-193.

¹³⁵ P. Laín Entralgo, *Esperanza en tiempo de crisis*. Círculo de Lectores, Madrid 1993, p. 255, translator's version.

- Cultivating gratuity and compassion by living entirely for others.
- Witness, consistency and unlimited generosity. There is his courage, strength, ability to endure and sacrifice in the exercise of ministry, even to the point of shedding his blood or accepting exile.
- Seeking the most effective ways to make his voice heard, both in word and in writing, before powerful people and those who should act justly.
- Counting on others, collaborating, sharing projects and media; making the network work.
- Creativity, initiative and the diligence to do the best possible good.

Claret continues to raise his voice to make of the Church and of the educational community, a house of mercy, a community that mediates truth, freedom, collaboration in progress and well-being for all.

CONCLUSION

Concluding Claret's life journey, we must affirm that he was a man of solidarity. He overcame mere assistentialism. He truly sought to care for and accompany the elderly, to care for the spiritual growth of children and young people, to aid the sick, to help the poor, to rebuild marriages, to restore human dignity to slaves, to care for migrants, etc., but his resolutions, plans, projects, initiatives and actions were all better in the measure that they were aimed at the integral service and promotion of individuals and human groups.

Claret, with his solidarity, sends us forth anew toward the future. That future, as Paul Valéry said, is construction. We all seek a new world in which universal brotherhood becomes a reality where no one dies of hunger or thirst, and everyone has a roof for shelter and living conditions worthy of a child of God. The figure of Claret reminds us of God's love for the world and for each and every man. Because he was attuned with divine goodness and mercy, he knew how to put at his disposal all his ingenuity, his intuition and his creativity to make appropriate pastoral proposals in order to promote a dignified, cultured and honest life; to make an evangelizing Church in which lay people and women took part.

Today we need men like Claret who defend and promote life and family and fight against the culture of death; who shout against violence, war and arms trafficking; who denounce sexual exploitation and the abuse of children; who promote dialogue, gender equality, and defend migrants and minority cultures. May they not tire of fighting political and administrative corruption and, in the end, join their efforts to recover the image of the human person as a child of God and, therefore, brother and sister to all people

THE CONSTITUTIONS

ARE THEY STILL AN INSTRUMENT OF PERSONAL AND COMMUNITY RENEWAL?

“I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you” (Ez 36:26).

“I will place my law within them, and write it upon their hearts” (Jr 31:33).

“The Church most highly exhorts all of us to base our earnest search for the vigour of our missionary life on the Constitutions” (CC 158).

LET US MAKE A “GRATEFUL REMEMBRANCE”

We are on the eve of the inauguration of the “Year of Consecrated Life” offered as a gift from Pope Francis to the Church. One of the objectives of this year is to make a grateful remembrance of the Council and the significance of these post-conciliar years.

The Council cannot be reduced to an event from 50 years ago. The protagonist was the Spirit, as recognized by all the pontiffs, conciliar fathers and great theologians. And it is the Spirit who has inspired and animated the life and mission of the Church. When the Council spoke of the proper renewal of religious life, it asked to do so “under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and the guidance of the Church” (*Perfectae Caritatis* [PC] 2).

We should place the Council within the context of the sources of Christian life: The reference to the mystery of God the Trinity, to Jesus Christ and his Gospel, and to the Church as a community that testifies that Jesus is alive among us and as a community that serves all men and women, until we all gain the fullness of the Kingdom.

Through the Council we have learned the place and mission of consecrated life in the Church and in the world with its charismatic, prophetic and eschatological mark. It affirmed: Without religious life, the Church would lack that fullness of presence among men that Christ wanted for her (Cf. *Ad Gentes* [AG] 18).

With the criteria for renewal set out by the Council (PC 2) the Institutes began a process of reworking their Constitutions, knowing that their original identity should be explicit in them. This task was entrusted to all the members of the Institutes because they are all participants in the charism of the founders.

There were several general chapters that dealt with the *Constitutions*. For our Congregation, they were those held in 1967, 1973, 1979 and 1985. In the last one there was only some retouching to adjust it to the most recent Code of Canon Law (CIC).

Many of us knew about the controversies when faced with the new *Constitutions*. I refer to your memory about the experience of the life of the Congregation between 1972 and 1982, the year in which they were

officially approved.¹³⁶ Also at that time there was a certain weariness about the successive texts that were being presented.¹³⁷

Anyone who carefully examines the text of the *Constitutions* that we have, the commentaries that we have and knows the esteem that so many Institutes have for them, because they have used them as a model for many of their own, will give thanks for having achieved a great project of missionary life. We owe it to the fact that it was many of our brothers who collaborated and, above all, great experts.¹³⁸

1. WHERE WE STAND WITH REGARD TO THE CONSTITUTIONS

1.1. *A Complex Phenomenon of What Has Happened in the Last Forty Years with Regard to the Constitutions.*

— In religious institutes, there has been a move from admiration to indifference.

It is true that there was a time when the *Rules* were worshiped and that they were sometimes imposed above the Gospel. But that was pre-conciliar. The new *Constitutions* were made according to the criteria of renewal from the Council and it was changed from juridical to theological, from ascetic to charismatic.

After 1985, a placing in parenthesis has occurred. From the abundant literature in the first twenty years after the council about the elaboration, value and experience of the *Constitutions*, there has now been a near total silence. Very little is written about the *Constitutions*.¹³⁹ In the first years after the council, the whole renewal was oriented toward the elaboration of the *Constitutions*. Although we consider it an achievement to have made them and approved them, they are referred to very seldomly. They ceased to be the privileged means to motivate, to measure, to aspire, to inspire. Some studies have been made on specific points: the person, the community, the mission, the spirituality, etc. In the Magisterium of the Church there are only some texts in *Vita consecrata* (VC), which I will comment on, and some allusions in the documents *Starting Afresh from Christ* (SAfC) and *The Service of Authority and Obedience* (SAO).

In passing let me say that, in some institutes, they have revised their *Constitutions* again in recent years, either because of problems of restructuring governance, or because they had not incorporated references to important aspects of their own spirituality or out of sensitivity to the new circumstances: interculturality, dialogue in its various dimensions, shared mission, etc.

The underlying problems already existed. The indifference comes, but it does not arise from one moment to the next. We can note as signs: 1) The lack of understanding of the meaning and scope of the

¹³⁶ They say that two young Italian men had a strong controversy and even went on to fight a duel because one said that Torcuato Tasso was a better writer and the other Ludovico Ariosto. They were both mortally wounded and moments before death they confessed that the one had not read Tasso and the other had read Ariosto. When faced with the new texts of the *Constitutions* there was no shortage of those who, without having read them, raised their swords high to protest their strangeness.

¹³⁷ Having made the proper qualification, this anecdote and reflection is applicable to our case:

“The gypsy in the story went to confession, but the cautious priest asked him if he knew the commandments of the law of God. To which the gypsy replied, “Well, Father, it’s this way: I was going to learn them, but I heard talk that they were going to do away with them.” Is not this the situation in the world at present? The rumor is running round that the commandments of the law of Europe are no longer in force, and in view of this, men and peoples are taking the opportunity of living without imperatives.” J. Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses*, (1927), EPUB version of the 1932 book “The Revolt of the Masses” Accessed on October 27, 2023. <https://archive.org/details/TheRevoltOfTheMasses>, p. 92.

¹³⁸ Cf. CMF. *Our Project of Missionary Life: Commentary on the Constitutions*, vol. I, Rome, 1992, in the section on the history, pp. 78 et seq. And also what has been written on this matter by Fr. Gustavo Alonso, *Misioneros Claretianos, III, La renovación postconciliar*, Editorial Claretiana, Buenos Aires 2007.

¹³⁹ I will name a few: José Cristo Rey García, «Constituciones. Hacia una “mejora” del texto constitucional», *Vida Religiosa* 105 (2008) 125-130. The CIVCSVA magazine, *Sequela Christi*, published some articles in the year 2006/2, I highlight one of them, because I find it interesting: M. E. Posada, «Costituzioni, attenzioni carismatiche», 193-203.

Constitutions requested and elaborated according to no. 3 of *Perfectae caritatis*. 2) Caution about the people who prepared them. 3) Passive acceptance of them. People read them out of curiosity but did not internalize them. 4) Those who challenged them in the name of tradition. 5) Those who rejected them in the name of the latest theological novelty that appeared or spiritual trend. They were going to drink at other wells. 6) Those who find themselves without roots. Dry trees. 7) The lack of pedagogy to maintain the constitutional text as an original reference to the spirit of the Institute. This has led formands and other consecrated men and women to quench their thirst for spirituality in other wells. 8) Personal situations: unclear vocational experience, crises that have not been overcome, insufficient formation, an unfavorable environment in the community or in ministry, etc.

What is serious about these signs is that they are emerging in a great socio-cultural crisis that affected the Church and consecrated life. The ambiguity in behavior began to spread, the disproportion between the ideal of life set forth by the *Constitutions* and people's behavior. The courses informed and illustrated, but did not internalize the new values that had been discovered. A certain Gnosticism took hold of large sectors of Christian life and the constitutional text was slowly pushed aside.

Sociologists spoke of the anomalous confusion suffered by social groups. They called this situation of perplexity, or that of not knowing the purpose of the aims proposed for the community, anomie. This leads to the inability to subjectivize the aims, norms, and models of conduct that were received. Not everything was negative, as there was a reaction in the reconstruction of values and groups with the help of adequate discernment.

— And in our Congregation? Lights and shadows

Individuals and communities have shown the same or similar signs. Admiration and joy, on the one hand; but it is also possible to hear in response to the *Constitutions* “there they are.” We admire the commentaries that have been made¹⁴⁰ and that have been used in many communities for retreats or spiritual exercises, for ongoing formation sessions, for programming, etc. You meet people who read and meditate on them, but there don't seem to be very many.

At the institutional level, the General Superiors and the General Chapters have continued referring to the *Constitutions* as inspiration and impulse for missionary renewal. Fr. Leghisa, Fr. Alonso and Fr. Bocos wrote circular letters on the *Constitutions*. Fr. Abella frequently refers to the *Constitutions* in his letters written to the Congregation. The Congress “Our Missionary Spirituality on the Path of the People of God” has the *Constitutions* as its base (cf. p. 39).

This experience makes us wonder whether the *Constitutions* have already become part of the “congregational culture” in which we live, and there is no need to keep going over them. It would be admirable, but I am afraid not for everyone. We are at a sociocultural moment in which people suffer an imbalance between the public and the private, between the social and the individual more than they should. What governing bodies offer is not always embraced by the grassroots as one might expect.

1.2. *Questions to Ask*

This description leads to these questions: Are the *Constitutions* still an instrument of personal and community renewal today? Are they compatible with the future? According to what proposals and with what perspectives should we consider reading, praying and applying them today?

¹⁴⁰ CMF. Our Project of Missionary Life: Commentary on the Constitutions, three volumes, Rome, 1992, 1992, 2000; P. Franquesa, ¿Las constituciones claretianas son misioneras?, Claret, Barcelona 1997; M. Martínez, Nueve retiros sobre las Constituciones, Misioneros Claretianos, Madrid 2006; G. Alonso, Misioneros Claretianos, III, La renovación postconciliar, Editorial Claretiana, Buenos Aires 2007, sobre todo el capítulo dedicado a la renovación de las Constituciones: pp. 258-307; G. Alonso, Notas espirituales sobre las Constituciones Claretianas, Editorial Claretiana, Buenos Aires 2012, etc.

But before these questions can be answered, we need to carefully examine the current state of consecrated life and the possibilities offered on its journey by the *Constitutions*. That is what I am going to try to do.

2. THE PRESENT CONTEXT OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND THE PLACE OF THE CONSTITUTIONS.

2.1. *Where is Consecrated Life on its Journey Today?*

— The Great Challenges it Experiences

We all know the great challenges of religious life. What the latest documents describe involves all of us. The *Instrumentum laboris* from the last Synod on the New Evangelization has indicated very well the coordinates in which we move. It talks about sectors. Pope Francis in *Evangelii gaudium* discusses the challenges and temptations. I offer you this text that makes us think of the situation of our world that belongs to everyone and nobody:

The current world is full of paradoxes and a good part of them could be synthesized into the idea that it is a world of everybody and nobody. There is a proliferation of issues that belong to everybody (which affect us all and require coordinated actions), but of which, at the same time, no one can or wants to take charge (for which there is no competent body or of which nobody is made responsible). What is the difference between the common and the ungovernable, between shared responsibility and generalized irresponsibility? How can we distinguish between what belongs to everybody and to nobody or between what has no owner and what nobody cares about? Would we not be calling the emptiness universal and celebrating as an openness what in reality is out in the open and vulnerable?

This ambiguity is reflected in the conflicting assessments with which we welcome the new realities. We declare the death of experts, the accessibility of data, the exaltation of transparency and the overcoming of all mediation; but these same gains are accompanied by the fear of deregulation, ungovernability and obscurity. Society is divided between optimists and pessimists, which is the axis on which we stand when we have no idea what is going on. Given this ambivalent perspective, who can assure us that this is all a harbinger of great gains, and that it is not the prelude to the worst disasters?¹⁴¹

It is to this world that we must *awaken*, from which we must *go forth* and stand on the *periphery*, in which we must offer our *witness* of life and in which we must exercise the *prophecy* of the new life of the Kingdom. These are the proposals of the present Pope.

— What the Synod Said and the Exhortation *Vita consecrata*

The first crisis of men and women religious, highlighted at the beginning of the Synod on Consecrated Life, was that of spirituality.¹⁴² It is the most widespread. It is the foundational crisis that is identified with the crisis of faith and meaning. It is also a crisis of internal freedom and belonging.

During the first part of the Synod on Consecrated Life (1994), there were no special references to the *Rules* or *Constitutions*. As the fruit of an intervention made by a Minor Circle that asked for them to be taken into account – not so much as rules to comply to, but as texts that had to be assumed in creative fidelity – proposal 27 was formulated that was later included in no. 37 of the post-synodal exhortation *Vita consecrata*. In this paragraph, after reaffirming that “all must be fully convinced that the quest for ever

¹⁴¹ D. Innerarity, *Un mundo de todos y de nadie. Piratas, riesgos y redes en el nuevo desorden global*, Paidós, Barcelona 2013, p. 9, translator’s version.

¹⁴² Cardinal B. Hume, rapporteur of the Synod, said that spirituality is “the challenge that constitutes a particularly important and provocative situation, which needs a courageous response and, in our case, one that is consistent with the Gospel and prompted by the Spirit” (*Relatio ante disertationem*, no. 16), translator’s version.

greater conformity to the Lord is the guarantee of any renewal which seeks to remain faithful to an Institute's original inspiration," it adds:

In this spirit there is a pressing need today for every Institute to *return to the Rule*, since the Rule and Constitutions provide a map for the whole journey of discipleship, in accordance with a specific charism confirmed by the Church. A greater regard for the Rule will not fail to offer consecrated persons a reliable criterion in their search for the appropriate forms of a witness which is capable of responding to the needs of the times without departing from an Institute's initial inspiration.

This text is extremely important. The immediately preceding paragraph, no. 36, is dedicated to fidelity to the charism, and it says:

In the first place, there is the need for fidelity to the founding charism and subsequent spiritual heritage of each Institute. It is precisely in this fidelity to the inspiration of the founders and foundresses, an inspiration which is itself a gift of the Holy Spirit, that the essential elements of the consecrated life can be more readily discerned and more fervently put into practice.

The *Constitutions* can only be understood well from the perspective of the Founders' experience of the Spirit, from their radical following of Jesus, from their contact with the Word of God, from their communion with the Church – with all the members – from their capacity to discern the will of God. "It is fitting to remember the ability of holy foundresses and founders to respond to the challenges and difficulties of their times with a genuine charismatic creativity" (*Starting Afresh from Christ* 13; cf. *The Service of Authority and Obedience*, 9).¹⁴³ The emphasis on the consideration of the *Constitutions* is thus changed. Its inspirational strength is placed before its ascetic dimension.

— Paradigm Shift in Consecrated Life

During these last 30 years, there has been a paradigm shift that has been progressively developing in consecrated life.¹⁴⁴ For a variety of social, cultural, political, economic, anthropological, theological and ecclesial circumstances, the focus of religious life has become centered on a diverse set of values.

A good reference point for seeing the paradigm shift is in the *Diccionario Teológico de la vida consagrada*¹⁴⁵ [Theological Dictionary of Consecrated Life] and the Supplement (*Suplemento*) to this Dictionary.¹⁴⁶ There is a difference between the first twenty years after the council (1965-1985) and the next twenty years (1986-2005). In the Supplement there is a new language and a new vision. It can be seen in the words that arise from the historical moment and that affect consecrated life: globalization, ecology, interculturality, intercongregationality, interreligious dialogue. Others are characteristic of the intraecclesial course of consecrated life: Word of God, covenant, Philokalia, ecclesiology of communion, refounding, forms of Christian life, relations in the People of God, new communities, ecclesial movements, formation (new perspectives), etc.

¹⁴³ In the discourses by John Paul II and Benedict XVI they talk a lot about the founders. On the Magisterium of Benedict XVI, cf. Gonzalo Fernández, «La referencia a los Fundadores. Seguimiento radical de Jesús», *Vida Religiosa* 114 (2013), monográfico, no. 2, 183-198.

¹⁴⁴ The paradigm shifts in the constellation of values, convictions, techniques and behaviors shared by members of a community. It brings a new vision of reality.

¹⁴⁵ A. Aparicio-J. M. Canals (eds.), *Diccionario Teológico de la vida consagrada*, Publicaciones Claretianas, Madrid 1989, con varias reediciones.

¹⁴⁶ A. Aparicio, *Suplemento al Diccionario Teológico de la vida consagrada*, Publicaciones Claretianas, Madrid 2005.

We have grown or at least have become more in tune with: 1) the evangelizing mission; 2) the affirmation of our own identity which today is affirmed in a correlated and dynamic manner; 3) sensitivity toward the poorest and most needy; 4) in relationships: reciprocity, complementarity, “ad gentes” and “intergentes” catholicity; 5) dialogue (interreligious, intercultural and of life); 6) shared mission; 7) intercongregationality and 8) intergenerationality.

2.2. *Seeking the Most Essential*

The “novelty” brought by the renewed text of the *Constitutions* was, first of all, a return “to the sources” (the Gospel, the spirit and charism of Fr. Claret); it is, therefore, a return to what is essential and fundamental. But it is a return that takes place, under the incessantly renewing dynamism of the Spirit, according to the concrete situation of a Church that lives, teaches and guides, and according to the need of a world that changes rapidly, suffers and hopes.

It was not a simple “accommodation to changing circumstances.” Otherwise, we would have had to have made *Constitutions* for every region of the world. The renewal was attempted from the perspective of a return to the Gospel, the ultimate standard of our lives. In the person of Jesus, whose lifestyle we want to relive, and his message we agree that we have been called to live the path inaugurated by Claret and his companions.

But as we look at the prevailing culture in recent years, for reasons of various kinds, of which we can highlight: the technological revolution and cybernetics, weak thought and the exaltation of success, migration and globalization, we continue to grow in dispersion, anxiety, immediacy, de-identification, addiction to substitutes, vulnerability of belongings, etc. The number of voices grow that cry out for recovering what is most essential and original, even in the commercial language when there is an appeal to name the sources or people seek the taste and quality of genuine and unadulterated products.

In this context, two aspects have been highlighted in recent decades: 1) Our condition as seekers of the most essential. 2) The living and uninterrupted consciousness of the foundational charism as a fundamental, inspirational and invigorating principle.

We have gone through periods of change, renewal, standardization, revitalization, re-founding, reorganization, restructuring. And each one responded to precise situations. Everything fit into our condition as “seekers.” Something we carry in our condition as Claretian Missionaries: “To seek in all the glory of God” (CC 2).

The search for the essential does not end with the discovery of refurbished formulas, but rather with the personal encounter of the absolute of God. The *cry for the essential* in the Church and in religious life is demanded by the condition of being followers of Jesus, the Son of the Father, the Lord of history and the Redeemer of all men and women. It is another way of talking about evangelical radicalism. It is a return to Galilee, where it all began, and to Caesarea Philippi, where Peter confessed that Jesus was the Christ, the Lord, and it is a look to the future: “I am the first and the last, the one who lives” (Rev 1:17-18).

Schweitzer has compared the method of focusing on the most essential to the behavior of spiders. He says the spider’s genius is to weave the threads beginning at the center. The more tense the threads are, the more beautiful the figure is. If they are loosened, everything gets tangled and even their appearance is unpleasant. When in the experience of vocation, which is a gift of the Spirit, the encounter with Christ is in harmony with the communion with the Church and service to mankind, the joy of walking in renewal is experienced. But, when we overlook divine gratuitousness, we forget to contemplate Christ’s face, we entangle ourselves in secondary matters, or we move around in the darkness; discouragement seizes us and we experience devitalization.

Therefore, it is fitting to ask: do the *Constitutions* allow us to respond to the search for the essential? The *Constitutions* certainly place us at the heart of the consecrated vocation according to the charism of the Congregation to which they belong. On the one hand, it is the way to offer, with seriousness and authority, a *project of life* according to the present knowledge of the charismatic, historical, ecclesiological and sociocultural coordinates. This makes it possible to express more clearly the identity of the Congregation in the Church and the possibilities of collaboration in the building up of the Kingdom of God.

2.3. *The Spirit of the Founders, a Reliable Reference Point*

It is a fact. In these fifty years after the Council, the topic of the founders has aroused the greatest interest and appreciation. Studies have been made of their lives, their writings, their congregational origins. Here too, we can congratulate ourselves. But why is recourse to the founders turning out to be the reliable common thread that gives cohesion, continuity and hope to the Institutes in the changes we are experiencing? Because consecrated life is a gift from the Spirit to the Church which begins in the life of the founders and the community which the Spirit grants it. The figure of every founder evokes a singular grace, a charism, which encompasses:

- An original experience of the mystery of Christ, based on the concrete way in which they understood the totality of the Gospel,
- A particular prophetic vision of the Church and of the world,
- An ability to make disciples,
- And a special sensitivity to adopt the most suitable structures to fulfill the mission for which they had been called.

The founders have always sought the most essentials of things and of the human heart. They have understood the scope of the primacy of the Love of God. It is necessary to live according to the simile of the compass (Claret): A fixed point and the needle that allows for reaching different spaces, but that always allows for a full turn.

When we talk today about the need for a *charismatic revival*, we are only trying to unite ourselves to and follow the spirit of the founders. Returning to Vic and allowing ourselves to soak up the spirit of Claret and the co-founders to continue the great work of the Spirit.

In fact, it is enough to pronounce the name of the founder in an institute to understand the foundation of the vocation and mission of the members of the Congregation.¹⁴⁷ The fatherhood [motherhood] of the founders is a presence of communion that makes possible encounter, fraternity and commitment in apostolic projects. Fr. René Voillaume (the founder of the Little Brothers of Jesus, inspired by the life and writings of Saint Charles de Foucauld) used to say:

We all know that without Brother Charles of Jesus we would be nothing and the vital movement that animates, unites and sustains the brothers, giving them strength, all this spiritual movement comes from him, from his life, from his writings, from his prayer. We do not doubt in the least that we are

¹⁴⁷ This story is interesting: “One day Fray Bonaventure, gardener of the convent of the Porziuncola, was going up to Mount Subasio with a brother from a distant country. That brother asked him what the Franciscan spirituality consisted of. Fray Bonaventure, a simple and very spiritual man, with his sweet voice (even sweeter because of his accent, typical of the Umbrian region), replied: ‘Franciscan spirituality is St. Francis. And who is St. Francis? It is enough to say his name, in order for the same idea to arise in everyone. And the idea is this: St. Francis “is a man of God!” And because he was a man of God, he always lived what was most essential. That is why he was simple, courteous and tender to everyone, like God in his mercy.’” Leonardo Boff, *San Francisco de Asís. Ternura y vigor*. Sal Terrae, Santander 1982, p. 17, translator’s version.

truly your sons. Because without you we would not be here, and you are, without doubt, at the origin of our friendship to which Jesus gives witness.

The founders created family, organized relationships into structures, built community, inspired and propelled shared mission with other charisms and ministries. Not only while they were alive, but rather as long as they are recognized and accepted as the community's mother-father, role models, teachers, and mediators. From this perspective, to revive the gift or grace in each person is to revive *Claret's vocational experience* with all that it entails of identification with Christ, of a prophetic vision of the Church and of the world and of a special sensitivity to adopt the most suitable structures in order to fulfill the mission. When we feel present to the founders, everything around us is realigned and we establish a correct assessment of our relationships in the community, in the Church and in society, of our actions and projects. The founders are present in the life of the Institutes as *a memory of an ideal of evangelical life* and as *the vanguard of the Spirit* that brings about the updating of the means to better fulfill the mission entrusted in every time and place.

3. THE CONSTITUTIONS, AN INSTRUMENT OF RENEWAL

If we want to return to the constitutional text and make it an instrument of personal and community renewal, we must recover the meaning, content and appropriate provisions that we had in the past, which were real and authentic and which we take for granted today unless we ask ourselves the ultimate questions. And so, it is good to: 1) Reposition ourselves in a correct vision of them. 2) Focus our attention on the fundamental contents. 3) Assume them in continuity of life. 4) Consider them as an expression of a common faith.

3.1. *What Are the Constitutions for us?*

The significance of the *Constitutions* can be reflected in a series of statements. They are:

- The stable expression of our charism, the original way of following and imitating Jesus Christ, highlighting his missionary dimension;
- The translation of the Gospel for our missionary life;
- Our identity card in the Church;
- The evangelical project of our Congregation, the life of an institute, the translation of the Gospel into a Congregational key;
- The expression of our *creed*, of our common vocation;
- The basic book of congregational spirituality (traits and attitudes that create a "lifestyle" or a particular way of being and doing, of sanctification and apostolate);
- The fundamental book of prayer and personal and community discernment;
- The instrument and guide of formation and of animation and governance.

The Congregation has described its own understanding of the *Constitutions* in the *Directory*:

The Constitutions are an expression of the action of the Holy Spirit who calls some in the Church to follow and imitate perfectly the evangelical life of Christ according to the form lived and proposed by our Father Founder. Their approval on the part of the Church testifies to the ecclesial nature of our Congregation (cf. 1 RL 5).

In them the nature, characteristics and most essential and permanent demands of our mission in the Church are set forth, and our lifestyle (cf. SW 3.1) and the type of government befitting a missionary congregation are defined.

The Constitutions have to be the central axis of our impulse for renewal in the following of Christ (cf. SW 13.2). (*CMF Directory*, 2011, no. 4)

It is clear that taking the *Constitutions* into our hands today and reading them carefully cannot be done with the mentality we had when we professed them or received them when they were newly approved and adapted to the CIC of 1983 during the Chapter of 1985.

The resonance that the constitutional text has today is different because of the commentaries we have received about them through the General Chapters. The *CMF Directory* tells us:

Chapter Documents, besides the properly so-called norms collected in our legislation, contain evaluations and guidelines on the being and task of the Congregation. Hence we should hold these documents in high esteem and strive to know and assimilate them as the authorised way of thinking of the whole Congregation and as the best commentary on the Constitutions. (no. 16)

After having approved the current constitutional text, the Congregation has been highlighting aspects of our identity, fraternity and missionary life. Thus, the following General Chapters have been celebrated: *The Claretian in the Process of Congregational Renewal* [CPR] (1985), *Servants of the Word* [SW] (1991), *In Prophetic Mission* [IPM] (1997), *That They May Have Life* [TMHL] (2003), *Men on Fire With Love* [MFL] (2009).

3.2. Axes, Undercurrents and Dynamics of our Missionary Life

Our *Constitutions* revolve around *three fundamental axes: identity, community and mission*. They echo the first three general chapters, in keeping with the post-conciliar process of the Church. They appear in the fundamental constitution itself.

Our identity is dynamic, always seeking the glory of God. Itinerant in following Jesus in a community of apostolic life. Our mission is the proclamation of the Gospel for the salvation of all people.

As a project of missionary life, they have very clear and precise *undercurrents* that are specified in the successive chapters. I highlight the first and list the others, which can be seen in the calm reading of the *Constitutions*:

1. *The first above all is mission*. *Missionary* for us is a noun, not an adjective. And the word “missionary” is described in the *Directory* no. 26:

The word ‘missionary,’ understood in the light of the spiritual experience of St. Anthony Mary Claret, defines our charismatic identity. The title of ‘Apostolic Missionary’ which he received synthesises his ideal of life according to the style of the apostles. This way of life implies being disciples and to follow the Master, to live the evangelical counsels in a community of life with Jesus and the group of those who are called, to be sent and to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom to the whole world.

The anointing of the Spirit to announce the Good News and the communion with Christ, the prophet par excellence, render us sharers of his prophetic function (cf. VC 48; SW 6; IPM 1; MFL 42).¹⁴⁸

This description wants to express our missionary charism in the style of Claret.

The Congress on the Mission (2012) has tried to reposition us and to underline the initiative of the Spirit in the mission of the Church and the Congregation. The Spirit is the protagonist of the mission we have received. We collaborate.

2. *Biblical inspiration*. We cannot live without referring to the Word.

¹⁴⁸ *CMF Directory*, no. 26.

3. *Trinitarian, Christocentric and Cordimarian foundations.*¹⁴⁹ The vows acquire their greatest evangelical density from this threefold perspective as a sign of the future Kingdom and as an expression of response to love first.

4. Ecclesial mark.

5. *The missionary community*: harmony of charism and ministry.

6. *Openness and commitment* to social and cultural challenges.

The *Constitutions* imply an *integrative dynamic* through 1) The mission and missionary spirituality. 2) Formation. 3) Government. 4) Economy.¹⁵⁰

The interrelationship of these *axes, undercurrents* and *dynamics* makes our project of missionary life coherent and keeps it open.

4. HOW TO MAKE THE CONSTITUTIONS AN INSTRUMENT OF RENEWAL

Four requirements can be indicated to convert the *Constitutions* into an instrument of personal and community renewal: 1) Approach them under the breath of the Spirit, 2) Assume them in continuity of life, 3) Consider them as an expression of a common faith, 4) Be inspired by them to respond to challenges.

4.1. *Approach Them According to the Breath of the Spirit*

I have already written about nos. 36 and 37 of the *Vita consecrata*. They have as a background no. 2 of *Perfectae caritatis*; no. 11 of *Evangelica testificatio* and no. 11 of *Mutuae relationes* which says:

The very *charism* of the *Founders* (EN 11) appears as an *experience of the Spirit*, transmitted to their disciples to be lived, safeguarded, deepened and constantly developed by them, in harmony with the Body of Christ continually in the process of growth. [...] This *distinctive character* also involves a particular style of sanctification and of apostolate, which creates its particular tradition, with the result that one can readily perceive its objective elements. In this hour of cultural evolution and ecclesial renewal, therefore, it is necessary to preserve the identity of each institute so securely, that the danger of an ill-defined situation be avoided, lest religious, failing to give due consideration to the particular mode of action proper to their character, become part of the life of the Church in a vague and ambiguous way.

The renewal of the *Constitutions* went on to liberate the institutes from ascetic and juridical norms, and to make us understand the promise of the prophet: “I will place my law within them, and write it upon their hearts” (Jr 31:33). The center of the new *Constitutions* is occupied by Jesus who gives us his Spirit who dwells in our hearts (Rom 8:9-11) and is established as an interior principle of our behavior as sons and daughters: “For those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God” (Rom 8:14). The essential thing now is to live “according to the Spirit,” in the radical dynamism of this “law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus” that has freed us “from the law of sin and death” (Rom 8:2).

Without the presence of the Spirit, nothing is explained in the Church. Our historical origin begins with the inspiration of the Spirit in order for a person, St. Anthony Mary Claret, to begin this work in the Church. He is our Founding Father. The deep and intimate connection between Claret and the Congregation can only be understood according to the Holy Spirit. It was the Holy Spirit who led Claret

¹⁴⁹ Mary appears 16 times in the constitutional text and 6 of them refer to the Heart of Mary. For us, the Cordimarian spirituality is a sign of the forge where the apostles of the Congregation are formed.

¹⁵⁰ Note that our *Constitutions* do not have a fourth section dedicated to the economy. The communication of goods and their management through the administrators and other bodies is found in the section on Government.

to gather the first missionaries, to name the primitive community, to write the *Constitutions* for it. He met with a group of priests who had the same spirit as him to do with them what he could not do alone.¹⁵¹

However, this presence of the Spirit – in the Church and in the Congregation – has been permanent and has been especially noticeable in the post-conciliar stage of renewal. “We live in the Church at a privileged moment of the Spirit.” That was said in *Evangelii nuntiandi* (EN 75) and it continues to be repeated now. This determination is the key that helps to decipher the most acute questions and to explain all the novelties that took place in the Church and in religious institutes during the first years following the celebration of Vatican II.

Now too, it is necessary to continue under that impulse of the Spirit. We cannot settle for contemplating a constitutional text and congregational documents, however beautiful they may be. It’s about realizing that process inside of us, that is, *renewing ourselves, converting ourselves, changing our minds, not settling for simple external adaptations*. The most urgent and indispensable thing is to continue to let us be impelled by the power of the Spirit toward configuration with Christ, the anointed one and the one sent to proclaim the Good News to the poor.

If our life is a “*living exegesis*,” we must demonstrate it according to an attitude of discipleship, that is, openness and docility to the action of the Holy Spirit, the Word of God, and the realities of the present world.

4.2. *Assume them in Continuity of Life*

In the normal process of spiritual movements that institutionalize, the following steps are usually taken: The spirit crystallizes into laws; laws guarantee stability and uniformity; stability and uniformity favor standardization, monotony, routine; routine produces unconsciousness and unconsciousness leads to death. When institutions become aware of being in danger of routine or unconscious procedures, etc., they propose returning to the spirit that gave rise to them. Only by returning to that spirit can they regain life. These have, in fact, been the steps taken in the ecclesial renewal by religious institutes. Hence comes the return to the spirit of the founders as a principle of renewal.

The grace or divine gift given to the founder, comparable to a spiritual energy capable of binding together and structuring a community of persons and of propelling it to a mission, affects not only the entire life of the founder, but also those who share that life as their disciples. The charism granted to the founder by the Spirit, to give birth to a new way of life in the Church, is not a grace that is extinguished by the death of the founder. As a communication of the Spirit given to other people, those people also experience its dynamism and share in its vitality across the ages.

It is true that in the person of the founder this grace or charism takes a characteristic form. It is like an emergence of a special and overflowing vitality which, instead of ending, is destined to endure and become a permanent and obligatory point of reference for the members of the institute.

The founder, far from obstructing the vision of Christ and of the Church, makes them more transparent, translates the Gospel into a way of life for those like them who feel called to follow Jesus Christ in that way. The grace, the founding charism, is a *presence* that recalls an ideal of life and internally renews those who open themselves to its beneficial influence. Without this grace, in reality, the lives of the members of the institute would not have been united in the service of the Church.

The historical unfolding of each institute, including ours, has had and has its guarantee and encouragement in this original experience of the founder. Our Congregation, in particular, could not have subsisted either in the time immediately following the foundation, because of the obligatory

¹⁵¹ Cf. *Carta al Nuncio*, 12 agosto 1849.

separation of its founder when he was named Archbishop of Santiago de Cuba, nor in the course of later times, if it had not continuously had this reference to the founder's original experience and if it had not been able to constantly revive its spirit (whatever the degree of consciousness and intensity with which it has been revived, in reality, over the years).

The *Constitutions*, since they are an objective expression of the founding charism and since they condense the tradition of our religious family, must be assumed *in continuity of life* with that gift of the Spirit granted to St. Anthony Mary Claret, to the first companions of the Founder, who had the same spirit as his,¹⁵² and to those who successively continued to join the Claretian community throughout the years.

When we take the *Constitutions* into our hands, we must be aware that we are holding the family album. The *Constitutions* are not an expression of objective theological knowledge, nor are they the fruit of the whim of individuals, nor are they merely a compendium of ethical and legal guidance. They are a book that gathers and offers the experience of a missionary life already realized and achievable in the Church. Therefore, they must be opened with great respect and love for those who have preceded us and sanctified themselves with them. They are a model of an inheritance of faith, life and mission. We enter into continuity of congregational life with the general chapters, which are an expression of congregational communion.

4.3. Consider them as an Expression of a Common Faith

Let us start from these words of Pope Francis which refer to faith within the Church. They can be applied, proportionally, within the congregational community:

It is impossible to believe on our own. Faith is not simply an individual decision which takes place in the depths of the believer's heart, nor a completely private relationship between the 'I' of the believer and the divine 'Thou', between an autonomous subject and God. By its very nature, faith is open to the 'We' of the Church; it always takes place within her communion.¹⁵³

In fact, our *Constitutions* are written in the first-person plural.¹⁵⁴

To pray together, to live together the Mystery of Christ himself in the one Church, and to commit ourselves to walking together in hope. It is the effective and pastoral way of animating consecrated life.

Faith in the same vocation, in the same origin, in the same mission, is the unifying principle of the members of an institute. It justifies the brotherhood, the organization of life, the whole world of references in words, practices and behavior of the congregational community.

This faith, on which our missionary life is based, is not synonymous with ideology, a collection of formulas or a set of well-articulated laws, but rather a particular reference to Jesus Christ the evangelizer, to the Church, extending her mission, and to all men and women as recipients of our witness and service.

The *Constitutions* are born as an expression of this faith. In the Church, the first thing that existed was a life and a history: that of Jesus and his Spirit of Pentecost. Then came the Gospels and the book of Acts. These writings cannot be understood except "from the perspective of the ecclesial faith." Taking into account the proper proportion, the same thing happens in the life of the institutes. In the beginning

¹⁵² Cf. *Aut.* 489.

¹⁵³ Francis, *Lumen fidei*, no. 39.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, "Persons always live in relationship. We come from others, we belong to others, and our lives are enlarged by our encounter with others. Even our own knowledge and self-awareness are relational; they are linked to others who have gone before us: in the first place, our parents, who gave us our life and our name" (no. 38).

is the Spirit, the Founder and the primitive community called by the same Spirit. The *Constitutions* then become a solidification of the life inaugurated and followed by the Founder and their disciples.

In our Christian life, in general, faith consists in walking and discovering the God of the Lord Jesus, who is merciful and saving love. In meditating attentively on the revealed Word, believers find a few coordinates that serve as criteria or guidance, which urge us to live the faith today with a new strength: openness to the amazing gift of God, obedience in our response, personal reference to Jesus Christ and interpersonal communion with Him and with all people, in the midst of the most disparate and often questionable situations of the modern world. This allows us to encounter ourselves anew and open ourselves to the discovery and acceptance of others, in a universal community in which there are a variety of gifts and ministries and a diversity of ways of life and services.

In our Claretian religious life, concretely, personal and community seeking also goes through this process or path. The *Constitutions* are a true aid to each person's interior freedom, to initiation and growth in faith and to stability in their commitment. In them, the deepest aspirations of human beings, the core values of the Gospel, as captured and interpreted by the Founder, are respected and carefully included.

Only when the *Constitutions* are contemplated from this perspective can they also be assumed as a concrete and ascetic path of the Gospel; can they be understood as a genuine expression of faith and a standard of life for those who want to profess in community the following of Jesus. The human, the Christian and the Claretian-religious are condensed in this congregational *creed*, which is the text of *the Constitutions*, as an objective framework from which the identity and mission of the Congregation in the Church and its missionary lifestyle, its structures and its organization, acquire meaning and value. From it are justified: shared prayer, the communion of spiritual and material goods, the fabric of the relationships proper to our community life, the availability necessary for the evangelizing mission, the joint search for the will of God, the witness of life and formation for ministry – both initial and ongoing.

4.4. *Be Inspired by them to Respond to Challenges*

The *Constitutions* carry within them proposals for the future. They cannot be considered as a point of arrival in the renewal, but as the principle according to which life must be oriented and face the future. The General Chapter of 1991 called for us to make the *Constitutions* “the central axis of a new impulse for renewal” (SW 13.2). This meant, within the scope of that Chapter, two things: 1) That our *Constitutions* be a permanent source of inspiration and an obligatory point of reference to guarantee and promote fidelity to our charismatic identity in the Church (cf. SW 3.1); and 2) that we should be able to integrate into our charism the spiritual riches and cultural values of the diverse peoples with whom we live (cf. SW 13.2).

Their capacity for the future lies in expressing a unique experience of the Spirit, personalized by Claret and by the community that has followed him. It is this experience of the Spirit that ensures the fruitfulness of ingenuity and the joyful search for new paths for our missionary life, which are not without risk and difficulties and which require generosity and boldness.

Our *Constitutions* introduce us into a continuous revision of our ways of thinking and acting, and open us up to a horizon of continuous improvement where freedom and creativity are blended in with the experience of the Beatitudes. Therefore, they do not admit ambiguity, mediocrity, gentrification, irrelevance, or individualism. They continually open us to new perspectives and relaunch us to an increasingly shared mission.

The living of the *Constitutions* strips us of certainties and displaces us spiritually and sometimes materially. They empower us for our prophetic ministry in this secular world of so many imbalances, injustices, and a culture of death. They enable us to be always ready to occupy front-line missionary positions, where the Son of the Immaculate Heart of Mary fears nothing and, with patience, prepares the way of the Lord

CONCLUSION

Our *Constitutions* continue to be:

- A memorial on how to follow Jesus in Claret's missionary style;
- Our community creed;
- Our journey of missionary spirituality;
- Our *illuminating focus and our encouragement* to continue to proclaim the joy of the Gospel.

What is left pending is the pedagogy that helps us to maintain the *Constitutions* as an instrument of help in growing in our missionary life:

- Regular personal and community reading
- Taking them to meditation and prayer
- A guide in our examination of conscience

THOUGHT AND PRAXIS OF PROXIMITY IN
THE HISTORY OF THE CONGREGATION*

INTRODUCTION

Starting Point

We feel called to discover and bring forth in us the gifts of the Spirit; to share the joy and blessedness of the Gospel; to put into practice the corporal and spiritual works of mercy (cf. MV 15) and to express our heart-felt compassion in our encounter with each person (cf. EG 127) and our concern for the vulnerable (cf. EG 209-216); to be – personally and as community – credible witnesses of hope in God who never wants to hide himself; to ‘live in mercy’ and promote the joyful proclamation of forgiveness and the revolutionary nature of love and tenderness (cf. EG 288; MV 9-10). (MS 16).

I begin with this text from the XXV General Chapter as an indication of our interest in elaborating a thought and reaffirming the praxis of proximity in which we are culturally, ecclesially and charismatically involved.

We have been invited to conjugate these verbs: *Go forth, listen, discern, walk, accompany, transform (passively and actively), grow (as well as decrease) and worship*. These verbs encourage us to rethink our missionary vocation, which is humanizing and evangelizing, *in and from proximity*. They rekindle the renewal of the covenant. The word proximity today arouses a new sensitivity and way of acting from the perspective of inclusion and involvement in an intercultural world. It leads us to move freely towards inequality and integrate racial, social, cultural, linguistic, and personality differences; to place ourselves in the existential peripheries, the spaces occupied by the poor, the suffering, the marginalized and the excluded. We are invited to assume a new style of living in relationship, of understanding and of getting involved in the situations in which we are called to bear witness that the kingdom of God is in our midst (cf. Lk 17:21) and to work together so that the whole of humanity may be the great family of the children of God.

The New Language Wants to Tell us Something

Through language we express what we are.¹⁵⁵ Language has a creative function in the elaboration of meaning. Through language we share our beliefs and moral assessments.¹⁵⁶

The *grammar of proximity* combines a series of verbs, pronouns, names and prepositions that lead us to value relationship and openness, otherness and presence; it leads us to appreciate closeness, respect, dialogue, encounter, the “I-you” and the “us”, understanding, cordiality and love for our neighbor. It gives us an attitude of criticism and rejection in the face of intolerance, exclusion and injustice. It opens the doors to the importance of everyday life and the details of life together, inclusion, friendship, sharing, living together, compassion, mercy, getting involved and being committed.

* Meeting of Apostolates, held in Guatemala in 2018.

¹⁵⁵ “Spoken language is proper to man in such a way that everything characteristic of man depends on it, is marked, impregnated, and mediated by it.” Gabriel Amengual, *Antropología filosófica*, BAC, Madrid 2016, p.128, translator’s version.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. *a. c.*, pp. 130 et seq.

