

CMF  
XXII GENERAL CHAPTER  
  
IN PROPHETIC MISSION

Rome, 1997

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Prophetic Dimension of our Missionary Service of the Word

Rome, 1997

*Declaration of the XXII General Chapter of the Congregation of Missionaries, Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (Claretian Missionaries), held in Rome from 26 August to 24 September 1997 (cf., Annales Congregationis, vol. 63, 1997).*

#### FREQUENTLY USED ABBREVIATIONS

- Aut = Autobiography of St. Anthony Mary Claret.
- CC = Constitutions, 1986.
- CPR = The Claretian in the Process of Congregational Renewal, XX General Chapter CMF (1985).
- Dir = Directory CMF (1987)
- EC = Epistolario Claretiano (3 vols.) ed. José M<sup>a</sup> Gil, CMF (1970-1987).
- MCT = The Mission of the Claretian Today, XIX General Chapter CMF (1979).
- GPF = General Plan of Formation (1994).
- RMi = Redemptoris Missio, Encyclical Letter of John Paul II (1990).
- SW = Servants of the Word, XXI General Chapter CMF (1991)
- VC = Vita Consecrata, Postsynodal Apostolic Exhortation of John Paul II (1996).

Biblical citations are from the New Revised Standard Version

## INTRODUCTION

1. On concluding the XXII General Chapter we present the results of our discernment on the concerns and needs of the Congregation. The theme chosen, "Prophetic dimension of our missionary service of the Word," has allowed us to go more deeply into the proposal of the preceding General Chapter.

*"The ministry of the Word, through which we communicate the total mystery of Christ to humanity, is our special calling among the People of God (CC 46). Imitating Jesus, the Prophet par excellence, whom our Founder followed so radically, we must be transformed into a sign and expression of the Word of God" (SW 6).*

With it, we apply to the Congregation one of the most fruitful insights of the Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, following the universal Synod of Bishops of 1994: prophetic witness (cf. VC 84-95).

2. We consider the *prophetic* aspect to be *one* dimension of our missionary life: it likens us to the biblical prophets and above all to Jesus the Prophet. The prophets are persons seduced by God (cf. Jer 20:7), impassioned by Him and his Covenant, partakers in his compassion for the poor and the people. They see historical reality with the eyes of God, they feel with his heart (cf. 1 Sam 12:7-25) and proclaim a message of renewal with the authority of his Word. This message is at once consoling and challenging, hence it creates hope and arouses rejection. This vocation alters their lives and transforms them into a sign. Authentic prophets are faithful to the ultimate consequences. Anointed by the power of the Spirit, Jesus was the definitive prophet of God and the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy (Lk 14:21; Mt 5:17; CC 3 and 40). The "prophetic dimension" of our missionary service of the Word should be understood as deriving from Him.

3. The sexennium we are beginning is a time of special grace. With the whole Church we celebrate the pilgrimage toward the great Jubilee of the year 2000, and in the Congregation the 150th anniversary of our foundation. We want to illumine this moment on our way. We take as our background the prophetic program of Jesus: Lk 4:14-30. In it our Founder found inspiration for his own prophetic mission and for that of his missionaries (cf. Aut 687).

## I. TRENDS AND CHALLENGES OF REALITY

*"Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing"*  
(Lk 4:21).

4. Every prophecy has its historical and geographical context. Our latest General Chapters, *"in keeping with the example of Claret and in harmony with the Church in the modern world"* (MCT 4), have sought in the life and journeying of humankind the signs and voice of the God of the Kingdom. Like them, we intend to listen to the Word of God in our "today," *"in the events of history, in cultures and in the life of the people, in their silences and in their outcries"* (SW 16.1). We know that on our continents there are many positive values and many problem situations that stir up the prophetism of our missionary service. Aware of this, we point out in what follows some tendencies and challenges of reality which call out to us from our experience in the places we live in.

### ***1. All different: a complex and diversified reality***

5. We Claretians sense *Africa* to be a continent rich in cultures, spirituality, traditions and natural resources which, at the portals of the XXI century, is seeking an affirmation of its identity. Our peoples have on many occasions shown a capacity for surviving, happily and vitally, under inhuman conditions. We regard the following as challenges:

- political instability and corruption, totalitarian regimes and "false democracies that impede progress and the organization of countries.
- Tribalism, which generates conflict and confrontation between our peoples, and also leads to the problem of refugees.
- The negative influence of exterior interests that stifle local cultures and traditions, foster tribal conflicts, abusively exploit and export the natural riches of the Continent, leading to impoverishment, deforestation and other ecological problems, besides supporting unjust and corrupt politicians.
- The emigration of young people and intellectuals because of repression and a lack of hope.

From a religious viewpoint we would also stress as challenges:

- The superposition of traditional-spiritual values and Christianity.
- Fundamentalism and the incipient rash of sects, the lack of a first evangelization in widespread regions.
- The need for inculturation, ecumenism and interreligious dialogue.

6. Looking as evangelizers at the reality of *Latin America and the Caribbean*, there are many sore spots that wound our prophetic sensibility:

- Neoliberalism, which conceals the external debt that continues to oppress us, is becoming more and more an economic, political, social and cultural macro-dictatorship: the whole of life is structured around the market, profits and consumerism. The wealth and power of a few is increasing, while at the same time the number of the excluded is growing and their poverty is aggravated.

- The spread of a modern and postchristian occidental culture is leveling the values of many of our peoples; it is manifested especially in the corruption of institutions, structures and persons, while at the same time damaging ethnic and cultural minorities.
- Violence, injustice, the systematic violation of the rights of peoples and of persons, and drug-trafficking continue in our surroundings.

As signs of hope that encourage us, we see:

- The growing number of organizations that are coordinating in order to defend justice, human rights, peace, ecology, women and life.
- In many places the poor and the excluded are coming together in solidarity and organizing with new verve.
- The steps being taken toward continental unity.
- Our people's faith, religiosity and interest in the Word of God are the thrust that keeps them working in hope for a better world.

7. The Claretians in *Canada and the United States* live and work in a context of democratic freedom and religious, cultural and political pluralism. There have been many positive advances in science and technology, especially in the communications media and in computerized industries. Despite this:

- The economic systems of our countries, which have repercussions on the whole world, operate for the economic benefit of the rich few.
- Uncontrolled capitalism and materialism have seduced many and have led them into a narcissistic existence that often translates into a lack of interest in for the collectivity and for the search for meaning.
- Workers live with insecurity, while multinational enterprises move through the world in search of cheap manual labor and of places where workers' rights are ignored, thus generating negative consequences that we all know of.

In this multicultural setting, there are also:

- Tensions between different ethnic and racial groups competing to gain social helps and obtain a higher level of life.
- A progressive degradation of family values and a lessening of respect for human life and for the person. Moreover, there is an increase in the number of single-parent household and of children living in poverty.
- The powerful influence of the media in exalting violence and the uncontrolled use of sexual instincts.
- Much has been done by Christian Churches and other groups for the poor and marginalized, especially for groups of immigrants, although much more still needs to be done.

