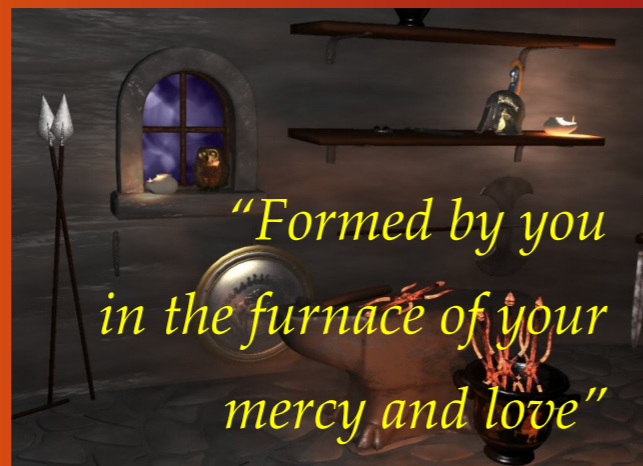


THE FORGE

IN OUR DAILY LIFE

CLARETIAN RENEWAL PROJECT

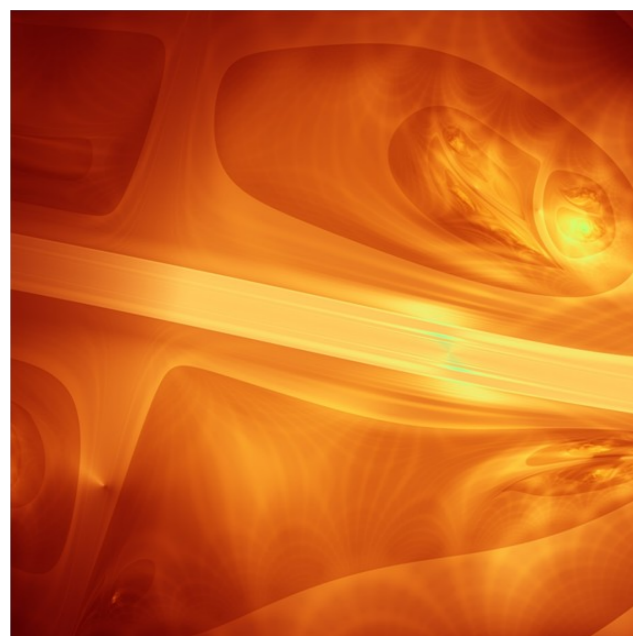


(St. Anthony Mary Claret)



Claretian Missionaries

Rome 2010



“A Son of the Immaculate Heart of Mary is
a man on fire with God’s love”

THE FORGE IN OUR DAILY LIFE

CLARETIAN RENEWAL PROJECT

The purpose of this booklet is to present the characteristics of The Forge project in our daily life to facilitate its understanding as well as to prepare its implementation. You will find in it:

- An **introduction** of Fr General, Josep Maria Abella i Batlle (pp. 3-4).
- A **letter from the General Prefect of Spirituality**, Fr Gonzalo Fernández Sanz, which explains what the project is (pp. 5-22).
- **Some suggestions** on what you need to know before you begin: how to practice the exercises, the "lectio divina, the accompaniment, texts on the forge and some prayers (pp. 23-32).
- A **model of celebration** that our communities can use to start the project in Advent (pp. 33-35).

CLARETIAN MISSIONARIES

GENERAL PREFECTURE OF SPIRITUALITY
ROME 2010

Oración final

Mother of Divine Love (*Sp. Dir.* 16)
(Said by all)

O Mary, my Mother, Mother of Divine Love!
I can ask for nothing more pleasing to you
nor for anything you are more ready to grant
than the love of God.
Grant me this, my Mother and my love.
Help me, satisfy my need.
O Heart of Mary,
furnace and instrument of love,
kindle in me the love of God and neighbour.
Amen

Hymn to Fr Claret



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in their homes; they shared their food with great joy and simplicity of heart; they praised God and won the people's favour. And every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved."

St. Anthony Mary Claret (Aut 342)

"At the beginning of my stay in Vich I was undergoing an experience not unlike what goes on in a blacksmith's shop. The smith thrusts an iron bar into the furnace, and when it is white-hot he draws it out, places it on the anvil, and begins to hammer it. His assistant joins in, and the two of them keep alternating hammer-blows in a sort of rhythmic dance until the iron takes the shape the smith planned. You, my Lord and Master, thrust my heart into the furnace of the Spiritual Exercises and frequent reception of the Sacraments; and after thus setting my heart on fire with love for you and the Blessed Virgin Mary, you began to hammer away at me with humiliations, and I, too, began hammering away with my particular examen on this virtue that I needed so badly."

Homily

(This could be the time to read and comment on some of the suggestions and inducements in Father General's letter, which announced the *Forge project in our daily life*)

Handing over of the Bible

(After the readings and homily, if done during Lauds, or after the normal homily if done during the Eucharist, the community Superior should hand over to each member, the Bible they are going to use for the "lectio divina", with the following words).

(Name), receive this Bible which contains the Word of God for which you have been nominated a messenger. Make a living faith of what you read; teach others the living faith you have experienced and fulfil in your life what you have taught them.

Intercessions

United in the Holy Spirit, to Christ, to Mary and to Fr Claret, we ask for help to faithfully and profitably carry forward *the Forge project in our daily life*.

So that the Forge will propel us to seek the glory of God and the salvation of every human being, praying, working and suffering.

We pray to the Lord.

So that, on fire with prayer like Claret, we purify our apostolic motivation and direct all that we are and all that we do to being a listener and servant of the Word of God.

We pray to the Lord.

So that the Holy Spirit will maintain and rekindle the fire of our vocations through this continuous process of deepening our understanding of the call, and of our formation in his discipleship until we are moulded in Christ's image.

We pray to the Lord.

So that the mission, which is entrusted to us, springs from the love of God, is nourished frequently by the Word and the Eucharist, is proclaimed with praise and is spread throughout the world under the banner of mercy and friendship, especially toward the poor and dispossessed.

We pray to the Lord.

So that, on this path of formation which we are about to begin, we do not give in to fatigue, discouragement, despair or reluctance, but are stimulated by prayer, the prayerful reading of the Word, and the spiritual study and dynamism of the liturgy.

We pray to the Lord.

Other spontaneous intercessions can be added.

Our Father

The Lord who always feeds and fortifies us with the bread of the Word and with the bread of the Eucharist, diligently shared, invites us to pray together: Our Father...

Introduction by the Superior General

Dear brothers,

When members of the General Government met, just over two years ago, with the Major Superiors of the Congregation for the preparation of the General Chapter, we started our meeting by sharing our perception of the reality of the world and our own Congregation.

Looking at the world, our hearts were filled, as you would expect, with contrasting feelings of happiness and pain, hope and frustration, a willingness to act and a fear of the risks that might be involved. To those of us who invoke God as "Father", the lives of men never leave us feeling indifferent making us, therefore, truly brothers to one another. Creation seemed to us like a gift to be shared and cared for, as a beautiful sign of God's love, defiled by some, however, by greed and selfishness. Looking at this reality before us, we are again called to be witnesses and messengers of the God of life, to fulfil those roles decisively today and in each of the places where we live and work. Yes, God still loves us as missionaries.

In the Church, along with all those who conduct their lives opting for Jesus and the Kingdom, we strongly feel the urgency of the mission. We know that the experience of God's love transforms the lives of those who are open to it and makes it an instrument of transformation in history. Proclaiming that God loves us and directing people to experience that love appears as an urgent mission. Moreover, together with all men and women of good will, we know we are called to restore the harmony between people and nations and amongst all created beings which forms part of God's plan for his children. We feel that the mission has an increasingly universal and more Catholic dimension.

But faced with this mission, we know we are small and weak. The many challenges we face cast doubt on our ability to take on the task entrusted to us. We need spiritual depth and community support to live our lives with a missionary dimension. We often experience fatigue and succumb to the temptation of mediocrity. But we continue to feel the call and we are drawn to the beauty of a life devoted to the service of the plan of salvation that Jesus has revealed to us and for which he himself has given his life. It is worthwhile being a missionary.

How should we live our missionary vocation? The question naturally and forcefully arose during the Encounter which tried to identify the theme of the Chapter. There was no doubt that this was the question that had to guide the programme of our Chapter. We began a process of evaluation in which all were invited to participate. The fruit of this evaluation is now well known.

We have come to understand the need to rekindle the inner fire that gives meaning to our lives and energy to the apostolic commitment. This was the experience of our Founder and this has been the experience of many of our brothers who are now role models for those who are called to share the missionary charism of the Claretian community. Without that fire, our lives will not be capable of transmitting light or heat. Without it our work and our institutions will not be able to communicate the Gospel of the Kingdom.

We need, therefore, to enter into a process of conversion and renewal that allows us to rekindle that fire in each of us and in our communities. To help us along this path of renewal the General Chapter decided to "implement the Forge project in our daily life" (MFL 55.4), which we present to you now. The General Government, through the Prefecture of Spirituality and supported by an international team has prepared some guidelines that will help us along this path. This is a four-year project that we are all invited to participate in obediently and enthusiastically. We will have to schedule our routines making sure that there is sufficient time for this process to really touch our lives. We will need to make a creative effort so that the project has a meaningful impact in our communities and help us to deepen our experience of sharing which is a manifestation of our missionary brotherhood. We will travel with a strong sense of congregational solidarity knowing that we are united on the journey with all our brothers involved in this process of charismatic renewal. We will need to overcome those obstacles and difficulties that are inevitably found on the road of spiritual growth. But I tell you from the bottom of my heart: it is worth trying.

