

**TOWARDS THE COMMON HOME  
-WORLD BROTHERHOOD AND SISTERHOOD-  
PROPHETIC READING OF OUR MISSIONARY VOCATION  
FROM "LAUDATO SI'" AND "FRATELLI TUTTI"**

José Cristo Rey García Paredes, cmf

*We, the Claretian Missionary Sisters, want to continue the process of sensitizing, educating, providing tools and committing ourselves to the experience of JPIC from **Laudato Si' y Fratelli tutti**.*

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**INTRODUCTION**

Claretian Sisters, you deserve great congratulations for the initiative to involve yourselves and our Claretian charismatic family - religious and lay - in the serious purpose of updating the charism and the charismatic mission.

150 years ago, Antonio Maria Claret died in Frontfroide; and 135 years ago in Reus Maria Antonia Paris died. Our founders - collaborating with the Holy Spirit - began a mission and charismatic life that continues in us and has been reconfigured over the years. A great step of "aggiornamento" and renewal we took at the Second Vatican Council. After almost 60 years, we again asked ourselves how to update our charism and mission, following, above all, the rhythm that Pope Francis presented to us in his teaching.

The magisterium of the Church has invited us to discern the signs of the Holy Spirit in our time. In the Constitution "Gaudium et Spes" (GS, 11) we were told that the Holy Spirit fills the universe and also urges the people of God to discern in events the true signs of the presence of God's plans.

In this conference we want to look at the recent teaching of Pope Francis (the apostolic exhortation "Evangelii Gaudium" and the encyclical "Laudato Si'" and the latest encyclical "Fratelli tutti") to integrate it more decisively into our processes of education, formation and spirituality and to re-design from it our charism and mission. The same Spirit that inspired Father Claret and Mother Antonia, continues to act today, but within a new context, that wishes to make our charism "contemporary".

The reflection I propose responds to this concern: *What are the "signs of the Spirit" in our time that challenge us and should find a charismatic response in us, the leaders of the charism of Father Claret and M. Antonia?* By way of thesis I respond saying that: the Spirit of the Abba and the risen Lord leads us to collaborate - from our charismatic gift - in converting our blue planet into the "common house" of all and to fight so that all the inhabitants of it feel, be and behave like brothers and sisters. To this end, I propose three moments in our reflection.

- *The first two moments* will be dedicated to presenting in synthesis the proposal of the care for the common house of the encyclical "Laudato Si'" and our commitment so that the world fraternity and sisterhood according to the encyclical "Fratelli tutti" is established in it.
- *The third moment* will offer some clues of response to the Spirit from the charism and mission in this time of pandemic.

## **I. CARE OF THE COMMON HOME ("LAUDATO SI'")**

The Spirit invites us to broaden our outlook and our consciousness; not to stop at our little things: our older and smaller communities, our charismatic ministries more served by the laity than by our sisters or brothers. The Spirit invites us today to look in another direction: to acquire a new awareness of our identity and to re-invent our mission.

Pope Francis has placed us, as Church, in a new context through his encyclical "Laudato Si'". He refers to our planet as "home" or "common home" on multiple occasions (more than 20 times). He invites us to consider our earth as St. Francis of Assisi: "sister with whom we share existence" and "beautiful mother who welcomes us into her arms". The message of "Laudato Si'" can be summarized in three sections:

- What is happening to our house (nos. 17-61) and our human responsibility in it (nos. 101-136).
- The good news of Creation (nos. 62-100) which leads us to an integral ecology (nos. 137-162).
- Towards a new ethical practice (nos. 163-201), which is nourished by a new education and spirituality (nos. 202-246).

### 1. What is happening to our house and our responsibility

*"The common house is battered, hurt... and everything is degraded by it... and many do not act, as if nothing is happening!"*

We have never mistreated and offended our common house as much as in the last two centuries. We are called to become an instrument of God the Father so that our planet may be that which He dreamed of when He created it and which responds to His project of peace, beauty and fulfillment (LS, 53).

We need a change of route, a spiritual conversion, an integral ecological conversion. Today, technological and economic power with its enormous advances is in the hands of a few; this situation is aggravated by the prevalence of the techno-economic paradigm, which hardly finds leaders and groups to oppose it, and there is no agreement on how to interpret what is happening to us.

