



**PARÍS Y
CLARET:**
dos plumas
movidas por
el mismo Espíritu

Llamados a renovar la Iglesia

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París and Claret:
Two Pens Moved
by the Same Spirit
Called to Renew the Church

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BY THE SAME SPIRIT
CALLED TO RENEW THE CHURCH**

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PRESENTATION

*Since the origin of our Institute, the Holy Spirit urges us to work **for the renewal of the Church** by the keeping of his most holy law and by the radical living of the evangelical counsels, with special love for the evangelical poverty, which is “the foundation of the new apostles.”¹*
Constitutions 2.

With these words the Constitutions present a dimension of the charism which is so fundamental, but which we have not sufficiently developed. It is a rich vein to explore and live more deeply.

The call to the Renewal of the Church has always been present in our Congregation, but it is only after the II Vatican Council with the invitation made to the religious life *to return to the origins*, that our Institute discovered the full challenge that this charismatic dimension entails.

The research that the Congregation carried out in response to the invitation of the Church made possible that the richness and the originality of the writings of María Antonia Paris be known, among them the *Plan for the Renewal of the Church*. Since then these writings have nourished the life and the mission of the Claretian Missionary Sisters. We have been challenged with greater force than ever by the need to make them real and to live them more radically.

The Seminar on the Charismatic Foundation, which we have carried out on the occasion of the 125 Anniversary of the Death of María Antonia Paris, has helped us to deepen into the meaning of this dimension. Now we offer to you with love the fruit of our reflection, research, and prayer.

París and Claret: Two Pens Guided by the Same Spirit. Called to Renew the Church is the title of the book which you are going to enjoy. In it, for the first time, we have put together the two writings: María Antonia Paris *Plan for the Renewal of the Church* and St. Anthony M. Claret *Notes of a Plan to Preserve the Beauty of the Church*. Hortensia and Regina will help us to see the emphasis of each one, similarities and differences; and we will be able to recognize, as Rev. Dionisio Gonzalez said in a letter to Claret, that “a same spirit has guided both pens.”²

We wish from the bottom of our heart, that this book may help us to grow in our love for the Church, in the commitment to renew our faithfulness to the Gospel, and in our evangelizing action. We hope that it will help not only us, the Claretian Missionary Sisters, but also all the brothers, sisters and friends with whom we will share this book.

Madrid, 27th of August de 2010
155 Anniversary of the Birth of the Congregation.

María Soledad Galerón
Superior General

¹ Aut MP, 11.

² Letter of Rev. Dionisio González to Archbishop Claret. Cuba, 31st of July 1858. Cf. CO, 122 & EPCL-II, 442.

INTRODUCTION

Anthony M. Claret y Clará and María Antonia París y Riera are the main characters of this book. Both were born at the beginning of the XIX century. During that century the traditional way of life disappears in all the different areas: political, social, cultural, and religious. At the same time a new social and political order is making its way in Europe and later on in Spain, particularly in Catalonia.

The system of beliefs and values is changing: God is not needed anymore to explain the world and the deepest human desires. There is no need of authorities which will dictate how to think, act, determine what is good and what is bad. The absolutism gives way to the French Revolution with the motto: Liberty, equality, brotherhood!

The Enlightened Reason proposes and demands that each person take the responsibility for his or her own life and thoughts, while at the same time it puts under suspicion Sacred Scripture, religious experience and the Church as an institution. The XIX century's Church tries to survive in the midst of the progressive loss of Christian values in society.

What began as an ideal was transformed into an indiscriminate religious persecution: disentanglements, burning of convents, forced secularizations, prohibition to make new foundations and to accept new candidates in the existing orders.

It was the beginning of a new period of history, and the Church still anchored in the old regime did not know how to keep her identity and her mission without renouncing her old fashioned structures, privileges, and possessions. As it usually happens during changes which are imposed from outside the confusion was inevitable; everything that seemed a novelty was rejected; the Church held fast to what was familiar, to more conservative positions.

But what at the beginning seemed to be an evil, ended up being a great benefit for the Church. History, itself, helped to purify many things, from some unclear vocational motivations so abundant in the convents, to the ecclesiastical patrimony which had been dangerously increasing over the centuries.

In all times when the circumstances are not easy God calls different persons, men and women, who seek to serve God and the human race within the reality in which they find themselves. This was the case of Anthony Mary Claret and María Antonia París.

The works of God have always a process. God gives us the seed and accompanies us in the process of developing it. The first time that María Antonia felt that God was speaking to her heart, she understood that God was asking her to found a new religious order in the Church, a new order called to live radically the evangelical counsels, specially the evangelical poverty; and to work until death teaching the Gospel. Very deep in her heart she grasped that the New Order was established for the renewal of the Church, but many years had to pass by until María Antonia fully understood this call of God.

At the same time Anthony Mary Claret was discovering that his work as an apostolic missionary helped with the renewal of the Church.

The Institute has followed the same process. In the development of the charism received, we have discovered with greater clarity that only being the New Order we will understand our identity as Claretian Missionary Sisters, born for the renewal of the Church.

This work is the fruit of the Congregation's reflection, which we want to present in the following chapters.

In the first chapter we present the vocational journey of Claret and Paris, each one with their own constant and peculiar aspects, their process of becoming mature as persons and as Christians.

In the second chapter we explain the two experiences of God that have left a permanent footprint, and have changed their lives.

We consider the third chapter to be the most important, because for the first time the writings of our Founders on the renewal of the Church will be presented together in a book. First the *Plan for the Renewal of the Church* by María Antonia Paris since it is the first chronologically, and *Notes of a Plan to Keep and Preserve the Beauty of the Church* by Anthony M. Claret. Let us listen to their own words telling us about their ideals on the renewal of the Church.

Finally in the fourth chapter, we try to approach the reality of our world and of our Church to listen to what Claret and Paris have to offer in this never ended journey of giving back to the Church the merciful face of Christ.

As we read the journey of our Founders, it is our hope that their ever growing love to the Church and their unconditional commitment will help us, Claretians, and anyone who reads these pages, to be moved by their example, and also grow in this same love and commitment. In the midst of the "evils" we might experience, may we never lose the ability to dream of a Church more friendly completely dedicated to the service of the human beings. In spite of our limitations, let us be aware that the Lord walks with us as he did with the pilgrims of Emmaus. On the way he explains to us the Scriptures and breaks the bread of brotherhood and thus helps us to discover the signs of his presence in our time.

This book is the fruit of the love for the Church that each Claretian Missionary Sister has woven in the deepest recesses of her heart.

We are aware of its limitations, but we offer it as a starting point to continue the reflection on this fundamental dimension of our charism, and to continue the never finished task of the renewal of the Church.

Madrid, August 15, 2010
Anniversary of the Tarragona Vow
Charismatic beginning of the Congregation

CHAPTER 1

PARIS AND CLARET, PROTAGONISTS OF THIS STORY

The secret in the life of Maria Antonia was that she had ... “a heart determined to comply with the divine will...”³ The translation in her life of this determination, was to establish a “New Order not new in doctrine but new in practice” founded on the evangelical poverty to proclaim the Gospel to every creature and to work for the Renewal of the Church.

Claret, is a man on fire,⁴ who from his early childhood understood the need to work so that all men and women be saved and could know, love, and serve God. He will be a missionary in Catalonia and in the Canary Islands, Archbishop of Cuba, Confessor of Queen Isabel II and Father of the I Vatican Council.

We will briefly follow the journey of their lives, where we will see how they discovered the will of God and, through it, how they grew and matured in their Church vocation.

1. Antonio Maria Claret y Clará

1.1 A Childhood Marked with a Strong Experience of the Spirit

Born in Sallent (Barcelona), of the Diocese of Vic, on December 23rd, 1807, he was the fifth child of eleven, that were born from the marriage of Juan Claret and Josefa Clará. They were a very religious family of weavers. He received the sacrament of Baptism two days after his birth, on Christmas 1807. He was given the names of Anthony, Adjutor and John.

Claret has described in his *Autobiography* a powerful experience of the Spirit which he had when he was only five years old:

“The first ideas I can remember date back to when I was five years old. When I went to bed, instead of sleeping-I never have been much of a sleeper- I used to think about eternity, I would think “forever, forever, forever.” I would try to imagine enormous distances and pile still more distances on them 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 would ever see an end to their suffering. Would they have to go on suffering? Yes forever and forever they will have to bear their pain!”⁵

This marked his life and when in his mature years he writes about it, he continues to experience the same shudder thinking of “always, always, always.” Through his faith journey, he will complete little by little this experience which will be at the foundation of his ecclesial vocation. In the following paragraph he explains why he felt the emotion he has described:

³ Juan Manuel Lozano, *Escritos de María Antonia París*, “Autobiography,” English translation by an unknown author, 7. (From now on it will be cited as Aut.MP followed by the number of the paragraph.)

⁴ Cf. St Anthony Mary Claret, *Autobiography*, edited by José María Viñas, (Chicago: Claretian Publications, 1976), 494. (From now on it will be cited as Aut FC.)

⁵ Aut. FC, 8.

“This troubled me deeply, for I am by nature very compassionate. The idea of an eternity of torment made such a deep impression on me, either because of the tenderness it evoked in me or because of the many times I thought about it, that it is surely the thing that to this day I remember best.”⁶

Compassion is the reason of his worries about his neighbor. He continues describing what this has meant for him.

“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 one to one conversations.”⁷

If in his childhood this idea is the reason for his compassion for the salvation of his neighbor, this experience will ripen and be completed with the experience of God as Father, which will be the fundamental reason of his vocation as an evangelizer. The fatherhood of God over his children and the unhappy eternity of he who will not allow God to be at the center of his life will be the *stimulus and spur* of his apostolic zeal and will remain with Claret in future experiences.

“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. This idea breaks my heart with pain and makes me want to run like... And I tell myself, if a sin is infinitely malicious, then preventing a sin is preventing an infinite offense against my God, against my good Father.”⁸

When he was 12 years old, he received another peculiar grace which he explains in “*Review of his Life*,”⁹ as follows:

“1820, 12 years old, God called me, I offered myself to his most holy will.”¹⁰

Short, clear and to the point. He is aware that the call is a gift and requires an answer which he gives promptly. This was an event that marked his availability, as a starting point, for whatever God might want. Many years will have to pass by until he will discover how God wants him to fulfill his vocation, which he had felt, for the first time when he was 5 and 12 years old. It will be a long journey and, sometimes difficult to discern, but the experience of these two events will be as a backdrop curtain for future situations; in them he has discovered the need to work for the salvation of mankind and the fatherhood of God, situations which will help him to remain attentive to God’s Will, to which he answers with a full availability.

1.2 Called to the Textile Manufacturing

⁶ Aut. FC, 9a.

⁷ Aut. FC, 9b.

⁸ Aut. FC, 16 y 40.

⁹ This is a writing he composed when he was Archbishop of Cuba in 1856. He summarizes events of his life between 1813 and 1856. It was written five years before the *Autobiography* and contains it like in germ. In *Escritos Autobiográficos*, (BAC: Madrid, 1981), 426-430.

¹⁰ Brief narration of his life *Escritos Autobiográficos*, 427.

The life of Claret goes on. As any other young man he is initiated in the world of labor, at the family loom. Anthony has a especial ability for the textile manufacturing. His father made him do all sorts of tasks, and he even made him go over what the workers had not completely finished.¹¹

The work of manufacturing thrilled him; he felt it as his own, to the point to ask his father to let him go to Barcelona to get a better education. In 1825, when he was 18 years old, his father, realizing his talent, sent him to Barcelona to improve in the textile art:

“He agreed and took me there. But, like St. Paul, I had to earn what I needed for food, clothing, books, teachers...”¹²

In the Lonja of Barcelona he learned drawing, grammar, and French. He is fascinated by the art of manufacturing. Somebody offers him to be the manager of a business which he rejects.¹³

“Of all the things I have studied or worked at during my life, I have understood none better than manufacturing. Apropos of this, in the firm I worked for, there were catalogs of patterns shown at the yearly display in Paris and London, and they were kept up-to-date to be in step with the latest fashions. God gave me such a ready wit in this that all I had to do was analyze any pattern and in short order, a copy would emerge from the loom exact to the last detail, or even with improvements if my employer so desired.”¹⁴

His creativity and his natural gift for handicrafts and for practical things make him feel satisfied with what he does. He does not have anything else to learn.

Anthony is portrayed in his *Autobiography* as a young man determined, oriented, and called toward the textile manufacturing, for which he has good abilities and gifts. He was satisfied and happy in his work; he felt he was lacking nothing. In his twenties it seems that his life is completely on track. Now he only needs to put in practice what he has learned in Barcelona

1.3 His Conversion

If he had followed this way; we could not say that he had done anything wrong, but looking at the history of his entire life, with the perspective that time gives to us, we can truly say that he would not have fulfilled the plan God had for him, the plan he glimpsed in his childhood. His professional orientation almost became for him the center around which he organized everything, even his relationship with God. Now God will encounter him, and with the same availability that he had when he was 12 years old, he will follow the call. He explains it in his *Autobiography*:

“During those first three years in Barcelona the fervor that I had at home began to cool. True, I received the sacraments frequently during the year. I attended Mass on all feasts and holy days of obligation and daily prayed the rosary to Mary and kept up my other devotions, but with none of my former fervor. My only goal and all my

¹¹ Cf. Aut. FC, 33.

¹² Aut. FC, 56.

¹³ Cf. Aut. FC, 63-64.

¹⁴ Aut. FC, 58.

anxieties were about manufacturing. I can't overstate it –my obsession approached delirium. Who can say? Perhaps the very intensity of my inclination was the means God used to take away my love for manufacturing?"¹⁵

Textile manufacturing had become for him an absolute. His conversion will be to discover what is the concrete call he had to follow. This does not mean that textile manufacturing was not something good in itself and a possible way of life for someone, but this was not Claret's call; for this reason he will have to leave it and change direction. He had not abandoned completely his religious devotions but:

"...I was tormented during Mass with new ideas, discoveries etc. There seemed to be more machines in my head than saints on the altar."¹⁶

His conversion comes about in contact with the Word of God:

"In the midst of this whirligig of ideas, while I was at Mass one day, I remembered reading, as a small boy, those words of the Gospel: What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and suffers the loss of his soul?(Mt 16,26). This phrase impressed me deeply and went like an arrow to my heart. I tried to think and reason what to do, but to no avail."¹⁷

In these words there is a return to his childhood, when the theme of Salvation worried him. The unhappy eternity, which in his childhood he would think about others, now he applies it to himself, because truly he was not accomplishing what God wanted of him. When he realizes that he is not fulfilling the Plan that God had for him and thus he may be lost forever, he decides to change his path and he will say:

"The warmth of piety and devotion reawakened in me. I opened my eyes and recognized the dangers to soul and body that I had been passing through..."¹⁸

Through the events he lived in Barcelona, he discovers in them signs that tell him he has to abandon manufacturing: the experience of nearly drowning,¹⁹ the intent of seduction of a woman²⁰ and the disloyalty of a friend,²¹ which he reinterpreted under the light of his experience and in contact with the text of Mt 16,26. He sees in them the voice of God who calls him to a change in the orientation of his life.

He tells us that this is a conversion and compares it to the conversion of Paul:

"I was like Paul on the road to Damascus, but I was in need of an Ananias to tell me what to do."

And Claret will look for someone to advice him. This will be Fr. Amigó, from the Oratory of St. Philip Neri:

¹⁵ Aut. FC, 66.

¹⁶ Aut. FC, 67.

¹⁷ Aut. FC, 68.

¹⁸ Aut. FC, 70.

¹⁹ Cf. Aut. FC, 71.

²⁰ Cf. Aut. FC, 72.

²¹ Cf. Aut. FC, 73-76.

“...he listened to me, approved of my decision, and counseled me to study Latin. I obeyed him.”²²

Claret felt a deep incompatibility between his mind, full of machines, and his relationship with God. And as a background music, the Word of God: *What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and suffers the loss of his soul?*

“Disenchanted, weary, and bored with the world, I considered leaving it for the solitary life of a Carthusian and pursued my studies with this end in view...”²³

Once Anthony decides something he will fulfill it in the most radical way. But a very insignificant event, at least at first sight, as a storm, makes him realize that his health is not strong enough for that way of life. He interprets it as a sign that God does not call him to this path.²⁴ He will have to continue his search, which will take many more years.

He goes back to Vic; he is 23 years old. He continues to study Philosophy, and in the second year he experiences an event which is going to be decisive and will mark the direction of his life: *Initial Experience*, which we will discuss when the time comes.

Before finishing theology, he is ordained as a priest and appointed parochial Vicar of Sallent; in this town he continues to study the three years of theology that he needs, and he goes to take his exams in Vic. At the same time that he studies, he has a very active ministry: mass, confessions, catechesis, visitations to the sick, preaching.

1.4 I determined to leave the parish and go to Rome

After his *Initial Experience* and in touch with Sacred Scriptures, Claret discovers his vocation as an Apostolic Missionary for the Church and he makes the resolution to offer his life:

“...thus it was that I determined to leave the parish and go to Rome, to present myself to the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith so that they could send me anywhere in the world.”²⁵

His love for the Church impelled him always to look for more, for the places where it would be more difficult. However, we wonder why, after the dangerous journey to Rome,²⁶ he enters the Company of Jesus. The reason was a non transcendental event, such as the Cardinal in charge of Propaganda FIDE being in vacation for a month.²⁷ Claret uses this month to do the Spiritual Exercises and it is, in this context, and by means of the Jesuit who gave him the book to do the Exercises, that he enters the Company of Jesus.

He stayed in the Company for four months, and it was an important formation period in his journey to become an Apostolic Missionary for the Church.

²² Aut. FC, 69.

²³ Aut. FC, 77.

²⁴ Cf. Aut. FC, 89.

²⁵ Aut. FC, 120.

²⁶ Cf. Aut. FC, 121-136.

²⁷ Cf. Aut. FC, 138.

Knowing the discernment methods of the Company of Jesus, it is surprising that the reason for him to leave the Company be a pain in his knee, which he never mentions again. Claret was already very determined in his priestly vocation; maybe the Jesuits took advantage of the pain of his knee to tell him that God had other plans for him, as so it was.

On the other hand, the things might not be too clear for him, as we may deduce from the two anecdotes of the games and the Bible.²⁸ He must have felt relieved with the decision taken by the Company. Another period in the life of Claret is closed, a period in which he wanted to develop his call as an Apostolic Missionary for the Church.

He goes back to Spain convinced about what the Father General of the Company of Jesus had told him: "God brought you to the Company not that you should remain in it, but that you might learn how to win souls for heaven."²⁹ Surprisingly this sentence is not found in any of the three letters written by the Superior General of the Jesuits.³⁰ However, he consigned this in his *Autobiography*, which is a proof that he experienced this period of his life as a training for the universal mission in the service of the Church, completely in tune with his childhood worries for the salvation of mankind.

1.5 Apostolic Missionary for the Church, in the Style of Jesus with his Apostles, in Poverty and Itinerancy

He came back from Rome; he went to Vic and his Bishop sent him to Viladrau to dedicate himself completely to preaching:

"I started giving missions in the parish of Viladrau on August 15, 1840, conducting a novena in honor of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Next I gave another in the parish of Espinervas, an hour away from Viladrau. Then I went to the parish of Seva. The mission here was more sensational than the others. A large number of people underwent conversion and made general confessions. This was the start of my fame as a missionary."³¹

He says candidly, that *this was the start of my fame as a missionary*. He was 32 years old. From this moment the large missions begin. During eight years he is free from the parish responsibilities and available to go from one town to another wherever the Bishop would send him (1840-1848). This is another characteristic of Claret as a Missionary for the Church, the itinerancy in the style of Jesus and his Apostles. In poverty like them, without purse, or sandals, accepting the hospitality which is offered to him.

As he was dedicated to the missions, on July 9, 1841, the Holy See, granted him the title of Apostolic Missionary. Although this was an honorary title, he considered it as a confirmation of his identity, in the way as in the Bible the imposition of a new name, manifests a new vocational purpose.

Missionary meant for Claret, from his vocational experience, his way to be in the Church as servant of the Word, offering his own life to the service of the Gospel.

²⁸ Cf. Aut. FC, 149-151.

²⁹ Aut. FC, 167.

³⁰ Cf. Aut. FC, 167, note 48.

³¹ Aut. FC, 172.

Apostolic, although in the language of the Roman Curia, it meant the Holy See that conferred it to him, he understood it to be a mission in the style of the Apostles in communion of fraternal life and of evangelical testimony, of full availability and itinerancy for the universal mission.

An important event during this period of his life is the gift of healing³² using herbs which he had noticed during his sojourn in the Montseny, and also from an important herbalist, D. Jaime Bofill, who initiated him in this art. People would crowd around him and ask that he go to different places where he was needed, and they also realized that when he was present, fewer people would die; thus they insisted that he stayed in the Parish.³³

Jesus had told his disciples that, their preaching would be accompanied by some signs: healing of the sick, raising of the dead, cleansing of the lepers and driving out demons (Cf. Mt 10,7). And those signs accompanied the life of Claret. In the theme about demons he was very cautious as we can see from the title of Chapter IX of Part II of the *Autobiography: On Healing the Possessed, and on the Many Fictitious Cases of Possession*.

He felt that this fame, which was forcing him to stay in one place, was a temptation to keep him apart from his itinerant life and from the ministry of evangelization. It is at that moment when he asks his Bishop to remove him from the parish and he offers himself in complete availability to go to any place where evangelization would be needed.³⁴ Thus, he goes to the Canary Islands where he evangelizes in the islands of Gran Canaria and Lanzarote, from February 1848 to May 1849, one year and three months.

For Claret, to be an Apostolic Missionary is to be at the service of the Word in the Church, and this with only one goal: *for the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls*.³⁵

He came back to the Peninsula, and on July 16, 1849 in one of the rooms of the Seminary of Vic, he founded the Congregation of the Missionaries of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. For the sanctification of its members and the salvation of humankind, through the missionary proclamation of the Word, with the intention that where he could not go his missionaries would.

M^a Antonia, even before meeting Claret, through the experience of the Spirit of God acknowledged him as an *Apostolic man and the grace for evangelic preaching he had received*

“One night while praying and in bitter tears, pleading to our Lord that by the merits of His Passion and death to have mercy on the necessities of His church which at that time were many, our Lord told me and pointing at Mgr. Claret as if I saw him between our Lord and me.” This, my daughter, is the apostolic person whom you have asked me for so many years and with so much tears”.

“His Divine Majesty showed me the grace He poured on that holy soul for the preaching of the gospel, and our Lord told me that there was no other remedy for the peace of the church. I did not know that person. Only a few days before I heard that a certain chaplain by the name of Mosen Claret began preaching with much zeal about

³² Cf. Aut. FC, 171; note 57.

³³ Cf. Aut. FC, 173.

³⁴ Cf. Aut. FC, 174.

³⁵ Cf. Aut. FC, ch. XI.

the honor due to God and the salvation of souls. I think this [the vision] happened at least eleven or twelve years ago."³⁶

1.6 Apostolic Missionary for the Church in situation of stability: Archbishop of Cuba and Confessor of the Queen

Claret has lived his vocation as Apostolic Missionary in very diverse situations that, in some moments, seemed to be contrary to this vocation. However he will always know how to profit from all the circumstances of his life to fulfill his vocation.

He receives the nomination as Archbishop of Cuba on August 11, 1849; at first he does not want to accept it. In substance he feels a deep incompatibility between being a missionary and the way to fulfill the ministry as a bishop on his time. To be an Archbishop at that moment was considered to be an honor, and the work had a bureaucratic nature, which seemed to be in contradiction with his vocation as an Apostolic Missionary.

"Overwhelmed by the nomination, I had no desire to accept it because I considered myself unworthy and incapable of such a great dignity, for which I lacked both the necessary knowledge and virtue. Even after prolonged reflection on the matter, I concluded that, even if I had the required knowledge and virtue, it would be wrong for me to abandon the Religious Library and the Congregation, which were just coming into being. Therefore I forcefully rejected all the overtures of the Papal Nuncio, Monsignor Brunelli, as well as those of the Attorney General of Spain, Don Lorenzo Arrazola. When both of these gentlemen, the Nuncio and the Attorney General, saw that they were getting nowhere with me, they decided to work through my superior, the Bishop of Vic, whom I always obeyed blindly, and he, in turn, formally commanded me to accept."³⁷

Although he insists on his unworthiness and incompetence, in substance what is happening is that he finds himself caught between different duties; on one hand, he does not want to accept because he sees his vocation as an Apostolic Missionary in danger; and on the other hand he was involved with the foundation of the Claretian Missionaries(men), the Religious Library, and the final composition of the Constitutions of the Carmelites of Charity of Mother Vedruna. He prays and asks people to pray for him. He leaves it in the hands of the mediations; he sees in their insinuations the will of God and he accepts.³⁸ Once again obedience prevails.