I have little more to add. The project does not seek anything other than to help us to live what we are told in number 39 of the Constitutions: "For this reason, we who have been called to follow the Lord and collaborate with him in the work assigned him by the Father, must keep our gaze fixed on Christ, imitate him, and be so steeped in his spirit that it will no longer be we who live, but Christ who truly lives in us. This is the only way in which we will become effective instruments in proclaiming the kingdom of heaven"

I entrust this congregational journey to Mary, our Mother. In our meditation on her response to the Lord's call we will discover a Heart filled with the fire that we want to kindle in our own hearts.

I appreciate the effort of Fr. P. Gonzalo Fernández Sanz, the General Prefect of Spirituality, and team members who have prepared guides that will help us along the path. I'm sure it will bring us abundant fruits.

Rome, May 23rd 2010
Feast of Pentecost

Josep M. Abella, cmf.
Superior General

Celebration for the beginning of the project

(All community members will gather in the Chapel. Various contributions of readings and canticles will have been prepared. On the altar there will be a copy of the bible for each Claretian).

Opening statement (reader)

Brothers: As Claretian missionaries, we are called to be listeners and servants of the Word. During this period of Advent 2010 we are embarking on the journey of the *Forge project in our daily life*. Aware of the fact that life in the Spirit has to take precedence in life's plan, we want to give special priority to fostering our own continuous formation and to strengthen the Christian dimension of our lives. As we pray together, we begin our journey of the Forge project in our daily lives, beseeching the help and assistance of the Spirit of the Risen Lord and of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, our Mother and Formatrix.

Entrance hymn

Presider's welcome

Lord Jesus, Son of the Father, born of Mary and anointed by the Spirit "is the passion that spurs us on and the path we follow" (MFL 46) be with you all and go with you always.



Prayer (recited by all)

Don't give up, Lord,
continue to insist on coming to us,
on becoming a permanent guest
in our community.
Never stop drawing near.
Remain committed
to taking the worn iron
of our tired and exhausted lives
in our efforts as missionaries
and put it in the fire of your love.
Mould us patiently
with gentle strokes of light
on the anvil of prayer
and of shared life
so that we come to be
the shape of Christ the missionary.
Transform us into sharp arrows,
to fly accurately to wherever needed
to radiate the love of God,
and proclaim the beautiful news
of the kingdom,
with words of truth and works of justice.
Help us to prepare your arrival.
There will come a day
when everything will be
as you want.
Amen.

Readings

Acts of the Apostles 2:42.44-47 (reader)

"At that time they were faithful to the teaching of the apostles, the common life of sharing, the breaking of bread and the prayers. Now all the believers lived together and shared all their belongings. They would sell their property and all they had and distribute the proceeds to others according to their need. Each day they met together in the Temple area; they broke bread

Letter of the General Prefect of Spirituality

Introduction

Perhaps what you feel does not fully coincide with any of the above reactions. Give yourself time to understand your own reaction. Whatever it is, it is important that you acknowledge it and, if possible, share it. It will help greatly to face up to it and be able to go on this journey with a sense of certainty and freedom.

Questions

Beyond the feelings that the project awakens in you, I am sure that you value your Claretian vocation. Saint Anthony Mary Claret described the Son of the Immaculate Heart of Mary as "a man on fire with love" (cf. Aut 494; CC 9), as a "man on fire". The XXIV General Chapter wanted to remind us of the meaning of this beautiful vocation with the declaration *Men on fire with love (MFL)*. When you read it, you are likely to come up with the same questions that arose in the Chapter:

How to rekindle the fire within us? (cf. MFL 53-56)
How to set others ablaze? (cf. MFL 57-61)
How to pass on the fire to future generations? (cf. MFL 62-65)

These are questions that link with the concerns that we Claretians have been voicing over the last few years. Of course, there is a great diversity of nuances here. We don't all approach these questions in the same way, as a 30 year old might do or a 50 or 70 year old might do. Nor do they have the same impact in Africa as they do in America, Asia or Europe. The age, psychological and spiritual characteristics, social and cultural context, process of formation etc. of each one of us influences our perception in many different ways. Confronted by such diversity, it would appear difficult to embark on a common project that might fulfil our personal and community needs of renewal and growth. Nevertheless, beyond the differences, we do share the same vocational gift, we have taken the same vows to live an evangelical life as detailed in the Constitutions, and we get our inspiration in Claret to follow Jesus, the unique centre of our lives.

The power of the Word

What will one gain by winning the whole world if he destroys himself?

So that no obstacle will ever make us lose that sense of your calling, grant us, Father, an attitude of intent and good judgment.

Our joy will always consist of the glory of God and being in all things to do with the Father.

So that nothing and no-one will make us live surrounded by superficiality and noise, grant us, Father, an attitude of depth and silence.

The love of Christ has been poured over us and it propels us to share it.

The Spirit of the Lord sends us to proclaim the gospel to the poor.

So that no habit of ours keeps us in a passive and routine state, grant us, Father, a bold and creative missionary attitude.

O Virgin and Mother of God

O Virgin and Mother of God, you know that we are your children and ministers, fashioned by you yourself in the forge of your mercy and love. We are like an arrow put into your powerful hand. Propel us, dear Mother, against everything that opposes the Kingdom of God. Trusting in your protection, we undertake the proclamation of the Gospel without any weapons other than the Word, without any titles other than that of Sons of your Immaculate Heart. Share with us the way and give us your joy and fidelity. Yours, Mother, will be the victory. Amen.



Proposal

On the basis of this common vocation, the XXIV General Chapter approved this proposal: "We will commit ourselves to live the 'Forge Project in our daily lives', in such a way that, with the accompaniment of the General Government, we as individuals, communities and Major Organisms relive the experience of "fire" and grow in missionary zeal" (MFL 55.4)

The proposal is not just a bright idea; it is the result of much collective deliberation. The Chapter adopted it after having examined what is happening to us today (cf. MFL, 7-27), what is of concern to us and what we probably need as a Congregation.

But the deliberation and decision of the Chapter are not meant as an imposition but rather as a stimulus. They prompt you to ask yourself:

How am I living my Claretian vocation? Am I happy with it? What do I need to continue fostering it? How can I deal with personal, community and apostolic problems which confront me each day? How can I really be "a man on fire with love" in this world where I am called to live? In other words: What does God want of me at this moment in my life?

Only after having measured the temperature of our own Claretian lives can we ask other questions concerning the nature and impact of the Forge project in our daily life:

¿What is it? What's it all about? What's in it? How can it be followed "in our daily lives"?

This brotherly letter is intended as an initial response to these questions. But, as you progress along the path, you yourself will find the answers that best apply to your own situation.

Spiritual search

Our Claretian project of renewal is not an isolated event: it falls within the broad context of the ongoing search for spirituality. Paradoxical as it may seem, we must recognize that today, in this ultra-modern, globalised and, in some regions of the world, secularized society, spirituality is in vogue. It is commented on both in Christian circles and beyond. The bookstores are flooded with publications on the subject. One could even speak about a publishing boom. There is an explosion in the number of courses, workshops and experiences that explore this dimension of the human being. There is even talk that human beings have a "spiritual intelligence." There is a social under-current of sympathy for all that is attributed to the word "spiritual", though not so much for religion and in particular for Catholic Christianity, although this varies widely according to the different regions of the world.

How is it possible to talk at one and the same time of lack of belief and spiritual awakening, of disaffection to the Church and new phenomena in religious groups? Something is happening in our world that we haven't been able to decipher. We detect the reverberations, but we do not know where the epicentre is. Everybody wants "something different" to help them overcome the crisis in which they live, to build a new society.

The impact that this phenomenon has on our missionary life is evident. We also feel called to continue the search through which we began our own spiritual journey. We may have to refer later to the various dimensions (mystical, prophetic, wisdom, martyrdom, etc.) of all genuine Christian spirituality, but, beyond these details, the challenge that "post-modern spirituality" means to us is undeniable. It directly influences the question about the meaning of life, a fundamental question for the human being which becomes more critical precisely at times of personal and collective crisis.

The XXIV General Chapter has recognized that "today, many Claretians, from all cultural origins, ages and mission contexts, show an intense desire to grow in the Spirit, joyfully cultivating, in the midst of difficulties, their response to the call they have received" (MFL 9).

5. Forge prayers

Invocation to the Spirit

You, Spirit of Jesus,
you know me and you sustain me
In the midst of my days and nights,
you continue leading me
to the knowledge of the one Lord.
You breathe into me
the greatest desire.
You know what I have and what I need.
There is nothing worthy in me
other than the fruit of your love.
On the way to all truth,
be my momentum and my guide.
Help me to be ready
like the iron bar
which is heated in your love
until it is not I who live,
but Christ who lives in me.
Make flexible my rigid convictions,
warm my cold attitudes,
straighten out my deviations
and make me a disciple
in the school of the Gospel.
Put me in communion with my brothers
and the rest of the world,
so that on this journey
that I am beginning
I will never feel alone.
Be with me always,
You, Spirit of Jesus,
who knows me and sustains me.
Amen.