A wasteful and consumerist super-development has been reached. The effects on the environment are pernicious and also on society. The earth is becoming a huge garbage dump, increasingly polluted and overheated; its natural resources are being depleted, especially clean drinking water; biodiversity is being lost and ecosystems are being impoverished. At the same time, the quality of life is deteriorating, and social degradation is endangering human beings; and, both the human and natural environment are degrading together, while 1/3 of the food is being wasted.

St. John Paul II dared to say that "humanity has defrauded the divine expectations" (St. John Paul II). When the human being supplants God, nature rebels; and tries to supplant him when he does not respect life, when he manipulates genetically. Nature offers everything that human beings need, but not everything that they covet.

The encyclical "Laudato Si'" proposes to give way to another paradigm of progress, more humane, more social, more integral; it even calls for a courageous cultural revolution, which will slow down and recover the depth of life.

## 2. The Good News of Creation - towards an integral ecology

"Laudato Si'" invites us to participate in the solution of the ecological crisis by drawing on *two sources*: the wisdom of religions, especially the wisdom of the Bible, and an integral vision of ecology.

- *Biblical wisdom* shows us how the cause of the first great crisis (expulsion from paradise, fratricide, terror) was the rupture of the Covenant with the Creator, with our neighbors, with all living beings and with the care of the earth. God renewed the covenant with Noah to show that a good man is enough to give hope!
  - At the heart of the Covenant, *creation* is a gift rather than nature. Nature is God's precious book, whose letters are the multitude of creatures present in the universe. To contemplate creation is to hear a mysterious voice. The whole of the universe better shows the richness of God. All of nature manifests God and is the place of his presence. Nature should not be deified: creatures have an owner.
  - The *human being* is a novelty that cannot be explained solely by the evolution of open systems: within the material universe we are a direct action of God!
  - *The earth* is a common heritage. The right to property is not absolute... it is a social mortgage. The environment is a collective good, the heritage of all humanity and the responsibility of all.
  - *Jesus lived* in full harmony with creation. The mystery of Christ operates hidden in creation. Everything is reconciled and recapitulated in him. The risen Jesus is the ultimate end of all creatures. And the creatures and we advance towards the common term that is God - the Risen Christ.
  - *Biblical wisdom* makes us participate in a unique way in the ecological process. Therefore, as Christians, we should be the pioneers in the concern and care of nature.
- *The second source* that invites us to participate in the solution of the ecological crisis is *integral ecology*. This concept indicates to us that in the cosmos everything is interrelated, cultural, eco-systemic, ecology of thought and action, spiritual ecology. This is what we mean when we speak of integral ecology. And, if everything is interconnected, we must act at different levels, according to our vocation and charism.

## 3. The "ecological conversion": a new beginning in consciousness, ethics, education and spirituality

Therefore, the "*new consciousness*" drives us to a new way of life, which liberates us from the techno-economic paradigm (many means to rickety ends!) and helps us to change our social habits and avoid environmental degradation. The new consciousness drives us to

a "*new beginning*" that awakens a new reverence for life, that develops the capacity to go out of ourselves to others and induces us to care for the environment.

Pope Francis calls us to "ecological conversion" which arises from the conviction that every creature reflects something of God and contains a message from God, that Jesus has taken on this material world and that, having risen, he dwells in the most intimate part of every being and that God has created the world by inscribing in it an order and a dynamism that human beings must not ignore.

The "ecological conversion", requires first of all, *educational processes*: that it leads us to unlearn concepts and acquired habits and to learn a new lifestyle in Alliance between humanity and the environment. Part of the educational processes towards ecological conversion is environmental education, education for eco-logical citizenship with new habits, solid virtues, small daily actions; an education in the field of aesthetics to develop the contemplative capacity.

The educational processes will prepare us for an alternative way of life characterized by the conviction that "less is more" (spirituality of sobriety), by the appreciation of the small and the gratitude for the possibilities that life offers us - without attachment or pretension of domination - (spirituality of simplicity of life), by the culture of care.