8. As evangelizers, the Claretians in *Asia* recognize that our continent is characterized by complex and contrasting realities: some of them are bearers of life and others, of death.

- Our people increasingly appreciate pluralism and cultural, linguistic and religious diversity, although many conflicts arise precisely from this.

- Our people maintain a deep sense of the sacred and in many Christians there is a growing interest in the Word of God. Moreover, the great religions of Asia, which are deeply rooted and alive in our peoples, demand of the small Christian community a serious commitment to interreligious dialogue, which constitutes the adequate framework for preaching the Gospel of Christ.
- Family values are held in high esteem.
- The poor and the marginalized --women, youth, tribal groups, *dalits*-- are becoming more aware of their rights and continue struggling to attain a greater participation in significant areas of society.
- Industrialization and modernization are causing grave ecological harm at the same time that there is a growing awareness of the need to conserve and reestablish the integrity of creation.
- Economic globalization has many negative effects on the life of the poor: dehumanization, massive poverty, injustice and an increase of inequality and corruption.
- The irresponsible use of the communications media is leading to a loss of religious and cultural values, giving rise to a new secularized and consumerist culture.

9. As servants of the Word, we discover that *Europe* is a reality in transformation.

9.1. *Western Europe:*

- It is going through a situation of decrease in population, due in part to a lower birth rate, but it is receiving a great number of immigrants, whose presence, which enriches the continent with different races and cultures, also provokes situations of conflict.
- The project of the so-called "*common European household*" expresses a strong will for peace and integration among peoples. At the same time, in many places there is a stress on the culture and traditions of one's own ethnic and linguistic community.
- Despite countercultural movements, a new resurgence of religion and a growing social volunteerism, there is also a spreading mentality for which the great value is being well-off, often without regard for solidarity. Happiness is measured by the levels of consumption. Efficiency and profit are taking the place of traditional values and many persons are socially excluded (unemployment, neglect of minorities, xenophobia).
- There are signs of a breakdown and undervaluing of the family.
- We find ourselves in a context of unbelief in which life and culture are shaped by reasons of lay ethics or subjective religiosity. There is a growing number of persons who live without God and do not feel the void.

9.2. *Eastern Europe*

- The culture is fundamentally post-communist. Society is made up of a majority of poor people, a small middle class concentrated mainly in cities, and by a reduced group of nouveaux riches. The levels of unemployment are very high.
- Many people feel disoriented at abandoning the lifestyle formerly imposed on them by communist regimes, and coming in contact with consumerist society and the world of Western values.
- The imprint left by the anti-religious education of the former regime is very strong. Interreligious and ecumenical dialogue is especially difficult.

## ***2. In a single world: sharing a globalized reality***

10. Each one of our peoples is trying to follow its own way, but there are many realities that affect us all and make us interdependent in both positive and negative ways. The current organization of political and economic power everywhere accentuates inequalities, dependence and domination, excluding the well being of millions of men and women. Some countries adopt a double standard: they respect freedoms within their own territory, but deny them in their external politics.

11. The technological revolution in communications has qualitatively changed the treatment of information and has opened up new ways for evangelizing. Cyberspace piques our missionary sensibility like the discovery of a new Continent. It enormously enhances the possibilities for humanization, solidarity, development and the service of the Word. In theory, present-day science and technology hold solutions for many of the problems that afflict us: hunger, disease, etc. We can engage in a universal dialogue and give birth to an effective solidarity between all human beings, overcoming dogmatisms, fundamentalisms, totalitarianisms and a meaningless or aimless vision of the world. In practice, however, all of this potential is often used by a dominant system that puts it in the hands of a few and spreads a single model of human being. These few overlook the human rights of peoples and cultures, the rapid deterioration of creation and the exploitation of natural resources.

12. Some militant groups in favor of peace and justice are already tired and disillusioned. At the same time other movements arise with new energies in their commitment to social problems and to the defense of human rights. There are many persons who have taken stock of these values: respect, appreciation and dialogue with different peoples, cultures, religions and beliefs. Every day more and more voices are raised in favor of nature, which has been mistreated in many places.

## ***3. A reality that stimulates our prophetic response***

13. We Christians know that we are involved in the realities of the world that we have just analyzed. Not all of the obstacles to the prophetic ministry of the Church can be chalked up to others. Many of the baptized separate their faith from their life and do not commit themselves to walk with the people. The Spirit is raising up new styles of life and ways for the Gospel. We are aware of many of the fruits of the Church's vitality: the increase of interreligious and ecumenical dialogue; the growing commitment to the poor and to justice; Christians who spearhead the defense of the poor, human development and advancement; the formation of the laity and the acknowledgment of their mission; bringing the Word of God closer to all believers; awakening new popular organizations; a greater awareness of solidarity. The daily life of our Churches, despite their differences, is also full of these signs.

14. We Claretians are not exempt from these contradictions. We have our failings and, at the same time, our successes. The Congregation, despite a light decrease in numbers during the past decade, has continued its missionary deployment and is serving the Word today in 56 nations on all continents. During the most recent years we have been paying special attention to certain situations and challenges:

14.1. A large part of the efforts of the Claretians in *Africa* is devoted to first evangelization, to interreligious dialogue, to seek a response to social needs, to support all kinds of vocations and to form laity and catechists.

14.2. The Congregation in *Latin America and the Caribbean* has promoted new evangelization, the popular reading of the Bible, the communications media, missionary parishes and youth ministry. It has likewise striven to keep its eyes open to the challenges of reality, to living and working with the poor and the excluded, and helping the victims of violence and of drug trafficking.

14.3. In *North America (Canada and the USA)* we have made a great effort to serve communities of immigrants, to foster the formation of the laity and to attend to the announcement of the Gospel through the communications media.

14.4. In *Asia*, our preference for the poor and the marginalized is expressed in our commitment to justice and peace, the consciousness raising and education of the poor, and dialogue with other religions. We have also made an effort toward the formation of consecrated and lay agents of evangelization.

14.5. The Claretian communities of *Europe* have striven to focus their attention on the education of youth, on creating living communities, on promoting organizations of solidarity, on the qualified service of immigrants, on the formation of leaders, both lay and religious, on popular evangelization and on dialogue with modern cultures, especially through the use of the communications media.

15. The contributions received for this General Chapter reveal our awareness of the historical moment in which we are living and the will to take up these challenges in a prophetic way. From a plurality of origins, languages and cultures, the Claretians want to stress in the coming years the prophetic dimension of our missionary service of the Word, as an unfolding of our common charismatic calling.

## II. PROPHETIC LIFESTYLE

*"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor" (Lk 4:18).*

16. The Spirit of Jesus is on each and every one of us. This is the fire that makes the Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary into men who are afire with charity and set its fire wherever they go (cf. Aut 494), into persons who are integrated and centered. The Spirit gives life to the Word: only then does it reach people's hearts and has the power to transform.