In this new situation Claret will make his identity as an Apostolic Missionary compatible to the call from God to be Archbishop of the Diocese of Santiago de Cuba. What at the beginning seemed to him a danger for his identity as Apostolic Missionary, will enlarge the horizons and will make of the Diocese of Santiago de Cuba a permanent place of Mission.

His pastoral visitations were true missions. Time of familiar sharing with the missionary team that accompanied him and of an intense evangelization. With his new way to live his ministry as a bishop, he will be an example for the other prelates. The renewal of

³⁶ Aut. MP, 19.

³⁷ Aut. FC, 495.

³⁸ Cf. Aut. FC, 495.

the Church worries him and he shares these worries with M^a Antonia París. During the six years of his leadership in the Diocese, he made three pastoral visitations remaining about thirty days in each town.

The intent to kill him in Holguin will be the beginning of a new period in his life. It was for him a shock, although it was at the same time a joy to be able to partake in the sufferings of Christ for his Body which is the Church.³⁹ During his convalescence he conceives the Plan for San Michael's Academy.⁴⁰ Claret dedicates all his energies to the Apostolic Mission, even when his strength is weak.

He was at the beginning of his forth visitation when he received the nomination from the Queen Isabel II to be her confessor. In this new mission, Claret will have the opportunity to accomplish greater apostolic plans: his worries for the Church at the national level and even at the universal level. He imposes three conditions on the Queen before accepting his nomination, which she agrees with:

"May 28 (1857) Second meeting with the Queen Isabel II... the Queen accepts the three conditions: that he will not have to deal with politics; that after fulfilling his duties in [the] palace he will have free time for his own works; that he will not have to lose his time waiting when he goes to [the] palace..."⁴¹

These conditions aim to protect his being as an Apostolic Missionary of which Claret was zealous.

This is a very fruitful time: he has a direct influence on the Queen of Spain and thus, in some way, in the leadership of the Country. He works for the renewal of the Church of Spain with his constant influence in the nomination of bishops, electing worthy and authentic shepherds. He establishes the Academy of St. Michael, as a meeting place between faith and culture. He publishes many books, booklets, and flyers. He works on the consolidation of the popular libraries. He establishes the inter-diocesan seminary in El Escorial and a university college for the formation of the new leaders of the new society, in which faith and culture will have to dialogue.

His apostolic activity has been important for the Church during these years. However, in reading these chapters of the Autobiography we realize that there is a deep tension between his spirit of universality and his itinerancy, as it had been during the period in which he was an Apostolic Missionary and the forced stay in the Court;⁴² between his fidelity to the apostolic vocation and his voluntary withdrawal from politics;⁴³ his apostolic work and his spiritual life.⁴⁴

In a synthesis, he explains very graphically how he feels his spirit in this situation:

"I can see that what the Lord is doing in me is like what I observe going on in the motion of the planets: they are pulled by two forces, one centrifugal, the other centripetal. Centrifugal force pulls them to escape their orbits; centripetal force draws

³⁹ Cf. Aut. FC, 585-587.

⁴⁰ Aut. FC, 581.

⁴¹ San Antonio María Claret, *Escritos Autobiográficos y Espirituales*, (BAC: 1959), Edition prepared by José M^a Viñas, 26.

⁴² Cf. Aut. FC, XI.

⁴³ Cf. Aut. FC, XII-XIII.

⁴⁴ Cf. Aut. FC, XIV-XIX.

them toward their center. The balance of these two forces holds them in their orbits. That's just how I see myself. I feel one force within me, which I'll call centrifugal, telling me to get out of Madrid and the court; but I also feel a counterforce, the will of God, telling me to stay in court for the time being, until I am free to leave. This will of God is the centripetal force that keeps me chained here like a dog on his leash. The mixture of these two forces, namely, the desire to leave and my love for doing God's will, keeps me running around in my circle."⁴⁵

To fulfill the will of God will always be the motive of his work for the Church.

1.7 Apostolic Missionary until the end

It is the last period of his life. He arrived in Rome from his exile in Paris, on April 2nd 1869 with the purpose to participate in the priestly jubilee of Pope Pius IX. The Pope invited him to take part in the preparation of Council Vatican I that, in these dates, already was very much advanced. He tells us about this event in the *Autobiographical Documents*.⁴⁶

The Council was announced publicly on June 26, 1867. His taking part in the Council was also an expression of his ecclesial vocation. In a letter to M. Foundress he tells her what is his participation and what are his hopes:

"Now I am very busy with the preparation for the Council; because I have been in and have seen many places, they ask me about different matters, and this makes me very busy. I expect many good things from this Council; you might remember what I wrote in the book "Notes...."⁴⁷

Two month later, in a letter to Currius he explains in more detail the benefits he expects from the Council:

"I have been very busy in getting information for the Council... many expect material benefits from the Council... I expect spiritual benefits. We will know what to do; I expect that the Council and his Doctrine will be a beacon which will show us the harbor of salvation in the midst of the storm which will still become stronger and greater. Alas of the earth!..."⁴⁸

He does not say what these benefits are, but he says they are spiritual; and besides, from his former letters we know that those benefits are in the line of the Renewal of the Church in the difficult society of the XIX century. From the *Notes of a Plan...* we know that his preoccupation was the Church and, in it, the renewal of the clergy and the religious men and women, the good formation of the seminarians. He felt the need for the Church to live in poverty, that each one according to his vocation be faithful to his or her Christian commitments and proclaim the Gospel; only in this way will the evils that surrounded the Church disappear.

His presence in the Council was constant, in spite of his ailments. The weather of Rome did not help him. We know from the records of proceedings that he was present to all

⁴⁵ Aut. FC, 623.

⁴⁶ Cf. *Escritos Aut. FC*, 450-504.

⁴⁷ EC,II, 1419. (Letters are cited by number)

⁴⁸ EC, II, 1425.

the general assemblies and to almost all the congregations .⁴⁹ He spoke only once there to give witness of his willingness to martyrdom in favor of the Papal infallibility. S. Antony M^a Claret considered his presence and action in the Council as his last service to the Church, the consummation of his vocation as Apostolic Missionary in the Church. In a letter addressed to M^a Antonia, on July 21st 1869, 15 month before his death, he says:

“It can be said that the purposes that the Lord had on me have been accomplished. Blessed be God, may the works I have done be pleasing to God.”⁵⁰

He thinks that he has accomplished the plan God had over his life. He died in exile, at the Monastery of Fontfroide (France), at 08:45, October 24, 1870.

2. M^a ANTONIA PARÍS Y RIERA

2.1 *A Birth Marked with the Sign of Suffering*

M^a Antonia was born under the sign of suffering on June 28, 1813, six years after Claret. She belonged to a well-to-do farm family that lived in Tarragona. Francisco Paris and Teresa Riera had already a three year old daughter and one on the way. Francisco, the father, died on May 19, 1813, a little bit more than a month before the birth of María Antonia, leaving Teresa sunken in a deep sorrow. She had to flee from the troops of Napoleon. In their retreat, they were committing many atrocities, thus she had to leave in a hurry from his home in Tarragona and take refuge in Vallmoll, a little town 15 Km from Tarragona, in the home of her male servant. She starts labor and the doctor says that the baby girl will be still born; however, she gives birth to a thin and pale girl who looked like she was roasted on a grill.⁵¹ In another occasion M^a Antonia interprets this event as the presence of evil who wanted to make her disappear:

“...In that prayer hell was in fury and no doubt we were given that “present” to [fracture] my head, if not to kill me, because hell was trying to kill me several times (even before I was born, it wanted to drown me by means of an accident that my mother suffered, as the doctors said it was impossible to save the unborn baby).”⁵²

The only accounts that we have from her childhood and adolescence are found in notes of M. Getrudis Barril. She tells us that she was a person of few words, serious and of good Catalan common sense, *seny*. Extremely obliging and hard working in the housekeeping, she tells us that since early childhood she was in charge of these tasks. The school education of Antonia was quite complete comparing her education to that of other women of her time: reading, notions of arithmetic, drawing, painting, embroidering and sewing in general. Her handwriting was steady with a firm stroke. Her spelling was not too good, and sometimes she uses words and grammatical forms which show that her mother language was Catalan. We do not know where she went to school, probably to the School of the Sisters of the Company of Mary, near her home in the *Plaza de los Cedazos*, where some years later she will enter as a postulant.

⁴⁹ Cf. *Escritos Aut. FC*, 451, note 126.

⁵⁰ EC, II, 1419.

⁵¹ “Notes on the Servant of God,” written as a brief biography by M. Gertrudis Barril, around 1885 after María Antonia’s death. (Cf. *Positio M. París*, 9-10).

⁵² Aut. MP, 18.

As for her Christian formation we not see jumps or fractures in her spiritual evolution, but a continuous deepening, typical of someone having received a good formation during childhood. She received her First Communion at the early age of 9.

2.2 *Her conversion. All my Longings Were the Holy Cross and to Live and to Die Crucified with Christ*

We can date her conversion during a Mission preached by the Franciscan Priests of Scornalbou, at the Cathedral of Tarragona, when she was 14 years old. They recommended very much the life of faith and of a personal relationship with the Lord, love for the sacraments, Marian devotion, works of mercy, reading books that could help in formation, avoiding harmful shows, and to have a spiritual director. M^a. Antonia will maintain during all her life this Christian simplicity and solidity.

In the notes she wrote some time later, she remembers those years and says:

“God taught me the most refined perfection as soon as I discovered him... All my longings were the Holy Cross and to live and to die crucified with Christ.”⁵³

Her conversion meant a deep encounter with Jesus Christ. From almost the beginning her spirituality was Christ centered, with a strong attraction towards the humanity of Christ and his saving suffering.⁵⁴

During these years she has a great eagerness for the acts of penance and corporal mortifications, to the point of becoming sick. In this situation she meets the canon Rev. Jose Caixal, who will play a very important role in the life of M^a Antonia. She took him as her spiritual director, and he freed her from her mysterious sickness. Probably around that time she began to feel the vocation to the religious life. She will say that she had always felt it.

Almost immediately Caixal went on exile out of the country and returned when Antonia was already in the Convent of the Company of Mary.

2.3 *In the Convent of the Company of Mary*

Although she decided to be a sister very early in her life, she did not enter in the Company of Mary of Tarragona until she was 28 years old. She entered as a resident, because the anticlerical laws prohibited the admission of new vocations.

The time she lived in the Company of Mary is the time of her life that we best know through her autobiography.⁵⁵ She entered on October 23, 1841 and left on January 28, 1851, after almost 10 years. It was in this very long wait, in the Company of Mary, when an event, which was the starting point for her Church vocation, took place. She had been in the convent about one year when the Lord gave her an experience which marked her life and we call it the *Initial or Founding Experience*.

⁵³ *Escritos de M^a Antonia París*, “Recuerdos y Notas,” 1, p.189 (From now on cited as, R y N followed by the number of the paragraph).

⁵⁴ Cf. R y N, 2.

⁵⁵ Cf. Aut. MP, 1-109.

Some time after this experience, the Lord made her understand that Claret was the man who would help her. She had never met him, but she recognized him as the apostolic man that the Church needed to preach the Holy Law. She met him some time later.

In 1850, due to an exception granted by the Queen during her visitation to the Convent of Tarragona,⁵⁶ M^a Antonia began her novitiate with her other companions. This was the beginning of her strong and distressing doubts. She asked herself whether she had to make her vows in the Company or whether it would be better not to make her vows, in order to be free for the foundation of the New Order according to what she understood was the will of the Lord.

“While I and all the novices were in the holy exercises for the profession, his Excellency Claret came to Barcelona to sail. My confessor commanded me to write to him telling my anguish since it was necessary to profess or to leave. So that if he would be kind to answer me, as soon as possible, on what was the best thing to do in so difficult a case and to tell me either to go on with the profession or to postpone it, since we had only twelve days. 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 to depart from Spain leaving me in a sea of confusion without having anything determined.”⁵⁷

We may imagine her agony.

2.4 *Leaving the Company of Mary and the Vow of Tarragona*

This period of the life of Maria Antonia is marked by suffering, an intense pain of a especial meaning in her life. From January 1850 when she met Claret to January 1851 when after a long discernment she leaves the convent, she experienced a hard interior test, she asked herself if she had to leave the Company of Mary to found the *New Order* she had envisioned in her *Initial Experience*. The thought about leaving was painful; maybe it was an impulse of the devil to take her away from the place where God had put her. It was a time of waiting, suffering and decision making.⁵⁸

“God our Lord was pleased in this occasion to make me taste the summit of affliction. I thought very seldom of the promises the Lord had made to me and, if I remember them sometimes it was for a great torments because at once my old anguishes assaulted me – that all that my confessor told me to be the Spirit of God was perhaps the evil spirit to get me out of the convent and then, to leave me unable to become a religious. This was for me the cruelest torture because I cannot explain the love I have always had for the religious life. And the devil all the more reinforced these fears in me seeing that the confessors and the good bishop Claret, who assured me of the work, did not dare to define the case.”⁵⁹

She lives this situation with deep pain, but with hope. M^a Antonia, as always, leaves it in the hands of obedience and waits.

⁵⁶ Nothing written has been found about this visitation.

⁵⁷ Aut. MP, 98.

⁵⁸ Cf. Aut. MP, 94-109.

⁵⁹ Aut. MP, 100.

“A Dominican Father, a great servant of God, very learned and of great virtue, Rev. Fr. Tomas Gatell who was the confidant of my confessor in the matter because I had opened to him my soul many times and he had always said to me that I would not take my profession in that convent – now he was also fearful to decide in the case because my confessor left it in his hands trusting more in the great experience of this Fr. Master Gatell than in himself, and because he was also director of my companion, the one who wanted to leave with me. This father was more inclined to see as God’s will to forget the profession and leave the convent, but the great difficulties expected frightened him so much as not to have the courage to assume the responsibility. He knew the disturbance the whole community would suffer and, no less than the community, the Archbishop since he knew well how much we were loved by all of them. He said we were going to make such a toll of the bell that it would be heard not only in the whole city but in the entire Archdiocese.”⁶⁰

After a long deliberation of the directors of Antonia and of Florentina Seingler, Rev. Caixal and Fr. Gatell O.P. counsel them to leave:

“Thus the Dominican Fr. Master Gatell and the Doctor Most Illustrious D. Jose Caixal now Bishop of Urgel, who was that time a canon in the Cathedral of Tarragona, decided on my departure from the convent.”⁶¹

Florentina and Maria Antonia left the convent on January 28, 1851 and thus began a new period in their lives, characterized by silence and prayer, living almost as religious sisters in Tarragona, in the house of Canon Bofarrull.⁶² They remained there almost one year. During this time three other young women joined them.

On August 15, 1851 the five of them made the *Vow of Tarragona*, charismatic beginnings of the new Order:

“Day of the Assumption of Mary most holy. I gather the young ladies I had admitted as companions with a great devotion and fervor, offering ourselves to God by a vow of crossing the seas and [going] to any part of the world without dividing the group, nor deviating away from the opinion of our superior in anything. Since I had at that time no other superior than my confessor, we offered the vow to our Lord after Holy Communion with the intention to ratify it in the afternoon of the same day in the hands or presence of the most Rev. Dr. Jose Caixal – my confessor and the confessor of the others as well. As we promised in the morning, we did it in the afternoon in the presence of Dr. Caixal and after we made the vow and offered ourselves to suffer any kind of trial for love of our Lord Jesus Christ, the confessor gave us a talk so fervent telling us such things that have been very profitable for us in so many tribulations which came to us, as it will be seen (even only as a shadow) in this summary I am writing under obedience.”⁶³

To cross the seas, the fearlessness and courage of these young women... without *dividing the group*... union and sisterhood that she will love during her entire life and which she translates it in the sentence: *One family with one heart.*

⁶⁰ Aut. MP, 101.

⁶¹ Aut. MP, 108.

⁶² Cf. Aut. MP, 113-115.

⁶³ Aut. MP, 121.

After her departure from the Company she wrote, by indication of Dr. Caixal, to the Archbishop Claret who by that time was already in Cuba. We do not know exactly if Claret wrote to her or to Caixal; if he wrote to her, the letter has been lost. The answer that M^a Antonia ascribed to Claret⁶⁴ is a summary of what Claret had written to Caixal in several letters he had sent to him during 1851. On March 25, 1851, Claret answered the letter that Caixal had sent him on February 7, in which Caixal talked to him about the two sisters... This is what Claret says to Caixal:

“I have just received your letter from February 7, and in regard to the two sisters I say to you: that I approve their coming here when there might be an opportunity of a good company, embarking, if possible, on the month of Nbre.⁶⁵ This will help them during the trip and also to become acclimated here, because we came during winter and it was so hot that we were sweating all the time since this place is warmer than la Habana, because it is closer to the tropics and also because the city is surrounded by mountains

Tell them not to bring too many wool clothes, because they will not be able to use them. Here they sell a black cloth which is very thin; I do not say that for lack of mortification, but because of need. I think that they should come and live in a simple rented house, there support themselves by ironing and at the same time start teaching; and thus they will be able to support themselves because in this country everything is very expensive, thus I repeat they will be able to support themselves at the beginning, and meanwhile God will provide. I will help them in everything, but I do not have the courage to offer myself to found them a convent and to support them...”⁶⁶

What M^a Antonia says in her *Autobiography* n. 126 coincides with what Claret said about them in the letter to Caixal.

2.5 To Cuba

Finally they left for Cuba, on February 22, 1852. She lived the difficulties of the journey with a deep trust in God:

“ The more we went into that immense sea of waters, the more my spirit plunged into the immense sea of God; when I looked at myself surrounded by that immensity of water, then I saw myself within the heart of my God and Lord more clearly than in a mirror. God was so pleased in this way of considering his infinite greatness that many times He made me feel the tenderness of his most holy arms with which His Holy Majesty pressed my soul within his sacred heart. This was the cause of that inalterable peace I enjoyed and the fact of not getting tired in the trip so long and so difficult. The immensity of the sea reminded me of the immensity of God and those skies so wide brought to my mind the immense spaces of the glory of the saints...”⁶⁷

In Cuba, the moments of comforting trust intermingled with the difficulties.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Cf. Aut. MP, 126.

⁶⁵ November.

⁶⁶ Misioneras Claretianas, *Cartas de los Orígenes*, (Madrid: 2009), 5. (From now on cited as CO followed by the number of the letter.)

⁶⁷ Aut. MP, 159.

⁶⁸ Cf. Aut. MP, 136.

There was suffering also from the first moments in Cuba, due to what she calls the *detachment of the Archbishop*.⁶⁹ Claret left all the business about the convent in the hands of the Procurator, a good canonist, but it seems that he did not understand too much about questions of holy poverty. She had to suffer much for this.⁷⁰

To this we have to add the loss of M. Florentina, *who was part of her soul*,⁷¹ her first companion who followed her in her discernment and departure from the Company of Mary, the journey to Cuba, and the first moments in Cuba.

Her trust in God intensified during this period of time. During this period her sorrowful motherhood over the Church is expiatory. M^a Antonia might have experienced during this period of her life a passive purification of the Spirit, where the Church has an important place, since Christ identifies himself with his Church. For this reason she always sees him suffering and never glorious. The ecclesiology of M^a Antonia follows from her Christology, as it is also the case in Claret.

But it is also the moment of the great experiences on the renewal of the Church:

“In this year, 1854, our Lord gave me a continuous communication with his Divine Majesty in such a way that it seems impossible to me that a creature could live in this miserable life with such an intimate communication with God. I do not know if I would be able to explain how it was. It seems that our Lord had my soul inside in the most sacred recesses of his heart, and there he was communicating to me his eternal dispositions,... What I saw especially in the divine secret was the situation of the church, and the ways and means determined by the Blessed Trinity in order that the Divine commandments be followed faithfully...”⁷²

What a deep experience to feel herself immersed in God and in Him to discover the situation of the Church; besides the three Divine Persons enlighten her on the task to Renew the Church and the faithfulness to the Gospel.

“ 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 to be done...”⁷³

One year after her profession, M^a Antonia learns from God, how God wants the Renewal of the Church,

2.6 So, I Made my Long -Awaited Profession

It was difficult to get the approval from the government. Once they received it, Claret requested from Pope Pius IX the Bull to establish the new convent. They had already begun the apostolic work of teaching. On August 25, 1855 Claret signed the Decree of the Foundation of the New Order, and on the 27th of August M^a Antonia make her profession in the hands of Claret. On this day she had another experience about the Church and the need for her renewal. This is the highest point of her sorrowful motherhood. The evils of the

⁶⁹ Cf. Aut. MP, 175 y 196.

⁷⁰ Cf. Aut. MP, 184-188.

⁷¹ Cf. Aut. MP, 180.

⁷² Aut. MP, 48.

⁷³ Aut. MP, 49.

Church that were revealed to her in the Initial Experience become now her burden, her deepest worry.

On September 3rd nine novices made their vows; thus the first community is formed by ten sisters, who elected her as their prioress. Claret asks M^a Antonia to rewrite in an orderly way the Rules she had written in Tarragona. At the same time her spiritual director, Rev. Paladio Currius, asks her to write down her insights on the Renewal of the Church. This is the so called *Plan for the Renewal of the Church* which she finished writing on December 8, seven minutes after 11:30 p.m.⁷⁴ By this same time she also finishes writing her *Autobiography* and the *Report to Caixal*.

2.7 Sadness for the Evils of the Church

From 1857, two years after her religious profession, she began to experience some painful phenomena; she explains that it was a *deep sadness for the evils of the Holy Mother Church*...⁷⁵ It is an experience which repeats itself several times.

Besides the typical traits of a vocation to a sorrowful motherhood, there were some others of a different nature, which could also have an expiatory meaning; she calls them *very lewd things*,⁷⁶ periods of little concentration, *many distractions, and great temptations*.⁷⁷

On March 18, 1857, Claret embarks for Spain, called by the Queen who wants him to be her confessor. It was providential since they had already discussed in Cuba, that a new foundation was needed in Spain to prepare sisters to go to Cuba. He will do all the steps to get the permission for the new foundation, which will not be easy.

M^a Antonia returns to the Peninsula on 1859; Sisters Gertrudis Barril and Josefa Caixal accompany her to establish the second house of the Institute in Tremp, in the Diocese of Seo de Urgel, to be a house for the formation of sisters to be sent to Cuba. The next year, Rev. Currius travels to Rome, carrying with him the *Constitutions and the Plan for the Renewal of the Church*. He presents to His Holiness Pope Pius IX the *Plan for the Renewal of the Church* with a letter from Archbishop Claret and Bishop Caixal. Pius IX answered that the Plan for the Renewal of the Church would not produce the fruit they expected. And he sent the Constitutions to the Congregation of Bishops and Clergy for their review and approval.

Through her correspondence with Dr. Caixal,⁷⁸ her director, we know that in the year 1862 she suffered a dreadful loneliness, feeling abandon by God, distressful temptations, fear to be in sin, strong feelings of her unworthiness and doubts on the origin of her experiences. On reading these letters, Juan Manuel Lozano⁷⁹ says that we have here all the

⁷⁴ María Antonia París, “*Plan for The Renewal of the Church*” unpublished translation of the “*Puntos para la Reforma*,” by Teresa Gallarreta, 81f. (From now on cited as PR followed by the number of the paragraph).

⁷⁵ Cf. Aut. MP, 244; *Escritos de María Antonia París*, “Diary,” 15; 18; 45; 69. (From now on Dairy followed by the number of the paragraph.)

⁷⁶ Cf. Diary, 17.

⁷⁷ Cf. Diary, 64.

⁷⁸ Cf. Carmen Ruiz & Encarnación Velasco, *Positio super virtutibus and fama Sanctitastis María Antonia París i Riera*, (Roma, 1987), 236-238. (From now on cited as *Positio*)

⁷⁹ J. Manuel Lozano, *Con mi Iglesia te desposaré*, (Madrid: 1974), 309.

symptoms of the dark night of the soul. To the agony produced by her fear to have lost God is added the sensation of abandonment from her director Caixal.⁸⁰

During this period, the writings of M^a Antonia are filled with thoughts about the Church and her evils. No doubt that they contributed to her personal purification. She speaks frequently about her own sins. To this experience of her own poverty we have to add two interesting moments, worth recalling:

One, in 1858. She feels at the same time a great attraction to God and something like a rejection on his part:

“...I do not want anything from you except what may go through Holy Obedience.” This blow, was without any doubt more felt than the slap in the face that the Angel gave to St Frances of Rome ... because a word of God is stronger than all the Angels together...”⁸¹

The other moment in 1864. Clear vision of her own poverty:

“It is impossible to describe what I felt on this occasion: my soul annihilated before the Divine Majesty... and I was astonished to see myself naked before the Lord... feeling like a stone, incapable to move, I experienced that my soul was coming closer... and driven by an interior force which pulled it more and more, as if willing to dress it... and I asked the Lord he deign to cloth me with his own graces and that he may not permit me to be lost. I heard a voice that said to me: What is any virtue, before the Lord of all virtues?”⁸²

Lozano⁸³ concludes from all of this that those were experiences that God allowed as a means of purification and to prepare her for the union with Him, Juberías⁸⁴ as well as Lozano,⁸⁵ say that we have to attribute the long duration of this night and all the situations in which she found herself to her vocation to a sorrowful motherhood over the Church.