For us, followers of Jesus, ecological conversion implies *a spirituality* of the presence of the Creator (not to be manufactured but to be discovered), which will lead us to intense spiritual experiences, to a new sacramental and contemplative spirituality.

Ecological conversion leads us to a holistic spirituality in which we connect our body with nature, learn the art of living together and communion, change our habits of life, become much more grateful and free, and more struggling to overcome all the dramas of our world. The ecological conversion provokes that sublime fraternity with all creation that St. Francis of Assisi lived so brilliantly.

## **II. WORLD BROTHERHOOD AND SISTERHOOD ("FRATELLI TUTTI ")**

In the consecrated life we have discovered with much strength -already from the early Monastic beginnings- the importance of fraternity, of sisterhood. We feel ourselves to be communities of brothers and sisters. If it is true that in past times, we gave much importance to the distinction - "mothers" and "sisters", "fathers" and "brothers", since the Second Vatican Council we have recovered again the sense of fraternity, of sisterhood. And we have discovered the symbolic and prophetic importance that our communities can have.

The encyclical letter "Fratelli tutti" calls us to broaden our outlook and awareness - in admirable continuity with the encyclical "Laudato Si'". How can we understand fraternity and sisterhood when they are extended to all human beings, of any race, people and nation? And, even more, how to understand fraternity and sorority when we refer to the fraternity and sorority with all created realities: brother, sun, sister and mother earth, sister water, brother fire, brother wolf.

That is what is expected of those of us who live in that "common house" that is our plan: that we all feel like brothers and sisters, and not only human beings, but all the beings that make up this earth.

Pope Francis invites us to extend our vision of fraternity and sisterhood, with a whole series of ethical and spiritual implications that need to be discovered. The encyclical "Fratelli tutti" can and should have an explosive and innovative effect on our charismatic institutes and families. It calls us not only to take care of the "common house", but to inhabit it from the condition of "brothers and sisters" and never from that of dominators and subjects, of rich and poor, of powerful and weak or discarded. We are all brothers and sisters!

I am going to present the message of "Fratelli tutti" through four words: world, road heart, and Diakonia:

- World: closed or open (FT, chapter 1 and 3)
- Road: A Stranger and the Re-encounter (FT, Ch. 2 and 7)
- Open heart and social friendship (FT, Ch. 4 and 6)
- Service or Diakonia: Politics and Religions (FT, Ch. 5 and 8).

### 1. Opening up our world

The conversion to brotherhood and sisterhood among all human beings means the passage from a closed world (or perhaps better, closed worlds), to a single open world, interconnected without any kind of exclusions. The common house is not enough: we must re-discover each other as brothers and sisters who are equal in dignity and different in our way of being. And it is necessary to include in the common house those who are so often excluded.

There is a closed world, characterized by "disunity": *self-referential identities* that separate us from others; a lack of a common project for the development of all humanity; we do not form a "we" that inhabits the common house and builds justice and peace.

*There is a closed world* in which we live connected, but not as brothers. There is a great discrimination: the different ones - the disabled, the exiles, the unborn, the elderly, the women - are considered as adversaries and are fought against. A tragic example of this great discrimination is that we allow millions of children to die, reduced to human skeletons because of poverty and hunger. We are imposed a culture of walls from which the other is not respected (aggressiveness, insults, abuse, disqualification; also, in the Christian community), it is imposed its own ideology (religious fundamentalism).

"Another world is possible". It is the "open world", because open societies integrate everyone. God wants it and, for this reason, he has poured into it seeds of good. We all have the same rights because we have the same human dignity. All the nations of the world share a common destiny. We all subsist in interdependence, and even better when it is based on bonds, communion, fraternity.

The way to achieve a fraternal and sisterly world requires cultivating the awareness that we all form one family: and this can be achieved through education, learning dialogue and discovering reciprocity. This learning will lead us to love others for who they are, to seek the best for them, to exclude no one. Society generates brotherhood and sisterhood when it is at the service of people, of the common good, and especially when it invests in the fragile. Fraternity is also generated through the sacred duty of hospitality when necessary, but also through the recognition of the right of every human being to live in his land, in his country.

The United Nations are contributing to the design and gestation of a more open world.