In thanksgiving for my vocation

Father, from you we have received
the grace of vocation.
We have been called by you,
We are called by you every day,
to be servants of the Word
among our brothers and sisters.
We want to live from the very roots
your gift and your call
because we know that this is the way
of happiness.
So we ask you to help us
to discover together
what you offer us
and what you want from us.
Give us the ability
to overcome obstacles
that prevent us from giving
a generous response.
Visit us with your joy
so that we do not falter
along the road.
Heat us in the forge of your love
until we are fashioned
according to your Son Jesus Christ,
whose love propels us all
to proclaim the gospel.
Amen.

3. “As the fire that penetrates into the iron when it is put into the **furnace**, the iron keeps the substance of the metal but is converted and made real by the fire that enables it and literally transforms it. This marvellous parable, which was used first by St. Macarius the Great, echoes throughout the whole Christian tradition, from east to west. Today as yesterday, Christ invites us to climb the holy mountain, Tabor, to enter with him into the divine fire. Meditation opens for us that path in a concrete way.”

(Alphonse y Rachel Goetemann).

Literary

1. The piece of iron that learned to fly

“There was once a piece of iron that slept beneath the ground. On a night with a full moon it dreamt that its body had wings and could fly through space feeling the breeze of the evening and the illuminating caress of the moon. Soon the nocturnal rainbow approached him and asked, ‘Would you like to be an arrow to tauten the rainbow and fly further?’ At that moment the rainbow disappeared and the piece of iron awoke from its sleep. He rose early and whilst walking he said to himself, ‘All the time I have lived under the earth but now I want to rise, to launch myself into infinity, to conquer space but how can I do it? The sun read his thoughts and told him to go to the house of the blacksmith.’

When the blacksmith saw him he was very happy because his raw material had just finished. The piece of iron greeted the blacksmith and asked him if he could help as he wanted to be an arrow. The blacksmith told him that he didn’t need arrows but rather horseshoes, grills and sheets. The iron said to him, ‘You don’t understand, I have my personal project, I want to learn fly.’ The blacksmith laughed loudly, he had never has such an amusing proposal. ‘But now, what do you want to be?’ ‘Arrow’, replied the piece of iron.’ ‘Aha! Now I understand, but you will have to undergo

many trials, endure high temperatures until your body becomes red hot, then be struck with the hammer to give you shape and after you will be plunged into water. The iron was shocked at what the blacksmith had to say but then he said, ‘I have to be brave, I believe it is worth paying this price for a moment of flight’, and so gave himself into the hands of the blacksmith.

Never had there been a lighter or sleeker arrow than that which the blacksmith made from that piece of iron.

Each time the arrow tensed that rainbow it would fly further and transform its body from iron to bronze, to copper or to gold depending on the quality of the flight.”

(Javier Pulgarín, CMF)

2. I dreamed of God as a forge

I dreamed of God as a **forge** of fire, that softens the iron, as a forger of swords, as a steel polisher, who inscribed on the leaves of light: Freedom – Empire

(Antonio Machado)



Do you share this point of view? In the context in which you are living, are you discovering a desire for something different? Do you also feel like a person who is searching, like a pilgrim? Do you detect in yourself an inner call to continue growing in the Spirit?

1. What is the Forge?

Over the last twenty years the allegory of the forge has circulated amongst us. You are probably familiar with it and you have a clear idea of its import. You may have even taken part in courses of continuous development or spiritual exercises organized around this allegory. But it might also be that you have only a vague idea of what it means or it’s a little confusing or even strange. Let me share with you a few points to help you clarify what we mean exactly.

Brief history

In 1989, in the Claretianum in Rome, a meeting of formators of the whole Congregation was organized by the General Prefecture of Formation. The main concern of this meeting was the following: in our congregational tradition is there a specifically Claretian method of formation?

This concern was then expressed over a wide range of areas: Can we talk about a Claretian spiritual journey, expressed in pedagogic terms? What is the essential core of this journey? How could it be presented in a brief and attractive way?

Behind these questions there palpitated a great interest in learning and sharing our Claretian identity on the one hand and, on the other, the need to find pedagogical solutions that allow us to live out our spirituality as a true journey of personal growth in harmony with the times in which we live.

Enlightenment came from the study of the Autobiography, written by Father Founder as a kind of handbook for his missionaries. Within it you will see, in narrative detail, the spirituality of our Founder. Moreover, symbolically condensed in a short passage of the Autobiography “the allegory of the forge”, you can see the charismatic process experienced by Anthony Mary Claret:

“At the beginning of my stay in Vich I was undergoing an experience not unlike what goes on in a **blacksmith’s shop**. The **smith** thrusts an **iron bar** into the **furnace**, and when it is white-hot he draws it out, places it on the **anvil**, and begins to **hammer** it. His **assistant** joins in, and the two of them keep alternating **hammer-blows** in a sort of rhythmic dance until the iron takes the **shape** the smith had planned. You, my Lord and Master, thrust my heart into the furnace of the Spiritual Exercises and frequent reception of the Sacraments; and after thus **setting my heart on fire with love for you and the Blessed Virgin Mary**, you began to hammer away at me with **humiliations**, and I, too, began hammering away with my particular examen on this virtue that I needed so badly” (Aut 342).

So, from then on, we began referring to Anthony Mary Claret’s spiritual journey as *the Forge*.

The 1994 *General Plan of Formation* (cf. GPF 123-127) makes reference to it. This model was also used in the *Congress on Spirituality* which took place in 2001 (cf. Our missionary spirituality on the path of the People of God II, 1, a).

Many Claretians around the world have been able to recognise, in this symbolic presentation, the elements of Claretian spirituality which they themselves were living.

Meaning of the allegory

Nevertheless, you may still find this discovery a somewhat arbitrary choice or, at best, a mere coincidence. Why, precisely, do we linger with this allegory when we know that St Anthony Mary Claret uses many others to describe his spiritual experience (for example, the allegory of the inner cell or of the potter)? Why give special importance to the forge? There are two fundamental reasons for this:

- Because this allegory directly connects with the symbol used by Claret in the so-called “definition of the missionary”: the *fire*. The XXIV General Chapter has re-defined this statement in order to lay before us our missionary identity today. This particular symbol of the fire is used by Claret to refer to the most important virtue for the missionary: *love* (cf. *Aut* 438-441).
- Because it not only presents, in a static way, the *essential elements of missionary spirituality* (an experience of God the Father, Son and Spirit, which empowers us to proclaim the gospel) but the *process of growth* is outlined, or at least hinted at (the idea of several stages: furnace, anvil, etc.) and the *agents* are referred to (director, assistant, iron bar) and so too are the *elements* (forge, fire, hammer) which are involved in the process. (cf. *GPF*, 90, 145)

To some this may seem an anachronistic allegory, too mechanical, even a little violent. I don't know what your reaction will be. I don't even know if you've ever seen a forge in your life in order to fully understand what it is. Who cannot be fascinated by the fire that softens the hard iron or the hammer that rhythmically transforms iron into a useful and beautiful object? Beyond the first impression that it produces, it is a beautiful allegory with a deep meaning:

- *Cosmic*. It brings together the four elements: earth, fire, air and water.
- *Artistic*. Each piece made in the forge is unique, the result of a technical craft and not a conveyor-belt industrial process. The blows of the blacksmith are not an expression of his aggressiveness but his artistic talent and skill.
- *Teaching*. It emphasizes that every process of transformation has an inspiration that is both “mystical-passive” (fire) and “ascetic-active” (the anvil).

As in every allegory, it is vital to establish a connection between the different elements and the reality to which it refers. In the table below you will see what they meant for Claret.

The meaning of the elements contained in the allegory of the forge

- The **blacksmith's workshop** is the formative environment of Vic.
- The **Director** is the Father, Christ, Mary and the various people in charge of formation.
- The **iron bar** is Claret himself, as much a passive subject as a disciple who lets himself be shaped by the forge.
- The **forge** is, above all, the Holy Spirit, but also the Heart of Mary and various ascetical practices such as prayer and spiritual exercises.
- The **anvil** represents the situations and trials of life.
- The **assistant** is, once again, Claret as an active subject who collaborates in his own process of transformation.
- The **hammer** equates to the various formative activities.
- The **shape** proposed by the Director is none other than Christ himself symbolized by an **arrow** which, placed in the hands of Mary, must be launched against the enemies of the gospel.



6. “In the **Forge** of the exercises of St. Ignatius were formed and perfected St. Francis Xavier, St. Francis de Borja and the venerable Granada, adornment of the order of St. Dominic for his virtue, letters and eloquence, called the Spanish Cicero.” (Translated from *Ejercicios explicados*).

7. “St. Ligori says that the principal concern of a bishop is to have a well organized and managed Seminary, and to not ordain any young man who has not been three or four years in the Seminary, in which he will learn the proper sciences of the ministry of the sanctuary, and the similar virtues of the priestly state. We would want this general rule not to have any exception, although there have been lawyers, wise and virtuous people who want to be ordained, it is necessary for them to infuse the ecclesiastic spirit; they must acquire the rubrics and practices of Religion, and only in the Seminar can this be obtained: there the **forge** is; there is the workshop for good churchmen. Even though the metal and the wood are of the best quality, it is indispensable that they are prepared in the workshop, so that they can be the required tools. For this reason, there is the need that those who try to be good and useful priests come to the Seminar.” (Translated from *El Colegio Intruido*).