2.8 *Sorrowful Communion with the Church*

In 1867 she goes from Tremp to Reus (Tarragona) with 5 sisters, to establish the third house of the Institute. It is precisely there where she experiences the September Revolution in 1868, with the proper difficulties.

Lozano says that she might have reached the full union with God around 1868, as can be seen from several signs.⁸⁶ In these dates there are no more divine reproaches and all the other phenomena with a purifying end, and her sufferings take on an even more sacrificial meaning of sorrowful communion with the Church.⁸⁷

This year she experienced again, although for a shorter time, the same grace received from the Lord on the day of her Profession, of keeping the sacramental species intact within

⁸⁰ Cf. Diary 89 and the note 267.

⁸¹ Diary, 17.

⁸² Diary 88.

⁸³ J.M. Lozano, *Con mi Iglesia te desposaré*, 310-313.

⁸⁴ Francisco Juberías, *Por su cuerpo que es la Iglesia*, (Madrid: 1973), 229-239.

⁸⁵ J.M. Lozano, *Con mi Iglesia te desposaré*, 313.

⁸⁶ J.M. Lozano, *Con mi Iglesia te desposaré*, 313-315.

⁸⁷ Cf. Diary, 100-112.

her, it lasted three days. It happened on February 23 1868.⁸⁸ She experienced a very intense feeling of the Divine Majesty and of her unworthiness. At the same time it felt as if she was carrying in her heart a jewel, and she experienced herself immersed in God, the same experience of the day of her profession. It is possible that this experience points out to her entrance into the full union. It is the most outstanding grace of this last period; at the same time she experiences a dark night of the soul, in tune with the evils of the Church. It is a sorrowful grace due to her great love for the Church. Some months later she experienced the most painful experiences of her life:

“..So terribly dark, that compared to it, the darkest night is as clear as noon...that those dreadful *tenebrae* signified the terrible situation of the Holy Church.”⁸⁹

This experience is very close to the September Revolution that caused so many sufferings to the Church. Lozano says:

“M^a Antonia experiences herself identified with (the Church), suffering in her soul what the Bride of Christ is suffering in her members and institutions. Has the promise Christ made to betroth her with the Church been accomplished? Yes we believe so. She was already in the transforming union, united to Christ and betrothed with the Church. But, since she was a victim, hers was a wedding of blood, different but similar to that wedding that Christ celebrated with his Church on the cross.”⁹⁰

M^a Antonia not only suffered for the Church, but she suffered with the Church. The sufferings of her soul were the reflection of those suffered by the Church. Lozano explains these three hours of agony:

“Thus it is not surprising that on the eve of the sufferings which were going to be poured out on the Church of Spain, she experienced these three hours of terrible agony. The Church was suffering with her. The union, in so far as it is possible in this life on earth, had been consummate.”⁹¹

Many sorrowful events take place in this moment. Between 1867 and 1875 we have the gradual separation of the house of Tremp. On the 1st of October 1868 they are expelled from the convent of Reus by the revolutionaries. They take refuge in the hospital and return on December 23rd, on the eve of Christmas.

On June 12, 1869, Pius IX proclaims the *Decree of Praise* of the Institute as a Congregation of simple vows that started in the Diocese of Urgel on 1854. The Congregation of Bishops and Priests sends the “Observations” for the correction of the Constitutions. The *Decree of Praise* changed the juridical nature of the Institute and the place and year of its foundation.⁹² Curríus and M^a Antonia revise the Constitutions, according to the Observations, and they send the Constitutions back to Rome, for their approval.

⁸⁸ Cf. *Diary*, 100.

⁸⁹ *Diary*, 105.

⁹⁰ *Diary*, 105 note 300.

⁹¹ J.M. Lozano, *Con mi Iglesia te desposaré*, 315.

⁹² Jesús Álvarez Gómez, *Historia de las RR. de María Inmaculada*, (Roma: 1980), 892-904.

On October 24, 1870 Claret dies. This event caused a deep suffering to M^a Antonia, as she writes on her *Diary*. She describes this event with words of affliction but with a great hope that the Lord helps her to see in the cross:

“Being very much afflicted by the death of his Excellency Claret, I prayed intensely to God for the renewal of the Holy Church because he had taken him, how would his work be accomplished? Then His Divine Majesty said to me, “By chance has my word been abridged? Trust my daughter, wait a little while, and you will see what I do...”

One day I went to the choir, full of sorrow and as I was in prayer, I saw next to me Your Excellency and the Lord was between us, and he said to me: Why are you afflicted, my daughter? We all have to be one. These words console me and gave me the hope that it will be so.”⁹³

Claret was not only the Founder of the Institute, but the man chosen by God to carry through the Renewal of the Church, which the Lord with so much insistence required from her; at least he was the one to do it, according to the inspirations of M^a Antonia. This death seemed to contradict all the hopes she had put on Claret, due to her deep faithfulness to God’ inspirations. However, with the words “trust my daughter, wait a little and you will see what...,” God makes her experience, in the midst of her sorrow, that his Word cannot be contained within the reduced boundaries of our human experience. And in reality these words were of great consolation for the soul of Antonia. Even without understanding how this would come about,⁹⁴ she knew that the Lord would keep his word.

Five years later the fourth house of the Congregation is founded in Baracoa (Cuba) on September 5, 1875. A week later, on September 12, the house in Carcagente (Valencia-Spain) is founded, and Ma. Antonia goes to this house.

In 1879 some problems arise in Reus, and she has to go back to this convent. On September 24, 1880 the house in Velez-Rubio (Almería-Spain) is founded, Ma. Antonia never knew this house. She remains in Reus due to the problems that had arisen in that community

On February 3, 1884 she goes to the infirmary of the community of Reus, where she will stay until the day of her death, January 17, 1885. The sisters that took care of her have left beautiful testimonies of her last moments.

Her entire life was a constant suffering, prayer and offering for the evils of the Church, with a clear objective which she gives to the Congregation in the “*Aim and Goal*.”⁹⁵

“... the conversion of all consecrated persons to the service of God, and the conversion of the whole world for the greater glory of God and of His most holy Mother.”

3. CLARET AND PARÍS MEET

⁹³ Cf. *Diary*, 109-

⁹⁴ *Escritos de María Antonia París*, note 317, p. 285.

⁹⁵ *Escritos de María Antonia París*, “Constituciones del Instituto Apostólico de la Inmaculada Concepción de María Santísima,” 383-384 (From now on: *Constituciones del Instituto Apostólico*.)

The first knowledge that M^a Antonia had of Claret was in her prayer. As she was praying to God to have compassion for the needs of the Church, the Lord made her see and hear:⁹⁶

“This, my daughter, is the apostolic man whom you have asked me for so many years and with so many tears.”⁹⁷

As it happens in the vocational stories in the Bible, Claret is the sign given to M^a Antonia to assure her that what is required from her will be accomplished. Time and new experiences will confirm it:

“Our Lord told me: Fr. Claret will give you a hand in founding the first houses of the Order... and he added that this same priest would give me much to suffer.”⁹⁸

They had not met yet. The fame of this missionary in all Catalonia had reached the convent of the Company of Mary in Tarragona. M^a Antonia will see him for the first time in 1847,⁹⁹ the occasion of the Mission he preached in Tarragona, although it does not seem that they talked. We will have to wait until January 1850, when Claret returns to Tarragona and Dr. Caixal, confessor of M^a Antonia, insists in the need to pay her a visit, since her leaving the Company of Mary was imminent.

When they finally meet, Claret says to M^a Antonia:

“... not to hesitate, that it would be done ... that the fruit was already ripe but not yet in season, ...now, I know already that you are here.”¹⁰⁰

Meanwhile, silence was the only answer given to M^a Antonia. So she says:

“I was not contented at all with this response, rather I complained... 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 to depart from Spain leaving me in a sea of confusion without having anything determined.”¹⁰¹

This is a usual behavior in M^a Antonia. When a project is from God, she does whatever is in his hand to fulfill it; but when others seem to resist or do not follow it, she neither imposes it, nor forces it. She knows that the Lord himself will move those who resist his action:

“...so, I remained in my convent as before, and he (Claret) continued in his missions, maybe without remembering me anymore, until the time God had established from his eternity, for us to transfer to this new world, where he wanted to begin his Work... 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...”¹⁰²

⁹⁶ Words used to explain a spiritual experience of God.

⁹⁷ Aut. MP, 19.

⁹⁸ Aut. MP, 36-37.

⁹⁹ J. Álvarez, *Historia de las RR. de María Inmaculada*, 69-70.

¹⁰⁰ Aut. MP, 61.

¹⁰¹ Aut. MP, 97-98.

¹⁰² Aut. MP, 62. 218.

The ongoing mutual knowledge and the great spiritual similarities between them, will little by little make possible, a sincere friendship, a mutual companionship which will manifest itself largely through their letters. The time they spend working together in Cuba was especially rich. Two strong and firm temperaments, which without planning it, were united by God for the same Project.

CHAPTER II

EXPERIENCES THAT LEFT AN IMPRESSION IN PARÍS AND CLARET

In the history of spirituality we encounter men and women in whom the experience has left a lasting impression and has changed the journey of their lives.

Sometimes the events are from ordinary life, but they impact the person due to the psychological or spiritual situation in which the person finds him or herself, or due to the circumstances that accompanied such events. Some other times there are authentic revelations of the Spirit in persons who already have allowed the Spirit to guide their lives. These events have forced the person to examine his or her life and to change it according to new parameters. These kinds of events were present in the lives of Antonio M^a Claret and of M^a Antonia París. Both had an experience which we may call *Initial*, because it will give rise to a new way of looking at reality and both will discover in these experiences the call of the Lord.

We will see that in both Claret and Paris these events shaped their ecclesial vocation.

Anthony Mary Claret

1. *Our Struggle Is Not With Flesh and Blood. Initial Experience*¹⁰³

Claret narrates his Initial Experience in his *Autobiography*. In different occasions in his life, he will look back again to this event. This makes us realize the importance that it had for him.

In 1856 being Archbishop of Santiago de Cuba and after the attack he suffered in Holguin, he writes two books: *Method for Giving Missions*¹⁰⁴ and, *On the Devotion to Mary Most Holy*¹⁰⁵. These Works were written in the third person, thus he could speak about his experience with a greater freedom, without the restrictions that his humility imposed on him. He also mentions this event in the *Brief Narration of His Life*.¹⁰⁶ We have also an

¹⁰³ Cf. Aut. FC, 95- 98. 101.

¹⁰⁴ Aut. FC, 97; Cf. note 97. Doc. Aut. FC, 142-143.

¹⁰⁵ Doc. Aut., VIII, 408-41.

¹⁰⁶ Doc. Aut., VIII pp. 426-430.

extensive narration of this event in his *Autobiography* written in 1862 when he was the Confessor of Queen Isabel II. This is the text we will use here.

In 1865, when he did not want to continue being the confessor of the Queen, in the homily “A Student Devoted to Mary,” given to the students of El Escorial, he mentions again this event.¹⁰⁷ This writing is very valuable because it is written in the third person, and thus he can express himself without letting anyone know that he is talking about himself.

The fact that he talks several times and in different occasions during his life about the same event is a sign of how strong was the impression it made in him.

In the account of this event given by Claret in his *Autobiography*, he uses the verbs *to see and to hear*. In Sacred Scripture *to see and to hear* are the characteristic words used in the stories of prophetic and apostolic vocations. Whenever we see these verbs, we may say that the author is talking about an *Experience of the Spirit*. In every experience there is a context, a vision, and a hearing¹⁰⁸. They do not always necessarily follow this order. In this case the *context*, which is a temptation, surrounds the *vision-hearing* of the Virgin Mary.

1.1. *Context of The Experience: a Very Terrible Temptation*

This event took place on January or February 1831; when he was 23 years old and in his second year of Philosophy in Vic. It was customary when there was not enough room at the seminary for all the students, that some families would welcome some seminarians in their homes. Claret lodged in the Casa Tortadés, and from there he would go back and forth to the seminary for his classes. He had caught a cold; such a simple thing will become the most important event in his life. One day as he was in bed due to his illness, he had a *terrible temptation*.

“I had the following experience while I was in my second year of philosophy at Vic. 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.”¹⁰⁹

Claret speaks of a *terrible temptation*. He does not say what kind of temptation, but he gives to us sufficient information to deduce it. He defines it as *bad thoughts* and in the next paragraph he says that *Mary is a woman but she does not give him any bad thought*. In n. 98, he will say “...that from that moment on (...)and for many years stayed free of any temptation against chastity.” Thus the nature of the temptation is clear.

Claret puts all the means in his power to overcome the temptation; human means: he tries to distract himself, to fix his attention on indifferent things... He also uses transcendent means: he invokes Mary, the angels, and the saints, does the sign of the cross... but he adds that: *everything was in vain*.

¹⁰⁷ Doc, Aut. II, 433.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Is 6, 1-9; Jer 1,4-10 ; Mk 1,9-11 ; Lk 1,26-38.

¹⁰⁹ Aut. FC, 95.

It does not seem to be a simple juvenile excitation, proper of a situation of growth and maturity; he was 23 years old. Later on in his homily to the students of El Escorial he describes it as a temptation, the strongest and the most vehement¹¹⁰. In his book *On the Devotion to Mary Most Holy* he will define it as *the most critical situation*.¹¹¹ If he has seen it so, we cannot simplify it.

1.2. *To See and to Hear: Suddenly I saw Mary Most Holy... She Spoke to Me...*

The Initial Experience takes place precisely in this context of temptation. Claret narrates it giving many details; some of them make us smile due to his candor:

“Finally I turned over on my other side, to see if the temptation would go away, when suddenly I saw the Blessed Virgin Mary, very beautiful and gracious. Her dress was crimson, her mantle blue, and in her arms I saw a huge garland of the most beautiful roses. I had seen lovely artificial and real roses in Barcelona but none as lovely as these. How beautiful it all was! As I lay face up in bed, I saw myself as a beautiful white child kneeling with hands joined. I never lost sight of the Blessed Virgin, on whom I kept my eyes fixed. I remember distinctly thinking to myself, “She is a woman and yet she does not give you any evil thoughts; on the contrary, she has taken them all away from you. The Blessed Virgin spoke to me and said, “Anthony, this crown is yours if you overcome.” I was so worried that I did not know what to say. Next I saw the Blessed Virgin place on my head the crown or roses that she held in her right hand (besides the garland, which she held between her arm and her right side). I saw myself crowned with roses in the person of that little child, and I was speechless.”¹¹²

“I saw also a band of saints standing at her right hand, in an attitude of prayer. I didn’t recognize them, except that one seemed to be St Stephen. I believed then, as I do now, that those were my patron saints praying and interceding for me so that I wouldn’t fall into the temptation. Then, on my left, I saw a great crowd of demons in battle array, like soldiers who fall back and close ranks again after a battle. I said to myself. “What a host of them there is-and so fearful! During all this I remained as if caught by surprise, without quite realizing what was happening to me. As soon as it had passed, I felt free of temptation and filled with a joy so deep that I couldn’t grasp what had been going on within me.”¹¹³

The result of the vision-hearing is clear; *I felt free of temptation and filled with a joy so deep that I couldn’t grasp what had been going on within me*. He says immediately after this account that it was not an illusion, that he was neither sleeping nor delirious. But what made him believe that what had happened was real is that *... many years he 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*.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ Doc. Aut, II, 413.

¹¹¹ Cf. Doc. Aut, I, 410.

¹¹² Aut. FC, 96.

¹¹³ Aut. FC, 97.

¹¹⁴ Aut. FC, 98.

He had this *temptation-vision* one year and a half after entering the seminary, some months after abandoning his project of going to the Chartreuse of Montealegre to become a Carthusian and in a moment in which he was discovering his missionary vocation.

Taking everything into consideration, we may say that the temptation was the opposite of the option he started to discover. Mary intervenes to help him to be faithful to the life of celibacy that he was embracing, which will allow him to give himself completely to the apostolic ministry in the service of the Church.

1.3. *The Meaning of the Event: Our Struggle Is Not With Flesh And Blood...*

Three years later, on December 20 1834, during his ordination to the diaconate at the age of 26, he discovers the meaning of the temptation he had suffered:

“During the Ember Days of St. Thomas in that same year of 1834, I received the diaconate. At the ordination the bishop read those words of St. Paul in the Pontifical: “For it is not against human enemies that we have to struggle, but against the Sovereignities and the Powers who originate the darkness in this world...” (Ef 6,12) At that moment the Lord made me understand clearly the meaning of the demons I saw during the temptation I described in the preceding chapter.”¹¹⁵

For Claret the diaconate was a day of vocational revelation. The key was the figure of St. Stephen, the man of Spirit and Word, and also the text from the letter of St. Paul to the Ephesians: *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...* (6,12). Anthony realized that the struggle is not only against the temptations of the flesh, but also against the evil which is not only at home, but also outside ... It is significant that the understanding of the temptation comes at the same time as he is incorporated into the apostolic ministry through the diaconate.

This event is the beginning of a new period of his life. He understands that in the struggle against evil, Mary Immaculate, the New Eve, and hers victorious descendant, will accompany him in his apostolic mission. Mary becomes part of Claret’s spirituality, not only as his mentor, but also as the powerful arm, which releases him as a burning arrow against evil.¹¹⁶

As J.M. Lozano says, we may conclude that the temptation-vision which Claret had at the Tortadés home was a typical Initial Experience¹¹⁷; one of the many experiences that we find in Sacred Scripture and in the history of spirituality; experiences in which the one who is called discovers his or her mission and decides to realize it responsibly. The experience that Ma. Antonia will have some 11 years later in 1842 belongs to this same group of experiences.

2. *What Moved and Stimulated Me Most Was Reading the Holy Bible... Discovering his vocation as an Apostolic Missionary for the Church*¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Aut. FC, 101.

¹¹⁶ Cf. Aut. FC, 270. This is the prayer he prayed at the beginning of each mission.

¹¹⁷ Cf. J.M. Lozano, *Mystic and Man of Action*, (Chicago: Claretian Publications, 1977), 79-81, 142-143.

¹¹⁸ Aut. FC, 113-120.

At the same time, on reading Sacred Scripture Claret began to discover his vocation as a missionary within the Church:

“Ever since I lost the desire to become a Carthusian monk –which God had used to uproot me from worldliness – I not only thought about becoming holy myself, but I was continuously trying to imagine what I could do to save the souls of my neighbors. Hence I prayed continuously to Jesus and Mary, offering myself to them for this purpose. The lives of the saints, which we read daily at table, and my own spiritual reading all contributed to this. But what moved and stimulated me most was reading the Holy Bible, to which I have always been very strongly attracted.”¹¹⁹

Through several documents from different periods of his life, we have known the Biblical texts that guided him in his vocational discernment:

*Vocation to the Apostolate*¹²⁰. The Biblical texts we find in this document are from the Deutero-Isaiah and Luke.

The texts from the Deutero-Isaiah, prophet of the New Exodus, are: 41,8-17 situated within the context of the vocation of Cyrus, the liberator of Israel from the Babylonian exile; 48,10-11 this text is found between the 1st and 2nd Songs of the Lord’s Servant and 49,3 belong to the second song of the Lord’s Servant. In these texts Claret emphasizes the gratuitousness of the call (41,8.9.13; 48,10); the surrender of the chosen one in the hands of God (41,14); the work of God through his chosen one (41,15); the trust in the divine help in his mission (41,9-11); his witnessing before those that do not believe (41,12); and the praise of God (48,11; 49,3).

The text from Luke 2,48-49 belongs to the Infancy narratives; 9,59 is the beginning of Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem, which is the place of the Passion, Death and Resurrection. On the way he proclaims the Good News wherever he goes. Through these texts Claret hears the voice of Christ himself who invites him to dedicate himself to the Father’s affairs (2,48); to reproduce in his life the poverty of Christ “*He had nowhere to lay his head*” (9,58).

Narration of His Life.¹²¹ There are some differences between the texts in this document and those in the preceding document. He omits Is 49,3 and adds Ez 3,17-19.

From the prophet Ezequiel he sees the evangelizer as a watchman, who welcomes the Word and proclaims it (3,17); it is the responsibility of the evangelizer to call to conversion (3,18); if the person does not turn away from his or her wicked conduct, it is not the responsibility of the evangelizer but that of the person, who will have to accept the word to become an evangelized person (3,19).

Autobiography.¹²² He omits 41,10.14; 48,10-11 and Lk 2,49; 9,58 and adds Is 61,1 (read through Lk 4,18) and Is 41,9-18.

¹¹⁹ Aut. FC, 113.

¹²⁰ Autobiographical Document written in Latin, when he was a seminarian, between 1831 and 1835. Cf. Doc. Aut. IV, 416-418.

¹²¹ He writes this brief account responding to the petition of his confessor, D. Paladio Curríus. He gives a summary of his life with the main vocational dates. Doc. Aut., VIII, 426-430.

¹²² The didactic aim of this writing, makes us to pay more attention to it. Aut. FC, 113-120.

Probably it was on reading this oracle from Isaiah 61,1¹²³ that Claret felt in himself the anointing of the Spirit who sent him to proclaim the gospel. The other texts will help to understand other aspects of his vocation. It is a passage that Jesus has applied to himself in two important occasions during his life. The first occasion in the Synagogue of Nazareth; to justify his mission he reads Is 61,1.¹²⁴ In the second occasion when he is asked by those sent by John the Baptist: "Are you the one who is to come, or do we have to wait for another one?" Jesus answers with the text of Is 61,1.¹²⁵ He wants the Baptist but more than John, his disciples, to realize who he is.¹²⁶

In *The Well-Instructed Collegian or Seminarian* Claret makes a commentary of this passage, emphasizing its Christological aspect:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me... the other saints are anointed by the grace and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, but Jesus Christ, was anointed by the Holy Spirit itself as the source and fullness of all the graces, so that all may share in his fullness as from an overflowing fountain, which is poured out over the Apostles, Martyrs, Confessors and Virgins..."¹²⁷

Later on Claret understands the call to evangelize which gushes from his inner being, like the experience of Jeremiah: "...There seemed to be a fire burning in my heart, imprisoned in my bones and although I wanted to quench it, I could not do it" (20,9); it was the grace of Christ himself which overflowed from his heart, by the Spirit.

We may draw a first conclusion: the apostolic vocation of Claret within the Church has come from his contemplation of Christ the evangelizer through the passage of Is 61,1.

The second text that we find in his *Autobiography* is Is 49,9-18, taken from the Deutero-Isaiah, the prophet of the New Exodus. It is about Cyrus, king of Persia, who attacks Babylon and makes possible the return of the Jews, who were exiled, after the fall of Jerusalem into the power of Nabucodonosor. They return to Jerusalem in 586, thus Cyrus becomes the liberator of Israel.

Claret underlines the sentences: "I am with you..." "I am your God," "I am the Lord your God, I am holding you by the hand."¹²⁸ Claret feels that God is really with him, in the same way as Israel felt the protection of Yahweh in the liberation by Cyrus. Thus he will not spare any hardship or work to restore the beauty of the Church.

The year 1859 is particularly rich in profound experiences. He writes in *Lights and Graces*¹²⁹ that he starts the new year with the knowledge and the conviction of his own nothingness, using the symbol of the earth he writes:

¹²³ Cf. Aut. FC, 118.

¹²⁴ Lk 4,18.

¹²⁵ Although it is not a direct quote as it was in the Synagogue of Nazareth, he omits the part of "The Spirit of God is upon me..."

¹²⁶ Mt 11,5 and the parallel in Lk 7,22.

¹²⁷ Anthony Ma. Claret, "El Colegial Instruido", in *Escritos Espirituales*, Edition prepared by Jesús Bermejo, (Madrid: BAC, 1985), 284-285.

¹²⁸ Cf. Aut. FC, 115-116.

¹²⁹ It is an epigraph of the *Autobiography*, we find in it some extraordinary interventions of God in his spiritual and apostolic life. These lights aim to give him the capacity to accomplish the mission God has given him in the Church. Doc. Aut. 631-666.

