

**CMF
XXI GENERAL CHAPTER**

**SERVANTS
OF THE WORD**

**Our missionary service
of the Word
in the «New Evangelization»**

ROME, 1991

Declaration of the XXI General Chapter of the Congregation of Missionaries, Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (Claretian Missionaries), celebrated in Rome from August 26 to September 22, 1991 (cf. Annales Congregatio- nis, vol. 60, 1991).

ABBREVIATIONS MOST FREQUENTLY USED

- Aut. = *Autobiography* of Saint Anthony Mary Claret.
CA = *Centesimus Annus*, Encyclical Letter of John Paul II (1991).
CC = *C.M.F. Constitutions* (1986).
CD = Decree *Christus Dominus*, Second Vatican Council (1985).
ChL = *Christifideles laici*, Postsynodal Apostolic Exhortation of John Paul II (1988).
CPR = *The Claretian in the Process of Congregational Renewal*, XX General Chapter C.M.F. (1985).
DC = *Declaration on our Charism*, XVII General Chapter (1967).
DetV = *Dominum et Vivificantem*, Encyclical Letter of John Paul II (1986).
Dir = *C.M.F. Directory* (1987).
EC = *Epistolario Claretiano* (3 vol.), ed. José M. Gil, C.M.F. (1970-1987).

- EN = *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Apostolic Exhortation of Paul VI (1975).
- LG = Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, Second Vatican Council (1964).
- MCT = *The Mission of the Claretian Today*, XIX General Chapter C.M.F. (1979).
- MD = *Mulieris dignitatem*, Apostolic Letter of John Paul II (1988).
- MR = *Mutuae Relationes* (Pastoral Criteria), Congregations of Bishops and Religious (1978).
- P = *Document of Puebla* (1979).
- RM = *Redemptoris Mater*, Encyclical Letter of John Paul II (1987).
- RMi = *Redemptoris missio*, Encyclical Letter of John Paul II (1990).
- SH = *Declaration on the Spiritual Heritage of the Congregation*, XVII General Chapter C.M.F. (1967).
- SRS = *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, Encyclical Letter of John Paul II (1988).

INTRODUCTION

The XXI General Chapter of our Congregation, in keeping with the objectives assigned for it in the Constitutions (cf. n. 155), has chosen to bring together and complete the reflection that has been going on for more than a year in local communities, major organisms and conferences concerning our missionary service of the Word in the New Evangelization.

Since we Claretians have been called charismatically to proclaim the Good News, we have felt especially challenged by the urgent need of a New Evangelization, pointed out by John Paul II and translated into a call issued to the Church of Jesus. In dynamic fidelity to the Spirit and relying on the experience of postconciliar renewal, we have

brought our life and mission face to face with the demands of this call in the setting of our times.

The Chapter, in a fraternal gesture, is now handing back to the Congregation its own discernment and proposals. By means of motivations and concrete lines of action, it aims at awakening in all Claretians a new missionary vitality. The source of this vitality is, as it was for our Founder, the Word which is received in our heart, witnessed to in our own existence and transmitted to all human beings, mainly the poor and humble, through the manifold keys of human language. Jesus Himself is this living and lifegiving Word.

At the same time, by means of this Declaration, the Chapter is sending to all Claretians a message of communion in the diversity of areas and situations which they have to evangelize and a word of encouragement to them in their search for greater quality and fidelity in their service of the Gospel.

I.

THE CLARETIANS FACING THE «NEW EVANGELIZATION»

Discernment for Our Time

Challenged by Reality

Since the last General Chapter, the challenges to society, the Church and the Congregation that were detected at that time have become the burning issues of the day. Through them, the Spirit is now addressing and probing us, Missionary Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, once again calling us to personal, community and institutional conversion, and to a still greater fidelity to our missionary vocation.

1. Today's *world* holds out new hopes and offers new challenges to our evangelizing mission.

1.1. Although the traits currently shaping our world have not yet been etched out in final form, we can point out a few of them that question us in particular as Servants of the Word:

- The ever-keener awareness human persons have of their own dignity and inviolable rights: of their freedom and responsibility in the world.
- The growing conviction among peoples and ethnic minorities on all continents that they are agents of their own history and destiny.
- The new awareness of the meaning and defense of life.
- The new political and social map of Europe resulting from the changes in the East, which are going to affect not only that continent, but in some way all other parts of the world.
- The mutual relatedness and interdependence of nations, since none of them can be truly self-sufficient.
- The hunger that many feel for authentic values and for a deeper spirituality.
- The struggle for freedom and democracy.
- A growing sensitivity to cultural and religious pluralism.
- An evermore widespread concern for the ecological welfare of the planet.

1.2. Alongside these realities which open up new horizons of hope, we must also point to others that give rise to some genuinely grave concerns:

- The culture of death.
- The poverty and marginalization in which two thirds of humanity are living.
- The situation of injustice, oppression and the systematic violation of human rights which a great part of this same humanity is also suffering.
- The ever-widening gap between North and South.
- The exploitation of many peoples by more industrialized nations, together with the corruption and wastefulness of the governments of these same exploited peoples.
- Individualism, which is creating a wide and deep lack of solidarity between persons and peoples.
- The progressive dechristianization of many parts of the world which were, until recently, traditionally Christian.
- The growing divorce between belief and life, between culture and faith.
- Unbelief or superstition; inroads of sects and syncretism.
- Consumerism and the subordination of life to materialistic values.
- The loss of a sense of gratuitous giving and the resultant commercial spirit that often governs

human relationships and even religious expressions.

- The profound changes affecting the stability of the family.
- The distortion and even alienation of language which increasingly hampers true human conversation.
- The systematic manipulation of the mass media by the most influential powers.

We can trace these negative facts and situations to a common root in the selfish attitudes and systems of social coexistence and organization which lead many who are seduced «by the lure of power, wealth or lust» (cf. CC 46) to decidedly oppose the proclamation and implanting of the Kingdom and to strive to build a history that leaves aside the Word of God.

Often, even in the religious sphere, there are persons who consider themselves as the 'norm' of God's Word, rather than allowing themselves to be taught and led by that same Word.

2. The *Church*, too, has taken on some new traits. The Second Vatican Council continues to be most relevant and its driving impulse is irrepres-

ible. The Spirit is raising up dynamic forces that are at work in the most diverse ways in all milieux in the Church: new Christian communities and movements, new styles of life and spirituality, inculturated theologies, new forms of presence and committed accompaniment in the historic processes people are going through, etc. Of special relevance are the many new *martyrs of the Kingdom*, who are a clear sign of the Church's vitality.

The Church's Magisterium has striven to throw light on the new situation of the world by issuing some important documents: on *social issues* (SRS and CA); on the *mission* of the Church, the *laity* and *women* (RMi, ChL, MD); on the *Spirit* (D et V); and on *Mary* (RMa). It has made some especially significant gestures, such as the Encounter of Assisi, and some courageous declarations (in defense of human life and the dignity of the human person; against imbalances between peoples and against hunger in the world; against the proliferation of arms, against war and violence, etc.).

At the same time, individualisms and rivalries hinder the full maturation and consolidation of Christian communities. We still fall short of creat-

ing the communion of Christ's Body and have not managed to counteract the growth of unbelief and the inroads of sects. We experience daily that the Church's tendency to become more catholic and multicentered by incarnating itself in the reality and cultures of peoples is checked by a drive towards uniformity and centralization. We also frequently see it yielding to the temptation to turn in on itself and isolate itself from the world.