Spiritual

1. “Regarding the faults of individuals, it is certainly necessary that whoever knows himself should recognize the faults he has, for he will never be free of them in the state of our present misery until in the **furnace** of the everlasting love of God our Creator and Lord all our wickedness shall be entirely consumed, when our souls shall be completely penetrated and possessed by Him and our wills thus perfectly conformed to –or rather transformed into- His will, which is essential rectitude and infinite goodness.” (*St Ignatius of Loyola*).

2. “The second counsel is wholly necessary for religious so they may fulfill the obligations of their state and find genuine humility, inward quietude, and joy in the Holy Spirit. If you do not practice this, you will know neither how to be a religious nor even why you came to the religious life. Neither will you know how to seek Christ (but only yourself), or find peace of soul, or avoid sinning and often feeling troubled. Trials will never be lacking in religious life, nor does God want them to be. Since he brings souls there to be proved and purified, like gold, with **hammer and the fire** [Ecclus. 2:5], it is fitting that they encounter trials and temptations from human beings and from devils, and the fire of anguish and affliction. (*Eclo* 34,9.11)” (*St John of the Cross*).

4. Texts on the Forge

Biblical

“So, too, is the smith standing beside the anvil intent on forging iron; his face is scorched by flames from the fire and he struggles in the heat of the furnace; the clang of the hammer is deafening; his eyes are fixed on the model to be copied, he makes every effort to work well and spends time at night in bringing his task to perfection” (*Sir 38:28*).

Claretian

1. “At the beginning of my stay in Vich I was undergoing an experience not unlike what goes on in a blacksmith’s shop. The smith thrusts an iron bar into the **furnace**, and when it is white-hot he draws it out, places it on the anvil, and begins to hammer it. His assistant joins in, and the two of them keep alternating hammer-blows in a sort of rhythmic dance until the iron takes the shape the smith had planned” (*Aut 342*).

2. “In effect those who receive Communion well, will be like an iron bar placed in a furnace, where it turns to fire. Yes, in the same way the soul that received Communion well, will be divinized. The fire rids the iron of its dross, its natural coldness and hardness, making it so soft that it may be shaped to the liking of the smith. The fire of divine love in the **furnace** of Communion acts in a similar way on the soul who receives Communion well and often: it removes the dross of its imperfections, its natural coldness, the hardness of its self love, and makes it so tender and soft that it may be shaped completely to the will of God in all things, so that it says as Jesus said to his Eternal Father: ‘Not my will, but Thine be done.’” (*Spiritual Writings, Vol III, p. 159*)

3. “The seminarian, called by God to an ecclesiastical career, has to force himself to apply himself to the study, in order to one day be a perfect link in this beautiful unbroken chain of the Wise; and for this reason discovers oneself in the seminary, which is like the **Forge** in which one should well prepare oneself.” (Translated from CLARET, *El Colegial Instruido*).

4. “Finally you will pray an Our Father and Hail Mary which with the five will be six, that make up the main state, where you will want to receive communion, and in effect you will receive spiritual communion, and you will think, therefore that nothing lives in you that is not in Jesus and you find yourself placed like a bar of iron in the **forge**, where one melts and is shaped by the will of the artist, so you have to heat yourself in the love of God and be completely melted and shaped by the will of God’.” (Translated from *la Carta de Claret a la Madre Sacramento*, 19 de noviembre de 1861: EC II, 397).

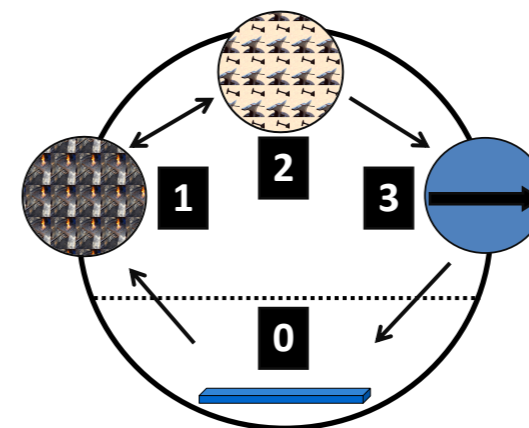
5. “Meditation has to be for Priests the spring, that has all the pleasures or knows all the virtues; because meditation is the **forge** where one is lit by the fire of divine love: *in meditatione mea exardescet ignis*. And finally no one should slacken in the meditation that each one does there in their retreat each day, we have arranged spiritual reading and the meditation or mental prayer, which will serve as material for the first conference of each month which as you know is being carried out every month; this is what one calls by another name a day of retreat.” (Translated from *an unpublished manuscript*).



Educational Process

The process of the forge can be described graphically as a circular procedure, or rather as a spiral process: you always go through the same stages, but each new lap marks an improvement over its predecessor.

Pay attention to the following chart. It will help you understand what the blacksmith does when he wants to shape something in the forge. As you can see, the piece of iron is never placed directly on the anvil. On cold iron the hammer bounces back and doesn't change anything. Everything begins with the fire.



- 0. Preparing to start
- 1. Piece of red hot iron
- 2. Piece of forged iron
- 3. The launched arrow

It isn't difficult to understand the process, is it? Now let us try to make it relevant. The teaching contained in this allegory is clear. If we want to transform a shapeless piece of iron into a sharp arrow (symbol of the missionary), it is necessary to follow the same process that the blacksmith adheres to in the forge:

- First, *take the iron bar* and prepare it appropriately (0).
- Next, *put it into the fire* to remove the slag, heat it and make it ready for the process of transformation (1).

- When the bar is red hot, *put it on the anvil* and very slowly, using accurate blows with the hammer, the desired shape will gradually emerge (2). Often, as the iron cools, you must put it back in the fire (1), so there is a continuous movement from the fire to the anvil, and anvil to the fire. In the process of casting, the liquid iron is poured into a mould and you quickly produce the finished products, all exactly the same. In the technique of forging, however, the slow process is that of a craftsman; the products are unique (no two are exactly alike); it goes back and forth; there is ongoing dialogue between the fire and hammer. Using today's terminology we could say that this is a "personalized" process.
- Finally, once the iron bar has acquired the desired shape (in our case, the shape of an arrow), the blacksmith puts it into the water to produce the tempered end-product (3). When through use or the passage of time it becomes dented or covered with slag, it is necessary to restart the process (0), so that the forge becomes a workshop of "continuous formation".

Application to the spiritual process

I imagine that, as we described these various steps, you've been thinking about your own experience of inner transformation. Perhaps you haven't experienced anything similar yourself throughout your life? The truth is that it's not difficult to apply the allegory of the forge to the process of spiritual growth.

- Each one of us is the iron bar. We are valued for who we are (iron), but often we have lost shape and we are full of rubbish. To truly carry out our mission we need to "get back into shape." This means accepting the call of God who invites us to move from where we are (0), changing ourselves and entering into the transforming forge of his Son.
- To experience fire (1) is, in short, to experience God's love that warms, cleanses, softens, cauterizes and brightens our lives. It is the mystical moment, without which there is no possibility of living out a process of transformation: "Love for God and for our brothers and sisters [Mk 12.29-31] has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit [cf. Rom 5:5] and builds up our communion. It is the first and most necessary gift which marks us out as true disciples of Christ. Hence, our entire missionary life will be governed and shaped by this love "(CC 10).

- The task of transformation also requires a slow process of forging (2). This second key stage of the forge (focusing on the work that the blacksmith carries out on the anvil) symbolizes the process of *being transformed with Christ*, which is precisely why we are called to be missionaries: "We must keep our gaze fixed on Christ, imitate him, and be so steeped in his Spirit that it will no longer be us who live, but Christ who truly lives in us. This is the only way in which we will become effective instruments in proclaiming the kingdom of heaven"(CC 39).
- Finally, the arrow that is forged and shot (3) symbolizes *our experience of being anointed and sent by the Spirit to proclaim the gospel to the poor*: "Our special calling among the People of God is the ministry of the word, through which we communicate the total mystery of Christ"(CC 46).

The key stages in the forging process

Each of the steps of the process refers to a key stage in our spiritual journey. We understand *key stage* as a basic Christian experience which has the potential to generate and illuminate all aspects of our existence.

There are four key stages contained in the allegory of a forge (read in the broader context of Claret's life): an *introduction* (which acts as a doorway for the others and as a hinge between successive developments) and *three central stages* (that are closely connected with the three verbs in the Definition of the Missionary through which is described the vocation of the Son of the Immaculate Heart of Mary: praying, suffering and working.)

The four key stages are defined by two Latin words drawn from the biblical texts which played a decisive role in the spiritual process of the Founder and which shone light on the critical predicaments in his life. Don't panic. You will soon become familiar with them.

They are given in Latin for consistency in a congregational context where there are several languages, making reference to them easier. In the table below you will find the name of the key stage and the biblical text which inspired it, both in Latin and in our own languages.