“January 6. I understood that I was like the earth. And I am really earth; the earth endures the tillage and thus it gives fruit; I am like this. The earth also needs water, and I need grace. The earth is trodden and keeps silent, thus I have to do the same.”¹³⁰

Two months later, on March 21 on reading in the Gospel of John the encounter of Jesus with the Samaritan woman, he was touched by the words *I am he who speaks to you* and he continues saying *I understood great things in these words*. In the text he repeats *Ego sum, I am*, 11 times. These words immediately bring to his mind Ex 3,14, *I am ..., I am who I am..., I am sends me to you...* With these words Moses proves his mission because *I am* is God himself who sends him. In the text of the Samaritan woman, Jesus uses the same words *I am*. Here Jesus reveals himself as God. Claret acknowledges Jesus Christ as God, who encourages him in his faith and confirms and impels him to his mission in the Church.¹³¹

In the resolutions of the Spiritual Exercises of this year, he made the exercises from the 5th to the 14th of October,¹³² he summarizes these two experiences on Jesus Christ and on himself. He writes:

“I will repeat frequently “*Noverim me, noverim te*” (“that I may know me and may know you”) ¡Alas! I am nothing. Nothing is mine except sin. If there is anything good in me, it comes from God. I am like a bad donkey, full of jewels...”¹³³

It is the same experience of *Lights and Graces*. Claret through the experience of the Spirit understands the divinity of Jesus and at the same time his own being, *I am dust*, that is to say, on one hand his incompetence, and on the other hand God’s gift. This experience transforms him to an Apostle sent by God. The initiative of his mission comes from God who has called him gratuitously for a Church mission, in the Church.

From this time on, Claret will devote himself to the Renewal of the Church being an Apostolic Missionary in the most diverse situations, either of itinerancy or of stability.

María Antonia París

1. Our Lord Taught Me From The Tree of The Cross. *Initial Experience* ¹³⁴

She stayed in the Order of the Company of Mary 10 years unable to make her religious profession. During this time she has a religious experience which will be the starting point of her Church vocation.

It is an *Initial Experience*, which she narrates as follows:

“As this was the first time that our Lord spoke to me, I did not understand these things and I did not know how to comply with his commands. I was crying abundantly...”¹³⁵

¹³⁰ *Luces y gracias*. (Lights and Graces), Doc. Aut, 644.

¹³¹ *Luces y gracias*, 21 marzo de 1859, Doc. Aut, 644-645.

¹³² Cf. Propósitos (resolutions) in *Escritos Autobiográficos FC*, 553-555.

¹³³ Propósito 10 in Esc. Aut. FC, 554.

¹³⁴ Aut. MP, 2-11.

¹³⁵ Aut. MP, 6.

The event is complex: visions, auditions, words, feelings... It seems that it took place at different degrees of depth. The deepest one was the experience of a divine message in two directions; one about the Gospel as the law of life; the other about the lamentable condition of the Church and, within it, the Religious Life. Putting these two realities together, M. Paris understands that God wants the foundation of a new order, not new in doctrine but new in practice.

The experience took place beyond the senses, in the spirit, without any image, without any book, without any writing. It was the engraving of the Holy Law on her heart as Jeremiah had prophesized (31, 33). The consequence was that the Gospel was engraved in her soul as the New Law; thus she has a prophetic knowledge of the real causes of the evils of the Church and of the ways to overcome them. P. Juberías calls the experience *substantial words*.¹³⁶ In the language of the theologians of Spirituality, it means an active word which does in the soul what the word means.

From a literary point of view, the text is difficult and heavy: Explanatory sentences one after the other, numerous repetitions, different words with the same meaning, parenthesis...

Fourteen years later, María Antonia says:

“It seems to me that I see and hear our Lord Jesus Christ in the same very way.”¹³⁷

Again as it happened with Claret, we find here also the verbs *to see and to hear*. This is a language used in revelations, characteristic of revelation in Scripture.¹³⁸ It is an experience of the Spirit and therefore difficult to articulate it in human language.

1.1. Context of the Event¹³⁹

María Antonia París has the *initial experience* while she was praying, offering, and imploring:

“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.

In this petition which, later I understood, was very much to the liking of His Divine Majesty, because it was done with much simplicity and good will...”

There are three important verbs in this text: she prayed, implored, and offered herself. They explain to us what M. Paris was doing that night in prayer. Besides this prayer was done with the genuine attitudes of a praying person: simplicity and good will.

She says that it was not the first time that she prayed, implored, and offered her life.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ Cf. F. Juberías, *Por su cuerpo que es la Iglesia*, 134.

¹³⁷ Aut. MP, 10.

¹³⁸ Cf. Is 6,1-9; Jer 1,4-10; Mk 1,9-11; Lk 1,26-38...

¹³⁹ Aut. MP, 2-3a.

In this context and with these attitudes, the 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 a simple question; it is a *life option*. She asked what was her mission in the ecclesial circumstances, which she had discovered that night in 1842. As she was praying, she began to perceive an extraordinary phenomenon.

1.2. Vision and Audition¹⁴¹

María Antonia in her prayer asked God *to teach* her what she had to do. The audition will be the teaching which will at the same time be transformed into vision:

“...Our Lord has deigned to teach me with much pleasure how He would like to be served by this ungrateful creature, it was in the following way: He set before my eyes the observance of His most Holy Law and evangelical counsels...”

And now God himself will ask her something:

“...He set before my eyes the observance of His most Holy Law and evangelical counsels, and told me to observe them with much perfection; he told me with intense sorrow that He had no body in His house to observe them, for the great extent that all the religious orders had gone lax in the observance of His most Holy Law and because of this He permitted with grief, their destruction...”¹⁴²

This is the cause of the great problems which afflict the Church. The evils which come from the outside: laws against religious life, persecutions..., are the consequences of the internal evils. The Most Holy Law and the Evangelical counsels are not kept. The first is the consequence of the second. Ma. Antonia was shocked on hearing these words. She explains why she was shocked:

“...I had always believed that all persons who profess perfection served God faithfully and for this I wanted to be a religious...”

She repeats again the narration of the vision, but now she tries to clarify the meaning of “putting before my eyes”:

“...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, His most Holy Law and Evangelical Counsels.”¹⁴³

With the words *eyes of my soul* she emphasizes that it is not a common human vision, but it is an event which happens in her spirit, 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 or letters; I was seeing it written, and I was understanding it so very well, that it seemed to me it was being engraved in my soul but in a particular way the book of the Holy Gospels,

¹⁴⁰ Cf. Aut. MP, 17,19; Diary 14,15, 18, 26, 69, 105...

¹⁴¹ Aut. MP, 3b-11.

¹⁴² Aut. MP, 3b.

¹⁴³ Aut. MP, 4.

which till then I had never read, neither the Sacred Scripture (O.T). After this experience, 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."¹⁴⁴

The following verbs are important: "looking," I "understood," they "were engraved," three words which are mutually related in an ascendant parallelism: what she sees, she understands and becomes engraved in her. Her whole being is touched by the experience: senses, intelligence and affectivity. The Word of God is embedded in her heart. From now on she will be shaped in the form of the Word forever.

She begins with a reaction: "I was very attentive overwhelmed..." The phenomenon she is experiencing is what causes her to be overwhelmed. Since she is narrating the event 14 years later, she says that she has been able to realize that what was engraved in her heart coincides with what she has later on read in the Bible.

In the next paragraph she goes back again to the experience, but here with a greater depth.¹⁴⁵ She insists again that what she saw was not a human vision, but a voice. It is surprising that the *sight* is transformed into *hearing*. But it is not a human word, but an interior voice. She repeats that this happened *in the depth of my soul*. We are now at the deepest level of this experience of the Spirit. This voice was explaining to her the meaning of the words and the way to fulfilled them.

A new reaction: "I was very confused." She is confused because in the convent where she lives they did not keep what she just had read in that *Sacred Book*. She uses that expression as a synonym for the "Holy Tree of the Cross." A little bit further she will say the "Crucified Christ." The Sacred Book is the tree of the Cross, where Christ is crucified. We see again in this experience the interaction of the senses, the intelligence and the affectivity.

Another repetition: "as he was teaching me the divine words, he was explaining their meaning to me."

What follows will discover to us the meaning of this experience: "As this was the first time that our Lord spoke to me..." It is an Initial Experience, the first time that God had spoken to her, to let her know her vocation and mission.

"...I did not understand these things and I did not know how to comply with his commands. I was crying abundantly and I told his Divine majesty, whom I had very present, that it seemed to me that I was speaking face to face with the Majesty of God..."

The disclosure of the evils of the religious life, and to see that what had been engraved in her heart was not fulfilled in the convent where she was living move 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."¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ Aut. MP, 5.

¹⁴⁵ Aut. MP, 6.

¹⁴⁶ Aut. MP, 7.

As Mary in the Annunciation, Mother Paris talks to God by means of a supplication: "I do not know how this will be."¹⁴⁷ This supplication did not come from a lack of trust, but from the preoccupation she had when she discovered the situation of the religious life and, at the same time, from the demand that came from God's teaching to her. Thus after she discovers that this is the will of God, she wants to do it. But she does not know where and how.

The supplication continues and goes a step further:

"My God, perhaps do you want something new?" (I did not know what I was asking."¹⁴⁸

She knows that the initiative comes from God; she did not know what she was asking; of what she is aware is that her petition "was not asked out of curiosity, much less of mistrust in the infinite power of God." Her trust was founded in the belief that "in God there is nothing impossible."¹⁴⁹ It is the same trust of Mary at the Annunciation, and M^a Antonia had a heart "determined to comply with the divine will cost what it may." This was a gift from God to M. Paris:

"Our Lord has given to 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."

Thus she can say: "... our Lord told me with much pleasure: Yes, my daughter, I want a new order, but not new in doctrine but new in practice."

The experience is presented in crescendo. She has discovered the need to live according to the Gospel as the guiding principle. She has become aware that the members of the Church, not even those in religious life, live according to the Gospel. Thus she discovers her vocation as Foundress in order to live the Gospel as the guiding principle for herself and for other persons. To establish a New Order which will live faithfully the Gospel and proclaim it. God gave her also the traits and the title of the New Order, *Apostles of Jesus Christ in Imitation of the Most Pure Virgin Mary*.

In the next paragraph of the *Autobiography*¹⁵⁰ she repeats again what she has already said in numbers 3 and 4. Again she sees the religious orders and the pitiful situation of the Universal Church. Against that, there is only one solution, the *keeping of his Most Holy Law*.

Jesus Christ shows to her the deep sorrow he experiences for his Church;

"At this moment I saw our Lord Jesus Christ, 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 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 the following night during prayer)."¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁷ Cf Lk 1,34

¹⁴⁸ Aut. MP, 7.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. Lk 1,37

¹⁵⁰ Aut. MP, 8.

¹⁵¹ Aut. MP, 9.

The sorrow for the sufferings of the Church was no more what M. Paris was praying for at the beginning of her prayer, the unjust laws which forbid her from making her profession, the persecutions, the confiscation of the possessions of the Church which had increased over the centuries...., but the fact that the Most Holy Law and Evangelical Counsels were not kept in the Church, especially by those members who had a greater responsibility to keep them, the religious men and women. The sufferings of the Church and within it the religious orders are the consequences of not keeping the Divine Law and the Evangelical Counsels.

She wrote the Initial Experience 14 years later;¹⁵² this helps us to understand that it left in her a deep and lasting impression, which is a sign that reveals the authenticity of the event. She also tells us why she loves so much holy poverty, although she adds "I loved her already very much before;" because poverty is the fundamental principle of the new Apostles and the lack of it has produced so many evils to the religious life and to the Church.

1.3. *The Content of The Initial Experience*

We find in this text three main lines of reflection.

a) The engraving of the Holy Law in her heart

María Antonia says:

"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."¹⁵³

This text brings to our mind Jeremiah's prophecy: "I will place my law within them, and write it upon their hearts..."(31,31). This prophecy of Jeremiah is fulfilled in M^a Antonia. The prophet is a man shaped by the Word of God that he has to proclaim. Mother Paris prayed God to teach her what to do in order to make up for the evils of the Church, and within it, of the religious life. God answers her prayer by imprinting in her heart the Law, the Gospel as the rule for her life. The Gospel engraved in her heart will become cordial, deeply loved; it will be the dynamism which will become the source of all her actions.

Shaped by the Gospel, she will devote her life to the Renewal of the Church by the proclamation of the Word, the Holy Law of the Lord, as she likes to call it.

b) Panorama of the evils of the Church

María Antonia experienced in her own flesh the consequences of the civil laws against the Church and, within it, against the religious life. This is the cause that she will not be able to begin her novitiate in the Company of Mary and that her postulancy will last almost 10 years. She was praying for the solution of this situation, and on that night in 1842 she begged the Lord and offered her life for it. In this context Maria Antonia has a

¹⁵² Aut. MP, 10-11.

¹⁵³ Aut. MP, 5.

prophetic knowledge¹⁵⁴ of the evils of the Church because she has been shaped by the Word of God from the tree of the Cross. The Holy Law, the Gospel, has been engraved in her heart. Thus she understands the distance between the Gospel and the situation toward which history has been leading the Church, because she has not lived according to the Gospel.

God gives Maria Antonia a vivid knowledge of what the Church should be and, within it, the religious life, thus her love for evangelical poverty. The Church patrimony had dangerously increased over the centuries. For this reason the liberal governments wanted to confiscate it.

c) The New Order

María Antonia has a prophetic knowledge of the evils of the Church: they are the consequence of its lack of faithfulness. God shows her the remedy: faithfulness to the Gospel and poverty.¹⁵⁵

God will call her to consecrate her life to the proclamation of the Holy Law of the Lord by the foundation of a new order; not new in doctrine but new in practice.¹⁵⁶ The novelty will be in living what is essential to religious life, faithfulness to the following of Jesus and evangelical poverty, which is the fundamental principle of the new Apostles.

María Antonia's mission in the Church will gradually become clear. The meaning of the call and of the mission will unfold through her life, and she will be given other graces to help her to fulfill her mission.

As a conclusion we may say that the Initial Experience had a decisive influence in her future life, especially because God imprinted in her soul the evangelical ideal that the Church was called to live, and within it the Religious Life. This is the origin of her deep ecclesial spirituality.

With this experience María Antonia is open to the whole Church, not to some need of the people of God, but to the renewal of the Church as such to help her to regain the face of Christ through her continuous conversion.¹⁵⁷ She will have a strong love of the evangelical poverty. The lack of this virtue has been the cause of the evils that the Church is suffering.

All the elements which will be important in her life are present in the Initial Experience: The humanity of the suffering Christ on the tree of the Cross, the Holy Law of the Lord, Sacred Scripture, in particular the Gospels as the rule of life, the teaching of the Holy Law of the Lord in the style of the Apostles, the Church, Mary, prayer and suffering for the Church, the New Order and the evangelical poverty, as the foundation for the new Apostles.

¹⁵⁴ Prophet as the person faith who tries to discover in real life the will of God in a given situation.

¹⁵⁵ Aut. MP, 11.

¹⁵⁶ Aut. MP, 7.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. J.M. Lozano, *Con mi Iglesia te desposaré*, 37-38; Cf. *Positio*, 21, note 28.

2. *This Is My Daughter The Burden of The Reformation of The Church Which is Put on You. Experience on The Day of Her Profession.*¹⁵⁸

“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 to be done...”¹⁵⁹

M^a Antonia learns from God how he wants the reformation of the Church. One year later on August 27, 1855 she makes her profession into the hands of Archbishop Claret, giving origin to the New Order. This is an important moment for Mother París. The evils discovered in the Initial Experience become now her *burden*, her deepest preoccupation. And through this burden she discovers her sorrowful motherhood over the Church.

She mentions vaguely this event in her *Autobiography* quoting for more information the *Relación a Caixal*, in which it seems it had already been written:

“The favor 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...”¹⁶⁰

The narration of this event in the *Relación a Caixal*, a short but profound writing, has very valuable information, which we could not imagine if we only had the *Autobiography*. We are contemplating a complex reality, as it is with every experience of the Spirit, although this one is more linear and easier to understand than the Initial Experience. Its structure is very simple and ordinate, which makes it easy to read. It unfolds in four parts.

2.1. *Time and Place*

In the paragraph immediately before she says

“...I leave the first point and I begin the second, giving to you an account of my spirit, as I have promised.”¹⁶¹

“Beginning with the day of my profession (August 27, 1855) I tell your Excellency (4) (Caixal) that when His Excellency (2) (Claret)...”

It is a report of her conscience to her confessor, Caixal; that is why the the first word of the text is “Beginning.” When an event is important, we explain all the details.

The experience begins mentioning the time and place. This means that we have in front of us an important text. The place is Santiago de Cuba. She does not say it explicitly, but we know that Claret was there by that time. Date: August 27, 1855. The mention of time and place go beyond the topography and the chronology, to become a place and time of God: A true Kayros, the opportune time, as is every time of God.

¹⁵⁸ *Escritos de María Antonia París*, pp. 169-179. “Relación a Caixal,” 9. (From now on cited as R.a C) The “Relación a Caixal” (The Report to Caixal) is an account of conscience to her spiritual director Rev. José Caixal, written before the *Autobiography*. We find of its paragraphs in the “Autobiography,” specially from 1-7. It seems that María Antonia wrote this Report around September 20, 1856.

¹⁵⁹ Aut. MP, 49.

¹⁶⁰ Aut. MP, 226. The letter has a reference to the “Relación a Caixal.”

¹⁶¹ R a C, 8.

2.2. *Narration of the Experience*

“... I tell your Excellency (4) that when His Excellency (2) put the crown on my head, I felt an extraordinary weight on my head that caused it to bend, and naturally the crown was very light since it was made of very delicate flowers...”

The person who was present and put on her head the crown of flowers was His Excellency, Claret. María Antonia narrates it in a very simple way, but at the same with amazement: “I felt a weight...” It is clear that the weight does not come from the flowers, which were very light, as she tells us. It must be something else. The text is open for further reflection.

2.3. *Explanation of the Experience*

“...As I wondered about that heavy weight, Our Lord told me: ‘This is, my daughter, the burden of the Reformation of the Church which is given to you (put on you); and His Divine Majesty called me three times “my bride” with great tenderness making me understand that the Eternal Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit loved me very much. And Our Lord said to me, “My daughter, from now on I want to be seated in your heart as on my own throne...”’

Logically, she is surprised, full of admiration, “As I wondered...” This heavy weight cannot be something natural. The weight of the flowers is very light because they are very delicate. Such an extraordinary weight which makes her to incline her head must be caused by something which goes beyond what is human. It is the Lord himself who explains to her the meaning of this event, which becomes for her a Mission: “This is my daughter the burden of the Renewal of the Church which I put on you today.”

The revelation-mission goes together with a particular presence of the Lord and of his Word, which clarifies the sign of the weight of the crown, and he calls her for three times *my bride*. Through these words M. Paris understands the affection and love that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit have for her. This Trinitarian love comes with a promise: “My daughter, from now on I want to be seated in the center of your heart as in my throne.”

2.4. *She Receives this Grace from God Because of her Faithfulness During Her Waiting.*

As a result from this loving intervention of God and of this promise, during eight days she felt herself filled with a very especial presence of God, which she experiences also at the sensible level of her being and which she calls *the conservation of the sacramental species*:

“...And he paid me with so much grace to have waited for so many years this sacred betrothal that His Majesty wanted to celebrate it during eight consecutive days keeping the sacramental species from one communion to the next. This grace was so overwhelming that I felt as if my soul had left my body. I experienced also myself seated in the center of the Sacred Heart of my God and Lord. I say at the center of the Heart of my God, because it did not seem that God was in my heart, but that I saw myself, body and soul, within the Sacred Heart of my God and Lord”

This experience is related to the Jesus’ promise “to be at the center of her heart as in his throne,” but Mother Paris experiences something different and even opposite. It is she who experiences herself in the heart of God. These are not two different things, but the

result of Jesus being seated in her makes her feel that it is she who is in the center of God's heart. F. Juberías calls this "recycling of the Trinitarian life."¹⁶² God in her and her in God.

María Antonia calls this event betrothal due to other contexts. Betrothal refers to the day of her Religious Profession, which she had just made.¹⁶³

We discover in this text a specific presence of the Humanity of Christ, a Trinitarian Experience, a mutual exchange of love. Christ calls her "my bride" and manifests "his willingness to be in her, in her heart as on his throne." And, as a consequence she feels herself submerged in God. There is a real gift of the Eucharistic grace, understood and formulated by M. París as "the conservation of the sacramental species," which is the most efficacious sign of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. As to his bride, Christ entrusted to her his Church, "the burden of the Renewal of the Church." This is her Mission, which she will fulfill during her life.

After going over the events which left a mark in both the Founder and the Foundress, we can say that the context is different in Claret and in París. In María Antonia the experience takes place as she is praying for the needs of the Church. In Claret the experience takes place as he is suffering a temptation against his chastity.

On the day of his ordination to the diaconate, Antonio María understood the meaning of the devils he had seen during his Initial Experience. The struggle he will have to endure will not be only against the temptations of the flesh, but against any principality, evil power and leader of darkness. The evil is not only at home but also elsewhere.

María Antonia, on the other hand, as she experiences the evil that comes from the outside world, the unjust laws that prevent her to make her vows, she discovers that the evil is also inside; consecrated persons are not faithful neither to the will of God nor to the Evangelical Counsels. As she experiences the evil outside, she discovers also the evil inside.

Claret has to work to restore the beauty of the Church, and in touch with Sacred Scripture he discovers his vocation as an Apostolic Missionary at the service of the Church.

María Antonia, has discovered that the will of God is the New Order for the Renewal of the Church, and in the day of her profession, she will understand that her personal contribution to this Renewal of the Church will be to take onto herself its burden.

¹⁶² F. Juberías, *Por su cuerpo que es la Iglesia*, 253.

¹⁶³ Cf. Aut. MP, 213.

CHAPTER III

THE CHURCH PARIS AND CLARET DREAMED OF

Through the last two chapters we have seen how the ecclesial vocation of Paris and Claret has been enfolding and deepening through their lives; how both of them have worked to give back to the Church the face of Christ. But they did something else; they left their own writings on the Renewal of the Church. María Antonia is the first in doing it and after her Claret.

From María Antonia herself we know that on June 9, 1856, she handed over to Claret her "Plan for the Renewal of the Church,"¹⁶⁴ which she had written in 1855.

On March 18, 1857 Claret received a letter from Queen Isabel II asking him to go immediately to Madrid. On March 28, 1857¹⁶⁵ he travels to La Habana in order to embark for Spain. He leaves on Easter Sunday, April 12, 1857.¹⁶⁶ He takes with him the *Plan for the Renewal of the Church* written by María Antonia.

In a letter from Claret to Currius, dated June 5, 1857, he says that he has with him in Madrid, the "Plan for the Renewal of the Church":

"I have with me the two notebooks of the Plan for the Renewal, and besides during the trip to Spain I have written a Plan that with the grace of God has to produce the good results we need. I have given them to the Bishop of Cádiz, who is a man of spirit and zeal, and he has praised it very much, and he says that this is what we really need."¹⁶⁷

He will publish a *Plan* in the following months. This Plan is what María Antonia wanted, to restore the beauty or to restore the fervor of the Church.

We may infer from this letter that Claret got the idea to write his *Notes on the Church*, on reading the two notebooks of María Antonia's "Plan for the Renewal of the Church," which he carried with him on his trip from Cuba to Spain. He himself puts them together in a letter to Currius. Besides, a week before he had told Caixal,

"I do not know if the Lord has arranged my coming to the Peninsula in order to plan the great project of the clergy's morality... when I was in Cuba, we already began a project with María Antonia, on the ship I have written a Plan..."¹⁶⁸

Currius takes to heart this *main goal*,¹⁶⁹ as he calls it, and he wants to cooperate closely with Claret in its implementation. He transcribes the two notebooks, to which he adds some elements. He calls them *My Book*.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁴ Cf. Aut. MP, 81. The document is called "Notes on the Reformation of the Church." When it was translated into English the title was changed to "Plan for the Renewal..." to avoid the connotations that the word reformation might have.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. Aut. FC, 589, cf. note 97.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. Aut. FC, 590 cf. note 98.

¹⁶⁷ CO, 61.

¹⁶⁸ CO, 58.