3. We *Claretians*, living in the world and keenly in tune with the Church, must ask ourselves how we are living this reality and how we are capturing in it the call of the Spirit, in order to transform it into Good News — new evangelization — from the standpoint of our *Missionary Service of the Word*.

3.1. The Spirit has given us a new awareness of our *spiritual heritage* (1967: SHI), a challenging project of *mission* (1979: MCT) and of *personal preparation* for it (1985: CPR), culminating in our new constitutional text.

The renewed *Constitutions*, definitively approved (1986), are our *evangelical project of life and mission*. Thus, they are a permanent source of inspi-

ration and an obligatory point of reference in order to guarantee and foster fidelity to our charismatic identity in the Church.

3.2. Nevertheless, we must humbly acknowledge that even during this time of grace we have had our share of resistance, failings, forgetfulness and lukewarmness.

We must face some gravely important situations and problems for our congregational life with greater clarity, hope and realism: issues affecting our system of *government* (tension between universal needs of the Congregation and local and regional priorities, revision of Major Organisms, etc.), our *missionary spirituality* (personal and community prayer, the quality of our lifestyle, etc.), our *community life* (interpersonal relationships, etc.), our *mission* (preferential options and recipients, revision of positions, greater collaboration with laypersons, insertion, availability, danger of activism, etc.), the identity of our *Missionary Brothers, Formation*, and other important points.

3.3. For us as Missionaries, a tremendous challenge lies in the fact that two thirds of humanity have still not heard of Jesus and of his Message.

Moreover, only a small percentage of Claretians are dedicated to the ministry of the *missio ad gentes*.

While we thank the Father for the undeserved gifts we have received from Him and entrust our failings to his mercy, we are spurred on by the new challenges that must awaken our missionary sense, our creativity and our joy at being able to collaborate in this hour of the world and of the Church, which is also our hour as an evangelizing community.

The «New Evangelization» as a Call of the Spirit

4. We must take up the «newness» offered us by the new reality of the world, the Church and the Congregation, and convert it into a challenge of the Spirit, prompting us to second the call of Pope John Paul II to the whole Church in our time, by eagerly undertaking, within our Claretian charism as Servants of the Word, the *New Evangelization*: new in its ardor, its methods and its expressions, and capable of creating a new worldwide horizon of solidarity, namely, the «civilization of love».

Although this project must take on its own distinctive shapes in our distinct geographic areas, nevertheless, there exists among us a fundamental agreement when it comes to pointing out the main characteristics related most closely to our Charism.

This New Evangelization:

4.1. Always has its starting point in reality, because the newness and the main thrust-lines of the new evangelization arise from the ongoing dialectic between the Spirit and reality.

4.2. Aims at establishing a new evangelizing cycle that is vast in scope and is a living presence in diverse cultures.

4.3. Should focus on announcing the total Mystery of Christ (cf. CC 46), who by his Life and his Word proclaimed the Gospel of the Kingdom to all, especially to the poor, as the all-encompassing liberation of humankind.

4.4. Is addressed to all God's People, men and women alike, as its active and responsible recipients, with their different charisms and ministries.

4.5. Requires for its realization evangelizers who are totally centered in God the Father, driven by

the love of Christ, led by his Spirit and passionately concerned for their brothers and sisters.

4.6. Implies a strong call to conversion in the context of the signs of our time.

4.7. Requires that we pay greater attention to quality than to quantity, to the essential than to the accidental; that we foster tireless dialogue; that we always search for a balance between the individual and the group, between institution and charism, between uniformity and pluralism, and for a just means between authoritarian rigidity and permissiveness.

4.8. Spurs us on to renew the missionary dimension of our charism *ad gentes*, educating ourselves for dialogue with cultures and religious traditions of people of other faiths, most of whom are poor.

5. In the face of the many demands that the present time has thrust upon us, we believe — after a serious discernment by the Congregation and by this Chapter — that during the next six years we must reactivate our efforts toward renewing our *Missionary Service of the Word* along the line we have been following since the General Chapter of 1967.

The reflections and proposals that follow will serve to orient and guide us.

II.

HEARERS AND SERVANTS
OF THE WORD

Reflections and Proposals

Disciples of Jesus Christ in Community

6. Our charism in the Church is an experience of the Spirit (cf. MR 11) conforming us with Jesus Christ the Evangelizer, in the style of Claret. For this reason, «the ministry of the Word, whereby we communicate the total mystery of Christ to humanity, is our special calling among the People of God» (CC 46). Imitating Jesus, the Prophet par excellence, whom our Founder followed so radically, we must be transformed into a sign and expression of the Word of God

Our apostolic activity must always spring from a real conformity with Christ the Evangelizer and from a close communion and friendship with him, that will prevent it from becoming mere activism. Let us remember that «one is a missionary, above

all, by what one is, just as the Church is what it is by deeply living unity in love, rather than by what it says or does» (RMI 23).

7. We are a community called together in the Spirit for the missionary proclamation of the Word. In our charism, the Word of God is as essential to community, as community is to the Word (CC 13). Without the primacy of the Word, the Claretian community would lose its reason for being. When marred by individualistic attitudes, our proclamation loses the community imprint with which Claret stamped us.

If the Word dwells in our community, as it did in Mary's Heart, our community will not lead a life that is divided or set in its ways (Lk 1:38-39); it will never be insensitive to God's crying out to us in others (Jn 2:3); nor will it serve any kinds of idols (Lk 1:49,52). It will be good soil that bears abundant fruit (Lk 8:15,21). Proclaimed by a community of brothers living united with Jesus and in Jesus (Mk 3:14; Jn 17:23), the Word of the Kingdom will be both believable and winsome.

7.1. We commit ourselves to provide and improve the human bases for our life together and to integrate

our differences, overcoming individualism in our life and mission. To accomplish this, we are resolved to be more faithful to the community project (cf. CPR 63-64).

8. Each one of us carries out this vocation of the ministry of the Word in keeping with his own distinctive condition within the People of God: as an ordained minister or as a consecrated layperson. This hour of New Evangelization is also the hour for the full integration of the brothers into missionary life, according to their condition as laypersons.

8.1. Each Claretian Missionary, both in his life and in his activity, must give primacy to the service of the Word, and must be situated wherever our mission needs him the most.

8.2. During the upcoming years, Provincial Chapters and Governments must establish, in all their breadth and depth, the vocational recruitment, the initial and ongoing formation, and the full integration of the Brothers into the Claretian mission.

9. The Spirit has brought us together to share the life and mission of Jesus by collaborating in the

ministry of the Word, so as «to be able to do together with others», in community and in the Church, what we neither could nor should do alone (cf. EC I, 305). We collaborate with our Shepherds primordially in what pertains to the proclamation of the Gospel (CD 12-14), according to our charism (CC 6, 50).

