

***“TO BE CLARETIAN  
FOR TODAY’S WORLD”***

**Our identity  
And  
Charismatic belongingness**

**CONGREGATIONAL SEMINAR**

2010

## MOTIVATION

The lastly enlighten events such as 200years of birth anniversary of Saint Antony Mary Claret and 125 years of death anniversary of Maria Antonia Paris, and as we near the XVI General Chapter it has all moved us to organize a congregational reflection on the charism.

We also consider important the motivations as:

The world we live there is an **accelerated evolution and complexity**. It demands us to deepen our identity for a better response to the challenges of the mission. We are aware that with time we will carry out our mission in a more adverse background and solitude.

Many times, **the urgency of the mission** will leave us alone, each one in her work and responsibility, facing the situations and apostolic activities, for which we need lot of depth and charismatic profoundness.

**The actual reality of our communities is:**

Some numerous and with lot of elderly sisters, others small in number; some are formed by very young sisters. Even within the same Entity, because it is formed by various countries, there are big distances: geographically, culturally, in age, of formation, etc. but all are called to respond evangelizing mission.

The cultural and geographical expansion of the Congregation needs means to revitalize the sense of unity and belongingness. Especially the new foundations in Asia and Africa where there are more young sisters with less opportunity to have contact with the traditions, the written doctrines and charismatic places, without the presence of the elderly sisters who can be near them.

We are sure that the richness of the Seminar will **strengthen our identity, the sense of belongingness and the commitment to actualize and inculturate the Charism to our here and now.**

## 2. OBJECTIVES

1. To do *an updated reading of* some fundamental elements of the Charism.
2. To **interiorize this charismatic gift** so that it may help us to live it more profoundly.
3. To pray over these fundamental themes for our being, so that **we let God shape us according to the specific call** we have received.
4. To seek among all how should **we live it in our today.**

5. **To prepare together the upcoming XVI General Chapter** at the light of these reflections

**3. CONTAINS: Be Claretian Sister Today**  
*(materials of the prepared themes)*



**What do we understand by identity and belongingness?** Jolanta Kafka.



**María Antonia París and Saint Antony Mary Claret: Founders:** Encarnación Velasco and Regina Tutzó.



**Christological resemblance in our Founders.....**Margarita Gómez.



**For the renewal of the Church. ...** Hortensia Muñoz.



**Poverty: Foundation of the new Apostles...** María Soledad Galerón.



**Apostles of Jesus Christ ...** Ondina Cortés.

## INTRODUCTORY NOTES ABOUT IDENTITY AND BELONGINGNESS

By Jolanta Kafka rmi

### 1. Entering...

We are beginning this workshop - seminar on "Our charismatic identity - to live it out today? " and my task is to do an initial work to create a common perspective in this congregational reflection:

- to open some questions and to share about them
- to suggest some fundamental criterion for the seminar.

But my first question to direct to each one of us is whether we do seriously feel the necessity of the seminar. Do we feel the desire of this reflection work personally? And concretely: Do we question ourselves about our identity? And if the question arises, from which point of view?

Is it a sign of regression to ask again who we are or do we have our identity clear? Or maybe the response is theoretically easy but our forms of life are sometimes reflecting lack of coherency, or are full of contradictions?

On the other hand the capacity of questioning and finding responses can be a manifestation of the Spirit who is calling us, challenging and opening up to be a seekers of God and of His will!

### 2. General notions

Before entering into the Claretian missionary identity theme, I would like to recall some basic notions about the identity from the psychosocial view.

The Identity - says the unique identification with oneself, the no-repeatability, that joining various features, all unified, describe the individual, not only in his or her today but also in her/his potentiality. At the same time the word id-entity: similar to the entity, evokes also a relationship. This relationship occurs inside (within) the person – who identifies her gender, qualities, characteristic features, origin, belongingness on the basis of relationships (origins and family) etc; and outside of the person - what the person goes identifying of herself in interaction with other ones.

From the beginnings of the person's growth the identity goes acquiring significance in contact with others - relationship - confrontation:

***On the level of knowledge:***

- what the person discovers in herself – in confrontation with what other say about

***On level of affectivity:***

- what the other accept of her – in confrontation with what the person goes accepting of herself, (her sex, distinguishing other persons from things.... step by step). Many conflicts arise when these relationships are not well identified and balanced.

The process of growth lasts a lifetime, as a path o road where to move forward it is necessary to cross bridges that one has built. Each stage is to cross a new bridge. If the bridge doesn't have good base where it starts up, it will not be stable. That is to say that advancing toward a new stage supposes to have made the previous stage more or less well. The past warrants the future. But the past – in the sense of having the experiences, enlightened by the principal values or faith and interiorized for the personal growth. This has also implications in the formation process: the community offers to the candidates the conditions and means to build up all the dimensions of their developing identity; the formandee harmonically integrates through the personalization process.

A definitive, in many aspects, stage for the growth of the identity is the adolescence, peculiar because in this stage the person in the meads of struggles, goes emerging more intensely with the elements of her identity. In this stage the search of the identity crosses a very significant bridge.

She or he leaves experiences and elements of identity behind (childhood, depending relationship in the family...). This will be successful when

- the corporeity and the sexuality is definitively accepted
- the stability is rooted in significant family nucleus - with both autonomy and appropriate dependence; in this time the identification with other groups can appear too and the identification with models as well.
- the separation from the affective presence is gradually lived out with serenity
- possible initiation in the responsibility and commitments.

It is not strange therefore that in this stage the interior movements such like: looking for personal place for the future, self-giving experiences and those we can call vocational, develop and lead to new initiatives.

It is true that now the adolescence is extended in years, but the main characteristics that describe it don't change.

To integrate with love and acceptance all the dimensions of this list, she/he must continue constructing and developing the basis of identity with constancy and patience until it will be achieved in the mature age.

We could consider a person with integrated identity when she or he is:

- a. capable of self-definition not only in the qualities she/he has yet for the sense of live she/he gives
- b. able to make decisions and to pursue his/her goals, because they are in accordance with the values - criteria - to judge her/him-self and to asses others
- c. able to be coherent – there must be consistence between what she/he says of him/herself and what the other ones say about
- d. able to be flexible but non re-mouldable.
- e. able to relate to others, and manage differences with respect and reciprocity
- f. able to give something without gratification; able to give oneself.

Only the one who knows (possess) himself, is able to give up himself..

All the features integrated require certain stability in time. It is impossible to speak about identity when behaviours and manifestations are temporary kept in certain rigour or adjustment. If there is not an integration work prolonged in time, we will be not be able to define the personality.

As curiosity but quite near to our understanding of the achieved identity I add the definition of a philosopher from India that I found among the thoughts published in a newspaper. He says: the identity is the instance of the relationship among the deep I and the capacity of thinking,

judging and acting. This instance is the one that is able to explain itself when thinking precedes the action and when the actions precedes thinking.

Is it possible to put on risk or can get lost the identity - even after having being partially achieved?

Experiences like -

- constant prejudices - that block the free expression
  - affections that create dependences (to be identified with the other one by the affection or another benefit)
  - behaviours that can weaken the capacities and even features of the personality (roll, submission...)
  - dependences (fashions, drugs, alcohol, TV, Internet, games...)
- ... they can alter the balance of the identity.

If may happen that we feel sometimes out of the danger, but not all are in the same vital and vocational moment. The process is personal and conditioned by many aspects.

In the list of these “dangerous” for the identity experiences are options of everyday life. It may appear simply but in reality every day demands a new option...; every day a decide what I will do with the time, how I spent energies, which relationship I establish, whether I overcame prejudices or maybe I am creating them... The experiences I do every day and how I face them can lead me harmonically in achieving the identity or, on the contrary, can lead me to its "diffusion" or delay the time of its definitions. Sometimes the identity process can be deposed in others – in the experience of dependence – emotional, social or in one’s imagination, especially in regards to the places, or special circumstances. In fact we have heard not rarely something like: *if I were there I would develop more my capacities,,,,; if there were no conflicts I would continue this mission...*

We can also pass through situations that don't depend on our options or on the community reality but there are experiences that the life brings: illness, lost of dear ones, pension, be minority, war... there are crisis originated by these circumstances and can leave a deep mark on the personalities. The person can became more open or more closed, aggressive or submitted; in continuation or in rupture with her process; it can eclipse or cause regression of the identity.

### **3. Identity and relationship.**

We said that the relationship is fundamental for the process of affirming the identity. According to Buber the relationships that give structure to the identity are basically three:

- between person and things: human being and the creatures (people can make a mistake with things) - the other one is always a person independently of condition, colour, culture and education.
- between person and the you, including the transcendental You - God - the other one is person but the Other, God is beyond the personal being. The other cannot be God;
- within the same person: I can relate to myself - I am a person, not God, not a thing.

Based on these experiences we create a net of relationships. According to these relationships, and how they are lived out – we establish a cannon of values and progressively, we are trying to live out as they “govern” our options and definitively the relationships. There is a mutual circulation between relationships and values.

For that reason it is not strange to hear: as you are related to God, you are related in the same way to other ... and likewise you are for the other ones you may be with God... At the same time

the biggest frustrations are those that are originated by the feeling of being treated as a thing - object.

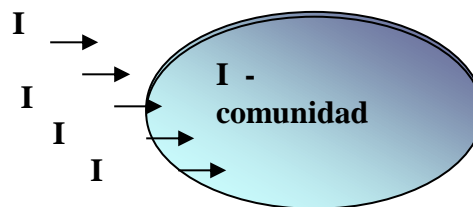
The identity is “visible”; it spreads to show its nature in many ways. Although the identity is a matter of the interiority, we can say that the identity is true when reflected in:

- spontaneous capacity to define oneself (I am....)
- certain coherence within the being - to think and to make go together.
- responsibility in making decisions and assume their consequences
- capacity to transcend oneself, even overcoming the vital values as health, faculties, until giving up the life....

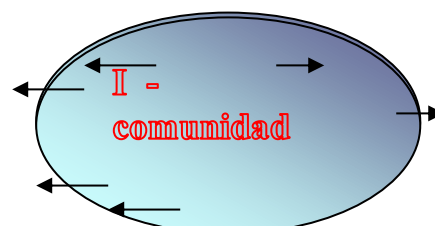
Everything obeys the scale of values the person has but for us - Christians – there exists one basic way to grow and it has to be deepened more and more: it is to arrive to Christ's fullness, to respond to the call of faith that becomes our project of life. This “way” is inscribed within the human dimensions. There are not two separate ways - that of personal realization and that of being Christian = disciple of Jesus.

***Why do I consider important this introduction?***

- Because the person's growth and the development of the identity is a slow process and it doesn't obey the chronological stages. The integration, we must recognize it, it is slow path and when we feel already "made" we should patiently give support to those who are on the way, especially to the “beginners”. The charismatic identity is inscribed within the human and Christian identity.
- Because in a group similar processes happen and when it is about the identity of a community (local, congregational... ) the elements of growth and its characteristics have more or less the same process. As Claretian Congregation we are already 150 years old, but in many places the Congregational identity planted in new missionary realities is undergoing a similar process of “identification”.
- Because each community is identified through the contribution of its members. The growth is assured when there is a "fine harmony" among what the members contribute to the communion, because from inside their personal experience of identification with the charism make them give up for Christ within it, and, on the other hand, what the community offers, testifies (doctrine, forms of life, witness) in accordance with what the community says about its identity and so the “identified” members easily can feel its part.



**At the same time:**



But there is another aspect more than this which identifies us as a charismatic community and it is fundamental for our identity. As religious community we are not simply “identifying ourselves”, it is not a simple processes of inter-relationships that arrive to the point of constituting an “association”. We cannot be self-defined like a nation (it is, I think, one of the human rights). Our community is not able to self-define, because it has a Spiritual origin - it is: the action of the Spirit in the Church.

The identity of a congregation is the reaches of the charism, deepened, meditated and lived out in the time by its members and translated into forms of life; developed with time and actualized up-to-date.

It is a gift of which we participate and living it out we transmit. For that reason only people – Claretian sisters - they can have the identity, as individuals and as communities. No book neither another person is able to be a bearer of this identity. It goes together with the vocational experience of each one, that is to say with the Grace of the call to follow Christ according to the charism, in our case given by Paris and Claret.

#### **4. And today?**

We are witnessing (and not as mere spectators only) to a series of phenomenon in the society that affect the identity and identities. It is necessary to put attention to certain social conditions because they don't stay out of the gates of our communities.

We live amid a chronic uncertainty. The migration – mobility - of people (for different reasons) bear fruit of the increasing interaction of cultures or at least closer approach and exchange, but at the same time menace; it puts on test the tolerance, sense of equality and dignity of human beings

The uncertainty of job, for the crisis on one hand and on another, the law of competitiveness and profit at minimum cost;

The emotional uncertainty - because the basic community - family - is not in grade of giving it for it also crosses its crisis and because the gratuitous experiences of friendship, of personal encounter, stay at very low level.

#### **Because of these facts, the society offers a supplementary but incomplete identities:**

- strongly legal identities: where relationship and the possibility of survival and belongingness is warranted by normative, more and more complex, but externally integral. They are social groups of all type, cultural, religious, political. We are not far from it when we happen to think that we will preserve the identity by establishing more norms or make it secure on the "points" of agreements.
- resistance identities - groups rising up among the minorities or excluded. They reinforce and make visible the features of their identity to affirm their presence, many times appealing to violent forms or to pressure.
- identities apparently integrated by the mere fact of belonging, but in reality impermeable in the relationship with the community and among its members. Let us think on the emigrants, intercultural workers groups. It is also a risk on the congregational level when being together many cultures, the sisters don't transcend their values to integrate others' and personal ones in communion. The experience of inculturation or incarnation of the charism is not something obvious.



But the identities are also affected when the individualistic culture is subtly influencing our communities, place where we share values, forms, activities, mission. Sometimes this common goals loose meaning. The personal prevails on the common thing more and more. It has a positive sides, but often damages the essential dimension of our lifestyle.

There are still other aspects: the market also offers us a supplementary identity, like to console or to trick raising necessities and responding to them, creating an ideal world for people. The “you will be happy” depends on what you buy; you will be accepted according to what you wear, you listen, how you make your house, with whom you spent time.... This is not new, since this consumerist mentality has been co-existing from several decades together with some “ideologies”, but recently it seems that there is no longer even a "weak thought", like Lipoventsky says. The fashion and the economy that is what move everything.... And the identity of what we buy and where we stick with certain subculture of customers or of owners.

We cannot undervalue another phenomenon, the one called now the "sixth continent" - that of the virtual world. There you can exist with a the invented "identity", and belong to an invented group.... And to make you love in this way. The more and more sophisticated mobile telephony and virtual communication, is the vehicle of contacts, yet more and more superficial relationships, deceiving and creating dependence not on the people but on this way of communicating. There was said in a newspaper in India that the product better sold today is sold is the “talk” – is the “bla-bla”.

The victims of this are mainly the adolescents and the youth in their age of more intense search of identity. If somebody puts it for them in a tray and easy – they will take it. Unfortunately this way of “social education” has been promoted from the 90-ties and since the "product" is being sold well, it doesn't change a lot... those adolescents of the 90-ties, they are already 30 years old and with fatigue they overcome the delays in the process of growth. Seems there is a premeditated “machine” that moves this type of incomplete "identities" . In fact it is the best thing for the market = the global adolescent... and it is not only about the music or dress.

The adults are also affected by this phenomenon and not few make regression to the adolescence in undefined behaviours, without taking responsibility, hiding their immaturity under the endless roaming - searching their place, personality, studies, “experiences”, affections.....

There are those who will come towards them offering a save “supplement” to give consistency to these weak identities. For instance:

- Associations or communities that offer strong **identity in external expressions**, very structured on *the legal – normative – level* or cohesive, where the protest is a main goal. They are fundamentalist movements, religious, cultural or economic groups. The characteristics are common: isolation, sense of superiority, not admission of extra influences.

- Associations of **superficial relationships** gathering people for any reason, to enjoy, to feel together with... it can be a bingo or beer club or even virtual. They can be in large contacts and relationships, but *without any commitment*. In this way the identities are deluded in multi-

presence or, on the other hand, create invisible boundaries of mutual exclusions for insignificant reasons.

And the religious life? In general, there are movements of searching for renewed identities, among those that are not at margin of these processes of the world, mainly in Euro-American area. Of course we cannot forget other problems that also affect us, such like injustices, wars, irrelevance of the Church in many places and therefore of the religious life too.

The fact of deepening the Christian vocation and therefore the prominence of each one, situates us surely in a more evangelical place inside the universal Church and the world, yet not existentially easier. It seems that the meaning of religious vocation have small relevance for this world of fashions, of a lot of chatting but little listening, of doing without God; this reality can help us in the deepening of our identity situating us in the place that corresponds without losing its evangelical meaning and without waking up certain melancholy of something definitively lost. This thought (Garrido, Garcia Paredes, Schneiders, Palmes) is vastly shared and in the Congress of the 2004 most of religious breathed this same air.

What defines us as religious is, in the first place, the freedom of the initiative of God that calls to follow the Risen Christ, to surrender the whole being in pursuit of the Kingdom, in a charismatic community. Secondly it is a response of love and life to this gift in freedom and it is translated into a commitment with public vows.

In front of the mentioned reality of the society, our identity is affected in the understanding of radical value of the consecration, and in its visible forms. However, paradoxically, it continues being eloquent the sign of a community or Claretian sister, whose life speak of God, Gospel and fully realized vocation.

At this point, before we will make echo of these questions in reference to our Claretian identity, I suggest to shift to another plane and to situate ourselves in front of the Word of God..

### **5. Lectio: Lc 6, 46-49 (Cf. 8,19-21)**

<sup>6</sup> 'Why do you call me, "Lord, Lord" and not do what I say? <sup>47</sup> 'Everyone who comes to me and listens to my words and acts on them -- I will show you what such a person is like. <sup>48</sup> Such a person is like the man who, when he built a house, dug, and dug deep, and laid the foundations on rock; when the river was in flood it bore down on that house but could not shake it, it was so well built. <sup>49</sup> But someone who listens and does nothing is like the man who built a house on soil, with no foundations; as soon as the river bore down on it, it collapsed; and what a ruin that house became!'

**Context:** conclusion of Jesus' teachings; closure of the of the section of the sermons on the plain (in Mt the sermon of the mountain); Jesus before continuing his journey has just given his criteria for the discernment - good and bad fruits; out of the abundance of the heart speaks the mouth; but He restricts, even when the mouth says Lord, Lord...

#### **Lectio:**

I'll teach you who is the one  
- that comes to me  
- that listens to my words  
- and puts them into practice

He is similar to a man that builds the house, digs out well ... puts the foundation on the rock  
- the flood, rains, boring river went against the house and it didn't move, because it was still and well founded.

The sapiential comparison in the mouth of Jesus invites to opt. Jesus presents an alternative, as that of Moses' speech in Dt: *I put before you the life and happiness, death and grief .... You will love your God, you will walk on His ways, follow his commandments, precepts and mandates; ... choose the life loving your God, listening his word and keep close to Him.* (Dt 30, 15 ss).

It is an invitation to choose life, a pedagogic closure that invites to declare, or to define the one's position in front of the Master; the provocation to response... what type of man are you? what do you want to choose?

Each one of us shall do a prayerful reading but I would suggest to stop on three concrete words:

- 1 – “to act on the words” - to complete - to make possible, visible, it causes effect
- 2 – the rock
- 3 - the house (Hebr 3,3-6)

Being aware that here we have not an allegory but a parable - a synthetic comparison.

1 - **to put into practice**. It is to simply make, as the one who exercises an occupation. But it bring us to other meaning: to complete - to give visibility to the Word like in Mt 5,17 and Lc 24,44. it is not then to act but to translate in life, in a project.

2 - **the rock** - it evokes the presence of God, firm rock; one of His poetic names given to Him out of the experience of stillness in God, in his fidelity and trust.  
From the rock the people of God drank in the desert and Paul saw it like a figure of Christ (1 Cor 10,4).

Dig out and penetrate all the layers of the soil to base the foundation on the rock is to cross the layers of our vulnerability and to put the construction in the firm ground - Christ.  
It is the beginning of any journey: the beginning of the option of faith, starting point, not the end.

3 - **the house** - To build a house and have the right to inhabit it was a part of the messianic promise. Here the accent is on the foundation of the house and not in the walls build usually to protect and close the access to the building, as it states in Dt when speaking about the person faithful to the Law.

To build a house is to think of a family, community, place for others. It means then to create community. The house is part of one's goods, not only a building.

The times when in the Gospel it appears that Jesus rests or stays in any house, it becomes HIS house, where all can enter and share indiscriminately (Cf. Mt 9, 27-33). The house appears also in references to Christ himself and to his community - Hebr 3, 3-6; Ef 2, 19-22.

We can interpret then: to begin the building of house and want to realize it assuring its stability, means not only be faithful at personal level, but at the same time to create fraternity.

In fact the three conditions that Jesus fosters here to build a house, are the same that he puts as conditions of the "new family" that he establishes, new way to relate one another, creating bonds in the family of the Kingdom of God - Lk 8, 19-21: *these are my relatives, family....* (they are together with him), *they listen to his words and they fulfil them.*

### ***Meditatio:***

Following the lot of the two houses, we see that their end depended on the beginning. It is a Good News: the house, the community, will stay firm (it will continue being house and place of sharing for its inhabitants, will be open to new ones...) when from the beginnings and always will keep on abiding with Jesus, listening to him and putting in practice his Word. The only thing, indeed that differentiates the two houses in this alternative: putting in practice the Word of Jesus or not.

That is to say that the stress of the passage is on the binomial - to listen - to put into practice. Is it because the faith is a matter of action? What is this practice, action expected? How to pass from the listening to the practice?

#### **- *To listen:***

One cannot listen without being attentive. It is not pure act of hearing, rather it is to direct all the faculties, to give time and capture what is said, not only words, but all their meaning and tunes. To listen is a fatigue because the one who listens have to displace himself, at least to the second lane, to leave space to the tunes, message and the person that speaks – communicates. To remain in attitude of listening means to welcome others; it purifies me from prejudices, it is an exercise of readiness. To listen shows up my capacities of welcoming the diversity. Those who are used to being in an atmosphere of the same language have difficulties and furthermore those who are living within a variety of cultural, linguistic expressions and communication. To listen to others makes me able to perceive and to keep me open to listen to God. It prepares me to say: behold, speak, o Lord... here I am... I am attentive, I watch over on your words. God, Christ, in most of the cases doesn't communicate in tunes that are already "domesticated" with the noises of the world. He speaks in other frequencies, beyond that perceived of our logic. To keep on listening of the word it is a school of faith, because very ften the no-evidences are given. Who is not attentive to the voices, signs, will remain disoriented or will follows any other captured voice.

#### **- *To put into practice:***

To listen goes together with the exercise to put in work. It seems strange this insistence, because we believe that who truly listens – consequently will be putting everything into practice. What does Jesus add to the calls: *be attentive as you listen...* (Lc 8, 18), let *the one that has ear hear* (Lc 8,8) or to the triple call of the Dt of walking according to the law?

- Jesus invites to come ***to Him***

- Jesus invites to listen ***HIS words***; it is not the old Law, but the message of Jesus and whole his life. To open up the heart to him is to follow Him, enter in the WAY.

- to put it into ***practice***, and this practice is different: it is ***new*** doctrine and ***new*** practice.

#### **- *Which are these mainly practice?***

1 - the first one and the most insistent in the Gospel is the faith: to ***believe in Jesus***, to trust Him. To know Him and to embrace integrally his message is the practice that Jesus requests and it is what Jesus very often reproaches the Twelve. Jesus is the fulfilment of the Scripture (Lk 24, 44). He is, the "Practice" and he is the prototype for his followers. This practice is born in the heart centred in Christ, in the love that yearns always to know him more, to be with Him and to resemble Him more.

2 - the second practice that Jesus insists in is *the compassion*. It is what appears in the dialogue with the rich man in Lk 19 (in parallel with Lk 10). How many times are we justified and we pass by, making a big circle around the needy, fixed in occupations or status?

3 - the third practice is the *readiness to be sent*: Lk 10, 1 ss; Lk 9 and Mt 9,36.

And there is another newness in the practice that Jesus launches with His life and is inseparably part of this “foundation of the house” we are talking about. It is *poverty*. Jesus requests it in the material sense as detachment, as solidarity, to share with equality, as freedom. But also like a way of life, of being a Son of God, of exercising the authority and availability to the Father’s will. Along the seminar we will have the opportunity to deepen this aspect on our claretian level. For Mather Antonia it will be a very important aspect of the charism.

The mother Foundress, also dreams of a house. This house is the Congregation: *although a thousand houses we had, we have to be one*, she says. She has seen the “trace” of its construction - development. The foundation of this construction is the evangelical poverty; the form is given through the obedience that is to listen and to practice the will of God. She writes in their autobiography that she felt *that Jesus liked to stay in this house*.

Can we improve our present house which is the Congregation? If there is something damaged in foundations, or the currents of underground waters washed them, it will be necessary to revise them and to restore.

Are we ready to rethink and to renew our “practice”? Are we willing to question ourselves and “check up” our lifestyle?

## 6. A CONGREGATIONAL journey

Our work in these days will favour, illuminate and invite to conversion of each one. We want to re-read today some dimensions of our charism.

*What criterion can help us so that our work will not be reduced to pure reflection and papers?*

1. The re-reading should be in attitude of discernment for the charisma is a gift of the Holy Spirit. It is matter of fidelity to the Spirit, allowing Him to guide and assist us, leaving behind what doesn’t match with (S. Ignacio: discernment principals). We have to put ourselves under the shade of the Spirit, to pray a lot and to be attentive, determined when fostering concrete options. The discernment also means to strengthen the positive ways of which we are convinced in fidelity to God.
2. Jesus said and assured us that he is present where two or three meet in his Name. The Lord speaks in community and through the community. We are used to, but we have to be vigilant to not deceive ourselves that simply enjoying the work in common the fruits are warranted. It is true, nobody can do the new reading of the charism by himself alone. Neither it can be done a-critically from outside.
3. Open attitude to the world: we have already seen some aspects, others will come out on the local levels. This world calls us too, expecting a prophetic response. The Church also calls us with her orientations, her commitment with the justice and peace and the religious life in general. This context of the world can be generalized but it should be drawn up again according to the changes in each social-geographical sphere.
4. This new reading of the charism requests three elementary obediences if we want to continue being the yeast of the ecclesial renewal (the real yeast, not the instant one); obedience to:

- the evangelical poverty
- the living out the announcement of the Word
- the communion

***What kind of means do we have?***

1. We have at our disposal the ***narrated identity***. It is the general history of the Congregation and the narrations of our foundations, the chronicles of our communities. It would be interesting to read them critically as they speak of our beginnings, community life and apostolate?  
If we made a video of the life of our today's communities, what would they transmit of our identity and what aspects will emerge in need of renewal of the Spirit?  
This narrated identity is the everyday life. Also the life of some sisters that have given special testimony: Ma Teresita, Patrocinio, Marizcurrena...
2. We have at our disposal the ***meditated and reflected identity***: these are the written books, pamphlets, thesis, in different contexts of places and times. It is a heritage that speaks of the historical course of the reading of the charism in different perspectives. This workshop will be a new contribution that it will energize the process of charismatic renewal too.
3. We have at our disposal the ***discerned identity***: these are the works of general and provincial chapters. A good summary about this historical itinerary is elaborated in our publication: General Chapters.

Each General Chapter has made and left for the posterity a reading of the Claretian sisters' identity in relation to some of its features. Now, from the perspective of time we can judge with more objectivity if the discernment and the decisions then were taken were in consonance with the charismatic origins or, rather took a long way far from them.

**Chapter 1896:** Moved by the desire to better define our identity, as Florentine Capdevilla said. This chapter frustrated the desire of the Founders' of the congregational unity and put into test the essential characteristic of our charisma. But the emblematic fact that shows it is the loss of the Blanco y Fin in the Constitutions. The six houses which have been founded will continue without giving a new life, until the time will arrive to return to the communion.

**Chapter 1920:** Important for the Decree of union. The Constitutions of this year are typical of the time; they speak of the main and of the secondary goal, according to what was the principal activity of the communities. The unified Institute recognized the Founder and the Immaculate Mother as a Patroness, but the Foundress and the whole charismatic heritage was not mentioned in the Constitutions. It will be however a moment of restoring the continuity - a historical thread - starting from the inspiration of the Foundress of the communion, and from there to go deepening in all the other dimensions of the charism. The visible fruit of this union will be new foundation of a community in Madrid.

**Chapter 1926:** It puts accent on the apostolate of the teaching and opening Sunday catechesis.

**Chapter 1932:** It reiterates the importance of this apostolate and due preparation for it. It speaks of the co-responsibility of all the communities in giving support to the formation. It puts prescriptions that precise the practice of the evangelical poverty. It brings back the topic of

fraternity. In front of the imminence of the conflict in Spain, the Chapter open the apostolic horizons. It seems to be like in the Acts of the Apostles that during the persecution in Jerusalem the community overcame the frontiers and open the gates to the new evangelization perspectives.

**Chapter 1939:** insists in the missionary openness and appropriate formation in the first stages and after the profession.

**Chapter 1946:** the fact of adding: “Claretian Missionaries” to our name means a deeper identification with the claretian missionary Spirit. In the formation and practice of the apostolate, it insisted more in an appropriate and deep preparation. There are voices about new structure organization in the Congregation because of its development, but for the time being the need of solidify the communion at general level prevailed. The sisters reflected on the solidarity in new constructions, in the personnel's exchange, in the availability for the mission.

**Chapter 1952:** for better live in the communion in the growing diversity the Chapter decides and establishes “visitadurías” (regions) in different parts of the Congregation. Also in the exercise of the authority it was seen as important that their responsible may have a council and the visitations should be done not only when canonical but fraternal. Living out the communion cannot be limited to the structure; internal magazine was born, because through the communication the bonds of community are strengthened. In living out the poverty it is remembered that the work is a form of its practice and it is not optional although the new apostolates require a different structure of life. In this context of the Chapter the Mother Foundress’ memory arose afresh. Her picture can be placed in our houses. She should be known and necessary presented in the formation process.

**Chapter 1958:** in the topic of poverty the sisters speak about some practical forms of life related with administration of goods. The way to practice it at the community level will be the budget. In the formation there is a necessity to distinguish the religious formation from the appropriate training for the apostolate.

The congregation goes extending and although it continues being one Entity, there desire to extend it to new boundaries is strong. The possibility to open a mission in Africa will request sisters' solidarity and funds. It is interesting that in this context of enlargement of apostolic fields the topic of the prayer is recaptured and re-proposed in a sobriety and use of appropriate readings. In this way not to increase particular devotions neither to impose them in the community. The sisters will also look for simplifying relationships removing the “your charity” while addressing some of us, but for the moment the motion was not accepted.

It insists on studies about Mother Foundress expressly proposing an appropriate analysis about her life starting from her writings and other material available in the Archives. The same thing is suggested with the testimonies of our sisters' life: Patrocinio, Teresita, Marízcurrena.

**Chapter 1964:** it follows the extension of our apostolic areas but it is insisted in that the options should be made within the community according to the orientations of the Church. The new structural division in provinces arrives, but at the same time ... the distinction of two different groups of sisters (mothers and sisters) is eliminated: all the sisters have the same rights. The closure is being revised to respond better to the mission.

We arrive in this way to the Special Chapter of 1969 where for the first time after the foundation, an integral re-reading of the charism is made and the Chapter Documents are the fruit of this beautiful work. A new stage will score until arriving to our today.

**Chapter 1969:** a completely fresh reading of the Charism on the light of the Documents and Renewal of the Vatican II. The Documents are a doctrinal masterpiece; the newness and depth are its characteristics. In anticipation to official ecclesial statements our documents speak about the "charisma of the Institute", its spiritual origin, the transmission and identification with this reaches: "When being called to share in the same vocation, all the claretians participate of the same charism of the Institute that, as the rich sap, circulates from its roots of foundation to the last branch of the Congregational tree. The claretian missionary that lives out her consecration, collaborates to the continuation and effective development of this gift." (CP16).

The characteristics of our charisma (claretian vocation) are presented in four aspects:

- exquisite fidelity to the evangelical counsels, especially poverty
- highly apostolic feature - to follow Jesus in the lifestyle of the Apostles
- love to Christ's humanity
- Marian character - eminent presence of Mary Immaculate

These aspects are also contained in the ByF like synthesis of the lifestyle and of the reason of the existence of the Institute. (CP20.21)

In the following chapters these dimensions are being deepened and at the same time "translated" into a concrete guidelines of community, apostolic life and formation. The different aspects of the Charism have been described in different ways by Chapters and other documents. The last version of General Plan of Formation presents them seven:



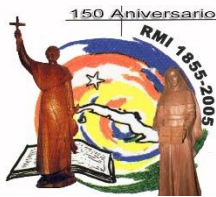


Apóstoles de Jesús



Juntar la acción con la contemplación

Fundamentados en la



Enseñar el Evangelio a toda criatura

A imitación de María



Sentir sobre nosotras el peso Iglesia

Una sola familia y un solo corazón

7.

## IDENTITY AND BELONGINGNESS

It's true and seems to be not necessary to explain the belongingness since when the identity is strong, "achieved", the belongingness is not a juridical result, not even "prolonged in time", but stable - perpetual. The consecrated vocation configures the person's structure, "before she was conceived". The belongingness is originated in the identity. The vocation as gift is (must be) shared.

This dynamics, as we have seen in the design of the community has double movement.

- **From the identity:** The claretian sister defines herself by the characteristics that we have seen above. What she is, comes together with the gift of charism that she receives from God and what she is - consequently leads her to feel, and to BE a part of the community that shares in this charism. **The identity brings about belongingness.** But it is necessary to remember that it is a process.

- ***From the belonging:*** What have been shared as a charismatic life in the communities, creates history, facts, experiences transmitted from generation to generation. There exists a concrete community of sisters that at this present time strives to live in fidelity to the Lord within this heritage. The belonging cannot be symbolic or sentimental. The community tries to walk on the roads of the charism and to cross the bridges, leaving behind stages which prepared, made possible our “today” and discerning the future. This community I belong to, does not only strengthen my identity as I feel part of her, but it is I who allow myself to be confronted, to be confirmed by sisters. ***The belongingness develops the identity.***

As there are weak identities there are also weak, confused, multiple, diffuse belongings... it is not necessary to specify.

The belongingness is a matter of Spirit and heart; and it is centred in constant pursuit of Christ, charism, and it is expressed in vows, shared within the community. But it also has certain human connotations, because if one is doing well, it will be noticed, in all senses: centred, available, animated member of the community.

For that reason I propose a confrontation with some aspects where the big values are translated into very simple ways...

The whole process of the Seminar can be an opportunity for our self-assessment and here you are a small “appetizer”.

I belong to my community...

1. Here I am because I receive something. Something that for me is important, that gives me life, that lifts me up, when I feel weak . What do I receive from my community? If the answer is "anything", my belongingness is anonymous.
2. I am here because I can give something of me, and my contribution is accepted. I know what I can give, I know what is expected from me... I know that it not only what I can that is appreciated, but who at I am, because I feel loved. I belong and from my "place" I give all that I can.
3. When making my decisions of everyday life, where I spend "my" time, in what kind of relationships I am involved, for whom I pray,... the community plays the main role and I count on it. I belong to this community and it is present in my thoughts, decisions, action and prayer.
4. My community has their "prominent" personages, that gave origin to it and they still inspire. I belong and they are important for me: I read history not only as a series of facts but I feel part of my life and theirs life takes my heart.
5. My community is the best! Today we usually do move in several circles of presences but which is really main? The one that heats my heart?, the one where to appeal in necessity, or the one where I feel at home?
6. The community which I belong to has a shared area of life, common spaces and goods, a net of relationships in different levels, but personal. The detached longings, not expressed, they will end up to die. I belong and I am related, I am interested in the life of other sisters – not for control o putting nose in other's business. I love my sisters.

7. The community is my house. It is the place of my daily fatigue, of my growth. I belong and my community transforms me, takes me out of my selfishness, enlarges my horizons, at least my possibilities.
8. My community appreciates the same essential values of the Claretian life more or less in the same level. I belong to it and I care the dialogue and the encounter with each sister, because each is important for me. I participate in opinion giving, I follow congregational news...etc.

The resonances of these questions will be a sign of the sense of identity and belongingness.

### ***Closing the entrance***

- to reflect and to share in groups:

1. What do you find important to keep in mind out of these presented point while we are beginning the Seminar?
2. Has it enlightened the problematic you have found in your life or in the communities?
3. How do the crises of the identity in the world in general affect the sense of identity and belongingness in your reality, where you live?
4. Pick up some points that question you more and write them down to be illuminated during this congregational Seminar.

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# SAINT ANTHONY MARY CLARET AND MARÍA ANTONIA PARÍS FOUNDERS OF THE RELIGIOUS OF MARY IMMACULATE CLARETIAN MISSIONARY SISTERS

## OUTLINE:

### **PART I: Different ways that Claret and Paris were founders – Encarnación Velasco**

0. Brief Introduction
1. Characteristics of the Founder/Foundress of a Religious Institute
2. Different ways to be a Founder/Foundress

### **PART II: Claret and Paris Founders of a New Order. Regina Tutzó**

Introduction

Our Founders in the life of the Congregation

1. Process of the Foundation
2. From the Foundation to the Death of the Founders
3. Living Presence of our Founders in the Congregation.

### **PART III: How is Claret our Founder and how is Paris our Foundress (Synthesis made by Encarnación Velasco)**

1. Repetitions during the Workshop (Summary by Encarnación Velasco)
2. Coincidences, differences and peculiarities of both.

## **PART I - DIFFERENT WAYS THAT CLARET AND PARIS WERE FOUNDERS by Encarnación Velasco**

### **0. Brief Introduction**

Since my school years, I have seen how all the Claretian Missionary Sisters experienced Claret as the Founder of the Congregation. When I joined the Congregation I have seen that we were following the same pattern. To recognize Claret as our Founder has been always accepted. In the years after 1960 we began to learn also about M. Paris, her writings and her experiences. I think I could say that for the sisters who made their novitiate before 1960, absorbed the Claretian spirituality through Claret because until then M. Paris was practically unknown, although she had always been considered the Foundress with Claret.

Around the time of the General Chapter in 1969, the Congregation felt very strongly the need to know also our Foundress whom we had abandoned because for some of our Claretian brothers, to know her could harm our Founder's process of canonization<sup>81</sup>. That period of a deeper knowledge of María Antonia Paris helped us to get closer to her and to discover more clearly our charismatic sources. At the same time it compelled us to go closer to Claret in a different way, knowing, through the original documents, what Claret meant for her in reference to our foundation and even in reference to the renewal of the Church.

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<sup>81</sup> We have writings from M. Pilar Gibert and M. Teresa Negroni that confirm this. Cf. Arch.Gral RMI A.B. 12.48. Proc Doc 11 pp. 132 and 134 quoted in the *Positio*, 345 and in Jesús Álvarez, *Historia de las Religiosas de María Inmaculada Misioneras Claretianas* (Rome: Boccea, 1980), 20-28.

I dare to say that, in the present time, for most of the members of the Congregation both Founders are known and accepted as such without doubts. We drink from their spirit and we venerate them. **The Epistolary of Claret and also the Writings of M. Paris have been sources of enlightenment. On the writings of our Foundress Claret has a prominent place, mainly as the person whom God had singled him out to begin our foundation and also to work on the renewal of the Church.**

In this sources it is very obvious that they had different ways to look at our Congregation and themselves en reference to it. **This is the object of the present work. In what way are Claret and Paris the founders of our Congregation? Coincidences, differences and peculiarities of each one of them.**

## **I. Characteristics of the Founders of Religious Institutes**

Claret in his work “L’egoismo vinto”<sup>82</sup> on St. Peter Nolasco, founder of the Mercedarians , calls the Founders “men and women according to the heart of God, full of Grace and doctrine”. Long time before, St. John of the Cross in his work *La llama* (the flame) (2,12-13) says that they reach a spiritual depth because they are the heads. From them “the future generations of their children will divulge their virtue and their spirit”. Frequently God gives them a deep experience of God so that others may be able to benefit from it also.

From each Founder, a peculiar way to understand the religious life is born in the history of humankind, with a peculiar theological understanding of religious life with original traits and a concrete way to understands and to live the spiritual life, which it is in substance a peculiar experience of the Mystery of Christ.

These peculiarities give an important sign for discernment. When we have felt called to a Religious Institute, we realized that our interior call coincide basically with the call of the members of the Institute and with the goal of the Institution, even with the ministries which are a consequence of the charism of the Institute. Beyond that and through our process of knowledge and experience, we adhere to the Institute because we are attracted to the person of the founder or foundress. This may be discovered gradually. We become aware of the coincidences between our own gifts and those received by the person who gave life to the Institute.<sup>83</sup>

## **II - Different Ways to Be a Founder or a Foundress**

Through history we find different ways to be a founder or a foundress of a religious institute. I think that the concept of founder is not exhausted with the forms we have known up to now, because they are so diverse and mixed among them that it helps us to realize that it is not easy to define the concept of founder or foundress.

In 1947 the Holy See asked the opinion of different experts on the theme. Of the traits in the relationship between the Founder/Foundress and his/her Institute, which are described in the reports some are more frequent and may be considered essential and others are less frequent:

1. All the Founders/Foundresses feel called by God to create a new family.

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<sup>82</sup>Anthony M.Claret, *L’egoismo vinto [Selfishness overcome]* (Rome 1869), chapter VII, p.47 (in the first edition). EE BAC 471, p.406.

<sup>83</sup> In this way the different gifts and charisms are identified in different styles of Christian life. This charism is the same over the years (the same given to the Founders) but, being pneumatic and ecclesial, it journeys through history and produces fruits in different times and places, giving rise to diverse styles of life incarnated in the different cultures and times.