### ***1. Heirs of a prophetic lifestyle***

17. Our Father Founder, Anthony Mary Claret, felt anointed by the Spirit of Jesus. He found incentives for his missionary vocation in the prophets (cf. Aut 114-120; 214-220) and above all in Jesus, a simple and enchanting prophet, close to the people, but also a sign of contradiction, persecuted even to death on a cross (cf. Aut 221-222). Claret's grand passion

was to become identified with Jesus in all things. He recognized that the virtue most needed by an apostolic missionary and the hidden treasure for which we should sell everything, is love (cf. Aut 438-439). The love of God, Jesus, Mary and his neighbor was his lifelong passion, the very reason for his apostolic ministry. Claret served the bread of the Word in season and out of season, so that God the Father might be known, loved and served (cf. Aut 233). He was clairvoyant, creative and enterprising. God granted him a strong sensibility in facing the evils of his time. He founded our Congregation, and in his "pattern of the missionary" (cf. Aut 494), he transmitted to us the way in which we are to prophetically prolong his project.

18. During its almost 150 years of existence, our Congregation has grown deeper in the Claretian charism and in its prophetic dimension. Moved by love and apostolic zeal, some of our brothers have become present in mission places that others deemed inaccessible because of their special difficulty (Equatorial Guinea, Chocó...). There were those who gave their life for Jesus and for their brethren without looking backward. Many assumed an apostolic lifestyle marked by simplicity, itinerancy, unselfish service of the Church, community and congregational spirit and permanent missionary intercession, such as Frs. Clotet and Avellana. The "*model of the missionary*" has become a reality in many of us: priests, deacons, brothers and students, martyrs and confessors of the faith. The Church has set before us, as a prophetic example, our own Martyrs of Barbastro.

## ***2. To make Jesus' way of life our own*** (CC 5)

19. We too, chosen by Jesus and anointed by the Spirit, feel called to carry on "today" this admirable missionary and prophetic tradition. Prophecy only becomes persuasive when there is a coherence between our announcement and our life (cf. VC 85). Our personal and community life is, then, our first prophetic act. We only live authentically when we live "in Christ Jesus." Hence, we must "keep our gaze fixed on Christ, imitate him, and be so steeped in his Spirit, that it will no longer be we who live, but Christ who truly lives in us" (CC 39). We desire "to set nothing above our personal love for Christ and for the poor in whom He lives" (VC 84).

20. Our prophetic lifestyle receives a distinctive imprint from the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Mother of the Congregation. She teaches us that without heart, without tenderness, without love, there is no credible prophecy. Mary uttered the Word (cf. Lk 1:38) because she had first conceived it in her heart; she proclaimed her prophetic Magnificat (cf. Lk 1:46-55) because she had first believed; she stood near the Cross and was present at Pentecost because she was the good earth that welcomed the Word with a glad heart, made it bear fruit a hundred fold (cf. Lk 8:8,15,21) and asked others to do whatever the Word told them (Jn 2:5).

21. The epoch-making change and cultural pluralism that we see in the Congregation encourage us to ask ourselves about the most fitting way to live our following of Jesus in chastity, poverty and obedience. It is not always easy to find adequate answers, but we are convinced that this way of life sets forth some elements of strong contrast and provocation in our societies (cf. VC 88, 89, 91). This makes the joyful and shared living of our profession a fundamental element in our prophecy. It is possible to cultivate and maintain our style of life within a harmonious development of our personality:

21.1. *If we strengthen much more our faith and trust in God, who cares for us; in Jesus, who is our Master and Savior; in the Spirit, who is a purifying and creative fire; in Mary our mother and intercessor; in our community and in ourselves.*

21.2. *If we entrust our inner life to another person who can accompany and counsel us.*

21.3. *If apostolic zeal burns within us and if we entrust our life wholeheartedly to our brother and sisters who need our service.*

21.4. *If in certain more serious circumstances we have recourse to the therapies best suited to our overall recovery.*

21.5. *If we clear-sightedly keep preparing ourselves to face the possible difficulties of the different stage of life.*

22. The Church exhorts us to fulfill our prophetic service (cf. VC 73) and asks us to *cultivate* an in-depth experience of God; to *discern*, in the light of the Spirit, the challenges of our time; and to *translate* them with courage and daring into options and projects that are coherent both with our original charism and with the demands of the concrete historical situation (cf. VC 73). We need, then, *"a solid spirituality of action, seeing God in all things and all things in God"* (VC 74).

23. The prophetic character of our missionary service of the Word should drink from *"the springs of a solid and profound spirituality"* (VC 93). We want our Congregation to be ever more and more a school of authentic missionary spirituality inspired in Claret and our tradition. Hence:

23.1. *In the coming years we will highlight much more the eucharistic dimension of our spirituality as a source of unity of life and apostolic fortitude.*

23.2. *We will take care of personal and community prayer, as being presupposed for any missionary service.*

23.3. *We will follow a rhythm of life that allows us to feel Life, to savor it and love it, from the standpoint of God's love for his creatures, without letting ourselves be dominated by the dizzying search for results and over-efficiency.*

23.4. *The General Government will continue animating the knowledge of our spirituality and its configuration as an authentic way of life.*

24. The prophecy of ordinary life, which is frequent among us, is what makes possible the great prophecy of extraordinary moments. It is shown in prayer as an expression of friendship with God; in an incessant search for his will; in relationships marked by tenderness, happiness of life, compassion, faith in others and service.

**3.. So that our poverty may be a personal and community sign of the Gospel (CC 25)**

25. It costs us to be poor and to find the road to poverty. We are convinced that our ministry only acquires great prophetic power when the Word we proclaim is backed by our apostolic poverty, an authentic option for the poor, an economy in solidarity, and our own hard work (cf. CPR 87-88; SW 20). The market economy in which we are immersed obliges us to constantly rethink our economies and lifestyle.

*25.1. We will seek greater simplicity and austerity in our lifestyle and will apply the already existing criteria and norms in order to take a stand against certain practices, such as private economies and expenses that are not sufficiently justified.*

*25.2. We will give greater importance to drafting, applying and evaluating community budgets as an expression of our prophetic lifestyle, so that it may have a real repercussion in our daily life.*

*25.3. We will undertake economic projects that channel our option for the poor and that contribute to creating among us a "culture of solidarity." All communities not inserted in regions of poverty will undertake economic projects on behalf of the poor and marginalized, with an amount that comes from their budgets, seeking the collaboration of those persons whom they attend to pastorally.*

*25.4. At determined times, or when we are no longer using them, we will cede out installations for works of human and social advancement.*

*25.5. The General Economic Council will spell out the lines of the Congregation's investments with a view to ethical factors, seeing to it that our investments clearly reflect our option for the poor.*

26. The documents of the Congregation establish clear guidelines for the good administrative management of our assets. Many of the difficulties we find in different parts of the Congregation arise from a lack of fidelity to these guidelines. Their fulfillment counteracts individualism and expresses our will for transparency and clarity. In this respect, the dispositions of the Directory will be updated in keeping with the mind of this Chapter.