QUID PRODEST (Mt 16:26)

QUID enim PRODEST homini si mundum universum lucretur, animae vero suae detrimentum patiatur?

What will one gain by winning the whole World if he destroys himself?

PATRIS MEI (Lk 2:49)

Et ait ad illos: Quid est quod me quaerabatis? Nesciebatis quia in his, quae PATRIS MEI sunt, oportet me esse?

Then he said to them: "Why were you looking for me? Do you not know I must be in **my Father's** house?"

CARITAS CHRISTI (2 Cor 5,14)

CARITAS enim CHRISTI urget nos.

The love of Christ urges us on.

SPIRITUS DOMINI (Lc 4,18)

SPIRITUS DOMINI super me; propter quod unxit me, evangelizare pauperibus misit me, sanare contritos corde, praedicare captivis remissionem, et caecis visum, dimittere confractos in remissionem, praedicare annum Domini acceptum et diem retributionis.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. He has anointed me to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and give sight to the blind; to free the oppressed and announce the Lord's mercy.

3. How to practice spiritual guidance

Spiritual guidance is differentiated from other forms of pastoral dialogue in that we do not operate at the level of psychological direction or moral advice, but rather in the realm of experience of the Spirit and the recognition of its action. Its objective focuses on helping the person being guided to analyse what he is living through, to see the paths along which he should be moving and to be aware of the resources that he can use.

Therefore, meetings with the person who is guiding will centre on those experiences and inner reflections ("thoughts" and "motions" using the words of the Christian tradition of bygone ages) which should be analysed so as to recognize the paths of the Spirit and possible diversions. The guide should help to ensure that the life of God filters through the person being guided and that it bears fruit.

Precisely because of the objective nature of this onward journey, spiritual guidance will demand that a certain routine be observed (though not necessarily with any great frequency) for the face-to-face meetings.

When we talk about spiritual life and spirituality, we are referring to a person's whole life. The whole field of action of the Spirit is "spiritual": private and collective life, inner life and relationships with society, affairs explicitly connected with faith (prayer, sacraments, virtues etc...) and worldly matters (economy, culture, politics etc).

Consequently, guidance must not limit itself to the inner life, but rather stretch to all areas of life which are the dominion of the Spirit of Jesus. He was led by the Spirit to prayer and to the liberation of the oppressed, to peaceful coexistence and confrontation, including temptation, etc.

The Forge project in our daily life suggests:

- **Find someone you trust who can accompany you** throughout the four years. It may be another Claretian, even from your own community. You can fall back on the help of other religious or priests and some lay person who is ready to carry out this task. In any case, you should inform him of the project's objectives and its contents so he can better guide you.
- **Prepare periodic meetings** according to the suggestions you'll find in most of the booklets. In any case, we are not dealing with psychological therapy (for which the appropriate qualifications are needed), but rather help to determine your spiritual path.
- **Arrange meetings in advance** to make sure they take place

For further study

- CH. P. MICHAEL, *An Introduction to Spiritual Direction. A Psychological Approach for Directors and Directees*, Paulist Press, 2004.
- J. K. RUFFING, *Spiritual Direction. Beyond the Beginnings*, St Paulus, 2000.
- D. J. SCHUURMAN, *Vocation. Discerning Our Callings in Life*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004.
- H. NOUWEN, *Spiritual Direction, Wisdom for the Long Walk of Faith*, Harper, 2007.

From the XII century, the method of practising the *lectio divina* is expressed as four moments (*lectio, meditatio, oratio and contemplatio*), to which can be added others (*collatio, discretio, actio, etc.*)

LECTIO	MEDITATIO	ORATIO	CONTEMPLATIO
<i>What the text says</i>	<i>What the text says to me</i>	<i>What I say to God resulting from the text</i>	<i>What changes God effects in me through study of the text</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Starting with the prayer to the Holy Spirit, the first step is a quiet reading of the bible text of the day. Read the text several times, even aloud, to better catch its meaning. If it helps, you can even copy it in your notebook. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The meditation is not a process of self-analysis, but rather an endeavour to gain a deeper understanding so as to bridge the distance that separates us from the text. To this end you might find the Bible notes of help, so too some parallel texts or even some bible commentaries. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> With prayer, the Word that comes from God revolves back to Him in the form of gratitude, praise and supplication etc. Resulting from the Word that you have been meditating on, let yourself be freely swept along by the Spirit. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contemplation does not mean visions or private mystical experiences, but rather a progressive alignment of my field of vision with that of God. Contemplation changes you into a Eucharistic person: it helps the meditation of the Word in you become flesh and to make of your life an offering. You can finish by doing a mini-assessment in your notebook of what has taken place.

For further study

- CMF-GENERAL PREFECTURE OF FORMATION, *Initiation in the ministry of the Word*, Rome 1998 (see appendix 5).
- S. J. BINZ, *Conversing with God in Scripture. A contemporary Approach to Lectio Divina*, The Word Among Us Press, 2008.
- T. MERTON, *Opening the Bible*, Liturgical Press 1986.
- C. HAYDEN, *Praying the Scriptures. A Practical Introduction to Lectio Divina*, St Paulus, 2001,
- WEBPAGE: www.lectio-divina.org.

I hope that, from now on, whenever you hear one of these statements, you will now understand its reference. Let's now look at the detail:

- Key stage 0, called **QUID PRODEST**, though not explicitly contained within the allegory, it refers to the threshold experience we have and prepares us for entry into the forge. The name of this key stage is taken from the verse in Matthew 16:26, which played a decisive role in the life of Claret: What does it profit a man if he gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his soul? (cf. *Aut* 68). It points to every experience that questions life itself and confronts us with the need to choose and, therefore, to surrender. Although it is a constant throughout life, it is exacerbated in times of crisis and challenges our vocational fidelity. In Claret himself it is of special importance because of its significance and frequency. It is evident especially in the major predicaments he had to live through in his life.
- Key stage 1, called **PATRIS MEI**, is inspired by Luke 2.49. This key stage is the first in the forge. It refers to the iron bar which, before being beaten, is placed in the fire. It expresses the relationship Claret had with God the Father. It symbolically presents the experience of God's love that heats the cold iron and prepares it to be shaped. To be heated by the love of God, communicated through the Spirit, is the same as *being concerned about the Father's business*, like Jesus. It is, therefore, like the foundation of the missionary life, experience without which no one can engender any process of transformation.
- Key stage 2, called **CARITAS CHRISTI**, is based on 2 Cor 5.14. This key stage reflects the stage at which the red hot iron is beaten by the director and the apprentice so that it takes on the required shape. It is the Claretian experience of imitation, transformation and union with the Son sent by the Father, born of Mary and anointed by the Spirit. The hammer blows are the virtues and ascetic ways that contribute most to reaching the *forma Christi*. For our Father Founder, Jesus Christ is the centre of his life, around which everything revolves. This centrality is reflected in the Pauline text which appears as the episcopal motto on his coat of arms and gives a symbolic name to this key stage: *The charity of Christ urges us on*. The charismatic key, as already noted, is fundamentally a missionary key.

- Key stage 3, called **SPIRITUS DOMINI**, is based on Luke 4:18 (cf. *Aut* 118). It is the final result of the transformational process. The iron bar, heated in the fire of love of the Father (and Mother) and shaped according to Jesus Christ through various formative activities, becomes the arrow which the Spirit and / or Mary fired against evil. It's time for missionary outreach. When Claret wants to describe his evangelical vocation, he has a "very special way" of understanding the words: *Spiritus Domini super me et Dominus me evangelizare pauperibus misit me Dominus*. They encapsulate the experience of being anointed and sent by the Spirit to proclaim the gospel to the poor, just like Jesus. Claret also applied them to the vocation-mission of each of the Claretians (cf. *Aut* 687).

The selection, designation and characterization of these key stages was not the result of arbitrary choices but, rather, the schematization of the original charismatic experience, as reflected in the Autobiography.

What Father Founder ultimately experienced, like any believer, was nothing other than a singular *experience of the Trinity of God* (Father, Son and Spirit) that drove him to devote himself fully to the proclamation of the gospel "so that God may be known, loved, served and praised by all" (*Aut* 233).

It should be stressed that Father Founder never lived these key stages separately, as if it were possible to parcel up the experience of God, but they highlighted one or another (and even different aspects within each) according to the different stages of his life.

His life resembles, rather, a spiral process that develops, at ever deeper and harmonious levels, the seed of the vocation bestowed on him. The same applies to us when we have received the same gift.

Understood as such, the key stages of the forge can be experienced by way of a *journey* (ie a path with stages). This is not limited to initial formation but is a journey of growth that gradually unfolds, deepens and harmonizes with different nuances, the basic key stages of the charismatic experience as the Founder expressed in his *Autobiography* (an instructive presentation of his journey) and as the congregation has assimilated, developed and updated in the *Constitutions* (normative expression of the charismatic experience.)