2. They define the goal of this family and design the rule of life at least in its essential notes.
3. Sometimes they do not layout these rules themselves; others cooperate, or they have accepted the rule of an older Order (S. Benedict, St. Augustine, St. Francis...) using them as a source of inspiration and adapting them.
4. Some founders were at the same time members of the Institute, but others remained outside (this is the case of the male founders of women's congregations)
5. Most of the Founders and Foundresses governed their institutes, but others left the governance in the hands of other persons (this is the case of Claret in relation to the Claretians(men), although he presided some of their Assemblies and Chapters and wrote the Constitutions)
6. There are other situations in which the Founder does not give origin to the institute, this is born later (the case of Claret with the Secular Institute of Filiacion Cordimariana).

Of these notes, it seems that the two first ones are more frequently repeated.

- a) To have conceived the idea of the Institute with its goal
- b) To have given to the group the by-laws of life and governance.

We will analyze more in depth these two notes:

*a) On conceiving the idea of the Institute:*

It seems that there are founders that have received the inspiration to found even from other persons, but in spite of this they have accomplished the work themselves. However someone who had no intention to found an Institute could not be considered to be a founder.<sup>84</sup> In such a case the institute may have him as protector and teacher since it accepts his/her doctrine.

*b) On defining its goal and lifestyle*

In reality many of the first founders the only thing they did was to present as the Rule the faithful observance of the Gospel (Basil, Francis). It is only from the XII century when the religious life began to diversify and thus the specific goals for each institute, although specific goal does not mean the only goal. On the other hand, historically it is true that the Founder not always lay out all the details of the life of the institute, but only de fundamental traits, in writing or in words.

*c) It is important to point out to two peculiarities*

1. There is a difference between being a **Founder and being a Patriarch**. It is very common the fact that diverse Institutes accept the spiritual doctrine of a Saint and they put themselves under his protection (Francis, Dominic...)
2. In the course of history there has been different couples of founders and foundresses. This is frequent among the foundations of sisters. The reason from the beginning is the secondary social role of the woman throughout history. Sometimes the rule for the sisters is only an adaptation of the men's rule; in other occasions it is a Rule written by a man for women.<sup>85</sup> Nevertheless it is not unusual that side by side of a holy man there is a woman whose holy life influences the composition of the Rule.

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<sup>84</sup> This question may arise doubts among us over Claret being the Founder of our Institute. This is something that we have to deal with, without fear. We need to look into it to find the truth. Actually, in the beginning, Claret does not look like willing to have anything to do with a new foundation.

<sup>85</sup> Some think that if the Constitutions for the religious institutes of women had been written by women themselves they would be very different. However it is also true that the depth of the evangelical and ecclesial spirit of some rules goes beyond the differences in sex. On the other hand, the rules have always been adapted once they have been lived by women (Benedictine Sisters, Augustine Sisters...)

During the XVIII and XIX centuries many Congregations have in their origin a founder and foundress. Juan Manuel Lozano sees our foundation belonging to this group. The reasons for this are the following:

- 1) Sometimes a holy woman has been attracted to the spiritual radiance of a holy man and a spiritual communion is established between them. Thus Maria Antonia understood that she was called by God to found a Congregation, but at the same time she mystically experienced that Anthony M. Claret had to found the Congregation together with her<sup>86</sup>.
- 2) Sometimes the idea comes with the spiritual direction.
- 3) Some other times a man dedicated to pastoral action inspires a young woman or a group of young women to put into practice some dimensions of his ministry.
- 4) Finally the woman is the one that feels the call to create a new religious family but cannot do it without the support of a man (bishop, spiritual director....) in this case he is more a CO-FOUNDER.

P. Lozano in his work on the Founders of Religious Institutes, leads us to the essential question: In what way each one of our founders: In what way is Claret our founder and Paris our foundress. Lozano says that many Congregations have not answered yet what has been the role of each one of their founders. Not even the Holy See has solved the question. Only the Congregation as a whole may give the answer to that question, through its General Chapter, after a thorough historical research. The criteria to do this seem to be those that have been emerging from the above analysis and it is upon those criteria that I want to place my research. But naturally I have to mention that in different and consecutive General Chapters, beginning with the first ones, the Archbishop Anthony M. Claret and Sr. María Antonia Paris are mentioned as our Founders.

The Chapter of the Union in 1920, considered the First General Chapter, when referring to the Nature of the Institute, *acknowledges that our Founders are the Venerable Archbishop Anthony Maria Claret and the Servant of God M. Maria Antonia Paris de San Pedro.*<sup>87</sup> For this reason the Constitutions that were composed in 1920, and used for a long time by the Claretian Missionary Sisters, say in the first point: *The Institute... founded in Santiago de Cuba on August 25<sup>th</sup> 1855 by the Blessed Archbishop Anthony Mary Claret and the Servant of God María Antonia París de San Pedro, acknowledge as our only patroness the Most Holy Virgin in the mystery of her Immaculate Conception....*<sup>88</sup>

The IX General Chapter of 1969, mandated by the II Vatican Council to go back to the foundational origins, after a long and deep research on the foundational charism, mentions again Claret and Paris as our Founders in the first Decree called *Charism and Spiritual Patrimony of our Institute* (cf. pgs. 17 ff). I quote the following words from the Chapter because I consider them very important: *Urged by the same spirit (that St. Anthony Maria Claret), Mother Antonia felt the call from God to put a dike to the evils that the Church was suffering by that time. With this purpose she found with St. Anthony Maria Claret the Apostolic Institute of the Immaculate Conception of Mary Most Holy....*

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<sup>86</sup> Cf. LOZANO, *El Fundador*, 28.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. Jesús Alvarez, *Historia*, 1053 and *Capitulos Generales* [General Chapters] (Rome:RR.of Mary Immaculate Claretian Missionary Sisters,2004), 16.

<sup>88</sup> Even in the General Chapter of Carcagente (1896) which we could call the Chapter of the Disunion, the founding nature of our Institute was clear, since when M. Ma. Dolores de San Mateo, superior of Tremp, presented the Constitutions for the approval of the Holy See, she presents Claret as Founder of the Institute even more than Paris (Cf. Alvarez, *Historia*, 931-934).

Having made this contribution on the different ways the Chapters have looked at the matter mentioned above, I point out again the two criteria that emerge from the research on the diverse ways to be a founder or foundress and that may be fundamental to help us to frame the second chapter of this work. These criteria are:

- A) **How did the idea of the Institute emerge.**
- B) **In what measure did each one of the Founders (Claret, Paris) influenced in shaping the mission and the spirit of the Institute.**

## **PART II – CLARET AND PARIS FOUNDERS OF A NEW ORDER**

**Regina Tutzó**

### **Introduction**

Anthony Mary Claret I Clará and María Antonia París i Riera, founders of our Institute, Religious of Mary Immaculate Claretian Missionary Sisters, lived during the XIX century. This was a century of political unrest, of persecutions of the Church and of the birth of new ideologies. All of that greatly affected the Church, which did not always know how to face and respond to the needs of the times. Many of her members, among the hierarchy as well as among the people, did not live up to the demands of the gospel. Claret wants to respond to that situation with a tireless work of evangelization. Paris discovers in prayer that the Church needs a “reformation”, a conversion from the inside. She understands that the Lord asks her to found a religious institute whose aim will precisely be to work for the continuous conversion of the Church. Although both founders were born in Catalonia their lives took very different paths.

How would they meet? He is a missionary on fire, in love with Christ and he is completely dedicated to the preaching of the gospel in Catalonia and the Canary Isles. He is a man that does not have time for other businesses. She is a novice who lives secluded in her monastery, dedicated to the education of girls, woman of a profound prayer life, who experiences the fire for evangelization. The canon José Caixal will put them in contact. He is a friend of Claret and the confessor of the novice María Antonia, from her adolescent years.

Let us go back in time and let us see how they meet. Monsignor José Caixal who has been exiled for many years due to political reasons, has returned and hears from Antonia the religious experience she has had during her prayer. He is fascinated by the account and asks her to write everything about the Order and about her religious experience.<sup>89</sup> He sends a letter with this notes to Claret. By that time he is very busy and he cannot respond to them.

Caixal and María Antonia do not give up since they are convinced that Claret is the man that will make possible the foundation of the Order. Caixal because he admires Claret and he considers him more capable than himself.<sup>90</sup>

She had not yet met with Claret, she had only heard about him. The opportunity came when Claret went to Tarragona in January 1850. Caixal took advantage of this to have him meet María Antonia. She explained briefly her mystical experience, her call to found a new Order. Without allowing her to explain more, he answered her that without any doubt this would be done.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Aut. MP, 228.

<sup>90</sup> Aut. MP, 19

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 61. “Now I know that you are here”



## OUR FOUNDERS IN THE LIFE OF THE INSTITUTE

### 1. Process of the Foundation

Claret and Paris have met, the novice Antonia has explained to him her religious experience, that God asks her to found a new Order. After that a few month later Antonia will leave the convent of the Company of Mary together with Florentina Sangler. As for Claret, who has received the appointment as Archbishop of Santiago of Cuba, he embarks to that Isle to take care of the archdiocese of Santiago. They eagerly await for the letter from Claret inviting them to his archdiocese. During the time of their waiting, some other young women join them: María Josefa Caixal I Roig, niece of canon José Caixal; the sisters María and Antonia Gual.<sup>92</sup>

Claret finds a diocese destroyed in regards to the Christian life, many are the problems and the needs. One month after arriving to his diocese Claret writes to Caixal and tells him that he wants to call the young women from Tarragona<sup>93</sup>. He writes to María Antonia and her companions inviting them to come to his diocese<sup>94</sup> to help him in the education of the girls and young women. In Tarragona Antonia and her companions open with eagerness the letter from the archbishop.<sup>95</sup>

No more doubts, no more sufferings for Maria Antonia. It seemed as if the heavens opened up, that the clouds of doubt and darkness when she thought that she might have been mistaken leaving the convent of the Company of Mary, disappeared. They begin immediately the preparation for the trip.<sup>96</sup>

Through the application for the foundation that they wrote to Claret we are able to discover more deeply the feelings that were in the hearts of these young women they say:

*“ we preferred to go to this Great Antilles as a place with a greater spiritual need of religious education, ... we faced the difficulties and we abandoned everything for the love of Jesus Christ...”*<sup>97</sup>

They travel in a stage-coach<sup>98</sup> from Tarragona to Barcelona. Surely their hearts, in spite of the eagerness thinking in the newness of what they will encounter, were filled with the nostalgia to leave their country Tarragona, without being sure if they would sometime come back, but filled with the love of the Lord who calls them and of the fire for the proclamation of the gospel, they embark for Cuba on February 22, 1852. What they did not know was the difficulties and dangers of the trip. The ship “Nueva Rosalía” broke in the Canary Islands and they had to stay a month in Lanzarote. They took advantage of this situation to begin their evangelizing mission.<sup>99</sup>

They leave from Lanzarote on May 3<sup>rd</sup>, Antonia encourages the crew and her own sisters to pray asking the help from heaven for this trip. She manifests her trust without limits in the

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<sup>92</sup> Alvarez, *Historia*, 195-196.

<sup>93</sup> Claret to Caixal, March 25, 1851: EC- I, 202.

<sup>94</sup> *Aut. MP*, 126-127. Claret to Caixal August 18, 1851: EC- I, 202.

<sup>95</sup> *Aut. MP*, 127.

<sup>96</sup> Alvarez, *Historia*, 117-120.

<sup>97</sup> Proceedings of the foundation of the Convent of Santiago de Cuba, 1-2.

<sup>98</sup> Horse-drawn coach that was used to carry passengers.

<sup>99</sup> *Aut. MP*, 156.

Lord with the following words “*The more we went into that immense sea of waters the more my spirit plunged into the immense sea of God...*”<sup>100</sup>. During this last part of the trip, one day there was some movement in the sea. Frightened by the memory of what they had suffered, and realizing that there was no land around, Maria Antonia began to pray to the Most Holy Virgin. She heard Mary who said to her that she would always protect them.<sup>101</sup>

They arrived at Santiago de Cuba on May 26, 1852. They were very much welcome, since the Archbishop had left everything prepared. The joy to be where their dreams would be accomplished, was darkened by the absence of the Archbishop. Due to the delay of the trip, he had to leave to continue his pastoral visitation. The day they arrived he was in Manzanillo. From this city he had answered the letters of Maria Antonia and he wrote to his friend Caixal telling him that he would have liked to be there when the sisters arrived, but he could not.<sup>102</sup>

Due to some strong earthquakes, the Archbishop came back to Santiago to console his people. He visited the sisters on September 3<sup>rd</sup>, the very same day of his arrival.<sup>103</sup> They began the conversations on what the sisters would do. The Archbishop says to Maria Antonia not to look for novelties, that it is better to establish a house of the Company of Mary. Out of respect she did not dare to contradict him, nor to remind him about the notes that herself and Caixal had given him in Tarragona and the conversation he had had with her.<sup>104</sup>

María Antonia did not know Claret well, he was a man on fire for the gospel, that could not remain idle without going from one city or town to another. He had left the administration of his Archdiocese in the hands of his Vicar Most Rev. Dionosio González, while he himself visited all the churches of his vast archdiocese. This was a cause of suffering for Maria Antonia,<sup>105</sup> especially at the beginning. Later on they began little by little to know each other, he discovered more and more the values of Maria Antonia and on her part she discovered the faithfulness of the Archbishop, who was able to discern the situations under the light of God and make amendments when necessary. Claret left again for his pastoral visitations and the Vicar began to take care of the sisters. He filled all the papers needed to grant them the permission to celebrate the Eucharist in their house. However he continued the procedure for a house of the Company of Mary. Antonia kept praying that this might not happen and whenever she could she gave her own opinion.<sup>106</sup>

In the midst of all these businesses of the foundation, affliction will be present in a very strong way among the group of sisters, especially María Antonia. On September 20 of this same year 1852, Florentina died, the companion and intimate confidant of María Antonia.<sup>107</sup>

To answer the requests of the people who wanted that the sisters started the school for girls, they fixed the little house they were living in, and on Pentecost 1853 Claret celebrated the First Eucharist in the little chapel which they had prepared in the house. On June 7 of this same year, the cloister was established, thus the four sisters, María Antonia París, María Josefa Caixal, María Rosa Gual and María Encarnación Gual, began their novitiate. On the 15<sup>th</sup> of the same

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 159.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 160.

<sup>102</sup> *Claret to Caixal*, June 15, 1852: EC- I, 226.

<sup>103</sup> *Aut. MP*, 172.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 175.196.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 178.

<sup>107</sup> *Aut. MP*, 179.

month they start the classes<sup>108</sup>. Latter on they will move to another house bought by the Archbishop Claret<sup>109</sup>. He bought the house and the empty field next to it, giving a initial sum of money and the rest in monthly installments.<sup>110</sup> The new house will be the first of the Order.<sup>111</sup>

What the Lord had asked Antonia to do begins now to be a reality, however they will have to suffer many difficulties and disappointments until the foundation be finished. A cause for joy was the arrival from Spain of a group of girls candidates for the new Institute.<sup>112</sup> Among them was a young woman, María Gertrudis Barril, who was her secretary and confidant and also her successor as First Mother of the Order.

The royal permission for the foundation arrived on July 1853. Because there was a prohibition to establish new religious orders, Claret had presented his petition as a new monastery of the Company of Mary in Santiago de Cuba. The Queen in her answer said that since María Antonia had left the convent of Tarragona being a novice, they needed a professed sister from that convent in order to be able to proceed with the foundation and the profession of the sisters. Claret wrote to the Archbishop of Tarragona asking him that a sister from that convent might be sent to Cuba. The answer given by the sisters in the convent of Tarragona was negative, thus finally on November 20, 1854 Claret took the decision to request from Rome the permission to receive the profession of María Antonia and in this way make reality the foundation.<sup>113</sup> He also mentions in this document that the new foundation is different from the one in Tarragona in that he has established a more strict observance in the practice of the evangelical counsels. The answer from Rome arrived in Cuba on July 16<sup>th</sup> 1855.<sup>114</sup>

Here again Claret and María Antonia had their disagreements.<sup>115</sup> What Maria Antonia wanted for the New Order did not fit into the canon law of the time. Claret, advised by the Vicar, knew that there are things that could not be granted, in the way María Antonia wanted them and thus he did not follow her requests.<sup>116</sup> The difficulty arose because in the papal bulla<sup>117</sup> one of the clauses requested that they had rents<sup>118</sup> to take care of themselves and not depend on the Church. Antonia in her “Initial experience” understood that the Lord wants a very especial poverty for the New Order, its members will get their income from their work and with it they will also help others. The goods will not belong only to one monastery but they will be distributed according to the needs of each one of the monasteries of the order. But according to the laws of the XIX century’s laws, the convents and monasteries needed to have their maintenance guaranteed by their dowries and the rents produced by these dowries, moreover the convents were independent from each other even being part of the same order.

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<sup>108</sup> *Aut. MP*, 189.

<sup>109</sup> *Aut. PC*, 561.

<sup>110</sup> *Aut MP*, 216.

<sup>111</sup> This house is located on the street San Germán n.72. It has been the First House of the Order, the sisters have lived there and have educated the girls until the house was confiscated by the Cuban revolution in 1961. The sisters had to abandon the house. This house continues to exist and it is dedicated to means of communication.

<sup>112</sup> *Aut. MP*, 199.

<sup>113</sup> *Alvarez, Historia*, 173-174.

<sup>114</sup> *Aut. MP*, 211.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 206-210.

<sup>116</sup> *Lozano, María Antonia Paris: Writings*, footnote 166 p. 135.

<sup>117</sup> Pontifical document from the Apostolic Chancery.

<sup>118</sup> Financial means that the convent had for the sister’s sustenance.

Antonia in her prayer presents her complaints to the Lord and she sheds tears in abundance. Eventually the answer comes during her prayer.<sup>119</sup>

Cleared all the difficulties to proceed with the foundation, the Archbishop Claret wrote the official document of the foundation which he signed on August 25, 1855. We read on the rescript:

*... we admit to the religious profession, which according to what is established in the Sacred Rescript we will receive, from our dear daughter María Antonia de San Pedro on the twenty seventh day of the month of August and we will receive the profession of her sisters and our beloved daughters, on the third day of the month of September of this same year. Once made the profession, we will declare them as RELIGIOUS OF THE APOSTOLIC INSTITUTE OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION OF MARY MOST HOLY MOTHER OF GOD AND OURS.*<sup>120</sup>

A new religious family had been born into the Church, a new order not new in doctrine but in practice. To discover the richness of this newness we need to read the Aim and Goal.<sup>121</sup> In order to be able to live in the way Antonia wanted, the Institute should have been an institute with simple vows, as those who were been established during the XIX century. They were considered Pius Institutes of sisters with simple vows, they did not have a papal cloister, they had a superior general who had authority over all the sisters.<sup>122</sup> The Mother always insists in that it has to be an Order, whose members must be nuns. This is something surprising when we look into the New Order's charism "to work until death in teaching every creature the Holy Law of the Lord." She envisions to have monasteries in mission countries to accompany the (men) missionaries.<sup>123</sup> Only after many years waiting for the approval from Rome<sup>124</sup> and suffering difficult situations among the convents founded by her, María Antonia, advised by knowledgeable persons on the religious life and the laws of the Church, will introduce in the constitutions "*the obligation of the First Mother of the Order to visit every three years, by herself or by another sister, the houses of the Order.*"<sup>125</sup>

Let us go back to the part of the history where we were. María Antonia has made her profession on August 27<sup>th</sup> 1855 and the other sisters on September 3<sup>rd</sup> of the same year. This same 3<sup>rd</sup> of September the sisters met presided by Rev. Paladio Currius for the election of the Prioress. María Antonia was elected by unanimity. With this last formality the canonical foundation of the Institute, which is now called Religious of Mary Immaculate Claretian Missionary Sisters, was completed.<sup>126</sup>

Another period will start in the life of the newly born Institute. It is true that the official date of the foundation is August 25<sup>th</sup> 1855, but the Institute was born in the heart of Maria Antonia at the moment of her "Initial Experience" and began to be a reality in what we may call

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<sup>119</sup> *Aut. MP*, 214.

<sup>120</sup> Proceedings of the foundation of the Convent in Santiago de Cuba, 24. General Archives RMI.

<sup>121</sup> Constitutions of the Religious of Mary Immaculate Claretian Missionary Sisters, 1988, 2.

<sup>122</sup> Alvarez, *Historia de la Vida Religiosa* (History of the Religious Life), III, 388.

<sup>123</sup> Constituciones del Instituto Apostolico de la Inmaculada Concepcion de María Santísima. (Constitutions of the Apostolic Institute of the Immaculate Conception of Mary Most Holy). *Trat primero* (First Part), ch.6, n.1, in Lozano, *Escritos*, 418.

<sup>124</sup> The Constitutions presented by our Founders did not fit into the canonical laws of the Church of the XIX century, the work would fit for a Benedictine Order, the poverty for a Franciscan Order, the obedience for the Jesuit Order. This was keeping the Holy See from giving the approval.

<sup>125</sup> Lozano, *Escritos*: TMP, 718.

<sup>126</sup> To know the different names of our Institute see the appendix n.2.

the charismatic foundation on August 15<sup>th</sup> 1851, when María Antonia and the other four young women met at the Cathedral of Tarragona and made a vow to not separate from each other.<sup>127</sup>

There is a difference between Maria Antonia and Claret in their relationship with the Institute. She knew with very clearly what she wanted for the foundation, Claret was discovering little by little during the process, what the Lord wanted from him in this foundation. At first he leaves everything in the hands of Rev. Dionisio González and latter on in those of Rev. Paladio Currius. However, as the events are unfolding, he realizes that he has to take part personally in order that the so much desired foundation may happen. Maria Antonia saw him always as the founder<sup>128</sup>, he needed more time to understand it. God in his infinite patience was working on him and shaping him until Claret embraced this foundation as his and María Antonia's. Through the process of foundation both Founders share the difficulties which arise and look together for the best answers to be faithful to the lights received by Maria Antonia in her "initial experience". The relationship between both Founders becomes deeper, closer and more friendly. On reading the letters, they exchanged between them, we realize how in each one of them the trust and admiration for the other increases. As for our Founder we know that he did not answer the letters received from women, but we have a number of his letters addressed to María Antonia. Let us see how the history of the new Institute in the Church continues.

## **2.- From the Foundation to the death of the Founders**

### **a. Until the Death of our Founder Claret.**

After her profession, Claret asks Maria Antonia to write again the Constitutions of the Institute, based on those written in 1848 when she was in Tarragona, making the necessary amendments.<sup>129</sup> A few days earlier Currius had also asked the Mother to write the "Plan for the Renewal of the Church".<sup>130</sup>

In her "initial Experience" she understood that she had not only to be the foundress of a new order, but she had also to work for the renewal of the Church. She was afraid, the word "reformation" she used to talk about the renewal of the Church, was a dangerous word in the Church, due to the protestant separation in the XVI century. Because of her fears she did not do or say anything until her profession.<sup>131</sup> When she talked with Currius about that, he asks her to put in writing what she just had said to him.<sup>132</sup> When Claret receives the Constitutions written by Maria Antonia, advised by Rev Dionisio González, he asks Currius to put rewrite them in juridical language.<sup>133</sup>

Again the events disrupt the peace and joy of the sisters and especially Maria Antonia. As we have already see this is a constant situation in her life and also in Claret's. When the difficulties seem to be overcome, the foundation is already a reality, the Archbishop is attentive to their needs, he receives a letter from Madrid dated March 18, 1857 which will change this peaceful situation they are enjoying. Queen Isabella II wants him to be her confessor and the teacher of the little princess Isabella. Claret begins to make the arrangements necessary to leave

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<sup>127</sup> *Aut. MP*, 121.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.36.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.* 228.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 229.

<sup>131</sup> *Aut. MP*, 49-53.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>133</sup> Currius a Caixal, March 31<sup>st</sup> 1857.

as soon as possible.<sup>134</sup> He gives all the necessary dispositions to leave the Archdiocese in order, he also finds time to say good-bye to María Antonia and to the other sisters as well, so dear to him, and he embarks for La Habana from where he will leave in a few weeks towards the Peninsula. María Antonia asks him that, once in the Court of Madrid, he do what would necessary in order to have another community of the Institute in Spain.

To read during his travel to Spain, Claret took with him the “*Plan for the Renewal of the Church*” written by María Antonia. She explains with simplicity and without much order her intuitions and thoughts about how the renewal of the Church should be done and who would have to do it. Claret kept them always with him, and he attached them at the end of his Autobiography.<sup>135</sup> We know that during his trip he wrote his own version addressed to the bishops, his brethren. The title of his document is “Notes of a Plan to Preserve the Beauty of the Church (*Apuntes de un Plan para Conservar la Hermosura de la Iglesia*).”<sup>136</sup> The main points are the same: evangelization, poverty, communion. As Rev. Dionisio González would say, answering to Claret who asks him to give his opinion on the “Plan for the Renewal” written by María Antonia, “*it seems to me that the same spirit has guided both pens.*”<sup>137</sup> During his trip and as he was reading the Plan for the Renewal written by María Antonia and writing his own, Claret begins to discover the will of God hidden in his new mission as confessor of the Queen. As in other situations in his life this he will have the opportunity to preach the gospel from a larger scenario, Spain, Paris and Rome.<sup>138</sup>

Immediately after his arrival in Madrid, May 26, 1857, he begins the legal process for the foundation of the new community. It will not be as easy as Currius and María Antonia thought.<sup>139</sup> The first thing was to find a diocese. Before embarking for the Peninsula, the Archbishop and María Antonia had talked about founding in the diocese of Urgel, whose bishop was Caixal.<sup>140</sup> Claret has to spend many hours in the waiting rooms of the offices, he says to Currius: “*alas how many sacrifices do those nuns cost me*”.<sup>141</sup> Realizing that he was not getting anywhere, he advises Currius and María Antonia to write to Caixal. This strategy got the effect he was looking for, on the month of October Caixal writes to Currius letting him know that he was willing to welcome his daughters from Cuba.<sup>142</sup> Having solved all the problems, obtained all the licenses and Caixal’s approval, Claret let Currius know that he may come to the peninsula with María Antonia and two other sisters.<sup>143</sup>

After six years in Cuba, she comes back to Spain in the ship “Venus” on April 6<sup>th</sup> 1858 with the sisters María Josefa Caixal and María Gertrudis Barril. They arrived at Cadiz on May 12. Claret and Caixal had asked the Bishop of Cadiz to look for a convent in the city for the sisters to stay, so they could rest for a while before continue their trip to Barcelona. They lodge at the convent of the Concepcionistas who even gave them gifts for the new foundation.<sup>144</sup> On

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<sup>134</sup> Alvarez, *Historia*, 245.

<sup>135</sup> Clotet to Currius, February 2nd, 1889 quoted in Alvarez, *Historia*, 24.

<sup>136</sup> Claret to Currius, June 5, 1857, CO 61, P.109. Claret to Caixal, May 31<sup>st</sup> 1857, CO 58, p.105.

<sup>137</sup> Dionisio González de Mendoza a Claret, EPCL II, 31.

<sup>138</sup> Ruiz, Carmen and Velasco Encarnación, *Positio sobre la vida, virtudes y fama de santidad de María ANTONIA Paris I Riera*, Roma 1987.

<sup>139</sup> Alvarez, *Historia*, 249

<sup>140</sup> Paris to Claret, June 2<sup>nd</sup> 1857, EMP 4, p.8.

<sup>141</sup> Claret to Currius, August 8<sup>th</sup> 1857, CO 67, p.118.

<sup>142</sup> Caixal to Currius, October without date, 1857, quoted in Alvarez, *Historia*, 255.

<sup>143</sup> Claret to Currius January 8<sup>th</sup> 1858, CO 91, p.157.

<sup>144</sup> Diary 40, in Lozano, *Escritos*, 238; Alvarez, *Historia*, 277.

May 17 they embark again to the port of Barcelona where they arrived on May 23. On arriving they have the pleasing surprise to meet the Founder who was waiting for them.<sup>145</sup>

They travel to Tremp in a railroad train, a coach, a horse ridden carriage and on a donkey back until they arrived to the Conca de Tremp (Valley of Tremp)<sup>146</sup> where the town is built. The official foundation of the second house of the Institute, is made on June 13<sup>th</sup> 1859, feastday of our Founders,<sup>147</sup> They begin without delay the building of the convent. María Antonia in a letter to Currius gives him a report explaining how she covers the construction expenses in Tremp, and how Claret has helped them *“the donations that you know our Father the Most Rev. Claret has sent to us”*<sup>148</sup>.

He continues to communicate with María Antonia and, through her, with the community. As the number of sisters was growing, they felt the need to have a written legislation so that all the sisters could follow it. When the Foundress was present, she could advise the sisters, but not in the house of Cuba especially the young Cuban women that were entering the Order. Although the Constitutions were not approved, María Antonia took counsel from Claret on the need to print the rules about the daily life of the sisters and communities. He answered affirmatively.<sup>149</sup> She also took counsel from the Father about the book of ceremonies. We read on a letter to Caixal *“I have received a letter from our Most Rev. Claret, that he likes very much the book of ceremonies.”*<sup>150</sup> Claret besides helping them financially, he also oriented to the Institute those young women he considered fit for it. He made him present through an abundant correspondence through which he was concerned about their life, their mission and the formation of the new candidates.<sup>151</sup>

When the time came to send the first expedition to Cuba, the Mother was in communication with the Founder who was giving her advice on the matter. After some years and having increase the number of sisters María Antonia believes it is time to found the third house of the Institute. She wants to move to the South of the Peninsula but the Founder, thinks it is better to remain in the Northern region.<sup>152</sup> They turn their eyes to the Archdiocese of Tarragona<sup>153</sup> to the city of Reus<sup>154</sup> in the “Plain of Tarragona”.<sup>155</sup> The little house where they will lodge is situated on the road to Tarragona. Father Founder takes care to buy the house and to do the necessary repairs. He also helps them with the legal procedures even, as we have already seen, how much all of this was difficult for him, but for his religious sisters he was able to do even what he did not like. Finally the authorization arrives. Some sisters from Tremp will be able to go to Reus for the third foundation of the Institute.<sup>156</sup>

On July 12, 1867, after eight years in Tremp, Maria Antonia leaves with the sisters: Ma. Gertrudis de San Felipe (Barril), Ma. Luisa de San Pablo (Fábregas), Ma. Rosa de Santo Tomás

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<sup>145</sup> Alvarez, Historia, 279 footnote 57.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 282.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 281.

<sup>148</sup> París to Currius, April 17<sup>th</sup> 1863, EMP 55, p.93.

<sup>149</sup> Claret to París, December 30<sup>th</sup> 1861, CO 208, p.314.

<sup>150</sup> París to Caixal, March 29<sup>th</sup> 1863, EMP 53, p.90.

<sup>151</sup> Claret to París, February 23<sup>rd</sup> 1863, CO 221, p. 330.

<sup>152</sup> Claret to París, March 23<sup>rd</sup> 1863, CO 224, p. 335.

<sup>153</sup> Claret to París, January 18<sup>th</sup> 1865, CO 235, p.346.

<sup>154</sup> Alvarez, Historia 346.

<sup>155</sup> *Camp* a Catalan word which means “field”.

<sup>156</sup> Alvarez, Historia, 360 footnote 36.

(Caixal), Ma. Josefa de San Mateo (Vidal) and Ma. Dolores de Santo Tomás (Caballé). They travel to Reus in “tartana”<sup>157</sup> where they arrive on the thirteenth at night.<sup>158</sup> Rev. Paladio Currius accompanies them, the law of the Church did not allow the nuns to travel alone, they had to be accompanied by a priest. The official foundation took place on the fourteenth, feast of St Boventure. Some days later they received a letter of the Founder in which he gives them advise and shares with simplicity his joy for the foundation of the third community.<sup>159</sup>

Now the works and difficulties of building the convent began. As usual there is a scarcity of financial means and also the struggle with the architects that want to show off adding decorations to the building and also the struggle with the clergy who do not understand the poverty of the Institute. María Antonia will have to suffer and struggle, but at the same time the Lord will intervene to help his daughters. Very soon new young women knock at the doors of the convent, contributing in this way to the growth of the new Institute. On the other hand the sisters will suffer the 1868 political revolution and will have to leave for some month their convent and look for shelter in the Hospital.<sup>160</sup>

Meanwhile, the Archbishop Claret, confessor of the Queen, suffers the consequences of being in the Palace. All the hatred that the different political parties have against the monarchy fall upon him. Claret, who never wanted to take part in politics finds himself in a very difficult situation, suffering all sorts of slanders<sup>161</sup> and finally he goes exiled to Paris together with the Royal Family. Now he is waiting for the moment that the Queen is not the Queen of Spain anymore to end his responsibility as his confessor.

Mother Antonia writes to request from him that while he is in Rome he might try to get the approval of the Constitutions.<sup>162</sup> He answers explaining to her what he has done for the approval of the Constitutions and he recommends her to be patient.<sup>163</sup> A few days latter he explains to her how he is preparing himself to participate in the I Vatican Council from which he expects great things.<sup>164</sup> Later on in another letter he shares with her his intervention in the Council in defense of the Papal Infallibility.<sup>165</sup>

During the year 1870 he writes two letters to Maria Antonia about the so anxiously expected approval of the Constitutions. In the first letter he exhorts all the sisters to live as good religious.<sup>166</sup> In the second letter he manifests his trust that all will go well, they have only to wait patiently.<sup>167</sup>

Claret continues participating in the Council, but the stress that this produces in him, besides the terrible heat of Rome, are the cause of the beginning of a stroke. With the good care

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<sup>157</sup> Spanish word for horse drawn carriage.

<sup>158</sup> Report of the trip to Reus in the Chronicles of the House of Reus, 1-2 quoted in Alvarez, *Historia* 362.

<sup>159</sup> Claret to París, July 21<sup>st</sup> 1867, CO, 266, p.375.

<sup>160</sup> Alvarez, *Historia*, 385.

<sup>161</sup> Obscene cartoons and other mockeries about Claret and the Queen printed on boxes of matches and on the newspapers of that time.

<sup>162</sup> Paris to Claret, July 8<sup>th</sup> 1869, EMP 95, p.135.

<sup>163</sup> Claret to Paris, July 21<sup>st</sup> 1869, CO 283, p.392.

<sup>164</sup> Claret to Paris, July 21<sup>st</sup> 1869, CO 283, p.392. He is probably referring to the document about the renewal of the Church.

<sup>165</sup> Claret to Paris, June 17<sup>th</sup> 1870, CO 294, p.408.

<sup>166</sup> Claret to Paris, January 1<sup>st</sup> 1870, CO 289, p.399.

<sup>167</sup> Claret to Paris, June 17<sup>th</sup> 1870, CO 294, p.408.



of the Mercedaries help he gets better.<sup>168</sup> However his health continues to worsen, for that reason the Superior General of the Claretian Missionaries P. José Xifré goes to Rome to take him to Prades where the Claretians, who were expelled from Spain in the revolution of 1868, have a community. There he lives humbly as any other member of the community. However he cannot remain in Prades. There are news that because of the intrigues of the Spanish ambassador in France, some people want to capture him.<sup>169</sup> His brothers decide to take him to the Cistercian Monastery in Fontfroide. During the two following month, it seemed that his health was improving, but this was only a temporary recovery, his health starts deteriorating little by little until his death on October 24 of the same year 1870. He had been an apostolic missionary during his entire life. He himself had written some time before to describe his mission:

*I have preached the Law of God in Paris as the capital of the world, and in Rome, capital of Catholicism, I have done in words and in writing. I have lived in holy poverty....*<sup>170</sup>

On his grave they wrote the following words which are witness to his life and ministry “*I have loved justice and hated impiety, for this I die in exile*”<sup>171</sup> At the moment of his death in the Monastery of Fontfroide in France, the bell of the convent of Reus rang without anyone touching it, Currius and all the sisters in the convent understood that it was the Father who wanted to say his last farewell to his daughters before leaving this world.<sup>172</sup>

### **b. From the Death of the Founder to the Death of the Foundress**

After the death of the Founder, the Archbishop Claret, María Antonia will faithfully follow the commands he had given during his life, and she will invoke them whenever some one wanted to do something different, and she will repeat over and over again that Claret founded the Institute.<sup>173</sup>

But let us not anticipate the events, let us see how our Foundress continues to guide the Institute. After some years from the foundation of Reus, the Mother begins to look toward other horizons to establish other communities. She looks toward America and also Spain. Bishop Orberá<sup>174</sup> suggests the United States of America, Belice, but none could be. Finally they do the foundation in Baracoa, Cuba on September 5<sup>th</sup>, 1875. Maria Antonia could not go personally to that foundation. The Gual Sisters, María Rosa and María Encarnación, went with the sisters who were going to form the community of Baracoa. They returned to Santiago once the community was established and realizing their mission as educators.

At the same time María Antonia was doing all the paper work for the foundation of Carcagente in the Province of Valencia, Spain. Bishop Orberá helped her. He had come exiled from Cuba to Spain, because the Government of the Cuba had accused him. On January 1875 he was free from all charges and was about to return to his Archdiocese of Santiago. First he wanted to help María Antonia, by leaving this foundation already on its way. He presented a petition to the Cardinal Archbishop of Valencia to be granted the authorization to establish a

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<sup>168</sup> Claret to Xifré, July 1<sup>st</sup> 1870, EC-II, 1451 p.1481-1482.

<sup>169</sup> Alvarez, *Historia*, 397-398.

<sup>170</sup> Claret to Currius, October 2<sup>nd</sup> 1869, CO 286, p.395.

<sup>171</sup> Saint Anthony M. Claret, *Autobiographical and Spiritual Writings*, General Introduction 64.

<sup>172</sup> Deposition of Rev. Paladio Currius in the “*Proceso Informativo*” of Tarragona, quoted in Alvarez, *Historia* 400.

<sup>173</sup> Paris to Orberá, August 15<sup>th</sup> 1880, EMP 319, p. 395.

<sup>174</sup> CO 420, “Index of Persons”.

community of the Institute whose name is House of Mary Most Holy and of Education, founded in Santiago de Cuba by Most Rev. Anthony M. Claret, archbishop of Cuba.<sup>175</sup> Cardinal Barrios answered this letter granting the authorization. María Antonia having learned that the Cardinal welcomed the institute she wrote to him asking him to give the authorization to Rev. Paladio Currius to accompany the sisters. She says to him that Currius had been the subsecretary of “our late, most reverend and never forgotten Founder, His Excellency Archbishop Claret.”<sup>176</sup>

The Foundress with her three companions arrived to Carcagente on September 2<sup>nd</sup> 1875. Rev. José Navarro Darás, principle of St. Luis School in the same city, had prepared for them an old abandoned convent. On the 12<sup>th</sup> of the same month they broke the ground for the building of the convent and school.<sup>177</sup> The day after, September 13, the cloister was established and this is the date recognized as the foundation of the new house.<sup>178</sup> The construction began and also with it the headaches of María Antonia who was faced with several difficulties: the lack of financial resources, the misunderstanding about poverty by the clergy and the architects, as it had happened already in the previous foundations. The people of the town helped to cover the expenses according to their financial means. In the official document of the inauguration of the convent, that was not completely finished, it is recorded that the new convent-school will be used for the gratuitous education of girls and that it will be conducted by the nuns called Teaching Sisters, founded by His Excellency the Most Rev. Anthony M. Claret.<sup>179</sup>

When María Antonia was still in Reus some difficult situations began to surface with the community of Tremp. The new superior elected in 1872 did not recognize the authority of the Foundress as the First Mother. The constitutions mentioned a style of governance in which the First Mother or Superior General, had the authority over all the convents. However according to the law the convents of solemn vows were independent from each other. Based on this, without paying attention to the spirit of the Institute, the new superior, María Dolores Moles de Santiago, not only did not accept the authority of María Antonia, but she started changing the content of the constitutions, which were already in Rome for their approval. She had the support of Bishop Caixal and also of Rev. Paladio Currius who was in Reus.

After María Antonia leaves Reus, there will also be some very serious difficulties in this community. They were caused by the superior María Luisa de San Pablo and the confessor Rev. Paladio Currius. The Archbishop of Tarragona writes to our Foundress and asks her to come back to Reus to fix the difficulties of that community. She comes back on June 1879, with Ma. Gertrudis Barril and Rev. Enrique Goimis. She remained there until her death. She was not welcomed, but little by little, with her humility, meekness and love she won the heart of her sisters and peace was restored to the convent.

The third convent to make our Foundress suffer was the one in Santiago de Cuba. The new Archbishop José Martín Herrera, who arrived in Santiago on December 1875, had always a great concern and love for the sisters. When he did the first canonical visitation as he read the Constitutions he was aware of certain juridical anomalies in the constitutions. He asked María Antonia for a copy of the document of the foundation and of the constitutions. She sent both

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<sup>175</sup> Orberá to Cardinal Barrios, January 16<sup>th</sup> 1875, cfr. Cepeda, *La Sierva de Dios María Antonia Paris y la Congregacion de las Religiosas de Enseñanza de María Inmaculada* (The Servant of God María Antonia Paris and the Congregation of the Teaching Sisters of Mary Immaculate), 188-189, quoted by Alvarez, *Historia*, 463-464.

<sup>176</sup> Paris to Cardinal Barrios, January 27<sup>th</sup> 1875, cfr. Cepeda, pp. 190-191 quoted by Alvarez, *Historia*, 465.

<sup>177</sup> Newspaper “Las Provincias” (the Provinces) quoted by Alvarez, *Historia*, 475.

<sup>178</sup> Book of the Foundation of Carcagente, page added and glued at the beginning of the book, quoted in Alvarez, *Historia*, 475.