#### ***4. So that the world may believe* (CC 10).**

27. The charism of Claret that we share is the source of brotherhood among us and with other persons and groups, especially with members of the Claretian Family. This passion for communion is "today" a prophetic trait that makes our service credible in a world that intercommunicates so much, but is at the same time so divided and lacking in solidarity. Mission presents us with such sweeping challenges, that without communion among all of us it is impossible to give them an adequate response (cf. VC 74). Our fraternal life is the privileged instrument for doing this.

28. Living in communion, which is also the first act of mission, is not sufficiently prized and valued among us. We bring up undiscerned excuses for not being with our brethren, for not praying, eating and recreating with them or programming and evaluating our missionary life.

*28.1. Local and Provincial Superiors will urge that the dynamisms established in the Constitutions and other Documents of the Congregation be put into practice: the community project, the rhythm of prayer, recollection day, monthly meeting, the Word-Mission project, spiritual exercises.*

29. We recognize the difficulty that community life entails because of our diversity and the legitimate affirmation of our self. But we commit ourselves in these next years to enhance communion among us, in order to make our message of reconciliation more credible.

*29.1. We want to integrate our personal projects into a common missionary project with our brothers in our community, Province and Congregation.*

*29.2. We will continue caring for the human bases of our living together (cf. SW 7.1).*

30. Our missionary service of the Word will be more credible if our community, made up of priests, deacons, brothers and students, overcomes the inequalities that militate against fraternal communion, and if it integrates our different charisms in a creative way. Therefore:

*30.1. We will reflect in our communities on our common vocation as consecrated missionaries (cf. Vita Consecrata and the Circular on "The Missionary Brothers...", 1997). We will revise all usages that still denote clericalism: titles, practices and customs.*

*30.2. We will do more to foster the ministries of Brothers that are directly related to the missionary service of the Word.*

*30.3. We will study the nature of our Institute and the possibility of having it recognized as a "mixed" institute.*

31. "To have all things in common" is a prophetic sign. The sharing of assets among us has been growing stronger. We can still share more resources. The economic imbalance that exists between zones and Organisms of the Congregation obliges us to study its causes and demands of us a just administration and redistribution of goods in the service of mission and fraternity. Every Major Organism should have as an objective to achieve its economic autonomy, understood as a capacity to dispose of its own resources in order to attend to its life and mission and to collaborate with the universal mission of the Congregation (cf. Dir 284).

*31.1. The General Government will urge and be watchful in order that the Major Organisms, within a prudential time-frame, achieve the solidity involved in self-financing. To do this each Organisms must rely fundamentally on its own endeavor, its creativity and work, on its savings and effective sharing of assets in common, in order to generate and make productive all possible economic resources within its grasp. The Congregation will maintain its Fund of Aid in order to collaborate with the Major Organisms that may need it.*

*31.2. The General Government will assure those Major Organisms that lack economic autonomy of the accompaniment of experts to advise them on the creation of funds.*

*31.3. We will enhance the present sharing of assets among the diverse Major Organisms of the Congregation. We will attend especially to those most in need in the field of formation, missions and those that live in zones of greatest marginalization.*

32. The missions of the Congregation --both those that are dependent on a Major Organisms and those that are independent-- often experience the lack of means and of economic resources. It is important that all of us take on these missionary services both affectively and effectively, that we commit ourselves in solidarity with them out of our own economy, and that we attempt to raise the missionary consciousness of our own Christian communities.

*32.1. All Organisms will do their utmost as soon as possible, to establish Mission Procures as an efficacious means of apostolate, along with prayer, missionary sensibility and economic collaboration (cf. Dir 123).*

*32.2. We will consolidate the General Mission Procure, which, besides becoming involved in projects of evangelization or social promotion of the Congregation, will collaborate if possible with other ecclesial, ecumenical and even social organizations.*

33. We know that building communion in the Church and in society is a complex and arduous task. As missionaries, we desire to contribute with our efforts to build communion in the Church and peace in the world.

*33.1. We will care for our belonging to particular churches and for communion with their shepherds, opening ourselves to the wealth of their diverse charisms and contributing our own to them.*

*33.2. We will search for new ways to share our life and missionary commitment with the laity. We will undertake common apostolic initiatives in a co-responsible way.*

*33.3. We will collaborate in spreading and strengthening the Lay Claretian Movement. We will offer them the support they need for growing deeper in their identity and formation. We will follow through with them by providing the service of religious assessorship and will seek with them new ways of communion and of joint apostolic works.*

*33.4. We will endeavor to work together with those men and women, institutions and groups engaged in prophetic witness to the Kingdom of God: particular churches, religious life, basic ecclesial communities, ecclesial movements, non-governmental organizations, groups that promote justice and peace and the safeguarding of creation, associations of solidarity, think tanks, etc....*

##### **5. To keep abreast of the times (CC 56)**

34. Only a community that welcomes the gift of God, listens to the signs of the times and allows itself to be constantly rejuvenated can carry out the announcement of the Gospel in a credible and attractive way. We have made efforts in this direction, but we have still not translated into the daily rhythm of our life the conviction that "*ongoing formation is a demand for every Claretian*" (GPF 462). We urgently need to improve this situation. To do so:

*34.1. Major Organisms will draft their own Project of Ongoing Formation as part of their Plan of Action for each sexennium.*

*34.2. Communities will single out the times, spaces and means which they are going to dedicate to ongoing formation and their manner of evaluating it.*

*34.3. We will inculcate on our missionaries, from initial formation on, a conviction of the need to live ongoing formation as a process that lasts all their life long, and of the suitability of their carrying out their own personal plan of formation.*

*34.4. We will integrate into both initial and ongoing formation an adequate theoretical and practical education for inculturation, inter-religious dialogue and a commitment to justice and peace.*

*34.5. In the next years, as far as possible, we will promote some specializations for responding better to the challenges of our mission.*

*34.6. We will enhance the processes of evangelization as a privileged place for ongoing formation.*

*34.7. We will encourage persons to carry out intense experiences of ongoing formation in significant or crucial moments of their life.*

*34.8. We reaffirm the validity of the "Word-Mission" project. We will attempt*

*34.9. We will increase the interchange of life-experiences and Claretian materials among the Major Organisms. Through the Internet and other possible media, we will make Claretian documents, formation materials and sources for personal and community renewal available.*

35. The first years following ordination or perpetual profession are a delicate time in the life of many young missionaries. On leaving the formation community they are often burdened by an accumulation of commitments or excessive responsibilities.

*35.1. The Chapter encourages that they be accompanied in these situations, as proposed in the GPF, 506-511.*

*35.2. The General Government will offer a program-course of three or four months as an opportunity for those are finishing the fifth year. It will also be open to other missionaries.*

## **6. To invite others to embrace the Lord's calling (CC 58)**

36. Prophecy, despite contradictions and the cross, is attractive and awakens admiration and following. Those who are struggling for a new world value any prophetic trait. Hence we ask ourselves what influence does the prophetic dimension of our ministry exert on ourselves and those around us, especially the young.