We share this mission with the Claretian Family and collaborate with those of other charisms who are committed to the cause of the Kingdom, especially with lay evangelizers, secular as well as consecrated, men as well as women, according to the spirit of our Founder. At the present moment, given the situation of the Church, we feel called:

9.1. *To commit ourselves to the consolidation of a Church of communion and participation, of dialogue and service, of solidarity, justice and fraternity, which lead to belief in the Word (cf. Jn 17:21).*

9.2. *To collaborate in particular Churches to promote and consolidate the New Evangelization, in keeping with our missionary charism.*

9.3. *To promote a greater relationship with the other members of the Claretian Family and lend a*

more decided support in the assessorship and formation of the Lay Claretians.

Announcing the Gospel of the Kingdom

10. The ministry of the Word is aimed at announcing the total mystery of Jesus (CC 46), so that the Father's Reign may grow in the world (Jn 3:16). In this way, the centrality of the Kingdom in the message of Jesus becomes for us the fundamental criterion of discernment for our life and mission.

Although our forces may be small, when the Word takes power of us and we are docile to it, it acts mightily within those who hear it and fulfill it (cf. Mt 7:24; Lk 11:28). Hence, in an attitude of discernment and conversion, we are resolved:

10.1. *To highlight and promote initiatives that open up pathways for the Kingdom of God through the proclamation of the faith, the living of the Gospel, the defense of life, justice, solidarity and peace, thus collaborating in the establishment of a more just international order (cf. SRS 38).*

10.2. *To serve the Word by opting preferentially to accompany those living in situations of want or op-*

pression, and those who are living in unbelief or have lost a sense of meaning in life (cf. CPR 80-81).

10.3. *To cultivate and support the 'ad gentes' dimension of our charism, searching for seeds of the Word and of the Kingdom in dialogue with other religions and diverse cultures (cf. EN 53; MCT 167).*

11. By means of the Word, Jesus issues a call to conversion and faith (Mk 1:14-15; Acts 2:37), to communion with Him in his life and mission, and constitutes the community of disciples (Mk 3:13-14; Acts 2:47). Our missionary service of the Word achieves its aim whenever it raises up or consolidates the kinds of faith-communities in which the Eucharist is celebrated and in which each believer feels like a person, lives in solidarity and acts as an evangelizer (cf. CC 47).

11.1. *In processes of Christian initiation, let us enhance the acceptance, proclamation and living of the Word of God.*

11.2. *Let us raise up and accompany small communities, Basic Ecclesial Communities and other possible forms, in which the Word brings growth in frater-*

nity, in the universal missionary dimension, the attitude of sharing, and the spirit of service.

11.3. *In every celebration let us stress the power of the Word; and let us devote special care to the homily, keeping very much in mind the concrete reality of the persons we are addressing.*

12. Our ministry of the Word is not exhausted in the initial proclamation of the Gospel. It is also expressed in the spiritual accompaniment of persons and groups that our itinerant ministry affords us. At other times it is translated into services in support of our mission. An authentic Claretian missionary is always a servant of the Word, because even when he is unable to speak or act, his whole life is a living word.

12.1. *Let us make ourselves available and prepare ourselves adequately for the ministry of spiritual accompaniment and the sacrament of reconciliation.*

12.2. *Let us continue to acknowledge and value those missionaries who because of their age, health or some other reason, collaborate in the service of the Word by praying and suffering and continue sharing our projects with them (cf. CC 13).*

Our spirituality as hearers and servants of the Word

13. Welcoming the Word that makes us disciples (cf. Lk 8:21), announcing it and witnessing to it, is the core of our spirituality, that is, of our way of following Jesus, a Prophet powerful in works and words (Lk 24:19), with the power of the Spirit. The Spirit of the Father and of the Son — and also the Spirit of our Mother (Aut 687) — is the integrating center for all the dimensions of our life and mission.

This vocation, which is both a grace and a commitment, creates our personal and community style in the Church. Nevertheless, forms of thinking and acting that do not correspond to the Gospel radicalism we profess have crept into our life. This accounts for the dullness in our missionary life, for our lack of daring in the revision of positions and for the scant capacity of our witness to challenge others.

13.1. *Let us allow ourselves to be questioned by the Word of God and make an effort to respond to it, by overcoming mediocrity in our lifestyle, which is many times lacking in evangelical radicalism.*

13.2. *Let us make the renewed Constitutions the central axis of a new impulse for renewal. And let us integrate into our charism the spiritual riches and cultural values of the different peoples among whom we live.*

13.3. *For growth in our missionary life, let us have assiduous recourse to spiritual help or accompaniment, the personal project, and personal and community discernment.*

14. Our Founder's practice of the daily and «vocational» reading of the Bible, and our acceptance of it as God's Word for us today, must be family traits that allow us to give constant proof that we are hearers-servants of the Word.

14.1. *Let us daily practice listening to God's Word in our reading of the Bible in the style of our Father Founder, and let us make the study of the Bible one of our central concerns.*

15. Jesus, anointed by the Spirit, welcomed the will of the Father, living in communion with Him and sharing the suffering of the people. We contemplate the Master and listen to his Word in order to proclaim the Kingdom, opening our innermost

depths — our heart — to him and sharing the anxieties and hopes of our brothers and sisters.

In the depths of Mary's Heart we discover and learn the way to listen. She received the Word in her Heart (cf. Lk 2:19, 51) — the Word made history in the cry of the poor (cf. Lk 1:48-53). Claret presents Mary's Heart to us as the blazing forge in which we are shaped as heralds of the Word.

15.1. *Let us fraternally share in listening to, living, celebrating and announcing the Word, above all, in the Eucharist (CC 34-35).*

15.2. *Let us develop our capacity for inner silence. In the light of the Word and of the reality that challenges us, let us develop an attitude of prayer that will make us «contemplatives in mission» (CPR 56).*

15.3. *Following the example of our Father Founder and of so many of our brethren, let us allow ourselves to be formed by Mary in the forge of her Heart. And in the exercise of our ministry, let us be and know ourselves to be instruments of her love, so that we can prolong the works of her spiritual Maternity among human beings (cf. Aut 270: DC 17: SH 19: LG 65).*

16. The anointing of the Spirit equips us to become fit ministers for the proclamation of the Word. This gift of anointing demands of us a constant commitment, one that is fulfilled in the measure that our experience of the Lord and our encounter with others, especially the poorest and most suffering, gradually transforms our life (Lk 4:16-30: Aut 118, 687).

We evangelize when we open our hearts to others, offering them the best of ourselves and sharing our hope with them. They, too, can transmit God's Good News to us in unsuspected ways, if we welcome them, listen to their words and allow ourselves to be enriched by their experiences.

16.1. *Let us also listen to the Word of God in personal prayer, in the events of history, in cultures and in the life of the people, in their silences and in their outcries.*

16.2. *Let us share the Word of God with laypersons, in order to encourage them to assume joint responsibility with us in the task of evangelization.*

16.3. *Let us learn to read the reality in which the people whom we address live, and learn how to ex-*

press ourselves in their language and in their symbolic world.

16.4. *Let us become identified with the poor; otherwise it is difficult to understand and announce the Word of Jesus.*

17. We often experience difficulties in our ministry, because transmitting a message of annunciation and denunciation in conflicting situations of unbelief, injustice, alienation or death, is always a dangerous and risky business. Jesus was the «Martyr of the Word», and it was precisely for this reason that he could not be silenced. The history of our Congregation, beginning with our Father Founder himself, is rich in martyrs.