<sup>179</sup> Cepeda, “*La Sierva de Dios*”, 198-199.

documents to him and she explains that, although they are not officially approved, all the bishops have followed without any difficulty what our dear father, his Excellency the Most Rev. Claret had established for the Institute.<sup>180</sup> In this same letter she let him know her approval to his prohibition to the Gual Sisters to go to the new projected foundation in La Habana. Due to the abuses of authority on the part of the Gual Sisters, who had been leading the convent during twenty years in a row, the Archbishop asked the Vatican for the faculties to have anticipated elections in the convent. The election was done on May 1882. The Foundress writes to the Archbishop letting him know her sufferings.<sup>181</sup>

The two sisters were left without any responsibility in the governance of the convent. Mother Antonia offered them to come to the peninsula and she will send each one to a different convent. They said that they had made a promise to their mother to never separate from each other. Surely it was also hard for them not having any responsibility in the governance. They decided to leave the Institute on September 22, 1882. This was the strongest blow for María Antonia, they had been the first collaborators, they had made in Tarragona in 1851, with the other young women the vow to not separate from each other.

The city of Velez Rubio was going to be the scenario of the sixth and last foundation during María Antonia' life. She was in Reus since 1879 and she could not travel with the sisters to the new foundation. On September 22, 1880 the sisters appointed for the foundation left Carcagente, they were accompanied by Rev. Enrique Gomis, who will return to Carcagente once the sisters be in their new house. They arrived on September 24 and they were welcomed with warmth and joy by the people of the town. On the Decree of foundation Bishop Orberá wrote that it was "*a convent of the Teaching Sisters of Mary Most Holy founded in the city of Santiago de Cuba in 1855 by His Excellency the Archbishop Anthony M. Claret and Clará*".<sup>182</sup>

They had to do some changes to that building since some parts did not agree with the poverty and simplicity of the Institute as was required by the charism and the will of our Founders. After making the needed adaptations for the classrooms, the school was inaugurated on November 3<sup>rd</sup> 1880. Very soon some young women asked to enter the convent, but their number was not enough to take care of the growing apostolate of education in that town.<sup>183</sup>

María Antonia is in Reus, her health is failing, and she is confined to her bed since 1884. The sisters think that the Lord will come to take her during the Christmas celebrations,<sup>184</sup> but it did not happened, the day of her final encounter with Christ, her only love and to whom she had surrendered her life, was on January 17, 1885.

### **c. Relationship between our Founder and our Foundress**

As we read the history, the letters and other documents about our Founder and Foundress found in the archives, we discover that the relationship between them grew in depth, respect and admiration as time was passing by and the events were happening.

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<sup>180</sup> Paris to the Archbishop of Cuba, without date, it seems to be from the end of 1876 or beginning of 1877, EMP 224 .

<sup>181</sup> Paris to Gomis, May 9<sup>th</sup> 1881, EMP 370 .

<sup>182</sup> Book of the Foundation of Vélez Rubio, cfr. Cepeda, *La Sierva de Dios* , 203-206, quoted in Alvarez, *Historia* 655.

<sup>183</sup> Alvarez, *Historia*, 659.

<sup>184</sup> M. Gertrudis Barril, "Biografía de la Madre Fundadora" (Biography of Mother Foundress) placed on her casket ,quoted in Alvarez, *Historia*, 669.

The first time they meet in Tarragona Claret does not speak to much. In Cuba they had their problems because he did not want to found something new. He wants them to collaborate with him in the women's education in his Archdiocese of Cuba. This helps us to understand that he values the talent and ability of María Antonia. On her part she is convinced that he is the one who will be her collaborator in the foundation, because she had understood in prayer that Lord was telling her" *Fr. Claret will help you in the establishment of the first Houses of the Order*".<sup>185</sup>

From the first time that they begin to talk and do the paper work for the foundation in Cuba, she acknowledges him as the founder. She does nothing without his approval and this again is the cause of many frictions between them. He expects her to speak and say for him to know how to act, and on the other hand she expects him to take the lead, because she knows that God makes his will known through those in authority in the Church,<sup>186</sup> but when the decision does not agree with what she has understood in prayer about the New Order, she suffers, weeps and keep silent. Little by little he accepts that mission which has been entrusted to him against his will, as in so many situations in his life: archbishop of Cuba, confessor of the Queen, exile in France... in a word during the journey of his life God keeps asking him and although he wishes something else he keeps responding with faithfulness. As the Foundress says:

*And so it has happened in this foundation, that though the Archbishop was unwilling to be concerned for this or that, he has been, by Divine impulse, concerned for everything, because I have never expressed a desire of mine except when I have been asked.*<sup>187</sup>

As time was passing they began to share not only about the Institute, but also their apostolic dreams, poverty, the renewal of the Church. Let us remember what we have already explained about their writings on the renewal of the Church. In Cuba Claret with the collaboration of Paris makes a plan to work for the morality of the clergy. He communicates this to Caixal in a letter saying " *in Cuba we began the project with Mother Antonia*"<sup>188</sup>. He writes the *Colegiala Instruida* on the request of María Antonia. " *The second means is the formation of youth of both sexes, for this reason, I will write the booklet you have asked me for*"<sup>189</sup> He sends her his books for her opinion on them. Claret appreciates very much the opinion of María Antonia and on her part she has a great admiration for Claret. When Claret suffers the attack in Holguin she writes to him a letter in which she says that God has given him the greatest reward to shed part of his blood for the zeal of the divine word.<sup>190</sup>

Before the foundation of the third house of the Order, María Antonia consults with him and even though she has a different opinion she follows the advice of Claret whom she considers to be the founder of the Order. It happens as well with the criteria for the admission of new candidates to the Institute. Even after the death of Claret she will continue to lead the Institute according to the directions that Claret had given, and she will remind this to the bishops who will help her in future foundations.

To conclude this section let us see the letter written by Claret to Antonia some month before his death in his exile in Fontfroide, France:

*I have received your letter of the 23<sup>rd</sup> of the present month, after reading what you say in it, I answer.*

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<sup>185</sup> Aut MP 36.

<sup>186</sup> Aut MP 221.

<sup>187</sup> Aut MP 218.

<sup>188</sup> Claret to Caixal, May 31<sup>st</sup> 1857, CO 58.

<sup>189</sup> Claret to Paris, August 31<sup>st</sup> 1860, CO 196.

<sup>190</sup> Paris to Claret, February 28<sup>th</sup> 1856, EMP 3.

*In general the weather of Rome did not help me, and besides that there has been during this present year some special circumstances which are: a extraordinary heat, to have to go through the streets of Rome, almost every day, from seven in the morning to two in the afternoon and many times walking, because I could not find a carriage to rent, Finally, in the Council the very serious matter of the infallibility of the Supreme Pontiff: all of this has made a mixture of things which have had a negative effect on me; thus on May 23 I had a cerebral stroke. I endured and suffered very much; the friends were alarmed; I took and continue to take the medicines prescribed by the physicians. As soon as the superior of the Congregation knew that, he came to take me to Prades that with the change of weather and of place I could recover since I was very sick, with a headache which did not leave me during the day, and less during the night, it did not allow me to sleep or rest.*

*Fifteen days after arriving in Prades they gave me the news that the French government ordered and commanded that all the Spanish citizens that had recently arrived had to be arrested; and thus I had to come to this place where I find myself now, which is in the diocese of Carcassone, called Fontfroide, which means cold fountain. It is a Monastery of Trapists who are very good, and take good care of me; since I have come to this Monastery I feel much better, thanks to God. This is in essence what has happened; you may know that the bishops of Lerida, Huesca, Barcelona and Tarragona have died.<sup>191</sup>*

Our Founders Claret and Paris have gone a long way in their relationship which have become deeper as time passed. Both were prayerful persons, paying attention to what God was communicating to them, faithful in spite of their difficulties and reluctances about some missions. I think that this explains the journey that they walk together because the Lord wanted to do his work counting on them.

### **3. Living Presence of the Founder and Foundress in our Congregation**

The young congregation is left without her Founders and her Foundress, maybe it is more accurate to say that they have now a different presence. The sisters have to continue the work they began. They will have to discover day by day what the Founder and Foundress understood to be the will of God upon the Congregation and handed down to them during their lives. In spite of the difficulties this will be possible because all the sisters of the Congregation receive the same charism as their Founders have received.

As it happened after the death of the Founder, there are some difficult situations that shake the young religious family. All the sisters want to be faithful, but they differ in the way to be faithful. Some, following the law of the Church over the convents with solemn vows, are in favor of the separation and independence of the different convents. For this sisters the sense of family that our Founders had is the communication among the convents. Those who knew what was in the heart of María Antonia before her death and that she had even left in writing, wanted the union of the convents with a First Mother or a Superior General, who could in some way intervene in the life of the convents for the good of the sisters, who could also transfer the sisters from one convent to another and to visit the convents.<sup>192</sup>

At first they choose to keep the autonomy of each convent, but as the years passed they realize that many of them languish, in the finances and in vocations. This leads them to rethink

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<sup>191</sup> Claret to Paris, August 29<sup>th</sup> 1870, CO 295.

<sup>192</sup> Lozano, Escritos: TMP,717.

and look in their deepest congregational experience. What is the reason to have been born in the Church, what was the will of their Founders, and they look for the help of their brothers the Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, known as Claretian Missionaries.

The superiors of the communities of Vélez-Rubio and Húercal Overa were the first to ask for ministerial help to the Claretian of Cartagena. Also the communities of Tresp and Reus knew some Claretian Priests. In 1914 the superior of Vélez, Ma. Concepción de San Felipe in a letter to Fr. Felipe Maroto, says that several years before they had asked Fr. Martin Alsina, cmf, who was then the Superior General, “to be helped and protected”, but this was not translated into any concrete action towards the union of the houses.<sup>193</sup> The sisters from the communities in Cuba got in touch with Fr. Felipe Maroto, cmf, the new Superior General of the Claretian Missionaries, who got interested in our Congregation. In a letter published in the “Anales” of our brothers’ Congregation, Maroto says:

*It would be very suitable that in order to support and to propagate this important work of our Venerable Father Founder we, his Missionaries, try to help as much as we can these our Sisters; since they really are our Sisters, Daughter of the same Father.*<sup>194</sup>

To help the missionaries who were going to work more closely for the union of our convents, Fr. Maroto wrote some notes which he called: *Notes for the Father who will work in promoting the union among the Religious of the Venerable Fr. Founder, called the Teaching Sisters of Mary Immaculate.*<sup>195</sup>

The work of the Claretians Fr. Felipe Maroto, Fr. Mariano Fernández and of the Sisters Concepción de San Felipe, superior of the convent in Santiago; Ma. Dolores Odío, superior of Baracoa; Carmen Esteve de San Andrés, superior of Vélez-Rubio reached the desired goal. Sisters representing the different convents, with the exception of Carcagente, met in the General Chapter from September 25 to 30 of the year 1920. In this chapter so important for the history of our Congregation the Venerable Fr. Antonio María Claret and the Servant of God María Antonia París de San Pedro were recognized to be the Founders of the Institute.<sup>196</sup>

Once the Chapter was finished, the constitutions newly written and approved by the members of the Chapter, were presented to the Holy See for their approval. The Decree of approval says as follows:

*Our Most Holy Father the Pope, by the Divine mercy, Pius XI, in the audience granted to .... Secretary of the Sacred Congregation for Religious on the 4<sup>th</sup> day of July 1922, deigned to approve and benevolently confirm, ... the Constitutions of the Institute of the Teaching Sisters of Mary Immaculate...*<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Cfr. Concepción de San Felipe to P. Felipe Maroto, cmf., February 16<sup>th</sup> 1914, quoted in Alvarez, *Historia* 998.

<sup>194</sup> P. Maroto, “Una Obra importante de nuestro Venerable Padre Fundador”, in ANNALES, 220, quoted in Alvarez, *Historia*, 1006.

<sup>195</sup> Fr. Maroto, Notes for the Priest who will work in promoting the union among the communities of the Religious of the Venerable Fr. Founder, called the Teaching Sisters of Mary Immaculate, quoted in Alvarez, *Historia* 1011.

<sup>196</sup> Minutes of the I General Chapter, 1920, section 2, quoted in *Capítulos Generales*, 16.

<sup>197</sup> Decree of Approval of the Constitutions, quoted in the Constitutions of the Religious of Mary Immaculate Claretian Missionary Sisters, 1988.

With this Decree we have reached the end of this long journey to obtain the Church's approval of our Constitutions. The dream of our Founder and of our Foundress becomes a reality. They died without seeing the approval of the Constitutions, that was a great suffering for both but especially for María Antonia. After the Union of the Convents and the approval of the Constitutions a new period begins for the Congregation.

The fruits of the Union are very soon experienced, there is a growth in vocations, new houses are opened, the Congregation enters again in American soil founding in Argentina. When a group of Sisters goes to the beatification of our Founder, the Claretian Missionaries from Italy asked them to stay and establish a community. Some of the sisters that went to the beatification remain in Rome to start a new foundation in Italy.<sup>198</sup>

Certainly the difficulties are not absent and some are even serious. During the Spanish Civil War most of the communities find themselves in the region opposed to the Catholic religion. It seemed that the work of Claret and Paris was going to be extinguished, but it was not so. In the midst of so much destruction some beautiful flowers sprout, one of our sisters has the joy to give her life for Christ, her name is María Patrocinio Giner whom the Church has declared Blessed. The other was a student from our school in Carcagente, student of María Patrocinio, her name is María del Olvido Noguera<sup>199</sup> who also gave her life during the war. She has also been declared Blessed by the Church. Many more sisters suffered also imprisonment, persecution and exile among them Sr. Ma. Gertrudis Mariezcurrena. Looking at the situation of our Congregation during the Spanish Civil War, the sisters went for help to Fr. Nicolás García, Superior General of our brothers the Claretians.<sup>200</sup> Later on the same Fr. Nicolás asks the Pope the authorization to nominate a General Governance for us, and thus he does it after having received the authorization and having also consulted the sisters with whom he could communicate.

Once the Spanish war is over, without enough time to recover, world war II begins leaving the young foundation in Italy without communication with the rest of the Congregation. In spite of all these situations, apparently negative, the life of the Institute goes on and comes back to life when it seems that everything is destroyed. The Lord takes care of all of us and the fidelity of the sisters fructifies. When the war is ended the Congregation is reborn and fructifies. Very soon there is a missionary expansion and fruits of holiness in abundance. Among these Teresita Albarracín who died very young. Her short life in the Congregation is not an obstacle for the sisters to discover in her a great holiness, the holiness of the little and simple of heart.

In 1945 Carcagente joins the rest of the Congregation this community had not been part of the General Chapter in 1920.<sup>201</sup> In 1948 a group of sisters goes to China, but due to the political situation caused by Communism, the sisters after much suffering escape from China. The golden dream to be in Asia will be a reality seven years later when another group of sisters goes to Japan. From 1950 on the foundations increase greatly in Europe, America, Africa and Asia. This expansion continues to our days. The communities in Cuba suffer in the sixties due to the communist regime which is established in the Island. The Congregation leaves Cuba and all the houses behind, among them the Mother house of Santiago witness of the sufferings and

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<sup>198</sup> Boletín Interno n. 108, 1984, p. 156.

<sup>199</sup> *María del Olvido Noguera Albelda, Mártir* (Rome: Generalate, 2005- 150th Anniversary of the Foundation of the Congregation), 33-35.

<sup>200</sup> Nicolás García, Circular Letter to the Claretian Sisters, quoted in Alvarez, *Historia*, 1098.

<sup>201</sup> On July 17, 1944 the Sacred Congregation for Religious had given a decree appointing P. Eduardo Fabregat, cmf. Apostolic Visitor of the Convents of Carcagente, Sagunto and Rocafort that were separated from the rest of the Institute.

joys of our foundation in 1855. In 1988 taking advantage of the somehow favorable situation offered by the communist regime, a group of sisters makes present again the Congregation in Cuba, the land of our birth. In the seventies our Sisters in Congo suffer due to a revolution, the political instability and the persecution. Since then they have suffered some other times for the same causes. But as in other places the fidelity, constancy and love of the sisters makes possible that in spite of the adversities the vocations of African sisters are growing.

The spring time of the Church arrives, the new Pentecost when the Church is renewed and rejuvenated in response to the voice of her pastors assembled in the II Vatican Council. This is the greatest event of the XX century, which coincides also with a time when there is a great optimism in society, optimism that assures people that everything can be changed for the best. The Religious Congregations are invited and summoned to return to their origins, to their founders, and to eliminate all that does not belong to the foundational charism. Since 1964 our Congregation had already begun the process to know more deeply our Foundress. The Founder was better known, due to the processes of beatification and canonization. Some changes had already been done to our legislation. But the official process of renewal began with the IX General Chapter in 1969.

We have mentioned above that since 1964 our Congregation had begun a process of a deeper understanding of our Foundress. Why did we have to do this process? Our brothers the Claretian Missionaries who worked on the cause of beatification of our Founder were worried about the Plan for the Renewal of the Church, written by our Foundress and that Claret had attached at the end of his Autobiography.<sup>202</sup> Fr Jaime Clotet, cmf., one of the co-founders of the Claretians, feared that the process of beatification could be delayed or experience difficulties, if the Holy See would, by any chance, know that Claret had approved the *Plan for the Renewal*, and still more, he had not only approved it but written his own plan based on that of our Foundress. From a letter written by Clotet we know the counter-sign that himself, Currius and others working on the Cause adopted, they would not mention Maria Antonia if they were not asked, and if they were asked they would answer evasively.<sup>203</sup> The fear experienced by Clotet induced him to remove the *Plan for the Renewal* written by Maria Antonia from Claret's Autobiography.<sup>204</sup>

As Alvarez says in the History of the Congregation, probably the way in which Currius explained to Clotet the refusal given by Pope Pius IX to the *Plan for the Renewal*, caused Clotet to consider María Antonia as a hot-headed and visionary woman.<sup>205</sup> Even the sisters of the Congregation did not grasp the depth of the spiritual life of María Antonia. After the beatification of Claret, the Claretians begin to be more open to our Congregation. Fr. Maroto thinks that the bond of union among the convents has to be our Foundress. Later on, even before the Council, some of our brothers help our Congregation to make some changes which could already be foreseen. In respect to the knowledge of our Foundress it was Fr. Francisco Juberías, cmf. Who began the process by means of a series of talks to the superiors of the Congregation, which were published in our *Boletín interno* and ended up being the book "... *Por su Cuerpo que es la Iglesia*".<sup>206</sup>

It is since the IX General Chapter in 1969, called also Special Chapter, because it was celebrated before the regular time, that our Congregation is in an ongoing process of renewal. This process was initiated in response to the call of the Council for the renewal and adaptation

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<sup>202</sup> Alvarez, *Historia*, 23.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.,24.

<sup>204</sup> Clotet to Currius, February 2nd 1889, quoted in Alvarez, *Historia*, 24.

<sup>205</sup> Alvarez, *Historia*, 25.

<sup>206</sup> Francisco Juberías, ... *por su cuerpo que es la Iglesia*,13-17.



of the religious life, let us remember that our Congregation was born for the renewal of the Church. Since the Council we are more aware that life changes and that faithfulness means to adapt to these changes, as John XXIII would put it speaking of the life of the plants, they adapt themselves to their environment, if they do not adapt they die. Since then we have had powerful and intense moments of renewal of the Congregation, this does not mean that there had not had them in the past. Among these times of renewal and growth before the Council, we count the Chapter of the Union (1920), the beatification (1934) and canonization (1950) of our Founder, the first centennial of the foundation of the Congregation (1955). On the occasion of the canonization of our Founder, our Superior General Maria del Pilar Gibert de Sto. Tomas, wrote in a circular letter:

*Let us take advantage of this time of grace, since there are two strong reasons for this: The Holy Year and the glorification of our Holy Founder.*<sup>207</sup>

After the Council the intense moments of renewal have been:

- The three General Chapters of renewal from 1969 to 1981, in those chapters the *Constitutions* and *Directory* were written again based on the Constitutions written by our Foundress (1969-1981).
- First Centennial of the Death our Founder (1970)
- The Jubilee Celebrations of the Foundation of the Congregation: 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary (1980) and 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary (2005).
- The transfer of the mortal remains of our Foundress (1980)
- The beginning of the historical process of beatification of our Foundress (1981)
- The first centennial of the death of our Foundress ((1985).
- The 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the First Experience of our Foundress.
- The beatification of our sister María Patrocinio Giner and our student María del Olvido Noguera (2001).

From October 2007 to October 2008 we have remembered and celebrated in each one of our communities, ministries and major entities the second centennial of the birth of our Founder Antonio María Claret, the apostolic missionary, who set on the fire of the Gospel the society and the Church of his time. Of him Pius XII said:

*Great soul, born to unite extremes:  
He might be humble in his origins and at the same time glorious in the eyes of the world;  
Small in his body but having a giant spirit  
Of humble appearance  
But at the same time able to impose respect even to the great men of the earth  
Strong in character,  
But with the gentle sweetness  
Of the one who knows the countenance of austerity and penance;  
Always in the presence of God,  
Even in the midst of his prodigious external activity  
Slandered and admired, celebrated and persecuted  
And among so many wonders, as a light which pervades everything, his devotion to the Mother of God.*<sup>208</sup>

From January 17, 2010 to 2011, as we have done for the Founder, we will dedicate this jubilee year to the memory of our Foundress, having a Seminar on Claret and Paris for the whole Congregation. It has begun in Barcelona and will continue in each one of our

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<sup>207</sup> Boletín Interno, Year 1,n.4, September 15<sup>th</sup> 1950.

<sup>208</sup> Speech of His Holiness Pope Pius XII to the Claretian Pilgrims, 1950.

communities. On the circular letter of our Superior General, Soledad Galerón, announcing the celebration of the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of our Foundress, says:

*This celebration will be the a manifestation of our Thanksgiving for the extraordinary grace received from God in the person of Maria Antonia Paris; for her “accomplished mission” of which we are in a very especial way the beneficiaries and continuators.*<sup>209</sup>

To this great missionary and saint Antonio María Claret I Clará, as well as to this great woman called María Antonia París I Riera we owe our birth, growth and perseverance in the Church. May they, from the Kingdom for which they lived and died, protect us and guide us so that we may be faithful in “*working until death teaching every creature the holy law of the Lord*”<sup>210</sup> and in giving “*a public witness to evangelical poverty*”<sup>211</sup> so that, in our journey toward our heavenly homeland, we teach and make easy the same way to our brothers and sisters who journey with us in this world.<sup>212</sup> And as in Claret, our Founder, may the charity of Christ burn inside of us in such a way, that we cannot do anything else but live and proclaim the gospel, so that the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ might be known and loved by all peoples.”<sup>213</sup>

### **III. PART: MOST REPEATED ANSWERS TO THE TWO QUESTIONS:**

#### **A) HOW DID THE THOUGHT ABOUT THE INSTITUTE BEGIN B) IN WHAT MEASURE THE FOUNDER AND THE FOUNDRRESS SHAPED THE MISSION AND THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE INSTITUTE.**

After having read the section about the historical birth of our Institute, having seen the relationship between both Founders, a desire to know them better has been awakened in us. Thus it is important to read the Writings of M. Paris in relation to Claret, the meaning of this “man of God” for her, for our Institute and for the renewal of the Church. Also it is convenient to read some of the most important letters related to the foundation. They are the best source to know the mind of Claret, how he was progressively making his own our foundation and how he wanted our spirit and mission to be.

#### **MOST REPEATED ANSWERS FROM ALL THE GROUPS IN THE WORKSHOP (Barcelona, December 28<sup>th</sup> 2009 to January 6<sup>th</sup> 2010)**

##### **A) How did the thought about the Institute begin?**

All agree that the foundational inspiration of our Institute comes clearly from M. Paris in Tarragona on 1842; this is what we call the “Initial Experience”. She recognizes it as a grace from the Holy Spirit calling her to a specific way of life and mission closely united to the renewal of the Church. At the same time she receives the call and the impulse to be an instrument of God for the beginning of a “New Order” (foundation) because she recognizes this impulse to be the will of God (cf. Aut.MP 7).

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<sup>209</sup> Soledad Galerón, Circular letter to the Congregation, September 21<sup>st</sup> 2009.

<sup>210</sup> *Reglas del Instituto Apostólico de la Inmaculada Concepción de María Santísima*, 1862, Blanco y Fin,

<sup>211</sup> Claret to Paris, January 30<sup>th</sup> 1862. CO 213.

<sup>212</sup> Cfr. *Reglas del Instituto Apostólico*, Blanco y Fin.

<sup>213</sup> *Constitutions* 1988, 10.

Her inspiration comes from her worries for the Church experienced in prayer. In the contemplation of the Crucified Lord, she discovers the real evils of the Church beyond the sufferings of the Church caused by her enemies. The Lord helps her to understand that the real evils of the Church are the lack of faithfulness to the Gospel, especially among her consecrated members (bishops, priests and religious men and women). Within this frame of mind she discovers that the Lord calls her to found a “*New Order, not new in the doctrine but new in practice*” with a deep commitment to live according to the evangelical counsels and teaching to everyone the Gospel (cf. *Aim and Goal*). This is part of the renewal of the Church that the Lord wants.

As we have seen in the second part of this Work, this foundational inspiration, is seriously discerned by M. Paris. Discernment which entails not only interior meditation but also dialogue with other persons. Caixal and later on Maestro Gatell helped her. But there is a person who intervenes in a more specific and deep way in this discernment, Claret. By God’s inspiration this intervention is essential. Even before knowing him personally, in her Autobiography from 1844 to 1845<sup>214</sup> she joins her personal vocation to help in the “needs of the Church” with that apostolic man which she had asked for with tears. The Lord reveals to her the “grace he had given to that man for the preaching of the gospel”, he was the remedy for the “peace of the Church” (Aut. MP 19).

Some time later she experiences again that P. Claret will be the one who will establish those “*Second Apostles, living copies of the First ones*” who “*with the torch of the Gospel in their hand, will enlighten the wise as well as the ignorant men*” (Aut.MP 31). And the experience continues “*this is the first Father and I want him to establish the first houses of this new order*” (Aut. MP 32)<sup>215</sup> and she goes on with “*great joy.... Even with tears*” because the Lord has shown to her “*so many and so great things of this holy soul... to see what the grace of God can do in a soul*” (Aut. MP 33-34). Graces received “*to restore the Most Holy Law*”.

The personal encounter will be in 1850, Claret says to her in that occasion “*do not doubt that it will happen....now I know that you are here*” and he shares with her his plans for the preaching of the Gospel with his companions in Barcelona. In those moments Claret was discerning how to answer the petition from the Pope to be the Archbishop of Santiago de Cuba. (Aut. MP 61-62).

The whole process of the inspiration of the foundation continues to be of Maria Antonia but, at the same time, looking at Claret in the plans of God over her and the “Order”. They experience lights and darkness in this ongoing relationship until the foundation in August 1855.<sup>216</sup> In fact it is Claret who gives the “canonical mission”<sup>217</sup> to the first sisters who offer themselves to cooperate in his apostolic project in the Diocese of Santiago de Cuba to answer to the need for the education that he himself observed in the island.

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<sup>214</sup> This prayerful experience happens a short time after the Initial Experience and before the first composition of the Constitutions in 1848 (Cf. Aut.MP 20).

<sup>215</sup> On this point of the Autobiography of Maria Antonia Paris (Escritos-Writings p.7) the footnotes of Juan Manuel Lozano are very enlightening.

<sup>216</sup> Reflecting on the development of the first steps of the Institute, it seems that M. Paris considers the first step of the foundation the vow in Tarragona which we could call the *charismatic foundation* (August 15<sup>th</sup> 1851). Afterwards, taking into consideration the juridical steps, the signing of the Decree for the foundation by Claret we may consider that the “*foundation de iure*” (August 25<sup>th</sup> 1855) the religious profession of Maria Antonia as the first sister in the Institute would be the *foundation de facto* (August 27<sup>th</sup> 1855).

<sup>217</sup> Without a mission given by the official Church, our first community would not have had the complete consecration and mission characteristic of our Institute.

Little by little Claret goes through the different steps towards the foundation, many times unwillingly, dragged by the Spirit who sometimes uses the persistence of M. Paris, and in other occasions the events themselves. There are some clear dimensions which Maria Antonia connects to Claret and which are essential to our foundational spirit. For this reason she considers Claret a Gift for the Church and for herself. These dimensions which M. Paris experiences as forming part of the New Order and even necessary for the renewal of the Church,<sup>218</sup> are in Claret as the “grace” God has given to him as an “apostolic man” (Cf. Aut.MP 34):

- The Second Apostles
- Preaching of the Gospel, to restore the Holy Law (Gospel)
- Evangelical poverty
- Renewal of the Church
- Life in communion
- Mary as the evangelizer center

Looking at this from Claret the things are different. Reading his Autobiography, we become aware that he does not speak about our foundation, he only says :” *I also established a convent of nuns dedicated to teaching girls, and I bought them a house which cost me about 12,000 duros* (Aut.PC 561). All of us would like him to talk longer and in a more affectionate way about us. However, it is important to be aware that the Autobiography of Claret was written in response to the petition of P. Xifré for the Claretian Missionaries (men), to help them in their formation and daily life. It is written neither for us nor for the whole Claretian Family as such.

M. Paris never asked him to write anything to help us to live his spirituality. However they exchanged their spiritual experiences in Cuba and later on through their correspondence. This requires that we have in the letters written by Claret a point of reference of what he wanted from the Foundress and from each one of us who form the Congregation. (cf. the Annex). We perceive through the letters, and also through the Writings of M. Paris, a growing deeper and richer syntony between their spiritualities. (cf. Annex , last letters).

**B) In what measure the Founder and the Foundress shaped the mission and the spirituality of the Institute.**

M. Paris sees Claret bound to our foundation, precisely through his life, his missionary spirituality and all that this means for the Institute and for the renewal that the Church needs (Cf. Annex, M. Paris, Writings on Claret). On the other hand it is also true that a strong person was needed, a person who could have a word that would be listen to, in order to achieve what God asked from them and which she called the “work” (cf. Diary MP 109); by the word “work” she understands the New Order as well as the Renewal of the Chuch.

When she thinks on the New Order she dreams about a group of men and women who would live this spirituality, able to evangelize in the midst of the difficult historical situation of her time. And this group of people is a very important part of the renewal of the Church that the Lord makes known to her as urgently necessary. We can say that our Congregation is “Claretian” because M. Paris wanted us to be so, since the moment she knew the will of God.

On the other hand Claret lived all of this as something that little by little was being part of his plans. He did not feel the call to found us, he experienced God dragging him into it through

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<sup>218</sup> From the “Initial Experience “ even before writing it down, she begins to feel in her heart the need for the renewal of the Church.

the historical realities that were leading him to be part of the whole process, even without willing it. It is true that little by little, and following the calls of the Spirit – in the same way as the prophets-, he does not only do what is needed for the foundation (he was the only one that could do them<sup>219</sup>) but he does more. In syntonny with the interior ecclesial calls of the Foundress, he gave the guidelines to help us to live the evangelical counsels in a deeper way in the historical situation of his time, well know to him, and also in the Church in need of renewal (Cf. Aut. MP 217-218).

From María Antonia, the Congregation has drunk the spirit from the inside, in the day to day life. She taught with her word and her own life, with the conviction that we had to be “nuns” (the only kind of religious life known then)<sup>220</sup>, with her struggles in all the foundations, with the anecdotes of the community and the ministry of the education of girls and young women. Also with her mature and respectful manners with so many Church persons who intervene in her life, but always as a relationship between equals. During her long life she established different customs which she applied according to the circumstances of time and place.<sup>221</sup> She was the incarnation of the Constitutions with her way of living them and, when she realized that it would take a long time for the written Constitutions to be in the hands of the sisters since the approval was delayed, in order that all the sisters could read them she communicated to Claret the need to publish what was not related to what the Holy See had questioned. Claret answered positively and he himself asked Mr. Naudo to print them and he paid the expenses himself. This events and others that cannot be ignored have grown deep roots essential for our Congregation.

Our Founder, the Archbishop Claret visited very frequently the sisters of the Santiago de Cuba convent and he had pleasant conversations which influenced their spirituality, this is also part of our roots. We can perceive this relationship through sentences and whole letters. When Claret went to the Peninsula this dialogues happened through correspondence. (cf. Annex).

## WORKSHOP

### I Part.

Reflect on the diverse ways to be a founder or foundress in history.

- Where do you situate Claret?
- Where do you situate Paris?

### II Part.

- What do you see more important?
- Have you discovered anything new?
- Anything surprising?

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<sup>219</sup> Among these are: the discernment on the best juridical form to welcome into his Diocese a new Institute, the petition to Rome, the signing of the Decree of Foundation. Later on, the paper work to have the Institute established in the Peninsula, the intervention and counsel on the vocations discernment, the guidelines for a appropriate way to live the evangelical counsels.

<sup>220</sup> It is obvious that this makes us understand the great importance of the consecration as a total surrender to God within our charismatic spirit. When the Code of Canon Law accepted the religious life of the new congregations we became an Institute with simple vows.

<sup>221</sup> I include here the way she claimed the rights of the community before Bishop Caixal in his Visitation to the Convent of Tremp, in leaving quickly the convent of Reus when the September 1868 Revolution; telling the sisters of Reus not to wear the veil over their face to receive certain persons from Carcagente, because this might not be understood as something positive by the persons who visited them.

### III Part.

- Read slowly the Writings of M. Paris on Claret which are mentioned and underline the ones that stand out because of what they say of him.
- Read the letters of Claret that attract you most, and later on keep reading all of them. Do not leave the last ones, they are really good.
- How would you summarize in a sentence the role of our Founder and of our Foundress?

**CHRISTOLOGICAL EXPERIENCE  
Of  
The Venerable M. María Antonia Paris  
And  
Saint Anthony Maria Claret  
Founders of the Religious of Mary Immaculate  
Claretian Sisters**

**A BRIEF PRESENTATION OF THE ORIGINAL PAPER**

**Paper submitted by Sister Margarita Gomez, rmi.**

**US Independent Delegation  
West Palm Beach, Fl. January 5, 2010**

This paper is a summary presentation of the paper introducing the Christological experience of our founders, the Venerable M. Maria Antonia Paris, and Saint Anthony Maria Claret. This paper was presented at the workshop held in Barcelona on December 28, 2009 till January 6, 2010.

It is very important to have from the very beginning an attitude of wonder and reverence in order to be able to have a glimpse into the intimate relationship between Christ and our Founders. We are entering a sacred space, the in depth relationship held between Christ and Mother Maria Antonia and Fr. Claret. Let us allow ourselves to be amazed by the

intimacy they had with Christ and how this intimate relationship was an ongoing reality until the time the Lord called them home.

I also would like to underline that our Founders did not write any Christological treatise, yet in their autobiographies they opened their hearts letting us know how their lives were centered in Christ, they did it in a very candid way, with honesty and in truth. They lived in Christ to such an extent that they truly could say with Saint Paul: *It is not I who lives, it is Christ who lives in me.* (Gal. 2:20)

**The first part** of this paper deals with the vocation of Mother Maria Antonia y Fr. Claret. Here it is summarily mentioned how they grew in awareness of their being call to follow Christ.

Mother Maria Antonia Paris and Fr. Claret were open to hear the call of the Holy Spirit to follow Jesus. They listen to Jesus calling them to be with Him, and to be sent to announce the Good News of God's Kingdom, like He did with the first disciples (Mk 3:14). Our Founders understood their lives within the perspective of God's love, they experienced God's love being poured out in their hearts, and they understood themselves as consecrated by God to carry out a mission in the Church and in the world. They understood themselves as being consecrated by God's love from the very beginning, even before they were in their mothers' womb. God had consecrated them, separated them to be apostles-missionaries (Eph 1:3ff). Their being apostles-missionaries was not an accident but the expression of who they were, of their identity: they were apostles-missionaries sent by the Spirit of Christ to renew the Church and preach the Good News to every creature.

**Part II** is the center of the paper. It aims to be a reflection-contemplation on how Christ became the center of Mother Maria Antonia's and Fr. Claret's life. Their hearts were in fire for the love of Christ. They felt gifted by the Spirit with a unique experience of the Incarnated Word; Christ was for them the *raison d'être* for their life; once they accepted the friendship offered to them by Christ, they knew they could only live for Him and with Him, looking forward to live in Him.

The gospels' narratives witnessed to our Founders Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God; they were given the insight of His loving care and self-giving for humankind. In the gospels they discovered:

- Jesus giving of himself unconditionally in the service to God's Kingdom; His love for the Father guided his words and his actions.
- Jesus did not marry, he was a teacher, a rabbi, gathering into his company a group of companions who would live with him and who He would send to share what they had seen and experienced being with Him.



- Jesus devoted himself unreservedly to the mission the Father entrusted Him. His only desire was to bring about God's love and mercifulness to the people
- Jesus had friends, Martha, Mary, Lazarus; he enjoyed friendships, he entered the houses of poor and rich, Matthew, Zaccheus, and he sat at table with them, he did not make any difference, he looked for the outcasts, the sick, the sinners... He was sensitive to their causes.
- Jesus' heart was compassionate, he felt for the poor, the women, the outcasts, the sinners, he reach out to all those the official religion rejected.
- Jesus felt the pain of the mother who had lost his only son (Lk 7:11-17); Jesus cried at Lazarus tomb (Jo 11), he was moved at the sight of the impenitent city, Jerusalem (Lk 19:42).

“Come follow Me.” They heard the call of Jesus to follow Him, to walk in his footsteps; their hearts were expanded enabling them to love unreservedly, with no boundaries, they gave themselves without setting any pre-conditions. They experienced fully their being children of God, they responded to God's mercifulness with total and unconditional generosity; there was no obstacle capable of deterring them from loving God and doing His will. They follow Christ lovingly and unreservedly; their only goal was to live up to the call they had received serving the Church and humanity wholeheartly. They freely embraced Jesus lifestyle, in His being totally for-the-Father and for-others. They lived their lives in Christ and for Christ. And in Christ they live also for-others, as He Himself did. Their heart was rooted in Christ, and as they journey towards a full identification with Christ they became in turn Christ for their fellow men and women. The Spirit that possessed Christ, the same Spirit of love who unites in love the Father and the Son, was poured out in the heart of Mother Maria Antonia Paris and Fr. Claret; they unconditionally received God's love, and this divine love moved them to share this same love with others.

In the writings of Mother Maria Antonia we can recognize a loving heart that does not keep anything to her but empties out totally to serve others. Her love was virginal love, chaste love, a generous surrendering of her being; this love burned in her heart since she was a little child; her indisputable desire to consecrate herself to the Lord, to be a religious sister, emerged from a loving heart whose only desire was to be only for the beloved. It is in this burning heart full of love that the Crucified Lord made His presence known, establishing with her a unique friendly intimate relationship while teaching her the mission He wanted her to fulfill in the Church. The Crucified Lord is Mother Maria Antonia's Teacher, who guides her to understand that love has no boundaries, that is given unconditionally, and that the person who is in love is to empty oneself without expecting any reward. The Crucified Lord teaches her that she has to give of herself emptying herself into Him, trusting that God will guide her, and will help her to accomplish the mission He entrusts her. She is asked to live as a poor, in simplicity, trusting that the Lord will guide her life, and she does not hesitate to trust Him. In her writings she tells

that there is nothing she cannot endure if she knows it is God's will; she will always surrender to God's will: *The love to your will, of Lord, makes me surrender to whatever sacrifice I may have to endure. (El amor a Vuestra Santísima Voluntad Señor, me rinde a todo sacrificio.*<sup>222</sup> She lives each moment in God's presence, Christ's centered; such is the intensity of God's love that she feels her heart is shattering into pieces, her heart does not have the capacity for keeping so much love inside her.

*From that moment on (the experience of the origin) the Lord has given me the grace to experience him always present, and in an intimate relationship with Him, especially in the Holy Humanity of Christ Jesus our Lord and in the Blessed Sacrament. There have been too many and such sweetness of love that the Lord has poured out in this poor sinner that I have been compelled to exclaim: Enough, my Lord, enough. Please expand my heart or do not give me any more of such sweetness. (Desde entonces (la visión inicial) me ha hecho la gracia Nuestro Señor de tenerlo siempre presente, y una muy íntima comunicación con Su Divina Majestad especialmente en la Humanidad Santísima de Cristo Señor Nuestro, y en el Santísimo Sacramento. Han sido tantas y tales las finezas de amor que ha obrado Dios nuestro Señor en esta miserable pecadora, que muchas veces me he visto obligada a exclamar: Basta, Señor mío, basta; o ensanchad mi corazón o suspended tales finezas)*<sup>223</sup>

Fr. Claret's missionary activity drew from a loving heart, a heart that was willing to give everything for the love of God and for the love of his brethren. He wanted even to seal this love with martyrdom. He carried in his heart the desire to save souls; Christ's love and the love for his fellow men and women were united, they were just only two faces of the same coin; it was an undivided love, giving of himself to the Lord, in preaching, confessing, establishing cooperatives, etc. etc., those were the means he used to introduce God's love in the hearts of all those he was sent to care for. *Poor of me if I would not preach the gospel!* (1Cor 9,15)

Christ is the only model to be followed by those who want to live God's kingdom here and now. To follow Jesus requires to walk behind Him, not at his side or ahead of Him, but to walk behind Him (as he taught Peter, Mth 16:23), looking at Him, appropriating for oneself His fundamental attitudes of unconditional self-giving, capturing His foundational poverty, His self-denial, emptying of himself in love for the benefit of all. (Flp 2:5-11)

To follow Jesus it is not a question of doing the same works he did, but to enter into His dynamism of unconditional self-denial for the well being of others, and all because of His love to the Father. Fr. Claret understood it very well:

*To imitate Jesus Christ, the apostolic missionary has to start by doing and practicing what he is going to teach later. Coepit facere et docere. So that with his works he can*

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<sup>222</sup> Aut. MP # 107, p. 108.

<sup>223</sup> Aut. MP # 12, p. 61.