D. Dionisio González, in a letter to S. Anthony M. Claret written from Cuba on July 31st 1858 says,

“My dear three¹⁷¹ writes to your Excellency about the sisters’ business, on which occasion I have read again very carefully the Plan for the Renewal.¹⁷² I like it very much, and it is clear that they address the main problem. On reading it again, and on thinking about those written by your Excellency for the Bishops,¹⁷³ I realize that María Antonia’s Plan prepares the ground to accomplish the Renewal proposed in yours in such a way that on comparing them, I think that a same spirit is guiding both pens.”¹⁷⁴

D. Dionisio considers that María Antonia’s Plan prepares the way to realize the Renewal proposed by Claret. He expresses this with a very beautiful comparison: *a same spirit has guided both pens.*

In the correspondence between Claret, Currius, D. Dionisio González and María Antonia, whenever we find the phrases *our Project, the main goal or our main purpose,* they are speaking about the Renewal of the Church, with which they identify and to which they commit themselves.

On reading both writings, we see differences and at the same time similarities:

The Plan for the Renewal of the Church of María Antonia is a series of simple points addressed to her Spiritual Director, to Claret... to concrete persons with whom she shares her ideals of the Renewal of the Church and in which she mentions some means to accomplish it.

The Notes of a Plan is a more theological document, addressed to the Bishops. In it Claret shares his own experience as Bishop. Although Claret entitles his document *Notes*, on reading them for the first time, it looks more as *Points*. However it is an authentic Plan to accomplish the Renewal of the Church, with a profound ecclesial foundation.

The similarities between both Documents are their practical nature, the theme of the Renewal of the Church in her members and the means to renew the Church.

It is difficult to decide which one influenced the other. If it is true that Claret had the Plan of María Antonia with him when he wrote his Notes while he was on the ship, it is also

¹⁶⁹ CO, 76.

¹⁷⁰ CO, 179.

¹⁷¹ Aut. MP, 52, note 142 of the Spanish original. Juan M. Lozano says: “Our author adopts here the code of numbers usually used by her confessor, Paladio Currius, (and most probably invented by him), to refer to some persons when they speak about the Plans for the Renewal...”: number 1 is the Pope, number 2 is Archbishop Claret, 3 is Currius, 4 is Caixal, Mother Paris is number 5 and Dionisio González number 6.

¹⁷² It refers to the Plan for the Renewal

¹⁷³ Claret, *Notes that for his personal use....* (Madrid: Printing Office and Bookstore of D. Eusebio Aguado, 1865². Published in *Escritos Pastorales BAC*, 1997. 461- 545. We will use Claret’s original, second edition of 1865, which is kept in the Museum in Vic, Spain. We will refer to them as *Notes....* It is also published in *Escritos Pastorales*. (Madrid: BAC, 1997), III Part, 451-675: “The renewal of the Church,” 465-545. No English translation has been found.

¹⁷⁴ CO, 122.

true that when María Antonia wrote her Plan for the Renewal, she had seen, incarnate in the life of Claret as Archbishop of Cuba, all that she puts down on writing.

What is a reality is that Claret approved the *Plan for the Renewal* of Mother París and that they were written before his *Notes*.... María Antonia writes the *Plan* she thinks may be useful for the Renewal and Claret writes a detailed Plan to accomplish what she has understood in her prayer and in her experience of God.

We may conclude that it has been a mutual influence, as it is also with the ideals and in the understanding of the Church's situation of their own historical time.

Claret y María Antonia speak in their Writings about the Renewal, General Renewal, Restoration of the Church..., To Keep the beauty...¹⁷⁵ They also use the verb to Reform¹⁷⁶. In some texts from María Antonia, she speaks of to reviving¹⁷⁷ or reestablishing.¹⁷⁸ These words tell us how to understand the reform-conversion: it is not about the faith or the sacramental life, or the structures of grace, thus about the Church in her transcendent dimension, the Church as mystery which they call Holy as did also Council Vatican II. Both documents are about the Church's fidelity in her members in any walk of life; that is to say the Church in her human dimension as Pilgrim People of God. It is about the reformation of the Church in her members and institutions; a call to go back to her origins, to the original fervor of the first Christian men and women, to the Gospel, to the newness of the preaching and witnessing of the first communities. The *Reformation* entails living in fidelity, poverty, and in proclaiming the Gospel with words and, above all, with the testimony of life.

1. Ma. Antonia París: Plan for the Renewal¹⁷⁹

It is the first non autobiographical writing of María Antonia and the second after the draft of the Constitutions in 1848, which are not found in the archives. The *Plan for the Renewal* was developed during a long period of time, although she wrote it in a little more than a month.¹⁸⁰ It has its starting point in the Initial Experience, to which we will always have to go back in order to understand her ecclesial spirituality, her work, and her mission in the Church.

After her Initial Experience, María Antonia goes through a normal process of deepening in the understanding of what the Lord had revealed to her. Little by little she learns that the Renewal is not only about the New Order, but also about something larger and deeper; it is the whole Church that has to be renewed, converted and returned to her first love. And in the Church, two groups of persons have a greater responsibility: the Hierarchy and the Religious men and women, because the conversion of the people of God depends on their conversion. Thus María Antonia writes this *Plan* to contribute, for her part, to the Renewal of the Church which she has understood as a must in the Initial Experience. Let us see how she conceives it and how she translates it later on in the *Plan for the Renewal*.

1.1. The Text in its Present Redaction

¹⁷⁵ Cf. Aut. MP, 49-51; 229. Notes, p. 3.

¹⁷⁶ Cf. PR 9, 15, 20.

¹⁷⁷ PR, 1.

¹⁷⁸ PR, 75.

¹⁷⁹ *Escritos de María Antonia París*, p. 309-343.

¹⁸⁰ Diary 32b.

The copy of the present text of the *Plan for the Renewal of the Church* is kept in the General Archives of the Religious of Mary Immaculate Claretian Missionary Sisters in Rome. It is not an autographed copy, but one made by Currius. It has a note that reads: *exact copy of the original*. María Antonia wrote the draft in 1855 and on the following year, 1856, she made two copies, one for Claret and the other for Caixal. These two copies and the draft got lost. In 1860 D. Paladio Currius made a copy to be presented to the Pope. We do not know, whether before or at the same time, he copied the full text in this notebook which is now in the General Archives.

María Antonia called this writing *Plan for the Renewal of the Church* and Currius gave it the title *Apostolic Institute of the Immaculate Conception of Mary Most Holy*. He knew that it was not convenient to present this writing to Rome with the title *Notes on the Reformation* since at that time and until Council Vatican II, this word “reformation” evoked the Protestant Reformation and, therefore the Writing could be seen with reluctance and not be welcomed conveniently. There is also another reason we know that Currius was more interested in the second part of this writing, the Rules for the Missionaries.

1.2. *The content*

María Antonia presents with great simplicity, and sometimes even with little order, her intuitions on how the Reformation of the Church should be, and who should do it.

Claret kept with him these two Notebooks, and we realize the value they had for him, since he included them at the end of his *Autobiography*. We have a written evidence in two letters of Father Clotet.¹⁸¹

The text has two introductions, in which María Antonia explains the reason for writing the *Notes on the Reformation*. Two parts follow: the first part¹⁸² on who has to do the Reformation¹⁸³ and how the Reformation has to be¹⁸⁴. The second part are the Rules for the Apostolic Missionaries.¹⁸⁵ There is a conclusion¹⁸⁶ in which she explains that she has written in obedience. She also mentions her hopes in the new institute.

She goes through all the ways of Christian life, without omitting the lay persons, explaining what each one has to do in order for this Reformation to be a reality. The different paragraphs of the first part, attract our attention to the importance that Mother Paris gives to the Word of God, in a time when very few in the Church had access to the Word of God. The Word for Mother Paris is the *bread of life and light which scatters the darkness*. She emphasizes also the importance of the proclamation of Scripture by the ministers to open up the meaning of it, and the need of wisdom, the gift of the Spirit, to comprehend its meaning, to enjoy its reading and to make it transparent.

María Antonia understands that in order to be able to live the Holy Law, the Gospel, Christ himself Word of God, the Church needs a reformation, a renewal and a conversion, and return to the origins, to the first fidelity to the Gospel. This is the meaning of *imitation of the Holy Apostles*. That is how the idea of an apostolic religious life is born in the

¹⁸¹ J. Clotet a P. Currius, January 25, 1889 and February 2, 1889, quoted by J. Álvarez Gómez, *Historia de las Religiosas de María Inmaculada Misioneras Claretianas*. Tomo I, (Roma:1980), pp. 23-24.

¹⁸² PR, 3-60.

¹⁸³ PR, 3-4.

¹⁸⁴ PR, 5-60.

¹⁸⁵ PR, 61-75.

¹⁸⁶ PR, 76-82.

mind of María Antonia. This apostolic life has its base on poverty and on the proclamation of the Gospel.

This renewal touches all the commitments of the different walks of life; poverty according to each one's personal call¹⁸⁷, because the lack of poverty has brought the evils which affect the Church; the communion of goods and the proclamation of the Gospel, to help the whole Church to renew herself in all her members.

¹⁸⁷ En PR, 50, cf. note 63 of the *Escritos de María Antonia*: "María Antonia distinguishes between the common poverty of each Christian person, understood as detachment and availability to renounce; and the poverty of the religious person which has to be understood as an effective renouncement."

1.3. The Outline

INTRODUCTION	<p>Personal: She asks the Holy Spirit to guide her. She understands that God our Lord commands her to write. She implores the Saints and Mary. Her attitudes: prostrated, humbled. To keep quiet/to speak. The twelve/her (n.1)</p> <p>General: God wants the Church to be renewed.</p>
<p><u>FIRST PART</u> WHO HAS TO DO THE REFORMATION AND HOW. POPE</p>	<p>The renewal has to be promoted by the Pope. It has to reach the whole Church. Claret and Currius must give example (nn. 2-8)</p> <p>She explains his mission in the Renewal: The Pope has to take the initiative and regulate it. She asks him to have a delegate in all the Dioceses (nn. 9-10)</p>
BISHOPS	<p>She asks for their personal renewal. She introduces here the idea that God does not want anything new, only the fulfillment of the Gospel, which is for everyone without exception. (nn. 11-14)</p> <p>The means to be used for this Renewal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reformation of their lives, houses and members of their household. Poverty (15) - Community life, sharing all their goods (16-17) - To give their income to the poor, keeping only what is necessary (18-19) - He must preach the Word, this will be his first mission (20-21) - He needs to pay attention to the seminary. The bishop needs to look for good formators (22) - He needs to pay attention to the priests. The Bishop needs to take special care of the priests, preach the Word to them; forming communities of clergy; to have a Vicar (23-26) - He needs to pay attention to the places of worship and to the sacred garments (27-29) - The pastoral visitation to all the places of his Diocese; to the places of worship (30-31) - Responsibility of the clergy in the Church's crisis (32) <p>Duties of the Bishop: to distribute the bread of the Word, to hear confessions, to cherish the Holy Law, and teach it through words and deeds (n. 33)</p>
PRIESTS	<p>They must not have any possessions. The bishop has to see how they use their income, if they have enough for their living. They need to use the cassok. They have to share their goods, or live in very poor houses, without women. The bishop will visit them. (nn. 34-36)</p>
RELIGIOUS MEN/WOMEN	<p>The religious men and women have to keep their Constitutions. The Bishops will visit them to make sure they lack nothing in the spiritual and material aspects of their lives. (nn. 37-38)</p> <p>She makes a reflection on the situation of the Church, according to what the Lord has inspired her and on the need for renewal. (nn. 39-44)</p> <p>She talks about the religious women and men: poverty; prayer of intercession for the Church; holiness of the religious persons. She believes that ignorance is the worst of evils. The religious persons need someone to preach to them. (nn. 45-58)</p>
LAY WOMEN/MEN	<p>They must fulfill the Divine Commandments. Poverty. (n.50)</p>
<p><u>SECOND PART</u> RULES FOR THE APOSTOLIC MISSIONARIES</p>	<p>Presentation of the Institute. Description and function (n. 59)</p> <p>Claret as the Founder of the Institute and light for the Church, for the Renewal from his headquarters. (nn. 60-63).</p> <p>The body of missionaries have to be in his Palace (n. 64).</p> <p>The Gospel must be their rule of life. Living in extreme poverty and humility (nn. 65-69).</p> <p>Concrete Rules for the daily life of the Institute. Organization of the Institute. (nn. 70-75).</p>
CONCLUSION	<p>She justifies that she has written for Obedience.</p> <p>She mentions her hopes over the new Institute. Her respect for the clergy, in spite of all the things she has to tell them. (nn. 76-82)</p>

1.4. *The writing: plan for the renewal of the Church. María Antonia*

PLAN FOR THE RENEWAL OF THE CHURCH

1. May the light of the Holy Spirit guide my pen to write with clarity what God our Lord has ordered me several times and now again orders me by means of Holy Obedience. I beg, then, all the Saints in Heaven, and especially my Most Holy Mother, Mary Most Holy, upon whose feet I lie prostrate, plunged in my own vileness and engrossed in the midst of my lowliness, without knowing where to begin. I cannot remain silent, and to speak is temerity. Supposing then my God, that you order me to do so, I will speak so that those who will read it will magnify your works, Lord, and seeing the inadequacy of the instrument may remember that to establish the Holy Church you chose twelve poor fishermen and now to revitalize it you deign yourself to give the fundamental plan to another poor creature without more miserable comparison. Blessed be your Power and Kindness forever.
2. Let the first point be how God, our Lord, wants general renewal in his entire Church. Resisting the points that His Divine Majesty wanted to point out to me for the effect, He has assured me of the truth, twice manifesting to me the proximate final judgment. What a frightful day!!!!!!The most terrible thing that can be imagined.....
3. His Divine Majesty wants that this renewal be done by Pope Pious IX as a reward for having given the universal Holy Church the Immaculate Conception of Most Holy Mary as a dogma of faith.
4. That the Most Reverend Father Claret with his associate Father Paladio Currius consult with His Holiness and be the first to offer themselves with the vow of keeping the evangelical counsels with great perfection as Jesus Christ orders.
5. May His Holiness order the entire College of Cardinals to gather, and communicate to them the general renewal of the whole Church, beginning with the same College of Cardinals, followed by the Bishops, renouncing their money earned through interest, and after them, all the Religious Orders.
6. God our Lord asks Our Most Holy Father and Bishops to conform their lives and customs with those of the Holy Apostles: they will achieve this easily adopting as their own the words of the Holy Gospel; without a doubt, the words of God our Lord will be totally fulfilled, and Jesus said them for them as well as for his apostles.
7. The Religious Orders keeping and conforming their lives to the holy rules of their first Founders, for every rule approved by the Holy Church comprises evangelical perfection.
8. 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. The time is here; the one who excuses himself will be greatly punished: some will be deprived of many temporal and spiritual graces in this life, and others will be deprived of many degrees of glory in the next life, and others will suffer very terrible torments.

FIRST POINT

9. The Holy Father should send a circular Bull to all the Bishops ordering and entreating them to reform their houses and families; in this Bull, he should entrust them the surveillance of all the Religious Orders belonging to their dioceses.
10. His Holiness should have a Delegate in each Diocese, whose duty will be to see how the Bishop fulfills and ensures the fulfillment of Holy Apostolic Letters. He should not always be at the same place, but should go around the entire Diocese from time to time, and should write each month to the Holy Apostolic See to give an exact account of how that Diocese is. These should be trustworthy people, who are full of apostolic spirit; with more virtue than letters. If all is possible, better.

SECOND POINT

11. We have said to the Bishops that God asks them to conform their lives and customs with those of the Holy Apostles. Our Lord wants a living copy of his Apostles in his Bishops, for they govern the same Church which they established; it is necessary that they water it with the same water they used to fertilize it. It is necessary that the one who occupies the same positions have and fulfill the same duties.
12. Our Lord does not ask for anything new in his Church; he only asks all of us what we have promised him. Our Divine Redeemer asks us to observe his Holy Law, and he asks this particularly of the Bishops in such a special way, and with so much eagerness that I do not know how to express; he only demands it of them, as if the world's well-being depended on them.
13. We have said that no one should excuse himself. The Lord's Holy Law is one and he orders it to be preached equally in the whole world without exceptions, neither of people, nor kingdoms, nor provinces. Then his grace is ready to fulfill it in all parts and people. (Look at point 2 in parenthesis in the notebook).
14. The way to begin this task which appears both difficult and impossible looked upon with human eyes only is very easy for a Prelate zealous of the Lord's Holy Law; for the Lord himself knows how to accept the barriers of holy prudence; but not that prudence considered holy by not so zealous souls, because they put together or want to put together the world and God and we know for sure that no one can serve two lords. This second prudence is the one that governs my Church and because of this it has become such a horrendous monster that causes terror and fear to the children of the true law, if I do have any in the midst of all this confusion.
15. The means that the Pastors of the Church should use to fulfill the Lord's mission are the following as we have jotted down.

FIRST: The first thing that they should do is renew their lives, houses and families; that is, they should fix their houses with the most essential and absolutely necessary, without allowing superfluous things that serve vanity more than necessity. For this they should consult Saint Paul who was full of true prudence. They should also observe this in the clothes used by them and their associates, avoiding all types of silk clothing as much as possible.

16. The Bishops should live in community with their associates, and there should not exist a distinction of what is yours and mine between them. He should give them everything, everything that is necessary being very careful that they do not lack all that religious modesty allows; in clothing since they should always dress with much modesty and cleanliness, in food, and especially when they are sick: he will have a nurse whose primary occupation will be to remedy their needs, with prompt assistance. (He will have the same care in spiritual matters). This point is of much importance, because the fervor of our days is so little that in lacking the necessary we think that we do not have an obligation to serve God, fearing dying of need.
17. He will not pay any of his associates a salary, for the Lord does not like to be served by hired servants, rather by sons who freely serve him. He will only pay a salary to the lay servants and maids.
18. Everyone's income from properties and interest from dowries belongs to the poor (deducting exactly what each one needs), and therefore it should be given to them, and among these it could be taken into consideration if there is someone poor who is a relative of one of the associates. The Bishops should not see this as childish, and take into consideration that 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.
19. This, which at first sight may appear to the Bishops as something of little importance, is the only weapon with which they should defend the Holy Law which they should preach, and understand that without this, all of their works will be fruitless. I could say great things here about the esteem that a Prelate should have of the example of his Divine Master, as God has taught me, but it seems too bold to me, for I speak with whom I am not worthy to hear, and so it appears to me I will fulfill my obligation simply writing the most essential points that His Divine Majesty has pointed out to me without excluding any, without failing to observe the Lord's command.
20. Therefore, after renewing themselves and their associates, the Bishops should fully devote themselves to distributing the bread of the Divine Word. This is a point that has his Divine Majesty very sad and displeased because it is not preached as it should be. Therefore, may the aim of preaching be the observance of the divine commandments and the end of times; for Judgment will flood the earth.
21. Each one should make sure that in all the parochial churches of his Diocese the Commandments of God's Law alternated with those of the Holy Church be explained each Sunday; and make sure that the Pastor know well the Divine Precepts.
22. They will have Seminaries where the young men who will be ordained should be educated. They should provide God-fearing men, who are also zealous of his Holy Law, as the Teachers of these young men. They should educate them detached of all interests, without there being a distinction of what is yours and mine in all Seminaries; this even when they themselves cover the expenses, and if anyone gives any sign that what he really desires is to be ordained for his own benefit, or to help

his family, rather than for God's glory, he should not be ordained. Greed has destroyed religion. Greed has its foot on it and does not allow it to breathe.

23. It is of great importance that the Pastor gather his flock at least once a month; I mean the entire clergy, and address the Divine Word to them. Make them comprehend the greatness of the priestly state, and teach them how they should fulfill the Lord's Holy Law. Make them see the rigorous account that God will ask of them if they do not observe his Holy Commandments. Persuade them that because of men's failure to consider the obligations of their condition, they miserably lose their bodies and their souls forever without end.
24. He should order the same in all the large towns where there are communities of priests. In these large towns and cities he will have a Vicar whose duty will be to watch over the behavior of the entire clergy, and of each one in particular.
25. These Vicars will have strict obligation of writing monthly to their Prelate, giving exact account of everything without hiding anything. They should be individuals so faithful to their Bishop, that if they fail to fulfill their duty, they should be removed from their positions and severely punished.
26. The Bishop should not content himself with receiving news from these particular individuals; rather, he should demand the following from his Vicars: 1. If all the Priests confess at least once every eight days, if they say Mass every day, if they all participate in the monthly talks, if they live distracted or recollected, and in what they busy themselves with the hours that they have left after their sacred ministries, if they go to the confessionary everyday to hear the confessions of the lay people, if the Pastors in addition to this preach in the High Mass every Sunday and on Holy Days; if on said days Christian doctrine is taught in the church in the afternoons, if they do half an hour of mental prayer and pray the Holy Rosary every day in the afternoon. He should order the fulfillment of all of these details in each one of his parishes, without neglecting tidiness and much cleanliness of the sacred vestments. This is the first thing he should order.
27. Every month, the Vicar should see for himself the condition of the sacred vestments: the chalices, corporals, and purificators especially should be very clean because of the immediate contact they have with the Venerable Body of an Incarnated God. The Bishops should be very vigilant in this, writing pastoral letters, emphasizing tidiness in the churches and cleanliness of the altars; it does not matter that the place and vestments be poor, very poor, what his Divine Majesty wants is tidiness and cleanliness.
28. That Lord who was not ashamed of being born in a stable, in the company of animals, did not want his Most Holy Body to be wrapped in filth; rather, he prepared his Most Holy Mother and his Holy Angels, the latter so that they would arrange the place, and Mary Most Holy so that she would wrap him in poor but clean diapers.
29. In this lesson, the Bishops could advise some Pastors who boast of being of noble spirit because they are unable to squander with that pomp and luxury which dominate our times, and abandon it saying that it is impossible to maintain order without money from interest. What a much better example they would give the lay people if they went begging for money for modest maintenance! And surely they

would not lack because God is an observer of his honor and that way they will revive the faith and veneration due to the sacred temples. Since the ministers of the Lord have failed to do it like this and are so slack, the Holy Church has come to much contempt in our unfortunate days. It is the joke of the impious and the mockery of Christians themselves! There is no longer faith! There is no longer piety!...Woe! because the Saints of the Lord have not treated their God and Lord well.

30. The Bishops should visit their entire diocese themselves, without entrusting this duty to anyone else. Examine the parochial churches: in some they will find some vestments and ornaments that are very precious and of much value, but that do not match with the rest of the ornaments. In this case it is necessary to balance it, because it is a great monstrosity that the ministers of the Lord wear grand and rich vestments, while the ones whom they serve through contact with the Most Holy Body of Our Lord Jesus Christ are very untidy and indecent. Our Lord likes rich vestments and precious objects in the parochial churches very much, but greatly abhors the mismanagement of Priests in our times.
31. The Bishops should put a stop to so much neglect if they want to fulfill their duty. The time of so much simplicity has already passed! Everything is vanity and lie in our disgraceful days! Make such Priests understand that God is honored more by mediocrity, not by being treated one day with many riches and another with such great necessity that his Most Sacred Body comes to be profaned. That in all the churches it is the same God, who likes to be treated with the same respect by all his Ministers, and who is greatly offended by all.
32. Oh my Lord and my God! How great is your goodness! How infinite your mercy!...Who Lord, if not your burning charity, would suffer so much contempt?...so many indignities?...so many profanities? Oh my Redeemer, by whom are you so offended? Ah!!!! Your sons, my God, the Holy Church's preferred children! The Priests of the Lord have trampled the most sacred laws, putting our Holy Mother the Church under their feet!!! Because of this, there is no faith! There is no charity on earth!...Oh my Jesus! Send a ray of your divine light and illuminate the earth. My Lord, especially enlighten all of the Church's Prelates; my Lord, break this veil of mundane vanity, and make them see with impartial eyes the duties of their position according to Your Most Holy Law.
33. During the holy visit, the Bishop should distribute the bread of the Divine Word; do not avoid confessing, engrave in the hearts of all the Lord's Holy Law; teach through words and deeds the fulfillment of the Divine Commandments.
34. He should know how many priests there are in his entire Diocese, how many in each town; what money gained from interest they have, if there is enough to live at least with religious modesty, how they use their ecclesiastic income. The Bishop should keep an eye on this point so that what is justly owed to the poor of Christ is not spent on scandalous and profane ostentation and vanities.
35. Do not allow them to have or buy possessions of any kind. The ones who are not in the Seminary, will be served by one single manservant; under no circumstances will they be allowed to have any woman in the house. As a father visits his son, visit them some time in their homes, and lovingly correct them if their homes are not in accordance with religious moderation. Order them to remove vain and superfluous

decorations, making them see that the lay people whom they think they will please with their vanity are the ones who gossip most about them. And for the same reason that they think they are more respected by following urban vanities and etiquette, more so are they looked down upon.