37. We thank God for the numerous vocations he is granting us in some places. This invites us to welcome and accompany them responsibly. Yet we know that not a few Organisms of the Congregation are in an alarming vocational situation, for the following reasons, among others: a) the dominant social milieu, characterized by strong changes in the system of values; b) the valuing of other forms of Christian life and commitment; c) difficulties in undertaking lifelong commitments; d) insufficient missionary witness; e) hesitancy in setting forth the topic of vocations and placing the obligation to do so on others. All of these things lead us to propose that:

*37.1. Vocation ministry should be a priority in each Province and community and for every Claretian (cf. CC 58). This should be embodied in the community project., in prayer for vocations, in services that are programmed and in actions that are carried out.*

*37.2. In every pastoral or formative action, we must bear in mind the fundamental fact that our whole life is a vocation, an openness to the calls of God and a response to them.*

*37.3. Youth ministry and formation should be articulated with vocation ministry, giving special care to vocational accompaniment.*

*37.4. We should evangelically discern the meaning of the scarcity of vocations, in order to avoid the temptation to give in to nostalgia, to disenchantment or a mere consideration of numbers, instead of putting our trust in the Lord of history.*

*37.5. Particular attention should be paid to the vocational challenge in the process of revision of Organisms and of positions, and in policies for foundations and assignments.*

*37.6. Specific materials on vocation ministry should be drafted for the different forms of Claretian life (brothers, deacons, priests), in such a way that the vocational thrust of each should appear in full clarity.*

*37.7. All Christian communities, especially families, should become involved in interest and work for vocations, thus raising up a vocational culture in the Church (cf. GPF 280).*

### III. PROPHETIC MINISTRY

*"He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor"  
(Lk 4:18-19)*

38. The Lord who chose us sends us "to go out into the whole world to proclaim the good news to every creature" (CC 4). We have his missionaries. We speak and act in his name. Without him we can do nothing (cf. Jn 15:5).

#### ***1. Heirs of a prophetic ministry***

39. *"My spirit is for all the world"* (EC I, p. 305), said our Father Founder. He knew that he was called and destined, like the Servant of Yahweh, to be a light to the nations (cf. Aut 114, 120). He was so spurred by the desire to make God known, loved and served, that he used all means in his grasp --in a world undergoing great transformations-- to evangelize the people, who were hungry for the Word of God. His apostolic zeal also led him to dedicate himself with special interest to the spiritual renewal of all forms of Christian life (families, laity, priesthood, religious life) to raise up agents of evangelization everywhere and to promote initiatives to meet the most pressing needs of the people (cooperatives, credit unions, cures, etc.).

40. This same spirit has also been granted to us, his missionaries, whom Claret compared to a thunder that amplified the voice of the apostles and reached where he himself could not reach (cf. Aut 686; EC II, p. 627). In almost 150 years of life, our Congregation, born in a room of the diocesan seminary of Vic, has been led by the Spirit to many countries of the earth to announce the Gospel. Though our deficiencies may have been many, nevertheless, in our missionaries, the Word has become gesture, service, sermon, class, music, painting, sculpture, book, poem, liturgy, outcry and silence.

41. We not only have *"a glorious history to recall and recount, but also a great history yet to build"* (VC 110). The Spirit impels us to creatively continue the "great work" which Claret and his companions began. We want to enter the third millennium highlighting the prophetic dimension of our service of the Word.

## ***2. To communicate the total mystery of Christ*** (CC 46)

42. We wish above all to announce the Kingdom of God and with it, Jesus, the Mediator of the Kingdom, the beloved Son of the Abba, and our Brother. We want our announcement to come from the heart. We want it to be founded on a wise knowledge of the Scriptures in their historical context and of Christian Tradition. We want it to disclose the way Jesus remains alive in those who carry on his actions and pronounce his words in solidarity with the poor, with sinners, with the sick and the marginalized (Mt 11:2-5; Lk 4:18-19; Jn 10:10b, 13:1-5,15).

43. Our word and preaching of the God of Life and Love will be a consoling and hope-filled announcement, especially for his wounded people. Our service of the Word will be prophetic whenever its is backed by actions that tend to heal the ills that afflict our brothers and sisters.

44. Everywhere in the world, our words and actions will denounce the unjust economic order that values profit above persons and causes so much poverty, dehumanization and death. It will likewise be a denunciation of all that can wound human rights, peace and justice, or destroy nature.

45. We propose that our language, our celebrations and our whole life should capture and express the values and symbolic universe of the peoples and groups we serve, so that our ministry may be truly inculturated.

## ***3. To collaborate in the evangelization of the people*** (CC 50)

46. As evangelizers, we are distressed to see so many persons who do not know the full manifestation of the love of God made real in Jesus. The missionary thrust *ad gentes* leads us

to deploy our forces toward the increasing multitude of those who do not know Christ (cf. VC 78).

*46.1. We will enhance our missionary presence in Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe, and we will generously and lucidly respond to the missionary challenges that keep presenting themselves to us.*

*46.2. We will take advantage of the special and extraordinary opportunities that the mission 'ad gentes' offer our Missionary Brothers, in the divers contexts of lay life, for a particularly incisive apostolic action (cf. VC 78).*

*46.3. We will shape our participation in interreligious and intercultural dialogue, which forms part of the evangelizing mission of the Church, as an authentic "dialogue of life" (cf. VC 102). Moreover, we will cultivate opportune forms of dialogue, in keeping with our charism.*

*46.4. We will reflect more deeply on the 'missio ad gentes' and its characteristics. The General Government will establish a group of experts in the theology of mission.*

47. As evangelizers, we are concerned about the situation of the many men and women who for various reasons have become alienated from the Christian faith or who, because of their secularized surroundings, have become estranged from faith or religious feeling.