*say with the Apostle: Imitate me, like I imitate Christ. Imitatores mei estote, sicut et ego Christi.*<sup>224</sup>

Mother Maria Antonia, whose heart was in love with the beauty of Jesus Christ, teacher and Crucified Lord, said too:

*As soon as I knew God, He taught me what perfection is all about. What a perfect mortification! What wonderful self-denial! What perfect love to the Crucified Lord! All I desired was the Holy Cross and to live and die crucified with Christ. Me enseñó Dios lo más acendrado de la perfección tan pronto como le conocí; ¡qué mortificación tan perfecta! ¡qué abnegación tan cabal! ... ¡qué amor más puro e intenso a Cristo crucificado!. Todos mis deseos eran la Santa cruz y el vivir y morir crucificada con Cristo.*<sup>225</sup>

Mother Maria Antonia was opened to let Christ's love for His church to take root in her heart; she accepted to suffer with Christ for His body, the Church. She received from Christ the invitation to share in His own self-giving for the Church.

*September 3 of the same year (1859), while in prayer, the Lord told me that he wanted to espouse me with the Church. I answered: Lord I am already espoused to You through the religious vows. Then he made me understand that He wanted it to be a singular betrothal. 3 de septiembre del mismo año (1859) estando en oración díjome su Divina Majestad aún quiero desposarte con mi Iglesia, dije yo "Señor yo estoy desposada con Vos por los votos religiosos" entonces me hizo entender que quería un desposorio singular.*<sup>226</sup>

The love to Christ permeates Mother Maria Antonia being, *to follow Christ our highest good* is the motivation of her whole life, it directs all her aims and endeavors.<sup>227</sup>

To try to be like Christ requires adhering to Him through an unconditional following; our Founders lived and recommended the virtues they themselves practiced confident those virtues were the best way to work their configuration with the Lord. The work for acquiring virtues is not because of the value per se of the virtue but the desire to become configured with Christ. Mother Maria Antonia configuration with Christ was made gradually, as she entered in a deeper relational experience with Christ, her being and her doing became more a more the manner of responding to the graces she received while sharing with others what she was becoming. Whatever experiences and situations come into her life became an opportunity to be more Christ like. Her spirituality was nurtured by the strength and consolation received from the Spirit.

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<sup>224</sup> Aut. PC # 340.

<sup>225</sup> "Recuerdos y Notas" # 1, *Escritos*, p. 189. De aquí en adelante RN

<sup>226</sup> "Diario" # 41. *Escritos* p. 240. Leer la nota no. 135 sobre este punto que explica la espiritualidad eminentemente eclesial de M. María Antonia.

<sup>227</sup> Constituciones Misioneras Claretianas, *Blanco y Fin*, 3. De aquí en adelante Const.

*... I always felt encouraged to suffer, because God has given me such a love for my Holy Mother the Church, that even if it would cost my life (and though I might have one thousand lives) if I could return peace to her, with great love I would suffer the most painful torments, even if I would suffer them until the end of the world. ...me animaba mucho a padecer, porque Dios nuestro Señor me ha dado un amor tan grande a mi Santa Madre Iglesia, que si a costa de mi vida (y aunque tuviera mil) pudiera yo restituírle la paz, con grandísimo amor sufriría los más crueles tormentos, aunque fuera hasta el fin del mundo.<sup>228</sup>*

The intimacy held between Mother Maria Antonia and Christ was of such density that she would say: *It seems to me it is impossible for a creature to live in this life such an intimacy with God. Me parece imposible poder vivir una criatura en esta miserable vida tan íntima comunicación con Dios.<sup>229</sup>*

There was a time in Mother Maria Antonia life when she lived this intimacy in a very particular way. She felt the relationship she maintained with Christ was such as the relationship existing between two friends, they both look for opportunities and times to be alone to share their inner thoughts, feelings, desires, worries, plans, and projects. Those were the times when Christ opened her eyes to see the situation lived by the Church, and how much she needed reformation/renewal.<sup>230</sup>

In their ongoing configuration with Christ our founders realized that the Beatitudes proclaimed by Christ in the mountain sermon (Mt 5:1-7,29) were the program they were asked to appropriate in their life.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, the Kingdom of heaven is theirs.

Blessed are the gentle, they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who mourn, they shall be comforted.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice, that shall have their fill.

Blessed are the merciful, they shall have mercy shown to them.

Blessed are the pure of heart, they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, they shall be called sons and daughters of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted in the cause of justice, the Kingdom of heaven is theirs.

Blessed are you when you people abuse you and persecute you and speak all kinds of calumny against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven. (Mth 5:3-11)

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<sup>228</sup> Aut. MP # 35, *Escritos*, p. 72-73.

<sup>229</sup> Aut. MP # 48. *Escritos*, p. 243.

<sup>230</sup> Aut. MP # 48. *Escritos*, p. 243

The beatitudes are an expression of who Jesus is. Jesus proclaims the beatitudes as the “constitution” of the New People of God; He introduces them as the lifestyle to be followed by anyone who would like to enter and be a part of the Kingdom. Jesus lived them first, He is the meek, the humble, the poor, the persecuted, .... and He is entitled to ask His followers to adopt them if they want to be His disciples. Our Founders, Mother Maria Antonia y Fr. Claret took the beatitudes as the road to be walked in their progressive configuration with Christ. They made of the beatitudes their personal life project.

It was the Spirit who guided Mother Maria Antonia and Fr. Claret to discover and be in love with Christ, poor, dispossessed of everything and of any one. They understood existentially that Christ’s poverty had its roots in His divine sonship. He left the Father to bring about the salvation of humankind; Jesus did it because of his unconditional obediential-love to the Father (Flp 2:6-8). It is precisely His being totally and absolutely for the Father what makes Christ be the man-for-others, He is the Beloved Son who gives himself in unreserved love for the salvation of all, a love that ends giving his life, and in giving His life, He gives the Spirit that unites Him to the Father in perennial communion of love. It is this same Spirit that is poured into the hearts of all who welcome in faith and in love Christ’s self-giving. Jesus, the Beloved Son of the Father, has always his eyes fixed on the Father, Jesus nourishes himself from the words that come from the Father, he does what he sees the Father do, He loves with the Father’s love (Jo 5:19-20). In this loving dynamism centered in the Father Jesus loves humanity as brothers and sisters. Jesus, the Incarnated Word, became one of us to bring us the Father’s loving kindness, mercifulness, and faithfulness. Our Founders discovered their own sonship in Christ; they experienced God’s love for them to the extent that in many occasions they felt the Lord was calling them: (Antonio) my beloved son, (Antonia) my beloved daughter. As they experienced their being the daughter/son of God, they came across with the reality that they had many brothers and sisters; they all were beloved children in God’s family.

Mother Maria Antonia and Fr. Claret experienced Christ as being the poor par excellence, and if for Christ poverty was an expression of his total dependence on the Father, and of his being-for-others, than our Founders came to realize that their being daughter and son of God meant to be poor like Christ, and like him be servants-for-others. Poverty was the virtue they embraced and put into practice inviting their followers to do the same.

In a letter Fr. Claret addressed to Mother Maria Antonia, he tells her that what God wants of them is to give a public witness of poverty by living it fully.

*In reference to holy poverty I know very well what the Church canons say and what is mandated by the laws of the King, but this for what is common and ordinary. What happens with us is an exceptional case that God wants ... God wants a public witness be given in favor of holy poverty ... poverty has to be all in all, it is the virtue most loved by Jesus and Mary. Respecto a la santa pobreza sé muy bien lo que está dispuesto por los sagrados cánones de la Iglesia y lo que está mandado por las leyes del reino, pero esto por lo común y ordinario.*

*Más lo que pasa en nosotros es un caso excepcional que Dios quiere... Dios quiere que se dé un público testimonio en favor de la pobreza. ... que reine en todo y por todo la santa pobreza, que es la virtud más amada de Jesús y de María.*<sup>231</sup>

Why the virtue of poverty and not any other virtue? The answer is very simple: Because Jesus Nazareth was poor and they wanted to be like him. Jesus lived dispossessed of anything that was not God's will; his personal identity was to live depending unconditionally from the Father, in a wholehearted self-giving of His divine sonship, in total kenosis, and this only to show us with his own life, and not only with words, that the only thing that is important is to accept unreservedly the poverty of depending for everything and in anything from the Father who has given us life. Only accepting this poverty of being creatures of God, created in his own image, all the possessions of the earth will be given to us. The treasure we are called to encounter is that we are sons and daughters of God, and for this sonship to put down everything else.

For our founders poverty was a way of their ongoing configuration with Christ, the man-for-others, deprived of all things and of all, in doing so, Christ gave witness that he was only for the Father and that His family was humankind. In Christ's footsteps our Founders took upon them to let it go of everything and of their own self, they freely chose to live in a radical dependency from the Father, giving themselves to the task and mission they were entrusted with, trusting the Spirit would work on them the same way he had worked on Christ. Material poverty was not an end in itself, it was the translation of their fundamental attitude of self-giving in service to the Kingdom. They lived poverty as Christ did, having their trust in the Father (Lk 12:22-34). The gospels tell the story of an itinerant Jesus, teaching about the Kingdom of God, a man who had nothing, no possessions whatsoever. The son of man has nowhere to place his head. (Mth 8:20)

Poverty in Mother Maria Antonia is the core of his ongoing christification, configuration with Christ. Just at the start point of her call to found a New Order, the Lord showed her the value of poverty as an essential element for the reformation of the Church. To be poor, living in poverty was something connatural to Mother Maria Antonia's being. She drinks from the Crucified Lord the radical and absolute poverty of the Son who hangs from the tree, in a complete loneliness, abandoned by the Father and the disciples. Gazing at the poverty of the Crucified is something that makes us to shiver (Mc 14:50), Peter had denied him (Lk 22:54-62), all have abandoned Him. Though the gospel of John presents the mother and the beloved disciple at the feet of the Crucified, He asks of his mother, the woman, to take the beloved disciple as her own son (Jo 19:25-27). He disposes himself of any human love and attachments, and all because Christ loves us, with a real love, a love that is shown in the giving of himself, it is a love whose outcome in the salvation of humankind. The Crucified is the Christ-Teacher, poor, suffering, lover, who seats at the throne of the cross and teaches Mother Maria Antonia how to live and be effective from the cross, even to her, through suffering, persecution and misunderstanding.

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<sup>231</sup> CO 213, 30 de enero de 1862.

Mother Maria Antonia considers poverty as her only possession. *My only possession is poverty. Mis bienes son la pobreza.*<sup>232</sup> The reason for her living in such total self-emptiness is to become identified with Christ. *The virtue of poverty has to be set as a seal in our hearts; it is the first lesson and last testament of our Redeemer and also of His beloved Mother. Esta virtud de la pobreza debe estar grabada en nuestros corazones como primera lección y último testamento de nuestro Redentor y de su Santísima Madre.*<sup>233</sup>

Living in poverty for Mother Maria Antonia is not just a lack of possessions. She lives poverty from the very center of her being, she sees herself as nothing, as one who has received everything, her whole being hangs upon the Lord, she had a lived experience of the beatitude proclaimed by Jesus *Blessed are the poor*, those who acknowledge themselves as in total dependence of God's will, those who put themselves under God's protection and expect everything from Him.<sup>234</sup>

Poverty in Mother Maria Antonia's thought and spirituality is basic for the Gospel to be announced and received. *Poverty is the key that opens the hearts of the people. La pobreza es la llave maestra que abre los corazones.*<sup>235</sup> She ends the account of the initial vision with an annotation on poverty. *From the moment of this vision, I have a great love for evangelical poverty (I already loved it before), because Our Lord told me that Holy Poverty would have to be the foundation of His new apostles, and that because this virtue was not observed, religion had plummeted. Desde esta visión tengo mucho amor a la pobreza evangélica (ya la amaba mucho antes), porque me dijo Nuestro Señor que la Santa Pobreza había de ser el fundamento de sus nuevos Apóstoles, y que por la falta de esta santa virtud ha venido a tierra toda la Religión.*<sup>236</sup>

On his part, Fr. Claret, from the very beginning of accepting the call to be a priest, he freely chose to live poor as Jesus himself lived in poverty.

*I always remembered that Jesus had become poor Himself; he chose to be born, to live and to die in the utmost poverty. I thought of how Mary, too, had always wanted to be poor. And I thought, too, of how the Apostles left everything to follow Jesus Christ. Sometimes the Lord made me feel the pinch of poverty but only for a short time. Then He would console me with whatever I needed, and the joy I experienced in feeling poverty was so great that the rich could never enjoy all their riches as much as I enjoyed my beloved poverty.*<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>232</sup> M. Antonia to Fr. Curríus, letter November 18, 1875.

<sup>233</sup> Constitutions 1870, cap. XL, 11.

<sup>234</sup> M. Maria Antonia in the Constitutions of 1862 says that to live in poverty has as only goal to imitate Christ. *Great has to be this virtue when the Lord set it as the first in his sermon at the mountain when he said: Blesses are the poor in spirit, theirs is God's Kingdom* (Const. de 1862, Capítulo 2, 1).

<sup>235</sup> Cf. Const.1869, Trat. I, cap. 2, n. 84.

<sup>236</sup> Aut. MP # 11. *Escritos*, p. 61.

<sup>237</sup> Aut.PC # 363.

The zeal for the salvation of his contemporaries takes Fr. Claret to study the situation of the society of his time. He clearly sees that the possessions, honors, desire of having each time more and more, have hardened and dried the heart of the persons; they have forgotten the teachings of the gospel. He sees poverty as the only answer to this situation; one has to live poor, with no desire to have any possessions, just dispossessed of everything and of all. One has to have the heart in the Father, just as Jesus did.<sup>238</sup> Fr. Claret did not have anything: *I had nothing, wanted nothing, and refused everything.*<sup>239</sup> His contemplation and study of the gospels ingrained in him a desire to live like Jesus, letting the Spirit work in him his gradual configuration with Christ.

*I knew that people were deeply impressed by this detachment, and for that reason I was determined to maintain the position I had taken. To encourage myself, I would recall Christ's teaching on the matter and meditate on it constantly, especially those words, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.... If you would be perfect, go, sell what you have, give it to the poor and come, follow me.... No one can be my disciple unless he renounces all things."<sup>240</sup> To live with simplicity, as a poor, is an essential instrument for those who are to proclaim the gospel if the gospel is to be accepted.*

Our founders lived poverty in an obediential attitude to the Father, as Jesus himself did (Heb 5,7-8). The Instruction of the Congregation for the Consecrated Life, "The serviced of authority and obedience,"<sup>241</sup> speaks of Jesus on these terms, and so does the gospel according to St. John (cf. Jn 8:28-29); "Jesus of Nazareth did what the Word did from the beginning of creation. Jesus embraced unconditionally the Father's love and did always the Father's will. His food was to do his Father's will (Jn 4:34), in so doing Jesus obtained for us resurrection, abundance of life, and to live in the heart of the Father (cf. Jn 1:12). Jesus obedience obtains justification for all (Rm 5:19)."<sup>242</sup> Obedience is not humiliation but the truth upon which the very being of men and women is accomplished. The believer desires to do the Father's will, in the footsteps of Jesus, the believer wants to live from this will. Imitating Christ and learning from Him, the consecrated person freely and trustingly gives oneself into the hands of the Father, offering a perfect sacrifice (cf. Rom 12:1). Our founders understood it perfectly. Their apostolic spirituality can only be understood as obediential spirituality, an obedience that brought them freedom; it is in their being obedient to the Father that they found their joy.

In Mother Maria Antonia we discover that she lived obedience as a concrete form of following Jesus Christ. She learned obedience at the feet of the Crucified Lord, in living an intimate relationship with Him; like Jesus, her unique desire was to do the Father's will. Once she knew the Father's will, she gave herself unreservedly to accomplish it.

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<sup>238</sup> Ibid., # 356. (en los números 357-364).

<sup>239</sup> Ibid., # 357.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid., # 362.

<sup>241</sup> *El Servicio de la autoridad y obediencia*, Instrucción de la Congregación para los Institutos de Vida Consagrada y las Sociedades de Vida Apostólica, dada en Roma el 11 de Mayo del 2008.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid., # 8



*God has given me this determination, in knowing what is God's will there is not obstacle that I cannot surmount.<sup>243</sup> From the very beginning of my serving the Lord, I have had in front of my eyes my Lord, I always was sure that He was by side sustaining me.<sup>244</sup>*

We have already said that the Crucified Lord was Mother Maria Antonia's teacher, at the feet of the Crucified Lord she learned, as a loving disciple, to obey and to follow God's plan for her. As Jesus, she learned what obedience was all about in the midst of suffering, trusting always that she was being guided by the Spirit guiding the Lord in the cross. She refused to write the graces received from the Lord, and she finally did it in obedience to the mandate of her confessor.

It is not easy to obey to God. We know by Mother Maria Antonia writings that she always wanted to consecrate her life to God as a religious with solemn vows, and we know that when her desire was about to be accomplished, she had to face a hard decision: to leave the convent in order to be free to start the New Order the Lord had told her to begin. She had to decide and take action, to stay in the convent, or to forget about God's plan. Risking everything, obeying the Spirit, she abandoned the convent, Mother Maria Antonia had to die to her inner desires of consecrating herself to the Lord and move on, with no warranty whatsoever, just trusting that the Lord would carry out His will in due time. She lived a blind obedience, a crucifying obedience, a dark obedience, hoping against hope that what the Lord wanted and had told her would be accomplished in due time. Her role in the matter was to obey, to trust, to find support in the God who gave her the strength to follow a path she did not know, a path she had to walk in total darkness. And her obedience was fruitful. God was writing our own story through the sonship obedience of Mother Maria Antonia. At this moment of her life she found herself alone, her confessor did not dare to give her a word of advice; they seek advice from a wise priest, who did not dare to give any advice on the matter. They wrote to Fr. Claret to Cuba, and no answer is given to her. She received Word from the Lord neither. What to do? Mother Maria Antonia in her Writings says: *the Lord wanted to test me to the fullest of my affliction.*<sup>245</sup> Mother Antonia interpreted God's silence as been put to test by Him. She accepted His silence: *Lord, be done to me according to your will.*<sup>246</sup>

If we move now to see Fr. Claret, we come to know that he always wanted to obey his immediate superiors. The fire of the gospel was burning in his heart with the same strength that burned in the heart of the prophets (Jer 15:16c, 20:9; Am 3:8), and yet, he did not go to any place if his Bishop did not bless and send him in mission. As Jesus, the Word existing in the Trinity, offered himself to be sent in mission for the salvation of humanity, so, the missionary has to offered himself and wait to be sent.

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<sup>243</sup> Aut. MP # 7. *Escritos*, p. 59.

<sup>244</sup> Aut. MP # 135. *Escritos*, pp. 118-119,

<sup>245</sup> Aut. MP # 100. *Escritos*, p. 104.

<sup>246</sup> Aut. MP # 106. *Escritos*, p. 107.

*This need for being sent to a particular place by a bishop was something that God himself helped me understand from the very beginning. Thus, no matter how evil and demoralized the towns I was sent to, great fruits were always obtained, because it was God who sent me to them and prepared them and predisposed them for me. Missionaries may rest assured, then, that they should go to no town, however good, unless they go under obedience; but that under obedience they should not hesitate to go to any town, however bad. As far as any possible difficulties or persecutions are concerned, let have no fear: God has sent them through obedience and He will take care of them. .<sup>247</sup>*

Their communion with Christ was progressive. The communion Mother Maria Antonia and Fr. Claret enjoyed with Christ, they wanted to be a reality for all those who would follow their charisma. They were given the charisma to be founders of religious families who would witness with their lifestyle a life of communion, poverty, and obedience, so they could freely proclaim the good news of the gospel. Mother Maria Antonia understood it clearly when she expressed her deep desire: *Charity makes us to be a family, with one heart, as the Lord wants from us.*<sup>248</sup> In the Constitutions of 1869 she wrote that *the Institute had to have as only foundation a perfect charity and harmony living as members of the same one body.*<sup>249</sup>

Fr. Claret had the same understanding of the Lord wishes; he sought men with the same ideal and same charisma he had received from the Spirit. He looked for and engrained in other diocesan priests to give themselves to preaching in villages and places where they would be sent. In so doing, Fr. Claret gave birth to the Congregation of the Sons of the Heart of Mary (CMF). When named Archbishop of Santiago de Cuba, though he did not want to accept this nomination, he did in obedience to his superiors, Fr. Claret had to abandon the project trusting the Divine Providence would take care of the incipient community. In Cuba, Fr. Claret established with his coworkers a family; all of them had the same ideal: the evangelization of the island and the reformation of the local church. Fr. Lozano says that Fr. Claret thought it was necessary to live in community in order to be able to become brothers with the same spirit.<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> Aut. PC # 198.

<sup>248</sup> Carta de M. Antonia al Obispo de Cuba el 30-9-1877. Esta afirmación también se encuentra en el Testamento espiritual de M. Antonia. (*Escritos*, pp717-718).

<sup>249</sup> En las Constituciones de 1869, Tratado Primero, capítulo 1, n. 1, M. Antonia pone a la base de esta Orden Nueva el principio de la comunión entre todos sus miembros.

<sup>250</sup> J. M. Lozano. *Una Vida al Servicio del Evangelio. Antonio María Claret*. Barcelona: Editorial Claret, 1985p p. 224-229.

Finally, the paper guides us to enter into a contemplative and reflective mode on who was the Christ who subjugated the hearts of our Founders. It is Christ, the Crucified, the persecuted, the slandered, the one whose love was so powerful that prompted Him to give his life unconditionally. It is the Christ who gave of himself completely and unconditionally, and who continues to give of himself in the Eucharist, in the Bread and the Wine, for our nourishment, to be our food, food for the salvation of humanity. Both of our Founders, Mother Maria Antonia and Fr. Claret received the extraordinary grace to have in their heart the eucharistized Lord for days, in Mother Maria Antonia, and indefinitely in Fr. Claret.

**Conclusion.** At the end of this unassuming presentation on the Christological experience of Mother Maria Antonia Paris and Fr. Claret, we come to affirm that the center of their spirituality is their undivided love of being rooted in Christ; a love with which they were gifted, a love they encounter in their heart, a love they accepted unreservedly. They received the revelation of who Christ was, as it happened with Saint Paul, it was a freely given revelation, rooted in their heart before they were conceived in their mothers' womb, even before they were born, they had been chosen to be bearers of the gospel, heralds of the Word made flesh in them.

In our Founders there is an intrinsic union between their being and their doing. When Mother Maria Antonia requires her daughters (us) to unite work and contemplation, she does it not because she might have been influenced by the charisma of St. Ignatius of Loyola, but because this recommendation comes forth from the bottom of her whole being, it comes from who she is. In her contemplating the Crucified Lord, the expression of the unconditional and mysterious love of the Father for humankind, Mother Maria Antonia received and was nurtured into a love for the Church and humanity. The heart of Jesus Christ made his tent in the heart of Mother Maria Antonia, and in her, He continued to suffer for his body, the Church.

The apostolic dimension in our Founders, Mother Maria Antonia and Fr. Claret is a consequence of their living in Christ. It is not possible to separate in Mother Maria Antonia what identifies her as a person, and her being called by the Lord to establish in the Church a new Order, new not in theory but in practice, that is, an Order distinguished by living fully the radicalism of the gospel. Her work comes from her being, and her being nurtures her work.

Mother Maria Antonia suffers with Christ and in Christ for his body the Church. She answers the call she receives from the Lord by giving of herself unconditionally, she risks her life, and let aside her dreams. She abandons herself in an obediential faith to the will of the Father revealed to her in the Crucified Lord. Her love for the Church is a sharing in the love of Christ for his Church; it is this love for the Church that constitutes her being apostle, her being Foundress of a new Order whose only aim will be expressed in the living and experiencing Christ, the one whose life is-being-for-others.

The love Mother Maria Antonia has for poverty is just an expression of her love to Jesus, the Crucified. Her only possession is the poverty of her Lord, and it is from within this

experience of radical and unconditional poverty that she lived in total abandonment, trusting in He who called her day by day to live in His footsteps. To be poor is to live life in self-giving, holding to nothing or to anybody. Mother Maria Antonia became day by day poor, obedient, by contemplating the Crucified Lord. She was the disciple seating at the feet of the Teacher, opening her heart to His teaching, to His corrections, to His love, ... Knowing the will of the Lord there is not obstacle that she could not overcome. She kept in her humble heart the graces she received from the Lord. Her intimacy with Jesus Christ was something so sacred to her that when her confessor asked her to put them in writing, she resisted. She overcame her natural repugnance to do so when the confessor asked her to do it in obedience to his mandate.

Her love to the Lord was nurtured contemplating the Crucified Lord, the Teacher that teaches His disciple from the cross; and continued to be nurtured by the Lord through His presence in the Eucharist. The Eucharist was for Mother Maria Antonia the sacrament of love, in the Eucharist the Lord continues to journey with His Church, accompanying his disciples in the road. In the Eucharist Mother Maria Antonia received the strength needed to follow the road walked by Christ. It was in the Cross and in the Eucharist that she learned and lived the gentleness and lowliness lived and taught by Christ.

Mother Maria Antonia is a woman who lives the beatitudes proclaimed by Jesus in the mount (Mth 5,1ff). She lives them because they have been impressed in her heart when in a vision the Lord gave her the knowledge of the Scriptures. She lives the New and Eternal Covenant; she does not need anybody to teach about God's covenant because God himself has sealed it in her heart.

The sisterly fraternity Mother Maria Antonia wanted all her daughters to live, was the outcome of her living in Christ. As Christ lives in the Father in communion with the Holy Spirit, so Mother Maria Antonia glimpsed that love would be the knot knitting together those who were going to be called to live in this family. Fraternal communion expressed not only in the sharing of common goods, but in the sharing of personal talents, possibilities, joys, sorrows, health, sickness, ... The sisters' life in communion would be the sign of the Church's communion.

**A final Word.** We have come to the end of this summary. Now we introduce some questions that may help the reading and the personal reflection of what we have been sharing until this moment.

- Our Founders lives deeply-rooted in Christ Jesus, where do I have the foundation/center of my life?
- To live configured with Christ is to live in fraternal communion, how do I live communion in my community?

- Christ was always the center of our Founders heart/desire, who is in the center of my heart? What dwells in my heart: discouragement, frustration, resentment, emptiness?
- Is it my deepest-desire to be configured with Christ? Do I let the Spirit to work on me such configuration?
- Take time to make a memorial of my personal encounter with Christ, and how have I been growing in intimacy with him all my life long until the present moment.

To the Glory of God and His Blessed Mother

# THE RENEWAL OF THE CHURCH IN OUR FOUNDERS

(Summary)

*In between the 200th anniversary of the birth of our Founder  
and the 125th anniversary of the death of our Foundress*

*M<sup>a</sup> Hortensia Muñoz  
Southern Spain Province*

## PRESENTATION

In order to understand the Renewal of the Church in our Founders, we need to refer to their ecclesial vocation.

Our Founders' ecclesial vocation is not a precise moment; it is a process which coincides with the itineraries of their lives, and which undergoes a process of enrichment and maturity with time.

They discover the characteristics of their personal vocation to Renew the Church through the events they live.

In the first two sections of this work, we are going to turn to the fundamental moments in which their ecclesial vocation first appears: first in our Foundress and then in our Founder.

In the third section, we will synthesize her Writings regarding the Church. First, we will look at our Foundress' "Plan for Renewal" since it came first chronologically. Then we will turn to our Founder's "Notes of a Plan." We will finish by pointing out those points where both writings converge.

All of this with a desire to continue deepening the richness of the ecclesial vocation that our Founders have transmitted to us.

We will finish with two questions for personal reflection.

## THE RENEWAL OF THE CHURCH IN OUR FOUNDERS

### Introduction

#### I. MARÍA ANTONIA PARÍS

##### Introduction

1. In the Company of Mary. Initial Experience (1842)
  - 1.1. Structure of the initial experience (Aut. 2-11)
    - a) Context of the Experience (Aut. 2)
    - b) Vision and Auditions (Aut. 3-11)
  - 1.2. Content of the Initial Experience
    - a) The engraving of the Holy Law in her heart
    - b) Panoramic vision of the evils of the Church
    - c) The New Order
2. Experience on the Day of her Profession (August 27, 1855) Relation or Account to Caixal nº 9
  - a) Indications of Time and Place
  - b) Narration of the Experience
  - c) Explanation of the Experience
  - d) Grace she receives from God for her faithfulness in waiting

#### II. ST. ANTHONY MARY CLARET

##### Introduction

1. Initial Experience (1830)
  - 1.1. Context of the experience: "a terrible temptation"
  - 1.2. "See and hear": "I saw the Blessed Virgin Mary...she spoke to me"
  - 1.3. "Our struggle is not with flesh and blood..."
2. "What moved me most was reading the Holy Bible..." Discovery of his vocation as Apostolic Missionary for the Church

#### III. OUR FOUNDERS' WRITINGS DEALING WITH THE RENEWAL OF THE CHURCH

##### Introduction

1. "Plan for the Renewal": Maria Antonia París. 1855
2. "Notes for a Plan to Preserve the Beauty of the Church" Anthony Mary Claret. 1857

#### IV. RENEW THE CHURCH TODAY

1. Conversion – renewal of the Church. Fidelity
2. The "evils" of the Church: evangelical poverty
3. Proclaiming the Gospel

##### Conclusion

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## INTRODUCTION

An Ecclesial Vocation is the fundamental element of our Foundress' spirituality; it is something both she and our Founder had in common although each one lived and expressed it in a different manner. Fr. Juberias<sup>251</sup> says that an ecclesial vocation can take two different yet complementary directions:

A vocation and apostolic suffering, in which apostolic works involving tiredness, fatigue, worry/concern about the church, persecutions, calumnies, and dangers of all kinds abound. St. Paul represents this type of vocation; he manifests it in many of his letters: 1 Cor 4:8-15, 2 Cor 11:22 ff, Col 1:24, texts in which he describes his apostolic works and the redeeming value he finds in them, “filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of his body, which is the church” (Col 1:24).

And also a vocation and maternal suffering in which the church's sufferings change direction: this refers to intimate tortures/struggles, internal struggles, abandonment as in the cross, deep, silent pain which is not shown exteriorly, but which breaks one's heart. These are internal sufferings. These persons are a prolongation of the suffering Mother. The Second Vatican Council says: “she conceived, brought forth and nourished Christ. She presented Him to the Father in the temple, and was united with Him by compassion as He died on the Cross. In this singular way she cooperated

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<sup>251</sup> F. JUBERIAS, “Por su Cuerpo que es la Iglesia” AGESA, Madrid, 1973, pp. 122.



by her obedience, faith, hope and burning charity in the work of the Savior in giving back supernatural life to souls. Wherefore she is our mother in the order of grace.”<sup>252</sup> Juberias says that this whole mystery of suffering, which is such an essential part of the Mystery of Christ, must continue to be perpetuated in the Church if the Mystery of Christ is to be realized within the Church in its totality.<sup>253</sup>

These two distinct, yet complementary directions of the Mystery of Christ in his Church develop in our Founders, not in an exclusive manner, rather, inclusively. Both make their ecclesial vocation present in its totality and universal scope.

Our Founders love the Church more than their own lives. They work for her, give themselves to her so that the Church may clearly manifest Christ’s face to all people. Because of this, our Founders will not spare any efforts, fatigue or tiredness or suffering to “restore the beauty of the Church.” Let us draw close to each one of them to see those important moments in which they discover their ecclesial vocation.

## I. MA ANTONIA PARÍS, A VOCATION OF MATERNAL SUFFERING FOR THE CHURCH

### Introduction

In the document “**Relatio et vota**” in which we find the judgment and objections of the Congress of Historical Consultants which was held in Rome October 17, 1989 regarding the Positio<sup>254</sup>, the fourth consultant asks about the originality of our Foundress’ ecclesial vocation.

He says that in order to affirm the originality of the revelations our Foundress received regarding the spiritual renewal of the Church, it would be necessary to study more carefully the renewal in progress during the first half of the nineteenth century in the universal Church, the Spanish Church, and more concretely, the Catalanian Church.<sup>255</sup> The same consultant gives a series of facts<sup>256</sup> regarding renewal in those years, and concludes that *the spirit of renewal of the Church which Maria Antonia Paris proposed was already present in those times*. The originality that this consultant seems to highlight is that nobody had previously spoken about the topic. However, the originality of our Foundress’ ecclesial vocation lies elsewhere.

The originality of our Foundress’ ecclesial spirituality does not depend on her being the first one to denounce the situation the church is living. Historically, nothing starts from zero; usually, there are prior causes which in this case lead us to understand that she “*felt with the Church*” and this is important.

The originality of our Foundress’ ecclesial spirituality is that contemplating Christ Crucified leads her to an experiential knowledge/understanding of the 19th Century Church and of its real needs.<sup>257</sup> These needs were not only the difficulties lived because of unjust laws which restricted the Church, but even worse, they had to do with the Church not responding to the Gospel. We will see this when we turn to the **Initial Experience**.

Secondly, these needs of the Church ask for *an evangelical renewal, especially in those Consecrated*. By Consecrated she understands: Pope, Bishops, Priests and Religious, and she lives this situation of the Church so intensely that it becomes for her “burden,” her deepest

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<sup>252</sup> LG, 61.

<sup>253</sup> Cf. F. JUBERIAS o.c., 123.

<sup>254</sup> C. Ruiz-E. Velasco, Positio super vita, virtutibus et fama Sanctitatis de Maria Antonia París y Riera. Romae, 1987. (A partir de ahora se citará Positio)

<sup>255</sup> Relatio et vota, sobre el Congreso de Consultores históricos, Roma 1989. p. 25. (R. et v.)

<sup>256</sup> Ibidem, pp. 25-27.

<sup>257</sup> Cf. Positio p.240.

worry/concern. Because of this she concentrates all her energies on the **Renewal of the Church**: her work, her sufferings, her prayer, the Foundation of the Institute, the Plan for Renewal, etc. The starting point for this mode of living is the **Experience she had the day of her Profession.**<sup>258</sup>

Lastly, she would write the **Plan for the Renewal of the Church.**<sup>259</sup>

## 1. The Initial Experience (1842 in the Company of Mary)

Maria Antonia Paris felt God's call at an early age, but she could not enter religious life until she was 28. Her time in the Company of Mary is the time of her life that we know most about because of her autobiography.<sup>260</sup> She entered October 23, 1841 and left January 28, 1851 after belonging for nearly 10 years. It was during this long waiting period in the Company of Mary when the event that marked the starting point of her ecclesial vocation occurred.

The event presents itself with much complexity: visions, auditions, words, reactions, feelings...it seems that it took place at different levels. In the deepest level, it characterized itself by the experience of a divine message that touched: on the one hand the Gospel as a way/rule of life and on the other hand was the lamentable state of the Church, and within the Church, of Religious Life. Converging both of these realities, Maria Antonia discovers that God wants the foundation of a new Order, not new in doctrine, but in practice. A new horizon opens before her.

The experience takes place beyond the senses, in the spirit, without any images, book or letters; rather, following the image of the Prophet Jeremiah,<sup>261</sup> she felt that the new Law was engraved in her heart. In Spiritual Theology this is considered a mystical phenomenon of intellectual character, since she says that she "saw this with the eyes of the soul, since she did not see anything with eyes of the body."<sup>262</sup>

The consequence is that the Gospel remained engraved in her soul as New Law. Because of this she has a prophetic understanding of the roots of the evils of the Church and at the same time, an awareness of how to overcome them. Fr. Juberias calls it "substantial words"<sup>263</sup> which in the language of spiritual theologians means "active word which enacts in the soul what it means."

### 1.1. Structure of the text (Aut. 2-11)

We are before an experience of the Spirit and it is therefore difficult to express it in our human language. From a literary point of view, it is a difficult and dense text: continuous explanatory phrases, numerous repetitions, different words with similar meanings, parenthesis, etc.

Fourteen years later Maria Antonia says: "*it seems to me that I see and hear our Lord Jesus Christ in the very same way.*"<sup>264</sup> When the words "**see and hear**" appear in Sacred Scripture, we know that we are looking at revelatory language, typical of prophetic and apostolic vocations.<sup>265</sup> These texts generally have three parts: the context in which the event happens, vision, and audition.

The three do not necessarily occur in that order. Sometimes they present themselves simultaneously, and they even mix, as it occurs in our text with the last two.

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<sup>258</sup> Cf. Positio p. 423-425.

<sup>259</sup> Puntos para la Reforma (PR) en Escritos María Antonia París, Barcelona, 1985. pp. 309-346.

<sup>260</sup> Cf. Aut. MP, 1-109.

<sup>261</sup> Cf. Jer 31,33.

<sup>262</sup> Aut. M.F., 4.

<sup>263</sup> Cf. F. JUBERIAS, o.c., p. 134.

<sup>264</sup> Aut. MF., 10.

<sup>265</sup> Cf. Is 6,1-9; Jer 1,4-10; Mc 1,9-11; Lc 1,26-38...

### a) Context of the experience (Aut. 2-3a)

Our Foundress has her initial experience in a context of prayer, offering of self, and supplication:

*“Year 1842, one night while I was at prayer pleading to Christ crucified to remedy the necessities of the church, which in that time were many, that had cost him so much, I offered him my life in sacrifice as I have done before many times, well aware that my life was not of much value to sacrifice for so many evils, but as I had no virtues to offer him, I begged him to deign to teach me what should I do in order to give him pleasure and glory accomplishing his most holy will.”<sup>266</sup>*

There are three important verbs in the text: plead, beg, offer. They reveal to us what our Foundress was doing that night in prayer. Furthermore, this prayer was done with those attitudes proper of one who is praying: simplicity and good will. In this context and with these attitudes, our Foundress’ petition is clear: *“I begged him to deign to teach me what should I do in order to give him pleasure and glory accomplishing his most holy will”*

It is not just any petition; it is a *life option*. She asked what her mission was in that situation the Church was living and which she had experienced on that night in 1842. In the midst of this prayer, she began to perceive an extraordinary phenomenon.

### b) Vision and audition (Aut. 3b-11)

In prayer, our Foundress asked that God would show her what she needed to do. The audition was the teaching, which at the same time became a vision:

*“...our Lord has deigned to **teach** me (ear) with much pleasure how He would like to be served by this ungrateful creature...it was in this how He **set before my eyes** the observance of His most Holy Law and evangelical counsels”*

And now it is God who makes a petition:

*“...he told me with intense sorrow that He had nobody in His house to observe them ...”<sup>267</sup>*

And this is the cause of the great problems the Church suffers: the evil that comes from exterior sources: laws restricting religious life, persecutions...is a consequence of the interior evil: God’s Most Holy Law and Evangelical Counsels are not kept. The first is a consequence of the second. Our Foundress’ reaction towards this revelation is “shock.” And she tells us the cause of this shock: *“...I had always believed that all persons who profess perfection served God faithfully and for this I wanted to be a religious...”<sup>268</sup>*

She then repeats the vision, but attempts to clarify what “set before my eyes means.” She says: *“once more our Lord put, as of what I can understand, before the eyes of my soul, because with my bodily eyes I did not see anything...”*

With these words she stresses that this event is not an ordinary human vision; it is an act that occurs in the spirit.

Then she relates an event that is original in the history of spirituality; it is the deepest level of the experience:

*“I was very attentive, overwhelmed to what was happening, and it seemed to me that I was reading the Holy Law of God, but without seeing any books nor letters; I was seeing it written, and I was understanding it so very well, that it seemed to me it was imprinting in my soul but in a particular way the book of the Holy Gospels, which till then I had never read, neither the Sacred Scripture*

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<sup>266</sup> Aut. MP, 2.

<sup>267</sup> Aut. MP, 3.

<sup>268</sup> Aut. MP, 4.

*(O.T). After, by God's grace, I have read something and I have seen it written word by word, as our Lord taught it to me from the holy tree of the cross. It seems to me that the words I understood were coming out from his most holy mouth.*<sup>269</sup>

The verbs underlined in the text are important: Teach (see), understand (hear), understand (engrave). These are three words that imply themselves in an ascending parallelism: What she sees, she understands and remains engraved. Her entire person is involved: senses (see-hear), reason (understand), and affectivity (engrave). Sacred Scripture is engraved in her heart. From now on, she will be configured with Scripture forever.

She begins with a reaction: "I was attentive admiring..." The cause of the admiration is the phenomenon she was experiencing. Since what she is narrating occurred 14 years earlier, she says that she has verified that the Sacred Scriptures engraved in her heart coincide with what the Biblical text says.

In the following number she goes over the experience, but entering more deeply into it. Once again she insists that what she saw was not a human vision, but a "voice"; it is noteworthy that "see" is transformed to "listen." It is not a human voice either; rather, it is an interior voice, and she insists that it was in the depth of her soul.

We are in the deepest level of this experience of the Spirit. This voice explained, a word synonymous with taught: the meaning of the words and the way of fulfilling them.

We also see a new reaction: "sea of confusion." The cause of this confusion was rooted in that in the convent she found herself in, those things which she had just read in that "Sacred Book," (another word that presents itself as synonymous with "tree of the Cross" and later on with "Christ Crucified") were not observed. The Sacred Book is the tree of the Cross, where we find Christ Crucified. Once again we see the role of the senses, intellect and affects in this experience.

And a new repetition: *"as he was teaching me the divine letters, he explained their meaning"*

This discovery of the ills affecting religious life and seeing that what had been engraved in her heart was not lived in the convent she was at led her to make a new petition to the Lord: *My Lord and my God, if you do not tell me in what religious order you want me to enter so as to comply with your command, I do not know how this will be done.*<sup>270</sup>

Like Mary in the annunciation, our Foundress addresses God in supplication: "I don't know how would that be." (Cf. Lc 1,34) This supplication does not come from a lack of trust, but from the realization of the state of religious life and at the same time the demands of the God's word. This is why she wanted to be a religious, she knows that it is what God wants of her. But she does not know where nor how she ought to realize it. Her prayer continues a step further, "Do you want my Lord and my God, something new? (here I did not know what I was asking).