36. See to it that all wear a cassock, and may the one who dares to take it off be punished. His Divine Majesty is very irritated by those who dishonor the priestly state.
37. The Bishops should examine with all diligence the Rules of all the Religious Orders that they have in their Dioceses, and order their exact observance with all accuracy. He should visit both houses of religious men as well as religious women to inform himself how they observe the Rules and Constitutions. He should do this even if it is a house that was not previously subject to the Bishop because of its Order. For as it was said in the first points, the care of Religious Orders is the responsibility of the Bishops, and so with the same care they should keep an eye on the religious observance of both.
38. Be careful that they do not lack what is necessary, both in the spiritual as in the temporal, especially the first, because with this they will have the second. May all, both religious men as well as religious women, never lack the bread of the Divine Word, at least once every eight days. For the Word of God is bread of life and light that dispels the darkness of the soul. There are many wise people in my Church, but none who understands true wisdom. These, the religious, clergy and nuns, say "what need do they have of sermons?" Some preach everyday, and the others can take a good book where they will find a sermon continued. They say this without reflecting over priestly dignity and that the words of the Holy Law pronounced by their Ministers open the meaning of the Scriptures, and as light of the soul, guide our steps toward God's altar.
39. Many times God has revealed to me, and some with much sorrow and anguish, that the cause of all the wrongdoings of the Holy Church, is because its Prelates neglect giving the pasture that their beloved sheep need, failing to distribute the bread of the Divine Word among such a great multitude of ignorant people. Because of their character they do not appear to do so, but in reality they ignore what is most essential of the Lord's Holy Law such as what is necessary for their sanctification. The Pastors' neglect loses the Lord's sheep.
40. Sometimes I am frightened, and right now as I am writing I am trembling, and it seems to me that the blood in my veins freezes, to such a degree that I am unable to move my body. I confess that if Our Lord did not comfort me I would not be able to live, seeing God's indignation against his Pastors. Ah! Fathers of the Church and my brothers in Christ! If for one moment you could see the furies of one God! How terrified you would be in this valley of miseries avoiding vanity!!! Oh and how you would try to dismantle the anger of God's indignation which is going to engulf us in a deluge of fire!!!!!!...
41. Lucifer congregates his secret meetings and scatters councils of demons throughout for the conservation of vices, and I do not have zealous Pastors in my Church who gather councils and hit the target for the conservation of my Law. The whole world is so blind that without the light of the Gospel in hand it is impossible to cure its

blindness. Pastors of my Church, pause with attentive reflection upon the condition of the primitive Christians, and you will find that they were of the same and worse condition as the ones now. And what was the reason that in its beginnings God's Church flourished so much when there were few workers? Because they preached with the Gospel in hand, more than in their mouth; His Divine Majesty told me this, meaning that deeds give spirit to the voice.

42. Look at with what haste and zeal the Holy Apostles and the first Bishops would gather to deal with the sanctification of their flock. The Early Fathers and Founders of monastic life did the same thing. Because all of them, inspired by the true light, recognized that without continuous preaching and admonition of virtue, it was impossible for the first to observe the strictness the sweet law of grace imposed on them. And the latter could not remain in the rigors of the monastic life, attending the weakness of human nature and man's inconstancy, as a sad experience has revealed to us.
43. (I did not want to continue anymore in this matter, because it causes me much sorrow to speak of matters that I do not understand, and I find it funny to see a poor ignorant creature involved in such a delicate and important task. But today, after having received communion, God Our Lord has reprehended me strongly, ordering me to write with simplicity all that he brings to my knowledge, without detaining myself in anything. He told me, what have you in what I do? Understand that the less capable the instrument that refines a piece that is out of order, more so does it reveal the wisdom of the Teacher who guides it.
44. Tell these Bishops, to whom I have entrusted my flock, and have chosen for great things, that to banish so much impiety from the earth, the only thing necessary is their sanctification. They will reach this with great perfection, measuring their deeds with those of the Apostles. What His Divine Majesty wants most in these unfortunate final times is the sanctification of the people in charge of his service. These are the most immediate enemies that our Holy Mother the Church has, and because of this she cries such sorrowful tears.
45. The Bishops will have the same care in the convents of religious women, without leaving them there so that each one practices virtue according to her own whim. It does not matter less to the Bishops to have convents of religious women in good order, rather, they should buy them or sustain them at all expense since religious women are people especially dedicated or consecrated to God's service and who can more freely dedicate themselves to prayer, because, "who will hold back God's justice, irritated with such a corrupt people, but daily prayer which without all work would be nothing, or as dust thrown to the wind?" Because of this, it is important that the nuns be holy and not nuns because of convenience.
46. This, which depending on how one looks at it, seems to be a matter of little importance, is the first step that a Prelate should take, because the Lord has made me understand that the healing of so many evils depends on the holiness of these two members. So much can be done by a Pastor zealous of the Lord's Holy Law! May this remedy not appear impossible, because most people consecrated to God's service are lost because of ignorance. They do not understand the meaning of Scripture, and persuade themselves that living a life somewhat withdrawn, more in the external than in the internal, together with some mortification and prayer, they

live happily and fooled, some saying that Our Lord does not ask them for more, and the others that they already observe what is most essential of the Rule and that they do not have an obligation to observe the little things of the Constitutions, either because they are not in use (this is very powerful) or because it seems to them impossible to keep them, as if they were of a different condition than their first Fathers, or as if Our Lord no longer responded with the same help and grace he gave the first Fathers. Oh Lord, how much pity is caused by seeing such a multitude of souls consecrated to your service who do not serve neither God nor the world, because after doing the most, the devil tempts them so that they do not do the least, which is what is most important! I would not grow tired of writing or saying that many more are the souls that are lost because of ignorance than because of malice. For this is how the Lord has manifested it to me many times and God willing this will engrave itself in the mind of the Prelates.

47. The Bishops should convince themselves that to restore the monastic discipline it is necessary to take into consideration the means used by all the Founders to establish it: We know that these were the complete contempt of all earthly goods, basing themselves on a perfect poverty as Jesus Christ orders in his Holy Evangelical Counsels.
48. This virtue should be so precious that it was the first one that the Most Holy Humanity of Our Lord Jesus Christ practiced, being born in a shoddy manger, 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.
49. This then should be the foundation to restore monastic discipline. All the Prelates can be certain that greed has lost all Religion; through this the devil has opened the way for all the misfortunes the Church is suffering. My God, what should I say about this beautiful virtue if it is not known on earth? The Church's children, who through their profession are obliged to observe it, do not know its worth! And because of this they have sold it for a worthless interest buying an eternal misery. Bishops therefore look at the Rules and order that they be observed with all its purity, getting rid of all the negligence that the mundane spirit has favored saying that poverty does not consist of not having goods or riches or any other thing, but in having the heart detached from it: to those who speak in this manner, destroying the spirit of Religion, 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.
50. These most holy words are the ones that should be adopted by those who profess to be perfect, because that is how our Divine Master has taught us through word and deed. And the others should be understood to fulfill the Divine Commandments, as that good young man had done up to that moment. And if this is not enough, look at or pay attention to the words that he said to the Apostles when he sent them to

preach and you will see the provisions that he orders them. Oh greed of humankind, which makes you trample the most holy and divine laws! Oh ambitious vanity of the Church's children! But, which children of the Church are these, Lord? Ah!! what sorrow!!! Those whom you love as the apple of your eyes and to whom you have entrusted the treasures of your power!

51. In this point I find myself so incapable to state what God allows me to understand. I confess that my pen is insufficient to write on paper the effects that occur in the most intimate of my soul. I will only say that as all the evils and miseries that all of us, children of Adam, suffer are the effect of this our first Father's sin, so has Our Lord always manifested to me that all the evils of the world are the effect of the ambition of the ministers of the altars. And Our Lord suffers so much, that if he were capable of tears, he would shed them of living blood.

Look Fathers for the wellbeing of your poor souls, and that the riches here have treasured great ire in God's heart for the day of his fury. Therefore, look at what is most convenient.

52. This is what the Lord orders me: Do not allow public functions especially in the churches of religious men, and much less in those of nuns, and believe me that you will avoid countless wrongdoings. The functions that should be held in the churches of nuns are, the Low Mass, and two on feast days if possible, and a sermon in the afternoon with closed doors; I mean without the participation of lay people. If the Prelates would see the disorder that occurs in the convents of nuns because of these "blessed" church functions, I am certain that they would strictly prohibit them.
53. I have lived much time in a labyrinth with this point, not knowing where to exit by, because I would look at the works of piety (church functions) that are done in convents, so holy and religious as they are in themselves, but I always felt in the innermost part of my soul something I cannot describe that displeased the Divine Majesty, until through his mercy, God has deigned himself to open the eyes of my soul to the true light. With the more clarity I contemplate the works of the Lord, the more I discover the blindness of men. The devil, both cunning and shrewd, knows well that no trap is so strong and at the same time works to seize perfection than to make them drink a wrongly understood piety which is covered with zeal that is as pure as it is repugnant.
54. If I were a person of authority, it seems to me that at this moment I would not be able to hold back the pen to write to all the Fathers and Pastors of the Church, communicating to them that ray of evangelical light that with its clarity and force disperses the thick fog that has their eyes so covered. There is no remedy. God's justice no se is not satisfied because the Pastors of his Church do not measure their works with the compass of the Gospel. It is better said that whoever does not awaken with the horrible sound of such loud, painful, and difficult to endure blows that the Holy Church is suffering in these unfortunate days is dead rather than sleeping: Within her very center and cradle, she finds herself buried in the midst of the ruins of her magnificent buildings.
55. My spirit is so busy contemplating divine justice that it seems to me I find myself in the plazas in Rome listening to the cadavers from their ruins or buried in their ashes, both the good and the bad, crying out; the latter for their shame and the first for their

glory: observance, observance, observance; poverty, poverty, poverty; retreat, retreat, retreat; fidelity, fidelity, fidelity, to the Lord's Holy Law. I think that the song that ought to resonate in the ears of the ones and the others for all eternity is made up of these virtues.

56. A few days after having written this, it was known that there had really been a great revolution in Rome in those days and that many died. I was never able to find out the day this happened because I have never written things of visions, because I am never certain of them and I always disregard them or look at them with indifference; of which Our Lord has reprimanded me many times and now makes me say everything. For what is relevant to this vision, I can very well say for certain that Our Lord made me see in spirit what was happening in that holy city of Rome. Now that I am writing it, in spite of many years having passed by, it seems to me that I am seeing and hearing the yells and screams of those poor suffering people.
57. May false piety or the devil's slanderous zeal saying that public functions in the convents of religious men and religious women are beneficial for society not fool our Fathers. The churches of religious women should be like the desert where Jesus went to rest from his apostolic work.
Of Saint Teresa it seems to me I have heard (because I have not read her works) that she converted hundreds or thousands of souls in the quietness of her convents.
58. In all towns there are parochial churches and confraternities well established. Their superiors are the ones who should celebrate with much diligence and care the functions in their churches according to the feasts and times of the year, instructing the people in the functions of the Church and ceremonies of our Holy Religion, seeing that they do not lack the spiritual pasture. They or other ministers should take care of this.
59. Perhaps I have said nonsense, but I have not done more than fulfill obedience: I do not do more than jot down what God writes in my soul. The world is lost because the great men, placed in the midst of the light, do not see. They do not know the truth, and because of that the world is full of darkness: My second Apostles ought to be a living copy of the first, both in name as in deeds. With the torch of the Gospel in hand, they are to light the way for the most wise and ignorant men.
60. Up to here for all the prelates in general, but the last words of the previous clause His Divine Majesty addresses to the Most Reverend Father Claret because it is he who God Our Lord has chosen so that among the Saints of his Church a light will emerge that as a clear and shining star will illuminate and gladden the dark and tenebrous night of this ignorant century (that I think that those who are most blind call an illustrated century). Look in the general notes number 21, folio 4, and continue until number 22.
61. This is the first father, and I want him together with his sons in the Order of Apostles of Jesus Christ to arrange the first houses of this new Apostolate. This is the Angel that St. John saw in heaven with the Gospel in hand to evangelize all men and tell all: Fear the Lord, and give him the honor that is due. This is that apostolic man who is to once again put into practice the Lord's Holy Law.

62. His Majesty told me these and other things many years ago, when I did not know this Father Claret (now through divine disposition my most honorable Prelate), and everything up to here has slowly been fulfilled in spite of all the impossibilities, His Divine Majesty assuring me that the heaven and the earth will be missing before he fails to fulfill his word. This way, he assures me that he will continue fulfilling what is missing.
63. The way for this new Apostle to begin the Lord's Mission is as follows: God Our Lord with his infinite wisdom, power and goodness has wanted to place to the eminence of the episcopal chair this clear light so that from his position, power and authority, he spread his rays like the sun, to dissipate the dense fog that covers all the earth. He should be like another Moses, legislator of the law of grace. He ought to give the law to the people. All of his brothers should be seen in him: the Bishops, Priests, Clergymen and Religious, which would not have been able to happen being a simple priest: This is how Our Lord has manifested it to me. Thus, His Divine Majesty does not like that he struggles to come down from where He has taken him up for the universal good of his Church. For this reason, Our Lord wants him to offer himself with a vow to His Holiness, as has been said, so that he and his sons give testimony of the Law that they ought to preach to every creature.
64. Immediately after having consulted with His Holiness, having received his holy advice and having obtained his particular privileges, he will establish his house or palace as an apostolic college, the exterior arranged according to what is said in folio 7 of the first notebook, because he should live as a holy Bishop according to the people (executing all the duties of Father and a very vigilant Pastor) and more holy according to God for as new legislator of the Law, he should not contain himself within the limits of his diocese, but should spread it through all the earth, and for this in his palace he will have a Seminary in which he will educate the young men who enter for Apostolic Missionaries. This could also be interpreted as: These should be educated with all the rigor of monastic discipline without calling any attention to the practice and execution of all that has been said and will be said.
65. The Rule which these should observe is the book of the Holy Gospels, divine law! Not inspired but given by the Eternal Word of the divine mouth of our adored Redeemer to his beloved Apostles, written with letters of blood, and which will never be erased until it reaches its perfect fulfillment for all eternity.
66. From this sacred book they will read a chapter each day, kissing it before and after reading it as a sign of the love which they profess to it, 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. Oh, if we would study in this great cave, what perfect disciples we would be! In this holy and most happy cave this Baby Jesus...this God who reduced himself to nothing...describes to us the observance of his Most Holy Law.
67. Ah! A God made man deigns himself to come down from heaven to teach us the observance of his Most Holy Law through word and deed so that nobody could excuse themselves from keeping it. 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? I do not see more in the holy cave! fortunate cave!, than an extreme poverty and a wonder of humility! But as if humility could not be without

poverty, so Our Divine Redeemer chooses her as an inseparable companion until death and beyond it. Because in Bethlehem his Most Holy Mother has poor diapers with which to cover his precious little body; but in Calvary does not have a poor sheet with which to cover his bloody body. Oh poverty of my God! Oh avarice of mortals that to satisfy your greed you have put the Divine Commandments under your feet! 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 is as the foundation of evangelical life.

68. Because of this Our Lord does not want us to have money earned through interest nor possessions because He wants to be our possession and inheritance. (Read the chapter that deals with Holy Poverty in the general notes that deal with the entire Order).
69. All the Religious Orders are distinguished through the names and Rules that their Holy Founders inspired by the Holy Spirit have written: so our Apostolic Missionaries should distinguish themselves through the observance of the Divine Commandments. Our Lord does not ask anything new in these times to lift up his Church, but he does ask with great insistence and almost impatient, the renewal of his Most Holy Law, and because of this he wants them to be called Apostolic Missionaries; because the Apostles wrote it as taken from the divine mouth of their Divine Master. This then is the divine Rule that God orders be taught to the young missionaries in the Houses of probation, or call it Seminary. But for the distribution of time and management of the house, they will observe the following:

DISTRIBUTION OF TIME

70. They will wake up at three o'clock in the morning, immediately pray matins and lauds, followed by an hour of mental prayer, then immediately after the Holy Mass, and after the Priests will devote themselves to confessing, if there are people, until eight when they will have a light breakfast. Then if they have left people waiting to confess, they can go to confess them, and at nine pray the hours. Half an hour of spiritual reading and study until twelve when they will have fifteen minutes of examination of conscience and immediately after they will eat. Then half an hour of recreation, retreat and nap until half and hour 'til three, when they will pray vespers and complines. Followed by half an hour of spiritual reading and study. If there are people to confess, they can dedicate themselves to confessing until the bell rings for prayers and no more: and they should retreat immediately: they will do half an hour of mental prayer, study, dinner, a short time of walking through the garden and an examination of conscience. All of this should be done so that at nine they can go to bed. As far as the young ones who ought continue their studies are concerned, their time will be distributed in such a way that they will have enough for their studies and not fail to do any of the aforementioned practices.
71. Regarding the furniture of the house, cell and some other things that correspond to domestic order, look at the general notes that deal with Holy Poverty, and the chapter or article that deals with the order that should be observed with food, both ordinary and extraordinary.

72. The interior clothing should be a woolen tunic. It could be white or lead-colored, as it seems best to observe cleanliness; be it known that if it is necessary, with the Superior's consent, they can use a linen scapular that covers the entire body; underwear of lead-colored fabric which covers their knees; a cassock with sleeves which is lined up to the waist. Black woolen socks, unpolished black leather shoes with iron or lead buckles, the hat according to the custom of the country, but if possible it should be a medium shovel hat, the handkerchiefs of blue or dark thread. Understand that everything, everything should be of the most inferior quality that there is in the region or country where they live.
73. God wants a house of these holy missionaries set in each kingdom immediately, and in time one in each province, and no more because few missionaries ought to work a lot.
74. In each house there will be no more than three priests and four lay brothers for the maintenance of the house and vegetable garden which they will have well cultivated in order that it will produce the house's sustenance, for Our Lord orders us to eat with the sweat of our foreheads.
75. For the governance of this first house which will be in his own Palace so that His Excellency can be the first in all without failing in any of his ministries (because God's works are not contradicted) and put the solid foundations, he should the assistance of his associate Fr. Paladio Currius, and this one should be second in the management of this holy mission, as it is insinuated in the main points, because from eternity God Our Lord put his eyes on the three people named in the beginning for the reestablishment of his Church in these unfortunate days.
76. These are the points which God Our Lord has pointed out to me to begin his new mission. Holy Obedience pardon my boldness, for I confess, absorbed in my vileness, having spoken words worthy of all reprehension, and which would prove great nonsense if God Our Lord, through his just judgments would not have ordered it to me, obligating me to such a painful sacrifice the power of Holy Obedience.
77. Heaven and earth know well that in my heart the Ministers of the Lord hold the first place, and that I have never thought evil against them, for since my childhood Our Lord has instilled in me a great love for all sacred things and especially his Priests. This reverence due to the Priests of the Lord has caused me to battle against Holy Obedience thirteen continuous years until my soul, seized with the beauty of the Divine Commandments, has allowed itself to be overcome by the strong and repetitive complaints that His Divine Majesty would make to me against the transgressors of his Most Holy Law, as he has again revealed to me in the vision that I will now relate.
78. One day asking Our Lord with many tears to put in the heart of my confessor to lift up the painful obedience he had ordered me of writing these notes with all of their details (which I don't see necessary) without a doubt because of the reluctance that I felt in writing them, for seeming out of place to me because of my insufficiency, I humbled myself in the presence of God; and suddenly I saw the Eternal Father next to my right hand full of incomparable majesty and unexplainable meekness, that he presented me his Humanized Son, and told me with very clear words that were fully formed in the most intimate of my soul: Yes, my daughter, ask His Holiness for it in

my name, that through the Blood with which so much love this my Son shed, he put prompt remedy to so many evils that are going to flood the earth.

79. In this vision I did not see anything with the eyes of the body, and I was looking at them with the eyes of the soul more clearly than with a very clear mirror, and in his sight I was seeing and understanding all that I will say, and endless more things that I understood (especially in the destruction of the Church) that His Divine Majesty reserves some for another time, and others for the day of the Final Judgment which is not far away.
80. The Father and the Son were surrounded by a light amongst darkness, and this darkness hid from me or prevented me from fixing my attention on the Son's Most Holy Humanity, but not so much to keep me from seeing the entire aspect that he presented, that was the most sorrowful that none of the mortals can imagine. It seemed that he was able to stand with great difficulty and that because of this his Eternal Father had him by the hand. Now and again he would move his head as if to vomit, and other times he struggled as if to hold back the vomit, and other times it seemed that he would swallow it. Here God Our Lord made me understand that he had already vomited some of his Prelates because of their great wicked deeds, falling from the midst of the light to the midst of the darkness; that others disgusted him because they live so proud of themselves since it seems to them that they already fulfill their duty in some of the duties of their ministries, forgetting that whoever observes nine precepts of the law and forsakes one, does not observe any, and he swallowed the infidelities of others with great sorrow because of the great love that he has for them, hoping that soon they will remember to fulfill the promises that they have made to him.

The darkened glare was the darkness of faith which our Holy Religion suffers, caused by the bad example of the Prelates of the Church and other people consecrated to divine service; these are the only ones that he mentions to me. The body which was so weak that it needed the support of his Eternal Father to stay standing, it was not then revealed clearly to me what it meant as had been done with everything else; but because of what His Divine Majesty has later deigned himself to reveal to me, I have clearly understood that it is a sign of the Holy Father who ought to give his hand to his son, the Reverend Father Claret, and together they are to restore and re-establish Our Holy Mother the Church.

81. a) Furthermore, His Divine Majesty brought to my knowledge many other things of the noble ends that God has in this holy Task, that it would be necessary to write great books to declare its meaning and all exceeds my small capacity. Nevertheless with divine grace I will say what Our Lord has ordered me to say to warn these Most Reverend Bishops to whom he orders me to address these simple notes.

b) I saw in God Our Lord the great gentleness with which he waits for the conversion of these his preferred children. The great ire which he has stored in this meek Heart; I understood the terribleness of his judgments; I comprehended something (I say something because I recognized that they were without greater comparison than what human understanding can comprehend) of the immense sea of sorrow that pierced through the Most Holy Soul of Our Lord and Redeemer adorable in the garden of sorrows for the transgressions of the Commandments of the holy Church which is now suffering. Here the Eternal Father with the Son made me understand

that he would be very grateful to the one who would again put into practice the Holy Church's Commandments, especially the fifth one, which orders the payment of tithes to the Church of God. That only this be his inheritance to maintain his true children giving each one the necessary without any other money gained from interest with which they buy their slavery in this life, and in the next their eternal condemnation, because greed is abhorred by God and demons themselves. Here His Divine Majesty told me with very heartfelt words, worthy of all reflection as they have no house where to lie at rest (except this one which is all mine, because it is the only one which observes with all punctuality the counsels of his Most Holy Law) that 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, and now in general it is going to bring on the greatest destruction with much force: In¹⁸⁸ he wanted to fix his dwelling because of how much he loves it, but greed also prevents him. I saw his Most Holy Heart open, inviting all creatures with great love and sorrow to the observance of his Most Holy Law; but in a very special manner, he invites the Pastors of the Church before God punishes them.

c) Here my vision of the final Judgment was renewed with great terror and fear because of the terribleness and equity of Divine Justice. This God! This Father of mercies! this very meek Heart that is now open and eagerly awaiting and desiring the conversion of all sinners, this open Heart will close forever on the approaching day of his vengeance. Listen, my sons, what I want to teach you: What will you respond to the Judge when he asks for an account of the Law that he has entrusted to you? Ah! If these words that I heard from the voice of the Father, not as a Judge, but as a very loving father, who warns his beloved son, caused such an impression on my soul, that with them as..., with them I sleep..., with them I pray...(Finally, with each step it seems to me that I hear the pieces of the clock of this great factory of the world loosened, fatal prognosis of the consummation of the centuries). What will happen when he comes to summon heaven and earth for witnesses of the just residence that will take his people? Ah, I assure every person that if the world knew the terribleness of the final Judgment, the earth would convert into heaven because there would be no one who would dare violate the holy laws of the Just Judge...

d)Considering what I have just finished writing and that endless sea of God's greatness, I find myself so terrified in the center of my vileness, that I do not know how to continue what I have begun, because all the reasons that my unpolished discourse presents in writing are no more than a very ugly rough draft that belittles the works of infinite wisdom through the areas where it should be enhancing it. Thus, as St. Paul, I can say with all honesty, (in a different manner), that in this vision I saw and understood what I cannot explain.

e) These things God Our Lord has deigned himself to reveal to me through his infinite goodness to assure me of the truth, and write without resistance or fear according to the order of Holy Obedience.

f) In these notes you will find the means God Our Lord wants to employ to renew the primitive fervor of the first Christians renewing in his holy Church the observance of the Divine Precepts through his second Apostles, who with the purity and

¹⁸⁸ *Escritos de María Antonia París*, note 104, p.340. Since this was a private writing that was not meant for publication, and the author had mentioned a specific religious institute here.

uprightness of your lives and doctrine you will convince the wise and ignorant, kingdoms and cities of the truth of the holy Gospel, and you will destroy so much impiety and corruption of vices that flood the earth at the same pace that it makes the true children of the Church cry heartfelt tears. God wills it that you read all of his clauses with much attention, without looking at the one who wrote it, rather at the spirit that has directed it.