*47.1. Our word and preaching will be an announcement of Jesus Christ, the Light of the world, and they will aim at arousing an experience of faith and at personalizing evangelical values.*

*47.2. The fact that several persons want to silence God invites us to purify our way of evangelizing and to keep proposing the God that Jesus preached as the greatest good of human beings.*

48. A continuing great challenge for us is the growth of poverty affecting the majority of the world's population as a result of the spread of unjust socioeconomic and political structures and systems, such a Neoliberalism. As evangelizers, we ratify our option for the poor as a great criterion of our missionary priorities. Hence, we propose:

*48.1. To favor a sincere confrontation of our criteria and positions with the realities of our world that challenge us as missionaries.*

*48.2. To continue enhancing the deployment of our ministries toward the poorest and neediest people.*

*48.3. To join with those who, desiring to celebrate adequately the Great Jubilee of the year 2000, call for the cancellation of the external debt of poor countries, which is being paid off at the cost of the health, education and life of the most defenceless.*

49. In our evangelizing task, we frequently come in contact with groups of non-Catholic Christians. The Church's permanent call to the witness of union and ecumenical dialogue leads us to contribute our prophetic word within this dimension. We therefore propose:

*49.1. To be present at national and international forums of ecumenical dialogue*

*49.2. To intensify our welcome, collaboration and dialogue with non-Catholic Christians, where every it is possible or required.*

**4. To help all those who are seeking to transform the world according to God's design (CC 46)**

50. There are many men and women of all conditions who are fostering the movement of peoples toward the Kingdom of God. We are not alone in our service. We want to collaborate with them:

*50.1. To build a Church that integrates all charisms and ministries:*

*- we will strengthen our collaboration with the laity, fostering their leading role in the new evangelization and in human advancement, without reducing their role within the Church;  
- we will contribute creatively toward the advancement of religious life in the different continents through theological reflection and different forms of spiritual and apostolic animation (cf. VC 13).*

*50.2. We will be present in a significant way among the marginalized and wherever life is most threatened. We will heighten our subsidiary participation in places and institutions where the lot of the poor is being decided. We will endeavor to discern the voice that comes to us from new social movements and to welcome the spurs to change that may come to us, whether from inside or outside the Church.*

*50.3. The General Government will renew the Secretariat of Justice and Peace by incorporating in it a concern for ecology, and it will strive to animate this dimension in our ministry. We will also include these aspects in our provincial and community projects and will collaborate with other organizations that work in this sphere.*

*50.4. We will devote some personnel to a deep study of the present functioning of worldwide economy and of so-called Neoliberalism, in an effort to understand its internal mechanisms and its real effects. We will search for viable alternatives to its injustices and we will propose them through our word and actions.*

*50.5. We will strive to make a fitting use of the evangelizing possibilities offered by the new technologies of communication.*

**5. To keep the Congregation ever ready to serve the Church and the whole human race in keeping with the needs of various times and places (CC 136)**

51. Our universal missionary vocation makes us always attentive to whatever is most urgent, timely and effective (cf. CC 48). Keeping the Congregation ever ready to serve the Church and the whole human race in keeping with the needs of various times and places (cf. CC 136) sometimes puts it in *tension* with the challenges that local realities present to the respective Organisms (cf. CC 113). The discernment with which this tension is channeled affects such important matters as the revision of positions, collaboration between Major Organisms, assignments outside the Province and the restructuring of Organisms.

52. In many Organisms, the process of *revision of positions*, begun some fifteen years ago, has not been carried out or has been carried out only weakly.

*52.1. We will continue to pursue the revision of positions from the standpoint of our option for the poor and the urgent needs of evangelization, as a demand of our prophetism.*

*52.2. We are aware that this revision will provoke conflicts; hence we will do everything possible to lessen tensions and maintain fraternal charity.*

*52.3. The General Government will require each Major Organism to draft a very concrete project of revision of positions and to put it into practice with the required gradualness. This project must be open to the needs of the Church and the Congregation, to collaboration with the laity, and to the real situation of the Organisms itself.*

*52.4. The General Government, through Provincial Chapters, canonical visits and other types of action, will report on the needs of the Congregation and will spur and closely accompany the development of these projects of revision of positions.*

53. In the last few years advances have been made in collaboration between *Major Organisms*. To deepen this:

*53.1. We will reinforce the vanguard missionary posts we have already undertaken, especially with our new foundations, and with the vital or significantly missionary positions of the most debilitated Organisms.*

*53.2. We will keep encouraging projects shared by various Organisms in the areas of initial and ongoing formation, in vocation ministry, in the formation of new evangelizers and in the development of interprovincial projects of vanguard evangelization. We will likewise encourage the drafting of a common project of interprovincial mission by geographical and cultural areas.*

*53.3. We will continue to foster in all Claretians, from initial formation on, their openness and availability for the universal mission of the Congregation.*

54. To facilitate discernment in the case of *extraprovincial assignments*, so that those assigned may feel as their own the mission project of the Organism that is receiving them:

*54.1. Organisms that require help will draft a plan of priority needs, since assignments must be made in order to enhance concrete projects that respond to our mission and to the vital needs of the Organism.*

*54.2. Before the assignment, an ample dialogue will take place between the superiors of the Organisms of origin and of assignment, with the concerned party (cf. Dir 310 a) and with some persons who know the individual. Those assigned must be able to rely on the time and means necessary in order to prepare themselves adequately with a view to better inculturation.*

55. It is necessary to improve the missionary vitality of our Organisms and of the entire Congregation.

*55.1. In dialogue with the General Government, each Major Organism will examine its own juridical status in keeping with our legislation (cf. CC 88; Dir 283-284).*

*5.2. The General Government will spur the restructuring of Organisms by means of a careful pedagogy that respects the sensibility of persons and facilitates the participation and co-responsibility of all the members of the Organisms in question, through consultations, meetings, assemblies and decision-making processes.*

56. The cultural diversity of the Congregation and our presence in such diverse contexts invite us to keep cultivating fraternal communion and mutual knowledge. To this end:

*56.1. We will do all that we can, especially in initial formation, to stimulate the study of languages.*

*56.2. We will keep fostering the exchange of news and information between the different areas of the Congregation.*

## **6. To seek the salvation of men and women throughout the world (CC 2)**

57. We incarnate our missionary and prophetic service of the Word in each of the countries and cultural contexts in which we live. Hence, each geographical area should contextualize the commitments which we have made in this Chapter and which we as a Congregation have undertaken for the next six years. We now single out some more specific points for the different geographical areas, which can serve as a mutual challenge and stimulus to co-responsibility in our mission.

*In Africa:*

58. We, the Claretian Missionaries who feel call to serve as evangelizers of our peoples of Africa, reaffirm what was said in SW 25, and we propose:

*58.1. To prepare Claretians able to reflect in a inculturated way on the socio-religious problematic of Africa and to launch out on the use of the communications media.*

*58.2. To keep denouncing, from the standpoint of our prophetic service of the Word, both the abuses of governors and power-brokers and the despoilment of natural riches carried out by external powers.*

*58.3. To keep supporting religious and social groups who open up ways of hope and are preparing themselves for a religious, political and social transformation of African society.*

*58.4. To continue working in the formation of priests, religious and laity.*

*58.5. To enhance and open up mission posts where the first announcement of the Word is needed, to accompany persons living in inhuman situations and to attend in a particular way to the spiritual needs of refugees and immigrants.*

*58.6. To promote and carry out projects of educational and cultural formation: schools, anti-illiteracy programs for adults, promotion of women.*

*In Latin America and the Caribbean:*

59. In order to respond with a prophetic thrust to the challenges presented us by our peoples of *Latin America and the Caribbean*, besides the commitments undertaken in SW 27, we propose the following:

*59.1. To decidedly renew our option for the poor in this neoliberal hour, by analyzing and making known the mechanisms and consequences of this system for the life of the people in different fields; and to accompany the rise and strengthening of alternative projects.*