## 2. On the Road: A Stranger and a Re-Encounter

And what is the way to achieve worldwide brotherhood and sisterhood? The parable of the Samaritan is presented to us in "Fratelli tutti" as the paradigm of a humanism of brothers and sisters, concerned with the other person without any kind of prejudice. The parable takes for granted that there will always be aggressive jumpers and also representatives of religious or civil power who are totally insensitive to those who lie on the road; but he discovers "a stranger" who does not pass by and provokes a healing encounter and also finds collaboration in the host. Fraternity, sisterhood, is reborn when the Samaritan attitude - fruit of the Spirit of compassion - takes hold of us and transforms us into caretakers of our brothers, sisters in need.

It is easy to forget about fraternity and sisterhood when we find ourselves in the midst of people in need and let ourselves be carried away by the perverse tendency to "pass by". "Being Samaritans" is not the most spontaneous, nor easy; the human being is not, either, by a voluntary effort. One is a Samaritan when God's compassion takes hold of a human being, when the Holy Spirit is poured into the heart and the human being responds with his own collaboration: this is what Jesus asked of us when he said: "Be merciful as your Father is merciful. This is how fraternity-sorority without borders is generated.

And to cultivate this grace that comes to us from heaven, we must collaborate. There are ways of re-encountering each other so that we can feel like brothers and sisters to each other. Pope Francis offers us, as clues: to converse from the truth - clear and naked -; to be artisans and architects of peace; to approach and meet with the most impoverished and vulnerable sectors; and, to reconcile and forgive each other.

## 3. Open heart: ethics, dialogue and social friendship

Against a closed world - described with very realistic and crude strokes in the first part of the encyclical - the antidote is a humanity of open hearts, open hands and open minds.

People who are strict, intolerant, legit, proud of their reason, self-sufficient, egomaniacal, will never be good "brothers" or "sisters. Brotherhood, sonority, is built through open hearts, willing to connect - even to the most difficult connection, which will be resolved with an open mind and imagination.

The artists were ahead of us. In our songs - some of them more popular - other "authentic masterpieces" like the fourth movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. He left us 250 years ago; but his spirit, his soul continues to move us, in all his music; and, especially with his "Ode to Joy", a sublime song to the Brotherhood of all human beings, an extended Our Father. Pope Francis invites us to deduce from this fundamental conviction a new ethic, which translates into political charity, hospitality, kindness, and the culture of encounter.

Sometimes I ask myself this question: how can I be concerned about social friendship, about global ethics, if I cannot be a friend of the people with whom I live and am hardly capable of living with them an ethics of the minimum? I am convinced that micro-ethics and macro-ethics influence each other. The passion for the macro influences the micro and vice versa. This third part of the Encyclical - in which I summarize chapters 4 and 6 together - will certainly stimulate us to broaden and open our hearts.

That a heart desires to be the brother of all without exception is not a spontaneous feeling. The ethic of solidarity opens the human heart to think and act in terms of community, to fight the structural causes of poverty, the inequality that affects our brothers and sisters.

The ethic of generosity widens the heart to help others, using our best resources. The ethic of hospitality welcomes the persecuted, the immigrant who seeks his and his family's subsistence and opposes localist narcissism.

The new ethic helps us to establish a family of nations through dialogue and social friendship.

#### 4. Politics and Religions at the Service of the Fraternity and Sorority

There are those responsible for promoting and maintaining brotherhood and sisterhood in the world; and also those responsible for a fraternal and sisterly relationship with "sister earth", the "common house". There are groups of leaders who, if they try, can be the paradigm of a different humanity, who can have an authentic "moral authority" to establish new relationships in our "common house". These are the people upon whom political and religious authority rests. The encyclical concludes with a call to the political and religious powers to be "leaders with a soul" on our planet, generating contexts of brotherhood and sisterhood. They are the servants of the Fraternity-Sorority. To them and to them has been entrusted the Father-Mother of all the leadership of the transformational Service.

The responsibility of the great fraternity and sisterhood falls on the Politics and the Religions. Authentic politics is neither populist nor liberal, but it does give all the protagonism to the "people. Authentic politics generates a living and dynamic people, it favors community searches, it has common objectives. Politics has to enter into the reversal of tenderness.