This language has biblical, philosophical, theological and pastoral foundations. Proximity is not a horizontal and neutral relationship. It becomes intimate in suffering and through the cross, but it always bears a sign of new life and thus it is made fruitful by hope. Encounter, dialogue, communication and communion always have transcendent allusions. In our missionary life, the praxis of proximity always directs us toward the accompaniment of our neighbor. The question remains always open: And who is my neighbor?

The topic of proximity, expressed in *Missionarii Sumus* as closeness and accompaniment, affects our spiritual life, fraternal life, formation, missionary activity and economy. It poses for us today the perspectives (motivations), the contexts (value of spaces and places) and the how (style) of being Claretian Missionaries.¹⁵⁷

We are celebrating this meeting in Guatemala, Latin America. Last year, 2017, we celebrated the 50th anniversary of the special General Chapter of the Congregation. This year, 2018, we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the General Conference of Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean in Medellin. Two key reference points for us Claretians that will relaunch us into the future. In fact, as a result of Medellin, there was a re-reading of our missionary life that had special influence in the Chapter of 1973. Similarly, the Assembly in Puebla was very important in 1979 and the Assembly in Aparecida in 2009.

Since 2013 we have had Pope Francis as Peter's successor, who with his lifestyle and his teaching is being a true Shepherd in the midst of his people, with great simplicity, closeness and reaching out to all kinds of people, especially the marginalized and the poor. He has become an icon of *proximity* for the whole Church. That is why he wants it to *go forth* and be the *Samaritan* in the social and existential peripheries.

Pastoral ministry at this time cannot help but look to the south, to its anthropological and theological approaches. Pope Francis is an obligatory reference point, in that he refers to the post-synodal exhortation *Pastores gregis* (2003) and *Aparecida*, in which he had so much influence. Since 1997, when he was appointed Cardinal of Buenos Aires, he has laid out a profound magisterium from which we are currently being nourished.¹⁵⁸

The title assigned to me for this talk is a challenge to delve deeper into the richness of our missionary charism and to promote the dynamism of our evangelizing vocation at the present time. We are Witnesses and Messengers of the Joy of the Gospel and, as such, we are obliged to reflect on the *praxis of proximity* in our missionary life.

I am not aware of explicit texts in our documents on the subject of "proximity" as it is currently being understood and used in the current cultural and ecclesial context. But, if we examine the life and mission of Fr. Claret and his missionaries, we can derive consequences for our missionary life *in* and *from* proximity.¹⁵⁹

I will dedicate the first section to the praxis of proximity in Father Claret, Founder, which allows us to act on the DNA of our missionary life. In the second section I will try to collect some data from the history of the Congregation. As could be expected, in this genetic code we must highlight the

¹⁵⁷ Cf. A. Bocos Merino, «La misión del Espíritu en la Congregación», en: *Misioneros Claretianos, teología para la misión*, Taller, Colmenar Viejo, 2012, pp. 191-236.

¹⁵⁸ J. M. Bergoglio/Francisco. *En tus ojos está mi Palabra. Homilias y discursos de Buenos Aires, 1999-2013*, Publicaciones Claretianas, Madrid, 2018, 1170 páginas.

¹⁵⁹ At the Claret Forum held in Vic (2006) I offered a reflection on "How to consider some current initiatives from Claret's experience: shared mission, intercongregationality, internationality, globalization? How to integrate these aspects into our understanding and experience of the figure of the Founder? Current initiatives for ecclesial life. Inspiration and Claretian repercussions." CESC, *Claret hoy. Foro Claret*, Publicaciones Claretianas, Madrid 2007, pp. 179-205. I am referring to the reflections I made then, particularly in pp. 196-200.

configuration of Claret with Jesus.¹⁶⁰ It is necessary to emphasize not only the love that he has for Jesus Christ, but that he always tries to “act” like Jesus Christ.

1. PRAXIS OF “PROXIMITY” IN FR. CLARET

I am aware of the limitation of what I will offer. Most of the references are taken from *St. Anthony Mary Claret, Autobiography and Complementary Writings*, Bicentennial edition, Claretian Publications, Bangalore 2011 (hereinafter ACW). I should have consulted more of Claret’s writings, especially *Escritos Espirituales*, *Escritos pastorales*, and *el Epistolario activo y pasivo*, etc. but the quotes offered here sufficiently support the discourse.

Claret was a missionary. It was his great title that he kept until the end as the most precious. It was his vocation and his service to the Gospel. It was defined in the Memorial he gave to his missionaries, when he said: “A Son of the Immaculate Heart of Mary...” (*Aut.* 494). In this definition Claret revealed the deep meaning of his apostolic zeal. It is enough to review the phrases he used: a man on fire, spreads its flames, desires mightily, set on fire, nothing daunts him, embrace sacrifices, working, praying, suffering, etc.

We know that by meditating on the Word of God, especially of the prophets and the gospels, he discovered his missionary vocation. Claret experienced in his heart and voice the demand for justice that cried out from the place and situation of the weak, the poor, the excluded. He said in the *Autobiography*, 118:

The Lord made me understand that I would not only have to preach to sinners but that I would also have to preach to and catechize simple farmers and villagers. Hence He said to me, “The poor and needy ask for water, and there is none, their tongue is parched with thirst. I, Yahweh, will answer them. I, the God of Israel, will not abandon them’ (Is 41:17).

Then he added the words of the prophet spoken by Jesus in the synagogue of Nazareth: *Spiritus Domini super me et evangelizare pauperibus misit me Dominus et sanare contritos corde.*

1.1. Claret’s Basic Attitude in his Missionary Life: The Analysis of Reality

Part of his starting point was to contemplate the world, the surrounding reality in which he lived and to discern what he could and should do for the sake of his brothers and sisters. He wrote in the *Autobiography*:

Seeing that our Lord, out of sheer good will and no merit on my part, was calling me to stem the torrent of corruption and cure the ills of a moribund society, I thought that I should dedicate myself to studying and gaining a thorough knowledge of the maladies of this social body. I did so, in fact, and found that this world is nothing but the love of riches, the love of honor, and the love of sensual pleasure. (*Aut.* 357)

And in the following paragraph he added:

I see that we live in a century that not only adores the golden calf as did the Hebrews but also worships gold so avidly that it has pulled down the most generous of all virtues from their sacred pedestals. I have seen this era as one in which selfishness has made men forget their most sacred duties to their

¹⁶⁰ We must thank so many of our brothers who have contributed to the understanding of the figure of Claret. We need only review the bibliography included in ACW. As well as the studies carried out by Fr. Augusto A. Ortega, Fr. J. M. Viñas, Fr. Juan M. Lozano, Fr. G. Alonso, Fr. J. Bermejo, Fr. J. Álvarez, etc. I want to highlight the work of T. Cabestrero, *El Jesús de Claret. Luces y desafíos para los Claretianos del siglo XXI*, Publicaciones Claretianas, Madrid 2013. This work, in collaboration, has very accurate reflections on Claret’s way of proceeding.

neighbors and brothers--for all of us are images of God, children of God, redeemed by the Precious Blood of Jesus Christ, and destined for heaven. (*Aut.* 358)

These texts highlight a characteristic note that he will maintain at all stages of his life as a missionary, archbishop in Cuba, royal confessor and in exile. He had a great ability for observing what was happening in the context in which he was living and preaching missions. Reading his writings, his sensitivity to the reality is surprising, which he analyzed with an evangelical gaze and tried to position himself to be leaven and to help his neighbor in need. As he detected dark points, he noted them and sought to remedy them.

In his evangelizing service he forgot about himself and surrendered himself completely. He discerned the places, times, means and ways of acting so that God the Father may be known, loved and served by all creatures (cf. *Aut.* 233).

1.2. *Three Keys to Claret's Missionary Life*

The praxis of his mission can be divided into themes by three interrelated words: *neighbor, people, poor*. In the background there was a model: *Mary*. He felt like he was her son and was sent by her.

The aim of his mission was the glory of God and the salvation of all people. This is the aim of all the institutions he founded and, of course, of our Congregation as indicated in the *Constitutions*. He cared for men and women as *neighbors*, which he found in the *people* and had a special preference for the *poor*.

— The Neighbor

Claret's love of neighbor had very little to do with what Freud points out in *Civilization and Its Discontents*.¹⁶¹ Nor with the way of thinking of one of Dostoevsky's characters, in *The Brothers Karamazov*: "The more I love humanity in general, the less I love man in particular." Claret identified better with the German poet Richard Dehmel who stated: "A little kindness from person to person is better than a vast love for all humankind." Claret loved his neighbor in particular, the one who was close to him and who was in need because he was a son or daughter of God, because he was his brother or sister.

Reviewing the *Autobiography*, the autobiographical documents and, above all, the resolutions, and the spiritual notes, we find repeatedly his concern for loving God and neighbor. In the *Autobiography* he dedicated no. 448, in the form of prayer, to his appreciation and dedication to his neighbor. The content of this paragraph is found in another writing and I transcribe it here because it is more explicit:

To love someone is to wish them well. We must wish our neighbors well; we must feel with them in their sufferings and rejoice with them (not envy them) in their prosperity. We must strive to remedy their needs as best we can. To make loving our neighbor easier, the one who would love must consider not only his or her own miseries, as we have said but must also consider the excellences and prerogatives of their neighbor, at least these six: a) an image of God. b) a child of God. c) a brother or sister and friend of Jesus Christ. d) their soul is a spouse of the Holy Spirit. e) redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ. f) destined for the kingdom of heaven.

Christians who dwells on all these titles of each one of their neighbors will be able to do no less than to love them with the most tender and effective love.¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ The precept "love your neighbor as yourself" is, according to Freud, one of the supposed ideals of civilized society. But when he examines it in the light of pleasant utilitarianism, he sees no way out. S. Freud, *El malestar en la cultura*, Alianza Editorial, Madrid 1972, pp. 50 et seq. See *Civilization and its Discontents*, 1930 German original, 2002 English Penguin Publication.

¹⁶² Saint Anthony Mary Claret, "The Temple and Palace of God our Lord", in *Works of Saint Anthony Mary Claret*, Vol. III. *Selected Spiritual Writings*, Claretian Publications, 1991, p. 205. Chapter VII is dedicated to the love of neighbor.

Their love of neighbor ranged from the love of all souls to love of those who persecuted him. It culminated with the grace of love for their enemies (1869).¹⁶³

In the resolutions from 1864 he reflected his deep feeling inspired by Fray Luis de Granada: “For God, I will have the heart of a son; for myself, the severity of a judge; and for my neighbor, the heart of a Mother.”¹⁶⁴

In love of neighbor, mercy is revealed. Claret made frequent reference to it in the *Autobiography*.¹⁶⁵ The mercy that God is and spreads is his goodness and, therefore, the counterpoint of all evil. Jesus shows the merciful face of the Father. He is the season of mercy. He moves from and through mercy to care for the little ones, the sick, the possessed, sinners, women, the excluded.

- The People

Another reference point to talk about the praxis of proximity in Fr. Claret is the relationship he had with the people. The people, which he did not reduce to space or territory, but included what was really important for him, that was: The group of people to whom he tried to bring the Word of God so that all may be saved. He traveled through towns in Catalonia, the Canary Islands, and Cuba. When he returned to Spain, he traveled through cities and towns accompanying the King and Queen. He also evangelized in Paris and Rome. In his journeys the common thread was his ministry of the word - spoken, written and given meaning through example and charity.

With a heart on fire with love, he reached out to all kinds of people with simplicity, humility, kindness, and compassion. He very easily entered into relationship, was in tune and tried to remedy spiritual and material needs.

Claret did not fail to remember God’s love for the world and for each person and put at his disposal all his ingenuity, his intuition and his creativity to make appropriate pastoral proposals in order to promote a dignified, cultured and honest life; to make an evangelizing Church in which lay people and women took part. The list of initiatives he undertook is long: the herbs he suggested for healing; the associations he promoted, the promotion of women with deaconesses, credit unions, the farm, the pamphlets he wrote for different members of the Church, the great seminary of El Escorial, the Congregations he founded and the help he gave a good number of founders.

The people followed him. They listened to his word. They admired his example of a poor, simple and charitable life. Everything was done for everyone without concern for his time, and without thinking about money, or fame, or pleasure (*Aut.* 200). He cultivated essential *relationships* with God through humility and with his neighbor through meekness. Re-read Chapter 25 of the *Autobiography* on the virtue of *meekness*, which I will write about later.

More than logical reasons to convince, he contributed concrete activities that can be confirmed at the various stages of his life and with different types of people. He sought, above all, to involve other members of the Church and of society. His activity with associations was intense. Throughout his life, Claret founded institutions, congregations, prayer groups and support groups. When he narrated his activities, he used “we”, the first-person plural, which is not the royal we, but rather an expression of cooperation with others. He referred to the names of his collaborators and of the people who were, in one way or another, involved in the works he was carrying out.

¹⁶³ Cf. ACW, p. 764.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p. 827

¹⁶⁵ *Autobiography*, nos. 21, 39, 42, 43, 65, 76, 136, 154, 156, 160, 236 (bis), 248, 269, 270, 296, 320, 346, 364, 414, 532, 533, 536, 609, 660, 766 (bis), Merciful, 152 and 830.

- The Poor

Claret felt, like the prophet and like Jesus, called to evangelize the poor (cf. *Aut.* 118). But his sensitivity and the social doctrine of the Church was very different from the one we have today. The most remarkable, at the beginning of his ministry, was the poverty with which he lived and his determined will not to show partiality to people who were poor or rich.¹⁶⁶ The poor, for him, were primarily those who were sinners (*Aut.* 265, 270, 332). He also spoke of the poor sick (*Aut.* 479). Helping the poor was an act of the virtue of mortification (*Aut.* 416).

He took Jesus as his model, who was a friend of children, of the poor, of the sick and of sinners (*Aut.* 435).

Upon arriving in Cuba, he carried out a discernment of the social reality he encountered and his special emphasis on his commitment to the poor became more prominent. But, since there is another talk about Claret in Cuba, I will not describe here all his initiatives in favor of the poor. I will simply refer to the *Aut.* 562-573. When he wrote about agriculture, he tried to embody the spirit of the prophets, the lifestyle of Jesus, the example of the great preachers and humanizers, such as Bartolomé de las Casas and Cardinal Cisneros.¹⁶⁷

During his time in Madrid, he maintained that same attitude toward the poor. He preferred to spend his energy on the poor and not on banquets and balls (*Aut.* 771). In the *Spiritual Exercises* of 1857, he resolved: “In all that concerns my own person, food, bed and clothing, I will be like a miser, a skinflint and a scrooge; but I will be generous to friends and companions, and prodigal with the poor and needy.”¹⁶⁸ I will not complain of the poor.¹⁶⁹ We honor Mary if we give alms to the poor.¹⁷⁰

- A Model, Mary

Claret’s tender devotion to Mary was evident ever since he was a child. “Mary Most Holy is my mother, my patroness, my mistress, my directress and my all, after Jesus” (*Aut.* 5). He himself described his early devotion to Mary (*Aut.* 43-55). He also recounted the influence Mary had on the entire trajectory of his apostolic life as his protector and motivation to do good to others. When he was consecrated Bishop, he took on the name of Mary. He spoke and wrote extensively about Mary. He proposed, in addition to the Rosary, many popular devotional practices. Among them stands out that of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, the Mother of Beautiful Love.¹⁷¹ He tried to bring Mary closer to the people and the people to Mary. She is the Mother of Jesus, the Mother of Mercy. The figure he proposed of Mary in his writings was that of Daughter of the Father, Mother of the Son, Bride of the Holy Spirit; full of grace; the mother of all men; the Immaculate Conqueror of evil; the humble servant of the Lord; the obedient creature who puts her life at the service of the salvation of humankind.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. *Self-portrait*, in ACW, p. 606 et seq; *Ibid.*, pp. 809, 813, 814 in which he spoke of his devotion to the poor.

¹⁶⁷ San Antonio María Claret, *Reflexiones sobre la agricultura*, en *Escritos Pastorales*, BAC, Madrid 1997, p. 299.

¹⁶⁸ ACW, p. 796. Cf. ACW pp. 496-497. “The poor besieged him: ‘His house seemed like a poorhouse. Rarely did we go there without finding people who had come there to explain their needs, which could hardly be attended to with ordinary alms. But during the hour when he held audiences, there was such a concourse of beggars and needy people, that it was sometimes hard work to wade through them just to make it to the staircase’ (Testimony of Aguilar, Francis of Assisi), *Op. cit.*, p. 960.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, Resolutions, p. 812. Lights and Graces, p. 960.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, *Spiritual Notes*, p. 885.

¹⁷¹ On the connotations surrounding the title “Immaculate Heart of Mary”, cf. J. M. Hernandez, *Ex abundantia cordis. Estudio de la espiritualidad cordimariana de los Misioneros Claretianos*, Roma 1991, pp. 67 and et seq.

The speech about “Mary, Heart of the Church” was beautiful, where he spoke of Mary “mother of all the living” and the woman given as Mother at the foot of the cross. Mary is the heart of the Church and from the heart spring forth the works of charity.¹⁷²

Claret felt like he was her son and had been sent. In his manuscripts he wrote: “The prodigal son had no mother. You do have a mother, who is Mary Most Holy. She sends me to look for you.”¹⁷³ He experienced the tenderness of Mary’s heart, which caused him to be on fire with love. This heart is “the forge of your mercy and love” (*Aut.* 270). We are already familiar with the definition of the missionary. Our Memorial (*Aut.* 494).

Without explicit reflection, but with constant praxis, Mary was present in his relationship with the Trinity, with the people, with each person with whom he came into contact. The *most fitting paradigm of proximity* that Claret used for all his neighbors (children, poor, sinners, etc.) was maternal love. What is a mother capable of doing for her children... Even more so Mary. Therefore, Claret resolved to have a mother’s heart.¹⁷⁴

In Claret, proximity, with Mary as a background, transformed into solicitude, tenderness, cordiality, compassion, mercy, ingenuity, constancy in accompaniment.

1.3. Constants in his Proximity: Closeness, Witness, Compassion and Meekness

Four traits that reveal the importance Claret gave to personal reality about ideas. He was interested in people in their stages of life, in their concrete situations of physical and spiritual health, of formation and of responsibility before God and other human beings.

In the practice of the virtues, he learned from the ant, the cock, the donkey, and the dog. He drew conclusions about prudence, vigilance, generosity, fruitfulness, humility, poverty, fidelity and obedience (cf. *Aut.* 664-673). As he described them, they revealed a special human and spiritual quality. But let us take a look at these constants:

— Closeness

Closeness has a lot to do with the encounter. His experience of encounter with Christ made him give substance to personal encounters. These marked his closeness and proximity. Fr. J.M. Viñas writes in the introduction to the *Autobiography*:

He could not have lived in Christ without a personal encounter with Him in faith. Claret tells us how he found Christ living, first in the Eucharist, and later in the Word; also in his neighbor and in the events of life; and finally, in his heart, as a center from which his effectiveness in the apostolate came, like a source and oven of passion, like a dwelling: the house of Martha and Mary, of the disciple and of the apostle.¹⁷⁵

Indeed, the “encounters” in Claret’s life are well understood if we remember his intention to imitate Jesus in everything. He said:

Because we should do all things just as Jesus Christ did, I used to ask myself in every situation, and still do, how Jesus would have acted. How carefully and with what purity and rightness of intention

¹⁷² Works of Saint Anthony Mary Claret, Vol. III, Selected Spiritual Writings, Claretian Publications 1991, pp. 578-582.

¹⁷³ *Mss. Claret*, IX, 102, translator’s version.

¹⁷⁴ See *the Resolutions* of the years 1865 and 1866. Speaking of Priestly zeal, he wrote: “*For himself*, a priest should have the understanding and heart of a prosecutor and judge. *For his neighbor*, the heart of a mother.” Then he described everything a mother is capable of doing. A mother does, suffers, prays... A mother teaches to speak, to walk, educates and forms the heart... cf. ACW, pp. 886-887.

¹⁷⁵ ACW, p. 163-164.

He did everything: preaching, eating, dealing with all sorts of people, praying! Thus, with the Lord's help, I resolved to imitate Jesus Christ in all things so as to be able to say by my actions, if not in so many words like the apostle, Be imitators of me as I am of Christ. (*Aut.* 387)

This idea of how he dealt with all sorts of people is reflected in the memorable encounters of Jesus recounted in the Gospels. Let us call to mind all of his salvific encounters: when he called James and John, Peter, Andrew, Philip, etc., of the apostles, the Samaritan woman, Nicodemus, Mary Magdalene, Zacchaeus, the adulterous woman, the possessed man from Gerasa, Lazarus, Martha and Mary, the grateful leper, Peter's mother-in-law, the hemorrhaging woman, the disciples from Emmaus, etc.

Claret was close to the people who suffered, who were elderly, sick, abandoned or imprisoned. He cared about homeless children. He was close, especially, to sinners.

Jesus was his example in contact with people. Like him, with the people and among the people. He was affected by their needs, their anxieties and hopes. He knew the people and showed them his trustworthiness. Claret was on the journey and always on foot, allowing him to have personal contact. He gave importance to encounters on the roads, in the confessional, during visits. He had a special pedagogy in his relationships with children, young people, families, the sick, the incarcerated, the elderly, the poor, women, workers, men and women religious, priests. He encouraged encounters, maintained *closeness* and the constant willingness to sit in the *confessional* as a place of special encounter.¹⁷⁶

In his preaching his use of images and examples in written and spoken language (sermons), the means he used (writing and distributing bulletins, cards, booklets), and his intense commitment to his activity with associations are all surprising. He encouraged popular associations. He tried to call to mind the most essential of the dignity of human beings and of Christians. He contributed to another style of living relationships within the family and between social classes, by taking responsibility for unbelief, injustice and industrial progress.

— Witness

Claret's journey of life was marked by the witness of what he believed and what he did. He was a living sign of the raw love that God wanted from him. If we put ourselves at the end of his life and look back, his fidelity to the missionary vocation is a light that illuminates his concerns, his projects, his initiatives and his commitments. Claret before the people was a witness of Jesus, taking on persecutions and shedding his blood.

The credibility of his preaching was endorsed by the anointing of the Spirit, the zeal of his charity and the coherence of his life with the message he proclaimed; in addition, by his total unselfishness and dedication, without rest or compensation. In the seven years of evangelization in Catalonia, he gave missions in 150 places, whether in the capitals of the provinces, or in the most distant mountain towns. Always on foot, always watched by the Government, because it scared them whenever a multitude of people came together and the universal prestige they feared they would lose in a general uprising.¹⁷⁷

In the face of the diverse needs he encountered, his first response was his witness of wanting to imitate Jesus.¹⁷⁸ It is surprising that, in the face of the many evils he detected in society, his poverty intensified more and more. He told us: "I believed that this dreadful giant, which worldlings call all-powerful, had

¹⁷⁶ I invite you to review the *Autobiography* to see the multiple occasions in which he refers to the confessional. It is true that he gives enormous importance to whether or not there are confessions at the end of the missions or that some people have confessed after some pastoral intervention, but, undoubtedly, the most striking thing is his total willingness to attend to and administer the sacrament. Apart from the sacrament, the encounter of the priest with those who implore divine mercy is precious.

¹⁷⁷ J. M. Viñas, General Introduction to *Autobiography*, in: ACW, p. 13.

¹⁷⁸ Cf. *Aut.* 435.

to be confronted with the holy virtue of poverty. So wherever I encountered greed, I countered it with poverty.”¹⁷⁹ “I always remembered that Jesus had become poor Himself; he chose to be born, to live, and to die in the utmost poverty. I thought of how Mary, too, had always wanted to be poor.”¹⁸⁰ And he understood poverty as having nothing for himself and offering everything he had to others.¹⁸¹

I reiterate: Where Claret’s witness was manifested, where it really measured up was in the love of his enemies. In the Spiritual Exercises of 1861 he wrote: “Enemies and... [persecutors] I will think that they are to me what carpenters are to wood, what blacksmiths are to iron. Like stonemasons, statue-makers, sculptors. Like surgeons who operate on us. They should be repaid with favors, thanks and prayers.”¹⁸² At the end of his life he wrote this spiritual note: “Love for One’s Enemies.” Anyone who has the Spirit of Christ “looks upon a hostile neighbor as a mother looks upon a drunken son, sick with delirium, who insults and strikes her. For all this, she never grows angry with him. She feels compassion for him and says: *He doesn’t know what he’s doing*. Like Jesus.”¹⁸³

— Compassion

Compassion was a quality that accompanied Claret in his life and ministry. In his *Autobiography* he returned to this very characteristic feeling of his character eight times. He left us this confession: “For my greater embarrassment I should like to quote the words of the author of the Book of Wisdom (8:19): *I was a boy of happy disposition. I had received a good soul as my lot*. That is, I received a good nature or disposition from God, out of his sheer goodness.”¹⁸⁴ He was a missionary “moved by compassion.”

Compassion becomes the response to the experience of such mercy. Like that of Jesus, who has compassion on the crowds because they were like sheep without a shepherd, because he did not want to see them starve to death. It is not possible to contemplate the face of Jesus without perceiving in his eyes a look of tenderness and compassion toward the world, toward the crowd, toward every man and woman. There are more than a few scenes in the gospel where explicit reference is made to this compassion that flows from his heart; sometimes at the sight of the crowd because they were “troubled and abandoned” (Mt 9:36), and sometimes at seeing a poor widow weeping inconsolably at the death of her only son (Lk 7:11-15).

Compassion in Claret transcended all sentimentality in the face of deficiencies, negative situations or evils that people were going through. In it was mixed tenderness, kindness, sweetness,¹⁸⁵ with vivacity, constancy and receptivity in what he undertook. On the horizon there were always others, those who needed spiritual or material help.

When we speak of compassion in Claret, we can assume this going out of oneself, of one’s own plans, and placing oneself in the path of the other by acknowledging their actual dire situation. It also involves feeling affected, moved, and accompanying the one who suffers. Compassion induces a responsible connection by moving toward people who are suffering, establishing one’s abode among them and assuming responsibility unconditionally. This responsibility does not end with an analysis of the causes of suffering or marginalization, but it forces one to accompany the other and to take decisive steps toward their full liberation. The journey of the one who becomes a neighbor out of compassion shapes their way

¹⁷⁹ *Aut.* 359.

¹⁸⁰ *Aut.* 363.

¹⁸¹ Cf. *Aut.* 133-134.

¹⁸² ACW, p. 813.

¹⁸³ Op. cit., p. 910. This text seems to be in line with what he narrates as light and grace: “12th day [of October, 1869]. At 11:30 in the morning, the Lord granted me the love of enemies.” Op. cit., p. 966.

¹⁸⁴ *Aut.* 18. First, attention should be paid to the nos. 9-10.

¹⁸⁵ Like a divine blessing upon him, cf. *Aut.* 34.

of thinking, feeling and acting. Underlying this journey is always the conviction that the world can change and the hope for the possibility of change.

Compassion in the experience of grace, which Claret showed, acquires the rank of superior strength that embraces, makes us understand, gives meaning and leads to the shared exercise of mercy.¹⁸⁶ In the compassionate encounter with the fallen, wounded, impoverished neighbor, Christ continues to reveal himself, whom Claret followed.

— Meekness

Perhaps meekness is the most revealing constant of “proximity.” Its roots denote the ability to “gather” contrasts within oneself and around oneself. It peacefully assumes positive and negative experiences, pleasant and unpleasant, and therefore neither despises nor excludes. The meek person welcomes, is at ease with everyone and expands serenity and tenderness. Because they have achieved inner mastery, those who live meekness relate to others with great cordiality, even when there are setbacks, adversities and persecutions. Meekness imparts strength.

Meekness is an essential virtue for the missionary. Claret wrote about it in a variety of his writings with some breadth.¹⁸⁷ He dedicated the second part of the *Autobiography* to it in Chapter XXV. It is a beautiful chapter. “I knew that the virtue an apostolic missionary needs most, after humility and poverty, is meekness” (*Aut.* 372). “There is no virtue so attractive as meekness” (*Aut.* 373). He then affirmed:

Meekness is one sign of a vocation to be an apostolic missionary. When God sent Moses, he gave him the grace and virtue of meekness. Jesus Christ was meekness itself, and because of this virtue He is called the Lamb. The prophets foretold that He would be so mild that He would neither break the bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax; that he would be persecuted, calumniated, and covered with reproaches and yet remain as one without a tongue and say nothing. What patience and meekness! Yes, by his labors, his suffering, his silence and death on the Cross, He redeemed us and taught us how we must act to save the souls He has entrusted to us. (*Aut.* 374)

He also offered the example of the Apostles, but above all, he looked to the words of James that impressed him so much:

Thus St. James says to any of us who thinks he is wise and understanding enough to teach others, let him show this in practice through a humility filled with good sense. Should you instead nurse bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, at least refrain from arrogant and false claims against the truth. Wisdom like this does not come from above. It is earthbound, a kind of animal, even devilish, cunning (James 3:13-15). (*Aut.* 375)

His experience told him that meekness was essential, especially in the confessional. Therefore, he asked the Lord to act in all things *fortiter et suaviter*. In the Resolutions of 1863, he wrote: “I will continue making my particular examen on meekness.” He added: “I will consider how useful humility is; for humility pleases God, whereas meekness pleases our neighbor. It is better to do less with patience, meekness and kindness, than to do more with haste, anger, annoyance and quarreling, for people are scandalized by the latter.”¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁶ To expand on the topic of mercy in Claret, cf. S. Blanco, «“Tendré para con el prójimo corazón de madre”. La misericordia, rasgo central en la espiritualidad de Claret», *Studia Claretiana* XXXI (2016) 75-104.

¹⁸⁷ Cf. St. Anthony Mary Claret, *El santo Evangelio de Nuestro Señor Jesucristo según San Mateo; Catecismo explicado, El Colegial Instruido, Notas espirituales. Propósitos, etc.* The Epistolario Claretiano (EC), active and passive, contains testimonies which have not been taken into account here.

¹⁸⁸ ACW, p. 822-823. Balmes bears witness to Claret’s preaching: “Little terror, softness in everything (...) does not want to exasperate or make people crazy.” J. Balmes, *Obras completas*, I, BAC, Madrid 1948, p. 295, translator’s version.

2. THOUGHT AND PRAXIS OF “PROXIMITY” IN THE CLARETIAN CONGREGATION

Just a brief note because this part is the subject of a doctoral thesis and it would be interesting for someone to do it.¹⁸⁹

Although, as I have already indicated, there is no written thought on the *praxis of proximity* of our missionary life, we can appreciate some signs or facts that make us think that the Congregation has been close to the people, has walked with the people and has worked for the people. It has fulfilled its aim of seeking in all things and of striving for, by all means, the glory of God and the help of its neighbors. In a special way of the poor and needy.

Not surprisingly, the Congregation has been recognized for these characteristic features: *closeness, simplicity, generosity* and *diligence*.¹⁹⁰ This is often heard in the different mission environments. Undoubtedly, this appreciation has been maintained among us as a family heritage.

The foundation and credibility of this appreciation stems from the *charismatic inspiration*, from the *places* where we have gone to evangelize, from the *collaboration* with which we have evangelized, from the *missionary pedagogy* which has guided us and from the *means* that we have used. All this exudes *closeness* and *proximity* in Claretian missionary life.

I will make some references around these keys in two sections: 1), from the beginning until Vatican II and 2) from the Council until now.

2.1. FROM THE BEGINNING UNTIL THE COUNCIL

— Charismatic Inspiration

The Claretian Congregation is heir to the spirit of Claret. From him it received the example of his life, the *Autobiography* and the *Constitutions*. To contemplate Claret is to see a whole project of missionary life that is embodied, dynamic, and creative.¹⁹¹

Before founding the Congregation, he thought about and outlined some constitutions of the Brotherhood of the Blessed and Immaculate Heart of Mary. The text started like this: “To seek better and more easily the glory of God and the spiritual and bodily good of our neighbors...”¹⁹² It indicated out how each individual has to show his “respect” toward God, himself, and his neighbor. In the latter he indicated all the tasks of evangelization of the people and devotions that must be instilled. Then he added: “He will visit patients in hospitals or private homes, depending on the opportunity. He will visit the imprisoned. He will help the poor, especially those who feel ashamed, with alms that he will ask from the rich people, for this purpose. He will take care of the elderly, widows, and orphaned children. As soon as he can, he will seek to gather or amend lost and scandalous women. He will unite the divorced.”¹⁹³

This text was developed and adjusted for the Claretians in Ch. X of the first CMF *Constitutions* (nos. 87-95). They talked about evangelizing the people with missions and giving exercises to priests, religious

¹⁸⁹ We should take into account the *Historias de la Congregación* by Fr. Aguilar and Fr. Fernandez, the *Anales* and the *Provincial Bulletins*.

¹⁹⁰ What Claret told Fr. Xifré held true: “because between a few of us we have to do a lot.” Letter from October 1, 1857.

¹⁹¹ A good study is the one carried out by Fr. Jesús Álvarez Gómez, *Claretian Missionaries, Return to Origins, Vol. I., Transmission and Reception of the Claretian Charism, Vol II.* Trans. By J. Daries, Claretian Publications, 2000. And the following will help: CMF, *Our Project of Missionary Life: Commentary on the Constitutions*, three volumes, Rome, 1992, 1992, 2000.

¹⁹² J. M. Lozano, *Constituciones y textos sobre la Congregación de Misioneros*, Ed. Claret, Barcelona 1972, p.117, translator’s version. This Brotherhood was founded in 1847 (see p.23-30 and its relationship with the Congregation).

¹⁹³ *Ibid*, p. 121, translator’s version. The Brotherhood was created in 1847.

and seminarians. There was a strong insistence on practices of popular religiosity, on catechesis and religious instruction and on the dissemination of pamphlets and booklets. Especially for men and women of the 21st century, the providential origin of the class distinction is shocking (no. 93), but it must be placed in the context of that time.

The Constitutions of 1865 highlighted *the universality* of the Congregation, which seeks the salvation of people *throughout the world* (CC, I, 2), and which should use *all means possible* (CC II, 63). Claret had understood that the mission of the Congregation had no limits, neither in terms of the recipients nor in terms of the means.

Fr. Josep Xifré offered us a testimony of how the early Congregation lived in his *Crónica de la Congregación* [Chronicle of the Congregation].¹⁹⁴ He evoked the charismatic features of the Founder, his apostolic charity, his intense prayer, his self-sacrifice for others, his love for his neighbor. Of this he said: “His ever compassionate heart directed his actions, gaze and attention to the afflicted, patients and the needy, and when he could not provide a remedy for them, he sought to replace it with good counsel and prayers” (no. 23, translator’s version). He then recounted the origins, the protagonists and the first steps taken by the Congregation as its government was organized and it spread geographically.

The Congregation has had a harmonious journey of development. It has not experienced any ruptures in its missionary life. It has evolved and specified the foundational charism of popular missions into attention to churches, confessions, catechesis, teachers and direction of seminaries, teaching, but discerning, motivated and supported by the Founder.

In 1867, Fr. Josep Xifré published the first edition of *El Espíritu de la Congregación* [The Spirit of the Congregation]. He bore the blessing or approval of the Holy Founder, as was evident from some of his letters. It was addressed to the members of the Congregation to be “suitable ministers of the divine Word.” In 1892 it was republished and this edition marked the successive editions until the 100th anniversary of the Congregation.¹⁹⁵ In 1949 a new edition was printed that was more like a handbook. Today it can only be read profitably if we take into account the historical, theological and religious context of that time. But, taking into account our topic, it seems appropriate to me to consider this paragraph which is found in the section that speaks of “The Height at which the Missionary Should be Placed”: “My most dear brothers, you, in addition to the holiness of life that is necessary for you, and that you must seek to achieve by the means prescribed to you; besides the knowledge that your ministry requires, and which you must acquire through an uninterrupted study, you must always show yourselves to be kind without pretense, serious without pride, modest, meek, reserved and prudent by conviction, with which you will earn the esteem of men, you will have prestige toward them and you will inspire respect from them.”¹⁹⁶

— Places of New Foundations

The Congregation was born with a vocation of universality out of simplicity, poverty and missionary imagination. As something connatural was the *itinerancy* and the *availability* to go to one position or

¹⁹⁴ It was published in *Anales de la Congregación* in 1915-1916. The magazine *Studia Claretiana* reproduced it with some previous clarifications in 1999, vol. XVII, pp. 7-93.

¹⁹⁵ J. Xifré, *Espíritu de la Congregación de Misioneros Hijos del inmaculado Corazón de María*, Imprenta de San Francisco de Sales, Madrid 1892.

¹⁹⁶ *O. c.*, p. 149, translator’s version. A little later he says: “Have as inviolable a maxim to always speak well of everyone, according to the laws of charity, and never speak malevolently of anyone, no matter how much he has given you cause; rather be patient, peaceful, and defend even those who have insulted you; but above all, always speak with respect and charity about the pastors and cathedral choir clergy, whatever the defects or lifestyles of some or many, and even if there is murmuring and slander, of which you may be victims, begun by some of them, remember what is written: *Benefacite his qui oderunt vos, et orate pro persequentibus et calumniantibus vos*”, p. 151, translator’s version. This consideration has Claretian resonance.

another. It has no other claim than to give glory to God and to serve the Word of God to the People. The places speak to and qualify the Congregation's style of mission.

Let us review *places*: Our Congregation, founded in Vic, opened its second house in Gracia and the third in Segovia. The mission and influence of the Founder in the first foundations were by his own hand. Then came Jaca, La Selva del Camp, Prades and Thuir (France). Algiers and Chile. After the restoration, in Spain, there were a few foundations. I recall those of Alfaro, Alagón, Barbastro, Solsona, Calahorra, Santo Domingo de la Calzada, Plasencia, Zafra, Balmaseda, Aranda de Duero, Almendralejo, Don Benito, etc. There were some cities: Segovia, Pamplona, Tarragona, Huesca, Bilbao, Santiago (Chile), Madrid, Rome, etc. But the great expansion, in the first fifty years of the Congregation, took place in medium-sized towns, with the capacity to move around the neighboring regions.¹⁹⁷

The centers of formation, except Segovia, were in towns such as Vic, Solsona, Alagón, Barbastro, Aranda de Duero, Santo Domingo de la Calzada, Don Benito, Zafra, Balmaseda, etc. There was a certain harmony with the traditional atmosphere.

In our missionary activity, it was the popular missions, the feast days of patron saints and some special events that required the presence of missionaries in the villages. The presence of our communities led to an intense spiritual life, ongoing formation and openness to the requests of bishops or priests, confraternities or groups who wished to hear the Word of God. In our houses or in other places, another activity was the spiritual exercises for religious, priests and lay people. Other reference points were the multiple gatherings of members of various associations, the Archconfraternity of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, the Nocturnal Adoration, Our Lady of the Rosary, etc. Complementary activities were the clothes closets, the night classes for workers and the assistance groups, sometimes the poor were fed right from the front door. How many of our Missionary brothers sought work or homes for those who requested it!

This missionary activity was not only entrusted to the Congregation by the priests of the parishes, but was also requested by the bishops to prepare for pastoral visits. There was excellent ecclesial collaboration. It was carried out while treating people of all different kinds well. It involved relationships, acceptance, catechesis, preaching, confessions, differentiated conferences for young people and adults, visits to the sick and imprisoned, spiritual direction, which involved closeness and proximity.

2.2. LEAVING SPAIN AND THE MISSIONS AS SPACES OF PROXIMITY

The universality of the Congregation, as has been pointed out, is found at the roots of our Congregation. Claret's spirit was for the whole world. Although they had to go to France because of the revolution in Spain (1868), soon, from Prades, our brothers left for Algiers (1869) to serve the Spanish emigration, although their presence did not last long. Then came the foundations in Chile, Equatorial Guinea, Mexico, Italy, Argentina, Brazil, etc. They were new places that demanded radical availability: leaving one's own country, contact with other cultures, with other languages, with other historical and social realities. They were favorable for showing proximity, dialogue and what today we call interculturality, even if it was with deficiencies. In fact, the Congregation is rooted, grows and opens itself to new missionary projects.

Our missions among non-Christians are exponents of great closeness and proximity among the people and for the people. Our evangelization acquires a particular harmony between religious instruction and human promotion. The Gospel is proclaimed, catechesis is intensified, spaces of worship are built. At the same time, schools and centers for learning trades are opened, the family is promoted, people's health

¹⁹⁷ To get an idea of this, review the work of Fr. C. Fernández, *Historia de la Congregación de los Hijos del Inmaculado Corazón de María*, Vol. I, Cocusa, Madrid 1967.

is taken care of. There is *collaboration* with other religious institutes and the natives are incorporated into tasks of domestic collaboration and evangelization as interpreters, catechists, etc. With regard to the mission, concern, hope, and mutual help flourish.

2.3. PUBLICATIONS, SCHOOLS AND PARISHES: OTHER PRAXIS OF PROXIMITY

The criterion of “use all means possible” set out in the *Constitutions* of 1865 (no. 2) and maintained in the current *Constitutions* (1988, no. 48) has been a reference in the mouth of Claretians with varying, sometimes opposing, meanings. For some it is a prophetic sign, because it foretold the successive modernization of a Congregation that evolves in the face of the social, cultural and religious challenges of each time and place; for others it has been ambiguous because, if discernment is not done, we can dedicate ourselves to any activity. For many years of the first half of the twentieth century, there has been no lack of controversy. However, if we look at history, in addition to reaffirming the charismatic legitimacy, we can discover that publications, schools and parishes¹⁹⁸ reveal other praxis of proximity.

The Founder was a great promoter of both popular and other religious publications. We need only review what the *Librería Religiosa* published. It disseminated many bulletins and pamphlets. He also wanted the missionaries to do the same. In 1889 the *Boletín del Corazón de María* [The Immaculate Heart of Mary Bulletin] appeared, which became the *El Iris de Paz* [Iris of Peace]. In São Paulo (1899) the magazine *Ave María* began to be published; in Equatorial Guinea (1903) *Guinea Española* [Spanish Guinea] appeared; and in 1935 in Chicago *U.S. Catholic*. They were four popular magazines promoted by the Claretians. In this area I must add the publishers that were founded in these years and the good number of journals that were emerging in the Congregation: *Ilustración del Clero* [Enlightenment of the Clergy], *Comentarium pro Religiosis*, *Vida Religiosa* [Religious Life], *Ephemerides Mariologicae*, etc.

With regard to teaching, the letter from the Founder to Fr. Xifré is well known. At the beginning of the 20th century, in the first 50 years, many schools were remodeled or built. The legitimacy of the Claretian presence in teaching is indisputable.¹⁹⁹ Fr. Xifré himself wrote these words: “To devote oneself and focus on teaching, especially of young children, is a great work, worthy of all reward. It is undertaking a superhuman work, it is angelic. How much we wish to see our beloved missionaries engaged in it!”²⁰⁰

The parishes have grown in number since 1890 when the Congregation took on the parish in Andacollo (Chile) until the Council and more so after Paul VI asked religious congregations to accept parishes.

These three forms of evangelization, which have only apparently paralyzed missionary itinerancy and availability, open us to other ways of expressing the missionary service of the Word and proximity to the people, children, young people, families and those who may need spiritual and social assistance. They are other ways of encountering young people and carrying out vocation ministry.

2.4. DISTANCES THAT DO HINDER PROXIMITY

The flourishing of schools and parishes among us came about during a time when there was strong impact from technical progress, religious ignorance and the de-Christianization of society. There was talk of the rebellion of the masses. The Spanish civil war was taking place in the middle of two world wars.

¹⁹⁸ For the history of these forms, cf. J. Álvarez Gómez, *Claretian Missionaries, Vol. II., Transmission and Reception of the Claretian Charism*, Trans. By J. Daries, Claretian Publications, 2000.

¹⁹⁹ In 1990 I wrote a brochure: *Claretianos educadores en la misión educativa de la Iglesia*, Curia General, Roma. Also, *Prioridades evangelizadoras en los colegios claretianos*. This text is included in *Caminando juntos*, Publicaciones Claretianas, Madrid 2008, pp. 441-485.

²⁰⁰ J. Xifré, *Espíritu de la Congregación*, *ibid.* p. 184, translator’s version.