I have not done more than to copy (in the manner that my poor capacity has been able to) the points that His Divine Majesty has written in my ungrateful heart. If you look at some of the points attentively, it seems to me you will find some darkness, but with the power of prayer, God Our Lord will give you light to know his holy will and the meaning of all the doubts that you might be presented with; for he will not deny his light to those whom he has chosen to accomplish the task, having given it with much abundance to this very ungrateful creature. The abundance of light he has poured into my soul has been so much, that frightened by seeing such greatness in the works of God (especially in the beauty and good order of his Most Holy Law) and in my vileness, and in all mortals so much ingratitude, that confuses, I have humbled myself so much that many times I have written with my arm trembling, and sometimes my entire body, and this trembling is the reason why in some points I have not done more than like one who takes a simple note of his owner's will, trusting that God Our Lord with his infinite grace will supply what is missing because of the shortness of my words.

May all be for the greater glory of God and of my Most Holy Mother.

Day of the Immaculate Conception at 11thirty at night and seven minutes
1855.

I am ashamed of presenting this writing to you because certainly it contains many mistakes; but as you already know who I am, nothing should surprise you who have ordered me to write it. Look at it well before giving it to His Excellency and I ask you for the love of God, to tear it all without allowing anyone to see it. I am already satisfied having obeyed because this obedience has not been easy. You already know that the entire house depends on my care, and with so much work great is my fatigue.

82) The doctrine will be good because it is marked by my Divine Master, but the composition ought to be very disorderly, because disregarding that I am not a writer, that the A, B, C is better in my hand than the pen, there are clauses that are written from line to line taking and leaving every once in a while, dealing with things so different as the heavens and the earth, this during the day, and night which I wait for with great anxiety to busy myself more fully. All of hell bothers me without ceasing until leaving me worn out. Blessed be the Lord, who wants to bring down my pride in this manner. Therefore you will hardly be able to understand its content. I give you permission to have fun at my expense, but without showing it to anybody; rather quickly burn all that is bad, and if there is anything good, do whatever you think is best before God.

2. NOTES THAT D. ANTONIO M^a CLARET Y CLARÁ ARCHBISHOP OF SANTIAGO DE CUBA(NOW OF TRAJANOPOLIS), WROTE AND HAD ALWAYS WITH HIM FOR THE GUIDANCE OF HIS ARCHDIOCESE.

This is the title of the second edition in 1865, Claret edited with notes and explanations, the first edition which he had composed on the ship on his return to Spain in

1857. This is the edition we will transcribe in our book. It has a simpler and more discrete title than the original one. *“Notes Of a Plan To Keep The Beauty Of The Church And To Preserve Her From Error And Vices, Which Are The Weed That The Enemy Takes Advantage of Any Opportunity To Sow It Among The Good Wheat.”*

Both titles are not too good for advertisement, but it gives us an idea about the goal of the writing. They are Notes and thus we are going to find in them a simple style, but at the same time with a sound theological foundation. These notes are at the same time a *Plan* written with a purpose, which is expressed in the title by two verbs: to keep and to preserve the beauty of the Church.

These two verbs seem to be of a passive nature because it is not a question of making a new Church. But during the course of history, this Church has fallen off her beauty because we have not lived according to the Gospel. Thus we have to dynamically keep and preserve this holy Church, as she came from the hands of her Lord and Founder. It is not the Church as Mystery of Faith that has to change, but her members, that is to say the Pilgrim People of God; our errors and vices are the weed... that we have to eradicate. The Church as Mystery is holy; she is the good wheat.

This is the Mission of the Bishop in his diocese: to keep and preserve the Church from men’s errors and vices. That is the meaning of the second title. In fact this writing is the Pastoral Plan which Claret carries out in his diocese of Santiago de Cuba, because when he writes it he is on his way to Spain, called by Queen Isabel II. Thus the contents of this writing do not explain what he has to do, but what he has been doing during the time he was Archbishop of Cuba.

He published it encouraged by the words of D. Juan José Arbolí y Acaso, Bishop of Cádiz. On his arrival at Cádiz Claret stayed in Bishop Arbolí’s house, and gave to him the *Notes* to have his opinion:

“You are right in calling them a Plan to Restore the beauty of the Church. How much will the beauty of the bride of Jesus Christ shine in our poor Spain!”¹⁸⁹

In the Plan he describes the experience he acquired in his service to a local Church, that of Santiago de Cuba. This experience, enlightened by his Spirituality of the Renewal of the Church, becomes a *Plan for the Renewal* of the whole Church presented to the Bishops.

He says to Caixal in a letter, that one of the goals he set for himself:

“...Is to form with all the Bishops a compact body. The body of Bishops if they are united is invincible and almost all powerful; but in the present times a Bishop alone can do very little. I think you have already seen the way to form this body of bishops by means of writings, national or provincial councils; but here we stumble against the royal rights; we will exhaust ourselves in meetings, if we are allowed to discuss the matters, we will make homilies and afterwards the “royal rights ladies” will take those laws and will examine them very thoroughly on the tables of the congress and will die ever seeing the public light; thus it has happened in South America. The Nuncio knows it and is well aware of this.”¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁹ *Notes*, 3-4. (The Notes do not have # of paragraph, we cite the page)

¹⁹⁰ CO, 83.

In this letter he is talking about the great intrusion of the Estate in the ecclesial businesses. This is the reason for him to exhort them to form an Episcopate united and that all the bishops be of one mind to be able to work on the Renewal of the Church.

2.1 *The text in its Present Form*

The edition was already made on the 19th of October 1857. A copy for each bishop was printed; they were very soon exhausted. The new bishops that were being elected wanted to have these guidelines given by Claret for the Renewal of the Church. Claret prepared a new edition which was issued in the year 1865. He added in this new edition, besides a series of explanatory notes, the answers sent by the Bishops and two new appendices: one, about a Bishop D. Pedro de Castro, who, according to Claret, embodies these *Notes*; and the second one on the work, El Escorial, as a seminary and a college, renewed according to the spirit of the *Plan*. It was obvious for Claret that to renew the Church, the clergy has to be renewed, and in turn to reach this goal the seminary has to be renewed.¹⁹¹ This explains why he puts so much dedication and enthusiasm in the El Escorial.

The renewal of the Church is present here as it is present in the writing of María Antonia. Both coincide in the orientation of this renewal. It is not a renewal about the holiness of the Church, but in the living experience of her members, in poverty, fidelity, communion, and proclamation of the Gospel.

2.2 *The Content*

The document has an outline easy to follow, due to its interconnection, order, and coherence.

It begins with a *Prologue*¹⁹² in which Claret explains that he has been motivated to print again this work by the positive reactions of several bishops on receiving the first edition. He makes them believe that this is his own personal Plan used in his service to the Diocese of Santiago de Cuba.

A long *Introduction*¹⁹³ follows. We find in this introduction doctrinal, theological, and apologetic elements which come before giving the counsels and the practical pastoral strategies. We are surprised that in a writing of this nature, addressed to his brothers Bishops, he starts with a profession of faith in Christ and in the Church. This has an explanation due to the situation they were experiencing, especially in France. This country presented itself to the world as a model of the new civilization based on the motto of the French Revolution: Liberty, Equality, Fraternity. With the Revolution, France wants to begin a new period of its history. Some French Bishops, in particular Govel, Constitutional Bishop of Paris, rejects Christ for the Revolution. Rationalism gave the primacy of reason over faith.

Claret wants to make it clear from the beginning: the Bishop, who has the mission to keep and preserve the beauty of the Church, has to be a man of faith in Jesus Christ, true God and true man; and also in the Church as the fullness of Christ, Mystical Body and

¹⁹¹ *Notes*, 110-129.

¹⁹² *Notes*, 3-4.

¹⁹³ *Notes*, 5-25.

espouse. This is going to be the foundation of the pastoral strategies which will follow after this Introduction.

Claret gives the main points of his theology in a time when ecclesiology was mainly about the visible, social, and apologetic aspects of the Church. He presents the Church from the ecclesiology of Paul, as the New Eve, the Bride of Christ, the Mother of the living, the Body of Christ, Christ in his fullness and in his Hierarchical reality.

Saint Paul has composed his theology on the Church from a double experience: his communion of life with Christ, which has its origin in the experience on the way to Damascus, and on his multiple apostolic works for the sake of the Christian community.

It is the same with Claret. His communion of life with Christ the Evangelizer¹⁹⁴ and his multiple apostolic works lead him to discover the mystery of the Church.

However we need to realize that for the organization, structures, and strategies of governance of the Diocese, Claret takes the model of the Council of Trent in which the hierarchy and the religious men and women have a greater responsibility in being holy.

Between the Church of the XIX century and the Church of the XXI century in which we find ourselves, the Spirit has spoken to the Church in the Vatican II Council. The Fathers of the Council, enlightened by the Spirit of Jesus, understood that the Church is a mystery of communion and of participation in the way of the Trinitarian life of our God. All those who belong to the Church, lay men and women, hierarchy, religious men and women, we have the same dignity, since all of us have received the same baptism, and we are all called to be holy. Our diversity comes from our particular mission within the body of the Church.

If we have that in mind, we will not be interested so much in the details which are proper of the time, and we will be able to hear the voice of the Spirit that, through Claret, calls the Bishops to work tirelessly in keeping the beauty of the Church.

¹⁹⁴ Cf. Is 61,1.

2.3 The Outline

PROLOGUE	(pp. 3-4)		Clerics: What they need to know (pgs. 58-66) Religious men (p.66) The nuns (pgs. 67-68) The School Sisters (pgs. 68-69) The Sisters of Charity for the sick (pgs. 69-70) Lay men and women: Corporal goods (pgs. 70-71) Spiritual goods (p. 71)
INTRODUCTION	Theological, doctrinal and apologetic - Jesus Christ and the Church: Body of Christ, New Eve (pgs.5-8) - Kingdom of Jesus Christ or of the Church and of her persecutors (pgs. 9-13)		
THE POPE	- Obedience to the Pope (pgs. 14-17) - The Fathers of the Church and the Papacy (pgs. 18-19) - The enemies of the Pope and of the Church (pgs. 20-25) - Who is the Pope and what are his attributes (pgs. 26-31)	GOVERNANCE OF THE DIOCESE	Bases for the good governance: humility, meekness, patience and listening (pgs. 71-72) Means to obtain the gift of Governance (pgs. 72-73) - Prayer - The imitation of Jesus Christ - To look for the advice of wise, prudent and good men - Research, information, do not hasten in responding. The Holy Pastoral Visitation (pp. 73-80) - Every year - In imitation of Jesus: walk with him through the cities, towns, villages and houses... - Before, during and after the pastoral visitation.
COUNCILS	Usefulness and need of (pp. 32-35) - Frequent celebration - The lack of councils causes relaxation and evils. Diocesan councils or synods. (p. 36)		
BISHOPS	Successors of the Apostles: to sanctify, to teach and to govern (pp. 37-47) Particular duties (pp.48-50) - To live imitating Jesus Christ - Supervisor, watchman and sentinel - Men perfect in virtue - Model of holiness - Teacher who teaches and practices what he says - Leader, pastor, column of the desert, salt of the earth, light of the world, sun of the Church. - Mediator between God and men - Victim destined to martyrdom. Duties in relation to God (pp. 51-57) Duties in relation with his people.	PRACTICAL QUESTIONS	Duties of the Prelate (pp. 81-88) - With himself - With the members of the Curia - With his household. He will not transfer of pastors (pp. 88-89) The canons (pp. 91-96) Vicars, pastors and priests (p. 97) - Duties of the canons vicarios foráneos (pp. 97-101) - Duties of the pastors and other priests (pp. 101-110) Seminary (pp. 110-129) - Duties of the students - Prayer Vacations

This document of Claret is in the process of being translated.

3. Points of Convergence Between Both Documents

Both documents have many coincidences and both have a practical orientation. There are three main points in the documents:

- 3.1. **The Renewal of the Church**
- 3.2. **Denunciation of the “evils” of the Church and the means to overcome them: poverty, faithfulness, community, and formation.**
- 3.3. **The proclamation of the Gospel**

3.1 *The Renewal of the Church*

María Antonia understood progressively that the Lord wanted the renewal of the Church and, within it, of the religious life, through the road of evangelical poverty. Even before meeting Claret, in her Initial Experience she understood that God was calling her to a especial mission in this Renewal.

After this experience M. Paris undergoes a normal process of an ever deeper understanding of what the Lord had revealed to her. She understands that the Renewal is not only about the foundation of the new Order, but something larger and deeper. It is the whole Church that has to be renewed, be converted to return to her original fervor. The situation of the Church of her time will become her *burden*, her deepest worry.

In the Plan for the Renewal, she will insist in the need of conversion. This conversion has to lead us, all the members of the Church, to conform our life to the Gospel, following the example of the first community, in poverty and fidelity for the proclamation of the Gospel.

María Antonia has understood that the Renewal of the Church has to begin with those who have a greater obligation to be already converted. The idea of the New Order is at the heart of the second part. The newness is not in doctrine, but in life. Thus she introduces the Rules for the Apostolic Missionaries.

In number 81f of the Plan for the Renewal, she gives as a conclusion, a synthesis of the whole document. In order to be able to live the Holy Law, which is the Gospel and also Christ himself, the Church needs a conversion, a renewal a reformation, to return to the origins, to return to the fidelity to the Gospel. Thus it is necessary to imitate the Apostles, to keep the divine precepts. She becomes aware of the need of other elements: the denunciation of the evils of the Church and the proclamation of the Gospel.

In Claret the idea of conversion is born from his experience of the *always, always, always*, of his childhood which he applied to others in his childhood and to him in his youth: *What profit does a man have in conquering the world if he loses his soul?*, until he will discover his personal vocation as an Apostolic Missionary for the Church. He will always act from this idea of conversion.

The two *Documents* have a different but convergent orientation. What in María Antonia are “Points” that call to conversion-reformation, in Claret is a Plan to accomplish the Project of conversion, which is simply what he has been doing in his Archdiocese in Cuba.

The Plan of Claret begins with a theological reflection on the Church in her transcendent and in her human dimensions, followed by the ministry of the bishop, who is called to promote the Reformation of the whole Church, beginning with his own personal conversion.

The Pastoral care of the Bishop has to reach everyone: priests, religious, nuns and the people of God..., so that all may be able to live the Gospel faithfully according to the plan of God over each person.

They are invited to have a special care of the seminary so that the seminarians may have an appropriate and firm formation; they will be the priests who will be in touch with the People of God and thus will be able to impel the Renewal of the Church.

3.2 Denunciation Of The Evils Of The Church and the necessary means to overcome them: poverty, fidelity, community and formation.

The second strong point of convergence between both documents is the denunciation of the evils of the Church and the means to overcome them.

Since her Initial Experience, María Antonia has discovered that the evils of the Church she was praying for are many and deep. It was not only the discriminatory laws that have led to the torching and closing of convents and to disentail the possessions of the Church, but all of this happens because of the unfaithfulness of the children of the Church, mainly those who have a greater duty to be faithful, as is the case of the priests and religious men and women.

For María Antonia the cause of the evils of the Church is very clear. The authentic evils are in those who have a greater obligation to live in fidelity. This is the reason why there is no faith, no charity. The situation is alarming...¹⁹⁵ María Antonia is strong in her denunciation.¹⁹⁶ She sums it up in two sins: love for riches and lack of proclamation of the Gospel...¹⁹⁷ There are only two remedies for these two sins: poverty and proclamation of the Gospel.

Here Mother París addresses herself to the pastors of the Church, urging them to live in poverty and to avoid being entangled in the nets of ambition. Thus the bishops have to give up their income,¹⁹⁸ and imitate the Apostles. The reason for this is that they govern the same Church that the Apostles established.¹⁹⁹ They have to reform their lives, their homes, and their household, having only what is indispensable and necessary;²⁰⁰ they have to live in community with the members of their household sharing their goods,²⁰¹ and they have to share with the poor because their income belong to the poor.²⁰² The motif to live in poverty is Christ.²⁰³ Second, not only the prelates have to live this poverty, but they have also to form the seminarians accordingly.²⁰⁴ The priests have to live it too; the bishop will not allow them to buy properties.²⁰⁵ Besides they have to examine how they use their ecclesiastical

¹⁹⁵ Cf. PR, 32.

¹⁹⁶ Cf. PR, 46, 80.

¹⁹⁷ Cf. PR, 39, 49, 51.

¹⁹⁸ Cf. PR, 5.

¹⁹⁹ Cf. PR, 11.

²⁰⁰ Cf. PR, 15.

²⁰¹ Cf. PR, 16.

²⁰² Cf. PR, 18.

²⁰³ Cf. PR, 48.

²⁰⁴ Cf. PR, 22.

²⁰⁵ Cf. PR, 35.

income.²⁰⁶ Third, he has to urge religious men and women to be faithful to their consecration.²⁰⁷ The Prelate needs also humility, following the example of Christ.²⁰⁸ The Lord has to be the only possession of the Prelate.²⁰⁹

Claret shares these same thoughts in his *Notes on a Plan*. He asks the bishops to live in poverty, giving up their income.²¹⁰ He advises them to put their goods in common with the members of their household and with the other persons that live with them.²¹¹ Neither he nor his clerics will accept any donation whatsoever.²¹² He reminds the Prelates their responsibility toward the poor; he calls the Prelate the *father of the poor*.²¹³

Like María Antonia he repeats the theme of the imitation of Christ and of the Apostles as the foundation for the life of the Prelate, with the themes of poverty, humility, and meekness.²¹⁴ But this is not for him alone; he has to see that his clerics live in poverty and simplicity, following the example of the Lord, because Jesus Christ did not have a place to lay his head.²¹⁵

He has to take care that his ecclesiastics have knowledge and all the necessary virtues, among them, to be charitable and without greed.²¹⁶

As for the Religious he insists that they have to be always busy and keep their rules and their vows. He considers them as collaborators of his mission.²¹⁷

3.3 *Proclamation of the Gospel*

For María Antonia, the love for riches and the lack of poverty are the result of the ignorance of the people, because the Bishops, the Pastors, the Ministers of the Lord, do not preach the Word. The Bishops have in relation to the people, the mission to: proclaim the Gospel, instruct spiritually the flock which has been entrusted to them.²¹⁸ For the lack of evangelization the souls are lost; only the light of the Gospel will heal the whole world.²¹⁹ The bishop has to instruct by words and deeds.²²⁰ The bishop has to urge his collaborators and priests to preach because it is not enough to read the Word of God, it has also to be preached.²²¹

As for the religious, we may distinguish two different aspects: the word that has to be preached to them,²²² and the word they have to preach.²²³

²⁰⁶ Cf. PR, 34.

²⁰⁷ Cf. PR, 47 cf. 48-50.

²⁰⁸ Cf. PR, 67.

²⁰⁹ Cf. PR, 68.

²¹⁰ Notes 7° & 8°, 83-84.

²¹¹ Notes 11°, 96.

²¹² Notes, 5°, 76.

²¹³ Notes, 69.

²¹⁴ Notes, 5°, 38.

²¹⁵ Notes, 19°, 45.

²¹⁶ Notes, 59.

²¹⁷ Cf. Notes, 66-70.

²¹⁸ Cf. PR, 19, 20, 33.

²¹⁹ Cf. PR, 41, 46.

²²⁰ Cf. PR, 54.

²²¹ Cf. PR, 21, 26, 38.

²²² Cf. PR, 38 y 46.

Claret gives many recommendations over the theme of evangelization. The whole work is a Plan to proclaim the Word, made visible or concrete in the life and mission of the bishop. The bishop has to be well educated because nobody can teach what he does not know.²²⁴

As for the Councils and Synods, Claret says: *They have to banish ignorance and promote education.*²²⁵ He constantly speaks about the duty of preaching.²²⁶ He says the same thing to the priests: education, catechesis and preaching.²²⁷

In the same way as María Antonia, Claret calls the Word of God food: *the bread of the divine Word.*²²⁸ Also mentioning the words of St. John Chrysostom, he calls the Word of God Law: *The curate or priest of a parish, and any priest, has to be the Law itself.*²²⁹ *The priest shall love God with all his heart, keeping the holy Law and the evangelical counsels.*²³⁰

Claret as well as María Antonia insists on the grave duty of the bishop and of the ministers to preach and proclaim the Word of God to the people.

Since the work of Claret is addressed to the bishops, he says very little to the religious. But when he speaks to the bishops, he says something about the religious, which we want to emphasize:

*The Prelate needs to have and to show much benevolence and gratitude to the religious, because if they are as they should, they will help him to take care of the vineyard that the Lord has entrusted to him...*²³¹

He acknowledges that the religious will help him in the ministry of evangelization. In the same way as María Antonia, Claret also recommends to the bishop the continuous formation and instruction of the religious through preaching.

As a conclusion to this section, we copy a letter of Claret to María Antonia, written on July 20, 1868, two years before his death. He explains to her a *Plan for the Reformation of the Church* which he has proposed to the Queen, the King, the Attorney General and the Nuncio. All have considered it appropriate. He mentions the different parts of the Plan and the way to put it into practice:

“... I have to tell you that I am so busy with other very important businesses that I do not feel like using the time, writing letters.

And because I know that you will rejoice in the Lord, I will explain to you one of my works in which I am very much engaged. This work is a plan for the Church, which I already have as an embryo(...) It has four parts. The first one is for the right nomination of the future bishops. The second is for the canons: how to choose them, they will be chosen from among the pastors with 20 years of good service; among

²²³ Cf. PR, 60, 61.

²²⁴ Notes, 6° y 8°, 38-39.

²²⁵ Notes, 18°, 44-45.

²²⁶ Cf. Notes, 52-57.

²²⁷ Cf. Notes, 74-75.

²²⁸ Notes, 1°, 71.

²²⁹ Notes, 103.

²³⁰ Notes, 3°, 105.

²³¹ Notes, 66.

professors of the seminary of 10 years of teaching; and the third, from workers in the bishop's house, who will have served for 5 years as vicar general, secretary, attorney general, etc., and also if a priest excels for his knowledge, virtue or special services, according to the decision of the Prelate

There is also another part which deals with the fulfillment of the pastors' duties. The fourth and last part is about how to nourish the mind and how to form and educate the heart of the children that the Lord may call to religious life, so that they become good friars."²³²

Although the "Notes of a Plan..." had been written a long time ago, his ideals to work for the Church were still very much alive. Both, Claret and Paris, shared their ideals and committed themselves to make them real until the end of their lives.

CHAPTER IV

TO RENEW THE CHURCH TODAY

Love and communion with the Church, the spouse of Christ,²³³ are profoundly rooted in our Congregation of Religious of Mary Immaculate Claretian Missionary Sisters. We show it in many different ways, above all being aware that we are sent by the Church to proclaim the Gospel.

Our love for the Church, to which we belong, has to be critical and prophetic, as was the love of Claret and Paris for the Church of their own time. Both uncovered and denounced the evils that the Church was experiencing in the concrete persons of the Bishops, Clergy, Religious men and women and Laity.

The prophetic dimension, which is a characteristic of the religious life in general, has for us a special nuance: to feel the burden of the Church as María Antonia felt it, to analyze in truth the reality and to discover what does not coincide with the Gospel in order to work unceasingly to bring the Holy Law of the Lord to all creatures and thus cooperate in the permanent renewal of the Church. Like Claret, we have to work so that "God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ be known and loved by all men." In that journey we commit ourselves completely to the service of the Church, going to the places which we recognize are most in need of evangelization.

We are living in a time of great transformations which affect the whole human race in all the different aspects of its existence. The world is changing profoundly with a vertiginous speed; this fact causes an unavoidable vital tension in front of a difficult present, and an uncertain future constantly changing.

We are faced with the challenge to discern the signs of the times; to discover in our historical reality what the Spirit of the Lord is saying to the Church; and to question ourselves about the role that we are playing as a Church, in this crucial time. The task is not easy, in the same way as it was not easy for Claret and Paris. We need a superabundance of optimism, hope, and courage, to accept this challenge in which we find ourselves. We have

²³² CO, 273.

to face our mission with humility and complete trust in God; only in this way will we be able to be signs of peace and joy in our world. Only having our eyes open to see the concrete circumstances of our time, we will be able to look for the means to fulfill this task, so charismatic for us, to “Restore the beauty of the Church.”