On the other hand, the wisdom of religions offers an incalculable service to brotherhood in the world, when it favors inter-religious dialogue, when the faith in God that it proclaims becomes the foundation of brotherhood-sorority and fights against any form of idolatry with its terrible consequences.

The church of Jesus wants to offer itself as the home and house of all. And it offers humanity the mother of Jesus, as the Mother of all. The church makes sure that the music of the Gospel, which is the music of the family of God, never falls silent.

### **III. KEY POINTS OF RESPONSE TO THE SPIRIT FROM OUR CHARISM AND MISSION**

We want to become an "outgoing congregation", "towards the peripheries" (geographical and existential). We want to respond to the great challenges presented to us by the magisterium of Pope Francis. This requires us to be aware of the context, a mystical, contemplative and missionary attitude.

#### 1. Context: times of pandemic

We are in a humanity in turmoil because of the pandemic. We are going through an apocalyptic era: a masked humanity, forced to keep its distance, confined, afraid of contagion, insecure, with a large army of health people, unable to stop the avalanche of disease and death.

It also has serious economic consequences, especially for the poor and marginalized of society. It is said that the pandemic has delayed - as if by ten years - the desired progress

towards another better world, longed for by the United Nations with its Sustainable Development Goals, to be achieved by 2030.

And what does it mean for us to speak of "spirituality" and "ecological conversion", or conversion to universal brotherhood-sorority, in this context?

On the day of Pentecost, the Holy See's Interdicasterial Table on Integral Ecology published a document entitled "On the Way to Care for the Common House: Five Years after "Laudato Si'" (on May 31, 2020, the solemnity of Pentecost). Its objective is to keep alive in the Church the call to "ecological conversion" - in the key of integral ecology - and to collaborate more decisively with those who, from various quarters, are committed to the care of our earth.

## 2. Mysticism: the great connection

We detect in our time thirst for Spirituality. Some, however, understand it as a narcissistic turn on themselves. There is spirituality where there is connection with the Spirit of God the Father Creator and of the risen Jesus. Then "spirituality" is a reflection of our connection with the Spirit of God who fills the earth. Sometimes we reduce spirituality to acts of piety (personal prayer, meditation, exercises or spiritual activities); we understand it as what we do for God. However, spirituality is rather what the Holy Spirit does in us and with us for the sake of humanity and creation. The Spirit is "Lord and giver of life", "speaks through the prophets", prays in us and cries out "Abba" and "Jesus is Lord"; it is divine love poured out in our hearts, from Him come "spiritual blessings from heaven" (Ephesians 1:3) and the forgiveness of sins.

Spirituality - in the consecrated life - is connection with the person of the Holy Spirit, living in covenant with Him, participating in His Mission. Spirituality is welcoming in us the "divine guest" and living with Him at all times. The Spirit of God fills the earth and connects us to the Whole: to God the Father, to Jesus, to the Holy Church, to the Humanity, to creation, to the cosmos. The great anthropologist and social scientist Gregory Bateson were right when he stated that "only the wholeness is sacred". The connection with the Whole "consecrates" us. From there the importance that has the inclusive spirituality and never exclude you, the holistic and not partial spirituality, the open-dialogic spirituality, and never closed: the inter-spirituality (inter-religious, intercultural, inter-confessional...)

## 3. Contemplation: the great vision

Spirituality is also vision. The apocalyptic seer describes Jesus as the Lamb with the "seven eyes". He adds that they were the "seven eyes of the Spirit, which have been sent to the earth. The number seven thus describes the "perfect vision.

Perfect vision does not consist solely of the ability to see everything that is visible. In our faith we confess that God is the creator of "the visible" and "the invisible. The Spirit grants us the capacity to see everything: with the eyes of the Spirit we then begin to de-detect the invisible realities: a whole world apparently inaccessible, but full of life! They are the eyes of faith that allow us to see what for us was inaccessible, opaque. Jesus made the blind see. He granted not only the gift of seeing the visible, but also "the invisible. And, for this reason, he exclaimed full of joy: "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see" (Lk 10:23).