Industrialization caused the movement from towns to cities. It was necessary to readjust, sometimes, to survive. There was a change in human, social, cultural and religious relationships.

I cannot omit that organized structures slow down itinerancy and reduce availability. Civil qualifications in schools and specialization in pastoral subjects are required. Formation in ecclesiastical sciences is more qualified. Stability and professionalization are called for. There is a certain conflict between the roots and availability; between attending to the parish community and to other communities of the region or dioceses. The same happens in schools where the education of new generations is emphasized and personal relationships are limited.

In any case, the vectors that generate distance, already during that time, and more so in the later times, are indifference, banality, bureaucracy, comfort, professionalism, efficiency and routine. Sacramentalism and paternalistic assistance are not signs of proximity. And, of course, in some countries, collusion with colonialism is the most opposite of proximity.

It is easy to guess that proximity, as a quality of our missionary vocation, must be sought further in the depths of the spaces we occupy and the means we use. Our openness, evangelical sensitivity and commitment to those who truly need us are at stake.

2.5. IN POST-CONCILIAR TIMES

If we follow the course of what the Congregation has reflected on during its chapters, the elaboration of the new text of the *Constitutions*, meetings, congresses, studies and publications, it is easy to see that we have the basis for a thought and praxis of proximity in the Congregation.²⁰¹

— A Privileged Decade and the Event of the Council

This decade could start in 1949 with the celebration of the first centenary of the Congregation. In 1950, Fr. Claret was canonized. These events were the best way to prepare for accepting the principle of renewal proposed by the Council based on returning to the founders. In the 1950s many theses were written on Claretian spirituality. The autobiographical writings were published. The Claretian Secretariat and the Center for Claretian Studies were created. Houses were opened in Japan and the Philippines. The slogan of Father General “*ad majora et ampliora*” set a different pace for the Congregation. The decade of the 1950s was a real dawn precursor of the renewal that the Council would later promote.

This event of the Spirit in present history had as precursors the great social, spiritual and cultural movements.²⁰² The great theologians who participated in the Council were reflecting on and offering a new sensitivity to God, to the Church, to society, and to the created world. They offered a vision that was less anchored in tradition and more prone to progress; less attached to uniformity and to the established order and more prone to pluralism and participation. Pope John XXIII, in convoking the Council, said: “While humanity is on the edge of a new era, tasks of immense gravity and amplitude await the Church, as in the most tragic periods of its history. It is a question in fact of bringing the modern world into contact with the vivifying and perennial energies of the gospel.”²⁰³ Following the Council, without realizing it, we began to use a new language that would lead us to the content of the current category of “proximity.”

— New Vision and New Way of Situating Ourselves

²⁰¹ In this part, the work of Fr. G. Alonso helps to understand the whole process of renewal. Cf. G. Alonso, *Misioneros Claretianos, III, La renovación conciliar*, Editorial Claretiana, Buenos Aires 2007. (2024 English edition pending.)

²⁰² Cf. A. Bocos Merino, «En el umbral de la teología conciliar sobre la vida consagrada», en C. Martínez Oliveras (ed.), *Memoria para el futuro*, Publicaciones Claretianas, Madrid 2017, pp. 13-60.

²⁰³ John XXIII, Apostolic Constitution *Humanae Salutis*, December 25, 1961, no.1.

The Council introduced us to a new way of seeing and situating ourselves, of thinking and proceeding. It encouraged us to live from the imperatives of returning to the Trinitarian, evangelical, ecclesial, and charismatic origins while taking into account the social context. From the perspective of these assumptions, the foundations for a *thought about proximity* were opened for the Congregation and, above all, to *guarantee a fruitful coming closer, becoming neighbors and getting involved* in the lives of the recipients of our mission.

An early confirmation, a fruit of the conciliar guidance, was the experience of grace that enveloped our Claretian missionary life in the Church. It strengthened us in our foundational charism and reaffirmed us as servants of the Word. Our renewal was not an exercise in archeology, but rather an entering into contact with our Trinitarian and charismatic sources. It introduced us to the dynamism of the Spirit, enlightened us with the return to the Word of God and encouraged us to share the condition of members of the People of God. It made us love the world we inhabit and that is making its pilgrimage in the history of salvation. It prioritized the Church's *raison d'être*, which is her evangelizing mission, and involved us in it according to what was the most *urgent, timely and effective*.

The language of the Council and following the Council was not empty or static. It was dynamic and contextualized. The category of "history" appeared for the first time in an ecumenical council. Although used with multiple modalities, here I want to highlight how the Church is an existential reality, unfolds in time and shows solidarity with the destiny of the human race and its history.²⁰⁴ In fact, it makes us undertake journeys, develop programs, and distinguish stages and phases. Little by little, a new way of seeing and engaging has been created in all the members of the Church. We have become accustomed to an "enriched" vocabulary of words, that is, those with special significance, such as: Mystery, Word of God, following Jesus, Gospel, People of God, communion, mission, charisms, prophecy, eschatology, ministries, laity, religious, local church, etc.

On the other hand, it is necessary to point out how the Council emphasized the dignity of the person, being in relationship and inclusive interrelationships, conscious subjects, free and responsible in the construction of society. It underlined the value of relationships with God, with others and with creation. It emphasized diversity, pluralism, dialogue, participation and co-responsibility.

It opened our eyes to those who the Lord favors, who are *the poor*, and it pushed us to make an option for them and to share their destiny. Before, during and after the Council, the search for peace, justice and solidarity has been one of the great ecclesial concerns and has been reflected in our General Chapters. There were those who described Vatican II as the council of the poor. The Assembly of CELAM in Medellin, now 50 years ago, was something that launched the option for the poor forward in the Church.

It placed us in a world of profound changes, in which we must discern the signs of times and places,²⁰⁵ maintain critical thinking and evangelize a religiously cold society with growing incredulity. It encouraged ecumenism, interreligious dialogue and "care for our common home", as Pope Francis now asks (ecology).

²⁰⁴ This is the complete paragraph no. 1 of *Gaudium et spes*: "The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts. For theirs is a community composed of men. United in Christ, they are led by the Holy Spirit in their journey to the Kingdom of their Father and they have welcomed the news of salvation which is meant for every man. That is why this community realizes that it is truly linked with mankind and its history by the deepest of bonds."

²⁰⁵ Our *Constitutions* consider places and times to have particular theological value: The Congregation must always be "responsive to the needs of the Church and the world in various times and places" (CC 136). Its mission should be fulfilled "amid the changing circumstances of times, places and persons" (CC 29). Therefore, "our communities, considering the conditions of each place, should strive to give a collective witness to poverty" (CC 25).

— The Three Main Axes for Rethinking Proximity: Identity, Communion, Mission

Following the Council, the Congregation went through two cycles regarding identity, communion and mission. First in the constitutional phase that ended with the approval of the new *Constitutions* (1988) and second from the explanation of its vocation as *bearers and servants of the word, in prophetic mission, that they may have life*. Later, two essential aspects of our lives were emphasized as *men on fire with love* and *witnesses and messengers of joy*. This entire journey has been illuminated by the Church's magisterium and the calls and challenges of today's world.

The *thought and praxis of proximity* will be built on the basis of this identity, communion and mission affirmed and reconfirmed in the post-conciliar General Chapters. We cannot be among the people if not as servants of the Word, as an evangelizing community, as collaborators in the mission of the Church. Everything that is said about our proximity will have resonance in these three words.

Even more so, the Congregation, in accordance with the Church, has no reason to exist except for the mission. It is a universal mission, without borders or exclusions. Having placed the evangelizing mission at the center of its life makes it open to differences and attentive to all who demand its merciful presence. The mission inspires and drives the spirituality, education, economy and governance.

— Options for the Congregation

At the end of the first cycle of renewal, the General Chapter of 1979 offered, along with the renewed constitutional text, the programmatic charter: *The Mission of the Claretian Today (MCT)*. In this Charter, as an expression of our commitment to the mission, the following options appear: 1) for missionary evangelization, 2) for a more culturally related evangelization, 3) for a prophetic and liberating evangelization, 4) for an evangelization from the viewpoint of the poor and needy, 5) for an evangelization that multiplies evangelizing leaders (MCT 161-179).

These options have been maintained throughout the process of renewal of the Congregation. In one way or another they are reflected in the *Constitutions, Directories, General Plan of Formation* and in the document derived from the World Congress on Claretian Spirituality "*Our Missionary Spirituality on the Path of the People of God*" (2001). In these documents and in all the statements from the General Chapters after the Council are indications that show how our proximity should be.

If our post-conciliar journey is considered in phases, it can be broken up by three key moments and its three major options can be pointed out: 1) *The option for the poor*. This marked the insertion, solidarity and review of positions. 2) *The option for the "missio ad gentes"*, which underlined evangelization and the new evangelization, insisted on inculturation and tried to respond to the call of John Paul II to make itself present in Asia, Africa and the East Europe. 3) *The option for universal fraternity*. Based on the ecclesiology of organic communion and the spirituality of communion. Prevailing elements are recognition of the other, dialogue and collaboration (shared mission).

The XXV General Chapter asked us to be involved in three commitments that have as a background the questions of our times, the charismatic features in the mission and the processes of transformation. The commitments are these three: 1) *start or carry out processes*, 2) *practice discernment* and 3) *enter into the dynamic of transformation in the different areas of missionary life (spirituality, formation, governance)*. These commitments are intimately linked, interrelated, and lead us to engage in what is at the heart of *the Church's reform* as Pope Francis currently proposes.

— New Acts of Proximity in the Claretian Mission

Consistency with these choices has led us to propose a way of life and ministry that is prophetic (In Prophetic Mission 1997) and to carry out apostolic charity boldly (Men on Fire With Love 2009). Hence, as a consequence, we have taken steps to occupy positions on the front lines, to be in working-class areas and in social and cultural peripheries, to promote the insertion not only of small apostolic communities but also of formation centers, to occupy spaces in order to attend to the marginalized and excluded.

If we review the foundations made after Vatican II and the Special Chapter, we can find *difficult missions of the Provinces* around the world.²⁰⁶ They have been and continue to be living presences in different cultures and in areas marked by poverty. One only needs to go through the catalog of houses founded in Africa, Asia and Latin America or in centers serving migrants in Europe and North America. This expansion of the Congregation has required promoting the adaptation of lifestyles, generosity and austerity, witness of welcome and solidarity, the inculturation of the Gospel and of the charism, dialogue in its various forms (intercultural, interreligious and of life) and ecumenism, as I have already indicated.

In these years and for different reasons, a greater awareness and functionality of “doing with others” (shared mission) has been created; intercongregational awareness has been promoted and a remarkable effort has been made to multiply evangelizing leaders, both lay and men and women religious. Consider the institutes of consecrated life. On the other hand, there are: the preparation of teachers in our schools, catechetical leaders in the missions and in parishes and centers of higher education in the Theology of Consecrated Life.

Anyone who visits our missions can see how many projects have been carried out in order to promote human development and evangelization in perfect harmony. Without dichotomies. The Mission Procures, at the general and provincial level, offer consistent reports about them.

Another example of proximity today is the communication of goods, both personnel and economic. The scale of values and priorities in favor of the people and mission are at stake. Solidarity is at work in many areas. And, in short, it is the people, especially the most needy, who are taken into account and they give thanks.

Finally, I add the proximity in publications, radio and communication networks. Although it has always been a missionary task to write and publish books, pamphlets, and magazines, today we have a greater number of magazines and publishers that contribute proximity in the cultural and religious sphere. The greatest novelty is in the networks: institutional and personal websites of the Congregation, Major Organisms, parish and school institutions, and higher education centers. It is a way to enhance our virtual presence, reach out to each other and convey our message.

— What Guarantees Fruitful Proximity in our Mission

Based on what has been said, the doctrinal framework that guides us is magnificent. What happens is that proximity refers to the existential, to the real life of people and in us everything is ordered toward, like in Jesus and in the style of Claret, one aim: that *God the Father is known, loved and served*.

What really qualifies our mission in proximity is to enter into the *dynamism of the kingdom* in its double movement of inner liberation (conversion) and complicity in love of neighbor, who has their own dignity, face and history. The kingdom grows like a mustard seed, like yeast in the dough (Lk 13:18-20). In the kingdom there is no exclusion, but rather inclusion. Of course, it comes through the little ones, the poor, the meek, those who seek and work for justice and peace. Therefore, one can only recover accompaniment from the perspective of sincere conversion to the essential values of the Gospel or, more precisely, to the person of Jesus. We are his neighbors and only from him do we become Samaritans.

Now, we are not evangelically compassionate if we provide partial services, if we give something from what is left over, if we keep accounts of the good that we do. Our compassion, and the way Claret lived it, implies giving of ourselves unconditionally and without reservation. Accompaniment means going out

²⁰⁶ In the Special Chapter (1967) a Decree was issued *On Missions to Non-Christians*. It determined: “All the provinces should have their own mission, providing it with personnel and financial means.” MI, 8. In the early 1960s we had begun to be present in India, Congo, Izabal (Guatemala), etc. After 1968 began: Humahuaca (Argentina), Honduras-Panama, Yhu (Paraguay), Juanjui (Peru), Gabon, São Felix (Brazil), Akono (Cameroon), Bamenda (Nigeria), etc. Later, houses were founded in Korea, Sri Lanka, Timor, Indonesia, Russia, Belarus, Ivory Coast, Taiwan, Haiti, etc.

of ourselves, contemplating and believing in the real needs and taking care of them. We become neighbors by loving the other as ourselves. There is no neighbor for those who live only for themselves and their own interests.

Those who keep their eyes open, their ears attentive, their hearts on fire, their feet always on the journey, and their arms outstretched guarantee the fruitfulness of proximity. Always in harmony, contributing, bringing together, building. These are, therefore, signs of identity of those who are well prepared to be neighbors and live in proximity.

People who maintain a harmonious and responsible balance between all their relationships (with God, with other people, with all created things); their following of Jesus in the style of Claret; the fraternal life in the apostolic community, careful initial and permanent formation and the governance that helps to grow, guarantee a true proximity in our mission. These are requirements that emanate from our project of missionary life reflected in the *Constitutions*, explained in the chapters, and taken on in our later formative and spiritual remedial efforts.

3. RE-READING THE PRAXIS OF PROXIMITY IN THE CLARETIAN MISSION

To open this section, we will listen to the cry for “closeness” and “proximity” in today’s world. We can see that people are tired of technology, abstract philosophy, lack of faith, and existential emptiness. Ideas, customs, and duty have lost weight. The scale of values is constantly being constructed. It is a moment of fragility and fluidity. We can speak of culture without worship, of formation without information, of death without mortality, of feminism without women, of work without happiness, of unfaithfulness without faith.²⁰⁷ But fortunately, the need to think about life *from the perspective of the other* is growing progressively. It is no wonder that there is a culture of the “inter”: interreligious, intergenerational, intercultural, international, intercontinental, etc. The grammar of the prepositions we use today opens us to hope: “in” (inclusion, insertion, insistence, involvement, etc.); “re” (renewal, revitalization, refounding, reconstruction, reorganization, etc.) and “con”* (convocation, co-belief, coexistence, commitment). The value of silence, contemplation, encounter, sympathy and solidarity are being restored. The window of hope is higher and more is visible.

I will define these two reference points and then I will develop them: 1) Its meaning in biblical and personalistic thinking. 2) The ecclesiology of the People of God and the spirituality of communion. 3) The frequent mentions made by Bergoglio-Francis in his teaching.

3.1. *Biblical and Personalistic Thinking*

The word *proximity* refers, in our usual language, to closeness in space and time. You are near; you are far away. It is also synonymous with closeness and is linked to border and contact. Another meaning indicates the shared preferences, hobbies and tastes that connect people. The reverse, in this case, is the psychological and affective incompatibility that produces distance, detachment, separation.

But this term *proximity* has another scope, beyond the categories of time and space, when speaking of *presence* and *neighbor*. Two words that have special resonance in the Old and New Testaments and in the spiritualist and personalist thought with their Jewish and Christian inspiration.

Revelation and personalism help us to enter into an open and dynamic anthropology that is conjugated in the verbs of the senses (look, listen, taste, smell and touch); of the mind, of memory, of feeling and of

²⁰⁷ V. Verdú, *Yo y tú, objetos de lujo. El personismo: la primera revolución cultural del siglo XXI*, Arena abierta. Debate, Barcelona 2005.

* Spanish text reads: “‘con’ (convocación, concreencia, convivencia, compromiso)”.

heart; of spaces and times; of cultures and beliefs and religions. In short, of the whole person in their various relationships. It refers to an anthropology of relationship, otherness and reciprocity; of encounter, dialogue, covenant and solidarity.

— Presence and Proximity in Revelation

In the Old Testament, the first thing we find is the figure of a God who takes the initiative and draws near to man. God the Creator has a good relationship with the first couple until they are expelled from the garden of Eden (Gen 3:23). Throughout the history of the Old Testament, it is narrated how God *becomes present, draws near*, with his mercy and with his loving eagerness so that his people may walk according to his will, may be converted and enter into communion with him. A crucial and decisive moment through which the divine presence becomes evident is making the covenant with Abram (cf. Gen 15:8; 17:7), with Isaac (Gen 26:24), and Jacob (Gen 28:15). This covenant continues through the whole history of the people and will be sealed by Jesus, establishing a New Covenant, shedding His blood for all humankind. God will reveal His name as presence: “I am who I am”, the unchanging one, who is there to help (Ex 3:13-16), the always faithful companion, always watching over his people. He is ever present. He is presence.

Israel was in danger of linking the presence of God to the promised land (1 Sa 26:19), to the holy city, Jerusalem. That is, to spaces. It was the prophets who spoke of the infinite greatness of God that surpasses all localism. The psalms sing the glory of the Lord on earth and in the heavens, proclaiming his righteousness and faithfulness. All peoples see his glory and majesty (cf. Ps 97). To seek the face of God means to live in his presence and for him to be our God (cf. Ps 11:7).

The reciprocity that God expects of the Israelites is not only that he be loved with all their heart and strength, but also to love their neighbor. The neighbor, at first, is the “other,” not the brother. In Lv 19:18 it is said “You shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.”

In the New Testament, the Word dwelt among us (Jn 1:14) and Jesus preaches the proximity of the kingdom and, therefore, of salvation. The icon, the sacrament of proximity, is Jesus of Nazareth. The Gospel is a story of proximity to the sick, sinners, children, strangers, apostles, friends. Jesus reminds them of the greatest commandment: *To love God and to love your neighbor* (cf. Mt 22:37-40).²⁰⁸ Some examples of proximity that stand out are the conversation with the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:1-2) and the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37), which answers the question: Who is my neighbor?

John instills reciprocity. Four times in his gospel he speaks of the new commandment: “I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another” (13:34; 13:35; 15:12; 15:17). He insists more repeatedly in his letters (1 Jn 3:11; 3:23; 4:12; 2 Jn 1:5). The washing of the feet is the sign of how to express love for the other (Jn 13:14) that will culminate on Easter: the death on the cross and the resurrection.

St. Paul described Jesus’ proximity in the canticle to the Philippians (2:6-11). And in his other letters he is a teacher of *reciprocity* in love. Build up one another (Rom 14:19); welcome one another (Rom 15:7); admonish one another (Rom 15:14); serve one another through love (Gal 5:13); bear one another’s burdens (Gal 6:2); bear with one another through love (Eph 4:2; 5:21; Col 3:13); be kind to one another (Eph 4:32); be merciful and forgive (Eph 4:32; Col 3:13); console one another (1 Ts 4:18; 5:11); encourage one another (1 Ts 5:11); and so many other texts.

— Encounter, Presence and Proximity in the Philosophy of the Spirit and Personalism.

²⁰⁸ “Where is the proximity of the Lord made presence? Where someone loves and, like Jesus, exists for others, because there temporary proximity is overcome. Hence, proximity is, first and foremost, personal, not temporary. The Lord is near with his requirement, or with his love; He is constantly near us in our brother and in other men.” A. Grabner-Haider, «Proximidad», en: *Vocabulario práctico de la Biblia*, Herder, Barcelona 1975, translator’s version.

These currents, closely linked to each other, as I have already indicated, have spoken of *encounter, presence and proximity*, highlighting the concepts of *mystery, face,*²⁰⁹ *relationship, otherness, donation, reciprocity and solidarity.*²¹⁰ From this anthropology, significance and witness have been invoked, the priority of ethics and the invocation of justice and peace.

Let us focus on these words: *encounter, presence and proximity.*

a) *Encounter.* Existential analysis, through personal experiences, makes us move from “there is” to “I give” and enter into the logic of gift.²¹¹ As we will see, it is in the *personal encounter* where it is most noticeable; where presence becomes a gift. “The Thou meets me through grace — it is not found by seeking. But my speaking of the primary word to it is an act of my being, is indeed the act of my being. (...) I become through, my relation to the Thou; as I become, I say Thou. (...) All true life is encounter.”²¹² The poet Antonio Machado says it in verse:

“It is not the fundamental ‘I’
that the poet seeks,
but the essential ‘you.’”²¹³

“With that ‘you’ in my song
I do not refer to you my companion:
that ‘you’ is me.”²¹⁴

The category “encounter” is a constant reference point to define the human being as an *open and syntactic reality; intersubjective and dialogical.* The encounter is characterized by respectiveness, reciprocity and intimacy of the relationship established between people, beyond their nicknames and functions. To live is to live together. Finding oneself is something more than being in proximity, juxtaposing oneself, clashing, controlling oneself and managing oneself. To find oneself means to glimpse the area of one’s own life with that of another reality that reacts actively to my presence. To find oneself is to be present, in the creative sense of exchanging possibilities of one order and another. “The true ideal of the human being is to create valuable forms of unity. For that reason, it can be affirmed, with reason, that there is nothing that unites us like doing good together.”²¹⁵

In the encounter there is mutual enlightenment and personal enrichment. Admiration, listening, dialogue and understanding give quality to the encounter and activate creative fidelity. The result of this dialogical dynamic is the reciprocity of giving and receiving the other. “That’s when the miracle of the ‘we’ occurs: the other is not something that happens in your life, but something that ‘happens’ to you.

²⁰⁹ Cf. I. Murillo, *Persona y rostro del otro.* Instituto Emmanuel Mounier, Madrid, 1991. Id., “*Rostró*”, en *Diccionario de pensamiento contemporáneo*, San Pablo, Madrid 1997.

²¹⁰ We recall P. Wust, F. Ebner, M. Buber, F. Rosenzweig, Luis Lavelle, Maurice Nedoncel, Gabriel Marcel, Manuel Mounier, Roman Guardini, Emmanuel Lévinas, Xavier Zubiri, Pedro Laín Entralgo, Julián Marías, José Rof Carballo, Alfonso López Quintás, Liberation philosophers and theologians (Gustavo Gutiérrez, Leonardo Boff, Enrique Dussel, Juan Carlos Scanone, etc.), Juan de Dios Martín Velasco, Carlos Díaz, Xosé Manuel Domínguez, etc.

²¹¹ Cf. C. Díaz, *Del hay al doy. ¡Ay, si nadie diera! (La urgencia de la gratuidad)*, San Esteban, Salamanca 2013. F. Torralba, *La lógica del don*, Khaf, Zaragoza 2012; X. M. Domínguez Prieto, *Antropología de la familia*, BAC, Madrid 2007, pp. 11-40.

²¹² M. Buber, *Yo y Tú*, Caparrós, Madrid, 1993, p. 17. [For English Translation see MARTIN BUBER, *I and Thou*, 1923, Blurb, San Francisco, Ca., 2018]

²¹³ A. Machado, *Poesías completas*, Espasa Calpe, Madrid, 1987 (12ª ed.), p. 271.

²¹⁴ *Ib.*, p. 275.

²¹⁵ A. López Quintás, *Inteligencia creativa. El descubrimiento personal de los valores.* BAC, Madrid 1999, pp. 176; Id., *El secreto de una vida lograda*, Palabra, Madrid 2003; Id., *Llamados al encuentro*, Ciudad Nueva, Madrid 2011. And in other works he has dealt with the theme of encounter and presence.

It's not just before you, but rather it is a *call* for you. Its presence touches you in your depths. Therefore, many times, the presence of the other, even if you like it, also makes you uncomfortable, since it is an invitation to let yourself be dethroned. The presence of the other, of this 'thou' with which, perhaps, you form a we, gives you an important first lesson: it shows you that you are not the center of the universe."²¹⁶ Thus, the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37) begins to be paradigmatic of the encounter with the other, where accompaniment, compassion, mercy and charity (the love for others) occur together.

b) *Presence*. At the foundation of the encounter is the presence of the person, which for Gabriel Marcel is not a problem, but rather a mystery. A problem is something before which I find myself and a mystery is something in which my own being is involved and committed. In the face of a problem, we are spectators and in a mystery, we are actors. Marcel speaks of presence according to the analysis of the situation in which two people find themselves, who may be communicating, but there is no communion between them and they end up as strangers and unrecognizable.

By a very singular phenomenon indeed, this stranger interposes himself between me and my own reality, he makes me in some sense also a stranger to myself; I am not really myself while I am with him. The opposite phenomenon, however, can also take place. When somebody's presence does really make itself felt, it can refresh my inner being; it reveals me to myself, it makes me more fully myself than I should be if I were not exposed to its impact.²¹⁷

Presence, according to him, only occurs in the emptying of oneself and in meditation. It is in recollection where the person recovers inner unity and finds the foundation of his relationship with others.

The presence of the other always affects me, just like I affect the other. It is not elusive. The challenge, the invitation and the requirement to establish belief in each other and coexistence emerge. Positive and negative presences can be distinguished. *Positive* presences are those that radiate light and enlighten, that are liberating and strengthening. In short, they are transformative. *Negative* presences are those that cause tensions and conflicts and create divisions. The presences are negative of those who are opaque and do not allow the clean water that is to be drunk to spring forth. But, probably, the most negative presence is that of the one who lies because of the effect it produces. Nietzsche was irrefutable when he said: "I'm not upset that you lied to me, I'm upset that from now on I can't believe you."

We are used to thinking about presence in space-time and physical coordinates. But we are in a new era of continuous and diffuse cultural mutation induced by the new information and communication technologies (ICT). We have gone from the industrial age to the digital age. But with a surprising qualitative leap. There is no comparison of one revolution to another. Information and communication technologies have made electronic space possible with a multitude of new social spaces. It is the new digital and technological continent²¹⁸ that has generated enormous capacity for free expression and free movement of information. It affects all areas of information, communication, cultural development, education, economics and politics. It has an impact on the spheres of knowledge and emotions and affection. They are changing our perceptions and relationships. As well as our privacy and security.

²¹⁶ X. M. Domínguez Prieto, *Eres luz. La alegría de ser persona*, San Pablo, Madrid 2005, p. 77.

²¹⁷ G. Marcel, «El misterio del ser», en *Obras completas*, I, BAC, Madrid 2002, pp. 185-186. (Translator's note: This quote can be found at https://archive.org/stream/themysteryofbeing00marcuoft/https://archive.org/stream/themysteryofbeing00marcuoft_djvu.txt See also GABRIEL MARCEL, *The Mystery of Being*, 1951, Andesite Press, 2017.) E. Mounier elaborated on this idea: "The value of a mystery is not its opaqueness, as is believed, often for and against it, but because it is the diffuse sign of a reality richer than clarities overly immediate. Its dignity is completely in its diffuse positivity, in the presence it announces. It is not strong enough to be safe from danger." (*Obras completas*, Sígueme, Salamanca 1992, p. 203, translator's version).

²¹⁸ Cf. CMF. *Witnesses and Messengers of the Joy of the Gospel*, Chapter Statement, 2015, nos. 17-18.

The new technologies have the characteristics of immateriality, interactivity, instantaneousness, innovation and possibilities of improving the image and the sound and the interconnection. Through them a new way of understanding *presence* has emerged, which is not only physical, but also virtual.²¹⁹ A person can *make themselves present* to another in both ways. With their commonalities and their differences. The difficulty is to agree on what is virtual and what is its scope, because as experts say, on the one hand, definitions are very ambiguous and, on the other, the virtual is emerging with such force that it escapes all precision. We have not done more than pull at the tip of the ball of yarn. Either way, “digital media are not doors out of reality, but rather ‘prostheses’, extensions capable of enriching our ability to live relationships and exchange information.”²²⁰

Perhaps the most remarkable thing is the progressive advance of the globalization of relationships, since space and time are compressed into the instant and the immediate. Some people think that the social change created by the web, albeit in a diffuse way, is leading to the recognition that “to be is to share” and that in the digital era individualism is being overcome, because we are all knots making up a net.²²¹ On the other hand there are those who see that many men and women are excluded from the use of these means and their possibilities and they suffer marginalization. They add that the process of maturation of the person presents many problems. Withdrawal, dissociation, solipsism and individualism are emerging in this networked society, a society in which we are subjects of the lords of the cloud, who control our steps in the course we digitally chart with their technology. We are subjects, yes, more than citizens. We are users. Michele Nors, the business face of the Valentino firm, gathered in this expression the common feeling of the observers: “Technology brings us closer to the ones who are most distant and distances us from the ones who are closest.”

I add this testimony:

‘Presence’ is a noun, not a verb; it is a state of being, not doing. States of being are not highly valued in a culture which places a high priority on doing. Yet, true presence or ‘being with’ another person carries with it a silent power — to bear witness to a passage, to help carry an emotional burden or to begin a healing process. In it, there is an intimate connection with another that is perhaps too seldom felt in a society that strives for ever-faster ‘connectivity’ (...) The power of presence is not a one-way street, not only something we give to others. It always changes me, and always for the better.²²²

c) *Proximity*. Emmanuel Levinás has perhaps been the author who has reflected the most on proximity. For him, ethics is the first philosophy. He contrasts its way of seeing all speculation and rational deduction. He begins with the radical situation in which any man feels responsible for another man. He wrote:

Proximity is not an intentionality. To be in the presence of something is not to open it to oneself, and aim at it thus disclosed, nor even to ‘fulfill’ by intuition the ‘signitive thought’ that aims at it and always ascribes a meaning to it which the subject bears in itself. To approach is to touch the neighbor, beyond

²¹⁹ “Social networks are not a set of individuals, but a set of relationships between individuals. And they are finding systems that allow different platforms of social networks to interact with each other. The key concept is no longer ‘presence’ in the network, but ‘connection’: if we are present but not connected, we are ‘alone’. You enter the network to experience or increase a certain form of proximity. It is necessary, therefore, to understand well that the very concept of ‘neighbor’ and more specifically that of ‘friendship’ is modified and developed precisely because of the network.” (A. Spadaro, *Ciberteología. Pensar el cristianismo en tiempos de la red*. Herder, Barcelona, 2014, p. 64, translator’s version).

²²⁰ Id., *op. cit.*, p. 24, translator’s version. AA. VV. (A. Schmucki-D. Forlani, eds.) *La vita consacrata e il nuovo ambiente digitale. Sfide e opportunità formative*, EDB, Bologna 2015.

²²¹ Cf. Ch. Giaccardi, *Abitare il presente*, Messaggero, Padova 2014, p. 6.

²²² D. Hall, “The Power of Presence,” in: *Lo que mueve mi vida*, recopilación de testimonios de grandes personas, J. Allison-D. Gendiman (eds.), Plataforma editorial, Barcelona 2007, pp. 101-102. For the English version see <https://thisibelieve.org/essay/6647/>.

the data apprehended at a distance in cognition, that is, to approach the other. This turning of the given into a neighbor and of the representation into a contact, of knowledge into ethics, is the human face and skin. The caress is dormant in sensorial or verbal contact; in the caress proximity signifies: to languish in the presence of the neighbor as though his proximity and closeness were also an absence. (...) The neighbor, this face and this skin in the trace of this absence, and consequently, in their distress as forsaken, and in their unimpeachable right over me, with an obsession irreducible to consciousness, which has not begun in my freedom.²²³

Proximity arouses and motivates solidarity. Neighbors are not over there, they are not the others, that is, they are not the beaten, the wounded, the marginalized, but rather they are those of us who approach those who suffer and those who need us. Accompaniment means going out of ourselves, contemplating and believing in the real needs and taking care of them.

The relationship of accompaniment is shown to us as a belief in the need of the other, capable of provoking in those who feel it a work for the remedy of that need; and, reciprocally, as a belief in the benevolence of the neighbor, directly provoked by the help received from him and determining a response at a grateful and favorable time.²²⁴

We become neighbors by loving the other as ourselves. There is no neighbor for those who live only for themselves and their own interests.

In the category “proximity” the “desire for union” is relegated; that is, that eagerness to “bind ourselves” where the “I” and the “thou” are diluted. Only when “closeness” and “distance” are brought together does presence come and this is genuine proximity. We have each been created distinctly and each of us has our own space to grow. It is the Spirit that makes us partakers of harmony. “The more I wish to unite myself to a reality, the more I must respect what it is and what it is called to be. Respect prevents subjugation and fusion. It places us at the right distance to know and love: to be close at a certain distance. By uniting both relationships, a *space of freedom*, of *free play* is established, in which a superior form of immediacy is gained, a higher way of being close to something: it is *integration*: the *exchange of possibilities*. This exchange is precisely *presence*.”²²⁵

A couple of years ago Josep Maria Esquirol, a professor at the University of Barcelona, published “*The Intimate Resistance: An Essay on the Philosophy of Proximity*.” It is an invitation to resist in the face of disintegration in ordinary life. He praises everyday life. His message fits between what he says in the introduction and the concluding words. “Living together relies on eating together, and hence all the images of isolation – not loneliness – have something disturbing. Bread, salt, celebration, mourning and peace; all this that is shared depends on the always difficult and precarious community of the ‘we.’”²²⁶ And in the final words he stated: “The neighbor, the house, daily life, the remedy, are elements of a philosophy of proximity that has recognized being founded by the experience of nihilism and being out in the open. These elements of proximity allow themselves to be integrated in the sense of resistance.” Resistance implies confidence capable of discovering that “integration is also prayer.”²²⁷

²²³ E. Levinás, *Descubriendo la existencia con Husserl y Heidegger*. Madrid: Síntesis, 2005, p. 333 [For English version see E. Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, Translated by Alphonso Lingis, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, Dordrecht, 1987.]; Id. *De otro modo que ser, o más allá de la esencia, Sígueme, Salamanca 1987*, pp. 140-162. Ver además, *Alteridad y trascendencia*, Arena Libros, Madrid 2014, pp. 79-86, 101-110.

²²⁴ P. Laín Entralgo, *Teoría y realidad del otro*, Alianza, Madrid, 1983, p. 620. The reflection about the parable of the Samaritan man is clarifying. Also, Josep M. Esquirol, *Uno mismo y los otros. De las experiencias existenciales a la interculturalidad*, Herder, Barcelona 2005, pp. 89-92.

²²⁵ A. López Quintás, *Inteligencia creativa. El descubrimiento personal de los valores*, BAC, Madrid, 2002, p. 165.

²²⁶ J. M. Esquirol, *La resistencia íntima. Ensayo de una filosofía de la proximidad*, Acantilado, Barcelona, 2015, p. 8.

²²⁷ *Ib.*, p.178.

3.2. *The Insight Offered by Bergoglio-Pope Francis*

— Within the Framework of the Ecclesiology of Organic Communion and the Spirituality of Communion

The figure of Pope Francis, since his appearance on the balcony of the Vatican, inaugurated a new imagination for the Church. He is an icon, a beacon and a torch of *proximity*. The manner and the gestures of his presence and words are loaded with symbolic significance. They require a commitment. Here are three examples: asking for the prayer and the blessing of the people, his trip to the Holy Land and his presence and discourse in Lampedusa. His home country, Argentina; his status as a Jesuit; his theological formation;²²⁸ his intense pastoral praxis; his influence on Aparecida and on the ecclesial synods; his lifestyle and his magisterium project rays that give light and warmth to human relationships and to the evangelizing mission.

He is offering us a special language. I will highlight these groupings of words: 1) The faithful, citizenship, land, housing, work. 2) To evangelize, to take the first step, to go forth, to go out to the streets. 3) Synodality, communion, charisms, protagonism of the laity, inclusion. 4) Poor, existential peripheries, throwaway culture, exclusion. 5) Differences, inclusion, polyhedron. 6) Pastoral conversion, reform, discernment and forgiveness as opposed to self-referentiality and worldliness. 7) Mercy, tenderness, indulgence, forgiveness and joy. 8) People, faces, closeness, proximity, accompaniment. 9) Encounter, dialogue, processes. 10) Power as a service to the common good, washing feet, bending to the need of the other, care for, watch over, guard.

I will draw attention to three points that for Pope Francis exude and refer to proximity: *the People of God*, *mercy* and *encounter*. It is true that under these three points there is a common foundation which is *the mission*, because it is the origin, the path and the goal in all three. They are interconnected pillars that help us to understand his mission as Shepherd in the midst of the flock and clarify where to place the emphasis on our pastoral care today.

— People of God

In these last twenty-five years, more or less, we have been able to see the renewed appreciation of the Church as the People of God. At the same time, its evangelizing mission has taken the forefront.

During the Extraordinary Synod of 1985, twenty years after the Council, an Italian newspaper wrote this headline: “*Requiem for the People of God.*” It came from the lament of some theologians at the silence around the understanding of the Church, made by Vatican II, as the People of God.

H. J. Pottmeyer made this affirmation about the three trends in this Synod. 1) The Central European bishops were not satisfied with those who equated the concept of the *People of God* with a democratic society. They wanted to insist on the Church as a mystery. 2) A second Anglo-Saxon group lamented the lack of development of collegiality and synodality. They sought a Church with more communion, more communitarian. 3) For the third group, formed by the bishops of the Third World, the key concept was the *option for the poor*, linking with one of the desires of liberation theology. Without automatically implying

²²⁸ He does not hide his admiration for Henry de Lubac, Michel Certaux, Lucius Gera, etc. He delved into the thought of Romano Guardini.

the victory of the second group, the concept of “communion” enjoyed versatility and allowed the acceptance of the interests represented by the three tendencies.²²⁹

After this Synod, *communio* was considered as a central category for speaking of the Church²³⁰ and remained as a motto for the following Synods in which the Church is seen as *mystery*, *communio* and *mission*.²³¹ Carlos Maria Galli spoke of the “return of the People of God”²³² and Pottmeyer himself recently wrote:

There are some who have wanted to replace the expression ‘People of God’ with *communio* as a fundamental concept of the Church. However, we must adhere to ‘People of God’ as a fundamental concept, to point out the Church as an active agent, sustained by many active agents. By contrast, *communio* designates rather their co-participation and their way of feeling, that is, a property of the People of God.²³³

When speaking of the theology underlying the magisterium of Pope Francis, we should highlight the notion of the people of God.²³⁴ He has also referred to the people in an anthropological sense in civil society and in the construction of culture, but speaking more strictly of the People of God, as an ecclesiological category, he made it clear with these words:

The image of the Church I like is that of the holy, faithful people of God. This is the definition I often use, which is the image of *Lumen gentium*, no. 12. Belonging to a people has a strong theological value: In the history of salvation, God has saved a people. There is no full identity without belonging to a people. No one is saved alone, as an isolated individual, but God attracts us looking at the complex web of relationships that take place in the human community. God enters into this popular dynamic.”

The people themselves are the subject. And the Church is the people of God on the journey through history, with joys and sorrows. *Sentire cum Ecclesia* [to think and to feel with the Church], therefore, is my way of being a part of this people. And all the faithful, considered as a whole, are infallible in matters of

²²⁹ Cf. H. J. Pottmeyer, «Dal Sínoo del 1985 al Grande Giubileo delbanno 2000», en R. Fisichella (ed.) *Il Concilio Vaticano II. Recezione e attualità alla luce del Giubileo*, Cinisello Balsamo 2000, pp. 11-25; aquí: 18. W. Kasper, «Iglesia como “communio”. Consideraciones sobre la idea eclesiológica directriz del Vaticano II», en: *Teología e Iglesia*, Barcelona 1989, pp. 376-400.

²³⁰ Let us recall the letter from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith “*On Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion*,” (1992). It began by affirming the concept of *communio* (*koinonia*) and wanted to provide a deeper appreciation because “some approaches to ecclesiology suffer from a clearly inadequate awareness of the Church as a *mystery of communion*, especially insofar as they have not sufficiently integrated the concept of *communio* with the concepts of *People of God* and of the *Body of Christ*, and have not given due importance to the relationship between the Church as *communio* and the Church as *sacrament*.” (Introduction). Cf. G. Mazzillo, «Pueblo de Dios», *Diccionario de Ecclesiología*, BAC, Madrid 2016, pp. 1201-1216.

²³¹ In fact, from the synods dedicated to people (lay people, priests, consecrated men and women and bishops), the corresponding exhortations were issued based on this perspective of mystery, communion and mission. Cf. A. Bocos Merino, «Las relaciones en el pueblo de Dios», *Suplemento al Diccionario de Vida Consagrada*, Publicaciones Claretianas, Madrid, 2005; Id., «La comunión como categoría eclesial, Sínoo de 1985», en: *Synodus. Sínoos eclesiales y vida consagrada*, Publicaciones Claretianas, Madrid 2016.

²³² C. M. Galli, «Il ritorno del Popolo di Dio. Ecclesiología argentina e riforma della Chiessa», *Il Regno* 5 (2015) 294-300.

²³³ H. J. Pottmeyer, «La Iglesia en camino para configurarse como Pueblo de Dios», en A. Spadaro-C. M. Galli (eds.), *La reforma y las reformas en la Iglesia*, Sal Terrae, Santander 2016, p. 89, translator’s version.

²³⁴ Cf. J. C. Scannone, *El papa Francisco y la teología del pueblo*, Razón y Fe, 2014, n° 1395, pp. 31-50; Id., *El Papa del Pueblo*, PPC, Madrid, 2017; W. Kasper, *El papa Francisco. Revolución de la ternura y el amor. Raíces teológicas y perspectivas pastorales*. Sal Terrae, Santander 2015, especially Chapter 6: *La eclesiología del pueblo en concreto*, pp.61-73. C. M. Galli, «La reforma misionera de la Iglesia según el papa Francisco. La eclesiología del Pueblo de Dios evangelizador», en la citada obra: *La reforma y las reformas en la Iglesia*, Sal Terrae, Santander 2016, p. 51-77. See from this author: “*De Puebla a Aparecida*”, *conferencia en el Instituto di Studi Politici San Pio X* (puede verse en la web); R. L. Rivero, *El papa Francisco y la teología del pueblo*, PPC, Madrid 2016.

belief, and the people display this *infallibilitas in credendo*, this infallibility in believing, through a supernatural sense of the faith of all the people walking together.²³⁵

Cardinal Bergoglio, a master at integrating, combined the ecclesiological and the anthropological: *People and of God*; social and historical subject and sacrament of communion. For him, the people of God are pilgrims on their way toward God in peoples and cultures. In expressing “People of God”, he evokes the divine initiative, the mystery that has its roots in the Trinity, the communion of the faithful and, therefore, the equality and commitment of everyone in evangelization;²³⁶ the people who exist concretely in history, who are pilgrims and evangelizers, transcending the merely institutional (cf. EG 111): The people of many faces – “a varied face” – and in which we are all missionary disciples (EG 115-117).

It is the chosen people, the people of the promise and of the covenant. “The covenant that God makes with his people and with each one of us is precisely so that we may walk toward a promise, toward an encounter. This journey is life.”²³⁷

On the other hand, in *Evangelii gaudium* he tells us:

Being Church means being God’s people, in accordance with the great plan of his fatherly love. This means that we are to be God’s leaven in the midst of humanity. It means proclaiming and bringing God’s salvation into our world, which often goes astray and needs to be encouraged, given hope and strengthened on the way. The Church must be a place of mercy freely given, where everyone can feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged to live the good life of the Gospel. (EG 114)

The people of God includes everyone, enriched by the Spirit with charisms and ministries, with different gifts. The members are witnesses and missionary disciples who dialogue and collaborate with each other and with others who do not belong to the Church, promoting relationships of understanding with all the protagonists of society. The Cardinal of Buenos Aires had a very notable influence on the Aparecida document whose objective was to renew the pilgrim and missionary People of God. We must also recall his influence in the *Pastores gregis*, in which the bishop’s position within the People of God is highlighted. Then it has been sealed in *Evangelii gaudium*, *Laudato si’*, *Amoris laetitia*, etc.