She feels that it is God's initiative. She did not know what she was asking. It was as if somebody within her told her. What she did know is that her question *"was not asked out of curiosity, much less of mistrust in the infinite power of God, but it came from a heart determined to comply with the divine will cost what it may.* Her trust was founded in that "nothing will be impossible for God" (Lk 1:37). It is the same trust of Mary in the Annunciation and she had "a heart determined to follow God's will at all costs." This has been a gift of God within her: *"Our Lord has given me this readiness, that as soon as I know the will of God, there is nothing difficult to me, blessed be God for his goodness."*

Then the Lord responds: *"Yes, my daughter, I want a new order, but not new in doctrine but new in practice."*

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<sup>269</sup> Aut. MP, 5.

<sup>270</sup> Aut. MP, 7.

We see the ascending line of her experience. She has discovered the need to live the Gospel as a way of life. She has realized that it is not lived either in the Church or in Religious Life. This is how she discovers her vocation as Foundress: she is called to live the Gospel as a way of life together with others-Found a New Order that lives in fidelity and proclaims the Gospel. God gives her the design of the Order and its name: Apostles of Jesus Christ in imitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary.”

In the following number<sup>271</sup>, she repeats what she has already said in numbers 3 and 4. Again, she sees before her religious orders and the lamentable state of the Universal Church. Before this reality, there is only one remedy: *the observance of God’s Most Holy Law*.

Jesus Christ makes her see the deep sorrow he has for his Church:

*At this moment I saw our Lord Jesus Chris; I had him present in very special way. He had so much pain for the evil of the church, that it seemed as if his Divine eyes were bursting into tears, and he told me sorrowfully: “look, my daughter, if with tears I would be able to renew the spirit of my church, I would shed tears of blood. Because I did not spare myself to shed all my blood for her creation, but I left myself as pledge and memory of my infinite love for her, for her conversion until the end of time.” (Our Lord granted me again this vision for the following night during prayer).*<sup>272</sup>

The sorrow for the evils of the Church were no longer those for which our Foundress had originally prayed for. Rather, they had to do with not keeping God’s Most Holy Law and Evangelical Counsels, especially when they were not kept by those who were more obligated to do so such as religious. The evils the Church, and within her, religious life, suffer are a consequence of the lack of observance of the Divine Law and Evangelical Counsels.

She wrote down the initial experience 14 years after it happened.<sup>273</sup> This suggests that it has left a deep and lasting mark within her, a sign which reveals the authenticity of the event. It also reminds us of why she experienced so much love towards poverty, although she adds the nuance: “I had a great love for it before.” Poverty is the foundation of the new Apostles and its absence has given way to many evils in Religious Life and the Church.

## Conclusion

In the text we find **three main points for reflection:**

- a) the engraving of the Holy Law in her heart
- a) vision of the evils of the Church
- b) The New Order

### a) The engraving of the Holy Law in her heart

*“I was attentively observing what was happening, and it seemed to me that I was reading the Holy Law of God, but without seeing any books nor letters; I was seeing it written, and I was understanding it so well that it seemed to me it was being engraved in my soul”<sup>274</sup>*

This text immediately invokes Jeremiah’s prophecy: “I will place my law within them, and write it upon their hearts..” (Jer 31:33). Jeremiah’s prophecy is realized in our Foundress. A prophet is a person configured by the Word of God which she or he has to proclaim. She begged God to show her what she needed to do to remedy the evils of the Church and religious life, and God responded by engraving God’s Law, the Gospel, in her heart. That way, the Gospel, engraved in her heart, will become for her cordial and intimate; it will be a dynamism that acts within her and the root of all her actions.

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<sup>271</sup> Aut. MP, 8.

<sup>272</sup> Aut. MP, 9.

<sup>273</sup> Aut. MP, 10-11.

<sup>274</sup> Aut. MP, 5.

To teach, to understand, to engrave...God has taught her, has made her understand, and has engraved in her heart the Holy Law. God has configured the Law with her so that she could dedicate her life to Renew the Church by proclaiming the Word.

### **b) Panoramic vision of the evils of the Church**

Maria Antonia lived in her own flesh the consequences of civil laws which persecuted the Church and religious life. For this reason, she was not able to begin her novitiate in the Company of Mary and lived a postulancy of almost 10 years. It is for this reality that she prayed, implored God, and offered herself that night in 1842. In this context our Foundress gains a prophetic knowledge of the evils of the Church: the evils that come from outside sources (laws that restricted religious life, persecution of church people) are a consequence of the evils that spring from within the Church: the Most Holy Law and Evangelical Counsels are not lived. The first is a consequence of the second.

She has an experiential knowledge of all of this because she has been configured by the Word of God from the tree of the Cross. The Most Holy Law has been engraved in her heart and she understands the great distance between the gospel ideal and the situation towards which history has been leading the Church for not living the Gospel.

God gives her knowledge of what the Church, and religious life, should be like.

### **c) The New Order**

Our Foundress had a prophetic understanding of the evils of the Church and she prayed for these. They are a consequence of the Church not living faithfully. God revealed to her the remedies for this situation: faithfulness to the Gospel and poverty.<sup>275</sup>

For this reason, God calls her to consecrate her life to proclaim the Holy Law of the Lord by means of a New Order, not New in doctrine, but New in practice.<sup>276</sup> The novelty is in living what is essential to Religious Life: fidelity to following Jesus and evangelical poverty, foundation of new Apostles.

Our Foundress' mission in the Church clarifies itself slowly. Her call and mission will be intertwined along with all the other graces she receives during her lifetime.

In **conclusion**, we can say that the **Initial experience** played a decisive role on the rest of her life, especially because God engraved in her soul the evangelical ideal the Church, and religious life within her, were called to live. This is where her deeply ecclesial vocation is born.

With this experience, our Foundress remained open towards the Church in its totality. She would work for the renewal of the Church so that the face of Christ could be recovered in all of its members. She would have a passionate love for evangelical poverty for it has been the lack of this virtue which has given way to all the evils the Church is suffering.

All the elements that would be of decisive importance in her life appear in the initial Experience:

- The humanity of Christ suffering on the tree of the Cross, the Lord's Holy Law, Holy Scripture, especially the Gospels as a way of life
- The teaching of the Lord's Holy Law in the style of the Apostles
- The Church
- Mary
- Prayer and suffering for the Church
- The new Order to renew the Church
- Evangelical poverty, foundation of new apostles

### **2. Experience on the Day of her Profession**

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<sup>275</sup> Aut. MP, 11.

<sup>276</sup> Aut. MP, 7.

*“Year 1854, feast of all Saints, at 10:00 A.M as I was praying his Divine Majesty deigned to manifest how he would like the reformation of the church”<sup>277</sup>. Through an experience of God, Maria Antonia discovers how God wants the renewal of the Church. A year later, on August 27, 1855, she professed. The evils discovered in her Initial Vision become her “burden,” her deepest concern.*

She vaguely alludes to this event in the Autobiography, and for greater clarity refers the reader to the Letter to Caixal<sup>278</sup>, which apparently was already written by this time:

*“The favors the Lord gave me in this most happy day, which cost me so many desires and sighs, are already written in a draft of a letter...”<sup>279</sup>*

Her writings about this event in the Letter to Caixal<sup>280</sup> contain very valuable information which we would not even have been able to suspect by solely reading her Autobiography.

It is a short yet deep text. As in all experiences of the Spirit, we stand before a complex reality; however, this one is more linear and easier to interpret than the initial vision. Its structure is very simple and appears very ordered; the narrative is also much shorter and this facilitates its reading.

### a) Structure of the text

It is a clear, well-structured text. It has the following parts:

- 1) Indications of time and place
- 2) Narration of the experience
- 3) Explanation of the experience
- 4) And the grace she receives for the long wait

<b>INDICATIONS OF TIME AND PLACE</b>	“Beginning with the day of my profession (August 27, 1855), when your Excellency placed
<b>EXPERIENCE</b>	the crown of flowers on my head, I felt such an extraordinary weight that made me incline my head and naturally, it weighed very little, since it was made with very fine flowers.
<b>EXPLANATION</b>	While surprised by that weight, the Lord spoke to me: “This is my daughter, the burden of the renewal of the Church that place on you.” And the Divine Majesty called three times “my Espouse” with deep love, letting me know that I was deeply loved by the Eternal Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. <b>“Daughter from now on, I want to be seated in the center of your heart like in my own throne”</b>
<b>GRACE</b>	And he paid me with so much grace having waited for so many years for this holy union that his Majesty chose to celebrate it for eight consecutive days preserving the holy species from one communion to another. Grace that had my soul out of itself

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<sup>277</sup> Aut. MP, 49.

<sup>278</sup> “Relación a Caixal” (RCX.) en Escritos de María Antonia París, pp. 165-169. The Letter to Caixal is a confession of conscience to her spiritual director Fr. Caixal. It is written before the Autobiography, probably around September of 1856. We find some of its material in the Autobiography, specially in numbers 1-7.

<sup>279</sup> Aut. MP, 226.

<sup>280</sup> RCX, 9.

and it felt it had it was seating in the center of the sacred heart of my God and Lord. I say "in the center of the sacred heart of my God because it did not feel like God was in my heart, rather, I saw how all of me, body and soul, was inside the sacred heart of my God and Lord.

This revelation-mission is accompanied by a particular presence of our Lord and of his Word which clarified for her the meaning of the weight of the crown and calls her three times "my spouse." With these words, she understands the love and affection that the Trinitarian Love, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, have for her and the promise: "*Daughter from now on I want to sit in the center of your heart like in my throne.*"

As an effect of this loving intervention by God and of this promise, she felt full of God's presence for eight days; she calls this experience "preservation of the sacramental species." This experience is in relationship to the promise that Jesus made to her to "be seated in her heart as in his throne," but she experiences in this something quite contrary: it is she who feels she is within God's heart. God in her and she in God.

In **conclusion**, we can affirm that in the experience of the day of her profession is the second characteristic of the originality of our Foundress' ecclesial vocation; it is that the needs of the Church ask for an evangelical renewal, especially in those Consecrated, and this evangelical renewal of the Church discovered by our Foundress in her Initial Experience is lived by her so intensely on the day of her Profession that it became her "burden", her suffering Christ. Our Foundress has the Pauline vision of the Church Body of Christ. From this point on, she will focus all of her energies, work, suffering, prayer, the foundation and the plan for the Renewal for the renewal of the Church.

Her entire life, until her death on January 17, 1885, would be a continuous working, suffering, petitioning, and offering of self for the evils of the Church, with a clear objective which is available to us in the Aim and Goal.<sup>281</sup>

## II. ST. ANTHONY MARY CLARET, APOSTOLIC MISSIONARY FOR THE CHURCH

### Introduction

The originality of our Founder's ecclesial vocation springs forth from the experience of Christ Evangelizer with whom our Founder identified himself with and translates itself as in St. Paul in numerous apostolic fatigues with the aim of "restoring the beauty of the face of the Church."

We need to see the starting point of these apostolic fatigues in the strong experience he had when he was five years old.<sup>282</sup> When Claret reflects on this event in height of his adulthood, he finds that this experience was the "*mainspring and goad of my zeal for the salvation of souls.*"<sup>283</sup>

Another important event that has an impact on him is his conversion at age 20.<sup>284</sup>

From this moment on, he will seek his life's direction. Two events help him in his search: temptation and initial experience<sup>285</sup> and the discovery of his vocation to be an Apostolic Missionary in touch with the Gospel.<sup>286</sup>

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<sup>281</sup> Escrito sintético que pondrá al inicio de las Constituciones que resume nuestra Misión en la Iglesia y la forma de realizarla.

<sup>282</sup> "I used to think frequently on eternity and it made an even greater impression on me then than it does now" (Claret, *Resume, Collected Writings*, vol. 7, p. 446).

<sup>283</sup> Autobiografía P. Fundador (Aut. PC), 15.

<sup>284</sup> Cf. Aut. PC, 56-76.

<sup>285</sup> Cf. Aut. PC, 95.98.101.

<sup>286</sup> Cf. Aut. PC, 113-120.



Our Founder's initial experience takes place in a context of temptation. Years later, in his diaconate ordination, he discovers that evil is not only within, but also outside. In contact with Sacred Scripture he discovered his vocation to be an Apostolic Missionary.

Our Founder would be an Apostolic Missionary in situations of itinerancy or stability: a missionary in Catalonia and the Canary Islands, Archbishop of Cuba, Confessor to Isabella II, in exile, as Council Father during Vatican I. In whichever situation he found himself in he would work so that the Church would extend herself through the preaching of the Gospel and would renew herself in those who had already embraced her. Labor, difficulties, and even attempts against his life do not set him back. He offers it all and considers it a good in the service of "restoring the beauty of the Church."<sup>287</sup> Let us continue this itinerary that allows us to discover our Founder's ecclesial vocation. Let us draw near to his initial experience as an important moment in this journey of discovering his vocation as Apostolic Missionary.

### 1. Initial experience (1830)

Our Founder left a record of this event on five occasions and in different stages of his life. This means that this event was important for him.

In 1856 when he was Archbishop of Cuba and in light of the attempt against his life in Holguin he wrote: "Account of His Life"<sup>288</sup> and "On Devotion to Most Holy Mary"<sup>289</sup>. This is written in third person, attempting to remain anonymous; free of the restrictions that humility placed on him, he was able to speak more freely.

In 1862 when he was Queen Isabella II's Confessor: Narration of the event in the Autobiography.<sup>290</sup>

In 1865 when he desired to no longer be the Queen's confessor: Homily to the students of the Escorial: "A student devoted to Most Holy Mary of the Rosary." It is also written in third person and for this reason is a valuable document; he expresses himself without anyone knowing that it refers to himself.<sup>291</sup>

The fact that he speaks 5 times (two of them in the Autobiography) of the same event, and in different times of his life, underlies the importance the experience had and how it marked him.

We may say that it has to do with an Experience of the spirit. In Sacred Scripture, "**to see and to hear**" are words typically found in the revelatory language of prophetic and apostolic vocations.

As in all biblical experience, there is a context, a vision, and an audition.<sup>292</sup> The three elements do not necessarily occur in that order; in this case, the context of a temptation involves the "vision and audition" of the Virgin.

#### 1.1. Context of the experience: "*a terrible temptation*"

The event occurred in the month of January or February 1831; he was 23 years old and in his second year of Philosophy studies in Vich. He had a cold, something so simple, which was going to be important for the rest of his life. In one of the days he remained in bed because of this cold, he tells us he had "a terrible temptation."

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<sup>287</sup> Cf. "Apuntes de un Plan..."

<sup>288</sup> Doc. Aut., VIII pp. 426-430.

<sup>289</sup> Doc. Aut., VIII pp. 408-411.

<sup>290</sup> Aut. PC. nn. 95-98.10.

<sup>291</sup> Doc. Aut. II, pp. 411-414.

<sup>292</sup> Cf. Is 6, 1-9; Jer 1,4-10 ; Mc 1,9-11 ; Lc 1,26-38...

"I had the following experience while I was in my second year of philosophy at Vich. That winter I had caught a bad cold and was ordered to bed; so I obeyed. One day as I lay there at about ten-thirty in the morning, I felt a terrible temptation. I turned to Mary, called on my guardian angel, and prayed to all my name-saints as well as to those to whom I have a special devotion. I fixed my attention on indifferent objects so as to distract myself and forget about the temptation. I made the sign of the cross on my forehead so that the Lord would free me from evil thoughts, but everything I did was in vain."<sup>293</sup>

Our Founder speaks of a "terrible temptation." He does not say explicitly what the temptation is, but he gives us some information that allows us to deduce what it was. He defines it as "evil thoughts" and in the following number says that "She (Mary) is a woman and yet she doesn't give you any evil thoughts." Later on, in number 98, he says that he will never again have any temptations against chastity. Therefore, the nature of the temptation is clear. Our Founder puts all the means available to him to try to overcome it, both human and transcendent. He tries to distract himself, to fix his attention on indifferent objects; he invokes Mary, the angels, the Saints, makes the sign of the cross...but, he concludes: "all in vain."

It does not seem that it refers to a simple moment of adolescent excitement, proper to a situation of growth and maturity. He was 23 years old. Years later, he would describe it as "the strongest and most vehement temptation" in the homily to the students of El Escorial.<sup>294</sup> In another moment he would also define it as "the most critical case" in the small work "On Devotion to Most Holy Mary."<sup>295</sup> If that is how he lived it, we cannot simplify things.

### 1.2. "See and hear": "I saw the Blessed Virgin Mary...she spoke to me"

And it is precisely in this context that the **Initial Experience** takes place, a context very different from our Foundress'. She was in prayer asking for the needs of the Church; he was immersed in a temptation.

Our Founder narrates it with all types of details; some make us smile because of their ingenuity.<sup>296</sup>

The result of the "vision-audition" is clear: "I felt free of the temptation and filled with a joy so deep that I couldn't grasp what had been going on within me." In the following line he affirms that it was not an illusion: he was neither sleeping nor suffering from dizziness. What made him believe that what happened was real was that "from that moment on I was free from temptation and for many years stayed free of any temptation against chastity. If later there have been any such temptations, they have been so insignificant that they hardly deserve to be called temptations."<sup>297</sup>

This temptation-vision occurred: a year and a half after entering the Seminary, some months after having abandoned his Project of entering the Carthusians in Montealegre, and at a moment in which in contact with Sacred Scripture, he was beginning to discover his missionary vocation.

With all of this in mind, we can say that the temptation against chastity takes places as a counterpart of the option he was beginning to live. Mary intervenes in a vision, helping him be faithful in the chastity of celibacy which he has opted for and which will allow him to give himself completely to apostolic ministry in service of the Church.

### 1.3. Understanding of the event: "our struggle is not with flesh and blood"

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<sup>293</sup> Aut. PC, 95.

<sup>294</sup> Doc. Aut. II p. 413.

<sup>295</sup> Cf. Doc. Aut. I, p. 410.

<sup>296</sup> Aut. PC, 96-98

<sup>297</sup> Aut. PC, 98.

Three years later, in his diaconate ordination, when he was 26 years old, December 20<sup>th</sup>, 1834, the meaning of the temptation he had suffered became clear.<sup>298</sup>

For our Founder, the diaconate was a day of vocational revelation. The key was the figure of St. Stephen, the man of Spirit and Word, and the text of St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians: "For our struggle is not with flesh and blood but with the principalities, with the powers, with the world rulers of this present darkness, with the evil spirits in the heavens" (6:12). Our Founder realized that the struggle was not only with temptations of the flesh, but also with principalities, powers, and rulers of darkness. Evil is not only within, but also externally...This is contrary to our Foundress who discovered internal evil through her experience of external evil.

It is significant that he gains this understanding precisely when he is incorporated into apostolic ministry through the diaconate. This event marks the beginning of a new stage of his life: from now on his struggle will not only be against flesh and blood, but against evil, God's enemy.<sup>299</sup> He discovers how in the struggle against evil, Mary Immaculate, the New Eve, and her victorious descent against evil, will be with him in his apostolic struggle. Mary thus enters into our Founder's spirituality not only as his formator, but also as the full force of a mighty arm that releases him as a blazing arrow against evil.<sup>300</sup>

All of this leads us to conclude that the temptation-vision that our Founder had in the Tortades house was a typical initial experience as J.M. Lozano says.<sup>301</sup> It is one of those experiences of which there are many examples in Sacred Scripture and in the history of Spirituality, where the one called recognizes his or her mission, and responsibly sets out to realize it. Our Foundress' experience eleven years later, in 1842, is also in line with this.

## 2. "What moved me most was reading the Holy Bible..." Discovery of his vocation as Apostolic Missionary for the Church

During this time, our Founder was beginning to experience his ecclesial vocation within the Church through **Sacred Scripture**.<sup>302</sup>

Through several documents written in different times, we have access to the Biblical texts that guided him in this vocational search:

*"Apostolic Vocation"*<sup>303</sup> The Biblical texts that appear in this document are Deutero-Isaiah and Luke.

The texts of Second Isaiah, prophet of the New Exodus, are: 41:8-17: it is in the context of Cyrus' vocation, the one who would deliver Israel from Babylonian slavery; 48:10-11: it is the transition from the first to the second Servant Song, and 49:3 belongs to the second Servant Song.

In these texts Claret underlines:

- The gratuity of the call (41:8,9,3; 48:10)
- Abandonment of the one chosen in God's hands (41:14)
- God's action through the chosen one (41:15)
- Certainty of divine assistance in his mission (41:9-11)
- Testimony before those who do not believe (41:12)
- Glorifying God (48:11; 49:3)

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<sup>298</sup> Aut. PC, 101.

<sup>299</sup> Cf. Aut. PC, 101.

<sup>300</sup> Cf. Aut. PC, 270.

<sup>301</sup> cf. J.M. LOZANO, "Un místico de la acción" pp. 142-143.

<sup>302</sup> Aut. PC, 113.

<sup>303</sup> Es un documento autógrafo, escrito en latín, cuando era seminarista, entre 1831 y 1835. Cf. Doc. Aut. IV, p. 416-418.

Luke 2:48-49 is part of the infancy narrative and 9:59 is the beginning of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem, site of the Passion, Death and Resurrection; on the journey he preaches the Good News through the places he traverses. In these texts Claret experiences:

- Christ's voice which invites him to consecrate himself to the things of the Father (2:48)
- To reproduce Christ's poverty in his life; "he had nowhere to lay his head" (9:58)

*"Account of His Life"*<sup>304</sup>. The texts vary a bit with respect to the previous document. He omits Is 49:3 and adds Ez 3:17-19.

Ezequiel points out: the evangelizer is a watchman of those he evangelizes to. He embraces the Word and transmits it (3:17). It is the responsibility of the evangelizer to call to conversion (3:18), and if the person does not convert, it is no longer the evangelizer's fault. Rather, it is the fault of the one who should embrace that word to become one evangelized (3:19).

*"Autobiography"*<sup>305</sup>. Omits Is 41:10-14; 48:10-11 and Lk 2:49; 9,58 and adds Is 61:1 (read via Lk 4:18) and Is 41:9-18

Perhaps it was reading Isaiah's oracle in 61:1<sup>306</sup> when he felt the anointing of the Spirit who sent him to evangelize. The rest of the texts will clarify other characteristics of his vocation. It is a text Jesus has applied to himself on two important occasions in his life to justify his mission: When John the Baptist asks Jesus "Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?", Jesus responds with the text of Is 61:1 so that the Baptist, and his disciples, realize who he is<sup>307</sup>, and in the synagogue in Nazareth, at the moment Jesus was going to inaugurate his mission, he utilizes the text in Is 61:1.<sup>308</sup>

In "The Well-Instructed Student" our Founder comments on this text, highlighting the christological dimensions.<sup>309</sup>

Later on, our Founder has understood that the call to evangelize that sprung forth from within as in the case of Jeremiah (20:9) was Christ's own grace which abounded in his heart through the Spirit

We can say that our Founder's apostolic vocation in the Church sprung from his contemplation of Christ the evangelizer through the text of Is 61:1.

The second text which appears in the Autobiography is Is 41:9-18, which is taken from the context of the Second Isaiah, prophet of the New Exodus; it refers to the actions of Cyrus, the Persian king, who attacks Babylon and frees the Jewish people that had been taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar during the siege of Jerusalem in 586. Cyrus becomes the liberator of Israel.

He underlines the phrases "I am with you..." "I am your God" "I am the Lord, your God, who has taken you by the hand..."<sup>310</sup> Claret has had a profound experience of God being with him, as God was with Israel and liberated Israel through Cyrus.

From this moment on, our Founder will discover his ecclesial vocation as Apostolic Missionary in the most diverse situations, including those of itinerancy and stability.

The driving force in his acting in favor of the Church will always be to fulfill the will of God, even though he will have to undergo calumnies, insults, and scorn...until death in exile.

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<sup>304</sup> Doc. Aut., VIII, 427-429.

<sup>305</sup> La finalidad didáctica de este escrito, hace que le prestemos mayor atención. Aut. PF, 113-120.

<sup>306</sup> Cf. Aut. PC, 118.

<sup>307</sup> Mt 11,5 y el paralelo de Lc 7,22.

<sup>308</sup> Lc 4,18.

<sup>309</sup> El Colegial... II, p. 269.

<sup>310</sup> Cf. Aut. PC, 115-116.

In this manner, our Founder will fulfill his mission in the Church until the end (1870). In a letter to our Foundress which is dated July 21, 1869 (15 months before his death), he says: "One can say that the designs our Lord had for me have been fulfilled. Blessed be God, I hope that what I have done has pleased God."<sup>311</sup>

### III. OUR FOUNDERS' WRITINGS

#### Introduction

Our Founders had a very defined ecclesial vocation to the point that it was constituted as a personal vocation, which was unfolded and deepened throughout their lives. Furthermore, they left us in writing their ideals of the Renewal of the Church. Our Foundress did so first, followed by our Founder.

Through our Foundress' testimony, we know that on June 9, 1856, she gave the Plan for the Renewal of the Church<sup>312</sup>, which she had written the previous year (1855), to our Founder.<sup>313</sup>

In May 1857 our Founder was named Queen Isabel II's confessor. With this new assignment, new possibilities emerged. He would know how to take advantage of this situation to find new ways of living his Missionary vocation: from a small Diocese as was Santiago de Cuba, he would move to having decisive influence in the church in Spain thanks to his creativity and apostolic zeal.

He goes to Havana on March 28, 1857<sup>314</sup> to go to Spain and begin his new mission, which he began Easter Sunday, April 12, 1857.<sup>315</sup> Claret took our Foundress' Plan for the Renewal on this trip.

In a letter from our Founder to Currius dated June 5, 1857, he tells him that he has with him in Madrid the Plan for Renewal:

"The two notebooks of the General Renewal are in my hands. In addition, during the trip I have written a Plan of Reform that with the Lord's grace will produce the good results that we need, I have shown them to the Bishop of Cadiz, who is man of spirit and zeal and he has complimented it a lot. He says it is exactly what is needed."<sup>316</sup>

Because of this letter, we also know that during the journey, our Founder wrote a Plan which he would publish in the following months. It deals with what our Foundress wanted: to restore the beauty or fervor of the Church.

From this letter, we can conclude that Our Founder's idea to write his Notes regarding the Church sprung forth from reading our Foundress' two notebooks of the General Renewal which he took on the journey from Cuba to Spain. He himself relates the two in the letter to Currius. In addition, Caixal had told him a few weeks earlier:

*"I don't know if the Lord has willed my coming to the Peninsula in order to present the great project of morality for the clergy...we already began that project in Cuba with M. Antonia. In the ship I have written a Plan..."*<sup>317</sup>

This letter also shows their connection.

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<sup>311</sup> EC, II n° 1419.

<sup>312</sup> Cf. Aut. MP, 81.

<sup>313</sup> Cf. Aut. MP, 51.

<sup>314</sup> Cf. Aut. PC, 589. cf. nota 97.

<sup>315</sup> Cf. Aut. PC, 590. cf. nota 98.

<sup>316</sup> EC, I p. 1346.

<sup>317</sup> EC,I, 1340.

Currius is very interested in this “principal matter” as he refers to it, and he wants to closely collaborate with Claret to carry it forward. He copies the notebooks in a manuscript to which he adds some elements and entitles it “My Book.”<sup>318</sup>

D. Dionisio González in a letter from Cuba dated July 31, 1858 to St. Anthony Mary Claret tells him: “My good 3<sup>319</sup> writes to Your Excellency about the matter of the nuns.<sup>320</sup> On this occasion I have carefully re-read the *Apuntes de Reforma*.<sup>321</sup> I have liked them very much, and they undoubtedly put the finger on the wound. Re-reading them and remembering (how could I not) those that Your Excellency wrote to the Bishops<sup>322</sup>, I have observed that these prepare the way to realize the Renewal proposed in those, in a manner that comparing them, it seems that one same spirit has moved the two pens.”<sup>323</sup>

D. Dionisio sees that our Foundress’ Plan prepares the way for carrying out the Renewal proposed by Claret and he does so with a beautiful comparison: “one same spirit has moved the two pens.”

In the correspondence between Claret, Currius, D. Dionisio Gonzalez and Maria Antonia, we find expressions such as “our project,” “the principal aim,” or “our principal matter.” They are referring to the Renewal of the Church with which they strongly identify with and feel committed to. They also use a numerical code to speak to each other: 1=Pius IX; 2=Claret; 3=Currius, 4=Caixal, 5=Maria Antonia, 6=D. Dionisio Gonzalez.

Reading both writings, we observe their differences as well as their similarities:

Our Foundress’ **Plan for the Renewal** is simply a series of points addressed to her Spiritual Director, our Founder, etc., concrete people she was close to with whom she shares her ideals for Renewal of the Church and defines some means to make it a reality.

**The Notes for a Plan** is a more theological document addressed to Bishops in which our Founder reflects his own experience shepherding a diocese. Even though he uses the term “Notes,” which could suggest that it is only “Points,” it is an authentic plan with an ecclesial foundation.

Common to both writings are their practical nature, the theme of the renewal of the Church in her members, and the means to renew the Church: poverty, fidelity, community and formation.

It is difficult to decide who influences who. As a starting point, it is true that our Founder had our Foundress’ Plan in his hands when he wrote his Plan. But, it is also true that when our Foundress wrote the Plan for the Renewal, she had seen all that she wrote incarnated in the life of our Founder as Archbishop of Cuba.

What is certain is that Claret approved our Foundress’ Plan for Renewal and that this was written before his Plan. When he travels to Spain he takes it with him, and he himself tells us that in the journey, he has written a “Plan...” We could say that our Foundress writes the Plan she intuitively could serve the church for its renewal and our Founder draws out a detailed Plan to realize what our Foundress has intuited in prayer and in her experience of God, which is no more than what she has

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<sup>318</sup> Carta 492 ECR, página 624, Epistolario de D. Paladio Currius Pbro. Edición B: Edición corregida cronológicamente por el P. Joan Sidera, cmf. Arxiu Claret, Vic 1989.

<sup>319</sup> El nº 3 es Currius.

<sup>320</sup> Cf. La carta 443.

<sup>321</sup> Se refiere a los Puntos para la Reforma, *Escritos*, Barcelona 1985. pp. 287-343.

<sup>322</sup> Claret, *Notes for a Plan to Preserve the Beauty of the Church* Escritos Pastorales BAC, 1997. pp. 461- 545.

<sup>323</sup> Carta 442 EPC-III/ 331; ECR, página 448 del Epistolario de D. Paladio Currius Pbro. Edición B: Edición corregida cronológicamente por el P. Joan Sidera, cmf. Arxiu Claret, Vic 1989.

seen realized in our Founder as Archbishop of Cuba.<sup>324</sup> We could conclude that there is a “mutual influence,” since they share mutual ideals and reading of the church’s situation during their time.

Outlines of both Writings.

<p><b>PLAN FOR THE RENEWAL INTRODUCTION</b></p>	<p>Personal: She asks the HS to guide her. She feels God our Lord orders her. She implores the Saints and Mary. Her attitudes: remain silent/speak. The Twelve/her (n. 1) General: God wants the Church to be renewed</p>
<p><b>PART I Who needs to do the reform and how?  POPE</b></p>	<p>The Pope ought to promote the renewal. It needs to reach the whole Church. Claret and Currius ought to be an example. (nn. 2-8) Explains his mission in the Renewal. The Pope ought to take the initiative and moderate the renewal. She asks him to have a delegate in each Diocese (nn. 9-10)</p>
<p><b>BISHOPS</b></p>	<p>She asks for their personal renewal. Here she introduces the idea that God does not want anything new; all that God wants is that the observance/fulfillment of the Gospel, which is for all, no exceptions (nn. 11-14) Means that should be used for this Renewal (nn. 15-32): - Reform of their lives, houses and families. Poverty. (15) - Live in community, sharing goods (16-17) - Give their income to the poor, keeping only what is necessary (18-19) - Ought to preach the Word. This should be their first mission (20-21) - Careful attention to the seminary. The bishop ought to seek good formators (22) take care - Careful attention to the priests. The bishop ought to pay special attention to the clergy. He ought to: preach them the Word, create clerical communities, and have a Vicar. (23-26) - They ought to take good care of places of worship and ornaments (27-29) - Pastoral visit to the entire Diocese: to places of worship, preaching the Word, confessing, and preaching through their example (30-31) - Prayer in which they allude to the clergy’s responsibility in the Church’s crisis (32) Duties of the Bishop: distribute the bread of the Word, confess, teach the Holy Law, teach with words and deeds (n. 33)</p>
<p><b>PRIESTS</b></p>	<p>They should not have income or possessions. They should use the clerical clothes. They should live in community, or in very poor houses, without any women. Bishops should visit them. (nn. 34-36)</p>
<p><b>RELIGIOUS</b></p>	<p>Religious ought to observe their constitutions. Bishops should visit them regularly to make sure they lack nothing spiritual or material (nn. 37-38) Reflection of the Church’s situation, in line with what the Lord inspires and the need for renewal (nn. 39-44) Deals with religious women: poverty; their intercessory prayer for the Church; their holiness. She thinks that ignorance is the worst evil. Preaching for religious (nn. 45-46) Religious men and women (nn. 47-58)</p>
<p><b>LAITY</b></p>	<p>Follow the Divine Commandments. Poverty (n.50)</p>
<p><b>PART II</b></p>	<p>Presentation of the Institute: description and function (n. 59) Claret as Founder of the Institute and a light in the Church for Renewal (nn. 60-63) The college of missionaries should be in the bishop’s house (n. 64)</p>

<sup>324</sup> The title of our Foundress’ writing has been translated into English as “Plan for the Renewal of the Church.” A literal translation of the Spanish would be “Points for the Reform of the Church.” Hence, the distinction being made here is between points and a plan.

<b>RULES FOR THE APOSTOLIC MISSIONARIES</b>	The Gospel ought to be the rule of his life. Living in extreme poverty and humility. (nn. 65-69) Concrete rules and norms for daily life in the Institute. The Institute's Organization (nn. 70-75)
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	She justifies all she has written by virtue of Obedience. She relates the hopes she has placed in the new Institute. Her respect towards the clergy in spite of all that she has to tell them (nn. 76-82)

<b>NOTES FOR A PLAN PROLOGUE</b>	pp. 463-465		Clergy: What they should know (pp. 499-506) Religious (pp. 506-507) Nuns (pp. 507-508) School Sisters (pp. 508-509) Sisters of Charity for the sick (p. 509) Laity: Corporal Goods (pp. 509-510) Spiritual Goods (p. 510-511)
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	Theology, doctrinal and apologetic - Jesus Christ and the Church: Body of Christ, New Eve (pp. 466-468) - Kingdom of Jesus Christ or of his Church and its persecutors (pp. 468-471)		
<b>THE POPE</b>	- Obedience to the Pope (pp. 471-473) - The Holy Fathers and the Papacy (pp. 473-474) - Enemies of the Pope and of the Church (pp. 474-478) - Who is the Pope and his responsibilities (pp. 478-482)	<b>GOVERNANCE OF THE DIOCESE</b>	Foundations for good governance: humility, gentleness, patience and listening (p. 511) Means to attain the gift of Governance (pp. 511-512) - Prayer - Imitation of Jesus Christ - Seek counsel of wise, prudent and benevolent men - Studies, information, do not rush in giving answers



<p style="text-align: center;"><b>COUNCILS</b></p>	<p>Its value and necessity (pp. 482-483)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Frequent celebration</li> <li>- Lack of them produces relaxation and evils</li> </ul> <p>Councils or diocesan synods (p. 484)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>PRACTICAL ISSUES</b></p>	<p>The Holy Pastoral visit (pp. 512-516)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Each year</li> <li>- Imitate Jesus: walk like him through cities, towns, villages and homes ...</li> <li>- Before, during, and after the pastoral visit</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>BISHOPS</b></p>	<p>Successors of the Apostles: sanctify, teach and govern (pp. 484-491)</p> <p>Particular duties (pp.491-492)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Live imitating Jesus Christ</li> <li>- Observer , overseer and watchman</li> <li>- Man perfect in virtue</li> <li>- Model of sanctity</li> <li>- Teacher who teaches and practices what he says</li> <li>- Guide, pastor, desert column, salt of the earth, light of the world, sun of the Church</li> <li>- Mediator between God and people</li> <li>- Victim destined to martyrdom</li> </ul> <p>Obligations toward God (pp. 492-498)</p> <p>Obligations toward the faithful:</p>		<p>Obligations of the Prelate (pp. 516-521)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- With himself</li> <li>- With those of the curia</li> <li>- With house employees</li> </ul> <p>Bishops will not be moved around (pp. 521-523)</p> <p>Canon priests (pp. 523-526)</p> <p>Vicars, pastors, and other priests (p. 526)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Duties of vicars (pp.526-527 )</li> <li>- Duties of pastors and other priests (pp. 528-534)</li> </ul> <p>Seminary (pp. 534-545)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Students' responsibilities</li> <li>- Prayer</li> <li>- Vacation time</li> </ul>

In conclusion, I would like to share a letter from our Founder to our Foundress dated July 20, 1868 (2 years before his death and already after much time had passed since he had written the "Notes for a Plan." In this letter we see the continued presence of their ideals to work for the Church, which they live until the end of their lives:

*" I should let you know that I am so busy with other matters of much importance that I do not feel like spending so much time in writing letters. And because I think it will gladden our Lord, I will let you know a bit about one of the tasks which I am so busy with. This task is a plan for the Church, which I already have a draft for(...) It has four parts. The first is about how to choose well the bishops which ought to be named in due time. The second looks at the canon<sup>325</sup>: how and by what means they ought to be chosen, and that they will be selected among pastors who have realized 20 years of good service, seminary professors who have been teaching for 10 years, employees of the palace who have served for 5 years as provisor, secretary, fiscal, etc., or a priest who is distinguished for his knowledge, virtue or special services according to the prelate's judgment. Another part is the fulfillment of duties of pastors. The fourth and last part is the manner of*

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<sup>325</sup> A **canon** (from the Latin *canonicus*, "relating to a rule") is a priest who is a member of certain bodies of the [Christian clergy](#) subject to an ecclesiastical rule ([canon](#)). They live others in a clergyhouse or in one of the houses within the precinct or close of a [cathedral](#) and order their lives according to the orders or rules of the church; they recite the public Office or Liturgy of the Hours. (taken from Wikipedia)

*instructing and forming and educating the hearts of the children the Lord calls to religious life so that they will be good friars.*<sup>326</sup>

#### **IV. THIS DIMENSION OF THE CHARISM TODAY**

The history of the Church, as a people on a journey, is tied to events. From its origins, even though God is always the same, faith is something alive, and circumstances continuously change. For this reason, the image we have of Him, as well as the means of announcing his message, are factors that are exposed to change in their conception and focus.

With availability and openness to the spirit, let us look for concrete ways to respond today with a quiet and serene openness, contemplation, and listening to God and our sisters and brothers.

Given the present situation in a society that does not give any importance to religion, it is important that we know how to:

- Live in an attitude of conversion (this applies to all members of the Church)
- Be sensible to reality with all the problems it entails
- Live with all men and women as our brothers and sisters
- Discern the signs of the times to see what God is asking of us today.

The answer our founders gave to the evils of the Church was a universal answer which goes beyond changing situations. For this reason, it can also be an answer to the evils of our world and the Church even though the means of realizing it vary:

##### **1. Live in fidelity**

Our Founders discovered the reason they were suffering persecutions, burnings of convents, etc., was a lack of fidelity in church people.

This fidelity to the commitments of the journeying people of God continues to be an attitude to cultivate in all the members of the Church. We need to promote a critical, prophetic and creative fidelity towards the Church, the world and towards our own reality, which denounces all that is not coherent according to the Gospel, in order to be a proclamation of the values of the Kingdom from the coherence of our own lives in the service of Evangelization, We need to be creative in how we are present and in our way of living and acting in such a manner that our lives invite others to follow.

Maintain hope and strength to realize that which the different members of the Church have been called to (with enough humility so as not to err in thinking that we are better than others). We should act as if everything depended on us, but with the confidence of knowing, that in reality, everything depends on God.

##### **2. In poverty**

In a world in which social inequalities are so alarming, the current crisis is making the poor even poorer. A third of humanity dies of hunger. Poverty is a testimony and attitude that we cannot stop

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<sup>326</sup> P. Fundador a M. Fundadora. El 20 de Julio de 1868, en Cartas selectas nº 225

living if we want to be faithful to our charism.

The poverty we are called to is an evangelical poverty which is total trust in God and God's plan of salvation. It is sharing fraternally and in solidarity with our sisters and brothers. It is a poverty which is freedom before powers and the goods of this world that are not the goods of all humanity. On the one hand, it is a real poverty and solidarity. It is also a prophetic testimony of freedom before that which does not build the Kingdom.

### **3. To proclaim the Gospel**

It is our mission in the Church, and each day it has more meaning. We live in a world that does not believe and which each day grows more indifferent towards the values of the Gospel. We need the boldness our Founders had to discover today, as they did in their time, how to make this proclamation so that it reaches our sisters and brothers so in need of the Gospel.

<b>Questions for personal reflection:</b>
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1. What did you find interesting in this reading? What have you discovered? What has really touched you?
2. What characteristics of our ecclesial vocation would you point out?
3. What should we do today to renew the Church?