If we passionately love God, Mary and our brothers and sisters, we will perceive within us a power that will make us overcome our timidity, our fear, our complexes, our temptations to remain silent when we ought to speak out. This is how our Founder expressed it in his definition of a Son of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (Aut 494; CC 9). The text of our Constitutions traces out for us the path of conformity with Jesus Christ (CC 41-44).

17.1. *In facing difficult moments in the proclamation of the Word, let us have recourse to community discernment. Those who are united in listening to the Word and who remain united in living it together, will remain in solidarity before the cross.*

Structures and Means for a renewed ministry of the Word

18. «The missionary service of the Word, whereby we are constituted as an apostolic Institute in the Church, should always inspire and guide each and every member of our Institute and each and every one of our apostolic works» (Dir 104). In each institution it is necessary to stress the gospel values most proper of our charism. The New Evangelization needs institutions that are truly a «sign». This requires:

18.1. *Continuing with greater decisiveness and commitment the process of revision of positions, according to the preferential options pointed out in the MCT (cf. MCT 161-179).*

18.2. *Establishing more agile and less stable com-*

munities, that favor a greater availability for the service of the Word today (cf. MCT 164).

18.3. *Discerning when we should transfer determined apostolic works to other pastoral agents when we have already completed our evangelizing cycle in them, or when we cannot adequately fulfill the Claretian mission in them (cf. MCT 162).*

19. We communicate the Gospel by all means possible (CC 6, 48). But we must keep on searching for means and forms or styles of mission that have a greater scope, that help evangelization reach more people and places, that have a greater radius of action, above all in the field of the communication media.

19.1. *Let us encourage, as privileged services of the Word, itinerant missionary preaching, the ministry of the written word, in its various forms, and in its artistic expression (the sung, visualized, and danced word) always provided that they respond to the fundamental characteristics of our charism and of the signs of the times.*

19.2. *Among the means and forms of mission, we should accord a privileged place to those that multi-*

ply the service of the Word and are carried out in evangelizing teams. Among these we should give impulse to renewed popular missions, the formation of lay evangelizers, education in the faith and the missionary dimension in our parishes and educational centers, spiritual exercises, ecumenical dialogue, etc., always attentive to the urgent needs of our time.

20. During these years, we Claretians have been haunted by the panorama of impoverished and oppressed human masses who live in inhuman conditions. This situation impels us to reiterate with still greater force our congregational option for the poor (cf. CC 39, 46). We can certainly offer no «solutions» to the great problems of poverty; but we can support the «indicative signs» of a new style of life that points toward the utopia of the Kingdom. In these situations the prophetic Word cannot be neutral, but inevitably takes on a political dimension; and it can never — if it is truly authentic — be at the service of the idol of power. Insertion among impoverished majorities is a privileged place that allows us to read the Word in its most challenging keys.

20.1. *We should feel that we are particularly*

challenged by the grave phenomenon of emigration, and spurred to create Claretian communities inserted within these sectors of displaced persons.

20.2. *We should encourage genuine experiences of insertion among the poor and the impoverished masses, in order to be signs of the reality of the Kingdom.*

Formative processes of initiation and training for the ministry of the Word

21. The formation of our young missionaries, both students and brothers, is carried out as an authentic process of initiation for mission. One of its core aspects is initiation for the ministry of the Word, understood as an authentic way of being, acting and signifying. From what we have said in our earlier reflections, initial formation must:

21.1. *Be centered in real conformity with Christ the Evangelizer, adopting his attitudes and learning to live in close communion and friendship with him, and looking to Mary as their Mother and Formatrix, in the style of our Father Founder.*

21.2. *Give a relevant place, within a serious academic formation, to a 'savored and exegetical knowledge of the Bible; and see to it that the Word, through «lectio divina» and other kinds of reading, should be one of the hinges of the whole process of formation.*

21.3. *Develop our young missionaries' capacity for silence, listening, dialogue, discernment and analysis of different societies, cultures and religions.*

21.4. *Prepare formation candidates in the community orientation that our ministry of the Word entails, so that they may learn to live and work in community and in team, and develop an openness to our universal mission, by fostering attitudes of availability and itinerancy, and cultivating the study of languages.*

21.5. *Accompany our young men in the process of missionary insertion, so that they may learn to read reality as a word of God and listen to it with an evangelical attitude.*

21.6. *See to it that our formandi are practiced in the techniques of communications and language skills, so that they will be able to exercise this ministry both ably and attractively.*

21.7. *Develop and check, in the light of the experience of our different organisms, the «Claretian Formative Itinerary» drawn up in the last few years during the Renewal Courses for formation directors.*

22. In order to be suitable ministers of the Word we need to be in a permanent or ongoing process of formation. It is proper of a disciple to be constantly listening, open to the surprises of the Word and the Spirit. There are moments when our weakness or sinfulness blocks, both in ourselves and our communities, the dynamics of listening, of vital contact with the Word and the Spirit. There are critical situations that leave us inwardly void, yet demand an answer from us if we want to remain faithful to our vocation among the People of God. At such times we need to open ourselves to conversion and undertake a new process of Claretian re-initiation.

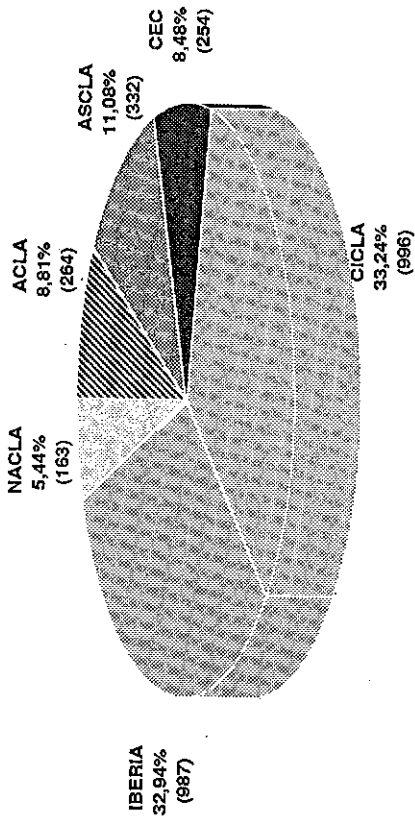
22.1. *During the coming six years, the general government and provincial governments should promote initiatives of ongoing formation, so that all Claretians may be duly prepared for the ministry of the Word, offering a response to the challenges of the present times.*

22.2. *Special care should be taken to see to it that some special formative initiatives be provided for young priests during the first five years of their ministry, and for brothers during the first five years following their perpetual profession.*

III.