From this conviction that the Church is the faithful People of God, it is understood that he wants a Church in a permanent state of mission, in missionary conversion, with open doors, “going forth”, itinerant, and in the streets, in the social and existential peripheries. It is, therefore, a believing, faithful, dynamic people, who experience closeness, reciprocity and getting involved for the good of the other. It is a people who pray, sing, hope and proclaim the Gospel of joy.²³⁸ It is the opposite of a worldly, introverted, self-protecting and self-referential Church (cf. EG 27). He promotes a missionary Church that drives “pastoral conversion,” encourages popular religiosity and spirituality, and carries out effective charity toward one’s neighbor by desiring, seeking and protecting the good of others (cf. EG 178).

When we stand before Jesus crucified, we see the depth of his love which exalts and sustains us, but at the same time, unless we are blind, we begin to realize that Jesus’ gaze, burning with love, expands to embrace all his people. We realize once more that he wants to make use of us to draw closer to his beloved people. He takes us from the midst of his people and he sends us to his people; without this sense of belonging we cannot understand our deepest identity. (EG 268)

²³⁵ A. Spadaro, “Interview with Pope Francis,” *La Civiltà Cattolica*, August, 2013.

²³⁶ “The Church’s closeness to Jesus is part of a common journey; ‘communion and mission are profoundly interconnected’” (EG 23).

²³⁷ J. M. Bergoglio/Francisco, *En tus ojos está mi Palabra. Homilias y discursos de Buenos Aires, 1999-2013*, Publicaciones Claretianas, Madrid 2018, p. 301, translator’s version.

²³⁸ “The Church which ‘goes forth’ is a community of missionary disciples who take the first step, who are involved and supportive, who bear fruit and rejoice” (EG 24).

This perspective of the “faithful people of God” highlights the dignity of the person, and the gratuitousness, closeness and care of God. The figure of Mary as disciple, mother and missionary who sings the Magnificat is highlighted. In this pilgrim people, listening is favored, faith is enlivened, there is celebration, and everyone is served without distinction of creed, culture, or social status. Baptismal, Eucharistic, missionary and synodal ecclesiology is becoming the framework and dynamism of the faithful people.

On March 2nd of this year, 2018, Pope Francis authorized the publication of a document of the International Theological Commission entitled *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*. Here I will only refer to its content and guidance and invite its study and pastoral application. We are members of the pilgrim and missionary people of God.

— Mercy

Mercy has been considered as the key to Pope Francis’ pontificate.²³⁹ No one has overlooked the motto of his episcopal shield: “Looking at me with mercy, he chose me.” He himself comments that, when he visited Rome, he liked to go to the church of St. Louis of France and contemplate Caravaggio’s painting of The Calling of Saint Matthew. “That finger of Jesus, pointing like this... to Matthew. That is what I am like. That is how I feel. Like Matthew.”²⁴⁰ Mercy for the Pope begins with the experience of the living God who cares for the sinner, the poor, the helpless, the orphan and the widow.

The theme of mercy has been repeated during 2016 as the Year of Mercy. But it should be noted that in his praxis and pastoral doctrine, Cardinal Bergoglio was insistent in proclaiming the Lord’s mercy which lasts forever and reaches us all. In a 2007 homily he said: “The mercy of God cannot be conceived as another attribute of God’s behavior toward us, but it constitutes the very ambit of God’s encounter with each one, with all of us, with God’s people.”²⁴¹ A little later, commenting on St. Paul (1 Tm 15:15-16), he added:

The patience of God waiting for the encounter, drawing us near ‘with bands of love’ (Hos 11:4), molding our being from the mud of our sins, shaping us and naming us from there with the strength of his mercy; creating us anew and, if you will allow me to force the language, *misericordiándonos* (bestowing mercy upon us). Thus, in his mercy, the Lord looked upon Matthew, Zacchaeus, the leper, the blind man, the paralytic man at the pool (38 years he waited patiently), the Samaritan woman, and Peter after his triple denial. That is what the mercy of God is like; he becomes patience, becomes flesh in Christ and in him it is ultimately manifested in meekness, for the eminently pastoral language of God’s mercy and patience is meekness.²⁴²

That is the good news: that as poor, fragile, vulnerable, and small as we are, we have been looked at, like her, with kindness in our smallness and we are part of a people over which extends, from generation to generation, the mercy of the God of our fathers.²⁴³

²³⁹ W. Kasper, *El papa Francisco...*, 53 et seq. “Francis communicates a theology, a spirituality and a pastoral ministry focused on the revolution of the tenderness of God, a Father rich in mercy, revealed in the face of Christ in his death and resurrection, and communicated through the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Church must be guided by the primacy of charity and the logic of pastoral mercy (AL 307-312). This logic leads to integrating, not excluding, and is symbolized, on a social level, in the achievement of building bridges and breaking down walls” (Galli. Conference at the Pius V Institute), translator’s version.

²⁴⁰ Cf. A. Spadaro, Exclusive Interview, 2013, translator’s version.

²⁴¹ Card. J. M. Bergoglio, Homilía en la apertura de la conferencia episcopal argentina (5 de noviembre de 2007), en: *En tus ojos...*, p. 697. La homilía se titula “misericordiando”. For the English version see Homily at the opening of the Argentina Episcopal Conference (November 5, 2007), in: *In your eyes...* The homily is titled “Showing Mercy.”

²⁴² *Ibid*, p. 699, translator’s version.

²⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 348.

It will do us good to let ourselves be molded, re-formed, by his mercy; to let him bestow mercy upon us through his faithful tenderness. It will do us good to fill our eyes contemplating the silent meekness of his Son in the midst of mockery, misinformation, outrage and slander (cf. Mt 26:63; Mk 15:16; Lk 23:9; Jn 19:8). The image of the ‘Lord of Patience’ carries within itself all of the divine mercy and becomes pastoral meekness toward us and – in us – toward our faithful.²⁴⁴

In the blueprint for his pontificate he said:

An evangelizing community knows that the Lord has taken the initiative, he has loved us first (cf. 1 Jn 4:10), and therefore we can move forward, boldly take the initiative, go out to others, seek those who have fallen away, stand at the crossroads and welcome the outcast. Such a community has an endless desire to show mercy, the fruit of its own experience of the power of the Father’s infinite mercy (EG 24).

In announcing the Year of Mercy, he added:

The Church is commissioned to announce the mercy of God, the beating heart of the Gospel, which in its own way must penetrate the heart and mind of every person. The Spouse of Christ must pattern her behaviour after the Son of God who went out to everyone without exception. In the present day, as the Church is charged with the task of the new evangelization, the theme of mercy needs to be proposed again and again with new enthusiasm and renewed pastoral action. It is absolutely essential for the Church and for the credibility of her message that she herself live and testify to mercy. Her language and her gestures must transmit mercy, so as to touch the hearts of all people and inspire them once more to find the road that leads to the Father. (...) Consequently, wherever the Church is present, the mercy of the Father must be evident.²⁴⁵

Mercy in the heart and in the words of Pope Francis refers to God the Father who is merciful and refers to the other who needs mercy, tenderness, compassion and forgiveness. Mercy in ministry is not an abstract criterion, but an operative principle loaded with mystical experience and ethical generosity. It is the love that opens eyes, hearts, hands and feet. It involves closeness, proximity, understanding, acceptance and getting involved. It is in this key that we must read *Amoris laetitia*.

— Encounter-Accompaniment

The theme of the “encounter” in the magisterium of Cardinal Bergoglio and Pope Francis has been the subject of many reflections.²⁴⁶ It has aroused interest as a counterpoint to a culture that is nominalistic, individualistic, fragmented, without roots, isolated, not integrated, and of exclusion and throwing away, lacking meaning.

In the face of a fragmented world, the temptation of new fratricidal fractures in our country, and the painful experience of our own fragility, it becomes necessary and urgent, I would dare to say, indispensable, to deepen in prayer and worship. That will help us to unify our hearts and will give us *mercy that is visceral*, to become people of encounter and communion, who take as their own vocation caring for their brother’s wound. Do not deprive the Church of her ministry of prayer, which brings oxygen to our daily fatigue by bearing witness to a God who is so close, so Other: Father, Brother, and Spirit; Bread, Companion on the journey and Giver of life. A year ago, I wrote to you: “...Today, more than ever, worship is necessary in order to make possible the accompaniment that these times of crisis cry out for.

²⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 699.

²⁴⁵ Francis, *Misericordiae vultus*, no. 12.

²⁴⁶ Cf. V. M. Fernández (ed.), *Hacia una cultura del encuentro. La propuesta del papa Francisco*, Educa, Buenos Aires 2017; J. L. Martínez, *La cultura del encuentro. Desafío e interpelación para Europa*, Sal Terrae, Santander 2017.

Only in contemplating the mystery of Love that conquers distances and becomes close, will we find the strength not to fall into the temptation to walk past, without stopping on the road...”²⁴⁷

There is beauty in creation, in the infinite tenderness and mercy of God, in the offering of life in service out of love. To discover, show and highlight this beauty is to lay the foundations of a culture of solidarity and social friendship. It is to draw near. It is to become neighbors (id., p. 533).

It is known that Jorge Bergoglio studied Romano Guardini²⁴⁸ carefully and that his favorite theologians were Henry de Lubac and Michel de Certeau.²⁴⁹ But they were not the only ones to leave their mark. The group of Argentine theologians with whom he shared approaches to liberation theology, commitments to the poor, concerns for cultures (inculturation), for coexistence in respect, for peace and justice, for solidarity with the excluded, etc., helped mature an anthropology, a social philosophy, a morality, a ministry and a spirituality that exudes concern for the “other” through drawing near, connection, dialogue, intersubjectivity, acceptance and integration of differences, communion. At the heart is compassion, becoming a neighbor and, ultimately, entering into the logic of gift for the encounter. And all with the essence of the Gospel, reflecting the friendly style of Jesus.²⁵⁰

“In order to assume the great project of the Kingdom, according to the style of Jesus, the Church will have to renew its ways of drawing near, of relationality and of interaction, as well as to rediscover the anchor points within the existing culture.”²⁵¹ The person, then, is a being rooted in love and impelled for the sake of transcendence; is communitarian, not isolated or self-sufficient; always open and in communication in all spheres: social, cultural and religious. His concrete, not idealistic thought, rooted in gratuitousness, loaded with remembering and courage for the future, is an antidote to nihilism, fragmentation, discontinuity and being orphaned.

Cardinal Bergoglio spoke of the culture of encounter repeatedly; to educators, to politicians, to catechists, to consecrated persons. The culture of encounter is the antidote to the self-referentiality that corrodes the person and makes the Church not bear fruit in her evangelizing mission.

From time to time, he unites encounter, proximity, and accompaniment. He promotes it with closeness, with gestures, with lifestyle. He rejects distance, absence, throwing away. Before becoming Pope, he was convinced of the value of encounter and he was accustomed to uniting coherently what he said and what he did. At the beginning of his pontificate (May 13, 2013), following Paul VI, he said: “today’s world stands in great need of witnesses, not so much of teachers but rather of witnesses. It’s not so much about speaking, but rather speaking with our whole lives.”²⁵²

²⁴⁷ Op. cit., *En tus ojos está mi palabra...*, p. 330, translator’s version.

²⁴⁸ He quotes Romano Guardini several times in the encyclical *Laudato si’*, cf. footnotes 83, 84, 85, 87, 88, 92. It is very present in his thinking that contrary and contradictory are not equivalent. Tensions and contrasts are acceptable in unity. Hence his proposal of the “polyhedron”.

²⁴⁹ Cf. Interview by Fr. Antonio Spadaro with Pope Francis, published in *L’Osservatore Romano*, Spanish ed. September 23, 2013. It is easy to understand the influence of Fr. De Lubac and of the trend of “La nouvelle theologie” from Lyon and Michel de Certeau. If one were to review his work “*The Practice of Everyday Life*”, they could appreciate his commitment to building a “science of the particular”, a “gift economy” and an “ethics of tenacity.” On March 11, 2016, the Pope received the “*Poisons roses*” and alluded to Mounier, Levinas and Ricoeur, as thinkers in the reconstruction of Europe. I have not seen anyone emphasize how much influence the personalist and dialogical thought has had in Bergoglio, however the overlap is clear. Some think that Bergoglio achieves a thought of his own by examining reality in the light of the word of God.

²⁵⁰ “The same God, who ‘loved us first’, is also the Good Samaritan who becomes a neighbor and tells us – like at the end of this parable – ‘Go and do likewise.’” (...) Let us imitate our God who goes before us and loves first, by accompanying our brothers and sisters who suffer loneliness, destitution, loss of work, exploitation, homelessness, contempt for being migrants, illness, and isolation like the elderly.” J. M. Bergoglio/Francisco, *En tus ojos...*, p. 147, translator’s version.

²⁵¹ J. M. Bergoglio/Francisco, *En tus ojos...*, p. 147, translator’s versión.

²⁵² Francis, Address, May 18, 2013.

Already, as Pontiff, his gestures have been as eloquent as his speeches and he has fostered very particular encounters; washing the feet of the prisoners and making his first pastoral visit to Lampedusa to meet with the African immigrants who arrived in dinghies. In this encounter he denounced the “indifference” of society toward these people.²⁵³ This gesture was considered the first encyclical of the new Pope.

In Aparecida, two pastoral categories stand out; they arise from the uniqueness of the Gospel, and we can employ them as guidelines for assessing how we are living missionary discipleship in the Church: *nearness and encounter*. Neither of these two categories is new; rather, they are the way God has revealed himself to us in history. He is the ‘God who is near’ to his people, a nearness which culminates in the incarnation. He is the God who goes forth to meet his people.

In Latin America and the Caribbean there are pastoral plans which are “distant”, disciplinary pastoral plans which give priority to principles, forms of conduct, organizational procedures... and clearly lack nearness, tenderness, a warm touch. They do not take into account the ‘revolution of tenderness’ brought by the incarnation of the Word. There are pastoral plans designed with such a dose of distance that they are incapable of sparking an encounter: an encounter with Jesus Christ, an encounter with our brothers and sisters. Such pastoral plans can at best provide a dimension of proselytism, but they can never inspire people to feel part of or belong to the Church. Nearness creates communion and belonging; it makes room for encounter. Nearness takes the form of dialogue and creates a culture of encounter. One touchstone for measuring whether a pastoral plan embodies nearness and a capacity for encounter is the homily. What are our homilies like? Do we imitate the example of our Lord, who spoke ‘as one with authority’, or are they simply moralizing, detached, abstract?²⁵⁴

To sow peace by nearness, closeness! By coming out of our homes and looking at peoples’ faces, by going out of our way to meet someone having a difficult time, someone who has not been treated as a person, as a worthy son or daughter of this land.²⁵⁵

It is urgently needed to live together to build together the common good that is possible, that of a community that resigns personal interests to be able to share with justice its goods, its interests, its social life in peace. Nor is it just an administrative or technical management, a plan, but rather it is the constant conviction that is expressed in gestures, in personally drawing near, in a distinctive seal, where this desire is expressed to change our way of connecting by molding ourselves, in hope, a new culture of encounter, of accompaniment; where privilege is no longer an impregnable and irreducible power, where exploitation and abuse are no longer a habitual way to survive. In this vein of promoting drawing near, a culture of hope that creates new connections, I invite you to win over people’s wills, to calm and convince.²⁵⁶

— The Reform of the Church

The path that the Pope points out to us is to live the essentiality of the Gospel which he sometimes calls, following Aparecida, pastoral conversion, missionary conversion. He insists on the reform of the Church that requires a change in thinking, in relationships and in commitment to the poorest. Cardinal Bergoglio was very clear with the cardinals during the conclave and spoke of the model of Church that was needed to carry out the reforms that were needed. In any case, the real revolution is “going to the

²⁵³ It was on July 9, 2013.

²⁵⁴ Francis, Address to the CELAM Leadership, July 28, 2013.

²⁵⁵ Francis, *Homily at O’Higgins Park*, Santiago, Chile, January 16, 2018.

²⁵⁶ J. M. Bergoglio/Francisco, *En tus ojos...*, pp. 149-150, translator’s version.

roots, recognizing them and seeing what those roots have to say to us today... I think that the way to make true changes is identity.”²⁵⁷

Pope Francis proposes the reform of the Church, and of religious life in it, from the perspective of the strength of the vocation and the influence of the Council and the previous Popes; from the perspective of the person as a relational subject and bearer of the gift of joy in the mission; mercy as the backbone that sustains the Church; pastoral conversion that supposes going forth from oneself and inhabiting the peripheries; the harmony of differences and synodality. The Pope is committed to processes in which primacy is held by God. Principles are present in these processes (cf. EG, 217-237). He is asking for dispossession, detachment, inner freedom and availability, and discernment as a way of proceeding. This reform is not a mere rational project or launch planning, but rather docility to the Spirit. He wants us, all Christians and not only the Roman Curia, to be evangelizers with Spirit.

HASTY CONCLUSION

I conclude by highlighting some points that will help to maintain our awareness and proximity, proper to our missionary vocation at this time and in the future. *First*, to promote creative fidelity in following Jesus, always on the journey²⁵⁸, like Claret did. Pastoral conversion involves de-centering and centering, decreasing in order to grow, going forth and situating oneself in that new land that today is the periphery.²⁵⁹ Crossing borders and inhabiting the peripheries, which are of a varied nature: sin, pain, injustice, ignorance, contempt for the religious and for thought (Pope Francis). *Secondly*, to take care of the quality of human relationships, which is a good anthropological basis. Promote dialogue and encounter. Now that everything seems to be disintegrating and moving, it is urgent to return to the base of our threefold connection: to the Word, to the people, to the poor. The Pope invites us and urges us to fight against the current and to exercise discernment.²⁶⁰ Following his principle that “reality is more important than the idea,” it is necessary to cultivate proximity, and even more so in this digital age. Being with and in favor of those who suffer violence and exclusion. *Third*, we must engage in the reform of the Church and initiate or restart in a responsible way the processes of growth and transformation that the last General Chapter has indicated to us.²⁶¹ Which, among other things, involves prioritizing presences and services. It is obvious that, to prioritize, we need vision and the ability to transmit passion for new projects. Hence the need to prepare leaders with free, generous, compassionate and Samaritan hearts.

²⁵⁷ H. Cymerman, Interview with Pope Francis for *La Vanguardia*, June 12, 2014.

²⁵⁸ Jesus goes “always to the ‘other shore’. Where was he going? What ecstasy propelled him off of the beaten paths, always further away, always in exodus? In intimacy, he spoke of his exodus, which he was going to accomplish in Jerusalem (Lk 9:30-31). But, in the immediate vicinity, what made him go from city to city, from village to village? What was he looking for? He saw the absent, the one who was missing, the one who was farthest away. He saw the lost sheep, the lost man. He saw the man without a name, without a face. He saw the leper, the sinner, the excluded, the condemned. Or, more simply, he saw the one who thought differently. In a word, he saw the ‘other’. Preferably, he always went out to those whom society had rejected: ‘this crowd, which does not know the law, is accursed’ (Jn 7:49).” E. Leclerc, *El Dios Mayor*, Sal Terrae, Santander 1997, p. 69, translator’s version.

²⁵⁹ Cf. A. Riccardi, *Periferias. Crisis y novedades para la Iglesia*, San Pablo, Madrid 2017.

²⁶⁰ Cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et exsultate* (2018), nos. 159-177.

²⁶¹ MS, nos. 66-75.

THE MISSION OF THE SPIRIT IN THE CONGREGATION*

“The origin of something is the source of its nature.”²⁶²

“Today the battle is taking place in the realm of the spirit.”²⁶³

The goal for the fourth day is marked with these accurate words:

Our Congregation has the Holy Spirit as its main source and Origin. Our birth is as a result of the work of the Holy Spirit, of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and of Claret. And we were born with a particular face, a particular purpose, and a particular identity. Fidelity to our charismatic origin is the guarantee of our capacity for spreading out, growth and creativity in the new historical and geographical contexts in which we exist.

We ask ourselves how the Spirit carries out his mission through us. How intense is our awareness of being instruments of the Spirit who animated Claret and the brothers who preceded us, and the family with whom we share a charism. We must not forget the apocalyptic and eschatological dimensions in which Claret was placed by the Spirit in the mission.

Our great missionary concern is to recognize if we are where the Spirit wants us, if we are docile to his inspirations for the mission, if in reality the Spirit can count on us for the new paradigm of mission that our world needs.

Having listened to and studied the proposals of the previous days, now, forty-five years after our special General Chapter of Conciliar Renewal, I will first narrate the Congregation’s awareness of the presence and action of the Holy Spirit throughout these years, which underlies the great intuitions and commitments of the last General Chapter (2009).



We too, as members of the Church, are living at a privileged moment of the Spirit (EN 75). It seems that the Holy Spirit had gained special strength in our community and in our world. As if the yearning for fullness had invaded us all. The Spirit has always been giving life, exercising his dynamism and filling the hearts of his faithful. The four Conciliar Constitutions (SC, DV, LG and GS) together with the decree AG, directed the faith and reflection on the Trinitarian Mystery, the Word of God and the figure of Jesus of Nazareth, the Church and its mission, Mary, the disciple and Mother of the Church and the world in which we live (ecology). The Holy Spirit illuminates everything and recreates everything. In this context, the Congregation has made a gigantic effort to affirm its identity and mission. As time has progressed, the conviction has grown that the Holy Spirit has offered it as a gift and service to the Church, in the prophetic, apocalyptic and eschatological spirit of Claret. The Holy Spirit has opened it to what is

* Text of the speech at the Workshop: *The Theology for our Mission*, Colmenar Viejo, 2012. Those that belonged to the commission for this conference were: Fr. Antonio Bellella, Fr. Carlos Sanchez, Fr. Rosendo Urrabazo, Fr. Héctor Cuadrado and Fr. Luis Angel de las Heras. This publication does not include the appendix *Presencia del Espíritu Santo en la vida y misión de la Congregación según los Capítulos generales postconciliares*, [Presence of the Holy Spirit in the Life and Mission of the Congregation According to the Post-Conciliar General Chapters], which can be found in the book *Teología para nuestra misión* [Theology for Our Mission], pp. 221-236.

²⁶² M. Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2002, p. 1.

²⁶³ E. Morin, *¿Hacia dónde va el mundo?*, Paidós, Barcelona 2011, translator’s version.

happening in the world, has left it affected by the challenges and has asked it to commit itself from its condition as a servant of the Word.

The Congregation has been aware since the Special Chapter of Renewal that it was undertaking a path of conversion and availability according to the impulse of the Spirit and under the guidance of the Church (PC 2). Throughout its post-conciliar history, it has not lost the awareness of the primacy of the Spirit in its missionary life.

I believe it may be appropriate to recall the steps and findings of the recognition of the Holy Spirit in the Claretian mission: 1) in the origin and sending forth of the missionary, 2) how we have been hindering or delaying Him and 3) how He continues to open horizons for us at this moment.

1. THE MISSION OF THE SPIRIT IN CLARET AND IN THE CONGREGATION

1.1. *The Holy Spirit in Anthony Mary Claret*

For us Claretians, after having read the writings and, above all, the *Autobiography* and Letters of Fr. Claret, it is familiar to us to say that Claret was a man of the *Spirit*, of the *Word* and of *Mary*. They were signs of his missionary identity.

Between 1950 and 1962, the year of the beginning of the Council, several members of the Congregation undertook valuable studies on the apostolic figure and the spirituality of St. Anthony Mary Claret.²⁶⁴ These works allowed us to have a clearer estimation of what Claret was for us.

Fr. Claret wrote about the Holy Spirit as a gift in the sacraments of baptism and confirmation²⁶⁵ and priestly ministry.²⁶⁶ In some spiritual exercises, Fr. José María Viñas, after studying this point, concluded:

In short, we can say that the Founding Father valued the gift of the Holy Spirit mainly in baptism, in confirmation – sacrament of the Holy Spirit –; in the diaconate as the Spirit of strength to fight against the enemies of the new people of God and in the presbyterate as the priestly Spirit of Jesus Christ. The presence of the Spirit with a capital S causes the spirit with a lower-case s or the personal transformation through the subjective dispositions in conformity with the Spirit*.

The saint wrote in his *Autobiography* that his heart began to open to the apostolate mainly through the reading of the holy Bible: “There were passages that impressed me so deeply that I seemed to hear a voice telling me the message I was reading” (*Aut.* 114). This voice was “the voice of God calling me to go forth and preach” (*Aut.* 120). Among various passages of Isaiah and Ezekiel, the one that moved him most was the consecration-evangelizing mission of the Servant: “And God our Lord made me to understand in a very special way those words: *Spiritus Domini super me et evangelizare pauperibus misit me Dominus et sanare contritos corde* [The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor and to bind up the brokenhearted.]” (*Aut.* 118).²⁶⁷

As an expression of incalculable value, we have this experience of the Spirit that he shared with his missionaries:

²⁶⁴ It can be seen in the bibliography of ACW. On the fatherhood of Father Claret for the Congregation, cf. J. Bermejo, «San Antonio María Claret y la Congregación Claretiana», *Claretianum* 39 (1999) 97-208.

²⁶⁵ Cf. Antonio M. Claret, *Catecismo explicado*, Librería Religiosa, Barcelona 1862, pp. 328 y 340.

²⁶⁶ Id., *Colegial Instruido*, t. II, Librería Religiosa, Barcelona 1861, pp. 204, 250, 269, 271.

* No citation given in Spanish text.

²⁶⁷ For a commentary on this text, cf. A. Aparicio, «“El Espíritu del Señor sobre mí” (Is 61,1)», en A. Bocos Merino-A. Bellela Cardiel (eds.), *Nacidos para evangelizar*, Publicaciones Claretianas, Madrid 2008, pp. 91-104.

The Lord told me both for myself and for all these missionary companions of mine, *Non vos estis qui loquimini, sed Spiritus Patris vestri, et Matris vestrae qui loquitur in vobis* [For it will not be you who speak but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.] (Mt 10:20). So true is this that each one of us will be able to say: *Spiritus Domini super me, propter quod unxit me, evangelizare pauperibus misit me, sanare contritos corde* [The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; He has sent me to bring good news to the afflicted, to bind up the brokenhearted]. (*Aut.* 687)

The Holy Spirit “enlightens and sets him on fire with divine love.” With regard to the episcopal consecration, Father Claret experienced charity as the love of Christ who impelled him in the apostolate. Now that he was suffering the consequences of that zeal, already configured with Christ, a sign of contradiction, he experienced the love of Christ as forgiveness and mercy: “Anyone who has the Spirit of Christ understands this precept [love of enemies] well and fulfills it. Whoever does not have the Spirit of Christ neither understands nor practices it” (ACW, p. 910). This conviction was the fruit of the mystical experience of October 12, 1869 (cf. *Lights and Graces*, ACW, p. 966).

The Founder, at the beginning of the exercises for the Congregation in 1865, at the end of the preparatory meditation, said this prayer:

You, my Mother, had the comfort of seeing the Apostles and disciples gathered for ten days, and finally had the pleasure of seeing them all filled with the Holy Spirit; I, my Mother, have the great honor and joy of seeing myself in these holy exercises under your protection, and so I hope with all confidence that You will obtain for me all the graces I need to do them well; on my part I am determined to do everything that I know to be for the greater glory of God and good of my soul. My mother, help me and protect me now and always. Amen.²⁶⁸

Claret managed to summarize his missionary life through docility to the Spirit in an atmosphere of prayer. In prayer he found the strength to face his opponents and to prepare himself for martyrdom (ACW, pp. 767-792). In exile, despite his age and aches, he maintained a living prayerful faith, in which he was configured with Christ (ACW, pp. 881-883).

The Chapter of 1979 recalled that the history of the Congregation is the incarnation and existential realization of the founding charism of Claret. The first fact of life in this history has been summed up for us by our Founder, who writes: “Thus we had begun and thus we continued, living together strictly in community. All of us were going out regularly to work in the sacred ministry” (*Aut.* 491)” (MCT 73).

The presence of the Spirit in the mission of Claret, the “Apostolic Missionary”, was marked by listening, interiorization and service of the Word, lived with a wise, prophetic, eschatological and apocalyptic spirit. These are not empty words. They refer to the words and actions of his life. I refer to these studies, because they are topics that have already been studied.²⁶⁹

Claret’s apocalyptic character must be understood above all in the line of a prophetic witness of open struggle against the powers of evil. Consecrated by the Spirit, he entered into God’s perspective and proclaimed a message of renewal with the strength of his Word. He denounced idols, called to mind the

²⁶⁸ San Antonio María Claret, *Ejercicios espirituales de S. Ignacio de Loyola. Explicados*, Coculsa, Madrid 1955, p. 42, translator’s version. By asking Fr. Clotet to have the communities of Vic and Gracia read the “Mística Ciudad de Dios” [The Mystical City of God], wasn’t he thinking that the entire Congregation was a permanent Pentecost? The mural of the chapel of our General Curia is dominated by a Pentecost by Maximino Cerezo. To understand why this mural was painted, cf. A. Bocos Merino, *Caminando juntos*, Publicaciones Claretianas, Madrid 2008, pp. 31-37. Our brother Pedro Casaldáliga wrote a beautiful poem before the image of Pentecost found in this work.

²⁶⁹ M. Orge, «La predicación profética de San Antonio María Claret. Su inspiración bíblica», en: «*Servidores de la Palabra*». *Tercera Semana sacerdotal de Vic*, Publicaciones Claretianas, Madrid 1990, pp. 91-134; G. Alonso, *Claret, misión profética y sabiduría*, Proyecto: Palabra Misión, Vol. VI, Madrid 2000; AA.VV., *Dimensión profética del Servicio Misionero de la Palabra*, Cuadernos de formación permanente, Provincia claretiana de Colombia Oriental, nos. 32 y 33.

covenant with God, condemned the oppression of the poor, and proclaimed the peace and justice that are born of fidelity to the God of the covenant. Claret's was a prophetic witness that expressed God's judgment, but also his mercy, as demonstrated by his insistence on the need for meekness for the missionary (*Aut.* 372-383). Consolation, a fundamental element in Revelation, is always present in *the Claretian ministry*.²⁷⁰

If we contemplate Claret's evangelizing journey, we can see the combination of action and contemplation in the following ways:

- 1) A conviction: *The Spirit of your Father – and your Mother – will speak through you.*
- 2) A proposal: *From the fire of love, the Holy Spirit will be made known* (cf. *Aut.* 440; MFL 42) or from *the fire of the Holy Spirit who impelled the Apostles to go out to the whole world* (cf. SSW, *Selfishness overcome*, chap. IX). Hence the "*Caritas Christi, urget nos*", which he used as his episcopal motto.
- 3) A basic attitude: *To seek in all things the glory of God.*
- 4) A clear purpose: *May God the Father be known, loved and served.*
- 5) How to reach it: *Do with others, according to the "union" with the Other.*
- 6) The universal horizon: *My spirit goes out to all the world.*

1.2. *The Congregation is Aware of its Charismatic Origins and of Being Guided by the Spirit in its Missionary Life*

— Various References

The Congregation has expressed in many ways its awareness of being founded and animated in its missionary life by the Holy Spirit. There are many documents that can be cited. It is enough to look at the texts that followed the *Constitutions*: the Spiritual Directories, the General Chapters, the writings of the Superiors General, the Directories, the Congresses of Claretian Spirituality, the Meetings of Claretians, and the writings of so many of our brothers who insisted on speaking about the spirituality of Claret and the Congregation.

The reference to the person of the Holy Spirit is intentional. Among us there is also talk of evangelical spirit, ecclesial spirit, Marian spirit, the spirit of Claret, the spirit of the Congregation, the spirit of faith, the spirit of prayer, missionary spirit, apostolic spirit, prophetic spirit, spirit of collaboration, spirit of service, spirit of poverty, spirit of obedience, priestly spirit, spirit of responsibility, etc. All these references to the "spirit" are genitive and have resulting anthropological nuance. When I emphasize "Holy Spirit" with capital letters, I am thinking of the person of the Trinity, in whom we believe and to whom we worship with the Father and the Son, from whom we receive life and who reveals to us the intimacy of God.²⁷¹ From the Spirit with a capital S, the "spirits" with lowercase s gain value. They are the dynamic expressions of the presence of the Spirit and together they make up the features of our Christian, Marian, ecclesial and Claretian spirituality.

The Claretian mission and the Claretian spirituality are the obverse and the reverse of the same vocation.²⁷²

There is an underlying conviction. We speak of the names (Paraclete, Spirit of Truth, Spirit of the Promise, Spirit of adoption, Spirit of Christ, the One who inspires, reveals, animates, recreates,

²⁷⁰ Cf. J. Bermejo, Cuaderno "*Una lectura claretiana de los escritos joánicos*". Proyecto Palabra-Misión, vol. V, Publicaciones Claretianas, Madrid 1998, p. 13, translator's version.

²⁷¹ Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, nos. 683-747.

²⁷² Cf. CMF, "Our Missionary Spirituality on the Path of the People of God", Rome 2002.

encourages, etc.) and we talk about the symbols with which the influence of the Spirit is expressed (water, anointing, fire, cloud, light, seal, hand, finger, dove), but the most decisive thing is his Person, his relationship with the Father and the Son, with whom he closes the mystery of love and brings us into the mystery of love. Thus, he is the source and the goal, he is life that in our history becomes a course of holiness, of transformation into filiation, fraternity and constant mission.

It is the Person of the Holy Spirit who gives us life, anoints and seals us. The Person who makes us born again (Jn 3:5-8); initiates us and enlightens us with the Truth and comforts us; fills us with his love and asks us to set everyone on fire with divine love. He makes us participants in the mystery of communion to be instruments of communion in the world, in the Church and in the congregational community.

To wrap up this topic: One of the most appropriate means to assess the awareness of the presence of the Spirit in the Congregation is what has been said by the General Chapters and the constitutional text. Here is what the *Constitutions* indicate.

— The *Constitutions*, at the Same Time, Point of Arrival and of Departure

The renewed constitutional text was reworked at various times and was approved only in 1982 by the Apostolic See. It was then revised according to the Code of Canon Law in 1985.²⁷³ The renewed *Constitutions* have enough references to the Holy Spirit to recall our charismatic origins.²⁷⁴ Two key statements are: “Our Congregation was raised up by the Holy Spirit and established by the Church. All of our members share a common vocation and mission and, like the Church itself, constitute a community which is at once charismatic and institutional; and in addition is counted among the clerical Institutes” (CC 86). “Our Congregation is the expression of a gift of the Spirit, sanctioned by the Church - a gift through which we are all called to carry out our universal mission in an orderly way” (CC 135).

The Claretian missionary life is founded, enlightened, sustained and animated by the Holy Spirit. Community life, vows, prayer,²⁷⁵ formation and apostolic service acquire quality when they are steeped in the Claretian charism (gift of the Spirit). He is the agent of the Mission It has three connotations: With Christ, with the Apostles and with us. Like Christ, he anoints us to proclaim the Good News to the poor, he conforms us to Christ to collaborate with him in the work of the Father, he transforms us into Christ so that it is not ourselves who live, but Christ who really lives in us (Gal 2:20), he makes us instruments to proclaim the Kingdom (cf. CC 39). Like the Apostles, we are impelled by the fire of the Spirit and moved by the joy of the Spirit to be witnesses of the Resurrection and to make God known, loved and served by everyone (cf. CC 40). As far as the personal level is concerned, “in fulfilling our personal vocation, each of us must esteem and uphold both his own gift and the graces bestowed on others by one and the same Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 12:7-12)” (CC 78).

Beyond these few indications, the important thing is to see that the Congregation is a missionary community through the Spirit and that people – each according to their condition – share the same Spirit of Christ. This leads to the various indications that are made about the spirit of Congregation, missionary spirit, spirit of solidarity, spirit of availability, spirit of docility, etc. “*A sense of alertness* to whatever is most urgent, opportune and effective, in the setting of the times, places and persons with whom they have to deal, without clinging to outmoded or inadequate methods or tools of the apostolate;” the sense of

²⁷³ For more details about the process, cf. C.M.F., *Our Project of Missionary Life: Commentary on the Constitutions*, Vol. I, Rome, 1992, pp. 106-114; G. Alonso, *Misioneros Claretianos. La renovación conciliar*, Editorial Claretiana, Buenos Aires 2007, pp. 257-312.

²⁷⁴ Cf. J. C. R. García Paredes, “The Holy Spirit’ in the Text of the CC”, in C.M.F., *Our Project of Missionary Life*, Vol. I, pp. 324-336.

²⁷⁵ In the chapter dedicated to prayer, the words “Holy Spirit” do not appear, but its content is not understood without reference to the Spirit who makes us cry “Abba, Father”. It is He who makes us have the spirit of sons and who puts us in prayer, listening to the Word and makes us pray in and from the Eucharist.

availability to renounce everything and be docile to the Spirit and obedient to the mission; and the sense of catholicity to go to all parts of the world... (cf. CC 48). These are only possible if we are animated by the Spirit.

The *Constitutions* are the fruit of the awareness that the Congregation acquired, being faithful to the guidance of the Church, and they remain open as a project of missionary life for the future. The *Constitutions* are not a text to be adjusted, but to be inspired by and committed to the mission received.

2. TRACES OF THE PRESENCE OF THE SPIRIT IN THE CONGREGATION

The Spirit passes through and offers his gifts that bear fruit in people, in communities, in the Church and in the world. In Fr. Claret, Founder of the Congregation, he left us the inspiration and missionary drive. Through him we are still urged to proclaim the Gospel with a prophetic, eschatological and apocalyptic missionary service. In the style of Claret, those of us who have been called like him to preach the Gospel throughout the world, feel anointed by the Spirit, find in the Word the source of our missionary life, feel shaped by the love of Christ in the Heart of Mary, are affected “by the poor and needy,” “we do with others,” and we use all means possible.

The history of the Congregation could be written as the “*Family Chronicle of the Presence and Action of the Spirit.*”

Already the existence and apostolic dynamism of the people who make up the present Congregation in all its activities and commitments are clear traces of the presence of the Spirit. I will recall some facts about missionary life, which will corroborate that. It is obvious that, if not by the Spirit, how could one sustain and desire, plan and commit to seemingly superhuman works? How could the change of mentality and attitudes have been carried forward? How are the options and commitments that have been made explained? How could missionary expansion be understood? Also, at this time it can be said, like the Founder: *Digitus Dei est hic.*²⁷⁶

- The process of post-conciliar renewal as far as what it has meant in awareness of the Spirit’s initiative to understand the mystery of the Church and our mission in her, to foster communion through dialogue, participation and co-responsibility.
- The ongoing concern to improve our missionary life, through faith, prayer, the living of the vows, training for missionary life, the response to the “cry of the poor.”
- All the initiatives of sharing and interprovincial activities have been a blessing.
- Having placed the person of Jesus, the anointed one sent by the Father, at the center of our lives and to continue his mission in the world from the missionary service of the Word.
- Having drawn up a text of *Constitutions* in tune with the spirit of the Founder and the harmony they have brought about.
- Having provided the Congregation with a General Plan of Formation (where the Holy Spirit is presented as the first and foremost agent of formation, the protagonist of our mission, the one who conforms us to Christ and equips us as fitting ministers of his Word²⁷⁷) and the Spiritual and Vocational Directories (The Congregation’s own legislation).
- The reflection that was shared about Cordimarian spirituality: gatherings, week-long seminars and publications.

²⁷⁶ *Aut.* 609, cf. Ex 8:19.

²⁷⁷ Cf. Claretian Missionaries, *General Plan of Formation*, Rome 2020, nos. 107-111.

- The efforts of ongoing formation: Specializations, sabbatical years, courses for those ordained five-years (*quinquenio*), for the elderly.
- Having reconciled among ourselves these points: A) The name: Missionary Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary - Claretian Missionaries. We saw that one cannot be Claretian without being a Son of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, as the founding father understood and lived it. b) In the fraternity and mission of all the members of the Congregation: priests, deacons, students and brothers. c) In the diversity of apostolates. We are all missionaries. d) We have reconciled ourselves with the fundamental choices of our missionary life. Today no one argues about them.²⁷⁸ Now the Spirit continues to work on us through the path of interculturality.
- Having given the Word of God a privileged place in our lives in many ways: Growth in listening and discernment according to the Word. Praying with the Word (*lectio divina*). The attention given to meditation on the Word of God and the care to transmit it with the proper preparation. Itinerant preaching and services to promote popular religiosity.
- Having taken on the three great options, which have been the options of the Church: For the poor, for the *missio ad gentes* and for universal fraternity.
- The Word-Mission Project, the work of so many brothers in the editions of the Bible, the Bible Diary, Word and Life.
- Promotion of the liturgy and inculturation of it.
- The ministry of Christian education.
- Efforts to promote ministry with young people.
- The beatification of our brother martyrs in Barbastro and Mexico were true gifts of the Spirit for the Congregation. Many of our brothers offered to go where they had wanted to go and could not. A spirituality of martyrdom has been cultivated.
- Fruit of the Spirit is the lifestyle of many of our brother priests, students and brothers, animated by the missionary spirit of Claret, and working in solitude, in places of extreme poverty, facing sacrifices of misunderstanding, etc. Let us think of the risky situations in Muslim countries, areas of extreme poverty, countries marked by atheism (Eastern Europe).
- Efforts to make the “shared mission” a reality. Our charism is for the Church and for sharing life and mission with priests, religious and, above all, lay people.
- The missionary expansion following the Special Chapter, first the missions of each Major Organism. Then, from the MCT and later, as a consequence of the mandate of John Paul II to be present in Asia, Africa and the Eastern Europe.
- The efforts carried out in favor of the revision of positions and the restructuring of organisms in order to enhance the quality of missionary life and the evangelizing mission.
- The commitments in the work for peace, justice and the safeguarding of creation. The prophetic mission in an unjust and violent world, which does not respect life or human dignity. Working together and networks.
- The ecumenical, interreligious and intercultural dialogue.
- Pastoral work in the face of the phenomenon of unbelief and religious indifference.

²⁷⁸ Cf. Aquilino Bocos Merino, *Herencia y profecía*, Publicaciones Claretianas, Madrid 2006, pp. 408-409.

- Communications media: Radio, magazines, publications, editorials, websites.
- Support and accompaniment of basic communities and Christian groups
- The growth of the number of vocations in countries of Africa, America, Asia.
- The Theological Institutes of Religious Life in Europe and Asia and the service they render to the consecrated life of so many religious families. And the service of other Centers of Higher Education.
- The effort to prepare leaders for evangelization: workshops and formation courses for lay delegates of the Word, catechists, mothers, teachers, etc.
- Family ministry, participation in movements in favor of the Christian family.
- Health care: creating and supporting medical clinics.
- The multiple acts of solidarity. Efforts for social promotion, the creation of NGOs and cooperation with international development organizations.
- The Eucharist-Life Project.
- The *Forge* as an opportunity for growth in personal and community life, within ordinary life, around the central axes: *Quid prodest, Patris mei, Caritas Christi, Spíritus Domini*.

3. THE EVIL SPIRITS THAT NEUTRALIZE OR DELAY THE MISSION OF THE CONGREGATION IN THE CHURCH AND IN THE WORLD

The Congregation, as an ecclesial reality that it is, has a trajectory of its life and a mission to accomplish. Always assisted by the Spirit, it is not lacking stumbling, detours, seductions, denials, and sins. All this hinders the action of the Spirit in it as a missionary community.

As we have been able to recognize the action of the Spirit in the mission of the Congregation, imbalances or infidelities have been indicated. The pedagogy of affirmation leaves in the dark the failure that is to be avoided.

The circumstances of the new evangelization raise in us questions such as these: Why have we lost novelty, charm, drive, parrhesia, mysticism and prophecy?

Our identity being the missionary service of the Word – as a way of being, acting and significance – which has its prophetic, eschatological and apocalyptic mark, is easy for us to identify plenty of the evil spirits that have withdrawn or stagnated us in the service that today's world needed. It should be specified that we are talking about the Congregation as a whole and not about each person.

3.1. *Neutralized Prophetic Mission*

Our missionary vocation has some prophetic profiles that stem from its Claretian DNA. 1) The Spirit and the Word. 2) Following Jesus anointed by the Spirit to proclaim the Good News to the poor. 3) Mary, fully heart, believer and faithful. 4) Universality with regard to peoples and nations and according to the possible means.