## **SUMMARY: EVANGELICAL POVERTY AS HEART OF NEW APOSTLES**

*María Soledad Galerón.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **EVANGELICAL POVERTY IN THE LIFE AND WORK OF OUR FOUNDERS**

##### **I. IN SAINT ANTHONY MARY CLARET.**

1. Attaining humility and poverty.
2. Poverty as Jesus and the Apostles lived.
3. Poverty as solidarity with the poor.
4. Work as a way to live out poverty

##### **II. IN THE LIFE OF MARIA ANTONIA PARIS.**

1. Evangelical Poverty and self knowledge.
2. Evangelical Poverty as total trust in the heavenly Father.
3. Evangelical Poverty as a way to follow Jesus, “the poor one.”
4. Evangelical Poverty as inner self surrender

##### **III. A “NEW ORDER” IN PRAXIS**

###### **1. Evangelical Poverty the Heart of the “New Order”**

- A. Evangelical Poverty as a way to live the Gospel radically.
- B. Evangelical Poverty as “*foundation-heart of New Apostles*”

###### **2. Difficulties to concretize the Evangelical Poverty in the legislation of the New Order: To establish the congregation without fees or dowry.**

###### **3. Evangelical Poverty in the original Constitutions**

###### **4. Aspects to highlight in concretizing Evangelical Poverty.**

- A. Working as a way to subsist - Social- Apostolic- Dimension of working -- Work and sharing of communication of possessions in the Order. – Balance between work and contemplation.
- B. The “public witnessing of poverty”.
- C. Importance of formation in Evangelical Poverty
- D. The Second Vatican Council confirms the intuitions of María Antonia París.

#### **THE INNER CALLINGS MADE BY EVANGELICAL POVERTY**

- 1. Evangelical Poverty: Know I am. Truth shall make us “poor” and free.**
- 2. To follow Jesus “the poor one” gives meaning to our Evangelical Poverty**
  - a. The Father: origin and essence of the poverty of Jesus
  - b. Evangelical Poverty: affiliation and trusting and joyful availability
  - c. The evangelical Poverty of Mary of Nazareth.

- d. “Go, sell what you have, give it to the poor and follow me”
- e. Apostolic dimension of Evangelical Poverty

**3. Concretizing Evangelical Poverty**

- a. Evangelical Poverty and work: “*We work to make a living*” C. 17
- b. Evangelical Poverty and solidarity: “*We work to meet the needs of the Congregation, of the church and the poor*” C. 17
- c. Living Evangelical Poverty: facing reality, people and things: Without possessions. Facing ourselves: Without possessing oneself. Facing God: Letting ourselves be possessed by God and others in Him and from Him.

<b>SOME CONCLUSIONS</b>
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- 1. **PRAY INDIVIDUALLY AND SHARE THE EXAMINATION OF POVERTY PROPOSED.**
- 2. **LECTIO DIVINA:** Luke 18: 18-27. “*Go, sell all you have, give it to the poor, you will have a treasure and follow me*”.

## INTRODUCTION

The question of poverty is among those that produce major dissatisfaction to a great majority of religious, not only today, but throughout the history of Consecrated Life. The dissatisfaction is experienced in theory as well and above all in the praxis. Nevertheless the Word invites us constantly to be poor. Why is it so difficult to find ways of “washing the feet” of the poor, when the Lord identifies himself with them and among them he wants to be found, served and loved?<sup>247</sup>

Despite the complexity of the subject we know that Evangelical Poverty is something “non negotiable” in our charisma: it is essential. We experience difficulties to find ways to concretize in our every day life this **existential reality**, but we have to constantly try because without it there is no way of being a Claretian Sister. To bring to life the specifics of poverty in our here and now of each Claretian sister, each community, we need reflection and search, trials and experiences, but above all we need to seek and **ask God for the gift of Evangelical Poverty**..

**Our Founders** perceived, as one of the major problems in the Church of their times, particularly in Religious Life the lack of witnessing the evangelical Councils, specifically the one of poverty. **Maria Antonia Paris and Saint Anthony Mary Claret** felt called by God to “*give public testimony of poverty*”<sup>248</sup> as one of the ways to heal the corruptions of the Church.

I think it is important to clarify from the beginning that the reason of our Evangelical Poverty is not sociological, economical, political, cultural but strictly **theological**: God is **Father** and wants all of us to **be brothers and sisters**. The source of poverty is in the mystery of the paternity and affiliation, in the experience of **Christ poor**. It springs up from **faith** and it’s fulfilled in **love**. It becomes real in us, in the extent that, lead by the Spirit, we follow Jesus Christ.

<p><b>EVANGELICAL POVERTY IN THE LIFE AND WORK OF OUR FOUNDERS<sup>249</sup></b></p>
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### I. IN SAINT ANTHONY MARY CLARET

There are two letters written on the last year of his life which reflect the importance of Evangelical Poverty in Claret. The first one was written in Rome, to Mother Paris;<sup>250</sup> it is a long letter, very moving and confidential, where he talks about his experience and personal situation and the interview with the Pope and at the end of the letter he says: “you may remember what I wrote in the booklet titled *Apuntes (Notes)*. It could be said that the will of God in me has been done”, referring to the efforts he had made for the renewal of the Church, especially for his witnessing through **poverty and missionary life**. The second one is even more explicit and written to Father Currius<sup>251</sup> as chaplain of Reus. On this letter he talks about the steps given towards the approval of the Constitutions and tells me clearly that he has communicated these matters to M. Antonia. The letter is sort of a farewell and last will: “I have suffered more than I am used to. I am eager to die... I believe I have already accomplished my mission. In Paris, in Rome **I have preached the law of God... I have observed the Holy Poverty** of what belonged to me, at present, thanks be to God I don’t receive anything from the Diocese of Cuba, neither the Queen gives me anything.”

#### 1. Attaining humility and poverty.

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<sup>247</sup> Matthew 25:31-46

<sup>248</sup> Carta de Claret a la M. París, 30 de Enero de 1862

<sup>249</sup> Álvarez Gómez, Jesús “María Antonia Paris, una mujer del siglo XIX”, conferencia presentada el 17 de enero de 1985, Centenario de muerte de la Madre París. .

<sup>250</sup> Taken fully from the Study of Alvarez.

<sup>251</sup> Letter of Claret, Rome July 21<sup>st</sup> 1869

From the beginning of his missionary and apostolic life, he centers all his energies and strengths on his personal sanctification and the one of his brothers. His whole persona, his apostolic activity and the doctrine he was teaching encouraged the living of the Evangelical Poverty, as a profound attitude towards God, our brothers and sisters which he also experienced in all his being and doing but because of the spiritual theological conception of the times, the terminology was different.

On his Autobiographical Writings<sup>252</sup>, he shares his spiritual journey and the means to reach it. Claret dedicates Chapter XXIV of his Autobiography to introduce the virtue of poverty, “second virtue that I attained”<sup>253</sup>. He tells us how Poverty is the key on his spirituality, and when speaking of the virtues most needed for a missionary, he presents the first one: humility, the second: poverty, the third one: meekness... three virtues that state clearly three dimensions of Evangelical Poverty. It is important to see that the focal point of this virtues and the motivation behind them was christocentric and apostolic. His only goals and motivations were: To follow Jesus and announce him by all means for the salvation of all.

Claret asks himself: *Who are Thou? Who am I...*<sup>254</sup> God gives him wisdom to be able to say: *“I have recognized quiet clearly that all that I can call truly my own is sin. If I am or have anything else, I have received it all from God. My physical being is not mine, it comes from God. He it is who created me, keeps me in being, and, through physical concurrence, sets me in motion. Without water, not even the best-built water mill can turn; I have come to know that his is true of me even in my physical and natural being”*<sup>255</sup>, *“the same is all the more true in the spiritual and supernatural orders... For without Him I can do absolutely nothing”*.<sup>256</sup>

He truly lives in a total trust and filial dependence of the Father and this availability for God is for him source of joy. *“I have come to know that the virtue of humility consists in this: in realizing that I am nothing, can do nothing but sin, and depend on God in everything—being, conservation, movement, and grace—and I am most happy to be dependent on God rather than on myself.”*<sup>257</sup> It is not a theoretical knowledge, it is the experience of faith the one which brings him to feel *“that I have nothing to boast of or be vain about because, of myself, I am nothing, have nothing, am worth nothing, can to nothing and do nothing. I am like a saw in the carpenter’s hands...”*<sup>258</sup>. *“I have come see that a truly humble man must be like a stone that, even if it is hoisted the very top of a building, always gravitates toward the bottom ...”*<sup>259</sup>

On his Autobiography he tells us how he lived poverty in his missionary life. He narrates with details his travel to Rome<sup>260</sup> wanting to become a Missionary Apostle.

## 2. Poverty as Jesus and the Apostles lived.

He shares the observations that throughout his ministerial experience he has made with regards to poverty. *“I have observed one thing, and the least I can do is set it down here: **When one is poor and really wants to be poor, freely and not by force, then he enjoys the sweetness of poverty.** Moreover, God will take care of him in one of two ways—either by moving the hearts of those who have something to give so that they will give it to him, or else by helping him live without eating. I have experienced both”*<sup>261</sup>.

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<sup>252</sup> Autobiography

<sup>253</sup> Claret, Autobiography 372

<sup>254</sup> Claret Autobiography 343

<sup>255</sup> Claret, Autobiography 344

<sup>256</sup> Claret, Autobiography 345

<sup>257</sup> Claret 347

<sup>258</sup> Claret 348

<sup>259</sup> Claret 350

<sup>260</sup> This narration is on his Autobiography 130 to 136

<sup>261</sup> Claret Aut. n. 364

Poverty has, as in Mother Paris a clear apostolic dimension and an explicit reference to the life of Jesus and the disciples.. *“I have observed the holy virtue of poverty not only edified people and upset the idol of mamón ... the virtues are like strings on a harp, poverty is the shortest and thinnest chord and hence gives the highest sound, thus we see that Jesus...with his disciples ...”*<sup>262</sup>.

He lives and proposes poverty as an instrument of renewal in the church with a language very similar to Mother Foundress *“this lack of resources abates pride, banishes arrogance, clears a path for humility, and disposes the heart to receive new graces... O my savior, make your ministers understand the worth of the virtue of poverty. Make them love it and practice it as you have taught us to, in deeds as well as in words. How perfect we would all be if only we practiced it well. What a great deal of good we would do and how many souls would be saved! ;on the other hand, if your ministers do not practice poverty, souls are not saved and the ministers themselves bring about their own condemnation...”*<sup>263</sup>

She insists in the importance of “visible” poverty to face the evils that invade the world. *“I believed that this dreadful giant, which worldlings call all-powerful, had to be confronted with the holy virtue of poverty. So wherever I encountered greed, I countered it with poverty. I had nothing, wanted nothing, refused everything.”*<sup>264</sup> *I was content with the clothes I had on and the food that was set before me. I carried all I had in a bandanna. The contents of my luggage were a full-year breviary, a sheaf of sermons, a pair of socks, and an extra shirt--nothing more”*<sup>265</sup>.

Claret was poor, wanted to be poor and enjoyed being poor. To identify with Jesus, whom he followed, he lived poverty with joy and sought to live in poverty, choosing the worst and most poor. He expresses frequently on his Spiritual Resolutions that *“I resolve to do well the ordinary things that I do. If there is a choice of two good things, I will try to select the better, even though it might cost me the sacrifice of my own will. I will likewise choose whatever is poorest, meanest, and most painful”*<sup>266</sup>. *“I have always wanted to die a poor man in some hospital”*<sup>267</sup>. *“How rich they will be who have left all things for Christ. How honored they will be who sought not honor, but delighted in being humbled. How wise will they be who were thought to play the fool-- for so men thought the Word incarnate--and how few wise fools there are nowadays, because of our sinfulness. Now, yes now it seems that we have seen the last of all those whom people scorned as madmen on seeing them perform the heroic works of true lovers of Christ. O world, world, how you go on gaining in honor simply because there are so few who know you truly”*<sup>268</sup>

Claret considers that meekness is a dimension of Evangelical Poverty that is essential to the apostolic vocation. *“Meekness is one sign of a vocation to be an apostolic missionary ...”*<sup>269</sup> *“The Apostles, who were taught by the Divine Master Himself, all had the virtue of meekness, practiced it them selves...”*<sup>270</sup>

### 3. Poverty as solidarity with the poor.

He says with simplicity: *“With the Lord's help, I saw to the needs of the poor. Every Monday of the year, as long as I was in Cuba, I gathered together the poor of whatever town I happened to be in and gave each person*

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<sup>262</sup> Claret Aut. n. 370

<sup>263</sup> Claret Aut. n. 371

<sup>264</sup> This norm of conduct was inspired by Jesus' recommendations to his apostles before He sent them out on their first missionary journey (Matt. 9:35-42).

<sup>265</sup> Claret Aut. n. 359

<sup>266</sup> Claret Aut. n. 649

<sup>267</sup> Claret Aut. n. 467

<sup>268</sup> Claret Aut. n. 244

<sup>269</sup> Claret Aut. n. 374

<sup>270</sup> Claret Aut. n. 375

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*there a peseta; but since they were often poorer in spirit than in the flesh, I first instructed them personally in Christian doctrine. After teaching them catechism I always gave them a talk and urged them to receive the sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist. Many of them did go to confession to me, because they knew I loved them--for the Lord has indeed given me a heartfelt love of the poor.*"<sup>271</sup>.

He lists several ways in which he dedicates time and resources to the poor: *"I bought a ranch for the poor of Puerto Principe. By the time I left Cuba I had spent 25,000 duros of my savings on it."*<sup>272</sup>. Frequently, one finds in Claret's writings references to the money he dedicates on particular things. It is clear that to invest money in a project expresses that it is considered something valuable. He would often dedicate money to help the poor come out of their poverty. *"My object in starting this ranch was to gather together poor boys and girls, many of whom were wandering the streets begging. At the ranch they were fed, clothed, and taught their religion, as well as reading, writing, and whatever art or trade they wanted to learn"*<sup>273</sup>.

Another way of helping the poor was to establish *"a licensed credit union in the diocese, for the use and benefit of the poor. For I saw that when the poor have proper direction and are given a decent means to earn a living, they are upright citizens; it is only otherwise that they become debased. Hence my eagerness to help them was as much spiritual as it was material."*<sup>274</sup>

*"I also visited prisoners in jail, catechizing them and preaching to them frequently. After my visits I would give each of them a peseta, and so they were happy to listen attentively to what I had to say. I was equally regular in visiting poor patients in the hospital and also gave them some help, especially those who were leaving as convalescents. I was president of the League of Friends of the Country. We met at my residence, and all of us took an active interest in any advances on the island. We procured a workshop for poor boys, and we saw to it that prisoners in jail were taught reading, writing, religion, and a trade of some sort. With this in mind we had workshops set up in jail; for experience had shown us that many men turn to crime because they have no trade and don't know how to make an honest living".*<sup>275</sup>

To dedicate time and word is an expression of recognition of the dignity of the person. Claret would often do this with the poor in imitation of Jesus. He mentions that he preaches *"... 35 sermons to the poor in the orphanages..."*<sup>276</sup>. *"With the same dedication and love I speak to poor and the rich, the ignorant and the learned...I visit and preach to the prisoners, the sick in the hospital and in their homes, and many come to see me or are brought to my house..."*<sup>277</sup>

#### **4. Work as a form poverty.**

Among the ways in which Claret practiced poverty, was avoiding to be a financial burden on anyone; he worked to earn his food. *"I will nor accept anything for my sermons, only the food I need to live, to avoid being a burden, I will always go on foot";* and later on in the same resolutions. *"I neither want nor will accept stipends, for I will bear in mind that it is all a grace that I have received through Mary and "what you have freely ... (Mt. 10, 8)"*<sup>278</sup>.

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<sup>271</sup> Claret Aut. n. 562

<sup>272</sup> Claret Aut. 563

<sup>273</sup> Claret Aut. n. 564

<sup>274</sup> Claret Aut. n. 569

<sup>275</sup> Claret Aut. nn 570-571

<sup>276</sup> Claret Aut. 704

<sup>277</sup> **SAN ANTONIO MARIA CLARET. Autobiografía y escritos complementarios.** *Misionero Apostólico: Autorretrato.* Documentos autobiográfico. Editorial Claretiana. Buenos Aires 2008. pag. 532.

<sup>278</sup> Propósitos de EE, 1843, n. 6. Obra citada pag. 652

He never loses sight of his Divine Teacher: *“If I lack something I need, I will not complain, but rejoice. Insofar as it depends on me I will choose the article most scorned. My clothing will be decent and clean, but as poor as possible. (I will never travel on horseback, but on foot, and if I am ever forced to ride, it will be on a donkey, in imitation of Jesus.)”*<sup>279</sup>

Everything he has received he places at the service of the Lord and his brothers and sisters. He knows that everything is a gift that he must place his time, wisdom, money and the fruit of his work at the service of others. *“God is my witness that no one gives me any payment for my work nor do I have other end than the one I said, and do not expect any other recompense, but that of heaven.”*<sup>280</sup>

Claret had the capacity to live the virtue of poverty with great joy without judging or placing demands on others, always relating to others with mercy and compassion. *“For me I will be stingy in reference to food, bed, clothing, and generous with my friends and the poor...”*<sup>281</sup> His sight was always on Jesus, the meaning and center of his life and mission. *“Jesus Christ loves poverty, the injuries and sufferings he loves I also want. I will never do anything in search of riches, honors and pleasures...”*<sup>282</sup>

## II. IN THE LIFE OF MARIA ANTONIA PARIS

The Initial Vision is a key element in understanding the life and work of Antonia Paris. Taking as a background the reflection on the Initial Vision already presented in the topic of the “Reform of the Church,” we will only refer to the aspects of evangelical poverty related to the foundation of the Order of New Apostles. As a result of that experience she says that she has received **“much love for evangelical poverty** and the grace of a deep communication with God whom she always had present since then.”<sup>283</sup>

*This “much love for evangelical poverty”*<sup>284</sup>, is an essential aspect of her vocation; she refers to it in a letter to Msgr. Caixal discussing changes that he wanted to make in the practice of poverty in the community of Tremp. *“It will destroy the basis of the Holy Poverty our Mother; if this is done...with what purpose did I leave the Convent in Tarragona? Why have that long struggle with the Administrator in Cuba? So much so, that I was not determined to profess if this was done and you would support me and encourage me not to give in.”*<sup>285</sup> From the very first charismatic encounter with the Gospel, Antonia ardently loved the Poverty of Christ. *“My Mother the Holy Poverty”*, as she calls it in the Diary.<sup>286</sup> The Lord had told her that *“the lack of this virtue has brought down religion”* and the new Apostles, the ones called to help raise it up, had to live accordingly.

Poverty will be key, the point that will concentrate all of the radical living of the Gospel and will be distinctive feature of the new order. *“See then the sons of this new Order with how much love you should kiss the book of the Holy Gospels, because this is the book of Life which Our adored Redeemer has left us written with his most holy life and doctrine, sealed with his most precious blood, and the great love that you should have to Holy Poverty for you see that Our Divine Master puts it as the foundation of evangelical life.”*<sup>287</sup> The Lord confirmed it years later when he said: *“Don’t you remember that my purpose in founding this Order is to give a public witness of evangelical Poverty.”*<sup>288</sup>

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<sup>279</sup> Propósitos de EE, 1843, n. 8. Obra citada pag. 653

<sup>280</sup> Obra citada, *Misionero Apostólico: Autorretrato* nn. 2, 3, 4. Pag. 532

<sup>281</sup> Propósitos de EE, 1857, n. 2. Obra citada pag. 681

<sup>282</sup> Propósitos de EE de 18 55, nn. 5, 6. Obra citada pag. 677

<sup>283</sup> At. 12

<sup>284</sup> Aut. 11

<sup>285</sup> Carta a Caixal del 30 de diciembre de 1861

<sup>286</sup> Diario 20

<sup>287</sup> Puntos reforma 67

<sup>288</sup> Diario 82

## Evangelical Poverty in the life of Antonia Paris

It is not easy to differentiate what Mother Antonia says about poverty in reference to her life from what relates to the foundation. We will highlight some aspects that we consider more personal and later on develop those that she presents in the Constitutions for all sisters.

### 1. Evangelical Poverty and self knowledge.

*“I plead that you may illuminate me with your infinite wisdom, to know you and to know myself”*<sup>289</sup> this prayer expresses her awareness of her own poverty.<sup>290</sup> To deepen one’s self-knowledge helps illumine God’s reality and to walk in the knowledge of God leads us to know more deeply who we are. To discover in an experiential way –not theoretical- who we are as creatures reveals to us that we do not have an existence in ourselves, we have received and we constantly receive it. We are not the origin of ourselves, there is a fundamental and founding being, original and originating from whom we receive our being. In recognizing this primordial and originating fountain, we also come to understand our existence as a project of divinization.

This double knowledge is like the first stone of our building. It implies that we become more aware of my deepest truth. To experience ourselves in this way is a gift I need to ask for: *to know myself*, Antonia pleads. *“Our Lord gave me the grace to see myself so miserable and to see my own nothingness in such a way that I felt like the most inept creature.”*<sup>291</sup> She asks “to know all what You want me to do to serve and love You”<sup>292</sup>; she asks to know herself as subject of responsibility, like St. Augustine would say, “The one who created us without us will not save us without us”. God responds to this prayer and gives her profound knowledge of her truth, her poverty. *“I saw my littleness and poverty as a person. I was so confused, ...”*<sup>293</sup> Aware of her vocational responsibility, she prays, waits, consults to learn the best way of carrying it out. But above all, she trusts as she conforms her life with the life of Jesus and Mary.<sup>294</sup> The Lord visits her and gives her a sign: *“our Lord told me and pointing at Mgr. Claret. This, my daughter, is the apostolic person whom you have asked me for so many years and with so much tears”... (he) will give you a hand in founding the first houses of the order.*<sup>295</sup> But the real sign, like in the case of Abraham, will come as events develop, for now she has to give herself in faith and poverty. *“How true it is that the wisdom of God is impenetrable, and from weak instruments, great things are accomplished. Blessed be God for such power and goodness!”*<sup>296</sup>

The first form of evangelical poverty that Maria Antonia teaches us is then, the recognition of our poor personal reality. This knowledge provides her with a consciousness of her own smallness, insignificance and on the other hand, with a total trust in God. This sense of insignificance does not produce sadness nor leads her to close herself up; it is a recognition of God’s love and mercy that leads her to place her hope in God.<sup>297</sup> This self knowledge is not lack of humility, nor a denial of her natural gifts and graces. She knows that God gave her *“a very attractive virtue and a way of handling herself and treating people that she would win their hearts for God and all people treated her with love.”*<sup>298</sup> Her capacity for organization was outstanding. *“In the convent I helped organize the education program for the girls, since it was somewhat abandoned because there were few religious....I tried to be everything for every one, with lots of love for those that were sick.”*<sup>299</sup>

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<sup>289</sup> Recuerdos y notas. Oración de la mañana. Respira en ella densa inspiración agustiniana e ignaciana

<sup>290</sup>It places us in Principle and Foundation of the Ignatian Exercises, which Mother Antonia appreciated so deeplyl.

Fundadora

<sup>291</sup> Recuerdos y Notas 5 y 6

<sup>292</sup> Morning Prayer

<sup>293</sup> Aut. 35

<sup>294</sup> Aut. 58-59, Aut 35

<sup>295</sup> Aut 19, 36

<sup>296</sup> Aut. 43

<sup>297</sup> Alvarez Espiritualidad 52

<sup>298</sup> Recuerdos y notas 8

<sup>299</sup> Recuerdos y notas 11-12

## 2. Evangelical Poverty as total trust in the Heavenly Father

This dimension of Evangelical Poverty is possibly the most important characteristic of Maria Antonia and without a doubt, the one most rooted in the Gospel. There are expressions of Evangelical Poverty in all of her writings, she speaks of “*the certitude of the power of God in his creatures*”<sup>300</sup> ... *I am certain that only what God wants gets done and not what men think ... I say this for the new ones coming to us, to learn how to hope in God against all hope*”<sup>301</sup> This certitude confirms her in her trusting surrender to God’s divine Providence and the protection of his “omnipotent hand.”

She feels called to witness the paternal providence that God has for those who live in trusting filiation. “*God our Lord ... has protected, guided and governed me since the moment His powerful hand took me out of the convent of Tarragona (which was my first heaven) until he brought me to this new world, Santiago, Cuba city, with so great security in the midst of so many and imminent risks that only your infinite power, my God could save my life.*”<sup>302</sup>

Not without suffering, the difficult experiences of life will confirm and reassure her of the Paternal Providence of God. When she receives the permission to profess, she experiences great affliction, pain, insecurity and abandonment not knowing what to do, whether to profess or to leave. This is possibly the moment of greatest darkness, uneasiness and interior division. She had placed her trust in Claret, but he leaves without giving her an answer. “*This was the only step I needed to get tranquil, but God our Lord who never willed me to put my trust in men but in His Divine Providence, permitted him not to answer and not to depart from Spain leaving me in a sea of confusion without having anything determined.*”<sup>303</sup> In this occasion like in others “*I had to count on him alone in so many situations, over the sea as upon the earth, he wanted to test my trust in his divine providence beforehand, and permitted me to go out without any other hope than to hope against all hope in His infinite providence*”<sup>304</sup>. Her directors finally determine that she leave the Company of Mary even without hearing from Claret and without knowing where to go and what to do. “*I was throwing myself in the hands of His Divine Providence How good it is to throw oneself in the hands of the Divine providence!*”<sup>305</sup> She perceives the lack of human support as a sign of being “*under the care of my heavenly father who had promised me so many times that he would be with me in everything.*”<sup>306</sup>

One of the most beautiful narrations that describe her total confidence in God, is her trip to Cuba. In spite of multiple difficulties that came about in this voyage, beginning with the problem in finding a ship and appropriate crew, “*I put all my trust in God sure and certain that I would always walk under his shade and, with so good a guardian, nobody would be able to offend me.*”<sup>307</sup> Overcoming with determination and confidence all the obstacles, on February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1852, they depart in the New Rosalia, “*armed with confidence in God, and sure that only He would be able to keep me safe with all those He had entrusted to me from so many and imminent dangers of a trip so frightful for women (and perhaps never seen with the same circumstances) I told myself: “The Lord is the defender of my life, will the most serious dangers be able to discourage me? This would be a great offense to the fatherly care of God has for his children whom he carries in the palm of his hands. With this most firm confidence we embarked, more certain and sure that if I would be accompanied by the most faithful escort. And what more faithful escort than the angels to whom God has commanded to keep you safe on the sea as on the earth? Grace was speaking this way with me. God put this*

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<sup>300</sup> Aut 35

<sup>301</sup> Aut 219

<sup>302</sup> Aut 93

<sup>303</sup> Aut 98

<sup>304</sup> Aut 107

<sup>305</sup> Aut 110, 116

<sup>306</sup> Aut. 139

<sup>307</sup> Aut 131

*trust in me since I began to serve him and I have always had my God before my eyes fully convinced that He is always at my side to uphold me*<sup>308</sup>.

*“O, My Lord and my God, in what way you are the most loving father and the most faithful friend! All left us in the hands of unknown people and even one had the courage to accompany us, but you my most loving father, carried us on the palm of your hand!”*<sup>309</sup> The arrived at Santiago de Cuba on May 26th, 1852.

It was not always spontaneous to live these contradictions in total confidence, but it is precisely in the moments of great difficulty, need, and confusion that she experiences how *“the Lord consoled me telling me that his Majesty is the steward of the poor*<sup>310</sup> *“Don’t you remember that I have all for you? Then it came to my mind how well this great, omnipotent Lord fulfills his words.”*<sup>311</sup> *“I would not get tired of crying in seeing the paternal care that God has of those that suffer a little hardships for his love...I am certain that God will take care of the Order as long as we preserve perfect Poverty.”*<sup>312</sup>

### 3. Evangelical Poverty as a way to follow Jesus, the poor one

In her writings there is an insistence on following Jesus in his poverty as a key to the Evangelical Poverty. The imitation of Christ’s poverty was integrally passed on as an ideal and it is reflected in the Constitutions. It is evident that since that first charismatic encounter with the Gospel, Antonia sought to conform her life with the poor Christ that she contemplated and with poor Mary, faithful disciple of the Lord. Conforming her life with Christ and Mary meant a constant attitude of filial love and generous self living to the divine will. This divine will was her great passion *“love for your most holy will, O Lord, makes me surrender to any sacrifice”*<sup>313</sup>, and she seeks it *“even in the most insignificant and domestic things”*<sup>314</sup>.

Like Jesus of Nazareth, her filial experience accompanies her and grounds her journey; it is the source of joy in the midst of her loneliness and abandonment from others. It is this abandonment that helps grow strong. *“My daughter, if one could be detached from oneself, then he would know what I do for him... this is the grace, which gives my soul more detachment not only from all the things of the earth and from me, but even from my own soul. And this humiliation that, in these occasions, I do not know what to tell Him: only to be ashamed and to shrink as if I would like to hide not to see the Majesty of God so humiliated.”*<sup>315</sup> The radical poverty to which she feels called must be translated into an imitation of Christ’s poverty and a communion with the poor, not to give them our own goods, but receiving from them their poverty,<sup>316</sup> *“...for me, I preferred to be poor with Christ than to have rents to give to the poor.”*<sup>317</sup>

Her effective and spiritual detachment reached such a point that in truth she can write Currius: *“As far as detachment from the goods of this world, I do not have, my Father, other goods in this world than the Poverty and Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, and even those I cannot glorify myself for, since I they belong to my Lord”*<sup>318</sup> *“... during her illness she suffered much interiorly with feelings of abandonment and inner sufferings imitating our Lord Jesus Christ whose life she always tried to imitate. Her last words were...I desire nothing but our Lord”*<sup>319</sup>

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<sup>308</sup> Aut 135

<sup>309</sup> Aut 140, 144-149, 152, 155, 158, 159

<sup>310</sup> D 3

<sup>311</sup> Aut. 90

<sup>312</sup> Diario 40

<sup>313</sup> Aut. 106

<sup>314</sup> Aut. 85

<sup>315</sup> Aut 91-92

<sup>316</sup> Nota de J.M. Lozano en la Autobiografía pag 150

<sup>317</sup> Aut. 221

<sup>318</sup> Carta a Currius, Carcagente 18 denoviembre de 1875

<sup>319</sup> Positio super vita , virtutibus et fama sanctitatis, Roma 1987, Testimonio de M. Gertudis Barril. pag.293

#### 4. Evangelical Poverty as inner self surrender

Evangelical Poverty is not achieved without emptying oneself and dispossession, in the same way that the experience of *kenosis* makes Jesus, the poor one, before God and men. Antonia Paris will also experience the pain of becoming “emptiness and liberation” for God’s action in her.

This inner dispossession to which God leads her made her suffer much. Some of the causes were related to the *detachment of the Archbishop*. She trusted stubbornly in the word that God spoke to her about how Claret would give her a hand in the foundation of the first houses of the order and Claret left everything in the hands of the Administrator.<sup>320</sup> Only great Evangelical Poverty can bring about such security when she faces the Administrator and tells him “...I was not afraid to die and that for whom I could die better than for my Lord Jesus Christ ... My only desire in coming to this land was to fulfill the Divine Will and I had to know this through my prelate. So, I told him to tell the Archbishop, to declare without any “*respeto humano*”(human concern) if in the presence of God, he knows that it was pleasant to Him to go on or if, because of the present event, he sees that it is God’s will to go back to Spain,...”<sup>321</sup>

**The death of Florentina.** “I felt such pain with this separation as if my soul would be separated from my body. How many things afflicted my soul at the same time. Her irremediable loss! My loneliness was complete!!! ...”<sup>322</sup>. In spite of this, the Lord that causes her suffering also comforts her. “God did not leave me abandoned to my pain for a long time. A few days after her death, bitterly complaining to His Divine Majesty (but respecting God’s designs and adoring the hand which wounded me) for having taken my sister who had abilities for everything and left me alone not being good at anything, Our Lord made it clearly known to me that this was expedient for His Glory. And so it happened as in the Apostolic College where all of them were rude and ignorant to make clear that all was the work of the Divine grace”<sup>323</sup>.

Another cause of suffering and purification was the purchase of the first house for the education of the girls, since she saw many difficulties in order to establish from the beginning the real poverty in the Institute: “the procurator got attracted to such a good a house that, for being so good, was not good for nuns, because a marble pavement does not fit the poor” sayal” (poor habit of rough cloth), and the house had been built for very refined people. I insisted in showing my disgust so that the house would not be bough because the Archbishop had told me, before he left for the visit, to buy a lot and the house would be built afterwards, and this was also my desire in order to make it according to the poverty God had told me.”<sup>324</sup> “I had much to fight with the Procurator in the purchase of this house because all the disagreement among us has been due to lack of understanding between our understandings of the practice of Holy Poverty...”<sup>325</sup>

Her struggle to be faithful to her vocation contrasted with the lack of understanding, especially coming from those who had been placed there by God to help her. She recognizes, “I, am an ignorant woman, who understands only what she has read in the Holy Gospel, but they, are very learned.”<sup>326</sup> Yet, she had to defend in obedience and trust God’s project. This tension and effort took many hours of prayer and suffering, but thanks to her Poverty and her constant openness to the heavenly Father, everything ended as God had manifested it. Other instruments of purification will be the rejection of the Plan of Reform of the Church; not seeing the Constitutions totally approved the division in Tremp, and the distancing of Msgr. Caixal.

### III. A “NEW ORDER” IN PRAXIS

#### 1. Evangelical Poverty, foundation of the “New Order”

The foundation originates, sustains and gives a building its consistency. It is the force that keeps it standing, the place where it rests, affirms itself, consolidates itself...Poverty is “the mother” that engenders us and

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<sup>320</sup> Aut 173- 174, 175 y 176

<sup>321</sup> Aut 177

<sup>322</sup> Aut 180

<sup>323</sup> Aut. 181-182

<sup>324</sup> Aut 72

<sup>325</sup> Aut 191

<sup>326</sup> Aut. 191

enlightens the whole Gospel. Evangelical Poverty should be all of that for the Congregation. We are not talking about any kind of poverty. It is Poverty with capital letters, Holy Poverty, our Holy Mother Poverty.

### A. Evangelical Poverty as a way to live the Gospel radically

The motivation that supports Antonia Paris' radical poverty is simple and profoundly biblical. It speaks of identification with the Gospel as well as with Christ Jesus. They are the same, since Jesus Christ is the incarnate Gospel, and he invites us to measure our work with the compass of the Gospel.<sup>327</sup> *"Since the book of the holy Gospels was read to me, I made every effort to conform my life with the life of our Lord and his Blessed Mother."*<sup>328</sup>

For our Founders, the only reason to live in Evangelical Poverty resides in the discipleship of Jesus: Since he became poor to enrich us with his poverty, we must become poor for Him, so that with his richness we may be able to enrich our brothers and sisters.

*"This virtue should be so precious that it was the first one that the Most Holy Humanity of Our Lord Jesus Christ practiced, being ..., poorer than all the poor in the world. Oh poverty of my God, who could inherit your riches! Christ Our Lord taught us all the virtues in a heroic degree because it was God's own virtue, but it seems that he wanted to inculcate Holy Poverty in a particular way (because she was his inseparable companion. He is born very poor, lives in utmost poverty and dies in extreme necessity), as the foundation of evangelical life."*<sup>329</sup>

The Gospel is valid for all times and situations and **the Gospel should always be the rule of the Church.** *"No one excuse himself because of the impossibility and corruption of customs or the times, because God our Lord has all times present and has not given us more than one Holy Gospel."*<sup>330</sup>

Our Foundress understood clearly that the commandment of love synthesizes the Gospel: to live the Gospel is to live in charity. *"...I had nobody to observe it, because there is no one who keeps the precept of charity"*<sup>331</sup> *"I especially recommend Charity among you because that is the essence of Evangelical perfection and all virtues are included in it."*<sup>332</sup> But she highlights Evangelical Poverty in a special way.

The internal incoherence are the greatest ills of the Church and the cause of the rest of its ills: *"greed."*<sup>333</sup> *"Oh greed of humankind which makes you trample the most holy and divine laws. Oh ambitious vanity of the Church's children",*<sup>334</sup> *"Greed has destroyed religion. Greed has its foot on it and does not allow it to breathe."*<sup>335</sup>, *"this sin of greed which has been the destructive wolf that has torn to pieces the holy Church, little by little destroying the Religious Orders particularly."*<sup>336</sup>

Experience has taught her that human prudence, which tries to reach a compromise between God and the world, leads to a lack of generosity and self living and lukewarm and superficial piety, which settles for affective devotions, but is not concerned with living according to the commandments. The lack of poverty, vanity, ambition, greed, attachment to possessions, etc. keeps us away from the ideal and evangelical vocation to which we are called. In contemplating the life of our Lord, she finds her magnet and foundation. She sees the different moments of Jesus' life as a continuous act of Poverty marked by two climatic moments that move

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<sup>327</sup> PR 53

<sup>328</sup> Carta a Mons. Orberá Sin fecha pero posterior a 26 del 8 de 1879 pues habla de Caxail com difunto. Epistolario Maria Antonia París Carta 293

<sup>329</sup> PR 47-48

<sup>330</sup> PR 8

<sup>331</sup> Aut. 27

<sup>332</sup> Carta a la comunidad de Carcagente, día de la Santa Cruz de setiembre de 1880

<sup>333</sup> PR 51

<sup>334</sup> PR 50

<sup>335</sup> PR 22, 49

<sup>336</sup> PR 81

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her deeply: **Bethlehem and Calvary:** *“this holy virtue of poverty should be inscribed in our hearts as the first lesson (Bethlehem) and last will (the cross) of our adorable redeemer and his Blessed Mother.”*<sup>337</sup>

In the cave of Bethlehem she finds all of God’s tenderness, a God who becomes small to the extreme to come near to us: *“...for love has pulled out of heaven God himself! The love of a God made man has taught us its exact observance. From the cave of Bethlehem with his tender cry as a newborn child, he reads to us the first lesson.”*<sup>338</sup> *“With what dress does this great Lord, to whom the heavens and the earth belong, present himself to teach us the observance of the Divine Commandments? ... Holy Poverty, as you see, Our Divine Master places it as the foundation of evangelical life.”*<sup>339</sup>.

María Antonia knew that she could not identify herself with the crucified Christ without experiencing herself the cross: *“Here our Lord made known to me that great tribulations awaited me...spiritual desolation; but in all, our Divine Majesty would give me the grace embraced to the Holy Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*<sup>340</sup>. She lived with great joy the deprivations, experiences of scarcity and all kinds of difficulties through which God led her to a crucifixion, although not a bodily one. *“All I desire and long for is to live crucified with Christ Crucified.”*<sup>341</sup> She feels, like St. Paul would say, that Christ unites her to his suffering to complete what is lacking in his Passion. *“The Lord told me that with those sufferings, he was letting me share in his sufferings and the agony he had experienced in the torments of the Cross...”*<sup>342</sup>.

She constantly prayed to Christ in the cross and in him found strength and inspiration. According to her, the best way to identify with Jesus is through obedience; it is not through the sacrifices or the work that we choose, but embracing what God wants for each one. *“See how I died to teach all creatures how to obey...I became obedient until death and death on the cross.”*<sup>343</sup>.

Other biblical texts in which our Mother Foundress fundamentals Evangelical Poverty are texts which she quotes in several places; first of all, the Beatitudes and the passage of the rich young man. The Beatitudes constitute the new program of the Kingdom; the poor are declared “happy” in eight different ways, since the Kingdom of God is present in them as gift and grace of God. The Beatitudes are the dynamism that transforms all of life. It presents happiness in a paradoxical way, a new order and values of the Kingdom: the poor, the meek, the afflicted, the persecuted... María Antonia reinterprets the first beatitude using her own experience, and reflecting on the greatness of poverty in the message of Christ she says: *“so great is this virtue that the Lord placed it as the first one in that beautiful sermon on the mount in which he said: Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”*<sup>344</sup>

She bases the exigencies of those who profess evangelical counsels on the text of the rich young man.<sup>345</sup> Through this text, Antonia keenly unmask some theories on poverty that are not in line with evangelical radicality and are characteristic of the worldly spirit: *“saying that poverty does not consist of not having goods or riches or any other thing, but in having the heart detached from it...His Majesty says that if they pay attention to those words: blessed are the poor in spirit because theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven, to pay attention to the words he responds to the young man who asked him what to do to be perfect: Sell what you have, give it to the poor and follow me. Notice that he did not tell him detach your heart from riches and follow me, but: sell your riches or goods, give them to the poor and follow me.”*<sup>346</sup>. In the Constitutions she explains that God may ask all Christians to have their hearts detached, *“but when we are referring to*

<sup>337</sup> Constituciones de 1869 Tratado III, Cap. 4, n. 11)

<sup>338</sup> PR 66

<sup>339</sup> PR 67

<sup>340</sup> Aut. 234

<sup>341</sup> Relación a Caixal 15

<sup>342</sup> Segunda Serie de Recuerdos y Notas 1

<sup>343</sup> D 8. Constituciones 1869. Tratado I, Cap. 2, nn 2 y 3

<sup>344</sup> Constituciones 1869 Tratado I, Cap. 2, n. 1

<sup>345</sup> Mc. 10, 21; Lc. 18, 18-27; Mt. 19, 16

<sup>346</sup> PR 49



*perfection or the fulfillment of the divine counsels...it does not say detach your hearts of all possessions, but clearly 'sell all you have and give it to the poor, then come follow me... you should take to heart the divine words that our Savior said to the young man that wanted to be perfect...In this way no one can try to relax the demands of Holy Poverty even one bit, sponsoring abuses with the words of Sacred Scripture wrongly applied.' "*<sup>347</sup>

### **B. Evangelical Poverty as the “foundation-heart” of the new Apostles.”**

Poverty is the foundation of our Institute, because it is the foundation of all Religious Life; our Foundress expresses this in the Plan for the Renewal of the Church.<sup>348</sup> Inspired by God, Maria Antonia asked for a **poverty that is real and effective** in contrast with the prevailing practice and doctrine on poverty. For her, Evangelical Poverty is the synthesis of what it means to live the Gospel. Poverty is a profound attitude, but it is also real, concrete, and incarnated in a lifestyle. The foundation without income from interest and dowries, and all the other concrete elements in daily life which are expressed in the Constitutions come from living this poverty.