SERVANTS OF THE WORD
ON FIVE CONTINENTS

Challenges and Lines of Action

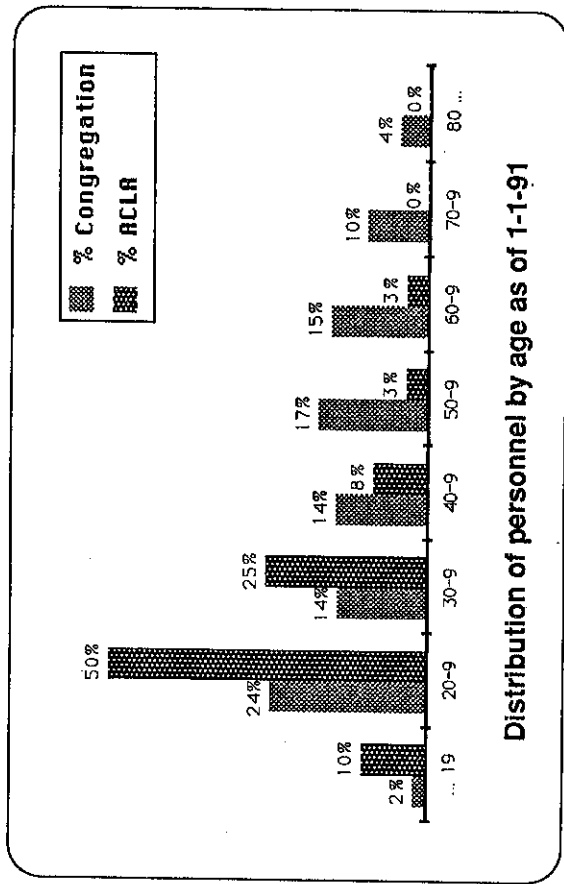


Personnel of the Congregation by Conferences as of 1-1-91

23. The missionary service of announcing the Word to all people (cf. CC 4) has made our Congregation present on the five Continents. Through our brothers and sisters we are touched by the grace that God pours forth in the world, and by the «disgrace» that troubles it. Present in the different areas of a divided world, we want to re-unite it as the people of God the Father, a community of brothers and sisters. We embrace as our own the challenges that are felt in each geographic area of the Congregation and we support their lines of action.

Servants of the Word in Africa

24. Today, Africa is searching for its own progress, reclaiming the recognition and full de-



velopment of human rights that were silenced by colonialism and are still frequently trampled on by the absolutism of their own rulers. On this continent very few have had access to formation and to greater personal cultivation. Those who reach the university level bring with them the materialism and unbelief of industrialized nations, and live a kind of cultural syncretism which they make use of according to their own convenience. Africa as a whole is experiencing a considerable setback in its development. Moreover, many possibilities for women have still not been exploited, because adult generations still harbor the traditional mentality that exclusively assigns to them the role of «fertile mother of the clan».

Their spiritual sense of life has created in Africans a background of beliefs and religious experiences which we value positively as «seeds of the Word». But this background, which was not valued adequately in the First Evangelization, is in contrast reappearing today and clamoring for recognition. In the Incarnation, the Lord has chosen to visit us with gratuitous love. The Church feels urged to receive Him with African hospitality «in spirit and in truth» (Jn 4:23), overcoming the fears

and sorceries of ancestral religion, laying aside any superficial and facile syncretism, while resisting the lure of the materialist ideologies of the industrialized world. The proclamation of the Gospel was possible, in large part, due to the self-denying labour of laypersons, especially catechists. They are also the animators of many Christian communities today. But, their formation needs to be updated according to the renewal of Vatican II.

25. Although we, Claretians, are relatively few in Africa, where urgent needs are so many, we are presently established in eight countries, in some of which the Congregation is growing rapidly. The vocations that the Lord is sending us make it pressing for us to provide them with an adequate formation. It is likewise necessary to harmonize Claretian life with some aspects of African cultural identity. Since we are so few in relation to the workload we have to bear, it is hard for us to balance community life with apostolic activity.

In view of all the above:

25.1. *In the missionary service of the Word, through our preaching, we commit ourselves to defend human rights, to promote solidarity in the face of*

tribalism and to raise sensibilities regarding the dignity of woman.

25.2. *We will enhance the overall sense of evangelization in the projects for promotion that we maintain and raise up others that attend in a special way to the formation of youth.*

25.3. *We will propose meditating on the Word so that it may be taken up in depth and help to reformulate the experiences, sentiments and aspirations proper of its recipients.*

25.4. *We will present the entire message of Jesus Christ, with respect to African cultures, in order that they may purify and harmonize their values in the light of the Gospel.*

25.5. *In order to harmonize our community better with our apostolic activity, we will give more importance to planning, especially by means of the community project and the personal project.*

25.6. *We will strive to consolidate and improve the two Formation Projects of Central Africa and Nigeria, particularly by preparing indigenous formators.*

25.7. *We will pay special attention to the prepa-*

ration and updating of catechists and lay people, organizing renewal courses for them.

Servants of the Word in Latin America

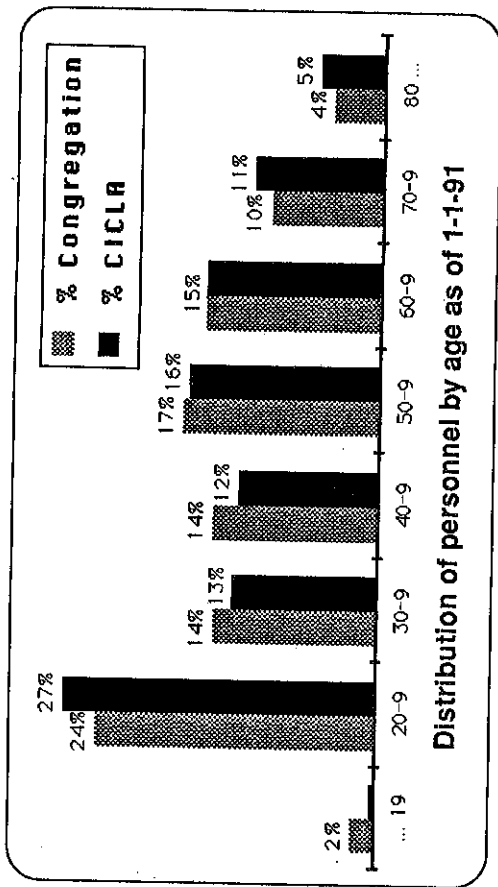
26. In this historic moment in which Latin America «celebrates» the mystery of death and resurrection of the 500 years since the beginning of the conquest and evangelization of our continent, we, Claretians, are looking anew with eyes enlightened by missionary spirit, at the reality presented to us by the world, the Church and the Congregation in Latin America.

With respect to the *World*, we feel challenged by the poverty of the greater part of the population and by the violation of human rights, including the right to life. The humiliating dependency with respect to the more industrialized countries and the evolution of some social alternatives that lead to anarchical violence, are especially painful to us. In the midst of this dark panorama, the critical consciousness of the poor and their efforts to become agents of their own history through popular organizations and the culture that emerges from

among the inhabitants of the peripheries of the large cities, shine through as signs of hope.

The Latin American *Church*, spurred on by the Conferences of Medellín and Puebla, strengthens its efforts to give a Gospel response to the challenges this reality presents. At the same time, a growing tendency of turning inward and a certain mistrust with respect to some ways of making «the preferential option for the poor looking towards their liberation» (P.734), are observable. The proliferation of sects has become a matter of both denouncement and challenge for the Church. Signs of hope on the ecclesial panorama are: great Christian masses still vibrant with popular religiosity, the growing leadership of the laity; development of Basic Ecclesial Communities which are making a model of Church characterized by communion, participation and co-responsibility, a reality; the increase in the number of religious communities living in insertion; the appearance of a more incarnated and liberating spirituality that is nourished by the popular reading of the Word of God.

27. We, *Claretians*, present in almost all the countries of Latin America, have suffered a severe



decrease in vocations, that is now being recovered in some major organisms.