It is therefore indispensable for us to experience the Spirit who reveals the Word to us, who makes us men of faith and prayer, who makes us contemplatives in action, who makes us friends of God and defenders of the rights of the excluded, who calls us together to live communion and makes instruments of communion, who opens us up and makes us assume the reality of our world, who warms us in the Heart of Mary and makes us arrows against evil, that dilates our pupils –like eye drops placed in our eyes– to go further (itinerancy) and to be empowered.

From this point of view, evil spirits haunt us, hinder or damage our missionary life when:

- We fall into idolatry and cease to relate to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the source and fullness of life.
- We foster division in the community, in the Province, in the Congregation, in the Church. Envy, murmuring, suspicion.
- We blame the other without taking responsibility.
- The egoism and the egocentrism of people and groups takes over. Individualism, provincialisms and lack of collaboration in works that transcend the legal limits of organizations. Lack of collaboration, working together in pastoral care and with the Church.
- We are self-absorbed. We close ourselves off and do not open ourselves to the Spirit. We do not let him act in us, we do not hear his moans or his cries from the wounds of the world: injustice, poverty, hunger, oppression. We gradually abandon contemplation, prayer, recognition, praise, participation in the Eucharist, etc.
- We live unconsciously, on the sidelines, as if what is happening does not affect us. We live with our backs to the world, we do not open ourselves to its cries from great poverty, scourges, and injustices, nor do we know how to place ourselves in the historical reality of the people of our time.
- We do not support the action of the Spirit who invites us to the ministry of consolation (cf. TMHL 12), of compassion (cf. MFL 35; *Aut.* 150, 160, 208, 209, 251).
- We take the “shared mission” lightly.
- We despise the new connections and break any communication network, often because we have not opened ourselves to new techniques.
- The Word of God is trivialized, it ceases to be a grateful remembering and a summoning force to create God’s family; without the capacity to console, without light that illuminates and without life that transmits hope.
- We lack tenderness, compassion, cordiality toward others. The cordiality that stems from the Heart of Mary is prophetic.
- We lack *coordination* and leadership.
- The vows lose their radicalness, the ideals of overcoming, of surrender, of solidarity are extinguished. The mission is dampened. The poor and our brothers lose. We ourselves lose.

3.2. *Eschatological Mission without Horizons*

Among the features of our eschatological mission can be listed: 1) To be a sign and to proclaim future goods, of the new earth and new heavens. 2) To free consciences and structures to make the Kingdom of God a reality. 3) To get involved so that all people have life and have it in abundance.

Our eschatological mission is hampered and nullified when:

- We are not able to admire, to contemplate, to look beyond.
- We do not cultivate the prophetic “seeing”, which is to see in depth and with the heart. To see with the eyes of the merciful God, friend of the poor and humiliated.
- We let ourselves be dragged down by routine, habit, insensitivity. We get used to everything and we are victims of the obvious.
- We are not free, true, or honest.

- We let ourselves be won over by secularization.
- We accommodate the currents of inconsequential thought and consumerism.
- We give priority to ideologies over the Christian message.
- We fall into despair.
- We are trapped by lukewarmness, mediocrity, the worship of false idols.
- We are afraid of what is new.
- We do not develop in-depth plans. Nor will we be able to make others do them.
- We are drowning in incompetence or lack of preparation to discover and discern the signs of the times. Not being able to perceive, examine and face the challenges of evangelization and the transmission of faith. We lack solid *formation* to meet the great challenges of the mission.

3.3. Apocalyptic Mission without Prodding or Consolation

The Congregation is heir to the apocalyptic spirit with which Claret exercised his ministry of the Word. The Book of Revelation is an open book, which allows us to read the history of the Congregation as a history of salvation and consolation, while helping us to discover our prophetic condition and the enemies that present themselves to us. We have Christ in the center and He is the Lamb who has overcome death. He is who is, who was and who is to come (cf. Rev 1:4), the “alpha and omega” (Rev 1:8). Recovering the encounter with the Spirit allows us to return to the vitality of prophecy. It gives assurance that good triumphs over evil.

In the reading of the Book of Revelation, we can also identify today’s evil spirits, the demons that extinguish our “shouting the Word”, that put obstacles to our ministry. The letters of the Spirit to the Churches are still current and come to us as a warning, as encouragement, as consolation.

- Softening the sting or forgetting the dangerous memory of being followers of Jesus.
- Quenching the fire of the Spirit, accumulating worries of secondary and inconsequential value.
- Dampening the passion for the Kingdom of God in the world.
- Obscuring the witness of our life.
- Relaxing in the fight against the anti-Kingdom forces.
- Losing sensitivity and connection with creation, the work of God; with history, which is the history of salvation; with the Church, which is the People of God; with the Congregation, which is the missionary family. (We forget that our apocalyptic spirit has a lot to do with the totality of God’s plan.)
- Having lost the ability let ourselves be moved, to be excited about the newness of the future Kingdom, of the joy that the Kingdom of God is near.
- Letting ourselves be tamed by laws, by structures, by the economy, by uncertainty in the future.
- Bureaucratizing our pastoral action.
- Trusting more in success, in the immediacy of efficiency, in the results of organization, than in the new life that we need to cultivate.
- Lowering the ethical requirements of our religious profession.
- Obscuring the prophecy of fraternal life in community.
- Neglecting openness, listening, contemplating the plan of salvation, postponing conversion.

- Being lukewarm and getting used to it.
- Hiding in the works, without discerning the value they have as means.
- Omitting denunciation out of fear.
- Letting ourselves be swayed by comfort and stifling the Word.
- Taming radical choices for the poor, for the proclamation of the Gospel *ad gentes* and *inter gentes* and universal brotherhood.
- Making a pact, albeit unconsciously, with the capital sins and new vices of today:²⁷⁹ consumerism, conformism, shamelessness, sexomania, sociopathy,²⁸⁰ rejection,²⁸¹ emptiness.²⁸²

4. WHAT THE SPIRIT “SAYS” TO THE CONGREGATION TODAY

The Spirit revealed himself in the General Chapter of 2009 and opened the ears, eyes and hearts of Claretians to understand and welcome his presence in the world, in the Church and in the Congregation. He speaks to us about a *new* name, a *new* family, a *new* lifestyle, a *new* path and a *new* sending forth. He speaks to us about novelty. The Spirit also makes the Congregation *new*. And he wants to keep making it new through listening to the Word and celebrating the Eucharist, where we renew the *covenant* and *sending*.

Like the disciples of Emmaus, we too can overcome the lack of enthusiasm and zeal when we allow ourselves to be accompanied by the Master along the way of the missionary life. He hears our frustrations and questions and gives us what we need to rekindle the embers of a weakened vocation: the Word that ‘makes the heart burn’ and the Eucharist that ‘opens our eyes’ (cf. *Lk* 24:31-45). That was the experience of our Founder. (MFL, 44)

The entire Chapter Declaration “Men On Fire with Love” gives us clues to rekindle the fire and set others on fire. I will highlight three points in which I perceive the breath of the Spirit.

4.1. *From Where to Carry out the Mission*

R. M. Rilke says that “God waits where the roots are.” This beautiful expression is the one that seems to me to pick up the call. The return to the essential, to the origins, that makes us understand from where the source emanates, even though it is night.²⁸³ At its heart is to place oneself in the mission of Christ, the one sent by the Father and anointed by the Spirit. For this reason, what is essential in the mission is: gratuitousness, hospitality, contemplation, prayer, suffering and compassion, which are, in turn, directed toward the glory of the Trinity.

“*For with you is the fountain of life, and in your light we see light*” (Ps 36:10). It is another variant of from where we have to situate ourselves. Our ministry is religiously distorted when we detach ourselves *from what is original* and fundamental, the Trinitarian mystery, and we place ourselves on a plane that does not correspond to us, becoming social agents or mere teachers.

²⁷⁹ Cf. U. Galimberti, *I vizi capitali e i nuovi vizi*, Feltrinelli, Milano 2003.

²⁸⁰ The sociopath only follows his own thoughts, walks his own path, only notices his own pain.

²⁸¹ Which leads to indifference or insensitivity.

²⁸² Inner emptiness, disillusioned hope, underlying self-absorption. He prefers to be alone.

²⁸³ “For I know well the spring that flows and runs, although it is night” (St. John of the Cross).

Hence it is necessary to return to our first love and, for this, it is necessary to blow on the accumulated ashes that prevent the light and heat of the living fire. (*Valor y oportunidad de la Fragua* [Value and Opportunity of the Forge]).

Rereading our life according to the sacramental dimension and practice of the Church. In the 2003 General Chapter, the declaration “That They May Have Life” made this consideration:

The Church symbolically, through Word and Sacrament, accompanies the whole journey of human life from birth to death. As members of God’s people each one of us (laity and ordained ministers) is an authentic ‘servant of Life’ that is: born and grows in the sacraments of Initiation, nourished in the Word and by the Bread and Wine of the Eucharist, reconciled in Penance, healed in the Anointing of the sick, betrothed and made fruitful in Matrimony, given in service through Holy Orders. (TMHL, 15)

Aware that life in the Spirit is a priority, the last General Chapter asked us to bear in mind that we are “called to strengthen the theological dimension of our lives”. We therefore should carry out the mission through the prism of the Spirit. In this regard it said: “Called to be listeners and servants of the Word, we are aware that life in the Spirit has to occupy first place in our life project (cf. VC 93). Thus we have tried in recent years to cultivate our missionary vocation in fidelity to the evangelical and charismatic roots expressed in the Constitutions (cf. TMHL 48)” (MFL 8).

In order to spread the fire of God’s love, to set others on fire and to share it, we must begin by rekindling the fire in ourselves, according to the insinuations of the Spirit: “We feel a special call of the Spirit to see the world with the eyes of God, to reinforce the experience of God in our lives (cf. nos. 8-11), to live in continuous formation (nos. 12-15) and to recommit ourselves to the community (nos. 16-17)” (MFL 53).

4.2. *The Place of the Mission has Theological Value*

Jesus, the one anointed by the Father to proclaim the Good News to the poor (Lk 4:18), went about this world doing good (Acts 10:38). This “going about” of Jesus, his crossing to the other shore, was not a purely geographical matter, but rather giving priority to the encounter with those who needed him to recover health, forgiveness, hope, and life.

The Spirit sets our hearts on fire to make our feet walk, so that we do not stop at anything other than the fulfillment of the Father’s will. *Itinerancy* is consubstantial to our condition as missionaries.

The Congregation must always be “responsive to the needs of the Church and the world in various times and places” (CC 136). Its mission should be fulfilled “amid the changing circumstances of times, places and persons” (CC 29). Therefore, “our communities, considering the conditions of each place, should strive to give a collective witness to poverty” (CC 25).

We are therefore invited, urged, to frequent the mission fields or Areopagus where the action of the Spirit of communion, love, counsel, and solidarity with those who need to live with the dignity of God’s children becomes evident.

The *Lineamenta* of the Synod on the New Evangelization speaks of new scenarios in this changing world and points out: 1) The backdrop of the cultural sector; 2) The other, more social sector: the great phenomenon of migration; 3) The challenge of communications media; 4) The economic sector; 5) Scientific and technological research; and 6) Civic and political life.²⁸⁴

²⁸⁴ Lineamenta for the Synod on the New Evangelization, no. 6.

Privileged places today for cooperating in the new evangelization are: the liturgy, charity as expressed in Benedict XVI's *Deus caritas est*, ecumenism, immigration, and communication.²⁸⁵

We are needed where life is threatened, unprotected and where there may be new growth of new life: a society that does not feel in struggle, nor does it penalize anyone based on culture, language, or social situation. In the defense of life, of the family, of education, on which the future of society depends.

From the beginning of the Congregation, by vocation we are promoters of leaders of evangelization: priests, religious and lay people.

4.3. *The How is Decisive in Carrying out the Mission*

The *how*, which is essential to the Christian life, qualifies our works. The decisive thing is not to love others, but to love “as” Christ has loved us; to do the Father’s will, so on earth “as in heaven”; and “as the Father has sent me, so I send you.” The mission today must recover the Christian mysticism, that is, the dynamism that comes from the Spirit of Christ and “sets the whole world on fire with his love.”

The *how* has for us several charismatic references: “As Jesus Christ is one with the Father and the Spirit” (CC 10); love “is the first and most necessary gift which marks us out as true disciples of Christ” (CC 10); “As images of God and members of one body” (CC 15); “as the Apostles did” –like the Apostles– (Formula of Profession); “to do with others” or way of proceeding; “take the Blessed Virgin Mary, the first disciple of Christ, as their Mother and Teacher” (CC 61); “as Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary” or *cordiality*; “as strangers and pilgrims”; “as one who serves”; “as instruments for the salvation of many” (CC 77); “steadfast co-workers of the bishops.” (CC 82); treating people “as brothers and sisters” (CC 83); “as true ministers of God” (CC 85).

Our entire missionary life is involved in the *how*. But, at the root, the most significant is that of *shared mission*. It is not a tactic, but a way of being and carrying out the mission. We are servants, ministers, collaborators, who work with others in a completely charismatic and ministerial Church.²⁸⁶

Other expressions of this “*how*” would be our mission or exercising ministry in words that are familiar to us: grateful, confessing, listening, praying, contemplative, eucharistic, prophetic, evangelical, poor, in solidarity, samaritan, merciful, reconciled, building peace, risky, passionate, committed, itinerant, constructive and intellectually empowered.

It remains a motto for the Congregation to remain attentive to “the most urgent, timely and effective” in the selection of missionary frontiers and the means to be used for the missionary proclamation of the Word.²⁸⁷

CONCLUSION: THE SPIRIT CONTINUES TO OPEN WINDOWS INTO THE FUTURE

The Congregation, founded and animated by the Spirit, the Lord and giver of life, sees windows open into the future in a world inhabited by his presence and in a Church that testifies to his presence. It knows it is not the protagonist in the mission. It feels like a servant, an instrument, a minister of communion.

Our congregational community is a community inhabited by the Spirit who keeps it united, free, agile, committed to human and ecclesial causes.

²⁸⁵ Cf. Rino Fisichella, *La nueva evangelización*, Sal Terrae, Santander 2012, pp. 65-76.

²⁸⁶ Cf. CMF “*Do with Others*,” Workshop on Shared Mission, Guatemala, 2005, Claretian Publications, Bangalore, India, 2006.

²⁸⁷ Cf. Chapter 1967, *Declaration on the Charism*, 12; MCT, 85 and 163.

We are bearers of a gift that must be made fruitful for the growth of the Kingdom. We need only let ourselves be challenged and keep our imagination awake. But we have no future without people who are prepared intellectually, pastorally and spiritually, to be able to meet the needs of the times (cf. CC 56). Today we need a “holistic” vision in the search for truth and to be honest in our behavior.

The ecology of nature and the ecology of the Spirit force us to dialogue with people of other languages, beliefs and cultures. The Spirit raises us to the Father and the Son, making humanity God’s family. Hence, our commitment to universal fraternity.

OUR PATH OF POST-CONCILIAR RENEWAL*

I have been invited by the Fr. General to carry out an exercise of corporate memory with regard to the General Chapters held after the Council. I have in my mind the words of Sören Kierkegaard, who said that “life can only be understood backward, but it must be lived forward.”

1. THE COUNCIL, AN EVENT OF GRACE

We are celebrating the 50th anniversary of the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council. It was inaugurated on October 11, 1962 by John XXIII. It is said that when asked about the goal he wanted to achieve from the Council, John XXIII opened the window to St. Peter’s Square and said: “*This is what the Council will do: let a little fresh air enter the Church.*” That happy day began the *aggiornamento*, “the new spring”, “the new pentecost” for the Church, as the good Pope had indicated on other occasions. The Church initiated a parable of renewal by returning to “the simple and pure lines of origins” in freedom and charity.

The Council was a very special visit by the Spirit to His Church and to humanity. The protagonist of the Council and of the process of renewal in the Church has been the Holy Spirit. The effects of that momentous event remain in the broad horizons open to the People of God and in the paths laid out for successive generations. With the Council, the Church entered into dialogue with our brothers and sisters of the separated Churches, with other religions and with the modern world. Its proposal to discern “the signs of the times” and to remain faithful to the Church’s evangelizing mission has endowed it with vitality and relevance. The Council enlightens the reflection on the totality of the sources of revelation, of the Christian tradition, of the questions raised by modern man and of the changes in the world. Therefore, its spiritual, doctrinal, social and cultural influence remains decisive.

Perhaps these statements can be said now, 50 years after its closure, after having experienced the euphoria of the new and having overcome many storms, confusions and quite a few capitulations. The process of renewal forced us to adopt another way of seeing, feeling and committing ourselves to the Christian life.

The Church and the religious institutes, including ours, during these 50 years since the Council have walked between lights and shadows. Behind a new language, such as: change, effective renewal, correct accommodation, gospel, follow, dialogue, freedom, fraternity, service, poor, lay, ministry, etc., there has been a new spirituality, a new relationship with the Father, with Jesus Christ and with his Holy Spirit; new relationships between people and with creation. The successive challenges of secularization, disbelief, postmodernity, dehumanization, the culture of death, etc. have been constant. But they do not have the last word. In fact, dawn continues to rise and a new song is still heard (St. Augustine).

* Conference given at the XXV General Chapter, 2015. Published in *Annales Congregationis*, Vol. 72, Fasc 2, pp. 206-224.

2. THE CONGREGATION TOOK ON THE PROCESS OF RENEWAL

A few months after the conclusion of the Council, Pope Paul VI published the *Motu Proprio Ecclesiae Sanctae* (1966) in which rules were established to promote the proper renewal of religious life and, in particular, the convocation of an ordinary or special General Chapter. Above all, the younger generations of Claretians felt concern and an urgency about the convocation of the Special Chapter of Renewal.

Among the various members of the Congregation who were Council Fathers, was Fr. General Peter Schweiger, who was notably enthusiastic about helping the Congregation feel with the Church and about promoting the spirit of our holy founder. It was not hard for him to convene the Special Chapter of 1967. In 1965 the Congregation had 3,735 members, which in 1970 had fallen to 3,404.

On the occasion of the first centenary of the Congregation (1949) and the canonization of the Founder (1950), there was a great interest in studying the figure and missionary spirit of St. Anthony Mary Claret. This was helped by the creation of the Claretian Secretariat (1949) and the Center for Claretian Studies (1954), established in the General Curia in Rome. Many of our brothers made doctoral theses about Fr. Claret's writings and activities. In 1959 his *Autobiography*, Selected Letters, Spiritual Notes, Resolutions from his Spiritual Exercises and Lights and Graces were published. In 1963, *Studia Claretiana* began. At the time that the Special Chapter was held, the Congregation had higher education centers where there were people who had studied Sacred Scripture, Theology, Law, Formation and Governance.²⁸⁸ The Congregation had opened to Asia: Japan and the Philippines and, very soon, India.

The Special Chapter had the ability to lay a solid foundation and open a safe channel for post-conciliar renewal.²⁸⁹ Now I can repeat what Bernard of Chartres said: "We are like dwarfs on the shoulders of giants, so that we can see more than they, and things at a greater distance, not by virtue of any sharpness of sight on our part, or any physical distinction, but because we are carried high and raised up by their giant size."

3. THE MILESTONES OF OUR PROCESS OF RENEWAL

The General Chapters are, above all, events of community life and are only well understood in continuity of life. They are links in an uninterrupted chain, milestones, reference points and indicators to face the future. Looking at them as a whole, they offer a progressive and harmonious development of the missionary charism of the Congregation. What needs to be highlighted most in them is communion, revision and a constant missionary relaunching. They always involve thanksgiving, reconciliation and commitment in the mission of whatever may be most *urgent, timely and effective*.

Already in the first Chapter of Renewal, it is recognized that the Holy Spirit is the *protagonist* in the life and mission of the Founder and of the Congregation. And in all of the Chapter declarations there is record of the presence of Mary as Mother of the Congregation. In her Heart the missionaries are formed.

Since the Special Chapter, the language in which the chapters have expressed themselves has been *dynamic*. They talk about progress, process, program, itinerary, stages, and phases. And they are *contextualized*. They take into account the various historical, social, cultural, religious, ecclesial and congregational contexts. We all know that it is not the words that save us, but rather the person of Jesus, but the words reveal sensitivity in the face of the challenges and the manner in which we position ourselves before the surrounding reality (L. Wittgenstein). We should not, therefore, underestimate the

²⁸⁸ I have in mind the Juridical Institute in Rome, the international centers in Rome and Salamanca, the Centers of Theology in Cordoba (Argentina), Manizales in Colombia, Curitiba, Washington, etc.

²⁸⁹ Fortunately, we have access to an excellent work about the process of renewal. G. Alonso, *Misioneros Claretianos, III. La renovación conciliar*, Editorial Claretiana, Buenos Aires 2007.

successive language: renewal, revitalization, refounding, revision of positions and restructuring, nor the new words we have been using.²⁹⁰ It is an expression of the Paschal journey and the new creation.

The *undercurrents* of our journey of renewal have been those indicated by the Conciliar Decree on *the adaptation and renewal of religious life* (PC): the return to the sources, conversion, the following of Jesus, ecclesiality, support for the person, missionary evangelization.

The *great options* that the Congregation, more or less explicitly, has been affirming and reaffirming throughout these years: *the option for the poor, the option for universal mission and the option for fraternity among people* with all that they entail: commitment to peace, justice, and integrity of creation.

Among the 8 General Chapters held after the Council, two different periods can be seen: The first period with a *constitutional* nature, which would comprise the first four Chapters (1967, 1973, 1979 and 1985). The second period, that would include the other four Chapters (1991, 1997, 2003 and 2009), could be called *creative fidelity*.

The *constitutional period* was a time of building the solid foundations of our missionary life on the central nuclei. During these years, the renewed texts of the *Constitutions* and the *Directory* were drafted and approved, which were adjusted in 1985 to the new *Code of Canon Law*. The course of Claretian missionary life flowed on three fundamental dynamics: charism, community and mission.

The *period of creative fidelity* is characterized by the reaffirmation of the Claretian charism, listening and discernment of the signs of times and places and the missionary expansion of the Congregation. Horizons are scanned in light of the Word of God, the foundational charism, the Magisterium of the Church and the calls of the world.

Throughout the almost fifty years of the post-conciliar renewal process, these dynamics have remained: information, dialogue, participation, co-responsibility and subsidiarity. All the documents of the General Chapters have dealt with spirituality, formation, vocations, community life, missionary service and the economy.

The path we have followed has been neither smooth nor straight. An appropriate image to explain the process of renewal is that of the river that springs from a few sources and follows its course. Sometimes it is winding, hides underground, creates backwaters and waterfalls, recedes and carries on, overcoming obstacles until reaching the sea. We have not always lived up to our proposals and commitments. More than once we have defrauded the poorest and those most in need of the Word.

Before analyzing each of the Chapters we should observe: 1) the insistence with which we talk about identity, belonging, availability and 2) the interrelation that mediates between these three axes that shape our missionary life. Each of these aspects is dynamic, open and multi-relational. And they are like communicating vessels that are exchanged. The same is true when speaking of consecration, communion, mission; or of charisma, fraternity and availability.

4. THE GENERAL CHAPTERS FROM 1967 TO 1985

4.1. *Extraordinary and Special Chapter of 1967*

Like all religious institutes, our Congregation also celebrated the Special Chapter, which the Church requested and which had an extraordinary character due to the resignation of Fr. Peter Schweiger, Superior General. It corresponded with the XVII General Chapter and was held from September 1 to November 14, 1967. It marked a historic, singular milestone in the history of the Congregation. During the Chapter, a doctrinal commission and several other commissions functioned. In light of the Conciliar

²⁹⁰ For example: prophecy, insertion, avant-garde, creativity, interculturality, ecology, covenant, shared mission.

Constitutions and Decrees, it aimed to respond to the call to holiness, according to our specific vocation (*Lumen gentium*, Ch. 5). It gave guidelines about our religious life, government, formation, brothers, the apostolate, Christian education, missions among non-Christians, administration of goods. But the most important documents were the *Declaration on the Charism of Saint Anthony Mary Claret* and the *Declaration on the Spiritual Heritage of the Congregation*. Both documents attempted to propose descriptions of the characteristics of our congregational identity.

The issue of the *Constitutions* was not directly addressed, but suggestions were given for an “Ad Hoc” Commission, after the Chapter, to draw up a renewed text. In 1971 the first draft was published, which was subject to revision in the following chapters: 1973 and 1979. In 1982 the text was approved by the Sacred Congregation for Religious and in 1985 it was adjusted to the new CIC.²⁹¹

The Special Chapter highlighted the pneumatological, Christocentric, ecclesial, Cordimarian and plural communitarian (priests, deacons, brothers, students) dimensions of the vocation of the Missionary Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Although the criteria for renewal offered by the *Perfectae Caritatis* were read in light of the four Conciliar Constitutions and all the Decrees, *Lumen Gentium* strongly polarized the attention of those gathered at the Chapter. The affirmation of *our identity in the People of God* as *servants of the Word* was and remains key to the entire process of congregational renewal. Around it the apostolate, spirituality, formation, government, and economy have been shaped. This Chapter enabled the Congregation to make the qualitative leap from law and morality to theology; from tradition to progress; from uniformity to pluralism; from the individual to the community; from the vertical, to the horizontal; from the established order, to participation and co-responsibility; from the devotional to spirituality; from the apostolates to missionary service of the Word; from devotional practices to the centrality of the Word and of the liturgy; from the Coadjutor Brothers to the Missionary Brothers.

The allusions to the evangelization of the poor and to social commitment were significant (Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Populorum Progressio* had only recently been published). This Chapter asked all of the Provinces to have their own mission, providing it with personnel and economic means (MI 8).

The Chapter documents were generally welcomed by the Congregation. But the Claretians entered a process of renewal that had plenty of cautiousness and opposition. “The profound and rapid changes” (GS 4) created confusion. Not every change was renewal. The masters of suspicion (Marx, Freud, Nietzsche) were fashionable, the anti-establishment movements had an impact in young men and women religious, who suffered the contagion of the May 1968 protests in France and other movements such as those that occurred in Mexico, USA, etc. All this produced quite a bit of disorientation, acute vocational crises and mass desertion. The pre-conciliar mentality resisted any initiative and the tension between the traditional and the new was strong in the communities. Since the renewal had solid foundations, it moved forward. The formation courses for all the members and in all areas of apostolate were beneficial, offering a service of awareness and deep reflection.

4.2. Chapter of 1973. Second Chapter of Renewal

When this XVIII General Chapter was held, the Congregation had 2,869 members. As a frame of reference, these four facts can be highlighted:

- I. In 1968, the General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean (CELAM) was held in Medellin, which highlighted the option for the poor. In 1969 the Sacred Congregation for Religious (SCRIS) published the *Renovationis Causam*. In 1971 Paul VI published *Evangelica*

²⁹¹ On the history of the elaboration of the CMF *Constitutions*, cf. P. Franquesa, in *Our Project of Missionary Life, Commentary on the Constitutions*, Vol 1, Transl. by J. Daries, Claretians Publications, Quezon City, Philippines. 1992, pp. 27-130. Also see from Fr. G. Alonso: *Misioneros Claretianos, III. La renovación conciliar*, Editorial Claretiana, Buenos Aires 2007, pp. 258-312.

Testificatio emerging from the crisis of identity among men and women religious. Almost at the same time he published *Octogesima Adveniens* and a Synod of Bishops on Justice was held.

- II. The Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* marked ecclesial sensitivity. The enthusiasm for progress was felt. The great challenge was to know how to place ourselves in the world without being of the world.²⁹² Among us, as in the other Institutes, an awareness grew of the value of the person, of freedom, of participation, of co-responsibility. Community experiences were sought in small groups, abandoning traditional positions. Our insertion among the poor in working-class and marginalized neighborhoods began.
- III. Diversity was accentuated in ways of thinking, feeling, and acting; in ages, in community rhythms, in lifestyles and in the selection of structures. While fighting against uniformity, there was a need for unity within pluralism and pluriformity.
- IV. Religious life required a well-founded and systematic theological reflection. The Congregation committed itself to this service.²⁹³

This Second Chapter of Renewal carried a concern in its objective: to verify the progress of the renewal initiated in the Special Chapter. But it was too early to make serious evaluations. A broad vision of this Chapter was expressed in the *Open Letter to the Congregation* which, in the Chapter Documents, precedes all the other Decrees on Government, Brothers, Religious Life, Apostolate, Formation, Economy and Associates of the Congregation. In this letter it was affirmed that the Chapter was a moment of deepening in the mystery of the Church-communion, which permitted conferring a new validity upon the evangelical fraternity, and deepening in the charism and spirit of the Founder. It emphasized the revitalization of community life, the reform of the structures of organization and government, the revision of positions to give them missionary flexibility, the vital problem of vocations, “the very serious problem of prayer,”²⁹⁴ the need to continue studying the Claretian charism and continuing education. There was already a renewed text (the second one) of the *Constitutions*.

This Chapter, which some have considered of little importance, was of great importance. It stressed *consecration* in the face of secularization and *community* in the face of individualism and disintegration. It tackled the crisis of *meaning* and *belonging* from the perspective of fraternal communion in all spheres. While supporting decentralization – the possibility of electing major and local superiors – it insisted on collaboration at all levels, especially with the Federations, Major Organisms and General Houses in mind. It promoted creativity, planning and programming of our apostolic activities.

The General Government created a Commission for Community Animation, which during the six-year period toured several Major Organisms of the Congregation. In the middle of the six-year period, the General Assembly was held in San José (Costa Rica) and missionary *availability* arose as a notable concern.

4.3. Chapter of 1979. *Constitutions and The Mission of the Claretian Today*

²⁹² The Dominican theologian J. M. Tillard expressed it very well in his book *Devant Dieu et pour le monde*. Translated into Spanish: *El proyecto de vida de los religiosos*, Publicaciones Claretianas, Madrid 1974. In his diagnostic essay, which is from the preceding years, he highlights the problem of faith.

²⁹³ Let us think of the Theological Institutes of Religious Life in Rome and Madrid (1971). It is regrettable that the attempt to found another theological institute of religious life in Medellín did not continue in those years. Later, ICLA was founded in Quezon City and Sanyasa in Bangalore.

²⁹⁴ The *Decree on Religious Life* has an appendix on “Prayer in the Congregation”. This text has probably been the boldest asking us to take personal and community prayer seriously.

This was the XIX General Chapter. Among those present at the Chapter were brothers of African and Asian origin. Four students from four continents and four Claretian lay people participated. This Chapter is recalled by the unique document: “*The Mission of the Claretian Today*” (MCT), which marked the missionary life of the Congregation. More importance should have been given to the fact that, during this Chapter, the final text of the *Constitutions* was prepared. The Congregation had, at that time, 2,926 members.

The context in which it was celebrated has as a reference point the Synod on the Evangelization in the Modern World (1974) and the publication of *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975). In 1978 the document *Mutuae Relationes* was published and John Paul II was elected, who published his first encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*. The theme of evangelization turned our eyes to the Council and found in the document *Ad Gentes* a solid support to overcome the crisis of mission. At the beginning of 1979, the III General Conference of CELAM was held in Puebla (Mexico) on *Evangelization in the Present and Future of Latin America*. The Union of Superiors General and the SCRIS reflected on “*Religious and Human Promotion*” and “*The Contemplative Dimension of Religious Life*”, which appeared as documents in 1980.

The Chapter of 1967 had affirmed that charism and mission cannot be separated. This Chapter, both in the renewed *Constitutions* and in the MCT, overcame the expression “apostolic religious” and reaffirmed the substantive character of the word “missionary” for us. A word that must be understood according to the spiritual experience of St. Anthony M. Claret and, therefore, defines our identity.²⁹⁵ We are all missionaries: priests, deacons, brothers and students.

While in the previous two Chapters decrees were offered on religious life, government, apostolate, formation, and economy, this is a single document and all these aspects are considered according to the mission. It also sent a message to the Lay Claretians.

The elaboration of MCT was laborious. It had an extensive and long preparation. It was worked on from the methodology of “see, judge and act”. The three parts are: I. Our Vision of Present-Day Reality, II. A Rereading of the Claretian Mission, and III. Programming our Missionary Action in which are highlighted: The options for evangelization and the recipients of our mission. It insisted on something that would be a priority in the years immediately following the Chapter: the revision of positions and the reorganization of the Major Organisms. This issue was addressed extensively at the Assembly in Los Teques (Venezuela) in 1983.

The Chapter was combining the work between the elaboration of the final text of the *Constitutions* and the MCT. This prevented completing a draft of the MCT. The most difficult points to integrate were the ecclesiological dimension and the missionary options and preferences. In response to those who said that it was not a Chapter text because it was not fully concluded during the Chapter itself, but rather the Government General was left with the task of final editing, it must be said that more than 90% of the text was already finished and approved by the Chapter. The General Government certainly made improvements by integrating ideas and suggestions that had been expressed in the Chapter itself.

The Chapter offered the third renewed text of the *Constitutions* for approval by the SCRIS. Several months of intense dialogue passed between the delivery of the text and the decree of approval (February 11, 1982). We finally had a definitive text that we could be very happy about.

4.4. Chapter of 1985. *The Person in the Process of Renewal*

²⁹⁵ Cf. CMF Directory, 26.

In 1983 the new *Code of Canon Law* (CIC) and the document *Essential Elements in the Church's Teaching on Religious Life* had been published. This led this XX General Chapter to adjust the *Constitutions* to the new CIC.

As for the trajectory of the General Chapters, which had offered the major lines that formed the backbone of our missionary life, this Chapter gave it flexibility. It contemplated the path taken since the Special Chapter and balanced the complex process of congregational renewal. These were times for evaluation. Many institutes did so and the Church did so in an Extraordinary Synod of Bishops 20 years after the Council. The Congregation had 2,931 members.

The conclusion of the evaluation was made by the Chapter itself:

we are well aware of where we must direct our efforts today in order to be faithful to our mission; our objective is clear-cut. In the Congregation, there is an abundant supply of good documents, good doctrine, and the main lines of a renewed community organization. However, we observe in many persons a sort of spiritual flabbiness, and a lack of the gospel mystique and utopian spirit needed to match the measure of our mission. We know that we cannot back the options and preferred recipients of our mission, unless each one of us internalizes, in terms of a personal commitment, the unique experience of the grace of our vocation, accepted and nourished in a serious spiritual life and in a community life so as to be always available to respond to what is most urgent, timely and effective. The process of renewal presupposes, as its proper source, the newness of the Spirit of Christ. (CPR 47)

What was the backdrop? The world had progressed technologically. Society was suffering the impact of secularism, indifference and practical atheism. There was a strong outcry in the face of hunger, injustice and marginalization. The “new poverty” stood out: migration, AIDS and drugs. The crisis of moral principles was evident and the hierarchy of values was altered.

The crisis that was hitting religious life at that moment was radical. People were disabled. At the ecclesial level there was talk of a “wintry situation” (K. Rahner) and frequently the question was asked: “*Church, where are you going?*”. The Chapter continued the commitment to renewal, reaffirmed the validity and continuity of the process undertaken, and proposed to promote it according to the Spirit, taking special care of the person in the missionary community. A care that took into account the physical, psychological, spiritual and pastoral aspects. Spiritual accompaniment was proposed. It promoted ongoing formation and being on the forefront of evangelization.

It urged programming our missionary action and the community project. After this Chapter, the successive General Governments have drawn up a Government Plan for each corresponding six-year period.

What might seem anecdotal turned out to be a strong trigger for the life of the Congregation, especially in formation. In the Chapter there was a discussion about the use of “Heart of Mary” or “Mary.” By only a few votes it was decided to put the “Heart of Mary,” but the General Government was asked to reflect more deeply on the Cordimarian spirituality. And a survey was carried out, a week of study in Vic and commissions for deep reflection. There was an attempt to clarify that we are Missionary Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, in the style of Claret.²⁹⁶ Fruit of this sensitivity was the mural that presides over the chapel of the General Curia.²⁹⁷

²⁹⁶ Those who offered their testimony of how they lived the Cordimarian filiation contributed to this. Cf. *Un Hijo del Corazón de María... 72 experiencias de nuestra espiritualidad mariana*. Secretariado del Corazón de María, Roma 1989. J. M. Hernández, *Ex abundantia cordis. A Study of Cordimarian Spirituality of the Claretian Missionaries, Rome, 1993*.

²⁹⁷ It is a Pentecost in which Mary, among the Apostles, invites us to walk and evangelize with her heart in her hand. It was painted by Maximino Cerezo Barredo.

During the six-year period, the commentary on the *Constitutions* was elaborated in three volumes. They are a valuable instrument for our spirituality.²⁹⁸

5. THE PERIOD OF 1991-2009

The four Chapters that comprise this period follow the script proposed by the *Constitutions*, no. 155. Building on the legacy of the previous Chapters, which were constitutional Chapters, they will develop the charismatic missionary potential paying attention to the social, ecclesial and congregational contexts of the moment in which they are held. It is not that we had entered into routine and irrelevance, but rather that these Chapters have been held, like the previous ones, under the spirituality of open eyes and in constant creative fidelity. With our eyes fixed on Jesus, the Prophet par excellence, and looking at the world to achieve its transformation according to God's plan. At no time have the evangelical demands of the *Constitutions* and the *Directory* – which deserves to be better known for its doctrinal richness and missionary impulse – been placed in parenthesis, nor have we turned our back on injustices, the excluded and those in need of the Word of God. The same “see, judge and act” methodology has been followed and, therefore, the contexts have been taken into account.

Paradigm Shift. After 1985, coinciding with the evaluation of the 20 years of post-conciliar renewal, religious life produced a paradigm shift with anthropological, sociocultural, biblical and theological bases. The key concepts until then: vocation, following, consecration, vows, community life, apostolic mission, etc., began to be understood in a more dynamic and interrelated way according to new categories based on the enlightenment of the Trinitarian mystery, the figure of Jesus of Nazareth, ecclesiology – mystery-communion-mission – the covenant, the Word of God and discipleship, peace, justice, ecology. The spirit of Assisi gained followers. Anthropology advanced toward reciprocity; ecclesiology toward the coexistence and interrelation of charisms and ministries; and in cultural, social and religious relations, interculturality, interdisciplinarity, interreligious and intergenerationality became essential. Today we note the influence of this “inter” both in the particular churches (mutual relationships) and in religious institutes (intercongregationalism). There is a new path in the company of others and in solidarity. This explains the relevance of the shared mission.

These buds of novelty have arisen trying to clear the thick cloud of tiredness, disillusionment and lack of harmony within the Church.²⁹⁹ Hence the longing for refounding, which had little luck.

The 1990s were especially marked by globalization with all its connections. A movement full of ambiguity that made the rich richer and the poor poorer. The strength of what was local awakened and opposed the global. And human beings experienced the drowning of space and time, necessary reference points for maturing.

In the Congregation, in the year 1992, we had the blessing of the beatification of the Martyrs of Barbastro; we benefited from the Synod on Consecrated Life (1994) and the Post-Synodal Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (1996). These were years of great expansion and consolidation of the Congregation in several countries.

²⁹⁸ Those who collaborated were: Fr. Jesús Álvarez, Fr. Pedro Franquesa, Fr. José María Viñas, Fr. Manuel Orge, Fr. José Cristo Rey García Paredes, Fr. Antonio Leghisa, Fr. Jesús María Palacios, Fr. Gonzalo Fernández Sanz and Fr. Gustavo Alonso.

²⁹⁹ Mutual relationships between bishops, priests and laity were impoverished by suspicion or lack of proper dialogue. It is enough to recall the conflicts in which the Confederation of Latin American Religious (CLAR) was involved.

The Chapters of 1991, 1997 and 2003 underlined our missionary identity as *Servants of the Word, In Prophetic Mission, That They May Have Life*. The Chapter of 2009 reaffirmed this identity *according to the love* that impels us.

5.1. Chapter of 1991: *Servants of the Word*

The XXI General Chapter was held when the effects of the fall of the Berlin Wall began to be felt. The gap between North and South remained open. The culture of death, hunger in the world, the struggle for freedom and democracy, and concern for the ecology of the planet, had spread. On the other hand, there was a great concern to respond to the call to the new evangelization. We were on the brink of the celebration of the 500th anniversary of the evangelization of America. In 1987 the Synod on the Laity was held and the encyclicals *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* and *Redemptoris Mater* were published. In 1990, the SCRIS published the document *Potissimum institutioni*. In 1990 the Synod on the Formation of Priests was held. In December of that year, John Paul II published the encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*. The guidelines of the Bishops' Conferences of Asia are also taken into account. The Congregation had 3,022 members.

The Chapter Document was entitled: *Servants of the Word Our Missionary Service of the Word in the New Evangelization*. It synthesized the response that the Congregation wanted to give to the Pope's call. Our missionary service of the Word is "an authentic way of being, acting and signifying" (SW 21). We must become poor to be servants of the Word and proclaim this Word in a prophetic and liberating spirit. Being *bearers and servants of the Word*, the Word of God must be at the center of our missionary life. Our spirituality is that of the disciple and our evangelization must bear the "sign" of newness, authenticity, creativity and sharing or "doing with others". The centrality of the Word obliges us to review the means, the forms and the positions in which we proclaim it.

The Chapter declaration included a third part where, in a differentiated way, it listed the challenges and lines of action for the five continents.

After this Chapter, an intense process of study, meditation, prayer and dissemination of the Word of God was triggered. The Prefecture of Apostolate prepared the six volumes of the Word-Mission Project with specialists from the whole Congregation. The centers focused on the Word of God multiplied. And the Prefecture of Formation prepared the Plan of Formation and opened the "Heart of Mary" School of Formators.

The expansion of the Congregation was a mandate of the Chapter (SW 29). Pope John Paul II asked the Superiors General to open new presences in Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe, something he had indicated in the encyclical RMI 30 and 37.

The fruit of this Chapter was the approach to the revision and structural reorganization of the Congregation. We began to act from this double criterion: *Quality of Claretian evangelical life and how to organize ourselves to serve better*.

5.2. Chapter of 1997: *In Prophetic Mission*

The XXII General Chapter took into account the challenges that the ministry of the Word experienced on each of the continents. See their descriptions (IPM 5-9). Globalization and the technological revolution forced us to redouble the option for humanization and justice. In 1994 the Pope published *Tertio millennio adveniente*. In that same year, *Fraternal Life in Community* from CICALSAL appeared,³⁰⁰ and the Synod on the Consecrated Life and its Role in the Church and in the World was held. In 1996 the post-

³⁰⁰ CICALSAL stands for the new name of the Sacred Congregation for Religious: Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life.

synodal exhortation *Vita Consecrata* appeared. The Chapter reread this exhortation according to our condition as servants of the Word and emphasized the *prophetic dimension*. We are heirs of Claret's prophetic spirit and from it our lifestyle and ministry must be understood. The Congregation had 2,894 members.

The Chapter Declaration, structured around the *Constitutions*, underlined the prophecy of ordinary life and spirituality, which was specifically addressed at the Congress on "*Our Missionary Spirituality on the Path of the People of God*", in which Claretians from the various parts of the Congregation participated (It was held in Majadahonda, 2001). It was attached to the celebration of the Great Jubilee and asked to renew the Secretariat of Justice and Peace by integrating ecological concern into it and pushed for this dimension to be encouraged in this ministry. Once again, it asked to continue the process of restructuring the Congregation.

The celebration of the 150 years of the Congregation began with the Assembly of Major Superiors in Bangalore. On July 16, 1999, there was an act of thanksgiving in Vic for the gift of the Spirit to the Church. It was concluded before Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico. During this jubilee many missionary initiatives were developed.³⁰¹

The concern for vocations led the Prefecture of Formation to develop the *Claretian Vocation Directory* (2000).

5.3. Chapter of 2003: *That They May Have Life*

The Continental Synods and the Synods on the vocations (laity, priests, consecrated life and bishops) had finished, analysis had been made of the situation in the world at the end of the millennium and a path of hope had been opened in the face of the new millennium. The indicators of violence, death and abuse of human dignity could not leave us indifferent. The echoes of the celebration of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 were still fresh, as examples of the spirituality of communion in the Church. In 2003 the prophetic dimension of our missionary service of the Word was affirmed so that the men and women of our times may have life and have it in abundance. Especially illuminating texts were the letter from John Paul II *Novo Millennio Ineunte* and the instruction from CICLSAL *Starting Afresh from Christ*. From these documents come two expressions full of content: "Cast out into the deep!" and "the time for a new 'creativity' in charity." The encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* was also present. The Congregation counted on 3,063 members.