1. A Glance Over Our Society

We are living in a complex and exciting time: a time of the encounter with God, a time when we are called to follow Jesus and to proclaim the Good News to the people of our time and to renew ourselves as a Church. It is a time of contrasts.

The event of globalization, influenced by the mass media, the new technologies and the convenience of the multiple means of communication among the countries, persons and cultures, is a phenomenon which has a deep social, economic, political, cultural and ideological impact. The positive aspect is the multiple nets of communication and solidarity. But when globalization is not at the service of all human beings, but only of a few, it enlarges the painful inequality between rich and poor, between first and fourth worlds, and causes serious problems of falsehood, manipulation, domination, violence and theft of identity.

Migration movements, from the poor countries to the affluent ones, are taking place as a consequence of globalization. This reality entails for the emigrants uprooting from their culture and family. But it has its positive aspect: to find better living conditions in the countries where they migrate. It helps also the countries where they arrive to develop attitudes of welcoming, care, and solidarity. At the same time we share the richness of the different cultures which helps us to be more aware of and better appreciate the values of other peoples, cultures, and religions, and thus become more sensitive and respectful of the differences.

We live in the culture of comfort, hedonism, and consumerism, which leads to a brutal individualism. We see new family structures and realities. The world of youth experiences difficulties to discover their future and their place in society. The older generation experiences itself as a burden for society.

Some people have never had so much free time for themselves, human relationships, sharing, and entertainment, which are important dimensions of the human life. Others, however, experience a very harsh life. In order to sustain themselves they need to work all seven days of the week, sometimes in difficult and hard jobs, in which their lives are in danger, they do not have any other choice to survive. We also find another reality: those who have a lot of free time because they do not find a job, and therefore cannot take care of the needs of their families, while others have so much financial means that they do not know what to do with them.

We have never spoken so much about human rights, justice and peace, but they have never been so violated: wars, violence of all sorts, human trafficking for the profit of those who sell and buy them; long hours of work that do not leave any time for the family, children working; hunger of millions of children who died everyday for lack of the most basic things to survive; worries about animal abuse and, at the same time indifference about children abandoned in our streets; torture in prisons and many other forms of human rights violations. Maybe we can sum up all of these saying that in our society human life is not valued. In many places there is no hesitation to eliminate whoever makes us uncomfortable: unborn babies, old people, persons with terminal illnesses and everyone who has a physical or mental disability.

However we also find a great sensitivity for the human person, his or her rights, the willingness to better their living conditions; for justice and peace for all nations. Those who work as volunteers, the different non-governmental organizations, all of these are a proof of the sensitivity and of the search for alternate ways.

There is a strong awakening of the ecological sensitivity in a world which we are transforming into a huge dunghill. This reality challenges us and impels us to respect the rhythms of nature and to look for ways to leave an earth more habitable for the next generations.

In some latitudes we are witnessing a progressive evolution toward a secularized society which deeply threatens the religious beliefs and seems to announce the end of Christianity. But in other places the Church is active and flourishing; there is an ever growing desire to know Jesus Christ better and to live a more responsible faith in the midst of society. At the same time we also witness a deep evolution of attitudes of respect toward a deeper spirituality. We see different positions coexisting together: from the lack of belief to agnosticism, religious indifference; the multiplication of religious sects; the religion of feelings that look for an easy way and fast solutions to the problems the same time there is a searching for religious experiences outside the traditional religions. There are more and more neo-pagans who are baptized outside Christianity and other religious traditions. They advocate values which are different from the religious ones: money, fame, power. But at the same time there is also an awakening of a more evangelical religious practice, incarnate in the real world, and committed in its transformation by the values of the Kingdom.

In conclusion it is a world very different from the world of Anthony M. Claret and María Antonia.

2. A Glance at the Church

The Church has lived the life-giving experience of Council Vatican II. On January 25, 1959, feast of the Conversion of St. Paul, in the Basilica of St. Paul outside the walls in Rome, John XXIII announced to the cardinals who were there his intention to convoke a Council. With the strength of his great humaneness, he opened the windows of the Church to the world, and the fresh air of the Spirit of the Risen Jesus came into the Church. He summoned the most ecumenical council that had been celebrated during the history of the Church.

The preparation which took place from 1959 to 1962 greatly helped the discussions during the Council. In only four years, 1962-1965, the greatest renewal which the church ever experienced took place; great documents were discussed and approved. Two of them have the Church as the protagonist: The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, and the Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the world, *Gaudium et Spes*.

The Church asked herself who am I and what is my mission. The fathers of the Council attentive to the voice of the Spirit, gave the answer to these questions.

The beginning of the Constitution *Lumen Gentium* says that the Church participates in the mystery of God and, thus she is herself a mystery; a mystery of communion and universal sacrament of salvation. The Fathers of the Council, turning their eyes toward the Fathers of the Church of the first centuries, ascended to the Mystery of the Trinity, where the Plan of salvation was conceived. God does not abandon man after sin, but journeys with him through the events of history. We may say that the Church is born there from the heart of God.

This is what moved the Council to abandon a concept purely institutional of the Church and look into the source from where everything springs: the Most Holy Trinity.

In the Pastoral Constitution *Gadium et Spes* we read, "The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ."(GS,1)

The Church is also an institution, and all her structures and norms of any kind need to be at the service of the incarnation of her mystery. This is what Claret and Paris

understood in contact with the Word of God; Claret in the reflection and study of Sacred Scripture,²³⁴ and M. Paris through an experience of the Spirit.²³⁵

In a moment in which the studies of ecclesiology were more interested in the visible, social, and apologetic aspects of the Church, Anthony M. Claret gives the main lines of his theology on the Church using the concepts of the theology of Paul. The Church is the New Eve, the Bride of Christ, the Mother of the living, the Body of Christ, Christ in his plenitude. His communion of life with Christ the evangelizer (cf. Is 61,1) and his multiple apostolic works have led him to discover the mystery of the Church. In the *“Notes of a Plan...”* he presents in a very balanced way the human and the transcendent dimensions of the Church.

María Antonia París, a woman born in the first years of the XIX century, presents in the *Plan for the Renewal of the Church* the lights she had received in her prayer and says who has to do the renewal and how. A renewal in the members of the Church, Pope, bishops, priests, religious men and women, laity, all living in fidelity the Gospel; in poverty and community life; with an ongoing formation, which will keep them from ignorance and will help them to go in depth into the message. They have to live up this message in their lives and pass it on to others.

3. What Are The Evils of the Church Today?

Each one in his or her own environment needs to ask him or herself about the evils of our Church today. The first impression that comes to us from the means of communication and the commentaries from some of the large social sectors is that religion as well as Christianity seem to be more and more distant from the men and women of our time.

The Church is accused of too much dogmatism, moralism, and orientation toward abstraction, without giving clear, concrete and convincing answers to the human and spiritual needs of so many persons; lack of coherence; ritualism of learned practices void of meaning.

Some sectors of society see Christianity as the vestige of an ancient culture, an obstacle, a tradition which has to be eradicated. Sometimes they might be right, at least due to the way we as Christians live our faith. What has become of the fresh wind of the Council, to make society see us in such a way?

We witness today a mass media campaign against the Church; her sins and weaknesses are published constantly; and the actions of some concrete persons within the Church are presented as something general, while they do not mention the life of so many priests, religious men and women, and lay persons dedicated completely to serve others in so many different sectors of society.

In the ecclesial community there are many brothers and sisters that look for ways to transform the world into the Kingdom of God. However it has been said also that the Council has not reached some sectors of the Church and that most of us need to know and live better the fundamental orientations given by the Council. We are a pilgrim people; thus we need each day to allow the Lord to convert us.

As in the historical time of Anthony M. Claret and María Antonia París, the Church suffers scorns and persecutions in words and deeds. Pope Benedict XVI has pointed out very clearly the core of the problem: *“The greatest persecution of the Church comes not from her enemies without, but arises from sin within the Church, and that the Church thus has a deep need to relearn penance, to accept purification, to learn forgiveness on the one*

²³⁴ Cf. Chapter II, 30-31.

²³⁵ Cf. Ibidem. 33-37.

hand, but also the need for justice."²³⁶ The true evils are inside, those that we ourselves cause to be. We point out those we consider fundamental.

The first is related to God, and without any doubt it influences the other three. The forgetfulness of God by society is only a reflection and a consequence of the abandonment of God by the Church in her response to the challenges of our society. These challenges make us feel vulnerable, lonely, and fearful as we are faced with situations which overwhelm us. We lack trust in the Lord, to acknowledge and to make the Lord the center of our life as a Church. Very often we lean more on the human, economic, or technical means, and we forget that the Lord of the harvest is the Father, that Jesus is our brother who journeys with us, and that the Spirit leads and enlightens us.

When as a Church we do not look anymore for the God made visible in Jesus, and in so many brothers and sisters who suffer, who are in need, who are vulnerable, we close ourselves, and we do not go out into the places where our brothers and sisters suffer. Then small matters become great problems.

The Lord sends us to proclaim to everyone what we have seen and heard. What is it that we have seen? We have seen the Lord, and he has repeated to us over and over again "Do not be afraid, I am with you always." The Lord during his earthly life gave back hope to those who had lost it and felt marginalized: the sinners, the poor, those who do not count.

We ourselves, his followers, his community, are we promoters of hope, joy, freedom, justice, and growth for the men and women of our time? Do we offer reasons to live? Saint Irenaeus of Lyon said, "The glory of God is man alive." Do we ask ourselves what do we do to make visible the Mystery of God, present in Jesus? to denounce the injustices? to defend those who do not have a voice in this world? to urge the respect for the whole creation which the Father has put into our hands to take care of it, for the use and benefit of all? Or instead do we worry about many external things which are certainly good, which we even say we do for the glory of the Lord without realizing that He wants to be known, loved, and praised in those who are in need, whom we meet on all the roads of life?

When fear does not allow us to live with the freedom of Jesus, and our unconditional faith in the resurrection becomes weak; the Church, in order to protect the communion, looks for support on our own strength rather than in the Lord.

The second, is the forgetfulness, disregard and abandonment of what the Spirit has said to the Church during Council Vatican II. According to the teachings of the Church, a Council has authority when the Pope is present. A Council is the most solemn way that the Church has to listen to the voice of the Spirit of Jesus. But we are witnessing how, little by little, many of the windows that were opened by the Council are being closed. Many privileges, divisions, and separations among the ecclesial groups, that had disappeared in response to the guidelines given by the Council, promulgated by the two popes who participated in it, have come back again. What is happening to us? Where is the dialogue within and outside the Church? Do we doubt about the presence of the Spirit? Are we afraid of what he tells us?

The third problem, which is a consequence of the former one, is the relationship of the Church with the world. We have lost the ability to insert ourselves into today's life to be able to give evangelizing answers from our Christian vocation. The only way to position ourselves and to find our way is to do a critical and objective reading of the moment that we Christians are experiencing. What image do we project to the world and how are we realizing our mission?

It seems that we fear to go out from our land, for this we always end up organizing activities within our environment where we find ourselves protected, without daring to

²³⁶ Words of the Holy Father Benedict XVI to the reporters during his flight to Portugal on Tuesday May 11, 2010.

have an active presence in other forums which are needed of the Church's presence. Some of those forums are the world of unbelief, of marginalization, of science and technology, of the estranged, of the youth, of the intellectuals, of the poor and the impoverished.

The renewal promoted by the Council, on opening the windows of the Church, forced us to go out from our securities and launched us into the world. However, it seems that now sometimes we fear and we choose to close the windows so that we neither hear nor see. In many sectors of the Church we live comfortably, well-off, installed within a consumeristic society which makes us selfish, individualistic, which closes our heart to so many problems which our brothers and sisters suffer.

A fourth evil which we may point out in our Church has to do with power and wealth which are present in our society and touches us; a power which is manifested in rules, laws, persecution of those who do not think like us, even when they are members of the Church. It manifests itself also in not recognizing in practice the equality between man and woman, closing to women many roads in the Church, which society has already acknowledged. It manifests itself also in the love for money, possessions, influence, which makes us estranged to the lowly and simple, and too often it makes us close to those in power who oppress and despise the rights of all, and many times even of the members of our own Christian communities. Thus we are not able to denounce with love for the good of both the oppressed and the oppressor. We are sent to proclaim the salvation to all. We cannot spare ourselves to denounce what is sin, no matter who does it, since the process of conversion begins when we acknowledge the evil in our heart.

Only rediscovering the hope we have been called to, acknowledging with humility our errors, our lack of fidelity to our vocation, and to our concrete mission in the Church, will we be able together, the members of the Church, to look for new ways that will lead us to cooperate in the *Renewal of the Church*. Responding to the invitation of the Council, let us also dialogue with our brothers and sisters who are not part of the Church, and through them let us listen to the voice of the Spirit of Jesus who calls us to conversion. Only then we will be the universal sacrament of salvation wanted by our God, so that salvation will reach each person "That all may be one, that the world may believe." Jn17,21

4. We Dream of a Church...

As a Church we want to be a community of Jesus' followers:

- Founded in love, interpersonal relationships, dialogue and listening.
- Who loves life because it is a gift from God; showing this love in her joy in spite of sufferings.
- In a constant process of conversion and of a search for God
- Who discovers the inner secret which dwells in her, shows it in the way she lives, and transmits it to others.
- That joins action and contemplation
- That lives in the world, loving it and thus denouncing with her life and words its evils, and at the same time offering the Gospel values.
- That responds to the mandate of Jesus, to go into the whole world and preach the Good News that God is Father, that He loves, welcomes and accompanies us.
- That knows that she is being sent in mission; in a constant effort to give concrete answers to the problems that the world will present to her.
- Centered in the human person; promoting freedom and development, recognizing the human dignity.
- A Church of all because she is universal.

- A Church, a community which has eyes to see the injustices and, like the prophets of Israel, reminds and helps to remember that the earth belongs to all, being herself a clear witness of poverty.
- Samaritan woman that understands her world, that pours oil and wine over the wounds of so many persons who are abandoned on the margins of the roads of life.
- In a word, a Church who shows the face of Christ, a Church clothed only with the Gospel.

What Do Paris and Claret Say to Us in This Never Completely Fulfilled Task to Give Back to the Church the Merciful Face of Christ?

How can we bring the insight that Claret and Paris had about the Church into the church and world reality of the XXI century?

In John we hear "The Advocate, the Holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name - he will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you." (Jn 14, 26) In this phrase is contained the whole history of the Church of all times. The Spirit continues to remind the Church the words of Jesus. He does it in different ways: sometimes through brothers and sisters who scrutinize the reality and hear in it the voice of the Spirit of Jesus who calls us; some other times, through situations and concrete needs of the men and women of our time; and in other occasions even through the persons who persecute, insult, calumniate and even want to eliminate us; but in reality it is the Lord Jesus whom they want to eliminate.

From the beginning the Church, as a people on a journey, is bound to the events of history. Thus although God is the same, faith is something alive and dynamic, the image we have of him, as well as the way to proclaim his message, are elements which are subject to change in their understanding and approach.

It will be useful to remember some of the words of Jesus which will help us to eliminate the fear and to be a Church of followers, completely free and overflowing with the joy of the Spirit of the Risen Jesus.

He repeated many times to his community of apostles, before and after the Resurrection: "Do not be afraid;" (Mt 17,7) "I have conquered the world ..." (Jn 16, 33) The Lord sent them and sends us "Go... I will be with you...." (Mt 28, 19-20) He invited his apostles to travel with few things, "Do not take..." (Mc 6, 10-11) He invites us to have eyes to see and determination to take action "Go and do likewise." (Lk 10, 37) He invites them to have faith, trust in Him, in the love of the Father whom they may call "*abba*" like him. He gives us his peace and sends us to give this same peace "as you enter a home, wish it peace..." (Mt 10,12)

Many of the documents of the Church call us to conversion, to a change of heart and to trust:

John XXIII invited the Church to open her windows so that the wind of the Spirit and of the world of men and women may enter the Church.

John Paul II invited the Church to open the doors to Christ, without fear. In the encyclical *Sollicitudo rei sociali* he summons us to look at all the Lazarus who lay down at the door of our society's opulence. In *Novo millennio ineunte*, he encourages the Church "to cast out into the deep."

Benedict XVI in the encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, insists on the gratuitousness and on discovering the gift that each person is.

Opened to the voice of the Spirit, let us look for concrete ways to answer to our own time with a silent and serene attitude of contemplation and of listening to God and to our brothers and sisters.

Claret and Maria Antonia insisted on the need of conversion to be able to live and proclaim the Gospel, being part a community that lives a radical and real poverty. In so doing we denounce the evils and we announce the joy of salvation, which is the Gospel.

As Claretians we need to ask ourselves, how we live our charism, our call within the Church. Is the ideal of communion, poverty and proclamation of the Gospel which our Founders had and invited us to live, a reality in our communities today? Or maybe we have become cold, and we are no longer the yeast which we have been called to be in the Church. Have we lost the joy, the fire, the enthusiasm of our first love? Sometimes we give the excuse that young women do not enter and that we are becoming older, we do not have anyone to continue the mission that we have received, and we become discouraged. We need to be aware that each season of human life has its own profound beauty, even when we do not feel it. As Claretians we need to regain the hope, the certainty that the Lord journeys with us and will continue to do so.

The answer that Claret and María Antonia offered to the evils of the Church of their time was a universal response, which goes beyond the concrete situations. Thus we may give today the same answer to the evils of the world and of the Church, although the methods are going to be different.

We may express it as follows:

- 5.1. To live the Gospel faithfully.
- 5.2. In evangelical poverty
- 5.3. To proclaim the Gospel

5.1 . To Live the Gospel Faithfully

The faithfulness of all the baptized to the Gospel proposed by María Antonia and Claret to overcome the evils of the Church of their time is still appropriate for us today.

- A fidelity to the Church, the world, and our own reality which is critical, prophetic and creative.
- A fidelity which may denounce what is not conformable to the Gospel, in order to announce the values of the Kingdom from the coherence of our own life in the service of evangelization.
- A fidelity which looks for new ways of being present, and new forms of living and acting ,which might be an invitation to follow Jesus.

May all the members of the Church accomplish with enthusiasm what we have been called to do, journeying together, sharing the mission in communion. We need to act as if everything depends on our effort, but knowing that everything depends on God.

5.2. In Evangelical Poverty

Another element on which our Founders insist is Evangelical Poverty:

- A poverty which is complete trust in God and in his Plan of Salvation;
- A poverty which is solidarity and fraternal sharing with our brothers and sisters;
- A poverty which has to help us to be attentive to discover today so many persons lying down along the roads, who await for a Samaritan who will pull them up from their situation and will acknowledge their dignity.
- A poverty which is freedom in front of the powers and the wealth of this world that do not seek the good of the human race.

Poverty is both a true solidarity and a prophetic witnessing to freedom in front of

anything that does not build the kingdom. It is at the same time a witnessing and a deep attitude which we cannot avoid if we want to be faithful to our charism.

4.3. For the Proclamation of the Gospel

The reality of their own time led our Founders to return to the Gospel as a means for the “Restoration of the Beauty of the Church.” This is our mission in the Church which is more real every day. We are living in a world of unbelief and, more than that, in a world of indifference towards the Gospel. We need to have the same audacity of Claret and Paris to be able to discover today, as they did in their own time, how to proclaim in order to reach our brothers and sisters in need of the Gospel.

The proclamation of the Gospel should be always be done:

- In an attitude of listening, dialogue, and welcoming, to help us to discover the needs of men and women of our time; and find together new roads for the Gospel.
- Responding to the persons who are in search of meaning in their lives, helping them to find a true and complete happiness, freedom, and dignity as human persons.
- Having a positive attitude in approaching a multitude of milieu, where there are persons who really want to change society; collaborating with them in search of new ways of thought and action, with love and warm personal relationships.
- Presenting the Gospel values to those who have never thought there is another way to understand life, away from the prevailing chaotic rhythm.
- Being aware of our poverty, knowing that we are also immersed in this world which affects us; and that there is still much to be purified in our own life.
- Reflecting the living God who dwells in us and challenges us to facilitate the search and the experience of God: the contemplative attitude.
- Favoring a more humane spirituality, recognizing the sacredness of the human person, based on the joy and hope which the Good News of Jesus brings about.
- Promoting unity and fraternal communion.
- Opening new horizons of evangelization and directing our evangelizing action towards secular fora or, even towards those persons who are more estranged, and in need of this Good News we bring.
- Pluralizing the way we live and express our faith.
- Searching for methods that are closer to the concrete reality of each place, and also to the spirituality and way of life of each people and culture.
- Welcoming the influence of other groups that may serve as a contrast, and even as opposition, which will help us to confront new opinions and new realities from different prisms. A different point of view may challenge our mental schemes and promote a constant and progressive renewal.

To proclaim the Gospel today is to present God as a loving Father, “ABBA”, whom we may speak to, feel and love. A God who has become man in the person of Jesus, with whom we may have a close relationship, which goes beyond our personal experience, since this relationship is possible through those who surround us. Although it is not possible to see directly the face of God, we may recognize him, as if on a mirror, present in our brothers and sisters, in the daily interpersonal relationships, in the events, in nature and in history.

We have the possibility to live in a constant search of the presence of God in attitude of thanksgiving, of offering and of consecration to the Lord through our daily endeavors. Working together with the persons close to us, looking at Jesus and allowing Him to look at us through the eyes of those who see us, we make the kingdom present. This is the *God-with-us*, who acts through us in our actions, decisions, affections, motivations and feelings.

CONCLUSION

After having done this study, we may conclude that the originality of the Church vocation of Anthony M. Claret comes from his experience of Christ as evangelizer with whom he identifies. This identification is transformed, as in St. Paul, into innumerable apostolic hardships, which he will impose on himself with only one goal: to give back the beauty to the face of the Church. After his conversion when he was 20 years old, Claret will always look for guidance in his life, and it is here that we have to insert his Initial experience. Some years later he will discover, on the day of his ordination to the diaconate, that the evils are not only inside but also outside. This experience will be completed as he discovers, in contact with Sacred Scripture, his vocation as an Apostolic Missionary. From now on Claret will be an Apostolic Missionary in the most diverse situations.

The originality of the church vocation of María Antonia springs from the contemplation of Christ on the Cross. This contemplation leads her to an experiential knowledge of the XIX century's Church and of her needs. These needs are not only the difficulties due to unjust and restrictive laws against the Church, but, and this is even more serious, that the life of the Church does not embody the Gospel. The evil is not only outside; it is also inside. These needs of the Church require an evangelical renewal especially of the consecrated persons. She understands as consecrated, the Pope, bishops, priests, and religious men and women. María Antonia lives with such intensity this situation of the Church that it becomes her *burden*, her most profound preoccupation. This is the experience she had on the day of her profession. Thus she will concentrate all her energies on the renewal of the Church; her work, her pain, her prayer, the foundation of the Institute, the Plan for the Renewal of the Church.

Our Founders had a very definite Church vocation, to the point to become for them their personal vocation, a vocation which looks at the Church in her wholeness and universality. Both put this ideal of the renewal of the Church in two literary compositions with which they wanted to give an answer to the evils of the Church of their time.

At the end of this journey guided by the hands of Paris and Claret, we dream of a Church poor, deeply in love with Christ, with creation, and with the whole human race; a Church clothed with the Gospel, accompanied by Mary, the Mother of Jesus and the Mother of the Church.

We dream of a Church in which we are aware of how weak we are, and for this reason we need to go through a process of ongoing conversion, journeying, progressing, accompanying, and being accompanied, teaching and always learning; in solidarity with so many women and men of our world who rejoice and suffer, together with all the members of the People of God on the way. In this manner we will restore the face of Christ in the Church.

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... I have read again very carefully the Notes on the Renewal (he means the writing of Maria Antonia, *Plan for the Renewal*). I enjoyed them very much, and there is no doubt that they attack the real problem.

On reading them again, and remembering the writing of Your Excellency Most Illustrious, which you sent to all the bishops "*Notes Of a Plan To Keep and Preserve The Beauty of The Church,*" I have noticed that yours prepare the way to carry through the Renewal presented in Maria Antonia's Plan. Comparing them it seems to me that there is no doubt that the same spirit has guided both pens. I am really aware of the difficulties which their fulfillment entails....

We do not have to stop in sight of the inconveniences that the weakness and limited human wisdom may experience. The great enterprises always encounter great obstacles, but whoever has the luck to hear the words we read in chapter 41 of Isaiah and in the 3rd of Ezekiel(...)

will be able to overcome them.

God Our Lord has given to his two witnesses (Claret and Paris) the same assistance he gave to the Apostles.

Rev. Dionisio González de Mendoza to St. Anthony Mary Claret
Cuba, July 31st 1858
(CO letter 122; EPCL-II letter 442)