Through very different approaches, a good number of Claretians have made the preferential option for the poor the foundation of our missionary life. Our commitments in poor environments, churches in formation (20 mission zones), and although still few, among indigenous and Afro-American peoples, are meaningful.

In this reality and in this Church, we, Claretians, ask ourselves how to respond through our missionary charism, to the cry and efforts for liberation of the impoverished. In keeping with the agreements of the XII assembly of CICLA (1991), we propose, among others, the following lines of action:

27.1. *To proclaim faithfully the liberating message of Jesus giving priority to the explicit announcement of the Word, consistency of life and poverty in solidarity.*

27.2. *To foster a model of Church-communion through Basic Ecclesial Communities, through the promotion of the laity and through the recognition of the active role of the woman in the Church.*

27.3. *To continue shifting our positions toward the poor and marginalized ethnic groups, through serious processes of insertion and inculturation.*

27.4. *To critically value the popular religiosity and the religion of our peoples and take advantage of their evangelizing potential.*

27.5. *To form for insertion and give more importance in the process of formation to the knowledge and praxis of the social doctrine of the Church.*

27.6. *To commit ourselves to initiatives for the defense of life and human rights and causes of justice and peace, abandoning all complicit neutrality.*

27.7. *To accompany the processes of liberation of our peoples through their own organizations. To encourage their education for democracy and their political participation.*

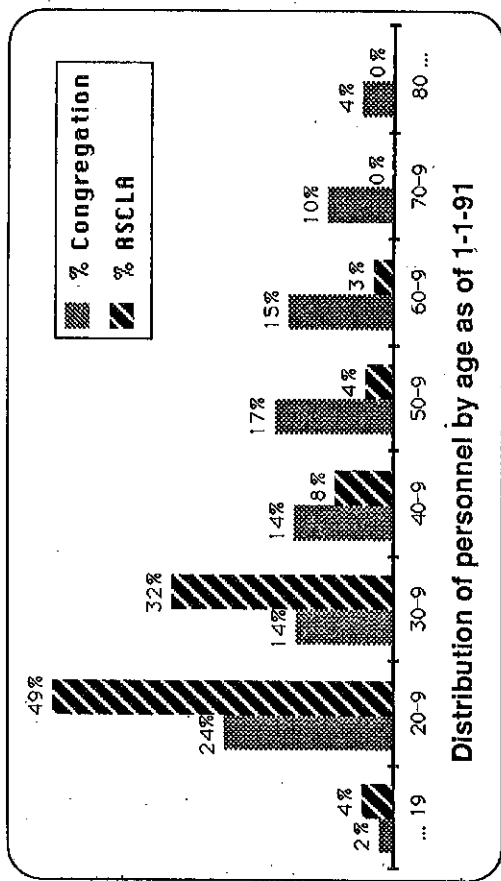
Servants of the Word in Asia and Oceania

28. The reality of Asia today projects hopes and problems that challenge our missionary service of the Word. Among the signs and hopes we perceive the growing awareness of the values in the diverse

cultures, religions and a new attitude of dialogue of life, non-violent movements for democracy, human rights, women's liberation, protection of ecology, the emergence of the marginalized people and the vitality and the aspirations of the youth for a just society. In the changing face of Asia there are still persisting inequalities, massive poverty, dehumanization, injustice, oppression, ecological destruction and the accelerated loss of traditional religious and cultural values, violent separatist movements and fundamentalist polarizations.

The Church of Asia can count only about 2% of its population as Christians, but the great majority of humanity lives here. It has gone through a process of constant discernment of its mission in the line of dialogue of faith and life with the cultures, religions and the poor, but the process of implementation is very slow.

29. Though we are present only in seven countries of this continent, i.e.: Philippines, Japan, India, Korea, Australia, Sri Lanka and Indonesia, in most of them we are experiencing growth. An abundance of vocations, the possibilities of missionary expansion within and to new areas, inspire us



with hopes for the future. We try to respond to the enormous challenges by enhancing:

29.1. *The renewal and clarification of our sense of mission, our motivations, expressions and methods.*

29.2. *To continue to deepen our commitment to explore new areas and concrete means for mission «ad Gentes», in dialogue of faith and life with other religions, cultures and the poor.*

29.3. *Empowering laity in the Church, especially youth and women.*

29.4. *A deepening of our missionary spirituality centered on the Word and on the experience of God, in a constant process of interiority, inculturation and insertion.*

29.5. *Supporting significant movements that are working to build a society of greater justice and solidarity.*

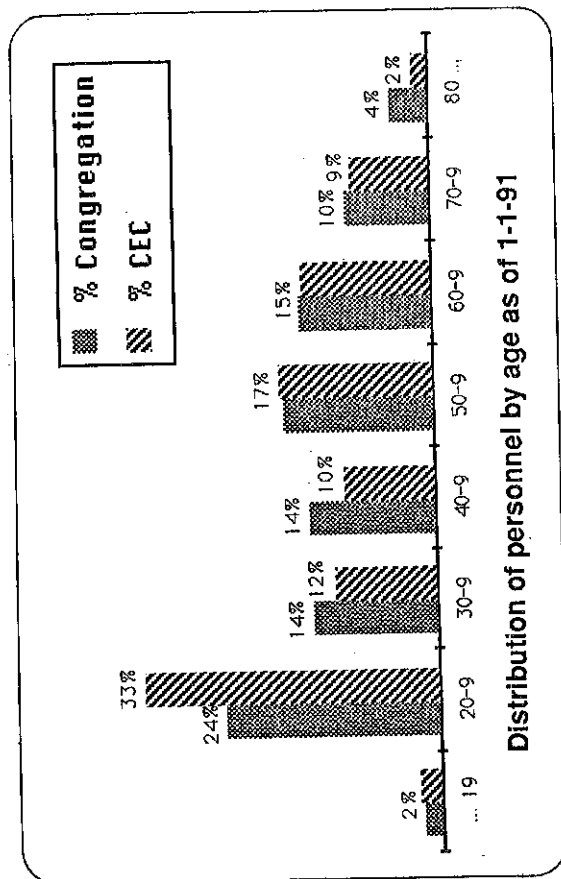
29.6. *Promoting vocations and fostering in our seminarians the gradual assimilation of the Patrimony of the Congregation; to assist them to recognize the signs of the times in society, cultures, religions and to train them for faith sharing, discernment and dialogue.*

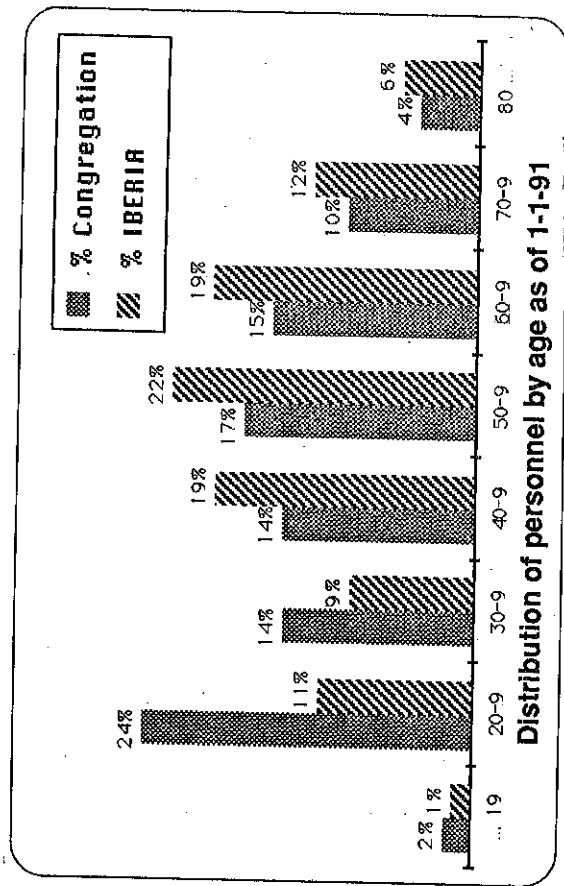
29.7. Promoting «mass media» and popular forms of communication.