The preparation for the XXIII Chapter was long and intense. Underlying these were the orientations of the volumes of the Word-Mission Project³⁰² and the conclusions of the meeting of the Prefects of Apostolate. The Precapitular Commission condensed everything it had received and drew up the draft document.

At the beginning of the Chapter the following major themes were highlighted for discernment and deliberation: 1) Continue "in prophetic mission" with new accents. 2) Intensify missionary spirituality. 3) Dedicate ourselves to walking the path of interculturality. 4) Continue the reorganization of the Congregation. 5) Increase the communion of goods.

Faced with the *loss of the value of life* and contempt for *the person*, the Chapter recalled:

³⁰¹ Cf. NUNC, September 2000, pp. 160-161.

³⁰² The titles of the volumes for each year were: "Vol. I. Pentateuch: So That People May Live;" "Vol. II. The Prophets: So That People May Live;" "Vol. III. The Synoptic Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, So that the People May Live;" "Vol. IV. The Gospel of Life. An Announcement of the Life for Different Cultures" (Paul); Vol. V. Confessing and Witnessing to Life In a Hostile World;" (John) Vol. VI. "Wisdom Books and Psalms: Rivers of Life". The Synoptics was entitled "The Kingdom Has Arrived," but one can accept that life was the key to the missionary reading of the Bible.

The glory of God, which is one of the basic aims of our Congregation (cf. CC 2), is the human person fully alive (Ireaneus of Lyon), the poor fully alive (Oscar Romero), nature fully alive (Paul of Tarsus). We give glory to God, proclaiming that ‘the Gospel of God’s love for people, the Gospel of the dignity of the person and the Gospel of life are one, indivisible Gospel’ (EV 2). The passion for life thus belongs at the very heart of our missionary vocation. (TMHL 8)

In this Chapter, finally,³⁰³ the creation of a Prefecture of Spirituality was approved. This has undoubtedly favored the strengthening of the Claretian Secretariat and the Encounters with Claret. Many will remember all that surrounded the celebration of the 200th anniversary of the birth of the Founder. We cannot overlook the beatification of Fr. Andrés Solá with a priest and a lay person, which was an event of grace for the province of Mexico and for the Congregation.

5.4. Chapter of 2009: Men on Fire with Love

I have frequently referred to the Declaration from this Chapter. The context is preceded by the World Congress on Consecrated Life, organized in Rome by the USG and the UISG³⁰⁴ in 2004: *“Passion for Christ, Passion for Humanity.”* CICLSAL published the document *“The Service of Authority and Obedience”* (2008). In that year, the Synod on the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church was held. In reference to consecrated life, Pope Benedict XVI emphasized seeking God and fidelity to the charism of the founders. The Congregation had 3,004 members.

This XXIV General Chapter relied heavily on our Chapters of Renewal. Once again, it raised identity, belonging and availability through charity, the primary virtue of the missionary. It does so in another cultural, religious and congregational context. It was a good idea for the Chapter to first listen to the call of God in the world, in the Church and in the Congregation. Its collection of answers formed something like an x-ray of the situation.

To simplify, two major concerns could be noted: 1) The fragility of the person who is dispersed and unable to move safely in the “liquid life” (Z. Bauman). “Not everything that has been lived and tried has expressed holiness, community vitality and pastoral boldness and commitment” (MFL 7). 2) The situation of the Congregation which was asking to deal with its new geographical and formative situation.

The subtitle of the Declaration offered its objective: *“Called to live our missionary vocation today.”* Thus, *identity, belonging* and *availability* were taken up again at that time. And in fact, impelled by love, the primary virtue of the missionary, a commentary was made on the definition of the missionary – Claret’s dream – with accents of novelty: the name, the family, the lifestyle, the journey, the sending forth.

It marked three major priorities: 1) to rekindle the fire within us; 2) to set others on fire; 3) to pass on the fire to future generations. A “new” guidance for our personal and community life and for our mission.

Two of the concrete commitments were highlighted: The reorganization of the Congregation, whose effects have been noted, and the promotion of the instrument for growth in the Claretian missionary life: The Forge in Everyday Life.

6. SOME POINTS TO HIGHLIGHT IN CLOSING

I affirmed from the beginning the protagonism of the Spirit in our process of renewal. Despite our weaknesses, it is He who maintains us as a living missionary community. He has purified and graced us

³⁰³ I say “finally” because this prefecture was requested in 1991 and the Chapter voted against it.

³⁰⁴ USG: Union of Superiors General. UISG: International Union of [Women] Superiors General.

with *unity, serenity* and *courage* in facing every present moment. The Spirit has been the most powerful “antivirus” before the “evil spirits.”

He has rooted us in Christ, the Word of life, and in the missionary project inaugurated by Claret. The pedagogy of “patient and persevering” insistence, has been beneficial.

It is inherent in our vocation to “seek in all things.” The key *questions* that we have asked ourselves have been successively displaced.

Who are we? –Identity.

Where are we? – Insertion into the world and the Church.

What are we for? – Evangelizing mission.

How do we live? – Meaning and witness.

Where are we going? – Missionary horizons.

From where do we evangelize? – From the Spirit, the Lord and giver of life.

In different ways, the ecclesial nature of our missionary life has been underlined. The visits of the Chapter Fathers with the Popes are a small sign of adhesion. In them we have received light and encouragement.

The *Constitutions*, once approved, have become a mandatory reference point in the process of renewal and have thus appeared in the Chapter Declarations. From them, each Chapter has tried to help the Congregation live with quality its present moment, its mission in the Church and in the world. The Chapters mark “the hour” of the Congregation.

The notable decrease in the number of Missionary Brothers has raised concern in all the Chapters. The Meeting in Vic (2014) urged us to take the vocational ministry of the Missionary Brothers seriously. Without them the Congregation is not fully formed.

In the process of congregational renewal, everyone’s interest to integrate and not exclude has been noticeable. Reconciliation remains an open task: 1) We were able to reconcile ourselves with the name: Missionary 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, as the Founder understood and lived it. 2) We reconciled in fraternity and mission all the members of the Congregation: priests, deacons, students and brothers. 3) We reconciled ourselves in the diversity of apostolates: we are all missionaries (perhaps we have not taken on the task of prioritizing among the apostolates. There is a lot of dispersion and not everything is as timely). 4) We have reconciled ourselves with the fundamental options of our missionary life. Currently no one debates them. 5) For a few years now, we have been committed to integrating cultural diversity through the obligatory path of interculturality. 6) Today we continue to be called to reconcile ourselves with humanity and with the whole of creation, embracing global and integral ecology. We must break all inbreeding and open ourselves to the broad circles of reference where, beneath the apparent dispersion, there is a cry for integration, harmony, communion.

We are missionaries and we live in mission. But we must “live forward.” We are already in the XXV General Chapter, which continues to be a Chapter of Renewal with the fresh air that Pope Francis has brought us. Will we be capable of “going forth” and taking the leap in quality to respond to what God wants of us, to what the Church expects of us and to the trust that the poor have placed in us?

LIVING AS AN ELDERLY CLARETIAN*

“Therefore, we are not discouraged; rather, although our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day” (2 Cor 4:16).

The elderly Claretian missionaries “should always strive to show that they are ever young at heart” (Cf. CC 18).



“I thought that my voyage had come to its end at the last limit of my power--the path before me was closed, that provisions were exhausted and the time come to take shelter in a silent obscurity. But I find that thy will knows no end in me. And when old words die out on the tongue, new melodies break forth from the heart; and when the old tracks are lost, new country is revealed with its wonders.”³⁰⁵

1. EVERYONE HAS THEIR SENIOR YEARS

1.1. *The Senior Years Arrive and with them the Uncertainties Arise*

Old age comes by itself. The years go by and the biological, psychological and spiritual configure our lives. I could list common or converging notes, but for each human being, for each Claretian, the senior years are a very personal and non-transferable existential stage.

The accumulation of hereditary reasons, occupational journey, social context in which he has worked, relationship situations, health, psychology, spirituality, etc. etc., come together in a person’s life and make the course of their senior years entirely special. Above all, because of the uncertainties. Our calculations are of little value. The age curve is not the energy curve. There are some who, at the age of 80, continue to provide valuable services and some who, at the age of sixty-five, have given of themselves as much as can be expected.

On the other hand, it is one thing to age among young people and middle-aged people and something very different to live among older people who are getting older every day. Growing old today is not the same as it was thirty years ago.³⁰⁶ Probably the most painful feeling of old age is loneliness and lack of continuity. What has been until now or until a few years ago the field of our work and the fruit of our effort we see changed and sometimes lost due to the lack of someone to continue it. The number of elderly people is increasing, the number of middle-aged and young people is limited and the lack of vocations in Europe is the most serious.

* Ongoing Formation Conference in the Province of Euskal Herria, 2009.

³⁰⁵ R. Tagore, “Gitanjali: A Collection of Prose Translations Made by the Author from the Original Bengali”, Scribner 1997, 128.

³⁰⁶ It was surprising to review things I had written in 1979 about the elderly. At that time, I said “the senior years of religious is not, cannot be, a matter reducible to a better way of attending to our elders. At stake, above all, is the spirit or attitude with which other religious are living our religious consecration and our posture in the face of the authentic renewal of our own institutes.” One could consider what it might have meant to grow old for those who had to change the way they think and act in so many aspects that were required by the renewal requested by the Council and the Chapters of Renewal. A. Bocos Merino, «La tercera edad en la vida religiosa: entre la inquietud y la esperanza», *Vida Religiosa* 46 (1979) 243-249, translator’s version.

It is therefore necessary, when reflecting on the elderly, to recognize the differential fact – each one has his own old age – and the communal, congregational, ecclesial and social contextual facts, or what is the same from the picture of possibilities offered to us. Aldous Huxley said that “experience is not what happens to you; it is what you do with what happens to you.” It is up to each person, in any case, to be open to what is coming, which is often unpredictable, and to contribute what is in their power.

1.2. *Accepting one's own Present Moment*

Two verifiable extremes. There are Claretians who belong to one of these two groups: Those who do not accept the age they are and those who do not manage to be missionaries in another way.

a) *Those who do not resign themselves to being older.* They want to continue at all costs in the trenches of the work that has given them so many satisfactions. They belong to the group of “this or that would never happen to me.” But the course of life is relentless and they turn 65, 70 years old and their expectations begin to diminish. They enter into an evil called realism, or pessimism, or withdrawal. They do not adapt to the new demands of the evolution of life, of ministry, of the sensitivity of young people, etc. For one reason or another they are removed from the services they used to provide and the laments begin. They had built their lives according to a *Promethean* spirit and not from the perspective of *gratuitousness*. But to enter one's senior years is not to close off all possibilities, but rather to exploit others that we have often hidden.

b) *Those who do not manage to be missionaries in another way.* Those who have identified their missionary life with their professional service or with their position in government or administration in which they have served. Those who have focused their lives on work or their position of social relevance and have not attended to the deeper values, have a bad, very bad time. It is difficult to close up shop and leave the power of the keys to someone else, to lose their image and to enter into dependence and we should consider why it is so hard for them. Is it not that they have been living from the gratification of appearances, of doing and not of being? The proper response is to be elegant in passing the baton: To be *generous* and *collaborate* in whatever way they can.

When we say that a Claretian missionary does not retire, it is because he operates from an understanding of his vocation in following Jesus until his death. It is not a pious consideration, nor are these words written only for young people. But for those who live in a Claretian way:

Our missionaries, hungering for holiness (cf. Mt 5:6), should strive to grow fully mature with the fullness of Christ himself (cf. Eph 4:13) so as to be more effective in communicating the grace of the Gospel to others. However, since God has called us not because of any merit of our own but according to his own gracious design (cf. 2 Tim 1:9), and has justified us in Jesus Christ (cf. Rom 3:24), we therefore trust that he who has begun this good work in us will carry it to completion, right up to the day of Jesus Christ (cf. Phil 1:6).³⁰⁷

This means that the cessation of activity does not close the horizon of our missionary life, but rather it remains open. And the proper response is to awaken our awareness of the moment we are in. The hour of Jesus is the hour of the Church and it is our hour. It is useless to dream about the past, nor does the future belong to us, but the present hour must be lived with that density and fidelity with which Jesus lived it.

Three points of reflection for facing our present in a fruitful way:

- 1) Jn 12:20-36: Face the hour with faithfulness
- 2) Jn 3:1-12: The encounter of Nicodemus with Jesus and the new birth.
- 3) Mt 25:1-13: The lamp that is lit to receive the bridegroom.

³⁰⁷ CC 51.

2. CLARET IN THE LAST STAGE OF HIS LIFE

I am going to talk about the last years of Father Claret's life as a reference point. Although we cannot imitate him in these experiences, they enlighten us and make us see from what perspective he places us in front of the last years of our lives.

Fr. Claret in his life is a paradigm of how to follow Jesus and how to evangelize. He died in 1870, shortly before turning 63. In the nineteenth century people of this age were considered seniors, the elderly. He was one of the oldest Council Fathers.

When talking about the last stage of his life, we must highlight two very different aspects: 1) how Claret lived his last years with his limitations and 2) what spiritual experience sustained him.

2.1. *Claret Experiences Human Limitations*

Fr. Claret, *compassionate by nature* (cf. *Aut.* 9 and 10), always had much veneration and respect for the elderly. He states this when he narrates the evacuations they had to make during the war of independence and how he accompanied his grandfather (*Aut.* 19). Then he added: "*if I had the pleasure of talking with one of them, I enjoyed it immensely. God grant that I have known how to take advantage of the advice of these elderly gentlemen*" (*Aut.* 20).

From the foundation of the Congregation until his death, Fr. Claret did not see very elderly people in the Congregation. The experience of a Congregation with elderly people came later. However, in the *Constitutions* of 1857, no. 104, he advised his missionaries that the youngest should go for walks with the elderly. And in the *Rules of the Institute of Diocesan Clergy who Live in Community* he said: "One man alone, if he is young, lacks prudence; if he is old, he lacks strength; bring the two together, and you will have both in each."

In any case, there are only a few occasions when there is mention of how Fr. Claret lived his senior years, his old age. Ailments began in the last months of his life and, practically, until that time he was able to carry out an intense activity. We need only review the books that he wrote while in Rome, the number of letters he sent, the visits to the sick in hospitals, the catechesis to children, and, above all, the tasks of the Council which were demanding. I will offer a few facts.

On June 29, 1866, he wrote that his health may be failing.³⁰⁸

On April 9, 1867 he wrote to Mother Antonia París and told her how his health was. Then he added:

*I desire with such strong eagerness to go to Heaven to see Jesus being loved and praised by the whole Heavenly Court, for me it will be the greatest joy and satisfaction I hope to have, more than the glory that the mercy of God can give me; such that I want to go to Heaven not for myself, but to see God, Jesus, the Most Holy Virgin, the Angels and the Saints glorified, for now the Lord is leading me on the path of sorrows and troubles, which are quite strong; but the help with which the Lord favors me is also strong. Blessed be God.*³⁰⁹

In 1868, renouncing the presidency of the monastery of El Escorial, he said: "*the poor state of my health and the consequent ailments at the age of 60, in which I find myself, does not allow me to lift such a heavy load with the diligence and care that are necessary...*"³¹⁰ But, in fact, Fr. Claret, after being released from this responsibility the following month, continued with normal activity in San Sebastian, in Pau, in Paris, even the months of 1869. It is also true that, shortly after arriving in Rome, he wrote to Fr. Dionisio: "*I suffer, I am old and I am very eager to retire as a confessor... I have suffered 12 years of martyrdom. (...) If I cease to be Confessor I will not*

³⁰⁸ Cf. *Letter to Fr. Xifré*, EC, II, p. 1017.

³⁰⁹ EC, II, p. 1143, translator's version.

³¹⁰ EC, II, p. 1266. It seems that it was written on May 31, 1868, translator's version.

remain in Madrid or El Escorial anymore, I will retire in the Congregation in one of its houses, which the Congregation has, and they very much desire it.”³¹¹

On May 2, 1869 he wrote to Fr. Xifré: “When it rains, my leg gets heavy where I had rheumatic pain before, in the meantime I am muddling through and when in September or in rainy weather I can’t stand it, I’ll go to another area that’s drier.”³¹²

On May 21, 1869, he wrote to Fr. Dionisio these words: “Now there is nothing more to do, suffer and pray a lot. I desire for the Lord to take me to heaven.”³¹³

On July 21, 1869, in letter to Mother Antonia París, he said: “It can be said that the plans the Lord had for me have been fulfilled. Thanks be to God. Hopefully, what I have done has been to God’s liking.”³¹⁴

On October 2, 1869 he addressed Fr. Paladio Currius with these words:

*I have suffered more than I am accustomed. I long to die... I think I have completed my mission: in Paris and in Rome I have preached God’s law: in Paris, as the capital of the world; and in Rome, the capital of Catholicism. I have done it by word and through writing. I have observed holy poverty as far as what belonged to me and today, thank God, no one gives me anything from the diocese in Cuba, nor does the Queen send me anything.*³¹⁵

On November 16, 1869 he wrote to Fr. Xifré about the foundation in Chile and giving him news about Honduras. He spoke of America as the young vineyard, as opposed to Europe, the old vineyard. His wishes would have been to continue as a missionary in these lands and he added:

*I am already old, because I will be 62 years old by Christmas and my internal brokenness discourages me more and more, because it is enough that the times are changing that I find fatalism; if it were not for this, I would fly there, and if I do not go there, I will go to the College of the Americans who are in Rome.*³¹⁶

On May 29, 1870 he had a stroke and he tells Fr. Paladio Currius about it on June 17th. He says that “my tongue could not speak clearly and the saliva ran down my mouth on one side. But with the baths and refreshing remedies that the doctor has ordered for me, it has corrected quite a bit. Pray to the Lord to give me courage, constancy and patience.”³¹⁷ But this does not prevent him from speaking with great fervor at the Council on May 31st.³¹⁸ He gave Fr. Pedro Naudó a glimpse of it when he sent him the booklet of *Las dos banderas* [The Two Standards], which he could no longer correct.³¹⁹ More carefully, and giving him reasons, he explained it to Fr. Xifré in a letter dated July 1, 1870:

There have been two causes of what I have experienced recently: First the extraordinary heat with which this summer began. The other cause is the question of the Council regarding the concerns of the Church and the Supreme Pontiff. Since I cannot compromise on this matter for anything or with anyone, and I am willing to shed my blood, like I said in the Council; upon hearing the errors, and even blasphemies and heresies which were being stated, I had such a rush of indignation and zeal that the blood rushed to my head and produced a cerebral incident. My mouth could not contain the saliva, which ran down involuntarily on one side, especially the side on which I have the scar of the wound

³¹¹ EC, II, p. 1391, translator’s version.

³¹² EC, II, p. 1383, translator’s version.

³¹³ EC, II, p. 1388, translator’s version.

³¹⁴ EC, II, p. 1411. He is probably referring to the Plan for reforming the Church, translator’s version.

³¹⁵ EC, II, p. 1423, translator’s version.

³¹⁶ EC, II, p. 1431, translator’s version.

³¹⁷ EC, II, p. 1471, translator’s version.

³¹⁸ Cf. C. Fernández, *El Beato Padre Antonio María Claret*, Cocusa, Madrid 1946, II vol, p. 832 y ss.

³¹⁹ EC, II, p. 1478, translator’s version.

I received in Cuba. In addition, my speech was greatly hindered. All the remedies ordered by the doctor have been carried out and I have experienced quite a bit of relief.

With the help of the Lord, I am willing and resigned to the will of God, to give me perfect health or to leave me with this disposition, in addition to the other of my internal brokenness that very often makes me suffer a lot, or if he wants to send me death I am entirely surrendered to his most holy hands. And I as you and all those of the Congregation out of charity to entrust me to God and thus become fully his servant.³²⁰

Fr. Xifré immediately went to Rome and accompanied him so that he would go rest at Prades.³²¹ We know the harassment he suffered upon his arrival and how he had to take refuge in the monastery of Fontfroide. His disease worsened, “he was very fervent” and he longed to die. When the doctor told him that you cannot want death, he reacted by saying: “*Cupio dissolvi et esse cum Christo*”. In the face of this energetic response, no one dared to make a comment.

If we wanted to make a brief synthesis of the most striking aspects of this last stage of his life, we would point out:

- The common thread of his life remains intact: to be an apostolic missionary.
- The great loves of his life: Jesus, Mary, the Church, the Pope, the Congregation, the missions.
- His openness to the means of mission: if he cannot speak, he writes, prays, testifies.
- The awareness that he has fulfilled his fundamental mission and that everything else is relative.
- His way of placing himself with hope in the face of death, which had been revealed to him³²² and for which he was prepared.³²³

2.2. *The Deep Spirituality of Claret, Reliving the Mystery of Christ*

The spiritual journey of the last ten years of Claret’s life is amazing. Anyone who progressively reads the *Autobiography*, the *Resolutions*, the *Spiritual Notes* and *Lights and Graces* will discover a continuous process of interiorization, conformity to Christ and complete transformation.

The awareness of his missionary vocation is explicit in the narration of his life and in the other autobiographical writings. The mission, whether he says it or not, comes first for him. Like Jesus, he feels anointed and sent by the Father to proclaim the Good News to the poor, to the little ones, to sinners. In this mission the motor is the love of Christ, as indicated by the motto of his Archbishop’s Shield: “The love of Christ impels us.”

If in the first years of his ministry all his eagerness was to imitate Jesus in his gestures, in his words, in his way of presenting his message, and in his way of proceeding, after the attack in Holguín, the Founder internalized Jesus’ life. The resolution of meekness appeared often, which may be a way of responding to the insults, slander, and persecutions he experienced. He spoke a lot about the presence of God. He felt uninhabited inside, intensified the conjunction between prayer and action, repeated that he only wishes to do the will of God and his life is Christ.

To get an idea, we need only review the resolutions of the last six years of his life and to evoke the Pauline texts or the saints in which he placed greater emphasis. Most of the central points of his

³²⁰ EC, II, pp. 1431-1432, translator’s version.

³²¹ About the transfer from Rome to Prades and his stay in Fontfroide we have the story as told by Fr. Clotet, which is included in ACW, pp. 997-1086.

³²² Cf. Resolutions from 1868, no. 15 and those of 1869, no. 12. *Autobiography*, Buenos Aires, p. 524 and p. 527.

³²³ Cf. *Spiritual Notes: Learning the Art of Dying Well Autobiography*, Buenos Aires, pp. 564-566.

resolutions are explained in the *Spiritual Notes* and in *Lights and Graces*, as I will indicate through some notes. Here are just a few aspects of the text of the Resolutions.

— From the Resolutions of 1864

“I will walk in the presence of God, within me.³²⁴ I will remember those words of the Apostle: *For you are the temple of the living God* (2 Cor 6:16). *Know you not, that you are the temple of God?* (1 Cor 3:16).”

“Compass. *That Christ may dwell by faith in your hearts.* (Eph 3:17).”³²⁵

“*Until Christ be formed in you*” (Gal 4:19). He proposed to make a particular examen on God’s love.³²⁶

“For God, I will have the heart of a son; for myself, the severity of a judge; and for my neighbor, the heart of a Mother.”³²⁷

“As I find myself so persecuted these days, I will consider that it all comes from God and that he wants me to offer Him the homage of bearing, out of divine love, every sort of affliction, whether in reputation, in body or in soul.”³²⁸

— From the Resolutions of 1865

He insisted on the presence of God, on the examen on God’s love and quotes the Pauline texts from 1864. He added: “*Until Christ be formed in you*” (Gal 4:19).

He repeated: “For God, I will have the heart of a *son* and a *spouse*...”

“In slanders and persecutions, I will remain silent. I will only say, ‘*Lord, I suffer violence, answer thou for me.*’ (Is 38:14). ‘*In silence and in hope shall your strength be.*’ (Is 30:15).”

— From the Resolutions of 1866

Once his *Autobiography* is finished, Fr. Claret revealed his inner life in his Resolutions starting in this year, which, on the other hand, insisted on the thoughts of the Resolutions from the previous year. The center of those exercises was concern for *love, union with God*.

— From the Resolutions of 1867

I emphasize these thoughts that focus on *inner peace as the fruit of charity*. They seem to respond to the situation of persecution. This is not the first time he has alluded to them, but now he underlined them.

“I will always strive for inner peace.³²⁹ Therefore I will not become upset or speak or pull a long face, or indicate pain or dislike for all that is said or done against me, or for all that people charge me with.”

“I will consider that all the things that happen to me, happen through the ordering of God, who tells me: My son, just now I want you to do and suffer this.”

“I will bear each thing with patience, joy and gladness, since it is the will of God, who sees how I am suffering and how I am bearing labors, contempt, sorrows, slanders and persecutions.”

³²⁴ On the “Effects of God’s Presence in the Soul”, cf. *Spiritual Notes, Autobiography*, Buenos Aires 2008, pp. 543-545. Also “Love of God”, Ibid, p. 551 and “Love”, Ib., pp. 551-552.

³²⁵ On “The Presence of Jesus Christ Within Us”, the “Presence of the Mysteries of Jesus” and the “How to Imitate the Inner of Jesus”, cf. *Spiritual Notes, Autobiography*, Buenos Aires 2008, pp. 545-547.

³²⁶ How he understands this love can be seen in the note “Love Alone.” *Spiritual Notes, Autobiography*, Buenos Aires 2008, p. 541.

³²⁷ On “Sonship and Self-Gift” and “Spiritual Childhood”, cf. *Spiritual Notes, Ibid.*, pp. 552-554.

³²⁸ On “An Offering to Suffer,” cf. *Spiritual Notes, Ibid.*, pp. 902-903. There is another note entitled “The Consolation that Jesus Christ gave His Disciples and Gives to Those Who Patiently Suffer Works and Persecution Because of Their Love for Him”, Ibid., 916-919.

³²⁹ On “Inner Peace”, cf. *Spiritual Notes, Ibid.*, p. 904.

He highlighted his desire to know the will of God and the strength to fulfill it when it has been known. Like St. Paul: “*Lord, what would you have me do?*” (Acts 22:10).

— From the Resolutions of 1868

The exercises this year were done in France. He reiterated his desire to foster inner peace, the presence of God in his heart, the acceptance of all suffering and persecution, the particular examen on God’s love.

About what happened in this year he wrote to Mother Paris on July 21, 1869:

Now, what I had so often predicted has been verified and is taking place in Spain. I offered myself as a victim, and the Lord deigned to accept my offering, because all sorts of slanders, infamies, persecutions, etc., have come down upon me. I had nothing but the testimony of my own good conscience, and so I remained tranquil and silent. I thought only of Jesus.³³⁰

At the conclusion of this year’s resolutions, he makes a prayer of aspiration to persevere and advance in perfection and concludes: “*My God, you are all-powerful; make me holy. I love you with all my heart.*”

— From the Resolutions of 1869

He reiterated some of the above resolutions. Although in the previous two years he had already referred to the Blessed Sacrament, he returned now to the recitation of the Rosary and devotion to Mary Most Holy.³³¹

The most significant of this year’s exercises is that on October 12th, two days before they are finished, the Lord granted him *love of his enemies*.³³² There is an orderly explanation of the “Love for One’s Enemies” in the *Spiritual Notes* from the time of the Council.³³³

— From the Resolutions of 1870

In the set of resolutions there is no special variant to the aspects of previous years, but there is a final note from May 26th, the feast of Ascension, in which the horizon of death is revealed.³³⁴ He said:

— The earth will be an exile for me. My thoughts, affections and sighs will be directed toward Heaven.

— *Conversatio nostra in coelis est* (Heb 11:13). I will neither speak of nor listen to anything, unless it is about God and those things that lead to Heaven.

— *Desiderium habens dissolvi et esse cum Christo* (Phil 1:23). Like Mary Most Holy, my sweet Mother.

— I have such a desire to go to Heaven and be united with Christ.

— I have to be like a burning candle: It spends its wax and its light until it dies. As the members of the body long to be united with their head, and as iron filings long to be united with the magnet, so I long to be united with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and in Heaven.

— St. Bonaventure tells us that one beholder loves God more than a thousand wayfarers do.

The last of the *Spiritual Notes* is entitled: “Into Thy Hands I Commend my Spirit.” I reproduce it as we know it:

³³⁰ *Spiritual Notes*, Ibid., p. 842.

³³¹ Cf. *Spiritual Notes*. Ibid., pp. 847-852. He had previously dedicated a note on “Manner in Which we are to Honor Mary,” pp. 883-886.

³³² Cf. Footnote, ACW, p. 966.

³³³ Cf. *Spiritual Notes*. Ibid., pp. 909-911.

³³⁴ In the *Spiritual Notes*, there is a text entitled: “Learning the Art of Dying Well”. It is from 1869-1870. It can be seen in ACW, pp. 911-914. There is another note with the title: “List of Ages at Which Some Saints Died.” After enumerating a few, he said: “Every day I am losing more of my memory, eyesight and agility: it seems to me that I won’t live much longer”, *ibid.*, pp. 914-916.

“Jesus has given me all that he had, and has suffered all he could for me. His divinity helped him lengthen his life, to suffer more than he would naturally have been able to suffer.

1. The first act of the Heart of Jesus during his life, and his last act as well, was a total commitment to the will of the Father, to do or suffer whatever He willed (cf. Heb 20:7, 9; Lk 22:42).
2. During his lifetime, Jesus said: My duty is to be occupied with carrying out my Father’s plans: *In iis quae Patris mei sunt oportet me esse* [I must be about my Father’s business.] (Lk 2:49).
3. At the end of his life, he said: *Into thy hands I commend my spirit* (Lk 23:46).

With the Lord’s help and grace, this beginning, middle and end will be imitated by me.”³³⁵

2.3. Claret Enlightens our Senior Years

Claret, during his senior years, enlightens us because, according to his possibilities, he continued to be a missionary and dedicated his time to:

- Visit sick people.
- Visit the prisons.
- Give catechesis to children.
- Suffer with the Church.
- Write letters, books and brochures.
- Contemplate, pray, intercede.

In Claret, the experience of Saint Paul is perfectly fulfilled: “Therefore, we are not discouraged; rather, although our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day” (2 Cor 4:16). A man so full of missionary activity is surprising, at least, in these aspects:

- 1) The scale of values that he established in his life in the midst of so many apostolic activities. The concentration in his personal life on the essential desires: Divine sonship, conformity with Christ, the presence of God, love for God and neighbor.
- 2) His aspiration to holiness became more intense.
- 3) The serenity with which he experienced persecutions and calumnies.
- 4) Placing himself on the horizon of new life before death.³³⁶

The bar that Fr. Claret sets during the last years of his life is high. This encourages the Claretians to live with this depth and density the years that the Lord wants to grant us.

Of all these characteristics, there is one that has always caught my attention: Claret’s *serenity* in the face of persecution and slander.

On this point of *serenity*, I recall a meditation by Ladislaus Boros.³³⁷ He quoted Heidegger, who defined it like this:

³³⁵ ACW, p. 919-920.

³³⁶ On August 11, 1870, a few months before he died, he wrote this call to the eternal homeland: “Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt and that the Lord your God set you free.” Cf. *Lights and Graces*, ACW, p. 972.

³³⁷ L. Boros, *Encontrar a Dios en el hombre*, Sígueme, Salamanca 1971, pp. 137-153. For the English version see *Meeting God in Man*, Image Books, Veghel, 1968.

Releasement toward things and openness to the mystery belong together. They grant us the possibility of dwelling in the world in a totally different way. They promise us a new ground and foundation upon which we can stand and endure in the world of technology without being imperiled by it.

He affirmed that a person rooted in his or her own being is a serene person. From this serenity all relationships with things, with men and women, and with God himself, are harmonized. In this meditation, the author comments on the seven words of Jesus from the cross and concludes: “We wanted to talk about the virtue of serenity, and we have spoken about Christ. (...) We have presented the person who could be totally human because he was God.” These are the seven words: *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do; Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise; Woman, behold your son... Behold your mother; My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?; I thirst; It is finished; Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.* Rereading Fr. Claret’s letters and resolutions, we can appreciate that there is a great harmony between the feelings of Christ in the forgiveness, in the mercy, in the sonship, in the letting oneself be helped, in the awareness of having fulfilled his mission, in the acceptance of death.

It is not permissible for us, when we reach our senior years, to live indifferent to the need to pray, suffer and do what we can to end the scourges of wars, violence, exclusion, greed, corruption, lies, despair, infidelity, blasphemy, persecution of the Church, lack of religious freedom, abortion, euthanasia, etc. Claret’s deep desire *that God the Father be known, loved and served* must remain ours.

3. LEARNING TO LIVE TOWARDS THE DAWN

3.1. *Towards the Light and Towards Life*

Surely more than once we have been thinking about these words from the *Constitutions*: The elderly Claretian missionaries “should always strive to show that they are ever young at heart” (CC 18).

This brief indication from the *Constitutions* about the elderly directly contrasts with what the dominant culture says about them. I find it interesting the way Dolores Aleixandre expressed herself when she wrote:

You have heard, we could say expanding on the words of Jesus: “Cultivate the art of growing old, accept clearly your rhythm of life;” but I say to you: “Dare to hope for what seems impossible to you, prepare yourselves for the encounter with the One who only desires trust and gratitude from you.”

You have heard: “Accept your history, be reconciled to your past;” but I say to you: “Give credit to the promise that pulls you into a future that will surpass your predictions.”

You have heard: “Fill your jars with the water of patience and resigned acceptance;” but I say to you: “Open yourselves to the arrival of the God of surprises who keeps the good wine for the last.”

Because if you are content to settle with the consequences of an obsolete life, what grace does it have? No, open yourselves to refute that death has the last word. This has been announced to you by the First born from the dead, who is the Source that makes you live.

Choosing to place oneself in this perspective implies the exercise of a certain ‘theological shamelessness,’ of the decision to carry faith, hope and love to its ultimate consequences, giving credence to the Gospel promise of life in abundance and, therefore, also of ‘old age in abundance.’ It is not something that we can achieve by force of determination, but a task undertaken with ‘determined determination,’ knowing that what is achieved will be received as a free gift. Nor will it be an attitude in which we find ourselves suddenly, but rather the Christian style of moving from one of life’s landscapes to another and of going along that path with wisdom, patience and slowness, as it suits the elderly. And if this time brings with it effects that are costly and difficult to accept, its entire

horizon is not exhausted there: “One of the wonderful facts of life is that everything ends up carrying with it the potential for a new beginning,” says Joan Chittister.³³⁸

I quote this text because it illuminates more clearly the experience of Claret, who always placed himself in what was most essential in his life and is for us a paradigm in terms of his attitudes. Therefore, we can say that an elderly Claretian bears witness to being ever young at heart when he lives “*until the dawn*”,³³⁹ when he stands before the light that does not go out and life in abundance. The psalmist expresses very well the scope of this living until the dawn when he says: “*My soul thirsts for God, the living God. When can I enter and see the face of God?*” (cf. Ps 42).

Any man, whether he wants it or not, lives always facing the light and life. “For with you is the fountain of life, and in your light we see light” (Ps 3). It is only by being born again that one opens up to true life. Let us recall the encounter of Nicodemus, an old man, invited to be born again so that in his desire to live he may acquire a life full of splendor and without end.

A Claretian remains and grows young at heart when he allows himself to be enveloped by the Spirit, like Mary, from whom New Life is born and in whom the eternal covenant is established. The Spirit helps to welcome, to internalize, and to respond; it is fidelity to the gift of life. The Spirit is a force that gives inner life and self-giving, it is grace and constant gift; it is ardent charity and wisdom, it is hope and it is joy.

For a Claretian to maintain his youth, he has to look sympathetically at what others do, even if it has never occurred to him, to understand more than reproach, to trust more than suspect. Only then will he be a man of his time and not his age. Other people are more interested in what you can offer them today than what you were yesterday.

One learns to live until the dawn when one pays attention to what the Lord says: “Behold, I make all things new.” (Rev 21:5) and there is a desire to learn.

3.2. *Serenity as a Gift and a Task*

When I say serenity, I am not talking about a state or a time of life when nothing happens. It is not when one can say “I am here in my calm home.” “*Serenity is not freedom from the storm but finding peace amid the storm.*” (Thomas à Kempis). Serenity is a gift and it is a task. It has a lot of roots and proposals. In fact, “*it is not other people or circumstances that cause us to be upset, but rather our own thoughts and attitudes about those people and circumstances that cause us distress*” (G. C. Jampolsky). Also, in our senior years we relive the convulsion of contrasts, tensions, and conflicts that occur in society, in the Church and in congregational life itself. It is common to encounter elderly people who are troubled and sometimes irritated. Who experience turmoil, impatience, anxiety, overwhelm, disenchantment, and bad moods.

Nietzsche said: “*He who has a why to live for can bear almost any how.*”³⁴⁰ This is also true at the end of life. If the meaning of our missionary life is clear, we end up giving it *depth* and *density*.

Depth refers to profundity as opposed to the superficial; it refers to the inner life, to the roots, as opposed to the exterior, and not having roots; it refers to what is essential, to the intimate, as opposed to the accidental, to dispersion. To give depth to the Claretian life is to be living it according to its charismatic roots, its own Claretian essence, the radical following of Jesus, our way of being Church and our way of offering the Word.

³³⁸ D. Aleixandre, *Las puertas de la tarde. Envejecer con esplendor*, Sal Terrae, Santander, 2007, pp. 10-11, translator’s version.

³³⁹ I take this phrase from the beautiful poem by A. Machado, when he narrates the death of Abel Martín, and says: “I thought I would live until the dawn.” *Poesías completas*, Austral, Madrid 1987, p. 362.

³⁴⁰ F. Nietzsche, *Crepúsculo de los ídolos*, XII. *Obras inmortales*, III, Barcelona, 1985, p. 1173. For the English version see *Twilight of the Idols*.

Density refers to weight, solidity and consistency. Also, to firmness and strength. Density is primarily a grace. It is not what we manage to be, but what we let it be in us. Only those who open themselves and let themselves be filled end up being full and dense.

Everything else is a consequence. Someone who leads a dense life considers and gives meaning to every event of his life; he lives with others, observes, thinks, decides, and serves. Density in life is shown by those who have chosen to do good without looking at who they do it for and without seeking applause and recognition; those who look at others as “neighbors,” who go to the other shore where they are suffering, and take care of them until they are healed. Thus, they fill their personal history with silent actions that build the kingdom of truth, justice, love and peace. We can consider our consecrated life as dense when we live it with coherence, seriousness and responsibility. These words are not static, but rather evoke what is understood today by creative fidelity,³⁴¹ by intensifying life,³⁴² by living in fullness. A dense consecrated life is one that is full of the Gospel and, lived according to the following of Jesus and the practice of the Beatitudes, is able to be an alternative existence and to pierce through the behavior of most human beings who move between unconsciousness, vulgarity and banality.

We are always in time to improve and achieve serenity. In a note dated August 11, 1870, our Founder wrote: “The talents of graces are acquired through fidelity to our first gifts. And natural talents are acquired by application to work. Let us apply ourselves, then, and we will see by experience that we will do more than we had ever believed possible.”

3.3. “They shall bear fruit even in old age, they will stay fresh and green” (Ps 92:15).

In applying this verse of the Psalm to ourselves, we again recall our distinct natures, since not all of us find ourselves in the same conditions to offer fruits. Either way, these words can encourage us:

Proclaiming the Gospel...: Where and how at our age? Our areas of influence have been reduced, and so is the case with our possibilities to act. What to do, then? Well, every day we will have a chance to speak through who we are. I cannot resist the desire to recall an extraordinary suggestion from K. G. Durckheim: ‘Be present in an outstanding way, overflowing with life.’ Above all, be silently respectful and cheerful. Our words will surely be scarce, but those that come out will be worth their weight in gold. There is an apostolic mission that we will always have in our hands, even when they are already trembling: that of awakening someone to the presence. To help them to be more present to themselves and, by that very fact, to be more present to God and to others. Therefore, and first of all, carry forward this task of internalization which will be in our power to carry out with everyone, starting with our own internalization. This is, without a doubt, what people will come to look for in us! A person brimming with life because they are so full within. Conquering that authentic interiority is one of our main autumn battles. Discussion and action will gradually give way to the simple radiant presence. What you are, like Emerson observed, speaks louder than what you say. While this is always applicable, it is applicable with incomparable greater measure as you age.³⁴³

The most precious fruit is that of authenticity, which we can only find in the Paschal Mystery. To desire, to ask, to seek a way to become a candle of resurrection, like Claret, who saw death as the passage to a new life. Face death head on and shine until you are extinguished. “*I, Sancho, was born to live dying*” (Cervantes). What a profound expression! Other people’s deaths make us think. They can make us think about the proximity of our own death, but the most important thing is to discover that we have become familiar with it, like Claret, and the desire to contemplate the beauty of God, our good and our peace

³⁴¹ VC 37.

³⁴² The magazine *Vida Religiosa* dedicated a special issue with this title: *Intensificar la vida* [Intensifying Life], 92 (2002, mayo-junio), pp.161-240. The journal *Sal Terrae* published several studies in 2003: January, *Educación la interioridad*. [Instructing Interiority].

³⁴³ A. Seve, *Inventar el otoño. Meditaciones para la tercera edad*, Verbo Divino, Estella 1991, pp. 139-141, translator’s version.

becomes more constant. Death ceases to be a warning and becomes an inspiration for new life (Segundo Galilea). “That is Easter.” Thus, the desire to live towards the dawn is fulfilled.

But there is a condition. The great project of our life is still open. Within it there are many other projects that become more authentic in the face of death, as long as we do not cheat. And we cheat every time we affirm with our mouth that we are going to die, but we begin to get wrapped up in a thousand unimportant things and we do not give the ultimate value to our thoughts, our volitions, and our actions. In the face of death there are many things that are not interesting, that are not worth doing, although while you are living you have to do them. But *“it is not enough to think about death, but to be always in front of it. Then life becomes more solemn, more important, more fruitful and more joyful”* (Stefan Zweig). Our resurrection is the encounter charged with a light that does not go out and with life in its fullness. Meanwhile, we continue to collaborate in the redemption of the world by completing in our bodies what is lacking in Christ’s passion (cf. Col 1:24). Claret repeated Paul’s words: *“For to me life is Christ, and death is gain”* (Phil 1:21).

3.4. Five Traits that Define our Living Until the Dawn

— Admire, Praise and Summarize in Love

The last stage of life, in which the Holy Spirit gathers the fruits of his gifts, is marked – or should be marked – by contemplation. Worship, blessing, praising, living and speaking wisely. We are asked to remain in constant awe in the face of the mystery. Claret took the example of Paul: “I am filled with encouragement; I am overflowing with joy all the more because of all our affliction” (2 Cor 7:4). Claret transmits to us the inner joy and peace, which is not human conquest, but a gift, because he is aware that “we hold this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing power may be of God and not from us” (2 Cor 4:7). It is the strength of the resurrection that is anticipated in this inner joy, which is cultivated by admiration, praise and love.

An inexhaustible source to continue admiring is the Word of God and the life of men; the Eucharist, sacrament of love, sacrament of Christ’s sacrifice, sacrament of communion and proclamation of the Lord until he comes again and, therefore, sacrament of infinite solidarity. As soon as we enter into the prayer of the Church, we are fascinated by the mystery of the Trinitarian God. Every psalm, every reading, every invocation is a call to look at our relationships with God, with men and with ourselves in a different way. One cannot contemplate the history of salvation without being amazed and overwhelmed and without feeling happy to collaborate in others’ joy (cf. 2 Cor 1:24).

It is the most precious time to spread love. To re-read the *Definition of the Missionary Son of the Immaculate Heart of Mary*. Our senior years are also active and not merely passive. We participate in the love of Christ made into an offering and this participation, if it is conscious and responsible, makes us into a counterpoint to this Promethean and Faustian humanity. Our job is to give our life for the Gospel and, at this age, we acquire prominence and stature through acceptance, listening, understanding, mercy (the senior priest should be willing to spend more time in the ministry of listening, in the confessional). We are called to comfort one another with the comfort we have received from God (cf. 2 Cor 1:3-4).