The Religious Life which hoards material goods and justifies this with a doctrine of spiritual poverty, according to which it is not poverty which matters but the *mere detachment* of the heart (a detachment which does not influence or have concrete consequences in daily life), is not truly poor. Material poverty is the sign of the interior transformation that takes place in a person through total identification with the poor Christ... “...if being poor was being childish, Our Lord would not have chosen to be born and live his entire life in a poor house. Moreover, in these times people’s concept of our holy religion has gone down so much that to now give it its value and esteem, it is necessary to bring it up by where it has come down, first persuading through the eyes rather than through the ears”<sup>349</sup>.

## **2. Difficulties for specifying Evangelical Poverty in the legislation of the “New Order”: Founding without money gained from rentals, interest or dowries**

Specifying real Poverty in the legislation, including the **money gained from interest and dowries** of the nuns, was a great source of setbacks in the process of the foundation. Maria Antonia prayed incessantly “to the Lord that He would clarify how it should be understood...that they would have no money earned through interest nor possessions...when I wrote it, I understood that the Lord wanted a **complete abandonment to Divine Providence** and that is why he wanted it written in the Rules, beyond that, the will of the donor was up to God’s Providence.”<sup>350</sup>

The papal brief which authorized the foundation and the sisters’ profession of vows required that the monastery had sufficient and secure **rents** (income from interest) according to the established Church laws, and therefore the this was an obstacle “because the Lord, God had told me that the foundation had to be without rents”<sup>351</sup> and she was willing to postpone her profession until she obtained the approval of the strict effective poverty according to God’s will.<sup>352</sup> Claret was trying to find a way to combine obedience to the Pope’s instructions with the original inspiration of the Institute. He would offer concrete solutions, but for Antonia, the nun’s sustenance was guaranteed through teaching and manual labor.<sup>353</sup>

Even though this was the greatest obstacle for the final approval of the Constitutions, there was never a doubt that it was an essential part of the charism. This is why Antonia placed in the Constitutions her ideal of poverty: radical renouncement of all possessions and to live exclusively from one’s work.<sup>354</sup> Poverty for her and the new candidates was a joyful experience of the marvels that God accomplishes in those that trust in Him. This experience was the basis on which Claret defended poverty, even though he was aware that it was against the

<sup>347</sup> Cont. 1869 Trat. IV, Cap. 9, Art. 3, n 8-10

<sup>348</sup> PR 47-48

<sup>349</sup> PR 18

<sup>350</sup> D. 20. PR 68

<sup>351</sup> Aut. 212

<sup>352</sup> Aut. 213, 214

<sup>353</sup> Aut. 222, 224

<sup>354</sup> Reglas Fundamentales 1860. n. 4

existing civil and church laws. He considered that God was making an exception and he told M. Paris: “*in respect to holy poverty, I know very well what is commanded by the sacred canons of the Church; and what is mandated by the laws of the Kingdom (Spain?), but this is for the common and ordinary situations, and I find it well. But what happens with us is an exceptional case. God wants it and I will prove it with two simple reasons: the first one is that experience has shown, as you can see, that you have not lacked anything and will not lack anything in the future if you place your trust in God; the second reason is that God wants a public testimony of poverty, because, sadly, nowadays there is more trust placed on money than on God. I will only say that however it is done, the point is that holy poverty, which is the virtue so loved by Jesus and Mary, should reign in and through everything.*”<sup>355</sup>

### 3. Evangelical Poverty in the Original Constitutions

There is no writing by Maria Antonia in which we do not find reflections and experiences about Evangelical Poverty, but it is in the Constitutions where she presents it a key aspect of the order. This ideal of our Founders remained intangible while they were alive and they always hoped Rome would approve it since it was nothing more than living the Gospel, an endeavor which Maria Antonia continued after Claret’s death: “I should earnestly tell your reverence that the principal foundation of our Institute is perfect, effective poverty, sustaining ourselves through the work of our hands...”<sup>356</sup>

There are two distinguishable parts in the *original Constitutions of our Institute*<sup>357</sup>: the Aim and Goal of the Order and the Rules. The Aim and Goal is the nucleus of the charism: “*The entire perfection of our Institute is contained in the Aim and Goal*”<sup>358</sup> and the Rules are the concretization of the content of the Aim and Goal.

The term poverty does not appear in the text of the Aim and Goal. However, the entire text is a compendium of the demands of poverty: **an identification with Christ who is Poor**. This synthetic formula condenses an entire mode of being, living, and acting: *before God*-the glory of God as supreme aspiration and source of all good; *before oneself*-freedom from all earthly bonds by means of a perfect observance of the evangelical Counsels and other Christian virtues; and *before others*-complete giving of oneself to the service of other via apostolate.<sup>359</sup>

As the Apostles learned evangelical perfection by contemplating the Lord’s poverty, so must we **contemplate Jesus** to learn to be poor: “*Look my daughters and look again to these first and last lessons and you will see how they comprise the essence of evangelical perfection; the apostles were schooled in them and turned out so wise that their doctrine penetrated the most obstinate hearts, so much so, that they were able to set the whole world ablaze.*”<sup>360</sup>

To follow this path entails ascetic demands that keep us in the dynamics of the Paschal Mystery: *Our form and manner of life requires that all those persons who wish to be enrolled in it should be crucified to all things of the world. Our Institute also requires that its daughters be stripped of all their inordinate affections and passions, so that they may be able to follow in the footsteps of Christ our highest good. It requires them to die to themselves in order to live for justice and holiness alone.*”<sup>361</sup>  
Our Foundress identified so much with this ideal that she did not have any goods besides **poverty and the Cross of the Lord**.

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<sup>355</sup> Carta a la M. París del 30 de enero de 1862

<sup>356</sup> EMP n. 367. Carta a D. S. Rongier 8 de marzo de 1882

<sup>357</sup> Nos referimos a las Constituciones que se redactaron y rigieron el Instituto en vida de la Madre, de las cuales se conservan las de 1862, que son un extracto de las de 1857, (cuyo texto al igual que el anterior que sirvió de base para la redacción, originales de la Fundadora, se han extraviado), las de 1869, que merecieron el Decreto de Alabanza de Roma, y las de 1870. Entre estas últimas hay muy poca diferencia

<sup>358</sup> EMP n. 240. A M. Luisa de San Pablo, priora de Reus.

<sup>359</sup> Álvarez, J. Espiritualidad Misioneras Claretianas, pag. 30, Blanco y Fin Constituciones 1869

<sup>360</sup> Cnst. 1869. Trat. I, Cap. 2, n. 3, Cnst 1869 Trat. I cap. 2. n.4

<sup>361</sup> Blanco y Fin Const. 1869

It is the evangelical attitude of poverty as one's foundation that makes the apostolate effective; without poverty "*all her works will be fruitless*"<sup>362</sup> because poverty is "*like the master key to introduce in people's hearts the perfect practice of the Holy Law of the Lord.*"<sup>363</sup>

The ordinances concerning poverty will constitute "*the first, fundamental and all around necessary rule*" of the Institute.<sup>364</sup> The first rule of the **Constitutions**, in the chapter on Evangelical Poverty, is the **total renouncement of all possessions**. According to it, none of the communities nor the order in general "*will have properties, income from interest nor any possessions of any kind, not even the actual convents*"<sup>365</sup> and we will rely on what divine Providence provides through donations given freely, since "*in our houses we cannot ask for donations*"<sup>366</sup> nor for payment "*for the work of our hands.*"<sup>367</sup>

#### 4. Important aspects in the practice of Evangelical Poverty

##### A. Work as a means of subsistence

It is clear, even before the foundation, that both founders desired sustenance via work.

"*Claret was pleased to answer my letter saying that we could go already, that we would be most welcome. That, although at the moment, he could not found a monastery, we could eat by working ...*"<sup>368</sup> Our Foundress herself tells us how God responded to that desire of working so as not to be a burden for anyone: "*God...soon provided us with work to earn our living with the sweat of our brow without bothering anybody else.*"<sup>369</sup>

The religious of this Order **will spend their time in two essential things**: 1) in prayer and contemplating the Gospel and 2) in work. It is interesting how our Foundress differentiates manual labor, as a means of sustaining ourselves, from education, a free apostolic action. "*They will be occupied in the exercise of 1) contemplation of the Holy Law of the Lord...2) in manual labor to earn their bread through their own efforts and 3) teaching young women with total dedication and fervor.*"<sup>370</sup> This distinction is enlightening for us in the historical moment in which we live.

**What is gained from work will be used for what is necessary.** What is obtained should be of good quality, "but should be of what is most ordinarily found in the country."<sup>371</sup> "In the houses where one can do with a thing that works, it is not necessary to have two of that thing...it is better to experience need and shortage in one or many things than for there to be anything superfluous."<sup>372</sup> Do not fear ever lacking the necessary; he who said: seek first the kingdom of heaven and its righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you, has also said that heaven and earth will cease to exist before his words fail to be fulfilled."<sup>373</sup>

**She does not want her nuns to lack what is necessary.** On the contrary, the mother prioress ought to "*make every effort to provide for the material needs of her daughters, making sure that they don't lack anything that is necessary*".<sup>374</sup> But, they ought to be very cautious so as not to forget that "as our wealth is in God's treasures,

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<sup>362</sup> PR 19

<sup>363</sup> Const. 1869. Trat. I, Cap. 2, n 84

<sup>364</sup> Const. 1869 Trat I, Cap. 2I, n. 2-4

<sup>365</sup> Const. 1869, Trat. I, Cap. 2, n. 5

<sup>366</sup> Const. 1869, Trat I, Cap. 34, n. 23

<sup>367</sup> Const. 1869, Trat. I, Cap.2, n. 7

<sup>368</sup> Aut. 126

<sup>369</sup> Aut 165

<sup>370</sup> Const. 1869, Trat I, Cap. 19, n. 2

<sup>371</sup> Const. 1869, Trat. I, Cap. 2, n. 10

<sup>372</sup> Const. 1869, Trat. I, Cap. 2, n. 10

<sup>373</sup> Const. 1869, Trat. IV, Cap. 9, art. 2<sup>a</sup> n. 38

<sup>374</sup> Const. 1869, Trat. I, Cap. 24 n.12

our subsistence depends even more on our heavenly Father”<sup>375</sup>, keeping in mind that “greed is an enemy that goes directly against our good mother, Holy Poverty...It is true that greed disguised as trying to secure what is necessary has exiled evangelical poverty from convents and therefore has destroyed and destroys our holy religion. Oh, what affliction to see the body of our holy Mother the Church destroyed by the same arms with which our first fathers founded it!”<sup>376</sup>

In the section on formation, she says something which we could very well apply to all the sisters today. *“This capital enemy of Holy Poverty leads superiors to neglect giving the young sisters what they need; and thus obliges them to engage in relationships with family members or friends, even strangers, to provide for their needs; and since our nature is so inclined to convenience, it does not have enough with what is necessary, but thinks of what may be lacking and in this totally upsets God’s plan for that soul.”*<sup>377</sup> The concern for what we may need takes God’s place and creates idols, since **from poverty springs abandonment in the Father’s providence.**

We will work diligently. *“Our Lord commands that we earn the food we eat,”*<sup>378</sup> but not in such a way that it interferes with *“the continuous contemplation of the Holy Law of the Lord; because the bread of the just depends more on divine providence than on our work”*.<sup>379</sup> *“They will not place a price on the work of their hands in imitation of the Blessed Mother...”*<sup>380</sup>

#### a. Work “to attend to the poor’s needs” and apostolic dimension

Work also has the socio-apostolic dimension: *“They ought to work for their brothers and sisters, their neighbors...”*<sup>381</sup> and always with *“open hands towards all the poor who in the name of the Lord himself ask for help; living generously according to the dispositions of the Mother Prioress...”*<sup>382</sup> Furthermore, *“...on the last month of the year...if there is anything left over, it should be given to the poor, especially to help young ladies in need...it should never be allowed that in our convents the money earned from interest be increased at the expense of the poor of Jesus Christ”*<sup>383</sup> because it justly belongs to them.<sup>384</sup> It is very clear that poverty is not founded in austerity, nor asceticism, nor in saving, but in following Jesus and his Apostles and it has a clearly testimonial and apostolic dimension. Living poverty is intrinsically **united with mission.**

The details about how to live Poverty in the different responsibilities and individuals that will carry them out appears in the chapter of the Administrator or Treasurer: *“Follow with fidelity the rules of holy religious Poverty if you want to be blessed”*<sup>385</sup>; with great wisdom she also says: *“Be careful not to be too economical to the detriment of the sisters, because an indiscrete economy causes great harm in the monasteries of the poor of Jesus Christ and causes much more harm to their spirits because this vice does not stop until it engenders a secret greed that impedes that total abandonment that God wants from his spouses, in the hands of his paternal Providence.”*<sup>386</sup>

#### b. Work and sharing goods in the Order

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<sup>375</sup> Const. 1869, Trat. IV, Cap. 9, art. 1<sup>a</sup> n. 8. Aut. 214

<sup>376</sup> Const. 1869, Trat III, Cap. 5, nn. 16-17

<sup>377</sup> Const. 1869, Trat. III, Cap. 5, n. 12

<sup>378</sup> PR 74

<sup>379</sup> Const. 1869, Trat. I, Cap. 2, n. 21

<sup>380</sup> Const. 1869, Trat. I, Cap. 2, n. 21

<sup>381</sup> Const. 1869, Trat. I, Cap. 2, n. 21

<sup>382</sup> Const. 1869, Trat. I, Cap. 34, n. 24

<sup>383</sup> Const. 1869, Trat. I, Cap. 34, n. 26

<sup>384</sup> PR 34

<sup>385</sup> Const. 1869, Trat. I, Cap. 34, n. 14

<sup>386</sup> Const. 1869, Trat. I, Cap. 34, n. 22

The fruit of our work ought to be **shared with other houses of the Order**. “*The First Mother*<sup>387</sup> will know the needs of her whole family and will have donations distributed...so that as members of the same body all equally enjoy the goods and ills of the others.”<sup>388</sup> It is the responsibility of the First Mother to make charity effective: “...she will ensure that that all temporal goods are held in common by the whole order, in any place where they are, to preserve charity which is so recommended by Jesus Christ himself to his dear Apostles...”<sup>389</sup> Poverty is particularly **united with charity**.

In line **with this collective poverty**, individual demands are absolute. “The religious should *understand well that under no pretext or excuse can they borrow, take or freely dispose of any temporal good of the convent, even it seems minimal, without permission from the Prioress.*”<sup>390</sup> The religious “*should rest in the arms of their Mother, Holy Poverty. In poverty, they should live. In her they should eat. With her they should dress. And all their lives they should long for her.*”<sup>391</sup>

### c. Balance between work and contemplation

The demands of **work should never make us lose the meaning of contemplating the Gospel**. In labors and work...seek to be diligent in your efforts, but not with such dedication that it interferes with “*the continuous contemplation of the Holy Law of the Lord; because the bread of the just depends more on divine providence than on our work*”.<sup>392</sup>

### B. Public witness of poverty

Poverty should not be limited to an inner experience, but we should give a public witness of it. We need to live in such a way that it is “visible” in all our external manifestations: dress, things we use, etc. She places a special emphasis on the buildings, since they are the most visible; she is concerned with the credibility of the mission given by the visible witness of poverty: “*when you start building a convent, the first stone should be Holy Poverty, upon which the whole building should rest and be constructed...*” “*All the splendor of our houses should consist of the simplicity and religious poverty of those who dwell in them.*”<sup>393</sup>

The buildings should be solid, “*ornamented with the true spirit of Holy Poverty, which is the distinctive character of the new Order, so that at first sight the splendor of the virtue of evangelical Poverty is evident and religious life continues to have a good reputation among lay people.*”<sup>394</sup>

“***Mi aim in founding this order is to give a public witness in favor of evangelical poverty.***”<sup>395</sup>

In spite of the meticulousness of the Rules in explaining concrete forms of living poverty, she is very aware of the individual responsibility of each of the sisters and appeals to this responsibility to give a response that is faithful and free. Speaking to the sister responsible for providing goods for individual use (ropera), she says: “*...she ought to think that each one ought to respond to Holy Poverty according to her conscience.*”<sup>396</sup>

### C. Importance of Formation in Evangelical Poverty

Our Foundress manifests a great **insistence in the need for formation** in order to live Evangelical Poverty. She considers it very important to discern what motivates a young person to Religious Life and presents them

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<sup>387</sup> This was her term for what today would be Mother General.

<sup>388</sup> Const. 1869, Trat. I, Cap. 1, n. 10

<sup>389</sup> Const. 1869, Trat I, Cap. 1, n. 13

<sup>390</sup> Const. 1869, Trat. I, Cap. 2, n. 14

<sup>391</sup> Const. Trat. III, Cap. 5, n. 32

<sup>392</sup> Const. 1869, Trat. I, Cap. 2, n. 22

<sup>393</sup> Const. 1869, Trat. IV, Cap 10, nn 4, 3

<sup>394</sup> D. 82

<sup>395</sup> D. 82

<sup>396</sup> Const. 1869, Trat. I, Cap. 32, n. 8

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with the demands “When a young woman asks to wear our holy habit, do not admit her easily without examining well what motivates her...whether she seeks only to live crucified with Christ, without desiring anything else but to work continuously for the glory of his Divine Majesty, suffering hunger, thirst and the lack of everything in imitation of Jesus Christ whom she seeks to be like.”<sup>397</sup>. Keeping in mind the cultural distance, we should learn from her when doing vocation ministry.

She asks for attention to new vocations to make the journey in Consecrated Life easier for them. “They must understand also...that in religious life they find a mother filled with love, always ready to respond to needs of her daughters...so that unconcerned with themselves, they can fly more freely to reach perfection”...<sup>398</sup> She asks the Formators from the beginning “to form them detached from all temporal things, so that they live only for God, depending only on his paternal Providence, with full certitude that with this loving Father they will lack nothing...until they are totally abandoned in the hands of God our Lord.”<sup>399</sup>

She desires that they be formed in theological virtues: “Faith will make them walk without stumbling in the darkness and night of ignorance; hope will teach them to live always abandoned in the arms of Divine Providence, without any other concern besides personal sanctification, and charity will lead them to initiate the most arduous and perfect missions and enkindle in them great desire to work for the sanctification of others.”<sup>400</sup> “She will try to train them and slowly introduce them in the practice of Holy Poverty.” But “this she should do with such salt and prudence that it is not annoying... but rather, helps them impress in their hearts the virtue of Holy Poverty.”<sup>401</sup>

## WHAT EVANGELICAL POVERTY CALLS US FOR

### 1. Evangelical Poverty: To know myself. The truth shall make us “poor” and free.

*Evangelical Poverty is the attitude that draws us nearer to God with trusting allegiance*, aware of how small we are, but knowing in faith, that we exist because of God’s gratuitous love. This poverty makes knowledge of oneself possible: “**That I may know you and know myself.**” “Who am I and who are you, Lord? To know who I really am, what I have, where I come from, where I am going, what I can do on my own... To be aware of our own smallness and to accept it, trusting in God by means of faith, makes us experience that the Lord sustains the poor, enlightens those who are incapable, strengthens the weak, comforts those who suffer, gives joy to the sad...Salvation, security, and stability come from listening to God and trusting in Him, renouncing other voices and not placing our trust elsewhere. Let us contemplate this **mystery**, silencing the voices that dazzle and confuse us. Let us learn to turn off the television, close the newspaper, and distance ourselves from our business. Otherwise, we will remain trapped in idols, supporting ourselves with realities that are not our author, creator, nor Father. The prophet warns us of the temptation of pride and self-sufficiency: “If you will not believe, surely you shall not be established” (Is 7:9)

God is the only Creator, the “giver of life.” Our availability for service is founded in the awareness of our “donated” reality and in the experience of our own personal poverty: to return with my service all that I have received and am. To be human is a gift which is completed in our everyday tasks; it is a gift which is realized by giving of ourselves. When, with a heart which knows itself to be needy and poor, we turn to our God, Creator and Giver of all, knowing that the heart’s origin and fullness are in Him, we walk in Evangelical Poverty, making all that we have and are through Him, available to His will. Jesus invites us to live in the truth, conscious of who we are before God and others.

### 2. To follow Jesus “the poor one” gives meaning to Evangelical Poverty

<sup>397</sup> Const. 1869, Trat. III, Cap.1, nn. 1, 5

<sup>398</sup> Const. 1869, Trat. III, cap. 5, n. 12

<sup>399</sup> Const. 1869, Trat. III, Cap. 5, n. 13

<sup>400</sup> Const. 1869, Trat. III, Cap. 5, n. 20

<sup>401</sup> Const. 1869, Trat. III, Cap. 5, nn. 31-32

The theme of Poverty, from one perspective or other, is found throughout the whole Bible. In the Bible, material poverty is an evil in itself and is contrary to God's plan. God himself teaches us that poverty is an evil which we have to fight against. For this reason, in Exodus, he is the one who **hears** the cry of the poor, **sees** their affliction, **knows** their suffering, and comes **down to deliver** them (Ex 3:7-8). *Concern for the poor* runs as a current of compassion throughout the whole Bible, and clearly expresses God's condemnation of the rich who have no mercy or who fail to assist the poor.

In Israel's history we see that in the period of splendor, goods were considered a blessing and a sign of God's benevolence. Yet, they also experienced that little by little they centered themselves on the goods themselves and distanced themselves from the *giver* of these gifts and ended up falling into all types of idolatries. However, in time of catastrophes, when the temple, the Monarchy, and well-being disappeared, and even in exile, Israel, poor among the nations, discovered that amidst tribulation and poverty, it had a Rock, a Good, a Defender: God himself. It is there where Israel discovers God as its utmost good, its only richness...and **discovers poverty as a great religious value, as a privileged situation to experience God as richness**. This atmosphere nourished the life of "Yahweh's poor." It is in this atmosphere that Joseph, Mary and Jesus grew up.

### I. The Father: origin and meaning of Jesus' poverty

Jesus, "the poor one," teaches us the true meaning of earthly goods and the attitude we should have towards them. Above all, it is Jesus' life, style and spirit that are key to our understanding of Evangelical Poverty. Jesus grows up as a laborer in an insignificant and ignored town. When the time for ministry comes, he chooses itinerant preaching, a lifestyle that does not correspond to the rabbis of the time. **He lives listening to the Father within his heart and from there discovers the "voice of the Father" in reality.**

To follow Jesus means to face an existence characterized by poverty and devoid of human securities. The Master's disciples should not settle themselves comfortably in this world. True disciples are those who learn the lesson living as the Master.

Jesus lived fully accepting his human condition, including weaknesses, needs, hunger, thirst, sickness, tiredness...Jesus lived insecurity as those who are deprived of material goods do, but the man, Jesus of Nazareth, founded his life on a **relationship of filial obedience to the Father**. From the rock of this filial relationship, Jesus lived fragmentation, darkness, tentativeness, and limitations; from this rock, he also overcame the temptation of all evil by living an existence in emptiness, humility, poverty, solidarity, and freedom (Phil 2:8).

### II. Evangelical Poverty: trustful and joyful filiation and availability

Jesus lived his poverty in many ways. We point out two which are key and resonate in our Founders: **a trustful filiation, and consequently, availability.**

For Jesus, to be the Son of God means to be a man among men; vulnerable; poor, not using his power; not imposing himself through extraordinary means; not realizing forceful actions. Positively, it means **to expect everything from God, and trust in the fidelity of God's Word**. The significance of Jesus' poverty is the manifestation that **nobody can substitute the Father**; nobody can take his place because salvation comes from God alone. Only one is the Good of the person: the Father of All. Jesus helps us to expose the danger of wealth as a source of pride. Abundance of wealth kills faith and drags lack of faith, because to put one's trust in the goods of this world blinds us and separates us from trust in the living God.

Jesus profoundly experiences himself as **SON**. His whole being is in relation with the FATHER. His whole living, doing and teaching are centered and developed in this relationship. Jesus knows himself called to be Son and to teach us to be the same. He does not have any programs or plans. His living is an emptying of self and openness to the Father. He is always willing to respond to the Father's intervention in his life through circumstances, people, questions, expectations, petitions. Above all, he perceives the Father's will in the needs of people: the sick, the sorrowful, the excluded, and the marginalized. His life was determined not by needs, but in the service of others. He emptied himself of all plans, interests, and personal goals, and lived with total

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openness, allowing himself to be guided by the Spirit. Living as the poor is how he found all types of misery and saw himself “obliged” to do miracles, so that by his poverty we might become rich (2 Cor 8:9).

When we decide **to follow Christ**, we should renounce our own plan/project to put ourselves at the service of God’s plan/project: **the Kingdom**. We should do this as Jesus, **knowing ourselves to be daughters and allowing the Spirit to make us empty/open and available for God’s plan**. This is what Evangelical Poverty means.

Because of this, the first form of poverty for a follower of Jesus, the Apostle, is to **renounce all personal plans**, allow oneself to let go of all perspective, and allow oneself to be guided by him. Poverty is to empty ourselves of ourselves, of our aspirations, our demands, our “rights,” our plans, and our projects to make space for God and God’s projects, demands, and plans. The poor person does not take ownership of the fruits of her works. She leaves this in God’s hands, and allows God’s power to act through her emptiness and availability.

We can evidently see Jesus of Nazareth’s emptying and poverty **in Bethlehem and in Calvary**. These have been the poles of Jesus’ life that in a special way have drawn the contemplative attention of the true followers of the Lord. Like Paul (Gal 6:14), Maria Antonia also received the gift of the wisdom of the cross: “...*I spoke to you from the Cross, because the Cross is my throne and one goes to the Kingdom through the Cross.*”<sup>402</sup>

### c. The Evangelical Poverty of Mary of Nazareth

In our founders we always see Mary of Nazareth with Jesus, her Son, as the one listening to the Word, the Father’s favorite daughter. God, the **Lord of history**, found in her a faithful servant, an instrument chosen to carry out the plan of salvation by means of living the Gospel in poverty, a living which the members of the new Order must learn by contemplating the moments in which Jesus and his Mother meet, even visibly, in close relationship: **Bethlehem and the Cross**. It is precisely in the chapter on poverty where our Foundress says that all persons who live in this family ought “to work to attain the virtues of Mary Most Holy...especially her laborious life...her poverty so great that being the queen of heaven and earth she wanted to earn a living through the work of her most holy hands, taking on the sentence that God our Lord gave our first fathers.”<sup>403</sup>

No creature has loved the Lord as much as Mary of Nazareth. She perceived God as her only reality and was fully available for his plans. For her, the Lord was the only richness. She opens herself completely to the riches of the kingdom; the handmaid of the Lord who becomes queen, the poor one who is called “full of grace.” Mary knows that all strength comes from the Lord, “who has shown strength with his arm and done great things.” Nobody has seen God in the brothers of her Son as she did; and no one, besides Mary, has engendered the new people of God in Calvary.

Mary recognizes **God as the success of her life**. She receives God’s gifts and returns them to God in praise and thanksgiving. In Her, all who are poor for the kingdom see the fecundity of a life spent listening and acting, oriented towards loving the Omnipotent with all the strength received from Him.

### d. "Go, sell what you have, give it to the poor and then, come and follow me"

The texts about the “rich young man,” have always been a key text as an invitation to follow Jesus. “Go, sell what you have, give it to the poor and you will have a treasure in heaven. Then, come and follow me”. (Mk 10, 17-22; Mt 19, 16, Lk 18,18). María Antonia sees in this text the key to understanding the real and effective Evangelical Poverty.

Poverty is a form of life that concerns not only the possession of things, but everything that gives us a sense of security. The possession of something, the attachment to something, may it be external or interior, is an obstacle for God to give himself to us, to fill our hearts up with His goodness. That’s why: “go, sell and give”, because “you cannot serve two lords”: God and material things... Wealth, although gained honestly and administered honestly, may be a source of temptation and worries and then, we always have the risk of putting

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<sup>402</sup> D. 38

<sup>403</sup> Const. 1869, Trat. I, Cap. 2, n 16



our trust on it. Too easily we count on it, and we place in it our security, and when we get "wrapped up" in it, we lose the horizon and the vision of the true riches.

Our renunciation to everything will only be possible from the understanding of Jesus' mystery, how "He became poor"; the contemplation of his radical impoverishment, of his long journey to self emptying, from being Son of God to being the carpenter's son. We need to become free of all superfluous things and to make space to trust in the action of the Provident Father and to be prepared to follow His Son.

To live and to love Evangelical Poverty doesn't have other motivation than the fact that CHRIST, "our Good", has manifested himself among us poor. He is the only one that can introduce the human being into the mystery of poverty and to induce him to embrace a poor life. The question why choose a poor lifestyle instead of a wealthy rich life?, has a simple answer: because Christ espoused poverty throughout his life; because Christ chose poor means for his work; because Christ wanted poverty as a companion of his existence and his mission. The contemplation of Christ's poverty has always been refreshing and a source of new inspiration for the Church.

### **e. Apostolic Dimension of Evangelical Poverty.**

Jesus challenges us in the Sermon of the mountain to look first for: "the Kingdom of God and its justice and everything will be given" (Mt 6, 33). The announcement of the Gospel, the pursuit of the Kingdom, should conduit all our energies and orient all our being and doing. Christ assures us that if we live for the Kingdom and we confidently place our trust in the Father, He will take care of us. "You are the Father more loving and the friend more faithful!... you, my loving Father hold us in the palm of your holy hand."

We have seen the importance that our founders gave to the "visibility" of the apostolic poverty because it is an essential part of the testimony and of the announcement that only GOD is the Savior. Only in Him we can await all good. We are going to fail, if we measure up the things of God with our criteria; or if we want to understand them with purely human reasoning, and look at the things of God with a human perspective. Abraham tried to get the son of the promise through his own means and the son was born "as the son of the slave;" he used his own strength, not that of the promise, not through the power of God. God wants us poor, so that we experience that He is our Good and our Savior, and He wants us to be instruments of His salvation, not of ours.

The New Testament teaches us that the evangelical demands are not easily accepted by the "natural" man. To walk against the current takes a lot of energies; for that reason to live in poverty means to hold onto the Rock, to the strong and faithful God that demands fidelity and that we trust in His cause. In the moment of darkness, we die, as the seed. Without death there is no new Life. But also the positive experiences, the successes, apparent victories, moments in which we feel strong, effective, lucid, need to be purified and oriented to the Kingdom. We are evangelically poor when in the richness, we offer it to the One from whom it comes and we orient anything and everything to the Kingdom.

The thermometer of our poverty is our necessity of the prayer. The necessity of prayer comes from the consciousness of being poor. We will know how to pray if we feel needy. We won't extend the hands when we are full and satisfied of ourselves and with our things. Poverty makes us pray and prayer strengthens and helps us to love poverty, to accept it even when it's burdensome. Evangelical poverty springs from and grows through faith; it nurtured in the contact with God.

## **3. Concretizing Evangelical Poverty**

### **a. Evangelical Poverty and work: "We work to gain our sustenance..." (Const. 7)**

God has entrusted the human being with creation to bring it to its fullness. God creates the human being in His image. God appears as the Potter and Gardener in the book of Genesis and in Jeremiah, and as a wine-holder in Isaiah. God gets tired and rests as a worker, and He makes us his collaborators. Our work should be a continuation of the creation act of God; we are responsible of maintaining creation, of guarding it, protecting it and its development.

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We have made it difficult to find a balance in work. Frequently the apostle, moved by a thousand urgencies, is absorbed and dominated by his work until feeling like "drugged". In such a situation it is also difficult to realize that other realities exist outside his work, such as the community and ecclesial life, contemplation, etc. Evangelical Poverty helps us to discover that the principal issues don't depend on us. Evangelical poverty makes us conscious of our limits; it teaches us to entrust all action to God and to be and to seek communion with our brothers and sisters; it is to trust the promise of the Lord, the Giver of the gift and of the mission. The poor person works and works hard, but doesn't allow work to overtake him or her because "if the Lord doesn't build the house in vain the workers strive for... "

In our claretian vocation, the invitation to keep the balance is essential: "They will join the action with the contemplation, which is the most necessary point of our Institute". To be at the Teacher's feet is the essential and distinctive attitude of the disciple. To listen to the Word of the Lord is the condition that prevents work doesn't become agitated and sterile, filling our emptiness because of the need of self-gratification.

**b. Evangelical Poverty and solidarity: *"We work to meet the needs of the Congregation, of the church and the poor"* C. 7**

Since the moment that the Son of God appeared in human flesh, the search for God cannot be done outside the human being. To love God in others is the expression and verification of the love of the "Invisible" God. The Love of God and the love of neighbor is "mutually including." These brothers or sisters have concrete faces: in the community, among collaborators, those whom we assist in our apostolic mission, any person that we meet in our journey, etc. Since Christ has explicitly identified himself with them, the neighbor is the needy (Mt 25, 40). From the first Christian tradition, the poor was considered "Christ's vicar". The Church has always been aware that to welcome or to reject the poor means to welcome or to reject Jesus, who made this attitude the universal criteria in the final judgment.

To speak of poverty is to speak of an enormous and diverse reality. There are poor in the material, economic and social aspect, victims of exploitation, oppression... Media shows us the dramatic and huge dimensions of poverty today. We also know the dehumanizing and destructive power of the economic poverty... Among us other forms of poverty are plentiful: those humiliated, those without work, the disabled, imprisoned, the immigrants, broken families, children without future, and psychological, physical and sexually abused, young people and children, lowly, drug addicts...

To take the poor seriously is not an easy thing, because the prejudices and the defenses towards them have become true barricades. Certainly the way of acting will be different, according to the charism, the responsibilities, the function that one has to carry out. But for those that follow the Lord, the evangelical invitation is challenging: "sell all your goods and give to the poor" (Mt 19, 21). The text is in the Gospel and we cannot erase it, but how can we make it a concrete reality in our lives? How to place our resources at the service of the neediest? When we do this, only then we will manifest that the Kingdom has arrived. (Mt 11, 5)

Another great task of solidarity is to contribute, through a patient work in education, to root out the hunger for possessions from the heart of the young generations. If we live Evangelical Poverty, we will be able to carry out in a believable way this task; since we ourselves have traveled the same way to liberation from the possessions and the desire to have and so, "walking with them", in the identification with Christ, "trying to teach and to make the same way easy to others... "

Isn't our difficulty to live poverty due to the fact that we are well installed, that we are too comfortable in this society and that after all, it doesn't demand a lot from us? Fullness removes lucidity from our eyes; comfort makes language shy and our arms to slack." When we have something or a lot to lose, it is hard to see the value of detachment that liberates us for Jesus' evangelizing mission. (Lk 4, 16-20)

**c. Living Evangelical Poverty: in relationship to reality, people and things.**

Evangelical Poverty transforms our basic attitude and the style of our relationships. A profound attitude of Evangelical Poverty is visible through all our life, especially through the quality of our relationships with God, with the others, and with creation.

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**1) In relationship to reality, people or things: Choosing not to possess**

We cannot be naive, we experience daily that while we live on this earth, our spirit experiences the attraction to have wealth, people, positions, places... We all need the goods, relationships, responsibilities, but we should live detached from them and willing to share them for the wellbeing of our brothers and sisters.

The level of sadness that we experience when we lack something, reveals the degree of attachment created between that reality and us. The way to detachment, as Jesus' disciples, has to encourage us to live, in fraternal relationships, to be content with few things, to avoid all accumulation, luxury and vanity, to prepare to give ourselves, to be willing to let go of what prevents us to be free; ready to share what we are and we have.

**2) In relationship to ourselves: Not to possess ourselves**

This desire to have things also affects the desire we have of being self possessed, of being able to administer our time, our person, our knowledge, our apostolate... Living in poverty encompasses many aspects. We need to acquire, without bitterness and with joy, the radical poverty that leads us to not consider anything as property or definitive wealth. My only wealth is the Lord, and my personal goods, my qualities and powers, my affections and actions are for the Lord. The one consecrated does not own his/her self; they belong to Christ and for Christ is all that he or she is and lives.

**3. In relationship to God: allow oneself to be possessed by God and others for the sake of the Kingdom of God, in Him and from Him.**

This level affects how we welcome and open ourselves to God; it presupposes the person's radical emptying of self to allow God's action. When we say we "allow God to possess us," we want to express that in this stage of the spiritual journey, as a result of living in Evangelical Poverty, we learn total availability; we learn to allow others to possess us in the sense that we welcome all suggestions from God that come through others. The service to the poor, listening to the visitor, visiting the sick, helping the weak ones... In allowing ourselves to be completely for the Lord, to be totally and truly in God's hands, to know how to rest in His providential and paternal will, that is Evangelical Poverty.

**SOME CONCLUSION****I. A DOUBLE TRANSFORMING EXPERIENCE**

We won't live poverty at a theoretical or practical level, without first living the double transforming experience that has been present throughout the history of the Church.

**1. Contemplation of Christ, the Poor one.**

As we have said this contemplation is the key to reach true "spiritual poverty," since what can truly inspire us to live in an evangelical way is not our willful decision to live in austerity, but the contemplation of Jesus in the manger of Bethlehem; "to taste" the simplicity of his self-emptying; to accompany him in the hard and silent work of Nazareth, and to look at him for while long in the nakedness of the cross. In this way, our love for Him will grow, and we will feel the necessity to identify ourselves with Him. Our poverty doesn't make sense outside of a deep personal love for Jesus Christ and this love implies to love Christ, the poor one.

**Evangelical poverty springs from a deep experience of God**, not out of one's determination or a sense of guilt. It comes from a transforming experience that touches the inner most dwelling of each person. The sociological or anthropological motivations are not enough; there needs to be an experience of the gratuitous love of God that has kindled an interior fire. It demands that we leave everything to follow Christ. It is the result of a life of contemplative prayer, capable of conquering the heart and all of one's life.

**Personal prayer has a definitive importance** because it leads us to a more intimate relationship with the Lord and from there to a real commitment to others. This prayer is transformative since by contemplating Christ's person and mission, I experience the need to confront my life with his, my criteria with his, my attitudes with his, my deeper feelings with his, and through the action of the Spirit in me, little by little I start thinking, acting, feeling as He does. This inner dynamic results in my personal identification with Christ.

## **2. The contact with the poor**

In second place, there is the **real contact with the poor**, whether we are living amid them, or going sporadically to their encounter. From the real contact with the poor comes a necessity to live poverty-solidarity. The poor are sometimes those who are closest to us, the neediest and sometimes unknown sisters or the ones relegated to the care of other sisters...and sometimes are distant. The poor person, by his/her very presence, is an interpellation to our lives, because without saying a word, they question us and they *prevent* us from being offensive to the poor. In that real contact we can feel shame for making problems out of small privations.

We know the statistics about poverty in the world. The number has grown, and the dramatic situation of so many millions of brothers and sisters cannot leave us neutral and indifferent. The poor invite us to assume their cause as our own, as the God of the Bible and Jesus from Nazareth have done.

It is a fact that not all of us feel capable of this, we don't know how to live and to work with the poor or among the poor, but we all should seek in our work and lifestyle to build a better world in which there are solutions for the situation of the poor. There is a well-known expression (mainly in Latin America) of P. Miranda: "**All for the poor. Many with the poor. Some as the poor**", among the poor.

Starting out of these two principles: the experience of God and contact with the poor, we will end up finding the concrete way to live poverty today, and how to use and administer goods in the most appropriate way. Poverty-solidarity is to be lived not only at a personal and community level, but also in the whole Institute.

## **II. TO PRAY PERSONALLY AND TO SHARE THE FOLLOWING EVALUATION OF OUR PRACTICE OF POVERTY**

Evangelical Poverty is a key element of our charismatic configuration. To feel called to be a Claretian is to be called to live evangelical Poverty. There are questions we should ask ourselves: Do I really feel called to seek a greater evangelical Poverty? Do I feel the called to poverty like a possibility of liberation and identification with Christ the poor one or is it a burden that I try to avoid whenever I can?

The first step will be to question ourselves about the concrete way to live the Evangelical Poverty. It would be good to reflect with sincerity on "the traps" that allow us to get entangled, the excuses we create to appease or soothe our conscience, because sometimes our lifestyle follows the values and approaches of the consumerist society in which we live.

### **Some suggestions or questions to help us reflect on the practice of "Evangelical Poverty."**

#### **A. Deep attitude of Evangelical Poverty:**

- \* Where do I support and I assure my heart?
- \* For which treasure am I willing to sell everything?
- \* What proximity I have to Jesus the poor one whom I follow?
- \* How is the Paternity of God present in my life. Do I live confidently my future?
- \* Do I seek to empty my heart and my life of all that is not God and the Kingdom?
- \* Do I have my "future", or is it God who has my future?
- \* Am I aware when I take the Word of God out of its context to justify my not living poor or to avoid the proximity to the poor.

#### **B. Frequent statements in relationship to the vow of poverty. How do I live them?**

- to say that we are poor because we have made a vow, when we know that in fact we are not poor...

- to only consider poverty as a sacrifice, a burden and not as a gift to be more thoroughly in communion with Jesus and with their Kingdom
- to be at pacify our conscience if we obtain permission and report expenses, but keep accumulating unnecessary and superfluous things...
- to take classes or acquire abilities and never to place them at the service of the community
- to try to hide with a thousand justifications the truth that after having been poor "we have become rich"... the opposite of what Jesus did.
- to fall in the trap of confusing the vow of poverty with economy.
- to work to secure everything and to affirm piously that "we depend on the divine providence"
- not to question what we do with the money and what money does to us...
- to save, to economize and to accumulate money for the service of the poor without a true solidary economy that helps break the circle of structural and institutionalized injustice
- to allow ourselves to be carried away by superfluous consumerism, the appearance of luxury, the excuse to be feminine, to care for the house...
- To accumulate with the excuse of taking advantage of the discounts and promotions to save money...
- to identify poverty with the use of money and not with availability of life

### **C. With relationship to the solidarity with the poor:**

- to consider poverty of the religious vow unrelated to the real situation of the poor of the earth
- to make the vow of poverty and not to seek critical formation in light of the Gospel and the Social Doctrine of the Church, and in confrontation with the excluding and unjust society in which we live...
- to love the poor and to defend their cause theoretically without being in solidarity with them really
- to look down on the poor impeding their growth, to offer them only assistantship...
- to give charity, but not to recognize that the poor deserve an equitable space in society
- to idealize the poor without a critical vision and to exclude the "non poor"
- to believe that because we live amid the poor we are already poor...
- to act in place of the poor, because "the poor ones" they don't know...