Servants of the Word in Europe

30. Europe is a continent, rich in peoples and cultures, which little by little, has been gaining its freedom, seeking a common identity in a «Common European Home ». This process brings with it, implies and invigorates a whole dynamic of economic, political, cultural and social diversity. The changes in the East, the recovery of freedoms and democracy, the uprising of ancient peoples with a strong national identity, open up for us a new historic challenge to which we must respond. At the same time, great waves of immigrants from the third world are arriving looking for a home and work. Selfish attitudes, lack of solidarity and even racial discrimination can result in the exclusion of these new poor.

Hand in hand with the progress made in the sciences, technology and freedom of expression has gone also an increase in those who seek to explain life without reference to faith. Despite the fact that





the reality of the Church in western Europe is very varied, we can say in general that they continue to lose faith in the Church. In Eastern Europe, the Church has been perceived as supporting the people against totalitarian dictatorship and as a force for freedom. Therefore, the Church, conscious of its sinfulness and responsibility, but faithful and confident in the voice of God, wishes to be open to and commit itself to a «New Evangelization».

31. We, Claretians, are present in 10 nations of Europe. While there are many of us in Spain, there are few of us in the other countries. Except for Poland, which is in the midst of a great growth, the rest are either undergoing or soon will be undergoing a 'harsh winter' for vocations. Challenged by this new situation and by the call of the Church, we propose, within our charism as servants of the Word:

31.1. *To shape our evangelization as a dialogue between Faith and Culture.*

To this end: we will establish and demand a broader and deeper humanistic and theological formation, both in initial and ongoing formation; we will increasingly orient Christian education as an «evangelization of

the culture» and will pay special care to the service of the Word through the mass media.

31.2. *To make our communities a place of encounter and experience of God, sharing this experience with all who seek Him.*

To this end: we will favour welcoming and accompanying people spiritually; we will share initiatives of community prayer meetings with the laity and with those who are alienated from the Church, but are seeking God; we will offer, within our apostolic centers, true processes of Christian initiation aimed at a personalized and living faith; and we will accompany lay communities in their effort to deepen and live more intensely their spirituality incarnated in the world: in their work, their profession, their social life etc.

31.3. *To reach out in a missionary way to the alienated and dechristianized.*

To this end: we will enhance itinerant groups of service of the Word, both with a view to popular evangelization (renewed parish missions etc.) and to the formation of qualified laypersons.

31.4. *To cultivate a true solidarity with those «excluded» from the process of development in Europe, and with the poorest countries.*

To this end: we will renew and support pastoral work among immigrants and we will create communities of insertion, also lay in character, orienting young Christians to opt for a greater presence among the poor; we will educate and evangelize for and from the standpoint of justice and peace, bringing about significant commitment in this direction; we will continue helping our mission zones and we will consolidate missionary procurees and volunteer programs.

31.5. *To enhance the missionary dimension «ad gentes» and to respond to the new challenge of Eastern Europe.*

To this end: the General Government will assume responsibility for designing the evangelizing project for Eastern Europe.

31.6. *To foster a greater relationship and collaboration between CEC and IBERIA.*

To this end: we will share evangelizing projects (pastoral work among immigrants, and those alienated from the Church); we will hold youth encounters and we will help in pastoral initiatives for vocations; together we will face other challenges which the new Europe will keep presenting to us.

31.7. *To intensify specifically Claretian vocation promotion from within our current youth work, as a demand of our very own evangelizing mission.*

Servants of the Word in North America (USA and Canada)

32. These nations belong to the advanced world of well-being, technology, communications, science, military and economic power. Imbedded in this world we find large concentrations of poor people and masses of immigrants and refugees in search of asylum because of war, poverty, and violence. The immense power of these nations has often been misused, not only in the selfish wastefulness of consumerism, but also in the exploitation of impoverished masses and the support given to despotic regimes.

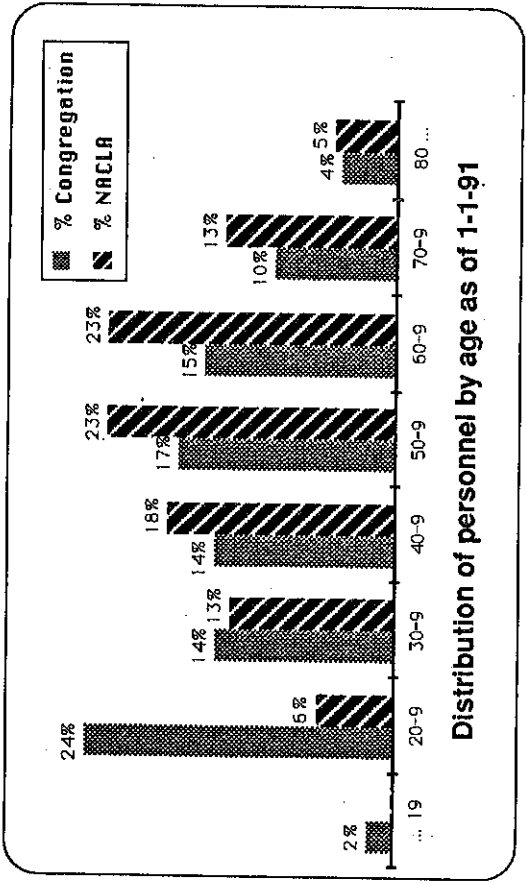
Although religious sentiment is widespread in these nations, there are three challenges in the area of religion: 1) the great number of baptized who want nothing to do with the Church, either because they do not agree with its official line or because, even though they believe in God, reject the de-

mands of Christian life; 2) the enormous number of immigrants, many of them Catholics, of which many lack religious formation; 3) the Church's lack of credibility or its failure to respond to important social and moral problems, which call into question its project for a New Evangelization.

33. The Claretians of these provinces have missions in poor countries and are seriously committed to immigrants. Not only are their personnel growing fewer and older, but vocations are scarce, despite the great efforts that have been put into promoting them. Nevertheless, they have a very broad range of important ministries which are carried out in collaboration with laypersons. These Claretians have an ever-growing awareness of the need for a spirituality centered in the Gospel, to integrate their life and ministry, as well as their personal and community growth.

Looking toward the next six years, we believe that:

33.1. Our parishes and apostolic centers can devote themselves still more effectively to evangelization; through their ministries to families, youth, the formation of laity, and service to small groups, they can get



closer to those alienated from the faith, welcome those who are discontent with the Church, and make a reality the total cooperation and participation of the laity in the life of the Church;

33.2. We should accompany immigrants with greater availability and interest by accepting their cultural and religious identity, opening for them new ways of integration and calling them to become active members in a welcoming faith community;

33.3. We should help raise social consciousness regarding family problems, violence and neighborhood crime, drugs, racism and sexism, using the communications media and collaborating with other agents who work for social change.