— Moving between Gratuitousness and Gratitude

Joy, inner joy is linked to thanksgiving. *Everything is grace and we must give thanks for everything. “It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you”* (Jn 15:16). *“In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us”* (1 Jn 4:10). Mary, in the *Magnificat*, teaches us to live grateful love. Mary knows that we are not the source of love; it is a deception to think so. To begin by being grateful for love is the best way to purify the deceitful pretensions that are full of vanity and ambition and to live in that humility of those who recognize that everything comes from above and that everything we are belongs to the One who created us, that has redeemed us and that is waiting for us. When we move between gratuitousness and gratitude, we “resize ourselves”, that is, we put the correct limits to our thinking, our desires and our actions. Human weakness is the manifestation of God’s power (cf. 2 Cor 12:9).

— Exercising Reconciliation

Forgive, forgive, forgive... as God the Father forgives us. The Father awaits us with open arms and does not remember our offenses. He shows us his love in the forgiveness asked for out of repentance. But he always draws near. The quiet prayer of the “Our Father” introduces us to the heart of the Gospel and recreates our relationships with him and with all the men and women with whom we have lived our history. To exercise reconciliation is to place oneself in the heart of the merciful Father and to see things as he does. You cannot live the last years of your life with outstanding accounts, preserving resentment, lamenting lost battles. Claret had many fronts, too many, of slander, persecution, misunderstandings, and he lived in peace by forgiving.

— Keeping Trust Alive

Life goes on and God is greater. Old age displaces us physically. We lose strength and experience weakness and dependence. But spiritually we can remain focused on our *self* and want to make everything revolve around *us*. We were baptized in Christ and live following Him. We are to make the sentiments of Christ Jesus our own, like St. Paul wrote to the Philippians (Phil 2:6-11). We live until the dawn when we trust that love will win in the end. It is comforting to know we are loved by God the Father and that he continues to count on us to make love triumph. This calls for looking at the world, events, and the future with faith and hope. In the face of those who suffer for so many reasons, Jesus unites us to himself on his cross and asks us to say with him his last words: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do;”³⁴⁴ “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise;” “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?;” “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.” Trust makes us enter into this dynamic of redemption until the end.

— Asking for the Gift of Peace

“Tranquility is an anticipated taste of living definitively in the Father’s house” (Håring). Let us consider that in the last stage of our life everything is being simplified, one is placed in the vision and valuation that God has of what He has created and, on the other hand, this simplicity helps us to live the peace that dwells in the heart of each person through the action of the Holy Spirit. To come to live from within, allowing oneself to be caressed by the hand of the Father and savoring the experience of kindness experienced. Always ready to announce that the Lord’s faithfulness lasts forever.



These features, in essence, are the exponent of a *return to what is essential* which entails the satisfaction of those who live in intimacy with the Lord. This enables a peaceful and silent surrender into the hands of the loving will of the Father. This is how Claret lived, who felt the joy that the Lord was coming and with the apostle could say: “I have competed well; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith. From now on the crown of righteousness awaits me, which the Lord, the just judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me, but to all who have longed for his appearance” (2 Tim 4:7-8).

³⁴⁴ Fr. Claret, on the last page of the *Spiritual Notes*, refers to this subject. Cf. ACW, p. 920.

LIVING OUR SENIOR YEARS IN COMMUNITY*

“The one who began a good work in you will continue to complete it” (Phil 1:6).

1. THOSE OF US WHO ARE NOW IN OUR SENIOR YEARS

Look at us who are gathered here! We are those who were formed around the Council. We had the same processes of openness, sensitivity, discernment, decisions and missionary commitments, either a little before the Council or during it. In the years before the Council there was a sense that something new was coming. The Council made us change the way we thought and worked.

What have these last fifty years been like for us? Are we stuck looking back? Have we examined what was planned and lived? What posture should we take today, with our age and capabilities, as members of the local and provincial community in which we live?

First of all, we must consider that we do not grow old together by juxtaposition, but rather as brothers, as members of the same community and of the same Province. We continue making history of Claretian life at the service of the Gospel.

The best thing we have, as we look forward, is not what we have done, but the soul we have put into it, the generous dedication with which we have done it. It is also good to hold onto this observation: “The past must be a springboard, not a sofa” (Harold MacMillan).

But we have to avoid three risks that are lurking:

- 1) *Wanting to be like Narcissus*, who looked at his reflection and could not stop looking at himself and was immobilized in front of his reflection.

Everything around him became blurred and he became the only thing important to himself. He closed in on himself, bending over himself until he was alone. In this solitude, the whole weight of being himself and existence was on his shoulders. (...) The self tries to affirm itself and recognize itself and closes itself to any dialogical encounter in which it can be ratified and recognized by a ‘you’, according to a ‘you’. ‘You’ disappears from the horizon and we end up defending ourselves from others and from God.³⁴⁵

- 2) *Wanting to be like Prometheus*, who decided to take fate into his own hands and ended up chained. In an attitude similar to that of Prometheus, who judged that the gods had mishandled things, we can try to take the helm of the world and of life into our own hands. He wanted to make a world as he would like, as he thought it should be.³⁴⁶

- 3) *Resigning yourself like Sisyphus*. “The gods had condemned Sisyphus to constantly push a rock to the top of a mountain, from where the stone would fall again by its own weight. They had thought, with some reason, that there is no more terrible punishment than hopeless and useless work.” (...) “It has already been understood that Sisyphus is the absurd hero. He is so both for his passions and for his torment. His contempt for the gods, his hatred of death and his passion for life earned him that unspeakable ordeal in which his whole being is dedicated to not finishing anything. It is

* Ongoing Formation Conference in the Province of Euskal Herria, 2009.

³⁴⁵ P. Peralta Ansorena, *Vivir a tiempo...* Montevideo 2003, p. 307, translator’s version.

³⁴⁶ Cf. *Ib.*, p. 308.

the price to be paid for the passions of this earth!” (...) “The very effort to reach the peaks is enough to fill a human heart. You have to imagine Sisyphus is happy.”³⁴⁷

Although the myth of Sisyphus does not have as much validity as those of Narcissus and Prometheus, it can be a risk to come to look with resignation at the life that we have to live in order to build what we currently have in sight. We have had to work with a lot of tenacity.

This text of Athenagoras invites us to overcome these risks:

I have waged this war against myself for many years. It was terrible, but now I am disarmed. I am no longer frightened of anything because love banishes fear. I am disarmed of the need to be right and to justify myself by disqualifying others. I am no longer on the defensive holding onto my riches. I just want to welcome and to share. I don't hold onto my ideas and projects. If someone shows me something better — No, I shouldn't say better, but good — I accept them without any regrets. I no longer seek to compare. What is good, true, and real is always for me the best. This is why I have no fear. When we are disarmed and dispossessed of self, if we open our hearts to the God who makes all things new then he takes away past hurts and reveals a new time where everything is possible.³⁴⁸

2. VERBS THAT WE SHOULD CONJUGATE WITH GREATER INTENSITY

In the *Constitutions* we have a very rich text:

Collaboration in the ministry of the word pertains to the very origins of our common life. However, there are many ways in which we can share in the mission of our Community: as members of a team associated in a common task, as individuals working on a project entrusted to us by the community, or as persons who pray and suffer on behalf of the Church. Therefore, whenever a ministry is entrusted to an individual, it should be carried out in such a way that we all feel we have a share in it. Conversely, each individual should feel that the work he is performing is one he has received from the community. (CC 13).

This text has another complementary text, of a more universal scope, which says:

Our Congregation is the expression of a gift of the Spirit, sanctioned by the Church - a gift through which we are all called to carry out our universal mission in an orderly way. Community of mission, however, inherently demands an organized structure so that the communion of all its members may be better preserved and that the strivings and purposes of each one of the members may be more aptly coordinated. (CC 135)

These are a few verbs that we must conjugate from our condition as members of the congregational community: The “Congregational We.”

- Trust
- Build Community
- Prove (Make Credible)
- Qualify
- Collaborate
- Expand³⁴⁹

³⁴⁷ A. Camus, *El mito de Sísifo*, Losada, Buenos Aires 1953, pp.129-133, translator's version. For the English version see *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Penguin Books, New York City 1991.

³⁴⁸ Athenagoras, *Christus* 191 (Jul 2001) 285, translator's version.

³⁴⁹ Cf. A. Bocos Merino, *Herencia y Profecía*, Publicaciones Claretianas, Madrid 2006, pp. 87-92.

3. THE INCENTIVES OF AGING TOGETHER

Living our senior years together, in community, has incentives that should not go unnoticed, because they are a real gift. In the mature years of life there is a “re-encounter” with our brothers, with the community, with the Church, with all men. In this re-encounter there are rewarding events and stimuli that encourage us to continue our journey in consecrated life. I will underline some of them:

1.1. *Celebrate and Appreciate the Gift of Fraternity*

In the document *Fraternal Life in Community*, we read that the religious community:

becomes the place where we learn daily to take on that new mind which allows us to live in fraternal communion through the richness of diverse gifts and which, at the same time, fosters a convergence of these gifts towards fraternity and towards co-responsibility in the apostolic plan. To realise such a community and apostolic ‘symphony’, it is necessary:

- a) *to celebrate and give thanks* together for the common gift of vocation and mission, a gift far surpassing every individual and cultural difference; to promote a contemplative attitude with regard to the wisdom of God, who has sent specific brothers and sisters to the community that each may be a gift to the other; to praise him for what each brother or sister communicates from the presence and word of Christ;
- b) *to cultivate mutual respect* by which we accept the slow journey of weaker members without stifling the growth of richer personalities; a respect which fosters creativity but also calls for responsibility to others and to solidarity;
- c) *to focus on a common mission*: each institute has its own mission, to which all must contribute according to their particular gifts. The road of consecrated men and women consists precisely in progressively consecrating to the Lord all that they have, and all that they are, for the mission of their religious family.³⁵⁰

These guidelines invite us to give joyful content to our celebrations and to encourage praise and thanksgiving. This means coming out of ourselves, out of our little inner world and recognizing all the reasons we have to say thank you, to bless God for the gifts we have received. It is beautiful to realize how we are involved in mystery, communion and mission. In this context we *celebrate* and *appreciate* the gift of fraternity.

1.2. *As Travelers and Pilgrims*

Our missionary life has other roots than those that cling to the earth. Our vision is far-reaching and faces the heavens.³⁵¹ Our journey is a pilgrimage by virtue of which we head toward the sanctuary of the new Covenant. Along this journey we can help each other to lighten our burdens, to ponder together what we are and have without deceiving ourselves, and to bestow the right value on what we perceive.

Commenting on one of Jesus’ parables, Dolores Aleixandre writes:

“The kingdom of heaven,” Jesus could have said, “looks like a man who, before returning to his country after a long journey in a foreign land, exchanges all his coins for the only ones that will

³⁵⁰ CICLSAL, *Fraternal Life in Community*, nos. 39-40.

³⁵¹ Hélder Câmara said in *A Thousand Reasons for Living* that “When your ship long moored in harbour and gives you the illusion of being a house; when your ship begins to put down roots in the stagnant water by the quay, put out to sea! Save your boat’s journeying soul and your own pilgrim soul, cost what it may. Accept the surprises that disturb your plans... Give freedom to the Father so that he himself can build the plot of your days.”

henceforth be valid for him.” Paul has no doubt about what those coins are: “*So faith, hope, love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love*” (1 Cor 13:13).

In an account of the desert fathers, it is said that:

a young disciple was sent by his *abba* to visit another brother who had a garden in Sinai. The young disciple, upon arrival, asked the owner of the garden: “Father, do you have any fruits to bring to my teacher?” “Of course, my son, take all you want.” The young disciple added: “Will there also be some mercy here, father?” “What are you saying, my son?” The young man repeated: “I ask if there will be any mercy here, father...” After the young man had asked the same question three times without the owner of the garden knowing how to answer him, he finally murmured: “May God help us, my son!” And, taking his bundle, he left the garden and went into the wilderness, saying: “Let us go in search of God’s mercy. If I have not been able to give an answer to a young brother, what will I do when God himself interrogates me?”³⁵²

‘Some mercy’: That is the lost coin that God, like that woman who swept her house, will seek high and low in us; and the talent with which we hasten to do some business for when the Owner demands it upon his return. Our only sensible investment will be like that of the steward who knew how to make friends with those who would later receive him and earned the congratulations of his Lord.

But for that we must let the theological life mark the ‘cruising speed’ for our wayward path and we need to learn to live according to this perspective: “*our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we also await a savior, the Lord Jesus Christ*” (Phil 3:20). Because hope, the smallest of the three, but the one which sustains the other two, as Péguy said, is patiently teaching us a new way of *doing*, which now consists in *being* and *hoping*.³⁵³

Walking together, in the spirit of pilgrims, knowing where our steps are heading, we can help each other with a generous and profound reconciliation with our past and our present; we can listen to each other and contrast each other; we can offer words of consolation according to the consolation that the Spirit gives to each one of us; we can exercise the ministry of mercy; we can heal wounds with the balm of understanding, of leniency, of compassion.

Listening to each other is a way to grow together in security. What happens is that we hardly listen to each other. People talk to us and we give them prescriptions; they talk to us and we continue in our own affairs; they talk to us and we do not put ourselves in the situation of the other. Rightly it has been written:

When I ask you to listen to me and you start giving me advice, you have not done what I asked. When I ask you to listen to me and you begin to tell me ‘why’ I shouldn’t feel that way, you are trampling on my feelings. When I ask you to listen to me and you feel you have to do something to solve my problems, you have failed me, strange as that may seem. Listen to me! All I ask is that you listen; not talk, nor do – just hear me. Giving advice is easy, but I am not helpless, maybe discouraged and faltering, but not helpless. When you do something for me, that I can and need to do for myself, you contribute to my fear and weakness. But when you accept as a simple fact that I do feel what I feel, no matter how irrational, then I quit trying to convince you and can get about the business of understanding what’s behind this irrational feeling.³⁵⁴

Encouraging awe and enjoying the wonders we find on our journey. Nature with all its wonders, with its signs and its life cycles; art in its various forms (music, architecture, poetry, painting, etc.), civil, ecclesiastical, and congregational history, etc., provide for both admiration and joy.

³⁵² Les sentences des Pères du désert. Nouveau recueil, Abbaye de Solesmes, 1970, p. 92.

³⁵³ D. Aleixandre, *Cómo me gustaría envejecer*, translator’s version. It can be found online in Spanish.

³⁵⁴ R. O’Donnell, «La escucha», en: A. Pagrazzi (ed.), *El mosaico de la misericordia*, Sal Terrae, Santander 1989, translator’s version.

Two traits of our pilgrimage together through life, as proposed by the Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy (no. 286):

Eschatological Dimension. The original and essential quality of pilgrimage: a pilgrimage, or “journey to a shrine”, is both a moment in and parable of, our journey towards the Kingdom; it affords an opportunity for the Christian to take greater stock of his eschatological destiny as *homo viator*: journeying between the obscurity of the faith and the thirst for the vision of clarity, tribulation and the desire for everlasting life, the weariness of the journey and the rest awaiting, between exile and homeland, between frenetic activity and contemplation

The joy of a Christian pilgrimage is a continuation of the joy experienced on Israel’s pious pilgrimage to Jerusalem: “I rejoiced when I heard them say: ‘let us go up to God’s house’” (Ps 122, 1); pilgrimage can be a break from the monotony of daily routine; it can be an alleviation of the burdens of every day life, especially for the poor whose lot is heavy; it is an occasion to give expression to Christian fraternity, in moments of friendship meeting each other, and spontaneity which can sometimes be repressed.

It is the *tranquility of those who are at ease in the house of the Lord* and praise and bless his Holy Name. Even in the midst of pain, loneliness, apparent abandonment, they are at peace knowing in whom they have placed their trust.

1.3. Redeeming Memories, Times and Places Together

No one makes a big decision for someone else. The exercise of freedom is an exercise in solitude. But the communion of existences, which is communion in love, makes corporate and personal well-being possible. Presence, silence, dialogue, and interpersonal communication make others grow; they help others to have trust, to know how to better themselves, to look forward with more certainty.

–Redeeming our Memory

Our memory is full of recollections of our lived experiences. Some pleasant and others unpleasant. In some moments joyful events emerge and in others our wounds ooze. It is difficult to understand the content and deeper meaning of what happened and, even more difficult, to remember and relive it objectively within us. The proper response is to heal our memory and turn it into a memory of gratitude and hope. To heal our memory and give it constructive vitality involves accepting the grace of reconciliation, divine mercy and wisdom to build; to free ourselves from all ingratitude and to enter joyfully into the flow of life.

There has been talk of the “viruses” of memory with this manner of labeling:³⁵⁵

Ungrateful-Apathetic Memory, which would be the way of remembering for those who are not moved by life and the good they have received. They do not know the virtue of recognition. It encourages a culture of ingratitude. The ungrateful person is the most forgetful.

Partial-Selective Memory, which is usually a memory that only contemplates partial aspects: the dark, hard and negative aspects of human existence or, on the contrary, the clear, pleasant and positive ones. But as it usually happens, we sculpt offenses in rock and favors in sand. The worst part about this kind of memory is the incoherence of life (the two brothers together in the parable of the prodigal son).

Superficial-Sensational Memory. Proper to people who only remember the extraordinary, amazing, sensational events, the wonderful experiences of God, excluding the times that God seems to have been absent. Those who “remember” this way are prone to presumption (the two disciples from Emmaus).

Idealizing-Nostalgic Memory. This is usually held by those who idealize the past and contrast it with the present, which they judge as mediocre (the Hebrews in the desert). If one forgets that the past is in the past, it can drive one crazy.

³⁵⁵ A. Cencini, *El árbol de la vida*, San Pablo, Madrid 2005, pp. 218-231.

Exonerating-Complaining Memory. It usually happens among those who discover in their past only grievances and injustices in which they have been victims, those who blame them as the cause of their current immaturities and/or conflicts that are difficult to overcome and of those who, naturally, never consider themselves to be responsible (the crippled man by the pool).

Offended-Resentful Memory. This is the stubborn memory of offenses or grievances received, or supposedly received, like an indelible and difficult memory, something carved in stone, which makes certain relationships eternally conflictive and prevents a person from experiencing the liberating strength of forgiveness. Resentment blocks memory and can lead the person to act out of anger or revenge. Whoever does not grant forgiveness to others is believed to exercise and retain a certain power over the other, but Jesus asks us to forgive up to 70 times seven times.

Distorted-Senseless Memory. This memory is held by those who do not make the effort to make connections between things that happen, do not understand their deepest meaning, as if everything happens without a reason or is simply by chance and, thus, they lack direction, both in the present, and for the future (how foolish you are...how slow of heart to believe...).

Wounded-Depressed Memory. This is the typical way of remembering for those who believe they can draw up a list with only personal failures and setbacks in their past, at different levels, to which they can only admit, with regret, disappointment, and defeat.

Those who do not reconcile with their memory and who perceive that the bad or deficient in their life far exceeds the good they find, suffer and make others suffer. In our community life we must encourage acceptance of deference, benevolence, and forgiveness. In our conversations, in our way of judging past events, and in our pondering of events, eliciting feelings of salvation and not of condemnation helps us to live in peace and serenity.

In contrast to so many “viruses”, the *just and grateful memory* is proper to those who recall the events of their entire life with realism, humility and gratitude, while recognizing the lights and shadows, and integrating the joys and sufferings, and living the present with peace, security and inner harmony.

Remembering one’s own history and knowing how *to tell it to oneself* and to others is to turn one’s memory into a place of prayer in its various forms: adoration, praise, thanksgiving, petition, intercession, repentance, and reparation.

–Redeeming Time

To redeem time is to free it from enslavements, entertainment or wasting away the hours without filling them with anything of substance. It is to rescue life from everything that binds it to customs, amusements, hobbies that, although necessary for relaxation, sometimes trap us. We redeem time when we exercise freedom responsibly and look to the future as a time of expectation. We redeem time when we welcome the gift of God that makes us partakers of the fullness of creation. God gives us time to grow. Therefore, we are asked to be alert and vigilant, because this is how we give meaning to the *now* that we have. Jesus, in the use of his time, taught us to live calmly and confidently. *Jesus went out to encounter people like someone who had time for wonder, for listening and for mercy.* He makes us think about the signs of the times. He knew how to wait for his hour, and indicated when it was the right time, the time and moment of salvation.

We redeem time when we give value and consistency to personal encounters with our brothers; when we fill our time with seeds of life that point toward that which never dies; when we discern together the will of God for us. There are many opportunities offered to us: meetings, retreats, exercises, celebrations, informal gatherings, outings, trips, etc. Every moment is a gift that is offered to us or that we offer. When we have time for the other, time is united with eternity and eternity with time. In short, we redeem time when we take advantage of it to love God and do good to our neighbor. We redeem time when, instead of grasping at it, we give it with total detachment to God and to our brothers and sisters.

–Redeeming the Places Where We Have Been

There are places that we run away from and roads that we would never want to travel. There is the path *that we should never step foot on again*. We make extensive detours to not to go through a certain place that has been engraved in our memory, in our experience, as *undesirable*. But we also make enormous efforts and take long journeys to return to the street, the house, or the village where life sprang forth. There are memories that we push to our subconscious because their very presence causes hurt and anguish. There are others that we go out to look for and where we can stop for a long time, because we know that they are more than memories. There are places, paths, experiences, recollections that have the strength to relaunch our life, to offer a truly new beginning. If we review the assignments we have had, there is a lot of good to remember, where we learned about living together, about ministry, and about the spiritual life. Redeeming places and spending time with those that have made possible the good we enjoy is not a nostalgic exercise, but rather a wise one that, on the one hand, purifies and puts into perspective the places themselves, and, on the other hand, encourages us to consider our definitive position. In the end, what shines in this exercise of redeeming places is our radical availability.

If we reflect for a moment on this redeeming of memories, times and places, we realize that we are focusing on the essentials of our Christian life, because we embrace the New Covenant, the memorial of our salvation; we live the opportunity that every moment offers us: “Behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Cor 6:2); we finally accept that our definitive place is elsewhere, that we have another homeland.

1.4. *Recreating and Ordering Where we Belong*

As we walk together in life, when we reach old age, one of the tasks that we are responsible for is *to recreate* and *to order* where we belong. This point is quite subtle in our Claretian life – just like in other congregations – because, given that we have accumulated a myriad of ways we belong, we are victims of a somewhat gratifying dispersion, with which we can justify almost everything we do. But there comes a time when life calls us to return to what is essential. To see the scope of this point, I will make the following reflection.

We are very much mediated by the *spaces*, the *affections* and our *attachments* which, as we can see, are too tangled and disjointed. A concept as abstract as *spatiality* is something that seems indifferent to us. However, when we analyze its associated meanings (place, area, territory, nation, homeland, home) and we see it linked to displacement, transits, journeys, migrations and wandering, the repercussions begin to be seen between what is “our own” and what is not, what is intimate and what is public, belonging and alienation, the person and the community at all levels (local, provincial and congregational). The same happens with the *affections* (events, experiences, passions) that, likewise, make the public and the private problematic and contrast the rational and the affective with the consequent implications with regard to the identifications, groupings, belonging, collective memories, etc.

Belonging is an issue that affects all human groups. The word belonging is now in the mouths of psychologists and sociologists who analyze the different human groups (family, unions, political parties, sports clubs, etc.) and all of them observe that the bonds are weak and of short duration. Zygmunt Bauman, in his book *Liquid Love*, describes the fragility of human bonds, the fear of establishing lasting relationships beyond mere connections, etc.³⁵⁶

The *feeling of belonging* develops on the basis of the motivations of aggregation (territorial, ethnic, religious, social, political, interpersonal and family) which becomes *a source of identity*. Belonging defines the existential situations that enhance the individual sphere of the subject. Depending on the degree of *affective* and *effective* bonding, greater or lesser success can be predicted in the fulfillment of the objectives. Belonging is usually assumed from the legal perspective, starting with belonging to the institute, but it is a mistake to believe that it has strength in the lives of people who live according to individual interests. We need to grease the wheels of the central axis of our belonging to God, to the Church, to the Congregation, to the province, and to the community.

³⁵⁶ Z. Bauman, *Liquid Love*: Polity Press, Cambridge 2003.

It is enlightening to cultivate in the community our belonging to the Congregation, which involves the whole network of relationships with the Trinitarian, ecclesial and social roots of our Claretian vocation. As we discover the core values upon which our lives turn, everything begins to have its precise place. To discover the center is to articulate, order, and adjust what is worthwhile and what gives serenity. Let us think about the relationships and sense of belonging that have made us grow: the family itself, the social groups we have been part of, the friendships we have lived, the Christian communities we have guided, the presbyterates to which we have belonged, the ecclesial groups we have cared for, the positions we have held in the province and in the different communities. Sooner or later, we discover that there are some primary relationships: as we age our relationship with the Father, with Jesus, and with the Holy Spirit are intensified (“For I know well the spring that flows and runs, although it is night.” St. John of the Cross).

1.5. *Pray and Suffer Together*

It is something that is easy to say and to recommend, but also to do. Two, three or more seniors who pray together the Liturgy of the Hours, who celebrate the Eucharist together, who entertain themselves by commenting on the Psalms or the readings, and sharing their intentions based on their experience and felt needs is an incentive for community life in our senior years. The same happens when you share pain and suffering. Being close, knowing how to be silent, listening to laments, etc., make suffering become more bearable. It helps to have words of encouragement and, above all, to accompany people in painful moments with the reminder that our life completes what is lacking in the passion of Christ. We do well to be open to praying and suffering together.

In our senior years, the tenderness of the heart of our Mother, Mary, becomes more present and alive. The small devotions to Mary, the recitation of the Rosary, the frequent ejaculatory prayers and the songs that we have learned become valuable again. All objections disappear and it is good for us to share the presence of Mary, who accepted us as her children at the foot of the cross of Jesus, our savior.

Let us not seek external compensations, nor tributes for what we have done. The greatest joy, the greatest satisfaction, the best reward is that the Lord grants us the gift of serenity in the last years of our life. It is a gift that we must ask for, because only the Lord can grant it to us.

1.6. *Hoping Together*

What should we hope for? And how do we hope together? Before answering, we must consider that the act of hoping is not individual, but communal, corporate. Whatever the object of our hope, we will have to work to acquire it in community, with others. “We are saved as a group,” hope is at the heart of the Mystical Body of Christ that pumps the blood and carries it to every corner, to all members.³⁵⁷

The *Constitutions* refer several times to hope, to the hopes of men and to the object of our hope (cf. nos. 15, 20, 45, 46, 52, 53, 63, 79).

Our brothers in community, and more closely those who have shared our missionary life, reinforce our way of facing the future, of purifying our pretensions and of preparing ourselves to accept the gift that will be given to us as a fulfillment. They help us in purification and strengthening. Our brothers purify and strengthen, open new perspectives to contemplate life in a more serene way.

4. REACHING WISDOM AND A NEW PROPHETIC MISSION

³⁵⁷ “The Christian does not hope in isolation; he hopes in and with the Mystical Body of Christ. Man does not hope individually; he hopes in and with humanity. Each person does not hope only for himself; he also hopes for another, if he is united with another out of a love of friendship, if he sees him and loves him as ‘neighbor.’” P. Laín Entralgo, *La espera y la esperanza*, Rev. de Occidente, Madrid 1957, p. 134, translator’s version.

Wisdom is a quality that comes from above and is given to the childlike and the simple (cf. Lk 10:21; Mt 11:25). The characteristics are described by saying that it is “first of all pure, then peaceable, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits, without inconstancy or insincerity” (Jas 3:17).

The Christian is called, yes, to understand what God tells him, but he is called even more to know it. To know it means, in spiritual language, to undertake an extremely complex experience, to create a situation in which man is involved not only with his own conscience, his own love, his own desire, the global meaning of his own life, his own sensitivity.³⁵⁸

Wisdom is the step from “having experience” to “being experience,” or it is “an experience that transcends experience,” as Merton would say from the heights of his monastic wisdom.

Wisdom is the typical global knowledge of the spiritual man, who reaches with his heart... to the heart of life, where man’s treasure is and everything becomes concrete and fused in God’s dream: to find in us the image of the Son and thus learning to enjoy it, like a treasure.

The wise man is thus the one who manages to enrich himself from all of his experiences, not only from some of them (the most exciting or satisfying or simple to decipher), but also from those that are more difficult to interpret and accept or that seem negative. He has a heart that is free to listen to life, which speaks at all times and transmits wisdom to those who know how to understand it. If wisdom is the maximum of intelligence, the wise man is the *docibilis* believer who has learned to learn from the existence of everyday life and of every person, in every circumstance and by every event until the last day of his life, until Christ, the incarnate wisdom, is fully formed in him (cf. Gal 4:19).³⁵⁹

The wisdom spoken of here is closely linked to the serenity of the previous chapter: *Living as an Elderly Claretian*. In the book of Wisdom, we read: “Although she is one, she can do all things, and she renews everything while herself perduring; passing into holy souls from age to age, she produces friends of God and prophets. For God loves nothing so much as the one who dwells with Wisdom” (Wis 7:27-28).

Living together, in community, seeking wisdom is an ideal program for seniors. That statement, extracted from the Bible, that prophecy does not age, becomes reality. There are many elderly prophets and *prophetesses*. There is no time to grow old for those who come out of themselves and follow Christ, who is the future. Prophecy does not age and our Claretian life is rejuvenated if it is nourished by listening. Let us not forget the expression of St. Ignatius to the Magnesians: “The Word came forth out of the silence” and whoever welcomes it becomes radiant. Prophecy does not grow old if it continues acting through praise, blessing and a new song.³⁶⁰ “Sing to the Lord a new song... But make sure that your life does not contradict your words. (...) then live what you express. Live good lives, and you yourselves will be his praise.”³⁶¹

³⁵⁸ G. Moiola, *L’esperienza spirituale, Lezioni introduttive*, Milano 1992, p. 52, translator’s version.

³⁵⁹ Cf. A. Cencini, *La verdad de la vida*, San Pablo, Madrid 2008, pp. 507-510.

³⁶⁰ Cf. Elena Bosetti, «La profezia non invecchia», *Consacrazione et servizio* 9 (2007) 42-43.

³⁶¹ Saint Augustine, *Sermon* 34, 6.

THE SERVICE OF THE CLARETIAN SUPERIOR IN HIS COMMUNITY*

“Grant us vigilance of the Spirit and lucidity of faith to ascertain to what end we root our future and that of our communities. Grant us, Lord, that evangelical wisdom capable of discerning the urgency of the new times and of attuning to those end times, which your Word and your life have inaugurated” (Michel Hubaut).

INTRODUCTION: CLARIFICATIONS

Required Reference Points

When we talk about the service of animation of a Claretian community, we need to turn to what the *Constitutions*, the *Directory* and the Chapters indicate. This requires personal work that no superior can fail to do. When it comes to seeing what is said in the CC about the superior, one must not only go to the section on Government, but should start with the chapters that talk about our charismatic traits, obedience, community and mission.

In examining the *Constitutions*,³⁶² *Directory* and Chapters, it is appropriate to observe:

- a) They express the congregational charism.
- b) They are written in first-person plural: “We”.
- c) Government is exercised in due order.³⁶³
- d) The most outstanding features of the exercise of authority in the Congregation are *foresight, mercy and availability* for listening, seeking, discernment, accompaniment and animation of missionary life.

It is enough to review what the XXV General Chapter says:

Those who exercise the service of authority, discern and act ‘according to God’s heart,’ to accompany persons, to foster missionary cooperation, to promote the creativity and innovation that the Spirit requires in every time and place. For this: We will encourage *a governance that is shared, compassionate, inspired by Jesus and in those attitudes found in the heart of Mary*. Thus, we will ensure proper qualification and support for those who will provide the services of animation, and we will enhance the role of the inter-provincial conferences (MS 72).

I add two clarifications or explanations in the following points.

About the Service of Animation (Leadership) of the Superior

* Text prepared for the Assemblies of Superiors of Baetica and Santiago and revised later in 2018.

³⁶² Cf. CC 103-104. CMF, *Our Project of Missionary Life: Commentary on the Constitutions*, Vol. III, Rome 2000. One could go through the paragraphs of the *Directory* and the different General Chapters, especially the most recent ones.

³⁶³ “Hence, government should be shared in by the associated will of all and be exercised with due order” (CC 93). “Authority is to be exercised in due order” (CC 95).

The figure of the superior and his function has been outlined according to the understanding that we have of the Church and of society. The ecclesiology of organic communion has favored the understanding of the service of animation or compassionate and participatory leadership.³⁶⁴

In what follows I will use the term superior, which although I do not like it, just like I am not fully satisfied with the term leader, it allows us to refer to that brother of the community who has the mission of guiding, accompanying and encouraging the whole community. The superior is the brother who reaches out, is interested, communicates and gets involved.

The Strong Impulse in Favor of the Service of Animation

Let us consider these references:

a) *Starting Afresh from Christ* (2002). Look at nos. 12, 13 and 14 from which this paragraph is taken:

In rediscovering the meaning and quality of consecrated life a fundamental task is that of superiors, to whom the service of authority has been entrusted, a demanding and at times disputed task. It requires a constant presence which is able to animate and propose, to recall the *raison d'être* of consecrated life, and to help those entrusted to them to live in a constantly renewed fidelity to the call of the Spirit. A superior cannot renounce the mission of animation, of brotherly/sisterly support, of proposing, of listening and of dialogue. Only in this way can the entire community find itself united in full communion and in apostolic and ministerial service. The directives offered in our Congregation's document *Fraternal Life in Community* remain a topic of great interest, when, in speaking of the aspects of authority which should be evaluated today, recalls the task of spiritual authority, of authority conducive to unity and an authority capable of making final decisions and assuring their implementation. (FLC 50) (*Starting Afresh from Christ*, 14).

b) *Faciem tuam. The Service of Authority and Obedience (SAO)*. Practically the entire document is oriented toward the service of animation. I will allude to it later.

c) The letters for the Year of Consecrated Life. The Pope's Letter, "*Witnesses of Joy*", and the letters from CICLSAL *Rejoice, Keep Watch!, Contemplate*. Each of them deserves a separate reflection as assumptions for animation and as guidelines, especially the *Pope's Letter, Keep Watch!* and *New Wine in New Wineskins*.

1. CONCERN FOR COMMUNITY LIFE

The superior has the mission to help people and encourage the life of his community. But today, questions arise about style, organization, fraternal life, and the mission of the community.

1.1. Why is Community Life at the Forefront Today?

Concern for community life is widespread in male and female religious institutes. But are they circumstantial causes or are there deeper reasons? The topic is complex and this invites us to think about fraternal life in community from the most radical Trinitarian, Christological, ecclesial, charismatic and sociocultural foundations.

³⁶⁴ Today the leadership of the superior is talked about frequently. Why and how to understand it? What implications does it have? Cf. A. Bocos Merino, *Leadership and Proximity. The Value of Presence in the Governance of Consecrated Life*. See the first chapter.

Apart from the official documentation,³⁶⁵ there have been persistent voices calling for tending to community life at the congresses on religious life in Rome (1993, 1997 and 2004) and on the occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life. In the male and female General Chapters community life is addressed from one perspective or another. Magazines on religious life have dedicated a lot of pages to the subject, which is another indication of general concern. Together we have fabricated a “dream of an enchanted and enchanting community.” The question is whether we will wake up joyfully or disappointed.³⁶⁶

With regard to fraternal life in community, the essential elements of consecrated life converge and we can see how all its positive and negative aspects intertwine.³⁶⁷ In it converge the centrality of the person of Jesus, the experience of the evangelical counsels of chastity, obedience and poverty as well as mission. Community life reveals the degree of enthusiasm, hope, joy and apostolic commitment, the quality of spiritual life, creativity, interest in the people around us and in the particular Church, as well as solidarity with the poor, those who suffer and the excluded, etc. You can also see discomfort, disenchantment, apathy, discouragement, individualism, dismissal of everything ecclesial and congregational, lack of interest in everything that should challenge us because of a lack of dignity, freedom, justice, truth, etc. Understanding the impact of all the essential elements of consecrated life on community life has forced us to pay attention to it. We know very well that by taking care of fraternal life, people are cared for because it is the environment in which they grow, mature and reach their fullness according to the charism and mission of the Institute itself.

In the Congregation there are true desires to have an intense fraternal life in community. The quality and intensity of our missionary life is found in it. Throughout the period of post-conciliar renewal it has been emphasized that our fraternal life is mission.³⁶⁸ The aspiration is high and this is positive. We are called to live intensely the call of Jesus to be with him and to proclaim the Gospel (Mk 3:13-14; CC 3). If this is not achieved, it is not surprising if there is discomfort and worry.

We are urged to live in permanent tension according to the double movement from inside to outside and from outside to inside. Our life is renewed from systole and diastole. Our Founder used the simile of the beehive for the community he had in Cuba (*Aut.* 608).

Our community life acquires quality when we respond in fidelity to the convening grace, which implies other very demanding dynamics. This convening leads us to a common faith (*co-belief*), to *coexistence* and apostolic *commitment*. The evangelizing subject is the community. Therefore, it is concerning that people focus on their own interests, that they are not moved by the needs of others and that they act like snipers; that community discernment is so difficult and that teamwork is so weak; that human relations are so formal and cold, and that we live so withdrawn in our own selves; that we do not appreciate the other as a brother and that community and apostolic projects are becoming mere formalities. It is logical that proposals about the *spirituality of communion*, of convincing witness to *community holiness*³⁶⁹ and *shared mission* should fall on deaf ears.

³⁶⁵ Cf. FLC, VC, SAfC, SAO. Letters from CICALSAL on the Year of Consecrated Life and in *New Wine in New Wineskins* (nos. 19-21; 48-54).

³⁶⁶ In the month of January 2018, Fr. José Cristo Rey García published: *Otra comunidad es posible. Bajo el liderazgo del Espíritu*, Publicaciones Claretianas, Madrid.

³⁶⁷ In current thinking, and the same thing happens in theology, there is a holistic way of approaching the issues. The same is true for religious life. Holistic is the doctrine that advocates the conception of each reality as a whole different from the sum of the parts that make it up. This is how the dictionary defines it.

³⁶⁸ Cf. PC 15. “Missionary community is, of itself, the first and most unequivocal word of evangelization” (MCT 222). Cf. *Ibid.*, 122, 132, 133, 151. SW, 7. IPM, 27, 28 and 30. MFL, 16. MS 46-48. Lately, the Church has reminded us of this: “The tension of making real fraternal community is not only preparation for the mission but also an integral part of it, from the moment that ‘fraternal communion, as such, is already an apostolate’ (FLC 54)” (SAO 22).

³⁶⁹ Cf. SAO 19.

1.2. *The Phenomenon of Globalization Distorts our Community Life*

One of the strongest challenges facing our missionary community life is *globalization*. The last two General Chapters have highlighted its positive and negative features.

Our life in common is quite conditioned by the dizzying multiplication of relationships. Currently there are no boundaries of spaces or times. Access to everything and everyone is immediate, either through the Internet or by mobile phone. It is so easy to send instant messages, to talk, and to see each other while talking! They are offers of possibilities that often interrupt our peace, our work and our fraternal life in common. We suffer an authentic invasion that produces saturation, overindulgence, disorientation.³⁷⁰ On the other hand, without noticing it, we have entered into a sickly aversion to *mediations*. We are dominated by *presentism* (the past is no longer valid), *privacy* (no one meddles in my life) and *immediatism* (everything now and perfectly). We put aside history and move in the present, unable to distinguish the real from the virtual, and in a real world of fakeness or *appearance*. It is not surprising, then, that the last document dedicated to authority and obedience highlights so strongly the need to take on *mediations*.³⁷¹

Regarding the challenge of the *digital continent* in which we live, the XXV General Chapter made observations in MS, nos. 17-18 and 60.³⁷²

2. THE SERVICE OF ANIMATION TODAY MUST BE THAT OF REGENERATION AND TRANSFORMATION, IN A PARTICIPATORY KEY

We are missionaries who find ourselves challenged by the cry of Mother Earth, by the cry of the poor and of justice, by the dream of peace and reconciliation, by the meaning of life and its care, etc. (see the entire first part of MS, nos. 5 et seq.) Who will open our eyes and ears, who will set our hearts on fire, who will give agility to our feet for going forth, who will give strength to our hands?

The protagonist of the animation is the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life. We must *let him do it* in a special way through listening to the Word, in regular prayer, and in the Eucharist. This is how, in the vast and complex world in which we move, the Spirit helps us to see, to discern, to discover and to appreciate what is good, what is true, what is noble, what builds up. And under his action we must consider the maternal influence of Mary, the Mother of the Lord. The dispositions for animation spring forth from the gift of the same Spirit who grants each one his grace for the common good (1 Cor 12:11). The whole complex set of actions aimed at reviving people and communities must be impregnated with the presence of the Spirit. He has distributed his gifts and made everyone brothers and sisters. This means that the Spirit induces those gifts to be recognized, encouraged and constructive, each contributing to the very essence of mission. Therefore, from the beginning, it must be argued that the service of animation is inclusive and participatory.

The techniques in this case are not something neutral. Those who exercise the charism of animation, while making operational the beatitude of the peacemakers (“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God”, Mt 5:9), make things blossom and seek ways to interrelate and give complementarity to the gifts of the members of the community.

I will focus especially on the document: *The Service of Authority and Obedience*

³⁷⁰ See, for example, the book of K. J. Gergen, *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas Of Identity In Contemporary Life*. Basic Books, New York 1991.

³⁷¹ SAO 9, 11, 20 and 27.

³⁷² I have written about “Governing a Community in this Digital Age” in the book *Leadership and Proximity*, pp. 158-172.

It is a document that goes beyond differences, addresses the counter positions and makes positive proposals. Its purpose is to qualify a “high obedience” and to motivate, accompany, encourage, assist and guide consecrated life. It is about those of us who have been called to bear witness to the primacy of God through free obedience to his holy will, may we live with joy the “yes” that we have given to the Lord. Today we have a glimpse of three fundamental tasks:

2.1. *Mistagogue of the Congregational Charism*

The beginning of the SAO document highlights three key words: *salvation*: “Let your face shine upon us and we shall be saved” (Ps 79:4), *seek*: “Your face, O Lord, I seek” (Ps 27:8), *listen/hear*: “Listen, child” (Pr 1:8) and “Hear, O Israel!” (Dt 6:4).³⁷³ These are three words that refer to a critical situation like the one we are living.

Basically, it means to return to what is essential, to the original inspiration of the Congregation. I believe that the primary objective of every superior is *to focus people vocationally*. The experience of life, transmitted with joy and enthusiasm, helps to give meaning and strengthens faith and hope in the project of Claretian missionary life, as reflected in the *Constitutions*.

According to Pope Francis, two aspects should be highlighted: A) Mercy. To sign up for the revolution of mercy, of tenderness (*to govern according to mercy*). b) There is a need to get involved in the transformation of hearts, minds and structures, as Pope Francis has insisted since *Evangelii Gaudium* (22 times in this encyclical he alludes to transformation).

2.2. *Pedagogue that Recreates the Covenant*

Covenant is another word to express the call-response and is placed at the center of our missionary life. “The entire Old Testament is an invitation to listen, and listening is a way of coming to the New Covenant when the Lord says: ‘I will place my laws in their minds and I will write them on their hearts; I will be their God and they shall be my people’ (Heb 8:10; cf. Jer 31:33).”³⁷⁴ “The real obedience of the believing person is adhering to the Word with which God reveals and communicates himself, and through which he renews his covenant of love every day. From that Word flowed life which continues to be transmitted every day.”³⁷⁵

In accepting the invitation made to us to renew the covenant, it can be helpful to take into account nos. 4 and 5 of the *Constitutions*. It is true that they do not include the word covenant, but they reflect its dynamism. They combine the call and the response. We have been called like the Apostles, we follow Jesus and take on the program of the Beatitudes. And, on the other hand, by responding to that divine vocation, we make Jesus’ way of life our own and proclaim it with our lives.

It is up to the superiors to “encourage those processes and means that help us to live each stage of our life as a moment of spiritual transformation” (MFL 55). It is a matter of joyfully living filiation, fraternity and mission. They are the processes of growth that are marked by the action of the Spirit in us. To renew the covenant is to cultivate this experience, which allows us to return to the original love, to the first love, and to look to the future with a longing for growing improvement in our missionary life. Mediations are the Word of God, the Church, the sacraments, the *Constitutions* and everything included in them. They are revealing, welcoming, discerning, nourishing and motivating mediations. The stages of

³⁷³ For the cultivation of “listening”, see the CICLSAL letter *Contemplate*, nos. 2-7.