Jesus makes us "see" when He pours out His Spirit upon us. The authentic contemplation is "vision" here on earth. Lack of spirituality is blindness, which leads us into darkness, into gloom. On the other hand, our connection with the Spirit - with his eyes, with his gaze - that has been sent to earth and is at our disposal, allows us to "see", "contemplate" what others do not see, nor contemplate.

The Word of God is light on the path. And it is so when the Word is contemplated with the eyes and understanding of the Spirit. Spirituality is thus a stream of light that is given to us through communion with the Spirit and reading in the Spirit of the Word.

#### 4. Mission: apocalyptic struggle.

We are missionaries, missionaries. We are not, however, the protagonists of the Mission. Mission is not what we do for God, but what the Spirit of God, who has been sent from heaven by the Father and the Son, does and wants to do through non-wealthy people on behalf of humanity and creation. The mission does not belong to us. We are non-we who belong to the Mission. We do not have a mission. It is the mission of the Spirit that has us.

From this perspective, our spirituality is missionary: it is docility and perfect obedience to the Spirit that sends us, that energizes us, that pours into us his love and charisms. We are missionaries when we make a covenant of alliance with the Spirit to act in us and with us. We are not protagonists, but humble servants, collaborators, accomplices of the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, missionary spirituality requires spiritual discernment. What spirit moves us? Because anything that does not come from the Holy Spirit is a bad spirit that takes hold of us. Led by the Spirit, miracles will arise, the will of the Abba will be fulfilled, his Kingdom will come.

But the Spirit is still fighting against evil spirits. We, as the accomplices of the Spirit, are caught up in the din of that struggle. So, strength, not cowardice, prophetic parrhesia, and not being silent by fear, are part of our missionary spirituality. The definition of the missionary, son of the Immaculate Heart of Mary presents us with how Jesus was, in whom the fire of the Spirit ignited so powerfully.

Even if we do not know how to understand and interpret the presence of evil in the world, the truth is undeniable: evil exists! Evil causes poverty, hunger, desertification, contaminates the air, the water, generates terrible inequalities, kills liberties; evil is cruel and destroys human and environmental biodiversity. Evil exists and wants to lead us all to swimming, to death! Evil can be called by many different names: sin-do, evil spirits, demons... Evil is anti-genesis, anti-creation.

The Spirit of God is, however, strength, dynamism, power of life, healing, re-conciliation. And he fights against evil, which is always the power of destruction, of anti-genesis.

The last book of the Holy Scripture is the Revelation. It is the book in which we are told with splendid and terrible images the historical struggle between good and evil, between the Spirit of God and his accomplices and the spirits of evil and their beasts.

Our Founders, Mother Antonia Paris and Father Anthony Mary Claret were granted an authentic apocalyptic understanding of their mission. It is a perspective of our spirituality that we must not forget. It makes us Claretians and Claretians - daring, peripheral,

combative with the two-edged sword that is the Word of God. Our brother bishop Pere Casaldàliga was an extraordinary paradigm of this model of missionary spirituality.

### CONCLUSION

And here concludes my contribution to this educational and reflective meeting. That in the context of a world pandemic - truly apocalyptic - we discover the mysterious presence of the Spirit. Let us enter into the great connection that makes us enter into the great empathy with the Spirit and from the Spirit of our Father, of Jesus and of our Mother, in empathy with the whole. Let us contemplate the world with the seven eyes of the Spirit and enter into the Spirit's struggle against all evil spirits and use the weapons of God. So our missionary spirituality will flourish in thousand ways and become not only combative but also extraordinarily seductive.

The intuition that everything is interconnected has a long and excellent tradition in the Church (St. Irenaeus, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Hildegard von Bingen, St. Bonaventure).

The response to the call to ecological conversion is also a call to us. It is probable that, because of our age, our condition, many of us think that it is already late. However, it is never too late for "conversion," that is, for an integral conversion that does not act from only one aspect, forgetting the others, but does so in an integral and integrated and subsidiary way. Ecological conversion asks us to initiate educational and associative processes among ourselves, inspired by principles of high ethics and morality.

Here we have one of the most important avenues of continuous formation or, perhaps better, of educational and associative processes.

Conversion? It is understood in an integral way - change of paradigm, a new consciousness, a new look, a dynamic of justice, compassion and solidarity: "a new way of living in the common home.

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