The forge understood in the Cordimarian context

These key stages can also be interpreted and lived in a Cordimarian manner. Do not forget that Father Founder often turned to the Virgin Mary calling her “forge”, particularly in the prayer that he used to recite at the beginning of popular missions. In this sense we can say that the forge is a Cordimarian itinerary. Indeed, in the spirituality of St. Anthony Mary Claret, Mary is:

- The *Protector* when dangers threaten the missionary and prevents him making a clear decision to follow God in the many predicaments of life: “You, dear Mother, how can I thank you for having saved me from death by pulling me out of the sea?” (*Quid Prodest*).
- The *Mother* who in her Heart reflects and transmits the fire of love of the Father: “Oh, Heart of Mary, a forge and an instrument of love, inflame me with the love of God and my neighbour” (*Patris Mei*).
- The *Formatrix* who forges, with her maternal activity, the iron bar which is the disciple until he takes on the shape of her Son Jesus: “You formed me in the forge of your mercy and love” (*Caritas Christi*).
- The *Directress* who sends the missionary, like a sharpened arrow, to preach the gospel: “I’m like an arrow put into your mighty hand” (*Spiritus Domini*).

We want to implement, over the next few years, a journey of renewal. It is a free and demanding decision. But only the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary can shape us like Christ. Do not forget to call on their help every day. It will help enormously to repeat some simple prayers inspired by the words of Father Founder, “Mother, shape me in the forge of your Heart”, “Mother, throw me like a sharpened arrow.”



2. How to carry out your daily practice of the “lectio divina”

The *lectio divina* is the most important driving force behind *The Forge project in our daily life*. Only the Word of God penetrates into our inner selves (cf. *Hb* 4:12) and has the power to re-ignite a heart that has gone cold (cf. *Lk* 24:32). Don’t forget that “the word of God is very close to you: in your mouth and in your heart, so that you put it into practice” (*Dt* 30:14).

The *lectio divina* is an exercise in reading the Bible which becomes a process of listening to the Word of God. Its ultimate objective is to come to know Jesus Christ, the Word of God incarnate, to love him and to follow him. The important thing is, then, to draw closer to the Scriptures with a humble heart, ready to gratefully accept the way of God for life itself.

Our *Father Founder* found the main stimulus for his own missionary vocation in the Holy Scripture (cf. *Aut* 113). He routinely read the Bible every day (cf. *Aut* 151) and recommended this practice to all kinds of people, especially missionaries.

The *Constitutions* tell us: “Before we dutifully proclaim the Lord’s word, we should first listen to it in attentive meditation and also share it with our brothers so that we ourselves may be converted to the Gospel, become conformed to Christ and set afire with his love, the force that should impel us” (*CC* 34). Vatican Council II (cf. *DV* 25) and the last General Chapters (cf. *SW* 13.1; *IPM* 42; *TMHL* 70.1; *MFL* 54.1) encourage us to practice the *lectio divina* both personally and with the community.

In order to complete this course of formation, *The Forge project in our daily life* suggests the following:

- Each day set aside a **special period** for the practice of *lectio divina*. Try to make it a **special** time (in which you are neither tired nor preoccupied with other matters) and allow sufficient time (between 30-60 minutes). Never say ‘I don’t have time’, because you will appear to be a victim of circumstances: time in your schedule is at your service, you don’t have to be a time-slave.
- Choose a **place** where you can read and pray in a calm atmosphere, preferably in your own room (cf. *Mt* 6:5-6) or your community chapel. You could make use of some images (an icon, a photo, a candle etc.) which help you to create an atmosphere of faith, beauty and contemplation.
- Prepare your **heart**, since the heart is the principal organ of the *lectio divina* because it is the centre from which each person lives and expresses his own personality.
- Focus the *lectio divina* each day on **the texts of the liturgy of the Word** (especially on the Gospel) to follow the road of the People of God.



- The booklet is not a text to be read like a book of meditation, but rather as an **“instruction manual”** which reveals what you can do in each phase of the journey. Given that it is only for you, you can underline and highlight whatever catches your attention, and also make notes in the margins.
- Some written exercises can be done in the same booklet. In this case, it will be clearly suggested and an appropriate space will be provided. Others, given their length, will have to be completed in your own **personal notebook**. This is the part that will occupy most of your time. The exercises are important to put your own personal imprint on the contents.
- Other texts that will help you to go deeper and complete the topic of each booklet will be found on the following **webpage**: www.lafraguacmf.org. Try to log on to this page from time to time, especially at the beginning of each phase.



To remember

2. What will *The Forge* project in our daily lives consist of?

We will now address the issue which touches directly on the project we are going to start. I've shared the above considerations with you, for without them, it is difficult to understand the background of the Forge project in our daily lives and the way it is articulated. We are now able to answer the question that heads up this section. I would like to respond to it with several assertions. I hope that, step by step, we can clarify any doubts and discover reasons why we should fully commit to this journey of renewal.

It is a Claretian spiritual journey

The Forge project in our daily lives is, as the XXIV General Chapter puts it, a project aimed at helping to "re-live the experience of the Fire and to grow in missionary zeal." To experience the Fire is to experience the love of God who transforms the person who lives it. It is not, therefore, a refresher course in biblical, theological, or pastoral studies but is, above all, a true spiritual journey inspired by the experience of our Father Founder. Today, lifelong formation, understood as a journey that lasts a lifetime, is the new theological way of thinking about the consecrated life¹.

1. "The times in which we are living call for a general rethinking of the formation of consecrated men and women, which is no longer limited to one period of life. Not only to enable them to become better able to insert themselves into a reality which changes with a rhythm which is often frenetic but also and more importantly because consecrated life itself, of its nature, calls for the constant openness of those who are called to it. If, in fact, consecrated life is in itself "a progressive taking on of the attitude of Christ", it seems evident that such a path must endure for a lifetime and involve the whole person, heart, mind and strength (cf. Mt 22:37) reshaping the person in the likeness of the Son who gives himself to the Father for the good of humanity. Thus understood, formation is no longer only a teaching period in preparation for vows but also represents a theological way of thinking of consecrated life which is in itself a never ending formation "sharing in the work of the Father who, through the Spirit, fashions in the heart the inner attitudes of the Son" (*Starting afresh with Christ*, 15).

The emphasis lies therefore, not in the content but in the *process of transformation* that each of us is called to live according to the itinerary of the Forge described above. It is, in short, a matter of being "born again" (cf. Jn 3.1-8). Behind this process lies a profound conviction: as we live true to the gift we have received, we will better contribute to building the Church and to humanizing our world. We enter the forge because we are sensitive to the reality in which we live and we want to love it with the fire of God.

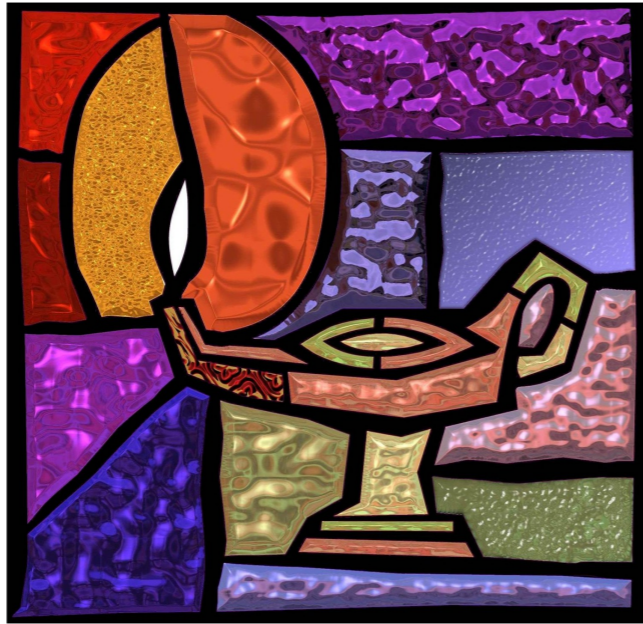
Done privately and within the community

The project focuses mainly on the person of the Claretian, understood always in relation to the other realities that impinge on him, especially his community. Each one of us is called to halt on the road, to take our lives in our own hands, to allow the Word of God to illuminate it, to let ourselves be transformed along the way and, eventually, to make those decisions that respond to the calls that we will experience.

It is not easy to undertake an enterprise of this kind. We could have limited ourselves to a project that is merely informative, but then we would have wasted the opportunity to transform into personal experience everything we have been discovering over the past years on the journey that the Congregation has made to answer the call for deep renewal. Let me be more specific. In practice, this journey will involve the following:



- Clarifying the *motivation* and developing *attitudes* required to continue to grow in the Spirit according to our Claretian charism; in particular, the *desire* to be better missionaries, *opening* our hearts and minds to the lights and movements of the Spirit, sincerely *recognizing* our lives as they really are, our *amazing ability* to overcome the routine, the *humility* we have to cure ourselves of smugness, our *meekness* to let ourselves be guided, and our *confidence* to believe that any real transformation is first and foremost, the work of the Spirit in us.
- Taking seriously the work that we will be proposing in the booklets, which we will all receive at the beginning of each liturgical year. This will require *spending a prolonged period of time each day* (about one hour) carrying out the exercises and, above all, the *lectio divina*. In fact, it is not adding anything to our agenda but simply putting into practice, according to our own circumstances, what the Constitutions ask of us: "Pondering the Word of God in our hearts [cf. Lk 2:19], we should spend some time daily in mental prayer, an hour when possible, and engage in spiritual reading, especially from the Scriptures (cf. 2 Tim 3, 14-17), and examine our fidelity to the gospel" (CC 37).
- Discussing our journey regularly with a *guide or spiritual director* to help us with our own judgments and encourage us when we have difficulties. It would be desirable to do so at the end of each stage or, at least, once every three months.
- *Sharing with the community*, during the monthly retreat or other appropriate time, the process that we are experiencing of growing together as a missionary community. The community perspective is essential to our growth in the Spirit. Although it can be expressed in many ways, it becomes more clearly defined, especially, on the road shared with the local community to which we belong.
- *Seeking prayers of intercession* from the people who are part of our network of relationships: family, friends, co-workers on the mission, etc.