³⁷⁴ SAO 6.

³⁷⁵ SAO 7. The letter *Keep Watch!* dedicates several paragraphs to the covenant between God and His people. At the end of the letter appear these references from the Pope: “It is important, ‘to be in the habit of asking for the grace to remember the journey which the People of God made.’ It is also important to ask for the grace of ‘personal memory: what has God done with me in my life? How has he had me journey?’. We also need to know how ‘to ask for the grace of hope, which is not optimism: it is something else.’ Finally, let us ‘ask for the grace to renew each day our covenant with the Lord who has called us.’”

life are moments of spiritual youthfulness (grand ideals), of maturity in the mission, of wisdom and of contemplation.

In his own life, the superior should manifest the freshness and beauty of this divine love in his way of attuning, thinking and acting with his brothers. Particularly if he encounters problems with: 1) accepting mediations in the search for God's will, 2) embracing and integrating diversity – interculturality – and 3) missionary availability.

The covenant takes place where differences harmonize, contrasts are overcome, cultures integrate, different ages connect, etc. The superior is a pedagogue and recreates the covenant of love encouraging religious feelings according to *charity*. A charity that must be “ordered,” according to the harmony of the rights and responsibilities of the individuals, the community project and the pastoral project. Thus, it favors the *spirituality of communion* and *community holiness*.

2.3. Promoter of Evangelizers and of Shared Mission

The superior is in mission with his whole being, like Jesus, the Lord. “To live the mission always implies being sent, and that includes referring to the one who sends or to the content of the mission to be developed” (SAO, 23). In the mission what is done is not as important as *from what perspective* it is done and *how* it is done. Hence, the value of the presence and the qualities of the superior.

The Claretian superior encourages the Claretian evangelizers and all those who collaborate in the transformation of the world according to God's plan (cf. CC 46 keeping in mind what the XXV General Chapter says, MS, 53-57).

Regarding *shared mission* I refer to the workshop document “*Doing with others*.”

3. THE GREAT OBSTACLES TO THE SERVICE OF REGENERATION AND TRANSFORMATION

Among the objective conditions that hinder this service, I list the following:

3.1. Trapped by the Obvious

In community life, we take for granted the idea of getting up, prayer, the celebration of Mass, eating together, the ministries we carry out, the usual ways of behaving, the ailments we suffer, etc. Because they are obvious and habitual, none of these surprise us. We all believe that we have mastered the obvious but it is proven that as soon as we drop our guard, the obvious traps us, imprisons us. We take everything for granted and end up not giving it any value. The obvious repeats itself endlessly and produces inertia and monotony. We get used to it and do not realize that the reason that everything happens is hidden from us. Without drama or lament we have eradicated wonder and admiration. We no longer make serious plans and have unconsciously given in to routine. Who can guess the vital pulse of a community in routine situations, which is the soil where indifference,³⁷⁶ apathy, fatigue, irritation, superficiality, mediocrity, disenchantment, lack of solidarity, etc. grow?

We must overcome all temptation of *resignation*. Pope Francis described it like this:

³⁷⁶ José Saramago said: “Human beings have become monsters of indifference.” And J. Bestard commented: “We get used to everything and become hard and insensitive. Nothing amazes or frightens us. We have lost the sense of admiration and compassion. The most spectacular advance of science and technology does not tell us anything anymore, because the next day there will be a greater one. And the most terrible misfortune does not faze us because tomorrow we will hear of a more terrible one during breakfast. When this happens the red alarm lights should go off and make us have to ask ourselves: What kind of man and society are we building? What project of man and society do we want for the future?” J. Bestard, *Diez valores éticos*, PPC, Madrid 2004, pp. 12-13, translator's version.

“And what are you going to do about it? Life is like that.” A resignation which paralyzes us and prevents us not only from walking, but also from making the journey; a resignation which not only terrifies us, but which also entrenches us in our ‘sacristies’ and false securities; a resignation which not only prevents us from proclaiming, but also inhibits our giving praise and takes away the joy, the joy of giving praise. A resignation which not only hinders our looking to the future, but also stifles our desire to take risks and to change.³⁷⁷

Among us members of a missionary community, whoever lets himself be trapped by the obvious, has a dormant spiritual tension and is unable to foster pastoral creativity. He endures community life, in which he finds his refuge, his pension, his place of passage, his space of well-being, but he does not participate or cooperate, and the shared mission seems to him an illusory projection. Conversations are trivialized, full of common clichés and places, or even full of criticism that is not fraternal. The final questions and, of course, the demands of the Gospel are always relegated.

In a community climate like this, what happens to the Word of God that we are to proclaim after meditating on it, praying it and personalizing it? How can we heal the sick, give hope to those who live without meaning, we who are in a crisis of faith and hope and spiritually sick? How can we celebrate the sacraments of God’s covenant with the world, if we allow ourselves to be carried away by ritualism, routine and lack of mysticism, making religious acts merely repetitive and alienating?

3.2. *Fragile Belonging*

Another point that makes community life weak and complicates the service of the superior is the multiplication and inconsistency of belonging. The Chapter Statement echoes this theme in various paragraphs. It usually refers to congregational belonging, but that is rooted, cultivated, strengthened or weakened and dies in the local community. Sociologically we are in an age of an impoverished and insecure sense of belonging. Without realizing it, a culture of dissolution of human ties is imposed on us, annulling the feeling of stable bonds. The fabric of our relationships no longer demands firm, strong and lasting connections. The exaltation of freedom surpasses the inherent family and religious ties and we have fallen into the slavery of immediate enjoyment. It happens within the Church and, therefore, it speaks about the criteria of ecclesiality and of belonging to Congregations and Movements.³⁷⁸

The General Chapter did not lose sight of the fact that a good number of Claretian communities are multicultural. In these communities, other difficulties are more concentrated. In addition to the hostility of the environment toward lasting belonging, they suffer the tensions between particularity and universality, between the local and the global, and this includes at the social, ecclesial and congregational level. They feel urged to harmonize their sense of belonging to their cultural origins and to the culture where they develop their life and ministry, without forgetting the attention demanded by the relationships with their family, with other congregations, with their fellow countrymen, with the people from their work group or from other affinities, etc. The identity of each of the members is multidimensional and is not reducible to one or the other of the indicated factors. Within the complexity of belonging, we can observe the continuous dynamics of influences, implications and reciprocations.

It is sad to see the departure of those who abandon Claretian missionary life to go to live the ministry as a diocesan priest. What is happening to us with regard to this point, not only to us, but to all religious institutes? What value is given to religious life? Or to this religious life?

The problem is deeper, as it appears in MFL, 11: “The number of those who abandon the Congregation, or do not join it after showing an initial interest, *challenges us to be better witnesses to the experience*

³⁷⁷ Address of Pope Francis in Morelia, February 16, 2016.

³⁷⁸ Cf. ChL 30; PI 93; FLC 62 and 65.

of God in our lives and to deepen our sense of belonging to the Congregation, caring for the times and ways we deepen our experience of faith and the sending forth that we share.”

Indeed, today it is not enough to affirm one’s identity from the perspective of *simplification*, nor from the *spirited defense of the prestige* of institutions, nor from the old tradition of “love for the institute.” We cannot dream about that vision of identity as a firm and stable unity, favored by reasoning that is not based on history. All this in the end disappoints and impoverishes the person, the community and, ultimately, the Church. It is not the case of suppressing belonging, but rather of articulating it, ordering it and recreating it according to that fundamental nucleus that allows for establishing harmony, meaning and inner satisfaction. I believe that the Chapter has been able to place itself, from a Claretian charismatic perspective, at the wellspring where belonging is recreated, where adherence, which is the *experience of the Spirit*, is refined.

3.3. The Greatest Crisis Today Is not one of Purpose, but of Foundation

The *sociocultural phenomenon of secularization* is taking its toll. The passion of love for Christ and the Kingdom, inherent in the vocational spirituality, has been left without that vitality and strength that could be expected. There has been resistance to the dynamism of conversion and sometimes the conciliar indication that it was necessary to cultivate above all, the spiritual life was not taken seriously (cf. PC 2c and 6). What else do so many calls mean to cultivate spirituality in following Jesus? What does so much outcry mean in favor of what is essential in our lives? Perhaps we have not always remedied *the fever of doing* nor *curbed activism*. We have often thought about our lives according to effectiveness and the services we provide; we have valued renewal by external changes, the transformation of institutions, including the constitutional texts; and we have left little room for divine initiative, for gratuitousness, for contemplation and for cultivating friendship with Jesus in prayer, letting ourselves be loved by Him.

3.4. The Saturated “I” and the Intolerance of Mediations

We have not yet achieved the balance between the person and the community. The community is magnified to the detriment of the individual or the individual is highlighted, making a caricature of the religious community.

Thus, on the one hand, there is the progressive *loss of the sense of the person* caused by multiple factors that lead to an identity crisis, the deterioration of relationships, losing one’s roots, etc., which impoverishes community life. On the other hand, the analyzes and projections about a more humanitarian community life based on the understanding of the person, a relational subject, which multiplies bonds and empowers communication, calls for greater consistency in community life. There is the entire Jewish-Christian anthropology or of Christian inspiration and the reflection of other authors that make us rethink the values of the person beyond narcissism, individualism and consumerism. The category “encounter” is a constant reference point to define the human being as an *open and syntactic reality, intersubjective and dialogical*.

Postmodernity has made subjectivity and liquid coexistence fashionable. I emphasize this aspect that comes as a result of what was said above. A few years ago, the community, the common good, was the center; now, the center is the individual. But this topic is nothing new, because the Holy Fathers called egocentrism the “mother of all sins.” Putting the “I” in the center and inflating it by worshiping the body, emotions and feelings, runs the risk of separating communities or basing them on affinities, affections and emotions.³⁷⁹ Today some candidates come to religious life who do not protest, but then they do

³⁷⁹ The CICLSAL document, with due restrictions, denounced how “individualism has spread, with greater or lesser intensity depending on the regions of the world, and in various forms: the need to take centre stage; an exaggerated insistence on personal well-being, whether physical, psychological or professional; a preference for individual work or for prestigious

whatever suits them or say that they are acting according to their conscience. Sometimes, in these cases, the motivations are unreliable. Because of the lifestyle they have started in childhood, they do not need the other as a complement in life, in real coexistence. Virtual relationships are enough for them. But not all candidates are like that. In any case, it is necessary to examine carefully the attitude with which they embrace consecrated life.

In these years at the beginning of the millennium, the process of globalization has become especially prominent, with a particular impact on community life. Relationships have multiplied rapidly. There are no boundaries of spaces or times. Access to everything and everyone is immediate, either through radio, television, the Internet or by mobile phone. It is so easy to send instant messages, to talk, and to see each other while talking! There are so many offers of possibilities to leave our tranquility or our work and neglect fraternal life. We suffer an authentic invasion that produces saturation, overindulgence, disorientation.

3.5. Neo-Gnosticism and the Spirit of Prometheus, Sisyphus and Narcissus

With the word *neo-Gnosticism* I am referring to the error of believing that, because we pronounce new words, we are actually making their content a reality. It is true that novelty in language is indicative of novelty of content. One who lives as if the cultural and technical changes did not exist is the one most puzzled by the use of new terms that express new concerns and new trends. Sometimes we suffer a certain fascination in the face of new words that rub off on us from the sociological or psychological culture like labels that solve problems without discerning the importance that their use had. We do not give weight to the words we speak because we do not get involved in what we say and then we get tired of them quickly.

We affirm that in the course of our consecrated life the principal agent is the Spirit. But at the same time, we experience who knows how many infections of other spirits, for example of Prometheus who unleashes the progress of humanity by its own effort; Sisyphus, determined to imagine man being happy; or Narcissus, who, in love with himself, has no eyes to see outside of himself. From unconsciousness, drugged by the myth of unfettered freedom, have we not fallen for the mirage of self-realization? What real space have we given to gratuitousness and to knowing that we are loved in prayer? Isn't almost everything in our lives calculated and programmed without leaving space for the surprises of the Spirit? Why are we so wrapped up in our image, in appearances, in external recognition?

4. SHORTCOMINGS, DEFICIENCIES AND RESISTANCES OF THE SUPERIOR IN HIS LEADERSHIP

4.1. Inner Insensitivity

Let us begin by examining our sensitivity to the poverty that exists in our world: Hunger, thirst, injustice, violation of rights, and violation of people's dignity, as well as a lack of health care, education and people to proclaim the Gospel.

Without social, cultural and religious sensitivity, it is difficult to show the charismatic face of one's vocation and to reach the hearts of those who suffer. In recent years I have heard, often from people from different institutes, that a type of superior from the past has reappeared: the superior/leader that is a businessman, a pragmatist, calculating, an organizer, efficient, controlling. They come from those groups that lost their memory and in which only the present moment counts. They put in parentheses freedom and the spread of freedom for the sake of the growth of the person and his attention to the

and 'signed' work; the absolute priority of one's personal aspirations and one's own individual path, regardless of others and with no reference to the community" (FLC 39).

mission. Therefore, they give priority to works over people; to economic results over the spiritual and human situation of communities; to organization, to completing projects and programs, over the theological life of the community; to prestige over quiet evangelical service. They give the impression that they have not traveled the path marked by Jesus in his service to the glory of the Father, who fights against the anti-Kingdom powers and lives the Beatitudes he proclaims.

This is seen in the way the superior *uses his time*. It is important to examine how he dedicates his time, his willingness to listen to others, to care for people – according to their age and health –, to pray and to prepare. While one is superior, the greatest privilege he has is that he is able to organize his time. Therefore, the thorn that hurts, when leaving office, is that of not being the owner of the agenda anymore.

4.2. *Running Away from Complexity*

Consecrated life is complex. To understand it and live it you have to have exceptional maturity of mind and heart, which are not common. There are many anthropological, social, ecclesial and institutional implications that shape its identity and mission. When this complexity, for any reason, is not absorbed, the normal reaction is to do without, simplify, retreat, run away. Fr. Congar said that *in the post-conciliar period there have been terrible simplifications* and Fr. Rahner spoke of the *heresy of forgetting*.

One way to have escaped complexity is to have closed one's eyes to reality itself, both inside and outside of the Institutes. We have not faced people's immaturity, progressive individualism, the detachment from institutions, the withdrawal from the riskiest commitments; and the culture of well-being, the relativism of weak thought, the insensitivity to poverty, injustice and disbelief that are advancing everywhere are rubbing off on us. We are afraid of complex works and serious commitments. To justify running away from complexity, a false freedom and inauthentic simplicity are exalted which has borne fruit in unilateralism and a lack of commitment. Others have evaded complexity through the fast track of hasty decisions, authoritarianism, adventures without proper consideration and without the necessary spiritual help.

In the escape of complexity, the process of globalization has had a strong influence.

In such a complex situation, the superior is tempted to flee by running forward or to resign secretly. He doesn't know where to start. He does not face the problems. He is silent and does not correct, or easily turns to the higher superior to solve the situation. He sometimes takes refuge in the Council. Complexity can only be faced by giving importance to what is essential: adherence to Jesus Christ, to the Church, to the spirit of the Congregation, to the mission inherent in the vocation. With solidity and understanding at the same time. But those who do not exercise the pedagogy of insistence on what is essential, have to ask themselves what does it do?

4.3. *Inhibition in the Exercise of Prophecy*

The exercise of prophecy is not optional in consecrated life. The entire Church is prophetic, but consecrated life plays its special role in the people of God, as VC recognized with some emphasis³⁸⁰ and as Pope Francis has in these years.³⁸¹ The superior has a mission of memory and prophecy that makes

³⁸⁰VC in no. 84 describes the prophetic character of consecrated life.

³⁸¹ The Pope gives importance to prophecy of men and women religious: "I am counting on you 'to wake up the world', since the distinctive sign of consecrated life is prophecy. As I told the Superiors General, 'Radical evangelical living is not only for religious: it is demanded of everyone. But religious follow the Lord in a special way, in a prophetic way.' This is the priority that is needed right now: 'to be prophets who witness to how Jesus lived on this earth... a religious must never abandon prophecy'" (*Apostolic Letter to all Consecrated People on the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life*, no. 2, November 29, 2014). In his address to the participants in the Jubilee at the End of the Year of Consecrated Life, he said, extemporaneously: "Prophecy is telling people that there is a path to happiness and grandeur, a path that fills you with joy, which is precisely the path to Jesus. It is the path to be close to Jesus. Prophecy is a gift, it is a charism and it must be asked of the Holy Spirit: that I may know that word, in the right moment; that I may do that thing in the right moment; that my entire life may be a prophecy. Men and

his brothers know where they come from and where they are going. Prophecy sustains and encourages the community to “dream” together with open eyes in a world that is inhumane and insensitive to suffering. Prophecy is a bearer of compassion and mercy.

Another form of inhibition in the face of prophecy has been accommodating apostolic institutions. How many times have we religious been accused of becoming institutionalized without revealing the point of our evangelical radicalism? When our institutions do not appreciate the spirituality of those who run them, we may well think that there has been a certain pact made with routine and irrelevance.

4.4. *Resistance to Fraternal Correction*

This resistance is one of the most common deficiencies in superiors. Sometimes it is inscribed in another broader phenomenon which is the abdication of the exercise of authority.

Whichever the case may be, the truth is that in the governance of consecrated life, which is personal, each one has to assume the responsibilities that correspond to him at his level. No one can honorably close their eyes or look away to avoid conflict.

The document SAO refers twice to fraternal correction, which is a help that is provided for in all religious institutes. The atmosphere of faith, dialogue and mutual trust makes it possible for evangelical or fraternal correction to cooperate with personal growth. Someone, before correcting, should stand before the Crucifix and say: “Speak to them first, Lord.”

5. BEING EMPOWERED FOR THE SERVICE OF ANIMATION

The superior is appointed and can act legitimately. But he verifies or gives credibility to his governance when every day can be welcomed and recognized. The superior must be continuously empowered for the service of animation. It is not a matter of good intentions. He must prepare, be informed, study, and put all the best of himself in the service that has been entrusted to him. The exercise of authority is enveloped in the gifts of wisdom and prudence, but it calls for openness, recognition of gifts and help to participate. Therefore, he must cultivate humility and freedom from all desire for prestige and arrogance.

At the center of this concern for empowerment is fidelity in following Jesus, the Son who was obedient to the Father, who did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life. The superior is enabled by cultivating his filiation, which is proper to those who feel loved and willing to give even their life for love.

It is necessary to recognize that the task of being a guide for others is not easy, especially when the sense of personal autonomy is excessive or conflictive and competitive in its relations with others. Therefore, it is necessary on everyone’s part to sharpen his or her ability to see the encounters of this task in faith, in order that he or she might be inspired to have the attitude of Jesus the Servant who washes the feet of his apostles so that they might have a part in his life and in his love (cf. Jn 13:1-17).³⁸²

The three environments in which a superior should develop himself are: *the chapel* where he should pray and reaffirm that everything does not depend on him; *the workplaces*, where he can sense the cry of pain of all the kinds of people that he cares for and where his brothers are found; and *the office* where he should think, read and plan. These are three suitable places to prepare his constant reconciliation with his responsibility, with different people, with difficult people and with the people wounded by sin. In

women prophets. This is very important. ‘Let’s do what everyone else does...’ No. Prophecy is saying that there is something truer, more beautiful, greater, of greater good to which we are all called” (Address, February 1, 2016). In the document *Identity and Mission of the Religious Brother in the Church* (2015), CICLSAL dedicated no. 37 to “Prophets for Our Time.”

³⁸² SAO 12.

addition to the theoretical preparation, he must cultivate the interiorization of the charismatic values, to reserve time for calm prayer, the purification of intentions, to expand his heart and to be trained for patient and merciful listening. It is true that we are in times of witnesses, rather than of teachers. But teachers are also needed. It is important for the superior to learn not to settle for what he has, but rather to be inclined towards innovation; to look up and put out his antennas to discover where we are going and what new possibilities we have.

There is another dimension in governance that is experienced in silence: *suffering*. Suffering is something inherent to governance. Keeping in one's heart the observed limitations, the false interpretations, the slander ... this makes one suffer. (cf. 2 Cor 4:7-12).

To conclude this part, I suggest these indications:

- 1) Accept the office as a gift, as a grace, to give glory to the Trinity.
- 2) Ask the Lord for wisdom and thus become a friend of God and of your brothers (cf. Wisdom 7 and 11) to have the counsel and rely on your brothers.
- 3) Be aware of the service that is being asked of you in the life of the Congregation, looking to the brothers of the community and aware that it is part of the Province and the Congregation and maintain constant contact with the social and ecclesial reality.
- 4) Take charge of the situation of the community and have a realistic view of the state of the people, the missionary dynamic, the apostolic works and the economic situation.
- 5) Embrace each and every member of the community. Which means: love them dearly, pray for them, encourage them and accompany them.
- 6) Create a governance team with a council, maintain cordial relations with its members and always seek to add ideas, initiatives, and proposals.
- 7) Make a creative community plan,³⁸³ setting the objectives and priorities for the period for which you have been appointed, stressing that the laity share the mission. Give importance to lifelong formation.
- 8) Promote and care for personal relationships and fraternal correction.
- 9) Take constructive care of the information that comes in and that which is given.
- 10) Do not forget that the position is for a certain time.

Cardinal A. M. Larraona, being secretary of the Sacred Congregation for Religious, repeated with some frequency the four key words of his plan for governance:

- 1) *Do.* 2) *Let others do.* 3) *Give something to do.* 4) *Make others do.*

6. WHAT SHOULD THE SUPERIOR EMPHASIZE IN HIS SERVICE OF ANIMATION?

There are many qualities that should adorn the superior, as animator of the community. A good summary is found in nos. 13, 14, 20 and 25 of SAO.³⁸⁴ He may be asked to be cautious: to maintain a

³⁸³ Planning is the best way to face the future, to work in an orderly fashion and to overcome dispersion and improvisation.

³⁸⁴ A new superior may find it helpful to read A. Grün, *Orientar personas, despertar vida*, Verbo Divino, Estella 2002. In the volume *Tiempos de comunión y de Misión*, Publicaciones Claretianas, Madrid 2008, p. 606, I have included "*Diez indicios de sabiduría en el gobierno religioso*".

balance between thinking and doing. Have vision, but do not crave power. One of the best compliments for a superior is to say that he has common sense.

The service of animation of the Claretian superior covers the entire project of missionary life that reflects the *Constitutions* and the orientations of the Congregation and the Province. In light of the last Chapter Declarations (MFL and MS), I understand that his concern should focus on the great missionary priorities and emphasize the following points, which, as can be observed, try to overcome the challenges I have indicated and that affect our missionary life. It is not enough to have a peaceful community, but rather to make it available so that it can boldly proclaim Jesus Christ, the Lord.

Two fundamental instruments in the service of animation of the superior are the *Autobiography* and the *Constitutions*. They are two reference points from which the benefits that he can offer the community receive value. To evoke the Founder is to evoke the presence of the *father* of the community, not only the teacher, the model, and the intercessor. Claret guarantees our entire life project. Not only does he start the journey, but he pushes us with his charismatic strength and his prophetic vision. The *Constitutions*, written in the first-person plural, help us to look forward together and to commit ourselves at every moment.

6.1. *Giving Rise to Gratitude*

The Chapter Declaration expresses, at different times, attitudes of gratitude. This is a positive sign of one's spiritual and apostolic well-being. The first point on which the superior's interest should focus is to foster moments when the community shows recognition and gratitude for being gathered in the name of the Lord and working to build the Kingdom. This is to direct it toward its source and its end, toward worship and praise. The community deepens its roots in the Trinitarian Mystery and, from this foundation, it can reaffirm what it is and for what reason it is in the Church and in society.

In the Claretian community Mary, the graceful and grateful woman, is always present. She is the ark of the new covenant. She is the complete model of how to feel loved and how to give all of her life for her Son and his saving mission. From the beginning of her vocation-mission, she sang the Magnificat.

Appreciation or gratitude gives density and depth to our consecrated life. It is the virtue that leads us to become aware of the gifts we receive and the generosity of the one who so abundantly gives them to us. It reveals our way of corresponding to them and is an incentive to take advantage of them, develop them and put them at the service of others. Gratitude builds the community upon rock. Gratitude breaks down every system of self-sufficient thought, every attempt at egocentrism, every desire for manipulation, and every sign of utilitarianism or pragmatism.

A grateful community is a healthy, mature, well-disposed community. It is a missionary community. It is easy to imagine how the life of a community can change when its members live according to the gratitude of having received brothers of different conditions, but coinciding in the same life project.³⁸⁵ All are recognized in their gift and ministry: the wisdom of the elderly, the cross of the sick, the joy of the young, the religious consecration of the Brothers, the services of the priests. All pray and work for vocations.

A grateful community is hospitable and supportive. Their house is a place of encounter and going forth. It becomes a home: a place of interiority and protection, of welcome and expansion; it combines silence and conversation, plans and achievements. The celebration of the Eucharist in community and retreat days are opportunities to rekindle the fire, to renew the covenant and for the renewal of missionary commitment.

³⁸⁵ The General Chapter rightly recommends: "We will give thanks for the gift of community, as the place where we become brothers (cf. FLC 11) and we will encourage those virtues and attitudes that help us to grow in communion: humility, sincerity, fraternal correction, reconciliation, mutual respect, concern and interest in each other" (MFL 56).

The superior is asked to “widen the tent” and make his community a missionary parable, that is, a story of how gratitude for the gift received – our charism – makes it a benchmark for praise and to increase the number of those who give thanks (2 Cor 4:15).

6.2. Encouraging Listening and Seeking

“We want to welcome and listen to these calls from God which we recognise in the situation of the world, the Church and the Congregation. (...) We feel, then, the call to rediscover the significance of our missionary vocation in a new global, ecclesial and congregational framework” (MFL 28). “If we listen anew to the call of God and allow him to guide our interior processes, we will live our vocation with renewed meaning and joy” (MFL 29).

What inner processes can we refer to? Probably one of the needs most felt by those who want to live their identity, their community connection and their missionary availability to the fullest is to be free. We must *free our conscience* from all ties, *affirm deep convictions* and *push for bold commitments*. It is, therefore, the processes of liberation, affirmation and commitment that we must promote at the moment.

The document on the Service of Authority and Obedience has underlined two basic attitudes, which are human and religious: *To seek* and *to listen*.³⁸⁶ Seek/seeks/seeking is used 31 times and listen/listening is used 37 times. The insistence on *seeking* and *listening* in this document, addresses what has been indicated above about routine, unconsciousness, apathy and disappointment. As we develop the topic of seeking, we realize that our existence is impoverished and stagnant every time it closes in on itself. Seeking makes us go out of ourselves toward the other, toward the Absolute, and makes us move within the me-you relationship in which our life is implanted and develops.

Although the world we live in shows many negative notes in culture, religion, politics and economics, we know that God also loves it. God remains the Lord of history and reveals himself in his goodness and mercy in many ways. It is therefore necessary *to promote seeking* and *to sharpen listening*. Seeking and listening are two powerful ways to break through religious insensitivity, a meaningless life, the lack of divine roots. The deepest crises that we suffer are not of purpose, because we know well where we must go; nor of what means to use, because we have them in abundance. Our crisis, the crisis that often paralyzes us, is our *foundation*. Therefore, it is appropriate to bring to the foreground the ultimate questions about our Claretians existence, about our coexistence and about our collaboration in missionary service. Who are you looking for? What God are we looking for? What does it mean for you to be Claretian? Let us not forget that “the aim of our Congregation is to *seek* in all things the glory of God” (CC 2).

Seeking and desiring to know the will of God for one’s life and what we have to do to obtain the Kingdom, in order to cooperate so that everything may be reconciled in Christ to the glory of God the Father, is the essence of our life. The one who seeks is waiting, listening, attentive to the signs of the presence of God who reveals himself and then he welcomes, in obedience, the plan of God’s will.

We are all seekers; we are all listeners and servants. Only the one who listens well serves and does so as a son, as a disciple, as a brother. The time we spend talking is not as important as the time we spend listening. The appropriate word, if it has to come, comes after a long time of listening. Listening boils things down to what is essential. Those who receive the mission of exercising authority must redouble their attention, their openness, their willingness to listen. Whoever listens frees the other from his prison

³⁸⁶ It begins with these words: “*Faciem tuam, Domine, requiram: your face, O Lord, I seek* (Ps 27:8). A pilgrim seeking the meaning of life, enwrapped in the great mystery that surrounds him, the human person, even if unconsciously, does, in fact, seek the face of the Lord. ‘Your ways, O Lord, make known to me, teach me your paths’ (Ps 25:4): no one can ever take away from the heart of the human person the search for him of whom the Bible says ‘He is all’ (Sir 43:27) and for the ways of reaching him” (SAO 1).

and helps him to seek God.³⁸⁷ D. Bonhoeffer wrote about this point saying: “The first service that one owes to others in the fellowship consists in listening to them. Just as love to God begins with listening to His Word, so the beginning of love for the brethren is learning to listen to them. It is God’s love for us that He not only gives us His Word but also lends us His ear. So it is His work that we do for our brother when we learn to listen to him.”³⁸⁸ The SAO instruction warns: “Whoever presides must remember that the one who does not listen to his brother or sister does not know how to listen to God either, that an attentive listening allows one to better coordinate the energy and gifts that the Spirit gives to the community and also, when making decisions, to keep in mind the limits and the difficulties of some members. Time spent in listening is never time wasted, and listening can often prevent crises and difficult times both on the individual and community levels.”³⁸⁹

6.3. “Stir into flame the gift of God that you have”

The experience of God’s call to the prophets, of the annunciation to Mary and of Jesus’ calls to his disciples are sublime experiences in their lives. They were unmistakable and decisive encounters. Every vocation has some or a lot of this relying on very different mediations. In one way or another, the Spirit has made us feel: “this is what I am supposed to be” and we have lived according to this conviction. Perhaps we are in the moment to remember it again and rekindle it.³⁹⁰

The festive character in which a community lives comes from, above all, by the moods of the people who make it up and live joyfully.

I have already commented on the things we experience in ourselves and around us that put a damper on us. Hence, the Chapter encourages “to give special attention to our experience of God and to the mystical dimension of our missionary vocation” (MFL 54). It can also be said to us, despite the many things we do and how much we work, the fatigue we endure and the tests we endure: “*Yet I hold this against you: you have lost the love you had at first*” (Rev 2:1-4). As well as the words addressed to the churches of Laodicea (Rev 3:14-22) and Sardis (Rev 3:1-6).

The words of St. Paul to Timothy:

Do not neglect the gift you have, which was conferred on you through the prophetic word with the imposition of hands of the presbyterate. Be diligent in these matters, be absorbed in them, so that your progress may be evident to everyone. Attend to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in both tasks, for by doing so you will save both yourself and those who listen to you” (1 Tm 4:14-16).

And those of the second letter in which he says: “stir into flame the gift of God that you have... For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice but rather of power and love and self-control” (2 Tim 1:6-7).

The Founder’s comment on this Pauline text:

³⁸⁷John Paul II indicated “A spirituality of communion also means an ability to think of our brothers and sisters in faith within the profound unity of the Mystical Body, and therefore as ‘those who are a part of me.’ This makes us able to share their joys and sufferings, to sense their desires and attend to their needs, to offer them deep and genuine friendship” (NMI 43).

³⁸⁸ D. Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, New York, Harper & Row Publishers, 1954, p. 97.

³⁸⁹ SAO, 20, a.

³⁹⁰ “The second function attributed to the Spirit, the Paraclete, is to *remember* (or “look back on”). The concept is understood in an active way: to call something to mind, to make something present, to remember it. The object of this remembering is described exactly: ‘all that I have told you.’ The community must remember the words of Jesus. The concept of *remembering* plays an important role in the fourth gospel. *Remembering*, as encouraged by the Spirit, is not a simple memorization of the past, but rather making it present along with a certain explanation. Thus, *remembering* is not simply equivalent to a literal repetition of what Jesus has said, but rather it is the living process of applying it to current reality and a new opening of history to Jesus... It is a *creative memory*”. J. Blank, *El evangelio según san Juan*, Herder, Barcelona 1979, II, t. 4, p. 124, translator’s version. For the English version see *The Gospel According to St. John*, Volume II, Crossroad Publishing Company: 1981.

“...the fire of grace...over time, gets covered with ashes caused by the coldness of the atmosphere of the world which surrounds us, by our lukewarmness, by laziness in work, the fear of persecutions and the inconsistency of our resolutions; such ashes have the fire of charity covered up as if dead; what is needed then is to rake it, fan it, and add fuel to make it return to life and make it flame. For this we need to fan it and fuel it with prayer, meditation, spiritual reading, joy, vigilance of spirit, study and a major effort toward the virtues and we have to work singularly, watch over and obtain with greater diligence and fervour the salvation of the souls of people who have been entrusted to us. (*El colegio instruido*, Librería Religiosa, Barcelona 1861, p. 7)³⁹¹

It is an invitation to reach the *burning embers of the Spirit*. Which means *moving from meditation to contemplation*. The devil is not afraid of long prayers or long hours spent in Church; however, he does everything possible to keep it from producing *contemplative tension* and to keep us in mere human reflection. He does not want us to contemplate Christ giving his life on the Cross or in the Eucharist, nor to see Him in the elderly, in the sick and in the poor. In fact, it is precisely in this contemplation that the missionary manages to grasp his authenticity and turn it into an incentive for his commitment.

When we encounter people who are not centered, who are disillusioned, or who feel a strong emptiness inside, first of all, we have to pray. Pray a lot. Since the Claretian vocation is a gift from God, only the Spirit can recover the initial enthusiasm. The Claretian superior, in his relationship with people, exercises an *amoris officium*. The path of love is the most certain for help. No one resists a mature, understanding and encouraging love, even if we do not like the person, even if they do not understand us, even if they criticize us and do not trust us. Praying, trusting and knowing how to hope helps people change in times of particular crisis and fits difficult situations. It is advisable to make vocational biblical texts resound in the community to evoke the seduction that we once experienced.

6.4. *Intensifying the Theological Life and the Sense of Belonging*

It is true that many Claretians have given and are giving witness that this Claretian vocation fills them with happiness and meaning all their lives, but there is no shortage of those who live without meaning, in a crisis of faith, of hope and spiritually sick. I seriously affirm that our entire missionary faith is rooted in faith and oriented to seek and fulfill the will of God. Hence the great interest of the Founder that the missionaries, beginning already in the novitiate, live by faith (Rom 1:17).³⁹²

The XXIV General Chapter makes this proposal: “We will give special attention to the accompaniment of people’s faith journey relying on the Word of God through spiritual exercises and other initiatives. We will see to it that their animation is done from the perspective of the community, as a team where possible, and make use of our spirituality centres” (MFL 59.3).

The relationship between faith and belonging is close. *Believing* and *belonging* are two dynamics that are inclusive in the search for and in the realization of a project of life that is always open to the will of God and to missionary urgencies. They break the dichotomy between our personal vocation and fraternal service. They are like the soil in which the multitude of relationships that interweave our apostolic life in the Church and in society are born, grow, and bear fruit and in which they are rooted.

Believing is more than just understanding. The *rational understanding* of Claretian life does not get to the heart of the inner renewal of the person and of the communities. Faith, which is the gift of the Spirit and therefore surpasses the affirmation of doctrines and the praxis of rites; enters and involves us in the Mystery of the Incarnate Word and of his Church, in the Claretian charism. Without beliefs there are no convictions and without convictions we stay on the edges, not getting to the heart of the evangelical

³⁹¹ This text appears in MFL, in the introduction of the third part dedicated to priorities. Before no. 51.

³⁹² Cf. CC 62.

project we have embraced. Convictions must be reached because on them depends the value of the word and the value of the encounter with God, with our brothers, with the poor, with the excluded. Beliefs launch us beyond our small inner world, toward that to which we all agree and we all feel intertwined by a love that invades us and, by confessing it, we proclaim universal brotherhood.

We need to create conditions in our communities for “*Confessio Trinitatis*”, to offer “*signum fraternitatis*” and to exercise “*servitium caritatis*” (cf. VC). According to faith, the person is seen as an image of the Trinity, as a member of the People of the Covenant; as a member of the Body of Christ and as a branch united to the vine; as a brother in a universal missionary community. The gift of baptism invites us to rekindle our condition as a son of God and brother of all men. St. Paul continues to remind us that the Father “chose us in [Christ], before the foundation of the world, to be holy and without blemish before him. In love he destined us for adoption to himself through Jesus Christ, in accord with the favor of his will” (Eph 1:4-5). These and other elements help us see belonging as a *choice* and a *commitment*.

The painstaking *revitalization of belonging* is the fruit of the strength that the charism puts in each one of those who have been added to the congregational body, but it is also a silent and sacrificial task, because we must overcome many egoisms and pretensions that spring forth from our flesh and blood. The fraternity inaugurated by Christ stems from his cross and from the gift of his Spirit and is strengthened by living the Paschal Mystery. Knowing that belonging is not accomplished by a simple juridical act, but rather is a theological and creative bond, we must expect to take up our cross daily. Taking up our cross purifies and refines belonging. In other words, belonging is rooted, intertwined, ordered and consolidated in individuals and communities.

The journey of the two disciples on their way to Emmaus (Lk 24:13-35) is emblematic for our missionary life: letting ourselves be reached, listening to the Word of Jesus, sharing the bread and returning to the community from which we have departed, with the joy of having seen the Lord.

If for us the title *Missionary Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary* is programmatic, we must live it with the awareness that Mary is Disciple and Missionary, is the Mother of the Congregation. She is blessed because she has believed, because she has kept the word and fulfilled it. She is the model of theological life, reflected in the Magnificat, and Mother who makes us brothers in her Son. Her maternal care opens us to the mystery of faith, purifies us from all selfishness and brings us together in her Congregation. The superior, looking to Mary, entrusts his brothers to her care.

6.5. *Fostering Moving from “I” to “We”*

Our resistance to move from ‘I’ to ‘we’ has a very negative effect for our options in service to the local church and the shared mission. We feel, then, a strong call to pass from the old man, who tends to close in on himself and on his belongings, to the new man who gives himself to the brothers and the things of the Kingdom (cf. FLC 21, 39) (MFL 17 and see MS 46-47).

Indeed, only through a process of conversion to the very heart of our Claretian missionary vocation can we move from “I” to “we”. Our mission, like the mission of the Church, is community. It is missionary communion. Therefore, it is the opposite of considering the community like a military company, an assembly of businessmen, or customers of a hotel. It is not even a body of specialists to evangelize. It is a community of disciples of Jesus; it is an apostolic community. In it, the person matures and grows in human and apostolic terms through interpersonal relationships, mutual recognition, open dialogue and co-responsibility in all areas of life: living together, spirituality, ongoing formation, the apostolate and, in particular, in the economy. Without economic transparency and solidarity, there is no way to achieve a mature community.

Making our language, our prayer, and all our work communitarian helps to correct all kinds of individualism and self-centeredness.

The principles that rule our governance (information, dialogue, participation, subsidiarity and co-responsibility) become criteria for growth in fraternal and apostolic life. It is true that, in order for them

to be effective, the superior has to create an environment of trust where it is possible to express one's own convictions and abilities, promote respect and share one's feelings and plans.

There is no shortage of isolated communities. They do speak in terms of "we", but they are closed in on themselves, with an unusual narcissism. Every community truly matures to the extent that it opens up to the Province and the Congregation, as well as in all areas.

6.6. *Dignifying the Use of Time*

A group of European intellectuals met a few years ago to reflect and interpret what has happened to the ideals that so many held in the events of 1968. And they did it with this motto: *He who does not know where he is going should not be surprised if he ends up elsewhere. He who does not know what gives meaning to his life, should not be surprised if his life is taken by the wind.*

Since our basic needs of housing, food, clothing, occupation, etc. are taken care of, we have the luxury of living without major concern for how we use our time. But how many of our brothers do we see are unsettled? They are so overwhelmed with what they have to do that they do not know what to do. They move in a noticeably scattered way and, consequently, they are uneasy. They may work a lot, but in a disorderly way. There is no shortage of those who even suffer from a certain anxiety due to nervousness and an overload of uncontrolled energy. Those who are scattered reveal this in their contradictions, in their frustrations and in their constant criticisms. They are not happy.

Speed, acceleration and nervousness go together. We complain that time escapes us, that we do not have time, that we are consumed by the passage of hours and days. And we see that we waste a lot of time. Or we spend it on trivial things.

What does the superior's service of animation have to do with this phenomenon? A lot. If he wants his brothers to be *faithful to the today of God* and to be *happy in their missionary vocation*, he must help them to order their time.

Jesus taught us to dignify time. He went about in this world doing good (cf. Acts 10:38). He did not use his time casually. He went so far as to say: "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Mt 15:22-24). He was aware of what he did or did not have to do. He knew that he had come to fulfill the Father's will, but he was, at the same time, flexible, for example, with the Canaanite woman (Mt 15:25-28). In addition, he had his priorities: the sick and the poor, preaching the Kingdom, praying and being with his disciples and friends.

Fr. Claret uses the simile of the compass as a key to always feel happy in our Christian condition. When you have the pointer fixed on Jesus, the needle can move closer or farther away, but it will always come full circle.³⁹³ And he had very harsh words for those who lived "in the dark, without a system of management to guide, encourage and rectify their actions."³⁹⁴ He therefore strongly recommended a rule of life.

To use time with dignity is to give importance to the Lord and to our brothers and sisters most in need. Those who are focused on their vocation find time for prayer, for ongoing formation, and for service to others.

³⁹³ "Each Christian should be like a compass, one leg of which is fixed firmly in the center, while the other travels about it, describing a perfect circle" (St. Anthony M. Claret, *The Temple and Palace of God our Lord*, in *Works of Saint Anthony Mary Claret*, Vol. III. *Selected Spiritual Writings*, Claretian Publications, 1991, p. 178). He later applied it to himself: "I will imagine that my soul and body are like the two legs of a compass, and that my heart, like one point, is fixed in Jesus, while the other point of the compass is describing the circle of my appointments and obligations quite perfectly, since the circle is the symbol of perfection on earth and of eternity in heaven" (*Resolutions from 1866*, no. 8. In ACW, p. 835).

³⁹⁴ St. Anthony M. Claret, *La verdadera sabiduría*, Barcelona, 1847. This quote is found in ACW, p. 733.

There has been much emphasis placed by the General Chapters on personal and community programming as means of personal and apostolic growth.³⁹⁵ The Chapter Statement returns to the subject: “We will encourage fidelity to the personal project, so that each missionary outlines his ongoing formation programme and revises it periodically. We will do this especially through the spiritual exercises and keeping in mind the need for this project to be in harmony with the community and province project” (MFL 55, 1). Several Provincial Chapters indicate the same.

I end with this suggestion from Enzo Bianchi’s reflection:

Time must neither be idolized nor despised; on the contrary, it must be ordered and lived with awareness and vigilance, at the service of man and his good. Unfortunately, a deficient education on the asceticism of time, suffered above all by the new generations, leads to a disorderly life in which no priority is perceived according to objective importance and urgency regarding the various activities and varied commitments that should be carried out. In this way it is no longer possible to grasp even the priorities of ministry, and all activities are consummated in a whirlwind that frustrates the life of human relationships and weakens the interior life. He who knows how to have ownership and to exercise self-control, knows how to safeguard himself.³⁹⁶



I conclude with five words that summarize quite well what is to be expected of the Claretian local superior: *attention*, *lucidity*, *passion*, *strength* and *mercy*. These five words are from the perspective of the gift of wisdom that only the Spirit can grant. He must be *attentive*, vigilant, to hear the calls of the living God who is present in this world, in his Church and in the Congregation. Always considering carefully those three reference points. He must be *lucid*, clairvoyant, to discern the challenges as opportunities of grace that people and their ministries have. He must live *passionately*, with ardent charity, to encourage and sustain missionary boldness. He must have *strength* to not fall into discouragement in the face of resistance and problems that are difficult to solve; to not resign himself or inhibit himself. And he must be *merciful*, always knowing himself to be an instrument of the Father’s merciful love.

³⁹⁵ Cf. CPR 63; SW 7, 1; IMP, 28, 1; TMHL 70, 3; 71, 1.

³⁹⁶ E. Bianchi, *A los presbíteros*, Sígueme, Salamanca 2005, p. 17, translator’s version.