33.4. The missionary work that the Claretians of these Provinces are doing in poor countries is worthy of high esteem. In some sense this work comes back with an evangelizing impact on these Provinces (reverse mission). We have an ever-growing awareness of the interdependence of the world, and of the fact that the politics and conduct of rich nations affect the lives in the poorest countries. When we go as missionaries to these countries, we recognize that in preaching the Gospel we are conditioned by our own world and cul-

ture, and that we must become open, through dialogue, to the meaning of the Gospel in the new culture in which we are exercising our ministry.

33.5. As regards the ministry of the Word, we see the need to highlight the implications of the Word both for personal conversion and for the transformation of society; this is necessary in view of the impact that this society has on the rest of the world.

CONCLUSION

The foregoing reflections and proposals describe the most important characteristics and urgencies involved in our missionary service of the Word at the present juncture of history. Our sharing of missionary experiences and our Chapter dialogue have led us, on the one hand, to take stock of the complexity entailed in the itinerary of the New Evangelization. On the other, they have introduced us into the world of the spirituality and the apostolic responses that we, Claretians, must offer, in a dynamic manner, to the challenges that face us in the present world and may arise in the immediate future. All of this has made us understand the need to qualify still more our ministry of the Word of

life and to commit ourselves to achieving a suitable formation, both initial and ongoing.

We would like this missionary communion, in its manifold expressions, to be felt also by the whole community of the Congregation. The fact that our Congregation feels impelled to constantly broaden its missionary horizons, is itself a work of the Lord. The differences of sensibility and of operative commitments of Claretians from various zones enrich all of us, inasmuch as they mutually challenge and spur us on to co-responsibility.

The Congregation, which is undergoing important changes in its human makeup, is happily living today in a most heartening vocational hour: an hour for recovering fully, in a richer and more universal communion, the inspiration that created in Saint Anthony Mary Claret, our Father, a heart possessed by the Word, and made him a tireless messenger of the Good News. As Missionary Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, we feel urged to carry out an evangelization that is *new* in its ardor, in its methods and in its expressions.

AUDIENCE
OF THE HOLY FATHER
WITH THE GENERAL CHAPTER

Greeting of Father General to Pope John Paul II

Most Holy Father:

After six years, on the occasion of this XXI General Chapter, the Missionary Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary are returning to your house to manifest to you our filial respect, in the same spirit that would have animated our Father, Saint Anthony Mary Claret.

The sentiments of the Chapter Members echo those of their brother Missionaries scattered throughout the different continents. During these years we have expanded our missionary action to new frontiers, principally in Asia, Africa and in

Eastern Europe. We have all felt challenged by your call for a new evangelization. In these past six years, the whole Congregation has entered into a process of reflection and discernment concerning what this project of new evangelization is asking of us Claretians. Through the gift of our charism we know that we are destined to carry out the missionary service of the Word, in keeping with the conviction expressed by our Founder in his Autobiography; «... 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).

Our General Chapter is trying to bring this ample community reflection to maturity, in order to work out some animating guidelines that might favor the growth of our members and communities in their missionary spirituality and in their generous dedication to distributing the bread of the Word to those who are most in need of it.

This enthusiastic adherence of the Claretians to your call is an updating, during the historic moment in which we live, of the communion with the See of Peter that has always inspired our Congregation. In turn, it expresses our gratitude for your

proposal of evangelization, which has touched the innermost fibres of our missionary vocation.

Thinking of all of our brethren, in their joys and sufferings on behalf of the Kingdom, and in their daily toil as announcers of the Gospel, we humbly ask of you, Holy Father, to bestow upon them and upon this Chapter your apostolic blessing, as a token of the grace of the Spirit which will bring to fruition our aspirations and resolves.

Address of the Pope to the members of the XXI General Chapter

Dear Missionary Sons of the Immaculate Heart
of Mary:

1. I am glad to have this meeting with you, the members of the ordinary General Chapter of your Claretian Institute which, by means of this Chapter and in continuity with the four preceding chapters celebrated since the Second Vatican Council, is renewing and rejuvenating its structures, charism and positions of responsibility. One sign of this is its inner dynamism and the broad representation of so many countries in which it is present.

I bid a special welcome to Fr. Gustavo Alonso who held the office of Superior General for 12

years, and at the same time I congratulate his successor, Fr. Aquilino Bocos Merino, whom I thank for the kind words of homage which he expressed in your name. I also want to express my appreciation for the good that your religious family does in the Church and within society.

2. In recent years a decline of vocations has taken place in Western Europe and in North America; however, it is being offset by a valuable expansion in Eastern Europe and in various countries of Africa and Asia. This has created problems for you not only on the economic order, but primarily at the level of formation, inculturation, vocational selection as well as the fulfilment of your Marian missionary vocation in the new areas where the Church needs you for the service of the Gospel.

The strong apostolic character of St. Anthony Mary Claret, reflected and put into effect in your renewed constitutions, has helped you to overcome many of the difficulties which the life of religious institutes has suffered in recent years. In this way the new demands of the missionary apostolate have made you realize that you have to emphasize and increase the spiritual, contemplative dimension of

your life, and to foster the community aspect of it not only as common life, but rather as mission and the fulfilment of your missionary task in the world.

3. On the other hand, the consciousness that the ministry of the Word is the main aspect of your Claretian heritage has made you understand that fidelity to your mission demands, as your founder emphasized, a lasting dedication to the study of the Word and unshakable loyalty to the Successor of Peter and the College of Bishops, whom St. Anthony Mary Claret called you «strong helpers».

During these days you have been conducting a programmatic reflection on your «missionary service of the Word in the new evangelization». Through it you want to respond to the challenges of the world which is aging, to which it is necessary to give hope through the lasting newness of the Gospel message. Therefore you must proclaim everywhere that Christ is the «new man». As Christians and religious you must bear witness that you have renounced the «old man» and have put on Christ (cf. Col. 3,10). As missionaries, you have the obligation to be «ambassadors of Christ», hav-

ing put on the «new man, created in God's way in righteousness and holiness of truth» (Eph. 4,24).

4. Please allow me, dear brothers, to urge you once again to study and meditate assiduously on the Word of God, to whose service you have been called. Every day your saintly founder dedicated as much time as possible to the study of Sacred Scripture. You cannot do otherwise if you want to fulfil your mission totally. The Word of God must become the source of contemplation and commitment for your personal spirituality and the centre of your community dialogue and celebration; it must also be the main object of your study and the inspiration of your formative journey; in that it is the proclamation of salvation and conversion, it must be the point of concentration for the energy of your ministry to the people of God and to non-believers; it must serve as your principle for discernment regarding the tasks which you undertake as a missionary community.

May the faithful Virgin, the Mother of Jesus, guide you on the path of fidelity; in her heart, whose sons you claim to be, she received and kept

the Word, giving Him to the world as the principle and universal sacrament of salvation.

Together with my prayer and sincere affection, I extend to you my Apostolic Blessing.

(L'Osservatore Romano, 20-9-1991)

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