In your daily routine

For over fifteen years there has existed a programme of Claretian renewal in the Congregation, known also as *The Forge*, which was undertaken outside the community for a period of two to four months. Maybe you've even had the opportunity to take part in one. The fact of leaving your normal environment had many advantages when it came to living the experience: concentration, silence, personal and group guidance at hand, deep personal experiences, etc.

In our lives, periods of separation are as necessary as periods of continuity. *The Forge project in our daily life* wants to stress continuity. In fact, it is in everyday life in our local community, in our ministry, where we grow as people and missionaries. How do we make our everyday lives the true scenario of our encounter with God? How do we address, step by step, the conflicts which we live through, the frustrations, the difficulties? Together, how do we find simple routes which allow us to take a qualitative leap in our missionary life? This is the challenge that the programme seeks to answer. "Everyday life" is our own private Galilee, the place where once again we experience the call of the Master (cf. Mk 1:16-20) and where we recognize him as risen, after having accompanied him on his journey up to Jerusalem, followed by his passion and death (cf. Mk 16:7).

Useful guidelines before you start

1. How to use the work booklets

Each year, before Advent, you will receive a collection of 9 work booklets. Each one is intended for one *phase* of each *stage*. Each of the four years into which the project is divided, is called a *stage*:

- Stage 1: *Quid Prodest* (2011).
- Stage 2: *Patris Mei* (2012).
- Stage 3: *Caritas Christi* (2013).
- Stage 4: *Spiritus Domini* (2014).

Each of the nine sections, into which each of the four stages is divided, is called a *phase*. The phases coincide with the liturgical calendar or, in the case of Ordinary Time, with some part of it, depending on its timings.

- Booklet 1: Advent.
- Booklet 2: Christmas.
- Booklet 3: Ordinary Time I.
- Booklet 4: Lent.
- Booklet 5: Easter.
- Booklet 6: Ordinary Time II.
- Booklet 7: Ordinary Time III.
- Booklet 8: Ordinary time IV.
- Booklet 9: Ordinary Time V.

Each booklet consists of 32 pages, in A4 format. Apart from the general plan of *The Forge project in our daily life*, you will find:

- **Short reflections** on the topic. The point of these reflections is not so much to expand the contents as to highlight those that touch more directly on the processes of human and spiritual growth, according to our Claretian charism.

- Suggestions for **practical exercises**: questionnaires, impact of photographs etc.
- **Suggestions for the daily practice of the "lectio divina"**: appropriate quotations from biblical texts, liturgical memorials and feast days, Claretian commemorations and short notes connecting the biblical texts (especially the Gospel) with each year's key stage (Quid Prodest, Patris Mei, Caritas Christi and Spiritus Domini). We are not talking about exegetical or spiritual mini-commentaries, but about emphases.
- Various **helpful hints** for the preparation of the interview with your guide, for the community meeting etc.
- A section which includes some texts (reflections, testimonies etc...) which will help **to go deeper** into the topic..

At the beginning of each phase, bearing in mind how long it lasts and the contents of the booklet, you can decide on the timings to suit yourself. It's important to bear in mind that:

- The best policy would be **to put aside a time each day** for completing your personal work. As you proceed, you will gradually discover the approach and pace that suits you best.



- The first is the *image of the disciples of Emmaus*: “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. In the forge of meditation, spiritual exercises, and especially of the Scripture and the Eucharist, challenged by the social, political and ecclesial context, his heart burned with the fire of his love for God and Mary (cf. *Aut 227, 342*). Realizing that love is a gift, as well as a task, Claret calls insistently upon God the Father (cf. *Aut 444-445*), Jesus (cf. *Aut 446*), the Spirit and Mary: “Oh Heart of Mary, furnace and instrument of love, kindle in me the love of God and neighbour” (*Aut 447*)” (*MFL 44*)
- The second is the *image of the martyrs of Barbaastro*: “In them we find gathered all the basic elements which make up our identity: love for Jesus Christ, for the Heart of Mary and the Church, missionary zeal, devotion to the Word and to the Eucharist, a sense of community, a preference for the poor, etc.” (*MFL 39*).

We entrust the evangelical fruitfulness of this programme of Claretian renewal to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, *the forge* in which we are shaped as missionaries, and to St Anthony Mary Claret, *the arrow* burnished in the very same forge.

I remain at your service, along with the General Government and the Coordinating Team, to help you in any way possible. Please don't hesitate to share your experience and your opinions. It is a journey we are all doing together!

Your brother *in Corde Matris*,

Gonzalo Fernández Sanz, CMF
General Prefect of Spirituality



In practice, living a path of transformation “in everyday life” is going to require:

- *Planning your apostolate and community life* in such a way that each Claretian creates the time and necessary conditions to carry out the programme. In reality, we are not talking about adding anything to the normal expected routine as required by our Constitutions: personal daily prayer, community gatherings, monthly retreat, time for continued personal formation, annual spiritual exercises etc.² So, it's not just a question of increasing the activity but to give them a new dynamism and a special direction. In the words of the classical adage: *Non multa sed multum* (“not many things but with intensity”).
- *Integrating the programme*, at the appropriate level, *amongst those with whom we live most closely*. They can pray with us, challenge us, suggest new routes to us etc.

When visiting our brothers in the Antilles Delegation last April, I was able to meet up with the Lay Claretians of that region. Thirteen of them had intensively followed the programme of *the Forge in our daily life*. And they aren't the only ones. Other groups of Lay Claretians have had similar experiences, so too the secular institute of the Cordimarian Filiation. Witnessing their enthusiasm and hearing their first-hand experiences, I asked myself the following: If these men and women, who have heavy commitments in their family, working and social lives, have been able to complete the journey, why not us?

2. “Thus it will be important that all consecrated persons be formed in the freedom to learn throughout life, in every age and season, in every human ambient and context, from every person and every culture open to be taught by any fragment of truth and beauty found around them. But above all they must learn to be formed by everyday life, by their own community, by their brothers and sisters, by everyday things, ordinary and extraordinary, by prayer and by apostolic fatigue, in joy and in suffering, until the moment of death. Openness to the other and to otherness, particularly a relation with time become most important.” (*Starting afresh from Christ*, 15).

In rhythm with the liturgical year

The instruction *Starting afresh from Christ* (2002) which you have already seen quoted in the above footnotes, sheds a clear light on the meaning which following the rhythm of the liturgical cycle has for us: “People in ongoing formation take advantage of time, they don't submit to it. They accept it as a gift and wisely enter into the various rhythms of life itself (days, weeks, months, years) with wisdom, seeking the harmony between them and the rhythm, fixed by an immutable and eternal God which marks the days, centuries and times. In a very unique way consecrated persons learn to allow themselves to be moulded by the liturgical year in which the mysteries of the life of the Son of God are relived in order to start afresh from Christ and from his death and resurrection everyday of their lives.” (*Starting afresh from Christ*, 15).

The Church presents the liturgical year, to all Christians, as a path of spiritual growth. Even though not all Claretians throughout the world follow the Latin liturgical calendar, everyone, in one way or another, re-lives the same mystery. *The Forge project in our daily life* does not intend to be a parallel path, and much less a path that ignores the way of the People of God. For that reason, the project proposes the following:

- For four years, starting from Advent 2010, it will present the four key stages of the Forge in harmony with the different periods of the liturgical year, devoting each liturgical year to a key stage in the Forge: *Quid Prodest* (2011), *Patris Mei* (2012), *Caritas Christi* (2013) and *Spiritus Domini* (2014).
- The nine work booklets for each year will correspond with the liturgical periods, in the following order:
 - Booklet 1: Advent.
 - Booklet 2: Christmas.
 - Booklet 3: Ordinary Time I.
 - Booklet 4: Lent.
 - Booklet 5: Easter.
 - Booklet 6: Ordinary Time II.
 - Booklet 7: Ordinary Time III.
 - Booklet 8: Ordinary Time IV.
 - Booklet 9: Ordinary Time V.



In short, if the Forge is a process of “configuration with Christ”, the liturgical year is its natural environment because it incorporates the whole message of the mystery of Christ.

With a clear missionary perspective

As indicated above, the Forge project in our daily lives is not focused on our inner lives but, fundamentally, serves to define the whole of our missionary lives. Only one arrow is forged to be shot, and not to be stored in a museum. We want to “be on fire with love” to “light the whole world in the fire of divine love.” This missionary perspective involves:

- *Broadening our outlook* so as not turn the project into something that is shut off to personal or community concerns. God is speaking to us also, as acknowledged by the XXIV General Chapter, in the situation of the world (cf. *MFL* 1-2) and the Church (cf. *MFL* 3-5). Only this broad outlook will allow us to see our own personal and institutional problems in perspective and highlight the importance to where there is a real need. We became missionaries to offer our lives, not to protect them.