### **D. Of the personal and community**

- to show off about personal austerity, while we build or praise ostentatious works without deciding to place them to the service of needy people.
  - to use the "habit" or "religious signs" as a sign of poverty and to use it often to look for social, ecclesiastical privileges...
  - to affirm something similar to "I deserve it!" I have given so much to the Congregation, so I can give myself the luxury of certain comforts or freedoms...
  - I don't spend almost anything, everything is given to me...
  - to make a personal and community budget but not to follow it... or to allow everything "because there is money" for it...
  - to fall in the trap of consumerism, justifying it because the mission needs sophisticated means
  - to let others serve us and to avoid the simple and domestic work with the excuse of lack of time...
  - to be at peace after a great summer with the family, claiming that we have not caused any expense to the community...
  - to carry out my personal projects in detriment of the needs of the community
  - to say by word of mouth, this "belongs to everyone"... but I am the only that knows how to use it... and act as if it was my private property... to transform the common goods in something purely personal
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## **CHARACTERISTICS OF THE APOSTOLIC CHARISM OF CLARET AND PARIS**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **I. THE SOURCE OF THE PASSION**

- A. In St. Anthony Mary Claret
- B. In Antonia Paris
- C. Responding to the passion

#### **II. APOSTLES OF JESUS CHRIST**

- A. In the title of the New Order
- B. The apostles in the experience of Antonia Paris
- C. In Imitation of the Holy Apostles

#### **III. TWO TEXTS, ONE SAME SPIRIT**

- A. The Apostolic Missionary
  - 1. Origin of the text
  - 2. Conte
- B. Letter to the Missionary Theophilus

#### **IV. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE APOSTOLIC CHARISM OF CLARET AND PARIS**

- A. The Missionary Life
    - 1. Configuration with Christ
    - 2. Witness of Life
    - 3. Charity as foundation of the new order and of the renewal of the Church
    - 4. Prayer Life as a source of personal integration
    - 5. The centrality of the Word
    - 6. Mary as teacher for the missionary
  - B. Missionary Practice
    - 1. Starting out from the reality of the people
    - 2. To become incarnate in the culture
-

3. Prophetism, Solidarity and Justice
4. Shared Mission
5. Missionary Availability
6. Scope of the Mission
7. Evangelization through all possible means

## Introduction

Before we approach the topic of the apostolic charism of St. Anthony Mary Claret and Venerable Mother Antonia Paris, we would like to define the term “apostolic.” According to the Gospel of Luke *Jesus departed to the mountain to pray, and he spent the night in prayer to God. When the day came, he called his disciples to himself, and from them he chose Twelve, whom he also called apostles* ([Ἀπόστολος](#), apostolos)<sup>404</sup>. The etymological meaning of apostle is “to be sent” as in a mission. In the New Testament the Apostles we have many references to the Apostles’s life and mission, to their successes and many failures in figuring out what it meant to follow Jesus and to proclaim the Kingdom of God. In the formative years with Jesus, from the moment of their call to the resurrection, their interaction with Jesus centers more around who Jesus is and what the Kingdom is about, than what they are supposed to do as apostles. It does show that to be an apostle is not just about doing, but a way of being and a way of carrying out their mission. It implies sharing in a special relationship with Jesus. When Jesus calls them, he invites them to be with him (in community) and sends them to proclaim the Good News (Mk. 3, 13).

In the history of religious life, to follow Jesus was always intimately connected to some kind of service or apostolate.<sup>405</sup> The first Christians in the midst of great dangers would practice charity and proclaim the kerygma (the basic message of the faith in Jesus). When Christianity becomes a legal religion in the Empire, persecutions stop and martyrdom is no longer the clear way of witnessing radical love for Jesus. In response to this vacuum of radical witnesses, monasticism begins, which in most of its expressions involved also some type of service. In the Middle Ages, the *vita apostolica* movements renewed the enthusiasm for apostolic life which always entailed some type of charity or preaching work accompanied by a life of poverty lived in community. For these groups it was clear what Karl Rahner has said: Loving the neighbor is more than an expression or result of loving God; it *is* loving God.<sup>406</sup> Nevertheless, this service to others and even commitment to justice, although essential to discipleship, is not the ultimate reason for religious life. Today more than ever every baptized person can and should commit to the service of the others in the many opportunities open to lay people. The “distinguishing characteristic of Religious Life is the exclusive commitment to the God-quest...[making] Jesus the affective center of meaning.”<sup>407</sup> This implies a life of intimate communion with him who is the center of this life. The document “Starting Afresh from Christ” says that consecrated life is a special following of Christ, “*a living memorial of Jesus’ way of living and*

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<sup>404</sup> D. Senior, Stuhmueller, C., *The Biblical Foundations of Mission*, Maryknoll: Orbis, 1983, p. 266

<sup>405</sup> VC 9

<sup>406</sup> Sandra Schneiders, *Finding the Treasure* (New York: Paulist Press), 2000, p. 298 referring to K. Rahner’s work, “The Unity of Love of God and Neighbor” (152) in *The Content of Faith: The Best of Karl Rahner’s Theological Writings*, Ed K..Lehmann and Al. Raffelt (New York: Crossroads, 1992).

<sup>407</sup> Schneiders, p. 313.

*acting* as the Incarnate Word in relation to the Father and in relation to the brethren... It is “becoming one with him, taking on his mind and his way of life”, and it is a life “taken up by Christ”<sup>408</sup> This total commitment with Christ implies a total commitment with the Kingdom, with the mission, not as a replacement of the love of God, but as its expression. This is how the first Apostles lived the unity of their relationship with Jesus and their mission, they were sent and went because they loved Jesus who also felt sent by the Father: *As the Father has sent me, I now send you* (Jn. 17, 18).

This work will focus on the apostolic dimension of our founders encompassing their way of life and evangelizing activity. It will attempt to explain what it means to be “Apostles of Jesus Christ,” especially in two documents that our founders wrote: Letter to the Missionary Theofilus (Claret) and the Apostolic Missionary (Antonia Paris). After introducing both texts, we will try to identify the most significant characteristics of their apostolic charism as they appear in these texts and in other texts, most importantly in their attitudes and options. Finally, we will ask ourselves what it means to be an apostle of Jesus Christ today. This is not an exhaustive work, just an attempt to explore the common vision of our founders on this subject and to offer some points of reflection in order to respond to our reality today.

## I. THE SOURCE OF THE PASSION

The source of the apostolic passion is the passion for God that is expressed in the love of neighbor. It is the way on making concrete that love that takes all of one’s life. On the other hand, there is a call that comes from reality itself, from the situations that awaken a deep concern, that challenge and demand a response. This call from reality has been a constant in many bible characters. Moses experienced the suffering of his people and even killed the Egyptian, as he tried to protect his own. Later on, that call of reality becomes *mission* when Yahweh sends him to liberate the people of Israel.<sup>409</sup>

This experience of the call of reality, this possibly God-given concern for others, shapes to great extent the response that grows out of it. In order to understand the response of Claret and Paris we need to address this originating motivation of their apostolic passion.

### D. In St. Anthony Mary Claret

Among the first memories that Claret narrates in his Autobiography we find his early concern for the salvation of souls, how he used to think about eternity.

*I would think "forever, forever, forever." I would try to imagine enormous distances and pile still more distances on these and realize that they would never come to an end. Then I would shudder and ask myself if those who were so unhappy as to go to an eternity of pain*<sup>410</sup>

This recurrent idea explains the fire that burs in his heart and leads him to proclaim the Gospel by all means available:

*It is surely the thing that to this day I remember best. The power of this idea has made me work in the past, still makes me work, and will make me work as long as I live, in converting sinners, in preaching, in hearing confessions, in writing books, in distributing holy cards and pamphlets, and in having familiar conversations.*<sup>411</sup>

We can say that since his childhood he experiences the apostolic impulse that will last all of his life; it will not let him to be still thinking how he can transmit the message of salvation. This zeal

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<sup>408</sup> Caminar desde Cristo, 22

<sup>409</sup> Exodo 3

<sup>410</sup> Aut. PC 8

<sup>411</sup> Ibid, 9b.

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for the salvation of souls is intimately connected to his love of God and the desire that everyone knows him and loves him.

*In time I felt a **further** stimulus for zeal of which I shall speak later, namely, the thought that sin not only condemns my neighbor but is an offense against God, my Father.*<sup>412</sup>

For the Founder, the image of Christ with which he always identified was that of Christ evangelizer: *I am ever more deeply impressed at the thought of Jesus moving from town to town, preaching everywhere.*<sup>413</sup> In his Autobiography, Chapter XII is dedicated to naming all the different examples of evangelizers that inspired him.

### **E. In Antonia Paris**

In M. Antonia, the first documented experience of her apostolic concern is the Initial Vision. Mother Antonia is moved to prayer by the concrete situation that the Spanish Church is going through. It is her concern about the surrounding situation of the Church that lead her to cry to heaven for help, but at the same time offering her life. Her prayer is not void of commitment. God will not leave her offer unanswered. The Lord takes her beyond her offer, not only inviting her to live radically the Gospel and Evangelical Counsels, but to invite others to do so (new order), and later on create a movement of renewal based on the same desire of renewal.

The original movement is from the Church to Christ. (2, 19) She considers her love for the Church a gift from God<sup>414</sup>. But as a result of it, her relationship with Christ reaches a different level. She herself tells us in the Autobiography “since then I have the Lord always present and a very intimate communication” It is such a deep experience that sometimes she has to tell the Lord “enough”<sup>415</sup>.

Even though she often says *I saw it all in Christ crucified*, pointing to the cristocéntrica aspect of her experience, it is undeniable that the starting point is the concern for the Church. Therefore it is a movement from the Church’s external situation to Christ and not the other way around, Christ leads her to an understanding of the internal situation of the Church –the real cause of the ills that afflict it.

Then it comes full circle, because the Lord gives back to her what she had originally brought to Him: the Church. He associates her to the Church in two ways: He invites her to share in his sufferings for the Church finding rests in her and espousing her with the Church.

### **F. Responding to the passion**

#### 1. Claret

We can say that Claret’s early childhood experience of eternity will be the source of his missionary vocation. It is his way of responding to his concern for the salvation of souls. It implies a life that is coherent with the message he announces in a profound identification with Christ.

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<sup>412</sup> Aut. PC 16.

<sup>413</sup> Ibid 221

<sup>414</sup> Aut. AP 35

<sup>415</sup> Ibid 12

## 2. Paris

Antonia's response translates in a response at three levels:

a. Personal; *The Lord showed me the Holy Law and asked me to practice it in all perfection.* But He did not only show her this divine law, but impressed it in her heart.

*I was very attentive, overwhelmed to what was happening, and it seemed to me that I was reading the Holy Law of God, but without seeing any book nor letters; I was seeing it written, and I was understanding it so very well, that it seemed to me it was imprinting in my soul but in a particular way the book of the Holy Gospel*  
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In many instances the Lord invites her to SUFFER mystically for the ills of the church.

*Cry my daughter the ills of the Church that pierce my heart.*<sup>417</sup> *Many times he has told me that He rests giving me part of the injuries he receives from sinners specially those he has chosen for his service.*<sup>418</sup>

For Claret, to embrace the passion of Christ means to embrace the apostolic sufferings to which the missionary will be exposed. Although, we know that Mother Paris did not shy away from the sacrifices implied by the mission; it is evident in her willingness to cross the Atlantic to begin the Order in Cuba.

b. Congregational: Antonia receives a call to transmit this radical way of living when the Lord asks for a *New Order, not new in doctrine, but in practice.* The new order is the first instrument which God suggests for the renewal of the Church. Later on, she will also receive the inspiration to write the Points for the Reform of the Church.

c. Ecclesial: From the beginning her apostolic concerns engulf the whole church. She feels called to "raise the Gospel" or restore gospel living through the renewal of the Church which will be carried out by this Plan of Reform, as well as by the life and work of the new order. Given that the Plan of Reform will be addressed by another author, we will concentrate in what it means to be Apostles of Jesus Christ.

## II. APOSTLES OF JESUS CHRIST

### A. In the title of the New Order

When Mother Antonia receives the inspiration to found the new order, she is told by the Lord what its title would be: *Here (at this moment) our Lord gave me the traits of the whole order and told me that I should be called: "APOSTLES of JESUS CHRIST IN*

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<sup>416</sup> Ibid 5

<sup>417</sup> Ibid 14

<sup>418</sup> Ibid 13

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*IMITATION of THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY*<sup>419</sup>This title will be used until 1860, it will be modified after that to Apostolic Institute of the Immaculate Conception of Blessed Mary which appears for the first time in the Constitutions of 1862.

## **B. The apostles in the experience of Antonia Paris**

*In the morning, on the feast of St. Andrew the Apostle, after communion our Lord told me that Fr. Claret together with his sons in the order of the Apostles of Jesus Christ.*<sup>420</sup>

In a feast day of the Apostles Peter and Paul she sees the Apostles walking with the Lord: *St. Peter and St. Paul were always at my left side, giving me much consolation; even now, when I remember I get much courage in the difficulties that I encounter.*<sup>421</sup>

In the Constitutions it is stipulated that the Acts of the Apostles be read during meals.<sup>422</sup> All the sisters will be asked to add the name of an Apostle to their name.<sup>423</sup>

## **C. In Imitation of the Holy Apostles**

The Aim and Goal states that the way of carrying out the mission of “working until death” has to be “in imitation the Holy Apostles.” This is one of the modifications introduced by M. Antonia to the Aim and Goal of the order. The Company of Mary calls the sisters to carry out their mission in imitation of Mary. In the second part of the Aim and Goal which describes the form and manner of life, we find additional references to the apostles. Like the apostles, the purpose of being “stripped of all inordinate affections and passions” is to be able “to follow in the footsteps of Christ our highest good.”

But, what does it mean to be “Apostles of Jesus Christ”? To answer this question, we will refer to two texts of our founders where we find a description of their apostolic ideal.

## **III. TWO TEXTS, ONE SAME SPIRIT**

The following two documents offer us a clear portrayal of what the founders envisioned for their missionaries. These texts that seem written by the same hand are certainly inspired by same Spirit. We are referring to the *Apostolic Missionary* written by Antonia Paris and *The Letter to the Missionary Theophilus* written by St. Anthony Mary Claret.

### **A. The Apostolic Missionary**

#### **1. Origin of the text**

The shortest of Antonia Paris’ writings and the one we have less information about the time, place and circumstances that led her to write it. Her authorship is undeniable, since the original handwritten document, ten pages long, has been preserved. Since other Antonia was very busy writing the Autobiography between the years 1856 and 1857, there is a possibility that she wrote this before leaving for Spain in 1859, while Fr.

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<sup>419</sup> Aut. MP, 7.

<sup>420</sup> Aut. MP, 32

<sup>421</sup> Aut. MP. 36

<sup>422</sup> Constitutions 1869, Trat. I, cap. 18, 4

<sup>423</sup> Constitutions 1869, Tratado I, cap. 20, 6

Currius was still with her pressing her to write her experiences and ideas.<sup>424</sup>

## 2. Content of the text

It is composed of two parts:

- The missionary in charge of the house: She dedicates the first part to a series of ascetical norms and the second to issues of financial administration.
- The missionary in his/her travels or missions: Describes the virtues of the missionary and concludes with a prayer which beautifully speaks of the union between the missionary and Christ in all aspects of life.

## B. Letter to the Missionary Theophilus

### 1. Origin of the text

This text served as a foreword to a collection of *Mission Sermons* that were published by Claret in 1858. The text can be found in the modern publication of the Works of St. Anthony Mary Claret, volume III Selected Spiritual Writings.<sup>425</sup> It is directed to a priest “who not only loves God (hence the name Theophilus –like addresse in Luke/Acts or St. Francis de Sale’s feminine God-lover, *Philotea*), but also on fire with zeal for his neighbor that he feels called to exercise the prophetic dimension of his priesthood in mission preaching”.<sup>426</sup> The text offers a mini-treatise of pastoral theology in simple and practical language.

### 2. Content of the text

The letter is divided into four chapters: the excellence of mission, advice on the life and spirituality of the missionary, an understanding human nature, maxims and topics to be stressed in the missions.

- a. Excellence of Mission: This reflection is based on the text of Is. 52,7: “How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news.” In this chapter Jesus appears as the head of the other missionaries. To be a missionary is to share in the mission of one sent by the Father. The missionary is given four motives to spur him on:
  - i. The worth of the soul which is the image of the Blessed Trinity. Here Claret shares what has been his driving motivation: the conversion of sinners, the salvation of souls.
  - ii. To demonstrate one’s love for God: It is interesting that here again it appears as a second motive and covers it very briefly.
  - iii. Predestination: Quoting St. Augustine, it presents the connection between one’s salvation and the salvation of others.
  - iv. Describes the consequences of not giving all to the mission: “Most priests will be condemned for sins of omission.”<sup>427</sup>
- b. Chapter II: Important Advice to a Missionary. Here Claret proposes some guidelines for living in such away that one’s life will be greater source of

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<sup>424</sup> *Escritos de María Antonia París*, Barcelona 1985, p. 349

<sup>425</sup> Prepared by Jesus Bermejo, cmf, translated by Joseph Daries, cmf. Claretian Publications: Quezon City, 1991.

<sup>426</sup> *Ibid.* 411.

<sup>427</sup> *Ibid* I, 3 p. 419.

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inspiration than one's words. The following topics are addressed: prayer, poverty, combating love of pleasure and honors, humility, acceptance of persecutions. It presents Jesus, St. Paul and the rest of the Apostles as examples of in living up to the demands of the mission.

- c. Chapter III: Who is the human person, or the knowledge of the human nature that the missionary needs. This is a brief theological anthropology presented in fifteen points. It is an incredible analysis of human nature and the moral ills that affect the human person and how to remedy them. How does Claret see the human person in this chapter?
  - i. First of it addresses the ultimate vocation of the human person.
 

*God made man in His image and likeness, so that he might know, love and serve Him here on earth, and afterwards be eternally happy there in heaven with the same God who created him.*<sup>428</sup>
  - ii. In second place, it presents the unity of body and soul and the triple faculties, memory and will which liken the person to the Blessed Trinity.
  - iii. Sin and its effects. "The primary cause of sin is the willful love of independence: the abuse of the dominion God gave man."<sup>429</sup>
- d. Chapter IV: This chapter lists the topics that should be covered in the missions and the maxims that should be stressed. These topics are: the commandments, prayer, good works, the sacraments, devotion to the Blessed Trinity, to Blessed Sacrament, the passion of our Lord, the way of the cross, the rosary, reading of good books, works of mercy, the Word of God.
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#### IV. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE APOSTOLIC CHARISM OF CLARET AND PARIS

The texts that we have considered contain key elements in the understanding of the apostolic vision of our founders, but they do not exhaust their understanding of what it meant to be an Apostle of Jesus Christ. The following characteristics have been mostly drawn from the aspects in which both texts coincide, but other sources have also been used to complement the portrait of the missionary using other texts and even examples of the founders' lives. This section will be divided in two parts: Missionary Life and Missionary Practice.

##### A. Missionary Life

###### 1. Configuration with Christ

a. In the Apostolic Missionary and Letter to the Missionary Theophilus.

M. Antonia begins and ends the text of the Apostolic Missionary with this theme.

*The first, and before all things, the apostolic Missionary needs to uniform his life with the life, person and customs of his Divine Teacher, Jesus Christ.*<sup>430</sup>

In the last paragraph the same idea comes back: *The central concern of the missionary is to uniform his life with the life of Christ...may he not lose sight of his divine example*

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<sup>428</sup> Ibid III, 2. p. 426

<sup>429</sup> Ibid III, 7. p. 427.

<sup>430</sup> MA I, 1.

*if he wants to bring to completion the mission that God has entrusted him.*<sup>431</sup>

The missionary looks constantly to Jesus and tries to incarnate the person of Jesus in all he or she does. This calls to an identification similar to that of St. Paul: “It is no longer I that live, but Christ living in me.”<sup>432</sup> While praying, traveling, eating, drinking, sleeping, suffering, preaching, tired, dead or alive, the missionary ought to be one with the in order to live eternally with him.

For Claret this theme comes up in the first chapter of the Letter. Christ is presented as the leader of missionaries. But especially in the second chapter there is a comprehensive presentation of the virtues that the missionary ought to strive for in imitation of Jesus: humility and love. In the face of sacrifices and persecutions, the missionary looks to Christ, St. Paul and the Apostles.

b. Radical in practice

Both texts show that the missionary, on fire with love for Christ, seeks to configure his/her life with Christ. In the first part of the Aim and Goal this radical dimension comes across clearly in the terms “with all diligence,” “utmost fulfillment,” “work until death.” The second part of the Aim and Goal is also characterized for a call to radical living.

Antonia Paris, since the initial vision had *a heart determined to comply with the divine will cost what it may.*<sup>433</sup> In the founders these desires of total self-giving reach a point of wanting to shed their blood for the Gospel, which for Claret became a reality in Holguin, Cuba.

c. Configuration with Christ as praxis

Since the birth of the congregation there is an insistence in praxis. The term used then, was practice. “*Yes, my daughter, I want a new order, but not new in doctrine but new in practice.*”<sup>434</sup> The reference here was to evangelical counsels, especially in the aspect of poverty. Since then, she begins to understand the Gospel-Holy Law in a new way, but most importantly *the way to practice it*<sup>435</sup> Claret abides by the same spirit: *Following Christ's example, he should first practice, then preach. "He began to do and teach."*<sup>436</sup> The Aim and Goal reminds us that we can only teach and make the way easier for others when we ourselves are walking the same walk and we teach others with the of justice and example.<sup>437</sup>

Antonia expressed it clearly in the Plan for the Renewal of the Church where she exhorts the Bishops to follow the example of the first Christians that *they preached with the Gospel in hand, more than in their mouth...because deeds give spirit to the voice.*<sup>438</sup> Her apostolic vision was very holistic; it integrated all aspects of life. In this sense, all of one's life is mission<sup>439</sup> (what one is as well as what one does) and ministerial action does not make sense without a life that backs it up and without a love that animates it.

## 2. Witness of Life

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<sup>431</sup> MA II, 30

<sup>432</sup> Gal 2,20

<sup>433</sup> Aut. MP 7

<sup>434</sup> Ibid

<sup>435</sup> Ibid 6

<sup>436</sup> PC 340

<sup>437</sup> R 1862

<sup>438</sup> PR 41

<sup>439</sup> Const. 68

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a. Guarding the senses

Moderation in talking, gesturing, looking, was an important element of contemporary ascetic practices of the times. Mother Antonia explains that her rationale behind this is that *it may be cause of edification to whom might look at him.*<sup>440</sup>

Claret feels the same way: *When you enter or leave a town, you should walk in such recollected manner that all who see you will be edified. Keep all your senses mortified. Speak very little, and when you must speak, let it be in a serious yet affable way...the more you suffer in silence, the more edification you will give.*<sup>441</sup>

b. Poverty

Antonia insists on Christological perspective: *the poor missionary in imitation of his Divine Master must not look for what gives him pleasure, because the disciple is not the grater than his Master.*<sup>442</sup> Claret explains to Theophilous that poverty is not just about renouncing material goods, but honors. Poverty is not giving up material things, but letting go and knowing oneself in humility and truth. *One thing that you should deeply abhor is greedy self interest. You should befriend poverty. In all things choose for yourself whatever is poorest... You should be aware that the main vices you must struggle against are the love of pleasures, the love of riches and the love of honors.*<sup>443</sup>

Poverty has a fundamental apostolic dimension, and for Antonia *it is the master key to introduce in the soul the perfect observance of the Holy Law of the Lord.*<sup>444</sup>

c. Humiility

This virtue is the first one that Claret suggests in order to do a fruitful mission. In the Autobiography he shares this insight: *I knew that if I was to acquire the virtues I needed in order to become a truly apostolic missionary, I would have to begin with humility, which I regard as the foundation for all other virtues.*<sup>445</sup>

Claret counsels the Missionary Teophilus along the same lines: *You must continually look to and imitate the humility and meekness of Jesus. Humility is the foundation of all virtues, and just as a tall building with no foundation will fall, so will you, unless you are humble.*<sup>446</sup>

Mother Antonia recommends that the apostolic missionary should never *argue with anybody, his way of talking be simple.*<sup>447</sup>

3. Charity as foundation of the new order and of the renewal of the Church

St. Anthony Mary Claret believed that *Love is the most necessary of all the virtues. Yes, I say it and will say it a thousand times: the virtue an apostolic missionary needs most of*

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<sup>440</sup> MA I, 2

<sup>441</sup> CMT II, 2-3

<sup>442</sup> MA I, 11

<sup>443</sup> CMT II, 4-5

<sup>444</sup> Constitutions 1869, Trat. I. cap. 2, n.84.

<sup>445</sup> Aut. PC, 341

<sup>446</sup> CMT II, 6

<sup>447</sup> MA II, 5.

*all is love. If he lacks this love, all his talents, however fine in themselves, are for nothing. But if, together with his natural endowments, he has much love, he has everything*<sup>448</sup>

What role does love play in the apostolic vision of Mother Antonia?

The two instruments that through divine inspiration she conceives as necessary for the renewal of the Church are the New Order and the Plan of Renewal. There is a common theme in these two projects: poverty. I propose that besides poverty, she considers fraternal union or charity as the other element to respond to the needs of the church, which together with the preaching of the gospel bring about the renewal of the church.

Poverty is key for the renewal of the church as well as for the new institute. This seems to be well established, at least in theory. Yet, we have not realized that Mother Antonia applies the same terms to poverty and charity; she calls them the **foundation** or **basis** of the new order. In a letter to Orbera she says: *The purpose that our Lord has for our Institute, whose principal basis is the mutual union of all the houses and forming one soul and one heart.*<sup>449</sup> To the Archbishop of Cuba she says: *The principal foundation of this Institute is the mutual union, and the love that makes us one family and one Herat as the Lord desires of us.*<sup>450</sup>

Also, in the beginning of our Constitutions, she highlights the value of charity for the renewal of religious life.

*There is nothing as important to the conservation of the religious orders as the practice of perfect charity and fine harmony in community among the houses of the same Order as members of the same body.*

*The lack of this precept so recommend by Jesus Christ our Redeemer to his beloved Apostles has lost our religion.*<sup>451</sup>

In this she clearly shows that in her understanding of the renewal of the Church evangelical fraternity or charity is as urgent as poverty. Fraternity is an essential part of that praxis makes our message believable; it witnesses that the Kingdom of love and justice is possible because, in spite of our different culture, generations and vision we can be *one family and one heart.*<sup>452</sup> We cannot be Apostles of Jesus Christ without evangelical fraternity.

Mother Antonia not only insisted on the importance of charity among the sisters,<sup>453</sup> but she was a living example of loving care for the sisters, and her greatest suffering was caused by the lack of union among the communities and sisters.

It is paradoxical that it was precisely these two aspects that for her were foundational that received the greatest opposition in the process of obtaining the approval of the Constitutions. The style of poverty she envisioned, which prohibited living off income from

<sup>448</sup> This is one of the most stirring chapters in the *Autobiography* and one in which the apostolic personality of the Saint is best portrayed: "A man who is afire with love and kindles that fire wherever he goes."

<sup>449</sup> Paris, Carta a Mons. José Orbera, 30 de enero de 1880 (298)

<sup>450</sup> Paris, Al Arzobispo de Stgo. de Cuba, 30 de septiembre de 1877. (255)

<sup>451</sup> Constitutions 1869, Trat. I, Cap. 1, 1-2.

<sup>452</sup> VC 51a. Placed as they are within the world's different societies — societies frequently marked by conflicting passions and interests, seeking unity but uncertain about the ways to attain it — communities of consecrated life, where persons of different ages, languages and cultures meet as brothers and sisters, are *signs that dialogue is always possible* and that communion can bring differences into harmony.

<sup>453</sup> Paris, A las Claretianas de Carcagente, setiembre 1880 (327).



properties and interest from dowries, and the centralized form of government that fostered unity among the houses, were two of the aspects that the Roman Congregation asked her to correct. She was certainly ahead of her times.

#### 4. Prayer Life as a source of personal integration

Prayer is another way to follow Christ who *during the day did mission work and at night he prayed*<sup>454</sup> Antonia highlights the apostolic dimension of prayer, which makes action effective: *If the words of the missionary do not come from the forge of prayer, they will not soften hearts.*<sup>455</sup> The missionary must maintain the balance between action and contemplation *the most important aspect of the Institute*<sup>456</sup> and for this reason she recommends the missionary *does not kill the spirit of holy prayer no matter the many things he has to do.*<sup>457</sup>

The Aim and Goal is another beautiful example of that effort to find a balance and integration in one's life. From this perspective there is no separation between the passion for God and the passion for humanity. Rather than contemplatives in action –which could mean any action-, we are called to be contemplatives in mission. This synthesis takes place inside, in that union with Christ as Mother Antonia describes in the Apostolic Missionary: *Let the missionary pray with Christ praying, preach with Christ preaching...*

Claret tells the Missionary Theophilus: *You must be a great friend of prayer. In this you will be imitating Jesus, who erat pernoctans in oratione Dei, and strongly urged his disciples to pray. He who seeks finds.*<sup>458</sup> Furthermore, the missionary should teach others to pray.

#### 5. The centrality of the Word

The Letter to Theophilus is filled with biblical references; we know how Claret loved God's Word. He also speaks of the power of the Word.

*Always remember: "The word of God is living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating and dividing soul and spirit."*<sup>459</sup>

Even though there are few biblical quotes in Antonia's writings, because she had never read it directly before the initial vision, the Word of God is central. She tells us that the renewal of the church involves "raising up" the Gospel or living according to it. *My Gospel is one and the church cannot be totally restored until the Gospel is raised.*<sup>460</sup>

#### 6. Mary as teacher for the missionary

Claret had a deep love for the Blessed Virgin Mary, she played an important role in his apostolic vision as the woman that overcomes evil and sends him as an arrow to preach the Good News. Claret invites Theophilus to learn from Mary's poor and chaste life.<sup>461</sup>

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<sup>454</sup> CMT II, 20

<sup>455</sup> Ibid II, 22

<sup>456</sup> Constitutions 1869, Trat. III. cap. 6, n.1.

<sup>457</sup> MA II, 19

<sup>458</sup> CMT II, 1

<sup>459</sup> CMT IV, 9

<sup>460</sup> Paris, Diary 108e

<sup>461</sup> CMT IV, 9-10

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We cannot find any reference to Mary in the Apostolic Missionary, which is surprising given that since the initial vision, to be an Apostle of Jesus Christ was intimately related to the Blessed Mother.

## B. Missionary Practice

### 1. Starting out from the reality of the people

Both founders were very aware of the social context that surrounded them. Even if Antonia does not mention it in the Apostolic Missionary, we know how the social situation impacted her life and how she not only saw the external aspects of it, but through divine intervention, was able to understand the deep causes of these problems and what response was needed. Claret also interprets these situations from a faith perspective, but uses observation and analysis to try to understand and seek a response. In more than one occasion he refers to his approach to evangelization as one that always begins with a careful study of the social and personal situations.<sup>462</sup>

### 2. To become incarnate in the culture

There is no doubt that the evangelizing work of Claret, specially in Cuba, included an effort to understand and respond to the culture of the people that the Lord had entrusted to him in his missionary and Episcopal ministry. In the Letter to the Missionary Teophilus, he emphasizes the importance of adapting the message to simple folks, using a language that they can understand and the one that is spoken in the place. In the Apostolic Missionary, Antonia begins by saying that the missionary *must always be kind and be all to all*.<sup>463</sup> This is an important point, so she repeats it: *The good missionary must adjust himself to the disposition of the persons with whom he relates and be all for every body in order to gain them all*.<sup>464</sup> Then she gives concrete ways to express the respect for people of other cultures: *Never speak ill of the country God send him; not tolerate that his brothers or companions speak ill of those poor people that God has entrusted them*.<sup>465</sup> The heart of the missionary is supposed to be wide enough to embrace the whole world.

*The whole world must be considered homeland for the missionary of Christ, because our Divine Redeemer came to redeem all, sending the missionary to preach the same Gospel all over the world*.<sup>466</sup>

Inculturation is a process that needs to take place not only in the sphere of our mission, but also in relationship to our charism.

Part of the discernment involved in any process of inculturation is distinguishing between the universal and the particular, between what is essential to the faith, to the charism and what is an expression of it that is conditioned by the culture or the times.<sup>467</sup> The new generations of sisters that emerge from diverse cultures have something important to

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<sup>462</sup> 86 cf. Aut. n. 33 171 191 315 475 545 717-728 729-735

<sup>463</sup> Ibid. II, 1

<sup>464</sup> Ibid II, 8

<sup>465</sup> Ibid II, 9

<sup>466</sup> Ibid. II, 10

<sup>467</sup> “Each metanarrative including ours, is limited and relative. Any metanarrative that claims universality is at risk of being oppressive in that it makes everyone other than us subordinate parts of our story].” Schneiders, S. p.113

contribute to the incarnation of the charism; after drinking from the fountain of the founders they become the face of the charism in each culture.<sup>468</sup> Fr. Jesús Alvarez also shared this point of view:

*When a young woman enters the Congregation, with her something new, original, personal, a new generation enters the Congregation and as a result because of that new young person, the Congregation becomes actualized, inculturized, new avenues are opened up for the charism; the Congregation is refounded.*<sup>469</sup>

This does not mean that all customs or practices of a particular culture, of the youth culture, need to be embraced in an uncritical way without evaluating whether they are in accordance with the gospel or compatible with the charism. We could speak of incarnation of the charism instead of inculturation, since incarnation implies a wider scope, more existential and theological, while inculturation is a sociological term. There are various models of inculturation, among them, the synthetic-theological model proposes an intercultural dialogue between the original cultural formulation of faith and the concrete culture.<sup>470</sup> In the encounter of these two worlds a new cultural zone emerges.<sup>471</sup> As far as the charism is concerned, it is not a matter of “adapting” nor “translating” the charism to the new culture, as if the charism was culturally neutral; the point is to open the dialogue between the charism (conditioned by the culture in which it has developed) and the new cultures where the charism now finds itself. In this intercultural dialogue both are invited to learn from each other and to influence each other. Recent ecclesial documents have addressed these issues: V Conference of Latin American Bishops (Aparecida 2007, Chapter 10), Synod of Africa (2009), Synod of Asia (1999).

### 3. Prophetism, Solidarity and Justice

The prophet is person that in God’s name announces the Kingdom and denounces what opposes it. Anthony Claret and Antonia Paris exercised their prophetic vocation in different and varied ways. In the initial vision, Antonia understands that in response to the ills that affect the Church she is called to a radical living of the Gospel, but also sees the New Order, the Apostles of Jesus Christ, as instruments of that renewal. Later on she will also receive the inspiration to develop a Plan for the renewal of the Church. This prophetic mission is not something she wants or desires, on the contrary. In all of her writings we find echoes of her struggle to comply with the Lord’s request that she denounce particular behaviors of priests.

This resistance to the prophetic mission is very common in biblical prophets and a sign of authenticity. Mother Antonia, as most religious women in her days, did not have an ample field of ministry, but we see that in the area of education she was very concerned about justice.

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<sup>468</sup> *Like the birth of a child into a family, the entrance of a new member into the congregation will change everything. It does not destroy the identity of the congregation; but it will modify it. And the attempt to so tailor the individual to the community that no ripples are felt as a result of the incorporation of the new member is a quenching of the Spirit and thus of the newness of life that is offered by every new entrant.* Sandra Schneiders, p. 289

<sup>469</sup> Alvarez, Jesús Gómez. *Cristo Ayer, Hoy y Siempre*. 1997, p.12

<sup>470</sup> Cf. Richard Gaillardetz, *Ecclesiology for a Global Church, A People Called and Sent*. New York: Orbis Books, 2008. p.71

<sup>471</sup> Interculturality implies mutual acceptance of each other’s points of views. This presupposes one’s acceptance of one’s own culture or intraculturality..

She wanted education to be free and in Santiago de Cuba developed educational options for colored girls who, by law, could not attend the same school as white girls. She opened in the convent special classrooms to provide them with quality education.

Claret had many more opportunities to exercise his prophetic vocation. His own simple and poor lifestyle denounced the search for personal benefits and placing one's trust in material goods. As confessor to the Queen, he often expressed his opposition when decisions threatened the interests of the Kingdom. The plan for the renewal of the Church that he proposed in Spain is filled with prophetic insights to bring the Church back to fidelity. I would like to highlight the prophetic character of his Episcopal mission in Cuba.

Claret makes an option for families and defends the rights women when he confronts the civil authorities in order to eliminate the false road blocks that supported the prohibition of marriages between Spaniards and color women. He also denounces the injustices and mistreatment given to slaves, all of which leads to an attempt to murder him in Holguin.

He demonstrated his concern for the poor, not only sharing his own financial resources, but he founds an association called "Association of the Daughters of Mary" to offer shelter and education to poor girls. He dedicates time to personally visit the common prisoners and organizes a rehabilitation program to offer them education and moral formation during their time of incarceration.

He founds Savings Bank for the poor so they can borrow money and develop financial initiatives. This was part of this agrarian reform which also included distribution of lands that had been taken away from religious communities or church property. Along with this incredible plan of social action, he developed spiritual components, such as a spirituality for those that work in the field of agriculture. He wrote a book to this purpose called "The delights of the fields." Finally, his dream project consisted of a House of Charity, for which he purchased land in Puerto Principe with his own money. This project that included education and formation for children, youth and the elder, was abandoned when he left for Spain.

This does not include all of Claret's initiatives, urged by charity, he sought untiringly to help his brothers and sisters in ALL their needs whether material or spiritual; the epithet on his tomb describes this trajectory: *I loved justice and hated evil, therefore I die in exile.*

#### 4. Shared Mission

Maria Antonia understands mission as a shared venture; the order she conceives has two branches.<sup>472</sup> Claret also sees his mission in Cuba as project in collaboration with the sisters and others there.

#### 5. Missionary availability

Missionary zeal is a characteristic of Claret's vocational journey. He first goes to Rome to offer himself to Propaganda Fide; then, he enters the Jesuits to be sent to missions; while in Spain he is an itinerant missionary in Catalonia, Canary Island..

Antonia shares this missionary desires and she demonstrates her willingness to live up to them when she accepts to cross the Atlantic to come to Cuba.

In the original idea, Antonia stipulated that in addition to the three vows of poverty,

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<sup>472</sup> Constitutions 1869, Trat. I Cap. 6, n. 6

chastity and obedience, and the vow of remain cloistered, a fifth vow would be made, similar to the one practiced by the Company of Jesus by which the Pope could send the sister to any part of the world he deemed necessary. This vow was not approved by the Sacred Congregation of Religious in Rome, only the three vows were allowed. After 1870 it disappears from the Constitutions.

## 6. Scope of the Mission

Claret starts out of a concern for the individual salvation of each person and this leads him to a global vision of the mission in the Church. He wants to save the whole world, so he goes to Rometo join Propaganda Fide. On the other hand, Antonia begins with a global understanding of the mission of the Church, her initial concern is for the whole Church; this eventually concretizes in particular projects. In the Aim and Goal she concludes that the life and work of the members of the Institute are oriented in special way to the conversion of the consecrated men and women and the salvation of all the world. This area of ministry with the consecrated is an important aspect of the charism; their fidelity is essential to the renewal of the church.

## 7. Evangelization through all possible means

Some theologians distinguish between mission and ministry. Mission goes beyond the borders of the Church. *The call to mission embraces every aspect of creation and seeks to foster and promote the key values of the Kingdom of God: justice, love compassion and liberation.*<sup>473</sup> From this perspective, religious life is a charism form the world, not just the Church.

- a. In dialogue with culture, science, the arts: St. Anthony Mary Claret developed a series of initiatives that led him to cross the frontiers of the Church. His idea of establishing the Academy of St.Michael was precisely to engage the leaders in the fields of the Arts and Science and to enter into a dialogue with culture to transform it from the inside.
- b. Mass Media: Claret was a pioneer in the use of mass media through the only means available at the time, which was the printed form. He wrote in all types of formats: books, pamphlets, plain little sheets...to share the Word of God and the basics of the faith.

The creativity of our founders within the limitations of their times are an inspiration for us today who have so many different means to reach out and share the good news, specially through technology.

## CONCLUSION

In this work we have attempted to offer a guide in our reflection of what it means today to be an Apostle of Jesus Christ. The task of concretizing and incarnating these insights is still ahead in each part where we are present. From what we have shared we can conclude that for our founders an apostle was above all a man or woman of God whose lives should speak louder that words. They were not interested in leaving us formulas for apostolic efficiency, but pointers in how to live as missionaries in the style of Jesus. Our most important mission is to live our consecration in fraternity and poverty.<sup>474</sup>

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<sup>473</sup> O'Murchu, Diarmuid. *Consecrated Religious Life, The Changing Paradigms* Orbis: Maryknoll, p,132

<sup>474</sup> VC 85

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The Church also understands it this way:

*The specific contribution of consecrated persons, both men and women, to evangelization is first of all the witness of a life given totally to God and to their brothers and sisters, in imitation of the Saviour who, out of love for humanity, made himself a servant. In the work of salvation, in fact, everything comes from sharing in the divine agape. Consecrated persons make visible, in their consecration and total dedication, the loving and saving presence of Christ, the One consecrated by the Father, sent in mission.(VC 76)*

The community sends us as apostles to proclaim what we have seen and believed, what we have experienced in the encounter with the Lord and our brothers and sisters. Urged by charity we will find the means to carry out our mission with creativity and audacity.

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