*59.2. In view of the challenges of urban and suburban pastoral ministry, to seek for new responses by generating lively communities, providing adequate means and methods of evangelization, and fostering the culture of solidarity.*

*59.3. To keep fostering the popular reading of the Bible from various hermeneutical keys (feminine, indigenous, African-American, farm workers, etc.)*

*59.4. To foster the ministry of consolation in view of the suffering of the people, stimulating resistance and nourishing hope.*

*59.5. Favoring interreligious, ecumenical and intercultural dialogue.*

*In North America (United States and Canada):*

60. In view of the complex reality of *North America* (Canada and the United States) and its importance in the worldwide sphere, we want:

*60.1. To orientate the revision of positions in the light of the preferential options of the MCT, especially the option for the poor, for families, and for those alienated from the Church.*

*60.2. To continue with the formation of lay leaders and to give out help in the development of the Lay Claretians.*

*60.3. To pursue our collaboration with dioceses, with other religious communities, ecumenical organizations and civil groups.*

*60.4. To further develop the use of technology in our ministries.*

*60.5. To enhance our personal and community commitment through prayer, poverty and community life.*

*60.6. To emphasize and promote ongoing formation.*

*60.7. To promote an awareness that both personal and corporate commitments must be expressions of the mission of the community.*

*60.8. To give a preferential priority to ministries in favor of vocations and formation.*

*60.9. To promote a greater awareness of our obligation to respond to the needs of the universal Congregation.*

*60.10. To continue promoting interprovincial collaboration and collaboration within NACLA.*

*In Asia:*

61. In order to contribute as evangelizers in responding to the great challenges that the peoples of *Asia* present us, we view as valid the proposals of SW 29; but at the same time, by reason of their relevance and timeliness, we propose:

*61.1. To bear witness to the Christian experience of God in the context of religious pluralism.*

*61.2. To respond to the growing interest in the Word of God and to promote the missionary animation of local churches.*

*61.3. To enhance formation for inculturation, for interreligious dialogue and for justice and peace.*

*61.4. To promote in the Congregation a pluralism of rites, especially during the period of initial formation and in mission fields.*

*61.5. To reinforce our collaboration with the laity and to spur on the Lay Claretian Movement.*

*61.6. To assimilate our Claretian heritage and to inculturate our charism.*

*61.7. To deepen our commitment to the "mission ad gentes," in a dialogue of faith and life with other religions and cultures, and with the poor.*

*In Europe:*

62. In *Europe*, we commit ourselves to keep developing the proposals of SW 31: the faith-culture dialogue, the community as the place for experience of God, attention to the alienated or dechristianized, solidarity with those who are excluded and with immigrants, the missionary dimension *ad gentes*, the collaboration between CEC and IBERIA and Claretian vocation ministry. Moreover we want to see to our qualification as evangelizers. In order to respond to some of our present challenges, we propose the following;

*62.1. To face the challenge of unbelief, within an attitude of dialogue, centering dialogue within the central cores of the faith;*

*62.2. To share our evangelizing mission with the laity, creating the opportune dynamisms to make possible their formation and to be co-responsible their formation and co-responsible participation.*

*62.3. To enhance family ministry by promoting values and helps that strengthen the family and make it a privileged place for the formation of persons and of growth in the faith.*

*62.4. To focus on the explicit announcement of the Gospel as a response to the searchings and expectations of our contemporaries.*

*62.5. To pay attention to ecumenical and interreligious dialogue in the framework of our plural society.*

## CONCLUSION

63. The Church has invited us, through the Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, to grow deeper in the prophetic dimensions of our charism and to stress it in our missionary service of the Word. This chapter has chosen to take up the reflection carried out by all Claretians during these months and to tackle the themes that the Congregation has deemed it necessary to deal with.

64. We wish to address to ourselves the words of the Exhortation which commit us to the great history that we still have to build: "*Set your eyes on the future toward which the Spirit impels you in order to keep doing great things with you*" (VC 110). The difficulties that arise or that we make arise on our missionary way cannot overcloud the great opportunities that have opened up for us in the years following Vatican II.

65. In the message he addressed to our Chapter, John Paul II has reminded us of *the prophetic attitude of bringing hope to all, because by means of you God will continue visiting his people* (cf. *Lk 7:16*). "If we live a life rooted in Jesus, the Spirit will grant us a *"transfigured existence,"* will renew fraternity in our communities, will strengthen us to join with the Lord in washing the feet of the poor and to collaborate by means of the service of the Word in transforming the world.

66. We want this project for the future to hearten all of us who feel called to prolong the "*great work*" born in Vic almost 150 years ago. Nobody is unnecessary in this. We all have something to contribute. The future can be greater than the past.

## Father General's Greeting to John Paul II

Most Blessed Father:

The members of the XXII General Chapter of the Congregation of Missionary Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, representing the almost three thousand Claretian Missionaries scattered throughout the five continents, have come with joy to visit you and offer you a sincere expression of our filial adherence, communion and obedience in the exercise of the mission which the Church has entrusted to us. We desire to express to Your Holiness our admiration and gratitude for the witness of pastoral care that you offer us in your intense service to the People of God and to all humankind. We appreciate your self-sacrificing and generous commitment in the exercise of the ministry of Peter.

We want to thank you in a special way for all you have done on behalf of the consecrated life by convoking the Synod and publishing the exhortation "*Vita Consecrata*." Our Congregation, which is engaged in enhancing the understanding and living of the consecrated life through its publications *Commentarium pro religiosis et missionariis* and *Vita Religiosa*, and its three Theological Institutes of Rome, Madrid and Manila, has felt particularly comforted and stimulated in this service to the Church.

We also want to thank you for the beatification of 51 Claretian Missionaries, martyred in Barbastro, Spain. This "Martyr Seminary," as Your Holiness called it, has stirred up a great missionary impulse in the Congregation. Many Claretians have wanted to go where the Martyrs dreamt of going but could not go. During these past six years the Congregation has become present in Russia, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Taiwan, Angola, Tanzania, Uganda and Ghana. Moreover, it has increased its missionary services in Cuba, India, Nigeria and Indonesia.

This General Chapter has focused its attention on *the prophetic dimension of our missionary service of the Word*, bearing in mind what Your Holiness said in your Apostolic Exhortation "*Vita Consecrata*," as well as the prophetic spirit that animated Saint Anthony Mary Claret, our Holy Founder. We want, thus, to take a step forward in our spiritual and ministerial renewal, preparing ourselves to respond to the great challenges that evangelization is facing on the threshold of the third millennium.

On examining our life and mission, we have found deficiencies and limitations that we want to correct. We have seen the need for fostering vocation ministry, preparing formators and organizing ourselves better in order to be effective collaborators in the service of the Gospel in the particular Churches and among the peoples we serve. Throughout the work of the Chapter we have felt a lively experience of ecclesial and congregational communion. We feel that we are debtors to the unceasing prayer, to the witness of consecrated life and to the apostolic endeavors of all our brothers, who are working on the most diverse fronts of evangelization.