- *Letting ourselves be challenged* by people who know us, by the sciences that study man, by the social and ecclesial contexts in which we live. What do others expect of us, especially the poorest? How do their lives challenge us? What do they say about our spirituality, about the way we understand and live out our vows, our community life, and our commitment to the mission? We need to pay attention to these voices and to incorporating them into our way of thinking.
- *Be aware* that, like Jesus (cf. *Lk* 4:16-19) and St. Anthony Mary Claret (cf. *Aut* 118) *we have been called and anointed to proclaim a year of grace*. We are invited to relive and proclaim the good news of the gospel. Where there is experience of grace there is communication of happiness.

Conclusion

In this long letter, I hope I have helped you to better understand what the project is all about. But, to be honest, what I would really like to do is to encourage you, in the name of the General Government, to live this journey as deeply as you can, one that is both a personal and a community journey at the same time. Be generous. Dedicate your time and energy to it. You will have moments of joy and moments of discouragement. You will find that diligent contact with the Word of God is refreshing, but it is also a battle that demands steadfastness. Community discussions will be a source of encouragement but, on occasions, they can flounder on the sea of triviality and frustration. You will even feel tempted to give up on the project. Accept calmly all that comes your way. How can you complete a journey without accepting such tests of your will-power? Those who see it through to the end will taste the happiness of reaching their destination.

In actual fact, we have no idea what the Holy Spirit will grant us or demand of us during the course of the next four years. But we are convinced that all that comes from him will savour of love, happiness, peace and generosity etc. (cf. *Gal* 5:22-23). And it will, therefore, tone up our own lives. When the burden of loneliness and absurdity is bearing down on us, it will help us to shout out: “Abba Father” (cf. *Rm* 8:15). When we are confronted by several false roads, the Spirit will help us to admit that only “Jesus is the Lord” (cf. *1 Cor* 12:3).

The Forge project in our daily life, in short, endeavours to help us continue our spiritual growth, to empower us to be better missionaries, but not to standardize the spiritual journey. In the words sung by the Spanish poet León Felipe, we are aware that “no-one went yesterday / nor goes today / nor will go tomorrow / to God / along the road that I go./ For each man keeps / a new beam of sunlight.../ and a virgin road / God”.

It is not long before the first Sunday of Advent 2010, the date on which we officially begin *The Forge project in our daily life* throughout the Congregation. Before that date, you will have received the materials you need to get started. Your Organism’s team will have visited you to encourage you and explain some details that are not listed in this letter. Many people will be praying for you and for all of us. You can also invite those around you to do the same. But more importantly, knowing your own limitations, ask God the Father for a humble heart as you approach his mystery. Remember the words of Jesus: “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned, and made them known to the little ones” (*Lk* 10:21). Humble prayer will purify your intentions and strengthen your disposition.

Let me finish by putting two images before your eyes which, next to those of the Samaritan woman (cf. *Jn* 4:1-42) and the Good Samaritan (cf. *Lk* 10:25-37), appear in the declaration of the XXIV General Chapter.





*The Spirit of the Lord is upon us.
He has sent us to announce
the year of grace.*

3. Some frequently asked questions

If you are familiar with computers, you know that in almost all programmes there is a section on *Frequently Asked Questions* (FAQ). Since the publication of the Chapter Document, a lot of questions have arrived at the General Government seeking clarification on several aspects of the *Forge project in our daily life*. Let me share some of them with you in case they coincide with yours. If you have other questions, you can ask them through the project website: www.lafraguacmf.org.

What happens if someone doesn't want to participate?

The project, as requested by the XXIV General Chapter, is a suggested path for all Claretians who have taken their final vows. It is not, therefore, optional. Naturally, there may be specific reasons (age, illness, special situation, etc.) that impede the completion of all or part of it. It is the responsibility of the Major Superior to judge each individual case. In these hypothetical cases, an attitude of prayer and support can be very important. When we are not able to "work" we are still able to contribute to the common mission with our "prayer" and our "suffering."

But perhaps there are some brothers who, even after being informed and motivated, are still opposed to it for subjective reasons which are not always convincing. Whatever the case, no journey of spiritual growth is made by decree. It only makes sense when it is the result of a free decision. We can not, therefore, demand participation, but we should prevent the person who is not involved from dissuading (by their words, silence, intimidation or hostile attitudes) the rest of his brothers from completing the project with the necessary peace of mind.

How do we conduct this project in small communities?

This is, above all, a personal journey that, in principle, is possible in any place and in any community, regardless of the number of members involved. It is true that if your community is very small you may need to make a special effort to arrange the times of the community meeting. Some meetings can also be scheduled with other neighbouring communities, although they may happen less often. What is important is not to be deprived of the opportunity to share our journey with the brothers with whom we share our lives and mission. In collaboration with the government of each Organism, we can find the solution that best fits the characteristics of each community.

Where do I find a spiritual guide?

The support of a personal guide is a key dynamic in this project. We need to confront what we discover in the presence of someone else. Everyone is free to choose a person who inspires confidence, even though he or she may not belong to the Congregation (other religious, priests and laity). Each Organism could also provide people willing to perform this task.

Ideally, we would have access to people who have the charisma of a spiritual guide and the necessary qualifications. But this is not always possible. We must realistically and humbly accept the reality in which each one of us lives, but in looking for the ideal situation we must not deprive ourselves of the help of those brothers and sisters who, with all their limitations, are available to listen to us and give us a word of guidance and encouragement. That brother can also be a member of your own community.

When a guide deems that the person being supported, given their particular problems, needs a more professional guide, he or she will try to suggest one and provide access to him or her in a spirit of brotherhood. This is a further opportunity that the project brings.

If, for various reasons (remoteness, lack of people, etc.), it is not possible to have a chat with a guide at the end of each stage, we must ensure that one is available, at least once every three months. Even in extreme cases, when a face-to-face meeting is impossible, we can use other means such as a letter or the Internet. Our Father Founder spiritually guided many people by means of a letter.

Do not forget, moreover, that God Himself is responsible for "guiding us" through many different channels, which we should accept with gratitude: pastoral meetings, conversations with people, church social events, experiences of various kinds, etc.

What skills are required?

Very few, in fact, but we can explain the main ones and rehearse them in the months leading up, especially if you don't use them routinely:

- **Reading.** Each year you will receive nine booklets which you will gradually work your way through. We are not talking about texts that will demand a huge leap of understanding, but about a kind of instruction manual that will help you to benefit from the different exercises. Nevertheless, if you have lost the habit of regular reading or the internet and other media have become a substitute, you will need to practise the art of sustained reading, which will help you to reflect, and not simply for entertainment or information. Generally speaking, for it to be really beneficial, reading practice should take place in a quiet, calm environment. You will know from your own experience, perhaps, that it isn't always easy to salvage periods and places of silence and, especially, to generate a mental state of recollection and listening.

- **Writing.** The project will, in each of its stages, provide several written activities. Although, at the beginning, it will make some demands of you, especially if you are out of the habit of writing, you will find that writing will help you to draw out your own inner self, and to put a name on many of the experiences that you are living with. Writing, especially when it is adapted to certain methodological techniques, will improve your self-knowledge and will have a liberating effect. To carry out the activities, you will need a Forge Notebook or some other medium that lets you record them.
- **Praying with the Word.** The most important part of the project is your daily contact with the Word of God. If you aren't used to the daily exercise of *lectio divina*, it would be a good idea in the coming months to read a book that explains, in simple terms, what the method is all about or, better still, that you attend some activity of this kind that is led by an expert. Not only that. Ideally you should start as soon as possible, or reinforce your habit, of freely and daily receiving the bread of the Word of God with a humble heart. You will note that true change comes about as and when the seed of the Word, which will always bear fruit, falls on suitable and well prepared ground.
- **Sharing.** You will be regularly invited to share what you are experiencing with your guide and your community. To avoid makeshift, or even frustrating, experiences you will have to sharpen up your own communication skills. Try not to use very abstract language. Confine yourself to simple descriptions of what you are going through. Be clear and direct. Believe in the healing power of the narrative. A person or a community that is used to sharing "what has been seen and heard" (cf. 1 Jn:1-4) will grow in authenticity, fellowship and missionary zeal.

What responsibility do the Organisms have?

The project aims to securely combine the personal, community, provincial and congregational perspectives. Earlier, I explained what is of concern to the people and communities. Let me say a word about how it would correspond to Organisms:

- To nominate a person or persons to take responsibility, as a team, of the promotion and coordination of the project within the context of the same Organism.
- To motivate people and communities at the beginning of each year and to give out the appropriate materials.
- To carry out periodic duties of guidance and assessment.
- To provide guides.
- To organize the spiritual exercises according to the time of year.
- To work in tandem with the General Government.

How can I express my opinion about the progress of the project?

Your experience too is very important for the project to really respond to the formational needs of the Congregation. Whenever you feel moved, you will be able to send your opinions and suggestions by ordinary post to the General Prefecture of Spirituality.

Still I would suggest that you take advantage of the offerings of our webpage. There you will find testimonies, all kinds of resource material, suggestions for community retreats etc. There will also be a section devoted to the opinions and suggestions of Claretians around the world. Feel free to use it.