At the conclusion of this Chapter, we joyfully await and enlightening and consoling word from Your Holiness. We also humbly ask for your paternal blessing, which we would like to be extended to all the Missionary Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary and to the members of

the Claretian Family. Thank you, Holy Father, for receiving us, and you can count on our prayers that the Lord may continue to bless your life and ministry for the good of the Church.

Castelgandolfo, 22 September 1997

Aquilino Bocos Merino, C.M.F.  
Superior General.

## The Pope's Discourse to the Members of the XXII General Chapter

### *To the Superior General and Chapter Members of the Missionary Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary*

1. It is a great pleasure for me to have this encounter with you, who are ending the XXII General Chapter, in which you have studied your participation in the evangelizing mission of the Church, looking toward the future with great hope, in order to live your charism for the good of ecclesial communities and of humankind.

Before all else, I affectionately greet Fr. Aquilino Bocos, re-elected Superior General, with the new Consultors and also you religious who represent all the Provinces of the Congregation, currently present in Europe, America, Asia and Africa. Through you I wish to send my appreciation and esteem to the other religious who, with their prayers, are asking for the happy and fruitful culmination of the Chapter's labors.

2. Your Congregation, which is more than a hundred years old, was born through the inspiration of Saint Anthony Mary Claret, who, after traversing Catalonia for years preaching popular missions, was appointed Archbishop of Santiago, Cuba, a ministry to which he fully committed himself for the salvation of souls. Upon his return to Spain, he had to face many sufferings for the good of the Church, until he died in exile in Fontfroide, France, in 1870. Yet his whole life was always marked by the peremptory Pauline exhortation: "The love of Christ urges us on" (2 Cor 5:14).

The Church highly esteems the service of the Word that you are carrying out in the mission "ad gentes," in popular sectors and among the marginalized; in the formation of new evangelizers, both religious and lay; in the promotion of the religious life; in educational tasks and in the renewal of Christian communities, fostering the dialogue of faith with those who are seeking God.

In this you are striving to be faithful to your Founder and Father, who, feeling that he should commit himself totally to others, proposed that you use all possible means within your grasp -parish ministry, publications, popular missions, preaching spiritual exercises and retreats-- in announcing the Gospel to all people (cf. Const. CMF nn. 6 and 48).

In this way, with a spirit of commitment to God, to the Church and to humanity, you develop your vocation, bearing witness to the love of Christ through the constant proclamation of the Good News and through sincere and effective solidarity, especially with the poorest of the poor, the sick, the elderly and the alienated.

3. In these years, your approach to the spiritual experience of Claret the missionary has led you to set the Word of God in the center of your personal and community life. Like Mary, you desire to welcome this saving Word into your heart, in order to meditate on it and later communicate it to others. Certainly, dear missionaries, this Word, which is living and effective (cf. Heb 4:12), will confirm you in your vocation, it will console you and give you hope in your toils and sufferings (cf. Rom 15:4) and will at the same time make your pastoral labor fruitful. As you face the difficulties of your ministry, remember what your Founder told you:

"You yourselves will not be speaking; the Spirit of your Father and of your Mother will be speaking in you" (Aut 687).

4. It gives me special satisfaction to learn that, on the threshold of the Third Millennium, your Chapter has proposed to delve more deeply into the prophetic dimension of the Service of the Word. In doing so, while reflecting on the orientations and guidelines of your earlier Chapters, which were centered on the figure of Jesus, anointed and sent by the Father to announce the Good News to the poor (cf. Lk 4:18; Aut 687), you have also wanted to respond to the call I issued to all consecrated persons in the Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (cf. nn. 84-95). What is expected of the Church, in this hour of deep social and cultural changes, is that the clear and opportune voice of those sent should be accompanied by the transparency of life of the "man of God." When sorrow, loneliness and exclusions beset the human heart, what is expected of consecrated persons is a new and luminous proposal of love, through a chastity that expands the heart, a poverty that does away with barriers and an obedience that builds communion in the community, the Church and the world. In this way the prophetic attitude will bring hope to all, because through you, God will continue visiting his people (cf. Lk 7:16).

You are also called to be --in communion with the Bishops of each place-- "and evangelical and evangelizing leaven of the cultures of the third millennium and of the social orders of peoples" (Homily on the Feast of the Presentation, 2 February 1992, n. 5). For this, you will have to cultivate a profound intimacy with Christ through prayer, assiduous listening to the Word, and the Eucharist. Foster ongoing formation with the study and discernment of the challenges of the present hour, and make your heart ever more generous to step out and encounter your neighbor who needs love and hope.

Your example and commitment must likewise be an invitation and stimulus for others, above all for young people, who, despite the present scarcity of vocations in some parts, want to unite themselves with the fraternal and missionary community that you are called to form, in order thus to follow Jesus and be sent to preach (cf. Mk 3:14). Your brothers, the 51 Blessed Martyrs of Barbastro, like so many other martyrs, "have borne witness to Christ the Lord in this very century, with the commitment of their own life" (cf. *Vita Consecrata*, 86). Hence I beg the Lord that the blood that has been shed may germinate the seed of many missionary vocations for your Congregation, who will have to rely on good and holy formators.

5. I commend your Chapter and the whole Congregation to the Virgin Mary, Mother of Christ and of the Church. May her motherly Heart be for all of you a school of intimate adherence to Jesus, of listening to his Word and of cordial love for all human beings. In this same Heart you must continue to draw inspiration for announcing to the world the mercy of the Lord and for loving him as she loved him. May her intercession also sustain you in the diverse works of apostolate in which you are committed. With these keen sentiments, I affectionately impart to you and to all the Claretian Missionaries, Sons of the Heart of Mary, my Apostolic Blessing.

Castelgandolfo, 22 September 1997.

Joannes Paulus II

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

### **I. TRENDS AND CHALLENGES OF REALITY**

1. All different: a complex and diversified reality
2. In a single world: sharing a globalized reality
3. A reality that stimulates our prophetic response

### **II. PROPHETIC LIFESTYLE**

1. Heirs of a prophetic lifestyle
2. To make Jesus' way of life our own (CC 5)
3. So that our poverty may be a personal and community sign of the Gospel (CC 25)
4. So that the world may believe (CC 10).
5. To keep abreast of the times (CC 56)
6. To invite others to embrace the Lord's calling (CC 58)

### **III. PROPHETIC MINISTRY**

1. Heirs of a prophetic ministry
2. To communicate the total mystery of Christ (CC 46)
3. To collaborate in the evangelization of the people (CC 50)
4. To help all those who are seeking to transform the world according to God's design (CC 46)
5. To keep the Congregation ever ready to serve the Church and the whole human race in keeping with the needs of various times and places (CC 136)
6. To seek the salvation of men and women throughout the world (CC 2)

### **CONCLUSION**

#### **Father General's Greeting to John Paul II**

#### **The Pope's Discourse to the Members of the XXII General Chapter**